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BY

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MADAM.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JOHN TREVANION remained in the empty house. It had seemed that morning as if nothing could be more miserable: but it was more miserable now, when every cheerful element had gone out of it, and not even the distant sound of a child's voice, or Rosalind's dress with its faint sweep of sound, was to be heard in the vacancy. After he had seen them off, he walked home through the village with a very heavy heart. In front of the little inn there was an unusual stir: a number of rustic people gathered about the front of the house, surrounding two men of an aspect not at all rustical, who were evidently questioning the slow but eager rural witnesses. 'It must ha' been last night as he went,' said one. 'I don't know when he

went,' said another, 'but he never come in to his supper, I'll take my oath o' that.' They all looked somewhat eagerly towards John, who felt himself compelled to interfere, much as he disliked doing so. 'What is the matter?' he asked, and then from half a dozen eager mouths the story rushed out. 'A gentleman' had been living at the Red Lion for some time back. Nobody, it appeared, could make out what he wanted there; everybody (they now said) suspected him from the first. He would lie in bed all morning, and then get up towards afternoon. Nothing more was necessary to demonstrate his immorality, the guilt of the man. He went out trapesing in the woods at night, but he wasn't no poacher, for he never seemed to handle a gun nor know aught about it. He would turn white when anybody came in and tried a trigger, or to see if the ball was drawn. No, he wasn't no poacher: but he did always be in the woods o' night, which meant no good, the rustics thought. There were whisperings aside, and glances, as this description was given, which were not lost upon John, but his attention was occupied in the first place by the strangers, who came forward and announced that they were detectives in search of an

offender, a clerk in a merchant's office, who had absconded, having squandered a considerable sum of his master's money. 'But this is an impossible sort of place for such a culprit to have taken refuge in,' John said, astounded. The chief of the two officers stepped out in front of the other, and asked if he might say a few words to the gentleman, then went on accompanying John, as he mechanically continued his way, repressing all appearance of the extraordinary commotion thus produced in his mind.

'You see, sir,' said the man, 'it's thought that the young fellow had what you may call a previous connection here.'

'Ah! was he perhaps related to someone in the village? I never heard his name.' (The name was Everard, and quite unknown to the neighbourhood.)

'No, Mr. Trevanion,' said the other significantly, 'not in the village.'

'Where then—what do you mean? What could the previous connection that brought him here be?'

The man took a pocket-book from his pocket, and produced a crumpled envelope.

'You may have seen this writing before, sir,' he said.

John took it with a thrill of pain and alarm, recognising the paper, the stamp of 'Highcourt,' torn but decipherable on the seal, and feeling himself driven to one conclusion which he would fain have pushed from him: but when he had smoothed it out with a hand which trembled in spite of himself he suddenly cried out with a start of overwhelming surprise and relief—

'Why! it is my brother's hand.'

'Your brother's,' cried the officer, with a blank look. 'You mean, sir, the gentleman that was buried yesterday?'

'My brother, Mr. Trevanion, of Highcourt. I do not know how he can have been connected with the person you seek. It must have been some accidental link. I have already told you I never heard the name.'

The man was as much confused and startled as John himself. 'If that's so,' he said, 'you have put us off the track, and I don't know now what to do. We had heard,' he added, with a sidelong look of vigilant observation, 'that there was a lady in the case.'

'I know nothing about any lady,' said John Trevanion briefly.

'There's no trusting to village stories, sir. We were told that a lady had disappeared, and that it was more than probable——'

'As you say, village stories are entirely untrustworthy, said John. 'I can throw no light on the subject, except that the address on the envelope (Everard, is it?) is in my brother's hand. He might, of course, have a hundred correspondents unknown to me, but I certainly never heard of this one. I suppose there is no more I can do for you, for I am anxious to get back to Highcourt. You have heard, no doubt, that the family is in deep mourning and sorrow.'

'I am very sorry, sir,' said the official, 'and distressed to have interrupted you at such a moment, but it is our duty to leave no stone unturned.' Then he lingered for a moment. 'I suppose then,' he said, 'there is no truth in the story about the lady——'

John turned upon him with a short laugh. 'You don't expect me, I hope, to answer for all the village stories about ladies,' he said, waving his hand as he went on. 'I have told you all I know.'

He quickened his pace and his companion fell back. But the officer was not satisfied, and John Trevanion went on with his mind in a

dark and hopeless confusion, not knowing what extraordinary addition of perplexity was added to the question by this new piece of evidence, but feeling vaguely that it increased the darkness all around him. He had not in any way associated the stranger whom he had met on the road with his sister-in-law. He had thought it likely enough that the young man, perhaps of pretensions too humble to get admittance at Highcourt, had lingered about in foolish youthful adoration of Rosalind, which, however presumptuous it might be, was natural enough. To hear now that the young man who had presumed to do Miss Trevanion a service was a criminal in hiding made his blood boil. But his brother's handwriting threw everything into confusion. How did this connect with the rest, what light did it throw upon the imbroglio, in what way could it be connected with the disappearance of Madam? All these things surged about him vaguely as he walked, but he could make nothing coherent, no rational whole out of them. The park and the trees lay in a heavy mist. The day was not cold, but stifling, with a low sky, and heavy vapours in the air, everything around wet, sodden, dreary. Never had the long stretches of turf and distant glades

of trees seemed to him so lonely, so deserted and forsaken. There was not a movement to be seen, nobody coming by that public pathway which had been so great a grievance to the Trevanions for generations back. John, though he shared the family feeling in this respect, would have gladly now seen a village procession moving along the contested path. The house seemed to him to lie in a cold inclosure of mist and damp, abandoned by everybody, a spot on which there was a curse. But this of course was merely fanciful; and he shook off the feeling. There was pain enough involved in its recent history without the aid of imagination.

There was plenty to do, however. Mr. Trevanion's papers had to be put in order, his personal affairs wound up; and it was almost better to have no interruption in this duty, and so get over it as quickly as possible. There is something dreadful under all circumstances in fulfilling this office; to examine into the innermost recesses in which a man has kept his treasures, his most intimate possessions, the records perhaps of his affections and ambitions; to open his desk, to pull out his drawers, to turn over the letters which, perhaps, to him

were sacred, never to be revealed to any eye but his own—is an office from which it is natural to shrink. The investigator feels himself a spy, taking advantage of the pathetic helplessness of the dead, their powerlessness to protect themselves. John Trevanion sat down in the library with the sense of intrusion strong upon him, yet with a certain painful curiosity too. He was afraid of discovering something. At every new harmless paper which he opened he drew a long breath of relief. The papers of recent times were few; they were chiefly on the subject of money, the investments which had been made, appeals for funds sent to him for the needs of the estate, for repairs and improvements, which it was evident Mr. Trevanion had been slow to yield to. It seemed from the letters addressed to him that most of his business had been managed through his wife, which was a fact his brother was aware of; but somehow the constant reference to her, and the evident position assigned to her as in reality the active agency in the whole, added a curious and bewildering pang to the confusion in which all this had closed. It seemed beyond belief that this woman, who had stood by her husband so faithfully—his nurse, his adviser, his agent, his

eyes and ears—should be now a sort of fugitive under the dead man's ban, separated from all she cared for in the world. John stopped in the middle of a bundle of letters to ask himself whether he had ever known a similar case; there was nothing like it in the law reports, nothing even in those *causes célèbres* which include so many wonders. A woman with everything in her hands, her husband's business, as well as his health, and the governance of her great household, suddenly turned away from it without reason given or any explanation—surely the man must have been mad, surely he must have been mad! It was the only solution that seemed possible. But then there arose before the thinker's troubled vision those scenes which had preceded his brother's death—the bramble upon her dress, the wet feet which she had avowed with—was it a certain bravado? And again, that still more dreadful moment in the park, on the eve of her husband's funeral, when he had himself seen her meet and talk with someone who was invisible in the shadow of the copse. He had seen it; there could be no question on the subject. What did it mean? He got up, feeling the moisture rise to his forehead in the conflict of his feelings; he could

not sit still and go for the hundredth time over this question. What did it mean?

While he was walking up and down the library, unable to settle to any examination of those calm business papers in which no agitation was, a letter was brought to him. It bore the stamp of a post town at a short distance, and he turned it over listlessly enough, until it occurred to him that the writing was that of his sister-in-law. Madam wrote as many women write; there was nothing remarkable about her hand. John Trevanion opened the letter with excitement. It was as follows:—

'DEAR BROTHER JOHN,—You may not wish me to call you so now, but I have always felt toward you so, and it still seems a link to those I have left behind to have one relationship which I may claim. There seems no reason why I should not write to you, or why I should conceal from you where I am. You will not seek to bring me back; I am safe enough in your hands. I am going out of England, but if you want to communicate with me on any subject the bankers will always know where I am. It is, as I said, an additional humiliation in my great distress that I must take the provision my husband has made, and cannot fling

it back to you indignantly as a younger woman might. I am old enough to know, and bitterly acknowledge, that I cannot hope to maintain myself; and I have others dependent on me. This necessity will always make it easy enough to find me, but I do not fear that you will wish to seek me out or bring me back.

'I desire you to know that I understand my husband's will better than anyone else, and perhaps, knowing his nature, blame him less than you will be disposed to do. When he married me I was very forlorn and miserable. I had a story, which is the saddest thing that can be said of a woman. He was generous to me then in every particular but one, but that one was very important. I had to make a sacrifice—an unjustifiable sacrifice—and a promise which was unnatural. Herein lies my fault. I have not kept that promise; I could not—it was more than flesh and blood was capable of; and I deceived him. I was always aware that if he discovered it he might, and probably would, take summary vengeance. Now he has discovered it, and he has done without ruth what he promised me to do if I broke my word to him. I deserve it, you see, though not in the way the vulgar will suppose.

To them I cannot explain, and circumstances, alas! make it impossible for me to be explicit even with you. But perhaps, even in writing so much, you may be delivered from some suspicions of me which, if I read you right, you will be glad to find are not justified.

'Farewell, dear John! If we ever should meet in this world—if I should ever be cleared—I cannot tell—most likely not—my children will grow up without knowing me; but I dare not think on that subject, much less say anything. God bless them! Be as much a father to them as you can, and let my Rosalind have the letter I enclose. It will do her no harm; anyhow, she would not believe harm of me, even though she saw what looked like harm. Pity me a little, John. I have taken my doom quietly because I have no hope; neither in what I leave nor in what I go to is there any hope. 'GRACE TREVANION.'

This letter forced tears, such as a man is very slow to shed, to John Trevanion's eyes; but there was in reality no explanation in it, no light upon the family catastrophe, or the confusion of misery and perplexity she had left behind.

CHAPTER XXIV.

'HAVE you ever noticed in your walks, Doctor, a young fellow?—you couldn't but remark him—a sort of *primo tenore*; big-eyed, pale-faced——'

'All pulmonary,' said Dr. Beaton. 'I know the man you mean. He has been hanging about for a month, more or less, with no visible object. To tell the truth——'

John Trevanion raised his hand instinctively. 'I find,' he said, interrupting with a hurried precaution, 'that he has been in hiding for some offence, and men have come after him here because of an envelope with the Highcourt stamp——'

Here Dr. Beaton began, with a face of regret yet satisfaction, to nod his head, with that offensive air of 'I knew it all the time,' which is more exasperating than any other form of remark.

'——The Highcourt stamp,' continued

Trevanion peremptorily, 'and a direction written in my poor brother's hand.'

'In your brother's hand!'

'I thought I should surprise you,' John said with a grim satisfaction. 'I suppose it is according to the rules of the profession that so much time should have been let slip. I am very glad of it for my part. Whatever Reginald can have had to do with the fellow—something accidental, no doubt—it would have been disagreeable to have his name mixed up—— I saw the man myself trying to make himself agreeable to Rosalind.'

'To Miss Trevanion!' cried the Doctor with evident dismay. 'Why, I thought——'

'Oh, it was a very simple matter,' said John, interrupting again. 'He laid down some planks for her to cross the floods; and the recompense she gave him was to doubt whether he was a gentleman because he had paid her a compliment, which I must say struck me as a very modest attempt at a compliment.'

'It was a tremendous piece of presumption,' said the Doctor with Scotch warmth. 'I don't doubt Miss Rosalind's instinct was right, and that he was no gentleman. He had not the air

of it, in my opinion — a limp, hollow-eyed phthisical subject.'

'But consumption does not spare even the cream of society, Doctor. It appears he must have had warning of the coming danger, for he seems to have got away.'

'I thought as much!' said Dr. Beaton. 'I never expected to see more of him after—oh, I thought as much!'

John Trevanion eyed the Doctor with a look that was almost threatening, but he said nothing more. Dr. Beaton, too, was on the eve of departure; his occupation was gone, and his *tête-à-tête* with John Trevanion not very agreeable to either of them. But the parting was friendly on all sides. 'The Doctor do express himself very nicely,' Dorrington said when he joined the company in the housekeeper's room, after having solemnly served the two gentlemen at dinner, 'about his stay having been agreeable and all that; just what a gentleman ought to say. There are medical men of all kinds, just as there are persons of all sorts in domestic service; and the Doctor, he's one of the right sort.'

'And a comfort, whatever ailed one, to know there was a doctor in the house, and as

you'd be right done by,' the housekeeper said, which was the general view in the servants' hall. These regions were, as may be supposed, deeply agitated. Russell, one of the most important among them, had been sent forth weeping and vituperating, and the sudden departure of the family had left the household free to make every commentary, possible and impossible. Needless to say that Madam's disappearance had but one explanation among them. In all circles the question would have been so decided by the majority; in the servants' hall there was unanimity: no one was bold enough to make a different suggestion; and had it been made it would have been laughed to scorn. There were various stories told about her supposed lover, and several different suppositions current. Gentlemen of different appearances had been seen about the park by different spectators, and men in careful disguises had even been admitted into the house, some were certain. That new man who came to wind the clocks? Why should a new man have been sent? And he had white hands, altogether unlike the hands of one who worked for his living. The young man who had lived at the Red Lion was not left out of the suspicions of the house, but he had

not so important a place there as he had in the mind, for example, of Dr. Beaton, who had with grief and pain, but now not without a certain satisfaction, concluded upon his identity. The buzz and talk, and the whirl of suppositions and real or imaginary evidence, made a sort of reverberation through the house. Now and then, when doors were open and the household off their guard, which occurred not unfrequently in the extraordinary calm and leisure, the sounds of the eager voices were heard even as far as the library, in which John Trevanion sat with his papers, and sometimes elicited from him a furious message full of bitterness and wrath. 'Can't you keep your subordinates quiet and your doors shut,' he said to Dorrington, 'instead of leaving them to disturb me with their infernal clatter and gossip?' 'I will see to it, sir,' said Dorrington with dignity; 'but as for what goes on in the servants' hall, I 'ear it only as you 'ear it yourself, sir.' John bade the over-fine butler to go to—a personage who need not be named, to whom very fine persons go: and went on with his papers with a consciousness of all that was being said, the flutter of endless talk which before now must have blown abroad over all the country, and the false conclusions that

would be formed. He could not publish her letter in the same way—her letter, which said so much yet so little, which did not, alas, explain anything. She had accepted the burden, fully knowing what it was, not deceiving herself as to anything that was to follow; but in such a case the first sufferer is scarcely so much to be pitied as the succeeding victims, who have all the misery of seeing the martyr misconstrued and their own faith laughed at. There were times indeed when John Trevanion was not himself sure tlaat he had any faith, and felt himself incapable of striving any longer with the weight of probability against her which she had never attempted to remove or explain.

He went through all the late Mr. Trevanion's papers without finding any light on the subject of his connection with Everard, or which could explain the fact of his letter to that person. Several letters from his bankers referred indeed to the payment of money at Liverpool, which was where the offender had lived, but this was too faint a light to be calculated upon. As the days went on, order came to a certain degree out of the confusion in John Trevanion's mind. To be suddenly turned out of the easy existence ot a London bachelor about town, with his cosy

chambers and luxurious club, and made to assume the head and charge of a family so tragically abandoned, was an extraordinary effort for any man. It was a thing, could he have known it beforehand, which would have made him fly to the uttermost parts of the earth to avoid such a charge; but to have no choice simplifies matters, and the mind habituates itself instinctively to what it is compelled to do. He decided after much thought that it was better the family should not return to High-court. In the changed circumstances, and deprived of maternal care and protection as they were, no woman about them more experienced than Rosalind, their return could not be otherwise than painful and embarrassing. He decided that they should remain with their aunt, having absolute confidence in her delighted acceptance of their guardianship. Sophy indeed was quite incapable of such a charge, but they had Rosalind, and they had the ordinary trahitions by which such families are guided. They would, he thought, come to no harm. Mrs. Lennox lived in the neighbourhood of Clifton, far enough off to avoid any great or general knowledge of the family tragedy. The majority of the servants were consequently dismissed, and

Highcourt, with its windows all closed and its chimneys all but smokeless, fell back into silence, and stood amid its park and fine trees, a habitation of the dead.

It was not until he had done this that John Trevanion carried her step-mother's letter to Rosalind. He had a very agitating interview with her on the day of his arrival at the Limes, which was the suburban appellation of Sophy's house. He had to bear the artillery of anxious looks during dinner, and to avoid as he could his sister's questions, which were not over wise, as to what he had heard, and what he thought, and what people were saying; and it was not till the evening, when the children were disposed of, and Sophy herself had retired, that Rosalind, putting her hand within his arm, drew him to the small library, in which Mrs. Lennox allowed the gentlemen to 'make themselves comfortable,' as she said, tolerating tobacco. 'I know you have something to say to me, Uncle John—something that you could not say before—them all.'

'Little to say, but something to give you, Rosalind.' She recognised her step-mother's handwriting in a moment, though it was, as we have said, little remarkable, and with a cry of

agitated pleasure threw herself upon it. It was a bulky letter, not like that which he had himself received, but when it was opened was found to contain a long and particular code of directions about the children, and only a small accompanying note. This Rosalind read with an eagerness which made her cheeks glow.

'My Rosalind, I am sometimes glad to think now that you are not mine, and never can have it said to you that your mother is not—as other mothers are. Sophy and little Amy are not so fortunate. You must make it up to them, my darling, by being everything to them—better than I could have been. And when people see what you are they will forget me.

'That is not to say, my dearest, that you are to give up your faith in me. For the moment all is darkness—perhaps will always be darkness, all my life. There are cases that may occur in which I shall be able to tell you everything, but what would that matter so long as your father's prohibition stands? My heart grows sick when I think that in no case—— But we will not dwell upon that. My own (though you are not my own), remember me, love me. I am no more unworthy of it than other women are. I have written down all I

can think of about the children. You will no doubt have dismissed Russell, but after a time I almost think she should be taken back, for she loves the children. She always hated me, but she loves them. If you can persuade yourself to do it, take her back. Love is too precious to be lost. I am going away from you all very quietly, not permitting myself to reflect. When you think of me, believe that I am doing all I can to live—to live long enough to see my children again. My darling, my own child, I will not say good-bye to you, but only God bless you; and till we meet again,

'Your true

'MOTHER AND FRIEND.'

'My true mother,' Rosalind said, with the tears in her eyes, 'my dearest friend! Oh, Uncle John, was there ever any such misery before? Was it ever so with any woman? Were children ever made wretched like this, and forced to suffer? And why should it fall to our share?'

John Trevanion shook his head, pondering over the letter, and over the long, perfectly calm, most minute, and detailed instructions which accompanied it. There was nothing left

out or forgotten in these instructions. She must have spent the night putting down every little detail—the smallest as well as the greatest. The writing of the letter to Rosalind showed a little trembling; a tear had fallen on it at one spot; but the longer paper showed nothing of the kind. It was as clear and steady as the many manuscripts from the same hand which he had looked over among his brother's papers; statements of financial operations, of farming, of improvements. She had put down all the necessary precautions to be taken for her children in the same way, noting all their peculiarities for the guidance of the young sister who was hereafter to have the charge of them. This document filled the man with the utmost wonder. Rosalind took it a great deal more easily. To her it was natural that her mother should give these instructions; they were of the highest importance to herself in her novel position, and she understood perfectly that Madam would be aware of the need of them, and that to make some provision for that need would be one of the first things to occur to her. But John Trevanion contemplated the paper from a very different point of view. That a woman so outraged and insulted as (if she were

innocent) she must feel herself to be, should pause on the eve of her departure from everything dear to her, from honour and consideration, her home and her place among her peers, to write about Johnny's tendency to croup and Amy's readiness to catch cold, was to him more marvellous than almost anything that had gone before. He lingered over it, reading mechanically all those simple directions. A woman at peace, he thought, might have done it, one who knew no trouble more profound than a child's cough or chilblains. But this woman—in the moment of her anguish—before she disappeared into the darkness of the distant world! 'I do not understand it at all,' he said as he put it down.

'Oh,' cried Rosalind, 'who could understand it? I think papa must have been mad; he must have been mad. Are not bad wills sometimes broken, Uncle John?'

'Not such a will as this. He had a right to leave his money as he pleased.'

'But if we were all to join—if we were to show the mistake, the dreadful mistake, he had made——'

'What mistake? You could prove that your step-mother was no common woman, Rosalind. A thing like this is astounding to me.

I don't know how she could do it. You might prove that she had the power to make fools of you and me. But you could prove nothing more. my dear. Your father knew something more than we know. It might be no mistake; he might have very good reason. Even this letter, though it makes you cry, explains nothing, Rosalind.'

'I want nothing explained,' cried the girl. 'Do you think I have any doubt of *her*? I could not bear that she should explain—as if I did not know what she is! But, Uncle John, let us all go together to the judge that can do it, and tell him everything, and get him to break the will.'

'The judge who can do that is not to be found in Westminster, Rosalind. It must be one that sees into the heart. I believe in her too—without any reason—but to take it to law would only be to make our domestic misery a little better known.'

Rosalind looked at him with large eyes full of light and excitement. She felt strong enough to defy the world. 'Do you mean to say that whatever happens, though we could prove what we know of her, that she is the best, the best woman in the world——?'

'Were she as pure as ice, as chaste as snow, there is nothing to be done. Your father does not say, because of this or that. What he says is absolute. If she continues with the children, or in communication with them, they lose everything.'

'Then let us lose everything,' cried Rosalind in her excitement; 'rather be poor and work for our bread, than lose our mother.'

John Trevanion shook his head. 'She has already chosen,' he said.

CHAPTER XXV.

RUSSELL left Highcourt in such wild commotion of mind and temper, such rage, grief, compunction, and pain, that she was incapable of any real perception of what had happened, and did not realise, until the damp air blowing in her face as she hurried across the park, sobbing and crying aloud, and scarcely able to keep herself from screaming, brought back her scattered faculties, either what it was that she had been instrumental in doing, or what she had brought upon herself. She did not now understand what it was that had happened to Madam, though she had a kind of vindictive joy, mingled with that sinking of the heart which those not altogether hardened to human suffering feel in regarding a catastrophe brought about by their means, in the thought that she had brought illimitable, irremediable harm to her mistress, whom she had always hated. She had done this whatever might come of it, and even in the

thrill of her nerves that owned a human horror of this calamity, there was a fierce exhilaration of success in having triumphed over her enemy. But perhaps she had never wished, never thought of so complete a triumph. The desire of revenge, which springs so naturally in the undisciplined mind, and is so hot and reckless in its efforts to harm its object, has most generally no fixed intention, but only a vague wish to injure or rather punish ; for Russell to her own consciousness was inspired by the highest moral sentiment, and meant only to bring retribution on the wicked and to open the eyes of a man who was deceived. She did not understand what had really occurred, but the fact that she had ruined her mistress was at the same time terrible and delightful to her. She did not mean so much as that: but no doubt Madam had been found out more wicked than was supposed, and her heart swelled with pride and a gratified sense of importance even while she trembled. But the consequences to herself were such as she had never foreseen, and for the moment overwhelmed her altogether. She wept hysterically as she hurried to the village, stumbling over the inequalities of the path, wild with sorrow and anger. She had meant to

remain in Madam's service, though she had done all she could to destroy her. She thought nothing less than that life would go on without much visible alteration, and that she herself, because there was nobody like her, would necessarily remain with the children to whom her care was indispensable. She had brought them all up from their birth. She had devoted herself to them, and felt her right in them almost greater than their mother's. 'My children,' she said, as the butler said 'my plate,' and the housemaid 'my grates and carpets.' She spent her whole life with them, whereas it is only a part of hers that the most devoted mother can give. The woman, though she was cruel and hard-hearted in one particular, was in this as tender and sensitive as the most gentle and feminine of women. She loved the children with passion. The idea that they could be torn away from her had never entered her mind. What would they do without her? The two little ones were delicate: they required constant care; without her own attention she felt sure they never could be 'reared': and to be driven from them at a moment's notice, without time to say good-bye! Sobs came from her breast, convulsive and hysterical, as she rushed along.

'Oh, my children!' she cried, under her breath, as if it were she who had been robbed, and who refused to be comforted. She passed someone on the way, who stopped astonished, to look after her, but whom she could scarcely see through the mist of her tears, and at last, with a great effort, subduing the passionate sounds that had been bursting from her, she hurried through the nearest corner of the village to her mother's house, and there, flinging herself down upon a chair, gave herself up to all the violence of that half artificial, half involuntary transport known as hysterics. Her mother was old, and beyond such violent emotions, but though greatly astonished she was not unacquainted with the manifestation. She got up from the big chair in which she was seated, tottering a little, and hurried to her daughter, getting hold of and smoothing out her clenched fingers. 'Dear, dear, now, what be the matter?' she said soothingly; 'Sarah, Sarah, come and look to your poor sister. What's come to her, what's come to her, the poor dear? Lord bless us, but she do look bad. Fetch a drop of brandy quick; that's the best thing to bring her round.'

When Russell had been made to swallow

the brandy, and had exhausted herself and brought her mother and sister into accord with her partial frenzy, she permitted herself to be brought round. She sat up wildly while still in their hands, and stared about her as if she did not know where she was. Then she seized her mother by the arm; 'I have been sent away,' she said.

'Sent away! She's off of her head still, poor dear! Sent away, when they can't move hand nor foot without you!'

'That's not so now, mother. It's all true. I've been all the same as turned out of the house, and by her as I nursed and thought of most of all; her as was like my very own; Miss Rosalind! Oh!' and Russell showed inclination to 'go off' again, which the assistants resisted by promptly taking possession of her two arms, and opening the hands which she would have clenched if she could.

'There now, deary; there now! don't you excite yourself. You're among them that wishes you well here.'

'Oh, I know that, mother. But Miss Rosalind, she's as good as taken me by the shoulders and put me out of the house, and took my children from me as I've brought up;

and what am I to do without my babies? Oh, oh! I wish I had never been born.'

'I hope you've got your wages and board wages, and something over to make up? You ought to have that,' said the sister, who was a woman of good sense. Russell, indeed, had sufficient command of herself to nod in assent.

'And your character safe?' said the old woman. 'I will say that for you, deary, that you have always been respectable. And whatever it is that's happened, so long as it's nothing again your character, you'll get another place fast enough. I don't hold with staying too long in one family. You'd just like to stick there for ever.'

'Oh, don't speak to me about new places. My children as I've brought up! It has nothing to do with me; it's all because I told master of Madam's goings on. And he's been and put her away in his will—and right too. And Miss Rosalind, that always was unnatural, that took to that woman more than to her aunt, or me, or anyone, she jumps up to defend Madam, and "go out of the house, woman!" and stamping with her foot, and going on like a fury. And my little Master Johnny, that would never go to nobody but me! Oh,

mother, I'll die of it, I'll die of it—my children that I've brought up!'

'I've told you all,' said the old woman, 'never you meddle with the quality. It can't come to no good.' She had given up her ministrations, seeing that her patient had come round, and retired calmly to her chair. 'Madam's goings on was no concern of yours. You ought to have known that. When a poor person puts herself in the way of a rich person, it's always her as goes to the wall.'

Of these maxims the mother delivered herself deliberately as she sat twirling her thumbs. The sister, who was the mistress of the cottage, showed a little more sympathy.

'As long as you've got your board wages,' she said, 'and a somethin' to make up. Mother's right enough, but I'll allow as it's hard to do. They're all turned topsy-turvy at the Red Lion about Madam's young man—him as all this business was about.'

'What's about him?' cried Russell, for the first time with real energy raising her head.

'It turns out as he's robbed his masters in Liverpool,' said Sarah, with the perfect coolness of a rustic spectator; 'just what was to be expected; and the detectives is after him. He was

here yesterday, I'll take my oath, but now he's gone, and there's none can find him. There's a reward of——'

'I'll find him,' cried Russell, springing to her feet. 'I'll track him. I'm good for nothing now in a common way; I cannot rest—I cannot settle to needlework or that sort.' She was fastening her cloak as she spoke and tying on her bonnet. 'I've heaps of mending to do, for I never had a moment's time to think of myself, but only of them that have showed no more gratitude—— My heart's broke, that's what it is. I can't settle down; but here's one thing I'm just in a humour to do—I'll track him out.'

'Lord, Lizzie! what are you thinking of it? You don't know no more than Adam what way they're gone, or aught about him.'

'And if you'll take my advice, deary,' said the old woman, 'you'll neither make nor meddle with the quality. Right or wrong, it's always the poor folk as go to the wall.'

'I'll track him, that's what I'll do; I'm just in the humour for that,' cried Russell, savagely. 'Don't stop me! What do I care for a bit of money to prove as I'm right? I'll go, and I'll find them. Providence will put me on the right

way. Providence 'll help me to find all that villainy out.'

'But, Lizzie! stop and have a bit to eat, at least. Don't go off like that, without even a cup of tea——'

'Oh, don't speak to me about cups of tea!' Russell rushed at her mother and dabbed a hurried kiss upon her old cheek. She waved her hand to her sister, who stood open-mouthed, wondering at her, and finally rushed out in an excitement and energy which contrasted strangely with her previous prostration. The two rustic spectators stood gazing after her with consternation. 'She was always one as had no patience,' said the mother at last. 'And without a bit of dinner or a glass of beer or anything,' said Sarah. After that they returned to their occupations and closed the cottage door.

Russell rushed forth to the railway station, which was at least a mile from the village. She was transported out of herself with excitement, misery, a sense of wrong, a sense of remorse—all the conflicting passions which the crisis had brought. To prove to herself that her suspicions were justified about Madam was in reality as strong a motive in her mind as the fierce desire of revenge upon her mistress which drove her

nearly frantic; and she had that wild confidence in chance, and indifference to reason, which are at once the strength and weakness of the uneducated. She would get on the track somehow; she would find them somehow—Madam's young man and Madam herself. She would give him up to justice and shame the woman for whose sake she had been driven forth. And, as it happened, Russell, taking her ticket for London, found herself in the same carriage with the man who had come in search of the stranger at the Red Lion, and acquired an amount of information and communicated a degree of zeal which stimulated the search on both sides. When they parted in town she was provided with an address to which to telegraph instantly on finding any trace of the fugitives, and flung herself upon the great unknown world of London with a faith and a virulence which were equally violent. She did not know where to go nor what to do; she had very little acquaintance with London. The Trevanions had a town house in a street near Berkeley Square, and all that she knew was the immediate neighbourhood of that dignified centre—of all places in the world least likely to shelter the fugitives. She went there, however,

in her helplessness, and carried consternation to the bosom of the charwoman in charge, who took in the strange intelligence vaguely, and gaped and hoped as it wasn't true. 'So many things is said, and few of 'em ever comes true,' this philosophical observer said. 'But I've come out of the middle of it, and I know it's true, every word,' she almost shrieked in her excitement. The charwoman was a little hard of hearing. 'We'll hope as it 'll all turn out lies—they mostly does,' she said. This was but one of many rebuffs the woman met with. She had spent more than a week wandering about London, growing haggard and thin; her respectable clothes growing shabby, her eyes wild—the want of proper sleep and proper food making a hollow-eyed spectre of the once smooth and dignified upper servant—when she was unexpectedly rewarded for all her pangs and exertions by meeting Jane one morning, sharply and suddenly, turning round a corner. The two women paused by a mutual impulse, and then one cried, 'What are you doing here?' and the other, grasping her firmly by the arm, 'I've caught you at last!'

'Caught me! Were you looking for me? What do you want? Has anything happened

to the children?' Jane cried, beginning to tremble.

'The children! How dare you take their names in your mouth—you as is helping to ruin and shame them? I'll not let you go now I've got you; oh, don't think it! I'll stick to you till I get a policeman.'

'A policeman to me!' cried poor Jane, who, not knowing what mysterious powers the law might have, trembled more and more. 'I've done nothing,' she said.

'But them as you are with has done a deal,' cried Russell. 'Where is that young man? Oh, I know—I know what he's been and done. I have took an oath on my Bible that I'll track him out. If I'm to be driven from my place and my dear children for Madam's sake, she shall just pay for it, I can tell you. You thought I'd put up with it, and do nothing, but a worm will turn. I've got it in my power to publish her shame, and I'll do it. I know a deal more than I knew when I told master of her goings on. But now I've got you I'll stick to you, and them as you're with, and I'll have my revenge!' Russell cried, her wild eyes flaming, her haggard cheeks flushing; 'I'll have my revenge. Ah!'

She paused here with a cry of consternation, alarm, dismay; for there stepped out of a shop hard by Madam herself, and laid a hand suddenly upon her arm.

'Russell,' she said, 'I am sorry they have sent you away; I know you love the children.' At this a convulsive movement passed across her face, which sent through the trembling awe-stricken woman a sympathetic shudder. They were one in this deprivation, though they were enemies. 'You have always hated me—I do not know why; but you love the children. I would not have removed you from them. I have written to Miss Rosalind to bid her have you back when—when she is calmer. And you that have done me so much harm, what do you want with me?' said Madam, looking with the pathetic smile which threw such a strange light upon her utterly pale face, upon this ignorant pursuer.

'I've come—I've come——' she gasped, and then stood trembling, unable to articulate, holding herself up by the grasp she had taken with such different intentions of Jane's arm, and gazing with her hollow eyes with a sort of fascination upon the lady whom at last she had hunted down.

'I think she is fainting,' Madam said. 'Whatever she wants, she has outdone her strength.' There was a compassion in the tone which, in Russell's weakened state, went through and through her. Her mistress took her gently by the other arm, and led her into the shop she had just left. Here they brought her wine and something to eat, of which she had the greatest need. 'My poor woman,' said Madam, 'your search for me was vain, for Mr. John Trevanion knows where to find me at any moment. You have done me all the harm one woman could do another; what could you desire more? But I forgive you for my children's sake. Go back, and Rosalind will take you again, because you love them. And take care of my darlings, Russell,' she said, with that ineffable smile of anguish; 'say no ill to them of their mother.'

'Oh, Madam, kill me!' Russell cried.

That was the last that was seen in England of Madam Trevanion. The woman, overcome with passion, remorse, and long fasting and misery, fainted outright at her mistress's feet; and when she came to herself the lady and her maid were both gone, and were seen by her no more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THERE is nothing more strange in all the experiences of humanity than the manner in which a great convulsion either in nature or in human history ceases after a while to affect the world. Grass grows and flowers wave over the soil which an earthquake has rent asunder; and the lives of men are similarly torn in twain without leaving a much more permanent result. The people whom we see one year crushed by some great blow, when the next has come have begun to pursue their usual course again. This means no infidelity of nature, no forgetting: but only the inevitable progress by which the world keeps going. There is no trouble, however terrible, that does not yield to the touch of time.

Some two years after these events Rosalind Trevanion felt herself, almost against her will, emerging out of the great shadow which had overwhelmed her life. She had been for a time swallowed up in the needs of the family,

all her powers demanded for the rearrangement of life on its new basis, and everything less urgent banished from her. But by degrees the most unnatural arrangements fall into the calm of habit, the most unlooked-for duties become things of every day. Long before the period at which this history resumes, it had ceased to be wonderful to anyone that Rosalind should take her place as head of the desolated house. She assumed unconsciously that position of sister-mother which is one of the most touching and beautiful that exist, with the ease which necessity brings—not asking how she could do it, but doing it; as did the bystanders who criticise every course of action and dictate what can and what cannot be done, but who all accepted her in her new duties with a composure which soon made everybody forget how strange, how unlikely to the girl those duties were. The disappearance of the mother, the breaking up of the house, was no doubt a nine days' wonder, and gave occasion in the immediate district for endless discussions; but the wonder died out as every wonder dies out. Outside of the county it was but vaguely known, and to those who professed to tell the details with authority there was but a dull response: natural

sentiment at a distance being all against the possibility that anything so extraordinary and odious could be true. 'You may depend upon it a woman who was going to behave so at the end must have shown signs of it from the beginning,' people said, and the propagation of the rumour was thus seriously discouraged. Mrs. Lennox, though she was not wise, had enough of good sense and good feeling not to tell even to her most intimate friends the circumstances of her sister-in-law's disappearance; and this not so much for Madam's sake as for that of her brother, whose extraordinary will appeared to her simple understanding so great a shame and scandal that she kept it secret for Reginald's sake. Indeed all she did in the matter was for Reginald's sake. She did not entertain the confidence in Madam with which Rosalind and John enshrined the fugitive. To Rosalind Mrs. Lennox said little on the subject, with a respect for the girl's innocence which persons of superior age and experience are not always restrained by; but that John, a man who knew the world, should go on as he did was a thing which exasperated his sister. How he could persuade himself of Mrs. Trevanion's innocence was a thing she

could not explain. Why, what could it be? she asked herself angrily. Everybody knows that the wisest of men or women are capable of going wrong for one cause; but what other could account for the flight of a woman, of a mother from her children, the entire disappearance of her out of all the scenes of her former life? When her brother told her that there was no help for it, that in the interests of her children Madam was compelled to go away, Aunt Sophy said 'Stuff!' What was a woman good for if she could not find some means of eluding such a monstrous stipulation? 'Do you think I would have minded him? I should have disguised myself, hidden about, done anything rather than desert my family,' she cried; and when it was suggested to her that Madam was too honourable, too proud, too high-minded to deceive, Sophy said nothing but 'Stuff!' again. 'Do you think anything in the world would make me abandon my children—if I had any?' she cried. But though she was angry with John and impatient of Rosalind, she kept the secret. And after a time all audible comments on the subject died away. 'There is something mysterious about the matter,'

people said; 'I believe Mrs. Trevanion is still living.' And then it began to be believed that she was ill and obliged to travel for her health, which was the best suggestion that could have been made.

And Rosalind gradually, but nevertheless fully, came out of the shadow of that blighting aloud. What is there in human misery which can permanently crush a heart under twenty? Nothing, at least save the last and most intolerable of personal losses, and even then only in the case of a passionate undisciplined soul or a feeble body. Youth will overcome everything if it has justice, and fresh air and occupation. And Rosalind made her way out of all the ways of gloom and misery to the sky and sunshine. Her memory had indeed an indelible scar upon it at that place. She could not turn back and think of the extraordinary mystery and anguish of that terrible moment without a convulsion of the heart, and sense that all the foundations of the earth had been shaken. But happily, at her age there is not much need of turning back upon the past. She shivered when the momentary recollection crossed her mind, but could always throw it off and come

back to the present, to the future, which are always so much more congenial.

This great catastrophe, which made a sort of chasm between her and her former life, had given a certain maturity to Rosalind. At twenty she had already much of the dignity, the self-possession, the seriousness of a more advanced age. She had something of the air of a young married woman, a young mother, developed by the early experiences of life. The mere freshness of girlhood, even when it is most exquisite, has a less perfect charm than this: and the fact that Rosalind was still a girl notwithstanding the sweet and noble gravity of her responsible position, added to her an exceptional charm. She was supposed by most people to be five years at least older than she was: and she was the mother of her brothers and sisters, at once more and less than a mother; perhaps less anxious, perhaps more indulgent, not old enough to perceive with the same clearness or from the same point of view, seeing from the level of the children more than perhaps a mother can. To see her with her little brother in her lap was the most lovely of pictures. Something more exquisite even than maternity was in this virgin-motherhood. She was a

better type of the second mother than any wife. This made a sort of halo around the young creature who had so many responsibilities. But yet in her heart Rosalind was only a girl; the other half of her had not progressed beyond where it was before that great crisis. There was within her a sort of decisive consciousness of the apparent maturity which she had thus acquired, and she only such a child—a girl at heart!

In this profound girlish soul of hers which was her very self, while the other was more or less the product of circumstances, it still occurred to Rosalind now and then to wonder how it was that she had never had a lover. Even this was meant in a manner of her own. Miss Trevanion of Highcourt had not been without suitors: men who had admired her beauty or her position. But these were not at all what she meant by a lover. She meant —what an imaginative girl means when such a thought crosses her mind. She meant—Romeo: or perhaps Hamlet, had love been restored to the possibilities of that noblest of all disenchanted souls—or even such a symbol as Sir Kenneth. She wondered whether it would ever be hers to find wandering about the world

the other part of her, him who would understand every thought and feeling, him to whom it would be needless to speak or to explain, who would know; him for whom mighty love would cleave in twain the burden of a single pain, and part it, giving half to him. The world, she thought, could not hold together as it did under the heavens, had it ceased to be possible that men and women should meet each other so. But such a meeting had never occurred yet in Rosalind's experience, and seeing how common it was, how invariable an occurrence in the experience of all maidens of poetry and fiction, the failure occasioned her always a little surprise. Had she never seen anyone, met about the world any form in which she could embody such a possibility? She did not put this question to herself plainly, but there was in her imagination a sort of involuntary answer to it, or rather the ghost of an answer, which would sometimes make itself known, from without, she thought, more than from within—as if a face had suddenly looked at her, or a whisper been breathed in her ear. She did not give any name to this vision or endeavour to identify it.

But imagination is obstinate and not to be

quenched, and in inadvertent moments she half acknowledged to herself that it had a being and a name. Who or what he was indeed she could not tell: but sometimes in her imagination the remembered tone of a voice would thrill her ears, or a pair of eyes would look into hers. This recollection or imagination would flash upon her at the most inappropriate moments: sometimes when she was busy with her semi-maternal cares, or full of household occupation which left her thoughts free, moments when she was without defence. Indeed temptation would come upon her in this respect from the most innocent quarter, from her little brother who looked up at her with eyes that were like the eyes of her dream. Was that why he had become her darling, her chief favourite among the children? Oh no; it was because he was the youngest, the baby, the one to whom a mother was most of all wanting. Aunt Sophy, indeed, who was so fond of finding out likenesses, had said—— And there was a certain truth in it. Johnny's eyes were very large and dark, shining out of the paleness of his little face; he was a delicate child, or perhaps only a pale-faced child looking delicate, for there never was anything the

matter with him. His eyes were very large for a child, appearing so perhaps because he was himself so little; a child of fine organisation, with the most delicate pure complexion, and blue veins showing distinctly through the delicate tissue of his skin. Rosalind felt a sort of dreamy bliss come over her when Johnny fixed his great soft eyes upon her, looking up with a child's devout attention. She loved the child dearly, was not that enough? And then there was the suggestion. Likenesses are very curious; they are so arbitrary, no one can tell how they come; there was a likeness, she admitted to herself: and then wondered, half wishing it, half angry with herself for the idea, whether perhaps it was the likeness to her little brother which had impressed the face of a stranger so deeply upon her dreams.

Who was he? Where did he come from? Where all this long time for these many months had he gone? If it was because of her he had come to the village, how strange that he should never have appeared again! It was impossible it could have been for her; yet if not for her, for whom could he have come? She asked herself these questions so often that her vision gradually lost identity and became a tra-

dition, an abstraction, the true lover after whom she had been wondering. She endowed him with all the qualities which girls most dearly prize. She talked to him upon every subject under heaven. In all possible emergencies that arose to her fancy, he came and stood by her and helped her. No real man is ever so noble, so tender, so generous as such an ideal man can be. And Rosalind forgot altogether that she had asked herself whether it was certain that he was a gentleman, the original of this shadowy figure which had got into her imagination she scarcely could tell how.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. LENNOX'S house was not a great country house like Highcourt. It was within a mile of Clifton, a pretty house, set in pretty grounds with a few fields about it, and space enough to permit of a sufficient but modest establishment, horses and dogs, and pets in any number to satisfy the children. Reginald, indeed, when he came home for the holidays, somewhat scoffed at the limited household, and declared that there was scarcely room to breathe. For the young master of Highcourt everything was small and shabby, but as his holidays were broken by visits to the houses of his school-fellows, where young Mr. Trevanion of Highcourt had many things in his favour, and as he thus managed to get as much shooting and hunting and other delights as a schoolboy can indulge in, he was on the whole gracious enough to Aunt Sophy and Rosalind, and their limited ways. The extraordinary changes that

followed his father's death had produced a curious effect upon the boy; there had been indeed a moment of impulse in which he had declared his intention of standing by his mother, but a fuller understanding of all that was involved had summarily checked this. The youthful imagination, when roused by the thought of wealth and importance, is as insatiable in these points as it is when inflamed by the thirst for pleasure, and it is perhaps more difficult to give up or consent to modify greatness which you have never had, but have hoped for, than to give up an actual possession. Reginald had felt his importance as his father's heir so much, that the idea of depriving himself of it for the sake of his mother brought a sudden damp and chill all over his energies. He was silent when he heard what a sacrifice was necessary, even though it was a sacrifice in imagination only, the reality being unknown to him. And from that moment the thing remarkable in him was that he had never mentioned his mother's name.

With the other children this effect had at the end of the year been almost equally attained, but by degrees; they had ceased to refer to her as they had ceased to refer to their

father. Both parents seemed to have died together to these little ones. The one like the other faded as the dead do out of their personal sphere, and ceased to have any place in their life. They said Rosalind now, when they used to say mamma. But with Reginald the effect was different—young though he was, in his schoolboy sphere he had a certain knowledge of the world. He knew that it was something intolerable when a fellow's family was in everybody's mouth, when his mother was discussed and talked of, and there was a sort of half-fury against her in his mind for subjecting him to this. The pangs which a proud boy feels in such circumstances are difficult to fathom, for their force is aggravated by the fact that he never betrays them. The result was that he never mentioned her, never asked a question, put on a mien of steel when anything was said which so much as suggested her existence, and from the moment of his departure from Highcourt, ignored altogether the name and possibility of a mother; he was angry with the very name.

Sophy was the only one who caused a little embarrassment now and then by her recollections of the past life of Highcourt and the

household there. But Sophy was not favourable to her mother, which is a strange thing to say, and had no lingering tenderness to smother; she even went so far now and then as to launch a jibe at Rosalind on the subject of mamma. As for the little ones they already remembered her no more. The Elms, which was the suburban title of Mrs. Lennox's small domain, became the natural centre of their little lives, and they forgot the greater and more spacious house in which they were born. And now that the second year was nearly accomplished since the catastrophe happened, natural gaiety and consolation had come back. Rosalind went out to such festivities as offered. She spent a few weeks in London, and saw a little of society. The cloud had rolled away from her young horizon, leaving only a dimness and mist of softened tears. And the Elms was, in its way, a little centre of society. Aunt Sophy was very hospitable. She liked the pleasant commotion of life around her, and she was pleased to feel the stir of existence which the presence of a girl brings to such a house. Rosalind was not a beauty so remarkable as to draw admirers and suitors from every quarter of the compass. These are rare in life, though we are grateful

to meet so many of them in novels; but she was extremely pleasant to look upon, fair and sweet as so many English girls are, with a face full of feeling, and enough of understanding and poetry to give it something of an ideal charm. And though it was, as we have said, the wonder of her life that she had never, like young ladies in novels, had a lover, yet she was not without admiration nor without suitors, quite enough to maintain her self-respect and position in the world.

One of these was the young Hamerton who was a visitor at Highcourt at the opening of this history. He was the son of another county family of the Highcourt neighbourhood; not the eldest son indeed, but still not altogether to be ranked among the detrimentals, since he was to have his mother's money, a very respectable fortune. And he was by way of being a barrister, although not so unthoughtful of the claims of others as to compete for briefs with men who had more occasion for them. He had come to Clifton for the hunting, not perhaps without a consciousness of Rosalind's vicinity. He had not shown at all during the troubles at Highcourt or for some time after, being too much disturbed and alarmed by his own dis-

covery to approach the sorrowful family. But by degrees this feeling wore off, and a girl who was under Mrs. Lennox's wing, and who, after all, was not 'really the daughter' of the erring woman, would have been most unjustly treated had she been allowed to suffer in consequence of the mystery attached to Madam Trevanion and her disappearance from the world. Mrs. Lennox had known Roland Hamerton's father as well as Rosalind knew himself. The families had grown up together, calling each other by their Christian names, on that preliminary brother and sister footing which is so apt with opportunity to grow into something closer. And Roland had always thought Rosalind the prettiest girl about. When he got over the shock of the Highcourt mystery his heart had come back to her with a bound. And if he came to Clifton for the hunting instead of to any other centre, it was with a pleasant recollection that the Elms was within walking distance, and that there he was always likely to find agreeable occupation for 'off' days. On such occasions, and even on days which were not 'off' days, he would come, sometimes to luncheon, sometimes in the afternoon, with the very frequent consequence of sending off a

message to Clifton for 'his things,' and staying all night. He was adopted, in short, as a sort of son or nephew of the house.

It is undeniable that a visitor of this sort (or even more than one) is an addition to the cheerfulness of a house in the country. It may, perhaps, be dangerous to his own peace of mind, or even, if he is frivolous, to the comfort of a daughter of the same, but so long as he is on these easy terms, with no definite understanding one way or the other, he is a pleasant addition. The least amiable of men is obliging and pleasant in such circumstances. He is on his promotion. His *raison d'être* is his power of making himself agreeable. When he comes to have a definite position as an accepted lover, everything is changed again, and he may be as much in the way as he once was handy and desirable; but in his first stage he is always an addition, especially when the household is chiefly composed of women. Hamerton fell into this pleasant place with even more ease than usual. He was already so familiar with them all, that everything was natural in the arrangement. And Mrs. Lennox, there was no doubt, wished the young man well. It would not be a brilliant match, but it would be 'quite

satisfactory.' Had young Lord Elmore come a-wooing instead of Roland, that would have been, no doubt, more exciting. But Lord Elmore paid his homage in another direction, and his antecedents were not quite so good as Hamerton's, who was one of those young men who have never given their parents an anxiety, a qualification which it is needless to say was dear above every other to Aunt Sophy's heart.

He was seated with them in the drawing-room at the Elms on an afternoon of November. It had been a day pleasant enough for the time of year, but not for hunting men—a clear frosty day, with ice in all the ditches, and the ground hard and resounding; a day when it is delightful to walk though not to ride. Rosalind had met him strolling towards the house when she was out for her afternoon walk. Perhaps he was not so sorry for himself as he professed to the ladies. 'I shall bore you to death,' he said; 'I shall always be coming, for I see now we are in for a ten days' frost—which is the most dolorous prospect, at least it would be if I had not the Elms to fall back upon.' He made this prognostication of evil with a beaming face.

'You seem on the whole to take it cheerfully,' Mrs. Lennox said.

'Yes, with the Elms to fall back upon—I should not take it cheerfully otherwise.'

'But you were here on Saturday, Roland, when the meet was at Barley Wood, and everybody was out,' cried little Sophy. 'I don't think you are half a hunting man. I shouldn't miss a day if it were me; nor Reginald wouldn't,' she added, with much indifference to grammar.

'It is all the fault of the Elms,' the young man said with a laugh.

'I don't know what you find at the Elms. Reginald says we are so dull here. I think so too—nothing but women; and you that have got two or three clubs and can go where you like.'

'You shall go to the clubs, Sophy, instead of me.'

'That is what I should like,' said Miss Sophy. 'Everybody says men are cleverer than women, and I am very fond of good talk. I like to hear you talk of horses and things; and of betting a pot on Bucephalus——'

'Sophy, where did you hear such language? You must be sent back to the nursery,' cried Mrs. Lennox, 'if you go on like that.'

'Well,' said Sophy, 'Reginald had a lot on

Bucephalus: he told me so. He says it's dreadful fun; you are kept in such a state till the last moment, not knowing which is to win. Sometimes the favourite is simply nowhere, and if you happen to have drawn a dark horse——'

'Sophy! I can't allow such language.'

'And the favourite has been cooked, don't you know, or came to grief in the stable,' cried Sophy, breathless, determined to have it out, 'then you win a pot of money. It was Reginald told me all that. I don't know myself—more's the pity! and because I am a girl I don't suppose I shall ever know,' the little reprobate said regretfully.

'Dear me, I never thought those things were permitted at Eton,' said Mrs. Lennox. 'I always thought boys were safe there. Afterwards, one knows, not a moment can be calculated upon. That is what is so nice about you, Roland; you never went into anything of that kind. I wish so much, if you are here at Christmas, you would give Reginald a little advice.'

'I don't much believe in advice, Mrs. Lennox. Besides, I'm not so immaculate as you think me; I've had in my day a pot on something or other, as Sophy says——'

'Sophy must not say those sort of things,'

said her aunt. 'Rosalind, give us some tea. It is quite cold enough to make the fire most agreeable and the tea a great comfort. And if you have betted you have seen the folly of it, and you could advise him all the better. That is always the worst with boys when they have women to deal with; they think we know nothing. Whether it is because we have not education, or because we have not votes, or what, I can't tell. But Reginald, for one, does not pay the least attention. He thinks he knows ever so much better than I do. And John is abroad; he doesn't care very much for John either. He calls him an old fogey; he says the present generation knows better than the last. Did you ever hear such impertinence? And he is only seventeen! I like two lumps of sugar, Rosalind. But I thought at Eton they ought to be safe.'

'I suppose you are going home for Christmas, Roland? Shall you all be at home—Alice and her baby, and every one of you?' Rosalind breathed softly a little sigh. 'I don't like Christmas,' she said; 'it is all very well so long as you are quite young, but when you begin to get scattered and broken up——'

'My dear, I am far from being quite young, and I hope I have been scattered as much as anybody, and had every sort of thing to put up with, but I never grow too old or too dull for Christmas.'

'Ah, Aunt Sophy, you! But then you are not like anybody else; you take things so sweetly, even Rex and his impertinence.'

'Christmas is pleasant enough,' said young Hamerton. 'We are not so much scattered but that we can all get back, and I like it well enough. But,' he added, 'if one was wanted elsewhere, or could be of use, I am not such a fanatic for home but that I could cut it once in a way, if there was anything, don't you know, Mrs. Lennox, that one would call a duty: like licking a young cub into shape, or helping a—people you are fond of.' He blushed and laughed in the genial confusing glow of the fire, and cast a glance at Rosalind to see whether she noted his offer, and understood the motive of it. 'People one is fond of;' did she think that meant Aunt Sophy? There was a pleasant mingling of obscurity and light even when the cheerful flame leaped up and illuminated the room; something in its leaping and uncertainty

made a delightful shelter. You might almost stare at the people you were fond of without being betrayed as the cold daylight betrays you; and as for the heat which he felt suffuse his countenance, that was altogether unmarked in the genial glow of the cheerful fire.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

In an easy house, where punctuality is not rampant, the hour before dinner is pleasant to young people. The lady of the house is gone to dress. If she is beginning to feel the weight of years, she perhaps likes a nap before dinner, and in any case she will change her dress in a leisurely manner, and likes to have plenty of time; and the children have been carried off to the nursery that their toilette may be attended to, and no hurried call afterwards interferes with the tying of their sashes. The young lady of the house is not moved by either of these motives. Five minutes is enough for her, she thinks and says, and the room is so cozy and the half light so pleasant, and it is the hour for confidences. If she has another girl with her, they will drift into beginnings of the most intimate narrative, which must be finished in their own rooms after everybody has gone to bed: and if it is not a girl, but the other kind of companion, whose.

confidences are perhaps even more exciting. Rosalind knew what Roland Hamerton wanted vaguely; she was, on the surface, not displeased with his devotions. She had no intention of coming to so very decided a step as marriage, nor did she for a moment contemplate him as the lover whose absence surprised her. But he was nice enough; she liked well enough to talk to him. They were like brother and sister, she would have said. 'Roland—why I have known him all my life!' she would have exclaimed indignantly to anyone who had blamed her for 'encouraging' this poor young man. Indeed, Rosalind was so little perfect that she had already on several occasions defended herself in this way, and had not the slightest intention of accepting Roland, and yet allowed him to persuade her to linger and talk after Aunt Sophy had gone upstairs. This was quite unjustifiable, and a more high-minded young woman would not have done it. But poor Rosalind, though her life had been crossed by a strain of tragedy, and though her feelings were very deep and her experiences much out of the common, and her mind capable and ready to respond to very high claims, was yet not the ideal of a high-minded girl. It is to be hoped

that she was unacquainted with flirtation and above it; but yet she did not dislike—as long as she could skilfully keep him from anything definite in the way of a proposal—anything that should be compromising and uncomfortable to sit and listen to, the vague adoration which was implied in Hamerton's talk, and to feel that the poor young fellow was laying himself out to please her. It did please her—and it amused her, which was more. It was sport to her, though it might be death to him. She did not believe that there was anything sufficiently serious in young Hamerton's feelings or in his character to involve anything like death, and she judged, with some justice, that he preferred the happiness of the moment, even if it inspired him with false hopes, to the collapse of all those hopes which a more conscientious treatment would have brought about. Accordingly, Rosalind lingered in the pleasant twilight. She sent her aunt's butler, Saunders, away when he appeared to light the lamps.

'Not yet, Saunders,' she said; 'we like the firelight,' in a manner which made Roland's heart jump. It seemed to that deceived young man that nothing but a flattering response of

sentiment in her mind would have made Rosalind, like himself, enjoy the firelight.

'That was very sweet of you,' he said.

'What was sweet of me?' The undeserved praise awakened a compunction in her. 'There is nothing good in saying what is true. I do like talking by this light. Summer evenings are different—they are always a little sad; but the fire is cheerful, and it makes people confidential.'

'If I could think you wanted me to be confidential, Rosalind!'

'Oh, I do—everybody. I like to talk about not only the outside but what people are really thinking of. One hears so much of the outside—all the runs you have had, and how Captain Thornton jumps, and Miss Plympton keeps the lead.'

'If you imagine that I admire Miss Plympton——'

'I never thought anything of the kind. Why shouldn't you admire her? Though she is a little too fond of hunting, she is a nice girl, and I like her. And she is very pretty. You might do a great deal worse, Roland,' said Rosalind with maternal gravity, 'than admire Ethel Plympton. She is quite a nice girl, not only

when she is on horseback. But she would not have anything to say to you.'

'That is just as well,' said the young man, 'for hers is not the sort of shrine I should ever worship at. The kind of girl I like doesn't hunt, though she goes like a bird when it strikes her fancy. She is the queen at home; she makes a room like this into heaven. She makes a man feel that there's nothing in life half so sweet as to be by her, whatever she is doing. She would make hard work, and poverty, and all that sort of thing delightful. She is——'

'A dreadful piece of perfection!' said Rosalind, with a slightly embarrassed laugh. 'Don't you know nobody likes to have that sort of person held up to them? One always suspects girls that are too good. But I hope you sometimes think of other things than girls,' she added, with an air of delightful gravity and disapproval. 'I have wanted all this long time to know what you were going to do; and to find instead only that hyperbolical fiend, you know, that talks of nothing but ladies, is disappointing. What would you think of me,' Rosalind continued, turning upon him with still more imposing dignity, 'if I talked to you of nothing but gentlemen?'

'Rosalind! that's blasphemy to think of. Besides that, I should feel like getting behind a hedge and shooting all of them,' the young man cried.

'Yes, it is a sort of blasphemy; you would all think a girl a dreadful creature if she did so. But you think you are different, and that it doesn't matter; that is what everybody says; one law for men and one for women. But I for one will never give in to that. I want to know what you are going to do?'

'And suppose,' he cried, 'that I were to return the question, since you say there must not be one law for men and one for women. Rosalind, what are you going to do?'

'I?' she said, and looked at him with surprise. 'Alas! you know I have my work cut out for me, Roland. I have to bring up the children; they are very young, and it will be a great many years before they can do without me; there is no question about me. Perhaps it is a good thing to have your path quite clear before you, so that you can't make any mistake about it,' she added with a little sigh.

'But, Rosalind, that is completely out of the question, don't you know. Sacrifice yourself and all your life to those children—why, it would be barbarous; nobody would permit it.'

'I don't know,' said Rosalind, 'who has any right to interfere. You think Uncle John, perhaps? Uncle John would never think of anything so foolish. It is much less his business than it is mine; and you forget that I am old enough to judge for myself.'

'Rosalind, you can't really intend anything so dreadful! Oh, at present you are so young, you are all living in the same house, it does not make so much difference. But to sacrifice yourself, to give up your own life, to relinquish everything for a set of half——'

'You had better not make me angry,' she said. He had sprung to his feet and was pacing about in great excitement, his figure relieved against the blaze of the fire, while she sat in the shadow at one side, protected from the glow. 'What am I giving up? In the first place, I know nothing that I am giving up; and I confess that it amuses me, Roland, to see you so excited about my life. I should like to hear what you are going to do with your own.'

'Can't you understand?' he cried hastily and in confusion, 'that the one might—that the one might—involve perhaps——' And here the young man stopped and looked helplessly at her, not daring to risk what he had for the

uncertainty of something better. But it was very hard, when he had gone so far, to refrain.

'Might involve perhaps——? No, I can't understand,' Rosalind said, almost with unconcern. 'What I do understand is that you can't hunt for ever if you are going to be any good in life. And you don't even hunt as a man ought that means to make hunting his object. Do something, Roland, as if you meant it!—that is what I am always telling you.'

'And don't I always tell you the same thing, that I am no hero? I can't hold on to an object, as you say. What do you mean by an object? I want a happy life. I should like very well to be kind to people, and do my duty and all that, but as for an object, Rosalind! If you expect me to become a reformer or a philanthropist or anything of that sort, or make a great man of myself——'

Rosalind shook her head softly in her shadowed corner. 'I don't expect that,' she said, with a tone of regret. 'I might have done so perhaps at one time. At first one thinks every boy can do great things, but that is only for a little while, when one is without experience.'

'You see you don't think very much of my powers, for all you say,' he cried hastily, with

the tone of offence which the humblest can scarcely help assuming when taken at his own low estimate. Roland knew very well that he had no greatness in him, but to have the fact acknowledged with this regretful certainty was somewhat hard.

'That is quite a different matter,' said Rosalind. 'Only a few men (I see now) can be great. I know nobody of that kind,' she added, with once more that tone of regret, shaking her head. 'But you can always do something, not hang on amusing yourself, for that is all you ever do, so far as I can see.'

'What does your Uncle John do?' he cried; 'you have a great respect for him, and so have I; he is just the best man going. But what does he do? He loafs about, he goes out a great deal when he is in town, he goes to Scotland for the grouse, he goes to Homburg for his health, he comes down and sees you, and then back to London again. Oh, I think, that's all right, but if I am to take him for my example—and I don't know where I could find a better——'

'There is no likeness between your case and his. Uncle John is old, he has nothing particular given him to do; he is—well, he is Uncle

John. But you, Roland, you are just my age.'

'I'm good five years older, if not more.'

'What does that matter? You are my own age, or, according to all rules of comparison between boys and girls, a little younger than me. You have got to settle upon something. I am not like many people,' said Rosalind loftily; 'I don't say do this or do that, I only say for heaven's sake do something, Roland; don't be idle all your life.'

'I should not mind so much if you did say do this or do that. Tell me something to do, Rosalind, and I'll do it for your sake.'

'Oh! that is all folly; that belongs to fairy tales, a shawl that will go through a ring, or a little dog that will go into a nutshell, or a golden apple. They are all allegories, I suppose; the right thing, however, is to do what is right for the sake of what is right, and not because any one in particular tells you.'

'Shall I set up in chambers, and try to get briefs?' said Roland. 'But then I have enough to live on, and half the poor beggars at the bar haven't; and don't you think it would be taking an unfair advantage, when I can afford to do without and they can't, and when everybody

knows there isn't half enough business to keep all going? I ask you, Rosalind, do you think that would be fair?'

Here the monitress paused, and did not make her usual eager reply. 'I don't know that it is right to consider that sort of thing, Roland. You see it would be good for you to try for briefs, and then probably the other men who want them more might be—cleverer than you are.'

'Oh! very well,' cried Roland, who had taken a chair close to his adviser, springing up with natural indignation; 'if it is only by way of mortification, as a moral discipline, that you want me to go in for bar work——'

She put out her hand and laid it on his arm. 'Oh no! it would only be fair competition. Perhaps you would be cleverer than they—than *some* of them.'

'That's a very doubtful perhaps,' he cried with a laugh. But he was mollified and sat down again—the touch was very conciliatory. 'The truth is,' he said, getting hold of the hand which she withdrew very calmly after a moment, 'I am in no haste; and,' with timidity, 'the truth is, Rosalind, that I shall never do work anyhow by myself. If I had someone with me

to stir me up and keep me going, and if I knew it was for her interest as well as for my own——'

'You mean if you were to marry?' said Rosalind in a matter-of-fact tone, rising from her chair. 'I don't approve of a man who always has to be stirred up by his wife; but marry by all means, Roland, if you think that is the best way. Nobody would have the least objection; in short, I am sure all your best friends would like it, and I for one would give her the warmest welcome. But still I should prefer, you know, first to see you acting for yourself. Why, there is the quarter chiming, and I promised to let Saunders know when we went to dress. Aunt Sophy will be downstairs directly. Ring the bell, and let us run; we shall be late again. But the firelight is so pleasant.' She disappeared out of the room before she had done speaking, flying upstairs to escape the inevitable response, and left poor Roland tantalised and troubled, to meet the gloomy looks of Saunders, who reminded him that there was but twelve minutes and a half to dress in, and that Mrs. Lennox was very particular about the fish. Saunders took liberties with the younger visitors, and he too had known young Mr. Hamerton all his life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was not on that day but the next that Uncle John arrived so suddenly, bringing with him the friend whom he had picked up in Switzerland. This was a man still young, but not so young as Roland Hamerton, with looks a little worn, as of a man who had been, as he himself said, 'knocking about the world.' Perhaps indeed, they all thought afterwards, it was his dress which suggested this idea: for when he appeared dressed for the evening he turned out in reality a handsome man, with the very effective contrast of hair already grey waving upwards from a countenance not old enough to justify that change, and lighted up with dark eyes full of light and humour and life. The hair which had changed its colour so early had evidently been very dark in his youth, and Mrs. Lennox, who was always a little romantic, could not help suggesting, when Rosalind and she awaited the gentlemen in the drawing-room after dinner,

that Mr. Rivers might be an example of one of the favourite devices of fiction, the turning grey in a single night which is a possibility of which everyone has heard. 'I should not wonder if he has had a very remarkable life,' Aunt Sophy said. 'No doubt the servants and common people think him quite old, but when you look into it, it is a young face.' She took her chair by the fireside, and arranged all her little paraphernalia and unfolded her crewel-work, and had done quite half a leaf before she burst forth again, as if without any interval, 'though full of lines, and what you might call wrinkles if you did not know better! In my young days such a man would have been thought like Lara or Conrad, or one of Byron's other heroes. I don't know who to compare him to nowadays, for men of that sort are quite out of fashion; but he is quite a hero, I have a conviction, and saved John's life.'

'He says Uncle John was in no danger, and that he did nothing that a guide or a servant might not have done.'

'My dear,' said Aunt Sophy, 'that is what they always say; the more they do the less they will give in to it.'

'To call that old man like the Wandering

Jew a hero!' said little Sophy. 'Yes, I have seen him. I saw him arrive with Uncle John. He looked quite old and shabby; oh! not a bit like Lara, whose hair was jet-black, and who scowled when he looked at you.'

'Why, how can you tell, you little—— Rosalind, I am afraid Miss Robinson must be romantic, for Sophy knows—oh, a great deal more than a little girl ought to know.'

'It was in your room that I found "Lara,"' said Sophy, 'and the "Corsair" too; I have read them all. Oh, Miss Robinson never reads them; she reads little good books where everybody dies. I do not admire Mr. Rivers at all, and if Uncle John should intend to give him one of us because he has saved his life, I hope it will not be me.'

'Sophy, I shall send you to bed if you talk so. Give him one of you! I suppose you think you are in a fairy tale. Mr. Rivers would laugh if you were offered to him. He would think it was a curious reward.'

'He might like Rosalind better perhaps now, but Rosalind has gone off, Aunt Sophy. Ferriss says so. She is getting rather old. Don't you know she is in her twenty-first year?'

'Rosalind! why I never saw her looking

better in her life. Ferriss shall be sent away if she talks such impertinence. And she is just twenty! Going off! she is not the least going off: her complexion is just beautiful, and so fresh. I don't know what you mean, you or Ferriss either!' Mrs. Lennox cried. She had always a little inclination to believe what was suggested to her, and notwithstanding the complete assurance of her words, she followed Rosalind, who was moving about at the other end of the room, with eyes that were full of sudden alarm.

'And I am in my thirteenth year,' said Sophy; 'it sounds much better than to say only twelve. I shall improve, but Rosalind will not improve. If he were sensible, he would like me best.'

'Don't let your sister hear you talk such nonsense, Sophy; and remember that I forbid you to read the books in my room without asking me first. There are things that are very suitable for me, or even for Rosalind, but not for you. And what are you doing downstairs at this hour, Sophy? I did not remember the hour, but it is past your bedtime. Miss Robinson should not let you have so much of your own way.'

'It was because of Uncle John,' said Rosalind. 'What has she been saying about Lara and the Corsair? I could not hear, Saunders made so much noise with the tea. Here is your tea, Aunt Sophy, though you know Dr. Beaton says you ought not to take it after dinner, and that it keeps you from sleeping.'

'Dr. Beaton goes upon the new-fashioned rules, my dear,' said Mrs. Lennox. 'It never keeps me from my sleep; nothing does that, thank God. It is the young people, that are so delicate nowadays, that can't take this and that. I wonder if John has any news of Dr. Beaton. He had a great many fads like that about the tea, but he was very nice. What a comfort he was to poor Reginald, and took so much anxiety off Gra——'

'I declare,' Aunt Sophy cried, colouring and coughing, 'I have caught cold, though I have not been out of the house since the cold weather set in. My dear, I am so sorry,' she added in an undertone; 'I know I should not have said a word——'

'I have never been of that opinion,' said Rosalind, shaking her head sadly. 'I think you are all taking the wrong way.'

'For heaven's sake don't say a word, Rosa-

lind; with John coming in, and that little thing with ears as sharp——'

'It is me that have ears so sharp, Aunt Sophy? It is funny to hear you talk. You think I don't know anything, but I know everything. I know why Roland Hamerton is always coming here—and I know why Mr. Blake never comes, but only the old gentleman. And, Rosalind, you had better make up your mind and take someone, for you are getting quite *passée*, and you will soon be an old maid.'

'Sophy! if you insult your sister——'

'Do you think that is insulting me?' Rosalind said. 'I believe I shall be an old maid. That would suit me best, and it would be best for the children, who will want me for a long time.'

'My dear,' said Aunt Sophy solemnly, 'there are some things I will never consent to, and one of them is, a girl like you making such a sacrifice. That is what I will never give in to. Oh, go away, Sophy, you are a perfect nuisance! No, no, I will never give in to it. For such a sacrifice is always repented of. When the children grow up they will not be a bit grateful to you; they will never think it

was for them you did it. They will talk of you as if it was something laughable, and as if you could not help it. An old maid! Yes, it is intended for an insult, and I won't have it, any more than I will have you do it, Rosalind.'

'Oh, Uncle John,' cried the *enfant terrible*, 'there is Aunt Sophy with tears in her eyes because I said Rosalind was going to be an old maid. But it is not anything so very dreadful, is it? Why, Uncle John, you are an old maid.'

'I don't think Rosalind's prospects need distress you, Sophy,' said Uncle John. 'We can take care of her in any case. She will not want your valuable protection.'

'Oh, I was not thinking of myself, I don't mind at all,' said Sophy; 'but only she is getting rather old. Don't you see a great difference, Uncle John? She is in her twenty-first year.'

'I shall not lose hope till she has completed her thirty-third,' said Uncle John. 'You may run away, Sophy; you are young enough, fortunately, to be sent to bed.'

'I am in my thirteenth,' said Sophy, resisting every step of her way to the door, dancing in front of her uncle, who was directing her

towards it. When Sophy found that resistance was vain, she tried entreaty.

"Oh, Uncle John, don't send me away! Rosalind promised I should sit up to-night because you were coming home.'

'Then Rosalind must take the consequences,' said John Trevanion. All this time, the stranger had been standing silent, with a slight smile on his face, watching the whole party, and forming those unconscious conclusions with which we settle everybody's character and qualities when we come into a new place. This little skirmish was all in his favour, as helping him to a comprehension of the situation; the saucy child, the indulgent old aunt, the disapproving guardian, of whom alone Sophy was a little afraid, made a simple group enough. But when he turned to the subject of the little disturbance, he found in Rosalind's smile a curious light thrown upon the altercation. Was she in real danger of becoming an old maid? He thought her looking older than the child had said, a more gracious and perfect woman than was likely to be the subject of such a controversy; and he saw, by the eager look and unnecessary indignation of Hamerton, sufficient evidence that the fate of the elder sister was by no means

so certain as Sophy thought, and that at all events it was in her own hands. The young fellow had seemed to Mr. Rivers a pleasant young fellow enough in the after-dinner talk, but when he thus involuntarily coupled him with Rosalind, his opinion changed in a curious way. The young man was not good enough for her. A touch of indignation mingled, he could not tell why, in this conclusion; indignation against unconscious Roland, who aspired to one so much above him, and at the family who were so little aware that this girl was the only one of them the least remarkable. He smiled at himself afterwards for the earnestness with which he decided all this; settling the character of people whom he had never seen before in so unjustifiable a fashion. The little new world thus revealed to him had nothing very novel in it. The only interesting figure was the girl who was in her twenty-first year. She was good enough for the heroine of a romance of a higher order than any that could be involved in the mild passion of young Hamerton; and it pleased the stranger to think, from the unconcerned way in which Rosalind looked at her admirer, that she was evidently of this opinion too.

'Rosalind,' said John Trevanion, after the episode of Sophy was over, and she was safely dismissed to bed, 'will you show Rivers the miniatures? He is a tremendous authority on art.'

'Bring the little lamp then, Uncle John; there is not light enough. We are very proud of them ourselves, but if Mr. Rivers is a great authority, perhaps they will not please him so much.'

She took up the lamp herself as she spoke, and its light gave a soft illumination to her face looking up at him with a smile. It was certain that there was nothing so interesting here as she was. The miniatures! well, yes, they were not bad miniatures. He suggested a name as the painter of the best among them which pleased John Trevanion, and fixed the date in a way which fell in entirely with family traditions. Perhaps he would not have been so gracious had the exhibitor been less interesting. He took the lamp, which she had insisted upon holding, out of her hand when the inspection was done, and set it down upon a table which was at some distance from the fireside group. It was a writing-table, with indications upon it of the special ownership of

Rosalind. But this he could not be supposed to know. He thought it would be pleasant, however, to detain her here in conversation apart from the others who were so much more ordinary, for he was a man who liked to appropriate to himself the best of everything. And fortune favoured his endeavours. As he put down the lamp, his eye was caught by a photograph framed in a sort of shrine, which stood upon the table. The doors of the little shrine were open, and he stooped to look at the face within, at the sight of which he uttered an exclamation: 'I know that lady very well,' he said.

In a moment the courteous attention which Rosalind had been giving him turned into eager interest. She made a hurried step forward, clasped her hands together, and raised to him eyes which all at once had filled with sudden tragic meaning, anxiety, and suspense. If there had seemed to him before much more in her than in any of the others, there was a hundredfold more now. He seemed in a moment to have got at the very springs of her life. 'Oh, where, where have you seen her? When did you see her? Tell me all you know,' Rosalind cried. She turned to him, betraying in her

every gesture an excess of suddenly awakened feeling, and waited breathless, repeating her inquiry with her eyes.

'I was afraid, from the way in which her portrait was framed, that perhaps she was no longer——'

Rosalind gave a low cry, following the very movements of his lips with her eager eyes. Then she exclaimed: 'No, no, she must be living, or we should have heard.'

'What is it, Rosalind?' said John Trevanion, looking somewhat pale and anxious too, as he turned round to join them.

'Uncle John, Mr. Rivers knows her. He is going to tell me something.'

'But really I have nothing to tell, Miss Trevanion. I fear I have excited your interest on false pretences. It is such an interesting face—so beautiful in its way.'

'Oh yes, yes!'

'I met the lady last year in Spain. I cannot say that I know her, though I said so in the surprise of the moment. One could not see her without being struck with her appearance.'

'Oh yes, yes!' Rosalind cried again, eagerly, with her eyes demanding more.

'I met her several times. They were travelling out of the usual routes. I have exchanged a few chance words with her at the door of an hotel, or on the road, changing horses. I am sorry to say that was all, Miss Trevanion.'

'Last year; that is later than we have heard. And was she well? Was she very sad? Did she say anything? But oh, how could she say anything? for she could not tell,' cried Rosalind, her eyes filling, 'that you were coming here.'

'Hush, Rosalind. You say *they*, Rivers. She was not alone then?'

'Alone? oh no, there was a man with her. I never could,' said Rivers lightly, 'make out who he was—more like a son or brother than her husband. But to be sure, you who know the lady——'

He paused, entirely unable to account for the effect he had produced. Rosalind had grown as pale as marble; her mouth quivered, her hands trembled. She gave him the most pathetic reproachful look, as a woman might have done whom he had stabbed unawares, and, getting up quickly from his side, went away with an unsteady wavering movement, as if it was all her strength could do to get out of

the room. Hamerton rushed forward to open the door for her, but he was too late, and he too came to look at Rivers with inquiring indignant looks, as if to say, What have you done to her? 'What have I done—what is wrong, Trevanion? Have I said anything I ought not to have said?' Rivers cried.

The only answer John Trevanion made was to drop down upon the seat Rosalind had left, with a suppressed groan, and to cover his face with his hands.

CHAPTER XXX.

ROSALIND came down to breakfast next morning at the usual hour. She was the most important member of the household party, and everything depended upon her. Sometimes Aunt Sophy would have a little cold and did not appear. She considered it was her right to take her leisure in the mornings: but Rosalind was like the mother of the young ones, and indispensable. Rivers had come down early, which is an indiscreet thing for a stranger to do in a house with which he is unacquainted. He felt this when Rosalind came into the breakfast-room, and found Sophy, full of excitement and delight in thus taking the most important place, entertaining him. He thought Rosalind looked at him with a sort of question in her eyes, which she turned away the next moment; but afterwards put force upon herself and came up to him, bidding him good morning. He was so much interested that he felt he could follow the

processes in her mind ; that she reproved herself for her distaste to him, and said within herself, it is no fault of his. He did not yet at all know what he had done, but conjectured that the woman whose photograph was on Rosalind's table must be some dear friend or relation who had either made an imprudent marriage, or still worse, 'gone wrong.' It was the mention of the man who had been with her which had done all the mischief. He wished that he had bitten his tongue rather than make that unfortunate disclosure which evidently had plunged them into trouble. But then, how was he to know? As for Rosalind, her pain was increased and complicated by finding this new visitor with the children ; Sophy, her eyes dancing with excitement and pleasure, doing her utmost to entertain him. Sophy had that complete insensibility which is sometimes to be seen in a clever child whose satisfaction with her own cleverness overbalances all feeling. She was just as likely as not to have poured forth all the family history into this new-comer's ears ; to have let him know that mamma had gone away when papa died, and that nobody knew where she had gone. This gave Rosalind an additional alarm, but overcame her re-

pugnance to address the stranger who had brought news so painful, for it was better at once to check Sophy's revelations, whatever they might have been. That lively little person turned immediately upon her sister, knowing by instinct that her moment of importance was over. 'What a ghost you do look, Rosie!' she cried; 'you look as if you had been crying. Just as I do when Miss Robinson is nasty. But nobody can scold you except Aunt Sophy, and she never does; though, oh, I forgot, there is Uncle John.'

'Miss Robinson will be here before you are ready for her, Sophy,' said Rosalind. 'I fear I am a little late. Has she been giving you the *carte du pays*, Mr. Rivers? She is more fond of criticism than little girls should be.'

'I have had a few sketches of the neighbourhood,' he answered quickly, divining her fears. 'She is an excellent mimic, I should suppose, but it is rather a dangerous quality. If you take me off, Miss Sophy, as you take off the old ladies, I shall not enjoy it.'

Rosalind was relieved, he could see. She gave him a look that was almost grateful as she poured out his coffee, though he had done nothing to call forth her gratitude, any more

than he had done anything last night to occasion her sorrow. A stranger in a new household, of which he has heard nothing before, being introduced into it, is like an explorer in an unknown country; he does not know when he may find himself on forbidden ground, or intruding with religious mysteries. He began to talk of himself, which seemed the safest subject; it was one which he was not eager to launch upon, but yet which had come in handy on many previous occasions. His life had been full of adventures. There were a hundred things in it to tell, and it had delivered him from many a temporary embarrassment to introduce a chapter out of his varied experiences. He had shot elephants in Africa and tigers in India. He had been a war correspondent in the height of every military movement. 'I have been one of the rolling stones that gather no moss,' he said, 'though it is a kind of moss to have so many stories to tell. If the worst comes to the worst, I can go from house to house and amuse the children.' He did it so skilfully that Rosalind felt her agitation calmed. A man who could fall so easily into this narrative vein, and who was, apparently, so full of his own affairs, would not think

twice, she reflected, of such a trifling incident as that of last night. If she had judged more truly, she would perhaps have seen that the observer who thus dismissed the incident totally, with such an absence of all consciousness on the subject, was precisely the one most likely to have perceived, even if he did not understand how, that it was an incident of great importance. But Rosalind was not sufficiently learned in moral philosophy to have found out that.

Her feelings were not so carefully respected by Roland Hamerton, who would have given everything he had in the world to please her, but yet was not capable of perceiving what, in this matter at least, was the right way to do so. He had, though he was not one of the group round the writing-table, heard enough to understand what had happened on the previous night, solely, it would seem, by that strange law which prevails in human affairs, by which the obstacles of distance and the rules of acoustics are set aside as soon as something is going on which it is undesirable for the spectators to hear. In this way Hamerton had made out what it was; that Madam had been seen by the stranger, travelling with a man. Rosalind's sudden departure from the room, her face of anguish, the

speed with which she disappeared, and the confused looks of those whom she thus hastily left, roused young Hamerton to something like the agitation into which he had been plunged by the incidents of that evening, now so long past, when Madam Trevanion had appeared in the drawing-room at Highcourt, with that guilty witness of her nocturnal expedition clinging to her dress. He had been then almost beside himself with the painful nature of the discovery which he had himself made. What should he do? Keep the knowledge to himself, or communicate it to those who had a right to know. Roland was so unaccustomed to deal with difficulties of this kind that he had felt it profoundly, and at the end had held his peace rather because it was the easiest thing to do than from any better reason. It returned to his mind now, with all the original trouble and perception of a duty which he could not define. Here was Rosalind, the most perfect, the sweetest, the girl whom he loved, wasting her best affections upon a woman who was unworthy of them, standing by her, defending her, insisting even upon respect and honour for her—and suffering absolute anguish, such as he had seen last night, when the veil was lifted for

a moment from that mysterious darkness of intrigue and shame into which she had disappeared. If she only knew and could be convinced that Madam had been unworthy all the time, would not that deliver her? Roland thought that he was able to prove this; he had never wavered in his own judgment. All his admiration and regard for Mrs. Trevanion had been killed at a blow by the shock he had received, by what he had seen. He could not bear to think that such a woman should retain Rosalind's affection. And he thought he had it in his power to convince Rosalind, to make her see everything in its true light. This conviction was not come to without pain. The idea of opening such a subject at all, of speaking of what was impure and vile in Rosalind's hearing, of looking in her eyes which knew no evil, and telling her of such a tale, was terrible to the young man. But yet he thought it ought to be done. Certainly it ought to be. Had she seen what he had seen, did she know what he knew, she would give up at once that championship which she had held so warmly. It had always been told him that though men might forgive a woman who had fallen, no woman ever did so; and how must an innocent girl,

ignorant, incredulous of all evil, feel towards one who had thus sinned? What could she do but flee from her in terror, in horror, with a condemnation which would be all the more relentless, remorseless, from her own incapacity to understand either the sin or the temptation? But no doubt it would be a terrible shock to Rosalind. This was the only thing that held him back. It would be a blow which would shake the very foundations of her being: for she could not suspect, she could not even know of what Madam was suspected, or she would never stand by her so. Now, however, that her peace had been disturbed by this chance incident, there was a favourable opportunity for Roland. It was his duty now, he thought, to strike to the root of her fallacy. It was better for her that she should be entirely undeceived.

Thinking about this, turning it over and over in his mind, had cost him almost his night's rest—not altogether. If the world itself had gone to pieces, Roland would still have got a few hours' repose. He allowed to himself that he had got a few hours, but as a matter of fact he had been thinking of this the last thing when he went to sleep, and it was the first thing that

occurred to him when he awoke. The frost had given way, but he said to himself that he would not hunt that day. He would go on to the Elms; he would manage somehow to see Rosalind by herself, and he would have it out. If in her pain her heart was softened, and she was disposed to turn to him for sympathy, then he could have it all out, and so get a little advantage out of his anxiety for her good. Indeed, she had snubbed him yesterday and made belief that she did not know who it was he wanted for his companion and guide; but that was nothing. Girls did so, he had often heard—staved off a proposal when they knew it was coming, even though they did not mean to reject it when it came. That was nothing. But when she was in trouble, when her heart was moved, who could say that she would not cling to him for sympathy? And there was nobody that could sympathise with her as he could. He pictured to himself how he would draw her close to him, and bid her cry as much as she liked on his faithful bosom. That faithful bosom heaved with a delicious throb. He would not mind her crying; she might cry as long as she pleased—there.

And, as it happened, by a chance which

seemed to Roland providential, he found Rosalind alone when he entered the drawing-room at the Elms. Mrs. Lennox had taken Sophy with her in the carriage to the dentist at Clifton. Roland felt a certain satisfaction in knowing that Sophy—that little imp of mischief—was going to have a tooth drawn. The gentlemen were out and Miss Rosalind was alone. Roland could have hugged Saunders for this information. He gave him a sovereign, which pleased the worthy man much better, and flew three steps at a time upstairs. Rosalind was seated by her writing-table. It subdued him at once to see her attitude. She had been crying already; she had not waited for the faithful bosom. And he thought that when she was disturbed by the opening of the door, she had closed the little gates of that carved shrine in which Madam's picture dwelt, otherwise she did not move when she saw who her visitor was, but nodded to him, with relief, he thought. 'Is it you, Roland? I thought you were sure to be out to-day,' she said.

'No, I didn't go out; I hadn't the heart.' He came and sat down by her where she had made Rivers sit the previous night. She looked up at him with a little surprise.

'Hadn't the heart! What is the matter, Roland? Have you had bad news?—is there anything wrong at home?'

'No, nothing about my people. Rosalind, I haven't slept a wink all night' (which was exaggeration, the reader knows) 'thinking about you.'

'About me!' She smiled, then blushed a little, and then made an attempt to recover the composure with which yesterday she had so calmly ignored his attempts at love making. 'I don't see why you should lose your sleep about me. Was it a little tooth-ache—perhaps neuralgia? I know you are sometimes subject to that.'

'Rosalind,' he said solemnly, 'you must not laugh at me to-day. It is nothing to laugh at. I could not help hearing what that fellow said last night.'

The colour ebbed away out of Rosalind's face, but not the courage. 'Yes,' she said, half affirmation, half interrogation, 'that he had met mamma abroad.'

'I can't bear to hear you call her mamma. And it almost killed you to hear what he said.'

She did not make any attempt to defend herself, but grew whiter, as if she would faint,

and her mouth quivered again. 'Well,' she said, 'I do not deny that—that I was startled. Her dear name—that alone is enough to agitate me; and to hear of her like that without warning in a moment!'

The tears rose to her eyes, but she still looked him in the face, though she scarcely saw him through that mist.

'Well,' she said again—she took some time to master herself before she was able to speak—'if I did feel it very much that was not wonderful; I was taken by surprise. For the first moment, just in the confusion, knowing what wickedness people think, I—I—lost heart altogether. It was too dreadful and miserable, but I was not very well, I suppose. I am not going to shirk it at all, Roland. She was travelling with a gentleman—well, and what then?'

'Oh, Rosalind!' he cried, with a sort of horror; 'after that, can you stand up for her still?'

'I don't know what there is to stand up for. My mother is not a girl like me. She is the best judge of what is right. When I had time to think, that became a matter of course, as plain as daylight.'

'And you don't mind?' he said.

She turned upon him something of the same look which she had cast on Rivers; a look of anguish and pathos—reproachful, yet with a sort of tremulous smile.

'Oh, Rosalind,' he cried, 'I can't bear to look at you like that; I can't bear to see you so deceived. I'll tell you what I saw myself. Nobody was more fond of Madam than I; I'd have gone to the stake for her. But that night—that night, if you remember, when the thorn was hanging to her dress—I had gone away into the conservatory because I couldn't bear to hear your father going on. Rosalind, just hear out what I have got to say. And there I saw—oh saw! with my own eyes—I saw her standing—with a man. I saw them part, he going away into the shadow of the shrubbery, she—— Rosalind!'

She had risen up, and stood towering (as he felt) over him, as if she had grown to double her height in a moment. 'Do you tell me this,' she said, steadying herself with an effort, moistening her lips between her words to be able to speak, 'do you tell me this to make me love you, or hate you?'

'Rosalind, to undeceive you; that you may know the truth.'

'Go away!' she said. She pointed with her arm to the door. 'Go away! It is not the truth. If it was the truth I should never forgive you—I should never speak to you again. But it is not the truth. Go away!'

'Rosalind!'

'Must I put you out,' she cried, in the passion which now and then overcame her, stamping her foot upon the floor, 'with my own hands?'

Alas! he carried the faithful bosom which was of no use to her to cry upon, but which throbbed with pain and trouble all the same, out of doors. He was utterly cowed and subdued, not understanding her, nor himself, nor what had happened. It was the truth; she might deny it as she pleased. He had meant it for the best. But now he had done for himself, that was evident. And perhaps, after all, he was a cad to tell.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ARTHUR RIVERS had come to Clifton not to visit a new friend, but to see his own family who lived there. They were not perhaps quite on the same level as the Trevanions, and Mrs. Lennox who did not know them. And so it came to pass that after the few days which he passed at the Elms, and in which he did everything he could to obliterate the recollection of that first unfortunate reference on the night of his arrival, he was for some time in the neighbourhood without seeing much of them. To the mistress of the house at least this was agreeable, and a relief. She had indeed taken so strong a step as to remonstrate with her brother on the subject.

'I am not quite sure that it was judicious to bring a man like that, so amusing and nice to talk to, into the company of a girl like Rosalind, without knowing who his people were,' Mrs. Lennox said. 'I don't like making a fuss,

but it was not judicious—not quite judicious,' she added, faltering a little as she felt the influence of John's eyes.

'What does it matter to us who his people are?' said John Trevanion (which was so like a man, Mrs. Lennox said to herself). 'He is himself a capital fellow, and I am under obligations to him; and as for Rosalind—Rosalind is not likely to be fascinated by a man of that age, and besides, if there had ever been any chance of that, he completely put his foot into it the first night.'

'Do you think so?' said Aunt Sophy, doubtfully. 'Now you know you all laugh at Mrs. Malaprop and her sayings. But I have always thought there was a great deal of good sense in one of them, and that is when she speaks of people beginning with a little aversion. Oh, you may smile, but it's true. It is far better than being indifferent. Rosalind will think a great deal more of the man because he made her very angry. And as he showed after that he could make himself exceedingly pleasant.'

'He did not make her angry.'

'Oh, I thought you said he did. Something about poor Grace—that he met her and

thought badly of her, or something. I shall take an opportunity when he calls to question him myself. I dare say he will tell me more.'

'Don't, unless you wish to distress me very much, Sophy; I would rather not hear anything about her, nor take him into our family secrets.'

'Do you think not, John? Oh, of course I will do nothing to displease you. Perhaps, on the whole, indeed, it will be better not to have him come here any more on account of Rosalind, for of course his people——

'Who are his people?—he is a man of education himself. I don't see why we should take it to heart whatever his people may be.'

'Oh, well, there is a brother a doctor, I believe, and somebody who is a schoolmaster, and the mother and sister, who live in—quite a little out-of-the-way place.'

'I thought you must mean a greengrocer,' said John. 'Let him alone, Sophy, that is the best way; everything of the kind is best left to nature. I shall be very happy to see him if he comes, and I will not break my heart if he doesn't come. It is always most easy, and generally best, to let things alone.'

'Well, if you think so, John.' There was

a little hesitation in Mrs. Lennox's tone, but it was not in her to enforce a contrary view. And as it was a point he insisted upon that nothing should be said to Rosalind on the subject, that too was complied with. It was not indeed a subject on which Mrs. Lennox desired to tackle Rosalind. She had herself the greatest difficulty in refraining from all discussion of poor Grace, but she never cared to discuss her with Rosalind, who maintained Mrs. Trevanion's cause with an impetuosity which confused all her aunt's ideas. She could not hold her own opinion against professions of faith so strenuously made; and yet she did hold it in a wavering way, yielding to Rosalind's vehemence for the moment, only to resume her own convictions with much shaking of her head when she was by herself. It was difficult for her to maintain her first opinion on the subject of Mr. Rivers and his people. When he called he made himself so agreeable that Mrs. Lennox could not restrain the invitation that rushed to her lips. 'John will be so sorry that he has missed you; won't you come and dine with us on Saturday?' she said, before she could remember that it was not desirable he should be encouraged to come to the house.

And Rosalind had been so grateful to him for never returning to the subject of the photograph or seeming to remember anything about it, that his natural attraction was rather increased than diminished to her by that incident. There were few men in the neighbourhood who talked like Mr. Rivers. He knew everybody, he had been everywhere. Sometimes when he talked of the beautiful places he had seen, Rosalind was moved by a thrill of expectation; she waited almost breathless for a mention of Spain for something that would recall to him the interrupted conversation of the first evening. But he kept religiously apart from every mention of Spain. He passed by the writing-table upon which the shrine in which the portrait was enclosed stood, now always shut, without so much as a glance which betrayed any association with it, any recollection. Thank heaven he had forgotten all that, it had passed from his mind as a mere trivial accident without importance. She was satisfied, yet disappointed too. But it never occurred to Rosalind that this scrupulous silence meant that Rivers had by no means forgotten; and he was instantly conscious that the portrait was covered; he lost nothing of these details. Though the story had faded

out of the recollection of the Clifton people, to whom it had never been well known, he did not fail to discover something of the facts of the case; and perhaps it was the existence of a mystery which led him back to the Elms, and induced him to accept Mrs. Lennox's invitation to come on Saturday. This fact lessened the distance between the beautiful young Miss Trevanion, and the man whose 'people' were not at all on the Highcourt level. He had thought at first that it would be his best policy to take himself away and see as little as might be of Rosalind. But when he heard that there was 'some story about the mother,' he ceased to feel the necessity for so much self-denial. When there is a story about a mother it does the daughter harm socially; and Rivers was not specially diffident about his own personal claims. The disadvantage on his side of having 'people' who were not in society was neutralised on hers by having a mother who had been talked of. Neither of these facts harmed the individual. He, Arthur Rivers, was not less of a personage in his own right because his mother lived in a small street in Clifton and was nobody, and she, Rosalind Trevanion, was not less delightful because her mother had been breathed

upon by scandal; but the drawback on her side brought them upon something like an equality, and did away with the drawback on his which was not so great a drawback. This at least was how he reasoned. He did not even know that the lady about whom there was a story was not Rosalind's mother, and he could not make up his mind whether it was possible that the lady whom he had recognised could be that mother. But after he had turned the whole matter over in his mind, after a week had elapsed, and he had considered it from every point of view, he went over to the Elms and called. This was the result of his thoughts.

It must not be concluded from these reflections that he had fallen in love at first sight according to a mode which has gone out of fashion. He had not perhaps gone so far as that. He was a man of his time, and took no such plunges into the unseen. But Rosalind Trevanion had somewhat suddenly detached herself from all other images when he came, after years of wandering, into the kind of easy acquaintance with her which is produced by living, even if it is only from Saturday to Monday, in the same house. He had met all kinds of women of the world, old and young,

some of them quite young, younger than Rosalind, in the spheres which he had frequented most: but not any that were so fresh, so maidenly, so full of charm, and yet so little artificial; no child but a woman, and yet without a touch of that knowledge which stains the thoughts. This was what had caught his attention amid the simple but conventional circumstances that surrounded her. Innocence is sometimes a little silly; or so at least this man of the world thought. But Rosalind understood as quickly, and had as much intelligence in her eyes as any of his former acquaintances, and yet was as entirely without any evil knowledge as a child. It had startled him strangely to meet that look of hers, so pathetic, so reproachful, though he did not know why. Something deeper still was in that look, it was the look an angel might have given to one who drew his attention to a guilt or a misery from which he could give no deliverance. The shame of the discovery, the anguish of it, the regret and heart-breaking pity, all these shone in Rosalind's eyes. He had never been able to forget that look. And he could not get her out of his mind, do what he would. No, it was not falling in love; for he was quite cool

and able to think over the question whether, as she was much younger, better off, and of more important connections than himself, he had not better go away and see her no more. He took this fully into consideration from every point of view, reflecting that the impression made upon him was slight as yet and might be wiped out, whereas if he remained at Clifton and visited the Elms, it might become more serious and lead him further than it would be prudent to go. But if there was a story about the mother —if it was possible that the mother might be wandering over Europe in the equivocal company of some adventurer—this was an argument which might prevent any young dukes from 'coming forward,' and might make a man who was not a duke, nor of any lofty lineage, more likely to be received on his own standing.

This course of thought took him some time, as we have said, during which his mother, a simple woman who was very proud of him, could not think why Arthur should be so slow to keep up with 'his friends the Trevanions,' who ranked among the county people and were quite out of her humble range. She said to her daughter that it was silly of Arthur. 'He thinks nothing of them because he is used to

the very first society both in London and abroad,' she said. 'But he ought to remember that Clifton is different, and they are quite the best people here.' 'Why don't you go and see your fine friends?' she said to her son. 'Oh no, Arthur, I am not foolish—I don't expect Mrs. Lennox and Miss Trevanion to visit me and the girls—I think myself just as good in my way, but of course there is a difference; not for you though, Arthur, who have met the Prince of Wales and know everybody—I think it is your duty to keep them up.' At this he laughed, saying nothing: but thought all the more; and at last at the end of a week he came round to his mother's opinion, and made up his mind that, if not his duty, it was at least a reasonable and not imprudent indulgence. And upon this argument he called, and was invited on the spot by Mrs. Lennox, who had just been saying how imprudent it was of John to have brought him to the house, to come and dine on Saturday. Thus things which have never appeared possible come about.

He went on Saturday and dined, and as a bitter frost had come on, and all the higher world of the neighbourhood was coming on Monday to the pond near the Elms to skate, if

the frost held, was invited for that too; and went, and was introduced to a great many people, and made himself quite a reputation before the day was over. There never had been a more successful *début* in society. And a 'Times' Correspondent! Nobody cared who was his father or what his family; he had enough in himself to gain admittance everywhere. And he had a distinguished look with his grey hair and bright eyes, far more than the ordinary man of his age who is beginning to get rusty, or perhaps bald, which is not becoming. Mr. Rivers's hair was abundant and full of curl; there was no sign of age in his handsome face and vigorous figure, which made the whiteness of his locks *piquant*. Indeed there was no one about, none of the great county gentlemen, who looked so imposing. Rosalind, half afraid of him, half drawn towards him, because, notwithstanding the dreadful disclosure he had made, he had admired and remembered the woman whom she loved, and more than half grateful to him for never having touched on the subject again, was half proud now of the notice he attracted, and because he more or less belonged to her party. She was pleased that he should keep by her side and

manifestly devote himself to her. Thus it happened that she ceased to ask herself the question which has been referred to in previous pages, and began to think that the novels were right, after all, and that the commodity in which they dealt so largely did fall to every woman's lot.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ROLAND HAMERTON was not one of those on whom Mr. Rivers made this favourable impression. He would fain indeed have found something against him, something which would have justified him in stigmatising as a 'cad,' or setting down as full of conceit, the new-comer about whom everybody was infatuated. Roland was not shabby enough to make capital out of the lowliness of Arthur's connections, though the temptation to do so crossed his mind more than once: but the young man was a gentleman, and could not, even in all the heat of rivalship, make use of such an argument. There was indeed nothing to be said against the man whom Roland felt, with a pang, to be so much more interesting than himself; a man who knew when to hold his tongue as well as when to speak; who would never have gone and done so ridiculous a thing as he (Hamerton) had done, trying to convince a girl against her

will and to shake her partisan devotion. The young fellow perceived now what a mad idea this had been, but unfortunately it is not till after the event that a simple mind learns such a lesson. Rivers, who was older, had no doubt found it out by experience, or else he had a superior instinct and was a better diplomatist, or perhaps thought less of the consequences involved. It wounded Roland to think of the girl he loved as associated in any way with a woman who was under a stain. He could not bear to think that her robe of whiteness should ever touch the garments of one who was sullied. But afterwards, when he came to think, he saw how foolish he had been. Perhaps Rosalind felt, though she could not allow it, everything he had ventured to suggest: but naturally when it was said to her brutally by an outsider, she would flare up. Roland could remember, even in his own limited experience, corresponding instances. He saw the defects of the members of his own family clearly enough, but if anyone else ventured to point them out! Yes, yes, he had been a fool, and he had met with the fate he deserved. Rosalind had said conditionally that if it were true she would never speak to him again, but that it was not true. She had

thus left for herself a way of escape. He knew very well that it was all truth he had said, but he was glad enough to take advantage of her wilful scepticism when he perceived that it afforded a way of escape from the sentence of excommunication otherwise to be pronounced against him. He stayed away from the Elms for a time, which was also the time of the frost, when there was nothing to be done; but ventured on the third or fourth day to the pond to skate, and was invited by Mrs. Lennox, as was natural, to stay and dine, which he accepted eagerly when he perceived that Rosalind, though cold, was not inexorable. She said very little to him for that evening or many evenings after, but still she did not carry out her threat of never speaking to him again. But when he met the other, as he now did perpetually, it was not in human nature to preserve an unbroken amiability. He let Rivers see by many a silent indication that he hated him, and found him in his way. He became disagreeable, poor boy, by dint of rivalry and the galling sense he had of the advantages possessed by the new-comer. He would go so far as to sneer at travellers' tales, and hint a doubt that there might be another version of such

and such an incident. When he had been guilty of suggestions of this kind he was overpowered with shame. But it is very hard to be generous to a man who has the better of you in every way; who is handsome, cleverer, even taller; can talk far better, can amuse people whom you only bore; and when you attempt to argue can turn you, alas! inside out with a touch of his finger. The prudent thing for Roland to have done would have been to abstain from any comparison of himself with his accomplished adversary; but he was not wise enough to do this: few, very few, young men are so wise. He was always presenting his injured, offended, clouded face, by the side of the fine features and serene, secure look of the elder man, who was thus able to contemplate him, and, worse, to present him to others, in the aspect of a mad youngster, irritable and unreasoning. Roland was acutely, painfully aware that this was not his character at all, and yet that he had the appearance of it, and that Rosalind no doubt must consider him so. The union of pain, resentment, indignation at the thought of such injustice, with a sense that it scarcely was injustice, and that he was doing everything to justify it, made the poor young

fellow as miserable as can be imagined. He did not deserve to be so looked upon, and yet he did deserve it; and Rivers was an intolerable prig and tyrant, using a giant's strength villainously as a giant, yet in a way which was too cunning to afford any opening for reproach. He could have wept in his sense of the intolerable, and yet he had not a word to say. Was there ever a position more difficult to bear? And poor Roland felt that he had lost ground in every way. Ever since that unlucky interference of his and disclosure of his private information (which he saw now was the silliest thing that could have been done) there was no lingering in the firelight, no *tête-à-tête* ever accorded to him. When Mrs. Lennox went to dress for dinner, Rosalind went too. After a while she ceased to show her displeasure, and talked to him as usual when they met in the presence of the family: but he saw her by herself no more. He could not make out indeed whether *that* fellow was ever admitted to any such privilege: but it certainly was extended to himself no more.

The neighbourhood began to take a great interest in the Elms when this rivalship first became apparent, which it need not have done

had Hamerton shown any command of himself; for Mr. Rivers was perfectly well bred, and there is nothing in which distinguished manners show more plainly than in the way by which, in the first stage of a love-making, a man can secure the object of his devotion from all remark. There can be no better test of a high-bred gentleman; and though he was only the son of a humble family with no pretension to be considered county people, he answered admirably to it. Rosalind was herself conscious of the special homage he paid her, but no one else would have been at all the wiser had it not been for the ridiculous jealousy of Roland, who could not contain himself in Rivers's presence.

The position of Rosalind between these two men was a little different from the ordinary ideal. The right thing to have done in her circumstances would have been, had she 'felt a preference,' as it was expressed in the eighteenth century, to have with all the delicacy and firmness proper to maidenhood so discouraged and put down the one who was not preferred as to have left him no excuse for persisting in his vain pretensions. If she had no preference she ought to have gently but decidedly made

both aware that their homage was vain. As for taking any pleasure in it, if she did not intend in either case to recompense it—that would not be thought of for a moment. But Rosalind, though she had come in contact with so much that was serious in life, and had so many of its gravest duties to perform, was yet so young and so natural as not to be at all superior to the pleasure of being sought. She liked it, though her historian does not know how to make the admission. No doubt, had she been accused of such a sentiment, she would have denied it hotly and even with some indignation, not being at all in the habit of investigating the phenomena of her own mind; but yet she did not in her heart dislike to feel that she was of the first importance to more than one beholder, and that her presence or absence made a difference in the aspect of the world to two men. A sense of being approved, admired, thought much of, is always agreeable. Even when the sentiment does not go the length of love, there is a certain moral support in the consciousness in a girl's mind that she embodies to someone the best things in humankind. When the highest instincts of love touch the heart it becomes a sort of profanity indeed

to think of any but the one who has awakened that divine inspiration; but in the earlier stages, before any sentiment has become definite, or her thoughts begun to contemplate any final decision, there is a secret gratification in the mere consciousness. It may not be an elevated feeling, but it is a true one. She is pleased; there is a certain elation in her veins in spite of herself. Mr. Ruskin says that a good girl should have seven suitors at least, all ready to do impossibilities in her service, among whom she should choose, but not too soon, letting each have a chance. Perhaps in the present state of statistics this is somewhat impracticable, and it may perhaps be doubted whether the adoration of these seven gentlemen would be a very safe moral atmosphere for the young lady. It also goes rather against the other rule, which insists on a girl falling in love as well as her lover; that is to say, making her selection by chance, by impulse, and not by proof of the worthiest. But at least it is a high authority in favour of a plurality of suitors, and might be adduced by the offenders in such cases as a proof that their otherwise not quite excusable satisfaction in the devotion of more than one was almost justifiable. The dogma had not

been given forth in Rosalind's day, and she was not aware that she had any excuse at all, but blushed for herself if ever she was momentarily conscious of so improper a sentiment. She blushed, and then she withdrew from the outside world in which these two looked at her with looks so different from those they directed towards any other, and thought of neither of them. On such occasions she would return to her room with a vague cloud of incense breathing about her, a sort of faint atmosphere of flattered and happy sentiment in her mind, or sit down in the firelight in the drawing-room which Aunt Sophy had left, and think. About whom? Oh, about no one! she would have said—about a pair of beautiful eyes which were like Johnny's, and which seemed to follow and gaze at her with a rapture of love and devotion still more wonderful to behold. This image was so abstract that it escaped all the drawbacks of fact. There was nothing to detract from it, no test of reality to judge it by. Sometimes she found it impossible not to laugh at Roland; sometimes she disagreed violently with something Mr. Rivers said; but she never quarrelled with the visionary lover, who had appeared out of the unknown merely to make

an appeal to her, as it seemed, to frustrate her affections, to bid her wait until he should reveal himself. Would he come again? Should she ever see him again? All this was unreal in the last degree. But so is everything in a young mind at such a moment, when nature plays with the first approaches of fate.

'Mr. Rivers seems to be staying a long time in Clifton,' Mrs. Lennox said one evening, disturbing Rosalind out of these dreams. Roland was in the room, though she could scarcely see him, and Rosalind had been guilty of what she herself felt to be the audacity of thinking of her unknown lover in the very presence of this visible and real one. She had been sitting very quiet, drawing back out of the light, while a gentle hum of talk went on on the other side of the fire. The windows, with the twilight stars looking in, and the bare boughs of the trees waving across, formed the background, and Mrs. Lennox, relieved against one of those windows, was the centre of the warmly but uncertainly lighted room. Hamerton sat behind, responding vaguely, and intent upon the shadowed corner in which Rosalind was. 'How can he be spared, I wonder, out of his newspaper work?' said the placid voice. 'I have always heard it

was a dreadful drudgery, and that you had to be up all night, and never got any rest.'

'He is not one of the principal ones, perhaps,' Roland replied.

'Oh, he must be a principal! John would not have brought a man here who is nothing particular to begin with, if he had not been a sort of a personage in his way.'

'Well then, perhaps he is too much of a principal,' said Hamerton; 'perhaps it is only the secondary people that are always on duty: and this, you know, is what they call the silly time of the year,'

'I never knew much about newspaper people,' said Aunt Sophy in her comfortable voice, something like a cat purring by the warm glow of the fire. 'We did not think much of them in my time. Indeed there are a great many people who are quite important in society nowadays that were never thought of in my time. I never knew how important a newspaper editor was till I read that novel of Mr. Trollope's—do you remember which one it is, Rosalind?—Where there is Tom something or other who is the editor of the "Jupiter." That was said to mean the "Times." But if Mr. Rivers is so important as that, how does he

manage to stay so long at Clifton, where I am sure there is nothing going on?'

'Sometimes,' said Hamerton, after a pause, 'there are things going on which are more important than a man's business, though perhaps they don't show.'

There was something in the tone with which he said this which called Rosalind out of her dreams. She had heard them talking before, but not with any interest; now she was roused, though she could scarcely tell why.

'That is all very well for you, Roland, who have no business. Oh! I know you're a barrister, but as you never did anything at the bar—— A man when he has money of his own and does not live by his profession can please himself, I suppose; but when his profession is all he has, nothing, you know, ought to be more important than that. And if his family keep him from his work, it is not right. A mother ought to know better, and even a sister; they ought not to keep him, if it is they who are keeping him. Now, do you think, putting yourself in their place, that it is right?'

'I can't fancy myself in the place of Rivers's mother or sister,' said Roland with a laugh.

'Oh, but I can, quite! and I could not do such a thing; for my own pleasure injure him in his career! Oh no, no!'

'And if it was anyone else,' said Aunt Sophy, 'I do think it would be nearly criminal. If it was a girl, for instance. Girls are the most thoughtless creatures on the face of the earth; they don't understand such things; they don't really know. I suppose, never having had anything to do themselves, they don't understand. But if a girl should have so little feeling and play with a man, and keep him from his work, when perhaps it may be ruinous to him,' said Mrs. Lennox. When she was not contradicted, she could express herself with some force, though if once diverted from her course she had little strength to stand against opposition. 'I cannot say less than that it would be criminal,' she said.

'Is anyone keeping Mr. Rivers from his work?' said Rosalind suddenly out of her corner, which made Mrs. Lennox start.

'Dear me, are you there, Rosalind? I thought you had gone away' (which we fear was not quite true). 'Keeping Mr. Rivers, did you say? I am sure, my dear, I don't know. I think something must be detaining him. I

am sure he did not mean to stay so long when he first came here.'

'But perhaps he knows best himself, Aunt Sophy, don't you think?' Rosalind said, rising up with youthful severity and coming forward into the ruddy light.

'Oh yes, my dear, I have no doubt he does,' Mrs. Lennox said, faltering; 'I was only saying——'

'You were blaming someone; you were saying it was his mother's fault, or perhaps some girl's fault. I think he is likely to know much better than any girl; it must be his own fault if he is wasting his time. I shouldn't think he was wasting his time. He looks as if he knew very well what he was about—better than a girl, who, as you were saying, seldom has anything to do.'

'Dear me, Rosalind, I did not know you were listening so closely. Yes, to be sure he must know best. You know, Roland, gossip is a thing that she cannot abide. And she knows you and I have been gossiping about our neighbours. It is not so; it is really because I take a great interest; and you too, Roland.'

'Oh no, I don't take any interest,' cried Hamerton hastily; 'it was simple gossip on

my part. If he were to lose ever so much time or money, or anything else, I shouldn't care!'

'It is of no consequence to any of us,' Rosalind said. 'I should think Mr. Rivers did what he pleased, without minding much what people say. And as for throwing the blame upon a girl! What could a girl have to do with it?' She stood still for a moment, holding out her hands in a sort of indignant appeal, and then turned to leave the room, taking no notice of the apologetic outburst from her aunt.

'I am sure I was not blaming any girl, Rosalind. I was only saying, if it was a girl; but to be sure when one thinks of it, a girl couldn't have anything to do with it,' came somewhat tremulously from Aunt Sophy's lips. Miss Trevanion took no notice of this, but went away through the partial darkness, holding her head high. She had been awakened for the moment out of her dreams. The two who were left behind felt guilty, and drew together for mutual support.

'She thinks I mean her,' said Mrs. Lennox; 'she thinks I was talking at her. Now I never talk at people, Roland, and really, when I began, I did think she had gone away. You

don't suppose I ever meant it was Rosalind?' she cried.

'But it *is* Rosalind,' said young Hamerton. 'I can't be deceived about it. We are both in the same box. She might make up her mind and put us out of our misery. No, I don't want to be put out of my misery. I'd rather wait on and try, and think there was a little hope.'

'There must be hope,' cried Mrs. Lennox; 'of course there is hope. Is it rational that she should care for a stranger with grey hair, and old enough to be her father, instead of you whom she has known all her life? Oh no, Roland, it is not possible. And even if it were, I should object, you may be sure. It may be fine to be a "Times" correspondent, but what could he settle upon her? You may be sure he could settle nothing upon her. He has his mother and sister to think of. And then he is not like a man with money, he has only what he works for; there is not much in that that could be satisfactory to a girl's friends. No, no, I will never give my consent to it; I promise you that.'

Roland shook his head notwithstanding. But he still took a little comfort from what

Aunt Sophy said. Such words always afford a grain of consolation; though he knew that she was not capable of holding by them in face of any opposition, still there was a certain support even in hearing them said. But he shook his head. 'If she liked him best I would not stand in their way,' he said; 'that is the only thing to be guided by. Thank you very much, Mrs. Lennox; you are my only comfort. But still, you know, if she likes him best—— I don't think much of the grey hair and all that,' he added somewhat tremulously. 'I'm not the man he is, in spite of his grey hair. And girls are just as likely as not to like that best,' said the honest young fellow. 'I don't entertain any delusion on the subject. I would not stand in her way, not a moment, if she likes him best.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ROSALIND herself was much aroused by this discussion. She thought it unjust and cruel. She had done nothing to call for such a reproach. She had not attempted to make Mr. Rivers love her, nor to keep him from his work, nor to interfere in any way with his movements. She had even avoided him at the first; almost disliked him, she said to herself: and that she should be exposed to remark on his account was not to be borne. She retired to her room, full of lively indignation against her aunt and Roland, and even against Rivers, who was entirely innocent, surely, if ever man was. This was another phase, one she had not thought of, in the chapter of life which had begun by that wonder in her mind why she had no lover. She had been surprised by the absence of that figure in her life, and then had seen him appear, and had felt the elation, the secret joy of being worshipped. But now the

matter had entered into another phase, and she herself was to be judged as an independent actor in it; she who had been only passive, doing nothing, looking on with curiosity and interest, and perhaps pleasure, but no more. What had she to do with it? She had no part in the matter: it was their doing, theirs only, all through. She had done nothing to influence their fate. She had conducted herself towards them no otherwise than she did to old Sir John, or Mr. Penworthy, the clergyman, both of whom were Rosalind's good friends. If Mr. Rivers had taken up a different idea of her, that was his doing, not hers. She detain him, keep him from his business, interfere with his career! She thought Aunt Sophy must be mad, or dreaming. Rosalind was indignant to be made a party at all in the matter. It had thus entered a stage of which she had no anticipation. It had been pleasant inasmuch as it was entirely apart from herself, the attentions unsolicited, the admiration unsought. It was a new idea altogether that she should be considered accountable, or brought within the possibility of blame. What was she to do? Mr. Rivers was expected at the Elms that very evening, at one of Mrs. Lennox's everlasting

dinner parties. Rosalind had not hitherto looked upon them as everlasting dinner parties. She had enjoyed the lively flow of society, which Aunt Sophy (who enjoyed it very much) considered herself to keep up for Rosalind's sake, that she should have pleasant company and amusement. Now, however, Miss Trevanion was suddenly of opinion that she had hated them all along; that, above all, she had disliked the constant invitations to these men. It would be indispensable that she should put up with this evening's party, which it was now much too late to elude. But after to-night she resolved that she would make a protest. She would say to Aunt Sophy that henceforward she must be excused. Whatever happened, she must disentangle herself from this odious position as a girl who was responsible for the feeling, whatever it was, entertained for her by a gentleman. It was preposterous, it was insupportable. Whatever he chose to think, it was his doing, and not hers at all.

These sentiments gave great stateliness to Rosalind's aspect when she went down to dinner. They even influenced her dress, causing her to put aside the pretty toilette she had intended to make, and attire herself in an old and very

serious garment which had been appropriated to evenings when the family were alone. Mrs. Lennox stared at her niece in consternation when she saw this visible sign of contrariety and displeasure. It disturbed her beyond measure to see how far Rosalind had gone in her annoyance: whereas the gentlemen, with their usual density, saw nothing at all the matter, but thought her more dazzling than usual in the little black dress, which somehow threw up all her advantages of complexion and the whiteness of her pretty arms and throat. She had put on manners, however, which were more repellent than her dress, and which froze Hamerton altogether, who had a guilty knowledge what was the matter which Rivers did not share. Roland was frozen externally, but it cannot be denied that in his heart there was a certain guilty pleasure. He thought that the suggestion that she had encouraged Rivers was quite enough to make Rosalind henceforward so much the reverse of encouraging that his rival would see the folly of going on with his suit, and the field would be left free to himself as before. Rosalind might not be the better inclined, in consequence, to himself: but it was worth something to get that fellow, whom

nobody could help looking at, away. There were two or three indifferent people in the company this evening, to whose amusement Rosalind devoted herself, ignoring both the candidates for her favour: and, as is natural in such circumstances, she was more lively, more gay than usual, and eager to please these indifferent persons. As for Rivers, he thought she was out of sorts, perhaps out of temper (for he was aware that in this point she was not perfect), her usual friendliness and sweetness clouded over. But a man of his age does not jump into despair as youth does, and he waited patiently believing that the cloud would pass away. Rivers had been very wise in his way of approaching Rosalind. He had not tried openly to appropriate her society, to keep by her side, to make his adoration patent, as foolish Roland did. To-night, however, he, too, adopted a different course. Perhaps her changed aspect stirred him up, and he felt that the moment had come for a bolder stroke. However this might be, whether it was done by accident or on principle, the fact was that his tactics were changed. When Rosalind rose, by Mrs. Lennox's desire, and went to the writing table to write an address, Rivers rose too, and

followed her, drawing a chair near hers with the air of having something special to say. 'I want to ask your advice, if you will permit me, Miss Trevanion,' he said.

'My advice! oh no!' said Rosalind; 'I am not wise enough to be able to advise anyone.'

'You are young and generous. I do not want wisdom.'

'Not so very young,' said Rosalind. 'And how do you know that I am generous at all? I do not think I am.'

He smiled and went on without noticing this protest. 'My mother,' he said, 'wishes to come to London to be near me. I am sometimes sent off to the end of the world, and often in danger. She thinks she would hear of me more easily, be nearer, so to speak, though I might happen to be in India or Zululand.'

Rosalind was taken much by surprise. Her thoughts of him as of a man occupied above everything else by herself, seemed to come back upon her as if they had been flung in her face. His mother! was she the subject of his anxiety? She felt as though she had been indulging a preposterous vanity and the most unfounded expectations. The colour flew to her face; for what had she to do with his

mother, if his mother was what he was thinking of? She was irritated by the suggestion, she could scarcely tell why.

'I think it is very natural she should wish it, and you would be at home, I suppose, sometimes,' she replied with a certain stiffness.

'Do you think so? You know, Miss Trevanion, my family and I are in two different worlds; I should be a fool if I tried to hide it. Would the difference be less, do you think, between St. James's and Islington, or between London and Clifton? I think the first would tell most. They would not be happy with me, nor I, alas! with them. It is the penalty a man has to pay for getting on, as they call it. I have got on in my small way, and they are just where they were. How am I to settle it? If you could imagine yourself, if that were possible, in my position, what would you do?'

There was a soft insinuation in his voice which would have gone to any girl's heart; and his eyes expressed a boundless faith in her opinion which could not be mistaken. The irritation which was entirely without cause died away, and, with the usual rebound of a generous nature, Rosalind, penitent, felt her heart moved to a return of the confidence he showed in her.

She answered softly, 'I would do what my mother wished.' She was seated still in front of the writing-table, where stood the portrait, the little carved door of the frame half closed on it. A sudden impulse seized her. She pointed to it quickly without waiting to think: 'That is the children's mother,' she said.

He gave her a look of mingled sympathy and pain. 'I had heard something.'

'What did you hear, Mr. Rivers? Something that was not true? If you heard that she was not good, the best woman in the world, it was not true. I have always wanted to tell you. She went away not with her will; because she could not help it. The children have almost forgotten her, but I can never forget. She was all the mother I have ever known.'

Rosalind did not know at all why at such a moment she should suddenly have opened her heart to him on this subject, through which he had given her such a wound. She took it up hastily, instinctively, in the quickening impulse of her disturbed thoughts. She added in a low voice, 'What you said hurt me—oh, it hurt me, that night; but afterwards, when I came to think of it, the feeling went away.'

'There was nothing to hurt you,' said Rivers, hastily. 'I saw it was so, but I could not explain. Besides, I was a stranger and understood nothing. Don't you think I might be of use to you, perhaps, if you were to trust me?' He looked at her with eyes so full of sympathy that Rosalind's heart was altogether melted. 'I saw,' he added quietly, 'that there was a whole history in her face.'

'Tell me all you saw—if you spoke to her—what she said. Oh! if she had only known you were coming here! But life seems like that—we meet people as it were in the dark, and we never know how much we may have to do with them. I could not let you go away without asking you. Tell me—before you go away.'

'I will tell you. But I am not going away, Miss Trevanion.'

'Oh!' cried Rosalind. She felt confused, as if she had gone through a world of conflicting experience since she first spoke. 'I thought you must be going, and that this was why you asked me.'

'About my mother? It was with a very different view I spoke. I wished you to know something more about me. I wished you to

understand in what position I am, and to make you aware of her existence, and to find out what you thought about it; what would appear to you the better way.' He was more excited and tremulous than became his years; and she was softened by the emotion more than by the highest eloquence.

'It must be always best to make her happy,' Rosalind said.

'Shall I tell you what would make her happy? To see me sitting here by your side, to hear you counselling me so sweetly; to know that was your opinion—to hope perhaps.'

'Mr. Rivers, do not say any more about this. You make so much more than is necessary of a few simple words. What I want you to tell me is about *her*.'

'I will tell you as much as I know,' he said, with a pause and visible effort of self-restraint. 'She was travelling by the common routes, without any mystery. She had a maid with her, a tall, thin, anxious woman.'

'Oh, Jane!' cried Rosalind, clasping her hands together with a little cry of recognition and pleasure; this seemed to give such reality to the tale. She knew very well that the faithful maid had gone with Mrs. Trevanion;

but to see her in this picture gave comfort to her heart.

'You knew her? She seemed to be very anxious about her mistress, very careful of her. Miss Trevanion, it may very well be that in my wanderings I may meet with them again. Shall I say anything? Shall I carry a message?'

Rosalind found her voice choked with tears. She made him a sign of assent, unable to do more.

'What shall I tell her? That you trust me —that I am a messenger from you. I would rather be your ambassador than the Queen's. Shall I say that I have been so happy as to gain your confidence—or even perhaps——'

'Oh, a little thing will do,' cried the girl; 'she will understand you as soon as you say that Rosalind——'

He was leaning forward, his eyes fixed upon hers, his face full of emotion. He put out his hand and touched hers, which was leaning on the table. 'Yes,' he said, 'I will say that Rosalind—so long as you give me an excuse for using that name.'

Rosalind came to herself with a little shock. She withdrew her hand hastily. 'Perhaps I am saying too much,' she said. 'It is only a

dream, and you may never see her. But I could not bear that you should imagine we did not speak of her, or that I did not love her, and trust her,' she added, drawing a long breath. 'This is a great deal too much about me, and you had begun to tell me of your own arrangements,' Rosalind said, drawing her chair aside a little in instinctive alarm. It was the sound she made in doing so which called the attention of John Trevanion—or, rather, which moved him to turn his steps that way, his attention having been already attracted by the fixed and jealous gaze of Roland, who had sat with his face towards the group by the writing-table ever since his rival had followed Rosalind there.

Rivers saw that his chance was over, with a sigh, yet not perhaps with all the vehement disappointment of a youth. He had made a beginning, and perhaps he was not yet ready to go any further, though his feelings might have hurried him on too hastily, injudiciously, had no interruption occurred. But he had half frightened without displeasing her, which, as he was an experienced man, was a condition of things he did not think undesirable. There is a kind of fright which, to be plunged into

yet escape from, to understand without being forced to come to any conclusion, suits the high fantastical character of a young maiden's awakening feelings. And then before he, who was of a race so different, could actually venture to ask a Miss Trevanion of Highcourt to marry him, a great many calculations and arrangements were necessary. He thought John Trevanion, who was a man of the world, looked at him with a certain surprise and disapproval, asking himself perhaps what such a man could have to offer, what settlements he could make, what establishment he could keep up.

'Are not you cold in this corner,' John said, 'so far from the fire, Rosalind?—and you are a chilly creature. Run away and get yourself warm.' He took her chair as she rose, and sat down with an evident intention of continuing the conversation. As a matter of fact John Trevanion was not asking himself what settlements a newspaper correspondent could make. He was thinking of other things. He gave a nod of his head towards the portrait, and said in a low tone, 'She has been talking to you of *her*.'

Rivers was half disappointed, half relieved.

It proved to him, he thought, that he was too insignificant a pretender to arouse any alarm in Rosalind's relations, which was a galling thought. At the same time it was better that he should have made up his mind more completely what he was to say, before he exposed himself to any questioning on the subject. So he answered with a simple 'Yes.'

'We cannot make up our minds to think any harm of her,' said Trevanion, leaning his head on his hand. 'The circumstances are very strange, too strange for me to attempt to explain. And what you said seemed damaging enough. But I want you to know that I share somehow that instinctive confidence of Rosalind's. I believe there must be some explanation, even of the—companion——'

Rivers could not but smile a little, but he kept the smile carefully to himself. He was not so much interested in the woman he did not know as he was in the young creature who, he hoped, might yet make a revolution in his life.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was not very long after this that one of 'England's little wars' broke out—not a little war in so far as loss and cost went, but yet one of those convulsions that go on far from us, that only when they are identified by some dreadful and tragic incident really rouse the nation. It is more usual now than it used to be to have the note of horror struck in this way, and Rivers was one of the most important instructors of the English public in such matters. He went up to the Elms in the morning, an unusual hour, to tell his friends there that he was ordered off at once, and to bid them good-bye. He made as little as possible of his own special mission, but there was no disguising the light of excitement, anxiety, and expectation that was in his eyes.

'If I were a soldier,' he said, 'I should feel myself twice as interesting; and Sophy perhaps would give me her ribbon to wear in my cap;

but a newspaper correspondent has his share of the kicks, and not much of the ha'pence, in the way of glory at least.'

'Oh, I think quite the reverse,' said Mrs. Lennox, always anxious to please and encourage; 'because you know we should never know anything about it at home, but for you.'

'And the real ha'pence do fall to your share, and not to the soldiers,' said John.

'Well, perhaps it does pay better, which you will think an ignoble distinction,' he said, turning to Rosalind with a laugh. 'But picking up news is not without danger any more than inflicting death is, and the trouble we take to forestall our neighbours is as hard as greater generalship.' He was very uneasy, looking anxiously from one to another. The impossibility of getting these people out of the way! What device would do it? he wondered. Mrs. Lennox sat in her chair by the fire with her crewel work as if she would never move, and Sophy had a holiday and was pervading the room in all corners at once; and John Trevanion was writing at Rosalind's table, with the composure of a man who had no intention of being disturbed. How often does this

hopeless condition of affairs present itself when but one chance remains for the anxious lover! Had Rivers been a duke, the difficulty might easily have been got over, but he whose chief hope is not in the family, but in favour of the lady herself, has a more difficult task. Mrs. Lennox he felt convinced would have no desire to clear the way for him, and as for Mr. Trevanion, it was too probable that, even had the suitor been a duke, on the eve of a long and dangerous expedition, he would have watched over Rosalind's tranquillity and would not have allowed her to be disturbed. It was a hopeless sort of glance which the lover threw round him, ending in an unspoken appeal. They were very kind to him; had he wanted money or help of influence, or any support to push him on in the world, John Trevanion, a true friend to all whom he esteemed, would have given it. But Rosalind—they would not give him five minutes with Rosalind to save his life.

Mrs. Lennox, however, whose amiability always overcame her prudence, caught the petition in his eyes and interpreted it after her own fashion.

'Dear me,' she said, 'how sorry we shall be to lose you! But you really must stay to

lunch. The last time! You could not do less for us than that. And we shall drink your health and wish you a happy return.'

'That will do him so much good; when he must have a hundred things to do.'

'The kindness will do me good. Yes, I have a hundred things to do, but since Mrs. Lennox is so kind, it will do me more good than anything,' Rivers said. His eyes were glistening as if there was moisture in them: and Rosalind, looking up and perceiving the restlessness of anxiety in his face, was affected by a sympathetic excitement. She began to realise what the position was—that he was going away and might never see her again. She would be sorry too. It would be a loss of importance, a sort of coming down in the world, to have no longer this man, not a boy like Roland; a man whose opinions people looked up to, who was one of the instructors and oracles of the world, depending upon her favour. There was perhaps more than this, a slightly responsive sentiment on her own part, not like his, but yet something—an interest, a liking. Her heart began to beat; there was a sort of anguish in his eyes which moved her more, she thought, than she had ever been

moved before—a force of appeal to her which she could scarcely resist. But what could she do? She could not, any more than he could, clear the room of the principal persons in it, and give him the chance of speaking to her. Would she do it if she could?—she thought she would not. But yet she was agitated slightly, sympathetically, and gave him an answering look in which in the excitement of the moment he read a great deal more than there was to read. Was this to be all that was to pass between them before he went away? How commonplace the observations of the others seemed to them both! especially to Rivers, whose impatience was scarcely to be concealed, and who looked at the calm, every-day proceedings of the heads of the house with a sense that they were intolerable, yet a consciousness that the least sign of impatience would be fatal to him.

'Are you frightened, then, Mr. Rivers, that you look so strange?' said Sophy, planting herself in front of him, and looking curiously into his face.

'Sophy, how can you be so rude?' Mrs. Lennox said.

'I don't think I am frightened—not yet,'

he said, with a laugh. 'It is time enough when the fighting begins.'

'Are you very frightened *then*? It is not rudeness; I want to know. It must be very funny to go into battle. I should not have time to be frightened; I should want to know how people feel, and I never knew anyone who was just going before. Did you ever want to run away?'

'You know,' said Rivers, 'I don't fight, except with another newspaper fellow, who shall get the news first.'

'I am sure Mr. Rivers is frightened, for he has got tears in his eyes,' said the *enfant terrible*. 'Well, if they are not tears, it is something that makes your eyes very shiny. You have always rather shiny eyes. And you have never got a chair all this time, Mr. Rivers. Please sit down: for to move about like that worries Aunt Sophy. You are as bad as Rex when he comes home for the holidays. Aunt Sophy is always saying she will not put up with it.'

'Child!' cried Mrs. Lennox, with dismay, 'what I say to you is not meant for Mr. Rivers. Of course Mr. Rivers is a little excited. I am sure I shall look for the newspapers, and read

all the descriptions with twice as much interest. Rosalind, I wish you would go and get some flowers. We have none for the table. You were so busy this morning, you did not pay any attention. Those we have here will do very well for to-day, but for the table we want something fresh. Get some of those fine cactuses. They are just the thing to put on the table for anyone who is going to the wars.'

'Yes, Aunt Sophy,' said Rosalind, faintly. She saw what was coming, and it frightened, yet excited her. 'There is plenty of time. It will do in—half an hour.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Lennox, with an absurd insistence, as if she meant something, 'you had better go at once.'

'I am nervous, as Sophy has discovered, and can't keep still,' said Rivers. 'May I go too?'

Rosalind looked at him, on her side with a kind of tremulous appeal, as he took her basket out of her hand. It seemed to say 'Don't!' with a distinct sense that it was vain to say so. Aunt Sophy, with that foolish desire to please which went against all her convictions and baffled her own purpose, looked up at them as they stood, Rosalind hesitating

and he so eager. 'Yes, do; it will cheer you up a little,' the foolish guardian said.

And John Trevanion wrote on calmly, thinking nothing. They abandoned her to her fate. It was such a chance as Rivers could not have hoped for. He could scarcely contain himself as he followed her out of the room. She went very slowly, hoping perhaps even now to be called back, though she scarcely wished to be called back, and would have been disappointed too, perhaps. She could not tell what her feelings were, nor what she was going to do. Yet there came before her eyes as she went out a sudden vision of the other, the stranger, he whom she did not know, who had wooed her in the silence, in her dreams, and penetrated her eyes with eyes not bright and keen like those of Rivers, but pathetic like little Johnny's. Was she going to forsake the visionary for the actual? Rosalind felt that she too was going into battle, not knowing what might come of it, into her first personal encounter with life and a crisis in which she must act for herself.

'I did not hope for anything like this,' he said hurriedly; 'a good angel must have got it for me. I thought I should have to go without a word.'

'Oh no! there will be many more words; you have promised Aunt Sophy to stay to lunch.'

'To see you in the midst of the family is almost worse than not seeing you at all. Miss Trevanion, you must know. Perhaps I am doing wrong to take advantage of their confidence, but how can I help it? Everything in the world is summed up to me in this moment. Say something to me! To talk of love in common words seems nothing. I know no words that mean half what I mean. Say you will think of me sometimes when I am away.'

Rosalind trembled very much in spite of all she could do to steady herself. They had gone through the hall without speaking, and it was only when they had gained the shelter of the conservatory, in which they were safe from interruption, that he thus burst forth. The interval had been so breathless and exciting that every emotion was intensified. She did not venture to look up at him, feeling as if something might take flame at his eyes.

'Mr. Rivers, I could say that very easily, but perhaps it would not mean what you think.'

'Yes,' he said, 'I see how it is; the words

are too small for me, and you would mean just what they say. I want them to mean a great deal more, everything, as mine do. At my age,' he said with an agitated smile, 'for I am too old for you, besides being not good enough in any way, at my age I ought to have the sense to speak calmly, to offer you as much as I can, which is no great things; but I have got out of my own control, Rosalind. Well, yes, let me say that—a man's love is worth that much, to call the girl whom he loves Rosalind, Rosalind. I could go on saying it, and die so, like Perdita's prince. All exaggerated nonsense and folly, I know, I know, and yet all true.'

She raised her head for a moment and gave him a look in which there was a sort of tender gratitude yet half-reproach, as if entreating him to spare her that outburst of passion, to meet which she was so entirely prepared.

'I understand,' he said; 'I can see into your sweet mind as if it were open before me. I am so much older than you are. But the love ought to be most on the man's side. I will take whatever you will give me. A little, a mere alms! if I cannot get any more. If you say only *that*, that you will think of me

sometimes when I am away, and mean only that, and let me come back, if I come back, and see—what perhaps Providence may have done for me in the meantime——'

'Mr. Rivers, I will think of you often. Is it possible I could do otherwise after what you say? But when you come back, if you find that I do not—care for you more than now——'

'Do you care for me at all now, Rosalind?'

'In one way, but not as you want me. I must tell you the truth. I am always glad when you come, I shall be very glad when you come back, but I could not—I could not——'

'You could not—marry me, Rosalind?'

She drew back a little from his side. She said 'No' in a quick startled tone; then she added, 'Nor any one,' half under her breath.

'Nor any one,' he repeated: 'that is enough. And you will think of me when I am away, and if I come back, I may come and ask? All this I will accept on my knees, and, at present, ask for no more.'

'But you must not expect—you must not make sure of—when you come back——'

'I will wait upon Providence and my good angel, Rosalind!'

'What are you saying, Mr. Rivers, about

angels and Rosalind? Do you call her by her name, and do you think *she* is an angel? That is how people talk in novels; I have read a great many. Why you have got no flowers! What have you been doing all this time? I made Aunt Sophy send me to help you with the cactuses, and Uncle John said, "Well, perhaps it will be better." But oh, what idle things you are! The cactuses are not here even. You look as if you had forgotten all about them, Rose.'

'We knew you were sure to come, and waited for you,' said Rivers; 'that is to say, I did. I knew you were sure to follow. Here, Sophy, you and I will go for the cactuses, and Miss Trevanion will sit down and wait for us. Don't you think that is the best way?'

'You call her Miss Trevanion now, but you called her Rosalind when I was not here Oh, and I know you don't care a bit for the flowers: you wanted only to talk to her when Uncle John and Aunt Sophy were out of the way.'

'Don't you think that was natural, Sophy? You are a wise little girl. You are very fond of Uncle John and Aunt Sophy, but still now and then you like to get away for a time, and tell your secrets.'

'Were you telling your secrets to Rosalind? I am not *very* fond of them. I like to see what is going on, and to find people out.'

'Shall I give you something to find out for me while I am away?'

'Oh yes, yes, do; that is what I should like,' cried Sophy, with her little mischievous eyes dancing. 'And I will write and tell you. But then you must give me your address; I shall be the only one in the house that knows your address; and I'll tell you what they are all doing, every one of them. There is nothing I should like so much,' Sophy cried. She was so pleased with this idea that she forgot to ask what the special information required by her future correspondent was.

Meanwhile Rosalind sat among the flowers, hearing the distant sound of their voices, with her heart beating and all the colour and brightness round flickering unsteadily in her eyes. She did not know what she had done, or if she had done anything; if she had pledged herself, or if she was still free.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It happened after these events that sickness crept into Mrs. Lennox's cheerful house. One of the children had a lingering fever; and Aunt Sophy herself was troubled with headaches, and not up to the mark, the doctor said. This no doubt arose, according to the infallible decrees of sanitary science, from some deficiency in the drainage, notwithstanding that a great deal of trouble had already been taken, and that a local functionary and expert in such matters had been almost resident in the house for some months to set right these sources of all evil. As soon, however, as it was understood that for the sixth or seventh time the house would have to be undermined, Mrs. Lennox came to a resolution which, as she said, she had 'always intended'; and that was to 'go abroad.' To go abroad is a thing which recommends itself to most women as an infallible mode of procuring pleasure. They may

not like it when they are there. Foreign 'ways' may be a weariness to their souls, and foreign languages a series of unholy mysteries which they do not attempt to fathom; but going abroad is a panacea for all dulness and a good many maladies. The Englishwoman of simple mind is sure that she will be warmed and soothed, that the sun will always shine, the skies never rain, and everything go to her wish 'abroad.' She returns discontented, but she goes away always hopeful, scarcely able to conceive that grey skies and cold winds prevail anywhere except in her own island. Mrs. Lennox was of this simple-minded order. When she was driven to the depths of her recollection she could indeed remember a great many instances to the contrary, but in the abstract she felt that these were accidents, and, the likelihood was, would never occur again. And then it would be so good for the children! They would learn languages without knowing, without any trouble at all. With this happy persuasion English families every day convey their hapless babes into the depths of Normandy, for example, to learn French. Mrs. Lennox went to the Riviera, as was inevitable, and afterwards to other places, thinking it as well,

as she said, while they were abroad, to see as much as possible. It was no small business to get the little caravanserai under weigh, and when it was accomplished it may be doubted how much advantage it was to the children for whose good, according to Aunt Sophy, the journey was prolonged. Little Amy and Johnny wandered with big eyes after the nurse who had replaced Russell, through Rome and Florence, and gazed alarmed at the towers of Bologna, which the children thought were falling upon them, without deriving very much instruction from the sight.

It was a thoroughly English party, like many another, carrying its own little atmosphere about it and all its insular customs. The first thing they did on arriving at a new place was to establish a little England in the foreign hotel or *chambres garnies* which they occupied. The sitting-room at the inn took at once a kind of *faux* air of the dining-room at the Elms, Mrs. Lennox's work and her basket of crewels and her footstool being placed in the usual exact order, and a writing-table arranged for the family letters in the same light as that approved at home. And then there were elaborate arrangements for the nursery dinner

at a proper nursery hour, and for roast mutton and rice pudding, such as were fit food for British subjects of the ages of nine and seven. Then the whereabouts of the English church was inquired into, and the English chemist, and the bookshop where English books and especially the editions of Baron Tauchnitz, and perhaps English newspapers, might be had. Having ascertained all this, and to the best of her power obliterated all difference between Cannes, or Genoa, or Florence, or even Rome, and the neighbourhood of Clifton, Mrs. Lennox began to enjoy herself in a mild way. She took her daily drive, and looked at the Italians from her carriage, with a certain disapproval, much curiosity, and sometimes amusement. She disapproved of them because they were not English in a general way. She was too sweet-tempered to conclude, as some of the ladies did whom she met at the hotel, that they were universally liars, cheats, and extortioners, but they were not English; though perhaps, poor things, that was not exactly their fault.

This was how she travelled, and in a sober way enjoyed it. She thought the Riviera very pretty, if there were not so many sick people about; and Florence very pretty too. 'But I

have been here before, you know, my dear,' she said; therefore her admiration was calm, and never rose into any of the raptures with which Rosalind sometimes was roused by a new landscape. She lived just as she would have done if she had never stirred from home, and was moderately happy, as happy as a person of her age has any right to be. The children came to her at the same hours, they had their dinner and walk at the same hours, and they all went to church on Sunday just in the same way. The *table d'hôte*, at which she usually dined with Rosalind, was the only difference of importance between her life as a traveller and her life at home. She thought it was rather like a dinner-party without the trouble, and as she soon got to know a select little 'set' of English of her own condition in her hotel, and sat with them, the public table grew more and more like a private one, except in so far as that all the guests had the delightful privilege of finding fault. The clergyman called upon her, and made little appeals to her for deserving cases, and pleaded that Rosalind should help in the music, and talked the talk of a small parish to her contented ears. All this made her very much at home, while still enjoying the gentle

excitement of being abroad. And at the end of six months Mrs. Lennox began to feel that she was quite a cosmopolitan, able to adapt herself to all circumstances, and getting the full good of foreign travel, which, as she declared she was doing it entirely for the children, was a repayment of her goodness upon which she had not calculated. 'I feel quite a woman of the world,' was what Aunt Sophy said.

Perhaps, however, Rosalind, placed as she was between the children and their guardian, neither too old nor too young for such enjoyment, was, as lawyers say, the true beneficiary. She had the disadvantage of visiting a great many places of interest with companions who did not appreciate or understand them, it is true; with Aunt Sophy, who thought that the pictures as well as the views were pretty; and with the sharp little sister who thought picture galleries and mountain landscapes equally a bore. But notwithstanding, with that capacity for separating herself from her surroundings which belongs to the young, Rosalind was able to get a great deal of enjoyment as she moved along in Mrs. Lennox's train. Aunts in general are not expected to care for scenery; they

care for being comfortable, for getting their meals, and especially the children's meals, at the proper time, and being as little disturbed in their ordinary routine as possible. When this is fully granted, a girl can usually manage to get a good deal of pleasure under their portly shadow. Rosalind saw everything as if nobody had ever seen it before; the most hackneyed scenes were newly created for her, and came upon her with a surprise almost more delightful than anything in life, certainly more delightful than anything that did not immediately concern the heart and affections. She thought, indeed, sometimes wistfully, that if it had been her mother, that never-to-be-forgotten and always trusted friend, who could have understood everything and felt with her, and added a charm wherever they went, the enjoyment would have been far greater. But then her heart would fall into painful questions as to where and with what companions that friend might now be, and rise into prayers—sometimes that they might meet to-morrow, sometimes that they might never meet—that nothing which could diminish her respect and devotion should ever be made known to her. Then, too, sometimes Rosalind would ask herself, in

the leisure of her solitude, what this journey might have been had *someone else* been of the party? This *someone else* was not Roland Hamerton: that was certain. She could not say to herself, either, that it was Arthur Rivers. It was—well, someone with great eyes, dark and liquid, whose power of vision would be more refined, more educated than that of Rosalind, who would know all the associations and all the poetry, and make everything that was beautiful before more beautiful by the charm of his superior knowledge. Perhaps she felt, too, that it was more modest, more maidenly, to allow a longing for the companionship of one whom she did not know, who was a mere ideal, the symbol of love, or genius, or poetry, she did not know which—than to wish in straightforward terms for the lover whom she knew, who was a man, and not a symbol. Her imagination was too shy, too proud, to summon up an actual person, substantial, and well known. It was more easy and simple, more possible, to fill that fancy with an image that had no actual embodiment, and to call to her side the being who was nothing more than a recollection, whose very name and everything about him was unknown

to her. She accepted him as a symbol of all that a dreaming girl desires in a companion. He was a dream; there need be no bounds to the enthusiasm, the poetry, the fine imagination, with which she had endowed him, any more than there need be to the devotion to herself, which was a mere dream also. He might woo her as men only woo in the imagination of girls, so delicately, so tenderly, with such ethereal worship. How different the most glorious road would be were he beside her! though in reality he was beside her all the way, saying things which were finer than anything but fancy, breathing the very soul of rapture into her being. The others knew nothing of all this; how should they? And Mrs. Lennox, for one, sometimes asked herself whether Rosalind was really enjoying her travels. 'She says so little,' that great authority said.

There was, however, little danger that she should forget one at least of her actual lovers. In the meantime a great deal had been going on in the world, and especially in that distant part of it to which Rivers had gone. The little war which he had gone to report had turned into a most exciting and alarming one; and there had been days in which the whole

world, so to speak—all England at least, and her dependencies—had hung upon his utterance, and looked for his communications every morning almost before they looked at those which came from their nearest and dearest. And it was said that he had excelled himself in these communications. He had done things which were heroic, if not to hasten the conclusion of the war, or to make it successful, yet at least to convey the earliest intelligence of any new action, and to make people at home feel as if they were present upon the very field, spectators of all the movements there.

This service involved him in as much danger as if he had been in the very front of the fighting; and, indeed, he was known to have done feats, for what is called the advantage of the public, to which the stand made by a mere soldier, even in the most urgent circumstances, was not to be compared. All this was extremely interesting, not to say exciting, to his friends. Mrs. Lennox had the paper sent after her wherever she travelled; and, indeed, it was great part of her day's occupation to read it, which she did with devotion. 'The correspondent is a friend of ours,' she said to the other English people in the hotels. 'We know

him, I may say, very well, and naturally I take a great interest.' The importance of his position as the author of those letters which interested everybody, and even the familiar way in which he talked of generals and commanders-in-chief, impressed her profoundly. As for Rosalind, she said nothing, but she, too, read all about the war with an attention which was breathless, not quite sure in her mind that it was not under a general's helmet that those crisp locks of grey were curling, or that the vivid eyes which had looked into hers with such expression were not those of the hero of the campaign. It did not seem possible, somehow, that he could be less than a general. She took the paper to her room in the evening when Aunt Sophy had done with it, and read and read. The charm was upon her that moved Desdemona, and it was difficult to remember that the teller of the tale was not the chief mover in it. How could she help but follow him in his wanderings wherever he went? It was the least thing she could do in return for what he had given to her—for that passion which had made her tremble — which she wondered at and admired as if it had been poetry. All this captivated the girl's fancy in

spite of herself, and gave her an extraordinary interest in everything he said, and that was said of him. But, notwithstanding, it was not Mr. Rivers who accompanied her in the spirit on all the journeys she made, and to all the beautiful places which filled her with rapture. Not Mr. Rivers—a visionary person, one whose very name was to her unknown.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE events of the night on which Mrs. Trevanion left Highcourt had at this period of the family story fallen into that softened oblivion which covers the profoundest scars of the heart after a certain passage of time, except sometimes to the chief actor in such scenes, who naturally takes a longer period to forget.

She on whom the blow had fallen at a moment when she was unprepared for it, when a faint sense of security had begun to steal over her in spite of herself, had received it *en plein cœur*, as the French say. We have no word which expresses so well the unexpected, unmitigated shock. She had said to herself, like the captive king in the Bible, that the bitterness of death was past, and had gone, like that poor prince, 'delicately,' with undefended bosom, and heart hushed out of its first alarms to meet her fate. The blow had gone through her very flesh, rending every delicate tissue before she

had time to think. It does not even seem a metaphor to say that it broke her heart, or rather cut the tender structure sheer in two, leaving it bleeding, quivering in her bosom. She was not a woman to faint or die at a stroke. She took the torture silently, without being vanquished by it. When nature is strong within us, and the force of life great, there is no pang spared. And while in one sense it was true that for the moment she expected nothing, the instantly following sensation in Madam's mind was that she had known all along what was going to happen to her, and that it had never been but certain that this must come. Even the details of the scene seemed familiar. She had always known that some time or other these men would look at her so, would say just those words to her, and that she would stand and bear it all, a victim appointed from the beginning. In the greater miseries of life it happens often that the catastrophe, however unexpected, bears, when it comes, a familiar air, as of a thing which has been mysteriously rehearsed in our consciousness all our lives. After the first shock, her mind sprang with a bound to those immediate attempts to find a way of existence on the other side of the im-

possible, which was the first impulse of the vigorous soul. She said little even to Jane until the dreary afternoon was over, the dinner with its horrible formulas, and she had said what was really her farewell to everything at Highcourt. Then when the time approached for the meeting in the park, she began to prepare for going out with a solemnity which startled her faithful attendant. She took from her desk a sum which she had kept in reserve (who can tell for what possibility?), and dressed herself carefully—not in her new mourning with all its crape, but in simple black from head to foot. She always had worn a great deal of black lace; it had been her favourite costume always. She enveloped herself in a great veil which would have fallen almost to her feet had it been unfolded, doing everything for herself, seeking the things she wanted in her drawers with a silent diligence which Jane watched with consternation. At last the maid could restrain herself no longer.

'Am I to do nothing for you?' she cried with anguish. 'And oh! where are you going? What are you doing? There's something more than I thought.'

'You are to do everything for me, Jane,'

her mistress said, with a pathetic smile. 'You are to be my sole companion all the rest of my life—unless, if it is not too late, that poor boy.'

'Madam,' Jane said, putting her hand to her heart with a natural tragic movement, 'you are not going to desert—the children? Oh no! you are not thinking of leaving the children?'

Her mistress put her hands upon Jane's shoulders, clutching her, and gave vent to a low laugh more terrible than any cry. 'It is more wonderful than that—more wonderful—more, ah! more ridiculous. Don't cry. I can't bear it. They have sent me away. Their father—has sent me away!'

'Madam!' Jane's shriek would have rung through the house had it not been for Madam's imperative gesture and the hand she placed upon her mouth.

'Not a word! Not a word! I have not told you before, for I cannot bear a word. It is true, and nothing can be done. Dress yourself now, and put what we want for the night in your bag. I will take nothing. Oh, that is a small matter, a very small matter, to provide all that will be wanted for two poor women. Do you remember, Jane, how we came here?'

'Oh, well, well, Madam! You a beautiful bride, and nothing too much for you, nothing good enough for you.'

'Yes, Jane; but leaving my duty behind me. And now it is repaid.'

'Oh, Madam, Madam! He was too young to know the loss: and it was for his own sake. And besides, if that were all, it's long, long ago, long, long ago.'

Mrs. Trevanion's hands dropped by her side. She turned away with another faint laugh of tragic mockery. 'It is long, long ago; long enough to change everything. Ah, not so long ago but that he remembers it, Jane. And now the time is come when I am free, if I can, to make it up. I have always wondered if the time would ever come when I could try to make it up.'

'Madam, you have never failed to him, except in not having him with you.'

'Except in all that was my duty, Jane. He has known no home, no care, no love. Perhaps now, if it should not be too late——'

And then she resumed her preparations with that concentrated calm of despair which sometimes apes ordinary composure so well as to deceive the lookers-on. Jane could not

understand what was her lady's meaning. She followed her about with anxious looks, doing nothing on her own part to aid, paralysed by the extraordinary suggestion. Madam was fully equipped before Jane had stirred, except to follow wistfully every step Mrs. Trevanion took.

'Are you not coming?' she said at length. 'Am I to go alone? For the first time in our lives do you mean to desert me, Jane?'

'Madam,' cried the woman, 'it cannot be—it cannot be! You must be dreaming; we cannot go without the children.' She stood wringing her hands, beyond all capacity of comprehension, thinking her mistress mad or criminal, or under some great delusion—she could not tell which.

Mrs. Trevanion looked at her with strained eyes that were past tears. 'Why,' she said, 'why—did you not say so seventeen years ago, Jane?'

'Oh, Madam,' cried Jane, seizing her mistress by the hands, 'don't do it another time! They are all so young, they want you. It can't do them any good, but only harm, if you go away. Oh, madam, listen to me that loves you! Who have I but you in the world? But don't

leave them. Oh, don't we both know the misery it brings? You may be doing it thinking it will make up. But God don't ask these kind of sacrifices,' she cried, the tears running down her cheeks. '*He* don't ask it. He says mind your duty now, whatever's been done in the past. Don't try to be making up for it, the Lord says, Madam; but just do your duty now; it's all that we can do.'

Mrs. Trevanion listened to this address, which was made with streaming eyes and a face quivering with emotion, in silence. She kept her eyes fixed on Jane's face as if the sight of the tears was a refreshment to her parched soul. Her own eyes were dry, with that smile in them which answers at some moments in place of weeping.

'You cut me to the heart,' she said, 'every word. Oh, but I am not offering God any vain sacrifices, thinking to atone. He has taken it into His own hand. Life repeats itself, though we never think so. What I did once for my own will God makes me do over again not of my own will. He has His meaning clear through all, but I don't know what it is, I cannot fathom it.' She said this quickly, with the settled quietness of despair. Then, the lines of her

countenance melting, her eyes lit up with a forlorn entreaty, as she touched Jane on the shoulder, and asked, 'Are you coming? You will not let me go alone——'

'Oh, Madam, wherever you go—wherever you go! I have never done anything but follow you. I can neither live nor die without you,' Jane answered, hurriedly; and then, turning away, tied on her bonnet with trembling hands. Madam had done everything else; she had left nothing for Jane to provide. They went out together, no longer alarmed to be seen—two dark figures, hurrying down the great stairs. But the langour that follows excitement had got into the house: there were no watchers about; the whole place seemed deserted. She who that morning had been the mistress of Highcourt, went out of the home of so many years without a soul to mark her going or bid her good speed. But the anguish of the parting was far too great to leave room for any thought of the details. They stepped out into the night, into the dark, to the sobbing of the wind and the wildly blowing trees. The storm outside gave them a little relief from that which was within.

Madam went swiftly, softly along, with that

power of putting aside the overwhelming consciousness of wretchedness which is possessed by those whose appointed measure of misery is the largest in this world. To die then would have been best, but not to be helpless and encounter the pity of those who could give no aid. She had the power not to think, to address herself to what was before her, and hold back 'upon the threshold of the mind' the supreme anguish of which she could never be free, which there would be time enough, alas, and to spare, to indulge in. Perhaps, though she knew so much and was so experienced in pain, it did not occur to her at this terrible crisis of life to think it possible that any further pang might be awaiting her. The other, who waited for her within shade of the copse, drew back when he perceived that two people were coming towards him. He scarcely responded even when Mrs. Trevanion called him in a low voice by name. 'Whom have you got with you?' he said, almost in a whisper, holding himself concealed among the trees.

'Only Jane.'

'Only Jane,' he said, in a tone of relief, but still with a roughness and sullenness out of keeping with his youthful voice. He added after a

moment, 'What does Jane want? I hope there is not going to be any sentimental leave-taking. I want to stay and not to go.'

'That is impossible now. Everything is altered. I am going with you, Edmund.

'Going with me—good Lord!' There was a moment's silence; then he resumed in a tone of satire, 'What may that be for? Going with *me*! Do you think I can't take care of myself? Do you think I want a nurse at my heels?' Then another pause. 'I know what you mean. You are going away for a change, and you mean me to turn up easily and be introduced to the family? Not a bad idea at all,' he added, in a patronising tone.

'Edmund,' she said, 'afterwards, when we have time, I will tell you everything. There is no time now; but that has come about which I thought impossible. I am—free to make up to you, as much as I can, for the past——'

'Free,' he repeated, with astonishment, 'to make up to me?' The pause that followed seemed one of consternation. Then he went on roughly, 'I don't know what you mean by making up to me. I have often heard that women couldn't reason. You don't mean that you are flinging over the others *now* to make a

romance—and balance matters? I don't know what you mean.'

Madam Trevanion grasped Jane's arm and leaned upon it with what seemed a sudden collapse of strength, but this was invisible to the other, who probably was unaware of any effect produced by what he said. Her voice came afterwards through the dark with a thrill in it that seemed to move the air, something more penetrating than the wind.

'I have no time to explain,' she said. 'I must husband my strength, which has been much tried. I am going with you to London to-night. We have a long walk before we reach the train. On the way, or afterwards, as my strength serves me, I will tell you—all that has happened. What I am doing,' she added, faintly, 'is by no will of mine.'

'To London to-night?' he repeated, with astonishment. 'I am not going to London to-night.'

'Yes, Edmund, with me. I want you.'

'I have wanted,' he said, 'you—or, at least, I have wanted my proper place and the people I belonged to, all my life. If you think that now, when I am a man, I am to be burdened with two women always at my heels—— Why

can't you stay and make everything comfortable here? I want my rights, but I don't want you —more than is reasonable,' he added after a moment, slightly struck by his own ungraciousness. 'As for walking to the train, and going to London to-night—you, a fine lady that have always driven about in your carriage!' He gave a hoarse little laugh at the ridiculous suggestion.

Mrs. Trevanion again clutched Jane's arm. It was the only outlet for her excitement. She said very low, 'I should not have expected better—oh no; how could he know better, after all? But I must go, there is no choice. Edmund, if anything I can do now can blot out the past—no, not that—but make up for it. You, too, you have been very tyrannical to me these months past. Hush! let me speak, it is quite true. If you could have had patience, all might have been so different. Let us not upbraid each other—but if you will let me, all that I can do for you now—all that is possible——'

There was another pause. Jane, standing behind, supported her mistress in her outstretched arms, but this was not apparent, nor any other sign of weakness, except that her

voice quivered upon the dark air which was still in the shadow of the copse.

'I have told you,' he said, 'again and again, what would please me. We can't be much devoted to each other, can we, after all? We can't be a model of what's affectionate. That was all very well when I was a child, when I thought a present was just as good or better. But now I know what is what, and that something more is wanted. Why can't you stay still where you are and send for me? You can say I'm a relation. I don't want you to sacrifice yourself—what good will that do me? I want to get the advantage of my relations, to know them all, and have my chance. There's one thing I've set my heart upon, and you could help me in that if you liked. But to run away, good Lord! what good would that do? It's all for effect, I suppose, to make me think you are willing now to do a deal for me. You can do a deal for me if you like, but it will be by staying, not by running away.'

'Jane,' said Mrs. Trevanion, 'he does not understand me: how should he? You did not understand me at first. It is not that he means anything. And how can I tell him?—not

here, I am not able. After, when we are far away, when I am out of reach, when I have got a little—strength——'

'Madam!' said Jane, 'if it is true, if you have to do it, if we must go to-night, don't stand and waste all the little strength you have got standing here.'

He listened to this conversation with impatience, yet with a growing sense that something lay beneath which would confound his hopes. He was not sympathetic with her trouble. How could he have been so? Had not her ways been contrary to his all his life? But a vague dread crept over him. He had thought himself near the object of his hopes, and now disappointment seemed to overshadow him. He looked angrily, with vexation and gathering dismay, at the dark figures of the two women, one leaning against the other. What did she mean now? How was she going to baffle him this time—she who had been contrary to him all his life?

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was a long walk through the wind and blasts of rain, and the country roads were very dark and wet—not a night for a woman to be out in, much less a lady used to drive everywhere in her carriage, as he had said, and less still for one whose strength had been wasted by long confinement in a sick room, and whose very life was sapped by secret pain. But these things, which made it less possible for Mrs. Trevanion to bear the fatigues to which she was exposed, re-acted on the other side, and made her unconscious of the lesser outside evils, which were as nothing in comparison with the real misery from which no expedient could set her free. She went along mechanically, conscious of a fatigue and aching which were almost welcome—which lulled a little the other misery which lay somewhere awaiting her, waiting for the first moment of leisure, the time when she should be clear-headed enough to understand and feel it all

to the fullest. When they came into the light at the nearest railway station the two women were alone. They got into an empty carriage and placed themselves each in a corner, and, like St. Paul, wished for day; but yet the night was welcome too, giving their proceedings an air of something strange and out of all the habits of their life which partially, momentarily, confused the every-day aspect of things around, and made this episode in existence all unnatural and unreal. It was morning, the dark grim morning of winter, without light or colour, when Mrs. Trevanion suddenly spoke for the first time. She said, as if thinking alond, 'It was not to be expected. Why should he, when he knows so little of me?' as if reasoning with herself.

'No, Madam,' said Jane.

'If he had been like others, accustomed to these restraints—for no doubt it is a restraint——'

'Oh yes, Madam.'

'And perhaps with time and use,' she said, sighing and faltering.

'Yes, Madam,' said Jane.

'Why do you say no and yes,' she cried, with sudden vehemence, 'as if you had no opinion of your own?'

Then Jane faltered too. 'Madam,' she said, 'everything is to be hoped from—time, as you say, and use——'

'You don't think so,' her mistress replied, with a moan, and then all settled into silence again.

It is not supposed that anything save vulgar speed and practical convenience is to be got from the railway: and yet there is nothing that affords a better refuge and shelter from the painful thoughts that attend a great catastrophe in life, and those consultations which an individual in deep trouble holds with himself, than a long silent journey at the desperate pace of an express train over the long, dark sweeps of the scarcely visible country, with the wind of rapid progress in one's face. That complete separation from all disturbance, the din that partially deadens in our ears the overwhelming commotion of brain and heart, the protection which is afforded by the roar and sweep of hot haste which holds us as in a sanctuary of darkness, peace, and solitude, is a paradox of every-day life which few think of, yet which is grateful to many. Mrs. Trevanion sank into it with a sensation which was almost ease. She lay back in her corner, as a creature wounded to death lies still after the anguish

of medical care is ended, throbbing, indeed, with inevitable pain, yet with all horror of expectation over, and nothing further asked of the sufferer. If not the anguish, at least the consciousness of anguish was deadened by the sense that here no one could demand anything from her, any response, any look, any word. She lay for a long time dumb even in thought, counting the throbs that went through her, feeling the sting and smart of every wound, yet a little eased by the absolute separation between her and everything that could ask a question or suggest a thought. It is not necessary for us in such terrible moments to think over our pangs. The sufferer lies piteously contemplating the misery that holds him, almost glad to be left alone with it. For the most terrible complications of human suffering there is no better image still than that with which the ancients portrayed the anguish of Prometheus on his rock. There he lies bound and helpless, bearing evermore the rending of the vulture's beak, sometimes writhing in his bonds, uttering hoarsely the moan of his appeal to earth and heaven, crying out sometimes the horrible cry of an endurance past enduring, anon lying silent, feeling the dew upon him, hearing soft voices of pity,

comforters that tell him of peace to come, sometimes softening, sometimes only increasing his misery; but through all unending, never intermitting, the pain—'pain, ever, for ever' of that torture from which there is no escape. In all its moments of impatience, in all its succumbings, the calm of anguish which looks like resignation, the struggle with the unbearable which looks like resistance, the image is always true. We lie bound and cannot escape. We listen to what is said about us, the soft consoling of nature, the voices of the comforters. Great heavenly creatures come and sit around us, and talk together of the recovery to come; but meanwhile without a pause the heart quivers and bleeds, the cruel grief tears us without intermission. 'Ah me, alas, pain, ever, for ever!'

If ever human soul had occasion for such a consciousness it was this woman, cut off in a moment from all she loved best—from her children, from her home, from life itself and honour, and all that makes life dear. Her good name, the last possession which, shipwrecked in every other, the soul in ruin and dismay may still derive some miserable satisfaction from, had to be yielded too. A faint smile came upon her face, the profoundest

expression of suffering, when this thought, like another laceration, separated itself from the crowd. A little more or less, was that not a thing to be smiled at? What could it matter? All that could be done to her was done; her spiritual tormentors had no longer the power to give her another sensation; she had exhausted all their tortures. Her good name, and that even in the knowledge of her children! She smiled. Evil had done its worst. She was henceforward superior to any torture, as knowing all that pain could do.

There are some minds to which death is not a thought which is possible, or a way of escape which ever suggests itself. Hamlet, in his musings, in the sickness of his great soul, passes it indeed in review, but rejects it as an unworthy and ineffectual expedient. And it is seldom that a worthy human creature, when not at the outside verge of life, can afford to die. There is always something to do which keeps every such possibility in the background. To this thought after a time Mrs. Trevanion came round. She had a great deal to do; she had still a duty—a responsibility—was it perhaps a possibility in life? There existed for her still one bond—a bond partially severed

for long—apparently dropped out of her existence, yet never forgotten. The brief dialogue which she had held with Jane had betrayed the condition of her thoughts in respect to this one relationship which was left to her, as it betrayed also the judgment of Jane on the subject. Both of these women knew in their hearts that the young man who was now to be the only interest of their lives had little in him which corresponded with any ideal. He had not been kind, he had not been true: he thought of nothing but himself, and yet he was all that now remained to make, to the woman upon whom his folly had brought so many and terrible losses, the possibility of a new life. When she saw the cold glimmer of the dawn, and heard the beginnings of that sound of London, which stretches so far round the centre on every side, Mrs. Trevanion awoke again to the living problem which now was to occupy her wholly. She had been guilty towards him almost all his life, and she had been punished by his means; but perhaps it might be that there was still for her a place of repentance. She had much to do for him, and not a moment to lose. She had the power to make up to him now for all the neglect of the

past. Realising what he was, unlike her in thought, in impulse, in wishes, a being who belonged to her, yet who in heart and soul was none of hers, she rose up from the terrible vigil of this endless night, to make her life henceforward the servant of his, its guardian perhaps, its guide perhaps, but in any case subject to it, as a woman at all times is subject to those for whom she lives. She spoke again, when they were near their arrival, to her maid, as if they had continued the subject throughout the night: 'He will be sure to follow us to-morrow night, Jane.'

'I think so, Madam, for he will have nothing else to do.'

'It was natural,' said Mrs. Trevanion, 'that he should hesitate to come off in a moment. Why should he, indeed? There was nothing to break the shock to him—as there was to us——'

'To break the shock?' Jane murmured, with a look of astonishment.

'You know what I mean,' her mistress said, with a little impatience. 'When things happen like the things that have happened, one does not think very much of a midnight journey. Ah, what a small matter that is! But

one who has—nothing to speak of on his mind——'

'He ought to have a great deal on his mind,' said Jane.

'Ought! Yes, I suppose I ought to be half dead, and, on the contrary, I am revived by the night journey. I am able for anything. There is no ought in such matters—it is according to your strength.'

'You have not slept a wink,' said Jane, in an injured voice.

'There are better things than sleep. And he is young, and has not learned yet the lesson that I have had such difficulty in learning.'

'What lesson is that?' said Jane, quickly. 'If it is to think of everything and everyone's business, you have been indeed a long time learning, for you have been at it all your life.'

'It takes a long time to learn,' said Madam, with a smile; 'the young do not take it in so easily. Come, Jane, we are arriving; we must think now of our new way of living.'

'Madam,' cried Jane, 'if there had been an earthquake at Highcourt, and we had both perished in it trying to save the children——'

'Jane! do you think it is wise when you are in great trouble to fix your thoughts upon

the greatest happiness in the world? To have perished at Highcourt, you and me, trying——' Her face shone for a moment with a great radiance. 'You are a good woman,' she said, shaking her head with a smile, 'but why should there be a miracle to save me? It is a miracle to give me the chance of making up—for what is past.'

'Oh, Madam, I wish I knew what to say to you,' cried Jane; 'you will just try your strength and make yourself miserable, and get no return.'

Mrs. Trevanion laughed with a strange solemnity. She looked before her into the vacant air, as if looking in the face of fate. What could make her miserable now? Nothing—the worst that could be done had been done. She said, but to herself, not to Jane, 'There is an advantage in it, it cannot be done over again.' Then she began to prepare for the arrival. 'We shall have a great deal to do, and we must lose no time. Jane, you will go at once and provide some clothes for us. Whatever happens, we must have clothes, and we must have food, you know. The other things—life can go on without——'

'Madam, for God's sake, do not smile, it makes my blood run cold.'

'Would you like me to cry, Jane? I might do that, too, but what the better should we be? If I were to cry all to-day and to-morrow, the moment would come when I should have to stop and smile again. And then,' she said, turning hastily upon her faithful follower, 'I can't cry—I can't cry!' with a spasm of anguish going over her face. 'Besides, we are just arriving,' she added, after a moment; 'we must not call for remark. You and I, we are two poor women setting out upon the world—upon a forlorn hope. Yes, that is it—upon a forlorn hope. We don't look like heroes, but that is what we are going to do, without any banners flying or music, but a good heart, Jane —a good heart!'

With these words, she stepped out upon the crowded pavement at the great London station. It was a very early hour in the morning, and there were few people except the travellers and the porters about. They had no luggage, which was a thing that confused Jane, and made her ashamed to the bottom of her heart. She answered the questions of the porter with a confused consciousness of some-

thing half disgraceful in their denuded condition, and gave her bag into his hands, with a shrinking and trembling which made the poor soul, pallid with unaccustomed travelling, and out of her usual prim order, look like a furtive fugitive. She half thought the man looked at her as if she were a criminal escaping from justice. Jane was ashamed: she thought the people in the streets looked at the cab as it rattled out of the station with suspicion and surprise. She looked forward to the arrival at the hotel with a kind of horror. What would people think? Jane felt the real misery of the catastrophe more than anyone except the chief sufferer: she looked forward to the new life about to begin with dismay; but nevertheless, at this miserable moment, to come to London without luggage gave her the deepest pang of all.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MRS. TREVANION remained for some time in London, where she was joined reluctantly, after a few days, by Edmund. This young man had not been educated on the level of Highcourt. He had been sent to a cheap school. He had never known any relations, nor had any culture of the affections to refine his nature. From his school, as soon as he was old enough, he had been transferred to an office in Liverpool, where all the temptations and attractions of the great town had burst upon him without defence. Many young men have to support this ordeal, and even for those who do not come through it without scathe, it is yet possible to do so without ruinous loss and depreciation. But in that case the aberration must be but temporary, and there must be a higher ideal behind to defend the mind against that extinction of all belief in what is good which is the most horrible result of vicious living. Whether

Edmund fell into the absolute depths of vice at all it is not necessary to inquire. He fell into debt, and into unlawful ways of making up for his debts. When discovery was not to be staved off any longer he had fled, not even then touched with any compunction or shame, but with a strong certainty that the matter against him would never be allowed to come to a public issue, it being so necessary to the credit of the family that his relations with Highcourt should never be made known to the world. It was with this certainty that he had come to the village near Highcourt at the beginning of Mr. Trevanion's last illness. To prevent him from bursting into her husband's presence, and bringing on one of the attacks which sapped his strength, Mrs. Trevanion had yielded to his demands on her, and as these increased daily had exposed herself to remark and scandal, and, as it proved, to ruin and shame. Did she think of that as he sat opposite to her at the table, affording reluctantly the information she insisted upon, betraying by almost every word a mind so much out of tune with hers that the bond which connected them seemed impossible? If she did think of this it was with the bitterest self-reproach, rather than any complaint of him.

'Poor boy,' she said to herself, with her heart bleeding. She had informed him of the circumstances under which she had left home, but without a word of blame or intimation that the fault was his, and received what were really his reproaches on this matter silently, with only that heart-breaking smile in her eyes which meant indulgence unbounded, forgiveness beforehand of anything he might do or say. When Russell, breathing hatred and hostility, came across her path, it was with the same sentiment that Madam had succoured the woman who had played so miserable a part in the catastrophe. The whole history of the event was so terrible that she could bear no comment upon it. Even Jane did not venture to speak to her of the past. She was calm, almost cheerful in what she was doing at the moment, and she had a great deal to do.

The first step she took was one which Edmund opposed with all his might, with a hundred arguments more or less valid, and a mixture of terror and temerity which it humiliated her to be a witness of. He was ready to abandon all possibility of after safety or of recovery of character, to fly as a criminal to the ends of the earth, or to keep in hiding in

holes and corners, liable to be seized upon at any moment; but to take any step to atone for what he had done, to restore the money, or attempt to recover the position of a man innocent, or at least forgiven, were suggestions that filled him with passion. He declared that such an attempt would be ineffectual, that it would end by landing him in prison, that it was madness to think she could do anything. She! so entirely ignorant of business as she was. He ended indeed by denouncing her as his certain ruin, when, in spite of all these arguments, she set out for Liverpool, and left him in a paroxysm of angry terror, forgetting both respect and civility in the passion of opposition. Madam Trevanion did not shrink from this any more than from the other fits of passion to which she had been exposed in her life. She went to Liverpool alone, without even the company and support of Jane. And there she found her mission not without difficulty. But the aspect of the woman to whom fate had done its worst, who was not conscious of the insignificant pain of a rebuff from a stranger, she who had borne every anguish that could be inflicted upon a woman, had an impressive influence which in the end triumphed over everything opposed to

her. She told the young man's story with a composure from which it was impossible to divine what her own share in it was, but with a pathos which touched the heart of the master, who was not a hard man, and who knew the dangers of such a youth better than she did. In the end she was permitted to pay the money, and to release the culprit from all further danger. Her success in this gave her a certain hope. As she returned her mind went forward with something like a recollection of its old elasticity, to what was at least a possibility in the future. Thus made free, and with all the capacities of youth in him, might not some softening and melting of the young man's nature be hoped for—some development of natural affection, some enlargement of life? She said to herself that it might be so. He was not bad nor cruel—he was only unaccustomed to love and care, careless, untrained to any higher existence, unawakened to any better ideal. As she travelled back to London she said to herself that he must have repented his passion, that some compunction must have mo ed him, even, perhaps, some wish to atone. 'He will come to meet me,' she said to herself, with a forlorn movement of anticipation in her

mind. She felt so sure as she thought of this expedient, by which he might show a wish to please her without bending his pride to confess himself in the wrong, that when she arrived and, amid the crowds at the railway, saw no one, her heart sank a little. But in a moment she recovered, saying to herself, 'Poor boy! why should he come?' He had never been used to render such attentions. He was uneasy in the new companionship, to which he was unaccustomed. Perhaps, indeed, he was ashamed, wounded, mortified, by the poor part he played in it. To owe his deliverance even to her might be humiliating to his pride. Poor boy! Thus she explained and softened everything to herself.

But Mrs. Trevanion found herself now the subject of a succession of surprises very strange to her. She was brought into intimate contact with a nature she did not understand, and had to learn the very alphabet of a language unknown to her, and study impulses which left all her experience of human nature behind, and were absolutely new. When he understood that he was free, that everything against him was wiped off, that he was in a position superior to anything he had ever dreamt of, without

need to work or to deny himself, his superficial despair gave way to a burst of pleasure and self-congratulation. Even then he was on his guard not to receive with too much satisfaction the advantages of which he had in a moment become possessed, lest perhaps he should miss something more that might be coming. The unbounded delight which filled him when he found himself in London, with money in his pocket, and freedom, showed itself indeed in every look; but he still kept a wary eye upon the possibilities of the future, and would not allow that what he possessed was above his requirements or hopes. And when he perceived that the preparations for a further journey were by no means interrupted, and that Mrs. Trevanion's plan was still to go abroad, his disappointment and vexation were not to be controlled.

'What should you go abroad for?' he said. 'We're far better in London. There is everything in London that can be desired. It is the right place for a young fellow like me. I have never had any pleasure in my life, nor the means of seeing anything. And here, the moment I have something in my power, you want to rush away.'

'There is a great deal to see on the other side of the Channel, Edmund.'

'I dare say—among foreigners whose language one doesn't know a word of. And what is it, after all? Scenery, or pictures, and that sort of thing. Whereas what I want to see is life.'

She looked at him with a strange understanding of all that she would have desired to ignore, knowing what he meant by some incredible pang of inspiration, though she had neither any natural acquaintance with such a strain of thought nor any desire to divine it. 'There is life everywhere,' she said, 'and I think it will be very good for you, Edmund. You are not very strong, and there are so many things to learn.'

'I see. You think, as I am, that I am not much credit to you, Mrs. Trevanion, of Highcourt. But there might be different opinions about that.' Offence brought a flush of colour to his cheek. 'Miss Trevanion, of Highcourt, was not so difficult to please,' he added, with a laugh of vanity. 'She showed no particular objections to me; but you have ruined me there, I suppose, once for all.'

This attack left her speechless. She could

not for the moment reply, but only looked at him with that appeal in her eyes, to which, in the assurance not only of his egotism, but of his total unacquaintance with what was going on in her mind, her motives and ways of thinking, he was utterly insensible. This, however, was only the first of many arguments on the subject which filled those painful days. When he saw that the preparations still went on, Edmund's disgust was great.

'I see Jane is still going on packing,' he said. 'You don't mind, then, that I can't bear it? What should you drag me away for? I am quite happy here.'

'My dear,' she said, 'you were complaining yourself that you have not anything to do. You have no friends here.'

'Nor anywhere,' said Edmund; 'and whose fault is that?'

'Perhaps it is my fault. But that does not alter the fact, Edmund. If I say that I am sorry, that is little, but still it does not mend it. In Italy everything will amuse you.'

'Nothing will amuse me,' said the young man. 'I tell you I don't care for scenery. What I want to see is life.'

'In travelling,' said Mrs. Trevanion, 'you

often make friends, and you see how the people of other countries live, and you learn——'

'I don't want to learn,' he cried abruptly. 'You are always harping upon that. It is too late to go to school at my age. If I have no education you must put up with it, for it is your fault. And what I want is to stay here. London is the place to learn life and everything. And if you tell me that you couldn't get me plenty of friends, if you chose to exert yourself, I don't believe you. It's because you won't, not because you can't.'

'Edmund!'

'Oh, don't contradict me, for I know better. There is one thing I want above all others, and I know you mean to go against me in that. If you stay here quiet, you know very well *they* will come to town like everybody else for the season, and then you can introduce me. She knows me already. The last time she saw me she coloured up. She knew very well what I was after. This has always been in my mind since the first time I saw her with you. She is fond of you. She will be glad enough to come, if it is even on the sly——'

He was very quick to see when he had gone wrong, and the little cry that came from

her lips, the look that came over her face, warned him a moment too late. He 'coloured up,' as he said, crimson to the eyes, and endeavoured with an uneasy laugh to account for his slip. 'The expression may be vulgar,' he said, 'but everybody uses it. And that's about what it would come to, I suppose.'

'You mistake me altogether, Edmund,' she said. 'I will not see anyone on the sly, as you say; and especially not—— Don't wound me by suggesting what is impossible. If I had not known that I had no alternative, can you suppose I should have left them at all?'

'That's a different matter; you were obliged to do that; but nobody could prevent you meeting them in the streets, seeing them as they pass, saying, "How do you do?" introducing a relation——'

She rose up, and began to pace about the room in great agitation. 'Don't say any more, don't torture me like this,' she said. 'Can you not understand how you are tearing me to pieces? If I were to do what you say, I should be dishonest, false both to the living and the dead. And it would be better to be at the end of the world than to be near them in a

continual fever, watching, scheming for a word. Oh no! no!' she said, wringing her hands, 'do not let me be tempted beyond my strength. Edmund, for my sake, if for no other, let us go away.'

He looked at her with a sort of cynical observation, as she walked up and down the room with hurried steps at first, then calming gradually. He repeated slowly, with a half laugh, 'For your sake? But I thought everything now was to be for my sake. And it is my turn; you can't deny that.'

Mrs. Trevanion gave him a piteous look. It was true that it was his turn; and it was true that she had said all should be for him in her changed life. He had her at an advantage; a fact which to her finer nature seemed the strongest reason for generous treatment, but not to his.

'It is all very well to speak,' he continued; 'but if you really mean well by me, introduce me to Rosalind. That would be the making of me. She is a fine girl, and she has money; and she would be just as pleased——'

She stopped him, after various efforts, almost by force, seizing his arm. 'There are some things,' she said, 'that I cannot bear. This is

one of them. I will not have her name brought in—not even her name——'

'Why not? What's in her name more than another? A rose, don't you know, by any other name——' he said, with a forced laugh. But he was alarmed by Mrs. Trevanion's look, and the clutch which in her passion she had taken of his arm. After all, his new life was dependent upon her, and it might be expedient not to go too far.

This interlude left her trembling and full of agitation. She did not sleep all night, but moved about the room, in her dingy London lodging, scarcely able to keep still. A panic had seized hold upon her. She sent for him in the morning as soon as he had left his room, which was not early; and even he observed the havoc made in her already worn face by the night. She told him that she had resolved to start next day. 'I did not perceive,' she said, 'all the dangers of staying, till you pointed them out to me. If I am to be honest, if I am to keep anyone's esteem, I must go away.'

'I don't see it,' he said, somewhat sullenly. 'It's all your fancy. When a person's in hiding, he's safer in London than anywhere else.'

'I am not in hiding,' she said, hastily, with a sense of mingled irritation and despair. For what words could be used which he would understand, which would convey to him any conception of what she meant? They were like two people speaking different languages, incapable of communicating to each other anything that did not lie upon the surface of their lives. When he perceived at last how much in earnest she was, how utterly resolved not to remain, he yielded, but without either grace or good humour. He had not force enough in himself to resist when it came to a distinct issue. Thus they departed together into the world unknown —two beings absolutely bound to each other, each with no one else in the world to turn to, and yet with no understanding of each other, not knowing the very alphabet of each other's thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THUS Mrs. Trevanion went away out of reach and knowledge of everything that belonged to her old life. She had not been very happy in that life. The principal actor in it, her husband, had regarded her comfort less than that of his horses or hounds. He had filled her existence with agitations, but yet had not made life unbearable until the last fatal complications had arisen. She had been surrounded by people who understood her more or less, who esteemed and approved her, and she had possessed in Rosalind the sweetest of companions, one who was in sympathy with every thought, who understood almost before she was conscious of thinking at all; a creature who was herself yet not herself, capable of sharing everything and responding at every point. And, except her husband, there was no one who regarded Madam Trevanion with anything but respect and reverence. No one mistook the elevation of her

character. She was regarded with honour wherever she went, her opinions prized, her judgment much considered. When a woman to whom this position has been given suddenly descends to find herself in the sole company of one who cares nothing for her judgment, to whom all her opinions are antiquated or absurd, and herself one of those conventional female types without logic or reason, which are all that some men know of women, the confusing effect which is produced upon earth and heaven is too wonderful for words. More than any change of events, this change of position confuses and overwhelms the mind. Sometimes it is the dismal result of an ill-considered marriage. Sometimes it appears in other relationships. She was pulled rudely down from the pedestal she had occupied so long, and rudely, suddenly, made to feel that she was no oracle, that her words had no weight because she said them, but rather carried with them a probability of foolishness because they were hers. The wonder of this bewildered at first; it confused her consciousness, and made her insecure of herself. And at last it produced the worse effect of making everything uncertain to her. Though she had been supposed so self-sustained and strong in

character, she was too natural a woman not to be deeply dependent upon sympathy and the support of understanding. When these failed she tottered and found no firm footing anywhere. Perhaps she said to herself she was really foolish, as Edmund thought, unreasonable, slow to comprehend all character that was unlike her own. She was no longer young; perhaps the young were wiser, had stronger lights; perhaps her beliefs, her prejudices were things of the past. All this she came to think with wondering pain when the support of general faith and sympathy was withdrawn. It made her doubtful of everything she had done or believed, timid to speak, watching the countenance of the young man whose attitude towards her had changed all the world to her. This was not part of the calamity that had befallen her. It was something additional, another blow; to be parted from her children, to sustain the loss of all things dear to her, was her terrible fate, a kind of vengeance for what was past; but that her self-respect, her confidence should thus be taken away from her was another distinct and severe calamity. Sometimes the result was a mental giddiness, a quiver about her of the atmosphere and all the solid

surroundings, as though there was (but in a manner unthought of by Berkeley) nothing really existent but only in the thoughts of those who beheld it. Perhaps her previous experiences had led her towards this; for such had been the scope of all her husband's addresses to her for many a day. But she had not been utterly alone with him, she had felt the strong support of other people's faith and approval holding her up and giving her strength. Now all these accessories had failed her. Her world consisted of one soul, which had no faith in her; and thus, turned back upon herself, she faltered in all her moral certainties, and began to doubt whether she had ever been right, whether she had any power to judge, or perception, or even feeling, whether she were not perhaps in reality the conventional woman, foolish, inconsistent, pertinacious, which she appeared through Edmund's eyes.

The other strange new sensations that Madam encountered in these years, while her little children throve and grew under the care of Mrs. Lennox, and Rosalind developed into the full bloom of early womanhood, were many and various. She had thought herself very well acquainted with the mysteries of human endur-

ance, but it seemed to her now that at the beginning of that new life she had known nothing of them. New depths and heights developed every day; her own complete breaking down and the withdrawal from her of confidence in herself being the great central fact of all. On Edmund's side the development too was great. He had looked and wished for pleasure and ease and self-indulgence when he had very little power of securing them. When by a change of fortune so extraordinary and unexpected he actually obtained the means of gratifying his instincts, he addressed himself to the task with a unity of purpose which was worthy of a greater aim. He was drawn aside from his end by no glimmer of ambition, no impulse to make something better out of his life. His imperfect education and ignorance of what was best in existence had perhaps something to do with this. To him as to many a labouring man the power of doing no work, nor anything but what he pleased, seemed the most supreme of gratifications. He would not give himself the trouble to study anything, even the world, confident as only the ignorant are in the power of money, and in that great evidence that he had become one of the privileged

classes, the fact that he did not now need to do anything for his living. He was not absolutely bad or cruel; he only preferred his own pleasure to anybody else's, and was a little contemptuous of a woman's advice, and intolerant of her rule, and impatient of her company. Perhaps her idea that she owed herself to him, that it was paying an old debt of long-postponed duty to devote herself to him now, to do her best for him, to give him everything in her power that could make him happy, was a mistaken one from the beginning. She got to believe that she was selfish in remaining with him, while still feeling that her presence was the only possible curb upon him. How was she to find a way of serving him best, of providing for all his wants and wishes, of keeping him within the bounds of possibility, yet letting him be free from the constraint of her presence? As time went on, this problem became more and more urgent, yet by the same progress of time her mind grew less and less clear on any point. The balance of the comparative became more difficult to carry. There was no absolute good within her reach, and she would not allow even to herself that there was any absolute bad in the young man's selfish life. It was all com-

parative as life was. But to find the point of comparative advantage which should be best for him, where he should be free without being abandoned, and have the power of shaping his course as he pleased without the power of ruining himself and her—this became more and more the engrossing subject of her thoughts.

As for Edmund, though he indulged in many complaints and grumbles as to having always a woman at his heels, his impatience never went the length of emancipating himself. On the whole his indolent nature found it most agreeable to have everything done for him, to have no occasion for thought. He had the power always of complaint, which gave him a kind of supremacy without responsibility. His fixed grievance was that he was kept out of London; his hope, varying as they went and came about the world, that somewhere they would meet the family from which Mrs. Trevanion had been torn, and that 'on the sly,' or otherwise (though he never repeated those unlucky words), he might find himself in a position to approach Rosalind. In the meantime he amused himself in such ways as were practicable, and spent a great deal of money, and got a certain amount of pleasure out of his life.

His health was not robust, and when late hours and amusements told upon him he had the most devoted of nurses. On the whole, upon comparison with the life of a clerk on a small salary in a Liverpool office, his present existence was a sort of shabby Paradise.

About the time when Rosalind heard from Mr. Rivers of that chance encounter which revived all her longings for her mother, and at the same time all the horror of vague and miserable suspicion which surrounded Mrs. Trevanion's name, a kind of crisis had occurred in this strange wandering life. Edmund had fallen ill, more seriously than before, and in the quiet of convalescence after severe suffering had felt certain compunctions cross his mind. He had acknowledged to his tender nurse that she was very kind to him. 'If you would not nag a fellow so,' he said, 'and drive me about so that I don't know what I am doing, I think, now that I am used to your ways, we might get on.'

Mrs. Trevanion did not defend herself against the charge of 'nagging' or 'driving' as she might perhaps have done at an earlier period, but accepted with almost grateful humility the condescension of this acknowledgment. 'In

the meantime,' she said, 'you must get well, and then, please God, everything will be better.'

'If you like to make it so,' he said, already half repentant of the admission he had made. And then he added, 'If you'd only give up this fancy of yours for foreign parts. Why shouldn't we go home? You may like it, you speak the language, and so forth: but I detest it. If you want to please me and make me get well, let's go home.'

'We have no home to go to, Edmund——'

'Oh, that's nonsense, you know. You don't suppose I mean the sort of fireside business. Nothing is so easy as to get a house in London; and you know that is what I like best.'

'Edmund, how could I live in a house in London?' she said. 'You must remember that a great deal has passed that is very painful. I could not but be brought in contact with people who used to know me——'

'Ah!' he cried, 'here's the real reason at last. I thought all this time it was out of consideration for me, to keep me out of temptation, and that sort of thing; but now it crops up at last. It's for yourself, after all. It is always an advance to know the true reason. And

what could they do to you, those people with whom you might be brought in contact?'

She would not perhaps have said anything about herself had he not beguiled her by the momentary softness of his tone. And now one of those rapid scintillations of cross light which were continually gleaming upon her life and motives flashed over her and changed everything. To be sure! it was selfishness, no doubt, though she had not seen it so. She answered, faltering a little: 'They could do nothing to me. Perhaps you are right, Edmund. It may be that I have been thinking too much of myself. But I am sure London would not be good for you. To live there with comfort you must have something to do, or you must have—friends——'

'Well!' he said, with a kind of defiance.

'You have no friends, Edmund.'

'Well,' he repeated, 'whose fault is that? It is true that I have no friends; but I could have friends and everything else if you would take a little trouble—more than friends; I might marry and settle. You could do everything for me in that way if you would take the trouble. That's what I want to do; but I suppose you would rather drag me for ever

about with you than see me happy in a place of my own.'

Mrs. Trevanion had lost her beauty. She was pale and worn as if twenty additional years had passed over her head instead of two. But for a moment the sudden flush that warmed and lighted up her countenance restored to her something of her prime. 'I think,' she said, 'Edmund, if you will let me for a moment believe what I am saying, that, to see you happy and prosperous, I would gladly die. I know you will say my dying would be little to the purpose; but the other I cannot do for you. To marry requires a great deal that you do not think of. I don't say love, in the first place——'

'You may if you please,' he said. 'I'm awfully fond of—— Oh, I don't mind saying her name. You know who I mean. If you were good enough for her, I don't see why I shouldn't be good enough for her. You have only got to introduce me, which you can if you like, and all the rest I take in my own hands.'

'I was saying,' she repeated, 'that love, even if love exists, is not all. Before any girl of a certain position would be allowed to

marry, the man must satisfy her friends. His past, and his future, and the means he has, and how he intends to live—all these things have to be taken into account. It is not so easy as you think.'

'That is all very well,' said Edmund; though he paused with a stare of mounting dismay in his beautiful eyes, larger and more liquid than ever by reason of his illness—those eyes which haunted Rosalind's imagination. 'That is all very well; but it is not as if you were a stranger: when they know who I am —when I have you to answer for me——'

A flicker of self-assertion came into her eyes. 'Why do you think they should care for me or my recommendation? You do not,' she said.

He laughed. 'That's quite different. Perhaps they know more—and I am sure they know less than I do. I should think you would like them to know about me for your own sake.'

She turned away with once more a rapid flush restoring momentary youth to her countenance. She was so changed that it seemed to her, as she caught a glimpse of herself, languidly moving across the room, in the large

dim mirror opposite, that no one who belonged to her former existence would now recognise her. And there was truth in what he said. It would be better for her, for her own sake, that the family from whom she was separated should know everything there was to tell. After the first horror lest they should know, there had come a revulsion of feeling, and she had consented in her mind that to inform them of everything would be the best, though she still shrank from it. But even if she had strength to make that supreme effort it could do her no good. Nothing, they had said, no explanation, no clearing up, would ever remove the ban under which she lay. And it would be better to go down to her grave unjustified than to place Rosalind in danger. She looked back upon the convalescent as he resumed fretfully the book which was for the moment his only way of amusing himself. Illness had cleared away from Edmund's face all the traces of self-indulgence which she had seen there. It was a beautiful face, full of apparent meaning and sentiment, the eyes full of tenderness and passion—or at least what might seem so in other lights, and to spectators less dismally enlightened than herself. A young soul like

Rosalind, full of faith and enthusiasm, might take that face for the face of a hero, a poet. Ah! this was a cruel thought that came to her against her will, that stabbed her like a knife as it came. She said to herself tremulously that in other circumstances, with other people, he might have been, might even be, all that his face told. Only with her from the beginning everything had gone wrong—which again in some subtle way, according to those revenges which everything that is evil brings with it, was her fault and not his. But Rosalind must not be led to put her faith upon promises which were all unfulfilled. Rosalind must not run any such risk. Whatever should happen, she could not expose to so great a danger another woman, and that her own child.

But there were other means of setting the wheels of fate in motion, with which Madame Trevanion had nothing to do.

CHAPTER XL.

TOWARDS the end of the summer, during the height of which Mrs. Lennox's party had returned to the Italian lakes, one of the friends she made at Cadenabbia represented to that good woman that her rheumatism, from which she had suffered during the winter, though perhaps not quite so severely as she imagined made it absolutely necessary for her to go through a 'cure' at Aix-les-Bains, where, as everybody knows, rheumatism is miraculously operated upon by the waters. Aunt Sophy was very much excited by this piece of advice. In the company which she had been frequenting of late, at the *tables d'hôte* and in the public promenades, she had begun to perceive that it was scarcely respectable for a person of a certain age not to go through a yearly 'cure' at some one or other of a number of watering-places. It indicated a state of undignified health and robustness which was not quite nice

for a lady no longer young. There were many who went to Germany, to the different *bads* there, and a considerable number whose 'cure' was in France, and some even who sought unknown springs in Switzerland and Italy; but, taken on the whole, very few indeed were the persons over fifty of either sex who did not reckon a 'cure,' occupying three weeks or so of the summer or autumn, as a necessary part of the routine of life. To all Continental people it was indispensable, and there were many Americans who crossed the ocean for this purpose, going to Carlsbad or to Kissingen or somewhere else with as much regularity as if they had lived within a railway journey of the place. Only the English were careless on so important a subject, but even among them many became convinced of the necessity day by day.

Mrs. Lennox, when this idea fully penetrated her mind, and she had blushed to think how far she was behind in so essential a particular of life, had a strong desire to go to Homburg, where all the 'best people' went, and where there was quite a little supplementary London season, after the conclusion of the genuine article. But, unfortunately, there was

nothing the matter with her digestion. Her rheumatism was the only thing she could bring forward as entitling her to any position at all among the elderly ladies and gentlemen who in August were setting out for, or returning from, their 'cures.' 'Oh, then, of course, it is Aix you must go to,' her informants said; 'it is a little late, perhaps, in September—most of the best people will have gone—still, you know the waters are just as good, and the great heat is over. You could not do better than Aix.' One of the ladies who thus instructed her was even kind enough to suggest the best hotel to go to, and to proffer her own services, as knowing all about it, to write and secure rooms for her friend. 'It is a pity you did not go three weeks ago, when all the best people were there; but, of course, the waters are just the same,' this benevolent person repeated. Mrs. Lennox became, after a time, very eager on this subject. She no longer blushed when her new acquaintances talked of their cure. She explained to new-comers, 'It is a little late, but it did not suit my arrangements before; and, of course, the waters are the same, though the best people are gone.' Besides, it was always, she said, on the way home, whatever might happen.

They set off accordingly, travelling in a leisurely way, in the beginning of September. Mrs. Lennox felt that it was expedient to go slowly, to have something of the air of an invalid before she began her 'cure.' Up to this moment she had borne a stray twinge of pain when it came, in her shoulder or her knee, and thought it best to say nothing about it; but now she made a little grimace when that occurred, and said, 'Oh, my shoulder!' or complained of being stiff when she got out of the carriage. It was only right that she should feel her ailments a little more than usual when she began her cure.

The hotels were beginning to empty when the English party, so helpless, so used to comfort, so inviting to everybody that wanted to make money out of them, appeared. They were received, it is needless to say, with open arms, and had the best suites of rooms to choose from. Mrs. Lennox felt herself to grow in importance from the moment she entered the place. She felt more stiff than ever when she got out of the carriage and was led upstairs, the anxious landlady suggesting that there was a chair in which she could be carried to her apartment if the stairs were too much for her.

'Oh, I think I can manage to walk up if I am not hurried,' Aunt Sophy said. It would have been quite unkind, almost improper, not to adopt the *rôle* which suited the place. She went up quite slowly, holding by the banister, while the children, astonished, crowded up after her, wondering what had happened. 'I think I will take your arm, Rosalind,' murmured the simple woman. She did really feel much stiffer than usual; and then there was that pain in her shoulder. 'I am so glad I have suffered myself to be persuaded to come. I wonder Dr. Tennant did not order me here long ago; for I really think in my present condition I never should have been able to get home.' Even Rosalind was much affected by this suggestion, and blamed herself for never having discovered how lame Aunt Sophy was growing. 'But it is almost your own fault, for you never showed it,' she said. 'My dear, I did not, of course, want to make you anxious,' replied Mrs. Lennox.

The doctor came next morning, and everything was settled about the 'cure.' He told the new-comers that there was still a good many people in Aix, and that all the circumstances were most favourable. Mrs. Lennox

was taken to her bath in a chair the day after, and went through all the operations which the medical man thought requisite. He spoke excellent English—which was such a comfort. He told his patient that the air of the place where the cure was to be effected often seemed to produce a temporary recrudescence of the disease. Aunt Sophy was much exhilarated by this word. She talked of this chance of a recrudescence in a soft and subdued tone, such as became her invalid condition, and felt a most notable increase of dignity and importance as she proceeded with her 'cure.'

Rosalind was one of the party who took least to this unexpected delay. She had begun to be very weary of the travelling, the monotony of the groups of new acquaintances all so like each other, the atmosphere of hotels, and all the vulgarities of a life in public. To the children it did not matter much; they took their walks all the same whether they were at the Elms or Aix-les-Bains, and had their nursery dinner at their usual hour, whatever happened. The absorption of Mrs. Lennox in her 'cure' threw Rosalind now entirely upon the society of these little persons. She went with them, or rather they went with her, in her constant

expeditions to the lake, which attracted her more than the tiresome amusements of the watering-place, and thus all their little adventures and encounters—incidents which in other circumstances might have been overlooked —became matters of importance to her.

It was perhaps because he was the only boy in the little feminine party, or because he was the youngest, that Johnny was invariably the principal personage in all these episodes of childish life. He it was whom the ladies admired, whom strangers stopped to talk to, who was the little hero of every small excitement. His beautiful eyes, the boyish boldness which contrasted so strongly with little Amy's painful shyness, and even with his own little pale face and unassured strength, captivated the passers-by. He was the favourite of the nursery, which was now presided over by a nurse much more enlightened than Russell, a woman recommended by the highest authorities, and who knew, or was supposed to know, nothing of the family history. Rosalind had heard vaguely without paying much attention of various admirers who had paid their tribute to the attractions of her little brother, but it was not until her curiosity was roused by the

appearance of a present in the form of a handsome and expensive mechanical toy, the qualities of which Johnny expounded with much self-importance and in a loud voice, that she was moved to any remark. The children were on the floor near her, full of excitement. 'Now it shall run round and round, and now it shall go straight home,' Johnny said, while Amy watched and listened ecstatically, a little maiden of few words, whose chief qualities were a great power of admiration and a still greater of love.

Rosalind was seated musing by the window, a little tired, wondering when the 'cure' would be over, and if Aunt Sophy would then recover the use of her limbs again, and consent to go home. Mrs. Lennox was always good and kind, and the children were very dear to their mother-sister; but now and then, not always, perhaps not often, there comes to a young woman like Rosalind a longing for companionship such as neither aunts nor children can give. Neither the children nor her aunt shared her thoughts; they understood her very imperfectly on most occasions; they had love to give her, but not a great deal more. She sighed, as people do when there is something

wanting to them, then turned upon herself with a kind of rage, and asked, 'What did she want?' as girls will do on whom it has been impressed that this wish for companionship is a thing that is wrong, perhaps unmaidenly. But after all there was no harm in it. Oh, that Uncle John was here! she said to herself. Even Roland Hamerton would have been something. He could have tried at least his very best to think as she did. Oh that——! She did not put any name to this aspiration. She was not very sure who—which—it meant, and then she breathed a still deeper sigh, and tears came to her eyes. Oh! for *her* of whom nobody knew where she was wandering or in what circumstances she might be. She heard the children's voices vaguely through her thinking, and by-and-by a word caught her ear.

'The lady said I was to do it like this. She did it for me on the table out in the garden. It nearly felled down,' said Johnny, 'and then it would have broken itself, so she put it on the ground and went down on her knees.'

'Oh, what did she go on her knees for, like saying her prayers, Johnny?'

'Nothin' of the sort. She just went down

like this and caught hold of me. I expose,' said Johnny, whose language was not always correct, 'she is stiff like Aunt Sophy; for I was far more stronger and kept her up.'

'Who is this that he is talking of, Amy?' Rosalind said.

The little girl gave her a look which had some meaning in it, Rosalind could not tell what, and, giving Johnny a little push with her arm after the easy method of childhood, said, 'Tell her,' turning away to examine the toy.

'It was the lady,' Johnny said, turning slightly round as on a pivot, and lifting to her those great eyes which Aunt Sophy had said were like—and which always went straight to Rosalind's heart.

'What lady, dear? and where did you get that beautiful toy?' Rosalind followed the description the child had been giving, and came and knelt on the carpet beside him. 'How pretty it is! Did Aunt Sophy give you that?'

'It was the lady,' Johnny repeated.

'What lady? Was it a stranger, Amy, that gave him such a beautiful toy?'

'I think, Miss Rosalind,' said the nurse, coming to the rescue, 'it is some lady that has

lost her little boy, and that he must have been about Master Johnny's age. I said it was too much, and that you would not like him to take it; but she said the ladies would never mind if they knew it was for the sake of another—that she had lost.'

'Poor lady!' Rosalind said; the tears came to her eyes in sudden sympathy; 'that must be so sad, to lose a child.'

'It is the greatest sorrow in this world, to be only sorrow,' the woman said.

'Only sorrow! and what can be worse than that?' said innocent Rosalind. 'Is the lady very sad, Johnny? I hope you were good and thanked her for it. Perhaps if I were with him some day she would speak to me.'

'She doesn't want nobody but me,' said Johnny. 'Oh look! doesn't it go. It couldn't go on the ground because of the stones. Amy, Amy, get out of the way, it will run you over. And now it's going home to take William a message. I whispered in it, so it knows what to say.'

'But I want to hear about the lady, Johnny.'

'Oh look, look! it's falled on the carpet;

it don't like the carpet any more than the stones. I expose it's on the floor it will go best, or on the grass. Nurse, come along, let's go out and try it on the grass.'

'Johnny, stop! I want to know more about this lady, dear.'

'Oh, there is nothing about her,' cried the little boy, rushing after his toy. Sophy, who had been practising, got up from the piano and came forward to volunteer information.

'She's an old fright,' said Sophy. 'I've seen her back—dressed all in mourning, with a thick veil on. She never took any notice of us others that have more sense than Johnny. I could have talked to her, but he can't talk to anybody, he is so little and so silly. All he can say is only stories he makes up; you think that is clever, but I don't think it is clever. If I was his—aunt,' said Sophy, with a momentary hesitation, 'I would whip him. For all that is lies, don't you know? You would say it was lies if I said it, but you think it's poetry because of Johnny. Poetry is lies, Rosalind, yes, and novels too. They're not true, so what can they be but lies? that's why I don't care to read them. No, I never read them, I like what's true.'

Rosalind caught her book instinctively, which was all she had left. 'We did not ask you for your opinion about poetry, Sophy; but if this lady is so kind to Johnny I should like to go and thank her. Next time you see her say that Johnny's sister would like to thank her. If she has lost her little boy we ought to be very sorry for her,' Rosalind said.

Sophy looked at her with an unmoved countenance. 'I think people are a great deal better off that are not bothered with children,' she said; 'I should send the little ones home, and then we could do what we liked, and stay as long as we liked,' quoth the little woman of the world.

CHAPTER XLI.

JOHNNY'S little social successes were so frequent that the memory of the poor lady who had lost her child at his age soon died away, and the toy got broken and went the way of all toys. Their life was spent in a very simple round of occupations. Rosalind, whose powers as an artist were not beyond the gentlest level of amateur art, took to sketching, as a means of giving some interest to her idle hours, and it became one of the habits of the family that Aunt Sophy, when well enough to go out for her usual afternoon drive, should deposit her niece and the children on the bank of the lake, the spot which Rosalind had chosen as the subject of a sketch. The hills opposite shone in the afternoon sun with a grey haze of heat softening all their outlines; the water glowed and sparkled in all its various tones of blue, here and there specked by a slowly progressing boat, carrying visitors across to the mock antiquity of Hautecombe.

After the jingle and roll of Mrs. Lennox's carriage had passed away, the silence of the summer heat so stilled the landscape that the distant clank of the oars on the water produced the highest effect. It was very warm, yet there was something in the haze that spoke of autumn, and a cool but capricious little breeze came now and then from the water. Rosalind, sitting in the shade with her sketching-block upon her knee, felt that soft indolence steal over her, that perfect physical content and harmony with everything, which takes all impulse from the mind and makes the sweetness of doing nothing a property of the very atmosphere. Her sketch was very unsatisfactory for one thing: the subject was much too great for her simple powers. She knew just enough to know that it was bad, but not how to do what she wished, to carry out her own ideal. To make out the open secret before her, and perceive how it was that Nature formed those shadows and poured down that light, was possible to her mind but not to her hand, which had not the cunning necessary for the task; but she was clever enough to see her incapacity, which is more than can be said of most amateurs. Her hands had dropped by her side, and her sketch

upon her lap. After all, who could hope to put upon paper those dazzling lights, and the differing tones of air and distance, the shadows that flitted over the mountain sides, the subdued radiance of the sky? Perhaps a great artist, Turner or his chosen rival, but not an untrained girl, whose gifts were only for the drawing-room. Rosalind was not moved by any passion of regret on account of her failure. She was content to sit still and vaguely contemplate the beautiful scene, which was half within her and half without. The 'inward eye which is the bliss of solitude' filled out the outline of the picture for her as she sat, not thinking, a part of the silent rapture of the scene. The children were playing near her, and their voices, softened in the warm air, made part of the beatitude of the moment—that, and the plash of the water on the shore, and the distant sound of the oars, and the breeze that blew in her face. It was one of those exquisite instants, without any actual cause of happiness in them, when we are happy without knowing why. Such periods come back to the mind as the great events which are called joyful never do—for with events, however joyful, there come agitations, excitements—

whereas pure happiness is serene, and all the sweeter for being without any cause.

Thus Rosalind sat—notwithstanding many things in her life which were far from perfect—in perfect calm and pleasure. The nurse, seated lower down upon the beach, was busy with a piece of work, crochet or some other of those useless handiworks which are a refreshment to those who are compelled to be useful for the greater portion of their lives. The children were still near to the edge of the water, playing with a little pleasure-boat which was moored within the soft plash of the lake. It was not a substantial craft like the boats native to the place, which are meant to convey passengers and do serious work, but was a little, gaily painted pleasure skiff, belonging to an Englishman in the neighbourhood, neither safe nor solid—one of the cockleshells that a wrong balance upsets in a moment. It was to all appearance safely attached to something on the land, and suggested no idea of danger either to the elder sister seated above or to the nurse on the beach.

Amy and Johnny had exhausted their imagination in a hundred dramatic plays; they had 'pretended' to be kings and queens, to be

a lady receiving visitors and a gentleman making a morning call, to be a clergyman preaching to a highly critical and unsatisfactory audience, which would neither stay quiet nor keep still, to be a procession chanting funeral hymns, even coming down sadly from that level of high art to keep a shop, selling pebbles and sand for tea and sugar. Such delights, however, are but transitory; the children after a while exhausted every device they could think of; and then they got into the boat, which it was very easy to do. The next thing, as was natural, was to 'pretend' to push off and row. And, alas! the very first of these attempts was too successful. The boat had been attached, as it appeared, merely to a small iron rod thrust into the sand, and Johnny, being vigorous and pulling with all his little might—with so much might that he tumbled into the bottom of the boat head over heels in the revulsion of the effort—the hold gave way. Both nurse and sister sat tranquilly, fearing no evil, while this tremendous event took place, and it was not till the shifting of some bright lines in the foreground caught Rosalind's dreaming eye that the possibility of any accident occurred to her. She sprang to her feet then, with a loud cry which

startled the nurse and a group of children playing further on, on the beach, but no one who could be of any real assistance. The little bright vessel was afloat and already bearing away upon the shining water. In a minute it was out of reach of anything the women could do. There was not a boat or a man within sight; the only hope was in the breeze which directed the frail little skiff to a small projecting point further on, to which, as soon as her senses came back to her, Rosalind rushed, with what intention she scarcely knew, to plunge into the water though she could not swim, to do something, if it should only be to drown along with them. The danger that the boat might float out into the lake was not all; for any frightened movement, even an attempt to help themselves on the part of the children, might upset the frail craft in a moment, and end their voyage for ever.

She flew over the broken ground, stumbling in her hurry and agitation, doing her best to stifle the cries that burst from her, lest she should frighten the little voyagers. For the moment they were quite still, surprise and alarm and a temporary confusion as to what to do having quieted their usual restlessness. Amy's little

face, with a smile on it, gradually growing fixed as fear crept over her which she would not betray, and Johnny's back as he settled himself on the rowing seat, with his arms just beginning to move towards the oars which Rosalind felt would be instant destruction did he get hold of them, stood out in her eyes as if against a background of flame. It was only the background of the water, all soft and glowing, with scarcely a ripple upon it, safe, so peaceful, and yet death. There could not have been a prettier picture. The boat was reflected in every tint, the children's dresses, its own lines of white and crimson, the foolish little flag of the same colours that fluttered at the bow—all prettiness, gaiety, a picture that would have delighted a child, softly floating, double, boat and shadow. But never was any scene of prettiness looked at with such despair. 'Keep still, keep still,' Rosalind cried, half afraid even to say so much, as she flew along, her brain all one throb. If but the gentle breeze, the current so slight as to be scarcely visible, would drift them to the point! if only her feet would carry her there in time! Her sight seemed to fail her, and yet for years after it was like a picture ineffaceable printed upon her eyes.

She was rushing into the water in despair, with her hands stretched out, but, alas! seeing too clearly that the boat was still out of her reach, and restraining with pain the cry of anguish which would have startled the children, when she felt herself suddenly put aside and a coat, thrown off by someone in rapid motion, fell at her feet. Rosalind did not lose her senses, which were all strung to the last degree of vivid force and capability; but she knew nothing, did not think, was conscious neither of her own existence nor of how this came about, of nothing but the sight before her eyes. She stood among the reeds, her feet in the water, trying to smile to the children, to Amy upon whom terror was growing, and to keep her own cries from utterance. The plunge of the new-comer in the water startled Johnny. He had got hold of the oar, and in the act of flinging it upon the water with the clap which used to delight him on the lake at home, turned sharply round to see what this new sound meant. Then the light vanished from Rosalind's eyes. She uttered one cry, which seemed to ring from one end of the lake to the other, and startled the rowers far away on the other side. Then gradually sight came back

to her. Had it all turned into death and destruction, that shining water with its soft reflections, the pretty outline, the floating colours? She heard a sound of voices, the tones of the children, and then the scene became visible again, as if a black shadow had been removed. There was the boat, still floating double, Amy's face full of smiles, Johnny's voice raised high. 'Oh, *I* could have doned it!'—a man's head above the level of the water, a hand upon the side of the boat. Then someone called to her, 'No harm done; I will take them back to the beach.' The throbbing went out of Rosalind's brain and went lower down, till her limbs shook under her, and how to get through the reeds she could not tell. She lifted the coat instinctively and struggled along, taking, it seemed to her, half an hour to retrace the steps which she had made in two minutes in the access of terror which had left her so weak. The nurse, who had fallen helpless on the beach, covering her eyes with her hands not to see the catastrophe, had recovered and got the children in her arms before Rosalind reached them. They were quite at their ease and skipped about on the shingle when lifted from the boat with an air

of triumph. 'I could have doned it if you had left me alone,' said Johnny, careless of the mingled caresses and reproaches that fell upon him in a torrent—the 'Oh, children, you've almost killed me!' of nurse, and the passionate clasp with which Rosalind seized upon them. 'We were floating beautiful,' said little Amy, oblivious of her terrors—and they began to descant both together upon the delights of their 'sail.' 'Oh, it is far nicer than those big boats!' 'And if he had let me get the oars out I'd have doned it myself,' cried Johnny. The group of children which had been disturbed by the accident stood round gaping open-mouthed in admiration, and the loud sound of hurrying oars from a boat rushing across the lake to the rescué added to the excitement of the little hero and heroine. Rosalind's dress was torn with her rush through the reeds, her shoes wet, her whole frame trembling; while nurse had got her tidy bonnet awry and her hair out of order. But the small adventurers had suffered no harm or strain of any kind. They were jaunty in their perfect success and triumph.

'I thought it safest to bring them round to this bit of beach, where they could be

landed without any difficulty. Oh, pray don't say anything about it. It was little more than wading, the water is not deep. And I am amply—— Miss Trevanion! I am shocked to see you carrying my coat!'

Rosalind turned to the dripping figure by her side with a cry of astonishment. She had been far too much agitated even to make any question in her mind who it was. Now she raised her eyes to meet—what? the eyes that were like Johnny's, the dark, wistful, appealing look which had come back to her mind so often. He stood there with the water running from him, in the glow of exertion, his face thinner and less boyish, but his look the same as when he had come to her help on the country road, and by the little lake at Highcourt. It flashed through Rosalind's mind that he had always come to her help. She uttered the 'Oh!' which is English for every sudden wonder, not knowing what to say.

'I hope,' he said, 'that you may perhaps remember I once saw you at Highcourt in the old days, in a little difficulty with a boat. This was scarcely more than that.'

'I recollect,' she said, her breath coming fast; 'you were very kind—and now—— Oh,

this is a great deal more! I owe you—their lives.'

'Pray don't say so. It was nothing—anyone would have done it, even if there had been a great deal more to do, but there was nothing; it was little more than wading.' Then he took his coat from her hand, which she had been holding all the time. 'It is far more—it is too much that you should have carried my coat, Miss Trevanion. It is more than a reward.'

She had thought of the face so often, the eyes fixed upon her, and had forgotten what doubts had visited her mind when she saw him before. Now, when she met the gaze of those eyes again, all her doubts came back. There was a faint internal struggle, even while she remembered that he had saved the lives of the children. 'I know,' she said, recollecting herself, 'that we have met before, and that I had other things to thank you for, though nothing like this. But you must forgive me, for I don't know your name.

'My name is Everard,' he said, with a little hesitation and a quick flush of colour. His face, which had always been refined in feature, had a delicacy that looked like ill-health, and as he pulled on his coat over his wet clothes he

shivered slightly. Was it because he felt the chill, or only to call forth the sudden anxiety which appeared in Rosalind's face? 'Oh,' he said, 'it was momentary. I shall take no harm.'

'What can we do?' cried Rosalind, with alarm. 'If it should make you ill! And you are here perhaps for the baths? and yet have plunged in without thought. What can we do? There is no carriage nor anything to be got. Oh, Mr. Everard! take pity upon me, and hasten home.'

'I will walk with you if you will let me.'

'But we cannot go quick, the children are not able, and what if you catch cold! My aunt would never forgive me if I let you wait.'

'There could be nothing improper,' he said, hastily, 'with the nurse and the children.'

Rosalind felt the pain of this mistaken speech prick her like a pin-point. To think in your innermost consciousness that a man is 'not a gentleman' is worse than anything else that can be said of him in English speech. She hesitated and was angry with herself, but yet her colour rose high. 'What I mean,' she said, with an indescribable delicate pride, 'is that you will take cold—you understand me, surely—

you will take cold after being in the water. I beg you to go on without waiting, for the children cannot walk quickly.'

'And you?' he said—still he did not seem to understand, but looked at her with a sort of delighted persuasion that she was avoiding the walk with him coyly, with that feminine withdrawal which leads a suitor on. 'You are just as wet as I am. Could not we two push on and leave the children to follow?'

Rosalind gave him a look which was full of almost despairing wonder. The mind and the words conveyed so different an impression from that made by the refined features and harmonious face. 'Oh, please go away!' she said, 'I am in misery to see you standing there so wet. My aunt will send to you to thank you. Oh, please go away! If you catch cold we will never forgive ourselves,' Rosalind cried, with an earnestness that brought tears to her eyes.

'Miss Trevanion, that you should care——'

Rosalind, in her heat and eagerness, made an imperious gesture, stamping her foot on the sand in passionate impatience. 'Go, go!' she cried. 'We owe you the children's lives, and we shall not forget it—but go!'

He hesitated. He did not believe nor

understand her. He looked in her eyes wistfully, yet with a sort of smile, to know how much of it was true. Could anyone who was a gentleman have so failed to apprehend her meaning? Yet it did gleam on him at length, and he obeyed her, though reluctantly, turning back half a dozen times in the first hundred yards to see if she were coming. At last a turn in the road hid him from her troubled eyes.

CHAPTER XLII.

WHEN the party arrived at the hotel and Aunt Sophy was informed of what had happened, her excitement was great. The children were caressed and scolded in a breath. After a while, however, the enormity of their behaviour was dwelt upon by all their guardians together.

'I was saying, ma'am, that I couldn't never take Miss Amy and Master Johnny near to that lake again. Oh, I couldn't!—the hotel garden, I couldn't go farther, not with any peace of mind.'

'You hear what nurse says, children!' said Aunt Sophy; 'she is quite right. It would be impossible for me to allow you to go out again unless you made me a promise, oh, a faithful promise.'

Amy was tired with the long walk after all the excitement; and she was always an impressionable little thing. She began to cry and protest that she never meant any harm, that the boat was so pretty, and that she was sure

it was fastened and could not get away. But Johnny held his ground. 'I could have doned it myself,' he said; 'I know how to row. Nobody wasn't wanted—if that fellow had let us alone.'

'Where is the gentleman, Rosalind?' cried Mrs. Lennox. 'Oh, how could you be so ungrateful as to let him go without asking where he was to be found? To think he should have saved these precious children and not to know where to find him to thank him! Oh, children, only think, if you had been brought home all cold and stiff, and laid out there never to give any more trouble, never to go home again, never to speak to your poor distracted auntie, or to poor Rosalind, or to—— Oh, my darlings! What should I have done if you had been brought home to me like that? It would have killed me. I should never more have held up my head again.'

At this terrible prospect, and at the sight of Aunt Sophy's tears, Amy flung her arms as far as they would go round that portly figure and hid her sobs upon her aunt's bosom. Johnny began to yield; he grew pale, and his big eyes veiled themselves with a film of tears. To think of lying there cold and stiff, as Aunt

Sophy said, daunted the little hero. 'I could have doned it,' he said, but faltered, and his mouth began to quiver.

'And Uncle John,' cried Mrs. Lennox, 'and Rex! what would you have said never, never to see them again?'

Johnny in his own mind piled up the agony still higher—and the rabbits and the pigeons, and his own pet guinea-pig, and his pony! He flung himself into Aunt Sophy's lap, which was so large, and so soft, and so secure.

This scene moved Rosalind both to tears and laughter; for it was a little pathetic as well as funny, and the girl was over-strained. She would have liked to fling herself, too, into arms of love like Aunt Sophy's, which were full—arms as loving but more strong. The children did not want their mother, but Rosalind did. Her mind was moved by sentiments more complex than Johnny's emotions, but she had no one to have recourse to. The afternoon brightness had faded, and the grey of twilight filled the large room, making everything indistinct. At this crisis the door opened and somebody was ushered into the room, someone who came forward with a hesitating yet eager step. 'I hope I may be permitted, though I

am without introduction, to ask if the children have taken any harm,' he said.

'It is Mr. Everard, Aunt Sophy.' Rosalind retired to the background, her heart beating loudly. She wanted to look on to see what appearance he presented to a spectator, to know how he would speak, what he would say.

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Lennox, standing up with a child in each arm, 'it is the gentleman who saved my darlings—it is your deliverer, children. Oh, sir, what can I say to you; how can I even thank you? You have saved my life too, for I should never have survived if anything had happened to them.'

He stood against the light of one of the windows, unconscious of the eager criticism with which he was being watched. Perhaps the bow he made was a little elaborate, but his voice was soft and refined. 'I am very glad if I have been of any service,' he said.

'Oh, service! it is far, far beyond that. I hope Rosalind said something to you; I hope she told you how precious they were, and that we could never, never forget.'

'There is nothing to thank me for, indeed. It was more a joke than anything else; the

little things were in no danger so long as they sat still. I was scarcely out of my depth, not much more than wading all the time.'

'Aunt Sophy, that is what I told you,' said Johnny, withdrawing his head from under her arm. 'I could have doned it myself.'

'Oh hush, Johnny! Whatever way it was done, what does that matter?—here they are, and they might have been at the bottom of the lake. And you risked your own life or your health, which comes to the same thing? Pray sit down, Mr. Everard. If you are here,' Aunt Sophy went on, loosing her arms from the children and sitting down with the full purpose of enjoying a talk, 'as I am, for the waters, to get drenched and to walk home in your wet clothes must have been madness—that is, if you are here for your health.'

'I am here for the baths, but a trifle like that could harm no one.'

'Oh, I trust not—oh, I anxiously trust not! It makes my heart stand still even to think of it. Are you getting any benefit? It is for rheumatism, I suppose? And what form does yours take? One sufferer is interested in another,' Mrs. Lennox said.

He seemed to wince a little, and threw a

glance behind into the dimness to look for Rosalind. To confess to rheumatism is not interesting. He said at last with a faint laugh: 'I had rheumatic fever some years ago. My heart is supposed to be affected, that is all; the water couldn't hurt that organ; indeed I think it did good.'

Rosalind in the background knew that this was meant for her; but her criticism was disarmed by a touch of humorous sympathy for the poor young fellow, who had expected no doubt to appear in the character of a hero, and was thus received as a fellow-sufferer in rheumatism. But Mrs. Lennox naturally saw nothing ludicrous in the situation. 'Mine,' she said, 'is in the joints. I get so stiff, and really to rise up after I have been sitting down for any time is quite an operation. I suppose you don't feel anything of that sort? To be sure, you are so much younger—but sufferers have a fellow-feeling. And when did you begin your baths? and how many do you mean to take? and do you think they are doing you any good? It is more than I can say just at present, but they tell me that it oftens happens so, and that it is afterwards that one feels the good result.'

'I know scarcely anyone here,' said the young man, 'so I have not been able to compare notes; but I am not ill, only taking the baths to please a—relation, who, perhaps,' he said with a little laugh, 'takes more interest in me than I deserve.'

'Oh, I am sure not that!' said Aunt Sophy with enthusiasm. 'But indeed it is very nice of you to pay so much attention to your relation's wishes. You will never repent putting yourself to trouble for her peace of mind, and I am sure I sympathise with her very much in the anxiety she must be feeling. When the heart is affected it is always serious. I hope, Mr. ——'

'Everard,' he said with a bow, once more just a little, as the critic behind him felt, too elaborate for the occasion.

'I beg your pardon. Rosalind did tell me; but I was so much agitated, almost too much to pay any attention. I hope, Mr. Everard, that you are careful to keep yourself from all agitation. I can't think the shock of plunging into the lake could be good for you. Oh, I feel quite sure it couldn't be good. I hope you will feel no ill results afterwards. But excitement of any sort, or

agitation, that is the worst thing for the heart. I hope, for your poor dear relation's sake, who must be so anxious, poor lady, that you will take every care.'

He gave a glance behind Mrs. Lennox to the shadow which stood between him and the window. 'That depends,' he said, 'rather on other people than on myself. You may be sure I should prefer to be happy and at ease if it were in my power.'

'Ah, well!' said Aunt Sophy, 'that is very true. Of course our happiness depends very much upon other people. And you have done a great deal for mine, Mr. Everard. It would not have done me much good to have people telling me to be cheerful if my poor little darlings had been at the bottom of the lake.' Here Aunt Sophy stopped and cried a little, then went on. 'You are not, I think, living at our hotel, but I hope you will stay and dine with us. Oh yes, I cannot take any refusal. We may have made your acquaintance informally, but few people can have so good a reason for wishing to know you. This is my niece, Miss Trevanion, Mr. Everard; the little children you saved are my brother's children—the late Mr. Trevanion of High-court.

Rosalind listened with her heart beating high. Was it possible that he would receive the introduction as if he had known nothing of her before? He rose and turned towards her, made once more that slightly stiff, too elaborate bow, and was silent. No, worse than that, began to say something about being happy to make—acquaintance.

'Aunt Sophy,' said Rosalind, stepping forward, 'you are under a mistake. Mr. Everard knows us well enough. I met him before we left Highcourt.' And then she too paused, feeling with sudden embarrassment that there was a certain difficulty in explaining their meetings, a difficulty of which she had not thought. It was he now who had the advantage which she had felt to lie with herself.

'It is curious how things repeat themselves,' he said. 'I had once the pleasure of recovering a boat that had floated away from Miss Trevanion on the pond at Highcourt, but I could not have ventured to claim acquaintance on so small an argument as that.'

Rosalind was silenced—her mind began to grow confused. It was not true that this was all, and yet it was not false. She said nothing;

if it was wrong she made herself an accomplice in the wrong; and Aunt Sophy's exclamations soon put an end to the incident.

'So you had met before!' she cried. 'So you know Highcourt! Oh, what a very small world this is!—everybody says so, but it is only now and then that one is sensible. But you must tell us all about it at dinner. We dine at the *table d'hôte*, if you don't mind. It is more amusing, and I don't like to shut up Rosalind with only an old lady like me for her company. You like it too? Oh, well, that is quite nice. Will you excuse us now, Mr. Everard, while we prepare for dinner? for that is the dressing-bell just ringing, and they allow one so little time. Give me your hand, dear, to help me up. You see I am quite crippled,' Mrs. Lennox said complacently, forgetting how nimbly she had sprung from her chair with a child under each arm to greet their deliverer. She limped a little as she went out of the room on Rosalind's arm. She was quite sure that her rheumatism made her limp; but sometimes she forgot that she had rheumatism, which is a thing that will happen in such cases now and then.

The room was still dark. It was not Mrs.

Lennox's custom to have it lighted before dinner, and when the door closed upon the ladies the young man was left alone. His thoughts were full of triumph and satisfaction not unmingled with praise. He had attained by the chance of a moment what he had set his heart upon, he said to himself; for years he had haunted Highcourt for this end; he had been kept cruelly and unnaturally (he thought) from realising it. Those who might have helped him, without any harm to themselves, had refused and resisted his desire, and compelled him to relinquish it. And now in a moment he had attained what he had so desired. Introduced under the most flattering circumstances, with every prepossession in his favour, having had it in his power to lay under the deepest obligation the family, the guardians as well as the girl who, he said to himself, was the only girl he had ever loved. Did he love Rosalind? He thought so, as Mrs. Lennox thought she had rheumatism. Both were serious enough — and perhaps this young stranger was not clearly aware how much it was he saw in Rosalind besides herself. He saw in her a great deal that did not meet the outward eye, though he also saw the share of

beauty she possessed, magnified by his small acquaintance with women of her kind. He saw her sweet, and fair, and desirable in every way, as the truest lover might have done. And there were other advantages which such a lover as Roland Hamerton would have scorned to take into consideration, which Rivers—not able at his more serious age to put them entirely out of his mind—yet turned from instinctively as if it were doing her a wrong to remember them, but which this young man realised vividly and reminded himself of with rising exhilaration. With such a wife what might he not do? Blot out everything that was against him, attain everything he had ever dreamt of, secure happiness, advancement, wealth. He moved from window to window of the dim room, waiting for the ladies, in a state of exaltation indescribable. He had been raised at once from earth to heaven. There was not a circumstance that was not in his favour. He was received by them as an intimate, he was to be their escort, to be introduced by them, to form one of their party; and Rosalind, Rosalind! she was the only girl whom he had ever loved.

CHAPTER XLIII.

He was placed between the ladies at the *table d'hôte*. Mrs. Lennox on her side told the story of what had happened to the lady on her other side, and Rosalind was appealed to by her left-hand neighbour to know what was the truth of the rumour which had begun to float about the little community. It was reported all down the table, so far, at least, as the English group extended, 'That is the gentleman next to Mrs. Lennox—the children were drowning, and he plunged in and saved both.' 'What carelessness to let them go so near the water! It is easy to see, poor things, that they have no mother.' 'And did he save them both? Of course, they must both be safe or Mrs. Lennox and Miss Trevanion would not have appeared at the *table d'hôte*.' Such remarks as these, interspersed with questions, 'Who is the young fellow?—where has he sprung from?—I never saw him before,' buzzed all about as dinner went on. Mr. Everard was presented by Mrs.

Lennox in her gratitude to the lady next to her, who was rather a great lady and put up her glass to look at him. He was introduced to the gentleman on Rosalind's other hand by that gentleman's request. Thus he made his appearance in society at Aix with the greatest *éclat*. When they rose from the table he followed Rosalind out of doors into the soft autumnal night. The little verandah and the garden walks under the trees were full of people, under cover of whose noisy conversation there was abundant opportunity for a more interesting *tête-à-tête*. 'You are too kind,' he said, 'in telling this little story. Indeed there was nothing to make any commotion about. You could almost have done it, without any help from me.'

'No,' she said. 'I could not have done it; I should have tried and perhaps been drowned too. But it is not I who have talked, it is Aunt Sophy. She is very grateful to you.'

'She has no occasion,' he said. 'Whatever I could do for you, Miss Trevanion——' and then he stopped, somewhat breathlessly. 'It was curious, was it not? that the boat on the pond should have been so much the same thing, though everything else was so different. And that is years ago.'

'Nearly two years.'

'Then you remember?' he said in a tone of delighted surprise.

'I have much occasion to remember. It was at a very sad moment. I remember everything that happened.'

'To be sure,' said the young man. 'No, I did not forget. It was only that, in the pleasure of seeing you everything else went out of my mind. But I have never forgotten, Miss Trevanion, all your anxiety. I saw you, you may remember, the day you were leaving home.'

Rosalind raised her eyes to him with a look of pain. 'It is not a happy recollection,' she said.

'Oh, Miss Rosalind. I hope you will forgive me for recalling to you what is so painful.'

'The sight of you recalls it,' she said; 'it is not your fault. Mr. Everard, you had relations near Highcourt.'

'Only one, but nobody now—nobody. It was a sort of chance that took me there at all. I was in a little trouble, and then I left suddenly, as it happened, the same day as you did, Miss Trevanion. How well I remember it all! You were carrying the same little boy who was in

the boat to-day—was it the same?—and you would not let me help you. I almost think if you had seen it was me you would not have allowed me to help you to-day.'

'If I had seen it was——' Rosalind paused with troubled surprise. Sometimes his fine voice and soft tones lulled her doubts altogether, but, again, a sudden touch brought them all back. He was very quick, however, to observe the changes in her, and changed with them with a curious mixture of sympathy and servility.

'Circumstances have carried me far away since then,' he said; 'but I have always longed to know, to hear something. If I could tell you the questions I have asked myself as to what might be going on; and how many times I have tried to get to England to find out!'

'We have never returned to Highcourt,' she said, confused by his efforts to bring back those former meetings, and not knowing how to reply. 'I think we shall not till my brother comes of age. Yes, my little brother was the same. He is very much excited about what happened to-day; neither of them understood it at first, but now they begin to perceive that

it is a wonderful adventure. I hope the wetting will do you no harm.'

'Please,' he said in a petulant tone, 'if you do not want to vex me, say no more of that. I am not such a weak creature; indeed, there is nothing the matter with me, except in imagination.'

'I think,' said Rosalind, with a little involuntary laugh, 'that the baths of Aix are good for the imagination. It grows by what it feeds on; though rheumatism does not seem to be an imaginative sort of malady.'

'You forget,' he cried, almost with resentment; 'the danger of it is that it affects the heart, which is not a thing to laugh at.'

'Oh, forgive me!' Rosalind cried. 'I should not have spoken so lightly. It was because you were so determined that nothing ailed you. And I hope you are right. The lake was so beautiful to-day. It did not look as if it could do harm.'

'You go there often? I saw you had been painting.'

'Making a very little, very bad sketch, that was all. Mr. Everard, I think I must go in. My aunt will want me.'

'May I come too? How kind she is! I

feared that being without introduction, knowing nobody—— But Mrs. Lennox has been most generous, receiving me without a question—and you, Miss Trevanion?'

'Did you expect me to stop you from saving the children till I had asked who you were?' cried Rosalind, endeavouring to elude the seriousness with which he always returned to the original subject. 'It is a pretty manner of introduction to do us the greatest service, the greatest kindness.'

'But it was nothing. I can assure you it was nothing,' he said. He liked to be able to make this protestation. It was a sort of renewing of his claim upon them. To have a right, the very strongest right to their gratitude, and yet to declare it was nothing—that was very pleasant to the young man. And in a way it was true. He would have done anything that it did not hurt him very much to do for Rosalind, even for her aunt and her little brothers and sisters, but to feel that he was entitled to their thanks and yet waived them was delightful to him. It was a statement over and over again of his right to be with them. He accompanied Rosalind to the room in which Aunt Sophy had established herself with

mingled confidence and timidity, ingratiating himself by every means that were possible, though he did not talk very much. Indeed, he was not great in conversation at any time, and now he was so anxious to please that he was nervous and doubtful what to say.

Mrs. Lennox received the young people with real pleasure. She liked, as has been said in a previous part of this history, to have a young man about, in general attendance, ready to go upon her errands and make himself agreeable. It added to the ease and the gaiety of life to have a lover upon hand, one who was not too far gone, who still had eyes for the other members of the party, and a serious intention of making himself generally pleasant. She had never concealed her opinion that an attendant of this description was an advantage. And Mrs. Lennox was imprudent to the bottom of her heart. She had plenty of wise maxims in store as to the necessity of keeping ineligible persons at a distance, but it did not occur to her to imagine that a well-looking young stranger attaching himself to her own party might be ineligible. Of Arthur Rivers she had known that his family lived in an obscure street in Clifton, which furnished her with objections

at once. But of Mr. Everard, who had saved the children's lives, she had no doubts. She did indeed mean to ask him if he belonged to the Everards of Essex, but in the meantime was quite willing to take that for granted.

'It is so curious,' she said, making room for him to bring a chair beside her, 'that you and Rosalind should have met before, and how fortunate for us! Oh yes, Highcourt is a fine place. Of course we think so, Rosalind and I, having both been born there. We think there is no place in the world like it; but I have a right to feel myself impartial, for I have been a good deal about; and there is no doubt it is a fine place. Did you see over the house, Mr. Everard? Oh no, of course it was when my poor brother was ill. There were so many trying circumstances,' she added, lowering her voice, 'that we thought it best just to leave it, you know, and the Elms does very well for the children as long as they are children. Of course, when Reginald comes of age—— Do you know the neighbourhood of Clifton, Mr. Everard? Oh, you must come and see me there. It is a capital hunting country, you know, and that is always an inducement to a gentleman.'

'I should have no need of any inducement, if you are so kind.'

'It is you that have been kind,' Mrs. Lennox said. 'I am sure if we can do anything to make our house agreeable to you—— Now tell me how you get on here. How often do you take the baths? Oh, I hope you are regular—so much depends upon regularity, they tell me. Lady Blashfield, whom I was talking to at dinner, tells me that if you miss one it is as bad as giving up altogether. It is the continuity, she says. Young men are very difficult to guide in respect to their health. My dear husband, that is, Mr. Pulteney, my *first* dear husband, whom I lost when we were both quite young, might have been here now, poor dear fellow, if he had only consented to be an invalid, and to use the remedies. You must let one who has suffered so much say a word of warning to you, Mr. Everard. Use the remedies, and youth will do almost everything for you. He might have been here now——' Mrs. Lennox paused and applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

Young Everard listened with the most devout attention, while Rosalind, on her side, could not refrain from an involuntary reflection

as to the extreme inconvenience of Mr. Pulteney's presence now. If that had been all along possible, was not Aunt Sophy guilty of a kind of constructive bigamy? To hear her dwelling upon this subject, and the stranger listening with so much attention, gave Rosalind an insane desire to laugh. Even Roland Hamerton, she thought, would have seen the humour of the suggestion; but Everard was quite serious, lending an anxious ear. He was very anxious to please. There was an absence of ease about him in his anxiety. Not the ghost of a smile stole to his lips. He sat there until Mrs. Lennox got tired, and remembered that the early hour at which she began to bathe every morning made it expedient now to go to bed. He was on the alert in a moment, offering his arm, and truly sympathetic about the difficulty she expressed in rising from her chair. 'I can get on when once I am fairly started,' she said; 'thank you so much, Mr. Everard. Rosalind is very kind, but naturally in a gentleman's arm there is more support.'

'I am so glad that I can be of use,' he said fervently. And Rosalind followed upstairs, carrying Aunt Sophy's work, half-pleased, half-amused, a little disconcerted by the sudden

friendship which had arisen between them. She was, herself, in a very uncertain, somewhat excited state of mind. The reappearance of the stranger who had achieved for himself, she could not tell how, a place in her dreams, disturbed the calm in which she had been living, which in itself was a calm unnatural at her age. Her heart beat with curious content, expectation, doubt, and anxiety. He was not like the other men whom she had known. There was something uncertain about him, a curiosity as to what he would do or say, a suppressed alarm in her mind as to whether his doings and sayings would be satisfactory. He might make some terrible mistake. He might say something that would set in a moment a great gulf between him and her. It was uncomfortable, and yet perhaps it had a certain fascination in it. She never knew what was the next thing he might say or do. But Aunt Sophy was loud in his praises when they reached their own apartment. 'What a thoroughly nice person!' she said. 'What a modest, charming young man! not like so many laughing in their sleeve, in a hurry to get away, taking no trouble about elder people. Mr. Everard has been thoroughly well brought up, Rosalind; he must have had a nice

mother. That is always what I think when I see a young man with such good manners. His mother must have been a nice woman. I am sure if he had been my own nephew he could not have been more attentive to me.'

Rosalind said little in reply to this praise. She was pleased, and yet an intrusive doubt would come in. To be a little original, not like all the others, is not that an advantage? And yet—— She went to her own room, thoughtful yet with a sensation of novelty not without pleasure in her mind, and paused in passing at the children's door to pay them her usual visit and give them the kiss when they were asleep which their mother was not near to give. This visit had a twofold meaning to Rosalind. It was a visit of love to the little ones, that they might not be deprived of any tenderness that she could give; and it was a sort of pilgrimage of faithful devotion to the shrine which the mother had left empty. A pang of longing for that mother, and of the wondering pain which her name always called forth, was in her heart when she stooped over the little beds. Ordinarily, everything was dim—the faint night-light affording guidance to where they lay, and no more—and still, with nothing but the soft

breathing of the two children, one in the outer and the other in the inner room. But to-night there was a candle burning within and the sound of nurse's voice soothing Johnny, who, sitting up in his bed, was looking round him with eyes full of light, and that large childish wakefulness which seems a sort of protest against ever sleeping again.

'Oh, Miss Rosalind, I don't know what to do with Master Johnny; he says a lady came and looked at him. You've not been here, have you, Miss? I tell him there is no lady. He must just have dreamed it.'

'I didn't dreamed it,' said Johnny. 'It was a beautiful lady. She came in *there*, and stood *here*. I want her to come again,' the child said, gazing about him with his great eyes.

'But it is impossible, Miss Rosalind,' said the nurse; 'the door is locked, and there is no lady. He just must have been dreaming. He is a little upset with the accident.'

''We wasn't a bit upsetted,' said Johnny. 'I could have doned it myself. I wanted to tell the lady, Rosy—but she only said, "Go to sleep."'

'That was the very wisest thing she could

say. Go to sleep, and I will sit by you,' said Rosalind.

It was some time, however, before Johnny accomplished the feat of going to sleep. He was very talkative and anxious to fight his battles over again, and explain exactly how he would have 'doned' it. When the little eyes closed at last, and all was still, Rosalind found the nurse waiting in the outer room in some anxiety.

'Yes, Miss Rosalind, I am sure he was off his head a little—not to call wandering, but just a little off his head. For how could any lady have got into this room? It is just his imagination. I had once a little boy before who was just the same, always seeing ladies and people whenever he was the least excited. I will give him a dose in the morning, and if he sees her again I would just send for the doctor. It is all physical, Miss, them sort of visions,' said the nurse, who was up to the science of her time.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MRS. LENNOX'S cure went on through the greater part of the month of September, and the friendship that had been begun so successfully grew into intimacy perhaps in a shorter time than would have been credible had the conditions of life been less easy. In the space of two or three days Mr. Everard had become almost a member of Mrs. Lennox's party. He dined with them two evenings out of three. He walked by the elder lady's chair when she went to her bath, he was always ready to give her his arm when she wished it, to help her to her favourite seat in the garden, to choose a place for her from which she could most comfortably hear the music. All these services to herself Aunt Sophy was quite aware were the price the young man paid for permission to approach Rosalind, to admire and address her, to form part of her surroundings, and by degrees to become her almost constant companion. Mrs. Lennox agreed with Mr. Ruskin that this sort of appren-

ticeship in love was right and natural. If in spite of all these privileges he failed to please, she would have been sorry for him indeed, but would not have felt that he had any right to complain. It was giving him his chance like another; and she was of opinion that a lover or two on hand was a cheerful thing for a house. In the days of Messrs. Hamerton and Rivers the effect had been very good, and she had liked these unwearied attendants, these unpaid officers of the household, who were always ready to get anything or do anything that might happen to be wanted. It was lonely to be without one of those hangers on, and she accepted with a kind of mild enthusiasm the young man who had begun his probation by so striking an exhibition of his fitness for the post. It may be objected that her ready reception of a stranger without any introduction or guarantee of his position was imprudent in the extreme, for who could undertake that Rosalind might not accept this suitor with more ready sympathy than she had shown for the others? And there can be no doubt that this was the case; but as a matter of fact Mrs. Lennox was not prudent, and it was scarcely to be expected that she should exercise a vir-

tue unfamiliar to her in respect to the young man who had, as she loved to repeat, saved the lives of the children. He was one of the Essex Everards, she made no doubt. She had always forgotten to ask him, and as, she said, they had never got upon the subject of his family, he had said nothing to her about them. But there was nothing wonderful in that. It is always pleasant when a young man does talk about his people, and lets you know how many brothers and sisters he has, and all the family history, but a great many young men don't do so, and there was nothing at all wonderful about it in this case. A young man who is at Aix for the baths, who has been at most places where the travelling English go, who can talk like other people about Rome and Florence, not to speak of a great many out-of-the-way regions—it would be ridiculous to suppose that he was not 'of our own class.' Even Aunt Sophy's not very fastidious taste detected a few wants about him. He was not quite perfect in all points in his manners; he hesitated when a man in society would not have hesitated. He had not been at any university, nor even at a public school. All these things, however, Mrs. Lennox accounted for easily—when she

took the trouble to think of them at all—by the supposition that he had been brought up at home, most likely in the country. 'Depend upon it, he is an only child,' she said to Rosalind, 'and he has been delicate—one can see that he is delicate still—and they have brought him up at home. Well, perhaps it is wrong—at least, all the gentlemen say so; but if I had an only child I think I should very likely do the same, and I am sure I feel very much for his poor mother. Why? Oh, because I don't think he is strong, Rosalind. He colours like a girl when he makes any little mistake. He is not one of your bold young men that have a way of carrying off everything. He does make little mistakes, but then that is one of the things that is sure to happen when you bring boys up at home.'

Rosalind, who became more and more inclined as the days went on to take the best view of young Everard's deficiencies, accepted very kindly this explanation. It silenced finally, she believed, that chill and horrible doubt, that question which she had put to herself broadly when she saw him first, which she did not even insinuate consciously now, but which haunted her, do what she would. Was he, perhaps, not

exactly a gentleman? No, she did not ask that now. No doubt Aunt Sophy (who sometimes hit upon the right explanation, though she could not be called clever), was right, and the secret of the whole matter was that he had been brought up at home. There could be no doubt that the deficiencies which had at first suggested this most awful of all questions became rather interesting than otherwise when you came to know him better. They were what might be called ignorances, self-distrusts, an unassured condition of mind, rather than deficiencies; and his blush over his 'little mistakes,' as Mrs. Lennox called them, and the half-uttered apology and the deprecatory look, took away from a benevolent observer all inclination towards unkindly criticism. Mrs. Lennox, who soon became 'quite fond of' the young stranger, told him frankly when he did anything contrary to the code of society, and he took such rebukes in the very best spirit, but was unfortunately apt to forget and fall into the same blunder again. There were some of these mistakes which kept the ladies in amusement, and some which made Rosalind, as she became more and more 'interested,' blush with hot shame—a far more serious feeling than that

which made the young offender blush. For instance, when he found her sketch-book one morning, young Everard fell into ecstasies over the sketch Rosalind had been making of the lake on that eventful afternoon which had begun their intercourse. It was a very bad sketch, and Rosalind knew it. That golden sheet of water, full of light, full of reflections, with the sun blazing upon it, and the hills rising up on every side, and the sky looking down into its depths, had become a piece of yellow mud with daubs of blue and brown here and there, and the reeds in the foreground looked as if they had been cut out of paper and pasted on. 'Don't look at it. I can't do very much, but yet I can do better than that,' she had said, finding him in rapt contemplation of her unsatisfactory performance, and putting out her hand to close the book. He looked up at her, for he was seated by the table, hanging over the sketch with rapture, with the most eager deprecation.

'I think it is lovely,' he said; 'don't try to take away my enjoyment. I wonder how anyone can turn a mere piece of paper into a picture!'

'You are laughing at me,' said Rosalind, with a little offence.

'I—laughing! I would as soon laugh in church. I think it is beautiful. I can't imagine how you do it. Why, there are the reflections in the water just as you see them. I never thought before that it was so pretty.'

'Oh!' Rosalind cried, drawing a long breath. It hurt her that he should say so, and it hurt still more to think that he was endeavouring to please her by saying so. 'I am sure it is your kindness that makes you praise it; but Mr. Everard, you must know that I am not quite ignorant. When you say such things of this daub, it sounds like contempt—as if you thought I did not know better.'

'But suppose I don't know any better?' he said, looking up at her with lustrous eyes full of humility, without even his usual self-disgust at having said something wrong. 'Indeed you must believe me, I don't. It is quite true. Is it a fault, Miss Trevanion, when one does not know?'

What could Rosalind say? She stood with her hand put out towards the book, looking down upon the most expressive countenance, a face which of itself was a model for a painter. There was very little difference between them in age, perhaps a year or so to his advantage,

not more; and something of the freemasonry of youth was between them, besides the more delicate link of sentiment. Yes, she said to herself, it was a fault. A man, a gentleman, should not be so ignorant. Something must be wrong before such ignorance could be. But how say this or anything like it to her companion, who threw himself so entirely upon her mercy? She closed the book that had been open before him and drew it hastily away.

'I am afraid,' she said, 'your eye is not good; of course it is no fault except to think that *I* could be so silly, that I could accept praise which I don't deserve.'

'Ah!' he said, 'I see what you mean. You despise me for my ignorance, and it is true I am quite ignorant: but then how could I help it, I have never been taught.'

'Oh!' cried Rosalind again, thinking the apology worse than the fault, bad as that was. 'But you have seen pictures—you have been in the galleries?'

'Without any instruction,' he said. 'I do admire *that*, but I don't care for the galleries. Oh, but I never say so except to you.'

She was silent in the dreadful situation in which she found herself. She did not know

how to behave, such unutterable want of perception had never come in her way before.

'Then I suppose,' she said, with awful calm, 'the chromo-lithographs, those are what you like? Mine is something like them, that is why you approve of it, I suppose.'

'I like it,' he said simply, 'because you were doing it that day, and because that is where I saw you sitting when everything happened. And because the lake and the mountains and the sky all seem yours to me now.'

This speech was of a character very difficult to ignore and pass over as if it meant nothing. But Rosalind had now some experience, and was not unused to such situations. She said hurriedly, 'I see—it is the association that interests you. I remember a very great person, a great author, saying something like that. He said it was the story of the pictures he liked, and when that pleased him he did not think so much about the execution. If he had not been a great person he would not have dared to say it. An artist, a true artist, would shiver to hear such a thing. But that explains why you like my daub. It is better

than if you really thought it itself worthy of praise.'

'But I——' Here young Everard paused; he saw by her eyes that he must not go any further; there was a little kindling of indignation in them. Where had he been all his life that he did not know any better than that? Had he gone on, Rosalind might not have been able to contain herself, and there were premonitory symptoms in the air.

'I wish,' he said, 'that you would tell me what is nice and what isn't.'

'Nice! Oh, Mr. Everard!' Rosalind breathed out with a shudder. 'Perhaps you would call Michael Angelo nice,' she added with a laugh.

'It is very likely that I might; you must forgive me. I have a relation who laughs at me in the same way, but how can one know if one has never been taught?'

'One is never taught such things,' it was on Rosalind's lips to say, but with an impatient sigh she forbore. Afterwards, when she began to question herself on the subject, Rosalind took some comfort from the thought that Roland Hamerton knew almost as little about art as it is possible for a well-bred young Eng-

lishman to know. Ah! but that made all the difference. He knew enough to have thought her sketch a dreadful production; he knew enough to abhor the style of the chromo-lithograph. Even a man who has been brought up at home must have seen the pictures on his own walls. This thought cast her down again, but she began after this to break up into small morsels adapted to her companion's comprehension the simplest principles of art, and to give him little hints about the fundamental matters which are part of a gentleman's education in this respect, and even to indicate to him what terms are commonly used. He was very quick; he did not laugh out at her efforts as Roland would have done; he picked up the hints and adopted every suggestion—all which compliances pleased Rosalind in a certain sense, yet in another wrapped her soul in trouble, reviving again and again that most dreadful of all possible doubts, just when she thought that it had been safely laid to rest.

And yet all the while this daily companion made his way into something which, if not the heart, was dangerously near it—a sort of vestibule of the heart where those who enter may hope to go further with good luck. He was

ignorant in many ways. He did not know much more of books than of pictures; sometimes he expressed an opinion which took away her breath, and he was always on the watch for indications how far he might go, a sort of vigilance which was highly uncomfortable, and suggested some purpose on his part, some pursuit which was of more consequence to him than his natural opinions or traditions, all of which he seemed ready to sacrifice at a word. Rosalind was used to the ease of society, an ease perhaps more apparent than real, and this eagerness disconcerted her greatly. It was true that it might bear a flattering interpretation, if it was to recommend himself to her that he was ready to make all these sacrifices, to change even his opinions, to give up everything that could displease her. If all expedients are fair in love, is it not justifiable to watch that no word may offend, to express no liking unless it is sure to be in harmony with the tastes of the object loved, to be always on the alert and never to forget the purpose aimed at? This question might perhaps by impartial persons be considered open to a doubt, but when one is oneself the object of such profound homage it is natural that the judgment

should be slightly biassed. And there was a certain personal charm about him notwithstanding all his deficiencies. It was difficult for a girl not to be touched by the devotion which shone upon her from such a pair of wonderful eyes.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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