JANET

BY

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

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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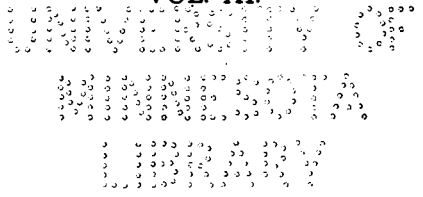

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JANET.

CHAPTER I.

It was not till a few days after this that Meredith's growing strength permitted a reference to the circumstances of his 'illness,' as they all called it, which, of course, was not at all concerted, but occurred quite unintentionally in the course of the conversation. One or two things had been said before he took any part in the talk himself. At length, rousing himself from a sort of reverie, he said,

'How was it, I wonder, that I was so lucky as to be knocked down at your door? Whoever the man was, he did me a good turn there; but

how was it that I was found at your door? It was not in the evening, you say—which would have explained itself.'

'It was about five o'clock,' said Julia, suddenly interposing. She had treasured up all the details in her mind.

'About five o'clock!' said Meredith, looking round him with elevated eyebrows. 'Now, tell me, some one, what could I be doing at five o'clock at this door?'

'And you were expected to dinner at half-past seven,' said Julia again.

'Evidently,' said Meredith, 'she has entered into the mystery of the situation. What was I doing at five o'clock, being expected at half-past-seven, at this door?'

'I have often thought of it,' said Gussy, 'and wondered if you were coming to say you could not come to dinner. You had clients who stopped you several times before.'

He gave her a glance and laughed, but Gussy was quite unsuspicious, and instanced the clients in perfect good faith.

'Poor clients!' he said; 'they have been left to themselves for a long time, but they don't seem to have been clamouring for me. I don't think it could be that.'

'Perhaps you were going to call somewhere in the neighbourhood,' suggested Mrs. Harwood.

'I don't think it could be that either—I don't make many calls, and none about here. Try again. I must find it out.'

Janet on this occasion was seated full in view. She had not been able to change her position, as she generally did when he was brought in. She did not look up or take any notice. But Janet was aware that her head was bent stiffly, not naturally, over her work, and that in her whole appearance there must be the rigour of an artificial pose. Her head was bent lower than it need to have been; her needle stumbled in her work, pricking her fingers; and her downcast face, in spite of her, was covered with a hot and angry flush. And he could see her, plainly, distinctly, near him as

she had not allowed herself to be since before 'the accident' had occurred. He did not take any notice for a little time, being apparently much engaged with his own thoughts; but presently he looked up, and caught the expression of both form and face as she sat in the full light of the window. Oh, that it should have so happened to-day, instead of on any of the preceding days in which it would have been of no consequence! Janet, through her drooping eyelashes, saw—as she could have seen, somehow, had he been behind her—a slight start and awakening in his face: and then he put up his hand to support his head, and fixed his eyes upon her under that shield.

'You are tired, Charley!' she heard Miss Harwood saying.

'No, no; not tired a bit, only thinking.'

His thinking was done with his eyes fixed on Janet, reading (she was sure) the dreadful consciousness which she felt to be in her. She waiting trembling for his next words.

'I think,' he said, 'a light begins to dawn upon me. I had been at Mimpriss's, the li-

brary; I suppose on my usual quest for music.'

Janet did not know what might come next. She had seen various glances directed towards her which made her think he would not spare her. She had made it a principle to forestall everything that could be said about herself.

'Oh, yes,' she said, hastily, 'now I remember! I saw Mr. Meredith there.'

'You never said so before, Janet.'

'I think I must have said so, the first evening. Since then nobody has thought of such details.'

He looked at her doubtfully, with some vagueness.

'Now I begin to recollect,' he said; 'I was at Mimpriss's, and walked along, because it was his way home, with—a man I met: and then—yes, I'm beginning to remember. In a little time I shall have it all clear.'

He fixed his eyes upon her again under the shelter of his hand. How they seemed to burn into her! She sat quite still, unnaturally still, with her eyes fixed upon her work. Oh, how they

burned, those eyes! they seemed to make holes in her, to reach her heart. But this was as far as he had gone as yet. He was beginning to see her in the shop, on the pavement by his side—talking to him. Under the cover of his hand he kept asking her,

'What more? What more?'

'You don't remember with whom it was you were walking?' said Gussy, breathlessly.

'Hush, I'm thinking—it is coming, very vaguely, like a thing in the dark.'

'Janet, perhaps you saw what sort of man it was with whom Mr. Meredith was walking?'

'No,' said Janet. She was unable to form more than this one word: and she never looked at him, but stumbled on at her work, steadying her hands with a tremendous effort.

He saw well enough the perturbation in which she was, though none of the others might remark it; and she saw how he looked at her. Now the smile broke out again, more malicious than ever.

'No,' said Meredith, 'I don't suppose Miss

Summerhayes would see him. I must have met him some time after she saw me at the shop. But I begin to get hold of it all. It was a dark night, and the lamps were lighted. My friend must surely have left me——'

'I was about to say,' cried Gussy, 'he could not have been with you there, or he must have come in with you, and told us how it was.'

'There was nobody with me, then?'

'Nobody, except the man who picked you up and the policeman, who is always coming back to say he's on the track of the murderer.'

'The murderer! That gives one an uncomfortable conviction, as if one had really been killed. I have a kind of vision of a face. When does this policeman generally come? I should like to have a talk with him. He might throw some light upon my very dim recollection.'

'Dolff is the one who sees him when he comes,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'I did not, myself, feel equal to it; and Dolff seemed the right person.'

'Ah, yes; and so kind of him,' said Meredith.

'I have been surrounded with true kindness. Dolff, please come and tell me—what does the policeman say?'

'Not much,' said Dolff, from the dark corner in which he had established himself.

Meredith turned half round towards him.

'Is the fellow any good?'

'No good at all,' cried Dolff. 'He has always a new cock-and-a-bull story. He is no good.'

'And none of you in the house saw anything?' Meredith said.

'Well, Charley, it was night. There was nobody at the window; and, had they been, they could have seen nothing. We did not even hear much. It must all have been done very quickly. My dears,' cried Mrs. Harwood, with a shiver, 'how can we be thankful enough! You might have been killed, Charley. A minute more, and they say there would have been no hope.'

Even Meredith was respectful enough to be silent for a moment. But he resumed immediately,

'It is strange that no one should have seen anything. I should have thought—And who opened the door? Did anyone ring to get in? How was it? Perhaps that would help me to pull my thoughts together. Some one must have rung the bell; some good Samaritan.'

'No. It was Vicars who heard something, and ran to see what it was,' said Gussy. 'Vicars is very quick-eared. He runs whenever there is any commotion.'

'Ah!' said Meredith again.

He put up his hand once more to cover his eyes, and under his regard Janet for the first time broke down. She got up hastily and threw her work from her.

'Shall I make the tea, Mrs. Harwood?' she said, in a trembling voice.

'Poor Janet,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'She has never quite got over it. It made such an impression upon her nerves.'

'I think,' said Gussy, 'it might have made more impression upon my nerves than upon Janet's.'

'Oh, please don't think of my nerves,' said Janet. 'If you will let me, I will pour out the tea.'

Meredith said nothing. He was following out, with his brain still a little confused, the clue he had got hold of. It was Janet, certainly it was Janet. He read it in every line of her stiffened figure and conscious countenance, and in the overwhelming agitation which had at last triumphed over her self-control. Yes, he had met her in the library, and it was with her he had walked towards the ambush laid for him. What more? Was there anything more? He had in his mind a vague reminiscence of something else which he had seen, which a little more thinking would perhaps enable him to master. She must have seen what happened if it was she who was with him, as he believed. She must be aware, if not who it was that had assaulted him, at least how it was. He kept on thinking while they talked round him, trying to quicken his own feeble brain into action, and saying to himself that she must

know. If she knew, why was she silent? Then it occurred to Meredith what the reason was.

He glanced at Gussy, sitting by him, and even upon his face there came a certain uneasy colour. Betray to Gussy his *rendezvous* with Janet! Ah, he understood now why Janet did not speak. She dared not. She must have stolen indoors somehow, and concealed the fact that she had ever been out. It would be her ruin to make her confess. Perhaps Meredith would not have cared so very much for this, if it had not appeared to him that he himself would cut but an indifferent figure—paying his addresses to the daughter of the house, and intriguing with the governess? He went over the same ground which Janet had already traversed, and he confessed to himself that it would not do. But what was this consciousness in his mind that he knew, or had known something more?—

'Bring Charley his tea, Dolff,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'I am sure he wants his tea. It is a nice habit for a man, which I hope you will keep up,

Charley, when you are well. I always like to see a young man find pleasure in his tea.'

Her soft voice ran on while Dolff very unwillingly, and with averted face, carried the tea to Meredith. What was it that this dark, stormy, half-averted face suggested to the sick man? Dolff leaned over him for a moment, very unwillingly holding out the tea to him, offering him cake and bread-and-butter, which simple dainties were now part of the invalid's regimen. Meredith caught that view of Dolff's face with a certain shock, with a quickened interest, almost anxiety. What did it mean? There was something which he recollected, which he could not recollect—some fact that might throw light upon everything. He was startled beyond measure by the sight of Dolff's face. Dolff! there could be nothing in him to excite anyone. Why was it that his heart began to beat at the sight of Dolff? He could not make it out—it had something to do with his accident. What was it? But presently Meredith felt his head begin to ache and his brain to swim. He

leaned back upon his pillows with a sigh of impatience. Gussy was standing by his side in a moment asking,

'Was he tired—did he feel giddy?'

Meredith answered with a disappointment and petulance, which in his weak state nearly moved him to tears,

'I can't think, that is the worst of it. I begin to remember a trifle here and there. I have got the length of remembering who was with me, and I know there is something more.'

'Don't try to think any more—leave it till to-morrow. You know,' said Gussy, 'dear Charley, the doctors say it will come all right; but you must do it justice, and not force it. There is no hurry, is there? You are not obliged to begin working directly again.'

'No, I'm not obliged to begin working,' Meredith said.

It was not necessary to enter into explanations, and to tell her how his mind was occupied. And, as a matter of fact, he remained very quiet all next day *en attendant* the great event and pri-

vilege of being allowed to walk across the hall to the drawing-room, and disport himself from chair to chair at his pleasure. From time to time during the day he did, indeed, take up the broken thread where it had dropped from him and try to tack it on to something. But he could not do it. He traced himself along the road from Mimpriss's with Janet on his arm, in the faint lamplight; but at the door he found himself stopped short. One word more would complete the task—one link and he would know all about it, as Janet did, who would never say what it was; but upon that link he could not get hold.

The event of the afternoon was accomplished with great success. He walked unassisted, though feeling as if his legs did not quite belong to him, into the drawing-room, the ladies rising to receive and admire him, as if he had been a child taking its first walk.

'Why, he's a perfect Hercules!' cried Mrs. Harwood. 'He walks as well as any of you. Thank God, my dear boy, that you have got on

so well. I think we may feel that you are out of the wood now.'

'Oh, don't encourage him too much, mamma! He won't be kept down. He is too venturesome. Fancy, nurse tells me that he has been thinking—actually thinking all day.'

'How very unguarded of him!' said Mrs. Harwood, with a laugh. And then the usual circle was made round him, and the tea poured out to refresh him after his exertion.

It was while the bread-and-butter was going round that Priscilla, the parlour-maid, came into the room which was so pleasant with firelight and smiling faces, and announced that the detective wanted to speak to the gentleman—Dolff's name was very well known since this inquiry had begun, but it was still to 'the gentleman' that this official asked to speak.

'He thinks he has found out something now,' said Priscilla, with a faint sniff of scepticism.

Priscilla sensibly thought that a man who

had been on this job for so long and had discovered nothing was a poor creature indeed.

'Who is the gentleman that is wanted?' said Meredith. 'It is Dolff, I suppose, as the man of the house. But why should Dolff be bored with this?—it is my business if ever any business was. Mrs. Harwood, may we have him in here?'

'Certainly, Charley—if you are quite sure that you can stand it.'

'Why shouldn't I stand it? I am quite well. I don't even feel weak. Let us have him in here.'

Mrs. Harwood looked at Gussy and Gussy looked at the patient.

'I am very much afraid it will try him, mamma. Still, as he would hear the voices in the hall, which might excite him more——'

'Of course it would excite me more. Thanks, my kindest Gussy, though you scold me, you are always on my side.'

Here Dolff spoke from the corner in which during these *séances* he always took shelter.

'This is a new man,' he said. 'He's always got a different thing to suggest, and it's very distracting—hadn't I better see him this time?'

'I think Dolff is right,' said Mrs. Harwood.

'No,' said Meredith. 'I want distraction. Let's have him here.'

He did not omit to note the fact that Dolff retired further still into his corner as the policeman came in.

The detective, who was in plain clothes, but not a lofty member of his profession, made a sweeping bow all round, and looked a little embarrassed as he found himself among a company of ladies. He looked round for Dolff, whom he knew, and then at the stranger in the centre of the group, whom he had never seen before, but who distinctly assumed the principal place.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'I don't see the gentleman I've seen before. Oh!—yes—I beg your pardon.'

He turned again to the corner, from which Dolff had emerged a little.

'You needn't mind me,' said Dolff, 'there is the gentleman who is most interested, Mr. Meredith.'

Meredith had his eyes fixed on Dolff. The young man was like a thunderstorm, dark, heavy, and lowering, his eyelids half covering his eyes, his shoulders shrugged up, his head down between them. A vague light was breaking upon the question. At this moment Dolff stooped down to recover something he had dropped. Meredith uttered a quick, low cry.

'What is it? What is it? This is too much for you, Charley,' said Gussy.

His eyes were fixed on Dolff in the corner. They were widening and brightening, the iris dilating, the eyes almost projecting, or seeming to project, with the intensity of his gaze.

'Ah!' he said, with a long-drawn breath.

He had found it at last—the thing which he had remembered, yet could not remember. Janet's eyes, drawn to him with a sort of fascination, divined what it meant, and her

heart sank. Gussy, who had no such prescience, thought only of excitement and fatigue to her patient.

'Oh, what is it? you are overdone?' she said. 'You must do nothing more to-day.'

When he turned to her he had a smile on his lips.

'I am not overdone,' he said, 'on the contrary, I have made great progress. I have got new light. I have got back my memory, and now I remember everything. Pray, Dolff,' he said, quietly, 'don't go away. You must help us with your experience.' And he laughed—a laugh full of mockery, which somehow, to two at least of the persons present, seemed like a death-knell.

Dolff, who had made a step or two towards the door, stopped with an obedience too ready and complete. He saw the change in Meredith's face, and felt that the hour of vengeance which he had, he thought, eluded, was now about to come. He cast a dull glance at Janet, half of appeal, half of despair—and saw that

she thought as he did, and was holding her breath in intense attention. She understood, but did not sympathise. She would not stand by him now, he felt instinctively, though she had stood by him before.

'Well,' said Meredith, 'excuse me, I have kept you too long waiting. You are after the fellow who knocked me down, officer—have you got any trace?'

'Well, sir,' said the policeman, 'you might say nearly murdered you. I'm glad to see you so well again.'

'Thanks,' said Meredith, 'as I'm so well, we'll say only knocked me down: and if he hadn't taken me at a disadvantage in coming up behind me, I suppose I ought to have been able to give a good account of him.'

'Ah!' said the policeman, 'one of those fellows he wouldn't face a gentleman like you. I'm sorry to say we've no trace of him—nothing as I could act upon: but I've got the man as saw it from the other side of the street, and he says he could pick out the man from any dozen. He

says he would know his face again wherever he saw him; he's got a notion, besides, of where the fellow's to be found. I was thinking as you might like to question him yourself; I have got him just round the corner, waiting with one of my mates, if you'd like to see him yourself.'

'Ah!' said Meredith, 'it wouldn't be a bad thing. What do you say, Dolff? Don't you think we might have this man—who could recognise the cad who hit me behind my back, here?'

Dolff's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He stood in his corner, and glanced at the speaker, but did not answer a word.

'I could have him here in a moment,' the policeman said.

'It would be interesting,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'but a little exciting; and, if he saw him so well, why didn't he secure him there and then?'

'His attention, ma'am, was called off by the gentleman as he thought was dying; but I don't think as it is too late.'

Did the detective glance into the corner too,

at Dolff standing in dark shadow against the wall?

'I am only afraid it will be too much for you in your weak state,' said Gussy, looking anxiously at her patient.

'We'll let Dolff decide,' said Meredith, with once more that dreadful laugh. 'Come, give us your advice, as you have had all the previous information. Shall we have this man in who can identify—the murderer, Dolff?'

There was a pause, which even to the unsuspecting ladies had something dreadful in it. Dolff cleared his throat and moistened his parched lips.

'You can have him—if you wish it, I suppose?' he said.

The crisis, however, passed off for the moment in an unexpected way—for Meredith's strength suddenly forsook him, and he had to be taken back to his room in something very like a faint.

CHAPTER II.

REMEMBERING is a very slow progress when your mind is confused by serious illness, weakness, and the breaking off for a time of all threads of meaning in the mind. Meredith took it up again in the morning, though not with the momentary gleam of conviction which had flashed upon him; and he worked very hard at it, as he might have worked at a case in his practice for the Bar or a mathematical problem. But it was harder than either of those. He made out easily enough his meeting with Janet at Mimpriss's, and guessed rather than remembered that he had walked home with her, and thus exposed himself to being knocked down at Mrs. Harwood's door; but he did not make out until he had returned to the question—his

faculties freshened by a night's sleep, and the new energy of the morning—why it was that he had met Janet, or that there was any special reason for their meeting. It flashed upon him all at once that he had made the appointment; that he had written to her to ask her to meet him; and then he remembered all at once the papers and the mystery which the papers had thrown so little light upon. He half started from his couch with excitement when it burst upon him that he was under the same roof as the mysterious recluse in the wing: and thus laid himself open to a grave reproof from his attendant, who called upon him to recollect that he had been very ill, that his escape was half-miraculous, and that to put his health in jeopardy by suffering himself to get excited would be 'more than criminal.' He believed that she meant scarcely less than criminal, but he was humble, and expressed the deepest penitence.

'I was only thinking,' he said, 'and something suddenly flashed upon me.'

'Thinking is the very worst thing you could

do,' said the nurse, severely, 'and to have things flashing upon you is what I cannot allow. If it occurs again I must appeal to the doctor.'

The nurse was a lady, so that he could not quench her as he would have done had she been Mrs. Gamp, and had to apologise again. But the compulsory pause did him good, for when he returned to the subject without any more starts and flashes, it all became clear to him again from the night of the ball upwards. The various events of that night came back like a picture to his mind. It had occupied him entirely in the short intervals that occurred between that discovery and the assault upon him at Mrs. Harwood's door. Since then he had remembered nothing about it till now.

And now: he was under the same roof—he would have, as he got better and better, unbounded opportunities of finding out what that mystery was. The couch was now to be altogether discarded. He was to be allowed to walk and to sit in a chair like other people. Vicars the mysterious would be under

his eye, and Mrs. Harwood—and Gussy in her present condition, softened with anxiety for him, and joy in his recovery, would disclose anything he might ask from her. He knew that she could not keep any secret from him now—if it were a secret she knew.

He felt greatly elated by the idea of the discovery which was so near, which lay under his hand, which he must be able to complete with his present advantages, and the thought of it led him very far on. True, he had almost forgotten Janet and the immediate yet lesser problem which he had to solve, *i.e.*, how he came to be knocked down and almost killed at Mrs. Harwood's, and who had done it. He left the other subject with a sigh and came back to this again for the moment. Yes, he had received from Janet the papers which she had put together for him—received them, he remembered, without a word, which had piqued and made him resolve to compromise Janet, and show her what a farce it was to be demure with him—at least, to compromise Janet as much as he could

without compromising himself. It was for that reason, he remembered, that he insisted upon going all the way with and talking to her as only a lover had any right to do—for that reason, and also because she had a great attraction for him, far more than Gussy had ever had. He began to recollect even the things she had said—her little struggles against his appropriation of her, her gradually yielding—all that is most delightful for a suitor of his kind to recollect.

He liked to feel himself the cause of emotion in others—he smiled as he thought of it. Poor little Janet; she was angry and she was horrified. She felt probably that it was she who had brought him into the great danger under which he had fallen, and she was desperate to see that his illness had separated them more than ever, and made Gussy mistress of the situation. He forgave her, therefore, for her averted looks and unyielding face. She must know how it had all come about. He was certain from her looks that she knew, but she would not betray herself by telling, and he

would not betray her by forcing her to tell, for in that case he would betray himself too.

Who could it be, he again asked himself, who had fallen upon him, and assaulted him in that terrible way? Meredith was not conscious of having enemies of that old-fashioned kind. There might be plenty of men who did not like him, as there were plenty of men whom he did not like; but between that and trying to murder him there was a great difference. He was not a man of the highest morals, perhaps, but he did not inflict injuries which would give any man a right to fling himself upon him in this way. It was a new idea to think that it might be a lover of Janet's: but what lover could Janet have—some young fellow from the country, perhaps, driven frantic by seeing his beloved in such close colloquy with another man.

Meredith's reason, however, rejected this hypothesis. The young man from the country would not be such a tragical fool as to rush upon an unknown stranger and try to murder him solely because that stranger was walking home

with his sweetheart. No! and besides, he remembered something—something which had been presented to his intelligence at the very last moment before that intelligence was temporarily quenched—something—what was it that he remembered? It was all perfectly clear up to this point. He saw every step as distinctly as if it were in a case he had studied from a brief, but here the evidence broke down. And yet it was lying somewhere in a corner of his mind if he could only get at it. He knew that it was there.

'How is our patient to-day?' said Gussy, coming in, with the privilege of her long nursing, after Meredith had made his toilette, and was lying on the sofa to rest after that operation.

The nurse shook her head.

'Our patient,' she said, 'has been thinking. He has been using his mind a great deal too much—he has been smiling to himself and knitting his brows as if he were trying to remember something. You will please to tell him, Miss Harwood, that this sort of thing will not do. I

have done so, but he does not mind me.'

'How cruel of you to say so!' said Meredith, 'when you know that I mind you in everything! I never take an invigorating glass of soda-water without asking you if I may.'

She shook her head again.

'It is not glasses of soda-water that are in question, but using your head, Mr. Meredith, when it's not in a fit state.'

'With two or three holes in it,' said Meredith, ruefully.

'No; you must not,' said Gussy, soothing him. 'I am glad you think you have found a clue, but that is enough for to-day.'

Yes, it was enough for to-day; he was compelled in his weakness to acknowledge that he could do no more.

'And you must not think. You must not even attempt to think,' said Gussy; 'thinking is not a thing for you to do. Promise me you will not try.'

He took her hand to reassure her, but he did not promise, and even in the act of holding

Gussy's hand and looking up tenderly into her face in requital of her care, he glanced round to make sure that Janet saw this little affectionate episode. He wished her to see, with a sense of pique at the indifference she had shown, and a desire that she should be made aware how little her indifference was shared by others. In his weak state it was doubly necessary to him to be surrounded by care and attention, to have love to wait upon and consider him in all things. He was pleased for himself to caress and be caressed, but he loved to have a spectator to whom he could make those little traitorous asides which increased his enjoyment, or whom he could at least mortify with the sight of his entire mastery over some one else if he had ceased to move her.

But, though this little play with the feelings of others pleased him, he did not give up on that account the quest upon which his mind had entered. Meredith had no inclination to let off or pardon the offender who had so nearly taken his life. Whoever it might be, he was

determined to hunt him out and punish him. And he only relinquished this, the process in his mind of putting together such evidence as he had got possession of and working it out, as he might have put aside any piece of manual work till his fatigue had passed away and he was able to take it up again. It would not do to throw himself back by getting a headache by injuring his nerves or his sleep. His mind was sufficiently trained to enable him to do this; to put thoughts aside when they hurt him, to take them back again when he was in a fit state to do so—which is a capacity always very astonishing to those who have never learned to discipline and rule their thoughts.

Janet thought with relief that whatever suspicions may have gleamed across him, whatever half recollections might have formed in his mind, they had passed away like clouds, when she saw him submitting to all Gussy's half-nurse, half-lover attentions, leaning back upon his pillows, suffering himself to be silenced and soothed, smiling upon his anxious ministrant,

and professing to do everything she told him.

'Was there ever so docile a slave?' he said; 'I have no will but my lady's.'

'You mean patient,' said Gussy, with the soft flush that lit up her face, 'and it is your nurse whom you obey.'

'Fortunately the two things are the same in my case,' he said.

To think that he could indulge in this badinage while his mind was still following out the thread upon which another man's life hung, was incredible to Janet. She thought it had all passed from his mind, and that she and her secret, and, still more, Dolff and his, must now be safe. And presently she was asked to go again and play for the soothing of the invalid, a request which she obeyed with suppressed indignation. Why should she be made to minister to him too—she whose eyes had been opened, who had just escaped, or hoped that she had escaped from him, almost at the risk of her life? Janet was impatient of him, and half disappointed after the excitement into which his tentative

questions and looks had thrown her, that he had let it drop again and float off in nothingness. She was quieted in her fears, but she almost resented it, and despised the man who had so little nerve and force left.

Janet was wrong, it need scarcely be said. Meredith retired a little earlier than usual on the pretence of being tired. He lay very still in the quiet of his room, which nobody but the nurse was now permitted to enter, till his headache was quite gone, and then he returned to the search of his own mind and recollections, and to the finding out of the something which he remembered, yet for the moment had forgot.

CHAPTER III.

It all came back like lightning when the policeman came once more. The family party were almost as before, when the man was announced again, bringing back the former excitement.

No one noticed when Dolff stole out of the room. The lamps had not been brought in, though the afternoon had become dark. The fire glowed, but gave no flame. But it is wrong to say that no one noticed. Janet did not lose a movement of the unhappy young man, nor did Meredith, though he took no notice. Meredith said little: he was struggling with the force of this new discovery that had flashed upon his mind, and which not only cleared up the knotty point, but put meaning and reason

into a business hitherto incomprehensible to him.

When the aspect of Dolff suddenly struck upon his dormant memory and roused it into keen life, he no longer found any difficulty in understanding the whole matter. Dolff had seen him with Janet, with whom the lout imagined himself in love. He had heard, perhaps, certain words of the conversation; he had seen the clinging of Janet to Meredith's arm, the hands held in his. Meredith thought he remembered now a figure with hat drawn down and collar up at the window of Mimpriss's shop. It was all explicable now; he understood it. Dolff! It flashed upon him without doubt or uncertainty. There was something whimsical, bizarre about it which made him laugh. Dolff, whom he had always despised, a rowdy undergraduate, a music-hall man. Dolff, a troublesome boy, wanting even in the matured strength of a man, not his own match in any way. And to think that he had been carried into the house, and nursed with the profoundest devotion under

the same roof with the cub who had tried to take his life.

Nobody had the least idea why Meredith laughed. It was at the detective, he said, though the detective was not ridiculous at all. And this was what had changed the looks of Janet, and given her that tranquil air which, now he thought of it, was so ludicrous too. He had to make an effort to restrain that laugh. After the first thrill of anger, Meredith rejected as impossible the punishment of Dolff. It was not a thing that could be done. Such a scandal and disturbance of all existing ties was inexpedient, even for himself—to have it published to the world that he had been knocked down and almost killed by the son of the house in which he spent most of his evenings, was impossible. At all hazards that danger must be staved off. But Meredith saw means of torturing both those culprits which would be very effectual without any intervention of the law. He would have Dolff at his mercy; he would pierce him with arrows of ridicule from which it would be

impossible for the young man to defend himself; and Janet, who had forsaken him, who held apart, and even played for him, when she was bidden to do so, unwillingly—Janet should suffer too.

Lights of malice and mockery woke up in Meredith's eyes. He anticipated a great deal of fun from the appearance of the witness, who, no doubt, would collapse and come to nothing when inquired into. Meredith saw nothing but sport in this unthought-of catastrophe. He had something of the feeling of the excited boy who has a cat or a dog to torture. He knew how to tickle Dolff up in the tenderest places, to keep him in a perpetual ferment of alarm, to hold endless threats over him; and to watch his writhings would be all the more fun that the fellow would deserve it all, and more than that if he got his due. Thus delightedly pursuing his revenge, Meredith missed the moment when Dolff withdrew. But Janet saw it, with a terror impossible to describe. She could not go after him or advise

him. Since these miseries had happened, it had become her charge to make the tea, and there she sat, conspicuous even in the fading light, unable to budge. She saw the unhappy young man steal out, and she knew that all kinds of desperate resolves must be in his mind. He would not have the courage to face it out. He would go away and he would conceal himself —do something to heighten suspicion and make every guess into certainty. And she could not go after him to warn him—to implore him to stand fast! The tortures which Meredith had imagined with such pleasure had begun in Janet's breast.

Dolff got out into the hall in a condition impossible to describe—his limbs were limp with misery and fear. Great drops of perspiration hung upon his forehead. He went blindly to snatch a hat from the stand; then took his coat, for he was cold with mental agony, and struggled into it. While he was doing this, Vicars suddenly appeared by him, he could not tell how, and laid a hand on his shoulder, which made

Dolff jump. He darted back with an oath, and would have that moment turned and fled had not Vicars caught his arm again.

'Mr. Dolff, what's up? For goodness' sake don't fly out like this. There's one of those d——d policemen watching on the other side of the road.'

Dolff stared wildly in Vicars' face.

'Let me go,' he said. 'I must go; I don't care where.'

'What's up?' said Vicars. 'You're in some row, Mr. Dolff?'

'Don't you know?' said Dolff, wildly. 'That man's coming back. If he comes back before I'm gone, it's all up with me, Vicars. Get out of my way. I'll go—by the garden door.'

'And show yourself to all the women,' said Vicars, 'who'll tell the first word, "Oh, he's in the garden." Mr. Dolff, is it life or death?'

Dolff could not speak. He stared dully at his questioner, unable to reply. The sound of the outer door pushed open, and men's footsteps upon the path, came in like a sort of horrible

accompaniment and explanation. The perspiration stood in great beads on Dolff's forehead. He tried to make a bolt at the passage to the garden, which led by the open door of the kitchen. Then he drew himself up against the wall, in a half stupor, as if he could conceal himself so.

'Is it life or death?' said Vicars, in his ear; but Dolff could not speak.

He had a dim vision of the man's face, of the light swimming in his eyes, of the knock upon the door of the house, ominous, awful, like a knell; and then he suddenly found himself drawn into darkness, into a warm, close atmosphere, beyond the reach of that, or apparently of any other sound.

Priscilla, always correct, but a little surprised, not knowing how to account for such an invasion of the drawing-room, ushered in the detective, accompanied by a man in a shabby coat, very inappropriate certainly to that locality. Mr. Dolff had always spoken to such men in the hall. A parlourmaid is, above all things, an

aristocrat. To have to introduce two such persons to her mistress's presence offended her in her deepest sense of right and wrong.

'Is this the man?' said Meredith. 'Mrs. Harwood, do you think we might have a little light?'

'Priscilla is bringing in the lamps,' said Mrs. Harwood, looking with a little suspicion and annoyance at the men, who certainly were much out of place: a feeling that there was danger in them somehow, though she could not tell how, crept into her mind.

She looked anxiously at the dim figures looming against the light, and a thrill of alarm went through her. Why did Charley insist on having them here? Why did not Dolff see them in the hall, as he had done before? She had never had a policeman in her house; never, except— Trouble and tremor came over her as she sat there growing breathless in her chair. As for Gussy, she was insensible to every appeal, to every claim upon her attention but one. She was Meredith's sick-nurse, watching lest he

should be over-fatigued, thinking of nothing else. There was no help or support in her for her mother's anxieties.

When the lamps were brought in matters were no better. A sort of Rembrandt-like depth of shadow fell upon the two strange figures, throwing a blackness over the tea-table at which Janet was sitting, and showing only the form of Meredith in his chair, which was full within the influence of the shaded light, and the awkward attitudes of the two men in the middle of the room.

'So this is the man who saw me—knocked down?' said Meredith. His face, which was the central light in that strange picture, was lit up with what seemed more like malicious fun than any other sentiment. 'And you think you could identify the fellow who did it? Is that so?'

'You may thank your stars as you weren't killed,' said the new-comer. 'He meant it, sir, that fellow did.'

'You think so? Well, he hasn't succeeded,

you see; and you think you can identify him?'

'Among a thousand, sir,' said the man. 'Just you put him afore me in a crowd and I'll pick him out afore you could say——'

'Then why,' said Meredith, 'haven't you done it before now? Here are three weeks gone, and plenty of time for him to have got away.'

'He's not got away; I've kept my eye upon him, and I have said to the police, times and times, as I could lay my hands upon him as soon as ever he was wanted.'

'I thought,' said Meredith, 'a criminal was wanted from the moment he put himself in the power of the law. You should have secured him at once; to keep your eye upon a man is not a process known to the law.'

'I don't know about the law, sir,' said the man. 'I know that I've been ready any day. I told 'em so the very first night, but they've never paid no attention to me—not till this gentleman was put on as knows me, and knows as he can trust in my word.'

'Yes?' said Meredith, solemnly, 'I'm glad to hear you can have such good recommendations. Is it necessary you should have a thousand to choose from before you tell us who my assailant is?—because, you see, it would be a little difficult to have them in here.'

'Oh,' cried the man, angrily, 'a deal fewer than a thousand will do—if you'll just collect all there is in the house——'

'In the house!' cried Mrs. Harwood, 'but what is the use of that? We know beforehand that there is nobody in this house who would lay a finger——' she stopped with an indefinite choking sensation in her throat, suddenly perceiving that Dolff had gone away. It was not distinct enough to mean suspicion of Dolff—suspicion of Dolff! what folly and insanity! but why should he have gone away?

'I thought as you said the young gentleman was here,' said the witness, turning to his guide. 'I told you as you'd never find him when you came back.'

'It don't matter much,' said the other, in a low

tone, 'he can't go far, there's two of my mates outside.'

The ladies did not catch the meaning of this colloquy, though it raised the most bewildering alarm in Mrs. Harwood's breast. Gussy still thought of it alone as it affected the health of her beloved. She stood by him, her attention concentrated on him, watching whether he grew pale, whether he flushed, if he seemed tired. Her mother's anxious look awakened no sympathy in Gussy's mind. If she observed it at all she set it down to the same cause as made herself anxious, the fear that Meredith might be over-excited or fatigued.

'Do you want the maids and all?' said Meredith, in his familiar tone of banter. 'You don't think much of me, my good man, if you think I could be battered like that by—Priscilla, for instance,' he said, turning to Mrs. Harwood with a laugh.

'I wasn't thinking of no Priscilla,' said the man, angrily. 'If it suits you to laugh at it, gentleman, it don't suit me. There's a reward out.

And when I see as clear as I sees you—I should think it *was* a man, and a strong one too. Lord, how savage he took you up again and dashed your 'ead against the pavement! I should know him anywhere, among a thousand.'

'Charley,' said Mrs. Harwood, faintly, 'there is something dreadful in all this. Do you think it could be put off to another time? or couldn't they just go and do their duty, whatever it is, without freezing the blood in our veins, and,' she added, catching Gussy's look, 'exhausting you?'

'I'm sorry to trouble the lady, sir,' said the detective. 'I shouldn't have said anything if I could have helped it; but, to tell you the truth, suspicion does attach to a person in the house. If the young gentleman had stayed and faced it, things might have been done quiet. But as he's gone away—I'm sorry, very sorry, to disturb the ladies—but I've got a search-warrant, and I must find my man. You'll explain it to 'em, sir, as I can't help it, and it was no wish of mine to upset the house.'

'A search-warrant! Oh, my God! what does he mean?' cried Mrs. Harwood. She added, in her bewilderment, 'That could have nothing to do with Charley,' under her breath.

'I have no more idea than you have,' said Meredith; 'some one in this house? It must be old Vicars they mean. Come, my man, don't be too absurd. If you think that old fellow could play at pitch-and-toss with me in the way you describe, you must have a precious poor opinion of me. But I suppose Vicars can be sent for—if he's in the house.'

'I don't know nothing about Vicars, nor who he is. Where's that young gentleman? What did he go away for when he knew as he was wanted? You produce that young gentleman, and then you'll see what we means,' said the witness, in great wrath.

'Hold your noise,' said the policeman. 'I daresay it's all nonsense when we come to the bottom of it; and I'm sure I'm very sorry to disturb the ladies; but I must just 'ave a few words

with the young gentleman. Most likely he can clear it all up.'

'Dolff!' said Mrs. Harwood, with an amazed cry.

'Dolff!' cried Meredith, with a burst of laughter.

His apparent appreciation of this as an excellent joke confused the two men. They looked at each other again for mutual support.

'You'd not have laughed if you'd seen him, as I did,' growled the stranger.

'I felt—him, whoever he was, as you didn't, my man; and it is evident you think me a poor creature, to be battered about by a boy—or a woman. Come, there's enough of this nonsense,' he said. 'Why didn't you seize the fellow when you saw him? What do you mean, coming with this cock-and-bull story three weeks after —and to me?'

'Produce the young gentleman, sir, and let me just ask him a few questions.'

'I haven't got him in my pocket,' said Meredith. 'Probably he has gone out. If he were

here, I should not allow him to answer your questions. I'm his legal adviser. Come, come, don't let us have any more of this.'

'If he has gone out,' said the policeman, 'by this time he's in the hands of my mate—and if he haven't I've a right to search the house. You'd better produce him, mister—or you, lady, before it's too late.'

Janet, unable to bear the scene which was thus rising to a climax, had got up out of the shadow and left the room a moment before. The hall was perfectly vacant, not a trace of anyone in it—not even Priscilla going about her business, or the nurse in the dining-room, which was still sacred to the invalid. The lamp burned steadily, the silence was dreadful to the excited girl. It seemed like the pause of fate—not a sound within or without—even the voices, subdued by distance, but generally audible in a cheerful hum from the kitchen, were hushed to-night. All perfectly silent—calm as if tumult or tragedy had never entered there.

CHAPTER IV.

'I MUST go after them; I must—I must follow them! Oh, Dolff, where are you—where are you?' cried Mrs. Harwood.

She was wild with excitement and alarm, her face alternately flushed and paled, her form trembling with endeavour to move, to push herself forward, to follow those dreadful emissaries of the law whose heavy steps were very audible, now on the stairs, now overhead.

The other members of the party were in strange contrast to her anxiety. Meredith lay back in his chair rubbing his hands, moved apparently by the supremest sense of the ludicrous, unable to see it in any but a ridicu-

lous light. Gussy leaned on the back of his chair, smiling in sympathy with him, yet a little pale and wondering, beginning to realise that something disagreeable, painful, might be going on, though it did not mean fatigue or excitement to her patient. Julia, finally roused from her book, had got up bewildered, and stood asking what was the matter, getting no reply from anyone.

The door of the drawing-room had been left open, and across the hall, at the opposite door of what was now Meredith's room, stood the nurse in her white cap and apron, with a wondering face, looking out.

'I thought I knew a great deal about the folly of the authorities,' said Meredith, 'and of Scotland Yard in particular, but this is the climax. By-the-bye, I see an opportunity for a great sensation, which, if I were at the Old Bailey, would make my fortune. "The prisoner, accused of a murderous assault upon Mr. Meredith, was defended by that gentleman in person." What a situation for the press—one might add,

who is a family connection, eh, Gussy?' he said, putting up his hand to take hers, which was upon the back of his chair.

'Oh, Charley! but speak to mamma. Mamma is miserable. Everything about Dolff makes her so anxious.'

'Even such an excellent joke?' said Meredith: but he did not say anything to comfort Mrs. Harwood.

In the midst of his laugh a sudden gravity came over him. He looked at her again with a quick, scrutinising glance. Dolff was not all. She had been bewildered—taken by surprise, but was not really anxious about her son. Now, however, as she sat listening, waiting, her suspense became unbearable. A woman imprisoned in her chair never moving, unable to walk a step, she looked as if at any moment she might dart out of it and fling herself after the invaders. Her hands moved uneasily upon the arms of her chair, plucking at them as if to raise herself. The light in her eyes was a wild glare of desperation. The colour fluttered on her face,

now ebbing away and leaving her ghastly, now coming back with a sudden flush. He remembered suddenly all that might be involved in a search of that house, and that for anything he knew a secret which it was of the utmost importance he should fathom now lay, as it were, within reach of his hand. He became serious all at once, the laugh passing suddenly from his face. He got up, but not to stop the examination, as Gussy hoped. He did not even stop to soothe Mrs. Harwood, but strolled out into the hall on his unsteady limbs, forgetting them all.

'I must go after them,' Mrs. Harwood cried again, half raising herself in her chair. 'I must go after them. Gussy, they may go—how can we tell where they may go?'

'No, mamma, there is nothing to be alarmed about. Vicars will see to that.'

'How can we tell where Vicars is? I have been afraid of something of the kind all my life. Gussy, I must go myself. I must go myself!'

'Oh, hush, mamma,' said Gussy; she was not alarmed about a risk which had never frightened

her at all. Mrs. Harwood was always nervous; but Gussy, who had been used to it for years, had never believed that anything would happen. So long as Charley did not throw himself back —was not over excited. This was what Gussy most feared.

'I'll take you wherever you like, mamma,' said Julia, coming with a rush to the back of the chair, and projecting her mother into the hall with a force which nearly shook her out of it. Mrs. Harwood's precipitate progress was arrested by Meredith, who called out to Julia to go softly, and caught at the arm of the chair as it swung past.

'Are you coming too, to keep an eye on them?' he said.

'I don't like,' said Mrs. Harwood, trying to subdue the trembling of her lips, 'to have such people all over my house.'

'Oh, they are honest enough; there will be no picking or stealing. As for the thing itself, it's a farce. I daresay Dolff has gone out. And, if not, what does it matter? If there is any

such ridiculous idea about, you had better meet it and be done with it. It's a wonder they don't arrest me for knocking down myself.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Harwood faintly, 'I am not afraid for Dolff.'

'You can have nothing else to be afraid of,' said Meredith, in his careless tones. 'A search by the police is nothing unless there happens to be something for them to find out. Nothing is of any importance unless it is true. They may search till they are tired, but, so long as there is nobody in hiding, what can it matter? Don't trouble yourself about nothing. Let me take you back to your comfortable fireside.'

'No, no,' said Mrs. Harwood, more and more troubled; 'I will stay here.'

He had not, it was evident, found the way to save her, with all his philosophy.

'No?' said Meredith, interrogatively. 'It's rather cold here, however, after the cosiness of the drawing-room. I hope you'll not catch cold. If it is any satisfaction to you, of course, there's

nothing to be said: but I should think you might let me look out for these fellows and send them off. Julia and me,' he added, with a wave of his hand to Julia, and the smile which was so exasperating.

He kept wondering all the time where Janet was—Janet, who had disappeared without attracting any notice, and who probably, he thought, had helped to smuggle Dolff away somewhere, uselessly—because when such an accusation was once made, it was much better to brave it out. It was like the folly of a woman to try to smuggle him away, when the only thing was to brave it out.

'This is the only place where there is no draught,' he said, pushing Mrs. Harwood's chair directly in front of the door which led to the wing—the door, which, on the night of the ball, he and Janet had miraculously found unfastened.

The door, he remarked once more, had every appearance of being a door built up and impracticable. To say, in a carefully-kept house

like this, that it was covered with dust would not have been true, but there was an air about it as if it had been covered with dust. Meredith smiled at himself while he made this reflection. His heart was singularly buoyant and free, full of excitement, yet of pleasurable excitement. He was on the eve of finding out something he wanted to find out, and he was most particularly concerned that the circumstances which favoured him should overwhelm Mrs. Harwood. He placed her almost exactly in front of the door as if she had intended to veil it, and drew over one of the hall chairs beside her and threw himself down upon it.

'This is the most sheltered spot,' he said, 'out of reach of the door and several other draughts. If you will stay out in the hall and catch cold, Mrs. Harwood, you are safest here.'

She glanced at the door as he drew her up to it with a repressed shudder. She had become deadly pale, and in the faint light looked as if she had suddenly become a hundred years old, withered and shrunken up with age. Julia,

very much startled, and with eyes wide open and astonished, stood by her mother.

'I shouldn't have put her by that nasty shut-up door; there is always a wind from under it,' she said.

'Hush—oh, hush!' said Mrs. Harwood, with a shiver.

The detective and his companion were coming downstairs, led by the sniffing and contemptuous Priscilla. They came down cautiously with their heavy boots, as if they might have slipped on the soft carpets.

'Well,' said Meredith, as they came in sight, 'found anything? We are waiting here to hear your news.'

'No, sir; the young gentleman have got clean away, so far I can see,' said the policeman; 'but you know, sir, as well as me, for a man that's known to struggle with the p'leece is no good. He'll be got at, sooner or later, and it's far better to give himself up at once.'

'That is exactly my opinion,' said Meredith, 'and I should have given him that advice if

either of us had known what you meant; but, you see, a young gentleman who has nothing on his conscience does not think what is the wisest thing to do about the police—for he does not expect to have anything to do with them.'

'I hope he have as easy a conscience as that,' said the detective.

'I hope he has, and I don't doubt it, either. Well—what are you going to do now? You've looked through all this part of the house, I suppose?'

'We began with the upper rooms first.'

'That was scarcely wise of you,' said Meredith, 'he might have popped out of one of those rooms and run for it, while you were busy upstairs.'

'Scarcely that, sir,' said the policeman, with a grin—and he opened the door, revealing suddenly a colleague erect and burly in his blue uniform upon the step outside.

This sight made even Meredith silent for a moment. It made the peril and the watch real, and brought before him all the difficulties to be

encountered if Dolff (which seemed incredible) should actually be taken, committed to prison, and tried for a murderous attack upon his own life. It was so appalling, and he knew so little how to meet it if it really became an actual situation to be reckoned with, that for a moment he was stunned; then he thought it best to burst into a laugh. The effect on Mrs. Harwood was naturally still more serious. The poor lady began to cry:

'Is it my boy, my Dolff, that they are hunting down like that? Oh! Charley, you are the only one that can tell them how—how ridiculous it is—tell them it's not true.'

'I'm very sorry, ma'am, to disturb you,' said the policeman, 'but will you just move your chair from that door? I beg your pardon, I didn't know the lady couldn't move—let me do it—thank you, miss—away from that door.'

'That's not a door,' said Julia, promptly, 'it's been shut up since ever I remember; that other is the dining-room where Charley Meredith lives, and that is the library that is standing open. And

this is the passage that leads to the kitchen and the pantry. And there's the drawing-room on the other side, and this is a cupboard, and this——'

'Beg your pardon, miss, we'll find them all out as we comes to them,' the man said. 'It's hard work, and it's harder still when we haves to do it in the face of a lot of ladies as is innocent of everything, and don't even know what we means when we speak. Won't you say to the lady, sir, as she'll be far better in her own room, and to let us do what is our painful dooty?'

'It is unnecessary for you to say anything, Charley,' said Mrs. Harwood; 'if my house is to be treated like a thieves' den, at least I shall stay here.'

'If it upsets you, lady, don't blame us,' said the policeman, respectfully enough.

They went through all the rooms while she sat watching, Meredith lounging beside her in a chair, occasionally getting up to take a turn about the hall. If the policeman had been a

man of any penetration, he would have seen that his investigations in these rooms were of no interest to the watchers, but that their excitement grew fierce every time he emerged into the hall.

Meredith felt the fire in his veins burn stronger as they came back and forward. It was with difficulty he could restrain his agitation. Mrs. Harwood's chair had been pushed aside, leaving the access open to that mysterious door. She sat with her head turned away a little, her hands clasped together, an image of suspense and painful anxiety, listening for the men's steps as they drew nearer. Gussy had followed the rest of the party, though it was against all her principles to yield to this excitement and make a show, as she said, of her feelings. She was vexed especially to see her mother 'give way.'

'Let me put you back into the drawing-room, mamma. What is the use of staying here? Dolff has gone out, evidently. It is very silly of him, but still he has done so. It will do him no good for you to catch cold here. Charley, do tell her

to come in. As for you, you will throw yourself back a week at least. Oh, for goodness' sake, do not make everything worse by staying here!'

Mrs. Harwood made no reply. She shook her head with speechless impatience, and turned her face away. She was beyond all considerations but one, and she could not bear any interruptions, a voice, a sound, which kept her strained ears from the knowledge of the men's movements, and where they were. Gussy's whisper continued to Meredith was torture to her. She raised her hand with an imperative gesture to have silence, silence! her heart beating in her ears like a sledge-hammer rising and falling was surely enough, without having any whispering and foolish, vain, ineffectual words.

'There's nothing now but this door,' said the policeman, coming out somewhat crestfallen. 'He's nowhere else, that's clear. If he ain't here he's given us the slip—for the moment. Hallo! it's locked, this one is! I'll thank you, sir, to get me the key.'

'I have always understood,' said Meredith, blandly, 'that the door was built up, or fastened up. It has never been used since I have known the house.'

'I told you so,' said Julia, 'if you had listened to me. It isn't a door at all, and leads to nowhere. It was once the door of the wing,' she continued, with the liking of a child for giving information, 'but it has never once been opened since ever I was born.'

'The wing! that's them empty rooms as we see from the garden—the very place for a man to hide. Tell you what, sir, I can't bear to upset the lady—but we must break in if we can't get in quietly. You might try if you couldn't get us the key, and take the ladies away—anyhow, get the old lady to go away—whatever happens, she'd better not be here.'

Mrs. Harwood spoke quickly, in a hoarse and broken voice.

'There is no key,' she said.

'I give you five minutes to think of it, lady,'

said the man; 'otherwise we must break in the door.'

There was a dreadful silence—a silence which no one dared to break.

'I am telling you the truth; you cannot open it, it has always been shut up. There is no key.'

CHAPTER V.

THE policeman's epigrammatic assertion that it was difficult for a known man to struggle with the police, is still more true when it is only a door which stands before a couple of men excited and exasperated by failure and a probable discovery. The door was a strong door, it was partially plated with iron, and its lock was cunningly devised, but after a while it began to give way.

Meredith, altogether absorbed in this new turn of affairs, and carried away by the prospect which it opened to him as well as to its assailants, seemed to the bystanders to have altogether gone over to the enemy. He stood by

them, encouraging them in a low tone, suggesting how to strike, examining into the weak points with the keenest critical eye; in fact, in the excitement of the moment, forgetting all his precautions and pretence of indifference, and throwing himself on the side of the assailants. He had, it is true, the safe ground to fall back upon that, as he had always been assured there was nothing there, he could do no possible harm in helping to prove that fact to the men who would not be convinced in any other way.

Mrs. Harwood sat with her face to the door, her arms crossed upon her breast, her whole frame swaying and moving with the strokes that rained upon it. When a crash came she shivered and shrank into herself as if the blow had struck her—a low moan came involuntarily to her lips. Gussy, who had abandoned Meredith after trying in vain to restrain him, came and stood by her mother's chair, with a hand upon her shoulder.

'Oh, mamma, for God's sake,' said Gussy, in her ear, 'don't! Don't let them see you mind it so.'

The mother half turned to her a face which was livid in its terror. Her eyes, so clear usually, had lost their colour even, and seemed to float in a sort of liquefication, the iris disappearing into the watery black globe—her mouth was open. She uttered a murmur of inarticulate passion, and made as though she would have struck the soothing hand. But the men at this exciting work took no notice of Mrs. Harwood. The officer of the law was more fit to break down a resisting door than to draw subtle deductions from the looks of the besieged family. The practical matter was within his sphere. He only looked round with an exclamation of triumph when the door at last burst from its holdings, and the dark passage gaped open before them with its curtains drawn back.

'There!' he shouted, turning round for a moment, 'there's your door that never was used,' and would have dashed in had not his attendant held him back.

'I say,' said the man who had hitherto

followed him like his shadow, 'how do ye know that he hasn't got a revolver up there?'

The detective fell back for a moment.

'We've got to risk it,' he said, with the professional stoicism of a man bound to meet danger at any time. He was not of much use in scenting out a mystery, but he could face a possible revolver with the stolid courage of his class. He made a pause, however, and added, with a rare effort of reflection, 'And this one's new to it; he's not up to their dodges——' *They* were the criminal class with which a straightforward policeman is accustomed to deal.

Meredith followed with an excitement which made him forget everything, even the group of women bewildered in the hall. He knew his way, though he dared not show that he did. He followed the burly figure, and the smaller ill-trained one of the attendant informer and witness, as they wound themselves up in the curtains and came to a pause opposite every obstacle. The passage was perfectly dark, but the inner doors were not closed, notwithstanding the sounds of

assault which those within must have heard. It turned out that the only individual within who had his wits about him had been too closely occupied to be able to look to those means of defence.

For a moment the group of the ladies below hung together in bewildered horror. Then Julia launched herself after the men into the dark passage, drawn by inextinguishable curiosity and the excitement of a child in sight of the unknown. Mrs. Harwood had covered her face with her hands, and lay back in her chair, fallen upon herself like a fallen house, lying, so to speak, in ruins. Gussy, with her arm round her mother's shoulders, whispered, with tears and a little gasping, frightened crying, some words that were intended to be consolatory in her inattentive ears.

'It is nothing wrong,' Gussy said; 'it is nothing wrong. It was to save him. It is nothing wrong.'

But by-and-by the strong attraction of that open way along which the unseen party were

stumbling seized upon her also. And her patient, who had to be taken care of—who was throwing himself back! Gussy cast a piteous glance upon her mother, lying there with her face upon her hands, paying no attention, whatever comfort might be poured into her ear, and presently impatience got the better of her sympathy, and she too followed in the train. She knew the secret of the wing. She was the only other in the house, except Mrs. Harwood, to whom that secret was known. But in how innocent and simple a way! She was troubled, but she had no sense of guilt; and Gussy said to herself that it was her duty to go and explain, to make it known to the others how simple it all was, when the fascination became too much for her to resist, and, with one glance at her mother, she too stole away. As for Dolff, he had disappeared from their minds, and the incredible suspicion attached to him, as if he had never been born. From the moment that the search began it had been to Mrs. Harwood a search for her secret, and nothing more.

Janet had been all this time hanging about unseen. She could not rest, she who knew so much more than anyone else in the house —both the mystery of the wing and the miserable story of Dolff and his guilt, both of them—as nobody else did: neither Mrs. Harwood, whose thoughts were concentrated upon one, nor Meredith, who had discovered or divined the other, but did not know as Janet did, who knew everything, what had been the cause of Dolff's terrible folly, and what its results, and even when and how he had disappeared. She had been hanging about now in one room, now in another, terrified to show herself, incapable of concealing herself, her very terror of being mixed up in it yielding to the fellow-feeling of a general misery in which she had but her share, and that not so great a share as the others.

When she saw that the mother of the house, who was the most to be pitied of all in this dreadful emergency, was left there forlorn and alone, lying helpless, unable to go after the

others, to confront the catastrophe, at least, as her children could, Janet's heart was touched. She stole down the stairs where she had been watching, looking down upon them all, and came to Mrs. Harwood's side. It was not for her to console or comfort. Janet was aware that she had been more or less the cause of all the trouble. She had found out the family secret, without in the least understanding it, and this was no blame of hers; but she had betrayed it to one who did understand it, and who might, for all she knew, use his knowledge unmercifully, being, as she knew him to be, a man with very little ruth or inclination to spare another. And she had been, without any doubt, the cause of Dolff's misfortune in every way. She had taken him into her toils innocently enough, with no more guiltiness than that of any other girl who had let a foolish young man fall in love with her, and then had driven him mad by her falsehood, and led him into crime—almost to the crime of murder. All this was in Janet's mind as she stole down the

stairs to his mother's side. She had plenty of excuse for herself had anyone accused her, but in her heart she was impartial, and knew very well how much she was to blame. Her heart beat loudly in consonance with the sounds of that exploring party in the dark passage, going to find out—how much more than they sought! She understood it all better than anyone. Meredith's keen satisfaction in unveiling the mystery, and the stupid astonishment of the strangers, who had no suspicion, and Gussy—— But what Gussy would feel was the one thing that Janet did not divine, for she was unaware how much or how little Gussy knew.

She stood by the chair in which Mrs. Harwood lay, all sunken upon herself like a fallen tower, her face hidden, her shoulders drawn together, sinking to her knees. Janet dared not say anything. She put her hand upon the arm of the chair, not even upon the unhappy lady's arm, which she felt that she dared not touch—and stood by her. It was all that anyone could do. The two were left there like wrecks on the shore, from which

everything had ebbed away, even the tumult and the storm which had been raging round. The sounds went on getting fainter, the voices dropped, the footsteps seemed to mount and then grow still, stumbling at first a little, gradually dying out. Mrs. Harwood did not move, nor did Janet, standing by her, scarcely breathing. Were they both following, in imagination, the darkling way which both knew, or had the mother, at last, fallen into a blind insensibility, hearing and knowing no more?

This imagination was, however, suddenly put an end to by a moaning from the chair.

'I can't bear this any longer; I can't bear this!' said Mrs. Harwood. 'Oh, my God! my God! Have they got *there*?' Then she cried, loudly, 'I can't bear it! I can't bear it!' and with a sudden wrench, as if she were tearing herself like a limb from its socket, the disabled woman rose.

Janet, terrified, gave a cry of dismay as, stumbling and tottering, she flung herself out of the chair. Whether Mrs. Harwood had been

aware of her presence before this she could not tell; but, at all events, now she was beyond all sentiment of displeasure or reproof. She put out her shaking hand and grasped at Janet's arm as if it had been a post. The girl's slight figure swayed and almost gave way at the sudden weight flung upon it; but the burden steadied her after the first moment's uncertainty. Mrs. Harwood's face had collapsed with the extreme anguish of the crisis past; her features seemed blurred, like the half-liquid, vaguely floating eyes, which did not seem to see anything. She made a heavy, uncertain step forward, carrying her prop with her by mere momentum of weight and weakness.

'Come,' she said, hoarsely, 'come!'

Janet never knew how these dark passages were got through. She was herself enfolded, carried away in the burden of the helpless woman who leaned upon her guidance for every step. Their progress was wildly devious and uneven, every step being a sort of falling for-

ward, which nevertheless carried them on with spasmodic rapidity, though terrible effort. The voices and steps in front of them grew audible again, but before they reached the last door, which stood open with curtains drawn aside, disclosing a warm blaze of light, there arose a sudden tumult, a roar as of some wild creature, with answering cries of panic and dismay. The opened doorway suddenly darkened with a crowd of retreating figures, and Julia darted out from the midst and came blindly flying upon the tottering group that was struggling forward.

'Go back, go back!' cried Julia, 'whoever you are. There's a madman there!' and then she gave a shriek as wild as the sounds that came from the room, 'Oh,' cried the girl, her shrill voice dominating even that riot, 'it's mamma! My mother's here!'

CHAPTER VI.

NEXT moment they had surged as on the top of a wave to the room within. Nothing could be more strange than the scene presented there. The room was curtained all round with red, hung above a man's height with ruddy thick folds, upon which the firelight threw a still warmer flicker. A shaded lamp filled it with softened light, and from above, from what seemed a large skylight, a white stream of moonlight fell in, making a curious disturbing effect in the warm artificial light. These accessories, however, though they told afterwards, were as nothing to the sight that burst upon the eyes of the new comers. In the centre of the

room stood a tall old man, with a long pallid face, straggling white hair, and a white beard. His face was distorted with excitement, his voice bellowing forth a succession of cries, or rather roars, like the roars of a wild animal. His loose lips gave forth these utterances with flying foam and a sort of mechanical rapidity:

'I know what you've come for! I can pay up! I can pay up! I've plenty of money, and I can pay up! But I won't be taken, not if it costs me my life!'

These were the words that finally emancipated themselves from the stammering utterance and became clear.

Vicars stood behind this wild figure holding both his arms, but it was only by glimpses that the smaller man was visible holding the other as in a vice.

'Come, sir, come, sir, no more of this; they'll take you for a fool,' he said.

And then this King Lear resumed. The foam flew from his lips; his great voice came out in its wild bellowing, the very voice which Janet

had heard so often. It had seemed to her to utter but an inarticulate cry, but this, it would seem, was what it had been saying all the time —words in which there was some meaning— though what that meaning was, or whether the speaker himself understood it, who would say?

The policeman and his attendant had edged towards the doorway, and stood there huddled upon one another. The leader of the search had been willing to face a revolver, but the madman was a thing for which he was not prepared. He stood against the doorway ready to retreat still further in case there should be any further advance. Meredith and Gussy had passed into the room, and stood together, she very anxious, he very eager, at the side, where those wild eyes had not caught them. Behind was Dolff very pale, standing half concealed by the group formed by the madman and his attendant, raising his head to look over them to the two in the doorway who had come to look for him, and had received so unexpected a check.

Mrs. Harwood stumbled into the midst of this strange scene with her tottering uncertain stride, driving Janet with her. She put up her hand to hold back the dreadful insane figure. She was at one of the moments in life when one is afraid of nothing, shrinks from nothing.

'Take him back to his seat, Vicars,' she said, 'take him back. Adolphus!' The tottering, helpless woman stood up straight, and put her hand upon the madman's breast. The eyes that had been blind with misery changed and dissolved as if to dew in their orbits, consolidated again, opened blue and strong like a relighted flame. She fixed them upon the staring red eyes of the maniac. 'Adolphus, go back, be silent, calm yourself. There is no need for you to say anything. I am here to take care of you. Let Vicars put you back in your chair.'

'I will not be taken,' he said, 'I will not be taken! I can pay up. I have got money, plenty of money. I will pay up!'

'Vicars,' cried Mrs. Harwood, imperiously, 'put him back in his chair.'

She held her hand on his breast, and fixed her eyes upon his, pushing him softly back. The roarings grew fainter, fell into a kind of whimpering cry.

'I'll pay it all—I have plenty of money. Don't let them take me away—I'll pay everything up!'

'Go back and rest in your chair, Adolphus. Put him in his chair.'

The astonished spectators all stood looking on while the old servant and this woman, whom force of necessity had moved from her own helplessness, subdued the maniac. Vicars had partially lost his head, he had lost control of his patient, but this unlooked-for help restored him to himself. Between them they drew and guided the patient back to the chair, which was fitted with some mechanical appliances, and held him fast. Mrs. Harwood seemed to forget her weakness entirely; she tottered no longer, but moved with a free step. She turned round upon the frightened policeman at the door.

'Now go,' she said, 'you have done your worst; whatever you want, go; you can get no further satisfaction here.'

The intruder breathed more freely when he saw the madman sink into quietude. He said, with a voice that quivered slightly,

'I am very willing to go: but that young gentleman has to go along with me!'

'Come on,' cried the other man, whose teeth were chattering in his head. 'Come on; we've got nothing to do here.'

'I'm going: when that young gentleman makes up his mind to come with me.'

'What young gentleman? Why, bless you, *that* ain't the young gentleman!' said the man, who had struggled out into the passage, and was now only kept from running by the other's strong retaining grasp.

It was not wonderful that the policeman was indignant. He let his friend go with an oath, and with a sudden push which precipitated him into the outer room.

'You d——d fool! to have led me such a

dance; and as much as our lives are worth, and come to nothing at the end.'

The man fell backward, but got up again in a moment and took to his heels, with the noise as of a runaway horse in the dark passage. The policeman, reassured to see that the madman was secured, had the courage to linger a moment. He turned to Meredith with a defiant look.

'It has come to nothing, sir, and I ask your pardon that I've been led into giving you this trouble by an ass. But I make bold to ask is this house licensed? and what right has anyone got to keep a dangerous madman in it without inspection, or any eye over 'im? I'll have to report it to my superior.'

'Report it to the—devil, and be off with you,' Meredith said.

The party stood round, staring into each other's faces, when the strangers thus withdrew. The madman struggled against the fastenings that secured him.

'Julia,' he said, 'don't let them take me!

He tried to get hold of her with his hands, feeling for her as if he did not see, and began to cry feebly, in a childish, broken voice, 'Don't let them take me! I have got enough to pay everybody. I kept it for you and the children. It was for you and the children; but I'll pay up, I'll pay everybody; only don't let them take me, don't let them take me!' he whimpered, tears —piteous, childish tears—suffusing the venerable face.

'Oh,' cried Gussy, 'don't let him cry; for God's sake don't let him cry! I cannot bear it —I cannot bear it—it is too much.'

'I'll never complain any more,' said the patient; 'I'm very comfortable, I don't want for anything. You shall pay them all up yourself if you don't believe me. I'll give you the money—only don't let them send me away! I've got it all safe here,' he said. 'Stop a moment, I'll give it you: and all these ladies and gentlemen can prove it, that I gave it you to pay up.' He struggled to get his arms free, trying to reach his breast pocket with one hand. 'Vicars,

get it out, and give it to your mistress. The money—the money, you know, to pay everybody up. Only,' he cried, putting the piteous hands together which were held fast and could do so little, 'don't, Julia—don't let them take me away!'

'Oh, mamma,' cried Gussy, 'I can't bear it—I can't bear it.'

She fell on her knees and covered her face.

'Who is he?' said Dolff. They had all of them, and even Dolff himself, forgotten what was the cause of this revelation. The young man came forward, very pale. 'I know nothing about this,' he said, looking round; 'nothing. I hope everybody will believe me. I want to know who he is!'

No one said a word. They all stood round, struck silent, not knowing what to think. Mrs. Harwood stood with her hand upon the table, supporting herself, asking no other support. She was perfectly pale, but her countenance had recovered its features and expression. She did not even look at her children—one on her

knees, one standing up confronting her, demanding to know the truth. To neither of them did she give a word or look. Her eyes were fixed upon the man who was thus utterly in her hands. Vicars extracted an old, large pocket-book from the pocket of the patient, and handed it to her, not without a sort of smile—half-mocking—on his face. She took it, glancing at it with a certain disdain, as if the trick, often employed but no longer necessary, had disgusted her, and flung it on the table.

'There are in this book,' she said, 'old scraps of paper of no value. This is what I am to pay his debts with. He has given it to me twenty times before. I get tired in the end of playing the old game over and over.'

'Mother, who is he?' cried Dolff. 'You have had him in your house, in secret, never seeing the light of day, and I, your son, never knew. Who is he?'

Mrs. Harwood made no reply.

It was a question to which no one there could give any answer, except perhaps Gussy—

on her knees, with her hands covering her face —who did not look up or give any attention to what was going on. Meredith alone seemed to have some clear idea in his mind ; his face shone with aroused interest and eagerness, like a man on the very trace of knowledge of the utmost importance to him. A rapid process of thought was going on in his mind, his intelligence was leaping from point to point.

'You will perhaps be surprised,' he said, 'to hear that I have known this for some time.'

'You!' Mrs. Harwood half turned to him, a gleam as of fire passing over her face. 'You!'

'Yes, I, who have several interests involved. I had just received information on the subject when that young fool, thinking heaven knows what other folly, knocked me down, taking me unawares, and nearly killed me. Oh, yes, it is perfectly true it was Dolff who did it. You start as if I were likely to make any fuss on that subject. Is it true that he had the money to pay everybody?—that is what I want to know.'

'Charley, Charley, do you mean to say that Dolff——'

'Oh, I mean nothing about Dolff,' he said, impatiently; 'answer me, Mrs. Harwood.'

'I can't answer for nothing, Mrs. Harwood,' cried Vicars, 'if you keep a lot of folks round him. He is working himself up into a fury again.'

The madman was twisting in his chair, fighting against the mechanical bonds that secured him. He was looking towards the pocket-book which lay on the table.

'She has got my money, and she throws it down for anybody to pick up,' he cried. 'My money! there's money there to pay everything! Why don't you pay those people and let 'em go—pay them, pay them and let them go! or else give me back my money!' he cried, wildly straining forward, with his white hair falling back, his reddened eyes blazing, struggling against his bonds. Mrs. Harwood took up the pocket-book, weighing it, with a sort of forced laugh, in her hand,

'You think there may be a fortune here—

enough to pay? And he thinks so. Give it to him, Vicars. We've tried to keep it all quiet, but it seems we have failed. You may leave the door open now—you may do as you please. It can't matter any longer. I have thought of the credit of the family, and of many things that nobody else thinks of. And of his comfort—nobody will say I have not thought of his comfort. Look round you: there is everything, everything we could think of. But it is all of no use now.'

The old man had caught the pocket-book from Vicars's hands with a pitiful demonstration of joy. He made a pretence of examining its contents, eagerly turning them over as if to make sure that nothing was lost, kissing the covers in enthusiasm of delight. He made an attempt with his confined arms to return it to his pocket, but, failing in that, kept it embraced in both his hands, from time to time kissing it with extravagant satisfaction.

'As long as I have got this they can do nothing to me,' he said.

While this pantomime was going on, and while still Mrs. Harwood was speaking, a little movement and rustle in the group caught everybody's attention as if it had been a new fact: but it was only Janet stealing away behind the others who had a right there which she did not possess. She had been watching her moment. She herself, who had nothing to do with it, had received her share of discomfiture too. Her heart was sinking with humiliation and shame. What had she to do with the mysteries of the Harwoods, the things they might have to conceal? What was she to them but a stranger of no account, never thought of, dragged into the midst of their troubles when it pleased them, thrown off again when they chose? Nobody would have said that Janet had any share in this crisis, and yet it was she who had received the sharpest arrow of all; or so, at least, she thought. She slipped behind Julia, who was bigger and more prominent than she, and stole through the bewildering stairs and passages. How well she seemed to know the way, as if it

had been familiar to her for years! And it was she who had given the information—she who had been the cause of everything, drawn here and drawn there into affairs alike alien to her, with which she had nothing to do. They were all moved by her departure; not morally, indeed, but by the mere stir it caused.

Gussy rose from her knees, showing a countenance as pale as death and still glistening with tears. She said,

'Mamma, shall we go away? Whatever there may be to be said or explained, it ought not to be done here.' She went up to the old man in the chair, who was still embracing his pocket-book, and kissed him on the forehead. 'If any wrong has been done to you, I don't know of it,' she said; 'I thought it was nothing but good.'

'No wrong has been done to him—none—none,' cried Mrs. Harwood, suddenly dropping from her self-command and strength. 'Children, you may not believe me, since I've kept it secret from you. There has been no wrong to

him—none—none. If there has been wrong, it has not been to him. Oh, you may believe me at least, for I have never told you a lie. Everything has been done for him. Look round you—look round you and you will see.'

'Who is he?' said Dolff, obstinate and pale, standing behind the chair.

'You have no thought for me,' said the mother. 'You see me standing here, come here to defend you all, in desperation for you, and you never ask how I am to get back, whether it will kill me—— No, no, Janet has gone, who supported me, who was a stranger, and asked no questions, but only helped a poor woman half mad with trouble and distress. Ah!' she said, 'he could go mad and get free—he who was the cause of it all: but I have had to keep my sanity and my courage and bear it all, and look as if nothing was the matter, for fifteen years. For whom? Was it for me? It would have been better for me to have died and been done with it all. For you, children, to give you a happy life, to do away with all disgrace, to

give you every advantage. Yes, I'll take your arm, Ju; you have not been a good child, but you know no better. Get me to my chair before I drop down; get me to my chair——' She paused a moment, and looked round with a hard laugh. 'For I am very heavy,' she said, 'and I would have to be carried, and who would do it I don't know. Ju, make haste, before my strength is all gone. Get me to my chair.'

CHAPTER VII.

Gussy was the last to leave of that strange procession, of whom no one spoke to the other. She closed the door after her, and the curtains, and followed the erect figure of Dolff, drawn up as it never had been in his life before, and walking stiffly, as if carrying a new weight and occupying a position unknown. They all came into the hall, defiling solemnly one after the other, to find Mrs. Harwood deposited in her chair and awaiting them, almost as if the whole events of the evening had been a dream and she had never left that spot. It was with a strange embarrassment, however, that they looked at each other in the pale, clear light as

they emerged from the doorway, almost like making new acquaintance, as if they had never seen each other before. Nobody certainly had seen Dolff in that new manifestation; nor was Gussy, she whose very existence had been wrapped up in that of Meredith, who had only lived to watch him for weeks past, recognisable. It was she who came out the last, but who made herself the first of the group.

'There may be a great many things to say,' said Gussy; 'but not to-night. We have all had a great many agitations to-night. My brother has been hunted for his life. My mother has done a thing which, so far as we know, she hasn't been able to do for years. Mr. Meredith has had a bad illness, for which it appears this unfortunate family is responsible too. I only and my little sister'—she paused here with an effort—'no; I will not pretend; I have had my share of the shock, too. We'd better all separate for the night.'

'Gussy!' cried Mrs. Harwood, with a sharp tone of appeal.

'Gussy!' cried Meredith, astonished, trying to take her hand to draw her towards him.

'Gussy!' said Dolff, with a certain indignation.

'It is of no use,' she said, quickly, 'to appeal to me. I think I am the one who has been deceived all round. I thought I knew everything, and I've known nothing. Whatever may be the meaning of it, I for one am not able for any more to-night, and none of the rest ought to be able for it. I don't know whether I may have been deceived there, too, about how much invalids could bear. Good night, mamma. I advise you to get to bed.'

Gussy waved her hand to the others without a word, and walked upstairs without turning her head. The sudden failure of a perfect faith in all the world, such as she had entertained without entering into complications for which her mind was not adapted, is no small matter. It is alarming even for others to see. They all stood for a moment huddled together as if a rock or a tower had fallen before their

eyes. They could scarcely see each other for the dust and darkness it made. All the other events of this startling night seemed to fall into the background. Gussy! who had been the central prop of the house, who had kept everybody together, done everything! When she thus threw up her arms they were all left in dismay, and fell into an assemblage of atoms, of units—no longer a united party ready to meet all comers.

Meredith, perhaps, he who had been the most eager, was the most discomfited of all. He had claimed Gussy's interest as his right for years. When she thus withdrew, not even asking if he were fatigued, speaking almost as if she thought that fatigue a pretence, he was so bewildered that he could do nothing. An anxious believer like this is accepted perhaps with too much faith and considered too inalienable a possession; and when she fails the shock is proportionately great. Without Gussy to stand by him, to make him believe himself a universal conqueror, always interesting, always important, Meredith

for the moment was like an idol thrown from his pedestal. He was more astonished than words could say. He exclaimed, hurriedly,

'I think Gussy is right, as she always is. Mrs. Harwood, I will say good night.'

Mrs. Harwood was altogether in a different mind. The period of reaction had not come with her as yet. She had got herself deposited in her chair in time enough to save her from any breaking down. And her spirit was full of excitement.

'I am ready,' she said, with a panting hot breath of mental commotion, 'to explain—whatever it is necessary to explain. Take me back to my room, Dolff. It is cold here.'

'Good night,' said Meredith. 'I will not encroach upon you longer to-night.'

'As you like,' she said. 'I warn you, however, that to-morrow—— Dolff, take me back to my fire.'

Dolff was unsubdued, like his mother. The reaction from a long period of suspense, and the sense of safety after a great alarm, no doubt

acted upon his mind: though, so far as he was aware, he was moved by nothing save the overwhelming discovery he had made, and his indignant sense of wrong in finding such a secret retreat unsuspected, in his mother's—in his own—house.

'We'll be better alone,' he said, in the stern tone which was so new to him, putting his hand upon her chair; 'but perhaps you could walk if you tried,' he added, with rude sarcasm.

He drove rather than wheeled her before him into the deserted room, where all was so brilliant and warm, the light blinking in the bright brass and steel, the lamps serenely burning, everything telling of the tranquil life, unbroken by any but cheerful incidents, which had gone on there for so many years.

'Now, mother,' said Dolff, 'we have got to have it out. Who is that man upstairs?'

Julia had followed them unremarked, and remained behind her mother's chair. Dolff stood before them, in the full firelight, very erect, inspired with indignation and that sense of

superiority which injury gives. It had elevated him altogether in the scale of being. His own shortcomings had fallen from his consciousness. He was aware of nothing but that he, Dolff, in reality the head of the family, had been deceived and compromised.

Mrs. Harwood took but little notice of her son. She took up her work which had been thrown upon the table and turned it over in her fingers.

'Gussy was right,' she said, 'though she was a little brusque in her way of saying it. I am certainly unable to bear anything more to-night.'

'I suppose, however, you can answer my question,' said Dolff.

'Go to bed, boy,' said his mother, 'and don't worry me. We have two or three things to talk over, you and I, which are too much for to-night.'

'I am not a boy any longer,' cried Dolff; 'you have made me a man. Who is it you have been hiding for years upstairs?'

She gave vent to a little fierce laugh.

'For my pleasure,' she said; 'for my amusement, as anybody may see.'

'Whether it is for your amusement or not,' said Dolff, 'I am of age, and I have a right to know who is living in my house.'

'In *your* house!' Her exasperation was growing. 'Don't force me, Dolff, to go into other questions to-night.'

'Whose house is it?' he said. 'There's been no question, because you have kept everything in your hands; but if I am to be driven to it, and claim my rights——'

'Your rights!' she cried, again repeating his words. 'Was it one of your rights to knock down a man like a coward from behind? It appears this is what you think you may be permitted to do with impunity—to have your home searched in every corner and to destroy all that I have been doing for years, and to bring shame and disgrace to a house that I have kept free of shame, almost at the risk of my life!'

'I did not,' cried Dolff, interrupting her eager-

ly. 'I did not knock him down from behind. I had not time to think. I let fly at him as I passed. It's a lie to say I knocked him down from behind.'

'You did the same thing; you took him unawares. And you dare to question me! You killed a man at my door—or meant to do it—and never breathed a word to warn us, to keep us from the disgrace——'

Dolff was not clever enough to know what to say. His snort of rage was not attended by any force of bitter words. He only could repeat, with rage and incompetence,

'At *your* door?'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Harwood, half carried away by passion, half influenced by the dismay which she knew she had it in her power to call forth, 'it would be better, since you are exact, to say at your father's door.'

Dolff responded with a strange cry. He did not understand it, but he felt all the same that a blow which stunned him had been directed at him, and that the ground was cut from beneath his feet.

'He has neither been tried, nor sentenced, nor anything proved against him,' cried Mrs. Harwood, carried away now by the heat of her own excitement. 'All that has to be gone through before he can be put aside. And at this moment everything's his—the roof that covers you, the money you have been spending. It is no more your house—*your* house!—than it is Julia's. It is your father's house.'

'My father is dead,' said Dolff, who had again grown very pale, the flush of passion dying out of his face.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'and might have remained so, had it not been for your cowardly folly and Vicars's infatuation for you. How was it the man had not the sense to see that a fool like you would spoil all?'

'You are dreaming, you are mad,' said Dolff; 'you are telling me another lie.'

But, though he said this with almost undiminished passion, the young fellow's superiority, his erect pose, his sense of being able to cow and overwhelm her, had come to an end.

e fell into his usual attitude, his shoulders opped and curved, his head hung down. He uld fling a last insult at his mother, but no ore. And his own mind began to be filled th unfathomable dismay.

Julia had been very uncertain what side to ke. Her mind went naturally with her other, who was most near herself. But a other is a mother after all. You may feel her be in some way your natural enemy when e matter is between yourself and her; but nen another hand plucks at her it is different. girl is not going to let her mother be insulted, no after all means her own side, without terposing. Julia suddenly flew forth from hind her mother's chair and flung herself on Dolff's arm, seizing it and shaking him olently.

'How dare you speak to her like that?' cried , 'you that can't do anything you try—not en kill Charley Meredith when you have the ance! I should be ashamed to look anyone the face. Go away, go away, and leave us

quiet, you that have done it all: that brought the police into the house, and yet did not hurt him to speak of, you great, useless, disappointing boy!'

Dolff did not know how to sustain this sudden assault. He looked round stupidly at the active assailant at his shoulder with a little pang, even in his agitated and helpless state, to find that Julia was no longer on his side. His head was going round and round: already in his soul he had entirely collapsed, although he still kept his feet in outward appearance. And it would have been difficult to end this scene without an entire breakdown on one side or the other, had not the pensive little voice of the parlourmaid become audible at this moment over their heads, making them all start and draw back into themselves.

'If you please, ma'am,' said Priscilla, 'for I can't find Miss Gussy—shall I take Mr. Meredith's tray to his room, or shall I bring it in here?'

'I think Mr. Meredith is going to bed,' said

Mrs. Harwood; 'he is a little tired. Take it into his room, Priscilla. And Miss Gussy has gone to bed; you may come now and help me to get into my room, and then shut up everything. It is later than I thought.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Priscilla, in those quiet tones of commonplace which calm down every excitement.

Priscilla indeed was herself bursting with curiosity and eagerness to find out what had happened. The long-shut-up door stood ajar, and every maid in the house had already come to peep into the dark passage and wonder what it led to: and the keenest excitement filled the house. But a parlourmaid has as high a standard of duty as anyone, were it an archbishop. It was against the unwritten household law to show any such commotion. She took hold of the handle of her mistress's chair as she did on the mildest of domestic evenings, and drew her very steadily and gently away. The only revelation she made of knowing anything was in the suggestion that a little gruel with a glass

of wine in it would be a proper thing for Mrs. Harwood to take.

'You may bring me the glass of wine without the gruel,' Mrs. Harwood was heard saying as the sound of her wheels moved slowly across the hall, an hour ago the scene of such passionate agitation. 'I don't think I have caught cold. A glass of wine—and a few biscuits,' she said as by an afterthought.

Was this part of the elaborate make-believe intended to deceive the servants and persuade them that nothing particular had happened? or was she indeed capable of munching those biscuits after such a night of fate?

'Ju, don't you turn against me,' said Dolff, feebly, throwing himself into a chair when they were thus left alone.

'Oh!' cried Julia, still panting with her outburst, 'to think you had hold of him and didn't really hurt him, not to matter! I can never, never forgive you, Dolff.'

'Oh, hold your tongue, you little fool; the only thing I'm glad of is that I didn't hurt him

—to matter! You don't know what it is to ive for a long week, all the time he was nsensible, thinking you have killed a man!'

'When it was only Charley Meredith!' Julia said.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was strange that it should be Gussy, who was not ideal or visionary, but very matter-of-fact in all her ways, who was the most cruelly offended and wounded by the events of this night. It seemed to Gussy that she had been deceived and played upon by everybody. By her mother, who had never confided to her the gravity of the position, though she had known the fact for years; by Meredith, who had seemed to know more of it than Gussy did, and whose eyes had been keen with understanding, following every word of what was to Gussy merely the ravings without consequence of a madman; he knew more of it than she did, who had helped

to take care of the secret inmate. And then Dolff, her brother. What was the meaning of this cloud of tempest which had come into Dolff's trivial, schoolboyish life? Why had he tried to kill, if that was what he wanted, or, at least, to injure, to assault Meredith?

It was all a mystery to Gussy. She understood nothing except that many things had been going on in the house which she either did not know at all or knew imperfectly—that she had been possibly made a dupe of, brought down from the position which she had seemed to hold of right as the chief influence in the family. She had thought this was how it was: her mother's confidant, the nurse and guardian-angel of her love, the controller, more or less, of all the house. And it turned out that she knew nothing, that there were all kinds of passions and mysteries in her own home with which she was unacquainted, that what she knew she knew imperfectly, and that even in the confidences given to her she had been kept in the dark.

Gussy was not imaginative, and consequently

had little power of entering into the feelings or divining the movements of the minds of others. She was wounded, mortified to the depths of her heart, and angry, with a deep, silent anger not easily to be overcome. She did not linger nor ask for explanations, but went straight up to her room without a moment's pause, careless that both her mother, whom she generally attended through the troublesome process of undressing, and Julia, whom she usually held under such strict authority, were left behind, the latter in contempt of all ordinary hours. Janet, whose charge that was, was not visible; she had stolen away, as it had lately been her habit to do. Janet, Gussy felt sure, was mixed up in it too; but how was she mixed up in it?

Think as she would, Miss Harwood could not make out to her satisfaction how it could be that Janet could have influenced Dolff to assault Meredith. Janet had no quarrel with Meredith, could not have. He had been very civil to her—too civil, Gussy had sometimes thought. She remembered that there was a time when

she had felt it very tiresome to have to discuss Miss Summerhayes so often; and on the night of the ball, certainly, they had danced and talked together almost more than was becoming. How, then, could Janet have moved Dolff to attack Meredith? It seemed impossible to discern any plausible reason: and yet Gussy had a moral certainty that Janet was somehow mixed up in it. Could it be that the joke about Dolff and his accompaniments had been the cause? Gussy felt involuntarily that it must be something more serious than that.

She went to bed resolutely, for, indeed, there are times when it requires a severe effort to do this—to shut out the commotions which are around, and turn one's back upon all the questions that require solving. Gussy felt bitterly that she had no certainty as to what might be going on in the house, which she had lately been as sure of as if she had created it. Her mother, for anything she knew, might be going from room to room, her chair set aside, and all her pretences with it. To think that she, Gussy,

should have been taken in by it so long, and have believed whatever was told her! Her brother Dolff, so good-natured, of so little account as he was! might have caught Meredith again at a disadvantage, and have accomplished now what he tried before.

The house, her calm and secure domain, seemed now full of incomprehensible noises and mysterious sounds to Gussy. But she would not even look over the banisters to see what was going on. She would not open her door, much less steal downstairs, as another woman might have done, to find out everything. She went to bed. She asked no explanation. She shut her door and drew her curtains, and closed her eyes. Whatever might be going on within or without, the gateways of her mind were closely fastened up, so that she might hear or see no more.

It was Priscilla who put her mistress to bed: and Mrs. Harwood was very angry with her children, feeling that Gussy had deserted her and that Dolff had insulted her. But it takes

more than that to make a woman betray her sons and daughters. With the flush of anger still on her cheek and the tremble on her lips she told Priscilla how tired Miss Harwood was, how she had been overdoing herself, how she had made her go to bed.

'I told her you could see to all I want quite nicely, Priscilla.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Priscilla; but it was doubtful how far she was taken in, for, of course, the servants knew a great deal more than they were supposed to know, and where they did not know they guessed freely, and with wonderful success.

It was curious to see them all assemble in the morning at the breakfast-table as if nothing had happened. Nay, that was not a thing that was possible. There were traces of last night's excitement on every face; but yet they came in and sat down opposite to each other, and Gussy helped Dolff to his coffee and again wondered how in all the world Janet could be the cause of his attack on Meredith: for it was

evident that now, at least, Dolff was not in a state of mind to do anything for Janet. He never spoke to her during breakfast. He avoided her eye. When she spoke, he turned away as if he would not let her voice reach his ears if he could help it. How then could Janet be mixed up in it? Gussy was sorely perplexed by this problem. As for Janet, though she was pale, she put on an elaborate appearance of composure and of knowing nothing which (in her readiness to be exasperated with everything) provoked Gussy most of all. She said to herself that it was a worse offence to pretend not to know when everybody was aware that she must know, than to show her knowledge in the most irritating way. No doubt, however, that if Janet had betrayed any knowledge, Gussy would have found that the most ill-timed exhibition that could be.

There was very little conversation, except between Janet and Julia, during this embarrassing meal. And Mrs. Harwood came out of her room as she had gone into it, unattended by

her daughters. There were less signs about her than about any of them of the perturbation of last night. Sometimes an old woman will bear agitation better than the young. She has probably had so much of it, and been compelled to gulp it down so often! Her eyes were not less bright than usual—nay, they had a glance of fire in them which was not usual in their calmer state, and the colour in her cheeks was fresher than that of anyone else in the house. The girls were all pale—even Julia, and Dolff of a sort of dusky pallor, which made his light hair and moustache stand out from his face. But Mrs. Harwood's pretty complexion was unchanged—perhaps because though they had all made so many discoveries she had made none, but had been aware of everything and of far more than anyone else knew, for years.

Early in the day the policeman of last night appeared with a summons to Mrs. Harwood, directing her to appear before some board to show cause why she should have kept, unregistered and unsuspected, a lunatic shut up in her

house. Mrs. Harwood saw the man herself, and begged to be allowed to make him a little present, 'for your great civility last night.' The policeman almost blushed, as he was a man who bore a conscience, for he was not conscious of being very civil; but he accepted the gratuity, let us hope, with the intention of being civil next time he was employed on any such piece of business.

While he spoke to Mrs. Harwood in the hall, whither she had been wheeled out to see him, Meredith came from his room and joined her. He had not escaped so well as she the excitement of the previous night, and it was with unfeigned astonishment that he contemplated this old lady, fresh and smiling, her pretty colour unimpaired, her eyes as bright as usual. She was over sixty; she had just been baffled in an object which had been the chief inspiration of her life for years, disappointed, exposed to universal censure, perhaps to punishment, but her wonderful force of nature was not abated; the extraordinary crisis which had passed over

her, breaking the bonds of her ailment, delivering her from her weakness, had left no signs of exhaustion upon her. She looked like a woman who had never known what trouble or anxiety was as she sat there smiling, assuring the policeman that she could fully explain everything, and would not fail to do so in the proper quarter. She turned to Meredith as he appeared, and held out her hand to him.

'Good-morning, my dear Charley; I hope you are not the worse for last night's agitation. You see our friend here has come to summon me to make explanations about my poor dear upstairs. You will appear for me and settle everything, won't you? You see this gentleman is a barrister,' she explained, smiling to the man who stood looking on.

'Of course I will,' Meredith said.

Upon this the policeman took courage, and with a scrape made his *amende honorable.*

'I ought to beg your pardon, sir, and yours too, lady, for all the trouble last night. I had every confidence in Jim Harrison, the man that

said he could identify the culprit—that is the fellow as nearly killed you, sir—and rumours have been getting up all over the place as it was the young gentleman here as had been a bit wild, and hated you like pison.'

'Dolff never hated me like poison, did he?' said Meredith, elevating his eyebrows and appealing to Mrs. Harwood.

'Never! you have always been one of his best friends.'

'Well,' said the officer, who was not too confident either in this assurance or in the conclusion he had been obliged to come to, 'there was a parcel of tales about. You can never tell how them tales gets up. However, it's all been a mistake: for when Jim sees your young gentleman he says in a moment, "Nothing of the sort—that's not 'm." So it all falls to the ground, as you'll see, sir, being used to these questions, as the lady says—for want of evidence.'

'Exactly,' said Meredith, 'and you'll do me the justice to say, officer, that I told you it

would from the first. It's worth while occasionally taking a man's advice that knows something about it, you perceive, instead of your Mr. Jim, who evidently knows nothing but what he thinks he saw or didn't see.'

'That's it, sir, I suppose,' said the policeman, and if he did see it, or if he didn't, I couldn't tell, not if it was as much as my place was worth.'

'He would have looked rather foolish though, don't you think, in the witness-box? You see,' added Meredith, with a laugh, 'you might have spared this lady the trouble of last night.'

'No, I don't see that, sir,' said the policeman, promptly, 'for if it didn't answer one purpose, it did another. I'm very sorry to upset a lady, but she didn't ought to bottle up a madman in a private house without no register, nor information to the commissioners, nor proper precautions. You know that, sir, just as well as me.'

'How do you know that the lady has no licence?' said Meredith, 'or that her relation's

illness is not perfectly known? I think you will find a little difficulty in proving that: and then your superiors will be less pleased with the discovery. However, that's my business, as Mrs. Harwood has confided it to me,' he added, with a laugh, which he could not restrain, at the man's sudden look of alarm.

'Don't find fault with our friend; he was as civil as it was possible to be. Good-morning, and thank you,' said Mrs. Harwood, sitting, with her placid smile, watching her visitor, stiff and uneasy in his plain clothes, as he went away.

When the door was shut upon him by Priscilla, who sniffed and tossed her head at the necessity of being thus civil to a man who had made so much commotion in the house—much as she and her fellow-servants had enjoyed the excitement—Mrs. Harwood's countenance underwent a certain change. The smile faded; a look of age crept round the still beaming eyes.

'If you will wheel me back to my room, Charley, we can talk,' she said. She could not but be conscious that he was thinking, asking

himself why she could not walk, she who had found power to do so when she wanted it; but she betrayed no consciousness of this inevitable thought. She was very grave when he came round from the back of her chair and stood facing her in the firelight, which, on a dull London morning in the end of January, was the chief light in the room. Perhaps the dreary atmosphere threw a cloud upon her face. Her soft, half-caressing tone was gone. She had become hard and business-like in a moment. 'You want me to explain,' she said.

'If you please. You know how much my father was involved: that craze about the money to be paid back means something. Even a mad repetition like that seems likely to have a foundation in fact. Is it true?'

She bent her head a little, and for the moment cast down her eyes.

'It was true.'

'It *was* true; then you have alienated——'

'Wait a little. There were no such creditors as his own children, who would have been

ruined had not I saved them. They know nothing of any question of money. They knew nothing of——'

'Of his existence at all—till last night?'

'I am bound to furnish you with every information I can. The young ones knew nothing of his existence. Gussy did; but only that I kept him there to save him from an asylum where he might have been treated cruelly—nothing more. You will not take a high moral tone against me, as she is ready to do, and Dolff——'

'No; I will take up no high moral tone,' said Meredith; 'but the position is very difficult. You have not, I suppose, done away with the money?'

'It is well invested; it is intact. We could not have lived as we have done on my own money. Now, of course, I must give it up—— And no injustice need be done,' she added, with a sigh; 'it can be paid—at last.'

'With interest for all these years?' said Meredith, with a smile.

'Oh, what are you talking of?' she said. 'People will be so glad to get anything so unexpectedly, that they will say nothing about interest. I even think——'

'What do you even think?' he said, as she paused.

'How can I tell how you may take it, whether it will commend itself to you or not? There might still be an arrangement by which things might be—tided over.'

'After it gets into the papers and it is known that you have been concealing——'

'Oh,' she cried again, 'you are more dull than I gave you credit for being, Charley Meredith! Who will notice up in Liverpool a romantic story (which is all the papers will make of it) occurring in St. John's Wood? Who will link one thing to another and understand exactly what has happened, or believe that—— I might have taken him in, a miserable wreck, out of sheer love and kindness. I did! I did!' she cried, suddenly, her face melting out of its hardness, her eyes filling with

tears. 'You may not believe me, but I did. I thought he had not a penny. I went to all the expense of fitting up the wing for him—working with my own hands at it, that nobody should suspect—believing that Vicars had brought him back with his own money—that *he* had none—— I did, though you may not believe me,' she said.

'I have not said I did not believe you. We are all very queer creatures—mixed up. And then when you found he had that old pocket-book—for it was full of something better than old papers then—you were tempted, and you——'

She nodded her head; then said, after a while,

'I do not accept that formula. I was tempted—and I did what I had a right to do. *I* had wronged nobody—I knew nothing about the debts. If I had divided *that* among them, what would it have been?—a trifle to each, but enough to dry up all the sympathy they were meeting with. He had made ducks and drakes of more

than that belonging to me. And the children were the most deeply wronged. I took it for their sakes, to make up what they had been robbed of. It can go to the others now, and you will see how much it will be.'

'You said something,' said Meredith, 'about an arrangement that might still be made?'

'Yes—if you could lend yourself to it, Charley. It could not be done without you.'

'I cannot tell whether I could lend myself to it or not, until I hear what it is.'

She looked at him, and two or three times made as if she would speak, but shut her lips again. Her eyes searched his face with an anxious expression.

'I don't know how you will take it,' she said, hesitating; 'I don't know how you will take it.' Then, after a pause, she added, 'I will begin by asking you a question. Do you want to marry my daughter Gussy? Yes or no!'

Meredith made a step backwards, and put his hand to his breast as if he had received a blow. In that moment various dreams swept through

his mind. Janet's image was not the only one, though it had the freshness of being the last. One of those dreams, indeed, was no other than the freedom of his own bachelor estate, and the advantage of life which was not bound by any social ties. He avowed, however, at length, soberly,

'I think I may say yes, Mrs. Harwood—that is what has been for a long time in my mind.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE conduct of affairs in the house of the Harwoods was very dreary during the whole of this day. It was, to begin with, a very dreary day, not fog, which can be borne, but one of those dark days which are the scourge of London, when everything is dull and without colour without and within, the skies grey, the earth grey, the leafless branches rising like a black tracery upon the colourless background, the light scarcely enough to swear by, to make it seem unnatural to shut the shutters and light the lamp, which is what every well-constituted mind desires to do in the circumstances.

And in the moral atmosphere the same thing reigned. Gussy had a countenance like the

day. She, who had at no time much colour, had now none. She was like the landscape: hair, eyes, and cheeks seemed the same. Every glimmer of light seemed to have been suppressed in her eyes. She kept them down, or she turned their gaze inward, or she veiled them with some film which is at the command of those who are angry, whether with or without cause. She made no inquiry even after the health of Meredith, which had been hitherto her chief pre-occupation, except in so far as was implied in the conventional 'How d'you do?' with which they met. Even he was daunted by the determined indifference of her aspect. When he talked of the drive which the doctor had suggested to him as a preliminary to getting out on foot, Gussy never lifted her eyes or made the least inquiry. Yesterday this step of decided progress would have been the most exciting event in the world to her. She took no notice of it now. There was scarcely anything said at table when they took their midday meal, with a candle or two lit on the mantelpiece, 'to

add a little cheerfulness,' as Mrs. Harwood said.

'For certainly we are not a very cheerful party,' added the mother, who was more full of life than all the rest put together.

She it was who took the lead in the conversation till Gussy retired. She talked to Meredith and a little to Janet, whom this curious aspect of the family interested greatly, though she did not quite understand it. But Gussy and Dolff both sat bolt upright and said nothing. They ate nothing, too, which, perhaps, was a more effectual weapon against their mother's heart, and, when luncheon was over, they separated gloomily, Dolff disappearing no one knew where, Gussy to her room, where she said she had something to do, while Mrs. Harwood retired with Meredith, between whom and herself a curious intimacy seemed to have struck up, to the dining-room, his room as it was called, to talk there.

In this universal gloom and strangeness Julia drew Janet out into the garden. The day grew darker as it approached its end, the atmo-

sphere became more yellow, signs as of a fog appeared in the air. The governess and the pupil put on their ulsters, and began to walk up and down the garden walks, Julia hanging with all her might upon the arm of her companion, dragging down Janet almost to the ground.

'Did you ever know,' Julia said, 'such a detestable day?'

'It is turning to fog,' said Janet, trying to keep to what was commonplace. 'It was better that we did not go out.'

'Oh, was I thinking of the fog?' said Julia. 'I would rather see a dozen fogs than Gussy shut up like that, pursing up her lips as if she were afraid something would drop out when she spoke. And poor Dolff, so dismal, not knowing what to do with himself. Janet, do you think there could be any truth in all that story about Dolff?'

'My dear,' said Janet, 'how should I have any opinion? I cannot be supposed to know about your brother, what he is likely to do.'

'Oh,' said Julia, 'I did not ask you what you know, but what you *think;* everybody must have an opinion. Besides, after all, it is not so very little that you know about Dolff. He has been at home for six weeks, and you have always seen a great deal of him; at least I am sure he has always tried to see as much as he could of you.'

'I think,' said Janet, 'that it is very bad taste for us to discuss people, especially for you to talk with me about your own family. You forget that I am the governess, Julia.'

'I think you are very nasty, and not nice at all. Whoever thinks of you as the governess! I wonder what you mean, saying such unkind things.'

'They are not unkind, they are true. Your mother and Gussy have been very good to me, but——'

'Oh, Janet, when you know we were very fond of you, and we thought you were fond of us!'

Here Janet was suddenly visited by a great

compunction which changed at once her countenance and her feelings.

'Julia,' she said, 'don't speak to me. I feel so horrible sometimes, I don't know what to do with myself. I don't think I am nice or good at all. Perhaps,' she added, with a faint revulsion of self-defence after this impulsive confession, 'it is not quite my fault.'

'I don't understand you,' said Julia. 'I ask you a question, quite a simple question, and you go off into reproaching yourself and saying you are not nice. What I want to know is whether you think it was Dolff that knocked Charley Meredith down? If it was, he has not had the strength of mind to stick to it, as I should have done. And what do you think that man meant who came to identify him, and then said it wasn't he? And do you think that man last night really meant anything about Dolff, or did they only pretend to find out about the wing? And, oh, Janet, did you ever know, did you ever suspect anything about the wing? Please don't run away to other subjects, but tell me what you think.'

'Where am I to begin? I can't answer all those questions at once.'

'Oh,' said Julia, with impatience, 'how tiresome you are to-day! You don't want to answer me at all. Do you remember that first night when you heard that cry, and were so frightened? I had heard it before, but mamma told me it was nothing, it was the wind in the empty rooms. One thinks it strange,' said Julia, 'but at first one is stupid, you know, and just believes anything. But you see you were right; and you didn't look surprised at all, not even to see mamma walking upstairs, she who never moves. Or, do you think she only pretends not to be able to move, to take us all in?' Julia added, after a pause.

'Oh, Julia, hush! How dare you say such a thing of your mother?'

'It is because she has deceived us about things,' said Julia, hanging her head. 'It was Dolff that said so, not me. She has deceived us in one thing, and how are we to believe her in another. Both Dolff and Gussy think so,

though Gussy says nothing; they think she has kept it secret all this time, and never let even the elder ones know: and how can we tell if it is not a deceit about the chair too?'

'If you had seen how she tore herself out of it last night! It was only her misery and anxiety that gave her power to do it. It is very hard to judge anyone like that. I daresay,' said Janet, indignantly, 'that the other was done for your sakes, too, not to trouble you, when you were still so young, with knowing what was a great secret, I suppose?'

'Ah, but why was it a secret? and who do you think the man is, Janet?' said Julia, clinging ever and ever closer to her arm.

'Julia, what have I to do with the secrets of your family?'

'Why, you are one of the family,' said Julia; 'you can't help knowing; and again I tell you, Janet, it isn't what you know, it's what you think I am asking. Why don't you give me your opinion? everyone must have an opinion. Dolff and I, we don't know what to think.'

Dolff himself came hurriedly up behind the girls at this moment. He had not gone out after all.

'Why do you trouble Miss Summerhayes, Ju? It is very interesting for us, but not for—a stranger——'

'That is what I have just been saying, Mr. Harwood.'

'—Who can't take any particular interest, except just as a wonder and a thing to talk about, in what happens to us?'

Dolff's hands were thrust to the very bottom of his pockets, his shoulders were up to his ears, his head upon his breast. Gloom and anger and misery were on Dolff's face. As for Janet, she had stiffened more and more with every word he said, and Julia, who had been clinging, with all a child's affection, to the arm of her governess, felt herself repulsed and detached, she could not tell how, and protested loudly:

'Janet, because Dolff is disagreeable that's no reason for shaking me off!'

'I have no intention of being disagreeable,'

said Dolff, walking slowly with them. 'I only say what everyone must perceive to be the fact. We have all supposed there was a miracle to be performed, and Miss Summerhayes was to think of us as if—as if—she was, as you say, Ju, one of the family; but she does not feel like that; our affairs are nothing to her—only something that is odd and makes a story to talk about, as they would be to any other stranger.'

'Oh, if you are going to quarrel!' said Julia, 'you had better get it over between yourselves. I don't like people who are quarrelling. You had better have it out with him, Janet, and then perhaps he will not be so dreadful as he has been all these days.'

'There is nothing for us to quarrel about. I am, as Mr. Harwood says, only a stranger,' said Janet, endeavouring to hold the girl's hand upon her arm.

But Julia slipped it out and ran indoors, not without a thought that she had managed matters well. Julia had long ago made up her mind that a romantic attachment between Dolff

and Janet would add great interest to her own life, and that the probable struggles of a love that would not run too smooth would be very desirable for a young lady to witness. And Dolff, under Janet's influence, had been so much 'nicer' than Dolff without that. He had stayed at home; he had been ready for anything (though there was always too much of that horrid music), he had not objected even to a round game. It was true that all these domestic pleasures had come to an end since Charley Meredith's accident. But Julia, in her inexperience, could not see why they might not come to an explanation and 'get over it,' and everything go on as before.

Janet did not follow her pupil as she would have liked to do. She consented to the explanation as it seemed necessary, but she neither hoped nor intended that everything should go on as before.

'Yes,' said Dolff, 'you are only a stranger, Miss Summerhayes. My mother, I think, took to you as if you had been her own, and everybody was at your feet, but you did not respond

—that is to say, you were very kind, and the things you could not help but see, being in the house with us, though we never saw them who belonged to it, you told—as amusing incidents, I suppose, to——'

'What did I tell, Mr. Harwood?'

'Oh, I have not been taken into anyone's confidence. You gave information—you heard him say it—which made a secret meeting necessary, and—all that followed. One might say,' said Dolff, with a cheerless laugh, 'that everything had followed. I went mad, I suppose, for a little while; and you know as well as I do what I did. Oh, I am very well aware that you know. You saved me in your way after you had ruined me. Fellows say that women are like that—driving you mad first, and then—— But I never was one that talked about women—till I knew you.'

'I am very sorry,' said Janet, 'to have given you a bad opinion of women; but I don't know why Mr. Meredith——' Here her voice faltered a little in spite of herself.

'Ah!' cried Dolff, fiercely, 'you have found out that fellow is not worth his salt, yet you could cry when you say his name.'

'It is nothing of the sort,' exclaimed Janet. 'I cry—for any man in the world! You don't know me, Mr. Harwood. Mr. Meredith, I remember, walked home a part of the road with me, as it was a dark night. There are some men who think that is a right thing when they meet a lady alone; and, though I am the governess, I am not very old. I think it very old-fashioned and unnecessary, and I am not afraid to go anywhere alone.'

'You know very well if you had wished for an escort, Miss Summerhayes——'

'Yes, Mrs. Harwood would have liked her son to be at the command of the governess! Mr. Meredith walked home with me out of a civility which is old-fashioned, and he stood talking, which it seems is his way—with ladies. A man like that,' said Janet, almost fiercely, 'will never learn that all girls are not alike, and that some detest these old-fashioned ways of

being polite. But there was not in all that any reason for knocking the man down. I supposed when I saw it that you were, perhaps, working out some old quarrel.'

'You thought,' said Dolff, grinding his teeth, 'that I had watched him, and flew at him, by premeditation, to take him at a disadvantage—not because I was driven mad to see him holding you by the hands.'

'How could I know one thing or another? There was no reason for anyone being mad about me; I can take care of myself without anyone interfering. But I did not want any scandal, I do not want to be mixed up in it; when a girl's name is mentioned it is always she that gets the whole blame. You know what they say, "Oh, there was a woman at the bottom of it." Now, I had done nothing wrong, I was not at the bottom of it. Whatever you choose to say, it was no doing of mine.'

'One of the things that fellows say,' said Dolff, 'is that a woman has always reasons to show she is never wrong.'

'They say everything that is brutal and cruel,' said Janet, with a sound of tears in her voice, 'and therefore I was determined not to be mixed up in it: and I did my best to save you from what was—not a very fine action, Mr. Harwood. You did take him at a disadvantage. I don't doubt that you were very angry, though you had no reason——'

'If you think it was all for you!' cried Dolff, transported with boyish passion and anxious to give a blow in his turn. 'But to think of that fellow, jeering and laughing at everybody, those who trusted in him——'

'You see,' said Janet, with a smile, 'that I was right when I said I was not at the bottom of it!'

Dolff gave her a look which might have killed her where she stood, had the fire which passion struck even from his dull eyes been effectual, and yet which had in it a strange mixture of love and hate. He was not clever enough, however, to note that in Janet's smile there was a mixture, too, of malicious triumph and of morti-

fication: for, notwithstanding all that she had said, it would no doubt have been more agreeable to Janet's pride to have been told that the sudden assault was entirely on her own account from fierce jealousy and passion. She was a little girl who was full of reason, and understood the complication of things, yet there was enough of the primitive in her to have been pleased, even had she not fully believed it, by such an asseveration as that.

'In that case,' she said, 'I don't know what you have to find fault with in me. I did my best to smooth it all away that nobody might have known anything. What use is there in telling things that are so easily misrepresented? If it would shock anyone who trusted in him to know that Mr. Meredith had walked home with the governess——'

'Oh,' cried Dolff, 'you will drive me out of my senses! who calls you the governess, Miss Summerhayes?'

'I do myself,' said Janet, 'it is my right title. I never have been one of those who despise it;

but if it would vex anyone—who trusted in him—to hear that Mr. Meredith had walked home because it was dark and late with the——'

'You are very anxious to defend Meredith,' said Dolff, bitterly.

'Am I?' cried Janet. There was a dart out of her eyes at that moment that was more powerful than any dull spark that could come from Dolff's. 'If I am,' she added, with a laugh, 'it is only for the sake of those who, as you say, trust in him, Mr. Harwood. For me I find those old-fashioned ways of his intolerable. He is like a man in an old novel,' cried Janet, 'who kisses the maid and gives her half-a-crown, and is what he calls civil to every girl. It is eighteenth-century—it is mock Lovelace—it is the most antiquated vanity and conceit. And he thinks that he takes people in by it, which shows how foolish and imbecile it is, besides being the worst taste in the world!'

Dolff stared open-eyed at this tirade. He had a faint idea that Lovelace meant a seductive villain, but what Meredith had to do with the

eighteenth century, or how he was old-fashioned, this young man, devoid of literature, understood not at all. He did understand, however, that Janet was angry with Meredith, and this went to his heart. The dull yellow sky began to look a little clearer. It became a possibility that things might brighten, that a new world might arise, that these misty shadows might blow away.

'If I could think,' he said, 'that you ever could forget all this, Miss Summerhayes. I heard you taking my mother's part with Ju: and you are thinking of Gussy, who doesn't deserve it very much, perhaps, and you have saved me: for I never could have faced it out but for what you said to me—though I have seemed so ungrateful: and if you think it possible that we could all forget what has happened —in time——'

'No,' said Janet, 'I think there are several things in it which neither you nor I could ever forget.'

'I am not so sure,' said Dolff. 'It would

depend upon you. If you would promise never to see or speak to——'

'Whom?' said Janet, rising several inches out of her shoes, and looking down upon him with a glance that froze Dolff; and then she added, interrogatively, 'For you?' and, turning round upon her heel, walked away into the house without a glance behind.

CHAPTER X.

JANET was passing quickly through the hall, coming from the garden by the long passage which led past the kitchen and pantry, and turning round to go upstairs, when she found herself suddenly caught as she went along. Some one took hold of the end of the long boa which was round her neck and detained her. She was a little startled and frightened at first, thinking instinctively of the mad tenant of the wing, and that now the door was no longer fastened between him and the house. Her fears, however, were instantly put to flight, and feelings very different substituted in their stead, when a voice said,

'Janet! stop a moment and speak to me, I am very lonely here.'

'You have no need to be here, or to be lonely unless you like,' she cried, hurriedly; 'and call me by my proper name, please. I can be only Miss Summerhayes to you.'

'Don't say so. You were not so hard upon me the other night. Ah! I forgot; it's not the other night, it's three weeks ago. Stop a moment; don't pass without saying a word. You ought to pay me a little attention, considering all that I have suffered since—for you.'

'For me!' she cried. 'I am sorry that you have suffered, but it was not for me.'

'Do you think for a moment that that lout would have sprung on me as he did if it hadn't been for you? You know better. Janet. I owe it to you, my dear, that I was beaten flat like a pancake, and had my head dashed against the stones, as they did, you know, in the psalm. No, Janet; be quiet and listen to me. I've paid dear for one bit of an interview, and you ought to give me some recompense. I've lain upon my

back all these many days for you, and it's for you that I grin at that fellow, instead of taking him by the throat!'

'That does me no good,' said Janet, panting with excitement and alarm. 'Let me go, please. I would rather die than be found talking to you here. Take him by the throat if you please. What is that to me?'

'To save you from trouble,' said the other. 'Don't you think I have felt how unpleasant it would be to have your name coming out? That is why I have let him off, for that reason and no other. Come, talk to me a moment, I deserve it. Nobody will hear us; Gussy is out, and the mother shut up in her room. I'm very forlorn in this house, which I had better leave, I think, at once; I'm well enough, I suppose, to do so now——'

'Don't you want to leave it? Shall you not be glad to get away?' cried Janet, under her breath.

'Glad to get away! when you are here, you little witch. Do you think it has been pleasant

to go on all the time purred over by the others, and never getting a word with you.'

'You will not,' said Janet, with perhaps a certain revengeful pleasure, 'be purred over by the others any more.'

'You think so?' he said. 'Don't you be too sure. If you disdain me, and refuse to hear me, there is no telling, they may purr again.'

'One way or other,' said Janet, 'it has nothing to do with me.'

'Why do you say so? Are you going to be sent away?'

'Sent away!' Janet breathed forth the words as in a gale of indignation. 'Nobody,' she cried, 'except myself, shall send me away.'

'Well,' he said, 'and yourself will not, I hope? It would be a changed house if you were gone. All the spirit and the understanding and the mischief—don't be angry, Janet; there is nothing so enchanting as mischief, and you know you are full of it—would be gone. I doubt if I should ever come back to the place again.'

'Mr. Meredith,' said Janet, 'you have no

right to speak to me so. It is unpardonable in a man. Who is to believe you? Miss Harwood, whom I believe you are engaged to all this time—or me, whom you venture to take hold of and—talk to, when you think nobody sees? Oh, it is quite unpardonable, Mr. Meredith! Is it her or is it me whom you want to please? You ought to know.'

'That sounds very like asking me my intentions,' he said, with a laugh, 'as the father does in novels, or sometimes the mother. But never, so far as I recollect, the young lady herself.'

Janet was angry, and she was sore. She had been made of no account among them; she who was very well aware of her own value, and had never been ignored by those around her before, had been lately treated as if she were nobody in this house. It had been necessary for her to conceal her own movements, to be prudent, to take the most urgent measures that her name should not suffer. But it had galled her to the very heart that Meredith should have spoken of her as

a mere means of receiving information, and even that Dolff should have ignored her part in the matter, though it was what she wished him most to do. She was full of inconsistency in this respect, as most human natures are, and as women in particular are expected to be. Not to be mixed up in it was her most urgent desire, but to be ignored, though it was what she desired most, was bitter to her heart. It had given her a certain amount of satisfaction to assert her superiority to Dolff, and she would have been still more pleased now could she have done the same with Meredith, and issued from the double complication triumphant, setting both men in 'their proper place,' and proving that she was not deceived by either, but above both. But it was not so easy with Meredith as with Dolff. She had played with the youth who was not so clever as she, nor her equal in anything, but alas! it was she who had been played with in the other case, and her attempt to change the *rôle* was not likely to be very effectual.

She did not love Meredith—she was angry

with him, and more or less despised him: but he had a charm for her which some men have for women, and some women for men, not only without merit on the part of the enchanter, but even with a distinct feeling of disapproval and almost contempt on that of the enchanted. This was her feeling towards Gussy's lover. He *was* Gussy's lover, probably for all she knew Gussy's betrothed; yet he had dared to play with her, to set up a secret understanding, to persuade her that he loved her best.

He did not love her at all, she declared to herself indignantly; he loved nobody except himself, he cared for nothing except to be amused, to have the best of everything, to gather sweetness on every side. She had thrown him aside indignantly in the moment of trial when he had been found wanting, and when she, too, had found herself wanting, and instinctively defended herself by dropping him. And yet now when Janet was suddenly brought face to face with him again, and there was a moment given her in which to express her final sentiments, one of those curious returns upon herself which come

in every such history came over her. It was always possible that in the human mind there should be a complete change of sentiment, that the balance should turn at a touch, and truth and love vanquish all evil. The most conventional and the most lively and imaginative of minds acknowledge this possibility. It is called conversion in religion, in other matters it bears a less important title: yet it is always a possibility. A man who has been an egotist may become suddenly generous and tender; a man who has resisted every inducement to do well, and broken every heart that loved him, may by some more subtle touch be changed, and turned from his evil ways. Such a thing is always possible: and Janet, when she addressed Meredith in her indignation, had some such feeling in her mind. He had a charm for her notwithstanding her anger against him, her sense of wrong, and the no-faith she had in him; but yet he had a charm: and it was possible that something she might say, some argument struck out in the heat of the moment, might still convert him to honour and to truth.

That was, to Janet's version of honour and truth, which was, perhaps, a one-sided one. It was according to all her canons that the man finding himself not to love his *fiancée*, but to love another, should sacrifice everything to that other, and leave the *fiancée* to bear it as she might. This would have been the triumph of love over worldliness and conventionality in Janet's eyes. She would not have felt it wrong for him to prefer herself, to give up Gussy: and it was quite in his power to hold by Gussy and give up herself; but one thing she felt must be done, and that at once. She would not allow him to go on, detaining her, making love to her, telling her in words and otherwise that he loved her best, if he meant after all to marry Gussy. It had to be now decided once for all.

'Since you say so,' she said, with her heart beating, 'I will not object to the word. I am not frightened by words: and I have neither father nor mother. Oh, don't think I forget what you said about that last time you asked me to meet you in the shop, that it was to receive

information. And now you stop me and want to begin again, in a way very different from getting information. Yes, I want to know what you mean. It is quite true: which of us is it you want to please? Answer me!' cried Janet, stamping upon the floor with her foot. 'Is it her, or is it me?'

'Alas, that it can't be both! My dear child, I should like to please you both, if that is how you put it,' said Meredith.

It was so dark that she could scarcely see his face, but he had twisted the long boa round his arm, so as to bring her nearer to him.

She stamped her foot again upon the ground, and began to loosen her boa.

'Answer me!' she said.

'Don't put a poor fellow in a corner, Janet. I have to temporise like other people. You have almost made me lose my head; but I can't afford it, don't you know. I can't throw things up like that: and there's no hurry—we're all young enough; let us wait and see what may turn up.'

'Is that all you have got to say?' said Janet, uncoiling the boa from her throat.

'What can anyone say more? You women have the most confounded way of putting a fellow in a corner. There's no need for any such desperate decision. Let us wait a bit and enjoy ourselves as much as we can in the meantime,' said Meredith, manipulating the boa on his side.

She left it suddenly in his hand, and quickly and noiselessly turned away, flying upstairs almost before he could call her back: and Meredith did not venture to call 'Janet, Janet!' in more than a subdued tone. He dared not follow her, he did not want anybody to know of that colloquy in the hall, though he had risked it, and would have prolonged it, perhaps, to the very edge of discovery. When he felt the boa dropped upon his hands he laughed to himself, with amusement mingled with a certain discomfiture, to think how much in earnest these girls were—and he was not at all in earnest. He liked to take the goods the gods had provided, and get all the pleasure he could out of

them: but to compromise his own future and bind himself for ever was what he would not do for anyone: and perhaps he was half-pleased to have got through the dangerous amusement of that interview, though it was he who had sought it and prolonged it, so easily upon the whole. He had not been made to commit himself to anything, and yet he flattered himself he had made no breach. Things were just as they had been before. He was not like a married man, or one who had come under solemn engagements; there was no reason that he should give up what was agreeable to him, yet at least; but it amused him to see Janet's high spirit, her impatience, and even those questions which it was ludicrous, yet a little confusing, to be asked by her—about 'his intentions,' as he said. Even the sudden conclusion of the interview by which she betrayed her impatience, her displeasure was amusing to him. He felt all the more fond of her, amused and flattered by her anxiety to know what he meant, and pleased that she had not made much of her bold attempt.

'The little vixen!' he said to himself. He gathered up the boa, which was of a kind which slips through unused fingers, and laid it carefully upon the table. It escaped him once, as its mistress had done, and had to be caught again, and laid in soft dark coils on the table, which was a thing that pleased him, and made him laugh again. Janet was in a great fright lest her conversation with him should be discovered, and she would by no means have liked it to be discovered, yet it gave him a pungent pleasure to linger and keep her there, and feel that she had fled on the very eve of detection, and get away himself to the shelter of his room, just as Gussy outside put her latch-key in the door.

He laughed as he heard her come in and call to Priscilla to light the lamps, and that the hall was so dark she could scarcely see her way upstairs. Janet had found her way upstairs like a bird a minute before. He chuckled at the thought that in another moment it might have been too late: and yet he had no desire at all

that Gussy should find out that meeting in the dark.

As for Janet, she hurried to her room with hot indignation in her heart and the water in her eyes. Oh, it was not that she expected it to have ended in any other way! She had known exactly how it would be. He was not a man to behave like a man, to love one and no more. What he wanted was his own pleasure and advantage, not Gussy and not Janet. She despised him for it all, for the subdued tone in which he had attempted to call her back, for his way of putting off everything that was serious: and she half-despised herself for having asked, as he said, 'his intentions,' and allowed him to see that she cared.

She did care, she said to herself, dashing the tears from her eyes. She had a contempt for him, and penetrated his character with the keenest perception, and to say that she loved him would have been a great exaggeration: and yet he had a charm for Janet—his mockery, his laugh, the tone of his voice, almost his want of

respect and bold appropriation of her, whether she wished it or not, had a charm. Her heart would have danced with pleasure had he given her an assurance of love (which he might very well have done, she knew, without in the least meaning it), and yet she had penetrated him through and through, and had no illusion as to his character. All motives are mingled, but Janet's were so mingled that she did not understand them. She was humiliated by the result of her endeavour, yet highly excited, her heart leaping in her breast: she sat down as she was, in her hat and coat, to think it all over. Dolff and Meredith had both revealed their affection more or less—they had both allowed her to see into their hearts. And Janet, though she had provoked it in both cases, was angry, mortified, full of fury and pain. That was what men were incapable of, she thought—any real feeling, but for themselves and themselves only. Even Dolff, who had been her slave, would have consented now to forget everything, if she would give him her promise. She to him! as if he would give any

promise or act otherwise than as pleased himself!

Janet sat for a long time pondering over the half-extinguished fire, her heart full of anger, disappointment, and contempt. It was themselves they had both thought of, never of her! At one time they had made her believe that she was everything, queen of their hearts, and for a moment she had been so silly as to be half-intoxicated, believing in it, accepting the high compliment, but now—— She suddenly sprang up under the impulse of the shock at the dictation of a new idea. They might be unworthy, but there were some who were worthy. Oh, what did it matter that they should have youth and a fair appearance, or any of those adventitious gifts. It was better to be true and real. It occurred to her suddenly that instead of going away to another family to exercise the mystery of a governess, instead of being liable to be dismissed, as Meredith so coarsely had suggested, instead of the state which was offensive to Janet's own good taste and feeling, of covert hostility to her employers, which she had fallen

into so readily, and which in another house it was horribly possible she might fall into again—how much better it would be to go out proudly in the eye of day, as good as any of them, as independent, with a life of her own to fall back upon!

Janet flew to her writing-table at this new thought, and wrote, as quick as the pen would form the letters, a hasty letter. It was all done at flying speed, without taking time to think, a hurried, blurred, as she felt unladylike production. She thrust it into an envelope, directed it, and rushed downstairs with it to take it herself to the post, not to lose a moment. The hall was now lighted but abandoned—nobody there to call to her, to bid her pause, to stop her on the way. Her boa lay on the table carefully coiled round and round. Janet snatched it up, as if that had been an additional reason for speed, and rushed out to decide her fate.

CHAPTER XI.

In the evening they were all assembled in the drawing-room once more.

The same party with so many differences. There were only Mrs. Harwood and Meredith who were unchanged. She sat in the usual warm corner, with the usual white fleecy knitting, which never changed, in her lace cap and white shawl, with her pretty complexion and her smiling looks, the woman of whom people said that she must have lain in the lilies and fed on the roses of life to preserve that wonderful complexion and eyes so clear and so bright. And he, looking so much better—really assured in his health, the tints of weakness going off, the high colour which was at once his characteristic

and the drawback to his good looks coming back, and his high spirits as if they had never had any check. It was only last night that he had been following up that discovery with the eagerness of a bloodhound, forgetting everything but the scent on which he was following on to the end. All that had now flown away. He was the Charley Meredith of old, playful and ready to 'chaff' everybody round, talking of the new songs and what would suit 'our' voices, and lamenting the interrupted 'practisings.' Charley was as if nothing had happened, full of fun, eager for amusement, calling upon the mother for sympathy and encouragement.

'They have all become so grave,' he said. 'It is you and I, Mrs. Harwood, that will have to perform our duet.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'if I had been twenty years younger there is no telling what might have happened. I should not have kept you waiting, Charley. I wish, Gussy, you would not look as if you had been to a funeral this afternoon.'

'Not this afternoon—but something a little like it, mamma.'

'You are talking great nonsense, my dear. If there is anybody that ought to be cast down, it is surely me. All my troubles have been forced back upon me; but I have the comfort of knowing,' said Mrs. Harwood, with a slightly raised voice, 'that I never meant any harm—and that I have done none—and that the last people in the world to criticise me are my children: so I desire that there shall be an end of this. I have been summoned, as I expected, to explain everything: and Charley has kindly promised to appear for me and clear it all up—and secure permission for me to look after my poor dear upstairs, as I have done ever since he was afflicted. When I have made it all clear with the Lunacy commissioners I may perhaps be supposed to have done enough, though one can never know.'

'Mamma,' said Gussy, 'there was no need for anything but to be frank and open. You have not been open—not to me, who was taken more

or less into your confidence. I suppose you were compelled to tell me something, but not all, or nearly all. A child could see there is more in it than meets the eye. And now I presume you have taken Mr. Meredith into your confidence, but none of your children.'

'Why *Mr.* Meredith?' said he, with a smile, putting out his hand for hers.

Gussy made no reply. She gave him a look of indignant reproach. In point of fact, when he asked her thus, she could not have told why —after all. The truth began to steal into her mind, like the influence of a thaw, that after all he had done nothing. He had been curious to fathom the secret in the house. So would anyone have been. And there was something about information that he had received—where or from whence could he have received information? But even that, she suddenly reflected, could not be his fault. If he had been told anything it would be difficult not to listen. Thus, though she gave him a look of reproach and drew away her hand, it suddenly occurred to Gussy that

after all there was no particular reason why she should call him Mr. Meredith, or consider him as deeply to blame. The thaw had begun.

Dolff had kept behind backs all the evening. He took no seat, he attached himself to none of the party. For some time he had been seated in a large easy-chair which almost swallowed him up, in the other part of the room, reading, or pretending to read. Then when the conversation began he had risen from that place, and walked about in the half-light like an uneasy ghost. Now he came into the talk with a voice that sounded far off, partly because of the length of the room, and partly because of the boyish gruffness which, as a token of high contrariety and offence, he had brought into his voice.

'I don't see,' he said, 'what Lunacy commissioners have to do with it in comparison with the people in the house.'

Mrs. Harwood turned her chair round as much as she was capable of doing, and cast a look into the dim depths of the other room.

'It is a pity,' she said, 'that the commissioners

could not be of your opinion, Dolff; it would have saved me a great deal of trouble.'

'I can't see,' he said, irritably, 'why you should have taken such trouble upon you at all. What is the man to you? Who is he that you should have taken such trouble for him? You have no brother that I ever heard of. Mother,' said Dolff, coming forward out of the gloom, 'I have cudgelled my brains to think who it could be. Is it possible that for a mere stranger—a man who is no relation to us—you should have risked all our comfort and separated us from you? I have heard of such things,' said the young man, working himself up, 'but to find them out in one's mother, in one's mother whom one has always respected——'

She gave a wondering look round upon them all and then burst into a strange confused laugh.

'In the name of wonder,' she cried, 'can anybody tell me what the boy has got in his head? what does he mean?'

What did he mean? They all looked at each

other with perplexity; even Janet, rousing from the rigid unmeaningness to which she had condemned herself, to take share in the glance of amazement which ran round. Only Meredith did not share that amazement. He laughed, which was a sound that made Dolff frantic, and brought him a step forward with his hand clenched.

'Dolff, my good fellow,' he said, with an air of superior experience which still further irritated the furious lad, 'don't fly upon me again: for that sort of argument doesn't do much good in a discussion. And don't bring your ideas out of French novels here. Such things are a great deal worse when they are translated than when they are at home.'

'I don't know what you mean,' cried Dolff, 'with your French novels! nor what right you have to be here, in the midst of us all, discussing a subject—a subject which—a subject that—makes me,' cried the young man, 'that I cannot endure myself, nor the house, nor so much as my mother's name.'

'What does he mean?' said the ladies to each other, looking all round with perturbed looks. They were all united, from Julia to her mother, in the wonder to which they had no clue. Englishwomen, brought up in the very lap of respectability, not knowing even the alphabet of shame, full of faults, no doubt of their own kind, but utterly incapable even of imagining the secret horror and suspicion that lurked in Dolff's words, they could do nothing but send round that troubled look of consultation. Was Dolff going out of his senses *too*? Was it perhaps in the family, this dreadful thing, and had it assailed the boy? Mrs. Harwood grew pale with sheer fright and horror as she looked back upon her son, and then pitifully consulted his sisters with her eyes.

'Dolff,' cried Meredith, in a warning tone, 'mind what you are about, my boy. I tell you to bring none of your French novels here. They don't explain the situation. Strike me if you like then; but don't be such an everlasting fool. Pierre et Jean, eh, *here!*' cried the elder man,

with a half shriek of derisive laughter. He sat with a sort of careless courage, not putting himself even into an attitude of defence, but on his guard, looking towards the enraged youth—an air which transported both the young feminine hearts beside him into an ecstasy of admiration, though Gussy was so deeply offended (she began to think more and more without reason), and Janet more deeply still, hating and despising him as she thought.

Gussy darted forward between her brother, who had the air of springing upon his senior, and Meredith, warning Dolff in her turn with a loud cry,

'Mind,' she exclaimed, 'what you are about! As Charley says, enough has happened already. We will tolerate no more in this house.'

Janet rose too, scarcely knowing why she did it, she who had so solemnly made up her mind that on no provocation would she take any part.

'I don't know,' she said, 'what Mr. Dolff means; but I hope no one will be angry if I say

I found some papers torn in little pieces under the windows of the wing. I thought they were from an old copybook and that they were Mr. Dolff's. I am sure now they belonged to the poor gentleman upstairs. They were signed "Adolphus Charles Harwood." I have no right to be here at all, and I am going away.'

Dolff stood breathless, feeling the light fail in his eyes. He saw Meredith spring up and open the door for her, and with a pang watched while the little dark figure disappeared. For the moment he was only aware of her disappearance, of the final going out as he thought in eternal darkness of the little light which had made his life so different. He came back to himself with a gasp when the door closed, but scarcely knew what had been said to him for the beating of the pulses in his head.

'"Adolphus Charles Harwood"?' said Julia, thoughtfully; 'then that, I suppose, is the poor gentleman's name; so, Dolff, you see I was right, and it was a relation after all.'

'What is Pierre et Jean, Charley?' said Mrs.

Harwood, sitting up a little more erect than usual, with a kindling in her eyes.

'It is a very clever French novel—far more clever and better than most—a very fine piece of work.'

'But with something in it,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'like our circumstances? You must bring it to me to read it, Dolff. If I did not burden your minds with a secret, which would have done you no good, and been hard, hard to keep——'

'Then,' he said, interrupting her abruptly, 'it is a relation? but even that I never heard of before. How is it that there should be a man of that name in the family, and I should never have heard of him before?'

He still stood on the defensive, his face flushed with anger, and a sense of being wrong and inferior to all the rest somehow, though he could not tell how.

It is strange how difficult it sometimes is in such a discussion, when there is one whose invincible ignorance holds out in face of all argument and proof, to say the single word

which will cut the knot. It was on Gussy's lips to say it; but she did not, perhaps because Dolff's want of comprehension was so curious to them all. And at this moment, almost before he could be replied to, there arose a little commotion in the hall. Janet's voice was heard in a faint cry, and there was a shuffling of feet, and another unknown male voice rising in the quiet. Julia, who was awake like a dog to all new sounds, rushed to the door and flung it open, and then there became visible the strangest sight.

There stood upon the threshold an old man in a strange dress, something between a long coat and a gown, with a white beard on his breast, long white hair streaming on his shoulders, and a long pallid face. His appearance was so sudden, so unlooked-for, like a stage entrance without warning, that the effect was more startling and wild than could be imagined. It was as if the conversation, in which so many complications, so many misunderstandings, were involved, had been suddenly embodied in this

bizarre and extraordinary figure which was its cause. And, as if to make it more extraordinary still, this strange apparition held by the hand, with her arm drawn through his, Janet, pale, terrified, and faintly struggling, who had left the room but a moment before.

Janet was evidently wild with terror, yet did not dare even to try to escape, except by the strain of reluctance in her whole figure, drawing back while he drew her forward. The most benignant aspect that is compatible with a disordered brain was in the madman's face. He smiled as he held her, dividing the fingers of the hand he held with his own, as if he were caressing and playing with a child. He stood for a moment contemplating them all, taking in the details of the picture which on their side they made, with that pleased, half-bewildered, half-imbecile look, and nodding his head from one to another, like one of those nodding figures that go on indefinitely. The weakness of the smile, the glow of foolish satisfaction in his face, the endless nodding, took much from the

majesty of the venerable patriarchal figure, and made him look more like a silly old man than a picturesque and tragical lunatic. While they all stood thunderstruck, he advanced into the room with a buoyant, almost dancing step.

'Well,' he said, 'here I am, Julia. I suppose that you expected me? This is a merry meeting: here's to our merry meeting. Vicars says I am so much better—and so I am, quite well—don't you see I have a colour in my cheeks—that I may come downstairs. He is a very good fellow, Vicars; but I want society. Julia, see what I've got here.'

He drew Janet forward, nodding at her with the most complacent looks, while the poor little girl, deadly pale, trembling with terror, hung upon his arm as if suspended by a hook, holding back, yet not daring to struggle, shutting her eyes for very terror. He waved his hand, releasing hers for a moment, but holding it tight within his arm.

'Another of them?' he said. 'Where does she come? I don't seem to remember what we

called her, or where she comes in the family; but a nice little thing, Julia—with some feeling for her old—for her old—eh? I forget what I was going to say. What is her name?'

'Adolphus! let the child go. Here is a chair by me: come and sit down.'

They all stood about helpless, gazing, Mrs. Harwood alone keeping her place in her chair, while he strayed across the floor in his half-dancing step, dragging Janet with him.

'I'll sit by you with pleasure, Julia. It is long since you have come to sit with me till last night. And these are all of them? I've said their names over in my mind, but I forget some—I forget some. They were so little once—curious to think so little once, and then when a man comes back—tse! in a moment all grown up—the same as men and women. But this,' he said, with a laugh, 'is still a little thing. Where shall I put her, Julia? Too big, you know, to sit on papa's knee.'

He laughed again, looking round upon them all, and suddenly let Janet go, so that she fell

in the shock of the release, which made the stranger laugh more and more.

'Poor little sing! but too big to tumble about. Det up again and don't ky. Julia,' he put out his hand again and laid it on the elbow of Mrs. Harwood's chair, 'these are all then?—between you and me——' He rubbed his long soft pallid hands.

'Who would have thought,' he said, 'that I should have got so well, and come downstairs again and sat by you in another chair, and seen them all men and women. It's more than we could have expected—more than we could have expected. And now there's a great deal to be done to show that we're thankful. Where is my pocket-book? I want my pocket-book. God in heaven! that villain Vicars has taken my pocket-book, and now I shall not be able to pay!'

He started up again in rising excitement, his eyes beginning to stare and his face to redden, while he dragged and pulled at the pockets of his coat. Mrs. Harwood put her hand upon him

to pull him down into his chair, and called to them all to find Vicars.

'Sit down, sit down, Adolphus,' she said, holding him with both her hands. 'It is in your other coat. You changed your other coat to come down, you know you did. Run—run, Dolff! for the love of heaven, and get the pocket-book out of your father's other coat!'

CHAPTER XII.

DOLFF hurried out of the room so bewildered and dazed that he neither understood what this new revelation was, nor what he was sent out to do. He felt himself hustled out of the room by his anxious sisters, while Meredith was left to be the defender of the party against the madman. The madman! What was it his mother had said. To fetch Vicars—but that was not all—to get something out of his father's coat. His father! Dolff stopped a few steps from the door, out of which he had been thrust to run in haste and bring what was wanted out of his father's coat.

'My father,' Dolff said to himself, 'has been

dead since ever I can remember. Who is my father?' He was completely bewildered. He remembered his mother very well in her widow's cap. And she was known everywhere to be a widow. 'Your father!'—he could not think what it meant. He believed there must be some mistake, some strange illusion which had fallen upon them, or which, perhaps, they had thought of, invented, to prevent remark. 'Your father!' could it have been said only to shut his mouth?

It was due to Providence, not to Dolff, that Vicars came in his way, drifting across the hall in pursuit of his patient. Vicars had the famous pocket-book in his hand, and Dolff wondered vaguely what was the meaning of it, and how it was that this pocket-book, like a property on the stage, should be so mixed up with the poor man's thoughts, if these distracted fancies could be called thoughts. All that he could do was to point towards the drawing-room, whither Vicars hastened. He had no command of his voice to say anything, or of himself to be able

to exercise his own wits. He dropped in his dismay upon one of the hard wooden chairs in the hall, and sat there staring vaguely before him, trying to think.

There was a faint jar of the door, and a little figure came out abruptly, as if escaping. It was Janet, whose smooth hair was a little out of order, and her black dress crushed by the half embrace in which the madman had held her. Janet was deeply humiliated by that embrace, by having thus appeared before Meredith and all of them, the object of the old man's fondling. Her face was obscured by anger and annoyance, and when Dolff sprang up and put himself in her way, the little governess looked for a moment like a little fury, contemplating him with a desire in her eyes to strike him to dust if she had been able—a fiery little Gorgon, with the will without the power.

'What is it—what is it *now*?' she cried, clenching her hand as if she would have struck him, yet at the same moment holding herself in with difficulty from a fit of angry tears.

'Janet, don't forsake me,' cried Dolff; 'I am half mad, I don't know what to think. Who is he? Tell me who he is!'

'Mr. Harwood,' cried Janet, fiercely, 'you—you are not a wise child.'

He looked at her with a naïve wonder.

'I have never set up for being wise. You are far, far more quick than I am. I suppose you understand it, Janet. I know you don't care for me, as I do for you; but you might feel for me a little. Oh, don't turn away like that—I know you've thrown me off; but help me—only help me. Who is he? Tell me who he is.'

'Mr. Harwood,' said Janet, 'how should I know your family history? He is your father; anyone can see that.'

'It is impossible,' said Dolff; 'my father is dead.'

'Of course, I cannot know anything,' said Janet, with a cruel intention which she did not disguise from herself, with her lip a little raised over her white teeth like a fierce little

animal at bay, 'but I will tell you what I think. Your father has done something which made it better that he should be thought dead, and your mother has hidden him away and kept him a close prisoner all these years: but now it is all found out.'

'Done something—that made it better he should be thought dead!' Dolff turned so deadly pale that the girl's heart smote her. The place seemed to turn round and round with him. He fell back against the wall as if he would have fallen. 'You don't mean that!—you don't mean that!' he cried, piteously, stretching out his hands to her as if she could help it.

'Oh! forgive me, Mr. Dolff. I did not mean to hurt you so.'

'Never mind about hurting me,' he said, hoarsely. 'Is it true?'

She made no reply; what did she know about it? Perhaps it was not true—but what else could anyone think who was not a fool? If Dolff had not been a fool he would have known

that it must be so. She stood confronting him for a minute while he stood there supporting himself against the wall, hiding his face in his hands. And then Janet left him, running upstairs to escape altogether from these family mysteries, with which she had nothing to do. It had been very interesting at first, full of excitement, like a story. But now Janet felt that it was a great consolation to have nothing really to do with it, to retire and leave these people to manage their own affairs. And she had in her veins an entirely new excitement, something of her own enough to occupy all her thoughts.

She ran upstairs, leaving Dolff in his dismay with his head hidden in his hands—what had she to do with that?—and fled to her comfortable room, where she sat down beside the blazing fire, and turned to her own affairs—they were important enough now to demand her full attention. Since she had written that letter, Janet herself had become subject to all the suspenses, the doubts and alarms of independent

life. What would be thought of it? Would he still be in the same mind? Would he come to take her away? And oh, biggest and most serious of all her questions, if he did come, if he were still of the same mind, could she endure him—could she accept the fate which she had thus invited for herself? Janet had serious enough questions of her own to discuss with herself as she sat over the glowing fire.

Poor Dolff did not know how long he stood there, with his head against the wall. He was roused at last by the sound of a movement in the drawing-room, and presently the door opened, and a sort of procession came out. First of all, the strange new inmate of the house leaning upon Vicars, looking back and kissing his hand to the others behind him, who came crowding out in a group close to each other.

'I'll come often now and sit an hour with you in the evening,' he said. 'Now that everybody's paid, I'll live a new life. My children, don't be frightened; I'll take care of you all. For,' he said, stopping short, turning Vicars

round by the arm, 'I'm to have a wheeled chair and go out for an airing to-morrow. Hey, what do you think—an airing! That means it's all paid and everything right.'

'I wouldn't, if I were you, say the same thing over not more than twenty times,' said Vicars, sulkily; 'and you won't have no airing, I can tell you, if you don't come off to bed.'

'That's Vicars all over,' said the smiling patient. 'Vicars all over! You would think he's my master—and he's only my servant! Yes—yes, it's all paid, and everything right—or how could I go out for an airing to-morrow? There is plenty in the pocket-book for everybody. You know—in the pocket-book. Eh! My! Where's my pocket-book?' he cried, suddenly changing his tone and searching in his breast-pocket. 'Vicars, do you hear? My pocket-book! Where's my pocket-book? It's not where I always have it—I keep it here, you know, to keep it safe. My pocket-book!' cried the poor maniac, tossing Vicars from him and waving his arms wildly.

His distracted eyes caught at this moment the figure of Dolff standing against the wall. Dolff had uncovered his pale and miserable countenance: he was standing in the shade, mysterious, half seen, with that very pale face looking out from the semi-dark. The madman rushed towards him with a cry.

'There's the thief! There's the thief! Get hold of him before he gets away! He's got my pocket-book—lay hold of him! I'm not strong enough,' he added, turning round with an explanatory look, 'to do it myself. Never getting any air, you know, as I couldn't till things were settled. I've got very little strength.'

'I thought,' said Vicars, 'as taking that pocket-book from him was a mistake! He's always a-looking back upon that pocket-book! You'll have to give it him back!'

'Don't you remember, sir,' said Meredith, holding up a sealed packet, 'that you gave it to me to put it up—look at the seals, you stamped them yourself. You gave it to me to pay off

everything. Try to remember. Here it is, safe and sound. You gave it to me yourself.'

'And who the devil are you,' said the invalid, 'that I should give you all my money? You're not one of them: some fellow, Vicars, that Julia has picked up. She's always picking people up. Give it back, make him give it back, Vicars—my money that's meant to pay off everybody! Give it back—back! I tell you I'll pay them all myself! I'll go out to-morrow in the wheel-chair—you know, Vicars, the wheel-chair for the airing—and pay them all myself!'

'Who is it,' said Dolff, coming forward out of the gloom, 'who has to be paid back? and who is this man? For you all seem to know.'

'Come, come, sir,' said Vicars; 'it's your time for bed. You'll not go nowhere, neither for an airing nor to pay them debts of yours, if you don't come straight off to bed.'

'Who is he?' cried Dolff, pushing upon the group. 'Who are you? For I will know.'

To the surprise of all, the madman, who had

been so self-confident, suddenly shrank behind Vicars, and, catching his arm, pulled him towards the door that led to the wing.

'I'm afraid of that man,' he said, in a whispering, hissing tone. 'Vicars, get me home; get me out of sight. He's an officer. Vicars, I'm not safe with that man!'

'Hold your tongue, can't you, Mr. Dolff, till I get him away,' cried Vicars, pushing past. And in a moment the pair had disappeared within the mysterious door, which swung after them, noiseless, closing without a sound.

Dolff was left, pale and threatening, with Meredith and his two sisters facing him. That they should know what he did not filled Dolff with a sort of frenzy; and yet how could he continue to say that he did not know?

'I wish,' cried Julia, stamping her foot, 'that you two who know such a lot would go away, and not speak to Dolff and me. You don't belong to us—at least Charley Meredith doesn't belong to us, and Gussy thinks more of him than of all of us together. Oh, Dolff, it only

matters to you and me! I believe,' cried Julia, catching her brother's arm, 'that old madman's our father, Dolff. I believe he is our father. It's terrible, it's odious, and I will never forgive mamma. Why isn't he dead? as she said he was. Dolff—oh, don't mind it so dreadfully! I don't mind it so dreadfully: he's only mad—and that's not wicked after all.'

Dolff pushed past them all to where his mother sat in that temple of brightness and comfort, in her chair. Everything that could be done for her convenience and consolation in her incapacity was about her. She sat there as in a sanctuary, the centre of the most peaceful house. And there she had sat for years with the air of knowing nothing different, fearing nothing, meeting every day that rose and every night that fell with the same serene composure—a woman with nothing to conceal, nothing to alarm her, occupied only with little cares of the family and sympathies with others, and the knitting with which she was always

busy. To look at her, and to think of the burden that had been for so long upon her shoulders, unknown, undreamed of, was a problem beyond the reach of imagination. Never a line upon her brow, and all that mystery and misery behind.

The room, usually so orderly, was a little disarranged to-night, the chairs pushed about anyhow, and one lying where it fell, which had been pushed over as Vicars led his patient out. And she had sat there patiently and listened to the voices in the hall, knowing that another encounter was taking place—knowing that her son was desperate, that he had it in him to be violent, that it was enough to touch that secret spring of madness which, for aught she could tell, the son of a mad father might have inherited. Perhaps, had she been scanned at that moment by anyone more able to judge than Dolff, the signs of a conflict might have been seen in her eyes, but to Dolff she appeared precisely as she always was in her incredible calm.

He placed himself in front of her with the air of an angry man demanding an explanation from his inferior.

'Is that man my father?' he said.

'Dolff, this is not a way either to address me or to inquire about your father. Yes, it is your father whom you have just seen, afflicted almost all your lifetime, an object for pity and reverence, not for this angry tone.'

'What had he done that you kept him shut up for fifteen years?'

'Done!' Even Mrs. Harwood's steady tones faltered a little. 'Why should he have done anything, Dolff? He was mad. If it had been known that I had kept him here he would have been taken from me, and how could I tell that he would have been kindly treated, or humoured, or waited on as he would be at home? He was never violent, and I knew Vicars could manage him. If you saw how carefully everything was arranged for him, you would not think it was from want of affection—too much perhaps,' she added, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

'And what is the meaning, then, of this about paying, and the pocket-book?' asked Dolff, half convinced.

Mrs. Harwood put her hands together with a little gesture of appeal.

'How can I explain the fancies of a mind that is astray?' she said. 'He has got something into his head, some distorted recollection of things that happened before. He was not quite fortunate in his business,' she added, with a slight trembling in her voice; 'the worry about that was supposed to have something to do with his breakdown.'

'Then there were, I suppose, people to pay —whom he thinks he has provided for in that pocket-book?'

He thought she gave an alarmed glance at some one behind him, and, turning round, caught what seemed to him an answering glance in the eyes of Meredith.

'*He* knows,' cried Dolff; 'you take him into your confidence, but give only what you can't help to me!'

'Charley is to appear for me before the commissioners,' said Mrs. Harwood, with dignity; 'I have given him all the information which was ready for you had you not treated your mother as if she were an enemy trying to injure you. If you do not know, it is your own fault.'

Dolff did not know what to think: his courage failed before his mother. Perhaps it was true that Meredith (though he hated him) had stood by the mother more than he, Dolff, had done, and was of more use in this great family emergency. This thought stung him, but he could not escape from it. And to think that if she had but been frank and honest—if he had known of it, as he ought to have done, as soon as he was old enough to understand——

'Oh, mother,' he cried, 'why did you keep it from us? Why did I not know long ago?'

A slight quiver came over Mrs. Harwood's face.

'What I did I did for the best. One may be mistaken, but I thought it best for you all,' she said.

'And I think Mrs. Harwood has had enough agitation for one night,' said Meredith.

'You have nothing to do with it!' said Dolff, wildly, 'you—what have you to do with our family? What right have you with our secrets? —since we have secrets,' the young man added, in a tone of despair.

And Meredith fixed his laughing eyes upon Dolff. He could laugh, however serious the circumstances might be.

'There are some secrets,' he said, 'which are supposed to be quite safe with me—which it might be awkward for other people were I to let escape.'

He looked Dolff full in the eyes, and his laugh drove the young man almost to frenzy. But at the same time it recalled him to himself. He dared not meet Meredith's laughing eyes. As long as they should both live this fellow would have him at a disadvantage. Dolff drew back with a mortification and humiliation which were unspeakable. He had no longer the courage to question his mother, to assert his own rights.

He had the right to know everything, to be the first to be consulted in his own house. But that look was enough to silence him, to drive him back. Oh, that he should have put such power into another's hand! And for what? For whom?

'If it will be any satisfaction to you, Dolff,' said Gussy, 'I knew all the time—at least, I have known for a year or two. Mamma told me, just as she has told you, that he was—afflicted soon after Ju was born, and that she knew they would not let her keep him if it was known. So it was said he had died abroad, where he was for a little while. Is that so, mamma?'

'You are quite right, my dear,' said Mrs. Harwood, who had quite recovered her composure. 'But with this in addition: that the news came of his death, and that I had got my widow's mourning, and everything was settled, when I found out that we had been mistaken. Vicars had gone with him, and Vicars brought him back. He sent me a letter to say that your

father was not dead, but afflicted, and that he was bringing him back. I could not tell what to do. I did not want to let anybody know.'

'Why?' said Dolff, who had plucked up a little courage. This time Gussy and Julia both stood by him. They looked at their mother, the three faces together, all so much alike, lit up with the same sentiment. 'Why did you make a mystery of it?' said Dolff. 'Would it not have been easier if everything had been frank and above-board?'

For a moment there was silence in the room. Mrs. Harwood made no reply. For the first time in all these fifteen years she wavered, her confidence forsook her, she had all but broken down. Another moment and the silence itself would have betrayed that there was something else—another secret still unrevealed. As she looked at them all together, her three children all asking the same question with faces overshadowed by a cloud of doubt, her strong heart almost gave way.

'Mrs. Harwood has already told you the

reason,' said Meredith behind them. 'She knew that she would not be allowed to keep him, that he would be carried off from her to an asylum——'

'Oh, children,' cried Mrs. Harwood, with a burst of sobbing which was half relief, 'it is hard, hard upon me to drive me back again to that time! I had to take my resolution all at once. I had nobody to advise me. I came up here, and took this house, and prepared it all myself. You may see for yourselves how carefully it is done. I made the curtains and things with my own hands. Oh, I did not spare any trouble to make him comfortable! And we managed everything, Vicars and I. At first, even, when he was not so weak, we managed to get him out sometimes to take the air. We did everything for him. I was not laid up then. Why should I defend myself before you as if you were my judges?' she cried, drying her eyes hastily. 'It was all for you.'

'Mamma,' said Julia, 'you said just now it

was because you would not be allowed to keep him—because he would be taken from you and put into an asylum: and now you say it was for us——'

Mrs. Harwood again raised her head and gave them a look; her countenance changed, a flash of anger came over her face. She had borne everything else, but these exasperating questions were more than she could bear. She was about to answer with unusual passion when Meredith's voice came in again.

'You do not remember,' he said, 'that to have a father in a lunatic asylum is not the best thing in the world for a family. Mrs. Harwood desired to save you that, to save you the anxiety of knowing he was here, to bear everything herself and leave your minds free.'

'Charley,' cried Gussy, quickly, 'thank you, you understand her better than we have done. Oh, mamma, that was why you told me so little —even me.'

'I did it for your sakes,' said the mother,

yielding at last to an exasperation beyond her power of resistance, and bursting into uncontrolled tears.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE explanation was over, but the family atmosphere was not cleared. Gussy indeed had been moved out of her resentment and doubt, partly for the sake of her lover, partly for the sake of her mother. To stand out against both was more than she had been capable of. And Meredith had been perhaps alarmed by her sudden withdrawal from him, or in some other way (she could not tell how) moved back towards his former devotion. He was more anxious to draw her back, to recover her attention, than he had ever been before in any of the little brief estrangements which Gussy was generally the person to bring to an end. But

on this occasion it was entirely he who did it, who sought her pardon, her return of tenderness, all the old attentions that had once been lavished upon him. Gussy could not resist that silent moving back of her heart; and it pleased her that he should defend her mother, whether or not her mother was worthy of it.

But the younger ones were not moved by this influence. They were the more dissatisfied with their mother's defence, because Meredith had chimed in, to put arguments into her mouth when she was about, as they believed, to break down. Had she been permitted to break down, a more full explanation might have been had, and the children might then have forgiven their mother; but, as it was, there had been too much and not enough. An insufficient explanation is the most painful of family misfortunes. It gives a sense of falsehood and insincerity to the mind. When you do not explain at all, it is possible you may be innocent: but when you explain profusely, dwelling upon some sides of the matter while ignoring others, you must be

guilty: and the impression left is all the more unhappy and unsatisfactory that it is in its way definitive and final, and all are precluded from opening up the subject again. Unless some new incident took place, or some accident which disturbed the family laws, Dolff could not ask any more questions. He was too young to know what to do, too proud and shame-faced to hazard the credit of the family by making inquiries in other quarters. An uneasy sense that everything was different, that his own position and that of everybody else was changed, that he was no longer sure of the ground on which he stood, or the relations of those around him, was in Dolff's mind. It must make a difference that his father was alive, even though that father was a madman: and vague notions came into his painfully exercised brain—ideas half seen, uncomprehended, of some sense in which his mother might have done what she had done for their sakes, although she had professed in the same breath that it was for her husband's sake she had done it, that he might

not be shut up away from her. Julia, on the other hand, who was much more sharp-witted than Dolff, had seized like lightning upon this inconsistency, and could not forget it.

'She said it was for him and then she said it was for us,' cried the girl. 'How could it be for us when it was for him? It could not be supposed good for us that there should have been some one shut up there in the wing, and when we might have found it out any day.'

'I never found it out nor thought of it,' said Dolff. 'If I had been told of it I should not have believed it. I should have said my mother was the last person in the world for mysteries —the very last person in the world—and that everything in this house was honest and above-board.'

'I never thought like that,' said Julia, shaking her head. 'There was always something queer. Vicars, that was our servant and yet not our servant, and that cry that one heard——'

'What cry?'

'Oh, an awful cry that we heard sometimes. Janet heard it when she had only been here a week, and she was dreadfully frightened. So was I at first,' said Julia, with dignity. 'It has only been for a few years: mamma explained it to me: she said it was the wind in the vacant chimneys that were not used. Oh, Dolff, though she knew very well it was not the wind, and the chimneys were not vacant! Dolff, mamma has said a great many things that are——'

'Don't talk of the mother, Ju—I'm very fond of the mother; and to think she should ever—— Don't—I think perhaps there might be reasons for our sakes, as she said. The property, you know, came from my grandfather to us. If he were known to have been alive, perhaps—I don't know so much about business as I ought —perhaps—— It makes my head a little queer to think of all that. She might have reasons.'

'If it was simply for *him*, as she said first, to keep him from being sent to an asylum, it could not be for us as well.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' said Dolff, stroking

fondly, but with a very serious face, his youthful very light moustache, light both in colour and texture.

'I have noticed in ladies,' said quick-witted Julia, 'that they like to have a motive, don't you know—something nice, as if they were always thinking of others, never of themselves; when they do anything, it's always for their children. Mamma is not like that, to do her justice; when things are going on she says she likes it, not for us only. Oh, Dolff! to think of the parties and romps we have had this Christmas, and people coming to dinner, and *him* there all the while!'

They were both overawed by the thought, and silenced, not venturing even to look at one another, when Julia suddenly cried out,

'There's a party to-morrow, Dolff.'

'It mustn't be,' said the young man; 'they must write and say it can't be.'

'What can they say? Nobody is ill: you can't shut the people out who come to call, and they would see mamma was quite well, and

know it was not true. Oh, no; mamma will say we must keep up appearances: and she will be there, looking as nice as possible at the end of the table, and Vicars behind her chair.'

'Ju, what did they do with *him* when Vicars was at all the parties behind her chair?'

'He was fastened in, I suppose, the doors all locked; I don't know. Dolff, suppose he had come downstairs one of these times, as he did last night!'

They looked at each other with a shudder.

'Perhaps on the whole,' said the young man, 'it *was* better for us that we did not know.'

This was how they came to a partial approval of their mother. It rankled in their hearts that she had said to them what was not true, that she had made explanations which they could not refuse yet could not receive; that this tremendous crisis had come and gone in their lives and everything been changed, and yet that they were little wiser than before. And it was still more bitter for Dolff to perceive, what he could not help seeing whenever the family assembled

together, that the knowledge that was kept from him was given to Meredith: but yet it had gleamed upon him that after all there might be something reasonable in his mother's plea.

There came, however, in this way to be two parties in the house—one which knew and discussed everything, the other which knew nothing and imagined a great deal, and chafed at the ignorance in which it was kept, yet found no means of knowing more or understanding better. Mrs. Harwood talked apart with Gussy and Meredith, who were always about her chair. When the others came into the room there was a momentary silence, and then one of the three would start an indifferent subject. It was enough for Dolff or Julia to come near to stop all conversation of any importance. They were shut out from all that was serious in the house as if they had nothing to do with it, as if their lives were not bound up with it as much—nay, far more than the others! What had Meredith to do with it at all? Only through Gussy, who, if she married

him at last, would go away with him and be a Harwood no longer; whereas Dolff, whatever happened, would always be the representative of the family, though shut out from its councils and kept in ignorance of its affairs.

Mrs. Harwood had decided, as Julia foresaw, that the party was to take place, that the world was not to be permitted to see any difference. Such whispers as had crept out could be silenced in no other way.

'Of course they have heard something,' she said, 'and if they were put off, if we made any excuse, they would believe the most of what they heard, whatever it was; but if they are received the same as ever and have as good a dinner, and see us all just as usual, even the worst-thinking people will be confused. They will not believe we could be such hypocrites as that. They will say whatever it is that has happened must be much exaggerated. The Harwoods look just as usual. Oh, I know the world a little,' she said, with a half laugh.

Even Gussy, who knew her so well, was

bewildered by her mother's fortitude, and by the clearness of her vision.

'I know the world a little,' Mrs. Harwood said. 'I have lived in it a great many years. Nothing makes quite such an impression as we expect. The people who can piece things together and understand exactly what has happened, are the ones that don't hear of it, and those who do hear haven't got the clue. I have told Charley already what I think. If we stand together and are bold, we'll get out of it all, and no great harm will come.'

'Yes, you have told me, and I begin to believe,' said Meredith.

'What do you mean by harm coming?' said Gussy, surprised. 'Gossip about one's family is not pleasant; but that is all, and what other harm could come?'

Her mother and her lover looked at each other, and a faint sign passed between them; they did not venture to smile, much less to laugh, at the simplicity which understood nothing. Dolff, too, overheard this talk with an

ache of wonder. What did they mean? Something more than gossip, he felt sure; for what did it matter about gossip? The madman in the house would scare and startle the neighbours, but it was not that his mother meant. What did she mean? He was the one that was likely to betray himself at the dinner-party, where he was compelled to take the foot of the table as usual, much against his will.

'Why can't you put Meredith there?' he said; 'you trust him a great deal more than you trust me.'

'And if I do so,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'have I not good reason? He is not always flinging my mistake—if it is a mistake—in my face. He is willing to do what he can for me. To help me without setting up for a judge.'

'I have not set up for a judge,' said Dolff.

'You have,' his mother said; 'you are judging me and finding me wanting whatever I do.'

'Why should you have this party?' cried the young man; 'why fill the house with strangers when we are all so miserable?'

Dolff could have cried with trouble and discontent and a sense of wrong had not his manhood forbidden such an indulgence. He was all wrong, out of place wherever he turned.

'I see no cause you have to be miserable. I am not miserable,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'and I hope you will have the sense not to look so, making everybody talk.'

This effort, however, on the part of Dolff was impossible. He sat at the foot of the table like a ghost. He scarcely opened his mouth, either to the lady on his right hand or the lady on his left. He ate nothing, making it very evident that he had something on his mind; and it became quite clear to all the guests that Dolff was in great trouble. Rumours about him had flown through the neighbourhood, as well as rumours on the other subject, perplexed stories of which it was difficult to make anything. But when his mother's guests saw Dolff's looks, they were instantly convinced that the true part of the story was that which concerned him.

'Didn't you remark what a hang-dog look he

had? Depend upon it, it is Dolff that is at the bottom of everything. The other thing is probably great nonsense, but Dolff is evidently in a bad way.'

This was the conclusion arrived at by Mrs. Harwood's guests, which that inscrutable woman had foreseen, and for which, perhaps, she was scarcely sorry. It is so common for a young man to get into a scrape—and when the said young man is only two-and-twenty it is not so difficult to get him out of it. Even the hardest of judges are tolerant of misdemeanours—when they are not dishonourable—at that age. Therefore, perhaps, the mother calculated—being forced to very deep calculations at this trying period—that it would do no harm to the house to have the trouble in it saddled upon Dolff. 'Is that all?' people would say. Whereas to have a family secret divulged—to have curious minds in St. John's Wood inquiring what was the meaning of that story about a secret inmate in the Harwoods' house, and who the Harwoods were before they came to that house,

and what there was in the antecedents of the family to account for it—that would be a very different matter. When a sympathetic friend, anxious to find out what she could, condoled with her after dinner in the drawing-room about her son's looks, Mrs. Harwood accepted the kind expressions gratefully.

'No,' she said, 'I am afraid Dolff is not looking very well, poor boy; he has had a good deal to trouble him: but I hope everything is now in a right way, and he will have no more bother.'

'Was it some trouble with his college?' asked the sympathetic friend.

'Oh, no! nothing with the college,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'He has stayed down for an extra week to look after some business, and he is going back to Oxford in a day or two—it is nothing of that kind.'

The friend concluded from this that it was debt which was troubling Dolff, 'like all the young men.' And his mother no doubt had been obliged to draw her purse. It must have

been some writ or something of that sort—which is a thing that still always seems to involve dungeons and horrors to women—which had taken the 'police' to the Harwoods: for that the 'police' had been at the house of the Harwoods everybody knew. Poor Dolff! but he had evidently got a lesson, and probably it would do good for him in the end, these good people thought.

Thus Mrs. Harwood's plan was successful more than she could have hoped, and it seemed as if all would settle down again, and go well. Meredith had arranged everything for his appearance before the commissioners on her behalf. He had a very touching story to tell. The poor wife distracted by the arrival of her husband, whom she had supposed to be dead, but who was brought back to her when she was in her widow's weeds, not dead, indeed, but mad, and as much severed from life and all its ways as if he had been dead indeed; and how she had no one to advise her, no one to consult with, and had come to a rash but

heroic resolution to devote herself to him, to provide for his comfort secretly in her own house; and how he had been carefully tended by an experienced servant, and by herself until rheumatism crippled her and confined her to her chair—which still did not prevent her now and then from paying him visits, at the cost of great agony to herself, to see that all was well.

'Such things rarely get into the papers unless there is some special interest in them,' said Meredith. 'I think with a little care we may keep it quiet, and then——'

'Then all will be safe,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'and no secrecy whatever. Oh! my dear Charley, what I shall owe you!—the relief to my mind, above all.'

'You will owe me no more than you will pay me,' he said, with a laugh; 'which will satisfy *him* also, as clearing off those debts which are so much on his mind. It is a transaction by which we shall all gain.'

This was not a point of view which was agreeable to Mrs. Harwood.

'I wish,' she said, 'that you would not treat it in that way. It will be Gussy's fortune. I have a right to give Gussy what I please. She has not said anything to me, but I hope you have spoken to Gussy——'

'As soon as the business is over,' he said, 'when I shall have won—not only Gussy, but my share——'

'Oh! for heaven's sake,' cried Mrs. Harwood, 'do not speak of it like that.'

CHAPTER XIV.

MEANTIME Janet, who had nothing to do with dinner-parties or anything of the kind, and who in the agitated state of the house appeared but little, and did not linger a moment longer than could be helped downstairs, had been passing through a period of suspense which was intolerable to her—far more terrible to bear than all the burdens, involving so much, which were on the accustomed shoulders of Mrs. Harwood. It was on Tuesday that she had written that momentous letter—that appeal of her impatient young soul to fate. She had written begging that she might be delivered at once from the position which she could not bear.

'All that I was threatened with before I left Clover has come true,' she said, 'though not in the way they thought: and I can't bear it any longer; and, if you meant what you said, come —come and take me away at once. If you don't come I will know that you didn't mean it, or that you have changed your mind: and I will do what I can for myself.'

On Tuesday! Thursday at the latest should have brought a letter—though what she had expected was, that on Wednesday, the very day he received hers, he would come at once, answering it in person. This was the natural thing to expect. He would come—full of that ardour which had made Janet laugh when in October he had pleaded with her not to go away, to let him take care of her, provide for her. It had seemed to Janet the most ridiculous of suggestions that she should give her hand to the old doctor, and settle down for life in the familiar place where she knew everybody and everything, and where novelty was not, nor change of any kind.

And it was only January, the end of January, not much more than three months! was it possible that life had so disgusted this little neophyte, who had faced it so valiantly, that she gave up the battle already? She had asked herself that question as soon as her letter was in the post-office and beyond her control. What was there to hinder her from going on to another chapter, from spurning from her this prelude in which she had not come off a conqueror—three months only, and to throw down her arms!

The moment that Janet had dropped her letter into the box at Mimpriss's, that place which had played so large a part in her life, her heart made a great leap, a sort of sickening rebound against what she had done. Oh no; her first beginning had not been a success. She had betrayed people who had been so good to her; her quick wit had seen too much, known too much, in the house where she ought to have been a grateful spectator only, making no discoveries. She had not been unwilling, by way of mere fun and distraction, to take Gussy's lover

from her. She had not been unwilling 'to make a fool of' the son of the house. She had been there like a little free lance to get what amusement and advantage she could out of them, without giving anything in return.

But Janet, though she had succeeded in the most remarkable way in both cases, had come to such a failure in the end as made her loathe herself. She had been met by her match, she had been deluded by a stronger practitioner of those arts, intent upon fun and distraction too, and with as little intention of promoting Janet as of anything else that would involve trouble to himself. How could she ever have thought it? A man who betrayed the woman who loved him to her, a stranger, how could she have supposed that he would be true to her and give up his own interests to proclaim his devotion to the governess! And Dolff, the dolt whom she had said to herself that she could turn round her little finger—Dolff, who had nearly killed the other man who had played with her; but not even that for Janet's sake. For

his sister's sake, whom Janet had never taken into consideration—Dolff, too, had thrown her off as easily as an old glove when he got into trouble, and more serious matters occupied his mind.

These extraordinary failures had altogether overset Janet's moral equilibrium. Had she been driven out of the house by the jealousy of the women, with the secret sympathy and support of the men, a victim to the spitefulness of her own sex, but assured in her power of attracting and subjugating the other, Janet would have felt this to be quite natural—a thing that is in all the stories, the natural fate of the too attractive dependent. But this was not at all her case. The ladies had been very kind to her; they had never discovered her misdoings. Even Gussy, if she suspected anything, had taken no notice, which was to Janet very humiliating, an immense mortification, though the thing most to be desired by anyone who had retained a morsel of sense.

Janet had a great deal of sense, but in this

emergency it forsook her—the kindness of the ladies had added a sting to the humiliating insincerity of Meredith and the indignant self-emancipation of Dolff. She had failed every way. It was she who was jealous—the one to be thrown aside: the legitimate sentiment had triumphed all along the line, and the little interloper had failed in everything. She had thought that to prove to them at last that she had no need of them, that she had but to hold up a finger to bring her deliverer flying to the rescue, to be carried off triumphant to her own house, to her own people, would be a triumph which would make up for all, while still Meredith was in the house, while Dolff was at home, while everyone could see how little necessity she had to care what they thought! Janet knew, she was certain, that the moment she held up a finger—— And she had held it up—she had summoned her deliverer—without pausing to think.

But when she dropped the letter in the letter-box at the window of Mimpriss's there suddenly came over Janet a vision of Dr. Harding as she

had seen him last, rusty, splashed with mud, his hat pushed back on a forehead that was a little bald, his coat-collar rubbed with hair that was iron-grey. He was nearly as old as Meredith and Dolff added up together; a country doctor, called out day and night by whoever pleased to send for him, not even rich. Oh, the agitated night Janet had after that rash step of hers! She had called him to her, and he would come flying on wings of love—*i.e.*, by the quickest express train that never stopped between Clover and London, which flew even past the junction—that terrible train which frightened all the Clover ladies; as quick as the telegraph almost would he be here.

Janet held her breath and asked herself how she could have done it? And what if, when he came, holding out his arms to her as he would be sure to do, her heart should fail and she should turn away—turn her back on him after she had summoned him? Oh, that was what she must not, dare not do. She had settled her fate; she had committed herself beyond remedy.

If Meredith and Dolff should repent, and fling themselves one after another at her feet, it would do no good now. He might be ready to sacrifice Gussy to her, but she could not sacrifice Dr. Harding to him. Oh, not now—she had settled her fate now!

All Wednesday morning Janet was in a state of suspense which defies description. She expected every moment to be called downstairs, to be told that a gentleman had come asking for her. The train arrived at half-past ten, just half-an-hour after the hour at which she sat down with Julia to lessons. Lessons, good heavens! They had never, perhaps, been very excellent of their kind, these lessons, though they had been gone through with steadily enough; but Julia had been quite well aware from the first that Janet's heart was not in them, just as Janet had discovered from the first that Julia would learn no more than she could possibly help learning. And it may be supposed that, with this indifferent mutual foundation, the agitated state of the house, and of the minds of

both instructress and instructed, had not improved the seriousness of the studies. Janet calculated that half-an-hour would be wanted to get from the station to St. John's Wood; half-an-hour would be enough, for of course he would take a hansom, the quickest to be had, instead of the slow four-wheeler which had conveyed her and her luggage on the occasion of her arrival. Then at eleven o'clock! Oh, what should she do, what could she do? There were but two things she could do—run downstairs at the first summons, and rush into Dr. Harding's arms—or fly away, somewhere, she knew not where, before he came.

Sitting dazed by this suspense, her heart beating in her ears, taking no notice of Julia's proceedings, which were very erratic, listening for the sound of Priscilla's steps on the stair with the summons feared yet desired, Janet came to herself with a shock at the sound of twelve, struck upon the little French clock on the mantelpiece, and by the larger church clock in St. John's Wood, at a minute's interval. Twelve o'clock!

It must be eleven, it could not be twelve! It was impossible, impossible! But, like so many other impossible things, it was true. Her heart seemed to sink down into her slippers, and a horrible stillness took the place of all that beating. He had not come! Could such a thing be? He had not come! Then he had not meant it, or he meant it no longer. Dr. Harding, who had been her slave since she was a child, who had pleaded, oh! how he had looked at her, what tones his voice had taken, how he had implored her as if his life depended upon it! while she—had laughed. Her voice had trembled, too, but it was with laughter. She had not given a moment's consideration to that proposal. She, before whom the world lay open full of triumphs, she marry the old doctor! It was ludicrous, too absurd to be thought of; she had not been unkind, but she had let him know this very completely: there had been no hesitation, no relenting in her reply.

And now he had done the same to her.

But Janet could not believe it—she went on

expecting him all day. Something might have happened to detain him in the morning. He might have gone out upon his rounds before the letter came—sometimes the postman was very late at Clover. She knew the life there so well that she could calculate exactly when the letters would reach the doctor's house. The bag was always heavy in the beginning of the year. Clover was one of those places where all the people hear from their friends in the early part of the year. Perhaps there were still some belated Christmas cards or premature valentines to give the postman more to do. And some one might have been ill, and the doctor called out before his usual time. All these things were possible—but not that he should have received her letter and not come. But when Thursday passed without even a letter in reply, and Friday—Friday, the third day!—Janet fell into a state of depression that was miserable to see. She could think of nothing else. Her doubts about the doctor's age, about his appearance, about

his grey hair, and all his disadvantages, disappeared altogether from her mind.

Astonishment, humiliation, the sense of having fallen altogether from her high estate, of being a miserable little failure abandoned by everybody, filled Janet's mind. He had not come, though she had sent for him; he had turned a deaf ear to her appeal. Where could she now go? Never to Clover to give him the chance of exulting over her, though Clover was the only place in which she could find a home. Oh, how foolish, how foolish she had been! She might have gone back to the vicarage with no more ado than saying that she was not happy in her situation. The vicar and his wife had expected as much—they would not have been surprised. But now she had closed in her own face that friendly refuge. She had longed for a triumph, though it would be a homely one, and again she had failed—again she had failed! Anything more subdued, more troubled than Janet could not be. The doctor was no longer in her eyes a makeshift, an expedient

—something to restore her *amour propre*, but whom she shrank from even in appealing to him. She forgot his rusty grey hair, his bald forehead, the mud on his boots. Oh, if he would but still come, if he would come! To let them see that she had some one who cared for her, a man who thought her the first of women while to them she was only the little governess. But when Friday came, Janet gave up the hope. He too had decided against her. She was not the first of women to anybody, but a poor little foolish girl who would not when she might and now had to be said nay.

The lessons went on all the time, not, I fear, very profitable lessons, and the two girls went out to have their walks as usual, with what comfort they might, and everything continued like a feverish dream. Janet sat upstairs and heard the sounds and commotion of the dinner-party and did not care. What did it matter that they were feasting below, while she was left all alone, neglected by everybody? By

everybody, yes! even by people who had loved her: nobody loved her now. She was forgotten, both by those at home and those here. And what did it matter? The school-room, that was the place for a governess. They ought never to have brought her out of it. It was true she ought not to have been deceived by any other thoughts—and it was true that she must calculate on spending all the rest of her life, nobody to give her any triumph, nobody to carry her away like a conquerer, nobody to vindicate her importance so that the Harwoods would see their mistake, and Mr. Meredith bite his lips with envy and dismay. No, that had all been a dream; there was nobody to deliver Janet, and nothing for her but to take a new situation, and perhaps go through the whole again, as poor governesses so often do.

On Friday afternoon she had come in from her walk depressed beyond description, feeling that everything had failed her. Julia had gone into the drawing-room to her mother, while

Janet, dragging a little behind, as she had begun to do in the prostration of her being, lingered in the hall, loitering by the umbrellas in the stand, untwining her boa from her throat, the boa which Meredith had held, by which he had detained her until she had thrown it upon his hands and escaped from him on their last interview. She was very low; expectation was dead in her—she no longer looked for an answer to her letter, nor for anything that could happen. So dull, indeed, was she in her despondency that she did not heed the ring at the bell, nor the hasty step upon the path when Priscilla opened the door. It would be some visitor, some one for the others—nobody any more for Janet. It was a noisy step which came in at the door, firm, a little heavy, and very hurried and rapid.

It was almost twilight; the hall was dark, and Janet in the darkest corner, with her back to the door, slowly untwisting the boa from her neck, when—oh, what was this that burst upon her ear?

'No,' very hastily, with an impatient tone, 'not Mrs. Harwood. I said "Miss Summerhayes." I want to see Miss Summerhayes.'

'Oh!' Janet turned round and came forward, feeling as if she had wings, as if her feet touched the ground no longer. She called out of the darkness, 'Is it you, is it you?' as if she did not know who it was at the first thrill of his voice!

'Janet,' he cried, and came forward and caught her—not exactly in his arms, but with his hands upon her shoulders, clutching her with a sort of hungry grasp ('as if he were going to eat me up,' she said afterwards). She felt him trembling, thrilling all over, and perhaps it was as well that it was dark, that she could see nothing of the grey hair, &c., but only that the middle-aged doctor had a vibration of haste, of anxiety, of emotion in his arms and hands, and the very lappels of his coat which touched her breast, which was more real than any words, convincing her in a moment, as no explanation from Meredith, for instance,

could have done, that the delay was none of his doing, that he was here as quickly as if he had come by that express train.

'Janet! You mean that?' he asked, with eyes that glowed even through the darkness, and a voice that thrilled and trembled too.

'Yes, Dr. Harding, if you do.'

'If *I* do?' he said, with a sort of suppressed shout, 'did you ever have any doubt of me? My little darling! I'm like your father, ain't I? I'll be father and mother and husband and altogether now you'll have me, child! If I do! How dare you say that, you little torment; you little delight! as if I shouldn't have rushed head over heels from the ends of the earth!'

'You have taken your time about it, Dr. Harding,' Janet said, 'you might have been here on Wednesday, and now it is Friday afternoon.'

'You little love! Have you counted the days?' cried the poor man, who was such a fool; and then he burst into his explanation, how he had indeed come from the ends of the

earth, from one of the great towns of the North where he had found 'a noble practice' awaiting him. 'They'd heard of me, dear, fancy that! How surprised the Clover people will be! And there will be fine company and grand parties, and everything she likes, for my little Janet,' he cried, with a sort of sobbing of joy and triumph in his voice.

To tell the truth, Janet was as much bewildered by the thought that Dr. Harding had been heard of, as anybody in Clover could have been. But she concealed this with a throb of delight in her heart to hear of the great town in the North, and the fine company and grand parties. No Clover then and seclusion, but the world and all its delights. Janet's heart beat high with satisfaction in her own wise impulse, and the sense of the triumph to come.

As they stood talking, the door of the drawing-room was thrown open, and, looking up at the sound, they both had a view of the interior of the room illuminated with its bright firelight and with the lamp, always the first brought in,

which stood on Mrs. Harwood's table. She in her white shawl, with her white hair and cap and the mass of white knitting on her knees, stood out like a mass of whiteness made rosy by the light from the fire, a most brilliant figure seen from the twilight of the hall. The doctor started a little, and took his hands from Janet's shoulders.

'Mrs. Adolphus!' he said.

'It is Mrs. Harwood; do you know her? But, indeed, her husband's name is Adolphus.'

'You mean was: don't let us speak of him. She is an old friend of mine. But if it had not been for Adolphus Harwood I should never have been doctor at Clover, and perhaps never have seen my little Janet, so for every trouble there is compensation, my dear.'

'What trouble?' she said, eagerly.

'Never mind. Come in and introduce me, Janet—though we know each other very well.'

Janet took the arm he offered her and walked in, with all her spirit and courage restored, to Mrs. Harwood's room. She wished they had

been all there, every one, to see that she was not the lonely creature they had thought her. But there was nobody but the mistress of the house, with Julia behind, telling her mother what they had seen during their walk. Mrs. Harwood was smiling; she had the air of a contented and cheerful mother with no trouble in her way. She looked up to receive the newcomers, saying, 'Why, Janet!' with a little surprise, quickly divining from the girl's attitude and the air of the pair that something unusual had come in the governess's way.

'I have brought an old friend to see you,' said Janet, faltering a little.

'John Harding, at your service, Mrs. Harwood, now as long ago,' the doctor said.

Mrs. Harwood uttered a low cry, the colour went out of her face, and the light out of her eyes. She sat and looked at him, with her under lip falling and dismay in her heart.

CHAPTER XV.

NOTHING, as Mrs. Harwood herself said, is so bad as you expect; and the great shock which the sight of this stranger evidently gave her soon subsided in the extraordinary composure and self-command which she was able to bring to bear against every accident. By the time that it had been explained to her who the visitor was, and what was his errand, which he insisted at once upon telling, the conversation became what an uninitiated person would have thought quite cosy and pleasant. Mrs. Harwood drew her breath more quickly than usual. She looked at the door with some anxiety, and she even sent Julia with a message whispered in her ear,

'Don't let Dolff come in here.'

'Why not?' said Julia, aloud.

It is inconvenient to have a daughter who has not the sense to obey. Mrs. Harwood made no answer, but pushed the girl away, and after a moment's pause Julia went, though whether to fulfil the message in the manner intended, her mother could not say.

'Things have changed very much for us all,' she said, in her cheerful voice; 'I have a daughter on the eve of marriage, like you, Dr. Harding—a man who does not marry keeps so much longer young. You may remember my Gussy as a child——'

'I remember my little wife that is to be as a child,' he said, heartily, 'and she might well have despised an old fellow. Yes, things have changed. It was very good for me, as it turns out, that I could not go on in my old way. I've been a hard-working man, and kept very close to it for a long time, and now things are mending with me. I shall be able to give this little thing what they all like—a carriage and finery

and all that. I am going back—to the old place, Mrs. Harwood——'

'To Liverpool?' she said, with something like a repressed scream.

'Yes, to Liverpool; they had heard of me, it appears, and then some of the old folks remembered I was a townsman. You have not kept up much connection with the old place, Mrs. Harwood.'

'None at all; you may suppose it would not be very pleasant for me.'

'Perhaps not,' he answered, drumming a little with his finger on his knee; 'and yet I don't know why, for there was always a great deal of sympathy with you.'

'Dr. Harding,' said Mrs. Harwood, with some eagerness and a nervous thrill in her voice, 'may I ask you a favour? It is, please, not to speak of me to any of my old friends. You may think it strange—there is nobody else in the room, is there, Janet?—but I would rather the children did not know more than is necessary about the past.'

'I understand: and I honour you, madam,' said Dr. Harding, in an old-fashioned, emphatic way.

A faint tint of colour came over Mrs. Harwood's face, which varied from red to white, no doubt with the agitation caused by the sight of her old acquaintance.

'I ask for no honour,' she said, hurriedly, 'so long as it is thought that I have done my duty by the children.'

'I should think there could not be much doubt of that,' said Dr. Harding, who, in his own high content and satisfaction with himself saw everyone round him in a rose-coloured light. He would have sworn she was an example to the country, had anyone asked him. So she was, no doubt, for had she not given shelter and protection to Janet, and somehow led her by example or otherwise to see that there was nothing so good in this world as to trust yourself to the man that loved you, whatever his age or his appearance might be?

Janet listened to this conversation with a

great deal of her old curiosity and desire to find everything out. She did not see why her doctor should be bound by a promise to Mrs. Harwood not to speak to her of Liverpool. Janet felt happy that it was not upon herself this injunction was laid, and that she was free to talk about the strange occurrences which had happened in St. John's Wood, and perhaps get to understand them better. Janet, however, gave only a part of her mind to this. The rest was filled with her own affairs: her heart was beating still with the startling sensation of his arrival and the realisation of all that must now follow. She had been a little afraid, when she brought him into the bright light, of the revelations it would make. But the Dr. Harding who was about to enter upon a 'noble practice' in Liverpool was not at all like the Dr. Harding of Clover. His clothes were new and well-made, his hair carefully brushed, his linen dazzling—oh, he was not at all like the man who rode over on a shaggy cob to see Miss

Philipson, and was at everybody's beck and call around the Green.

Looking at him again in this favourable new light, Janet decided that he was not so very old—older than herself, no doubt, older than Meredith or Dolff, but not *so* old—at the utmost no more than middle-aged—a man still in his prime. She did not do any talking herself, but let him talk, and she thought he talked well. All her thoughts had undergone such a revolution within the last half-hour. She had felt herself abandoned, a creature all alone, cast off from everything, scorned on all sides. And now all at once she had a defender in whose presence no one dared utter a jibe or make a scoff of Janet. She had wealth within her reach—a carriage (he said), all the prettinesses that life could bestow. No such prospect was before Gussy, though she thought herself so happy;—and the more Janet looked at him in these spruce clothes, the more her breast expanded with satisfaction. He was not merely Dr. Harding

—he was something that belonged to herself. And so manly—not a person to be despised. Meredith himself—why did she keep thinking of Meredith?—Meredith was a weakly person, a man who had let himself be almost killed, not one who would stand against the world like John Harding. Pride and satisfaction swelled her breast. She too looked at the door as Mrs. Harwood did, but with a different meaning. She desired that they should all come in to see how much changed her position was, and that she had now some one belonging to her—some one who was better than them all.

Both these ladies accordingly sat and listened to Dr. Harding without taking much notice of what he said. He filled them with emotions of different kinds, neither of them entirely on his own account. They both listened for sounds without while he talked, intently, anxiously praying and hoping on one side and the other that some one would or would not come. Mrs. Harwood had perhaps never been so deeply moved before. To have made sure that no one would

come—that this dangerous man might be got out of the house, without meeting Dolff at least, she would have given a year or two out of her life. There were sounds, several times repeated, of people coming and going, doors opening and shutting, the usual sounds of a house full of people, which brought the blood coursing to the mother's heart. She put up her handkerchief to her face as if the fire scorched her. But it was her trouble that scorched her, the great anxiety in which she was consuming her very soul.

At last, in a moment, it was stilled, as our fears of an evil are stilled, either because it has become impossible, or because it has happened. The latter was the case in this instance.

Dolff came into the room, and behind him Julia, very curious, and after her Priscilla carrying the tea-tray. Priscilla and the tea-tray were things in which there was hope—but what Mrs. Harwood dreaded had happened. She had no resource, but to say:

'My son, Dr. Harding. Dolff, Dr. Harding is

a friend of Janet's, and—and an old acquaintance of mine.'

'How do you do?' said Dr. Harding, rising up, formally giving the young man his hand. 'I did not know your son was grown up. I thought he was the youngest.'

'No, it is Julia who is the youngest,' said the mother, breathlessly, indicating the girl, who came forward and shook hands with Dr. Harding too. Though she had been in the room at his first appearance, there had been no thought of introduction then.

'It is quite curious,' said the doctor, with his hearty voice, 'to find myself among old friends. I expected to find only my little Janet, and here I am surrounded by people whom I knew in the old days in Liverpool before she was born.'

'But we have nothing to do with Liverpool,' said Dolff.

'Welsh,' said Mrs. Harwood, with breathless brevity.

'Ah, yes, by origin; the little property's there, isn't it? But Harwood has been a well-

known name in Liverpool for longer than any of us can recollect. I remember when it was talked of like the Bank of England,' said the doctor, shaking his head a little and with a suppressed sigh.

'Oh,' cried Mrs. Harwood, 'I am not fond of those old recollections; they always lead to something sad.'

She had made another tremendous effort of self-control, recovered her voice, recovered her composure. She sat bolt upright in her chair, her eyes shining out like watch-lights, and all her colour concentrated in two red spots in her cheeks.

'This is very interesting to me, for I never heard of it before,' said Dolff. 'My mother has told us very little, Dr. Harding; I should be very grateful for a little information.'

'My dear young fellow,' said Dr. Harding, 'I daresay your mother's very wise. Least said is soonest mended. That's all over and done with. It all went to pieces, you know, when your father'—he paused a moment, visibly embar-

rassed, not knowing what word to use; then added softly, 'when your father—died.'

Mrs. Harwood drew a long breath. She sank back a little in her chair. The dreadful tension was loosed.

'If you think that this is satisfactory to me,' said Dolff, 'you are making an immense mistake. Why should least said be soonest mended? Is there any disgrace belonging to our name? Besides,' he said, himself a little breathless, with an instinctive sense that his words were words of fate, 'my father—is not dead.'

'What?' said Dr. Harding. He jumped up from his chair as if he had been stung. 'What? Adolphus Harwood not dead? My God! Adolphus Harwood? What does this mean?'

Mrs. Harwood was making convulsive efforts to speak, to rise from her chair, but nobody heeded her. Dolff stood confronting the stranger, in his ignorance, poor boy, fearing he knew not what, angry, beginning to awake to the fact that there might be need for defence, and that the danger was his own. He said:

'I don't know why you speak in such a tone. There is no harm, I suppose, in my father—being alive. We never knew till the other day. Perhaps *she* can tell you why. Is there any harm in my father—not having died?'

His voice had grown hoarse with an alarm which he did not himself understand.

'Harm!' cried Dr. Harding. 'Adolphus Harwood alive!—harm! Only this harm—that I can't let old friendship stand in the way. I dare not do injustice; he must be given up to answer for his ill-doings. Harm! The fool! He never did but what was the worst for him! to live till now—with all the misery and ruin that he brought——'

Dolff frantically seized the doctor by the breast.

'Stop,' he said, 'tell me what has he done? I knew—I knew there was more in it; what has he done?'

'Done!' cried the doctor, flinging the young man off from him, 'done! ruined everybody that ever trusted in him! Don't stop me, young

man! Keep yourself clear of him! I cannot help it; I am sorry for your sake—but he must be given up.'

'To what?' cried Dolff, 'to what?' He put himself in front of the doctor, who was buttoning his coat hastily and had seized his hat from the floor. 'Look here! to what? You don't stir a foot from here till you tell me.'

He had his arm up in mad excitement as if ready to strike, while Dr. Harding, a man of twice his strength, stood slightly drawn back prepared to defend himself. Then there suddenly came between them, with a cry, a moving, stumbling figure, white shawl and white cap showing doubly white between the dark-clothed men. She put one hand on Dr. Harding's breast, and with the other pushed her son away.

'John Harding!' she cried, 'John Harding! listen to me. He is mad—mad, do you hear? Mad! What is that but dead?'

'Mother, let this man answer to me!'

'Oh, go away, go away with your folly! He

is mad, John Harding! He came back to me mad—could I turn my husband to the door? give him up to the police? Listen to me,' she cried, holding the doctor's coat as if it had been a prop to support her; 'you can see him yourself, if you doubt me—he is mad.' The poor woman burst into a shrill hysterical laugh. 'Mad as a March hare—silly! Oh, John Harding, John Harding, hear what I have got to say!'

A sudden transformation came over Dr. Harding, such as may be seen in his profession in the most exciting moments. He became a doctor and not an ordinary man. He threw down his hat and took her by the elbows, while she still held fast by his coat.

'Wheel her chair forward,' he said. 'Young Harwood, gently, send for her maid. Heavens, boy! be gentle; do you want to kill your mother? Janet, come round here and put the cushions straight, to support her head. There! quiet all of you. Let her rest; and you, Janet, give her air.'

'She has done it before,' said Dolff, with passion. 'Oh, I am not taken in, mother! Let her alone, man, and answer me!'

'Go to the devil,' cried the doctor, pushing the young man away. 'You confounded cub, be quiet, and let the poor woman come to herself?'

Had he forgotten all about the other, altogether, as if it had never been? He looked like it, bending over Mrs. Harwood in her chair, giving quick directions, taking the fan out of Janet's hand to give her air, moistening her lips with the wine he asked for, absorbed in her looks as if there was nothing in his mind but the care of her. Janet, too, ran to get whatever he asked for, stood at hand to do what was wanted, inspired by the doctor's devotion. As for Dolff, he turned away as if he took no interest in it. His mother to him was a deceiver, getting sympathy by an exhibition of weakness. Julia, half moved by her mother's faint, half by her brother's rebellion and excitement, wavered between the two, uncertain. Janet and her

doctor alone gave themselves up to Mrs. Harwood as if there was nothing else in the world to think about.

'Such an effort as that to a woman in her state might be fatal,' said the doctor. 'She must have the constitution of an elephant. Once before, did you say? Janet, my little darling, you're made for a doctor's wife! Hold this fast—and steady as a rock. Now, raise her head a little. There! Now I hope she'll come to.'

'You make yourself busy about my mother,' said Dolff, coming up to him, striking him upon the shoulder. 'There's nothing the matter with my mother; but you've got to explain to me—What does it mean? What do you want with him? What has he done? I never knew he was there,' cried the lad, 'till the other day. And then I never suspected he was my father. Oh, don't you know when one never has had a father, what one thinks he must have been? And then to see—that! but I must have satisfaction,' cried Dolff. 'What has he done? What are you going to do?'

At this moment the door was opened hastily, and Gussy came in, followed by Meredith. There had been so much excitement in the house that they all came together for every new incident.

'Is my mother ill?' she said, with a glance at Mrs. Harwood in her chair. 'Something has gone wrong. Dolff, who is this gentleman? and for heaven's sake tell me what is it now? What has gone wrong?'

Only a glance at her mother, who was still but half sensible, supported in Janet's arms, and then Gussy came and stood by her brother's side, and looked at the stranger. She had no doubt that he had something to do with the secret in the house. Everything clustered round that, and was drawn to it like flying things to the light.

Dr. Harding, on his side, looked at the little crowd round him, meeting their eager eyes with reluctance and embarrassment.

'I presume that you are Miss Harwood,' he said, 'but I cannot explain this matter to you.

The less you know of it the better, my dear young people. I have no ill-feeling to your poor father—not the least, not the least: though I was one of the victims, I hope I've forgiven him freely. But justice is justice. If Adolphus Harwood is in this house, he must be given up.'

'Dear Gussy,' said Meredith behind her, 'will you take my advice and go away, and get Dolff to go? Let me speak to this gentleman. I know all about the business affairs. I am to appear for your mother, you know. Let me speak to him, and hear what he has to say.'

Gussy gave him a look and a faint smile, but did not move. They all stood still gathered round the doctor like a ring, more anxious than hostile, and yet hostile too, hemming him in with a sort of enclosure of pale faces. Dr. Harding was greatly moved; he put out his hands as if to put them away—to deliver himself.

'God knows,' he said, 'how I feel for you, you

poor children! You break my heart; but if Adolphus Harwood has been living quietly here, living in comfort and luxury here, after bringing so many to ruin——'

'He has been living,' said Meredith, 'concealed in a couple of rooms, for fifteen years. I don't know who you are, or what right you have to be here, or to inquire into the affairs of this family.'

'Oh, hush,' cried Gussy, 'he will be a friend, he has a kind face!'

'His name is Dr. Harding,' said Julia, breaking in. 'He came for Janet, but mamma said he was an old friend: and Dolff told him by chance that *he—he*, you know—was living, and not dead.'

'This is all mere madness,' said Dr. Harding. 'I did not want to know anything about the affairs of the family, but I have my duty to do—I must do what is my duty.'

There came a faint voice from behind—from the chair in which the mother lay, only as it seemed half-conscious, propped by pillows.

'See him,' it said. 'See him, see him; a doctor, he will know.'

They all turned round startled, but it was Meredith alone who caught up the meaning of this half-stifled utterance. He put his hand on the doctor's arm.

'Come here,' he said, 'and look at the man for yourself.'

He opened the door softly as he spoke. There had been sounds outside to which no one had paid any attention till now. The lamp had been lighted in the hall, and it threw a strong light upon a man in a wheeled chair with white hair and beard. He was speaking in a note of half-whispering complaint.

'Why do you bring me in, when I don't want to come in, Vicars? Dark—I like it when it's dark and nobody can see.'

'It don't do you no good, sir,' said Vicars, 'to be out in the dark.'

'Vicars, you're a fool! A man with money about him, a lot of money like me—you want me to be robbed, you villain! And then how

can I pay up? When you know it's my pride to pay up, whenever I'm called upon. Whenever I'm called upon—everybody! There's plenty for everybody. Ah! there's an open door! I'm going to see them, Vicars. Their mother tells them lies, but when they know I have it all here to pay up——'

'No, sir,' said Vicars, 'you can't go in there to-night.'

'Why not to-night? Did she say so? She wants to get my money from me, that's what it is! Swear, Vicars, you'll never tell them where I keep my money! She got it and gave it to that fellow, but it came back, eh! Vicars? It knows its own master, and it always comes back.' Here the old man burst into a foolish laugh, but presently began to whisper again. 'Where are you taking me? You are taking me upstairs. You want me to be murdered for my money in that dark hole upstairs.'

The two men stood at the door, hidden in the curtain that hung on it, and watched this scene. They stood still, listening while the wheels of

the chair rumbled along, and the door of the wing closed upon it. Then Meredith spoke,

'Is this the man you are going to give up to punishment?' he said.

The doctor turned away and covered his face for a moment with his hands. When he turned round again to the audience, who watched him so intently, almost without seeming to draw breath, he met the gaze of Mrs. Harwood's eyes, wide open, full of agonised meaning. She had come to herself, and to a consciousness of all that depended upon the decision he would make.

'What does he mean about the money?' he asked, in a low tone.

'He means,' she said, answering him before anyone could speak, 'what he thinks he has in his pocket-book—money to pay everybody. Oh, John Harding, that's no dishonest meaning. He gives it to me, to pay up—and then he is restless till he has it back again. There's nothing but old papers, old bills, worth nothing. He thinks,' she said, carried on by her eager-

ness, 'that it is the money he took to Spain.'

'And where is the money he took to Spain?'

She had not meant to say that; but there was only one in the company who was aware that she had betrayed herself, or understood the look of bewilderment that for a moment came over her face. She paused, and that one who was in her confidence trembled. She raised herself up by the arms of her chair, and looked round upon them. Then she burst into a strange hysterical fit of laughter.

'He thinks that I know everything,' she said. 'How can I tell? Where are the snows of last year?'

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE are times when Nemesis appears unwitting at the door of a doomed house, and, however unlikely that might be, before she crosses the threshold, with the mere wind of her coming, the cunning webs of deceit are shattered, the blow of vengeance falls. But there are other cases in which Nemesis comes and stands in the doorway and departs again innoxious, either because some veil has been thrown over her clear-sighted eyes, or because the heart of that inexorable goddess has failed.

Nemesis turned and departed from the house of the Harwoods when Dr. Harding went upstairs to the school-room with his little Janet.

The middle-aged gentleman there spent an ecstatic hour, the happiest of his life, and he forgot that there were such people as the Harwoods in existence, or anybody worth thinking of except the little girl who had called him to come and take her to himself—Janet, who had flung him over that dark October evening on the edge of the windy common at Clover, but who had now whistled him back and put her little hand in his.

Which was more true to her real meaning—her refusal then, or her delighted acceptance now? The doctor never asked himself any such questions. He was too happy to be allowed to think that when Janet compared the others, all the rest of the world, with him, who had loved her since she was a baby, she had found that none were so much to her taste as her old lover. That she had 'them all' at her feet, Dr. Harding had no doubt—how could it be otherwise? seeing there was no one like her, no one! It seemed clear enough to him that both that cool fellow downstairs who had taken

the management of the business, and the dolt—Dolff—what did they call him? had been at Janet's feet, and had been rejected. The young fellows had done him a good turn. They had shown this little captivating creature, this darling little capricious woman who did not know her own mind, that there was nobody like her old doctor after all.

When he took his departure that night for the hotel where he meant to stay until he could take Janet down to Clover, to the vicarage from which he was to marry her, there was no thought in his disturbed and rapturous mind of the awful part which for a moment he had seemed about to play. Not Nemesis—but Dr. Harding, an old fellow in love, and more silly than any boy.

As for Janet, when her old lover left her, her little head was partly turned by his raptures, and by the opinion he had of her as if she had been a queen, and all the gratitude and honour he seemed to think he owed her. A little thing who had not a penny, and who, indeed, had

thrown herself into his arms in a kind of despair because of her first disappointment and disgust with the world. But he did not know that at all, and she scarcely remembered it, when he took his leave with a privileged kiss which made her cheeks burn, and a promise to come for her as early as possible in the morning, to take her out shopping, to buy what she would want against the great event, which was to be delayed only as long as was necessary—not a day longer, he vowed.

'For you have cheated me out of six months,' he said. 'I might have had you six months ago.'

'Oh, no, no, Dr. Harding,' said Janet, with gravity, remembering that nothing in the world would then have made her accept the old doctor.

But she had no such feeling as that now. She did not even remember that he was a *pis aller*, and she looked forward to to-morrow, when she was to be taken out shopping, and to buy such things as she had never hoped for—

dinner-dresses, morning-dresses, ball-dresses; for she would require a great deal of dress, she had the sense to perceive, in that great rich town in the north, which was so very different from Clover.

Janet could scarcely think for the moment of anything beyond this, for it was a delight she had never enjoyed before. To buy, is a pleasure to every woman—to get a number of new dresses, is a delight to any girl. If these things are accompanied by a heartbreak, as when she is going to be forced to marry a man whom she does not love, the pleasure evaporates. But this was not Janet's case. She had made up her mind to have her old doctor it is true in a moment of pique and disappointment, and perhaps if he had come instantly as she had expected, if he had not kept her waiting, if he had been still only the doctor of Clover—but none of these things had been. Her heart had been racked with the thought that he, too, had forsaken her; and then he had arrived a new man, in those new, well-cut clothes, with all

the confidence of a great success about him.

And he had no sooner appeared than he had taken a commanding position. The father of the family had been in his hand. Dolff was nothing but a foolish boy beside him, and even Meredith—Dr. Harding had held the upper hand easily of them all. He had been able to put aside Janet while that crisis which she but half understood was going on, and then he had come back to her, and poured out gratitude and admiration; and she was to have a handsome house in Liverpool, where there was a great deal of gaiety, a great deal of wealth—and a carriage—and a day of shopping to-morrow with nothing to do but to say, 'I like this,' or 'I like that!'

Thus Janet's mind was satisfied, and her fancy delighted. Those little vagaries which had troubled her rest had all dropped into oblivion. Meredith? Yes, he was going to marry Miss Harwood, to struggle into a practice at the Bar, though he was not at all hard-working, and probably would never be known

except as an amateur tenor among his friends. Janet wondered maliciously whether they would sing as much together after they were married, or, if not, what they would do to amuse themselves? and could not help the reflection that Gussy's accompaniments would probably tire her husband, and that he would not conceal the fact from her in these after days. She wished them no harm whatever, none at all, they had done her no harm: but still in her own room, as she was going to bed, Janet could not but laugh at this thought.

Mrs. Harwood had recovered in the most wonderful way. It was she who kept up the conversation at dinner, talking to Dr. Harding of old friends, and, with her head high and another cap on, looking as if agitation or trouble had never come her way. She kept it up all the evening with a courage that never faltered. It happened before they all separated for the night that there was a moment in which Meredith and she were left alone. He went up to her, and took her hand in his.

'You are wonderful!' he said. 'I could not have thought it possible. You are able for any emergency.'

She began to cry a little, with a laugh running through the sobs.

'Oh, Charley,' she said, 'I hope it will all be forgiven me. What could I do? I had to hold by it. And what would that have been among so many? I shall be able to do justice to Gussy.'

'No,' he said, ignoring these last words, 'it would have been nothing among so many.'

'You see that too?' said Mrs. Harwood. And then she added, raising her hands in an appeal to the roof or the skies, 'Heaven knows that it was *them* I thought of—my children—always, always! all the time.'

Nobody was aware of this momentary confidence, for Gussy came into the room a little afterwards, and Meredith led her up to her mother.

'Of course,' he said, 'you have known it, dear Mrs. Harwood, for long, and, though there

has been nothing absolutely said between us, I think that Gussy and I have understood each other for a long time. You will give her to me, won't you? I will try to be worthy of her.'

Mrs. Harwood's eyes were filled with tears. There was no hypocrisy in this, nothing but nature.

'That I will, with all my heart, Charley!' she cried, and held out her arms to her daughter, who in the moment of emotion forgot everything, and forgave her mother who had done so much—had she done so much?—for her children. Gussy did not know all that the mother had done, nor at what cost she herself was to be 'done justice to.' She only knew that there had been clouds upon the domestic firmament, and that they were now all blown away by delicious breezes of happiness and sweet content.

Everything was arranged afterwards with the authorities, and Adolphus Harwood, proved to be a harmless though hopeless lunatic, was left in the custody of his wife. When the story

stole out, it was as the story of a wife's devotion, which indeed it was, in some sort. It was said that he had wandered back to England, scarcely recognisable in his madness after he was supposed to be dead, and that she had then and there taken the tremendous task upon her of concealing him, caring for him, watching and providing for his safety and comfort. It was a tremendous task: nobody could exaggerate the weight of the burden that had been upon her shoulders. And those of the victims who heard of it in faint rumours after a time, were more disposed to shed tears over Mrs. Harwood's martyr life and her wonderful devotion than to take any steps—if any had been possible—to interfere with her custody of the madman.

The vengeance of Heaven had overtaken that criminal who had been the ruin of so many. And, as for his poor wife, what was she but the first of the victims, the one who had suffered most? The story of the pocket-book with which he was going to pay up every claim touched still more the hearts of those who heard it. They

thought it proved that, underneath all the misdoings which had overwhelmed his brain, there had still been an honest instinct, and that perhaps he had never intended but to give the money back. If Dr. Harding felt sometimes, when he looked back upon that strange scene, that there was something beneath, he was the only one to whom that idea came. And nobody suspected even, what there had been in the pocket-book the first time Adolphus Harwood's wife got it into her hands!

Dolff threw up the university, which did him but little good, and the music-halls, which did him less, and went down to the little property in Wales which had come to him from his grandfather. Notwithstanding that scene with Dr. Harding, he never understood clearly what his father had done. He married there, and was in a small way a gentleman farmer, and got perhaps as much good out of his life as if he had pursued the course his mother intended. Perhaps on the whole, even she admitted, it was as well that the name of Adolphus Harwood, which is a con-

spicuous name, should not flourish at the Bar, which was a thankless profession; and where even Charley Meredith, who had been always thought so clever, did not flourish as people had hoped, though fortunately he and his wife were sufficiently well off not to care.

As for Janet, the little governess, the wife of the great Liverpool doctor, who acquired such fame in that northern capital, and was knighted, and as great a man as any in the place, her career is too brilliant for these simple pages. And yet when I say that she was beyond question the best-dressed woman in the north of Lancashire, which is saying a great deal, where could there be found a sign more eloquent of the apotheosis and grand culmination of a favourable fate?

THE END.

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For some time previous to his decease, which occurred on January 4, 1890, the late Mr. Serjeant Robinson had been engaged upon the preparation of a second series of his Reminiscences. He had written several chapters and had extracted from his diaries a collection of interesting notes, but failing health prevented him from making much progress with his self-imposed task.

Only a few days before his death, he placed in my hands the materials which he had thus prepared, with a request that I would utilize them in some manner, in case he should not be able to complete the work.

Under these circumstances, and in default of revision and possible correction by the author, I have thought it advisable, after consultation with Messrs. Hurst and Blackett, to arrange with them for the publication of a new and cheaper edition of the original volume, adding thereto certain selections from the new matter in as nearly as possible the original state in which it was committed to my keeping, omitting only such portions as were manifestly incomplete. The selected portions will be found in the form of supplementary chapters at the end of the present volume.

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