THE

MARRIAGE OF ELINOR

BY

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CHAPTER XVI.

And now the last morning had come.

The morning of a wedding-day is a flying and precarious moment which seems at once as if it never would end, and as if it were a hurried preliminary interval in which the necessary preparations never could be done. Elinor was not allowed to come downstairs to help, as she felt it would be natural to do. It was Mary Tatham who arranged the flowers on the table, and helped Mrs. Dennistoun to superintend everything. All the women in the house, though they were so busy, were devoted at every spare moment to the service of Elinor. They brought her simple breakfast upstairs, one maid carrying the tray and another the teapot, that each might have their share. The cook, though she was over-

whelmed with work, had made some cakes for breakfast, such as Elinor liked. 'Most like as we'll never have her no more—to mind,' she said. The gardener sent up an untidy bundle of white flowers. And Mrs. Dennistoun came herself to pour out the tea. 'As if I had been ill, or had turned into a baby again,' Elinor said. But there was not much said. Mary Tatham was there for one thing, and for another and the most important they had said all they had to say: the rest which remained could not be said. The wedding was to be at a quarter to twelve, in order to give Lady Mariamne time to come from town. It was not the fashion then to delay marriages to the afternoon, which no doubt would have been much more convenient for her ladyship; but the best that could be done was done. Mr. Tatham's carriage, which he had brought with him to grace the ceremony, was despatched to the station to meet Lady Mariamne, while he, good man, had to get to church as he could in one of the flys. And then came the important moment, when the dressing of the bride had to be begun. The wedding breakfast was not yet all set out in perfect order, and there were many things to do. Yet every woman in the house had a little share

in the dressing of the bride. They all came to see how it fitted when the wedding dress was put on. It fitted like a glove! The long glossy folds of the satin were a wonder to see. Cook stood just within the door, in a white apron, and wept, and could not say a word to Miss Elinor; but the younger maids sent forth a murmur of admiration. And the Missis they thought was almost as beautiful as the bride, though her satin was grey. Mrs. Dennistoun herself threw the veil over her child's head, and put in the diamond star, the old-fashioned ornament which had been her husband's present to herself. And then again she had meant to say something to Elinor—a last word — but the word would not come. They were both of them glad that somebody should be there all the time, that they should not be left alone. And after that the strange, hurried, everlasting morning was over, and the carriage was at the door.

Then again it was a relief that old Mr. Tatham had missed his proper place in the fly, and had to go on the front seat with the bride and her mother. It was far better so. If they had been left even for ten minutes alone, who could have answered that one or the other would not have

cried, and discomposed the bouquet and the veil? It seemed a great danger and responsibility over when they arrived at last safely at the church door. Lady Mariamne was just then arriving from the station. She drew up before them in poor Mr. Tatham's carriage, keeping them back. Harry Compton and Mr. Bolsover sprang to the carriage window to talk to her, and there was a loud explosion of mirth and laughter, in the midst of the village people, and the children with their baskets of flowers who were already gathered. Lady Mariamne's voice burst out so shrill that it overmastered the church bells. 'Here I am,' she cried, 'out in the wilderness. And Algy has come with me to take care of me. And how are you, dear boys; and how is poor Phil?' 'Phil is all ready to be turned off, with the halter round his neck,' said Dick Bolsover; and Harry Compton said, 'Hurry up, hurry up, Jew, the bride is behind you waiting to get out.' 'She must wait then,' said Lady Mariamne, and there came leisurely out of the carriage, first, her ladyship's companion, by name Algy, a tall person with an eye-glass, then a little pug, which was carefully handed into his arms, and then lightly jumping down to the ground, a little figure in black—in

black of all things in the world!—a sight that curdled the blood of the village people, and of Mrs. Hudson, who had walked across from the Rectory in a gown of pigeon's-breast silk which scattered prismatic reflections as she walked. In black! Mrs. Hudson bethought herself that she had a white China crape shawl in her cupboard, and wondered if she could offer it to conceal this ill-omened gown. But if Lady Mariamne's dress was dark, she herself was fair enough, with an endless fluff of light hair under her little black lace bonnet. Her gloves were off, and her hands were white and glistened with rings. 'Give me my puggy darling,' she said in her loud shrill tone. 'I can go nowhere, can I, pet, without my little pug!'

'A Jew and a pug, both in church. It is enough,' said her brother, 'to get the poor parson into trouble with his bishop.'

'Oh, the bishop's a great friend of mine,' said the lady; 'he will say nothing to me, not if I put Pug in a surplice and make him lead the choir.' At this speech there was a great laugh of the assembled party, which stood in the centre of the path, while Mr. Tatham's carriage edged away, and the others made efforts to get forward.

The noise of their talk disturbed the curious abstraction in which Elinor had been going through the morning hours. Mariamne's jarring voice seemed louder than the bells. Was this the first voice sent out to greet her by the new life which was about to begin? She glanced at her mother, and then at old Uncle Tatham, who sat immovable, prevented by decorum from apostrophising the coachman who was not his own, but fuming inwardly at the interruption. Mrs. Dennistoun did not move at all, but her daughter knew very well what was meant by that look straight before her, in which her mother seemed to ignore all obstacles in the way.

'I got here very well,' Lady Mariamne went on; 'we started in the middle of the night, of course, before the lamps were out. Wasn't it good of Algy to get himself out of bed at such an unearthly hour? But he snapped at Puggy as we came down, which was a sign he felt it. Why aren't you with the poor victim at the altar, you boys?'

'Phil will be in a blue funk,' said Harry; 'go in and stand by your man, Dick: the Jew has enough with two fellows to see her into her place.'

The bride's carriage by this time pushed forward, making Lady Mariamne start in confusion. 'Oh! look here; they have splashed my pretty toilette, and upset my nerves,' she cried, springing back into her supporter's arms.

That gentleman regarded the stain of the damp gravel on the lady's skirt through his eye-glass with deep but helpless anxiety. 'It's a pity for the pretty frock!' he said with much seriousness. And the group gathered round and gazed in dismay, as if they expected it to disappear of itself —until Mrs. Hudson bustled up. 'It will rub off; it will not make any mark. If one of you gentlemen will lend me a handkerchief,' she said. And Algy and Harry and Dick Bolsover, not to speak of Lady Mariamne herself, watched with great gravity while the gravel was swept off. 'I make no doubt,' said the Rector's wife, 'that I have the pleasure of speaking to Lady Mariamne: and I don't doubt that black is the fashion and your dress is beautiful: but if you would just throw on a white shawl for the sake of the wedding—it's so unlucky to come in black ——'

'A white shawl!' said Lady Mariamne in dismay.

'The Jew in a white shawl!' echoed the others with a burst of laughter which rang into the church itself and made Phil before the altar, alone and very anxious, ask himself what was up.

'It is China crape, I assure you, and very nice,' Mrs. Hudson said.

Lady Mariamne gave the good Samaritan a stony stare, and took Algy's arm and sailed into church before the Rector's wife, without a word said; while all the women from the village looked at each other and said, 'Well, I never!' under their breath.

'Let me give you my arm, Mrs. Hudson,' said Harry Compton, 'and please pardon me that I did not introduce my sister to you. She is dreadfully shy, don't you know, and never does speak to anyone when she has not been introduced.'

'My observation was a very simple one,' said Mrs. Hudson, very angry, yet pleased to lean upon an Honourable arm.

'My dear lady!' cried the good-natured Harry, 'the Jew never wore a shawl in her life——'

And all this time the organ had been pealing, the white vision passing up the aisle, the simple villagers chanting forth their song about the voice that breathed o'er Eden. Alas! Eden

had not much to do with it, except perhaps in the trembling heart of the white maiden roused out of her virginal dream by the jarring voices of the new life. The laughter outside was a dreadful offence to all the people, great and small, who had collected to see Elinor married.

'What could you expect? It's that woman whom they call the Jew,' whispered Lady Huntingtower to her next neighbour.

'She should be put into the stocks,' said Sir John, scarcely under his breath, which, to be sure, was also an interruption to the decorum of the place.

And then there ensued a pause, a pause broken by the voice, a little lugubrious in tone, of the Rector within the altar rails, and the tremulous answers of the pair outside. The audience held its breath to hear Elinor make her responses, and faltered off into suppressed weeping as the low tones ceased. Sir John Huntingtower, who was very tall and big, and stood out like a pillar among the ladies round, kept nodding his head all the time she spoke, nodding as you might do in forced assent to any dreadful vow. Poor little thing, poor little thing, he was saying in his heart. His face was more like the face of a man

at a funeral than a man at a wedding. 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord'—he might have been nodding assent to that instead of to Elinor's low-spoken vow. Phil Compton's voice, to tell the truth, was even more tremulous than Elinor's. To investigate the thoughts of a bridegroom would be too much curiosity at such a moment. But I think if the secrets of the hearts could be revealed, Phil for a moment was sorry for poor little Elinor too.

And then the solemnity was all over in a moment, and the flutter of voices and congratulations began.

I do not mean to follow the proceedings through all the routine of the wedding-day. Attempts were made on the part of the bridegroom's party to get Lady Mariamne dismissed by the next train, an endeavour into which Harry Compton threw himself—for he was always a good-hearted fellow—with his whole soul. But the Jew declared that she was dying of hunger, and whatever sort of place it was, must have something to eat; a remark which naturally endeared her still more to Mrs. Dennistoun, who was waiting by the door of Mr. Tatham's carriage, which that anxious old gentleman had managed to recover

control of, till her ladyship had taken her place. Her ladyship stared with undisguised amazement when she was followed into the carriage by the bride's mother, and when the neat little old gentleman took his seat opposite. 'But where is Algy? I want Algy,' she cried in dismay. 'Absolutely I can't go without Algy, who came to take care of me.'

'You will be perfectly safe, my dear lady, with Mrs. Dennistoun and me. The gentlemen will walk,' said Mr. Tatham, waving his hand to the coachman.

And thus it was that the forlorn lady found herself without her cavalier and without her pug, absolutely stranded among savages, notwithstanding her strong protest almost carried the length of tears. She was thus carried off in a state of consternation to the Cottage, over the rough road where the wheels went with a din and lurch over the stones, and dug deep into the sand, eliciting a succession of little shrieks from her oppressed bosom. 'I shall be shaken all to bits,' she said, grasping the arm of the old gentleman to steady herself. Mr. Tatham was not displeased to be the champion of a lady of title. He assured her in dulcet tones that his springs were very good

and his horses very sure—'though it is not a very nice road.'

'Oh, it is a dreadful road!' said Lady Mariamne.

But in due time they did arrive at the Cottage, where her ladyship could not wait for the gathering of the company, but demanded at once something to eat. 'I can't really go another moment without food. I must have something or I shall die. Phil, come here this instant and get me something. They have brought me off at the risk of my life, and there's nobody to attend to me. Don't stand spooning there,' cried Lady Mariamne, 'but do what I tell you. Do you think I should ever have put myself into this position but for you?'

'You would never have been asked here if they had consulted me. I knew what a nuisance you'd be. Here, get this lady something to eat, old man,' said the bridegroom, tapping Mr. Tatham on the back, who did, indeed, look rather like a waiter from that point of view.

'I shall have to help myself,' said the lady in despair. And she sat down at the elaborate table in the bride's place, and began to hack at the nearest chicken. The gentlemen coming in at the moment roared again with laughter over

the Jew's impatience; but it was not regarded with the same admiration by the rest of the guests.

These little incidents, perhaps, helped to while away the weary hours until it was time for the bridal pair to depart. Mrs. Dennistoun was so angry that it kept up a little fire, so to speak, in her heart when the light of her house was extinguished. Lady Mariamne, standing in the porch with a bag full of rice to throw, kept up the spirit of the mistress of the house, which otherwise might, perhaps, have failed her altogether at that inconceivable moment; for though she had been looking forward to it for months it was inconceivable when it came, as death is inconceivable. Elinor going away!—not on a visit, or to be back in a week, or a month, or a year—going away for ever! ending, as might be said, when she put her foot on the step of the carriage. Her mother stood by and looked on with that cruel conviction that overtakes all at the last. Up to this moment had it not seemed as if the course of affairs was unreal, as if something must happen to prevent it? Perhaps the world will end to-night, as the lover says in the 'Last Ride.' But now here was the end: nothing had happened,

the world was swinging on in space in its old careless way, and Elinor was going—going away for ever and ever. Oh, to come back, perhaps—there was nothing against that—but never the same Elinor. The mother stood looking, with her hand over her eyes to shield them from the sun. Those eyes were quite dry, and she stood firm and upright by the carriage door. She was not 'breaking down' or 'giving way,' as everybody feared. She was 'bearing up,' as everybody was relieved to see. And in a moment it was all over, and there was nothing before her eyes—no carriage, no Elinor. She was so dazed that she stood still, looking with that strange kind of smile for a full minute after there was nothing to smile at, only the vacant air and the prospect of the combe, coming in in a sickly haze which existed only in her eyes.

But, by good luck, there was Lady Mariamne behind, and the fire of indignation giving a red flicker upon the desolate hearth.

'I caught Phil on the nose,' said that lady, in great triumph; 'spoilt his beauty for him for to-day. But let's hope she won't mind. She thinks him beautiful, the little goose. Oh, my Puggy-wuggy, did that cruel Algy pull your little, dear tail, you

darling? Come to oos own mammy now those silly wedding people are away.'

'Your little dog, I presume, is of a very rare sort,' said Mr. Tatham, to be civil. He had proposed the bride and bridegroom's health in a most appropriate speech, and he felt that he had deserved well of his kind, which made him more amiable even than usual. 'Your ladyship's little dog,' he added, after a moment, as she did not take any notice, 'I presume, is of a rare kind?'

Lady Mariamne gave him a look, or rather a stare. 'Is Puggy of a rare sort?' she said over her shoulder, to one of the attendant tribe.

'Don't be such a duffer, Jew! You know as well as anyone what breed he's of,' Harry Compton said.

'Oh, I forgot!' said the fine lady. She was standing full in front of the entrance, keeping Mrs. Dennistoun in the full sun outside. 'I hope there's a train very soon,' she said. 'Did you look, Algy, as I told you? If it hadn't been that Phil would have killed me I should have gone now. It would have been such fun to have spied upon the turtle doves!'

The men thought it would have been rare fun with obedient delight, but that Phil would have

cut up rough, and made a scene. At this Lady Mariamne held up her finger, and made a portentous face.

'Oh, you naughty, naughty boy,' she cried, 'telling tales out of school.'

'Perhaps, my dear lady,' said Mr. Tatham, quietly, 'you would let Mrs. Dennistoun pass.'

'Oh!' said Lady Mariamne, and stared at him again for half a minute; then she turned and stared at the tall lady in grey satin. 'Anybody can pass,' she said; 'I'm not so very big.'

'That is quite true—quite true. There is plenty of room,' said the little gentleman, holding out his hand to his cousin.

'My dear John,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, 'I am sure you will be kind enough to lend your carriage again to Lady Mariamne, who is in a hurry to get away. There is another train which stops at Downforth station, in half an hour, and there will just be time to get there, if you will order it at once. I told your man to be in readiness: and it would be a thousand pities to lose this train, for there is not another for an hour.'

'By Jove, Jew! there's a slap in the face for you,' said, in an audible whisper, one of the train, who had been standing in front of all the friends,

blocking out the view. As for Lady Mariamne, she stared more straight than ever into Mrs. Dennistoun's eyes, but for the moment did not seem to find anything to say. She was left in the hall with her band while the mistress of the house went into the drawing-room, followed by all the country ladies, who had not lost a word, and who were already whispering to each other over that terrible betrayal about the temper of Phil.

'Cut up rough! Oh! poor little Elinor, poor little Elinor!' the ladies said to each other under their breath.

'I am not at all surprised. It is not any news to me. You could see it in his eyes,' said Miss Mary Dale. And then they all were silent to listen to the renewed laughter that came bursting from the hall. Mrs. Hudson questioned her husband afterwards as to what it was that made everybody laugh, but the Rector had not much to say. 'I really could not tell you, my dear,' he said. 'I don't remember anything that was said—but it seemed funny somehow, and as they all laughed one had to laugh too.'

The great lady came in, however, dragged by her brother to say good-bye. 'It has all gone

off very well, I am sure, and Nell looked very nice, and did you great credit,' she said, putting out her hand. 'And it's very kind of you to take so much trouble to get us off by the first train.'

'Oh, it is no trouble,' Mrs. Dennistoun said.

'Shouldn't you like to say good-bye to Puggy-muggy?' said Lady Mariamne, touching the little black nose upon her arm. 'He enjoyed that *pâté* so much. He really never has *foie gras* at home: but he doesn't at all mind if you would like to give him a little kiss just here.'

'Good-bye, Lady Mariamne,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, with one of the curtseys of the old school. But there was another gust of laughter as Lady Mariamne was placed in the carriage, and a shrill little trumpet gave forth the satisfaction of the departing guest at having 'got a rise out of the old girl.' The gentlemen heaped themselves into Mr. Tatham's carriage, and swept off along with her; all but civil Harry, who waited to make their apologies, and to put up along with his own Dick Bolsover's 'things.' And thus the bridegroom's party, the new associates of Elinor, the great family into which the Honourable Mrs. Phil Compton had been so lucky as to marry, to the great excitement of all the country round, departed and

was seen no more. Harry, who was civil, walked home with the Hudsons when all was over, and said the best he could for the Jew and her friends. 'You see, she has been regularly spoiled: and then when a girl's so dreadfully shy, as often as not it sounds like impudence.' 'Dear me, I should never have thought Lady Mariamne was shy,' the gentle Rector said. 'That's just how it is,' said Harry. He went over again in the darkening to take his leave of Mrs. Dennistoun. He found her sitting out in the garden before the open door, looking down the misty walk. The light had gone out of the skies, but the usual cheerful lights had not yet appeared in the house, where the hum of a great occasion still reigned. The Tathams were at the Rectory, and Mrs. Dennistoun was alone. Harry Compton had a good heart, and though he could not conceive the possibility of a woman not being glad to have married her daughter, the loneliness and the darkness touched him a little in contrast with the gaiety of the previous night. 'You must think us a dreadful noisy lot,' he said, 'and as if my sister had no sense. But it's only the Jew's way. She's made like that—and at bottom she's not at all a bad sort.'

'Are you going away?' was all the answer Mrs. Dennistoun made.

'Oh, yes, and we shall be a good riddance,' said Harry; 'but please don't think any worse of us than you can help—— Phil—well, he's got a great deal of good in him—he has indeed, and she'll bring it all out.'

It was very good of Harry Compton. He had a little choking in his throat as he walked back. 'Blest if I ever thought of it in that light before,' he said to himself.

But I doubt if what he said, however well meant, brought much comfort to Mrs. Dennistoun's heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

THUS Elinor Dennistoun disappeared from Windyhill and was no more seen. There are many ways in which a marriage is almost like a death, especially when the marriage is that of an only child. The young go away, the old remain. There is all the dreary routine of the solitary life unbrightened by that companionship which was all the world to the one who is left behind. So little—only the happy going away into brighter scenes of one whose happiness was the whole thought of that dreary survivor at the chimney corner—and yet so much. And if that survivor is a woman she has to smile and tell her neighbours of the bride's happiness, and how great the comfort to herself that her Elinor's life is assured, and her own ending is now of no particular importance to her daughter; if it is a man,

he is allowed to lament, which is a curious paradox, but one of the many current in this world. Mrs. Dennistoun had to put a very brave face upon it all the more because of the known unsatisfactoriness of Elinor's husband: and she had to go on with her life, and sit down at her solitary meals, and invent lonely occupations for herself, and read and read, till her brains were often dazed by the multiplicity of the words, which lost their meaning as she turned over page by page. To sit alone in the house, without a sound audible, except perhaps the movement of the servants going upstairs or down to minister to the wants, about which she felt she cared nothing whether they were ministered to or not, of their solitary mistress, where a little while ago there used to be the rhythm of the one quick step, the sound of the one gay voice which made the world a warm inhabited place to Mrs. Dennistoun—this was more dismal than words could say. To be sure, there were some extraordinary and delightful differences; there were the almost daily letters, which afforded the lonely mother all the pleasure that life could give: and there was always the prospect, or at least possibility and hope, of seeing her child again. Those two particulars, it need

scarcely be said, make a difference which is practically infinite: but yet for Mrs. Dennistoun, sitting alone all the day and night, walking alone, reading alone, with little to do that was of the slightest consequence, not even the reading—for what did it matter to her dreary, lonely consciousness whether she kept afloat of general literature or improved her mind or not?—this separation by marriage was dreadfully like the dreary separation by death, and in one respect it was almost worse; for death, if it reaches our very hearts, takes away at least the gnawing pangs of anxiety. He or she who is gone that way is well; never more can trouble touch them, their feet cannot err nor their hearts ache; while who can tell what troubles and miseries may be befalling, out there in the unknown, the child who has embarked upon the troubled sea of mortal life!

And it may be imagined with what anxious eyes those letters, which made all the difference, were read; how the gradually changing tone in them was noted as it came in, slowly but also surely. Sometimes they got to be very hurried, and then Mrs. Dennistoun saw as in a glass the impatient husband waiting, wondering what she could constantly find to say to her mother; sometimes they

were long and detailed, and that meant, as would appear perhaps by a phrase slurred over in the postscript, that Phil had gone away somewhere. There was never a complaint in them, never a word that could be twisted into a complaint: but the anxious mother read between the lines innumerable things, not half of them true. There is perhaps never a half true of what anxiety may imagine: but then the half that is true!

John Tatham was very faithful to her during that winter. As soon as he came back from Switzerland, at the end of the long vacation, he went down to see her, feeling the difference in the house beyond anything he had imagined, feeling as if he were stepping into some darkened outer chamber of the grave: but with a cheerful face and eager but confident interest in 'the news from Elinor.' 'Of course she is enjoying herself immensely,' he said, and Mrs. Dennistoun was able to reply with a smile that was a little wistful that—yes, Elinor was enjoying herself immensely. 'She seems very happy, and everything is new to her and bright,' she said. They were both very glad that Elinor was happy, and they were very cheerful themselves, Mrs. Dennistoun truly cheered by his visit and by the necessity for

looking after everything that John might be comfortable, and the pleasure of seeing his face opposite to her at table. 'You can't think what it is to see you there; sitting down to dinner is the most horrible farce when one is alone.' 'Poor aunt!' John Tatham said: and nobody would believe how many Saturdays and Sundays he gave up to her during the long winter. Somehow he himself did not care to go anywhere else. In Elinor's time he had gone about freely enough, liking a little variety in his Saturday to Mondays, though always happiest when he went to Windyhill: but now somehow the other houses seemed to pall upon him. He liked best to go down to that melancholy house which his presence made more or less bright, where there was an endless talk of Elinor, where she was, what she was doing, what was to be her next move, and, at last, when she was coming to town. Mrs. Dennistoun did not now say, as she did at first, 'when she is coming home.' That possibility seemed to slip away somehow, and no one suggested it. When she was coming to town, that was what they said between themselves. She had spent the spring on the Riviera, a great part of it at Monte Carlo, and her letters were full of the beauty of the

place; but she said less and less about people, and more and more about the sea and the mountains, and the glorious road which gave at every turn a new and beautiful vision of the hills and the sea. It was a little like a guide-book, they sometimes felt, but neither said it; but at last it became certain that in the month of May she was coming to town.

More than that, oh, more than that!—One evening in May, when it was fine but a little chilly, when Mrs. Dennistoun was walking wistfully in her garden, looking at the moon shining in the west, and wondering if her child had arrived in England, and whether she was coming to a house of her own, or a lodging, or to be a visitor in some one else's house, details which Elinor had not given—her ear was suddenly caught by the distant rumbling of wheels, heavy wheels, the fly from the station certainly. Mrs. Dennistoun had no expectation of what it could be, no sort of hope: and yet a woman has always a sort of hope when her child lives and everything is possible. The fly seemed to stop, not coming up the little cottage drive; but by-and-by, when she had almost given up hoping, there came a rush of flying feet, and a cry of joy, and Elinor was in

her mother's arms. Elinor! yes, it was herself, no vision, no shadow such as had many a time come into Mrs. Dennistoun's dreams, but herself in flesh and blood, the dear familiar figure, the face which, between the twilight and those ridiculous tears which come when one is too happy, could scarcely be seen at all. 'Elinor, Elinor! it is you, my darling!' 'Yes, mother, it is me, really me. I could not write, because I did not know till the last minute whether I could get away.'

It may be imagined what a coming home that was. Mrs. Dennistoun, when she saw her daughter even by the light of the lamp, was greatly comforted. Elinor was looking well; she was changed in that indescribable way in which marriage changes (though not always) the happiest woman. And her appearance was changed; she was no longer the country young lady very well dressed and looking as well as any one could in her carefully made clothes. She was now a fashionable young woman, about whose dresses there was no question, who wore everything as those do who are at the fountain-head, no matter what it was she wore. Mrs. Dennistoun's eyes caught this difference at once, which is also indescribable to the uninitiated, and a sensation of

pride came into her mind. Elinor was improved, too, in so many ways. Her mother had never thought of calling her anything more, even in her inmost thoughts, than very pretty, very sweet; but it seemed to Mrs. Dennistoun now as if people might use a stronger word, and call Elinor beautiful. Her face had gained a great deal of expression, though it was always an expressive face; her eyes looked deeper; her manner had a wonderful youthful dignity. Altogether, it was another Elinor, yet, God be praised, the same.

It was but for one night, but that was a great deal, a night subtracted from the blank, a night that seemed to come out of the old times—those old times that had not been known to be so very happy till they were over and gone. Elinor had naturally a great deal to tell her mother, but in the glory of seeing her, of hearing her voice, of knowing that it was actually she who was speaking, Mrs. Dennistoun did not observe, what she remembered afterwards, that again it was much more of places than of people that Elinor talked, and that though she named Phil when there was any occasion for doing so, she did not babble about him as brides do, as if he were altogether the sun, and everything revolved round him. It

is not a good sign, perhaps, when the husband comes down to his 'proper place' as the representative of the other half of the world too soon. Elinor looked round upon her old home with a mingled smile and sigh. Undoubtedly it had grown smaller, perhaps even shabbier, since she went away: but she did not say so to her mother. She cried out how pretty it was, how delightful to come back to it! and that was true too. How often it happens in this life that there are two things quite opposed to each other, and yet both of them true.

'John will be delighted to hear that you have come, Elinor,' her mother said.

'John, dear old John! I hope he is well and happy, and all that; and he comes often to see you, mother? How sweet of him! You must give him ever so much love from his poor Nelly. I always keep that name sacred to him.'

'But why should I give him messages as if you were not sure to meet? of course you will meet—often.'

'Do you think so?' said Elinor. She opened her eyes a little in surprise, and then shook her head. 'I am afraid not, mamma. We are in two different worlds.'

'I assure you,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, 'John is a very rising man. He is invited everywhere.'

'That I don't doubt at all.'

'And why then shouldn't you meet?'

'I don't know. I don't fancy we shall go to the same places. John has a profession; he has something to do. Now you know we have nothing to do.'

She laughed and laid a little emphasis on the *we*, by way of taking off the weight of the words.

'I always thought it was a great pity, Elinor.'

'It may be a pity or not,' said Elinor, 'but it is, and it cannot be helped. We have got to make up our minds to it. I would rather Phil did nothing than mixed himself up with companies. Thank heaven, at present he is free of anything of that kind.'

'I hope he is free of that one at least, that he was going to invest all your money in, Elinor. I hope you found another investment that was quite steady and safe.'

'Oh, I suppose so,' said Elinor, with some of her old petulance: 'don't let us spoil the little time I have by talking about money, mamma!'

And then it was that Mrs. Dennistoun noticed

that what Elinor did talk of, hurrying away from this subject, were things of not the least importance —the olive woods on the Riviera, the wealth of flowers, the strange little old towns upon the hills. Surely even the money, which was her own and for her comfort, would be a more interesting subject to discuss. Perhaps Elinor herself perceived this, for she began immediately to ask questions about the Hudsons and Hills, and all the people of the parish, with much eagerness of questioning, but a flagging interest in the replies, as her mother soon saw. 'And Mary Dale, is she still there?' she asked. Mrs. Dennistoun entered into a little history of how Mary Dale had gone away to nurse a distant cousin who had been ill, and finally had died and left a very comfortable little fortune to her kind attendant. Elinor listened with little nods and appropriate exclamations, but before the evening was out asked again, 'And Mary Dale?' then hastily corrected herself with an 'Oh, I remember! you told me.' But it was perhaps safer not to question her how much she remembered of what she had been told.

Thus there were notes of disquiet in even that delightful evening, such a contrast as it was

to all the evenings since she had left home. Even when John came, what a poor substitute for Elinor! The ingratitude of those whose heart is set on one object made Mrs. Dennistoun thus make light of what had been her great consolation. He was very kind, very good, and oh, how glad she had been to see him through that heavy winter—but he was not Elinor! It was enough for Elinor to step across her mother's threshold to make Mrs. Dennistoun feel that there was no substitute for her—none: and that John was of no more consequence than the Rector or any habitual caller. But, at the same time, in all the melody of the home-coming, in the sweetness of Elinor's voice, and look, and kiss, in the perfection of seeing her there again in her own place, and listening to her dear step running up and down the no longer silent house, there were notes of disquiet which could not be mistaken. She was not unhappy, the mother thought; her eyes could not be so bright nor her colour so fair unless she was happy. Trouble does not embellish, and Elinor was embellished. But yet—there were notes of disquiet in the air.

Next day Mrs. Dennistoun drove her child to

the railway in order not to lose a moment of so short a visit, and naturally, though she had received that unexpected visit with rapture, feeling that a whole night of Elinor was worth a month, a year of anybody else, yet now that Elinor was going she found it very short. 'You'll come again soon, my darling?' she said, as she stood at the window of the carriage ready to say good-bye.

'Whenever I can, mother dear, of that you may be sure: whenever I can get away.'

'I don't wish to draw you from your husband. Don't get away—come with Philip from Saturday to Monday. Give him my love, and tell him so. He shall not be bored; but Sunday is a day without engagements.'

'Oh, not now, mamma. There are just as many things to do on Sundays as on any other day.'

There were a great many words on Mrs. Dennistoun's lips, but she did not say them; all she did say was, 'Well, then, Elinor—when you can get away.'

'Oh, you need not doubt me, mamma.' And the train, which sometimes lingers so long, which some people that very day were swearing at as so slow, 'Like all country trains,' they said—that inevitable heartless thing got

into motion, and Mrs. Dennistoun watched it till it disappeared; and—what was that that came over Elinor's face as she sank back into the corner of her carriage, not knowing her mother's anxious look followed her still—what was it? Oh, dreadful, dreadful life! oh, fruitless love and longing!—was it relief? The mother tried to get that look out of her mind as she drove silently and slowly home, creeping up hill after hill. There was no need to hurry. All that she was going to was an empty and silent house, where nobody awaited her. What was that look on Elinor's face? Relief! to have it over, to get away again, away from her old home and her fond mother, away to her new life. Mrs. Dennistoun was not a jealous mother nor unreasonable. She said to herself—Well! it was no doubt a trial to the child to come back—to come alone. All the time, perhaps, she was afraid of being too closely questioned, of having to confess that *he* did not want to come, perhaps grudged her coming. She might be afraid that her mother would divine something—some hidden opposition, some dislike, perhaps, on his part. Poor Elinor! and when everything had passed over so well, when it was ended,

and nothing had been between them but love and mutual understanding, what wonder if there came over her dear face a look of relief! This was how this good woman, who had seen a great many things in her passage through life, explained her child's look: and though she was sad was not angry, as many less tolerant and less farseeing might have been in her place.

John, that good John, to whom she had been so ungrateful, came down next Saturday, and to him she confided her great news, but not all of it. 'She came down—alone?' he said.

'Well,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, bravely; 'she knew very well it was her I wanted to see, and not Philip. They say a great deal about mothers-in-law, but why shouldn't we in our turn have our fling at sons-in-law, John? It was not him I wanted to see: it was my own child: and Elinor understood that and ran off by herself. Bless her for the thought.'

'I understand that,' said John. He had given the mother more than one look as she spoke, and divined her better than she supposed. 'Oh, yes, I can understand that. The thing I don't understand is why he let her: why he wasn't too proud to bring her back to you, that you

might see she had taken no harm. If it had been I——'

'Ah, but it was not you,' said Mrs. Dennistoun; 'you forget that. It never could have been you.'

He looked quickly at her again, and it was on his lips to ask, 'Why could it never have been I?' but he did not; for he knew that if it had ever been him, it could not have been for years. He was too prudent, and Elinor, even if she had escaped Phil Compton, would have met some one else. He had no right to say or even think, what, in the circumstances, he would have done. He did not make any answer, but she understood him as he understood her.

And later in the evening she asked his advice as to what she should do. 'I am not fond of asking advice,' she said, 'and I don't think there is another in the world I would ask it from but you. What should I do? It would cost me nothing to run up to town for a part of the season at least. I might get a little house and be near her, where she could come to me when she pleased. Should I do it, or would it be wise not to do it? I don't want to spy upon her or to force her to tell me more than she wishes.

John, my dear, I will tell you what I would tell no one else. I caught a glimpse of her dear face when the train was just going out of sight, and she was sinking back in her corner with a look of relief——'

'Of relief!' he cried.

'John, don't form any false impression! it was no want of love: but I think she was thankful to have seen me, and to have satisfied me, and that I had asked no questions that she could not answer—in a way.'

John clenched his fist, but he dared not make any gesture of disgust, or suggest again, 'If it had been I.'

'Well, now,' she said, 'remember I am not angry—fancy being angry with Elinor!—and all I mean is for her benefit. Should I go? it might be a relief to her to run in to me whenever she pleased; or should I not go? lest she might think I was bent on finding out more than she chose to tell?'

'Wouldn't it be right that you should find out?'

'That is just the point upon which I am doubtful. She is not unhappy, for she is—she is prettier than ever she was, John. A girl does

not get like that—her eyes brighter, her colour clearer, looking—well, beautiful!' cried the mother, her eyes filling with bright tears, 'if she is unhappy. But there may be things that are not quite smooth, that she might think it would make me unhappy to know, yet that if let alone might come all right. Tell me, John, what should I do?'

And they sat debating thus till far on in the night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. DENNISTOUN did not go up to town. There are some women who would have done so, seeing the other side of the subject—at all hazards; and perhaps they would have been right—who can tell? She did not—denying herself, keeping herself by main force in her solitude, not to interfere with the life of her child, which was drawn on lines so different from any of hers—and perhaps she was wrong. Who knows, except by the event, which is the best or the worst way in any of our human movements, which are so short-sighted? And twice during the season Elinor found means to come to the Cottage for a night as she had done at first. These were occasions of great happiness, it need not be said—but of many thoughts and wonderings too. She had always an excuse for

Phil. He had meant until the last moment to come with her—some one had turned up, quite unexpectedly, who had prevented him. It was a fatality; especially when she came down in July did she insist upon this. He had been invited quite suddenly to a political dinner to meet one of the Ministers from whom he had hopes of an appointment. 'For we find that we can't go on enjoying ourselves for ever,' she said gaily, 'and Phil has made up his mind he must get something to do.'

'It is always the best way,' said Mrs. Dennistoun.

'I am not so very sure, mamma, when you have never been used to it. Of course, some people would be wretched without work. Fancy John with nothing to do! How he would torment his wife—if he had one. But Phil never does that. He is very easy to live with. He is always after something, and leaves me as free as if he had a day's work in an office.'

This slipped out, with a smile: but evidently after it was said Elinor regretted she had said it, and thought that more might be drawn from the admission than she intended. She added quietly, 'Of course a settled occupation would interfere

with many things. We could not go out together continually as we do now.'

Was there any way of reconciling these two statements? Mrs. Dennistoun tried and tried in vain to make them fit into each other: and yet no doubt there was some way.

'And perhaps another season, mother, if Phil was in a public office—it seems so strange to think of Phil having an office—you might come up, don't you think, to town for a time? Would it be a dreadful bore to you to leave the country just when it is at its best? I'm afraid it would be a dreadful bore: but we could run about together in the mornings when he was busy, and go to see the pictures and things. How pleasant it would be!'

'It would be delightful for me, Elinor. I shouldn't mind giving up the country, if it wouldn't interfere with your engagements, my dear.'

'Oh, my engagements! Much I should care for them if Phil was occupied. I like, of course, to be with him.'

'Of course,' said Mrs. Dennistoun.

'And it is good for him too, I think.' This was another of the little admissions that Elinor

regretted the moment they were made. 'I mean it's a pity, isn't it, when a man likes to have his wife with him that she shouldn't always be there, ready to go?'

'A great pity,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, and then she changed the subject. 'I thought it required all sorts of examinations and things to get into a public office now.'

'So it does for the ordinary grades, which would be far, far too much routine for Phil. But they say a Minister always has things in his power. There are still posts——'

'Sinecures, Elinor?'

'I did not mean exactly sinecures,' she said with an embarrassed laugh, 'though I think those must have been fine things: but posts where it is not merely routine, where a man may have a chance of acting for himself and distinguishing himself, perhaps. And to be in the service of the country is always better, safer, than that dreadful city. Don't you think so?'

'I have never thought the city dreadful, Elinor. I have had many friends connected with the city.'

'Ah, but not in those horrid companies, mamma. Do you know that company which we just

escaped, which Phil saved my money out of, when it was all but invested—I believe that has ruined people right and left. He got out of it, fortunately, just before the smash; that is, of course, he never had very much to do with it; he was only on the Board.'

'And where is your money now?'

'Oh, I can answer that question this time,' said Elinor, gaily. 'He had just time to get it into another company which pays—beautifully! The Jew is in it, too, and the whole lot of them. Oh! I beg your pardon, mamma. I tried hard to call her by her proper name, but when one never hears any other, one can't help getting into it!'

'I hope,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, 'that Philip was not much mixed up with this company if other people have been ruined and he has escaped?'

'How could that be?' said Elinor with a sort of tremulous dignity. 'You don't suppose for a moment that he—— But of course you don't,' she added with a heightened colour and a momentary cloud over her eyes, 'of course you don't. There was a dreadful manager who destroyed the books and then fled, so that

there never could be a right winding up of the affairs.'

'I hope Philip will take great care never to have to do with anything of the kind again.'

'Oh, no, he has promised me he will not. I will not have it. He has a kind of ornamental directorship on this new company, just for the sake of his name: but he has promised he will have nothing more to do with it, for my peace of mind.'

'I wonder that they should care in the city for so small a matter as a peer's younger son.'

'Oh, do you think it a small matter, mamma? I don't mean that I care, but people give a good deal of weight to it, you know.'

'I meant only in the city, Elinor.'

'Oh!' Elinor said. She was half offended with her mother's indifference. She had found that to be the Hon. Mrs. Compton was something, or so at least she supposed: and she began timidly to give her mother a list of her engagements, which were indeed many in number, and there were some dazzling names among a great many with which Mrs. Dennistoun was unacquainted. But how could she know

who were the fashionable people nowadays, a woman living so completely out of the world?

John Tatham, for his part, went through his engagements that year with a constant expectation of seeing Elinor, which preoccupied him more than a rising young barrister going everywhere ought to have been preoccupied. He thought he went everywhere, and so did his family at home, especially his sister, Mary Tatham, who was his father's nurse and attendant, and never had any chance of sharing these delights. She made all the more, as was natural, of John's privileges and social success from the fact of her own seclusion, and was in the habit of saying that she believed there was scarcely a party in London to which John was not invited—three or four in a night. But it would seem with all this that there were many parties to which he was not invited, for the Phil Comptons (how strange and on the whole disgusting to think that this now meant Elinor!) also went everywhere, and yet they very seldom met. It was true that John could not expect to meet them at dinner at a Judge's or in the legal society in high places which was his especial sphere, and nothing could be more foolish than

the tremor of expectation with which this very steady-going man would set out to every house in which the fashionable world met with the professional, always thinking that perhaps—— But it was rarely, very rarely, that this perhaps came to pass. When it did it was amid the crowd of some prodigious reception to which people 'looked in' for half an hour, and where on one occasion he found Elinor alone, with that curious dignity about her, a little tragical, which comes of neglect. He agreed with her mother, that he had never imagined Elinor's youthful prettiness could have come to anything so near beauty. There was a strained, wide-open look in her eyes, which was half done by looking out for some one, and half by defying any one to think that she felt herself alone, or was pursuing that search with any anxiety. She stood exceedingly erect, silent, observing everything, yet endeavouring to appear as if she did not observe—altogether a singular and very striking figure among the fashionable crowd, in which it seemed everybody was chattering, smiling, gay, or making believe to be gay, except herself. When she saw John a sudden gleam of pleasure, followed by a cloud of embarrassment, came over her

face: but poor Elinor could not help being glad to see some one she knew, some one who more or less belonged to her: although it appeared she had the best of reasons for being alone. 'I was to meet Phil here,' she said, 'but somehow I must have missed him.' 'Let us walk about a little, and we'll be sure to find him,' said John. She was so glad to take his arm, almost to cling to him, to find herself with a friend. 'I don't know many people here,' she confided to John, leaning on his arm, with the familiar sisterly dependence of old, 'and I am so stupid about coming out by myself. It is because I have never been used to it. There has always been mamma, and then Phil; but I suppose he has been detained somewhere to-night. I think I never felt so lost before, among all these strange people. He knows everybody, of course.'

'But you have a lot of friends, Elinor.'

'Oh, yes,' she said, brightly enough; 'in our own set: but this is what Phil calls more serious than our set. I should not wonder in the least if he had shirked it at the last, knowing I would be sure to come.'

'That is just the reason why I should have thought he would not shirk it,' said John.

'Ah, that's because you're not married,' said Elinor, but with a laugh in which there was no bitterness. 'Don't you know one good of a wife is to do the man's social duties for him, to appear at the dull places and save his credit? Oh, I don't object at all; it is quite a legitimate division of labour. I shall get into it in time: but I am so stupid about coming into a room alone, and instead of looking about to see what people I really do know, I just stiffen into a sort of shell. I should never have known you if you had not come up to me, John.'

'You see I was looking out for you, and you were not looking out for me, and that makes all the difference.'

'You were looking out for us!'

'Ever since the season began I have been looking out for you, everywhere,' said John, with a rather fierce emphasis on the pronoun, which however, as everybody knows, is plural, and means two as much as one, though it was the reverse of this that John Tatham meant to show.

'Ah!' said Elinor, 'But then I am afraid our set is different, John. There will always

be some places—like this, for instance—where I hope we shall meet; but our set perhaps is a little frivolous, and your set a little—serious, don't you see. You are professional and political, and all that; and Phil is—well, I don't know exactly what Phil is—more fashionable and frivolous, as I said. A race-going, ball-going, always in motion set.'

'Most people,' said John, 'go more or less to races and balls.'

'More or less, that makes the whole difference. We go to them all. Now you see the distinction, John. You go to Ascot perhaps on the Cup day; we go all the days and all the other days, at the other places.'

'How knowing you have become.'

'Haven't I?' she said, with a smile that was half a sigh.

'But I shouldn't have thought that would have suited you, Elinor.'

'Oh, yes, it does,' she said; and then she eyed him with something of the defiance that had been in her look when she was standing alone. She did not avoid his look as a less brave woman might have done. 'I like the fun of it,' she said.

And then there was a pause, for he did not know what to reply.

'We have been through all the rooms,' she said at last, 'and we have not seen a ghost of Phil. He cannot be coming now. What o'clock is it? Oh, just the time he will be due at——I'm sure he can't come now. Do you think you could get my carriage for me? It's only a brougham that we hire,' she said with a smile, 'but the man is such a nice, kind man. If he had been an old family coachman he couldn't take more care of me.'

'That looks as if he had to take care of you often, Elinor.'

'Well,' she said, looking him full in the face again, 'you don't suppose my husband goes out with me in the morning shopping? I hope he has something better to do.'

'Shouldn't you like to have your mother with you for the shopping, &c.?'

'Ah, dearly!' Then, with a little quick change of manner, 'Another time—not this season, but next, if I can persuade her to come; for next year I hope we shall be more settled, perhaps in a house of our own, if Phil gets the appointment he is after.'

'Oh, he is after an appointment?'

'Yes, John; Phil is not so lucky as to have a profession like you.'

This was a new way of looking at the matter, and John Tatham found nothing to say. It seemed to him, who had worked very hard for it, a little droll to describe his possession of a profession as luck. But he made no remark. He took Elinor downstairs and found her brougham for her, and the kind old coachman on the box, who was well used to taking care of her, though only hired from the livery stables for the season—John thought the old man looked suspiciously at him, and would have stopped him from accompanying her, had he designed any such proceeding. Poor little Nelly, to be watched over by the paternal fly-man on the box! she who might have had—— But he stopped himself there, though his heart felt as heavy as a stone to see her go away thus, alone from the smart party where she had been doing duty for her husband. John could not take upon himself to finish his sentence—she who might have had love and care of a very different kind. No, he had never offered her that love and care. Had Phil Compton

never come in her way it is possible that John Tatham might never have offered it to her—not, at least, for a long time. He could never have had any right to be a dog in the manger, neither would he venture to pretend now that it was her own fault if she had chosen the wrong man; was it his fault, then, who had never put a better man within her choice? But John, who was no coxcomb, blushed in the dark to himself as this question flitted through his mind. He had no reason to suppose that Elinor would have been willing to change the brotherly tie between them into any other. Thank heaven for that brotherly tie! He would always be able to befriend her, to stand by her, to help her as much as any one could help a woman who was married, and thus outside of all ordinary succour. And as for that blackguard, that *dis*-Honourable Phil—— But here John, who was a man of just mind, paused again. For a man to let his wife go to a party by herself was not after all so dreadful a thing. Many men did so, and the women did not complain; to be sure they were generally older, more accustomed to manage for themselves than Elinor: but still, a man need not be a blackguard

because he did that. So John stopped his own ready judgment, but still I am afraid in his heart pronounced Phil Compton's sentence all the same. He did not say a word about this encounter to Mrs. Dennistoun; at least, he did tell her that he had met Elinor at the So-and-so's, which, as it was one of the best houses in London, was pleasing to a mother to hear.

'And how was she looking?' Mrs. Dennistoun cried.

'She was looking—beautiful——' said John. 'I don't flatter, and I never thought her so in the old times—but it is the only word I can use——'

'Didn't I tell you so?' said the mother, pleased. 'She is quite embellished and improved—therefore she must be happy.'

'It is certainly the very best evidence——'

'Isn't it? But it so often happens otherwise, even in happy marriages. A girl feels strange, awkward, out of it, in her new life. Elinor must have entirely accustomed herself, adapted herself to it, and to them, or she would not look so well. That is the greatest comfort I can have.'

And John kept his own counsel about Elinor's

majestic solitude, and the watchful old coachman in the hired brougham. Her husband might still be full of love and tenderness all the same. It was a great effort of the natural integrity of his character to pronounce like this; but he did it in the interests of justice, and for Elinor's sake and her mother's said nothing of the circumstances at all.

It may be supposed that when Elinor paid the last of her sudden visits at the cottage it was a heavy moment both for mother and daughter. It was the time when fashionable people finish the season by going to Goodwood —and to Goodwood Elinor was going with a party, Lady Mariamne and a number of the 'set.' She told her mother, to amuse her, of the new dresses she had got for this important occasion. 'Phil says one may go in sackcloth and ashes the remainder of the year, but we must be fine for Goodwood,' she said. 'I wanted him to believe that I had too many clothes already, but he was inexorable. It is not often, is it, that one's husband is more anxious than one's self about one's dress?'

'He wants you to do him credit, Elinor.'

'Well, mamma, there is no harm in that.

But more than that—he wants me to look nice, for myself. He thinks me still a little shy—though I never was shy, was I?—and he thinks nothing gives you courage like feeling yourself well dressed—but he takes the greatest interest in everything I wear.'

'And where do you go after Goodwood, Elinor?'

'Oh, mamma, on such a round of visits!—here, and there, and everywhere. I don't know,' and the tears sprang into Elinor's eyes, 'when I may see you again.'

'You are not coming back to London?' said the mother, with the heart sinking in her breast.

'Not now—they all say London is insupportable—it is one of the things that everybody says, and I believe that Phil will not set foot in it again for many months. Perhaps I might get a moment, when he is shooting, or something, to run back to you; but it is a long way from Scotland—and he must be there, you know, for the twelfth. He would think the world was coming to an end if he did not get a shot at the grouse on that day.'

'But I thought he was looking for an appointment, Elinor?'

A cloud passed over Elinor's face. 'The season is over,' she said, 'and all the opportunities are exhausted — and we don't speak of that any more.'

She gave her mother a very close hug at the railway, and sat with her head partly out of the window watching her as she stood on the platform, until the train turned round the corner. No relief on her dear face now, but an anxious strain in her eyes to see her mother as long as possible. Mrs. Dennistoun, as she walked again slowly up the hills that the pony might not suffer, said to herself, with a chill at her heart, that she would rather have seen her child sinking back in the corner, pleased that it was over, as on the first day.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next winter was more dreary still and solitary than the first at Windyhill. The first had been, though it looked so long and dreary as it passed, full of hope of the coming summer, which must, it seemed, bring Elinor back. But now Mrs. Dennistoun knew exactly what Elinor's coming back meant, and the prospect was less cheering. Three days in the whole long season —three little escapades, giving so very little hope of more sustained intercourse to come. Mrs. Dennistoun, going over all the circumstances—she had so little else to do but to go over them in her long solitary evenings—came to the conclusion that whatever might happen, she herself would go to town when summer came again. She amused herself with thinking how she would find a little house—quite a small house, as there are so many — in a good situation, where even

the most fashionable need not be ashamed to come, and where there would be room enough for Elinor and her husband if they chose to establish themselves there. Mrs. Dennistoun was of opinion, already expressed, that if mothers-in-law are obnoxious to men, sons-in-law are very frequently so to women, which is a point of view not popularly perceived. And Philip Compton was not sympathetic to her in any point of view. But still she made up her mind to endure him, and even his family, for the sake of Elinor. She planned it all out—it gave a little occupation to the vacant time—how they should have their separate rooms and even meals if that turned out most convenient; how she would interfere with none of their ways: only to have her Elinor under her roof, to have her when the husband was occupied—in the evenings, if there were any evenings that she spent alone; in the mornings, when perhaps Phil got up late, or had engagements of his own; for the moment's freedom when her child should be free. She made up her mind that she would ask no questions, would never interfere with any of their habits, or oppose or put herself between them—only just to have a little of Elinor every day.

'For it will not be the same thing this year,' she said to John apologetically. 'They have quite settled down into each other's ways. Philip must see I have no intention of interfering. For the most obdurate opponent of mothers-in-law could not think—could he, John?—that I had any desire to put myself between them, or make myself troublesome now.'

'There is no telling,' said John, 'what such asses might think.'

'But Philip is not an ass; and don't you think I have behaved very well, and may give myself this indulgence the second year?'

'I certainly think you will be quite right to come to town: but I should not have them to live with you, if I were you.'

'Shouldn't you? It might be a risk: but then I shouldn't do it unless there was room enough to leave them quite free. The thing I am afraid of is that they wouldn't accept.'

'Oh, Phil Compton will accept,' said John, hurriedly.

'Why are you so sure? I think often you know more about him than you ever say.'

'I don't know much about him, but I know that a man of uncertain income and not very

delicate feelings is generally glad enough to have the expenses of the season taken off him: and even get all the more pleasure out of it when he has his living free.'

'That's not a very elevated view to take of the transaction, John.'

'My dear aunt, I did not think you expected anything very elevated from the Comptons. They are not the sort of family from which one expects——'

'And yet it is the family that my Elinor belongs to: she is a Compton.'

'I did not think of that,' said John, a little disconcerted. Then he added, 'There is no very elevated standard in such matters. Want of money has no law: and of course there are better things involved, for he might be very glad that Elinor should have her mother to go out with her, to stand by when—a man might have other engagements.'

Mrs. Dennistoun looked at him closely and shook her head. She was not very much reassured by this view of the case. 'At all events I shall try it,' she said.

Quite early in the year, when she was expecting no such pleasure, she was rewarded for her

patience by another flying visit from her child, who this time telegraphed to say that she was coming, so that her mother could go and meet her at the station, and thus lose no moment of her visit. Elinor, however, was not in good spirits on this occasion, nor was she in good looks. She told her mother hurriedly that Phil had come up upon business; that he was very much engaged with the new company, getting far more into it than satisfied her. 'I am terrified that another catastrophe may come, and that he might share the blame if things were to go wrong'—which was by no means a good preface for the mission with which it afterwards appeared Elinor herself was charged.

'Phil told me to say to you, mamma, that if you were not satisfied with any of your investments, he could help you to a good six or seven per cent.——'

She said this with her head turned away, gazing out of the window, contemplating the wintry aspect of the combe with a countenance as cloudy and as little cheerful as itself.

There was an outcry on Mrs. Dennistoun's lips, but fortunately her sympathy with her child was so strong that she felt Elinor's sentiments almost

more forcibly than her own, and she managed to answer in a quiet, untroubled voice.

'Philip is very kind, my dear: but you know my investments are all settled for me, and I have no will of my own. I get less interest, but then I have less responsibility. Don't you know I belong to the time in which women were not supposed to be good for anything, and consequently I am in the hands of my trustees.'

'I think he foresaw that, mother,' said Elinor, still with her head averted and her eyes far away; 'but he thought you might represent to the trustees that not only would it give you more money, but it would be better in the end—for me. Oh, how I hate to have to say this to you, mamma!'

How steadily Mrs. Dennistoun kept her countenance, though her daughter now flung herself upon her shoulder with uncontrollable tears!

'My darling, it is quite natural you should say it. You must tell Philip that I fear I am powerless. I will try, but I don't think anything will come of it. I have been glad to be free of responsibility, and I have never attempted to interfere.'

'Mother, I am so thankful. I oughtn't to go against him, ought I? But I would not have

you take his advice. It is so dreadful not to appear——'

'My dear, you must try to think that he understands better than you do: men generally do: you are only a girl, and they are trained more or less to business.'

'Not Phil! not Phil!'

'Well, he must have some capacity for it, some understanding, or they would not want him on those Boards; and you cannot have, Elinor, for you know nothing about it. To hear you speak of per cents makes me laugh.' It was a somewhat forlorn kind of laugh, yet the mother executed it finely: and by-and-by the subject dropped, and Elinor was turned to talk of other things—other things of which there was a great deal to say, and over which they cried and laughed together as nature bade.

In the same evening, the precious evening of which she did not like to waste a moment, Mrs. Dennistoun unfolded her plan for the season. 'I feel that I know exactly the kind of house I want; it will probably be in some quiet insignificant place, a Chapel Street, or a Queen Street, or a Park Street somewhere, but in a good situation. You shall have the first floor all to yourself

to receive your visitors, and if you think that Philip would prefer a separate table——'

'Oh, mamma, mamma!' cried Elinor, clinging to her, kissing passionately her mother's cheek, which was still as soft as a child's.

'It is not anything you have told me now that has put this into my head, my darling. I had made it all up in my own mind. Then, you know, when your husband is engaged with those business affairs—in the city—or with his own friends —you would have your mother to fall back upon, Elinor. I should have just the *moments perdus*, don't you see, when you were doing nothing else, when you were wanted for nothing else. I promise you, my darling, I should never be *de trop*, and would never interfere.'

'Oh, mamma, mamma!' Elinor cried again, as if words failed her; and so they did, for she said scarcely anything more, and evaded any answer. It went to her mother's heart, yet she made her usual excuses for it. Poor child, once so ready to decide, accepting or rejecting with the certainty that no opposition would be made to her will, but now afraid to commit herself, to say anything that her husband would not approve! Well! Mrs. Dennistoun said to herself, many a young wife

is like that, and yet is happy enough. It depends so much on the man. Many a man adores his wife and is very good to her, and yet cannot bear that she should seem to settle anything without consulting his whim. And Philip Compton had never been what might be called an easy-going man. It was right of Elinor to give no answer till she knew what he would like. The dreadful thing was that she expressed no pleasure in her mother's proposal, scarcely looked as if she herself would like it, which was a thing which did give an unquestionable wound.

'Mamma,' she said, as they were driving to the station, not in the pony carriage this time, but in the fly, for the weather was bad, 'don't be vexed that I don't say more about your wonderful, your more than kind offer.'

'Kind is scarcely a word to use, Elinor, between you and me.'

'I know, I know, mamma—and I as good as refuse it, saying nothing. Oh, if I could tell you without telling you! I am so frightened—how can I say it?—that you should see things you would not approve!'

'My dear, I am of one generation and you are of another. I am an old woman, and your

husband is a young man. But what does that matter? We can agree to differ. I will never thrust myself into his private affairs, and he——'

'Oh, mother, mother, darling, it is not that,' Elinor said. And she went away without any decision. But in a few days there came to Mrs. Dennistoun a letter from Philip himself, most nobly expressed, saying that Elinor had told him of her mother's kind offer, and that he hastened to accept it with the utmost gratitude and devotion. He had just been wondering, he wrote, how he was to muster all things necessary for Elinor, with the business engagements which were growing upon himself. Nobody could understand better than Nell's good mother how necessary it was that he should neglect no means of securing their position, and he had found that often he would have to leave his darling by herself: but this magnificent, this magnanimous offer on her part would make everything right. Need he say how gratefully he accepted it? Nell and he being on the spot would immediately begin looking out for the house, and when they had a list of three or four to look at he hoped she would come up to their rooms and select what she liked best. This response took away Mrs. Dennistoun's

breath, for, to tell the truth, she had her own notions as to the house she wanted and as to the time to be spent in town, and would certainly have preferred to manage everything herself. But in this she had to yield, with thankfulness that in the main point she was to have her way.

Did she have her way? It is very much to be doubted whether in such a situation of affairs it would have been possible. The house that was decided upon was not one which she would have chosen for herself, neither would she have taken it from Easter to July. She had meant a less expensive place and a shorter season; but after all, what did that matter for once if it pleased Elinor? The worst of it was that she could not at all satisfy herself that it pleased Elinor. It pleased Philip, there was no doubt, but then it had not been intended, except in a very secondary way, to please him. And when the racket of the season began Mrs. Dennistoun had a good deal to bear. Philip, though he was supposed to be a man of business and employed in the city, got up about noon, which was dreadful to all her orderly country habits; the whole afternoon through there was a perpetual tumult of visitors, who, when by chance she encountered

them in the hall or on the stairs, looked at her superciliously as if she were the landlady. The man who opened the door, and brushed Philip Compton's clothes, and was in his service, looked superciliously at her too, and declined to have anything to say to 'the visitors for downstairs.' A noise of laughter and loud talk was (distantly) in her ears from noon till late at night. When Philip came home, always much later than his wife, he was in the habit of bringing men with him, whose voices rang through the house after everybody was in bed. To be sure, there were compensations. She had Elinor often for an hour or two in the morning before her husband was up. She had her in the evenings when they were not going out, but these were few. As for Philip, he never dined at home. When he had no engagements he dined at his club, leaving Elinor with her mother. He gave Mrs. Dennistoun very little of his company, and when they did meet there was in his manner too a sort of reflection of the superciliousness of the 'smart' visitors and the 'smart' servant. She was to him, too, in some degree the landlady, the old lady downstairs. Elinor, as was natural, redoubled her demonstrations of affection, her excuses and sweet words

to make up for this neglect: but all the time there was in her mother's mind that dreadful doubt which assails us when we have committed ourselves to one act or another, 'Was it wise? Would it not have been better to have denied herself and stayed away?' So far as self-denial went, it was more exercised in Curzon Street than it would have been at the Cottage. For she had to see many things that displeased her and to say no word; to guess at the tears, carefully washed away from Elinor's eyes, and to ask no questions, and to see what she could not but feel was the violent career downward, the rush that must lead to a catastrophe, but make no sign. There was one evening when Elinor, not looking well or feeling well, had stayed at home, Philip having a whole long list of engagements in hand; men's engagements, his wife explained, a stock-broking dinner, an adjournment to somebody's chambers, a prolonged sitting, which meant play, and a great deal of wine, and other attendant circumstances into which she did not enter. Elinor had no engagements for that night, and was free to be petted and fêted by her mother. She was put at her ease in a soft and rich dressing-gown, and the prettiest little dinner

served, and the room filled with flowers, and everything done that used to be done when she was recovering from some little mock illness, some child's malady, just enough to show how dear above everything was the child to the mother, and with what tender ingenuity the mother could invent new delights for the child. These delights, alas! did not transport Elinor now as they once had done, and yet the repose was sweet, and the comfort of this nearest and dearest friend to lean upon something more than words could say.

On this evening, however, in the quiet of those still hours, poor Elinor's heart was opened, or rather her mouth, which on most occasions was closed so firmly. She said suddenly, in the midst of something quite different, 'Oh, I wish Phil was not so much engaged with those dreadful city men.'

'My dear!' said Mrs. Dennistoun, who was thinking of far other things; and then she said, 'There surely cannot be much to fear in that respect. He is never in the city—he is never up, my dear, when city men are doing their work.'

'Ah,' said Elinor, 'I don't think that matters; he is in with them all the same.'

'Well, Elinor, there is no reason that there

should be any harm in it. I would much rather he had some real business in hand than be merely a butterfly of fashion. You must not entertain that horror of city men.'

'The kind he knows are different from the kind you know, mamma.'

'I suppose everything is different from what it was in my time; but it need not be any worse for that——'

'Oh, mother! you are obstinate in thinking well of everything; but sometimes I am so frightened, I feel as if I must do something dreadful myself —to precipitate the ruin which nothing I can do will stop——'

'Elinor, Elinor, this is far too strong language——'

'Mamma, he wants me to speak to you again. He wants you to give him your money——'

'But I have told you already I cannot give it, Elinor.'

'Heaven be praised for that! But he will speak to you himself, he will perhaps try to—bully you, mamma.'

'Elinor!'

'It is horrible, what I say; yes, it is horrible, but I want to warn you. He says things——'

'Nothing that he can say will make me forget that he is your husband, Elinor.'

'Ah, but don't think too much of that, mamma. Think that he doesn't know what he is doing—poor Phil, oh, poor Phil! He is hurried on by these people; and then it will break up, and the poor people will be ruined, and they will upbraid him, and yet he will not be a whit the better. He does not get any of the profit. I can see it all as clear—— And there are so many other things.'

Mrs. Dennistoun's heart sank in her breast, for she too knew what were the other things. 'We must have patience,' she said; 'he is in his hey-day, full of—high spirits, and thinking everything he touches must go right. He will steady down in time.'

'Oh, I am not complaining,' cried Elinor, hurriedly dashing her tears away; 'if you were not a dreadfully good mamma, if you would grumble sometimes and find fault, that I might defend him! It is the sight of you there, seeing everything and not saying a word, that is too much for me.'

'Then I will grumble, Elinor. I will even say something to him for our own credit. He

should not come in so late—at least, when he comes in he should come in to rest and not bring men with him to make a noise. You see I can find fault as much as heart could desire. I am dreadfully selfish. I don't mind when he goes out now and then without you, for then I have you; but he should not bring noisy men with him to disturb the house in the middle of the night. I think I will speak to him——'

'No,' said Elinor, with a clutch upon her mother's arm; 'no, don't do that. He does not like to be found fault with. Unless in the case —if you were giving him that money, mother.'

'Which I cannot do: and, Elinor, my darling, which I would not do if I could. It is all you will have to rely upon, you and——'

'It would have been the only chance,' said Elinor. 'I don't say it would have been much of a chance. But he might have listened, if—— Oh, no, dear mother, no. I would not in my sober senses wish that you should give him a penny. It would do no good, but only harm. And yet if you had done it, you might have said——and he might have listened to you for once——'

CHAPTER XX.

A FEW days after this Philip Compton came in, in the afternoon, to the little room downstairs which Mrs. Dennistoun had made into a sitting-room for herself. Elinor had gone out with her sister-in-law, and her mother was alone. It was a very rare thing indeed for Mrs. Dennistoun's guest—who, indeed, was to all intents and purposes the master of the house, and had probably quite forgotten by this time that he was not in reality so—to pay a visit 'downstairs.' 'Downstairs' had a distinct meaning in the Compton vocabulary. It was spoken of with significance, and with a laugh, as something half hostile, half ridiculous. It meant a sort of absurd criticism and inspection, as of some old crone sitting vigilant, spying upon everything—a mother-in-law. Phil's cronies thought it was the most absurd weakness on his part to let such an intruder get footing in his

house. 'You will never get rid of her,' they said. And Phil, though he was generally quite civil to his wife's mother (being actually and at his heart more a gentleman than he had the least idea he was), did not certainly in any way seek her society. He scarcely ever dined at home, as has been said; when he had not an engagement—and he had a great many engagements—he found that he was obliged to dine at his club on the evenings when he might have been free; and as this was the only meal which was supposed to be common, it may be perceived that Phil had little means of meeting his mother-in-law; and that he should come to see her of his own free will was unprecedented. Phil Compton had not improved since his marriage. His nocturnal enjoyments, the noisy parties upstairs in the middle of the night, had not helped to dissipate the effect of the anxieties of the city, which his wife so deplored. Mrs. Dennistoun that very day, when she came downstairs in the fresh summer morning to her early breakfast, had seen through an open door the room upstairs which was appropriated to Phil, with a lamp still burning in the daylight, cards lying strewn about

the floor, and all in that direful disorder which a room so occupied overnight shows in the clear eye of the day. The aspect of the room had given her a shock almost more startling than any moral certainty, as was natural to a woman used to all the decorums and delicacies of a well-ordered life. There is no sin in going late to bed, or even in letting a lamp burn into the day; but the impression that such a sight makes even upon the careless is always greater than any mere apprehension by the mind of the midnight sitting, the eager game, the chances of loss and ruin. She had not been able to get that sight out of her eyes. Though on ordinary occasions she never entered Phil's rooms, on this she had stolen in to put out the lamp, with the sensation in her mind of destroying some evidence against him, which some one less interested than she might have used to his disadvantage. And she had sent up the housemaid to 'do' the room, with an admonition. 'I cannot have Mr. Compton's rooms neglected,' she said. 'The gentlemen is always so late,' the housemaid said in self-defence. 'I hears them let themselves out sometimes after we're all up downstairs.' 'I don't want to hear any-

thing about the gentlemen. Do your work at the proper time; that is all that is asked of you.' Phil's servant appeared at the moment pulling on his coat, with the air of a man who has been up half the night—which, indeed, was the case, for 'the gentlemen' when they came in had various wants that had to be supplied. 'What's up now?' he said to the housemaid within hearing of her mistress, casting an insolent look at the old lady who belonged to 'downstairs.' 'She've been prying and spying about like they all do——' Mrs. Dennistoun had retreated within the shelter of her room to escape the end of this sentence, which still she heard, with the usual quickness of our faculties in such cases. She swallowed her simple breakfast with what appetite she might, and her stout spirit for the moment broke down before this insult, which was ridiculous, she said to herself, from a saucy servant-man. What did it matter to her what Johnson did or said? But it was like the lamp burning in the sunshine; it gave a moral shock more sharp than many a thing of much more importance would have been capable of doing, and she had not been able to get over it all day.

It may be supposed, therefore, that it was an unfortunate moment for Phil Compton's visit. Mrs. Dennistoun had scarcely seen them that day, and she was sitting by herself, somewhat sick at heart, wondering if anything would break the routine into which their life was falling; or if this was what Elinor must address herself to as its usual tenor. It would be better in the country, she said to herself. It was only in the bustle of the season, when everybody of his kind was congregated in town, that it would be like this. In their rounds of visits, or when the whole day was occupied with sport, such nocturnal sittings would be impossible—and she comforted herself by thinking that they would not be consistent with any serious business in the city such as Elinor feared. The one danger must push away the other. He could not gamble at night in that way, and gamble in the other among the stockbrokers. They were both ruinous, no doubt, but they could not both be carried on at the same time—or so, at least, this innocent woman thought. There was enough to be anxious and alarmed about without taking two impossible dangers into her mind together.

And just then Phil knocked at her door. He came in smiling and gracious and with that look of high breeding and *savoir faire* which had conciliated her before and which she felt the influence of now, although she was aware how many drawbacks there were, and knew that the respect which her son-in-law showed was far from genuine. 'I never see you to have a chat,' he said; 'I thought I would take the opportunity to-day, when Elinor was out. I want you to tell me how you think she is.'

'I think she is wonderfully well,' said Mrs. Dennistoun.

'*Wonderfully* well—you mean considering—— that there is too much racket in her life?'

'Partly, I mean that—but, indeed, I meant it without condition; she is wonderfully well. I am surprised often——'

'It is rather a racket of a life,' said Phil.

'Too much, indeed—it is too much—for a woman who is beginning her serious life—but if you think that, it is a great thing gained, for you can put a stop to it, or moderate—"the pace," don't you call it?' she said, with a smile.

'Well, yes. I suppose we could moderate the pace—but that would mean a great deal for me. You see, when a man's launched it isn't always so easy to stop. Nell, of course, if you thought she wanted it—might go to the country with you.'

Mrs. Dennistoun's heart gave a leap. 'Might go to the country with you!' It seemed a glimpse of Paradise that burst upon her. But then she shook her head. 'You know Elinor would not leave you, Philip.'

'Well! she has a ridiculous partiality,' he said, with a laugh, 'though, of course, I'd make her—if it was really for her advantage,' he added, after a moment; 'you don't think I'd let that stand in her way.'

'In the meantime,' said Mrs. Dennistoun with hesitation, 'without proceeding to any such stringent measures—if you could manage to be a little less late at night.'

'Oh, you listen for my coming in at night.'

His face took a sombre look, as if a cloud had come over it.

'I do not listen—for happily for me I have been asleep for hours. I generally jump up thinking the house is on fire at the sound of

voices, which make listening quite unnecessary, Philip.'

'Ah, yes, the fellows are rather noisy,' he said, carelessly, 'but Nell sleeps like a top, and pays no attention—which is the best thing she can do.'

'I would not be too sure she slept like a top.'

'It's true ; women are all hypocrites alike. You never know when you have them,' Phil said.

And then there was a pause; for she feared to say anything more lest she should go too far; and he for once in his life was embarrassed, and did not know how to begin what he had to say.

'Well,' he said, quickly, getting up. 'I must be going. I have business in the city. And now that I find you're satisfied about Nell's health—— By the way, you never show in our rooms; though Nell spends every minute she has to spare here.'

'I am a little old perhaps for your friends, Philip, and the room is not too large.'

'Well, no,' he said, 'they are wretched little rooms. Good-bye, then; I'm glad you think Nell is all right.'

Was this all he meant to say? There was, however, an uncertainty about his step, and by the time he had opened the door he came to a pause, half closed it again, and said, 'Oh, by-the-bye!'

'What is it?' said Mrs. Dennistoun.

He closed the door again and came back half a step. 'I almost forgot, I meant to tell you: if you've any money to invest, I could help you to—— The best thing I've heard of for many a day!'

'You are very kind, Philip; but you know everything I have is in the hands of trustees.'

'Oh, bother trustees. The only thing they do is to keep your dividends down to the lowest amount possible and cut short your income. Come, you're quite old enough to judge for yourself. You might give them a jog. At your time of life they ought to take a hint from you.'

'I have never done it, Philip, and they would pay no attention to me.'

'Oh, nonsense, mamma. Why, except you, who has a right to be consulted except Nell? and if I, her husband, am your adviser——'

'I know they would do nothing but mock at me.'

'Rubbish! I'd like to see who would mock at you. Just you send them to me, that is all.'

'Philip, will you not believe me when I say that it is impossible? I have never interfered. They would ask what made me think of such a thing now.'

'And you could tell them a jolly good opportunity, as safe as the bank, and paying six or seven per cent.—none of your fabulous risky ten or twelve businesses, but a solid, steady—— How could it be to my interest to mislead you? It would be Nell who would be the loser. I should be simply cutting off my own head.'

'That is true, no doubt——'

'And,' he said, scarcely waiting for her reply, 'Nell is really the person who should be consulted: for if there was loss eventually it would come upon her—and so upon me. I mean taking into consideration all the chances of the future: for it is perfectly safe for your time, you may be quite sure of that.'

No one, though he might be ninety, likes to have his time limited, and his heir's prospects dwelt upon as the only things of any importance, and Mrs. Dennistoun was a very long way from

ninety. She would have sacrificed everything she had to make her child happy, but she did not like, all the same, to be set down as unimportant so far as her own property was concerned.

'I am afraid,' she said, with a slight quaver in her voice, 'that my trustees would not take Elinor's wishes into consideration in the first place, nor yours either, Philip. They think of me, and I suppose that is really their duty. If I had anything of my own——'

'Do you mean to say,' he said bluntly, 'that with a good income and living in the country in a hole, in the most obscure way, you have saved nothing all these years?'

'If I had,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, roused by his persistent attack, 'I should be very sorry to fling it away.'

'Oh, that is what you think?' he said. 'Now we're at the bottom of it. You think that to put it in my hands would be to throw it away! I thought there must be something at the bottom of all this pretty ignorance of business and so forth. Good gracious! that may be well enough for a girl: but when a grandmother pretends not to know, not to interfere, &c., that's too much. So this is what you meant all the time! To

put it into my hands would be throwing it away!'

'I did not mean to say so, Philip—I spoke hastily, but I must remind you that I am not accustomed to this tone——'

'Oh, no, not at all accustomed to it, you all say that—that's Nell's dodge—never was used to anything of the kind, never had a rough word said to her, and so forth and so forth.'

'Philip—I hope you don't say rough words to my Elinor.'

'Oh!' he said, 'I have got you there, have I. *Your* Elinor—no more yours than she is—Johnson's. She is my Nell, and what's more she'll cling to me, whatever rough words I may say, or however you may coax or wheedle. Do you ever think when you refuse to make a sacrifice of one scrap of your hoards for her, that if I were not a husband in a hundred I might take it out of her and make her pay?'

'For what?' said Mrs. Dennistoun, standing up and confronting him, her face pale, her head very erect—'for what would you make her pay?'

He stood staring at her for a moment and then he broke out into a laugh. 'We needn't face

each other as if we were going to have a stand-up fight,' he said. 'And it wouldn't be fair, mamma, we're not equally matched, the knowing ones would all lay their money on you. So you won't take my advice about investing your spare cash? Well, if you won't you won't, and there's an end of it: only stand up fair and don't bother me with nonsense about trustees.'

'It is no nonsense,' she said.

His eyes flashed, but he controlled himself and turned away, waving his hand. 'I'll not beat Nell for it when I come home to-night,' he said.

Once more Phil dined at his club that evening and Elinor with her mother. She was in an eager and excited state, looking anxiously in Mrs. Dennistoun's eyes, but it was not till late in the evening that she made any remark. At last, just before they parted for the night, she threw herself upon her mother with a little cry —'Oh, mamma, I know you are right, I know you are quite right. But if you could have done it, it would have given you an influence! I don't blame you—not for a moment—but it might have given you an opening to speak. It might have—given you a little hold on him.'

'My darling, my darling!' said Mrs. Dennistoun.

'No,' said Elinor, 'there's nothing to pity me about, nothing at all—Phil is always kind and good to me—but you would have had a standing ground. It might have given you a right to speak—about those dreadful, dreadful city complications, mamma.'

Mrs. Dennistoun went to bed that night a troubled woman, and lay awake watching and expecting when the usual midnight tumult should arise. But that evening there was none. No sound but a key in the latch, the shutting of a door or two, and all quiet. Compunctions filled the mother's heart. What was the wrong if, perhaps, she could satisfy Elinor, perhaps get at the heart of Phil, who had a heart, though it was getting strangled in all those intricacies of gambling and wretched business. She turned over and over in her mind all that she had, and all that she had any power over. And she remembered a small sum she had in a mortgage, which was after all in her own power. No doubt it would be to throw the money away, which would be so much gone from the future provision for Elinor—but if by that means

she could acquire an influence, as Elinor said—be allowed to speak—to protest or perhaps even insist upon a change of course? Thinking over such a question for a whole sleepless night, and feeling beneath all that at least, at worst, this sacrifice would give pleasure to Elinor, which was really the one and sole motive, the only thing that could give her any warrant for such a proceeding—is not a process which is likely to strengthen the mind. In the morning, as soon as she knew he was up, which was not till late enough, she sent to ask if Phil would give her five minutes before he went out. He appeared, after a while, extremely correct and *point de vice*, grave but polite. 'I must ask you to excuse me,' he said, 'if I am hurried, for to-day is one of my Board days.'

'It was only to say, Philip—you spoke to me yesterday of money—to be invested.'

'Yes?' he said politely, without moving a muscle.

'I have been thinking it all over, and I remember that there is a thousand pounds or two which John Tatham placed for me in a mortgage, and which is in my own power.'

'Ah!' he said, 'a thousand pounds or two,'

with a shrug of his shoulders, 'it is scarcely worth while, is it, changing an investment for so small a matter as a thousand pounds?'

'If you think so, Philip—it is all I can think of that is in my own power.'

'It is really not worth the trouble,' he said, 'and I am in a hurry.' He made a step towards the door and then turned round again. 'Well,' he said, 'just to show there is no ill-feeling, I'll find you something, perhaps, to put your tuppence-ha'penny in to-day.'

And then there was John Tatham to face after that!

CHAPTER XXI.

It cost Mrs. Dennistoun a struggle to yield to her daughter and her daughter's husband, and with her eyes open and no delusion on the subject to throw away her two thousand pounds. Two thousand pounds is a big thing to throw away. There are many people much richer than Mrs. Dennistoun who would have thought it a wicked thing to do, and some who would have quarrelled with both daughter and son-in-law rather than do so foolish a thing. For it was not merely making a present, so to speak, of the money; it was throwing it away. To have given it to Elinor would have been nothing, it would have been a pleasure; but in Phil's investment Mrs. Dennistoun had no confidence. It was throwing her money after Elinor's money into that hungry sea which swallows up everything and gives nothing again.

But if that had been difficult for her, it may be imagined with what feelings she contemplated her necessary meeting with John Tatham. She knew everything he would say—more, she knew what he would look: his astonishment, his indignation, the amazement with which he would regard it. John was far from being incapable of a sacrifice. Mrs. Dennistoun, indeed, did him more than justice in that respect, for she believed that he had himself been on the eve of asking Elinor to marry him when she was snatched up by, oh, so much less satisfactory a man! which the reader knows is not quite the case, though perhaps it required quite as much self-denial on John's part to stand by Elinor and maintain her cause under her altered circumstances as if it had been the case. But notwithstanding this, she knew that John would be angry with what she had done or promised to do, and would put every possible impediment in her way: and when she sent for him, in order that she might carry out her promise, it was with a heart as sick with fright, and as much disturbed by the idea of a scolding, as ever child's was.

John had been very little to the house at Curzon Street. He had dined two or three times

with Mrs. Dennistoun alone, and once or twice Elinor had been of the party; but the Comptons had never any guests at that house, and the fact already mentioned that Philip Compton never dined at home made it a difficult matter for Mrs. Dennistoun to ask any but her oldest friends to the curious little divided house, which was neither hers nor theirs. Thus Cousin John had met, but no more, Elinor's husband, and neither of the gentlemen had shown the least desire to cultivate the acquaintance. John had not expressed his sentiments on the subject to any one, but Phil, as was natural, had been more demonstrative. 'I don't think much of your relations, Nell,' he said, 'if that's a specimen: a prig, if ever there was one—and that old sheep that was at the wedding, the father of him, I suppose——'

'As they are my relations, Phil, you might speak of them a little more respectfully.'

'Oh, respectfully! Bless us all! I have no respect for my own, and why I should have for yours, my little dear, I confess I can't see. Oh, by the way, this is Cousin John, who I used to think by your blushing and all that——'

'Phil, I think you are trying to make me angry. Cousin John is the best man in the

world; but I never blushed—how ridiculous! I might as well have blushed to speak of my brother.'

'I put no confidence in brothers, unless they're real ones,' said Phil; 'but I'm glad I've seen him, Nell. I doubt after all that you're such a fool, when you see us together—eh?' He laughed that laugh of conscious superiority which, when it is not perfectly well-founded, sounds so fatuous to the hearer. Elinor did not look at him. She turned her head away, and made no reply.

John, on his part, as has been said, made no remark. If he had possessed a wife at home to whom he could have confided his sentiments, as Phil Compton had, it is possible that he might have said something not unsimilar. But then had he had a wife at home he would have been more indifferent to Phil, and might not have cared to criticise him at all.

Mrs. Dennistoun received him, when he came in obedience to her call, as a child might do who had the power of receiving its future corrector. She abased herself before him, servilely choosing his favourite subjects, talking of what she thought would please him, of former times at the Cottage, of Elinor, and her great affection for Cousin

John, and so forth. I imagine that he had a suspicion of the cause of all this sweetness. He looked at her suspiciously, though he allowed himself to be drawn into reminiscences, and to feel a half pleasure, half pain, in the affectionate things that Elinor had said. At length, after some time had passed, he asked, in a pause of the conversation, 'Was this all you wanted with me, aunt, to talk of old times?'

'Wasn't it a good enough pretext for the pleasure of seeing you, John?'

He laughed a little and shook his head. 'An excellent pretext where none was wanted. It is very kind of you to think it a pleasure: but you had something also to say?'

'It seems there is no deceiving you, John,' she said, and with many hesitations and much difficulty told him her story. She saw him begin to flame. She saw his eyes light up, and Mrs. Dennistoun shook in her chair. She was not a woman apt to be afraid, but she was frightened now.

Nevertheless, when she had finished her story, John at first spoke no word: and when he did find a tongue it was only to say, 'You want to get back the money you have on that mortgage.

My dear aunt, why did not you tell me so at once?'

'But I have just told you, John.'

'Well, so be it. You know it will take a little time; there are some formalities that must be gone through. You cannot make a demand on people in that way to pay you cash at once.'

'Oh, I thought it was so easy to get money—on such very good security and paying such a good adequate rate of interest.'

'It is easy,' he said, 'perfectly easy; but it wants a little time: and people will naturally wonder, if it is really good security and good interest, why you should be in such a hurry to get out of it.'

'But surely, to say private reasons—family reasons, that will be enough.'

'Oh, there is no occasion for giving any reason at all. You wish to do it; that is reason enough.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Dennistoun with diffidence, yet also a little self-assertion, 'I think it is enough.'

'Of course, of course.' But his eyes were flaming, and Mrs. Dennistoun would not allow herself to believe that she had got off. 'And

may I ask—not that I have any right to ask, for of course you have better advisers—what you mean to put the money in, when you have got it back?'

'Oh, John,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, 'you are implacable, though you pretend different. You know what I want with the money, and you disapprove of it, and so do I. I am going to throw it away. I know that just as well as you do, and I am ashamed of myself; but I am going to do it all the same.'

'You are going to give it to Elinor? I don't think there is anything to disapprove of in that. It is the most natural thing in the world.'

'If I could be sure that Elinor would get any good by it,' she said.

And then his face suddenly blazed up, so that the former flame in his eyes was nothing. He sat for a moment staring at her, and then he said, 'Yes, if—but I suppose you take the risk.' There were a great many things on his lips to say but he said none of them, except hurriedly, 'You have a motive, I suppose——'

'I have a motive—as futile probably as my act—if I could by that means, or any other, acquire an influence——'

John was very seldom, if ever, rude—it was not in his way—but at this moment he was so bitterly exasperated that he forgot his manners altogether. He burst out into a loud laugh, and then he jumped up to his feet and said, 'Forgive me, I really have a dozen engagements. I can't stay. I'll see to having this business done for you as soon as possible. You would rather old Lynch had no hand in it? I'll get it done for you at once.'

She followed him out to the door as if they had been in the country, and that the flowery cottage door, with the great world of down and sky outside, instead of Curzon Street: longing to say something that would still, at the last moment, gain her John's approval, or his understanding at least. But she could think of nothing to say. He had promised to manage it all for her: he had not reproached her: and yet not content with that she wanted to extort a favourable word from him before he should go. But she could not find a word to say. He it was only who spoke. He asked when she was going to return home, with his hand upon the street door.

'I don't know. I have not made any plans. The house is taken till July.'

'And you have enjoyed it?' he said. 'It has answered?'

What a cruel, cruel question to put to her! She going so unsuspectingly with him to the very door! Philip Compton's servant, always about when he was not wanted, spying about to see whom it was that 'downstairs' was letting out, came strolling into sight. Anyhow, whether that was the reason or not, she made him no reply. He caught her look—a look that said more than words—and turned round quickly and held out his hand. 'I did not mean to be cruel,' he said.

'Oh, no, no, no—you did not mean it—you were not cruel. The reverse—you are always so kind. Yes, it has answered—I am more glad than I can tell you—that I came.'

He it was now that looked at her anxiously, while she smiled that well-worn smile which is kept for people in trouble. She went in afterwards and sat silent for some time, covering her face with her hands: in which attitude Elinor found her after her afternoon visitors had gone away.

'What is it, mother? What is it, dear mother? Something has happened to vex you.'

'Nothing, nothing, Elinor. John Tatham has been here. He is going to do that little piece of business for me.'

'And he—has been bullying you too? Poor mamma!'

'On the contrary, he did not say a word. He considered it—quite natural.'

Elinor gave her mother a kiss. She had nothing to say. Neither of them had a word to say to the other. The thought that passed through both their minds was: 'After all, it is only two thousand pounds—' and then, *après?* was Elinor's thought. And then, never more, never more! was what passed through Mrs. Dennistoun's mind.

Phil Compton smiled upon her the day she handed him over the money. 'It is a great pity you took the trouble,' he said. 'It is a pity to change an investment for such a bagatelle as two thousand pounds. Still, if you insist upon it, mamma. I suppose Nell's been bragging of the big interest, but you never will feel it on a scrap like this. If you would let me double your income for you, now.'

'You know, Philip, I cannot. The trustees would never consent.'

'Bother trustees. They are the ruin of women,'

he said, and as he left the room he turned back to ask her how long she was going to stay in town.

'How long do you stay?'

'Oh, till Goodwood, always,' said Phil. 'Nell's looking forward to it, and there's generally some good things just at the end when the heavy people have gone away: but I thought you might not care to stay so long.'

'I came not for town but for Elinor, Philip.'

'Exactly so. But don't you think Elinor has shown herself quite able to take care of herself —not to say that she has me? It's a thousand pities to keep you from the country, which you prefer, especially as, after all, Nell can be so little with you.'

'It would be much better for her at present, Philip, to come with me, and rest at home, while you go to Goodwood. For the sake of the future you ought to persuade her to do it.'

'I daresay. Try yourself to persuade her to leave me. She won't, you know. But why should you bore yourself to death staying on here? You don't like it, and nobody——'

'Wants me, you mean, Philip.'

'I never said anything so dashed straightfor-

ward. I am not a chap of that kind. But what I say is, it's a shame to keep you hanging on, disturbed in your rest, and all that sort of thing. That noisy beggar Dismar that came in with us last night must have woke you up with his idiotic bellowing.'

'It doesn't matter for me: but Elinor, Philip. It does matter for your wife. If her rest is broken it will react upon her in every way. I wish you would consent to forego those visitors in the middle of the night.'

He looked at her with a sort of satirical indifference. 'Sorry I can't oblige you,' he said. 'When a girl's friends fork out handsomely a man has some reason for paying a little attention. But when there's nothing, or next to nothing, on her side, why of course he must pick up a little where he can, as much for her sake as his own.'

'Pick up a little!' said Mrs. Dennistoun.

'I wish you wouldn't repeat what I say like that. It makes a fellow nervous. Yes, of course, a man that knows what he's about does pick up a little. About your movements, however? I advise you to take my advice and go back to your snug little house. It would kill me in a week, but I know it suits you. Why hang on

for Nell? She's as well as can be, and there's a few things that it would be good for us to do.'

'Which you cannot do while I am here? Is that what you mean, Philip?'

'I never saw any good in being what the French call brutal,' he said; 'I hate making a woman cry, or that sort of thing. But you're a woman of sense, and I'm sure you must see that a young couple like Nell and me, who have our way to make in the world——'

'You know it was for her sake entirely that I came here.'

'Yes, oh yes. To do the coddling and that sort of thing—which she doesn't require a bit: but if I must be brutal you know there's things of much more consequence we could do if——'

'If what, Philip?'

'Well,' he said, turning on his heel, 'if we had the house to ourselves.'

This was the influence Mrs. Dennistoun hoped to acquire by the sacrifice of her two thousand pounds! When he was gone, instead of covering her face as she had done when John left her, Mrs. Dennistoun stared into the vacant air for a minute and then she burst into a laugh. It was

not a mirthful laugh, it may be supposed, or harmonious, and it startled her as she heard it pealing into the silence. Whether it was loud enough to wake Elinor upstairs, or whether she was already close by and heard it, I cannot tell, but she came in with a little tap at the door and a smile, a somewhat anxious and forced smile, it is true, upon her face.

'What is the joke?' she said. 'I heard you laugh, and I thought I might come in and share the fun. Somehow, we don't have so much fun as we used to have. What is it, mamma?'

'It is only a witticism of Philip's, who has been in to see me,' said Mrs. Dennistoun. 'I won't repeat it, for probably I should lose the point of it—you know I always did spoil a joke in repeating it. I have been speaking to him,' she said, after a little pause, during which both her laugh and Elinor's smile evaporated in the most curious way, leaving both of them very grave—'of going away, Elinor.'

'Of going away!' Elinor suddenly assumed a startled look: but there is a difference between doing that and being really startled, which her mother, alas! was quite enlightened enough to see: and surely once more there was that mingled

relief and relaxation in the lines of her face which Mrs. Dennistoun had seen before.

'Yes, my darling,' she said, 'it is June, and everything at the Cottage will be in full beauty. And, perhaps, it would do you more good to come down there for a day or two when there is nothing doing than to have me here, which, after all, has not been of very much use to you.'

'Oh, don't say that, mamma. Use!—it has been of comfort unspeakable. But,' Elinor added, hurriedly, 'I see the force of all you say. To remain in London at this time of the year must be a far greater sacrifice than I have any right to ask of you, mamma.'

Oh, the furtive, hurried, unreal words! which were such pain and horror to say with the consciousness of the true sentiment lying underneath; which made Elinor's heart sink, yet were brought forth with a sort of hateful fervour, to imitate truth.

Mrs. Dennistoun saw it all. There are times when the understanding in such a woman is almost equal to those 'larger other eyes' with which it is our fond hope those who have left us for a better country see, if they are permitted to see, our petty doings, knowing, better than we know ourselves,

what excuses, what explanations, they are capable of. 'As for the sacrifice,' she said, 'we will say nothing of that, Elinor. It is a vain thing to say that if my life would do you any pleasure—for you don't want to take my life, and probably the best thing I can do for you is to go on as long as I can. But in the meantime there's no question at all of sacrifice—and if you can come down now and then for a day, and sleep in the fresh air——'

'I will, I will, mamma,' said Elinor, hiding her face on her mother's shoulder; and they would have been something more than women if they had not cried together as they held each other in that embrace—in which there was so much more than met either eye or ear.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was about the 10th of June when Mrs. Dennistoun left London. She had been in town for about five weeks, which looked like as many months, and it was with a mingled sense of relief, and of that feeling which is like death in the heart, the sense of nothing further to be done, of the end of opportunity, the conclusion of all power to help, which sometimes comes over an anxious mind, without in any respect diminishing the anxiety, giving it indeed a depth and pang beyond any other feeling that is known to the heart of man. What could she do more for her child? Nothing. It was her only policy to remain away, not to see, certainly not to remark anything that was happening, to wait if perhaps the moment might come when she would be of use, and to hope that perhaps that moment might never need to come, that

by some wonderful turn of affairs all might yet go well. She went back to Windyhill with the promise of a visit 'soon,' Philip himself had said—in the pleasure of getting the house, which was her house, which she had paid for and provisioned, to himself for his own uses. Mrs. Dennistoun could not help hearing through her maid something of the festivities which were in prospect after she was gone, the dinners and gay receptions at which she would have been *de trop*. She did not wish to hear of them, but these are things that will make themselves known, and Mrs. Dennistoun had to face the fact that Elinor was more or less consenting to the certainty of her mother being *de trop*, which gave her a momentary pang. But after all, what did it matter? It was not her fault, poor child. I have known a loving daughter in whose mind there was a sentiment almost of relief amid her deep grief when her tender mother died—could such a thing be possible? It was; because after then, however miserable she might be, there was no conflict over her, no rending of the strained heart both ways. A woman who has known life learns to understand and forgive a great many things; and Mrs. Dennistoun forgave her Elinor, her only child, for whose happiness she had lived,

in that she was almost glad when her mother went away.

Such things, however, do not make a lonely little house in the country more cheerful, or tend to make it easier to content one's self with the Rector's family, and the good old, simple-minded, retired people, with their little complaints, yet general peacefulness, and incompetence to understand what tragedy was. They thought on the whole their neighbour at the Cottage ought to be very thankful that she had got her daughter well, or, if not very well, at least fashionably married, with good connections and all that, which are always of use in the long run. It was better than marrying a poor curate, which was almost the only chance a girl had on Windyhill.

It was a little hard upon Mrs. Dennistoun, however, that she lost not only Elinor, but John, who had been so good about coming down when she was all alone at first. Of course, during the season, a young rising man, with engagements growing upon him every day, was very unlikely to have his Saturdays to Mondays free. So many people live out of town nowadays, or, at least, have a little house somewhere to which they go from Saturday to Monday, taking their friends with

them. This was no doubt the reason why John never came; and yet the poor lady suspected another reason, and though she no longer laughed as she had done on that occasion when the Honourable Phil gave her her dismissal, a smile would come over her face sometimes when she reflected that with her two thousand pounds she had purchased the hostility of both Philip and John.

John Tatham was indeed exceedingly angry with her for the weakness with which she had yielded to Phil Compton's arguments, though indeed he knew nothing of Phil Compton's arguments, nor whether they had been exercised at all on the woman who was first of all Elinor's mother and ready to sacrifice everything to her comfort. When he found that this foolish step on her part had been followed by her retirement from London, he was greatly mystified and quite unable to understand. He met Elinor some time after at one of those assemblies to which 'everybody' goes. It was, I think, the soirée at the Royal Academy—where amid the persistent throng in the great room there was a whirling crowd, twisting in and out among the others, bound for heaven knows how many other places, and pausing here and there on tiptoe to greet an acquaintance, at the tail of which,

carried along by its impetus, was Elinor. She was not looking either well or happy, but she was responding more or less to the impulse of her set, exchanging greetings and banal words with dozens of people, and sometimes turning a wistful and weary gaze towards the pictures on the walls, as if she would gladly escape from the mob of her companions to them, or anywhere. It was no impulse of taste or artistic feeling, however, it is to be feared, but solely the weariness of her mind. John watched her for some time before he approached her. Phil was not of the party, which was nothing extraordinary, for little serious as that assembly is, it was still of much too serious a kind for Phil; but Lady Mariamne was there, and other ladies with whom Elinor was in the habit of pursuing that gregarious hunt after pleasure which carries the train of votaries along at so breakneck a pace, and with so little time to enjoy the pleasure they are pursuing. When he saw indications that the stream was setting backwards to the entrance, again to separate and take its various ways to other entertainments, he broke into the throng and called Elinor's attention to himself. For a moment she smiled with genuine pleasure at the sight of him, but then changed

her aspect almost imperceptibly. 'Oh, John!' she said with that smile: but immediately looked towards Lady Mariamne, as if undecided what to do.

'You need not look—as if I would try to detain you, Elinor.'

'Do you think I am afraid of your detaining me? I thought I should be sure to meet you to-night, and was on the outlook. How is it that we never see you now?'

He refused the natural retort that she had never asked to see him, and only said with a smile, 'I hear my aunt is gone.'

'Do you mean to say that you only came for her? That is an unkind speech. Yes, she has gone. It was cruel to keep her in town for the best part of the year.'

'But she intended to stay till July, Elinor.'

'Did she? I think you are mistaken, John. She intended to watch over me—dear mamma, she thinks too much of me—but when she saw that I was quite well——'

'You don't look to me so extraordinarily well.'

'Don't I? I must be a fraud then. Nobody could be stronger. I'm going to a multitude of places to-night. Wherever my Hebrew leader

goes I go,' said Elinor, with a laugh. 'I have given myself up for to-night, and she is never satisfied with less than a dozen.'

'Ten minutes to each?'

'Oh, half an hour, at least: and with having our carriage found for us at every place, and the risk of getting into a *queue*, and all the delays of coming and going, it cannot be much less than three-quarters of an hour. This is the third. I think three more will weary even the Jew.'

'You are with Lady Mariamne then, Elinor.'

'Yes—oh, you need not make that face. She is as good as the rest, and pretends to nothing, at least. I have no carriage, you know, and Phil took fright at my dear old fly. He thought a hired brougham was not good when I was alone.'

'That was quite true. Nevertheless, I should like above all things to keep you here a little longer to look at some of the pictures, and take you home in a hansom after.'

She laughed. 'Oh, so should I—fancy, I have not seen the pictures, not at all. We came in a mob to the private view; and then one day I was coming with mamma, but was stopped by something, and now —— Always people, people—nothing else. "Did you see So-and-so? There's

some one bowing to you, Nell. Be sure you speak a word to the Thises or the Thats"—while I don't care for one of them. But I fear the hansom would not do, John.'

'It would have done very well in the old days. Your mother would not have been displeased.'

'The old days are gone and will never return,' she said, half sad, half smiling, shaking her head. 'So far as I can see, nothing ever returns. You have your day, and if you do not make the best of that——'

She stopped, shaking her head again with a laugh, and there were various ways in which that speech might be interpreted. John for one knew a sense of it which he believed had never entered Elinor's head. He too might have had his day and let it slip. 'So you are making the most of yours,' he said. 'I hear that you are very gay.'

Elinor coloured high under his look. 'I don't know who can have told you that. We have had a few little dinners since mamma left us, chiefly Phil's business friends. I would not have them while she was with us—that is to say, to be honest,' cried Elinor, 'while we were with her: which of course was the real state of the case. I myself

don't like those people, John, but they would have been insupportable to mamma. It was for her sake——'

'I understand,' he said.

'Oh, but you must not say "I understand" with that air of knowing a great deal more than there is to understand,' she said, with heat. 'Mamma said it would do me much more good to go—home for a night now and then and sleep in the fresh air than for her to stay; and though I think she is a little insane on the subject of my health, still it was certainly better than that she should stay here, making herself wretched, her rest broken, and all that. You know we keep such late hours.'

'I should not have thought she would have minded that.'

'But what would you have thought of me if I did not mind it for her? There, John, do you see they are all going? Ah, the pictures! I wish I could have stayed with you and gone round the rooms. But it must not be to-night. Come and see me!' she said, turning round to him with a smile, and holding out her hand.

'I would gladly, Elinor—but should not I find myself in the way of your fine friends like——'

He had not the heart to finish the sentence when he met her eyes brimming full of tears.

'Not my fine friends, but my coarse friends,' she said; 'not friends at all, our worst enemies, I am sure.'

'Nell!' cried Lady Mariamne, in her shrill voice.

'You will come and see me, John?'

'Yes,' he said, 'and in the meantime I will take you downstairs, let your companions think as they please.'

It proved when he did so that John had to escort both ladies to the carriage, which it was not very easy to find, no other cavalier being at hand for the moment: and that Lady Mariamne invited him to accompany them to their next stage. 'You know the Durfords, of course. You are going there? What luck for us, Nell! Jump in, Mr. Tatham, we will take you on.'

'Unfortunately Lady Durford has not taken the trouble to invite me,' said John.

'What does that matter? Jump in, all the same, she'll be delighted to see you, and as for not asking you, when you are with me and Nell——'

But John turned a deaf ear to this siren's song. He went to Curzon Street a little while after

to call, as he had been invited to do, and went late to avoid the bustle of the tea-table, and the usual rabble of that no longer intimate but wildly gregarious house. And he was not without his reward. Perhaps a habit he had lately formed of passing by Curzon Street in the late afternoon, when he was on his way to his club, after work was over, had something to do with his choice of this hour. He found Elinor, as he had hoped, alone. She was sitting so close to the window that her white dress mingled with the white curtains, so that he did not at first perceive her, and so much abstracted in her own thoughts that she did not pay any attention to the servant's hurried murmur of his name at the door. When she felt rather than saw that there was some one in the room, Elinor jumped up with a shock of alarm that seemed unnecessary in her own drawing-room; then seeing who it was, was so much and so suddenly moved that she shed a few tears in some sudden revulsion of feeling as she said, 'Oh, it is you, John!'

'Yes,' he said, 'but I am very sorry to see you so nervous.'

'Oh, it's nothing. I was always nervous'—which indeed was the purest invention, for Elinor

Dennistoun had not known what nerves meant. 'I mean I was always startled by any sudden entrance—in this way,' she cried, and very gravely asked him to be seated, with a curious assumption of dignity. Her demeanour altogether was incomprehensible to John.

'I hope,' he said, 'you were not displeased with me, Elinor, for going off the other night. I should have been too happy, you know, to go with you anywhere: but Lady Mariamne is more than I can stand.'

'I was very glad you did not come,' she said with a sigh; then smiling faintly, 'But you were ungrateful, for Mariamne formed a most favourable opinion of you. She said, "Why didn't you tell me, Nell, you had a cousin so presentable as that?"'

'I am deeply obliged, Elinor; but it seems that what was a compliment to me personally involved something the reverse for your other relations.'

'It is one of their jokes,' said Elinor, with a voice that faltered a little, 'to represent my relations as—not in a complimentary way. I am supposed not to mind, and it's all a joke, or so they tell me; but it is not a joke I like,' she said, with a flash from her eyes.

'All families have jokes of that description,' said John; 'but tell me, Nelly, are you really going down to the Cottage, to your mother?'

Her eyes thanked him with a gleam of pleasure for the old familiar name, and then the light went out of them. 'I don't know,' she said abruptly. 'Phil was to come; if he will not, I think I will not either. But I will say nothing till I make sure.'

'Of course your first duty is to him,' said John; 'but a day now or a day then interferes with nothing, and the country would be good for you, Elinor. Doesn't your husband see it? You are not looking like yourself.'

'Not like myself? I might easily look better than myself. I wish I could. I am not so bigoted about myself.'

'Your friends are, however,' he said; 'no one who cares for you wants to change you, even for another Elinor. Come, you are nervous altogether to-night, not like yourself, as I told you. You, always so courageous and bright! This depressed state is not one of your moods. London is too much for you, my little Nelly.'

'Your little Nelly has gone away somewhere, John. I doubt if she'll ever come back. Yes,

London is rather much for me, I think. It's such a racket, as Phil says. But then he's used to it, you know. He was brought up to it, whereas I—I think I hate a racket, John—and they all like it so. They prefer never having a moment to themselves. I daresay one would end by being just the same. It keeps you from thinking, that is one very good thing.'

'You used not to think so, Elinor.'

'No,' she said, 'not at the Cottage among the flowers, where nothing ever happened from one year's end to another. I should die of it now in a week—at least if not I, those who belong to me. So on the whole perhaps London is the safest—unless Phil will go.'

'I can only hope you will be able to persuade him,' said John, rising to go away, 'for whatever you may think, you are a country bird, and you want the fresh air.'

'Are you going, John? Well, perhaps it is better. Good-bye. Don't trouble your mind about me whether I go or stay.'

'Do you mean I am not to come again, Elinor?'

'Oh, why should I mean that?' she said. 'You are so hard upon me in your thoughts'; but she did not say that he was wrong, and John went

out from the door saying to himself that he would not go again. He saw through the open door of the dining-room that the table was prepared sumptuously for a dinner party. It was shining with silver and crystal, the silver Mrs. Dennistoun's old service, which she had brought up with her from Windyhill, and which as a matter of convenience she had left behind with her daughter. Would it ever, he wondered, see Windyhill again?

He went on to his club, and there some one began to amuse him with an account of Lady Durford's ball, to which Lady Mariamne had wished to take him. 'Are not those Comptons relations of yours, Tatham?' he said.

'Connections,' said John, 'by marriage.'

'I'm very glad that's all. They are a queer lot. Phil Compton you know—the dis-Honourable Phil, as he used to be called—but I hear he's turned over a new leaf——'

'What of him?' said John.

'Oh, nothing much; only that he was flirting desperately all the evening with a Mrs. Harris, an American widow. I believe he came with her —and his own wife there—much younger, much prettier, a beautiful young creature—looking on

with astonishment. You could see her eyes growing bigger and bigger. If it had not been a kind of amusing to a looker-on, it would be the most pitiful sight in the world.'

'I advise you not to let yourself be amused by such trifles,' said John Tatham, with a look of fire and flame.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As a matter of fact, Elinor did not go to the Cottage for the fresh air or anything else. She made one hurried run in the afternoon to bid her mother good-bye, alone, which was not a visit, but the mere pretence of a visit, hurried and breathless, in which there was no time to talk of anything. She gave Mrs. Dennistoun an account of the usual lists of visits that her husband and she were to make in the autumn, which the mother, with the usual instinct of mothers, thought too much. 'You will wear yourself to death, Elinor.'

'Oh, no,' she said, 'it is not that sort of thing that wears one to death. I shall—enjoy it, I suppose, as other people do——'

'I don't know about enjoyment, Elinor, but I am sure it would be much better for you to come and stay here quietly with me.'

'Oh, don't talk to me of any paradises, mamma. We are in the working-day world, and we must make out our life as we can.'

'But you might let Philip go by himself and come and stay quietly here for a little, for the sake of your health, Elinor.'

'Not for the world, not for the world,' she cried. 'I cannot leave Phil': and then with a laugh that was full of a nervous thrill, 'You are always thinking of my health, mamma, when my health is perfect; better, far better, than almost anybody's. The most of them have headaches and that sort of thing, and they stay in bed for a day or two constantly, but I never need anything of the kind.'

'My darling, it would not be leaving Philip to take, say, a single week's rest.'

'While he went off without me I should not know where,' she said suddenly: then gave her mother a guilty look and laughed again. 'No, no, mamma, he would not like it. A man does not like his wife to be an incapable, to have to leave him and be nursed up by her mother. Besides, it is to the country we are going, you know, to Scotland, the finest air; better even, if that were possible, than Windyhill.'

This was all that was said, and there was indeed time for little more: for as the visit was unexpected, the Hudsons, by bad luck, appeared to take tea with Mrs. Dennistoun by way of cheering her in her loneliness, and were of course enchanted to see Elinor, and to hear, as Mrs. Hudson said, of all her doings in the great world. 'We always look out for your name at all the parties. It gives one quite an interest in fashionable life,' said the Rector's wife, nodding her head, and Alice was eager to hear what the last month's novelties were in the fashions, and if Elinor had any nice new patterns, especially for under-things. 'But what should you want with new under-things, with such a trousseau as you had?' she added regretfully. Elinor in fact was quite taken from her mother for that hour. Was it not, perhaps, better so? Her mother herself was half inclined to think that it was, though with an ache in her heart, and there could be no doubt that Elinor herself was thankful that it so happened. When there are many questions on one side that must be asked, and very little answer possible on the other, is it a good thing when the foolish outside world breaks in with its banal interest and prevents this dangerous interchange?

So short a time did Elinor stay that she had kept the fly waiting which brought her from the station: and she took leave of her mother with a sort of determination, not allowing it even to be suggested that she should accompany her. 'I like to bid you good-bye here,' she said, 'at our own door, where you have always come all my life to see me off, even when I was only going to tea at the Rectory. Good-bye, good-bye, mother dear.' She drove off waving her hand, and Mrs. Dennistoun sat out in the garden a long time till she saw the fly go round the turn of the road, the white line which came suddenly in sight from among the trees and as suddenly disappeared again round the side of the hill. Elinor waved her handkerchief from the window, and her mother answered — and then she was gone like a dream, and the loneliness closed down more overwhelming than ever before.

Elinor was at Goodwood, her name in all the society papers, and even a description of one of her dresses, which delighted and made proud the whole population of Windyhill. The paper which contained it, and which, I believe, belonged originally to Miss Dale, passed from hand to hand through almost the entire community; the servants

getting it at last, and handing it round among the humbler friends, who read it, half-a-dozen women together round a cottage door, wiping their hands upon their aprons before they would touch the paper, with many an exclamation and admiring outcry. And then her name appeared among the lists of smart people who were going to the North—now here, now there—in company with many other fine names. It gave the Windy-hill people a great deal of amusement, and if Mrs. Dennistoun did not quite share this feeling it was a thing for which her friends blamed her gently. 'For only think what a fine thing for Elinor to go everywhere among the best people, and see life like that!' 'My dear friend,' said the Rector, 'you know we cannot hope to keep our children always with us. They must go out into the world while we old birds stay at home; and we must not—we really must not—grudge them their good time, as the Americans say.' It was more wonderful than words could tell to Mrs. Dennistoun that it should be imagined she was grudging Elinor her 'good time!'

The autumn went on, with those occasional public means of following her footsteps which, indeed, made even John Tatham—who was not

in an ordinary way addicted to the *Morning Post*, being after his fashion a Liberal in politics and far from aristocratical in his sentiments generally — study that paper, and also other papers less worthy; and with, of course, many letters from Elinor, which gave more trustworthy accounts of her proceedings. These letters, however, were far less long, far less detailed than they had once been; often written in a hurry, and short, containing notes of where she was going, and of a continual change of address, rather than of anything that could be called information about herself. John, I think, went only once to the Cottage during the interval which followed. He went abroad as usual in the long vacation, and then he had this on his mind— that he had half-surreptitiously obtained a new light upon the position of Elinor, which he had every desire to keep from her mother; for Mrs. Dennistoun, though she felt that her child was not happy, attributed that to any reason rather than a failure in her husband's love. Elinor's hot rejection of the very idea of leaving Phil, her dislike of any suggestion to that effect, even for a week, even for a day, seemed to her mother a proof that her husband, at all events, remained

as dear to her as ever; and John would rather have cut his tongue out than betray any chance rumour he heard—and he heard many—to this effect. He was of opinion, indeed, that in London, and especially at a London club, not only is everything known that is to be known, but much is known that has never existed, and never will exist if not blown into being by those whose office it is to invent the grief to come; therefore he thought it wisest to keep away, lest by any chance something might drop from him which would awaken a new crowd of disquietudes in Mrs. Dennistoun's heart. Another incident, even more disquieting than gossip, had indeed occurred to John. It had happened to him to meet Lady Mariamne at a great *omnium gatherum* of a country house, where all sorts of people were invited, and where that lady claimed his acquaintance as one of the least alarming of the grave 'set.' She not only claimed his acquaintance, but set up a sort of friendship on the ground of his relationship to Elinor, and in an unoccupied moment after dinner one day poured a great many confidences into his ear.

'Isn't it such a pity,' she said, 'that Phil and she do not get on? Oh, they did at first, like

a house on fire! And if she had only minded her ways they might still have been as thick——! But these little country girls, however they may disguise it at first, they all turn like that. The horridest little puritan! Phil does no more than a hundred men—than almost all men do: amuses himself with anything that throws itself in his way, don't you know! And sometimes, perhaps, he does go rather far. I think myself he sometimes goes a little too far—for good taste, you know, and that sort of thing.'

It was more amazing to hear Lady Mariamne talk of good taste than anything that had ever come in John Tatham's way before, but he was too horribly, desperately interested to see the fun.

'She will go following him about wherever he goes. She oughtn't to do that, don't you know! She should let him take his swing, and the chances are it will bring him back all right. I've told her so a dozen times, but she pays no attention to me. You're a great pal of hers. Why don't you give her a hint? Phil's not the sort of man to be kept in order like that. She ought to give him his head.'

'I'm afraid,' said John, 'it's not a matter in which I can interfere.'

'Well, some of her friends should, anyhow, and teach her a little sense. You're a cautious man, I see,' said Lady Mariamne. 'You think it's too delicate to advise a woman who thinks herself an injured wife. I didn't say to console her, mind you,' she said with a shriek of a laugh.

It may be supposed that after this John was still more unwilling to go to the Cottage, to run the risk of betraying himself. He did write to Elinor, telling her that he had heard of her from her sister-in-law; but when he tried to take Lady Mariamne's advice and 'give her a hint,' John felt his lips sealed. How could he breathe a word even of such a suspicion to Elinor? How could he let her know that he thought such a thing possible?—or presume to advise her, to take her condition for granted? It was impossible. He ended by some aimless wish that he might meet her at the Cottage for Christmas; 'you and Mr. Compton,' he said—whom he did not wish to meet, the last person in the world: and of whom there was no question that he should go to the Cottage at Christmas or any other time. But what could John do or say? To suggest to her that he thought her an injured wife was beyond his power.

It was somewhere about Christmas—just before—in that dread moment for the lonely and those who are in sorrow and distress, when all the rest of the world is preparing for that family festival, or pretending to prepare, that John Tatham was told one morning in his chambers that a lady wanted to see him. He was occupied, as it happened, with a client for whom he had stayed in town longer than he had intended to stay, and he paid little more attention than to direct his clerk to ask the lady what her business was, or if she would wait. The client was long-winded, and lingered, but John's mind was not free enough nor his imagination lively enough to rouse much curiosity in him in respect to the lady who was waiting. It was only when she was ushered in by his clerk, as the other went away, and putting up her veil showed the pale and anxious countenance of Mrs. Dennistoun, that the shock as of sudden calamity reached him. 'Aunt!' he cried, springing from his chair.

'Yes, John—I couldn't come anywhere but here—you will feel for me more than any one.'

'Elinor?' he said.

Her lips were dry, she spoke with a little difficulty, but she nodded her head and held out to

him a telegram which was in her hand. It was dated from a remote part of Scotland, far in the north. 'Ill—come instantly,' was all it said.

'And I cannot get away till night,' cried Mrs. Dennistoun, with a burst of subdued sobbing. 'I can't start till night.'

'Is this all? What was your last news?'

'Nothing, but that they had gone there—to somebody's shooting-box, which was lent them, I believe—at the very end of the world. I wrote to beg her to come to me. She is—near a moment—of great anxiety. Oh, John, support me: let me not break down.'

'You will not,' he said; 'you are wanted; you must keep all your wits about you. What were they doing there at this time of the year?'

'They have been visiting about—they were invited to Dunorban for Christmas, but she persuaded Philip, so she said, to take this little house. I think he was to join the party while she—— I cannot tell you what was the arrangement. She has written very vaguely for some time. She ought to have been with me—I told her so—but she has always said she could not leave Philip.'

Could not leave Philip! The mother, for-

tunately, had no idea why this determination was. 'I went so far as to write to Philip,' she said, 'to ask him if she might not come to me, or, at least, begging him to bring her to town, or somewhere where she could have proper attention. He answered me very briefly that he wished her to go, but she would not: as he had told me before I left town—that was all. It seemed to fret him—he must have known that it was not a fit place for her, in a stranger's house, and so far away. And to think I cannot even get away till late to-night!'

John had to comfort her as well as he could, to make her eat something, to see that she had all the comforts possible for her night journey. 'You were always like her brother,' the poor lady said, finding at last relief in tears. And then he went with her to the train, and found her a comfortable carriage, and placed her in it with all the solaces his mind could think of. A sleeping-carriage on the Scotch lines is not such a ghastly pretence of comfort as those on the continent. The solaces John brought her—the quantities of newspapers, the picture papers and others, rugs and shawls innumerable—all that he possessed in the shape of wraps, besides those which she

had with her. What more could a man do? If she had been young he would have bought her sugar-plums. All that they meant were the dumb anxieties of his own breast, and the vague longing to do something, anything that would be a help to her on her desolate way.

'You will send me a word, aunt, as soon as you get there?'

'Oh, at once, John.'

'You will tell me how she is—say as much as you can—no three words, like that. I shall not leave town till I hear.'

'Oh, John, why should this keep you from your family? I could telegraph there as easily as here.'

He made a gesture almost of anger. 'Do you think I am likely to put myself out of the way—not to be ready if you should want me?'.

How should she want him?—a mother summoned to her daughter at such a moment—but she did not say so to trouble him more: for John had got to that maddening point of anxiety when nothing but doing something, or at least keeping ready to do something, flattering yourself that there must be something to do, affords any balm to the soul.

He saw her away by that night train, crowded with people going home—people noisy with gaiety, escaping from their daily cares to the family meeting, the father's house, all the associations of pleasure and warmth and consolation—cold, but happy, in their third-class compartments—not wrapped up in every conceivable solace as she was, yet no one, perhaps, so heavy-hearted. He watched for the last glimpse of her face just as the train plunged into the darkness, and saw her smile and wave her hand to him; then he, too, plunged into the darkness like the train. He walked and walked through the solitary streets not knowing where he was going, unable to rest. Had he ever been, as people say, in love with Elinor? He could not tell—he had never betrayed it by word or look if he had. He had never taken any step to draw her near him, to persuade her to be his and not another's; on the contrary, he had avoided everything that could lead to that. Neither could he say, 'She was as my sister,' which his relationship might have warranted him in doing. It was neither the one nor the other—she was not his love nor his sister—she was simply Elinor; and perhaps she was dying; perhaps the news he would

receive next day would be the worst that the heart could hear. He walked and walked through those dreary, semi-respectable streets of London, the quiet, the sordid, the dismal, mile after mile, and street after street, till half the night was over and he was tired out, and might have a hope of rest.

But for three whole days—days which he could not reckon, which seemed of the length of years—during which he remained closeted in his chambers, the whole world having, as it seemed, melted away around him, leaving him alone, he did not have a word. He did not go home, feeling that he must be on the spot, whatever happened. Finally, when he was almost mad, on the morning of the third day, he received the following telegram:—'Saved—as by a miracle; doing well. Child—a boy.'

'Child—a boy!' Good heavens! what did he want with that? it seemed an insult to him to tell him. What did he care for the child, if it was a boy or not?—the wretched, undesirable brat of such parentage, born to perpetuate a name which was dishonoured. Altogether the telegram, as so many telegrams, but lighted fresh fires of anxiety in his mind. 'Saved—as by a

miracle!' Then he had been right in the dreadful fancies that had gone through his mind. He had passed by Death in the dark; and was it now sure that the miracle would last, that the danger would have passed away?

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was not till nearly three weeks after this, that John received another brief dispatch. 'At home: come and see us.' He had indeed got a short letter or two in the interval, saying almost nothing. A brief report of Elinor's health, and of the baby, against whom he had taken an unreasoning disgust and repugnance. 'Little beast!' he said to himself, passing over that part of the bulletin: for the letters were scarcely more than bulletins, without a word about the circumstances which surrounded her. A shooting lodge in Rossshire in the middle of the winter! What a place for a delicate woman! John was well enough aware that many elements of comfort were possible even in such a place; but he shut his eyes, as was natural, to anything that went against his own point of view.

And now this telegram from Windyhill—'At home: come and see us'—*us*. Was it a mistake of the telegraph people?—of course they must make mistakes. They had no doubt taken the *me* in Mrs. Dennistoun's angular writing for *us* —or was it possible——? John had no peace in his mind until he had so managed matters that he could go and see. There was no very pressing business in the middle of January, when people had hardly yet recovered the idleness of Christmas. He started one windy afternoon, when everything was grey, and arrived at Hurrymere station in the dim twilight, still ruddy with tints of sunset. He was in a very contradictory frame of mind, so that though his heart jumped to see Mrs. Dennistoun awaiting him on the platform, there mingled in his satisfaction in seeing her and hearing what she had to tell so much sooner, a perverse conviction of cold and discomfort in the long drive up in the pony carriage which he felt sure was before him. He was mistaken, however, on this point, for the first thing she said was, 'I have secured the fly, John. Old Pearson will take your luggage. I have so much to tell you.' There was an air of excitement in her face, but not that air of subdued and silent de-

pression which comes with solitude. She was evidently full of the report she had to make; but yet the first thing she did when she was ensconced in the fly with John beside her was to cover her face with her hands, and subside into her corner in a silent passion of tears.

'For mercy's sake tell me what is the matter. What has happened? Is Elinor ill?'

He had almost asked, is Elinor dead?

She uncovered her face, which had suddenly lighted up with a strange gleam of joy underneath the tears. 'John, Elinor is here,' she said.

'Here!'

'At home—safe. I have brought her back—and the child.'

'Confound the child!' John said in his excitement. 'Brought her back! What do you mean?'

'Oh, John, it is a long story. I have a hundred things to tell you, and to ask your advice upon; but the main thing is that she is here. I have brought her away from him. She will go back no more.'

'She has left her husband!' he said with a momentary flicker of exultation in his dismay. But the dismay, to do him justice, was the

strongest. He looked at his companion almost sternly. 'Things,' he said, 'must have been very serious to justify that.'

'They were more than serious—they had become impossible,' Mrs. Dennistoun said.

And she told him her story, which was a long one. She had arrived to find Elinor alone in the little solitary lodge in the midst of the wilds, not without attention indeed, or comfort, but alone, her husband absent. She had been very ill, and he had been at the neighbouring castle, where a great party was assembled, and where, the mother discovered at last, there was—the woman who had made Elinor's life a burden to her. 'I don't know with what truth. I don't know whether there is what people call any harm in it. It is possible he is only amusing himself. I can't tell. But it has made Elinor miserable this whole autumn through, that and a multitude of other things. She would not let me send for him when I got there. It had gone so far as that. She said that the whole business disgusted him, that he had lost all interest in her, that to hear it was over might be a relief to him, but nothing more. Her heart has turned altogether against him, John, in every way. There

have been a hundred things. You think I am almost wickedly glad to have her home. And so I am. I cannot deny it. To have her here, even in her trouble, makes all the difference to me. But I am not so careless as you think. I can look beyond to other things. I shrink as much as you do from such a collapse of her life. I don't want her to give up her duty, and now that there is the additional bond of the child——'

'Oh, for heaven's sake,' said John, 'leave the child out of it! I want to hear nothing of the child!'

'That is one chief point, however, that we want your advice about, John. A man I suppose does not understand it: but her baby is everything to Elinor: and I suppose—unless he can really be proved as guilty as she thinks—he could take the child away.'

John smiled to himself a little bitterly; this was why he was sent for in such a hurry, not for the sake of his society, or from any affection for him, but that he might tell them what steps to take to secure them in possession of the child. He said nothing for some time, nor did Mrs. Dennistoun, whose disappointment in the cold-

ness of his response was considerable, and who waited in vain for him to speak. At length she said, almost tremblingly, 'I am afraid you disapprove very much of the whole business, John.'

'I hope it has not been done rashly,' he said. 'The husband's mere absence, though heartless as—as I should have expected of the fellow—would yet not be reason enough to satisfy any—court.'

'Any court! You don't think she means to bring him before any court? She wants only to be left alone. We ask nothing from him, not a penny, not any money—surely, surely no revenge—only not to be molested. There shall not be a word said on our side, if he will but let her alone.'

John shook his head. 'It all depends upon the view the man takes of it,' he said.

Now this was very cold comfort to Mrs. Dennistoun, who had by this time become very secure in her position, feeling herself entirely justified in all that she had done. 'The man,' she said, 'the man is not the sufferer: and surely the woman has some claim to be heard.'

'Every claim,' said John. 'That is not what I was thinking of. It is this: if the man has a leg to stand upon, he will show fight. If he hasn't—

why that will make the whole difference, and probably Elinor's position will be quite safe. But you yourself say——'

'John, don't throw back upon me what I myself said. I said that perhaps things were not so bad as she believed. In my experience I have found that folly, and playing with everything that is right is more common than absolute wrong—and men like Philip Compton are made up of levity and disregard of everything that is serious.'

'In that case,' said John, 'if you are right, he will not let her go.'

'Oh, John! oh, John! don't make me wish that he may be a worse man than I think. He could not force her to go back to him, feeling as she does.'

'Nobody can force a woman to do that; but he could perhaps make her position untenable; he would, perhaps, take away the child.'

'John,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, in alarm, 'if you tell her that, she will fly off with him to the end of the world. She will die before she will part with the child.'

'I suppose that's how women are made,' said John, not yet cured of his personal offence.

'Yes,' she said, 'that's how women are made.'

'I beg your pardon,' he said, coming to himself; 'but you know, aunt, a man may be pardoned for not understanding that supreme fascination of the baby who cares no more for one than another, poor little animal, so long as it gets its food and is warm enough. We must wait and see what the man will do.'

'Is that the best?—is there nothing we can do to defend ourselves in the meantime—to make any sort of barricade against him?'

'We must wait and see what he is going to do,' said John; and they went over and over the question, again and again, as they climbed the hills. It grew quite dark as they drove along, and when they came out upon the open part of the road, from which the Cottage was visible, they both looked out across the combe to the lights in the windows with an involuntary movement. The Cottage was transformed; instead of the one lonely lighted window which had indicated to John in former visits where Mrs. Dennistoun sat alone, there was now a twinkle from various points, a glow of firelight, a sensation of warmth and company. Mrs. Dennistoun looked out upon it and her face shone. It was not a happy thing

that Elinor should have made shipwreck of her life, should have left her husband and sought refuge in her mother's house. But how could it be otherwise than happy that Elinor was there—Elinor and the other little creature who was something more than Elinor, herself and yet another? As for John, he looked at it too, with an interest which stopped all arguments on the cause of it. She was there—wrong perhaps, impatient; too quick to fly as she had been too quick to go—but still Elinor all the same, whether she was right or wrong.

The cab arrived soberly at the door, where Pearson with the pony carriage, coming by the shorter way with the luggage, had just arrived also. Mrs. Dennistoun said, hurriedly, 'You will find Elinor in the drawing-room, John,' and herself went hastily through the house and up the stairs. She was going to the baby! John guessed this with a smile of astonishment and half contempt. How strange it was! There could not be a more sad position than that in which, in their rashness, these two women had placed themselves; and yet the mother, a woman of experience, who ought to have known better, got out of the carriage like a girl, without waiting to be helped or attended to,

and went upstairs like the wind, forgetting everything else for that child—that child, the inheritor of Phil Compton's name and very likely of his qualities—fated from his birth (most likely) to bring trouble to everybody connected with him! And yet Elinor was of less interest to the mother. What strange caprices of nature! what extraordinary freaks of womankind!

The Cottage downstairs was warm and bright with firelight and lamplight, and in the great chair by the fire was reclining, lying back with her book laid on her lap and her face full of eager attention to the sounds outside, a pale young woman, surrounded by cushions and warm wraps and everything an invalid could require, who raised to him eyes more large and shining than he had ever seen before, suffused with a dew of pain and pleasure and eager welcome. Elinor, was it Elinor! He had never seen her in any way like an invalid before—never knew her to be ill, or weak, or unable to walk out to the door and meet him or anyone she cared for. The sight of her ailing, weak, with those large glistening eyes, enlarged by feebleness, went to his very heart. Fortunately he did not in any way connect this enfeebled state with the phenomenon upstairs, which was best for all

parties. He hurried up to her, taking her thin hands into his own.

'Elinor! my poor little Nelly—can this be you!'

The water that was in her eyes rolled over in two great tears; a brief convulsion went over her face. 'Yes, John,' she said, almost in a whisper. 'Strange as it may seem, this is all that is left of me.'

He sat down beside her and for a moment neither of them spoke. Pity, tenderness, wrath, surged up together in John's breast; pity, tender compassion, most strong of all. Poor little thing; this was how she had come back to her home; her heart broken, her wings broken, as it were; all her soaring and swiftness and energy gone. He could scarcely look upon her for the pity that overflowed his heart. But underneath lay wrath, not only against the man who had brought her to such a pass but against herself too.

'John,' she said, after a while, 'do you remember saying to me that I was not one to bear, to put up with things, to take the consequences if I tried a dangerous experiment and failed.'

'Did I ever say anything so silly and so cruel?'

'Oh, no, no; it was neither silly nor unkind, but quite, quite true. I have thought of it so often. I used to think of it to stir up my pride, to remind myself that I ought to try to be better than my nature, not to allow you to be a true prophet. But it was so, and I couldn't change it. You can see you were right, John, for I have not been like a strong woman, able to endure; I have only been able to run away.'

'My poor little Nelly!'

'Don't pity me,' she said, the tears running over again. 'I am too well off; I am too well taken care of. A prodigal should not be made so much of as I am.'

'Don't call yourself a prodigal, Nelly! Perhaps things may not be as bad as they appear. At least, it is but the first fall—the greatest athlete gets many before he can stand against the world.'

'I'll never be an athlete, John. Besides, I'm a woman, you know, and a fall of any kind is fatal to a woman, especially anything of this kind. No, I know very well it's all over; I shall never hold up my head again. But that's not the question—the question is, to be safe and as free as can be. Mamma takes me in, you know, just as

if nothing had happened. She is quite willing to take the burden of me on her shoulders—and of baby. She has told you that there are two of me now, John—my baby as well as myself.'

John could only nod an assent; he could not speak.

'It's a wonderful thing to come out of a wreck with a treasure in one's arms: everything going to pieces behind one; the rafters coming down, the walls falling in, and yet one's treasure in one's arms. Oh, I had not the heart or the strength to come out of the tumbling house. My mother did it all, dragged me out, wrapped me up in love and kindness, carried me away. I don't want you to think I was good for anything. I should just have lain there and died. One thing, I did not mind dying at all—I had quite made up my mind. That would not have been so disgraceful as running away.'

'There is nothing that is disgraceful,' said John; 'for heaven's sake don't say so, Nelly! It is unfortunate—beyond words—but that is all. Nobody can think that you are in any way disgraced. And if you are allowed just to stay quietly here in your natural home, I suppose you desire nothing more.'

'What should I desire more, John? You don't suppose I should like to go and live in the world again and go into society and all that? I have had about enough of society. Oh, I want nothing but to be quiet and unmolested, and bring up my baby. They could not take my baby from me, John?'

'I do not think so,' he said, with a grave face.

'You do not—think so? Then you are not *sure?* My mother says dreadful things, but I cannot believe them. They would never take an infant from its mother to give it to—to give it to —a man—who could do nothing, nothing for it. What could a man do with a young child?—a man always on the move, who has no settled home, who has no idea what an infant wants? John, I know law is inhuman, but surely, surely not so inhuman as that.'

'My dear Nelly,' he said, 'the law, you know, which, as you say, is often inhuman, recognises the child as belonging to the father. He is responsible for it. For instance, they never could come upon you for its maintenance or education, or anything of that kind, until it had been proved that the father——'

'May I ask,' said Elinor, with uplifted head, 'of what or of whom you are talking when you say *it?*'

It was all John could do not to burst into a peal of aggrieved and indignant laughter. He who had been brought from town, from his own comforts, such as they were, to be consulted about this brat, this child which belonged to the dis-Honourable Phil; and Elinor, *Elinor* of all people in the world, threw up her head and confronted him with disdain because he called the brat it, and not him or her, whichever it was. John recollected well enough that sentence at which he had been so indignant in the telegram —'child, a boy'—but he affected to himself not to know what it was for the indulgence of a little contumely: and the reward he had got was contumely upon his own head. But when he looked at Elinor's pale face, the eyes so much larger than they ought to be, with tears welling out unawares, dried up for a moment by indignation or quick hasty temper, the temper which made her sweeter words all the more sweet, he had always thought—then rising again unawares under the heavy lids, the lips so ready to quiver, the pathetic lines about the mouth:

when he looked at all these John's heart smote him. He would have called the child anything; if there had been a sex superior to him the baby should have it. And what was there that man could do that he would not do for the deliverance of the mother and the child?

CHAPTER XXV.

It cannot be said that this evening at the Cottage was an agreeable one. To think that Elinor should be there, and yet that there should be so little pleasure in the fact that the old party, which had once been so happy together, should be together again, was bewildering. And yet there was one member of it who was happy with a shamefaced unacknowledged joy. To think that that which made her child miserable should make her happy was a dreadful thought to Mrs. Dennistoun, and yet how could she help it? Elinor was there, and the baby was there, the new unthought-of creature which had brought with it a new anxiety, a rush of new thoughts and wishes. Already everything else in the mind of Elinor's mother began to yield to the desire to retain these two—the new

mother and the child. But she did not avow this desire. She was mostly silent, taking little part in the discussion, which was indeed a very curious discussion, since Elinor, debating the question how she was to abandon her husband and defend herself against him, never mentioned his name.

She did not come in to dinner, which Mrs. Dennistoun and John Tatham ate solemnly alone, saying but little, trying to talk upon indifferent topics, with that very wretched result which is usual when people at one of the great crises of life have to make conversation for each other while servants are about and the restraints of common life are around them. Whether it is the terrible flood of grief which has to be barred and kept within bounds so that the functions of life may not altogether be swept away, or the sharper but warmer pang of anxiety, that which cuts like a serpent's tooth, yet is not altogether beyond the reach of hope, what poor pretences these are at interest in ordinary subjects; what miserable gropings after something that can furnish a thread of conversation just enough to keep the intercourse of life going! These two were not more successful

than others in this dismal pursuit. Mrs. Dennistoun found a moment when the meal was over before she left John, poor pretence! to his wine. 'Remember that she will not mention his name; nothing must be said about him,' she said. 'How can we discuss him and what he is likely to do without speaking of him?' said John, with a little scorn. 'I don't know,' replied the poor lady. 'But you will find that she will not have his name mentioned. You must try and humour her. Poor Elinor! For I know that you are sorry for her, John.'

Sorry for her! He sat over his glass of mild claret in the little dining-room that had once been so bright: even now it was the cosiest little room, the curtains all drawn, shutting out the cold wind, which in January searches out every crevice, the firelight blazing fitfully, bringing out all the pretty warm decorations, the gleam of silver on the sideboard, the pictures on the wall, the mirror over the mantelpiece. There was nothing wanted under that roof to make it the very home of domestic warmth and comfort. And yet—sorry for Elinor! That was not the word. His heart was sore for her, torn away from all her moorings, drifting back a wreck

to the little youthful home, where all had been so tranquil and so sweet. John had nothing in him of that petty sentiment which derives satisfaction from a calamity it has foreseen, nor had he even an old lover's thrill of almost pleasure in the downfall of the clay idol that has been preferred to his gold. His pain for Elinor, the constriction in his heart at thought of her position, were unmixed with any baser feeling. Sorry for her! He would have given all he possessed to restore her happiness—not in his way, but in the way she had chosen, even, last abnegation of all, to make the man worthy of her who had never been worthy. Even his own indignation and wrath against that man were subservient in John's honest breast to the desire of somehow finding that it might be possible to whitewash him, nay, to reform him, to make him as near as possible something which she could tolerate for life. I doubt if a woman, notwithstanding the much more ready power of sacrifice which women possess, could have so fully desired this renewal and amendment as John did. It was scarcely too much to say that he hated Phil Compton: yet he would have given the half of his substance

at this moment to make Phil Compton a good man; nay, even to make him a passable man—to rehabilitate him in his wife's eyes.

John stayed a long time over 'his wine,' the mild glass of claret (or perhaps it was Burgundy) which was all that was offered him—partly to think the matter over, but also partly perhaps because he heard certain faint gurglings, and the passage of certain steps, active and full of energy, past the door of the room within which he sat, going now to the drawing-room, now upstairs, from which he divined that the new inmate of the house was at present in possession of the drawing-room, and of all attention there. He smiled at himself for his hostility to the child, which, of course, was entirely innocent of all blame. Here the man was inferior to the woman in comprehension and sympathy: for he not only could not understand how they could possibly obtain solace in their trouble from this unconscious little creature, but he was angry and scornful of them for doing so. Phil Compton's brat, no doubt the germ of a thousand troubles to come, but besides that a nothing, a being without love or thought, or even consciousness, a mere little animal feeding and sleeping—and yet the idol

and object of all the thoughts of two intelligent women, capable of so much better things! This irritated John and disgusted him in the midst of all his anxious thoughts, and his profound compassion and deliberations how best to help: and it was not till the passage of certain feeble sounds outside his door, which proceeded audibly upstairs, little bleatings in which, if they had come from a lamb, or even a puppy, John would have been interested, assured him that the small enemy had disappeared—that he finally rose and proceeded to 'join the ladies,' as if he had been holding a little private debauch all by himself.

There was a little fragrance and air of the visitor still in the room, a little disturbance of the usual arrangements, a surreptitious, quite unjustifiable look as of pleasure in Elinor's eyes, which were less expanded, and if as liquid as ever, more softly bright than before. Something white actually lay on the sofa, a small garment which Mrs. Dennistoun whisked away. They were conscious of John's critical eye upon them, and received him with a warmth of conciliatory welcome which betrayed that consciousness. Mrs. Dennistoun drew a chair for him to the

other side of the fire. She took her own place in the middle at the table with a large piece of white knitting, to which she gave her whole attention, and thus the deliberation began.

'Elinor wants to know, John, what you think we ought to do—to make quite sure—that there will be no risk, about the baby.'

'I must know more of the details of the question before I can give any advice,' said John.

'John,' said Elinor, raising herself in her chair, 'here are all the details that are necessary. I have come away. I have come home, finding that life was impossible there. That is the whole matter. It may be, probably it is, my own fault. It is simply that life became impossible. You know you said that I was not one to endure, to put up with things. I scoffed at you then, for I did not expect to have anything to put up with: but you were quite right, and life had become impossible—that is all there is any need to say.'

'To me, yes,' said John, 'but not enough, Elinor, if it ever has to come within the reach of the law.'

'But why should it come within the reach of

the law? You, John, you are a lawyer; you know the rights of everything. I thought you might have arranged it all. Couldn't you try to make a kind of a bargain? What bargain? Oh, am I a lawyer? do I know? But you, John, who have it all at your fingers' ends, who know what can be done and what can't be done, and the rights that one has and that another has! Dear John! if you were to try don't you think that you could settle it all, simply as between people who don't want any exposure, any struggle, but only to be quiet and to be let alone?'

'Elinor, I don't know what I could do with so little information as I have. To know that you found your life impossible is enough for me. But you know most people are right in their own eyes. If we have some one opposed to us who thinks, for instance, that the fault was yours?'

'Well,' she cried eagerly, 'I am willing to accept that: say that the fault was mine! You could confirm it, that it was likely to be mine. You could tell them what an impatient person I was, and that you said I was not one to try an experiment, for I never, never could put up with anything. John, you could be a witness as well

as an advocate. You could prove that you always expected—and that I am quite, quite willing to allow that it was I——'

'Elinor, if I could only make you understand what I mean! I am told that I am not to mention any names?'

'No, no names, no names! What is the good? We both know very well what we mean.'

'But I don't know very well what you mean. Don't you see that if it is your fault—if the other party is innocent—there can be no reason in the world why he should consent to renounce his rights? It is not a mere matter of feeling. There is right in it one way or another—either on your side or else on the other side; and if it is on the other side, why should a man give up what belongs to him, why should he renounce what is—most dear to him?'

'Oh, John, John, John!' She made this appeal and outcry, clasping her hands together with a mixture of supplication and impatience. Then turning to her mother—'Oh, tell him,' she cried, 'tell him!'—always clasping those impatient yet beseeching hands.

'You see, John,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, 'Elinor

knows that the right is on her side: but she will consent to say nothing about it to any one—to give herself out as the offender rather—that is to say, as an ill-disciplined person that cannot put up with anything, as you seem to have said.'

John laughed with vexation, yet a kind of amusement. 'I never said it nor thought it: still, if it pleases her to think so—— The wiser thing if this separation is final——'

'If it is final!' Elinor cried. She raised herself up again in her chair, and contemplated the unfortunate John with a sort of tragic superiority. 'Do you think that of me,' she said, 'that I would take such a step as this and that it should not be final? Is dying final? Could one do such a thing as this and change?'

'Such things have been done,' said John. 'Elinor, forgive me. I must say it—it is all your life that is in the balance, and another life. There is this infant to be struggled over, perhaps rent in two by those who should have united to take care of him—and it's a boy, I hear. There's his name and his after-life to think of—a child without a father, perhaps the heir of a family to which he will not belong. Elinor—tell her, aunt, you understand: is it my wish to hand her back to—

to—— No, I'll speak no names. But you know I disliked it always, opposed it always. It is not out of any favour to—to the other side. But she ought to take all these things into account. Her own position, and the position in the future of the child——'

Elinor had crushed her fan with her hands, and Mrs. Dennistoun let the knitting with which she had gone on in spite of all fall at last in her lap. There was a little pause. John Tatham's voice itself had begun to falter, or rather swelled in sound as when a stream swells in flood.

'I do not go into the question about women and what they ought to put up with,' said John, resuming. 'There's many things that law can do nothing for—and nature in many ways makes it harder for women, I acknowledge. We cannot change that. Think what her position will be—neither a wife nor with the freedom of a widow; and the boy, bearing the name of one he must almost be taught to think badly of—for one of them must be in the wrong——'

'He shall never, never hear that name; he shall know nothing, he shall be free of every bond; his mind shall never be cramped or twisted or troubled by any—man: if I live.'

This Elinor said, lifting her pale face from her hands, with eyes that flashed and shone with a blaze of excitement and weakness.

'There already,' said John, 'is a tremendous condition—if you live! Who can make sure that they will live? We must all die—some sooner, some later—and you wearing yourself out with excitement, that never were strong; you exposing your heart, the weakest organ——'

'John,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, grasping him by the arm, 'you are talking nonsense, you don't know what you are saying. My darling! she was never weak nor had a feeble heart, nor—anything! She will live to bring up *his* children, her baby's children, upon her knees.'

'And what would it matter?' said Elinor—looking at him with clear eyes, from which the tears had disappeared in the shock of this unlooked-for suggestion—'suppose I have no more strength than that, suppose I were to die? you shall be his guardian, John, bring him up a good man; and his Heavenly Father will take care of him. I am not afraid.'

A man had better not deal with such subjects between two women. What with Mrs. Dennistoun's indignant protest and Elinor's lofty sub-

mission, John was at his wits' end. 'I did not mean to carry things to such a bitter end as that,' he said. 'You want to force me into a corner and make me say things I never meant. The question is serious enough without that.'

There was again a little pause, and then Elinor, with one of those changes which are so perplexing to sober-minded people, suddenly turned to him, holding out both her hands.

'John—we'll leave that in God's hands whatever is to happen to me. But in the meantime, while I am living—and perhaps my life depends upon being quiet and having a little peace and rest. It is not that I care very much for my life,' said Elinor, with that clear, open-eyed look, like the sky after rain. 'I am shipwrecked, John, as you say—but my mother does, and it's of—some—consequence—to baby; and if it depends upon whether I am left alone, you are too good a friend to leave me in the lurch. And you said—one night—whatever happened I was to send for you.'

John sprang up from his seat, dropping the hands which he had taken into his own. She was like Queen Katherine, 'about to weep,' and her breast strained with the sobbing effort to keep it down.

'For God's sake,' he cried, 'don't play upon our hearts like this! I will do anything—everything—whatever you choose to tell me. Aunt, don't let her cry, don't let her go on like that. Why, good heavens!' he cried, bursting himself into a kind of big sob, 'won't it be bad for that little brat of a baby or something if she keeps going on in this way?'

Thus John Tatham surrendered at discretion. What could he do more? A man cannot be played upon like an instrument without giving out sounds of which he will, perhaps, be ashamed. And this woman appealing to him—this girl—looking like the little Elinor he remembered, younger and softer in her weakness and trouble than she had been in her beauty and pride—was the creature after all, though she would never know it, whom he loved best in the world. He had wanted to save her, in the one worldly way of saving her, from open shipwreck, for her own sake, against every prejudice and prepossession of his mind. But if she would not have that, why it was his business to save her as she wished, to do for her whatever she wanted; to act as her agent, her champion, whatever she pleased.

He was sent away presently, and accepted his

dismissal with thankfulness, to smoke his cigar. This is one amusing thing in a feminine household. A man is supposed to want all manner of little indulgences and not to be able to do without them. He is carefully left alone over 'his wine'—the aforesaid glass of claret; and ways and means are provided for him to smoke his cigar, whether he wishes it or not. He had often laughed at these regulations of his careful relatives, but he was rather glad of them to-night. 'I am going to get Elinor to bed,' said Mrs. Dennistoun. 'It has, perhaps, been a little too much for her: but when you have finished your cigar, John, if you will come back to the drawing-room for a few minutes you will find me here.'

John did not smoke any cigar. It is all very well to be soothed and consoled by tobacco in your own room, at your own ease: but when you are put into a lady's dining-room, where everything is nice, and where the curtains will probably smell of smoke next morning: and when your mind is exercised beyond even the power of the body to keep still, that is not a time to enjoy such calm and composing delights. But he walked about the room in which he was shut up like a wild beast in his cage, sometimes with long strides

from wall to wall, sometimes going round, with that abstract trick of his, staring at the pictures, as if he did not know every picture in the place by heart. He forgot that he was to go back to the drawing-room again after Elinor had been taken to bed, and it was only after having waited for him a long time that Mrs. Dennistoun came, almost timidly, knocking at her own dining-room door, afraid to disturb her visitor in the evening rites which she believed in so devoutly. She did go in, however, and they stood together over the fire for a few minutes, he staring down upon the glow at his feet, she contemplating fitfully, unconsciously, her own pale face and his in the dim mirror on the mantelpiece. They talked in low tones about Elinor and her health, and her determination which nothing would change.

'Of course I will do it,' said John; 'anything—whatever she may require of me—there are no two words about that. There is only one thing: I will not compromise her by taking any initiative. Let us wait and see what they are going to do——'

'But, John, might it not be better to disarm him by making overtures? anything, I would do anything, if he would but let her remain unmolested—and the baby.'

'Do you mean money?' he said.

Mrs. Dennistoun gave him an abashed look, deprecatory and wistful, but did not make any reply.

'Phil Compton is a cad, and a brute, and a scamp of the first water,' said John, glad of some way to get rid of his excitement; 'but I do not think that even he would sell his wife and his child for money. I wouldn't do him so much discredit as that.'

'Oh, I beg your pardon, John,' Mrs. Dennistoun said.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JOHN left the Cottage next morning with the full conduct of the affairs of the family placed in his hands. The ladies were both a little doubtful if his plan was the best—they were still frightened for what might happen, and kept up a watch, as John perceived, fearing every step that approached, trembling at every shadow. They remembered many stories, such as rush to the minds of persons in trouble, of similar cases, of the machinations of the bad father whose only object was to overcome and break down his wife, and who stole his child away to let it languish and die. There are some circumstances in which people forget all the shades of character, and take it for granted that a man who can go wrong in one matter will act like a very demon in all. This was doubly strong in Mrs. Dennistoun, a woman full of toleration and

experience; but the issues were so momentous to her, and the possible results so terrible, that she lost her accustomed good sense. It was more natural, perhaps, that Elinor, who was weak in health and still full of the arbitrariness of youth, should entertain this fear — without considering that Phil was the very last man in the world to burden himself with an infant of the most helpless age—which seemed to John an almost quite unreasonable one. Almost—for, of course, he too was compelled to allow, when driven into a corner, that there was nothing that an exasperated man might not do. Elinor had come down early to see her cousin before he left the house, bringing with her in her arms the little bundle of muslin and flannel upon the safety of which her very life seemed to depend. John looked at it, and at the small pink face and unconscious flickering hands that formed the small centre to all those wrappings, with a curious mixture of pity and repugnance. It was like any other blind new-born kitten or puppy, he thought, but not so amusing—no, it was not blind, to be sure. At one moment, without any warning, it suddenly opened a pair of eyes, which by a lively exercise of fancy might be supposed like Elinor's, and seemed to look him

in the face, which startled him very much, with a curious notification of the fact that the thing was not a kitten or a puppy. But then a little quiver came over the small countenance, and the attendant said it was 'the wind.' Perhaps the opening of the eyes was the wind too, or some other automatic effect. He would not hold out his finger to be clasped tight by the little flickering fist, as Elinor would have had him. He would none of those follies; he turned away from it not to allow himself to be moved by the effect, quite a meretricious one, of the baby in the young mother's arms. That was all poetry, sentiment, the trick of the painter, who had found the combination beautiful. Such ideas belonged, indeed, to the conventional-sacred, and he had never felt any profane resistance of mind against the San Sisto picture or any of its kind. But Phil Compton's brat was a very different thing. What did it matter what became of it? If it were not for Elinor's perverse feeling on the subject, and that perfectly imbecile prostration of her mother, a sensible woman who ought to have known better, before the little creature, he would himself have been rather grateful to Phil Compton for taking it away. But when he saw the look of terror

upon Elinor's face when an unexpected step came to the door, when he saw her turn and fly, wrapping the child in her arms, on her very heart as it seemed, bending over it, covering it so that it disappeared altogether in her embrace, John's heart was a little touched. It was only a hawking tramp with pins and needles, who came by mistake to the hall door, but her panic and anguish of alarm were a spectacle which he could not get out of his eyes.

'You see, she never feels safe for a moment. It will be hard to persuade her that that man, though I've seen him about the roads for years, is not an emissary—or a spy—to find out if she is here.'

'I am sure it is quite an unnecessary panic,' said John. 'In the first place, Phil Compton's the last man to burden himself with a child; in the second, he's not a brute nor a monster.'

'You called him a brute last night, John.'

'I did not mean in that way. I don't mean to stand by any rash word that may be forced from me in a moment of irritation. Aunt, get her to give over that. She'll torture herself to death for nothing. He'll not try to take the child away—not just now, at all events, not while it is a

mere—— Bring her to her senses on that point. You surely can do that?'

'If I was quite sure of being in my own,' Mrs. Dennistoun said with a forlorn smile. 'I am as much frightened as she is, John. And, remember, if there is anything to be done—anything——'

'There is nothing but a little common sense wanted,' said John. But as he drove away from the door, and saw the hawker with the needles still about, the ladies had so infected him that it was all he could do to restrain an inclination to take the vagrant by the collar and throw him down the combe. 'Who's that fellow hanging about?' he said to Pearson, who was driving him; 'and what does he want here?'

'Bless you, sir! that's Joe,' Pearson said. 'He's after no harm. He's honest enough as long as there ain't nothing much in his way; and he's waiting for the pieces as cook gives him once a week when he comes his rounds. There's no harm in poor Joe.'

'I suppose not, since you say so,' said John; 'but you know the ladies are rather nervous, Pearson. You must keep a look-out that no suspicious-looking person hangs about the house.'

'Bless us! Mr. John,' said Pearson, 'what are they nervous about?—the baby? But nobody wants to steal a baby, bless your soul!'

'I quite agree with you,' said John, much relieved (though he considered Pearson an old fool, in a general way) to have his own opinion confirmed. 'But, all the same, I wish you would be doubly particular not to admit anybody you don't know; and if any man should appear to bother them send for me on the moment. Do you hear?'

'What do you call any man, sir?' said Pearson smartly. He had ideas of his own, though he might be a fool.

'I mean what I say,' said John, more sharply still. 'Any one that molests or alarms them. Send me off a telegram at once — "You're wanted!" That will be quite enough. But don't go with it to the office yourself; send somebody—there's always your boy about the place—and keep about like a dragon yourself.'

'I'll do my best, sir,' said Pearson, 'though I don't know what a dragon is, except it's the one in the Bible; and that's not a thing anybody would want about the place.'

It was a comfort to John, after all his troubles, to be able to laugh, which he did with a heartiness

which surprised Pearson, who was quite unaware that he had made any joke.

These fears, however, which were imposed upon him by the contagion of the terrors of the others, soon passed from John's mind. He was convinced that Phil Compton would take no such step; and that, however much he might wish his wife to return, the possession of the baby was not a thing which he would struggle over. It cannot be denied, however, that he was anxious, and eagerly inspected his letters in the morning, and looked out for telegrams during the day. Fortunately, however, no evil tidings came. Mrs. Dennistoun reported unbroken peace in the Cottage and increasing strength on the part of Elinor; and, in a parenthesis with a sort of apology, of the baby. Nobody had come near them to trouble them. Elinor had received no letters. The tie between her and her husband seemed to be cut as with a knife. 'We cannot, of course,' she said, 'expect this tranquillity to last.'

And it came to be a very curious thought with John, as week after week passed, whether it was to last—whether Phil Compton, who had never been supposed wanting in courage, intended to let his wife and child drop off from him as if

they had never been. This seemed a thing impossible to conceive; but John said to himself, with much internal contempt, that he knew nothing of the workings of the mind of such a man, and that it might for aught he knew be a common incident in life with the Phil Comptons thus to shake off their belongings when they got tired of them. The fool! the booby! to get tired of Elinor! That rumour which flies about the world so strangely and communicates information about everybody to the vacant ear, to be retailed to those whom it may concern, provided him, as the days went by, with many particulars which he had not been able to obtain from Elinor. Phil, it appeared, had gone to Glenorban—the great house to which he had been invited—alone, with an excuse for his wife, whose state of health was not appropriate to a large party, and had stayed there spending Christmas with a brilliant houseful of guests, among whom was the American lady who had captivated him. Phil had paid one visit to the lodge to see Elinor, by her mother's summons, at the crisis of her illness, but had not hesitated to go away again when informed that the crisis was over. Mrs. Dennistoun never told what had passed between

them on that occasion, but the gossips of the club were credibly informed that she had bullied and stormed at Phil, after the fashion of mothers-in-law, till she had driven him away. Upon which he had returned to his party and flirted with Mrs. Harris more than ever. John discovered also that the party having dispersed some time ago, Phil had gone abroad. Whether in ignorance of his wife's flight or not he could not discover; but it was almost impossible to believe that he would have gone to Monte Carlo without finding out something about Elinor—how and where she was. But whether this was the cause of his utter silence, or whether it was the habit of men of his class to treat such tremendous incidents in domestic life with levity, John Tatham could not make out. He was congratulating himself, however, upon keeping perfectly quiet, and leaving the conduct of the matter to the other party, when the silence was disturbed in what seemed to him the most curious way.

One afternoon when he returned from the court he was aware, when he entered the outer office in which his clerk abode, of what he described afterwards as a smell fit to knock you down. It would have been described more appropriately

in a French novel as the special perfume, subtle and exquisite, by which a beautiful woman may be recognised wherever she goes. It was, indeed, neither more nor less than the particular scent used by Lady Mariamne, who came forward with a sweep and rustle of her draperies, and the most ingratiating of her smiles. 'It appears to be fated that I am to wait for you,' she said. 'How do you do, Mr. Tatham? Take me out of this horrible dirty place. I am quite sure you have some nice rooms in there.' She pointed as she spoke to the inner door, and moved towards it with the air of a person who knew where she was going, and was fully purposed to be admitted. John said afterwards, that to think of this woman's abominable scent being left in his room in which he lived (though he also received his clients in it) was almost more than he could bear. But, in the meantime, he could do nothing but open the door to her, and offer her his most comfortable chair.

She seated herself with all those little tricks of movement which are also part of the stock-in-trade of the pretty woman. Lady Mariamne's prettiness was not of a kind which had the slightest effect upon John, but still it was a kind which received

credit in society, being the product of a great deal of pains and care and exquisite arrangement and combination. She threw her fur cloak back a little, arranged the strings of her bonnet under her chin, which threw up the daintiness and rosiness of a complexion about which there were many questions among her closest friends. She shook up, with what had often been commented upon as the prettiest gesture, the bracelets from her wrists. She arranged the veil, which just came over the tip of her delicate nose, she put out her foot as if searching for a footstool—which John made haste to supply, though he remained unaffected otherwise by all these pretty preliminaries.

'Sit down, Mr. Tatham,' then said Lady Mariamne. 'It makes me wretchedly uncomfortable, as if you were some dreadful man waiting to be paid or something, to see you standing there.'

Though John's first impulse was that of wrath to be thus requested to sit down in his own chambers, the position was amusing as well as disagreeable, and he laughed and drew a chair towards his writing table, which was as crowded and untidy as the writing table of a busy man

usually is, and placed himself in an attitude of attention, though without asking any question.

'Well,' said Lady Mariamne, slowly drawing off her glove; 'you know, of course, why I have come, Mr. Tatham—to talk over with you, as a man who knows the world, this deplorable business. You see it has come about exactly as I said. I knew what would happen: and though I am not one of those people who always insist upon being proved right, you remember what I said——'

'I remember that you said something—to which, perhaps, had I thought I should have been called upon to give evidence as to its correctness—I should have paid more attention, Lady Mariamne.'

'How rude you are!' she said, with her whole interest concentrated upon the slow removal of her glove. Then she smoothed a little, softly, the pretty hand which was thus uncovered, and said, 'How red one's hands get in this weather,' and then laughed. 'You don't mean to tell me, Mr. Tatham,' she said, suddenly raising her eyes to his, 'that, considering what a very particular person we were discussing, you can't remember what I said?'

John was obliged to confess that he remembered more or less the gist of her discourse, and Lady Mariamne nodded her head many times in acceptance of his confession.

'Well,' she said, 'you see what it has come to. An open scandal, a separation, and everything broken up. For one thing, I knew if she did not give him his head a little that's what would happen. I don't believe he cares a brass farthing for that other woman. She makes fun of everybody, and that amused him. And it amused him to put Nell in a state—that as much as anything. Why couldn't she see that and learn to *prendre son parti* like other people? She was free to say, "You go your way and I'll go mine": the most of us do that sooner or later: but to make a vulgar open rupture, and go off—like this.'

'I fail to see the vulgarity in it,' said John.

'Oh, of course; everything she does is perfect to you. But just think, if it had been your own case—followed about and bullied by a jealous woman, in a state of health that of itself disgusts a man——'

'Lady Mariamne, you must pardon me if I refuse to listen to anything more of this kind,' said John, starting to his feet.

'Oh, I warn you, you'll be compelled to listen to a great deal more if you're her agent, as I hear! Phil will find means of compelling you to hear if you don't like to take your information from me.'

'I should like to know how Mr. Phil Compton will succeed in compelling me—to anything I don't choose to do.'

'You think, perhaps, because there's no duelling in this country he can't do anything. But there is, all the same. He would shame you into it—he could say you were—sheltering yourself——'

'I am not a man to fight duels,' said John, very angry, but smiling, 'in any circumstances, even were such a thing not utterly ridiculous; but even a fighting man might feel that to put himself on a level with the dis-Hon——'

He stopped himself as he said it. How mean it was—to a woman!—descending to their own methods. But Lady Mariamne was too quick for him.

'Oh,' she said; 'so you've heard of that, a nickname that no gentleman——' Then she too paused and looked at him, with a momentary flush. He was going to apologize abjectly, when with a slight laugh she turned the subject aside.

'Pretty fools we are, both of us, to talk such nonsense. I didn't come here carrying Phil on my shoulders, to spring at your throat if you expressed your opinion. Look here—tell me, don't let us go beating about the bush, Mr. Tatham—I suppose you have seen Nell?'

'I know my cousin's mind, at least,' he said.

'Well, then, just tell me as between friends—there's no need we should quarrel because they have done so. Tell me this, is she going to get up a divorce case——'

'A divorce——!'

'Because,' said Lady Mariamne, 'she'll find it precious difficult to prove anything. I know she will. She may prove the flirting and so forth—but what's that? You can tell her from me, it wants somebody far better up to things than she is to prove anything. I warn her as a friend, she'll not get much good by that move.'

'I am not aware,' said John, 'whether Mrs. Compton has made up her mind about the further steps——'

'Then just you advise her not,' cried Lady Mariamne. 'It doesn't matter to me: I shall be none the worse whatever she does: but if you are her true friend you will advise her not. She

might tell what she thinks, but that's no proof. Mr. Tatham, I know you have great influence with Nell.'

'Not in a matter like this,' said John with great gravity. 'Of course, she alone can be the judge.'

'What nonsense you talk, you men! Of course she is not the least the judge, and of course she will be guided by you.'

'You may be sure she shall have the best advice that I can give,' John said, with a bow.

'You want me to go, I see,' said Lady Mariamne; 'you are dreadfully rude, standing up all the time to show me I had better go.' Hereupon she recommenced her little *manège*, drawing on her glove, letting her bracelets drop again, fastening the fur round her throat. 'Well, Mr. Tatham,' she said, 'I hope you mean to have the civility to see after my carriage. I can't go roaming about hailing it as if it were a hansom cab—in this queer place.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOHN went down to Windyhill that evening. His appearance alarmed the little household more than words could say. As he was admitted at once by the servants, delighted to see him, he walked in suddenly into the midst of a truly domestic scene. The baby lay on Elinor's knee in the midst of a mass of white wrappings, kicking out a pair of pink little legs in the front of the fire. Elinor herself was seated on a very low chair, and illuminated by the cheerful blaze, which threw a glare upon her countenance, and called out unthought-of lights in her hair, there was no appearance in her looks of anxiety or trouble. She was altogether given up to the baby and the joy of its new life. The little kicking limbs, the pleasure of the little creature in the warmth, the curling of its rosy little toes in the agreeable sensation of the

heat, were more to Elinor and to her mother, who was kneeling beside her on the hearth-rug, than the most refined and lofty pleasures in the world. The most lofty of us have to come down to those primitive sources of bliss, if we are happy enough to have them placed in our way. The greatest poet by her side, the music of the spheres sounding in her ear, would not have made Elinor forget her troubles like the stretching out towards the fire of those little pink toes.

When the door opened, and the voice and step of a man—dreaded sounds—were audible, a thrill of terror ran over this little group. Mrs. Dennistoun sprang to her feet and placed herself between the intruder and the young mother, while Elinor gathered up, covering him all over, so that he disappeared altogether, her child in her arms.

'It is John,' said Mrs. Dennistoun. 'God be thanked, it is only John.'

But Elinor, quite overcome by the shock, burst suddenly into tears, to which the baby responded by a vigorous cry, not at all relishing the sudden huddling up among its shawls to which it had been subjected. It may be supposed what an effect this cloudy side of the happiness, which

he had not been able to deny to himself made a very pretty scene, had upon John. He said, not without a little offence, 'I am sure I beg your pardon humbly. I'll go away.'

Elinor turned round her head, smiling through her tears. 'It was only that you gave me a fright,' she said. 'I am quite right again; don't, oh, don't go away! unless you object to the sight of baby, and to hear him cry; but he'll not cry now, any more than his silly mother. Mamma, make John sit down and tell us—— Oh, I am sure he has something to tell us—— Perhaps I took comfort too soon; but the very sight of John is a protection and a strength,' she said, holding out her hand to him. This sudden change of front reduced John, who had been perhaps disposed for a moment to stand on his dignity, to utter subjection. He neither said nor even thought a word against the baby, who was presently unfolded again, and turned once more the toes of comfort towards the fire. He did not approach too near, feeling that he had no particular share in the scene, and indeed cut an almost absurd figure in the midst of that group, but sat behind, contemplating it from a little distance against the fire. The evening

had grown dark by this time, but the two women, absorbed by their worship, had wanted no light. It had happened to John by an extreme piece of luck to catch the express train almost as soon as Lady Mariamne had left him, and to reach the station at Hurrymere before the February day was done.

'You have something to tell us, John—good news or bad?' Mrs. Dennistoun said.

'Good; or I should not have come like this unannounced,' he said. 'The post is quick enough for bad. I think you may be quite at your ease about the child—no claim will be made on the child. Elinor, I think, will not be disturbed if—she means to take no steps on her side.'

'What steps?' said Mrs. Dennistoun. Elinor turned her head to look at him anxiously over the back of her chair.

'I have had a visit this afternoon,' he said.

'From——' Elinor drew a long hurried breath. She said no name, but it was evident that one was on her lips—a name she never meant to pronounce more, but to which her whole being thrilled still even when it was unspoken. She

looked at him full of eagerness to hear, yet with a hand uplifted, as if to forbid any utterance.

'From Lady Mariamne.'

How her countenance fell! She turned round again, and bent over her baby. It was a pang of acute disappointment, he could not but see, that went through her, though she would not have allowed him to say that name. Strange inconsistency! it ran over John too with a sense of keen indignation, as if he had taken from her an electric touch.

'——Whose object in coming to me was to ascertain whether you intended to bring a suit for—divorce.'

A cry rang through the room. Elinor turned upon him for a moment a face blazing with hot and painful colour. The lamp had been brought in, and he saw the fierce blush and look of horror. Then she turned round and buried it in her hands.

'Divorce!' said Mrs. Dennistoun. 'Elinor——! To drag her private affairs before the world. Oh, John, John, that could not be. You would not wish that to be.'

'I!' he cried with a laugh of tuneless mirth.

'Is it likely that I would wish to drag Elinor before the world?'

Elinor did not say anything, but withdrew one hand from her burning cheek and put it into his. These women treated John as if he were a man of wood. What he might be feeling, or if he were feeling anything, did not enter their minds.

'It was like her,' said Elinor after a time in a low hurried voice, 'to think of that. She is the only one who would think of it. As if I had ever thought or dreamed——'

'It is possible, however,' he said, 'that it might be reasonable enough. I don't speak to Elinor,' who had let go his hand hastily, 'but to you, aunt. If it is altogether final, as she says, to be released would perhaps be better, from a bond that was no bond.'

'John, John, would you have her add shame to pain?'

'The shame would not be to her, aunt.'

'The shame is to every one concerned—to every one! My Elinor's name, her dear name, dragged through all that mud! She a party, perhaps, to revelations—— Oh, never, never! We would bear anything rather.'

'This, of course,' said John, 'is perhaps a still more bitter punishment for the other side.'

She looked round at him again. Looking up with a look of pale horror, her eyelids in agonised curves over her eyes, her mouth quivering, 'What did you say, John?'

'I said it might be a more bitter punishment still for—the other side.'

Elinor lifted up her baby to her breast, raising herself with a new dignity, with her head high. 'I meant no punishment,' she said, 'I want none. I have left—what killed me—behind me: many things, not one only. I have brought my boy away that he may never—never—— But if it would be better that—another—should be free——'

'I will never give my consent to it, Elinor.'

'Nor I with my own mind; but if it is vindictive—if it is revenge, mother! I am not alone to think of myself. If it were better for——that he should be free; speak to John about it and tell me. I cannot, cannot discuss it. I will leave it all to John and you. It will kill me! but what does that matter?—it is not revenge that I seek.'

She turned with the baby pressed to her breast

and walked away, her every movement showing the strain and excitement of her soul.

'Why did you do this, John, without at least consulting me? You have thrown a new trouble into her mind. She will never, never do this thing—nor would I permit it. There are some things in which I must take a part. I could not forbid her marriage; God grant that I had had the strength to do it—but this I will forbid, to expose her to the whole world, when everything we have done has been with the idea of concealing what had happened. Never, never. I will never consent to it, John.'

'I had no intention of proposing such a step: but the other side—as we are bound to call him—are frightened about it. And when I saw her look up, so young still, so sweet, with all her life before her, and thought how she must spend it—alone: with no expanding, no development, in this cottage or somewhere else, a life shipwrecked, a being so capable, so full of possibilities—lost.'

'I have spent my life in this cottage,' said Mrs. Dennistoun. 'My husband died when I was thirty—my life was over, and still I was young; but I had Elinor. There were some who pitied

me too, but their pity was uncalled for. Elinor will live like her mother; she has her boy.'

'But it is different; you cannot but see the difference.'

'Yes, I see it—it is different; but not so different that my Elinor's name should be placarded about the streets and put in all the newspapers. Oh, never, never, John. If the man suffers, it is his fault. She will suffer, and it is not her fault; but I will not, to release him, drag my child before the world.'

Mrs. Dennistoun was so much excited that she began to pace about the room, she who was usually so sober and self-restrained. She had borne much, but this she was unable even to contemplate with calm. For once in her life she had arrived at something which she would not bear. John felt his own position very strange, sitting looking on as a spectator, while this woman, usually so self-controlled, showed her impatience of circumstances and fate. It was ruefully comic that this should be, so to speak, his doing, though he was the last in the world to desire any exposure of Elinor, or to have any sympathy with those who sought justice for themselves or revenge on others at such a cost.

'I was rash perhaps to speak as I did,' he said; 'I had no intention of doing it when I came. It was a mere impulse, seeing Elinor: but you must know that I agree with you perfectly. I see that Elinor's lot is fixed, anyhow. I believe that no decree of a court would make any difference to her, and she would not change the name that is the child's name. All that I recognise. And one thing more, that neither you nor Elinor has recognised. They—he is afraid of any proceedings—I suppose I may mention him to you. It's rather absurd, don't you think, speaking of a fellow of that sort, or rather, not speaking of him at all, as if his name were sacred? He is afraid of proceedings—whatever may be the cause.'

'John, can't you understand that she cannot bear to speak of him, a man she so fought for, against us all? And now her eyes are opened, she is undeceived, she knows him all through and through, more, far more, than we do. She opened her mind to me once, and only once. It was not *that* alone; oh, no, no. There are things that rankle more than that, something he did before they were married, and made her help him to conceal. Something dishon—— I can't say the word, John.'

'Oh,' said John, grimly, 'you need not mind me.'

'Well, the woman—I blush to have to speak to you even of such a thing—the woman, John, was not the worst. She almost might, I think, have forgiven that. It was one thing after another, and that, that first business the worst of all. She found it out somehow, and he had made her take a part—I can't tell what. She would never open her lips on the subject again. Only that once it all burst forth. Oh, divorce! What would that do to her, besides the shame? You understand some things, John,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, with a smile, 'though you are a man. She would never do anything to give herself a name different from her child's.'

'Yes,' said John, with a laugh, 'I think I understand a thing or two, though, as you say, my dear aunt, I am only a man. However, it is just as well I am that imperfect creature, to take care of you. It understands the tactics of the wicked better than you do. And now you must persuade Elinor and persuade yourself of what I came here on purpose to tell you — not to disturb you, as I have been so unfortunate as to do. You are perfectly

safe from him. I will not let the enemy know your sentiments, or how decided you are on the subject. I will perhaps, if you will let me, crack the whip a little over their heads, and keep them in a pleasing uncertainty. But as long as he is afraid that she will take proceedings against him, he will take none, you may be sure, against her. So you may throw aside all your precautions and be happy over your treasure in your own way.'

'Thank God for what you say, John; you take a weight off my heart. But happy—how can you speak of being happy after such a catastrophe?'

'I thought I came in upon a very happy little scene. It might be only pretence, but it looked uncommonly like the real thing.'

'You mean the baby, John, the dear infant that knows no harm. He does take off our thoughts a little, and enable us to bear——'

'Oh, aunt, don't be a hypocrite; that was never a fault of yours. Confess that with all your misery about Elinor you are happy to have her here and her child—notwithstanding everything—happy as you have not been for many a day.'

She sat down by him and gave him her hand. 'John, to be a man you have wonderful insight, and it's I who am a very, very imperfect creature. You don't think worse of me to be glad to have her, even though it is purchased by such misery and trouble? God knows,' cried the poor lady, drying her eyes, 'that I would give her up to-morrow, and with joy, and consent never to see her again, if that would be for her happiness. John! I've not thrust myself upon them, have I, nor done anything against him, nor said a word? But now that she is here, and the baby, and all to myself—which I never hoped—would I not be an ungrateful woman if I did not thank God for it, John?'

'You are an excellent special pleader, aunt,' he said, with a laugh, 'as most women whom I have known are: and I agree with you in everything. You behaved to them, while it was *them*, angelically; you effaced yourself, and I fully believe you never said a word against him. Also, I believe, that if circumstances changed, if anything happened to make her see that she could go back to him——'

Mrs. Dennistoun started in spite of herself,

and pressed her hands together, with a half sob of dismay.

'I don't think it likely, but if it were so, you would sacrifice yourself again—I haven't a doubt of it. Why, then, set up this piece of humbug to me who know you so well, and pretend that you are not very happy for the moment? You are, and you have a good right to be: and I say enjoy it, my dear aunt; take all the good of it, you will have no trouble from him.'

'You think so, you really think so, John?'

'I have no doubt of it: and you must persuade Elinor. Don't think I am making light of the situation: you'll have plenty to trouble you, no doubt, when that little shaver grows up——'

'John!'

'Well, he is a little shaver (whatever that may mean, I'm sure I don't know), if he were a little prince. When he grows up you will have your business laid out for you, and I don't envy you the clearing up——'

'John, don't speak as if a time would come when you would not stand by us. I mean stand by Elinor.'

'Your first phrase was much the best. I will stand by you both as a matter of course.'

'You must consider I shall be an old woman then; and who knows if I may live to see the poor little darling grow up?'

'The poor little darling may never grow up, and none of us may live to see it. One prediction is as good as another: but I think better things of you, aunt, than that you would go and die and desert Elinor, unless "so be as you couldn't help it," as Pearson says. But, however, in the meantime, dying of anybody is not in the question, and I hope both you and she will take as much pleasure out of the baby and be as happy as circumstances will allow. And I'll tell Pearson that there is no need for him to act the dragon—either the Bible one, whom he did not think you would like to have about the house, or any other—for the danger is over. Trust me at least for that.'

'I trust you for everything, John; but,' added Mrs. Dennistoun, 'I wouldn't say anything to Pearson. If you've told him to be a dragon, let him be a dragon still. I am sure you are right, and I will tell Elinor so, and comfort her heart; but we may as well keep a good

look-out, and our eyes about us, all the same.'

'They are sure I am right, but think it better to go on as if I were wrong,' John said to himself as he went to dress for dinner. And while he went through this ceremony, he had a great many thoughts—half-impatient, half-tender—of the wonderful ways of women which are so amazing to men in general, as the ways of men are amazing to women, and will be so, no doubt, as long as the world goes on. The strange mixture of the wise and the foolish, the altogether heroic, and the involuntarily fictitious, struck his keen perception with a humorous understanding, and amusement, and sympathy. That Mrs. Dennistoun should pose a little as a sufferer while she was unmitigatedly happy in the possession of Elinor and the child, and be abashed when she was forced to confess how ecstatic was the fearful joy which she snatched in the midst of danger, was strange enough. But that Elinor, at this dreadful crisis of her life, when every bond was rent asunder, and all that is ordinarily called happiness wrecked for ever, should be moved to the kind of rapture he had seen in her face by the

reaching out and curling in of those little pink toes in the warm light of the fire, was inconceivable—a thing that was not in any philosophy. She had made shipwreck of her life. She had torn the man whom she loved out of her heart, and fled from his neglect and treachery—a fugitive to her mother's house. And yet as she sat before the fire with this little infant cooing in the warmth—like a puppy or a little pig or any other little animal you can suggest—this was the thought of the irreverent man—there was a look of almost more than common happiness, of blessedness, in her face. Who can fathom these things? They were at least beyond the knowledge, though not the sympathy, of this very rising member of the Bar.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THUS there came a sort of settling down and composure of affairs. Phil Compton and all belonging to him disappeared from the scene, and Elinor returned to all the habits of her old life—all the habits, with one extraordinary and incalculable addition which changed all these habits. The baby—so inconsiderable a little creature, not able to show a feeling, or express a thought, or make even a tremulous step from one pair of loving arms to another—an altogether helpless little bundle, but nevertheless one who had already altered the existence of the Cottage and its inhabitants, and made life a totally different thing for them. Can I tell how this was done? No doubt for the wisest objects, to guard the sacred seed of the race as mere duty could never guard it, render-

ing it the one thing most precious in the world to those to whom it is confided—at least, to most of them. When that love fails, then is the deepest abyss of misery reached. I do not say that Elinor was happy in this dreadful breaking up of her life, or that her heart did not go back, with those relentings which are the worst part of every disruption, to the man who had broken her heart and unsettled her nature. The remembrance of him in his better moments would flash upon her, and bear every resentment away. Dreadful thoughts of how she might herself have done otherwise, have rendered their mutual life better, would come over her; and next moment recollections still more terrible of what he had done and said, the scorn she had borne, the insults, the neglect, and worst of all the complicity he had forced upon her, by which he had made her guilty when she knew and feared nothing—when these thoughts overcame her, as they did twenty times in a day, for it is the worst of such troubles that they will not be settled by one struggle, but come back and back, beginning over again at the same point, after we have wrestled through them, and have thought that

we had come to a close—when these thoughts, I say, overcame her, she would rush to the room in which the baby held his throne, and press him to the heart which was beating so hotly, till it grew calm. And in the midst of all to sit down by the fire with the little atom of humanity in her lap, and see it spread and stretch its rosy limbs, would suffice to bring again to her face that beatitude which had filled John Tatham with wonder unspeakable. She took the baby and laid him on her heart to take the pain away: and so after a minute or two there was no more question of pain, but of happiness, and delicious play, and the raptures of motherhood. How strange were these things! She could not understand it herself, and fortunately did not try, but accepted that solace provided by God. As for Mrs. Dennistoun, she made no longer any pretences to herself, but allowed herself, as John had advised, to take her blessedness frankly without hypocrisy. When Elinor's dear face was veiled by misery, her mother was sympathetically miserable, but at all other moments her heart sang for joy. She had her child again, and she had her child's child, an endless occupation, amusement,

and delight. All this might come to an end—who could tell when?—but for the moment her house was no more lonely, the requirements of her being were satisfied. She had her Elinor—what more was to be said? And yet there was more to be said, for in addition there was the boy.

This was very well so far as the interior of the house and of their living was concerned, but very soon other difficulties arose. It had been Mrs. Dennistoun's desire, when she returned home, to communicate some modified version of what had happened to the neighbours around. She had thought it would not only be wise, but easier for themselves, that their position should be understood in the little parish society which, if it did not know authoritatively, would certainly inquire and investigate and divine, with the result of perhaps believing more than the truth, perhaps setting up an entirely fictitious explanation which it would be impossible to set aside, and very hard to bear. It is the worst of knowing a number of people intimately, and being known by them from the time your children were in their cradles, that every domestic incident requires some sort of explanation to this close little circle of spectators. But Elinor, who had not the experience of her

mother in such matters, nor the knowledge of life, made a strenuous opposition to this. She would not have anything said. It was better, she thought, to leave it to their imagination, if they chose to interfere with their neighbours' concerns and imagine anything. 'But why should they occupy themselves about us? And they have no imaginations,' she said, with a contempt of her neighbours which is natural to young people, though very unjustifiable. 'But, my darling,' Mrs. Dennistoun would say, 'the position is so strange. There are not many young women who—— And there must be some way of accounting for it. Let us just tell them——'

'For heaven's sake, mamma, tell them nothing! I have come to pay you a long visit, after my neglect of you for these two years, which, of course, they know well enough. What more do they want to know? It is a very good reason: and while baby is so young of course it is far better for him to be in a settled home, where he can be properly attended to, than moving about. Isn't that enough?'

'Well, Elinor, at least you will let me say as much as that——'

'Oh, they can surely make it out for themselves.

What is the use of always talking a matter over, to lead to a little more, and a little more, till the appetite for gossip is satisfied? Surely, in our circumstances, least said is soonest mended,' Elinor said, with that air of superior understanding which almost always resides in persons of the younger generation. Mrs. Dennistoun said no more to her, but she did take advantage of the explanation thus suggested. She informed the anxious circle at the Rectory that Elinor had come to her on a long visit, 'partly for me, and partly for the baby,' she said, with one of those smiles which are either the height of duplicity, or the most pathetic evidence of self-control, according as you choose to regard them. 'She thinks she has neglected her mother, though I am sure I have never blamed her; and she thinks—of which there can be no doubt—that to carry an infant of that age moving about from place to place is the worst thing in the world; and that I am very thankful she should think so, I need not say.'

'It is very nice for you, dear Mrs. Dennistoun,' Mrs. Hudson said.

'And a good thing for Elinor,' said Alice, 'for she is looking very poorly. I have always heard

that fashionable life took a great deal out of you if you are not quite brought up to it. I am sure I couldn't stand it,' the young lady said with fervour, who had never had that painful delight in her power.

'That is all very well,' said the Rector, rubbing his hands, 'but what does Mr. Compton say to it? I don't want to say a word against your arrangements, my dear lady, but you know there must be some one on the husband's side. Now, I am on the husband's side, and I am sorry for the poor young man. I hope he is going to join his wife. I hope, excuse me for saying it, that Elinor—though we are all so delighted to see her—will not forsake him, for too long.'

And then Mrs. Dennistoun felt herself compelled to embroider a little upon her theme.

'He has to be a great deal abroad during this year,' she said; 'he has a great many things to do. Elinor does not know when he will be—home. That is one reason——'

'To be sure, to be sure,' the Rector said, rubbing his hands still more, and coming to her aid just as she was breaking down. 'Something diplomatic, of course. Well, we must not inquire into the secrets of the State. But what an ease

to his mind, my dear lady, to think that his wife and child will be safe with you while he's away!'

Mary Dale, not being present, could not of course say anything. She was a person who was always dreadfully well informed. It was a comfort unspeakable that at this moment she was away!

This explanation made the spring pass quietly enough, but not without many questions that brought the blood to Elinor's face. When she was asked by some one, for the first time, 'When do you expect Mr. Compton, Elinor?' the sudden wild flush of colour which flooded her countenance startled the questioner as much as the question did herself. 'Oh, I beg your pardon!' said the injudicious but perfectly innocent seeker for information. I fear that Elinor fell upon her mother after this, and demanded to know what she had said. But as Mrs. Dennistoun was innocent of anything but having said that Philip was abroad, there was no satisfaction to be got out of that. Some time after, one of the Miss Hills congratulated Elinor, having seen in the papers that Mr. Compton was returning to town for the season. 'I suppose, dear Elinor, we shan't have you with us much longer,' this lady

said. And then it became known at the Cottage that Mary Dale was returning to the Rectory. This was the last aggravation, and Elinor, who had now recovered her strength and energy, and temper along with it, received the news with an outburst of impatience which frightened her mother. 'You may as well go through the parish and ring the bell, and tell everybody everything,' she said. 'Mary Dale will have heard all, and a great deal more than all. She will come with her budget and pour it out far and wide; she will report scenes that never took place: and quarrels, and all that—that woman insinuated to John—and she will be surrounded with people who will shake their heads, and sink their voices when we come in, and say, "Poor Elinor!" I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it,' she cried.

'My darling! that was bound to come sooner or later. We must set our faces like a rock, and look as if we were unaware of anything——'

'I cannot look as if I were unaware. I cannot meet all their cruel eyes. I can see, now, the smile on Mary Dale's face, that will say, "I told you so." I shall hear her say it even when I am in my room, with the combe between. I know

exactly how she will say it—"If Elinor had listened to me——"'

'Elinor,' said poor Mrs. Dennistoun, 'I cannot contradict you, dear. It will be so—but none of them are cruel, not even Mary Dale. They will make their remarks—who could help it? we should ourselves if it were some one else's case: but they will not be cruel—don't think so—they will be full of sympathy——'

'Which is a great deal worse,' Elinor said, in her unreason; 'the one might be borne, but the other I will not endure. Sympathy, yes! They will all be sorry for me—they will say they knew how it would be. Oh, I know I have not profited as I ought by what has happened to me. I am unsubdued. I am as impatient and as proud as ever. It is quite true, but it cannot be mended. It is more than I can bear.'

'My darling,' said her mother, again. 'We all say that in our trouble, and yet we know that we have got to bear it all the same. It is intolerable—one says that a thousand times—and yet it has to be put up with. All the time that we have been flattering ourselves that nobody took any notice it has been a delusion, Elinor. How could it be otherwise? We must set our faces——'

'Not I, mamma!' she said. 'Not I! I must go away——'

'Go away? Elinor!'

'Among strangers; where nobody has heard of me before—where nobody can make any remark. To live like this, among a crowd of people who think they ought to know everything that one is doing—who are nothing to you, and yet whom you stand in awe of and must explain everything to!—it is this that is intolerable. I cannot, cannot bear it. Mother, I will take my baby, and I will go away——'

'Where?' said Mrs. Dennistoun, with all the colour fading out of her face. What panic had taken her I cannot tell. She grew pale to her lips, and the words were almost inaudible which she breathed forth. I think she thought for a moment that Elinor's heart had turned, that she was going back to her husband to find refuge with him from the strife of tongues which she could not encounter alone. All the blood went back upon the mother's heart—yet she set herself to suppress all emotion, and if this should be so, not to oppose it—for was it not the thing of all others to be desired—the thing which everybody would approve, the reuniting of those whom God

had put together? Though it might be death to her, not a word of opposition would she say.

'Where? how can I tell where—anywhere, anywhere out of the world,' cried Elinor, in the boiling tide of her impatience and wretchedness. 'Where nobody ever heard of us before, where there will be no one to ask—no one to require a reason; where we should be free to move when we please and do as we please. Let me go, mother. It seemed too dear, too peaceful to come home, but now home itself has become intolerable. I will take my baby and I will go—to the farthest point the railway can take me to—with no servant to betray me, not even an address. Mother, let me go away and be lost; let me be as if I had never been.'

'And me—am I to remain behind to bear the brunt?'

'And you—mamma! Oh, I am the most unworthy creature. I don't deserve to have you, I that am always giving you pain. Why should I unroot you from your place where you have lived so long—from your flowers, and your landscape, and your pretty rooms that were always

a comfort to think of in that horrible time when I was away? I always liked to think of you here, happy and quiet, in the place you had chosen.'

'Flowers and landscapes are pretty things,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, whose colour had begun to come again a little, 'but they don't make up for one's children. We must not do anything rashly, Elinor; but if what you mean is really that you will go away to a strange place among strangers——'

'What else could I mean?' Elinor said, and then she in her turn grew pale. 'If you thought I could mean that I would go—back——'

'Oh, my darling, my darling! God knows if we are right or wrong—I am not to advise you so, or you not to take my advice. Elinor, it is my duty, and I will say it though it were to break my heart. There only could you avoid this strife of tongues. John spoke the truth. He said, as the boy grew up we should have—many troubles. I have known women endure everything that their children might grow up in a natural situation, in their proper sphere. Think of this—I am saying it against my own interest, against my own heart. But think of it, Elinor. Whatever

you might have to bear, you would be in your natural place.'

Elinor received this agitated address standing up, holding her head high, her nostrils expanded, her lips apart. 'Have you quite done, mother?' she said.

Mrs. Dennistoun made an appealing movement with her hands, and sank, without any power to add a word, into a chair.

'I am glad you said it against your heart. Now you must feel that your conscience is clear. Mother, if I had to wander the world from place to place, without even a spot of ground on which to rest my foot, I would never, never do what you say. What! take my child to grow up in that tainted air; give him up to be taught such things as they teach! Never, never, never! His natural place, did you say? I would rather the slums of London were his natural place. He would have some chance there! If I could bear it for myself, yet I could not for him—for him most of all. I will take him up in my arms. Thank God, I am strong now and can carry him—and go away—among strangers, I don't care where—where there can be no questions and no remarks.'

'But not without me, Elinor!'

'Oh, mother, mother! What a child I am to you, to rend your heart as I have done, and now to tear you out of your house and home!'

'My home is where my children are,' Mrs. Dennistoun said: and then she made a little pause. 'But we must think it over, Elinor. Such a step as this must not be taken rashly. We will ask John to come down and advise us. My dear——'

'No, mother, not John or any one. I will go first if you like and find a place, and you will join me after. That woman' (it was poor Mary Dale, who was indeed full of information, but meant no harm) 'is coming directly. I will not wait here to see her, or their faces after she has told them all the lies she will have heard. I am not going to take advice from any one. Let me alone, mother. I must, I must go away.'

'But not by yourself, Elinor,' Mrs. Dennistoun said.

This was how it happened that John Tatham, who had meant to go down to the Cottage the very next Saturday to see how things were going, was driven into a kind of stupefaction one morning in May by a letter which reached him from the North,

a letter conveying news so unexpected and sudden, so unlike anything that had seemed possible, that he laid it down when it was half read with a gasp of astonishment, unable to believe his eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was Mrs. Dennistoun whose letter brought John Tatham such dismay. It was dated Lakeside, Waterdale, Penrith—an address with which he had no associations whatever, and which he gazed at blankly for a moment before he attempted to read the letter, not knowing how to connect it with the well-known writing which was as familiar as the common day.

'You will wonder to see this address,' she wrote. 'You will wonder still more, dear John, when I tell you we have come here for good. I have left the Cottage in an agent's hands with the hope of letting it. Windyhill is such a healthy place that I hope somebody will soon be found to take it. You know Elinor would not let me make any explanation. And the constant questions and allu-

sions to *his* movements which people had seen in the papers, and so forth, had got on her nerves, poor child. You can understand how easily this might come about. At last she got that she could not bear it longer. Mary Dale, who always lives half the year with her sister at the Rectory, was coming back. You know it was she who brought the first tale about him, and she knows, I think, all the gossip that ever was got up about any one. Poor Elinor — though I don't believe Mary had any bad meaning; and it would, alas! have been for all our good had we listened to what she said —Elinor cannot bear her; and when she heard she was coming, she declared she would take her baby and go away. I tried to bring her to reason, but I could not. Naturally it was she who convinced me—you know the process, John. Indeed, in many things I can see it is the best thing we could do. I am not supremely attached to Windyhill. The Cottage had got to be very homelike after living in it so long, but home is where those are whom one loves. And to live among one set of people for so many years, if it has great advantages, has at the same time very great disadvantages too. You can't keep anything to yourself. You must explain every step you take, and every-

thing that happens to you. This is a lovely country, a little cold as yet, and a little damp perhaps, being so near the lake—but the mountains are beautiful, and the air delicious. Elinor is out all the day long, and baby grows like a flower. You must come and see us as soon as ever you can. That is one dreadful drawback, that we shall not have you running up and down from Saturday to Monday: and I am afraid you will be vexed with us that we did not take your advice first—you, who have always been our adviser. But Elinor would not hear a word of any advice. I think she was afraid you would disapprove: and it would have been worse to fly in your face if you had disapproved than to come away without consulting you: and you know how impetuous she is. At all events the die is cast. Write kindly to her; don't say anything to vex her. You can let yourself out, if you are very angry, upon me.

'One thing more. She desires that if you write you should address her as *Mrs. Compton* only, no Honourable. That might attract attention, and what we desire is to escape notice altogether, which I am sure is a thing you will thoroughly understand, now that we have trans-

planted ourselves so completely. Dear John, form the most favourable idea you can of this sudden step, and come and see us as soon as it is possible.

'Yours affectly.,

'M. D.'

To say that John was thunderstruck by this letter is to describe his sensations mildly, for he was for a time bitterly angry, wounded, disappointed, disturbed to the bottom of his soul; but perhaps if truth were told it could scarcely be said that he disapproved. He thought it over, which he naturally did all that day, to the great detriment of his work, first with a sort of rage against Elinor and her impetuosity, which presently shaded down into understanding of her feelings, and ended in a sense that he might have known it from the first, and that really no other conclusion was possible. He came gradually to acquiesce in the step the ladies had taken. To have to explain everything to the Hudsons, and Hills, and Mary Dales, to open up your most sacred heart in order that they might be able to form a theory sufficient for their outside purposes of your motives and methods, or, what was perhaps worse still—to know that they were on the watch,

guessing what you did not tell them, putting things together, explaining this and that in their own way—would have been intolerable. 'That is the good of having attached friends,' John exclaimed to himself, very unjustly: for it is human nature that is to blame, if there is any blame attaching to an exercise of ingenuity so inevitable. As a matter of fact, when Miss Dale brought the true or something like the true account to Windyhill, the warmth of the sympathy for Elinor, the wrath of the whole community with her unworthy husband, was almost impassioned. Had she been there it would not have been possible for those good people altogether to conceal from her how sorry and how indignant they were; even perhaps there might have been some who could not have kept out of their eyes, who must have betrayed in some word or shake of the head the 'I told you so' which is so dear to human nature. But how was it possible that they could remain uninterested, unaffected by the trouble in the midst of them, or even appear to be so? John, like Elinor, threw a fiery dart of impatience at the country neighbours, not allowing that everywhere, in the greatest town, in the most cosmopolitan community, this would have been the same. 'The

chattering gossips!' he said, as if a club would not have been a great deal worse, as if indeed his own club, vaguely conscious of a connection by marriage between him and the dis-Honourable Phil, had not discussed it all, behind his back, long ago.

But on the whole John was forced not to disapprove. To say that he went the length of approving would be too much, and to deny that he launched forth a tremendous letter upon Mrs. Dennistoun, who always bore the brunt, is more than my conscience would permit. He did do this, throwing out, as the French say, fire and flame, but a few days after followed it up by a much milder letter (need I say this was addressed to Elinor?) allowing that he understood their motives, and that perhaps, from their own point of view, they were not so very much to blame. 'You will find it very damp, very cold, very different from Windyhill,' he said, with a sort of savage satisfaction. But as it happened to be unusually good weather among the lakes when his letter came, this dart did not do much harm. And that John felt the revolution in his habits consequent upon this move very much, it would be futile to deny. To have nowhere to go to freely when he

pleased from Saturday to Monday (he had at least a score of places, but none like the Cottage) made a wonderful difference in his life. But perhaps when he came to think of it soberly, as he did so often in the brilliant Saturday afternoons of early summer, when the sunshine on the trees made his heart a little sick with the idea that he had, as he said to himself, nowhere to go to, he was not sure that the difference was not on the whole to his advantage. A man perhaps should not have it in his power to enjoy, in the most fraternal intimacy, the society of another man's wife whenever he pleased, even if to her he was, as he knew, of as little importance (notwithstanding that she was, as she would have said, so fond of John) as the postman, say, or any other secondary (yet sufficiently interesting) figure in the country neighbourhood. John knew in his heart of hearts that this was not a good thing nor a wholesome thing for him. He was not a man, as has been said, who would ever have hurried events, or insisted upon appropriating a woman, even when he loved her, and securing her as his very own. He would always have been able to put that off, to subordinate it to the necessity of getting on in the world, and securing his position:

and he was by no means sure when he questioned his own heart (which was a thing he did seldom, knowing, like a wise man, that that shifty subject often made queer revelations, and was not at all an easy object to cross-examine), that the intercourse which he had again dropped into with Elinor was not on the whole as much as he required. There was no doubt that it kept him alive from one period to another; kept his heart moderately light and his mind wonderfully contented—as nothing else had ever done. He looked forward to his fortnightly or monthly visit to the Cottage (sometimes one, and sometimes the other; he never indulged himself so far as to go every week), and it gave him happiness enough to tide over all the dull moments between: and if anything came in his way and detained him, even from his usual to a later train, he was ridiculously, absurdly angry. What right had he to feel so in respect to another man's wife? What right had he to watch the child—the child whom he disliked so much, to begin with—developing its baby faculties with an interest he was half ashamed of, but which went on increasing? Another man's wife and another man's child. He saw now that it was not a wholesome thing for

him, and he could never have given it up had they remained. It had become too much a part of his living; should he not be glad therefore that they had taken it into their own hands, and gone away? When it suddenly occurred to John, however, that this perhaps had some share in the ladies' hasty decision, that Mrs. Dennistoun perhaps (all that was objectionable was attributed to this poor lady) had been so abominably clear-sighted, so odiously presuming as to have suspected this, his sudden blaze of anger was *foudroyant.* Perhaps she had settled upon it for his sake, to take temptation out of his way. John could scarcely contain himself when this view of the case flashed upon him, although he was quite aware for himself that though it was a bitter wrench yet it was perhaps good for him that Elinor should go away.

It was probably this wave of fierce and, as we are aware, quite unreasonable anger rushing over him that produced the change which everybody saw in John's life about this time. It was about the beginning of the season when people's enjoyments begin to multiply, and for the first time in his life John plunged into society like a very novice. He went everywhere. By this time he

had made a great start in life, had been brought into note in one or two important cases, and was, as everybody knew, a young man very well thought of, and likely to do great things at the Bar; so that he was free of many houses, and had so many invitations for his Sundays that he could well afford to be indifferent to the loss of such a humble house as the Cottage at Windyhill. Perhaps he wanted to persuade himself that this was the case, and that there really was nothing to regret. And it is certain that he did visit a great deal during that season at one house where there were two or three agreeable daughters; the house, indeed, of Sir John Gaythorne, who was Solicitor-General at that time, and a man who had always looked upon John Tatham with a favourable eye. The Gaythornes had a house near Dorking, where they often went from Saturday to Monday with a few choice *convives*, and 'picnicked' as they themselves said, but it was a picnicking of a highly comfortable sort. John went down with them the very Saturday after he received that letter—the Saturday on which he had intended to go to Windyhill. And the party was very gay. To compare it for a moment with the humdrum family at the Cottage would have

been absurd. The Gaythornes prided themselves on always having pleasant people with them, and they had several remarkably pleasant people that day, among whom John himself was welcomed by most persons; and the family themselves were lively and agreeable to a high degree. A distinguished father, a very nice mother, and three charming girls, up to everything and who knew everybody; who had read or skimmed all the new books of any importance, and had seen all the new pictures; who could talk of serious things as well as they could talk nonsense, and who were good girls to boot, looking after the poor, and visiting at hospitals in the intervals of their gaieties, as was then the highest fashion in town. I do not for a moment mean to imply that the Miss Gaythornes did their good work because it was the fashion: but the fact that it is the fashion has liberated many girls, and allowed them to carry out their natural wishes in that way, who otherwise would have been restrained and hampered by parents and friends, who would have upbraided them with making themselves remarkable, if in a former generation they had attempted to go to Whitechapel or St. Thomas's with any active intentions. And Elinor had never done

anything of this kind, any more than she had pursued music almost as a profession, which was what Helena Gaythorne had done; or learned to draw, like Maud (who once had a little thing in the Royal Academy); or studied the classics, like Gertrude. John thought of her little tunes as he listened to Miss Gaythorne's performance, and almost laughed out at the comparison. He was very fond of music, and Miss Gaythorne's playing was something which the most cultivated audience might have been glad to listen to. He was ashamed to confess to himself that he liked the 'tunes' best. No, he would not confess it even to himself; but when he stood behind the performer listening, it occurred to him that he was capable of walking all the miles of hill and hollow which divided the one place from the other, only for the inane satisfaction of seeing that baby spread on Elinor's lap, or hearing her play to him one of her 'tunes.'

He went with the Gaythornes to their country-place twice in the month of June, and dined at the house several times, and was invited on other occasions, becoming, in short, one of the *habitués* when there was anything going on in the house —till people began to ask, which was it? It was

thought generally that Helena was the attraction, for John was known to be a musical man, always to be found where specially good music was going. Some friends of the family had even gone so far as to say among themselves what a good thing it was that dear Helena's lot was likely to be cast with one who would appreciate her gift. 'It generally happens in these cases that a girl marries somebody who does not know one note from another,' they said to each other. When, all at once, John flagged in his visits; went no more to Dorking; and finally ceased to be more assiduous or more remarked than the other young men who were on terms of partial intimacy at the Gaythorne house. He had, indeed, tried very hard to make himself fall in love with one of Sir John's girls. It would have been an excellent connection, and the man might think himself fortunate who secured any one of the three for his wife. Proceeding from his certainty on these points, and also a general liking for their company, John had gone into it with a settled purpose, determined to fall in love if he could; but he found that the thing was not to be done. It was a pity; but it could not be helped. He was in a condition now when it

would no longer be rash to marry, and he knew now that there was the making of a domestic man in him. He never could have believed that he would take an interest in the sprawling of the baby upon its mother's knee, and he allowed to himself that it might be sweet to have that scene taking place in a house of his own. Ah! but the baby would have to be Elinor's. It must be Elinor who should sit on that low chair with the firelight on her face. And that was impossible. Helena Gaythorne was an exceedingly nice girl, and he wished her every success in life (which she attained some time after by marrying Lord Ballinasloe, the eldest son of the Earl of Athenree, a marriage which everybody approved), but he could not persuade himself to be in love with her, though with the best will in the world.

During this time he did not correspond much with his relations in the country. He had, indeed, some letters to answer from his father, in which the interrogatories were very difficult: 'Where has Mary Dennistoun gone? What's become of Elinor and her baby? Has that fashionable fellow of a husband deserted her? What's the meaning of the move altogether?' And, 'Mind you keep yourself out of it,' his father wrote. John had

great trouble in wording his replies so as to convey as little information as possible. 'I believe Aunt Mary has got a house somewhere in the North, probably to suit Elinor, who would be able to be more with her if she were in that neighbourhood.' (It must be confessed that he thought this really clever as a way of getting over the question.) 'As for Compton, I know very little about him. He was never a man much in my way.' Mr. Tatham's household saw nothing remarkable in these replies; upon which, however, they built an explanation, such as it was, of the other circumstances. They concluded that it must be in order to be near Elinor that Mrs. Dennistoun had gone to the North, and that it was a very good thing that Elinor's husband was not a man who was in John's way. 'A scamp, if I ever saw one!' Mr. Tatham said. 'But what's that Jack says about Gaythorne? Mary, I remember Gaythorne years ago; a capital friend for a young man. I'm glad your brother's making such nice friends for himself; far better than mooning about that wretched little cottage with Mary Dennistoun and her girl.'

CHAPTER XXX.

It happened thus that it was not till the second autumn after the settlement of the ladies in Waterdale, when all the questions had died out, and there was no more talk of them, except on occasions when a sudden recollection cropped up among their friends at Windyhill, that John Tatham paid them his first visit. He had been very conscientious in his proposed bestowal of himself. Perhaps it is scarcely quite complimentary to a woman when she is made choice of by a man who is consciously to himself 'on the outlook,' thinking that he ought to marry, and investigating all the suitable persons about with an eye to finding one who will answer his requirements. This sensible way of approaching the subject of matrimony does not somehow commend itself to our insular notions. It is the right way in every

country except our own, but it has a cold-blooded look to the Anglo-Saxon; and a girl is not flattered (though perhaps she ought to be) by being the subject of this sensible choice. 'As if I were a housekeeper or a cook!' she is apt to say, and is far better pleased to be fallen in love with in the most rash and irresponsible way than to be thus selected from the crowd: though that, everybody must allow, after due comparison and inspection, is by far the greater compliment. John having arrived at the conclusion that it would be better for him in many ways to marry, and specially in the way of Elinor, fortifying him for ever from all possible complications, and making it possible for him to regard her evermore with the placid feelings of a brother, which was, he expected, to be the consequence—worked at the matter really with great pertinacity and consistency. He kept his eyes open upon the whole generation of girls whom he met with in society. When he went abroad during the long vacation (instead of going to Lakeside, as he was invited to do), he directed his steps rather to the fashionable resorts, where families disport themselves at the foot of the mountains, than to the Alpine heights where he had generally found a more

robust amusement. And wherever he went he bent his attention on the fairer portion of the creation, the girls who fill all the hotels with the flutter of their fresh toilettes and the babble of their pleasant voices. It was very mean and poor of him, seeing he was a mountaineer himself – but still it must be recorded that the only young ladies he systematically neglected were those in very short petticoats, with very sunburnt faces and nails in their boots, who ought to have been most congenial to him as sharing his own tastes. It is said, I don't know with what truth, that at Ouch, or Interlachen, or some other of the most mundane and banal resorts of the tourists, he came upon one girl who he thought might make him a suitable wife: and that, though with much moderation and prudence, he more or less followed her party for some time, meeting them over and over again, with expressions of astonishment, round the most well-known corners, and persisting for a considerable time in this quest. But whether he ever came the length of proposing at all, or whether the young lady was engaged beforehand, or if she thought the prospect of making a suitable wife not good enough, I cannot say, and I doubt whether any

one knows—except, of course, the parties immediately concerned. It is very clear, at all events, that it came to nothing. John did not altogether give it up, I fancy, for he went a great deal into society still, especially in that *avant saison*, which people who live in London declare to be the most enjoyable, and when it is supposed you can enjoy the best of company at your ease without the hurry and rush of the summer crowd. He would have been very glad, thankful, indeed, if he could have fallen in love. How absurd to think that any silly boy can do it, to whom it is probably nothing but a disadvantage and the silliest of pastimes, and that he, a reasonable man with a good income, and arrived at a time of life when it is becoming and rational to marry, could not do it, let him try as he would! There was something ludicrous in it, when you came to think, as well as something very depressing. Mothers who wanted a good position for their daughters divined him, and many of them were exceedingly civil to John, this man in search of a wife; and many of the young ladies themselves divined him, and with the half indignation, half mockery, appropriate to the situation, were some of them not unaverse to profit by it, and accord-

ingly turned to him their worst side in the self-consciousness produced by that knowledge. And thus the second year turned round towards the wane, and John was farther from success than ever.

He said to himself then that it was clear he was not a marrying man. He liked the society of ladies well enough, but not in that way. He was not made for falling in love. He might very well, he was aware, have dispensed with that tradition, and found an excellent wife, who would not at all have insisted upon it from her side. But he had his prejudices, and could not do this. Love he insisted upon, and love would not come. Accordingly, when the second season was over he gave up both the quest and the idea, and resolved to think of marrying no more, which was a sensible relief to him. For indeed he was exceedingly comfortable as he was; his chambers were excellent, and he did not think that any street or square in Belgravia would have reconciled him to giving up the Temple. He had excellent servants, a man and his wife, who took the greatest care of him. He had settled into a life which was arranged as he liked, with much freedom, and yet an agreeable routine which John was too wise to despise. He relinquished

the idea of marrying then and there. To be sure there is never any prophesying what may happen. A little laughing gipsy of a girl may banish such a resolution out of a man's mind in the twinkling of an eye, at any moment. But short of such accidents as that, and he smiled at the idea of anything of the kind, he quite made up his mind on this point with a great sensation of relief.

It is curious how determined the mind of the English public at least is on this subject—that the man or woman who does not marry (especially the woman, by-the-bye) has an unhappy life, and that a story which does not end in a wedding is no story at all, or at least ends badly, as people say. It happened to myself on one occasion to put together in a book the story of some friends of mine, in which this was the case. They were young, they were hopeful, they had all life before them, but they did not marry. And when the last chapter came to the consciousness of the publisher he struck, with the courage of a true Briton, not ashamed of his principles, and refused to pay. He said it was no story at all—so beautiful is marriage in the eyes of our countrymen. I hope, however, that nobody will think

any harm of John Tatham, because he concluded, after considerable and patient trial, that he was not a marrying man. There is no harm in that. A great number of those Catholic priests whom it was the habit in my youth to commiserate deeply, as if they were vowed to the worst martyrdom, lived very happy lives in their celibacy and preferred it, as John Tatham did. It will be apparent to the reader that he really preferred it to Elinor, while Elinor was in his power. And though afterwards it gave a comfort and grace to his life to think that it was his faithful but subdued love for Elinor which made him a bachelor all his days, I am by no means certain that this was true. Perhaps he never would have made up his mind had she remained always within his reach. Certain it is that he was relieved when he found that to give up the idea of marriage was the best thing for him. He adopted the conclusion with pleasure. His next brother had already married, though he was younger than John; but then he was a clergyman, which is a profession naturally tending to that sort of thing. There was, however, no kind of necessity laid upon him to provide for the continuance of the race. And he was a happy man.

By what sequence of ideas it was that he considered himself justified, having come to this conclusion, in immediately paying his long-promised visit to Lakeside, is a question which I need not enter into, and indeed do not feel entirely able to cope with. It suited him, perhaps, as he had been so long a time in Switzerland last year; and he had an invitation to the far north for the grouse, which he thought it would be pleasant to accept. Going to Scotland or coming from it, Waterdale of course lies full in the way. He took it last on his way home, which was more convenient, and arrived there in the latter part of September, when the hills were golden with the yellow bracken. The Cumberland hills are a little cold, in my opinion, without the heather, which clothes with such a flush of life and brightness our hills in the north. The greenness is chilly in the frequent rain; one feels how sodden and slippery it is—a moisture which does not belong to the heather: but when the brackens have all turned, and the slopes reflect themselves in the tranquil water like hills of gold, then the landscape reaches its perfect point. Lakeside was a white house standing out on a small projection at the head of the lake, com-

manding the group of hills above and part of the winding body of water below, in which all these golden reflections lay. A little steamer passed across the reflected glory and came to a stop not a hundred yards from the gate of the house. It was a scene as unlike as could be conceived to the Cottage at Windyhill: the trees were all glorious in colour; yellow birches like trees made of light, oaks all red and fiery, chestnuts and elms and beeches in a hundred hues. The house was white, with a sort of broad verandah round, supported on pillars, furnishing a sheltered walk below and a broad balcony above, which gave it a character of more importance than perhaps its real size warranted. When John approached there ran out to meet him into the wide gravel drive before the door a little figure upon two sturdy legs, calling out in inarticulate shoutings something that sounded a little like his own name. It was, 'tle John! 'tle John!' made into a sort of song by the baby, nearly two years old, and 'very forward,' as everybody assured the stranger, for his age. Uncle John! his place was thus determined at once by that little potentate and master of the house. Behind the child came Elinor, no longer pale and languid

as he had seen her last, but matured into vigorous beauty, bright-eyed, a little sober as might have become maturer years than hers. Perhaps there was something in the style of her dress that favoured the idea, not of age indeed, but of matronly years, and beyond those which Elinor counted. She was dressed in black, of the simplest description, not of distinctive character like a widow's, yet something like what an ideal widow beyond fashion or conventionalities of woe might wear. It seemed to give John the key-note of the character she had assumed in this new sphere.

Mrs. Dennistoun, who had not changed in the least, stood in the open door. They gave him a welcome such as John had not had, he said to himself, since he had seen them before. They were unfeignedly glad to see him, not wounded (which to think of afterwards wounded him a little) that he had not come sooner, but delighted that he was here now. Even when he went home it was not usual to John to be met at the door in this way by all his belongings. His sister might come running down the stairs when she heard the dog-cart draw up, but that was all. And Mary's eagerness to see him was generally

tempered by the advice she had to give, to say that or not to say this, because of papa. But in the present case it was the sight of himself which was delightful to all, and, above all, though the child could have no reason for it, to the little shouting excited boy. ''Tle John! 'tle John!' What was Uncle John to him? yet his little voice filled the room with shouts of joy.

'What does he know about me, the little beggar, that he makes such a noise in my honour?' said John, touched in spite of himself. 'But I suppose anything is good enough for a cry at that age.'

'Come,' said Elinor, 'you are not to be contemptuous of my boy any longer. You called him *it* when he was a baby.'

'And what is he now?' said John, whose heart was affected by strange emotions, he, the man who had just decided (with relief) that he was not a marrying man. There came over him a curious wave of sensation which he had no right to. If he had had a right to it, if he had been coming home to those who belonged to him, not distantly in the way of cousinship, but by a dearer right, what sensations his would have been! But sitting at the corner of the fire

(which is very necessary in Waterdale in the end of September) a little in the shadow, his face was not very clearly perceptible: though indeed had it been so the ladies would have thought nothing but that John's kind heart was touched, as was so natural, by this sight.

'What is he now? Your nephew! Tell Uncle John what you are now,' said Elinor, lifting her child on her lap; at which the child, between the kisses which were his encouragement and reward, produced, in a large infant voice, very treble, yet simulating hers, the statement, 'Mamma's bhoy.'

'Now, Elinor,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, 'he has played his part beautifully; he has done everything you taught him. He has told you who he is and who Uncle John is. Let him go to his nursery now.'

'Come upstairs, Pippo. Mother will carry her boy,' said Elinor. 'They don't want us any more, these old people. Say good-night to Uncle John, and come to bed.'

'Doodnight, 'tle John,' said the child; which, however, was not enough, for he tilted himself out of his mother's arms and put his rosy face and open mouth, sweet but damp, upon John's

face. This kiss was one of the child's accomplishments. He himself was aware that he had been good, and behaved himself in every way as a child should do, as he was carried off crowing and jabbering in his mother's arms. He had formed a sort of little human bridge between them when he made that dive from Elinor's arms upon John's face. Ah, heaven! if it had been the other way, if the child and the mother had both been his!

'He has grown up very sweet. You may think we are foolish, John; but you can't imagine what a delight that child is. Hasn't he grown up sweet?'

'If you call that grown up!'

'Oh, yes, I know he is only a baby still; but so forward for his age, such a little man, taking care of his mother before he is two years old!'

'What did I hear her call him?' John asked, and it seemed to Mrs. Dennistoun that there was something severe in the sound of his voice.

'He had to be Philip. It is a pretty name, though we may have reason to mourn the day —and belongs to his family. We must not forget that he belongs to a known family, however he may have suffered by it.'

'Then you intend the child to know about his family? I am glad to hear it,' said John, though his voice perhaps was not so sweet as his words.

'Oh, John, that is quite another thing! to know about his family—at two! He has his mother—and me to take care of them both, and what does he want more?'

'But he will not always be two,' said John, the first moment almost of his arrival, before he had seen the house, or said a word about the lake, or anything. She was so disappointed and cast down that she made him no reply.

'I am a wretched croaker,' he said, after a moment, 'I know. I ought after all this time to try to make myself more agreeable; but you must pardon me if this was the first thing that came into my mind. Elinor is looking a great deal better than when I saw her last.'

'Isn't she! another creature. I don't say that I am satisfied, John. Who would be satisfied in such a position of affairs? but while the child is so very young nothing matters very much. And she is quite happy. I do think she is quite happy. And so well—this country suits them both perfectly. Though there is a

good deal of rain, they are both out every day. And little Pippo thrives, as you see, like a flower.'

'That is a very fantastic name to give the child.'

'How critical you are, John!—perhaps it is, but what does it matter at his age? Any name does for a baby. Why, you yourself, as grave as you are now——'

'Don't, aunt,' said John. 'It is a grave matter enough as it appears to me.'

'Not for the present; not for the present, John.'

'Perhaps not for the present: if you prefer to put off all the difficulties till they grow up and crush you. Have there been any overtures, all this time, from—the other side?'

'Dear John, don't overwhelm me all in a moment, in the first pleasure of seeing you, both with the troubles that are behind and the troubles that are in front of us,' the poor lady said.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE weather was fine, which was by no means always a certainty at Waterdale, and Elinor had become a great pedestrian, and was ready to accompany John in his walks, which were long and varied. It was rather a curious test to which to subject himself after the long time he had been away, and the other tests through which he had gone. Never had he been so entirely the companion of Elinor, never before had they spent so many hours together without other society. At Windyhill, indeed, their interviews had been quite unrestrained, but then Elinor had many friends and interests in the parish and outside of it, visits to pay and duties to perform. Now she had her child, which occupied her mornings and evenings, but left her free for hours of rambling among the hills, for long walks, from which she came back

blooming with the fresh air and breezes which had blown her about, ruffling her hair, and stirring up her spirits and thoughts. Sometimes when there has been heavy and premature suffering there occurs thus in the young another spring-time, an almost childhood of natural, it may be said superficial pleasure—the power of being amused, and of enjoying every simple satisfaction without any *arrière pensée* like a child. She had recovered her strength and vigour in the mountain air; and in that freedom of being unknown, with no look ever directed to her which reminded her of the past, no question which brought back her troubles, had blossomed out into that fine youthful maturity of twenty-six, which has already an advantage over the earlier girlhood, the perfection of the woman grown. Elinor had thought of many things, and understood many things, which she had still regarded with the high assumptions of ignorance three or four years ago. And poor John, who had tried so hard to find himself a mate that suited him, who had studied so many girls more beautiful, more accomplished than Elinor, in the hope of goading himself, so to speak, into love, and had not succeeded—and who had felt so strongly that

another man's wife must not occupy so much of his thoughts, nor another man's child give him an unwilling pleasure which was almost fatherly —poor John felt himself placed in a position more trying than any he had known before, more difficult to steer his way through. He had never had so much of her company, and she did not conceal the pleasure it was to her to have some one to walk with, to talk with, who understood what she said and what she did not say, and was in that unpurchasable sympathy with herself which is not to be got by beauty, or by will, or even by love itself, but comes by nature. Elinor felt this with simple pleasure. Without any complicating suspicion, she said, 'What a brother John is! I always felt him so, but now more than ever.' 'You have been, so to speak, brought up together,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, whose mind was by no means so easy on the subject. 'That is the reason, I suppose,' said Elinor, with happy looks.

But poor John said nothing of this kind. What he felt was that he might have spared himself the trouble of all those researches of his—that to roam about looking for a young lady whom he might—not devour, but learn to love, was

pains as unnecessary as ever man took. He still hugged himself, however, over the thought that in no circumstances would he have been a marrying man; that if Elinor had been free he would have found plenty of reasons why they should remain on their present terms and go no farther. As it was clear that they must remain on their present terms, and could go no farther, it was certainly better that he should cherish that thought.

And curiously enough, though they heard so little from the outside world, they had heard just so much as this, that John's assiduities to the Miss Gaythornes (which the reader may remember was the first of all his attempts, and quite antiquated in his recollection) had occasioned remarks, and he had not been many evenings at Lakeside before he was questioned on the subject. Had it been true, or had he changed his mind, or had the lady——? It vexed him that there was not the least little opposition or despite in their tones, such as a man's female friends often show towards the objects of his admiration, not from any feeling on their own part, except that most natural one, which is surprised and almost hurt to find that 'having known me, he could decline'

—a feeling which, in its original expression, was not a woman's sentiment, but a man's, and therefore is, I suppose, common to both sides. But the ladies at Lakeside did not even betray this feeling. They desired to know if there had been anything in it—with smiles, it is true; but Mrs. Dennistoun at the same time expressed her regret warmly.

'We were in great hopes something would come of it, John. Elinor has met the Gaythornes, and thought them very nice; and if there is a thing in the world that would give me pleasure, it would be to see you with a nice wife, John.'

'I am sure I am much obliged to you, aunt; but there really was nothing in it. That is, I was seized with various impulses on the subject, and rather agreed with you: but I never mentioned the matter to any of the Miss Gaythornes. They are charming girls, and I don't suppose would have looked at me. At the same time, I did not feel it possible to imagine myself in love with any of them. That's quite a long time since,' he added, with a laugh.

'Then there have been others since then? Let us put him in the confessional, mother,' cried Elinor, with a laugh. 'He ought not to have

any secrets of that description from you and me.'

'Oh, yes, there have been others since,' said John. 'To tell the truth, I have walked round a great many nice girls asking myself whether I shouldn't find it very delightful to have one of them belonging to me. I wasn't worthy the least attractive of them all, I quite knew; but still I am about the same as other men. However, as I've said, I never mentioned the matter to any of them.'

'Never?' cried Mrs. Dennistoun, feeling a hesitation in his tone.

He laughed, a little shamefaced: 'Well, if you like, I will say hardly ever,' he said. 'There was one that might, perhaps, have taken pity upon me—but fortunately an old lover of hers, who was much more enterprising, turned up before anything decisive had been said.'

'Fortunately, John?'

'Well, yes, I thought so. You see I am not a marrying man. I tried to screw myself up to the point, but it was altogether, I am afraid, as a matter of principle. I thought it would be a good thing, perhaps, to have a wife.'

'That was a very cold-blooded idea. No

wonder you—it never came to anything. That is not the way to go about it,' said Elinor, with the ringing laugh of a child.

And yet her way of going about it had been far from a success. How curious that she did not remember that!

'Yes,' he said, 'I am quite aware that I did not go about it in the right way, but then that was the only way in which it presented itself to me; and when I had made up my mind at last that it was a failure, I confess it was with a certain sense of relief. I suppose I was born to live and die an old bachelor.'

'Do not be so sure of that,' said Elinor. 'Some day or other, in the most unlooked-for moment, the fairy princess will bound upon the scene, and the old bachelor will be lost.'

'We'll wait quite contentedly for that day—which I don't believe in,' he said.

Mrs. Dennistoun did not take any part in the later portion of this discussion; her smile was feeble at the places where Elinor laughed. She said seriously after this fireside conference, when he got up to prepare for dinner, putting her hand tenderly on his shoulder, 'I wish you had found some one you could have loved, John.'

'So did I—for a time,' he said lightly. 'But you see, it was not to be.'

She shook her head, standing against the firelight in the dark room, so that he could not see her face. 'I wish,' she said, 'I wish—that I saw you with a nice wife, John.'

'You might wish—to see me on the woolsack, aunt.'

'Well—and it might come to pass. I shall see you high up—if I live long enough; but I wish I was as sure of the other, John.'

'Well,' he said with a laugh, 'I did my best; but there is no use in struggling against fate.'

No, indeed! how very, very little use there was. He had kept away from them for nearly two years; while he had done his best in the meantime to get a permanent tenant for his heart which should prevent any wandering tendencies. But he had not succeeded; and now if ever a man could be put in circumstances of danger it was he. If he did not appear in time for their walk Elinor would call him. 'Aren't you coming, John?' And she overflowed in talk to him of everything—excepting always of that one dark passage in her life of which she never breathed a word. She asked him about his work, and

about his prospects, insisting upon having everything explained to her—even politics, to which he had a tendency, not without ideas of their use in reaching the higher ranks of his profession. Elinor entered into all with zest and almost enthusiasm. She wrapped him up in her sympathy and interest. There was nothing he did that she did not wish to know about, did not desire to have a part in. A sister in this respect is, as everybody knows, often more full of enthusiasm than a wife, and Elinor, who was vacant of all concerns of her own (except the baby) was delighted to take up these subjects of excitement, and follow John through them, hastening after him on every line of indication or suggestion which he gave—nay, often with her lively intelligence hastening before him, making incursions into undiscovered countries of which he had not yet perceived the importance. They walked over all the country, into woods which were a little damp, and up hill-sides where the scramble was often difficult enough, and along the side of the lake—or, for a variety, went rowing across to the other side, or far down the gleaming water, out of sight, round the wooded corner which, with all its autumnal colours, blazed like a brilliant

sentinel into the air above and the water below. Mrs. Dennistoun watched them, sometimes with a little trouble on her face. She would not say a word to throw suspicions or doubts between them. She would not awaken in Elinor's mind the thought that any such possibilities as arise between two young people free of all bonds could be imagined as affecting her and any man such as her cousin John. Poor John! if he must be the victim, the victim he must be. Elinor could not be disturbed that he might go free. And indeed, what good would it have done to disturb Elinor? it would but have brought consciousness, embarrassment, and a sense of danger where no such sense was. She was trebly protected, and without a thought of anything but the calm yet close relations that had existed so long. He—— but he could take care of himself, Mrs. Dennistoun reflected in despair; he must take care of himself. He was a man and must understand what his own risks and perils were.

'And do you think this plan is a success?' John asked her one day as they were rowing homeward up the lake. The time of his visit was drawing to a close; indeed it had drawn to a close several times, and been lengthened

very unadvisedly, yet very irresistibly as he felt.

Her face grew graver than usual, as with a sudden recollection of that shadow upon her life which Elinor so often seemed to have forgotten. 'As much of a success,' she said, 'as anything of the kind is likely to be.'

'It suits you better than Windyhill?'

'Only in being more out of the world. It is partially out of the world for a great part of the year; but I suppose no place is so wholly. It seems impossible to keep from making acquaintances.'

'Of course,' he said, 'I have noticed. You know people here already.'

'How can we keep from knowing people? Mamma says it is the same thing everywhere. If we lived up in that little house which they say is the highest in England—at the head of the pass—we should meet people I suppose even there.'

'Most likely,' he replied; 'but the same difficulties can hardly arise.'

'You mean we shall not know people so well as at—at home, and will not be compelled to give an account of ourselves whatever we do?

Heaven knows! There is a vicarage here, and there is a squire's house: and there are two or three people besides who already begin to inquire if we are related to So-and-so, if we are the Scotch Dennistouns, or the Irish Comptons, or I don't know what; and whether we are going to Penrith or any other capital city for the winter.' Elinor ended with a laugh.

'So soon?' John said.

'So soon—very much sooner, the first year: with mamma so friendly as she is, and with me so silly, unable to keep myself from smiling at anybody who smiles at me!'

'Poor Elinor!'

'Oh, you may laugh; but it is a real disadvantage. I am sure there was not very much smile in me when we came; and yet, notwithstanding, the first pleasant look is enough for me, I cannot but respond; and I shall always be so, I suppose,' she said with a sigh.

'I hope so, Elinor. It would be an evil day for all of us if you did not respond.'

'For how many, John? For my mother and —ah, you are so good, more like my brother than my cousin—for you, perhaps a little; but what is it to anybody else in the world whether

I smile or sigh? It does not matter, however,' she said, flinging back her head; 'there it is, and I can't help it. If you smile at me I must smile back again—and so we make friends; and already I get a great deal of advice about little Pippo. If we live here till he grows up, the same thing will happen as at the Cottage. We will require to account to everybody for what we do with him—for the school he goes to, and all he does; to explain why he has one kind of training or another; and, in short, all that I ran away from: the world wherever one goes seems to be so much the same.'

'The world is very much the same everywhere; and you cannot get out of it were you to take refuge in a cave on the hill. The best thing is generally to let it know all that can be known, and so save the multitude of guesses it always makes.'

Elinor looked at him for a moment with her lips pressed tightly together and a light in her eyes; then she looked away across the water to the golden hills, and said nothing; but there was a great deal in that look of eager contradiction, yet forced agreement, of determination, above all, with which right and wrong had nothing to do.

'Elinor,' he said, 'do you mean that child to grow up here between your mother and you—in ignorance of all that there is in the world beside you two?'

'That child!' she cried. 'John, I think you dislike my boy; for, of course, it is Pippo you mean.'

'I wish you would not call him by that absurd name.'

'You are hard to please,' she said with an angry laugh. 'I think it is a very sweet little name.'

'The child will not always be a baby,' said John.

'Oh, no: I suppose if we all live long enough he will some time be a—possibly disagreeable man, and punish us well for all the care we have spent upon him,' Elinor said.

'I don't want to make you angry, Elinor——'

'No, I don't suppose you do. You have been very nice to me, John. You have neither scolded me nor given me good advice. I never expected you would have been so forbearing. But I have always felt you must mean to give me a good knock at the end.'

'You do me great injustice,' he said, much

wounded. 'You know that I think only of what is best for you—and the child.'

They were approaching the shore, and Mrs. Dennistoun's white cap was visible in the waning light, looking out for them from the door. Elinor said hastily, 'And the child? I don't think that you care much for the child.'

'There you are mistaken, Elinor. I did not perhaps at first: but I acknowledge that a little thing like that does somehow creep into one's heart.'

Her face, which had been gloomy, brightened up as if a sunbeam had suddenly burst upon it. 'Oh, bless you, John—Uncle John; how good and how kind, and what a dear friend and brother you are! And I such a wretch, ready to quarrel with those I love best! But, John, let me keep quiet, let me keep still, don't make me rake up the past. He is such a baby, such a baby! There cannot be any question of telling him anything for years and years!'

'I thought you were lost,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, calling to them. 'I began to think of all kinds of things that might have happened—of the steamboat running into you, of the boat going on a rock, or——'

'You need not have had any fear when I was with John,' Elinor said with a smile that made him warm at once, like the sun. He knew very well, however, that it was only because he had made that little pleasant speech about her boy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THERE passed after this a number of years of which I can make no record. The ladies remained at Lakeside, seldom moving. When they took a holiday now and then, it was more for the sake of the little community, which, just as in Windyhill, had gathered round them, and which inquired, concerned, 'Are you not going to take a little change?' 'Don't you think, dear Mrs. Dennistoun, your daughter would be the better for a change?' 'Do you really think that a little sea air and variety wouldn't be good for the boy?' Forced by these kind speeches they did go away now and then to unknown seaside places in the north when little Philip was still a child, and to quiet places abroad when he grew a boy, and it was thought a good thing for him to learn languages, and to be taught that

there were other countries in the world besides England. They were absent for one whole winter in France, and another in Germany with this motive, that Philip should learn these languages, which he did *tant bien que mal* with much assistance from his mother, who taught herself everything that she thought the boy should know, and shared his lessons in order to push him gently forward. And on the whole he did very well in this particular of language, showing much aptitude, though not perhaps much application. I would not assert that the ladies, with an opinion very common among women, and also among youth in general, did not rather glory in the thought that he could do almost anything he liked (which was their opinion, and in some degree while he was very young, the opinion of his masters), with the appearance of doing nothing at all. But on the whole, his education was the most difficult matter in which they had yet been engaged. How was he to be educated? His birth and condition pointed to one of the great public schools, and Mrs. Dennistoun, who had made many economies in that retirement, was quite able to give the child what they both called the best education. But

how could they send him to Eton or Harrow? A boy who knew nothing about his parentage or his family, a boy bearing a well-known name, who would be subject to endless questions where he came from, whom he belonged to?—a hundred things which neither in Waterdale nor in their travels had ever been asked of him. What the Waterdale people thought on the subject, or how much they knew, I should not like to inquire. There are ways of finding out everything, and people who possess family secrets are often extraordinarily deceived in respect to what is known and what is not known of those secrets. My own opinion is that there is scarcely such a thing as a secret in the world. If any moment of great revolution comes in your life you generally find that your neighbours are not much surprised. They have known it, or they have suspected it, all along, and it is well if they have not suspected more than the truth. So it is quite possible that these excellent people knew all about Elinor: but Elinor did not think so, which was the great thing.

However, there cannot be any question that Philip's education was a very great difficulty. John Tatham, who paid them a visit soberly from

time to time, but did not now come as of old, never indeed came as on that first occasion when he had been so happy and so undeceived. To be sure, as Philip grew up it was of course impossible for any one to be like that. From the time Pippo was five or six he went everywhere with his mother, her sole companion in general, and when there was a visitor always making a third in the party, a third who was really the first, for he appealed to his mother on every occasion, directed her attention to everything. He only learned with the greatest difficulty that it was possible she should find it necessary to give her attention in a greater degree to any one else. When she said, 'You know, Pippo, I must talk to Uncle John,' Pippo opened great eyes. 'Not more than to me, mamma?' 'Yes, dearest, more than to you for the moment: for he has come a long way to see us, and he will soon have to go away again.' When this was first explained to him, Pippo inquired particularly when his Uncle John was going away, and was delighted to hear that it was to be very soon. However, as he grew older the boy began to take great pleasure in Uncle John, and hung upon his arm when they went out for their walks, and instead of

endeavouring to monopolise his mother, turned the tables upon her by monopolising this the only man who belonged to him, and to whom he turned with the instinct of budding manhood. John too was very willing to be thus appropriated, and it came to pass that now and then Elinor was left out, or left herself out of the calculation, urging that the walk they were planning was too far for her, or too steep for her, or too something, so that the boy might have the enjoyment of the man's society all to himself. This changed the position in many ways, and I am not sure that at first it did not cost Elinor a little thus to stand aside and put herself out of that first place which had always been by all of them accorded to her. But if this was so, it was soon lost in the consideration of how good it was for Pippo to have a man like John to talk to and to influence him in every way. A man like John! That was the thing; not a common man, not one who might teach him the baseness, or the frivolity or the falsehood of the world, but a good man, who was also a distinguished man, a man of the world in the best sense, knowing life in the best sense, and able to modify the boy's conception of what he was to find in the world, as women could never do.

'For after all that can be said, we are not good for much on those points, mother,' Mrs. Compton would say.

'I don't know, Elinor; I doubt whether I would exchange my own ideas for John's,' the elder lady replied.

'Ah, perhaps, mother; but for Pippo his experience and his knowledge will do so much. A boy should not be brought up entirely with women any more than a girl should be with men.'

'I have often thought, my dear,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, 'if in God's providence it had been a girl instead of a boy——'

'Oh!' said the younger mother, with a flush, 'how can you speak—how could you think of any possible child but Pippo? I would not give him for a score of girls.'

'And if he had been a girl you would not have changed him for scores of boys,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, who added after a while, with a curious sense of competition, and a determination to allow no inferiority, 'You forget, Elinor, that my only child is a girl.' The elder lady (whom they began to call the old lady) showed a great deal of spirit in defence of her own.

But Philip was approaching fourteen, and the

great question had to be decided now or never; where was he to be sent to school? It was difficult now to send him to bed to get him out of the way, he who was used to be the person of first importance in the house—in order that the others might settle what was to be his fate. And accordingly the two ladies came downstairs again after the family had separated in the usual way, in order to have their consultation with their adviser. There was now a room in the house furnished as a library in order that Philip might have a place in which to carry on his studies, and where 'the gentlemen' might have their talks by themselves, when there was any one in the house. And here they found John when they stole in one after the other, soft-footed, that the boy might suspect no complot. They had their scheme, it need not be doubted, and John had his. He pronounced at once for one of the great public schools, while the ladies on their part had heard of one in the north, an old foundation as old as Eton, where there was at the moment a headmaster who was quite exceptional, and where boys were winning honours in all directions. There Pippo would be quite safe. He was not likely to meet with anybody who

would put awkward questions, and yet he would receive an education as good as any one's. 'Probably better,' said Elinor: 'for Mr. Sage will have few pupils like him, and therefore will give him the more attention.'

'That means,' said John, 'that the boy will not be among his equals, which is of all things I know the worst for a boy.'

'We are not aristocrats, as you are, John. They will be more than his equals in one way, because many of them will be bigger and stronger than he, and that is what counts most among boys. Besides, we have no pretensions.'

'My dear Elinor,' said John Tatham (who was by this time an exceedingly successful lawyer, member for his native borough, and within sight of a Solicitor-Generalship), 'your modesty is a little out of character, don't you think. There can be no two opinions about what the boy is: an aristocrat—if you choose to use that word, every inch of him—a little gentleman, down to his fingers' ends.'

'Oh, thank you, John,' cried Pippo's inconsistent mother, 'that is the thing of all others that we hoped you would say.'

'And yet you are going to send him among

the farmers' sons. Fine fellows, I grant you, but not of his kind. Have you heard,' he said more gravely, 'that Reginald Compton died last year?'

'We saw it in the papers,' said Mrs. Dennistoun. Elinor said nothing, but turned her head away.

'And neither of the others are married, or likely to marry; one of them is very much broken down——'

'Oh, John, John, for God's sake don't say anything more!'

'I must, Elinor. There is but one good life, and that in a dangerous climate, and with all the risks of possible fighting, between the boy and——'

'Don't, don't, John!'

'And he does not know who he is. He is ignorant of everything, even the fact, the great fact, which you have no right to keep from him——'

'John,' she cried, starting to her feet, 'the boy is mine; I have a right to deal with him as I think best. I will not hear a word you have to say.'

'It is vain to say anything,' said Mrs. Dennistoun; 'she will not hear a word.'

'That is all very well, so far as she is concerned,' said John, 'but I have a part of my own to play. You give me the name of adviser and so forth—a man cannot be your adviser if his mouth is closed before he speaks. I have a right to speak, being summoned for that purpose. I tell you, Elinor, that you have no right to conceal from the boy who he is, and that his father is alive.'

She gave a cry as if he had struck her, and shrank away behind her mother, hiding her face in her hands.

'I am, more or less, of your opinion, John. I have told her the same. While he was a baby it mattered nothing, but now that he is a rational creature with an opinion of his own, like any one of us——'

'Mother,' cried Elinor, 'you are unkind. Oh, you are unkind! What did it matter so long as he was a baby? But now he is just at the age when he would be—if you don't wish to drive me out of my senses altogether, don't say a word more to me of this kind.'

'Elinor,' said John, 'I have said nothing on the subject for many years, though I have thought much: and you must for once hear reason. The

boy belongs—to his father as much as to you. I have said it! I cannot take it back. He belongs to the family of which he may one day be the head. You cannot throw away his birthright. And think, if you let him grow up like this, not even knowing that he has a family or a—unaware whom he belongs to.'

'Have you done, John?' said Elinor, who had made two or three efforts to interrupt, and had been beating her foot impatiently upon the ground.

'If you ask me in that tone, I suppose I must say yes: though I have a great deal more that I should like to say.'

'Then hear me speak,' cried Elinor. 'Of us three at least, I am the only one to whom he belongs. I only have power to decide for him. And I say, No, no: whatever argument there may be, whatever plea you may bring forward, No, and no, and after that No! What! at fourteen, just the age when anything that was said to him would tell the most; when he would learn a lesson the quickest, learn what I would die to keep him from! When he would take everything for gospel that was said to him, when the very charm of—of that unknown name——'

She stopped for a moment to take breath, half choked by her own words.

'And you ought to remember no one has ever laid claim to him. Why should I tell him of one that never even inquired—— No, John, no, no, no! A baby he might have been told, and it would have done him no harm. Perhaps you were right, you and mother, and I was wrong. He might have known it from the first, and thought very little of it, and he may know when he is a man, and his character is formed and he knows what things mean — but a boy of fourteen! Imagine the glamour there would be about the very name; how he would feel we must all have been unjust and the — the other injured. You know from yourself, John, how he clings to you—you who are only a cousin; he knows that, yet he insists upon Uncle John, the one man who belongs to him, and looks up to you, and thinks nothing of any of us in comparison. I like it. I like it!' cried Elinor, dashing the tears from her eyes. 'I am not jealous: but fancy what it would be with the—other, the real, the—— I cannot, cannot, say the word; yes, the father. If it is so with you, what would it be with him?'

John listened with his head bent down, leaning on his hand: every word went to his heart. Yes, he was nothing but a cousin, it was true. The boy did not belong to him, was nothing to him. If the father stepped in, the real father, the man of whom Philip had never heard, in all the glory of his natural rights and the novelty and wonder of his existence, how different would that be from any feeling that could be raised by a cousin, an uncle, with whom the boy had played all his life! No doubt it was true: and Phil Compton would probably charm the inexperienced boy with his handsome, disreputable grace, and the unknown ways of the man of the world. And yet, he thought to himself, there is a perspicacity about children which is not always present in a man. Philip had no precocious instincts to be tempted by his father's habits; he had the true sight of a boy trained amid everything that was noble and pure. Would it indeed be more dangerous now, when the boy was a boy, with all those safeguards of nature, than when he was a man? John kept his mind to this question with the firmness of a trained intelligence, not letting himself go off into other matters, or pausing to feel the sting that was in Elinor's words, the reminder

that though he had been so much, he was still nothing to the family to whom he had consecrated so much of his life, so much now of his thoughts.

'I do not think I agree with you, Elinor,' he said at last. 'I think it would have been better had he always known that his father lived, and who he was, and what family he belonged to; that is not to say that you were to thrust him into his father's arms. And I think now that, though we cannot redeem the past, it should be done as soon as possible, and that he should know before he goes to school. I think the effect will be less now than if the discovery bursts upon him when he is a young man, when he finds, perhaps, as may well be, that his position and all his prospects are changed in a moment, when he may be called upon without any preparation to assume a name and a rank of which he knows nothing.'

'Not a name. He has always borne his true name.'

'His true name may be changed at any moment, Elinor. He may become Lord Lomond, and the heir——'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Dennistoun, growing red,

'that is a chance we have never taken into account.'

'What has that to do with it?' she said. 'Is his happiness and his honour to be put in comparison with a chance, a possibility that may never come true? John, for the sake of everything that is good, let him wait till he is a man, and knows good from evil.'

'It is that I am thinking of, Elinor; a boy of fourteen often knows good from evil much better than a youth of twenty-one, which is, I suppose, what you call a man. My opinion is that it would be better and safer now.'

'No!' she said. 'And no! I will never consent to it. If you go and poison my boy's mind, I will never forgive you, John.'

'I have no right to do anything,' he said; 'it is of course you who must decide, Elinor: I advise only; and I might as well give that up,' he added, 'don't you think? for you are not to be guided by me.'

And she was of course supreme in everything that concerned her son. John, when he could do no more, knew how to be silent; and Mrs. Dennistoun, if not so wise in this respect, was yet more easily silenced than John. And Philip

Compton went to the old grammar-school among the dales, where was the young and energetic headmaster, who, as Elinor anticipated, found this one pupil like a pearl among the pebbles of the shore, and spared no pains to polish him and perfect him in every way known to the ambitious schoolmaster of modern times.

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