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**SOUTHERN FIELD & FIRESIDE,  
NOVELETTE.**

**GERALD GRAY'S WIFE,**

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"BUSY MOMENTS OF AN IDLE WOMAN," "LILY,"

"SYLVIA'S WORLD," etc.

*[Revised by Mrs. Sue Petigrew]*

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# GERALD GRAY'S WIFE.

## CHAPTER I.

A tall, pale, thin woman; she is not very ugly, and she is by no means pretty. Her eyes are large and dark, with thick, long, black lashes, and the shape of her mouth is graceful and classic. These are her only beauties. Even these are only perceived when you study her closely, for the eyes are so stony in their usual expression, so cold, so self-concentrated apparently, so defiant, and so distrustful, and the lips have a way of setting themselves firmly together, from which they rarely relax into the smile which can diffuse a charm over the plain, rigid face. She asks and takes nothing from her dress to redeem her lack of good looks. Her father requires that she should wear rich stuffs, fine laces, handsome jewels. She chooses that she should be a parade for his wealth, just as his houses, and equipages, and plate, and hot-houses are constantly displayed; so to-day, on this wild, sandy beach, she wears a costly muslin gown, each flounce heavy with rare mecklin, and about her thin, sun-burnt wrists are great gold bracelets, and in her ears two pearls are hung, with diamonds encircling them, of which, when her father tossed them in her lap, on her last birthday, he said:

'Here, my girl; these cost a cool three thousand.'

But the rich muslin is carelessly put on, and the shawl she has wrapped about her (for the evening grows chilly,) is a worn old tartan plaid thrown over her head, and gathered up about her throat in dowdy folds, and she has shoved the bracelets out of sight, far up her arms, and the pure, lustrous pearls, which would have been so beautiful touching a snowy throat, I wot of, only make her's browner. So, to see her pacing along this

strip of ocean-beaten land, with low dark clouds veiling the setting sun, the white sea-birds skimming the water crests of the angry waves, and a sullen wind murmuring hoarsely of the storm to come, you might have thought this solitary, sallow, stern woman was some desolate wayfarer, some miserable waif, and stray on Life's ocean; and not Ruth Desborough, the richest and most courted heiress in the whole State.

Ruth Desborough's mother died when she was still a child. She was a gentle, feeble woman, who always seemed to stand in awe of all the luxury which her husband heaped about her. She wore her jewels as if she were afraid of them; Ruth put on hers as if she were ashamed of them. Mrs. Desborough thought wealth a great and glorious thing—something too grand for her to enjoy—she, who had begun life as a nursery governess, and been wooed and won by the stout, jolly, purse-proud Jacob Desborough, long before he made his tremendous speculations, passed for a madman, lowered on the brink of ruin, and then set down his large feet firmly as a *millionaire*.

Of course, Jacob Desborough loved his only child. He saw she was not handsome nor stylish, but she was dutiful to him and proud to all the world. He liked the way she carried herself to the "a-ris-tocrats" as he called his neighbors. He rubbed his huge, red hands, and chuckled when she looked over the heads of the Misses Seymours, and Cecil, and Clare—her companions and *friends*, as such acquaintances are called—and when saucy, smiling, sneering Mrs. Berners asked one day at dinner if the two pictures over the plate-laden sideboard were "family portraits"—they were dame and cavalier in silk and satin, rouge

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and powder—Ruth fixed her unquailing eyes on the pretty questioner, and said calmly:

'Scarcely. Papa is an orphan house boy, and my mother's parents kept a little corner shop. Those portraits were bought for a song, at an auction lately. Their owner was a gambler and a swindler, came to grief, and had to sell his own father and mother. His name was Cressingham.'

Mrs. Berners dropped her eye glass, and colored scarlet. It was but three years since she used to write herself "Rosaline Cressingham." She had not recognized her own grand parents, disposed of by her own uncle.

'Why, you are a Cressingham,' said another guest, as obtuse as some people can be, while the rest of the party were aghast.

'I beg your pardon for my allusion,' said Ruth, with stately courtesy, and changed the conversation.

Ruth was now twenty-six years of age. She had had many offers of marriage—but, although more than one of her suitors would have readily been accepted for her by her father, she had never wavered for one moment.

I often have thought the man bold who dared to address Ruth Desborough. I have often wondered how they went about it. I think all the declarations must have been written ones. I cannot imagine a person of ordinary courage and daring to sit or stand before that steel-faced woman, and make pretty speeches—speeches that, spoken, or on paper, always meant to her mind—"you are very rich, and I want your money, so I'll take you."

That, of course, was the curse of her life; there was the secret source of bitter waters that, from earliest childhood, had sprung up within her, and forcing its way into every vein, had mingled each throb of her heart with its acrid tide. From infancy her ears had been made familiar with the idea. Her father, in the kindly coarseness of his nature, constantly said:

'You mayn't be as pretty nor as smart as some girls, but I'll be hanged if you can't buy as good a husband as the best of them.'

Her husband was to be bought! As a child the idea amused and pleased her. Her dolls were bought for her. French dolls, with painted cheeks and elaborately dressed hair, tiny corsets, and whole suits of clothes; English dolls, just like real babies, with their fat, dimpled necks and infant heads turned on one side, their soft rings of flaxen hair, (not wigs,) and their long robes and caps; then when she grew up, instead of dolls, her papa would buy her a husband—a "true-for-true" husband—yes he would. So she confidenti-

ally said one day to one of her playmates, and this girl, barely ten years of age, answered scornfully:

'Buy a husband, indeed! I would not have a bought husband.'

'Why?'

'Because I heard my mamma say that love can't be bought; and when I grow up and get married I want to be loved,' and the little precocious wife tossed her little nose in the air.

Ruth thought over this remark, and soon she went gravely to her father and repeated it.

Mr. Desborough laughed heartily, and patted her head, and told the story after dinner to his two guests, and they laughed, and Ruth, who was eating grapes at her papa's side, grew angry and sullen, and lifted her large dark eyes from her plate, and looked seriously at both of her father's old comrades, and walked out of the room.

From that day the word "husband" never escaped the child's lips. When Mr. Desborough jested, as he had always done on the subject, she kept a sort of wounded silence; and when she was eighteen, and a ball of great magnificence proclaimed the fact that she was now about to enter the market to buy, and not to be bought, her resolution was taken.

She would live and die Ruth Desborough. No purchased love for her. Since even her own father deemed her unworthy to inspire a passion, she would endure no sweet words, to be paid for in dollars and cents; no lover's vows looking for return in bank stock; no soft glances to match her diamonds.

And the canker of this thought did not extend alone to her views of a wooer's motives. All mankind gradually came under the same leprosy.

She did not reject attentions from men or women, but she decided, with unflinching severity, that every kind word or action was given to the heiress, not the woman. And what she took she paid back scrupulously. To society she extended an unbounded hospitality. She spared no pains that money could bring about to entertain those who entertained her.

On her more familiar acquaintances—friends, she had none—she lavished gifts, seeking carefully to choose what was pleasantest to receive; not as her father would have done, with loud voiced disclosure of his reasons for offering, letting himself be guided by the cost in proportion to the intention. No; but with an inborn delicacy of thought and manner, which often won for her affection and respect—unuttered half the time—for few cared to speak of affection, or respect, or interest, to the cold, reserved, repellant Miss Desborough.

Such were her antecedents. Such was the morbid, unhealthy condition of her mind. No wonder she daily grew less and less sociable to herself and to the world. No wonder that on this evening, when she was restlessly yet earnestly watching sea and sky, she felt that a dreary scene like this better suited her than the gay party which she had left.

Ruth walked on and on. Fate seemed to lead her, and she was following it blindly. The few houses, scattered at unequal distances along the beach, were all far behind her. The low sand hills were getting higher and higher, and although she did not heed it, the tide was rising rapidly.

Suddenly she paused; a boat was making its way through the breakers, crossing from an opposite island. The occupants were evidently trying to land just in front of her. Curiosity caused her to stay and watch it, it looked to be in such danger. Two negroes were laboring at the oars; at the stern a young man held the rudder. The spray dashed over them again and again; now they were on the top of the highest wave—it would surely beach them; but as it receded it carried back the boat, to be tossed to and fro, and to rise again as before.

At length the work was accomplished, and the little bark lay almost "high and dry." The helmsman leaped on shore, gun in hand, and gave his directions in a low, clear, rapid voice to his servants. They were short.

'Drag up the boat beyond high water mark, and get home before the storm if you can. Take my gun, one of you.'

Then he turned and lifted his hat to Ruth. 'Excuse the liberty I take, madam, but it is a wild night for a lady to be abroad; can I offer my escort to your house? My name is Gerald Gray.'

'Thank you,' Ruth said, drawing back with surprise, and in her measured, haughty, unmoved tone, 'I am not far from my home, and it is not yet night.'

'Then,' said the stranger, smiling, 'you must live with the surf-skimmers in the sand, because there is no habitable roof nearer than a mile and a half, to my certain knowledge. There is a regular equinoctial gale coming on, with every dangerous accessory, the moon rises in an hour, but two days past its full, and this is a springtide. Jack! Jim! he continued, calling to his boatmen, 'come on and keep near us. This lady may need your care as well as mine presently.'

'You wish to frighten me,' said Ruth, 'but now I see that I am further from home than I thought. I do not know how I have managed to wander so far without knowing it.'

'Nothing easier when there are no especial landmarks to strike your attention. I have been after birds on Crane Island, intending to return through the back creek to take the last boat for the city, but I wounded a magnificent white crane, it got off, we followed, lost it after all, and a great deal of time with it, so I thought it best to cross over here and trust to my legs. I don't like water in a storm. Any strip of land is better, and a man who has just traversed half Europe on foot must not be daunted by a mile or two of sea beach.'

Miss Desborough made no answer. She thought her self-imposed companion was too free and easy. Who was he? She had never heard of Gerald Gray. In this dim light his outline of feature and figure was graceful and gentlemanly, but might not his offers of service, and his persistence in keeping by her side, be mere the pushing forwardness of some low bred adventurer, than the genuine politeness and kindness of some well born stranger, who would protect her in spite of herself?

She had no fear. In the region where she lived such a crime as robbing her or insulting her would have been, is almost unheard of. But she was not disposed to encourage these attentions, and she bit her lips with worried indignation at her own folly in walking so far and in stopping to watch the boat, which had brought on her this acquaintance.

'Do you see that cloud?' Mr. Gray said, abruptly. 'It travels faster than we can. When it bursts—*gare!* The wind is rising every moment. If you were under shelter I should enjoy this. By Jove! see that wave.'

He caught her in his arms just in time. The huge billow broke a second later over the point of her last footsteps. The wind was wildly tossing about her shawl, and as he set her down again he drew the cords of the plaid together.

'Have you a pin?' he enquired, as naturally and familiarly as if they were on the best terms.

Ruth shook her head; she was getting frightened; she tried to help herself, and dragged the shawl hastily from him. The strong Northeast wind seized it as it had been a feather, whirled it from her hands, and, a moment more, the old tartan would have been careering over the sea. Gerald caught it.

'Look at that; let me arrange it. It will be a shark's blanket before long if you don't take care.'

Tenderly and gently he folded the shawl about her head and shoulders. 'Give me your brooch; that will do to fasten it.'

Ruth silently gave him her brooch; he glanced at the pin to see if it was firm, stuck it in, and then resolutely drew her arm through his.

'We are losing time, and time is precious. I am sorry to hurry you so, but indeed we must make haste. This breeze will take you off your feet if it keeps on at this rate. Don't hesitate to lean on me; and if you get very tired I will try another plan.'

He was silent for a while after this, but, as the storm rapidly increased in its might, he glanced uneasily once or twice around him, and called to his servants to keep close. The sand was sounding before the breath of the blast, stinging their feet and faces; the angry clouds almost seemed to touch their heads—so low, and dark, and thick, and close they gathered; the black waves lashed themselves furiously into whitest foam, and a deep, distant, sullen roar sounded like underground thunder.

'What is that noise?' asked Ruth; 'it frightens me more than anything else.'

'It is the water coming over the bar—the ground-swell. It has a mysterious sound, and it means mischief. But we are nearing the settlement now. I have not the honor of knowing you—where shall I take you?'

What made Ruth unwilling to tell her name?—anxious to remain unknown as the heiress of the great Desborough fortune? and what made her pleased to be able to answer in such a way that she retained her incognito?

'We shall pass the house presently.'

She was very, very weary. Had it not been for his support, she would have fallen to the ground long before.

Mr. Gray felt the arm which had at first reluctantly and lightly rested on his, gradually leaning heavily; then, in spite of herself, her whole figure drooped upon his shoulders—she tried to keep up, tried to walk firmly; her skirts incommoded her; each founce seemed weighted with lead, not lace; the wind fought her like a strong enemy—she sighed, and almost gave up. 'I—I—can't,' she panted.

'Here it comes!' cried her companion.

Down poured the rain in sheets—in floods, and yet unconquered, the fierce wind drove it ahead, refusing to be stilled by even a deluge.

Mr. Gray passed his arm around Ruth's waist as he spoke, and carrying rather than supporting her, he encouraged her and soothed her terrors, as if she had been a frightened child.

'This is the house. We stop here.'

It was a small unpromising looking mansion. Mr. Gray dashed up the steps into the piazza.

'Knock, Jim, knock like the devil. The lady is fainting.'

'No I am not,' said Ruth. 'I feel so glad to get here.'

The door opened, and a grave old woman's face peeped over the head of the servant, who tried to close it again, when he found that the wind was effecting an entrance.

'Oh Ruth, Ruth,' cried the old woman, 'what is this? Aint you with—?'

'Hush,' interrupted Ruth, 'I left them and went to walk—very foolishly. Mr. Gray, went you—?'

He was gone. She ran down the steps after him—caught him.

'Surely,' she said, 'you will go no farther in this storm. I believe I owe my life to you. Come in. I can scarcely speak.'

She was gasping in the rain-tempest. Her voice could hardly be heard in the crash, and roar, and rush.

'Your servants too. Come in, for Heaven's sake.'

At last they were housed, at least for the time, but every gust seemed to threaten the wooden roof and walls with instant destruction.

'My cousin, Mrs. Price, Mr. Gray,' said Ruth, introducing him.

The old lady courted. She was evidently no 'high born hostess.' She bustled about noisily.

'Did you get wet, Ruth? Do be careful. What will your pa say? Where did the gentleman meet you?'

Pray be quiet, cousin Frances; you are louder than the storm. What a fuss you are. Ruth's voice was kinder than her words. 'Make Thomas show Mr. Gray to a room—come with me first. Don't mention my name or papa's,' she whispered as they got into the entry. 'See that Mr. Gray has the use of all those antique suits of your absent boys, that you keep so thoroughly brushed and aired. Look after his servant; get some brandy—papa's best—and don't fidget me to death. Supper as soon as possible.'

'Oh, yes, dear Ruth—but such a storm—and you are dripping wet, and I can't find my keys—Oh, here they are. And why didn't you stay at Mrs. Clares'? And I believe the kitchen is under water.'

Ruth was gone. She evidently had the habit of never listening to good Mrs. Price, who pattered away now on her different errands, talking incessantly.

#### CHAPTER II.

In a half hour more, Ruth re-entered the parlor to which her new acquaintance had

likewise just returned. She had taken off her jewels, and wore a plain, darkish dress. Her abundant hair was put back carelessly as usual from her broad, full forehead.

A lamp was lighted, and stood upon a small table in the corner. Mr. Gray was advancing towards it, evidently in search of one of the numerous volumes which lay scattered beneath the light. Ruth spoke and he bowed. For the first time she saw him distinctly. Singularly handsome was the face that met hers—a straight Greek profile; clustering dark auburn hair; eyes so intensely blue that they seemed almost black; a proud, sweet mouth—feminine in its curves, color, and ripeness, but with a rare strength shown when it ceased to smile, and which disclosed, when the full lips parted, teeth white, small, and even. The figure was slight, well made, nervous—the attitudes, graceful and unstudied. He had changed his clothes, and said, laughingly, to Ruth, as she greeted him:

'You see I have obeyed your orders as conveyed through your servant. I did not hesitate to don these respectable habiliments, when he said, "Miss Ruth say you must."'

'They are old-fashioned, but better than newer ones which have passed through what we did. What do you think of the night?'

'It and the storm are just begun. Are you frightened yet? Pray don't attempt to open that window.'

'Are we in danger here?' she asked.

'Shall I answer candidly?'

'Always, if one answers at all, it should be candidly.'

'Then, I think we may be after a while, if the wind continues to rise with the tide.'

At this moment the parlor door bust open, and a blast shook the house from rafters to foundation. In rushed Mrs. Price, followed by some terrified domestics.

'Oh, Ruth, the kitchen is gone. I just got out in time. The sea is upon us. Let us go.'

'Where?'

'To the Fort.'

Ruth looked at Mr. Gray. He answered her glance.

'If you wish to go, certainly. So far, I see no reason for removing. No doubt the Fort is already filled with people; if we can stand it here, you will be more comfortable.'

'We won't go, cousin Frances, just yet.'

'You can look out from that Southwest window—it is comparatively calm from that quarter. Would you like to do so?'

Ruth followed him. What a sight met her view! She had been conscious all this time that the house was rocking, the wind whistling through the Venetian blinds of the piazza, and

that a deafening, dull, continuous roar of mingled wave and wind never ceased; but she was quite unprepared for the grand and fearful spectacle before her.

The island was at its narrowest width just beyond their house in the direction from which she looked. Billows, higher than she had ever dreamed the storm-god could heave them, now met from North and South across this space. Great logs of timber were whirled like straws in the incessant dash. The wind howled like a living thing, maddened with rage and pain; the rain had ceased; the sky was one unbroken plain of sullen, grey hue—such a color as a light would give if veiled by a thick cloth, which subdued, but did not extinguish. The full moon was behind that dark canopy, helpless to disengage herself.

A heavy 'wind' every now and then told when the mighty force of the waters drove a piece of timber, like a battering ram, against the foundations of the house.

Ruth shuddered, and yet was fascinated by the angry majesty of the tempest.

Here and there a straggling group was seen in the space above, where the waters met, huddled together for safety, striving to breast the wind.

'Are they trying to cross to the Fort? Will they be able? Good God! what madness!'

'Not so much as you think. It is not deep there; the power of the waves is almost spent before they reach that point. To us it looks worse than it really is. If our piazza goes, and if these logs keep on pounding away at us as if they owed us some personal grudge, we must take up our line of march to that very spot. This is getting too sublime.'

'Don't jest,' said Ruth, gravely.

'Are you alarmed?'

'Yes, for the first time in my life. I have never felt powerless and dependent till this night. But for you—'

She paused, and caught his arm. The house fairly reeled, so tremendous was the blow dealt by one of those drifting, merciless timbers.

'We had better go,' said Mr. Gray, emphatically and calmly. 'If you have any valuables here, put them up in as small a bulk as possible. Don't be more frightened than you can help. Believe me, we will not be in absolute danger. Keep up your courage!'

A wailing cry interrupted him. Mrs. Price came, weeping, in. 'Oh, let's go; I can't stay here. Ruth, do you want to murder me?'

'We are going. Summon the servants. How many have you? Are these a—? A huddled group of terrified negroes were clustered in the entry. 'Jack, Jim, no nonsense now. Jack, hold this lady's arm firmly when we start,'

he pointed to Mrs. Price; 'and if you let her go, you may as well follow her. If there are any trifles here that you prize, secure them at once.' He spoke to Ruth. 'Get your thickest and least cumbersome wraps, and be quick, please.'

In ten minutes they were ready. A package of silver-ware was tied up by Mrs. Price, with trembling hands, and she was preparing to move off, dropping spoons and forks at every step, as if she were planting them in view of a future crop.

Gerald Gray directed a halt; had them picked up, tightly secured, and put them in Jim's keeping.

'Oh, Ruth,' whispered Mrs. Price, in the midst of her terror, 'your pa's heaviest English silver—and who's this gentleman? and mayn't the boy run off with them?'

'Cousin Frances, you are too absurd,' said Ruth, sharply. 'Stay behind, and take care of the spoons, if you wish. We are ready,' she added, turning to Mr. Gray, and giving him a small square box; he slipped it in the pocket of Tom Price's overcoat, which he had likewise been obliged to appropriate to his own use.

'Now we must keep together as closely as possible—walking in a body so as to present as large and solid a surface to the wind as we can manage. I will lead the way with you,' to Ruth. 'You are my charge. Mrs. Price, don't be frightened. Jack is strong and courageous. You, my man, addressing one of Ruth's servants, 'pick up that child; is it yours? wrap that blanket over head and all. Now forward, and wait till I put out the light in the parlor, and we will close the back door as firmly as we can.'

Perfectly cool and deliberate, Mr. Gray inspired his little party with some courage and energy.

Carrying a lantern—which the wind immediately put out, and he then abandoned—his right arm firmly wrapped around Ruth's waist, they left the house.

'Keep close—no straggling. This way.' His voice sounded clear, and strong, and cheering in the wild whirl of desolation and comparative danger. The water was more than ankle-deep where they started, for the huge waves were breaking, as has been shown, upon the very steps of the house in front. It was very hard to keep one's feet; twice they had to stop to pick up Ruth's maid, who keeled over from sheer fright; 'the wind talked too strong to her,' she said.

As they neared the most dangerous portion of their journey, the water widening up to them to close with its new ally from the back creek, Gerald spoke almost tenderly to his

drooping companion. She clung to him with ever growing confidence.

'Fate favored them—or a kind Providence rather—by causing a lull just then, in the sweep of the blast. And yet, perhaps, the day was coming when Ruth would rather that every element had conspired at that moment to drag her into the mighty flood, and carry her a dead and drifting corpse far away to the great ocean, whose white waves lashed the shore!'

But this was not to be. Safely they forded the perilous path, and safely they passed under the archway of the Fort, to be welcomed by crowds of acquaintances, who were ahead of them in seeking shelter. Everybody was so anxious about Miss Desborough; everybody was so glad to see her; everybody had thought of going in search of her. Ruth stood pale, and cold and silent, as usual, in the midst of this storm of words which she thought more unbearable than the one without. Mr. Gray had left her to see after some possible accommodations.

The barracks were filled almost to suffocation. The officers and their wives courteously tendered their hospitality, which was necessarily limited. The beds were given up to as many invalids and children as could be accommodated. People wandered about laughing and chatting. There was, as yet, no accident to cause gloom. Within the low, thick walls of the Fort, they defied the tempests, and it was more like an informal, impromptu picnic, or 'maroon,' than a storm-wrecked party.

Phyllis Clare, a young lady of the highest fashion and spirits, soon dashed up to Ruth, with her petticoats pinned above her trim ankles, and her brown curls dishevelled most becomingly.

'Dear, dear Miss Desborough!' she exclaimed, seizing both of Ruth's hands, 'how alarmed we have been for you! Cissy and I nearly cried because papa would not let us go round by your house. He said that he was sure you were here already.'

'Oh, yes,' put in Cissy, 'such a time we had; Phyl and I wanted to bring all our things. I have just had such a love of a dress made, with a baby-waist, so becoming; not like most baby-waists, but a pointed band coming up like a stomacher; it just suits my figure—you know I am so full, ordinary baby-waists don't become me—and this is a choice silk of that delicate peach color; but papa wouldn't hear of it, and, now, robbers may get into the house and carry off every atom of our clothes. That peach-color doesn't do for everybody, for, although I am brown, my skin is so clear,—and Cissy passed her plump white hand over her

lovely face, where if ever 'milk and roses,' 'strawberries and cream,' found their proper simile, it was there. She was beautiful with that beauty of flesh, and blood, and silkiness, which men find so attractive; there were soft dark eyes, and red lips, and soft brown hair, and soft white shoulders, and soft round arms; indeed she was very soft within and without!

She looked so femininely gentle, too, beside Ruth's tall, angular figure, and stern, cold, pale face. Phyllis had more sense and less beauty; she went for style, grace and dash. Interrupting, now, Cecilia's flow of half-lisp'd words, she offered that Ruth should come and join their party; 'all of us are at the other end of the piazza. There are some queer customers here.' 'I'm sure,' in a loud whisper, 'that's our butcher, who eats the largest half of his own beef. And that's Madame Butcheress, I suppose, talking to him.'

'That's my cousin,' Mrs. Price, said Ruth, with a grim smile.

'Dear! dear! so it is. But she is very eccentric, I suppose, and likes to —'

'She is a very humble person, as are all my family,' said Ruth. 'I come and board with her so as to help her live. Perhaps the butcher is my relation, too. I have a great many poor relations, who, strange to say, never thrust their attentions nor their society upon me, although they would have a right to do so.'

Phyllis Clare colored; the stroke was too palpable, and even Ruth seemed to regret her unnecessary harshness.

'But, as cousin Francis is so taken up with the butcher's bodine confidences, I am more at leisure to go with you, only —' here she paused, hesitating, 'only — there is a gentleman —' She turned to look for Mr. Gray. He was unpacking a basket just behind him.

'Looking for me?' he asked. 'Here am I, getting out some biscuits for a little shaver who is crying from hunger, not having, I presume, tasted one mouthful since his supper, two hours ago—poor, starved thing! Capital old lady, Mrs. Price! In spite of her terror she has put up provender enough in this champagne hamper to last us a week. How I do like a thoughtful woman of the Mrs. John Gilpin stamp! Here, young man, stifle your cries with that,' and tossing a handful of wine-crackers to the child, and receiving a smile and word of thanks from its gratified mother. Mr. Gray rapidly uttered all this, rose from his seat and presented his handsome face to the astonished gaze of the Misses Clare.

'Gerald!'

'Phyllis!'

'Gerald!'

'Cissy!'

'Where on earth do you come from?' asked both ladies.

'Recently from the hospitable, but at present dangerous, mansion of Mr. Price—just before that from Crane Island, where I went to shoot a white crane to make a fan for Cissy.'

'Nonsense,' pouted Cissy.

'Tell us the truth,' said Phyllis.

'Truth to a woman, dear Phyl! Little ladies like you don't wish men to tell the truth to them; and even if they do hear it, they don't believe it, as, for example, now.'

'And why did you not come to dinner to-day? Miss Desborough dined with us; but I suppose you desired to make her acquaintance without our help.'

'Miss Desborough can dine where she pleases, and, as for making her acquaintance, that's partly as I please, and I have not made up my mind about it; heiresses are not to my taste.'

'What?' questioned Phyllis, with her eyes and her mouth rounded into surprise, while Cecilia exclaimed, 'mercy, me!'

Ruth had very soon recovered from her surprise. So Gerald Gray was some connection or intimate of the Clare. This was the nephew probably, whose absence at dinner pompous Mr. Clare regretted. If his name was mentioned, it had escaped her memory or only grazed her hearing. She stood quietly by, during the first exchanged sentences, then, when Gerald uttered his doubtful remarks about her, she smiled faintly, and immediately said:

'I am Miss Desborough.' She had no idea of making a mystery of her identity, or rather of letting the Clares suppose she had done so.

Mr. Gray started, laughed merrily, and took off Tom Price's hat with a low bow.

'A thousand thanks for the introduction, and a thousand pardons for the apparently saucy speech just now.'

Ruth briefly told her story. 'After I left your house, Miss Clare, instead of going home, I fancied a solitary walk would do my head more good than any other repose. I never saw the storm coming—walked nearly to the end of the Island, and, fortunately, met this gentleman, who, without knowing me, most kindly brought me back. To him I owe, most probably, —, detesting all expressions of sentiment, Ruth stopped, and 'locked his lips.' Phyllis was warmly delighted, and Cissy said, with just a shade of pettishness, 'Very romantic indeed.'

Then the conversation turned into other channels, and they discussed the storm, which was still, of course, a first object of interest. Ruth was not more communicative nor demon-



strative than usual. The high wind could not blow away her reserve, nor the high tide wash a more genial spirit into her manner. It must take more than an outward tempest to shake her serenity. Nevertheless, she joined the aristocratic group of the Southwest corner of the staunch old Fort, where some played cards, some talked of reading prayers, and a few desperately tried to go to sleep, sitting bold-upright, while the lamps swung overhead from their iron chains.

### CHAPTER III.

There was a good deal to see, a good deal to amuse. A pretty widow, lively and full of spirits, put her two little boys on a mattress with seven others; charged them to be quiet, and then establishing herself in the piazza, never ceased talking from that time till she went home the next day. She flirted, she jested, she eat sandwiches, she prescribed for one woman's sick child, and put another mother's restless infant to sleep. She sang a gay song in an undertone to her group of admirers, and left them to tie up somebody's head with vinegar; nothing came amiss to her, and her consoling words and light step were encouraging to the most despondent.

Then there were anxious wives sending after careless husbands, who would come, listen to all the 'I wish you would see about so and so's; reply readily, 'yes, my dear—certainly,' and walk off to resume the hand at whist, from which they had been torn.

Gerald Gray had a quick eye for the ludicrous and pleasant way of telling what he saw. He pointed out many things, and told many things to Ruth which made the long night pass more quickly than she could have supposed possible. Then, so singular had been their meeting, so curious its results, that an intimacy sprang up which was stronger than any Ruth had ever owned for mortal being. There was no time to pause, to consider. Gerald's manners were so high-bred, and yet so easy, he had overleaped all the barriers erected between herself and the world at large. Before her watch told her it was twelve o'clock on that memorable night, her acquaintance of six hours' date knew her better than those who had visited her for twenty-six years. And then he possessed one attraction, one attribute; he held one trump that must command the game. He had rendered her a service, a service of vital importance, without knowing her.

Dispossessed of all the prestige of that wealth she held so cheap, and which all others deemed her sole possession, he had come to her relief; she had seen in his eyes, his bold,

beautiful eyes, that he did not think her displeasing or repulsive. He had met a plain, quiet woman, unconscious of danger and unprotected; he had come to her assistance; resisted her attempt to get out of his way, and had rescued her from her perilous position. True, any gentleman might and would have done that, but he had done more. However slight the indications, they were clear to her—his manner almost immediately had shown a nearer interest than that produced by the circumstances of the case. Ruth would have scorned the idea that she fancied 'love at first sight' had taken possession of this handsome Gerald Gray for her, and, yet, there had been something in his manner; something vague, but meaning in his tone. In a word, he had understood her, he had established between themselves a kind of free-masonry, an electric chain of unspoken thoughts, strange, new, and not yet analysed by the stern novice. Its charm was great and subtle; its influence she never resisted.

Phyllis Clare gradually withdrew from Ruth's side; she likewise carried away Cecilia, not so far as to isolate her cousin and the heiress, but far enough to give Gerald a chance for a tete-a-tete. Once or twice Phyl came back and joined in the conversation; once Cissy came with her and fixed her large soft eyes steadily on Gerald's face. He smiled affectionately and saucily at her.

'What makes you so silent, little Cis?' he asked, familiarly taking her white hand.

She snatched it away and said, 'I am listening to you.'

The tone struck Ruth; it was pettish and reproachful. Phyllis glanced at her sister, and then wound her arm around Cissy's waist.

'Cis is cross, Gerald,' she said, laughing, 'because I have been scolding her. She flirted outrageously all through dinner with Mr. Taylor.'

'I did not,' said Cissy, shaking back her curls; 'you would seat him beside me. He is a tiresome goose. There! that's what I think of him.'

'Oh, Cis,' said Gerald, teasing her, 'poor Taylor is dying for you. I am sure, by this time he is roaming the city. I presume he went back at 7, since I don't see him here—he is roaming the city, smiling his large forehead with his larger fist and offering incalculable sums to any boatman who will row him across the stormy water.' 'A silver pound' feebly conveys his bribe, and, yet, cruel 'Lord Clare Willin's daughter' doesn't even wring 'her lily hands' in sympathy for her absent sufferer! Ah, women! women! our tormentors! our heartless executioners! why have we not

the courage to cut our silken chains and be free!

'I think you very rude and foolish,' said Cecilia, walking away.

Ruth looked grave; Phyllis smiled uneasily, and Gerald put his head back and laughed heartily.

'What little simpletons girls are, to be sure!' he said; 'now, there is Cissy, who is as proud of her conquest of Taylor as if she had, single-handed, stormed a fort, or, like Florence Nightingale, founded a hospital; and yet, because I her cousin, to whose attentions she was accustomed, before I went abroad, because I am not sighing at her feet like a good many others, she is peevish at my remarks about this conquest, and put out that I am not one also. These recognized beauties are perfect marauders. Nobody is safe.' He paused.

'You are silent, too, Miss Desborough, and don't look satisfied? Did you also think me rude? Shall I go and make my peace with my little cousin?'

'Surely, Mr. Gray, it is not for me to decide that question. I have never seen you with your cousins before. I do not know the intimacy which warrants —; it is no concern of mine.' Ruth spoke as indifferently as if he had asked her opinion about the color of some woman's gown—dress being her detestation.

'Oh, pray, try and take an interest in this, for I fancy your judgment is good under all circumstances. What would you have felt if a cousin had so spoken—no, that's not it, for you and Cissy are not at all alike, nor are at all likely to feel alike —. What do you think about it?'

'I think you are making a great deal of a trifle. I should say—since you will keep on asking me—you had better tell Cecilia that you did not intend to wound her.'

'And you will not let anybody take this delightful chair, which is 'as tall and straight as a pop-lar tree,' during my absence? Promise.'

'I promise,' said Ruth, half smiling.

Mr. Gray dashed off to his cousin, and, with his back turned to Ruth, spoke a few words. Cecilia listened at first with a pout, then she showed her dimples, and raised her eyes to the speaker's face—he moved directly in front of her, concealing her expression from the steady gaze of Miss Desborough. Then, with slow-turning head, laughing glance, and graceful motion, he nodded good-bye, and returned to his chair.

'It is all right,' he said; 'Cissy is amiable, with all her pretty weaknesses. The temptation to tease her is very strong, for I confess, Miss Desborough, that I am a tease—an inveterate one.'

Ruth thought enough had been said on the subject; she did not like, somehow, the manner on either side. Was Mr. Gray frank about his cousin? Was Cissy's jealousy attributed by him to the true and only cause? Anyway, 'it was no concern of her.'

Wrapped in her plaid, she leaned out and tried to gain some fresh news from the sky about the progress of the storm. Mr. Gray began to tell her of a midnight tempest in Switzerland, during which he had been sorely buffeted. Then he talked of Rome, Florence, Naples, Paris, London—not the hackneyed, every day phrases, but his own fresh, clearly defined views, sentiments, thoughts. A few piquant personal adventures; a few 'telling' *mots*; an anecdote here and there of people high in renown, either from beauty, birth, or position. He prefaced his talk about society, by saying, 'I had some very kind letters of introduction to some very great people, and then I had, and always have, that fairy gift—luck. Things generally turn out well for me, which is but right, because no one has a keener appreciation. I do enjoy thoroughly. Now, those who are comparatively indifferent to everything, ought to have snubs and disappointments; the wrong woman always turning up at the right moment, for that walk, or that drive, or that waltz; and the wrong man boring you; and the book you want invariably lent out; and the scuffle over baked; and your rival successful in love, war, or politics. They don't mind it, and you would fearfully; and as suffering is of course properly apportioned, like happiness; also, of course, you should have what you desire—I mean the fanciful—you representing, in this instance, myself—I ought to tread a path of roses.'

'And do you?'

'Well—yes—and—no. You see my whole position is so peculiar—I may be a rich man, and may never have a shilling. My uncle, not my uncle Clare, but my father's brother, lives in New Haven, and has a good fortune —, but I am boring you with all this?'

'Indeed no, pray go on.'

'Do you really know nothing about my belongings? for I don't choose to tell you some rather uninteresting facts, which most people have heard.'

'I assure you, except having heard your name casually mentioned, and so seldom that, when you introduced yourself it was quite unfamiliar, I knew nothing of you. And don't be shocked at my confession of such unflattering ignorance. I so rarely take an interest even in the people that I meet habitually! I promise to treat what you say quite differently.' This was an unusual warmth of speech

for Miss Desborough. Had one of her 'friends' heard it, it would have been considered more encouragement than any man had ever yet heard from those rigid lips.

Mr. Gray bowed with only a matter of course air, and could not have done a wiser thing.

'Thank you. My uncle, Mr. Norman Gray's wife, is a Boston heiress; her very large income is, by her father's will, divided between them equally, but the fortune goes to the long heir; if she survives him, back to her family; if he outlives her, it is all to be mine. They have no children. Her health is, and has long been, deplorable. No change can be effected in this state of things. My uncle is very kind to me, and, like Edmond About's twins, of the Hotel Corneille, I have thirty thousand dollars a year, because he has. Strange to say, my dearest college friend and chum is my aunt's nephew, holding the same place in her affections and intentions as I do in my uncle's. It is a queer, romantic enough sort of business.'

'And is your chum likewise your aunt's sole heir?'

'Oh, no! he has a brother and a sister to share with him. I have a mother, but neither brother nor sister.'

'That is so nearly my own case,' sighed Ruth. 'It is very sad to feel so alone in the world. If I had a lovely younger sister to care for, or a brother to care for me, life would have seemed so much fuller and brighter. Papa does not heed me.'

(Ruth Desborough, confidential!)

'Yes,' said Gerald, softening his soft voice, 'without my mother's love, and my consciousness of how necessary I am to her happiness, I would be sauntering about Europe now, objectless and dissatisfied. I ought to have a profession, to be earning my own bread; I feel it deeply, but my uncle will not hear of it. My aunt and himself tried to make some sort of compromise with her people, so that, in case of the fortune going legally to them, I might not be entirely penniless; but William Jessolyns (that's my friend Francis' brother), by no means adores me, and refuses to sanction any such arrangement. He prefers to run the risk. So be it. At any rate, I have still youth and health. I can drive, too, and groom a horse. Would you take me as a coachman, Miss Desborough? or even 'funkey'? With a little training, I am sure I should form an impressive innovation upon the usual race of dark footmen who fill our Southern halls. Or, if I come to grief, I may give dancing lessons. You don't know how well I dance. If there were not so many people about, I would certainly favor you with an *echantillon* of my prowess in that line. Do you dance?'

'Dance! no,' said Ruth, grimly; 'I used to drag through quadrilles when I first 'came out,' because my father wished it, but 'graceful measures are not mine.' When did you get back from Europe? she continued, abruptly.

'Three weeks ago I landed at Boston, embraced my New Haven relatives, and then rushed down here. I suppose it is about ten days since my return. By the way, how odd our meeting was! It was the merest accident that brought me just — to your feet. And to think that I had been carefully avoiding you all day! He laughed mischievously. 'You are sure you forgive me for my impertinence?'

'Quite sure. Do you know that to find a person who avoids me is a luxury I have never before wittingly enjoyed?'

'Alas! alas! for I cannot promise that I shall ever do it again.' He leaned his head upon his strong, white hand, pushing up as he did so the short clustering curls from his forehead, and fixed his lovely, saucy eyes straight upon her. A flush slowly, yet not painfully, rose to Miss Desborough's sallow cheek. She could not meet his gaze unconcernedly, but managed to say with moderate indifference—

'Oh, now, you know you will always be welcome; my father must thank you for saving me.'

'No gratitude, if you please; if you mean to establish a private Humane Society, and intend offering me a gold medal, I decline on the spot. But indeed I owe you an apology for all this rigmarole about my 'prospects,' which, after all, are anything but gloomy. I believe my poor aunt only too frail and broken in health. Besides, long may they both live, for the death of either would be an affliction that neither positive wealth could console, nor decided poverty deaden the sense of. The wind is rising again; do you hear it? and with the breaking of the dawn, will come the next tide.'

The hours had indeed passed most swiftly; it was drawing towards daylight, and anxious eyes were again watching the waves, which had scarcely receded at the ebb. Faint streaks of dull light struggled in the East, and the water came pouring in from the back creek. Presently the whole Island seemed covered like a vast lake; scarcely a foot deep in some places, four feet in depth in others. The poor, drowned poultry floated about on the surface, and horses and cows were led away to the highest ground that could be reached. But an overshadowing Providence mercifully protected man and beast. Seven of the most exposed houses on the front beach melted away like lumps of sugar dissolving in a tea-cup;

the roofs settling down upon the wrecks with perfect propriety and great regularity; but not a life was lost. Trees fell here and there, and the picture of desolation was complete, so far as inanimate objects were concerned. About eight o'clock gentlemen wandered to their partially submerged houses, and came back reporting much discomfort but no farther danger. The refugees from the Ocean House beat a retreat from their hospitable military asylum; fathers summoned their households, and, although no sunshine yet illumined the gray sands, and the sullen roar of the wind still murmured hoarsely, every one felt that safety was proclaimed. Ruth was among the first to thank the officers and ladies of the Fort, and depart. Her servants reported Mrs. Price's house as still standing, and not looking much more worsted by the ravages of the blast than it had long been by those of time.

'Cousin Frances' timidly proposed staying where they were until complete tranquility reigned. She faintly remembered some dreadful newspaper stories of robbers and murderers that had overrun that unfortunate Island in the Gulf, some years before, when the sea overcame the wretched inhabitants. Her suggestions met with a peremptory refusal; 'besides,' added Ruth, 'we have already trespassed unmercifully upon the good nature of our entertainers.'

'You might offer to pay board,' hinted poor Mrs. Price. 'Your pa wouldn't object.'

Ruth's great eyes transfixed the culprit, who saw and wilted.

'Money, money,' Ruth muttered, half to her companion, half to herself; 'we purse-proud millionaires think that everything can be done for money; and our dependents catch the tone. Will I never be free from such ideas?'

'A palpable hit,' whispered Gerald, laughing; very unkind of you to say that, when you recollect that the staple of my talk this night has been money.'

Ruth smiled and shook her head.

'Mine was a shaft never meant for you. And now, good-bye, Mr. Gray. I see your cousins coming; they probably wish you. Need I say,' she went on, hurriedly, 'that I hope to see you.'

Before Gerald could answer, Mr. Clare and his daughters were beside them; the pompous, great man bowing low over Ruth's quiet hand, which lay in his patronizing grasp.

'My coachman has been unable to bring the carriage, or I should have been proud, dear Miss Desborough, to conduct you home. Most truly do I rejoice that my sister's son has had the privilege of serving my old friend's daughter;

the young gentleman may well look happy at having secured such an honor. My girls told me some hours since that you were here with us. I should have come at once to pay my compliments, but my valued friend, Gen. Harris, had persuaded me to form a whist party in the mess room, and there we have passed the night; while, with you young people the hours have gaily sped in mirth up here. You do not seem to have suffered from our protracted vigils, my dear young lady?'

'Not at all,' answered Ruth, passive and laconic.

'That is well. My mad cap, Cecilia, rejoices, I think, in what she calls a frolic.'

There was little frolicsome in Cecilia's air or face. Phyllis, with pretty sisterly earnestness, was smoothing her *cadettes* curls, and chatting coquettishly with an admiring Mr. John Morris. On hearing her name, Cissy asked:

'What are you saying about me, papa?'

'I say that this storm has been quite a frolic to you, my pet.'

'Has it? I am sure I did not know it. I suppose Gerald thinks it high fun, because he never enjoys anything half so much as seeing people uncomfortable.'

'At me again, Cissy?' said Gerald, setting his teeth together, with a steady look from between his half-closed lids. 'Come, be a good little girl. Let me wrap your shawl more closely around your pretty little shoulders and keep yourself warm—and cool,' he added in a whisper.

Phyllis began to make a bustle and hurry of preparation, darting a warning glance at Cissy, and taking her papa's arm.

'Mr. Norris is waiting for you, Cissy; and here is your other glove.' In giving it, she pressed Cissy's hand tightly. 'Good-bye, Miss Desborough; we will send a dove from our ark soon to see how you are getting on. Gerald will take you home, I presume. We will have your room ready, Gerald, for they say that no boat can yet leave the Island, but I would not be surprised if, by night time, we all have to take shelter here again. Anyway, you know where you are welcome. Come, papa, Cissy is quite ready. We had better do as the others, and take advantage of this lull to get away.'

Under cover of Phyllis' smiles, nods, and words, the party moved off briskly, soon followed by Ruth, Mrs. Price and Mr. Gray.

Little was said during the short walk; for it was occupation enough to pick their way through pools of water, and over logs and obstructions.

The house was undergoing a little sweeping and setting in order; a fire was kindled in one of the out-houses still standing, and the savory

fumes of a hot breakfast in preparation, were very grateful to the nostrils of 'Cousin Frances,' who had despatched this *avant-garde* before she left the Fort.

'Stay and eat something,' urged Ruth to Mr. Gray.

But he declined, saying that his uncle Clare would expect him, and, moreover, if it were possible, he must return to the city and relieve his mother's anxiety.

'If I do not get away you will not be rid of me, for I must see how you are coming on, if you will permit me.' He held out his hand; Ruth gave hers—they were standing just within the doorway—he, bright and beautiful as the morning star, with his glancing eyes, exquisite, mobile lips, soft, glowing cheeks, and all the airy, frank grace which distinguished him; she, pale and worn, careless in dress, looking much older than her years, with the strong, habitual reserve of her manner and face, struggling against the growing interest of this new acquaintance.

She faintly returned the kind pressure which he ventured, and they parted.

#### CHAPTER IV.

The storm was over, after three days of discomfort, damp gray sky, and nothing especial to eat. Happy those good heirs whose closets contained stores of tin canisters, from the warehouses Boden & Filz, of Bordeaux, and who could consequently regale themselves upon *pates* and *sauces truffes* in place of the uncomeatable beef steak and drowned chickens.

Mrs. Price rejoiced in her ample provision of hams and corned beef, kippered salmon and carinated fish. A box of sardines made the owner thereof very popular, to stray callers during the lulls of the sixty hours' gale—the housekeeper who possessed a supply of Boston crackers, might have trusted her reputation in the hands of her nearest neighbor, and *sot-désant* dearest friend. But this was all past now.

The sunshine glittered over heaps of sedge and rubbish left upon the beaches, front and back, and the waters tranquilly swept up not much nearer than their old landmarks, and looking as innocent as if they wondered what had done all the mischief, in the way of wrecks and ruin, which lay mournfully about. The wind was a mere murmur, soft as thistledown; in fact, it was "wind" no longer—only a gentle breeze, which carefully and slowly lifted the ends of the black lace scarf which Ruth Desborough wore over her head, and tied beneath her chin. She was looking out dreamingly from the window of her own room which faced the sea and the south-western sky.

Ruth's bed room did not look at all like a "maiden's bower;" it had few feminine trifles; a solid book or two, in solid binding, substantial, solid furniture, without one lounging chair, and on her dressing table ivory backed brushes and combs, and a large bottle of lavender or cologne water; not one essence *flacon*, nor a *potissoir* for almond shaped nails, no *pomade* for lips or tresses; nor Bohemian glass jars for powder puffs, or cold cream. All was orderly, neat, cold, uncoquettish.

The rays of the setting sun streamed in, lighting up the room, and resting on the head of its mistress as she leaned one supporting elbow upon the window sill, and her listless other hand held a small sized open note. Those beautiful, autumn southern skies! Her absent gaze was fixed upon the changing glories of their gorgeous coloring, but her thoughts were with the dozen lines in that note:

"Dear Miss Desborough," it said, "I find myself unable to keep the engagement you kindly allowed me to make with you for this evening. You must guess at once that it is a matter of much importance which forces me to say this. Alas! it is most sad, as well as most important. My dear uncle, of whom I spoke to you recently—who was but a week ago a hale and hearty man, died suddenly of apoplexy, without warning of any kind. My poor aunt found him cold and lifeless by her side, on awaking. The shock was too great. In two hours she followed him—her feeble frame being an easy prey to such grief, and such a blow. This double misfortune necessitates that I should leave to-night for New Haven.

'Your kind heart will sympathize with me in my great sorrow, and may I hope that, during my short absence, you will not forget

'Your faithful servant,

GERALD GRAY.

Ruth read that note more than once. It was simple, unaffected, natural—written evidently in haste, and carelessly composed. Once she drew out her watch and calculated that in so many hours he would have stated on his journey. Did he regret, she wondered, the informal engagement made to bring her a book that evening from town? In the midst of his sorrow and the confusion of his sudden departure, it was considerate of him to remember it.

Then she half smiled. How much more had other young men done in labored proof of their interest in her? Did not Charles Wentworth, while they were setting his broken arm, insist upon his sister leaving his bedside to inform Miss Desborough that while riding into the country to procure for her a certain black

and tan terrier to replace a dead favorite, he had been thrown from his horse and seriously injured? But she had simply been disgusted with this "bold stroke for an heiress," and with civil regrets and hot house grapes, cold enquiries and exotic bouquets, gave Mr. Wentworth to understand that when her dogs died, her father could replace what he had once before given.

Then she remembered the water party at a famous picnic, and her admiration for some pond lillies, and John Barksdale's desperate lurch overboard in trying to get them. She had been but little touched by this act of devotion, and had severely snubbed the aquatic youth, when, three hours after, he informed her (originally) that he "would go through fire as well as water to serve her."

But these were notorious fortune-hunters—men who "went in" for every heiress-plate on the matrimonial turt—whereas, Gerald Gray had studiously kept away from his uncle's dinner, lest he should be drawn into this golden circle.

'Pshaw!' exclaimed Ruth, at length, aloud, when arising from her seat, 'this is too absurd.'

She heard voices below her window—Phyllis Clare's sharp but lady-like notes, and Cissy's incessant laugh.

They were coming into the house—too late to stop them—the servant had already said she was at home; and moreover, Ruth felt herself inwardly confessing that she rather wished to see the Misses Clare.

'Oh! Miss Desborough,' cried Phyllis, as she ran forward on Ruth's entrance, 'isn't this dreadful about poor Gerald? Papa had a note from Aunt Ellen, written in despair. To think of Mrs. Gray not dying first—living just two hours too long! I can't think of anything else. Gerald would have been so rich and so happy, and now I suppose he has not enough to keep him in patent leather and perfumes. Wasn't it provoking of Mrs. Gray?'

For the first time, Ruth recollected what he had told her about the fortune and the disposition of it.

Phyllis went on:

'You know, of course, all about Mr. Norman Gray—everybody knows. Gerald has been brought up like a crown prince for expense. To all human knowledge, and everybody's expectation, he would have an immense estate. That forlorn, horrid Mrs. Gray was such an invalid nobody ever supposed she could possibly outlive her husband, but those two hours have upset everybody's calculations.'

'It was very unkind of Mrs. Gray not to have died sooner. I don't know but that, as her health

was so wretched, she ought to have been decently put to death some time back, and thus have relieved the anxiety of Mr. Gerald Gray and his friends,' said Ruth.

'Oh! don't, put in Gerald. He was absurdly attached to his aunt, and could not bear to hear me wish that the good lady were safely disposed of. It was only this morning, at breakfast, that he reproached me quite angrily for saying something of this sort.'

'Did he know this morning, last evening, of this loss?'

'Dear! no. The telegram sent from New Haven came the first day of the storm—after he had come down here, and loomed off again, when I told him that you—that we—had a dinner party. His servant put it in his room—said nothing about it to Aunt Ellen, and there it lay during those two days that the gale lasted, and he could not get back to town. He might have gone up yesterday evening, by that first trip which the steamer attempted, but he says the boat left him, and it was just as well, for when he got back to us, about eleven o'clock, (I don't know where he had been,)' and Phyllis looked, as if she were trying not to look arch, 'and it began to blow again, as if the roof would come off, we were so glad to have him with us. Gerald inspires one with so much courage—he takes every thing so coolly.'

'Does he take his loss of fortune coolly?'

'Aunt Ellen says, in her note, that he did not appear to give a thought to that; all his grief was about his uncle and aunt, and his being down here, gay and careless, while they were lying dead in the house which has always been more 'home' to him than even his mothers.'

'An amiable trait,' said Ruth, stiffly, seeing that Phyllis paused for some remark.

'Gerald is very amiable,' continued Miss Clare, 'the most amiable person I ever knew. Cissy and I having never had a brother, have always regarded him as one. While we were in New York at school, Gerald used to come constantly from New Haven to see us. He always brought such lots of presents for us, and took us everywhere that Mrs. C—— would let us go. Then, when he went to Cambridge, we saw less of him, but his vacations were spent pretty much with us on the plantation, when we grew up, and came home. Cissy and I are deeply devoted to him.'

'What is that about me, Phil?' asked Cecilia, who had been talking all this time to the inevitable Mr. Morris, the General's son, and their constant escort.

'I say that you and I have always looked upon Gerald as a brother.'

'Oh! yes, he has always looked upon both of us as his sisters.' Cissy spoke again with the



same asperity and intention that had before struck Ruth, and with great emphasis.

'You need not be so emphatic, Ois,' Phyllis laughingly rejoined. 'But I am forgetting the object of our stopping here—won't you come and walk with us, Miss Desborough? I am dying to see how all those houses look that have been washed down. Do you know Miss Fisher declares that her 'splendid jewels were abandoned by her in her midnight flight, and are buried beneath these wrecks of the merciless sea?' If we have luck, we may pick up a stray bracelet or so. True, nobody ever saw the 'splendid jewels,' which we only now hear of—but of course they are there.'

Ruth wished to decline, but she had to give way to Phyllis' polite insistence; so they took a short walk, found no bracelet, nor did they strike out much that was new in conversation or ideas. Phyllis, several times, alluded to Gerald—his journey—his probable return. She did not ask Ruth how she knew that his relatives were dead, and himself *en voyage* before her visit. Ruth fancied her too heedless to think about it, and was only glad that no question should oblige her to confess (what she certainly would not have concealed) that Mr. Gray had written to her.

#### CHAPTER V.

'Don't turn yet, pray.'

'Is it not time?'

'There is a moon.'

'True; but it was just here a month ago that you quoted the moon as a reason for my turning.'

'Ah, yes!' answered Gerald; 'but then there were clouds fierce and black about us; and when I saw a poor, forlorn, 'unprotected female' standing here, unaware of her danger, I rushed to her rescue. It was sublime of me, wasn't it?'

'Well, if not sublime,' said Ruth, smiling, 'it was very kind, and the poor, forlorn, unprotected female' was and is, very grateful.'

'Of course she is, because she has the kindest and most grateful heart in all the world, and does not consider that by that little act of politeness I gained the dearest of friends. My luck again! Had we met in an ordinary way at my uncle's that day, you would have ranked me among the herd of young men who dance, talk, dine and die; but that important deity, luck, favored me, and here I am, elevated to the post of chief councillor and unworthy ally of the Great Miss Desborough, with a large G.'

'The Great Miss Desborough will depose you if you laugh at her.'

'Not she; she has taught me not to fear her, and from the pedestal of my position I only laugh at the envy of the infuriates who are jealous of me. But what a wretch I am to go rattling on in this way, when I have something to tell you which makes me very sad, and which I trust you will not be pleased to hear.'

'What is it? Pray tell me. I would rather know it at once.'

'Oh, there is no need to open your handsome eyes at me so wildly,' said Gerald, with playful tenderness, and drawing her arm unforbidden through his. 'Don't prepare for the worst; it is no very great matter after all. You must have conjectured when you first heard of my poor dear uncle's death, and of the changes that it would bring to me, that I could not stay idly here in our drowsy old city. I cannot live on my mother, who, dear soul, has just enough to keep up the style of existence to which she has been always accustomed. There is enough for her, but not enough for me. I suppose I *could* manage to eat, drink and sleep at her expense and get a place as clerk on the Bay, which would ensure me a new dress coat every two years, and cotton gloves for the summer. Picture me, oh, my friend! driving a quill under the jurisdiction of old Herbert, instead of driving my black mares under my own eyes!'

'Terrible!' said Ruth.

'And then marking cotton bales without the cotton gloves, mind you, and doubtful concerning the spending of half dollars, and patronised by attentions from fellows who have been all this time receiving mine, and worse than all, warned off by the sour looks of mammas who have hitherto encouraged my witticisms to their delightful daughters!'

'Halt there,' interrupted Ruth, 'there I am sure you are wrong, as mammas with us do not discriminate in that way about their daughters' partners.'

'Don't they? Bless your innocent comprehension! Wait till you are a young man with fine prospects, and see how popular you will become with the very people who to-day think me an extremely over-rated person, and very much changed for the worse since my European trip.'

There was bitterness in Gerald's tone, beneath its careless outside ring.

'What are your plans?' asked Ruth gravely.

'Rather undefined. California is still a good opening for aspiring youths.'

'But you don't believe that you will make a fortune in a year or so and come back powdered with gold dust?'

'No, indeed; I do not. I expect to pass

many years there, and to have many ups and downs, to speculate and lose, speculate and gain many times, before I make one hundred thousand dollars. That is all I want.'

There was a pause. Ruth's face was paler even than usual. Gerald suddenly looked at her.

'You are *very* kind,' he said. 'I believe you really regret my going away.'

'Most sincerely,' she faltered. 'When do you think of going?'

'In three weeks.'

'So soon?'

'Why not; if a thing *has* to be done, why linger putting it off?'

'True.'

'Yes, it is true; and many other things are true, which are as true, but more foolish, and consequently one cannot speak of them.'

'Such as—?'

'I said one could not speak of them. Would you be so little like yourself as to be indiscreet in asking questions?'

He forced a smile which met an answering one still less joyous than his own.

'Yes, for this once—and because we are friends.'

'It is because we are friends and nothing more, that I dare not say what I would like to say. It is because your friendship is so precious to me, that I fear to lose it by confessing what you will treat with contempt—it is because we are friends only, that I would desire to make a confession.'

'You speak enigmas,' said Ruth, and she drew away her arm under pretence of fastening her shawl.

'Let me do it,' said Gerald, gently drawing her shawl together. 'It will not be the first time that I was more successful than you in securing the folds of this plaid of your predilection.'

He stood facing her; his beautiful countenance quite divested of its usual *insonnante* expression, and as his hand touched her's in again taking her brooch to fasten the rebellious shawl, she perceived that it was as cold as ice.

'It is a 'plaid of predilection,' said Ruth, in a very low voice. 'I connect it always with the memory of that day I first met you. I keep few anniversaries, and that is not of very ancient date, but I don't think I shall easily forget it.'

Gerald caught her hand. 'Ruth!' he exclaimed impetuously.

She threw up her head. The old instincts were strong in her. No man but her father—few women—had ever called her by her Christian name.

Gerald dropped her hand gravely and with a low bow. 'Forgive me. I forgot myself,' and his small white teeth were pressed impatiently against his under lip. He offered his arm with a stately air—she took it. It trembled for a second, and then grew quite still, as he called her attention to a curious cloud of vivid crimson, shaped like a man on horseback.

'Very strange,' said Ruth; 'quite like one.' She was looking far away from what he was pointing at.

'Does your mother approve of this?'

'Of this cloud? I doubt if she has seen it, and probably would not offer approval or disapproval about an affair which is palpably beyond her reach.'

'Your answer, although meant to sneer at my question, is, perhaps, very near the truth?'

'What truth? What is truth, dear Miss Desborough? Have you 'a passion for truth,' as I hear some people say, who show their reverence and affection by never approaching their passion. Not that I mean that you never approach truth, or that—'

'What are you talking about? Why are you going on in this frantic way?'

'I am frantic too, am I? Impertinent and frantic, and what else?'

'Unjust,' said Ruth, quietly.

'Unjust to whom? Not to myself, surely? I give myself credit for being very just to Gerald Gray, Esq. I think him an unmitigated ass, and a very—'

'Pray, stop; you are unjust to me.'

'To you! In what, pray?'

'In believing me to be unfeeling and insincere.'

'My dear Miss Desborough! when did I accuse you of either of those rather common little vices?'

'If you do not accuse me of them directly in those words, you do so indirectly by your—. You know that I am deeply grieved by all that has happened to you—by your sorrow, by your loss of fortune, and now by this necessity, as you consider it, to leave us all.'

'Well?' He was trying to make her look straight at him. She was turning her head aside like a blushing girl of fifteen.

'Well?' he repeated, enquiringly.

'Is it kind, then, to believe so capriciously? To begin a conversation in which I was interested, and break it off with foolish phrases, uttered in a tone of irritation?'

'Pardon me: it was you that turned the tide of my feelings, and cheered my presumptuous words.'

His voice was low and full of passionate earnestness. Presently he went on rapidly:

'I know that I am presumptuous. I know

that you will probably meet what I dare to say with chilling looks and haughty words, yet how can I avoid it. You have guessed it already. You know that I love you, and that I must not tell you so. I, a man of broken fortunes, you, a great heiress. The interest with which you inspired me when first I saw you, and which then I had the right to feel, and in time utter, is now—would be now regarded by you as a desperate attempt. Pshaw! forgive me, my friend. Forget what I say. Do you forgive me? Speak, dear Ruth—this once I will call you by your name—your gentle, Bible name—tell me you forgive my folly.

'It is folly,' said Ruth. 'How can I believe that, in so short a time, I, a cold, unattractive woman, have inspired you with love for me. No; I do not accuse you, believe me, I do not. I do not accuse you of any such mean motives as you hint at, but I do think that you misunderstand your feeling for me. We are speaking a *cœur ouvert*—I imitate the frankness with which you express yourself—your vanity has been flattered by my manner; my manner has a fictitious importance; you have been naturally pleased to be set above everybody in the circle which has chosen to make me a person of consequence; gradually you have accustomed yourself to fall into the belief that I am as worthy of admiration individually as—'

'Pardon me for interrupting you: your feelings I may not understand—my own, I thoroughly comprehend. I do not deny that I have seen women handsomer than you—more brilliant, more dazzling, more soft, more generally attractive, but you are *you*. I have never flattered you. I never shall; but when I tell you that Ruth Desborough, with her stern and stately carriage, her frozen look, her icy tone, her repelling air, has for me a mightier charm than the most languid or sprightly, the softest or sauciest of her sex, believe me that I speak a truth as holy and as certain as God and Death.'

'You have known me so short a time!' said Ruth, gently.

'How like all women is that speech! Do men often fall in love with the women whom they have met daily with indifference for years? Is not love *always* instantaneous, if only in the germ and unspoken.'

'What do you love in me?' asked Ruth quickly, and raising her dark eyes to the beautiful face of her lover, with a glance which, for the first time in her life, revealed the charm they ought always to have had.'

'What do I love in you?' *Que sais-je?* I love possibly the heart and the inner nature which, if ever you could love, would be revealed to the man of your choice. I love the

passionate depth of womanly tenderness which you have beaten down so skillfully, but which will spring up in floods if ever you permit it. I love the outward ice, as contrasted with the inward fire.'

'I see you do not know me,' said Ruth, blushing and subdued.

'I see that you know that I do know you,' whispered Gerald. 'You may deceive unob-servant eyes, but not mine. From the first moment that we met, I never did you the injustice to suppose that you were the "statue in lead" you like the world to believe you—cool, hard, polished and grey.'

'Yet you wish me to be the last'

'A pun! are the skies falling?' Gerald pressed her arm fondly to his side. 'You have not answered me? Will you accept, then, that quality as your future name?'

'You have not yet asked me to do so! You told me you would *not* ask me?'

'Did I, dear trifier? Then, I humbly ask it now?'

'Give me time,' pleaded Ruth.

'Time, again! I have a wise old aunt who is nearly a hundred, and she says, delays are dangerous.'

'Resolves should go calmly, for repentance gallops; is not that a good saying, too?'

'No, indeed; for, if resolves went quickly, repentance could never overtake them. Ruth, dear Ruth, you cannot tell what an effort it has cost me to cast aside all those doubts and worldly terrors which I spoke of just now. To have you suspect me, and despise me—to have pitiful considerations of money come up between my heart and yours! You would not put me off with phrases and hesitations if you knew how sore I feel—how differently I would speak if our positions were reversed—how I would sue and plead, and wait, thankful for the merest atom of attention and hope; but now, if you do not pledge yourself freely and fully, my pride will rise in arms. You have everything to give—I, nothing. So, conscious of my unworthiness, I must have *all*, or I reject all.'

'A first rate reasoner!'

'You are turning coquettish on my innocent hands. Dear Ruth—my Ruth—answer me.'

'First, answer me,' said Ruth, suddenly grave.

She stopped walking, and seated herself on a log, drifted up a month ago by the tide.

'Sit here,' she said, 'by me. I do not know if I love you. I knew I like you very much; and it may be that my affection for you, which I took to be gratitude and interest, is something deeper. Stay,' she cried, as he caught her hand, 'listen to me. I have always (the

long always of a month, two weeks of which you were away,) I have always suspected that there was an understanding—a by-gone, or a present attachment between Cecelia Clare and you. I have been told so—vaguely by some persons—positively by one. I never questioned you about it. I had no right; but I own I would have given a great deal to know the truth. It worried me, this doubt; I, who never cared for anybody's concerns. It *frightened* me—the constant dwelling on this thought in my mind. Now, I have the right to ask, and to demand of you, on your honor, has Cecelia Clare any claim upon you? Was there ever any attachment on your side for her?'

'On my honor, no,' answered Gerald. 'Cissy was a pretty child, is a pretty girl; she is a favorite of my mother's—was a belle among boys of my own age when I was a boy. I have looked upon her, and treated her invariably as a sister, but I used to like to take cousinly privileges with her, and carry her off from other boys, just to tease them and amuse myself. But nothing more—nothing that went beyond this.'

'She is very pretty,' said Ruth, musingly.

'Yes, I think her very pretty, and very amiable, and all that. A good, industrious girl, too, with all her affectations. She has a sewing-machine, and works it famously—keeps all those younger ones in the nursery well supplied with petticoats and pantalettes. Somehow the vision of Cissy, at her sewing machine, is commendable, but not attractive. And then her back—I own Cissy's back has always repelled me.'

'What is the matter with her back?'

'Did you never notice it? It is a very defective back. Her spine is threatened, and her back is very ugly. Not crooked you know, but clumsy.' He shook his head mischievously. 'Whenever Cissy's back is turned, her attractions vanish.'

'But look in her face and you forget' her back?' asked Ruth.

'I did not intend to convey that idea. You asked me about a silly report, which some kind individual has made his or her business to tell you. Without circumlocution I give you the exact and entire truth. There is nothing to conceal, and I conceal nothing.'

'Then, you do not love her?'

'Is your question an insult? No; I do not love her—I have never loved her; moreover, and to this, I likewise pledge my honor, I have never to any woman, until this day said, "I love you." I have had flirtations and follies to answer for, like every man; but I have never felt, nor owned, nor professed love for any

woman till now. My passions have been aroused, my tastes gratified, my fancy aroused, but my heart has been my own. I have never dragged those sacred words in the dust of every idle whim, nor whispered them in every pretty ear, nor kissed them out close to rosy lips. They are yours. Heaven nor Hell can not rob you of them. Worthless they may be, but such as they are, I love you.'

Two days later, Miss Desborough's and Mr. Gray's acquaintances learned, with surprise, that they were engaged, with the full approbation and consent of the destined bride's millionaire papa.

## CHAPTER VI.

Ruth was married on the 24th of November. It was not a long betrothal, but long enough to give time for the lawyers to draw up very liberal settlements, and for all the city to be exultant or despondent, as their fancy suggested, over the unexampled 'good luck' of that favorite of fortune, Gerald Gray. Long enough for a magnificent *trousseau* to be procured, the ordering of which Ruth placed in the hands of her future cousin, Phyllis Clare, who merited this mark of appreciation not only by her rapturous delight at the match, but by her superlative taste in matters of dress.

St. James' Church was crowded to excess. Twelve o'clock was the hour, and a large number of those present were invited to the breakfast which took place immediately after the ceremony.

To many conventional eyes all brides are 'lovely,' but Ruth did not elicit this comment from the present audiences.

Her costume was as superb as lace and diamonds and *noir* could make it, but the dead white was very trying to her sal-low skin; and her eyes, the really fine features of her face, (when permitted to be,) were steadily kept down. She showed no other sign of emotion, and repeated the responses calmly and in a low, measured voice.

Gerald was quiet, contented, very handsome; his manner and dress were equally correct and admirable. Everything that he had to do was done just in the right way, from the tie of his white cravat and the manner in which he carried his bride's bouquet, to the putting on of the ring and the endowing of her 'with all his worldly goods.'

There were no bridesmaids. Mrs. Gray and her brother, Mr. Clare, stood near the altar, on the right of the groom. On the bride's left stood portly Jacob Desborough, stout, red-faced, jolly and delighted. His daughter was

marrying an 'aristocrat'; one of those good-looking, gentlemanly, tight-tight youths, who would know now which side his bread was buttered, and behave accordingly; and Ruth wouldn't die an old maid, as he had begun to fear that she would, with all his money left to charities.

The large drawing rooms were lighted, with shutters closed and curtains drawn. Porcelain and silver, and glass, and wax lights, and flowers, decked the long table, stretching through the lofty suite. Phyllis, radiant in pink silk, with the very greatest love of a bonnet that Laure ever fashioned, fluttered about like a stray sunbeam that had slipped in through the chinks of the windows; and Cecilia looked very pretty and sober in blue; but she did not seem happy, and had little color and a red flush about her eyes; she had a headache from dancing too much the previous evening, she said. Mrs. Gray was a picture of middle-aged triumph and mature enjoyment. There was a good deal of her brother's natural turn for pomposity about her, and as she swept through the rooms in her black velvet and dowager prints, her huge, stately figure and well-cut *pronounced* features, were no mean addition to the splendors and varieties of the day.

Liveried servants, marshalled by a grey-haired butler, (who might have been serving crowned heads since his infancy, if the dignity of his black countenance was the criterion of his life-long avocations,) were busily engaged in placing upon the table massive silver dishes, unmistakably English, and costly in their taste and fashion. Mr. Desborough had made but one stipulation with his daughter about the arrangements for the day—everybody must have a seat.

'None of your standing up, snatchy colations,' Ruthy, where, when you gits some oshters you have time to see them grow cold before you can scramble for a bit o' bread, or a dry sangvitch. No; give everybody a seat, comfortable like, since you now fashioned people won't have a dance and a setting down supper as folks did in my day. Don't have all those stuck up Clare and Cressingham; people say I begrudged them plenty to eat and a place to eat it in. They are your relations now; show 'em once for all that I can give 'em a spread fit to look at.'

So everybody had a seat, but for those who preferred a cosy time elsewhere than at the long board, where Mr. Desborough presided, there were small tables in odd corners, which proved extremely popular.

But just before Marcus, the magnificent, had bowed his white cravat with an as-

tonounding bow, before his young mistress, to pronounce 'breakfast ready,' Mrs. Gray led her son into the partial shadow of a brocade curtain and renewed her warm congratulations.

'Dear Gerald,' she said, 'I have always been proud of you; I always knew that you would be a comfort to me; that in you I should find ample atonement for the errors and misdeeds of others—'

'Softly, dearest,' said Mr. Gray. 'She knows nothing of all that, and you must learn to be cautious about it.'

'What! she has never heard? you have never told her?'

'No.'

'Ah, my son, was that right—wisest?'

'I thought and think so. Best 'not distrust Caminara.' Why rip up old stories?'

'And her father! has he never heard anything about it?'

'I fancy not. He has always had something else to think about. He is not very wise, nor has he a good memory, except for figures and calculations. I think he must have been in China about that time, cheating the sons of the sun on the opium or tea question.'

'For shame, Gerald,' Mrs. Gray said, half smiling; 'he is your wife's father.'

'Don't I know it; am I likely to forget it? I rarely forget anything at any time, dear mamma, but I don't talk at any time of much that I remember. It is not a bad rule, that; suppose you try it.'

He looked a little impatient—just a little—just enough to give a slight, nervous quiver to his thin nostril.

Mrs. Gray turned to some other topic.

'Dear love,' she said, 'why have you not worn the studs I gave you, to-day? I should have felt pleased to see them glittering in that miraculous shirt bosom. I was so glad, I thought, of having them set for you. Once I came very near giving them to Cissy; poor little Cissy was so dying for diamond earrings.'

Again the slight quiver was perceptible, and accompanied this time by a momentary compression of the sweet, almost feminine lips, that at once robbed them of the latter expression.

'Ruth gave me these,' he remarked. 'It was a *trencher* of hers; one of her few little romantic ideas. She had a watch which had been her mother's—the only thing I remember hearing her say that her mother had ever saved money enough, out of her wages as a nursery governess, to purchase—the only thing Ruth owned which she valued, and

which had not been given her by her father. She went off the other day, sold the watch, and ordered these studs for me, with the proceeds. They are plain and handsome—a double G in the enamel their only ornament. See, and he turned up the delicate wristband of the 'miraculous' shirt, 'these are the sleeve buttons. After this sacrifice of hers, of course I could do no less than wear them on the most important and sacred occasion.'

'Of course, of course, my dear, and it was very pretty of dear Ruth, although I confess I don't quite enter into her motives.'

'Don't you?' and Gerald looked listlessly around him.

'Dearest,' said his mother, 'excuse the question: Are you very happy?'

'Intensely, sublimely, emphatically, and I see Marcus patronisingly bowing to my bride. Time's up, dear mamma. Any way, this long talk of ours looks suspicious to the eyes of this company. I fancy Mrs. Grundy thinks that you are discussing the marriage settlements with me. Here comes my respected papa-in-law.'

'I believe, mar'm,' said old Jacob, offering his arm, 'tis me that has this honor. Mr. Gray, will you please to lead out some lady? Your uncle has charge of Ruthy.'

Mother and son were instantly transformed.

Mrs. Gray lost the affectionate look and intonation of voice, and became gracious, condescending and stately. Gerald smiled and put on an air of irrepressible, yet most becoming joyousness. His lot fell upon a former friend and patroness of Mrs. Desborough, in her early days—a good tempered, excellent, stout lady, of undoubted fashion, large appetite, capital lungs, and a well developed talent for laughter. They formed a merry couple; and from his seat at the middle of the table, Gerald sent his lively sallies right and left, with all the intensity of a school boy and all the good breeding of a finished gentleman.

Not far from him, but a little out of earshot, was one of those small tables I spoke of, occupied by two ladies and three gentlemen. It was a party in full tide of fun, flirtation and fault-finding—but the latter quality spared the eatables.

'I pronounce this *salmi* quite worthy of the worthiest chef that ever sported the *cosdon-blen*,' exclaimed Mrs. St. Clair; 'try it, Bettina.'

'I have tried it, but give the preference to these lobster outlets. Some more champagne, McIvor,' Mrs. Denham added, languidly hold-

ing out her glass to her neighbor. 'Don't be so lazy or I will send you away; and don't make eyes at Bertha. She isn't looking at you and I am.'

'He shall look at me if he chooses,' said Bertha St. Clair, laughing. 'Don't force from me that forlorn old adage about cats and kings. But on the whole, let us all look for a moment at the bride, and prepare to drink her health; Mr. Clare is proposing it.'

'Ladies and gentlemen, my friends,' said Mr. Clare, with one hand on his ample white waistcoat, the other with the seal ring and its large crest, waving his brimming glass—'my very excellent friends, I trust you will not think what I am about to say is out of place or unwelcome. On the contrary, I am firmly persuaded that my remarks will fall upon pleased and sympathising ears. It is by some deemed unnecessary, by others, inelegant, to propose toasts. I own that I am not of their opinion, in view of which, allow me, before proceeding farther, to say a few words about myself.'

'Oh!' groaned Bertha, and down went her head, seeking an unfindable truffle, and discovering what she really needed—concealment behind Mrs. Denham's shoulder, for the laugh which broke over her saucy face.

'I am an old fashioned man—a very old fashioned man,' pursued the drawing room orator, warming to his subject, and rolling out his words with unctuous delight, 'and I like all old fashioned things and habits. I like this social board.'

'My idea, sir,' put in Mr. Desborough, 'Ruth wanted a colation but I said to her, says I, 'yes, and when you git your oshters, where's your bit o' bread; but I am interrupting you, Mr. Clare; excuse me, sir,' nodding his jolly head up and down; 'go on.'

'If those two old fellows keep up this manducic performance,' whispered Bertha, as Mr. Clare bowed his head, and flourished back at his host, 'where's our 'bit of bread,' and as for oshters, the venerable Marcus won't stir himself, nor permit one of those 'irrepressible conflicts' to move hand or foot while it is going on. Ah, here comes Mr. Clare again.'

'Just so, my dear sir. Your ideas and mine have always been singularly alike.'

'Except when old Jacob was director in the Mechanics' Bank, and refused that 'bit o' paper of yours,' again interpolated Bertha, softly, to her companions.

'For many years I have watched with interest and delight the progress to womanhood of a young lady whose graces of mind and person none more highly appreciated. If I had had a son I should have said, 'try and win

her.' My nephew has succeeded in carrying off this prize. 'Nay, my dear Ruth,' as Ruth laid her hand gently and rather nervously on his arm, 'we are among our friends. I say, ladies and gentlemen, that I like old fashioned habits and customs, and none better than that of gay and festive scenes like this when a happy marriage, a suitable marriage, a marriage which we all rejoice in, takes place. And I like to drink success, and health, and prosperity to the couple, and above all to this couple, and beyond all, to my new niece, the bride.'

'The bride!' was echoed from lip to lip, and Mr. Desborough cried:

'Get more wine, Marcus; fill the gentlemen's glasses; fill the ladies' glasses. Ain't any champagne in the house? Suppose you send round the corner and buy some.' A joke very much appreciated by those who saw the uncountable bottles of the finest vintage, flowing like water in every direction, not to mention such decanters of Lerchal, Amontillado, Tinto and Brown Sherry—such as, alas! the soils of Madeira and Spain no longer can furnish.

Mr. Clare sat down, and Gerald left off twirling his wine glass and looking annoyed. He smiled at Ruth and she smiled back at him.

Bertha St. Clair caught both smiles. She touched Mrs. Denham's arm, saying:

'Look there! Too late! You missed it. I saw Ruth Desborough beautiful!'

'Great Diana! drawled Bettina, 'can't she do it again?'

'Yes; I imagine that the same cause can again produce the same effect?'

'What cause?'

'Gerald Gray threw his whole soul into the blue of his eyes, his heart into the curve of his lips, and made her a present of the investment.'

The young men laughed, and Mrs. Denham shrugged her shoulders.

'But how does that change her decidedly plain face into a beautiful one?'

'Because she lives only in his looks, and draws her existence and her whole appearance from him. She is now, and always will be, what he makes her.'

'Pshaw! one of your fancies. Mr. Taunton, will you give me some of that *biscuit* before it melts? Melvor is star-gazing as usual to-day.'

'What a little woman for pitching into innocent people you are, Mrs. Denham,' said Arthur Melvor. 'Here, give me your plate, you shall have the whole *biscuit*, if you wish it, at once, or by installments, greedy little thing! This last epithet murmured close to her laughing face

'Stop fighting, you two,' said Mrs. St. Clair; 'I can't hear what Mr. Taunton says. I have come to the conclusion that society is ruined by being composed of persons who have lived together all their lives, been sent to the idle bench in company when they were just out of petticoats, and just in a girl's school, and then continuing to associate on familiar terms. Witness the abominable behavior of my friend, Mrs. Denham, and that youth beside her. How can we expect them to conduct themselves like grown up people, when they have had their heads knocked together over the same primer so often! What were you saying, Mr. Taunton?'

'I asked if you thought this a real love match?'

'Do you wish the truth, as I believe it, without reference to considerations of what is 'due to feminine delicacy,' and the 'propriety of supposing attachments always mutual,' and 'deference to'—fiddlesticks and so on?'

'Yes.'

'Then I proclaim this match to be, on the lady's side, one of the most insane and unreasoning passions; yet a love as pure, as self-sacrificing, and as devoted as ever filled a woman's heart and made up her life.'

'And on his?'

'Ah, exactly on his! *Je bria, monsieur, a votre admirable sante.*'

'Nay, pray answer, dear Mrs. St. Clair. Don't you think he wished to marry her?'

'Certainly, or he never would have done it, if the penalty of not doing it had involved the skinning alive of his own mother and every other human being that walks this earth—except himself.'

'Then, you think it is nothing, absolutely nothing, but her fortune that he wanted?'

'Or a pair of old shoes of Mr. Desborough's, with pointed toes, that are up stairs on the shelf, in the right hand closet of the front garret, and which are too worn out for Marcus to accept, and lie there by accident, but couldn't possibly be asked for by any thing but a whimsical son-in-law,' responded Bertha, quietly and gravely.

'What on earth do you mean, Bertha? enquired Mrs. Denham, opening her great brown eyes. 'All that is a row!'

'Mean, my dear Mrs. Denham, that Gerald Gray wants only what he wants, and that he wants he will have, be the consequence, great or small, trifling or of consequence, lovely or unlovely, sought by others or universally neglected. He has no rule to guide him, no fixed idea to follow. He wants it to-day—he will scorn it perhaps to-morrow; but while the whim lasts *he will have it*, if it is a

thing to possess; *he will do it*, if it is a thing to be done. There is nothing too cowardly, too low, too vile in the way of means to accomplish his object. He would lie, steal, cringe, swear, cheat—murder, if necessary. He would trample under foot every lie, every moral obligation, run any risk, dare any possibility with the same calmness and indomitable courage as if he were sustained by an inward power, born of high aims and noble aspirations. He is almost invincible, because he is utterly unrestrained and perfectly unscrupulous; because in his pursuit, be it the countless thousands of an heiress, or her father's old shoes, or the gratifying of a vanity, or the piquing of his compeers, he puts his whole energies to work, and neither falters nor swerves aside, even should his path be encumbered by rocks of honor or rivers of honesty.'

The speaker paused; her cheek was flushed and her eye bright; possibly her earnest tone had by its long continuance and the silence of her companions, in some way, struck the attention of the very subject of her remarks. Gerald Gray turned and looked towards the table. His glance met Mrs. St. Clair's; he smiled, bowed and raised his wine glass, without any hesitation; she returned the smile, the bow, and the glance, as easily and with as little embarrassment as if she had been discussing the hero of a novel.

'Oh, what a hypocrite!' said Mrs. Denham, laughing.

'Mr. Gray? Yes.'

'No, you little wretch, I mean you.'

'I am not a hypocrite. Why do you call me one?'

'Because you bowed and looked just now at Mr. Gray as if you admired him intensely.'

'And so I do; I think him excessively handsome, and excessively clever. I think him so very much both, that my cowardice won't keep on good terms with him—personally.'

I have but the single way.

I cannot call him a—field

For woman's defence in open day—

Man only can weapon wield.

Woman must 'only wield' smiles of an unalluring and insipid character.'

Mr. Taunton shook his head.

'What means Mr. Taunton's ominous shake of the head?' continued Mrs. St. Clair.

'I disagree with you. You both underrate and overrate Gray.'

'As how?'

'He is by no means so charming, nor so wicked as you describe him.'

'My dear friend, you reason like a man

talking of a man. I reason like a woman talking of a man. I grant you that although very handsome, I have seen men as handsome; and although very clever, I have seen many a great deal cleverer; but, he has a sort of charm that, however indescribable, exists. Pshaw! facts speak. Look at Ruth, turning her head slightly towards the upper end of the table; 'no, you can't look at her; she has gone to put on her traveling dress, and it is nearly time for us all to say good bye; so give me some champagne, and let me get on with my theory. Look at facts—look (mentally) at the late Miss Desborough. Was there ever a graver, colder, more able-to-take-care-of-herself young woman? How long has she resisted the attractions of Gerald Gray? Is it because he is so good-looking and so agreeable—because he has large, deep, passionate sapphire eyes and is quick at repartee, that he now stands master of this house and of that woman's heart? No. It is because he is thoroughly unscrupulous. He has found out her weak points, whatever they are, and has taken them as trumps to win the game. I know nothing about it, but I divine it all. Ah!' and the speaker slowly nodded her head, and fixed her eyes on her uplifted bumper of champagne—'I am terribly afraid of him.'

'You!' exclaimed Arthur Melvor, who entertained a lively admiration for Mrs. St. Clair; 'you afraid, and of Gerald Gray! What an ideal!'

'Young gentleman,' said Bertha, with mock gravity, while her bright eyes danced with suppressed amusement; 'if Gerald Gray wished my hand from off my arm, or my nose from off my face, I should feel that they were no longer safe. He would bully me out of them, or persuade me, or lie to me, and I should end by being minus both or other, and thanking him for his trouble, and apologising for their being no better!'

'You are too absurd, Bertha.'

'You are prejudiced and unjust. Mr. St. Clair,' said Mr. Browne, the third gentleman of the group, speaking for the first time. 'Pardon my saying so; you know my friend for you too well to put harsh constructions upon such words. I only desire to see you straight about this matter. I have every reason to believe that Gerald Gray is not the man you take him to be. I have but one regret and one fear in this business. He is entirely false and true, but I fear that he has thought more of pleasing his mother, whose ambition is great, than of crushing an old sentiment which, although unreciprocated, (by his own confession to me,) was some time back very sincere.'



The lady *never* cared for him, but he was *once* very much in love with that lovely creature.'

Mr. Browne motioned towards another small table at no very great distance.

'What a beautiful thing a man's friendship is, to be sure! Ah, Bettina, if women clung to each other and stood by each other as men do, how much stronger a body would 'the-ex' be. Now, my love, do you think that *you* would have rushed to *my* rescue as Mr. Browne does to Mr. Gray's? No, indeed, you would have regretted the truth, and wished perhaps that it were less widely known. Hush, dear; I know you are going to contradict me, but it don't signify, and I am dying to see this 'lovely creature' of Mr. Browne's kind imagination and Mr. Gray's fond fancy. Which is she?'

'Miss Cecilia Clair.'

'THAT!'

Was there ever scorn more expressive than a woman's face and voice can give!

'My good Mr. Browne!—my excellent and worthy Mr. Browne! a little simpering, silly, soft, and giggling girl! I retract. I take it all back, Bettina. I withdraw all that I said. Better any truth than invention like that. Your idea to Mr. Browne reminds me of a speech I once heard when Wm. Ashe married that forlorn wife of his—that dreadful woman. Somebody said that he had married her for her money—she had money—there was money somewhere floating in the family, besides madness. 'No,' contradicted a friend, 'he is in love with her—really in love.' 'Ah, that's bad,' said the first somebody—'very bad. The one would be want of principle, but the other is want of taste, and we all know which is most to be held in horror.' But the company is dispersing, and here comes the bride again. Let us make our adieux.'

Ruth had changed her dress—was ready for their short journey to her father's country-place, where the honeymoon was to be passed. Her costume was strictly elegant and dark, and became her more than her bridal white. She lowered her veil as the doors were thrown open, and the gaudy sunlight flashed in.

A handsome carriage, stylishly appointed, and with four horses, was waiting for them.

Ruth kissed her father and her new mother. Mr. Clare led her down the steps and put her in the carriage; Gerald sprang in after her, and gave the order 'go on,' while saying it, he waved a final farewell, his last look resting on Gissy's pale face, as she leaned upon Phyllis' shoulder in the door-way.

Mrs. St. Clair did not lose this.

'Pooh!' she murmured to herself; 'it cannot be. Come, Bettina, let us be off. The

whole thing has been extremely well managed. Those four horses are rather excessive, but then they are necessary, which excuses a little display, even from so well bred a man of such quiet 'ton' as Gerald Gray! But—but—depend upon it, no good can ever eventually result from a palpable case of 'married for money.'

## CHAPTER VII.

Honeymoons are proverbially 'stupid things, except to the parties concerned,' unless, as in some cases, they are sad and dreary days, never remembered but with shudders, and seldom spoken of. Do you think that when pretty Emilia Jones was "persuaded" by her mother that to marry rich and devoted John Mason, whom she did not care for, was a capital and praiseworthy act, since Louis Martin, whom she loved, had, in a measure, jilted her—do you think Emilia likes to recollect those moonlight evenings of her honeymoon-trip to Philadelphia? Does she like to think of those prim streets and houses, like brick tombs, built for respectable grocers—every shutter a funeral slab, and the only escape for heart and eye up through the linden trees to the magnificent variety, the fitful wealth of color and light above, indelibly associated in her mind with that time? It was not the 'stupidity' of her bridal tour that weighed upon that young spirit, destined, one would think, for a higher fate, than the virtuous, and decorous, and prudent marriage which Mrs. Grundy applauds to this day. True, Emilia Mason is linked to a fool, an obstinate, jealous, tiresome fool, whom she don't love and can't respect; but he is 'the father of her children,' and she keeps her carriage, and Mason admires her very much—what more need she ask of this life? But we will pass over *her* honeymoon, if you please.

Then, I rather imagine Julius Brodie did not find his honeymoon a dream of bliss, or only 'stupid.' He wanted position and some money to keep it; he had a passion for intellect, and grace, and feminine softness, but—he was obliged, by the requirements above named, to win and wed such an ungainly, dull and affectionate young woman! I fancy *his* honeymoon was an awful trial, until his sturdy elders got used to the matrimonial burthen.

I need not ask that stately, proud, passionate, ambitious beauty, what her feelings were when she had accomplished her noble object, and led captive from the altar the little, insignificant, self-willed, old, ugly *millionaire*,

whom she preferred to the honorable devotion and poverty which might have been her fate; before she had quite entirely put away the past from her well-regulated affections—before she had absolutely accepted diamonds and bankstock, place and power, as the proper substitutes for love and youth, sympathy and congeniality. I think she must have found *her* honeymoon a frightful experience.

And there is another style of honeymoon, an old, old story, which always fills my eyes with tears to think of—they were humble people whom it concerns—a pretty country-girl, poor, uneducated, one of many daughters, and her lover was like herself, penniless, but stout-hearted. He left her to try his fate in the West, to rescue from the primeval forest enough land on which to make his corn-patch, or to build the little shanty which should call her mistress. Years passed—but they were both young and hopeful; every now and then 'a letter came out'—as they expressed it—the spelling far from perfect, the writing anything but beautiful, but the faith and the affection unchanged, to find her the same. Then—of course, you are prepared for it—a long blank. No word, no news, no sign. A stray traveller, who had journeyed on those distant roads, and who had enquired concerning the young man, as they were from the same section of country, was told that his neighbors had reported him as dead; passing, accidentally, that way, this eye-witness saw the deserted log-house, with its solitary, small window staring, shutterless, at him, and showing the bare, ragged walls inside.

The poor little girl, who had steadily hoped and waited, had no time allowed her for grief or tears—they were poorer than ever—'no, there was sick,' necessarily, and 'father had taken to drink;' there were so many little mouths to feed and so many yellow heads to comb! She must help her elder and her younger sisters, and put aside her sorrow; but the pathetic face, with its faded roses, attracted more than one suitor; she was not only the beauty of the family, but it was well known that she could work as bravely as her plainer sisters. Then came the refrain of 'Auld Robin Gray,' and, to cut my long episode short, the luckless girl was assured that there was no crime in giving her hand to a very well-to-do young man, who wanted to marry her, while her faithful heart was still full of the lost one.

The Squire tied the knot, and the few guests sat down to the humbly furnished hospitality

of this marriage morn. There came a tramp of horses; a child looks out, the bride listlessly raised her head and did the same. A cry of mingled joy and horror broke from her lips. Leading a horse, (upon which a woman's side-saddle was fastened,) mounted, himself, upon another, there came, the dead lover to claim his promised bride, and to carry her away, as the custom then was, to his comfortable home, still farther West than his first choice, still richer land, but with postal facilities it seemed worse than none, for his letters, telling all this, had never reached their destination.

By the law, she was another man's property. Too late; just too late! Too late by ten minutes or by ten years, what matters it? Those fatal words, 'man and wife,' had been spoken. I might moralise for pages on them—so easily said—*never* to be unsaid, with decency, 'until death do them part.'

He turned his horses' heads and went back to his dreary forest home. Think of *her* honeymoon! But there are brighter sides than this—there are first days and weeks of wedded life unspeakable for their full delight, not from their bitter memory. In fact, I recollect meeting a couple once—the gentleman an old acquaintance—who seemed to entertain the most exalted opinion on this subject. He was a small, smiling, rather absurd youth, who lisped slightly, and had light curly hair, and a taste for painting.

'And so you are married?' I said.

'Yes; my wife is here.'

'I shall be pleased to make her acquaintance, presently.'

He bowed delightedly.

'How long since this charming event transpired?' I went on.

'Only four months—not quite four months.'

'Ah! then you are still almost in the honeymoon?'

'Don't say that; I entreat you, don't say that; this is not the honeymoon surely? Is not this to be all our life? Don't make me miserable by letting me suppose that this must end. I fancied this honeymoon, as you call it, was our existence.'

He passed his hands through his flaxen curls and seemed ready to cry; so I asked to be taken across the room to the other member of this delightful partnership. He frisked beside me, talking gayly.

'I am afraid you will find her 'new,' he

said. 'She is very 'new,' quite young; but you will be lenient, she is so 'new.'

The 'new' young lady sat at a table, looking over some engravings; her back was to us, and, as her admiring spouse stood beside her, his head was just on a level with hers.

'Miss Mary!' he called, gently, 'Miss Mary!'

Miss Mary turned round, and the introduction took place.

The usual preliminaries of how much she had heard of me, from her side; and on mine, of how much I appreciated the young gentleman whom she had so highly honored, were followed by my simple and natural question, as to the length of their stay in this country. I hoped they would make it their residence, &c.

'We shall stay about two years and a half,' said "Miss Mary."

'Oh! no! love, three years,' amended her ord.

'Two years and a half, dear,' persisted the lady, beaming into his face.

'Three years, my dearest; I think three years.'

'Two and a half, love, only two and a half,' insisted Madame, smiling, shaking her head, and gazing fondly into the fond eyes beside her.

'Three years, . . . . .,' surely, neither they, nor you, my patient reader, expected me to stand any more of that. I beat a hasty retreat, and have never seen nor heard of the 'new' young lady nor my old acquaintance since that moment.

Whether the honeymoon still lasts, or whether it turned acid about those disputed six months, I am unable, therefore, to say. He is the only decided admirer and unmitigated supporter of honeymoons that I ever met. Perhaps it is because people don't confide in me enough, or I have not sufficiently enquired into the matter. But I fear that many a *menage* which has since shaken down into shape, consistency, and tolerable contentment, began, perhaps on both sides, almost always on one, with a restless looking back on what Whittier sings:

'Of all sad words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest are, "It might have been!"'

And even in its happiest aspects, and with no such skeleton to tease or terrify, how many a woman learns, with sadness and amazement, that the lover, to whom her will was law, has been suddenly transformed, (as he ought ever

to be,) into the superior power to whom her feminine fancies must pay homage and deference? Is every young girl taught this necessary lesson? Is she always warned that if her happiness now fairly begins in the double life, for which God destined her, her trials also walk hand in hand with this happiness? She has become the one object of another's existence; with her rests his earthly comfort, but he is human and a man, he is her head and her master. Has it been earnestly and affectionately recalled to her, by those who first taught her to walk and to pray, that St. Paul writes: 'The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church; . . . . ., therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything?' Surely, if those inspired words, by which we profess to live and be guided, if they mean anything, they do not mean such marriages as are daily made, and urged and commended. Think of it! We don't think of it at all. In no point of really rational view, do we consider marriage, its fearful responsibilities, its awful risks, its fierce temptations.

Men see a pretty face in a ball-room, or a pleasing manner, or hear of a large fortune, and they ask no more; if it were a fine bread of horses they wished to procure, or a pleasant travelling companion for a summer's jaunt, they would look into the pedigree of the one, and reject 'bad blood'; they would hesitate in the other case about the man's temper, his habits, his capabilities for making things 'agreeable.' Alas! alas! when it is only a marriage, only life, only salvation, perhaps, how lightly, how carelessly, how cruelly are these matters managed!

The parent who is trustee of his daughter's fortune, weighs, considers, examines; "he could never forgive himself if he invested Sarah's money, left her by her godfather, in some losing concern; what about Sarah's heart and soul, given into his temporal care by her God?"

Oh! would that my pen were dipped in immortal fire, and had the power to trace my weak words in every parent's understanding. I renounce the task of touching their hearts, but can I not open their minds to this subject and its importance? I am no advocate for foolish, hasty *love matches*, as imprudent fancies are sneeringly called; but even such would not be hopeless if both men and women, as boys and girls, were instructed in the duties

and requirements and quicksands of matrimony, just as they are in Latin and Greek, modern languages, housekeeping, dancing, double-entry, 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses.' If girls were not taught that marriage is a necessity, and that 'any marriage is better than none!' On the contrary, would that this truth were sucked in with mother's milk, 'any loveless single life is more respectable than a disunited, unloving, married life.' To my eyes no spectacle is more degrading than the squabbles, the coolness, the mutual (or one-sided) dislike of two people, who, nevertheless, bring a yearly baby to be christened, and are said by their friends 'not to live very comfortably, but still they get on!'

I seem to have wandered from honeymoons, also, as I wandered from the thread of my story, but it is often from honeymoons that married disasters chiefly spring. George has been accustomed, perhaps, to see his mamma, who is well broken into harness, trot along calmly and contentedly under the guidance of the conjugal rein; he expects to see 'his wife,' in these early days, go through her paces as deftly. Louisa, *au contraire*, has been used at home, perhaps, to recognise 'the grey mare as the better horse'; she tosses her saucy head and kicks over the traces when the bridle means right, and she means left. If George is a sensible man, he perceives the difficulty, and coaxes his pretty, dearly-loved, spirited little nag. Doesn't St. Paul tell him too, (for there are two sides to this and every question,) 'So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself; he should not show temper, but he must show firmness. And she, if her real education has been neglected, if she has never learned, that honorable submission is her lot, and is wisest so; or if, oh, miserable woman! she married with the perfect conviction of a sad truth, known equally to herself and to her friends, that this George, whom so recently she swore to honor and obey, was not capable of inspiring either sentiment—shut the book of their lives. She will learn to 'manage' him, (hateful word!) or they will fight for supremacy, or she will be sullenly 'conquered,' or ingloriously conquer him, and so live, 'till death do them part!'

What says Phoebe Carey about that tremendous clause in our Episcopal service, murmured every day as thoughtlessly as if it had no more significance than the 'very humble and obedient servant' of a formal note?

"Promise to Love! why woman thinks  
To lose a privilege, not a task;  
If thou wilt truly take my heart,  
And keep it—this is all I ask."

"Honor thee! yes, if thou wilt live  
A life of truth and parity;  
When I have seen thy worthiness,  
I cannot choose but honor thee."

"Obey! when I have fully learned  
Each want and wish to understand,  
I'll have the wisdom to obey,  
If thou hast wisdom to command."

"So, if I fail to live with thee  
In duty, love and lowliness,  
'Tis Nature's fault, or thine, or both,  
The greater must control the less."

Which is all very well, if spoken before hand; but one is not permitted to interpolate 'ifs' in one's marriage vows, and, unluckily, it has not yet been satisfactorily decided, that the failure of one party to keep his or her share of this solemn compact, exonerates the other from its weight. And, yet, this, *the bargain* from which there is no withdrawal, to which no bounds are assigned, never to be honorably dissolved, either by 'mutual consent' or the 'terms of its limitation,' this is the firm which is most easily arranged—into which either or both partners plunge with a reckless indifference that Satan must smile to see, for it surely brings him, over and again, his richest harvest of human and unhappy souls!

I turn from the sad pictures, which here present themselves, to a brighter scene. Was there ever so happy a honeymoon as Ruth Gray's? Did ever bridegroom wear a serenest brow, or bend eyes more beautiful and bright upon the woman who worshipped him than did Gerald? Beauchamp is a lovely spot. As its name indicates, the house stands on a fine field of level ground. The river runs between low banks, about forty yards from the marble steps that in a stately double sweep lead up into the large, two-storied, handsome house, of which the servants' apartments and various offices occupy the ground floor, and you enter through a broad piazza into the drawing-rooms and hall on the first story.

Of course, there are live oaks, old as the river almost, with great 'gnarled trunks,' standing in the informal beauty of their forest growth, and not in stiff avenues of cultivated grace. You see no fences nor stone walls; to the right, in the distance, there is a low, broad gate, and stretching away on either side, y o

can catch glimpses of a hedge, (higher than a man's head,) of the impervious Cherokee rose; in the spring it will be covered thick with the white four leaved blossoms, mingled with the long sprays of the yellow jessamine. This forms the enclosure; the drive winds prettily in a smooth gravel path, around and about the trees, from that gate to the front entrance. Don't take the little Gothic building for a lodge; it is the chapel, where, every Sunday afternoon, there is service. The stables are to your left; do you see the small pond on which the rays of the setting sun are shimmering through the boughs of that overshadowing oak? Mr. Desborough has a fine stud, and the grooms are leading out the horses now in detachments, and watering them; you can hear the tones of those unmistakable African voices, faintly ringing through the clear, crisp air, as the men laugh and joke with each other and lazily get through their tasks.

Ruth and Gerald are sauntering by the riverside. His arm is around her waist, his other hand holds one of hers.

They are quite silent; presently she lifts her dark, wistful eyes to his face.

'What are you thinking of, darling?' he asked, gently.

'I am trying to discover why you first loved me. It is that old, provoking question; one that I asked you before.'

'Indeed?' and he smiled and pressed her hand, which clung so fondly to his grasp.

'Yes. I know that most people would think me a great idiot for not instantly deciding upon the most natural solution—that you don't love me at all, and that you marry me for my money.'

'Ruth!' said Gerald, gravely.

'Don't interrupt me, dear. I have never doubted you for one instant. If the whole world maintained such or such things against you, from your own lips, only, would I believe them. It is your truth that I love in you. Your frank sincerity; ah, darling, if you could but guess how weary of falseness and hypocrisy and double-dealing my twenty-six years of this life have made me! No, don't guess it. You would not like to find me such a withered, wilted, worn-out worldling.'

'Alliteritious, ably ally, I see you are.'

'Do you recollect,' pursued Ruth, 'that very first evening of your return from New Haven, when papa came into the room, as you were asking me to read that long letter, that dear and precious letter, the diary you kept on

your journey, and during your absence? He glanced at the voluminous manuscript, and you said, 'I am asking Miss Desborough to read my college valedictory.' No sooner had he left us than you started up with an exclamation of pain, and turning to answer my eager demand as to what ailed you, I saw your face as pale as death, and actual anguish working every feature —'

'Hush, dear child, don't recall all that,' said her husband, raising her hands to his lips.

'But I must; it was then the blow was fairly struck that brought me for life to your side. 'I have told a lie,' you said, with bitter emphasis; 'I feel it here, like a red-hot mark upon my forehead.' Gerald, from that instant, I adored you. God forgive me! but it is true, I adore you.'

'My sweet worshipper!' said Gerald, smiling half ironically, and very tenderly kissing the mouth that trembled with passionate feeling.

'Yours was the jealous love of truth that I had so long been seeking. Now, I was satisfied. Unlovely and unloveable as I know myself to be, when you said to me, 'I love you,' on that star-lit beach, I did not for one second doubt it; so it is, that I want to know, not if you do, but why you do?'

'Perhaps it is for your money,' said Gerald, teasing her; 'I love your lands and that house and the one in town, and the irrepressible conflicts,' and—your beauty,' he slowly added, in a different tone.

The tears started to Ruth's proud eyes—ah, me! with 'the full happiness of her double life had come the trial' of tears. I wonder who ever saw Miss Desborough cry? Why is it? why must it ever be that the fountain of our perfect joy lies always next to that briny source? When she 'walked through life,' bitterly alone, her eyes were as dry as they were cold.

'You are laughing at me!'

'Dear child,' said Gerald, pressing her to his heart, 'how have I wounded you? Oh, Ruth, what a silly, dear, little goose you are! Of course, there are lots of women handsomer than you; it is not for your looks I love you.'

'I should hope not, even if I were a red and white beauty, like Cecelia Clare. I should as soon be loved for the land and houses and conflicts,' as for my skin and eyes and hair; at least the former are more lasting usually.'

'I agree with you entirely, but, at the same time, I must insist on being a better judge

than you of your appearance. Can't you see that your eyes and mouth are beautiful?'

'No.'

'Candidly?'

'Was I ever uncandid, Gerald?'

'True; well, then, to impress upon your bewildered understanding that they are, and promising that I should love you just the same if they were not, which, perhaps, will help to answer your almost unanswerable question as to the 'why' of my love for you, listen to a little verse that came into my mind just now. You can tack it on to the end of that pretty, ancient ballad we read yesterday. —'Her I Love.' How does the original go?'

'I know a little hand,  
'Tis the softest in the land,  
And I feel its pressure bland,  
While I sing;  
Lily-white it seemeth now,  
Like a rose-leaf on my brow,  
As a dove might fan my brow.  
With its wing,  
Well! I prize all hands above,  
This dear hand of her I love!'

'I know a little foot,  
Very cunningly it is put,  
In a dainty little boot,  
Where it hides;  
Back and fore it glides —

(No, that's wrong; help me, Ruth, when I stumble: ah!)

'Like a shuttle it flies,  
Back and fore, before my eyes,  
As it glides,  
Well! I prize all feet above,  
This dear foot of her I love.'

'I know a little heart,  
It is free from courtly art,  
And I own it every part,  
For all time!  
Ever it beats with music's tone,  
Ever an echo of my own,  
Holy time!  
Well! I prize all hearts above,  
This dear heart of her I love!'

Now, these lines are very charming; but listen to what was suggested by the bright smile and your actually speaking lips, as you sat silently beside me last evening, not uttering one word, yet saying a volume:

'I know a little lip,  
Where a bee would love to sip,  
Like the honeysuckle's tip,  
Is it sweet,  
Parting now with ruby glow,  
Archling, too, like Cupid's bow

Weaving smiles of joy, I know,  
When we meet.  
Well! I prize all lips above,  
This dear lip of her I love!'

'Do you like that, *miladi*?'

'Very much,' said Ruth, blushing with pleased attention. 'So you are a poet, too?'

'*Comme mes vœux!* Not exactly destined to be the author of the Great Epic of the Day, nor shall I attempt to snatch at the bays of the Poet Laureate over the water—but enough to be your poetaster in ordinary, and send you 'pomes' on your birthday, when you are good. And take care that I don't have to add another verse about 'an eye, that dearly loves to cry,' belonging to 'her I love.' My darling, tears are my terror! I saw a 'glistening drop' trying to make its way from under your long lashes just now. *Pas vrai?*'

'Yes, I am very sorry,' said Ruth. 'You should forgive it for its novelty. I did not use to be given to the 'melting mood.' However, as my smiles were once quite as rare, and you have taught them to me, why you must, I fear, take their sisters along with them. But it is growing cold. Let us go in!'

The sun had sunk far below the trees, and the twilight had deepened into night. The cheerful blaze of the great wood fire sparkled through the undrawn curtains of the drawing-room windows. How luxuriantly comfortable it all looked, as the wedded lovers paused upon the lowest step, and Gerald said, resting his arm upon the pillar of the balustrade, and as if to finish the conversation before they entered the house.

'So it was that fit of mine which won your stubborn heart?'

No,' said Ruth, smiling, 'it was your agony of remorse for having told it to your obtuse Gerald.'

'And if I should ever be detected in an unrepentant one, an unconfessed prevarication, would you unlove me?'

'Yes.' Ruth's voice was almost as harsh as in her loneliest days, when she uttered this monosyllable after a silence of a moment.

'Well, you need not fear it,' he said. 'But I always fancied that it was the beautiful handwriting of that diary that gave you to me—and the spelling! Dogberry was wrong, it is 'spelling' that 'comes by nature.' My poor uncle used to be in despair about my erratic mode of vanquishing orthography. I never 'cave in' to it, but I make its rules submit to my powerful pen.'

'Yes,' said Ruth, laughing. 'On one page, you appeared suddenly struck with the curious look of some marvellously lettered word. "That I am sure, is not right," you wrote, pathetically; "do you think, dear friend, that it is ig—, with a dash and a final e, a trouble which makes me play such fantastic tricks with Johnson and Webster?"

'I am sure,' said Gerald, again drawing his bride near enough to lay his beautiful Greek head upon her shoulder, as she stood on the step above him, 'you may as well acknowledge it; you wished for a full-grown scholar, whose knuckles you can rap.'

'I wished, most earnestly, to show him that I believed in what Pope wrote to Martha Blount, and Mrs. Pioni quotes, in her shrewd old age, to her baronet friend—what was his name? She had got a melancholy letter from him when he was beset with family anxieties, and she cites this autographic scrap of Pope's: "My poor father died in my arms this morning; if, at such a moment, I did not forget you, assure yourself I never can." Mrs. Pioni concludes that her friend, also, really loved her, to write when he was busy and unhappy; when I read those hasty letters you wrote me, and that longer diary, full of thoughts in which I was present, was it strange that I came to the same conclusion?"

She softly bent her head and timidly, almost, laid her lips on his white forehead.

'At all events, Ruth,' he said, 'you do not regret your choice, just yet?'

'My darling! I am too happy. You stand between me and Heaven. I am a new creature with you; there is new blood in my veins; a new sun, moon and stars in the sky; all life is changed since I met you. I no longer regret my poor mother, as I used to do. But, on the other hand, I am more tolerant, I hope, of ordinary people.' She paused. 'Can you believe it?' she asked, with a little laugh. 'I find Cissy Clare less insipid than skin-milk, because I love you.'

I fear honeymoons are stupid things, except to the parties principally concerned, and that this conversation is no exception to the adage.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Gray did fair to be the most popular couple in their very fashionable circle. Why not? It was the most natural thing that could happen. Gerald's indolent, pleasant, gay manners, were always attractive; he had always been permitted to take more

liberties, say more saucy things, and be more quoted by men, and petted by women, than anybody. He was good-naturedly selfish. Provided he had everything he wished, he grudged no human being taking their share of the good things of this life: he would even invite them to partake of his own superfluity. If he had four "weeds" in his *porte cigares*, and the softest-cushioned sofa in the club-room, he would willingly tender one of the Habanas, (his "smoke" never exceeded three,) and point to the next best seat in the room to the first agreeable man that entered, would amuse the new-comer by a thousand funny stories, and leave the pleasantest impression of his social qualities on the mind of his companion, when he sauntered away. He paid his bills scrupulously; however much he was given to jokes against other people, permitted none to be launched against himself; was free with his money, and was called "very high-toned."

Their home was gay and hospitable. Mr. Desborough gladly retired from an active share in its honors. Tight shoes, and what he called "his stuck-up manners," were thankfully and almost permanently abandoned for a country life, varied only by visits to his daughter at quiet seasons, when balls were over and dinners few. He admired his son-in-law vastly: Gerald thoroughly understood what his *beau-pere* had called "which side his bread was buttered"—he showed no eagerness about spending money, (he knew that Ruth would take the coat off her father's back, and "put it up the spout," to supply her idol with a full purse); he was very polite to the old man, and they got on extremely well together. Beauchamp and the town house were virtually theirs already, and Mr. Desborough retired to Bellair, a small place near the city.

And Ruth! Ruth was the happy victim of the most delicious and soul endearing delusion. She fancied that she had married an angel with a silky moustache, a cameo profile, a strong sense of religious duty, (with no great practice about it,) shiny boots, excellent principles, the sweetest temper, and the loftiest ideas of truth and honesty. And this perfect being loved her! Had not he, the apostle of that goddess always down a well, had he too not moralised with her, over and again, upon the strange yet beautiful chance which had kept his heart absolutely untouched, until that ever blessed storm, whose driving wind had sent him straight, by so mere accident, to her side? Had he not from the moment when she placed her hand in his, and led him up those rickety steps of Mrs. Price's house had he not felt that virgin heart thrill to the touch of those fingers unconscious then, of their miraculous power? Oh, silly, silly woman's love! Was there ever

anything so blind and so foolish as a devoted woman? Ruth Desborough had more sense than half her sex—Ruth Gray was intensely absurd. Ruth Desborough weighed and judged, hesitated and doubted—Ruth Gray looked at everything through her husband's blue eyes, and placed her reasoning powers in the alembic of his mind, from which her ideas came forth as he willed them.

But she was very happy. I only can wish to every feminine soul whose earthly comfort I pray for, that they may pass through life with the feelings that made up Mrs. Gerald Gray's wedded existence.

Of course there were some clouds in this marvellously blue sky. Its otherwise monotonous azure would have wearied the gaze, perhaps. Light white,

"Argosies of summer, wrecked and drifting, Floated,"

occasionally up to the zenith, and once or twice a positive thunder-cloud, black and threatening, sent out its "forked tongues" of flame, and the rain drops fell, fast and furious. Mutterings of thunder rolled from marital lips, and the "cloud" was apt to put on its beaver and quit the home in the sky, leaving the shower to dry up, uncrushed. But how lovely the "cerulean vault," after all this, when the sun shone again—and explanations were given—and Ruth's proud spirit, having gladly stooped to ask pardon, for his having given her offence—how graciously her imperial master passed over the crime of *lese majeste*! There was no Vashti in the Gray ménage; but Esther was always bending low before Ahasuerus, and praying him to allow her to speak her submission. Jealousy was the skeleton in Ruth's closet: she scarcely would acknowledge that she saw it. She hid its dreadful old bones as well as she could, and never willingly unlocked the door. She was better off than I would allow Mr. Thackeray to give me credit for being, when, one evening, the lower press beneath a book case in the library, where we were supping, would fly open with a bang every two minutes, just at my back. Again and again the servant closed it—the key would not turn. I rose up and jammed a piece of paper beside the lock—"you are very anxious about that door," said Michael Angelo: "is the skeleton there?" "Ah! I sighed, "that small spot would not hold the half of my skeletons."

Ruth had but one: sometimes it took the visible shape of one woman, sometimes another. Gerald would spend hours at a ball, lazily chatting with some girl, saying nothing probably that as Ruth's property he had no right to say, but looking a great deal, and making this young heart, (he liked them young and fresh,) dance with gratified vanity. Or he would de-

vote himself, in an obscure corner, to some old flirt of his, some daring-eyed, gay-spoken woman, and Ruth would, as she passed, catch whispers and low laughs. Then, he would disappear at the theatre, and her anxious long-nette would discover him in a private box, sitting on a low stool at the feet of some desperately attractive woman, playing with her bow-quiver, and looking as little like a married man as a perfectly disengaged one could represent. But, oh, bitterest of bitter pangs, was to hear of her beloved from others. To be told that at that ball where she did not go, Mr. Gray was the life of the evening. 'He and his cousin, Miss Clare, got up a new dance—what was its name?'

Ruth did not know: but she knew well the sickening sinking with which she asked, "which Miss Clare? Phyllis?"

"Oh, no: Cissy. You know Mr. Gray's favorite was always Cissy."

There is no instinct in these things. Ruth had a dread of Cissy Clare. Gerald always spoke of her as frankly as possible: no reticence apparently, in word or action. She was his cousin; his early playmate; his mother's god-daughter. He even made a merit of never noticing Cissy before Ruth, when Ruth commented upon it.

'Darling,' he said, 'I know you have an idea that I was in love with Cissy; I can't get it out of your precious head—what then must I do? I can't absolutely neglect poor little Cissy, who is a good, amiable, harmless little creature—so, I never dance with her, or talk to her, where it will wrong you to see me. If you bid me speak just the same, when you are present, I shall do it.'

Of course, Ruth was ashamed, and begged pardon.

Then his other flirtations: 'What would you have, Ruth, dear?' he would say; 'recollect we are married, not lovers. We are living one life now. You would not wish that I should keep on talking only to you in society, and following you around with my eyes, as I did in my courting days? I must talk to other women.' 'Certainly; but you talk to one woman.'

'Cissy, again?'

'No—but all last week, at every party; in the street; at the opera, you were laughing over Eugenia Hopes' luxurious shoulders.'

'By Jove! Ruth, they are luxurious. I wonder if anybody will ever rouse that girl. I should like to do it. Stop, darling, don't go off. Listen to me. Don't you know that I would rather talk to you than to anybody—but you must learn to understand me. I only care to do what you call "devote myself" to some one indifferent woman at a time. You must learn to understand my temper, and I



don't always wish to do what I prefer doing. That is the key note to my wayward ways that vex you sometimes. And then you are jealous.

'I know I am,' said Ruth, gravely and sadly. 'I wish I had some vanity; I think I should be happier.'

'You are not happy then; you have made me so happy, and I cannot make you so?'—Gerald fixed his eyes upon her troubled, averted face.

She turned, and threw herself into his arms. 'I should be an ungrateful wretch, if I said or thought so. No, Gerald; these are but trifles after all, and are my necessary crosses. I must learn to bear them.'

But there were occasions when such merely passing outbursts were superseded by the dark storm charged clouds of which I spoke. One such occurred about five months after their marriage, and may perhaps be looked upon as the final thunder clap which, severer and longer-rolling than its predecessors, sounding in our very ears, and seeming to threaten entire destruction, dies away harmlessly after all—echoing from the distance, faintly and more faintly still—till the rainbow is seen spanning the fair sky, and proclaiming that peace has really come at last.

Gerald had been more wayward, and more obstinately bent upon smiling demonstrations of a disagreeable nature than usual. He had worried poor Ruth as remorselessly as a powerful child can torment a helpless kitten. Kitten gets *cattish* and shows her claws, and the child is then justified in knocking it about the head till it understands that 'velvet paws' alone are admissible for the weaker party. Kitty submits, and blows cease; but her fur is rubbed the wrong way, her whiskers are pulled, her tail is pinched—all in fun, you know—just playful nonsense, but the impatient and not perfect-tempered feline specimen darts out the sharp defences again, to be again summarily dealt with, and so on, and so on, *ad libitum*.

Gerald had a select party to play 'draw poker,' or 'lanquenet,' or some pleasant card devilry of a delightful nature and gambling tendency; this was rather aggravating, because his wife, like most true women, had a profound aversion to games of chance. He had not exactly promised her to give up such things, but he had distinctly and voluntarily assured her that he meant to do so—and had been very much commended and thanked by her for his virtuous resolve.

The morning after this party, she casually found out that his pockets were empty, and her mild remonstrance was met by a contemptuous desire to know if she were trembling for her

future. Immediately she repented, and felt humiliated at her own want of delicacy—but to teach her more prudence, Gerald told her carelessly, in the evening, that he was going to a supper, at the house of a lady of whom she justly disapproved, and whose very decided and marked attentions to Mr Gray formed many a bone in Ruth's skeleton.

To ask him to give up going was, she found, a sure method to make him go; but she tried it, and produced the satisfactory result—a distinct assurance that nothing should prevent his keeping his engagement, but likewise he laughed very kindly at her fears of Mrs. Redburn's attractions.

The more affectionate his words, the more she hoped he would change his mind; but off he went, leaving her more irritated than she had ever been against her chosen lord and idolised master.

The next day she had quite lost her temper; she injudiciously asked him questions about his supper, and tears came to her eyes when, after he had given her vague and thoroughly evasive answers, he left the breakfast-room with a cool 'good morning,' and bade the footman tell his mistress that he would dine at the club.

In the afternoon, when Ruth was taking a solitary drive, her husband's drag passed her with Cecilia Clare seated beside him, looking excessively handsome, dressed to perfection, and both in the gayest spirits. *Les comenances* escorted them in the shape of the groom in the dickey; but my unhappy heroine, a prey to the deepest melancholy, ordered the coachman 'home,' and passed the sad hours till bed time in restlessly pacing the floor of her drawing-room, alternately indignant against her absent darling, with herself for sending him away by her injudicious behaviour.

'He is right,' she murmured, 'I cannot tie him to my apron string; we are not sighing lovers, but two people who have their separate duties to perform, and who, though united by the strongest bonds to each other, are not disunited from all the world. Because I care for no society but his, it does not follow that he should care for none but mine. And yet—it is cruel of him. Is it my fault—is it a crime that I regret each hour he gives to others in needless, and to me most annoying, attentions? Why not have left me where I was? Why awaken in me this overwhelming love for him, this unreasoning delight in his presence, and then forever rob me of it?' A passion of tears followed her almost inarticulate words.

'How silly!' she thought, recovering her old grimness of expression, and seating herself resolutely in a chair near the reading lamp. 'Let me find my old self once more. I'll read.'

A few pages were listlessly looked at, and then the book was thrown aside—10 o'clock struck—she drew the *bureau* and inkstand near her, seized a pen and wrote a few lines:

'Dearest Gerald,' she said, 'great resolutions come sometimes very suddenly. I remember your telling me—oh, so long ago—it was last October, was it not?—that if resolves went as quickly as repentance, the latter would never overtake the former. So tonight, I have decided upon a great and sudden act. You will hear of it to-morrow. I am so tired of annoying, so helpless to prevent it. The childishness of my love for you, inexplicable as it would be to most people, you ought to understand. I was never really young, and certainly never happy, till I knew you. But the penalty I pay for the deep joy of my love, is too much for me. I have hit upon a plan, which I am sure will meet with your approval. And may loving peace to both of us—to you, whom I so incessantly disturb with my jealous fears of—I know not what, and to me, who am now, and will be to my last breath,

Faithfully yours,

RUTH.

'I lay this on your toilette table; I can't bear to go to sleep with you fancying, probably, that I am angry.'

She folded and directed her little note, and went off to her own room, first passing into her husband's dressing room, and depositing the loving message among the gold-mounted bottles and jars systematically arranged before his mirror.

Who could have recognised the Ruth Desborough of a year back, in the yearning-faced woman, who paused to look with such a long gaze of tenderness upon the manly belongings of that room? Her riding whip lay upon a chair, she took it up and almost stealthily carried it to her lips; a pair of old boots, carelessly left near the wardrobe, were *his*, and only looked at for *his* sake.

Indeed, I don't think that the silliest girl could have behaved more foolishly—human nature is certainly very absurd—and monotonous.

Her maid was hastily dismissed, and the outer door locked as usual, but she did not know

that she had carelessly pushed the bolt of the dressing room door—and worn out with the long tension of her mind, the sleeplessness of the two previous nights, and her tears, she presently fell into a deep slumber.

It was daylight when she awoke, and her eyes told her that she was alone, and that there was a strip of paper pushed under the dressing room door. She sprang up and seized it.

My own heart's darling. I write this with tears in my eyes. Oh, I have behaved shamefully to-night! I stayed at the club for no earthly reason but because I was angry. When I came home, your door was shut; you had bolted it. I scratched and scratched at the panels, but no answer. I lay down on my sofa really unhappy, and wishing so much that you would wake up. I tried again to make you hear me, you usually sleep so lightly, but in vain. Then I saw your dear little note, lying so white and still among my things, and a strange shiver seized me; I hardly dared to open it. D ring, I do and can love you so much; why is it, *why is it*, we do not get on well? At that stupid party I went to last night, I kept wandering about, caring to speak to no one. I missed my Ruth's loving look; and yet, this morning, I was cross to you, and continued so all day; but my anger has gone to the winds now. And your poor, little, good note. What plan is it? I am half tempted to arouse the house; you are so still. What should I feel to know that this door—but sleep on, dear child; I put this under the sill. I hope it will catch your eye at early dawn.

I don't essay to describe Ruth's deep delight as she read this note; her eyes devoured the contents, and then she flew to her husband, who was lying awake upon the sofa. On her knees beside him, with her happy head upon his breast, she thanked him for writing such a wondrously clever and brilliant production. I fancy no pen, to her mind, ever traced sentences so perfect.

Never was Gerald more truly her lover than in the grey dawn of that April morning; he had evidently been shaken by a tender remorse for his victim. It was the turning point in their lives. Ruth's real happiness dated from that day; Gerald had been seriously alarmed; and it had awakened all the best feelings of his nature. He had been vaguely uneasy about Ruth's note; he had been thinking about her 'wealth of devotion,' and he felt how very dear she had made herself to him, over and above the fact which we cannot doubt, of his never

having loved anybody but herself, except his own self, probably.

'And what is that mysterious plan, my darling?' he asked.

'Let us go to Europe for a year or two; we can easily persuade Papa to spare us. I think it will do my temper good.'

Gerald smiled and kissed her.

'Your's is a very nice plan, and I have not one objection to offer.'

In May they sailed.

## CHAPTER IX.

The Grays were two years absent. Mr. Desborough did not miss his daughter enough to hurry her back again, nor was she disturbed by any of the visions which constantly filled the anxious minds of her fellow-citizens, who more than once provided a step-mother for Ruth, and a fine family of half sisters and brothers to share her patrimony.

She wrote very regularly to him, and he was very proud of the letters; dwelling with great satisfaction upon her presentation at two courts, her admission into very high circles both in England and France, and accepting, as a matter of secondary importance, but still pleasant enough to know, the fact of her conjugal happiness, which, even to his rather obtuse comprehension in such matters, was clear enough.

Gerald wrote sometimes, too; one of his letters from Paris contained the gratifying information of the birth of an heir, and what was not quite so expected, of an heiress also. 'Ruth named them at once; and is so determined upon it,' he wrote, 'that although you may naturally think, dear sir, that she is too fond of almost perpetuating my cognomen, she will have both of our babies called for me—Gerald and Geraldine; therefore, they will stand in their baptismal record, and very fine little monkeys they are, I can assure you. Ruth is doing wonderfully well, and will write so soon as her stately professional attendant will permit her to use her pen.'

Another letter, some two months afterwards, had best be given in full:

Paris, April 10th, 18—.

My Dear Sir:

I have the pleasure of announcing a piece of intelligence that is very well worth telling. You may remember to have heard me say that one of my late aunts, Mrs. Norman Gray's nephews, has been from my boyhood my closest

friend. His name is Francis Josselyn; he, with his elder brother, William, and a sister, became heirs to my aunt's fortune by the terms of her father's will, and her marriage settlements. At the time of that sad blow when I lost both of my most kind and most partial relations, Francis was traveling in the East, exploring the centre of Africa for aught we knew, or setting up as a private Arab citizen, with a house, a palm tree, and a tent of his own. It was very long before any intimation could reach him of the change in his pecuniary condition, and when it did, he merely sent word that he would come home after a while.

Since I left America, nearly a year ago, a sort of fatality seemed to follow the Josselyns; Emily, who had married very well, with as strong settlements as her aunt before her, but only with regard to herself and her possible children, died last December, of typhoid fever, some weeks before her expected confinement; and not ten days after, William would drive a horse warranted to runaway, which did so, dashed him out of the buggy, and killed him on the spot.

He was unmarried, and, consequently, my friend Francis became sole heir, and his presence absolutely necessary. He was fished out of the desert, or wherever he was, and got to Boston by some circuitous and eccentric route best suited to his taste.

In looking over the packages and letters accumulated for him, there was one always considered too weighty to be sent by post to Arabia, Vetrica, or Timbuctoo, for it was a desk of our aunt's, carefully sealed up, and directed to him. In it he found an earnest and urgent appeal to share his portion with me, if ever fate should put it in his power; a duplicate letter to myself, asked the same of me, in the other case. Our beloved aunt added a few joint words to the effect that we were equally dear to her, and she was satisfied that the affection of each would rejoice to serve the other. Now, as Francis had seized the earliest chance to send me from his own generous heart a like proposition, when first he heard of our uncle and aunt's death, he triumphs like the great souled creature he is, over what he considers the legal and authoritative necessity for me to accept; especially as the address of the desk to him was her last living thought.

He argues that this is a will of our aunt's, which, if the law ignored her right to make, justice requires us to honour.

I have yielded to his most generous persuasions, in a measure, leaving the management of our affairs to him; ostensibly, during my absence abroad, but, in reality, never intending to have a division of the property, unless I find out that he lets me draw more than my share.

It is in vain that I argue with him that by your liberality, Ruth and I 'fare sumptuously every day,' and 'purple and fine linen' are week day clothes. He says, and it is a truth I have always forcibly felt, that I shall be more satisfied when you are not my sole banker; although the consciousness that I have now a very independent and handsome income, will never make me forget that your generosity of spirit, as well as of purse, has never for one moment caused me to remember with pain that I brought so little in worldly goods to my dearest Ruth.

As for her, were I a prince, and she a beggar, she could not more systematically, and as if unconsciously, try to make me feel that everything is mine, and she, my dependent.

The little ones are fat and thriving, they are no longer only snow balls with a dash of red upon them, and valenciennine lace, (I think that is the article,) running all over their small bodices in flounces and frills. They begin to sit up and look like Christians; one of the *bouines* almost shook her cap off her head this morning, with a toss of indignation, because I refused to believe that Gerald, jr., can say 'mamma,' and Miss Geraldine hup 'papa.' It all sounds bahl! bahl! to me.

But I leave this kind of talk for Ruth's letters. Party spirit runs higher than ever in our State, I see by the papers. The ——— comes occasionally to me—fire-breathing and foolish as usual. The lack of brains and the excess of arrogance that distinguish that journal, fill me with deep delight—that I am not there, and forced to look to its pages for my breakfast-table views of politics, at home and abroad.

In our obscurer districts are the people still voting for C——, for Congress, although his tombstone can be seen any day! Just as in some northern counties, it is said, votes are constantly dropped in the electoral boxes for Washington, maintaining that the report of his death is only got up by jealous rivals anxious to supersede him.

But my second sheet is filled. Ruth's love.

I am, dear sir, yrs. faithfully,

GERALD GRAY.

Another year passed away without any particular event to mark it; but when the third early spring of their absenteeism began, Mr. Desborough grew impatient to see his grand children. Such feelings must be very natural,

because we constantly witness them; and parents, by no means doting upon their immediate offspring, are frequently quite wild about their grand children. I suppose that the instinct of paternity, like madness, sometimes skips a generation.

The Grays promised to make their arrangements to return in the autumn. The twins needed sea air; they were going to Biarritz. Gerald wanted to visit Baden again, and Ruth had agreed to meet some friends afterwards at Pau.

Ruth had friends now; she numbered not a few Duchesses and Countesses among her allies, not to mention pleasant English women, and some slightly foreignized Americans, like herself. But, I will not describe my heroine as she looked to those who only knew her as she was now. I prefer to bring her home, and let her be framed in the old *cadre* of the first twenty-six years of her life. However, I will just lift the veil before she leaves Paris, for one small glimpse at her.

RUE DES VIEUX AUGUSTINS.  
12 Oct., 18—.

Dear Mrs. St. Clair:

You guessed as rightly as you usually do, when you decided that to hear from ——— and to execute your commissions would be me great pleasure. Gerald was quite proud of your confidence in my taste.

I took your measure and your directions to Vigriou; she understood perfectly, of course, but still these people constantly are guilty of mistakes; so I was careful to make her go over everything with me. Your ball dresses I chose of materials as light as a married woman can wear. Gerald can't bear to see heavy silks dancing, and you know how correct his notions are. We decided that a new shade of that eternal *mauve* would suit you for a dinner dress, and I have had it trimmed with white lace. I had determined on black *châtelain*, but Gerald chanced to be struck with the lovely combination of color and a suit of *point d'Alençon* worn by Madame de Baisvoger, and called my attention to it, so I instantly rushed off and countermanded the first order. I am sure you will approve.

Clara Daix has the honor of furnishing your velvet bonnet, but I prefer Laure for your lighter ones. The *maison Gagelin* promises me a *manteau de velours ravissant* for you, and *Tilmann* actually has the most elegant *coiffures* of anybody. In that department nothing would tempt me to try Vegriou again. Last winter, at a birth-day *fete* at Madame de Ville-neure's, Vegriou sent home my dress at the last moment; Gerald wanted to be early, and so I had scarcely glanced at myself when I

pronounced that I was ready. He screamed out when he saw me, that I looked as if I had been got by Madam R., in old King street! Such a wreath, to be sure!

He dragged it off my head, and scolded at Valie, who, in vain, protested, as was perfectly true, that Madame would not listen to her assurances when putting it on. *que cela allait fut mal, et était du plus mauvais goût.*

I humbly listened, as in duty bound, to Gerald's reproaches, while Valerie, almost sobbing from wounded taste, smoothed my disordered hair and replaced the detestable *guirlande* with diamond stars. But the next day I went after Vegriou, and told her that Monsieur would choose another *modiste* for me if there were a repetition of this crime. 'Monsieur!' she repeated, with great amazement, but the fact is, I know so little after all about dress—it was only the dread of Gerald's raileries that ever made me think of such things. He knows this; so he takes the greatest interest in my toilette, and helps me wonderfully.

I cannot tell you how lovely my children are; you must forgive my pride in them. Of course, they are very much alike, but still Geraldine is the most beautiful. Already, she is a miniature of her father. I long to show them to you, since you ask so kindly about them. But I fear that they will be terribly spoiled; Mrs. Gray will not be able to help it, because they are Gerald's; and my father, who seems so anxious to see them, cannot resist. I am sure, their attractions. I shall have a very severe. Somebody (I am really ashamed to mention my husband so often,) says that I may as well announce I mean to murder them. He is looking over my shoulder, as you may conjecture from this, and desires to convey his most respectful and admiring homage.

We sail by next steamer, this day week, from Liverpool, so that my letter will only be a little in advance of

Yours, very sincere,

RUTH GRAY.

When Bertha St. Clair received this letter, she laughed, with genuine pleasure, over its contents.

'Love, the mighty master!' she exclaimed to Mr. Taunton, who dropped in to see her, (no very unusual thing,) on the evening of the day whose afternoon mail brought this missive. 'I mean to have Ruth's dissertation on dress framed and hung up! Do you remember what sort of gowns Miss Desborough used to wear?'

'Perfectly.'

'Does the mirror of your memory reflect the outline of her bonnets—the hang of her skirts?'

'I think so, faintly.'

'Pray try and make it distinct, for by the mere force of contrast, I think you will enjoy seeing our fresh stepped from-the-Journal-des-Modes townswoman. It was a hazardous experiment to rely upon John Hutchinson's vivid account of Mrs. Gray's present perfect dressing, and send to her for my winter supplies, when it is comparatively so short a time since the heiress' awful toilettes used to disturb the eyes of her perforce silent friends; and yet, you dared, at their wedding breakfast, to tell me that I over-rated Gerald Gray!'

'What has he got to do with it? Can't his wife put herself in the hands of French milliners without his being answerable for it, or credited with it?'

'Oh, out of my decided and misplaced friendship! haven't you read the lady's letter? Do you not see that she dresses for Gerald, at Gerald, through Gerald. He is in a hurry to get to a ball, and the foolish creature don't see what she puts on! At that moment 'dressing for Gerald' was secondary to the horror of 'keeping Gerald waiting,' and the woman, who, I make no doubt, studies combinations of colors, slopes of sleeves, and *bavolets* of bonnets, was rushing off with some monster of a thing on her head, rather than that her liege lord should ask twice, if "Madame were coming." If you can name to me a greater work performed by mortal man than the transforming of Miss Desborough into a well-dressed woman, taking an interest in her own costume, and careful for the commissions of other people in that line, pray name it!'

Mr. Taunton laughed.

'I still believe,' he protested, 'that it is the force of surroundings, and not the power of love or Gray.'

'Very well; let us wait, and see. Already we know that her outward ornaments are revolutionized; what strange up-settings of character, manners and habits, (quite secondary matters!) may we not look for!'

#### CHAPTER X.

'Half a-dozen people sup with me to-morrow evening, the 'objects of the entertainment,' (unlike those at the wondrous party given by the D——'s ages ago, when we had no tea nor coffee, and Anna counted the 'forty-legs' that, in some strange way, walked over the mirrors, all evening, and we perished for lack of entertainment of every sort, first, and then nearly died afterwards from too much, in the

shape of *that* magnificent feed,)—heavens! what a parenthesis—well! the 'objects' of this entertainment are Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Gray.

I have seen her!

I say no more; only this, you will not know what to say, when you have seen her too.

B. St. C.

Charles street, Wednesday, 6th Nov.  
To Roland Taunton, Esq.'

'You did not name any hour, so I came early,' said Mr. Taunton, as he entered Mrs. St. Clair's drawing room.

'You were right,' she answered, shaking hands with him. 'But I ought to have said 9 o'clock, and, in fact,' looking at her watch, 'it is very nearly that now.'

'And now do you find our foreign friends?' asked Mr. Taunton, lazily dropping into a chair beside his hostess.

'Very pleasant.'

'Need one ask after the twins?'

'I advise you, if you wish to stand well with their mama, not to forget them. They are dear little things.'

'And the papa? How is he?'

'As handsome as ever.'

'Looks married?'

'Very.'

'Seems happy?'

'Perfectly.'

'Are you aware that you are cutting off your slave with strangely laconic replies?'

'Yes.'

'Parceque ....?'

'Parceque—I warned you that I was desirous to let you decide for yourself the great question of my knowledge of character; so not one word more of Mr. and Mrs. Gray. Have you been reading Owen Meredith's poems? Don't you like them?'

'My dear Mrs. St. Clair, he says just what everybody has been saying since Solomon, and he does not say it as well as Byron. He howls too plaintively all the while ....'

'And you are too utterly prosaic to appreciate him. Of course, he says what everybody has been saying; how can it be helped? We are all feeling every day just what everybody has been feeling, but is our love commonplace, our sorrow meaningless, our hatred, and envy and malice, alas! of no consequence, because they are such old sentiments? The feelings of which he writes are as old as the hills, but his words and similes are new, I protest; and then his verses are not transcendental, shadowy, vague, but plainly expressed and human. I don't know if he is very desolate really, this young Bulwer, as his poems might lead one to believe, (in fact, I have

heard that he is a very gay and jolly youth,) but, if the simplest of my friends wished to tell me that he or she had loved blindly or unfortunately, had been deceived and forgotten, had lived recklessly and repented, their hearts could not speak more plainly to my heart than in those pages.'

'Well! as I have never loved blindly or unfortunately, been deceived and forgotten, had lived recklessly and repented, they are to me, only morbidly sentimental.'

Bertha turned, and took from the table beside her the little blue and gold-bound volume, and, with her charmingly modulated voice, read:

"The more we change, the more is all the same."

Our last grief was a tale of other years

Quite outworn, 'till to our own hearts it came—

Wishes are pilgrims to the vale of tears.

Our brightest joys are but as airy shapes

Of cloud that fade on evening's glimmering slope,

And disappointment hawks the hovering hope,

Forever pecking at the painted grapes.

"Why can we not one moment pause, and cherish

Love tho' love turn to tears? or for hope's sake

Bless hope albeit the thing we hope may perish?

For happiness is not in what we take,

But in what we give. What matter tho' the thing

We cling to most should fail us? Dust to dust!

It is the feeling for the thing—the trust

In beauty somewhere, to which souls should cling.

"My youth has fail'd, if failure lies in aught

The warm heart dreams, or which the working hand

Is set to do. I have fail'd in aimless thought,

And steadfast purpose, and in self-command.

I have fail'd in hope, in wealth, in love; fail'd in the

word,

And in the deed, too, I have failed. And yet,

Albeit with eyes from recent weepings wet,

Sing thou, my soul, thy psalm unto the Lord!

\* \* \* \* \*

"For now the fullness of its failure makes

My spirit fearless; and despair grows hold.

My brow, beneath its sad self-knowledge aches.

Life's presence passes 'thine a thousand fold

In contemplated terror. Can I lose

Angst by that desperate temerity

Which now leaves no choice but to surrender thee

My life without condition? Could I choose

"A stipulated sentence, I might ask

For ceded dalliance to some cherished vice,

Or half-remission of some desperate task;

Now, all I have is hateful. What is the price?

Speak, Lord! I hear the Fiend's hand at the door —"

'No, you don't; it is mine,' said Arthur Melver, entering.

Bertha put down her book, and proclaimed that both the new-comer, for breaking the

speech, and Mr. Taunton for laughing at it, were utterly unworthy of hearing any more

poetry then, and of her favour, forever.

A few minutes afterwards, all the guests had appeared, except the 'objects,' but before Mrs. St. Clair's patience and politeness were too much tried, they entered.

Gerald Gray was the same handsome, Greek-faced, saucy-eyed creature as ever; a trifle more dandified in his air, and perhaps not so boyish in his manners. But his wife! Was it Ruth Desborough?

Beside him stood a tall and shapely woman, in a magnificent dress of violet velvet, with rich sunset gleams of crimson about its heavy folds. Neck and arms were bare; falling away from her smooth clear shoulders, masses of lace relieved the solidity of her gown's material, and were confined over the bust by a bouquet of golden grapes with deep green leaves. Braid upon braid of black and shining hair were rolled about her head, and low at the back a wreath of the same style as the cluster upon her corsage fell almost to her waist, its long tendrils giving a singularly graceful abandon to every movement of the wearer. Strictly beautiful no one could call her, but her fine eyes wore a look of such pure and perfect repose and intelligence. They had such a light of deep thought, passing words! Her lips, once so colorless and set, were now of a healthy red, with mobile curve playing about the corners. Her complexion had lost its sallowness; her figure had gained its natural proportions, and without challenging the sculptor's chisel, its lines were full and feminine.

She was, in fact, what our English neighbors call 'a fine woman.' Conversing, as she now was, with Mrs. St. Clair, she had more of the latter's conquering or 'passional attraction'; her sentences were clearly uttered, calmly composed, with a certain nameless, *insaisissable* coldness of tone; but her husband spoke, and, on the instant, a kind of rosy shadow, more outward than inward, softened and warmed her look and accent. There was a lingering caress in each word she used towards him, as if her great heart enveloped each phrase destined for those ears in a certain intonation never bestowed upon the public. There was nothing fulsome, nor obtrusive, nor conspicuously affectionate, in either phrase or voice, but to a close observer it was sufficiently plain.

He was her sun; from him she drew the warmth and radiance of her existence.

Does any one remember the difference between Ellen Kean's acting, when she was upon the boards with no matter whom, and when Charles Kean appeared?

Supper was announced; this was Mrs. St. Clair's favorite meal. She pronounced suppers infinitely more agreeable and conducive to sociability than a dinner, where the continual presence of servants, and the constant change of courses, interrupt conversation.

After the first few dishes had been discussed and removed, the 'domesticity' retired, whence the touch of the silver bell beside the lady of the house could easily recall them, and the conversation grew both animated and sparkling.

Unlike her former self, Ruth took part in all that was going on, and was even betrayed into quite a long speech about the error into which Americans fall, concerning Paris, its manners, morals and customs.

'I know nothing' so belied as French women,' she said. 'We are led to believe that there is no wedded happiness in Paris; that every *menage* has separate interests and pleasures; that gentlemen habitually neglect their wives, and women care only for dress and flirtations. I assure you it is not so; there are as many happy marriages in France as in England or America. I am not prepared to defend the way in which young people are *fiancés* there, but in consideration for my many charming friends, who are Parisians born and bred and married, I protest against condemning their entire households. I would not approve of our inaugurating '*marriages de convenance*' here, but I cannot let any one say that they all turn out badly.'

'Then you still stake your faith on love-marriages?' asked Mrs. St. Clair.

'I do,' answered Ruth. 'Ours is a love-match. . . ., but, and she colored, with a smile which lent a real beauty to her face, while her eyes glanced for one second at Gerald, who was watching her with evident pride and admiration, 'we are narrowing down this discussion to a very personal one, and I am having it all to myself.'

The light faded from her cheek, and she turned to listen to Mr. Taunton's question about a Paris acquaintance. But not with the grim and grave politeness, or endurance rather, of Miss Desborough; but, no, with a stately suavity and a quiet attention as charming as it was natural.

But a certain determined Miss Charlemont, who always enjoyed asking questions, preferred to exercise her mission just here.

'And you actually believe that there are thoroughly happy marriages, Mrs. Gray?'

'I should be sorry to disbelieve it,' Ruth smilingly answered.

'Do you believe in their actual existence, or only in their possibility?'

'In both, under certain circumstances.'

'For my part,' put in Mr. Taunton, 'I should the more readily subscribe to what Mrs. Gray says if those certain circumstances mean that marriages should be arranged as Dr. Johnson suggested, by the Lord Chancellor. Suitabil-

ity of fortune, position, and so on, forming the foundation . . . .'

'For shame!' cried Bertha. 'If ever the *libre arbitre* should rule, it is in the choice of a life-time companion. I would trust the choosing of my wardrobe to a judicious taste,' she bowed to Mrs. Gray, 'but for a husband, permit me to suggest that I can myself best tell what kind of man I should find it easiest 'to love, honor and obey.'

'Well, a single life for me!' said Miss Charlemont, tossing back her long, fair curls, with all the *aplomb* of a beauty not yet twenty-five, and sure that no one doubted her power to make it a double one whenever she pleased to do so. 'I have known a great many married people, and I hope those present will excuse me for thinking that I consider myself a great deal better off than any of the wives I have studied.'

'Oh, Lizzie, don't be severe upon us poor women!' exclaimed Bertha, putting up her fair hands.

'Spare us, Miss Charlemont,' said Gerald, 'and leave some hope to your adorers.'

'Oh, I don't say that either men or women are entirely to blame,' remarked the young lady, with the calm self-possession of an American girl, who belongs to that school called 'fast.' 'I only mean that—present company, of course, excepted—I should find it difficult to name one couple whom I consider happily married.'

'What says Mrs. Gray to that?' asked Mr. Taunton, with quiet malice, as if he looked upon Miss Charlemont's remark as a complete refutation of Ruth's belief.

'I regret Miss Charlemont's sad experience, but can, at the same time, congratulate her that her ideas are not founded upon a personal knowledge.'

'Such profound discrimination, and such clear proof don't convince you?' pursued Mr. Taunton.

'They do not,' said Ruth, who could no help smiling. Then leaning slightly forward with a graceful bend of her stately figure, she addressed Miss Charlemont with sweet gravity. 'I do not know, of course, from whom you have drawn such unflattering and such discouraging convictions, dear Miss Charlemont, but, in the name of that time-honored sisterhood to which I belong, let me suggest that if the wives, whose condition you deplore, entered 'lightly and unadvisedly' into their wedded state, neither you nor they must be surprised that the result does not bring happiness. Or, if uncongenial elements are brought together by third parties, and are expected to mingle—what then? If I pour that finest

oil of Lucea, excellent in itself,' touching with her fan the flask from which Mr. Taunton had deluged his oysters, 'and this purest spring water together, shall I make them combine, simply because I imprison them in my tumbler? Scarcely; and yet, all these are perfect of their kind, and the glass, especially, lifting with her round white arm and gemmed fingers the beautiful Bohemian goblet, 'is exquisite, you must admit. But the oil and the water would make, at their best, only a muddy compound, whereas . . . .,' she smilingly extended the glass towards Mr. Taunton, and looked at the Champagne he filled for her. She added water from her *caraffe* held up the rudely crystal towards the light, till her hand seemed bathed in the glow, then touched it to her lips with a bow to the young lady, and set it down.

With all her stately gravity, it was coquettish, and certainly very pretty.

'I shall never see a tumbler again without thinking of getting married,' said Arthur Melvor.

'Only, if you feel as weak as water, be sure about the Champagne, and avoid oil, my little Marquis,' said Bertha, who was much given to making a pet of this boy.

'Well,' said Mr. Aubrey, 'even in opposition to Mrs. Gray, I am forced to assure her that I have seen people who seemed as dissimilar as oil and water agree perfectly in the long run, while some spirits which appeared as likely to rush together as Champagne and Adams' Ale, made a confounded mass of it. Is it the beauty of the glass, the symbolic ceremony that Mrs. Gray considers perfect in itself, which makes occasionally the former miserable?'

'To drop that metaphor, that illustration,' said Ruth, slightly coloring, 'and to speak plainly, I cannot believe that what Almighty Goodness considered the highest and last blessing bestowed upon Adam is to us, his children, only a necessary evil. It was that which I disputed with Miss Charlemont, and which she has kindly permitted.'

'Besides,' added Bertha, swooping down to the rescue, 'dangerous experiments are not peremptorily unsuccessful. I have a friend who prevails in filling a camphine lamp while the wick is still alight. She has not been blown up. I own I always leave the room, and expect to see the explosion—am prepared to go in afterwards, pick up the fragments, and preach a sermon over the remains, to the text, 'served her right.' It has not happened yet, but I am none the less unshakably convinced that she is frightfully imprudent; and when some accident does happen, she shall not



have my sympathy, for I will be sure that she has got just what she deserves.'

'Which implies, . . . ' said Mr. Taunton, who liked to make his hostess talk.

'That when man or woman with open eyes and without deception practised, marries unfortunately, I give them my heartiest pity, my sincerest wishes, my warmest sympathy; but if some mercenary motive, some unexampled carelessness, some wilful obstinacy, prompts the step—if it be 'an establishment,' a pique, or *ennui*, which has brought about what ought to be so solemn and sacred a bond, and they find it unendurable, don't look to this severe speaker for comfort.'

'Mrs. St. Clair has ably supported your views, my dear Ruth,' said Gerald, 'but . . . ' and he held up his watch.

Everyone was amazed at the hour, and they all rose from the table; carriages were called, and the ladies retired to be hooded and shawled.

'Mrs. St. Clair tells me,' said Mr. Taunton to Ruth, as she waited in the hall for Gerald to find his *chapeau gibus*, which had gone astray; 'Mrs. St. Clair tells me that you have two of the prettiest children that ever made a mother proud.'

'My babies,' said Ruth, with a bright smile. 'They are to my eyes very beautiful, because they look like my husband.'

'Come, come, Roland,' cried Gerald, 'you are going quite too far in your attentions to this lady. She is so insanely vain about those infants, that if you were the most disagreeable of men, she would pass the whole time on our way home now in commending your amiability, your frankness, and general good qualities. As it is, you are far too charming for me to permit such strides in my wife's good graces. And Gerald, laughingly, shook hands with him and drawing Ruth's *hervous* more closely around her, gayly marched off.

'Well?' enquired Mrs. St. Clair, with a saucy sparkle in her eye, as Mr. Taunton came to wish her good-night.

He kisses her hand.

'Never, oh, puissant princess, will I again dispute your most extravagant persuasion! You are right: I am ready to take off my hat in humble admiration to Gerald Gray, if, in return, he will permit me in all companies to express my even greater affection of the wife—whom he has created.'

'Oh! you needn't testify to my judgment by falling in love with her,' remonstrated gertha, with a laughing moue. 'Fall in love with her! Why, even if I were in that *dever gonde* spot, Paris, in whose *devergondage* or *disme*, the radiant Ruth does not believe, I

should know that it was "mere midsummer madness" to fall in love with her! I should be like the noble lord who bought Punch and took him home, sans the showman, thinking to find the *manimette* amusement without the wire-puller.'

'Yes; or, like Rosamond, of the "Purple Jar," the wilful little girl of whom Miss Edgeworth tells us, who would buy said jar to put flowers in, and when she had got it all to herself, lo! the lovely color came from the liquid contents which she had had taken out.'

'Yes, Mrs. Gray is a part of Gerald Gray—and apart from him, she would tumble to pieces, grand as she looks now.'

'Grand, indeed!' put in Arthur McIvor, 'how the woman dresses too! I recognize her *solitaire* ear-rings, but they don't *limp* in her ears as they used to do, when her father "had them out" on state occasions. And did you see her hands? such brown, ugly things they used to be!'

'Oh, I fancy she owns and rejoices in *pate d'amande* and mother-of-pearl nail polishers, and all such dainty trifles, which, *dans le temps*, she scorned. 'But, go home, good people, before I yawn my head off. My politeness won't permit me to let you see me gape.'

'One instant, dear Mrs. St. Clair: do you think Gerald is really in love now, or was all the time?'

'I think—I think—that I don't know. Where is that little idiot, Cissy Clare? You needn't, any of you, answer. Good night.'

## CHAPTER XI.

The question asked by Mrs. St. Clair seemed to be one of small importance to Mr. Gray. He casually remarked to Ruth, after their first dinner at his uncles', that Phyllis was faded, since her marriage, (she was now Mrs. Ralph Fordyce,) and that Cecilia had lost her color, but was very pretty still, and then appeared to think no more about either.

He had met both of his cousins with the same jesting, half-teasing manner, habitual to him, had rallied Phyl on Mr. Fordyce's wig without the smallest consideration for her conjugal pride; and had pressed Cissy to sing "The Wind and the Beam loved the Rose," and then laughed at her absurdly affected style, and gave imitations of it, and he seemed not at all overcome by her telling him that if he had learned to think the ballad foolish, and her singing absurd, he need not tell her so.

Ruth came to her assistance.

'What is Gerald doing, Cissy?' she asked.

'Only teasing, I suppose,' remarked Phyllis.

'Only asking me to sing a song he used to

consider very beautiful and that he now laughs at.

'Not the song Cissy,' said Gerald saucily.

'Well, the singing, then,' said Cissy, very good-humoredly; 'you used to like it too.'

Gerald vowed that her present performance was not at all that of by-gone days.

'It is just what it always was; it is you who are changed,' remarked Cecilia.

'Perhaps so; you see the grand opera has made me a connoisseur. But I protest, Cissy, that if I have heard better singing, I have not seen a better temper.'

Cissy's dimples broke over her smiling face at this compliment, and soon after the Gray's carriage was announced, and they went home.

A few days more and business called them to Beauchamp, where they were to stay until race week.

Ruth enjoyed vastly her return to her own home; and even the gayeties of Paris seemed for a time banished from Gerald's mind by the duties of a planter.

Mr. Desborough came to spend a week or two, especially to enjoy the society of his grandchildren, whom he considered the most marvellous specimens of juvenile humanity. He would walk about half the morning leading each stumbling little baby, and followed by the *bourne*, or sitting under an oak tree, would alternately help to dress Geraldine's doll or set up Gerald's tin soldiers. He wished to have these two-year-olders "assisting" during the whole ceremony of dinner, but the wise mamma forbade their appearance until desert, when he was allowed to administer an occasional bit of preserved ginger, or a savory biscuit, to the youthful tyrants of his old age.

One morning towards the middle of January, Gerald received a letter which seemed to fill him with anxiety and concern. It was brought by a messenger on horseback from his mother.

He went off with it to the library, wrote a hasty answer, despatched the servant, and returned to find Ruth, who was eagerly waiting for him in her dressing-room.

'I have something to tell you, darling,' he said; 'something that is grave and terrible.'

She started up with a smothered cry.

'Have you time to listen to me?'

'Time to listen to you?' she repeated; 'oh, Gerald, what a question! What is it? I would not go out of this house, after seeing your look a little while ago. I fancied that you had something to tell me; what is it?'

He sat down, and drew her back to the sofa beside him, holding her hand.

'Dear Ruth,' he said, 'do you recollect my telling you once, that there was something connected with my life that I might one day

be forced to reveal, but I thought it best to let it alone and unsaid, until there was a necessity for doing otherwise?'

'Yes; it was long after our marriage, and I told you then, that I ought to know all that concerned you, and *had* hoped that I did.'

'Just so, dear, but I thought differently. The moment has come when I must tell it. Ruth, did you never hear of my father?'

'Your father?' repeated Ruth, with astonishment; 'your father! yes; I heard—I always supposed—I took it for granted—that he died when you were a child.'

'He did not, but I have not seen him since I was a child. Your father was in the East Indies, I believe, when the event happened which virtually widowed my poor mother, and he was reported to have died; and the scandal of the whole thing passed away in fresher tales; and as you never listened to gossip, and Mr. Desborough's acquaintances are business men, and cautious men, and our engagement took place almost before we were known to be acquainted, no one had then the hardihood to speak of it before him or you.'

Ruth's face grew into a faint semblance of its old lines.

'Was it absolutely necessary to hold back this mystery, whatever it is, from me?'

'I told you just now that I thought so.'

She toyed with her wedding-ring, twisting it round and round upon her finger with the thumb of the same hand—a motion familiar to her when annoyed, and her eyes gazed straight ahead. She evidently was thinking more of the concealment than of what was concealed.

'Do you not take an interest in what deeply concerns and distresses me, darling?'

'Do you doubt it? I am waiting till it is your pleasure to speak.'

'My father,' he went on, and as Gerald spoke, he placed his wife's head with gentle force upon his shoulder, and made her look up at him; 'my father was a very handsome dissipated, reckless man—a careless husband, and an indifferent parent. He gambled a good deal everything a man can do, and still keep his place as a gentleman, till, one day, his evil star brought him, face to face, with a person whose home he had made desolate, and then abandoned his victim. They say it was a very close enough fight—both were armed—but the one fell forever, and the other escaped.'

Ruth started up—and my children, she said; 'you have given my children such a lineage as that?'

'They are my children, Ruth; are you ashamed of their father?'

'I should have known this; you should have told me: you spoke openly enough even

on the first day we met, of puerile, pitiful money matters; *this* you withheld—not only then, but always.

'I did it, darling, for the best. I did it to spare you a knowledge which could only grieve.'

'You know then, as you know now, that there is no grief which, to my mind, ought not to be shared with the one you love. And was it to spare me a grief, or to spare yourself a refusal, that this was withheld?'

Gerald set his teeth together, and the dark flame burnt in his blue eyes.

'As you please,' he said, and turned away.

'I come to you beset with troubles of no common order, and you talk to me of your feelings, with neither sympathy nor interest for mine.'

'They ought ever to have been the same,' answered Ruth, more gently; 'our feelings should have had no divided line. But go on.'

'My father escaped from the hands of justice, and four years ago, we *did* think that we had tidings of his death—this time positively, and not like the rumors which were skillfully put about in the first instance, that he had been drowned in one of our own rivers, just after he got away. But we were wrong then, as the world was fifteen years ago; he has come back to his native city.'

'Oh!' groaned Ruth, and she moved nearer to him.

'The letter from my mother is written in despair; he has been to see her; he trusts in his changed appearance, and in the lapse of time that has passed since the—death I spoke of. But we know that Jerningham's brother avowed solemnly, on the dead man's body, to avenge him—he will be recognized—the whole wretched history brought to light again—another murder, or a trial—God knows what.' He started up and paced the room.

'My poor darling,' said Ruth; she had put aside her displeasure, and the sense of broken confidence. 'See,' she continued, 'I will say no more about what you ought to have done. Let us talk now of what you ought to do. What are you going to do?'

'I have ordered my brother's waggon and "Midnight." I shall drive at once to town, see my mother, and decide upon my plans. So far as I can judge by her hasty, unhappy note, he has come back penniless, attracted by the news to him of my uncle's death and my marriage. He has been in Australia, Cochin China—the devil knows where! God be thanked, Francis' liberality of heart and means enables me to provide for him; but it shall be on one condition—that he returns whence he came. If he refuses now or breaks his word after-

wards, I shall put him in the clutches of the law, without hesitation.

'Then, you don't require to consult with me?' 'No, darling, I seldom need to consult with anybody. Even if their ideas are better than mine, I prefer my own. Didn't you know that? Need I remind you that "my own" is better than anybody's "own"—my own wife, for instance, my own love, who began just now, by tormenting me, and ends by putting her two dear hands in mine, and accepting all I say, as "wisest, virtuous, discreetest, best."'

He bent his lips to hers; all was peace again.

'I will give you this undeniable praise, darling: you never oppose me, nor dispute with me, nor assert yourself, except just long enough to show that you have a will of your own, and ideas of your own, but that they always give way to mine. There comes the waggon—ring for Valerie and let her put a couple of shirts, and so on, in my valise. I will run off and kiss the babies.'

In five minutes he was back, as lively as if he were starting on a pleasure excursion. Ruth could not help saying, when Valerie had disappeared with the valise, and was heard in her shrill French accents, down stairs, ordering it put under the seat of the *voiture*:

'My dearest Gerald, what wonderful spirits you have! How do you manage it?'

'They manage me, darling. If it were not for this eternal spring of nonsense and lightness that I have within, such an errand as this would be fearful. Instead of wondering about my spirits, you ought to be thanking God that I have them.'

'I do, but when will you be back.'

'My child, do I ever answer a question like that, even if I knew the answer myself?—which, in this case, I do not. I shall write continually, and return just as soon as I can—of that rest assured. Good-bye, darling, my good little Ruth; God bless you; keep up a brave heart. Take care of my namesakes, they are both asleep; and, oh, by the way, make some excuse to your father for me. Give him anything but the true reason, steer clear even of my mother in speaking, and don't fret. Once more, good-bye.'

She saw him off, so handsome he looked, so brave, so bright; he was just gathering the reins from his servant's hand and casting a laughing, cheering, loving, last glance at her, when the spirited horse gave a bound and a prance. How the beautiful lip lost in one instant its playful smile, as it proudly curved over the white teeth, and he tightened the rein,

and showed 'Midnight' that a master's hand was on the bridle.

And Ruth gazed after him till the great gate clanged behind the waggon wheels, and the waggon and the loved one, and the black horse and the groom in the rumble all swept behind the hedge and were lost to her view.

Left alone, she began to think over this most unhappy resurrection of what she had supposed to be a long buried father-in-law; but the first shock passed, did she greatly blame Gerald for its being an entirely new source of disquiet?

Not in the least; she was busy considering if he had taken clothes enough, if he would find the sun very warm in his long drive, if he would be able to succeed in getting his father quietly and safely away, if it would keep him many days from Beauchamp, if she had best go to town herself, what she should say to her own father, so as to protect the secret, and yet not be a falsehood. All this she pondered about long and silently, walking, as was her habit, when in thought, up and down her room, with folded arms and downcast eyes. Not once did she remember the possible agony of poor Mrs. Gray, not one thought of pity for the once brilliant man of fashion wandering back to his home, repentant perhaps, but destined to be thrust forth again among strangers and to a foreign, far-distant land.

Was she not selfish? Her whole heart, its sympathies, its affections, its life, were given to Gerald only. Why? Because she hoped for his in return, in the first place; and because she couldn't help it, in the second.

She loved her children because they were Gerald's children, far more than because they were her own; but had he seemed fonder of them than of her, I should not like to answer for the consequences.

Alas! alas! here was a great-hearted, honest, thorough woman, the first part of whose life had caused the stream of that life's human hopes and fears and wishes and aspirations to be dammed up by the bitter curse of suspicion and lonely wealth; and the latter part, by the sudden flood pouring impetuously without check and without reason into one man's keeping—lies absolutely at his mercy.

Her heaven was here; she asked no other light now or hereafter than that which beamed from his dear eyes; she wanted no guide but his firm hand; she needed no support, no counsel, no help but from that wayward, strong man, whom she had sworn to love, honor and obey. And she was happy. She thought herself very, very happy.

## CHAPTER XII.

MY DARLING:—I got to town safely; Midnight

went the distance like a trump, never turned a hair, and landed me in Locust st. in time for dinner. Pretty good work, that! But you know nothing about horses, you dear little goose, and I make no doubt fancy that your fat bays could do just the same, if you would let them. Mamma is awfully cut down; looks ten years older. I shall see *him* this evening. I write this to send by the morning's mail, and to relieve your anxiety. Kiss the toddlekins for their precious papa, and don't let that young man take everything away from my young woman as you constantly permit; it is not you and me, all over again.

God bless you. Your G.

Wednesday evening, Jan. 23.

January 28th.

DEAR RUTH:—Got your letter safely. Matters progress more slowly than I like. Write to me every day if you can; I miss you dreadfully. Since my last of the 25th, *he* dodged us, but now I have been obliged to take detective Shorter into the secret; he found *him*, and I have a bad piece of news for you—I must go to New York and see *him* off. We have discovered a man who is trustworthy, and wants to go to Australia. I settle a pension of \$500 a year upon this man so long as he keeps *him* abroad. Dallas (the man), seems honest and reliable. It is the best we can do. My father—well, he is my father, and still so handsome and, Lord! how clever he is, sharp, quick—well, he does not want to go, and we have got to make him. Go he shall, never to return while my head is above the sod. I settle \$1,000 a year on him, and we all four, Dallas, Shorter, *he* and I sail from Savannah on the 1st of February for New York. I feel gloomy about it. I know you will be thoroughly wretched, and I don't intend to trust myself to come and tell you good-bye, because it would end in my letting D. and S. go without me. Duty, darling; a thousand thanks for the draft you so thoughtfully enclosed in your last. It is very acceptable, for I don't wish to attract too much attention to myself by doing too much bank business. My regards to your father. Be sure and switch Gerald if he imposes on Geraldine. I see you doing it!

God bless you, little woman. Your G.

SAVANNAH, Feb. 1st.

It is very late, my darling, and I have had a long drive, and must in a very little while go on board. We were told that the steamer could not leave till to-morrow, and as I met Tom Albyn, who invited me to go out and dine at his place, and seemed surprised at my journey North, and inclined to ask questions, I thought it best to go with him, and by my usual *dogage*

manner put him off the scent. He is not at the hotel with me; but is with D. and S., some where else, of course.

We had not been an hour at Montcalm, Albyn's plantation, when, who should come tearing out but Shorter, with the news that the steamer would sail this evening; so they scrambled up a hasty sort of lunch for me, and Albyn had out another bobtail, and drove me back to the city in fine style. A cool evening, a rising moon, a song or two, some poetry and a couple of Havanas, made it pleasant enough. Speaking of bobtails, do, my darling, make Jim attend carefully to my poor nag, with that cut on his eye. But I need scarcely worry you about that, for Jim was in tears on the subject when I left mama's house. I heard him mournfully saying to her coachman, 'Taint the coat, but the style of the animal, I regret, sir.'

Shorter reports him as pretty quiet. We have had some funny times, which I will relate if I escape the dangers of the sea, &c., and return in safety to the heaven where I would be.

Recollect my last urgent advice to you. Come to the city, at the appointed time, go to the races, &c., look cheerful, happy, if you can, my poor darling, enjoy it all,—good-bye to such things for me, forever.

'The day wears on, the storms keep out the sun, And thus the heart,' and so forth.

This northern visit of mine will grieve you terribly. I think my mind dwells more on that than on anything else. There is no use for you to deny that you have visions of (by me) long-forgotten New York belles, whom your vivid fancy will picture, knowing by instinct of my arrival, and waiting on the wharf with syren arms to welcome me. Well, I am grave now, have no fears; independently of the sad errand I go on; my heart and fancy are irrevocably fixed, and it seems humiliating that I should be obliged to swear to her whom I so passionately love and respect, that I am hers only.

But time is up. Good-night, darling: kiss our babies for me. Think of me all the time, and, oh, should you be tempted to say harsh things of people, or to be suspicious, and to relapse into your old severity of look and manner, remember you are so dear to me. I am so unwilling that you should do anything or say anything unworthy of the real sweetness and nobleness of your character. And if these should be my last words to you, which heaven forefend, remember what I say for the sake of your

And so Ruth Gray did as her absent lord desired, and to the delight of many young ladies who feared that there would be no ball

at the Gray's in consequence of Mr. Gray's absence, the great windows of the drawing-rooms were punctually opened four days previous to the Wednesday of race-week, (the commencement of "the season" in that Southern capital of which I write), and Mrs. St. Clair, *l'amie de la maison* confidently predicted that there would be plenty of pleasant doings in that spacious mansion.

'And what has taken your cousin away just at this time?' asked Arthur Melvor of Cecilia Clare, with whom he was waltzing at a ball and discussing dancing prospects.

'To meet Mr. Josselyn, of Boston, whom he has not seen for years, and who behaved so beautifully about Mrs. Norman Gray's estate, I believe.'

'How beautifully?'

'Don't you know? Why, he insisted upon sharing the fortune with Gerald, although he wasn't at all obliged to do so.'

'Well, by Jove! some people are born to too much luck. Look at Gerald! No matter what happens, he always falls on his feet. Old uncle drops off with apoplexy and leaves him penniless; the richest woman in the State, who turned up her nose at every man in it, marries him as soon as he asks her—instantly.'

'Yes, he is very fortunate, especially in his marriage.'

'Exactly, especially in his marriage,' pursued Melvor, who was quite unconscious of Cissy's half-sneer, 'most men marry a pretty woman, and before you can say what a lucky dog he is, what happens? Why, she is old and faded and forlorn. On the contrary, Gerald marries a downright, plain woman. Don't I remember how Miss Desborough used to look? the woman couldn't dress.' Mr. Melvor was great on dress; she couldn't dress, she wouldn't talk, she was sallow, and pale, and thin; she had nothing to make her endurable but her money, and as I didn't want her money, I couldn't endure her. He carries her off, and look at her now. She is a handsome woman.'

'Handsome?' said Cecilia, with a little laugh of disdain, and showing all her lovely, soft dimples. Cissy always laughed outwardly if there was no corresponding merriment within.

'Well, if she is not regularly handsome, she is a grand looking woman. Here she comes, let's speak to her. What a superb silk that is, and how it fits! Good evening, Mrs. Gray. Will you allow me to tell you that I have been admiring your dress?'

'I feel very much flattered, Mr. Melvor,' said Ruth, smiling gently. 'Good evening, Cecilia; is Phyllis here?'

'No; I came with papa.'

'When will Mr. Gray be back?' asked Arthur

The rather indifferent expression gave place to a bright look. 'Thank you, in two days I hope to him.'

'Where is he?'

'In Boston, I fancy. Our cousin, Mr. Josselyn, was at the West when we came home from Europe, and it was necessary that Gerald should go North now. He will probably induce Francis to return with him—a conquest for you to make, Cecilia. I have often heard Gerald say how handsome and charming he is.'

Cissy gave her usual twittering laugh, and Mr. Taunton, on whose arm Ruth leaned, said something about the impropriety of Miss Clare being allowed further pasturage for her inhuman treatment of the ruder sex. Then they all four bowed and parted, and Ruth went to speak to Mrs. St. Clair, who looked very brilliant in one of the Paris dresses of Mrs. Gray's selection.

'Don't come near me,' cried Bertha. 'I am making a great effort while you keep on the other side of the room. I don't wish to have my *toilette elegante crasee* by your magnificence. *Quelle est sublime cette ariane*, with her Theus departed!'

'Very well,' said Ruth, laughing; 'if you talk in that way, I shall grow malicious, and ask if your friend, Mr. Berrian, is near—he who wanted to know if that lady spoke English with French quotations, or French with English quotations?'

'That lady is far too amiable, or she should have made one of her admirers brain Mr. Berrian with his own ledger. But if I say that you look like Penelope pining for Ulysses—'

'No, thank you, my Ulysses has found no Calypso, I trust, and I just look like Ruth Gray, who wants to know if you will take a seat in her carriage to-morrow for the face course?'

'Certainly, and be delighted, provided you don't array yourself like the Queen of Sheba. How I hate diamond necklaces!' pursued the saucy creature, drawing up her white neck, and looking in her friend's eyes, as she whirled off in the waltz.

'What a light heart she has!' exclaimed Mr. Taunton.

'Do you think so? I should say she had light spirits. But I never talk of Bertha. It is a rule with me, and one I wish her other friends would follow. If one praises her, it seems somehow as if the most flattering words get turned into a different meaning when repeated, as they always are, and if one hazards a syllable, ever so slightly indicative of dispraise, it grows into a monstrous slander an hour after its birth from one's unconscious lips.

I have learned to know this, and I love her too well, therefore, to talk about her.'

'But to me? There is no one who cherishes a kinder regard for Mrs. St. Clair. I see her faults, of course.'

'Just so,' put in Mrs. Gray, gently; 'and even if you did not see them, I should still keep to my rule.'

'Have you always been so partial to her?'

'No: I remember, years ago, disliking her very much. But I have found out her best quality.'

'And that is —'

'You know her faults so well, and don't know her best quality?'

'I had no idea that you could tease,' said Mr. Taunton, laughing; 'you have caught that from Gerald.'

'Perhaps I have, but I caught my liking for Mrs. St. Clair through Gerald, too.'

'Indeed!' and Mr. Taunton remembered the wedding breakfast and Mrs. St. Clair's not very flattering comments upon the bridegroom, and the idea passed rapidly through his mind, how often it was that those appreciated us, of whom we think least.'

'Yes,' continued Ruth, 'and since you are a friend of Mrs. St. Clair, I will tell you something which I got from my husband, and which first turned the tide of my feelings toward Bertha. He—a gentleman of his acquaintance had a vast admiration for Mrs. St. Clair—liked to talk a great deal to her, dance with her, visit her, and pay her much attention, privately and publicly. The gentleman had a wife who adored him—she was, what you know is very shocking, but still —'

'She was jealous.'

'Very. Mrs. St. Clair saw it. The next time this gentleman approached her, she fixed her true yet laughing eyes upon him and said, "That idle and disengaged young man should entertain me and amuse themselves, by sending me bouquets and turning round the circle of my crinoline; very well!" As the navy said to his neighbor who wondered why he allowed his wife to beat him with a spade, when he could so easily master her, "It pleases her, and it don't hurt I." "All baggage at the risk of the owner," is my motto with such butterflies. But, that a woman should be made unhappy through me, however unreasonably; and that I should lay unconscious or violent or gentle hands upon other peoples property, heaven forbid!" She made him one of her sweeping courtesies and — that is all.'

'And who told this; she or he?'

'Gerald told it to me.'

'And the gentleman's name is —?'

'So intimate as you are with Bertha, ask

her,' said Mrs. Gray, with a polite, slight sneer.

But Mr. Taunton smiled so good-naturedly, and began to praise Mrs. St. Clair so warmly, and Gerald's words coming forcibly into her mind about 'her old severity of manner,' she resumed her suavity, and talked of the next day's races.

Mr. Clare came up to greet her, and she dropped Mr. Taunton's arm, with a cordial yet stately bow, and gave her uncle-in-law the supreme satisfaction of walking her up and down the room. Mr. Clare flattered himself that they made a magnificent display, and that the finishing touch was given to Mrs. Gerald Gray's grandeur of appearance, when she had his support.

Mr. Taunton came to a conclusion extremely shrewd, very commonplace, and entirely wrong.

'Gerald has made a merit,' he thought, 'of Mrs. St. Clair's *verbage*, and under cover of this confidence, they mean to flirt as much as they choose. Of course, 'he is the gentleman,' and she is laughing with him, and twisting the wife round that remarkably pretty little finger of hers.'

Decidedly Mr. Taunton was a great friend of Mrs. St. Clair. Did he not dine with her twice a week? And was not her pleasant chat and saucy ways the chief things that kept him alive at dull times? But then, you see, he knew her faults. From our intimate friends, who know our faults, and so delight in mentioning the fact, and the faults, good Lord deliver us!

Before the short season of ball room gayety was over, Gerald was back, looking particularly well, and quite ready to dance at parties, or play billiards at the club, or toss his children higher than his head, or watch Ruth, as she allowed her two small darlings to crush every atom of *frenthem* out of the toilette which Valerie had just superintended; and then—go and make it all over again, lest her large darling's eyes should be afflicted by the sight of a *chiff-fone* collar, and crumpled sleeves.

'And you have told me so little about Francis!' said Ruth, the evening after his return, when the romp was over and the children were in bed. 'How glad I am, that we are going nowhere to-night!'

'And so am I,' Gerald said, as he threw himself lazily on the sofa, and she took a low seat close beside him. 'But I will tell you what I am more glad of: to be back with you—to be quiet in my own house, with my faithful, loving, loyal love.'

The tears swam in Ruth's eyes; delicious tears, tears of gratitude that he should so care for her, this great, beautiful, wayward creature!

She took his hand and pressed her lips to it,

the tears gathered and fell. He lifted her head caressingly.

'My darling, we don't behave like married folk; one would suppose that we were lovers still, only, in those days, it was I that sat at your feet, and kissed your hand, as I do now. But I like these days best—it is very comfortable to play 'grand seigneur,' and have you think of nothing but pleasing me. Particularly, as that seems to be your idea of happiness too.'

'Yes.'

'That being the case, let me remind you that you are positively forbidden to show one tear.'

'But I am not crying,' protested Ruth. Gerald shook his head.

I know a little eye,  
And it dearly loves to cry,  
God knows the reason why,  
All the day!

'For shame, Gerald; I never cry now. What an idea! I did indulge in such follies when I was first very happy—and very unhappy—but we have gone through that stage.'

'Have we? Then I am sorry, because in my mind and thought, the verse goes on,

From her heart the tear-drop wells,  
To my heart its story tells,  
And it holds me in its spells  
By this way!  
Well! I love all eyes above  
This dear eye of her I love.'

'Oh, dearest Gerald, that is the same ballad you quoted and added to in our honeymoon—let me write it down.'

'Write down Mother Goose, you ditty!' cried Gerald, catching her by the sleeve as she sprang up. 'Sit down you unreasonably vain woman! eager after anything that praises you. Proud now of your power to cry—why, the twins could beat you at that any day.'

'Let me thank you, then,' and she bent over and kissed him.

'Don't crowd the monkeys,' said Gerald playfully, and putting up his hands before his face, after tenderly returning her kiss. 'Do you know, Ruth dear, that I don't think cart ropes could have kept me longer away; and it was so hard to act upon your nice suggestion and take a row to Boston, which simplified my Northern visit to all enquiring minds.'

'Yes; it was effectual, too—for no one appears to trouble themselves further about it. And Francis?'

'Will you be so good as not to interrupt my train of thought? I was so glad, too, that you should not know exactly the day of my return

—to come home, when you were at that ball and slip snugly into my dressing room, charging Joe and Valerie not to tell you, when they let you in. I watched your quiet, indifferent face, through the door, which I left ajar, on purpose. Valerie kept her counsel with all the tact of her nation, and was proceeding quietly to unlace your dress, without a word. You were listlessly unclasping a bracelet, when your eyes fell upon my gloves and penknife, that I had laid upon your pincushion. Ah! then came the flash of marvellous light into your great eyes, the bright, overwhelming joy of your expressive face. Two quick words—'*c'est assez*,' to Valerie, and you almost thrust her out of the room, as she was smilingly and respectfully re-appearing. In one bound, you were beside me, close to my heart, dear treasure, speechless and panting, and as I folded you in my longing arms and sat down, though you were in your favorite attitude, on your knees, with as little concern for your beautiful blue and white crape as if it had not been the dress of the evening.'

'And you?'

'Oh, I was not much better; I had not seen you for a month, remember, and I was pining for you. It is, indeed, when sorrow and trouble come, that a man learns fully to understand his dependence upon the single-hearted woman who loves him. I thought I loved you very dearly before—I only seem to know it now.'

The world is filled with folly and sin,  
And Love must cling where it can, I say,  
For Beauty is easy enough to win—

But one isn't loved every day,'

quoted Ruth.

'Ah, Mrs. St. Clair has taught you to read Owen Meredith, has she? How is that fair creature?'

'Very well.'

'Who is she victimizing at present?'

'Mr. Taunton, I believe.'

'Oh, that's an old story. Francis says—'

'Ah! Francis at last. *A la bonne heme*, pray go on about Francis.'

'Isn't that like you? Interrupting me to ask me to go on. Francis says—'

'Dear Gerald, won't you tell me what Francis looks like?'

'Go away, Mrs. Gray—Gooseling. I won't say another word. I am fast asleep.'

'Please forgive me,' said Ruth, laughingly. 'I was very stupid, that's the truth.'

'Well, Francis says—that when he comes on, this spring to see us, we must make up a pleasant party at Beauchamp and have Mrs. St. Clair. He understands that she is more

charming than ever, and he caught a flying glimpse of her year's ago, and liked her hugely.'

'So Francis is really coming on? I am very glad.'

'If he does not start for Central Africa, or Central America—if he does not propose fitting out a new expedition to the North Pole, or a sail of observation to the Southern Seas, I think he is booked in his own mind for a visit to us. But you must not reckon on him without those contingencies.'

'And may I ask, now, how he looks and how he seems?'

'You may, my love. He is a great six-foot-two, splendidly built man. I think he has grown several inches since I saw him last, but as you never saw him at all it will be easier for you to credit his assurance that he has not. He has ordinary features, of the usual number, with a great moustache, at which he pulls constantly in a sort of savage way, and his eyes being of a very light grey, and his skin and hair so dark, it gives a peculiar look to his face; but he is a handsome, bold type of a traveler.'

'He never means to marry?'

'What on earth would Francis do with a wife? Unless she were an Indian, and used to the tramp, or would like a husband whom she saw for ten minutes every ten years, I don't think he would suit her.'

'And who is going to look after your common fortune?'

'Ah! that's the point; as I live at the South and he lives in spots, we are to have an agent, who, I presume, will live on us.'

'How shocked Papa would be at such recklessness!'

'Of course, my darling. At college we used to be called Sir Francis Reckless and Sir Gerald Wayward, and college *soubriquets* have a deal of keen sense in them always.'

'I wish you would not pride yourself on being wayward, Gerald.'

'Well, I won't, dear. And about this party to Beauchamp. Shall it be as Francis says?'

'As you wish, of course. When do you think he will come, if he comes?'

'In about three weeks—middle of March.'

'To stay—?'

'As long as he finds it pleasant; but I think we had best appoint the second week in April for the party, and ask them to spend a week—who shall it be? Mrs. St. Clair, Melvor, Taunton—owh else?'

'Your friend, Mr. Browne?'

'Oh, Browne is such a muff—but he is a good fellow—swallows anything—let's have him.'

'Shall we invite Mrs. Denham?'



'Yes; she will do very well—talk to Browne. She don't mind who she talks to. She will rattle away with that beautiful face of her's all aglow, and her straight black brows giving such decision to her regular features, and not caring a button whether it be Tom, Dick or Harry who is listening to her.'

'Well, those are enough, I suppose,' said Ruth. 'If any decline, we will fill up.'

'Not half enough, my child. You ought to have some 'demoiselle'—some girl to make music. Think of somebody.'

'I know so few girls at all intimately or socially,' said Ruth.

'Why, there is Cissy—why not ask Cissy? And Phyllis and Fordyce. They have not been there yet, and ought to be invited some time.'

'My darling, Cissy is so affected and so dull!'

'Better then take her when she can be diluted with others.'

'Diluted! Can we dilute insipidity? Dilute cistern water?'

'Ruth, dear, what did I ask you? Not to be harsh, was it not! And Cissy is my cousin—a favorite niece of mama's—a little inoffensive, sweet tempered, good girl—whom I look upon as my sister.'

'Did she look upon you as her brother, do you think, Gerald?'

'Are you going to open up that old question? My love, have I ever deceived you?—judge by what I say now. I verily believe that Cissy 'did' care for me more than I dreamed of—I fear that she has never married because she was—disappointed. I fear mamma encouraged an idea in her mind that my attentions to her were other than Cissy herself, of her own knowledge, *knew*. Can you suppose for one instant that I would, by word or action, re-awaken in that innocent-minded girl an interest in me, when my life and heart are irrevocably and happily and fully engaged elsewhere! Do you think so meanly of me? Can you love me as you do, and think me so vile? It seems to me that if you were to see or hear me showing or expressing the utmost attention to Cissy, you would understand that my reason for so doing had nothing unworthy in it.'

'I believe you, Gerald,' said Ruth; 'I was wrong. We will write Cissy and Phyllis and Mr. Fordyce. And never will I again utter such suspicions.'

'That is my own perfect darling.'

#### CHAPTER XIV.

It was gala-week at Beauchamp. The old home—once belonging to an English master, who had built it in those first days, when the lordly British gave that aroma of good birth

and breeding to our State, on which we still pride ourselves, with or without cause—often added to and renovated, but now quite divested of its gentlemanly air of antiquity, was ringing now with gay laughter and made the scene of genuine and gracious hospitality.

The weather was beautiful; just cool enough to permit a little fire in the morning, but necessitating open windows all the day long. Not too warm to be out of doors; yet with a sun so bright, and a sky so blue, and an air so balmy, that it was no wonder that Francis Josselyn proclaimed Italy a humbug in comparison, and vowed that if ever he had the patience or power to settle himself anywhere, it should be on a neighboring plantation, with just such trees, just such a Cherokee rose hedge, and just such an out-door canopy, as those of Beauchamp, exquisite Beauchamp!

'Pooh!' exclaimed Mrs. St. Clair, as she sat upon the low balustrade of the stone steps, and switched with her riding whip at the violet bed on her right hand. 'You are so impetuous! Such a ridiculously impulsive creature! and the worst of it is, you really believe what you say and fancy for about two days, or two hours, or two minutes, that you are eager to be what you say—the lord of a Southern domain, for instance.'

'Why is that the worst of it? It ought to be the best of it.'

'No; because some day you may set your fancy upon something where others are concerned, and it may not suit them to change their minds as quick and as easily as you do.'

'Then—they have a safeguard against one, as I would have against myself—my sense of honor. If I carried off man or woman on the whirlwind of my fancy, as you are pleased to call it, the fact that I implicated anybody else would steady my resolve, instantly, and fix my plans.'

'A—a—h!' drawled Mrs. St. Clair, beading down her head, and taking up the train of her *amazone* to examine a speck of dirt upon it. 'You and Mr. Gray are really not cousins, are you?' and then she suddenly lifted her eyes and fixed them on the face of her companion.

He smiled in the most unconcerned manner, and folding his arms upon the same balustrade, and resting his chin upon his wrists, as he seated himself so as to bring his eyes almost on a level with hers, he said, slowly.

'You mean something by that very 'inconsequence' question. What is it?'

'I never meant anything in my life,' answered Bertha. 'Here come Mrs. Denham and Mr. Browne; he has out-galloped you, this time, my friends; where on earth were you linger-

ing? What a magnificent leap, Bethina. Indeed, it is a frightful pity that you were not permitted to follow the bent of your natural genius and be a circus rider.'

'It is so,' answered the pretty widow, patting her horse's glossy sides, as the groom came to lead him off. 'Good-bye, my beauty. You went like a love to-day. Fancy me, Bertha, flying round 'the ring,' with Festus as a 'trained animal'—saw dust in profusion—brass band blowing its curses away—and I butting my head through six successive hoops of colored paper, amid the acclamations of a bewildered audience!'

'Won't you try it some day for a limited but most enthusiastic crowd?' asked Francis.

'Unfortunately, as you heard Bertha remark, I was not permitted to go into that line. But you asked what kept us—I saw some delicious chickweed, and I persuaded Mr. Browne to gather it for my parrot.'

'Oh, that parrot! didn't I rush wildly into your room this morning, thinking I heard you say, 'come here, Bertha, come here,' as if an assassin had you by the throat; and behold! it was that wretched bird sidling up and down your dressing table, and looking at himself in the mirror like a hook-nosed demon.'

'Did you?' laughed Mrs. Denham. 'Why, he is improving.'

'Do you travel always with a parrot for a protector?' asked Mr. Josselyn.

'Make her tell you how she tamed this one—a series of pitched battles. Bethina, with two pairs of beaver gloves and a crooked poker, to help her, always managed to come off victorious.'

'I should like to have seen it,' said Mr. Browne, gravely; 'it must have been very pretty.'

'Here comes something pretty,' said Mrs. St. Clair. 'I think you told me that you and Mr. Gray are not really cousins, Mr. Josselyn,' she added in a half-whisper.

Advancing from the woods, where they had been strolling, Gerald and Cecilia Clare now emerged through the great gate and sauntered towards the house. He was in his shooting jacket and carried his gun; her face was almost hidden by the broad brim of her garden hat—her hands were full of wild flowers. He did not notice his four guests till he had nearly come up to the steps, but his cheery voice saluted them as soon as his eyes saw them.

'No birds to-day, Mrs. Denham!—I am very sorry—but I did my best.'

'Did Cecilia go to bring home the game bag, and sing of your prowess?' asked Mrs. St. Clair.

Cissy looked up blushing and very pretty;

her light curls were stuck full of blossoms and leaves.

'No,' answered Gerald; 'I met Cissy all alone, poor thing, as I was coming home.'

So you pocketed her, determined not to return without something to show as your morning's work.'

'Yes; and I think a man who could bag Cissy for life, and shew her off as the captive of his bow, would merit to be crowned himself, instead of crowning her—as I did, with all these jessamines and things.'

Gerald spoke as openly and as unconcernedly as if Cecilia were his sister. Not a shade of discomposure, not the smallest vestige of a 'flirtation' in his tone.

'Has Ruth not got back?' he went on. 'It must take Fordyce a long time to embrace that relation of his that Phyllis and himself carried off Ruth to visit.'

'It is nine miles to Mrs. Armstrong's,' put in Cissy, 'and, of course, they had to eat lunch, and all that.'

'Of course, and spoil their dinners by lunching at three o'clock, when we dine at five, having previously eaten something here. Well, it is now after four—and there goes the dressing bell.'

'Where are the other gentlemen?' asked Mrs. Denham.

'Gone in by the back way; McIvor returned hours ago; Taunton and Aubrey left me to come back and take a sleep.'

'Lazy wretches!'

'Were you up at six o'clock, fair lady?'

'Not more than I credit that they were; but we must go and dress; what a dandling way one gets into!'

'And there comes the carriage now.'

In a few moments it drew up, and Gerald was helping out his wife, and a-king Phyllis for how much she expected to be set down in Mrs. Armstrong's will, after this superhuman effort.

'Oh, Gerald! such a dear old lady!' said Ruth; 'I am excessively glad I went. She asked so kindly after you.'

'What a stretch of goodness!'

'And she makes so much of the twins!'

'Of course she does; the whole country is crazed with a desire to see them!'

Ruth laughed; 'well, I wish to see them now, at any rate; and as we have but little time to spare, I shan't lose a second, or dinner will be ready before I am.'

'Don't you believe that Gerald and I ought to be real cousins?' asked Mr. Josselyn, following Mrs. St. Clair up the stair case.

'Wait til I know you better, and see if you

deserve—to be so traduced,' said the smiling lady, as she nodded and closed her door.

While he dressed, Francis was turning over these scraps of remarks in his mind.

'Does she mean anything?' he thought. 'Pshaw! I see what she means—and it is nonsense. If women are not just at the moment bent on mischief themselves, they are always fancying that others are. That is why the bitterest scandal always comes from the ugliest and most uninteresting women. A real belle has her hands too full of her own affairs to be concocting stories about her neighbors. Positively, if I were of the softer sex and wished to lead a quiet life, I should establish myself among the flightiest and giddiest of the lovely beings—with not the smallest reference to their 'reputations.' The worse they are, the more chance for mine.'

He tied his cravat, and settled his chin comfortably in the shirt collar.

'Ergo—if I wish to keep Mrs. St. Clair's eyes from following Gerald, I must try and make them follow me—for a different motive. Can't I persuade her that I am madly in love with her! No. Not unless she first falls in love with me—and that don't appear to be in the least likely.'

The coat was now put on.

'It is an abominable thing, to get up such ideas—put such notions in one's head. I think very badly of the St. Clair for doing—but stop!—what did she put in my head? What did she say? What thought did I already have, however vague, which made me guess at once what she was driving at? I'll try and have a quiet talk with her this evening. Upon my soul, I think Ruth is the finest woman in the world, and she is more thoroughly in love with that fortunate rascal than I ever supposed a woman could be. For it is only men who really love once and forever.'

He sighed deeply, and walked down stairs.

#### CHAPTER XV.

'We are tolerably punctual, after all,' said Ruth, looking at her watch, as they took their places at the dinner table. 'Only eight minutes after five o'clock.'

'What is the reason for this eager pursuit of punctuality, may I ask?' said Francis. 'Is there to be an execution immediately after the meal, that we are not to lose?'

'Oh, no!' answered Ruth, 'but Gerald can't bear to wait for his dinner.'

'You spoil him,' remarked Phyllis, from her side of the table. 'Don't let Mr. Fordyce hear you.'

'Since when, Gerald, have you grown such a martinet about hours?' asked Francis.

'I'll tell you,' cried Mr. Aubrey; 'since Mrs. Gray humors all his caprices.'

'Go on, my friends,' said Gerald calmly. 'I like this sort of thing. I assemble you together and you preach insubordination to my wife.'

'I have a personal spite in the matter,' said Mr. Aubrey, sending away his soup plate and helping himself to wine. 'One day Gerald was engaged to dine with me—a select party—two very precise Englishmen—and we had to wait three quarters of an hour for this punctual young prince, who finally strolled in, as calmly and as composedly as possible—had been playing billiards, or driving a new horse, or amusing himself in some way—and 'there he was at last,' he seemed to say, and we ought to be so glad to see him at all, that he should be made much of, not abused.'

'Well, that was very bad, I admit,' said Gerald; 'quite unpardonable, and now that I have eaten that dinner, and have this one in prospect, I can venture to hint that I ought to have been turned away from your festive board and put into the hall, just where I could see what was going on, but not partake. Could vengeance go farther?'

'Oh, nothing can be more just and formidable than your strictures upon yourself, after the mischief is done, and the penalty impossible.'

'Did you ever hear of an adventure I had once about a dinner?' asked Mrs. St. Clair; 'if not, I'll tell it.'

'You might as well, being Jenny Lind, ask, if, having heard a certain song, we wished to hear it again,' said Mr. Taunton gallantly.

'I consider your question too vague, Bertha,' put in Mrs. Denham; 'you have had more than one dinner adventure, have you not?' and she looked mischievous and meaning.

'Tell it, any way,' half whispered Ruth; 'the next course seems dilatory; *'une histoire, madame, les plats nous manquent.*

'After that, I almost dare not,' said Mrs. St. Clair, bowing to her hostess, and raising her finger threateningly at Bettina, 'but all I had to tell was this. It was the last day of race week, and I was to dine with the Everards to meet a certain distinguished lecturer, whose name is very familiar to us all. I had engaged my cousin, Miss Turner, to send her carriage back for me after she got there, and had invited a 'really' punctual gentleman to take a seat with me. Tired and dusty when I got back late from the course, I nevertheless was ready in time, and as the five minutes to the hour arrived—with it, in walked my friend, Mr. Mayne. No carriage—five o'clock struck—five minutes past. Mr. Mayne grew impatient in a gentlemanly way—said he was'n't, but looked pitifully at his watch. He would not desert me,

and the carriage would not come. Useless to think of sending for another—everything that had four legs had been occupied in conveying everything human to the races; before I could get tired horses harnessed up again it would be anyway too late.'

'Were not they dining very early?'

'That's the worst of it. After appointing his own day, our Humorist friend had agreed to give another lecture that very evening, which would necessitate his leaving the table at half past six; from the beginning, therefore, it was all wrong—but to cut my story short, (for here comes the dishes, she said softly to Ruth,) I decided to start on foot. Picture me, then, at twenty minutes past five o'clock on a bright afternoon, in an apple green satin with black lace flounces, a white opera cloak, and a white 'mollie' thrown over my otherwise bare head—said green satin held up out of the dust—trotting along beside Mr. Mayne, in his dress coat and white kids! We took every bye-street that we could, but I think we met everybody I ever saw. One woman that I had gone to school with, and had not laid eyes on since, passed, and stared at me—as well she might.'

'Well, I suppose you were received with acclamations,' when you did get there?'

'I am not so sure; Mary Turner was miserable, I am happy to say, because there had been such a mistake about the carriage—but the lecturer towered in his wrath! I think if he could, he would have had me sacrificed on the door sill! You see he had an uneasy consciousness that his after thought about another lecture, was not polite to his entertainers—then, by my absence, he was losing still more of his possible dinner; but, unlucky me! it was destined to be a day ever memorable for its *contretemps*. What possessed me to be so tactless, those gods alone know that preside over the conversations of foolish women!'

'Why should such deities interfere with you?'

'Listen: I mentioned with all the exultation of the Lady Castleton, who was so proud of knowing a literary *dessous des cartes*, that the Harpers had just written me that no greater proof could be given of the poor standard of public taste, than the fact that the 'Wide, Wide World,' sold better than 'Vanity Fair.' It was all up then! How glad we were when 'Charity and Humour' left for his 'estrade.' We were charitable enough to forgive his ill-humor—when we ceased to suffer from it—but he has never forgiven me, I fear—if he remembers me at all—to this day!'

'What a cross creature he must be!' said Phyllis.

'Cross or not, he is my author,' said Bertha, 'and there are some books of his—some words of his—that ought to be framed—taught in schools, hung up at cross-roads, switched into boys and pounded into girls. I drink to his health!'

'You are so enthusiastic,' drawled Mrs. Fordyce.

'I should hope I am,' said Bertha, courtly.

'Enthusiasm in a woman so often leads into mischief,' said Phyllis, pensively, 'it is a great responsibility. I admire it very much, but I should'n't like to have it.'

'Anybody would suppose, Phyl, that enthusiasm was a gown or a newfangled ornament, or an animal to care of,' said Gerald.

'Indeed, I appeal to the gentleman,' said Phyllis; 'we all know that Mrs. St. Clair can do anything, and be trusted with anything. She has gifts that few women could manage; but for us,—the majority of us—is it not best that we should have less enthusiasm—be less impressive?'

'Ah! *pattes de rapin*,' said Mrs. St. Clair, in an under tone, to Mrs. Josselyn. 'The malicious meaning there! Shall I thank her and pretend I don't see?'

'If you ask my opinion, Mrs. Fordyce,' said Mr. Taunton, 'I should say you are perfectly right. Weak women had better have weak qualities, but Mrs. St. Clair should be enthusiastic; and when you get to more names, I shall continue to answer yes or no, as long as I am permitted.'

'I like everything that is genuine,' said Gerald. 'Genuine enthusiasm, genuine simplicity, genuine—'

'Wickedness?' asked Mr. Aubrey.

'Not exactly. But even genuine wickedness is better than disingenuous goodness. I hate pretences of all sorts. I would not care to be, for one moment, other than I seem to be. I would not—'

Mrs. St. Clair was looking steadily at him.

'Did you speak, Mrs. St. Clair?'

She shook her head.

'Oh! you were a theoretical man always,' said Aubrey. 'How much religion have you, pray? and yet, would not any one think, to hear you talk, that you were of the most strictest sect?'

'Of the Pharisees,' said Francis, laughing.

'For shame!' exclaimed Ruth. 'How can you say so, Francis? Gerald don't laugh when he talks so.'

'You and I have not been asked our opinions, Miss Clare,' said Arthur Molvor. 'Shan't we put in one word?'

'Oh, dear, no!' said Cissy, with her eternal simper. 'I never dispute with gentlemen, and

in fact, I know my opinion is quite worthless.  
'Why?'

'Oh, I have never thought about enthusiasm, either as a pretence or otherwise. I take it for granted that people are just what they seem to be. And some things suit some women and wouldn't suit others. You know that,—in short, Phyllis and I think exactly alike.'

'Most satisfactorily reasoned,' said Gerald. 'You have only contradicted yourself and involved your statements, Cis, in the most bewitchingly, unreasoning manner. Never mind, you are not a strong-minded woman, and don't care a button for all this. Let us leave it to Phyllis and Mrs. St. Clair, and follow Mrs. Denham's example; she has been eating her dinner and talking horse' with Browne, like a sensible creature. Won't you ride Mountain Mary to-morrow? And shall I make them give you some of this duck with olives?'

#### CHAPTER XVI.

'Mr. Josselyn, pray come here,' said Bertha, as the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing room. 'I want to say something disagreeable. Not about you; don't start back and scream!'

'Oh! I am infinitely relieved, and you may make it as disagreeable as you choose.'

'Thank you. I think Phyllis Fordyce the most intensely atrocious woman—so *maniere*, so false, so thoroughly pretentious, and so absurdly humble-minded!'

'Well, that is a mild, friendly sort of criticism. How gentle you are in your strictures!'

'Am I not? I knew you would think so. I did now, having said it, I feel much better.'

'What do you think of her sister?'

'Cissy? Oh, she is a little gabby, that's all.'

'Gabby? Shall I marry a gabby? for I am thinking seriously of trying to win Cissy.'

'Are you? said Bertha. 'I think it a capital plan. I am sure you will like it very much.'

'I am very glad you approve. When do you think I had best ask her?'

'Oh, I would not ask her at all, if I were you. Get Mr. Gray to ask her for you.'

'Well, that is not a bad idea either. He has known her so much longer than I have—seen so much more of her. He thinks so highly of me, too, that he could put my qualities in a more favorable light than I could myself.'

'Exactly. I am sure he would plead your cause with ardor, and then I think the less you see of her the greater your ardor would be.'

'She is so pretty—Cissy!' said Francis, pulling at his moustache; 'such a simple-minded, beautiful girl; not clever you know.'

'Oh, dear! no! no such evil quality as that about Cissy!'

And then these two began to laugh, and both sipped their coffee, till Francis resumed:

'Mrs. St. Clair, I am going to be serious now.'

'Seriously serious, or playfully serious?'

'Seriously serious. Without circumlocution, I think Gerald is making an ass of himself, and I wonder who else sees it besides ourselves?'

Mrs. St. Clair drained her cup, set it down, leaned her head upon her hand, and bit her lips.

'Not Ruth, certainly,' she said, at last.

'Shall we try to stop it, before she does see it?'

'Can we?'

'At least, we can try.'

'You can command my services. What do you think of doing?'

'I am going to flirt with Cissy.'

'Bon! And I?'

'You must flirt with Gerald.'

'Pleasant, but very dangerous. My dear Mr. Josselyn, don't you know that I am terribly afraid of this delightful Gerald? Ah! you ought to have heard me hold forth on the subject at his wedding breakfast. Really, my own eloquence quite filled me with surprise. *Je ne m'admire pas tant* that I was quite shocked at the feeling.'

'You must not find fault with doing yourself what all the rest of the world does.'

'A truce to *fadaises*. Conspirators don't waste their time paying each other compliments. When are we to begin our arduous undertakings? I am unfeignedly sorry for you.'

'This very minute.'

'Very well; like a true Knight, posting to the battle-field or the Tournament, I shall put on my armor at once. Is my hair smooth—quite smooth?' Francis nodded. 'And how are my eyes? Clara Wheeler has a way of blacking the lids with a hairpin held over the smoke of a candle. Shall I try it? It gives an oriental languor and brightness. Or shall I borrow a little of Phyllis's *rouge* that she never uses?'

'What makes you so malicious this evening?'

'I don't know. Evil associations perhaps. Well, we have no especial programme, but we

are to compare notes, I suppose, and carry on the war vigorously.'

'Yes.'

'Then, let us begin. Goodbye. Spread your nets, and I mine.'

Bertha sauntered off, looking bent on mischief, but, as she left, Ruth took her seat.

'What are you and Bertha talking about? both looking as wicked as possible.'

'Floating in a sea of small-talk.'

'You like Bertha, don't you?'

'Very much. She is what Gerald talks about—genuine. Her defects are genuine, but so are her virtues. Her likes and dislikes, her figure and fancies, her feelings and complexion. She is genuinely pleased and genuinely displeased. She is genuinely naughty, when the humor is upon her, and genuinely good, when she is good.'

'She is perfectly sincere,' said Ruth.

'Too sincere, for she can't conceal anything. I never saw such an ostrich, nor ever heard a greater misnomer than to call her 'a thorough woman of the world,' as some people do. She would be a vastly more popular person if she were a woman of the world. But if she is hurt, she *hollers*, like a baby, and if she is glad, she enjoys it, like a child.'

'Yes; she lets people see that they worry her.'

'Which, of course, in a Christian land, is an invitation to everybody to worry her.'

'And they drive her wild sometimes, with their stories, and comments and injustice.'

'And they will continue to do so, till she is indifferent to it.'

'That will be only when she is in her grave,' said Ruth. 'Poor Bertha!'

'Not a bit of it. She will have the sense some day to turn where such things can't pursue her.'

'Right,' said Ruth, gravely.

'Ruth, why don't you ask Miss Clare to sing?' began Francis, after a pause.

'Oh, Francis! do you like to hear her?'

'Excessively. She is so pleased with herself when she is at the piano. It does one good to see the air of triumph with which she seats herself—gives a sort of hump to her back, turns up her eyes, opens her mouth, and 'wobbles,' as Mr. Yellowplush says.'

'For shame! I don't think it is proper to ask the poor girl to make herself ridiculous.'

'She won't thank you for not giving her the opportunity.'

'Very well; I'll ask her.'

Mr. Josselyn followed Mrs. Gray, and added his entreaties, which were not needed, to Cissy. She was knitting a purse, seated near the lamp. At the table next her, Phyllis was

reading, and on the other side, Gerald was in his usual lazy, lounging attitude on the sofa, talking to both his cousins, for Phyllis' book did not seem to be very engrossing.

As Cissy went off, Bertha sauntered up to look for something on the same table, and a merry interchange of nothings took place between herself and her host, which ended in her ordering him to the other end of the sofa, with all the cushions if he choose, but to give her the side nearest the light and between him and Phyllis.

Before Mr. Fordyce had been dislodged, with his candlestick and newspaper, from the piano, and required to go and take refuge beside his wife, which at once entailed upon her the privilege of listening to scraps of news she had already read, and not hearing what Gerald and Bertha were saying, these two had embarked in a jesting conversation, which sank into lower and lower tones, as Cissy began to sing.

On she went, from one bravura to another, plied with flattery by Francis, and amazing him with the variety of grimaces and blunders that she executed.

But presently there was a laugh from Gerald in the very midst of some pathetic note, Cissy colored and looked around. Bertha was holding up her finger, as she looked at Gerald's outburst. The song came to an abrupt conclusion.

'Have you not skipped?' asked Francis. 'Don't cut me off in that way.'

'I will sing something else,' said Cissy, turning over the leaves of her music-book. 'I don't know the Italian words. The person who copied the notes for me only put the English ones; but they are very pretty, Rossini's music.'

No loving word was spoken.  
Calmly and coldly we parted;  
I know thee too false-hearted  
To waste regret on me!  
I felt the chain was broken,  
To bind us more, ah! never!  
And parting e'en forever,  
Sought no farewell of thee!  
In vain my heart, forsaken,  
Thy treachery now remembers,  
For love's undying embers  
Still burn for thee alone!  
Ah, yes, for thee alone!

A dead silence fell upon the room. Cissy got up and walked away from the piano. There had been something too marked in her voice and the words not to attract attention. Phyllis colored, looked intensely annoyed, and then said:

'How absurd English words to Italian music always sound.'

'Do you think so, Phyl,' asked Gerald; 'now, I think there is a good deal of sense in Cissy's song. I wish to learn them words; I shall keep them to launch at Ruth's head, if ever she purposes to run away from me. Or shall I sing them to you, Mrs. St. Clair, when you leave Beauchamp? How do they go?'

And then he set up an imitation, and shaking himself out of his lounging seat, he went after Cissy, making grotesque *routades*.

'Cis, my dear, I admire that vastly; I want you to teach me the words.'

'Go away, Gerald,' she said, a little pettishly; 'you always tease me.'

'But you don't mind being teased, do you?'

Her back was turned to him, and she seemed deeply interested in some engravings. Conversations recommenced. Mrs. Denham began playing waltzes; the chairs were pushed aside, and they began to dance. Francis went up and invited Cissy.

'Mrs. St. Clair is waiting for you, Gerald,' he added.

Ruth was leaning back in a great chair, tapping her lips with a paper-folder; she seemed watching the dancers.

Bertha stopped near her, and then offered a turn to Mr. Melvor. Gerald leaned over the high back of the chair and spoke to his wife:

'Do you feel badly, darling?'

'No.'

'You look worried.'

'Yes.'

'All this row bothers you, and Cissy's music.'

'Yes, Cissy's music.'

'It is rather poor. Has it given you a headache?'

'No, a—'

'Heartache, perhaps?'

Ruth was silent.

'You silly Ruth! are you going to allow Cissy Clare to annoy you?'

'No; Gerald Gray annoys me.'

'At least, you are candid. Most women would conceal absurd and unfounded jealousy.'

'I don't compare myself with most women, any more than I do you with most men.'

'During this colloquy, Bertha rapidly whispered to Francis: "The storm is brewing."

'All hands to reef sails, then,' he answered.

'Who is tired of dancing?' he called out. 'I am. Let's play some *jeu innocent*. Mrs. Denham will thank me, for I am sure her fingers are stiff.'

'Yes; what shall it be?'

'What were we playing two nights ago?'

'Oh! something new, let's have,' said Bertha. 'Suppose we try that game that is mentioned in "Daisy Chair"—that High-Church

novel that you were pouring over, Ruth? One goes out, we choose a word, which each must insert into a story that each must tell.'

'Original story?' cried Mr. Aubrey. 'I have no invention.'

'Then remember one; only be sure to bring in the word. Who shall go out?'

'Let two go out together,' said Francis; 'it makes it easier for the guesser. I vote that Mr. and Mrs. Gray retire to the dining-room, and be the first victims.'

'Carried unanimously.'

'Choose something easy: recollect we are dull,' said Gerald, as they left the room. 'Bless Francis for that idea, my darling. Look at me. What troubles you?'

'That silly song of Cecilia's.'

'Confound Cecilia! Can I prevent her from being silly? She doesn't know what she is doing. She sings die-away ditties with the air and tone of a victim. For Heaven's sake, don't notice her. I don't know what possesses her to be so foolish. I don't like to startle her innocence by letting her or anybody else see this sentimental set at me; and you observe how I treat it. Instead of helping me, it worries you.'

'But ought not Phyllis to interfere?'

'Phyllis did speak to her, and poor Cissy was quite shocked, and really has no idea of how much nonsense she shows. She really don't care two straws for me. She is a perfectly good, well-principled girl; but you know,—mama's ideas,—all that,—she fancies that I,—in fact, poor child! this is her notion of *revenge* for my short-comings.'

'We ought never to have asked her here,' said Ruth, decidedly.

'It was my fault,' said Gerald, 'and it will be mine if it is ever repeated. Now, you are all right, my nonsensical darling, ain't you?'

'Yes.'

'Ah! there's a monosyllable that I like.'

'Come in! come back!' called out the voices from the drawing-room.

## CHAPTER XVII.

'Who begins?' asked Gerald, entering.

'Mr. Fordyce.'

'I heard,' said Mr. Fordyce, 'that there were excellent mushrooms to be found in the old field —'

'Dear Mr. Fordyce,' interrupted Phyllis, 'what sort of story is that?'

'Mrs. Fordyce to pay a forfeit if she interrupts Mr. Fordyce on this occasion,' said Gerald.

'In the old field adjoining the next plantation,' went on Mr. Fordyce. 'I knew that my amiable hostess would not object to having

some, nor throw any obstacle in my way, if I even carried off Plato from some knife-cleaning duty to help me in the search. I started when I first got up, armed with faith, perseverance and a stick, not to mention Plato. I walked myself tired and hungry, and came back, without seeing a single mushroom!'

'Perseverance!' said Ruth and Gerald, both together.

'Oh, no! no!' they all cried.

'Very well done, indeed, Mr. Fordyce. Now to the next.'

'Some people think,' said Mrs. Denham, 'that everything is to be accomplished by faith in your own powers. I will relate a small anecdote that upsets such ideas. This winter I had set my heart, or my head, I don't know which, on the conquest of a young gentleman, and I fancied that if I only believed that I could,—had faith in myself—it would be an easy matter. There seemed to be no obstacle to interfere. He was young, and foolish, and conceited. I talked to him, laughed with him, flattered him, and was rewarded by his saying one day: "Mrs. Denham, you are a charming woman. Faith! if I wasn't so much younger than you, you would have great trouble in getting rid of me!"'

'Oh, that's too easy,' said Gerald. 'Faith! Mrs. Denham, you might have done better. Take my place.'

The answer was a burst of laughter.

'Mrs. Denham has treated you as the *law-dors* treat the bulls, Gerald,' said Francis; 'she shook the red rag in your eyes, and held the dagger in reserve.'

'What is your guess, Ruth?' asked Bertha; 'only one for each permitted.'

'Heart?'

'Your head runs on hearts. Do you remember any mention of hearts in Mr. Fordyce's mushrooms?'

'His heart was in the business, but he did not say so,' said Arthur Melvor.

'Now, Francis, 'tis your turn.'

'Once upon a time there lived in a city, which shall be nameless, a youth, who madly loved a maiden. That's a famous beginning, but it doesn't go on so well. He was poor; she wasn't rich. Those are obstacles to the course of all true love. He went away; not to forget her, but to work for her. That is an every day occurrence. They wrote and wrote to each other. He was as true as steel and thought her truer. On the last page of her last letter, she said:

'And so I write to you; and write and write. For the mere sake of writing to you, dear. What can I tell you that you know not?'

'He didn't know that with the same pen that traced those lines she answered "yes" next day, to the booby with ten thousand a year, whom she married in a month, and who asked her that evening to do so. But she took a night to consider about it—twelve hours; in fact, sixteen, to consider whether she should cast off the man who loved her so deeply and passionately. That was a hesitation he should have been proud of; and so I told him, for

Women's hearts change lightly;  
(Truth both trite and olden;)  
But blue eyes remain blue,  
Golden hair stays golden,

and there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught or lost. Now, guess the word.'

'Obstacle,' said Gerald, a little gravely.

'You have guessed it,' Francis said. 'Take my seat. Come, Ruth, you are not released until you guess for yourself.'

'Do you think that is a true story?' enquired Phyllis, as the door closed on Francis and Mrs. Gray.

'My child, all stories are true about something. There is nothing new under the sun. We may read of an imaginary Mr. Johnson's sufferings, but depend upon it, a real Mr. Thompson has had something very like it to experience. What some Margery in a book is said to have felt, depend upon it, a Mary in actual life is undergoing and suffering, or feeling and enjoying. We can't strike out new sensations to write us or make us happy, any more than the book-makers can. 'Everything is new; everything is old,' said Gerald.

'But,' persisted Phyllis, 'do you suppose that this story of Mr. Josselyn's has any relation to himself?'

'No more than through his relationship to Adam, and consequently to the whole human family.'

'Ah! I thought —'

'Phyl, thinking is the most dangerous thing anybody can do. Nothing would induce me to think.'

'Well, it strikes me it would be as well to think about the word we are going to choose,' said practical Mr. Browne, 'and not keep those two waiting all night.'

So the word was chosen, and Ruth and Francis summoned.

'Begin, now, at Mrs. St. Clair,' said Mr. Aubrey.

'Eighteen months ago, began Bertha, 'I got a note from a friend of mine,' (she glanced at Mrs. Denham,) 'telling me that she was, at the very moment of writing it, undergoing the pleasure of a visit from a widowed landed proprietor of our common acquaintance, who



had come with an extraordinary prayer—a plan to propose for our approval. That we should select a party of ten ladies and ten gentlemen, to go into the country on the Monday week following. We were to carry—

'How long were you to stay?' broke in Gerald; for I suggest cradles.'

'Gerald!' cried Ruth, reprovingly.

He held up his hands, and looked provokingly handsome, while the young men laughed, and Bertha went on, vainly trying not to smile.

'We were to carry horses and fishing lines, and ball dresses, and to stay a week. I wrote in reply, that unless the plague were to break out, I feared we could have no excuse for this little entertainment, and so, I suppose, by way of revenge upon my lukewarmness, when these Bo—, when these unlimited ideas resolved themselves into a *fete*, given by said landed proprietor, at his ancestral Hall, he never invited either of us at all.'

'I can't guess any thing,' said Ruth, puzzled. Gerald put me out.'

'I was listening to Mrs. St. Clair's story, not picking at her words,' said Francis.

'Which only means,' said Bertha, 'that you both wish to conceal your dullness. The word came—'

'You mustn't tell,' exclaimed Mr. Aubrey. 'You spoil my chance of escaping detection. I am going to quote. I warned you I couldn't invent. Listen to moon-rise from Fort Sumter:

Slow-climbing from the abyss of dread,  
Beneath the horizon's mystic line,  
The August moon begins to shine,  
A sullen orb of angry red!

Still upward! Lo! the lurid glare  
Commingles with a purer sky,  
And softer on the gazing eye  
A shield of rose illumines the air!

Up to the Zenith!—Silver bright  
The stainless splendor swims, below,  
The tremulous ocean seems to grow.  
One pathway of celestial light!

From doubt and anguish, and despair,  
I watch my clouded future climb!—  
Look up! from yonder arch sublime  
Its glory floods the gaze of prayer!

'Very pretty and proper;—whose?' asked Gerald.

'I found them in Mrs. St. Clair's album,' answered Mr. Aubrey.

'Did you, indeed? They evidently emanate from the pen of a virtuous and right-thinking young person. Name the author, Mrs. St. Clair, and if he is present let's crown him.'

'Oh, there are other verses in Mrs. St. Clair's album,' said Mr. Aubrey. 'What do you think of these, surmounted by a bunch of faded hearts-case?'

Soe! faded my flowers low drooping in sorrow,  
Afar from the bosom they die to adorn;

Let thy sweet lips but press them,  
Thy fair hand caress them,  
And the grief of the night beams with joy in the morn.  
Sweet flowers! go, tell her my heart's ease has faded,  
Like you, on that bosom I die to recline;

But the sweet lip disdains me,  
The fair hand restrains me;  
Ah! sleeping or waking, but sorrow is mine.'

'Mr. Aubrey! Mr. Aubrey!' cried Mrs. St. Clair, as well as she could for laughing; 'what do you mean by this? You interrupt the game and wish to throw my little Marquis into confusion, by quoting the verses he sent me wrapped in sugar-plums at Christmas!'

Gerald's color had risen, and he darted an uneasy look at Aubrey.

'I write verses!' exclaimed Melvor. 'It's my opinion that Aubrey wrote the first and—'

'Hush, hush, my child; you needn't be ashamed of them, and if you put in another disclaimer, I'll smother you with wreaths myself,' and Bertha launched into a laughing, jesting skirmish with her boy-admirer, and drowned his protestations in a torrent of nonsense.

Josselyn understood at once that Aubrey had quoted himself, and that Gerald had written the sentimental *madrigal*.

'This is all very well, and Mr. Aubrey recites admirably,' he put in; 'but what is the word? Do you guess, Ruth?'

'Not in the least. They must condense more.'

'And not deal in episode.'

'Go on to Browne—he may help you,' said Gerald, who seemed in no wise anxious to descend on the merits of album poetry.

'Prayer,' said Mr. Browne, clearing his throat.

'Oh! prayer,' exclaimed Ruth; 'that is it! Bertha spoke of the landed proprietor and his extraordinary prayer.'

'Yes, I thought you would guess it then; but Mr. Browne is more considerate in his aid than myself.'

'Well, I thought we never would guess it at all,' said Francis. 'I am not good at guessing, and things must be very plain to strike me.' Nothing more obscure than what I have just heard hits the range of my intelligence. Browne's help was absolutely required.'

The entrance of the supper tray caused a cry of surprise—no one had fancied it half so late.

Francis poured out a glass of curacao for Bertha, and smiled meaningly as he handed it to her.

'That dates five years back,' she said, answering his look; 'but I had not supposed that Mr. Aubrey knew its origin, and would seize it as a weapon. Did I not tell you that I knew how saucy Mr. Gray could be? It is for this reason that I want you to let me off. The creature has such eyes! and is so fearfully saucy. I think I could always resist the encroachments of his beauty upon my peace of mind, but I am powerless against his impudent nonsense.'

'But you know you are not really to attend him—only distract him from feeding his vanity and tormenting Ruth.'

'What a monster you are! Then you don't consider my feelings at all. Seriously,' she went on, ceasing to smile, 'I wonder if we shall do any good?'

'We can't do any harm, and our object is certainly commendable. I trust implicitly to your tact. Just get this girl out of the house without letting Ruth see that—'

'That what?'

'That Gerald has not been frank with her. I sincerely believe that he loves her now; but, I fancy—and so you have not finished reading *Rouge et Noir*? Ruth—she was beside them—send me something to read, please. I can't go to sleep before the small hours as you primitive people do. Good night.'

'Have you and Gerald talked yourselves out?' asked Ruth, 'and will you read a sober book of my choosing?'

'You had better come and take a hand with us,' suggested Mr. Aubrey.

'Oh, these cards—detestable cards,' cried Bertha. 'Why will men so waste time and money—sitting up all night shuffling and dealing? If I were you, Ruth, I should forbid the 'devil's books,' after a certain hour, in my establishment. Wait till I get a country seat.'

'Then you would never have your friend, Mr. Leonard Germaine, as a frequent guest, Mrs. St. Clair.'

'Why not, pray?'

'He would not like to go where limits are set to turning up the king—and a mighty pretty way he has of doing it too. The only thing he does better is—turning up the ace.'

'For shame,' said Bertha, indignantly.

'Well! ask Browne. Browne is our informant.'

Mr. Browne shook his great Teutonic head, (his mother was a German,) and smiled meaningly.

'Come, out with it, Mr. Browne. If what you hint is true, say it—if it is false, deny it. Don't stand there looking us if you might disclose volumes—and then after all have a mouse exit from your mountain.'

'God bless me! Mrs. St. Clair, you are so hard upon a man.'

'No, I am not; but I hate innuendoes, half-words, which are meant to mean whole sentences of condemnation, and so on—stabs in the dark from those who would not scratch with a pin by daylight.'

'Bertha,' said Mrs. Denham, warningly.

'Oh, nonsense!' cried Bertha; 'Mr. Germaine is my friend. I like him—I like his wife, and I should scorn to sit quietly by and hear slanders of him—none the more fatal because half-syllabled. If Mr. Browne means that he has seen Mr. Germaine cheat at cards, let him proclaim it. If he is not sure of it, let him never hint at it again. It is dis—it is outrageous.'

'You take up a fellow so quickly, Mrs. St. Clair,' said Arthur Melvor.

'Yes, I do,' said Bertha, shortly. 'I despise underhand dealings. It is not the first time that I have heard such talk as this, and I don't like it, and in my presence it shall never pass unnoticed.'

'Why, my dear creature,' said Bettina, 'you don't imagine, do you, that the Germaines don't know that such things are said, and that it is quite useless for you to break lances in this manner for them?'

'I know nothing but this,' answered Mrs. St. Clair, 'that they are my friends, and, as such, I owe them a sacred duty—'

'They' will fall off from you, just like others.'

'So be it; truth is truth. *Fais ce que doit, advienne ce que pourra*. I don't believe what has been said; that is sufficient for me. Am I not right, Ruth?'

'Yes,' and Ruth then whispered, 'but a little fierce.'

Bertha broke into a light laugh and held out her hand to Mr. Browne.

'Pardon me,' she said, with her softest air of contrition; and of our conversation only remember this, that were I to hear you accused behind your back, I should be just as energetic to the speaker.'

Mr. Browne took the fair hand, bowed and said something unintelligible, but the cloud remained sulkily on his brow.

Ruth, Bertha and Francis stood together

in the hall. Francis shook his head, with a look half amused, half sad.

'Don Quixote, *en jupes*, Mrs. St. Clair.'

'And after all,' said Ruth, very low, 'I fear Mr. Browne is right. Gerald has a horror of gambling; he never touches a card now, unless obliged to play from politeness, and he says that Mr. Germaine's society is not agreeable to him, because that gentleman is so devoted to play, and is too—lucky always.'

Bertha's upper lip trembled with suppressed amusement, and then a shadow of sadness darkened her expressive eyes.

She looked earnestly for a second in Ruth's calmly happy face, but only said; Good night, dear.'

Francis Josselyn kissed Bertha's hand. 'True, reckless and doubting,' was his thoughts; and then he took Ruth's. 'True, cautious and unsuspicious,' he went on. 'And there is a deal of semblance between these two women, and neither they nor the world will ever know it.' All he said was:

'Good night, sweet ladies.'

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

'Well, this is our last day here,' said Mrs. Denham, as she drew her chair to the breakfast table.

'Yes, and it is fortunate that it is so bright a one, for we will take advantage of it to go and see the old Church, shall we not?' asked Mrs. St. Clair, turning to her hostess.

'I wish you would all consent to remain a little longer with us,' said Ruth, politely.

'I don't see why you hurry off in this very punctual manner,' Gerald said, taking up the strain.

'Of course,' said Bertha, laughing, 'you have done now the right and proper thing—we are pressed to stay, and I, for one, decline, but with the pleasant feeling that I have not outstayed my welcome.'

'I would gladly remain,' remarked Phyllis, 'but we are expected at my mother-in-law's by to-morrow afternoon's train, and she would think it a breach of decorum for us to put her off.'

'Does Cissy go with you to Mrs. Fordyce's?' asked Gerald.

'Yes; some of the Rutford girls are asked to meet Cissy. She is such a favorite with every one, that I was not surprised to have Mrs. Fordyce urge me not to let her forget her promise to come, with the suggestion that

the dear old lady would do everything in her power not to make it too great a sacrifice, for one so young and so much admired.'

Nobody took up the strain, or expressed the natural desire of everybody to secure Cissy. Mr. Browne did say something, which was swallowed with the mouthful of waffle that he was at that moment mastering, and a second after, Cissy herself entered, looking very fresh and fair.

'Now let us discuss our plans,' said Taunton, who had had a headache the previous evening, and retired very early from the company. 'Are we going to the Church?'

'Yes.'

'Nice road?'

'Well, it is rather shady, which will be an advantage with so warm a sun. Those who don't like rough travelling had best go on horseback, perhaps. Mrs. Gray will take the carriage, for she never rides.'

'Who will go with me?' asked Ruth.

'I will,' said Phyllis; 'my riding dress is not with me, and I like the carriage just as well, and don't mind jolts.'

'I shall ride,' said Bertha.

'And I,' added Mrs. Denham.

'Are you going to try Mountain Mary, Cissy?'

'Oh, yes, if she is very quiet.'

'Quiet as a rocking-horse, and it would be just as hard to make her runaway.'

'Then that is settled,' said Mrs. Gray, rising. 'We had better start about——' and she looked at Gerald.

'About 11 o'clock.'

It was a gay and frolicsome party which took its way through Beauchamp woods to the deserted and dilapidated Church.

Mr. Browne had finally decided to drive Mr. Fordyce in the trotting-waggon, which came to the door, with Midnight in such prancing spirits, that the timid elderly lawyer, was half inclined to back out, and take refuge in the carriage with his wife; but being earnestly assured that 'it was only his fun, by the admiring groom who held the head of the handsome 'fast-trotter,' he, a little reluctantly, hoisted himself up to the seat, beside Mr. Browne.

'I say, Ruth, do you ever trust yourself in that waggon with Mr. Gray?' asked Bertha.

'Frequently,' answered Gerald for her; 'but I have to take her again. What is the use of driving so insensible a woman behind such a nag as that! Do you know, Mrs. St. Clair

that one afternoon, after having recently exhorted my wife to pay a little attention to Midnight's good points—after having forced her to confess that he was the most splendid horse she had ever seen, what do you suppose she did? I had some thoughts of buying Tom Trenton's milk white mare, and had her to try, and asked Ruth to go to drive, without mentioning the mare. We got in and went off. Ruth gazes at Snow with the air of a *connoisseur*, and says to me in a little patronizing air, assumed tone, 'It must be admitted that Midnight is a superb creature; I never saw him better?'

'Of course that story is true!' said Ruth, joining in the laugh against her.

'Of course it is,' said Gerald. 'Now let us be off. The carriage had better go ahead, for Jackson knows the road better than any of us. Aubrey, you go in the carriage, I believe?'

Mrs. Denham had Mr. Taunton for an escort, and Mrs. St. Clair, seeing that Gerald was determined not to quit Cissy's side, exchanged a rapid glance with Mr. Josselyn, which ended in the latter falling back to form a trio with the two cousins, while Arthur McIvor escorted Bertha.

Bertha could not help enjoying the sight of Gerald's provoked countenance, when he found Francis persisting in helping him to each Cissy in which hand definitively she should hold her reins. Mr. Gray could find no excuse to get rid of Francis, who was so placid and so pleasant, paying outrageous compliments to Cissy, who smiled and simpered and colored, and was as inoffensive and pretty as a large wax-doll.

Through the grand old primeval forests, which, except for the worm fences here and there, and a very indifferent road, looked as if neither the hand nor foot of man had ever come near them before, they went for several miles.

'Who does all this land belong to?' asked Francis.

'I don't know exactly where Mr. Desborough's interest ceases, or Taunton's begins,' said Gerald. 'The dividing line is not of very great consequence. It is not cotton land; and it is very poor corn-land. Take care, Cissy; don't jerk her so.'

'Of course; that is always the cry—corn or cotton; and now the introduction of the first named article is an innovation on a gentleman's consideration. You Southerners never will be the people you ought to be till you

leave off thinking it derogatory to your dignity to cultivate anything but cotton or rice. When some of you planters turn farmers, it will be a great thing for you all.'

'I make no doubt; and I have not the smallest objection to their doing so.'

'Miss Clare, would you refuse to dance with me if I grew and sold potatoes, beans and turnips? That only will deter me from it, when I settle as Gerald's neighbor.'

'Oh, well, I don't know. It is not the custom, you know.'

'That decides me,' said Francis, firmly. 'Adieu, ye shades of gathered "produce," that have never yet been planted! Miss Clare disclaims ye, and I disown ye!'

'Did the first settlers here, the English gentlemen who owned these lands,' asked Cissy, 'did they plant beans and things for market?'

'No, I fancy not; they were for the most part men of fortune, and the chief of their time was given to laying out their grounds and digging fish-ponds, instead of ditching and draining their lands. There was an immense amount of labor given to ornamental work. As Tom's father, old Trenton, says: "You can see that niggers then only cost fifty dollars a piece, when their services were wasted in that way!"'

'These places have all passed into other hands, have they not?' persisted Francis, obstinately bent upon being agreeable, and making Gerald instructive. 'The descendants of the first colonists have not kept to the old sites?'

'No, there are strange enough places to be seen about here; not very long since, there was a house which had remained for years and years deserted. It belonged to the M—— family. The young English bride brought over by the last occupant from her cheery British home, was miserable in the midst of the black faces and the solitude. They seemed to have rushed off one day, with scarcely any preparation or packing up. Mr. Desborough told me that when first he bought Beauchamp, twenty years ago, he went over to visit this queer, neglected place. Two ancient negroes still tottered about the premises. There was a harpsichord open, a book turned down upon its leaves, as if just being read, pictures upon the walls, faded carpets on the floors—a strange, haunted, weird look everywhere. The old negroes didn't 'know rightly' who owned the place. Roses still bloomed in the ragged garden, and the fish pond was choked up.'

Not long after the woods were on fire, and the house was burned down, and the old negroes straggled off and died.

'And who owns it now?'

'What? the house that was burned down? My dear Francis, I have been amusing you enough. Cissy don't care a straw for old burned down houses.'

'Yes, I do; and I think that a very interesting account. Tell us about somewhere else.'

'No, I won't, because while listening, you have let Mountain Mary pull and pull at the bridle until she has got her head between her forelegs and looks like a cart-horse.'

'Ah! here we are,' cried Francis, 'arrived! There is the carriage, and the ladies have got out.'

Under the porch, through the always open door into the old Church, where the British arms above the altar saved the building in the Revolutionary days. The Lion and the Unicorn had been freshly gilded and touched with red, a year or two before, when an attempt had been made to get up a congregation and a clergyman, which failed through lack of funds, fervor and farmers. Gerald suggested the first reason, when said attempt was soon discussed, Ruth hinted at the second, and Francis boldly stuck to the third.

'Who was to make your congregation?' he enquired. 'If all this waste land were in the hands of tenants, broad-shouldered, hard-fisted, working men, planting corn and beans and turnips, do you hear Gerald? corn and beans and turnips; how much better it would be.'

'For country doctors, yes; for you are reckoning without fevers and such things. You Northern people never cease being afraid of our climate, and yet never consider that it is this peculiar soil and climate which keeps us from spreading over our country and filling it up, as you do with yours.'

'The ground would be filled up with the bodies of the victims fast enough,' said Mr. Taunton, quietly.

'Not here—I don't believe it. In the swamp lands, necessarily,' said Francis. 'But, take this land into cultivation, drain, manure, clear——You would soon see.'

'Whoever saw an a-c-h-i-e-v-e-m-e-n-t pronounced hatchmen? and much mentioned in Mrs. Gore's novels, and other instructive works?' cried Mrs. St. Clair, from the gal-

lery over the door. 'Not you travelled people, but we republicans and sinners?'

'Not I! nor I!' answered several voices.

'Then run up here instantly.'

There was a scrambling for the narrow stairway, and a clambering over old worm eaten seats, till they stood before the black wooden board over which was painted the coat of arms, &c., of perhaps the last person in this country who followed the lugubrious and yet time-honored custom. It has been hidden away behind a bench.

'How queer and distant this little nook of a place seems from our times and people?' said Bertha, as she leant over the railing of the gallery and talked to Francis. 'We are so new; those monuments yonder, on either side of the chancel, would be almost modern in an English Church; they have only been there a little over a hundred years, to us they are antiquities; yet, I don't think ten people care about them! If one could lift up this small, grey and to me perfectly interesting old Chapel, and plant it safely where it could be entirely renovated and used, half the world of our world would prefer a staring, just-built edifice with not an association about it.'

'Progress, dear Mrs. St. Clair! This Church is not comfortably built; and what awkward little pews!' put in Mr. Aubrey, joining them.

'Precisely,' said Mrs. St. Clair, saucily; 'you are one of the world I speak of.'

'New things for a new country,' suggested Francis, languidly.

'But eternal newness is immortal vulgarity,' said Bertha.

'That sentence is so much like you, Bertha,' said Mrs. Denham, laughing at her; 'sounds so fine and means nothing!'

Bertha made a rush at the speaker, who caught up the folds of her riding habit, and disappeared down the staircase, followed by Mrs. St. Clair, and when the gentleman came up with them, Bertha had revenged herself by taking possession of a superb wreath of jessamines which Mr. Taunton had gathered with great difficulty for Mrs. Denham, and winding it around her own black-plumed grey *mousquetarie* hat.

They passed an hour decyphering inscriptions, and making wonderful discoveries about family connections.

'Why,' said Phyllis, 'who ever dreamed that Mrs. Turner, that red-faced, horrid woman, (however, she is dead, poor thing!) who ever dreamed that she was a niece of the Rutfords?'

'I didn't dream it, but I knew it,' said Mr. Fordyce.

'Why didn't you tell me? I never would have snubbed her so, if I had known it, and when we were at Catoosa Springs together. Here is her tombstone.'

'See how important it is for us to get up our Debrett!' exclaimed Mrs. St. Clair. 'How much more easily poor Mrs. Turner would rest now under that stone, if Mrs. Fordyce had only known that her mother was a Rutford!'

'I don't think we ought to jest about a death so recent,' said Ruth, gravely. 'Let us go further off.'

'You are right, Ruth,' whispered Mrs. St. Clair, 'and it was very naughty of me, but Phyllis does put me out of patience. I think she would strike sparks of indignation from a cold potatoe!'

'Has Mrs. John Gilpin brought anything to eat?' asked Gerald, as he came towards them.

'Yes,' said Ruth, 'our lunch is in the carriage; but let us get outside of the enclosure. This is consecrated ground.'

'Right again,' said Bertha. 'I fear we have shown more curiosity than reverence in our visit, so far.'

Presently they were all sitting under a great tree, and the contents of the hamper were happily brought to light.

Old jests and new were bandied about, and Bertha began to moralise in her usual slighty fashion.

'Don't you think,' she said, 'that people really grow better if they live in the country?'

'They grow fatter, usually,' said Mrs. Denham, helping herself to some more *pate*.

'But,' persisted Bertha, 'do they not grow better? How little excuse one can make to one's self for evil thoughts of one's neighbors, malice, and uncharitableness, when one lives away from all the petty annoyances and invitations of society.'

'On the contrary,' said Mr. Taunton; 'they grow self-satisfied and intolerable, from having nobody to rub their own opinions against; they form erroneous judgments of people and things.'

'They become intensely selfish,' said Gerald.

'I thought you had never lived in the country till now,' cried Bertha, innocently.

'Mrs. St. Clair, your remarks are personal. Do you think me selfish?'

'I am no judge,' said Bertha; 'I am so selfish myself,' smiling into his eyes with mock humility.

'Who says you are selfish?' broke in Arthur Melvor; 'I don't think so at all; I think you a very nice woman, which you would not be if you were selfish.'

'Young gentleman, come hither,' said Bertha, solemnly.

She took off the jessamine wreath from her hat and wound it round Arthur's curly head, as he knelt before her, taking care not to derange the perfect 'parting' right in the middle of his forehead. 'I crown you my knight henceforward and forever. Rise, Sir Arthur, and give me some chicken.'

'Bertha, what is the use of abusing yourself?' asked Bettina; 'there are so many to do it for you.'

'I like to follow *la mode*,' said Bertha.

'Is it the fashion?' asked Francis; 'alas! can I never hope to be fashionable here? What is your crime, dear Mrs. St. Clair?'

'Upon my word, I have never exactly found out,' said Bertha, carelessly. 'Sometimes I hear it is because I am so satirical—because I say sharp things. But I have set traps occasionally for my best friends, like the lawyer and his client, and have found out that once more it makes all the difference in the world 'whose ox it is that was gored.'

'I don't quite understand.'

'Shall I explain? Well, for instance, I am embarked in an encounter with somebody, and a skirmish of words ends in a mutual drawing off, which is called 'one of Mrs. St. Clair's quarrels'—all the odium rests on me. In vain I protest that the provocation came from the other side. 'Oh, impossible!' My fault has only been to resent. 'Oh, that cannot be!' At last I tell the story, reversing the actors, attributing to the other party my speeches and my actions, and *endosse*-ing theirs. A chorus of exclamations: 'Of course, don't you see? You were palpably wrong; nothing was done to you; you were needlessly fierce! poor so and so, no wonder that they are wounded.' 'You think so, really? I say. 'Most assuredly, nothing can be plainer.' 'I am heartily glad,' I answer; 'because I have exactly reversed what happened; 'twas *they* that did such and such things, and I who had the other side.' 'Ah! well, let's hear it all over again,' if I am weak enough to accede.'

'What?'

'I find out that it makes all the difference in the world 'whose ox is gored.'

'From which state of things you conclude—  
'Two. First: That *Æsop* is ever fresh, and that naughty wolf, my world, is always having the stream at which it drinks seriously muddled by this innocent little lamb far below the current; and, second: that it is the fashion to think me always in the wrong; and then she made a courtesy *à la Fontanges*, and proposed that they should all go home.

## CHAPTER XIX.

'Mrs. St. Clair, may I come in for an instant?' said Ruth, tapping at Bertha's door.

'Certainly,' cried Bertha; 'is anything the matter? Sit down.'

'Nothing very alarming, only I will venture to consult you. I have just got a note from my father, as we entered the house—but don't stop arranging your hair, you can listen just as well, and it is near the dinner hour, and I know you don't like being hurried.'

'Thank you. Your father is not ill, I hope?'  
'No, not exactly, but he writes that his head gives him some uneasiness, and adds, 'reading from the note in her hand, 'unless I grow worse, I will start for Beauchamp on Wednesday morning.' You see, he has not come; this note ought to have been here yesterday. Of course, had anything very serious been ailing him, my cousin, Mrs. Price, with whom he stays now, when I am not in town, would have sent for me; but still I am a little worried.'

'Of course. Are we in your way this evening? Would you go at once if we were not here?'

'Oh, not to-night; it is already after four o'clock. But you and Mrs. Denham meant to go to town by the twelve o'clock train; would you mind going instead with me in the carriage very early? It is now later in the day, but by starting at six o'clock—can you calmly contemplate six o'clock?—we shall have a pleasant drive, and I can return when I please.'

'It will suit me perfectly. But the luggage?'  
'That and your maids can still take the train.'  
'If we are not in your way, I think the plan a very agreeable one, and I am glad you have spoken so promptly and without hesitation.'

'Thank you, my dear Mrs. St. Clair; it was exactly what I knew you would say.'

'Well, it is exactly what I wish you would not say, when you address me as Mrs. St. Clair. Pray call me Bertha, as you sometimes do, and as every body else always does.'

'Bertha, then,' said Ruth, smiling, and stroking the bright dark hair which her guest was rapidly braiding; 'I am by nature very formal and stiff, you know.'

'By education you are growing very much the contrary,' said Bertha, as she looked up at her.

'Yes, Gerald is my teacher, and it is easy to learn from one who practices what he teaches. You will pardon my foolish admiration, when I say, that his graceful ease of manner is to me perfectly charming; but I always think that my efforts to imitate him are very like the donkey's labors in the lap dog line.'

'I think you are getting a style of your own which is even more attractive than his.'

'Oh!' said Ruth, blushing faintly; 'I shall make you one of your own courtesies for that. But the fact is,—she paused; 'the fact is, my present anxiety about papa is a little based on an evil conscience. I fear I am too much taken up with the study of Gerald and his perfections, to be able to pay the attention I ought to papa. I have an uneasy, vague presentiment of some coming evil connected with my dearest feelings. Have you ever had such silly fancies?'

'Dozens of times; very seldom with any result. It is quite reasonable that you should wish to go to Mr. Desborough, and I think it is right, but I make no doubt you will find nothing to alarm you. Either he is only still ailing, or else he has changed his mind about coming. Perhaps he has heard that you have a house full of noisy, chattering people, and keeps out of their way.'

'Perhaps so,' smiling. 'At all events, I think I had best go; and you are sure that Mrs. Denham will not object?'

'Quite sure. What becomes of the gentlemen?'

'Phyllis takes Mr. Browne with them to the Fordyce's, by the up train in the afternoon. Mr. Aubrey and young Melvor go over to the Trenton's to hunt, and pass a few days. Mr. Taunton goes in his own waggon, after breakfast, to his sisters, whose place is sixteen miles across the river. Francis remains here with Gerald.'

'Mr. Gray does not go to town with us, then?'

'Oh, no! he stays to see the Fordyces off, and, of course, I leave him to look after the children.'

'Of course.'

'Twas his proposition that I should suggest your going with me, and thus reach town so much sooner. Now, good-bye; I must hurry up Valerie. Your hair looks like plumed satin, and to think that I can do nothing with mine, except put it in Valerie's hand! Gerald always says when I attempt to arrange my hair myself that it looks as if I had invited the tuns to pass a leisure moment in brushing it.'

'So 'twas Gerald's proposition, was it?'

murmured Mrs. St. Clair, as Ruth closed the door. 'Humph!'

In half an hour there was a rustling of silks down the stairs, as the ladies assembled in the drawingroom, and immediately after dinner was announced.

The variable climate! This evening it was like the last of May; windows were thrown open, and in the coming twilight without, everything looked so cool and still, while around the plate-laden table, where flowers in profusion bloomed, the tall silver candelabra were not yet put to use. When the desert and the children appeared, the candles were lighted; and if among the many stereoscopic views which flooded the civilised world, this room could have been transferred to card board, the result would have had a great sale.

The women were all in their different styles, worthy of admiration, from stately Ruth to smiling Cissy. The gentlemen were, some of them, singularly handsome. Mr. Fordyce would only have lent a little shade to the colors. Then the two lovely babies in their white embroidered dresses, and shoulder knots, and sashes of bright, broad ribbon. They had *mignonnes* heads with long curls, and such pretty, foreign-accentuated voices and ways; their skins like ivory and roses, and their plump little bodies so well shaped.

Gerald at first clung to his mamma, burying his fair head on her shoulder, and refusing to look up, while Miss Geraldine, standing on her papa's knee, had seized his face between her two little chubby hands and was kissing him without ceasing, coquettishly pretending utter unrecognition of Mr. Taunton's efforts to draw her attention towards him.

Presently, however, she let her large, blue eyes wander in that direction, and before very long, was sharing an orange with him, and chattering away in her little half French, half English jargon.

'Did you see the papers, Mr. Fordyce?' asked Gerald. 'They were late in coming to-day, and I had no time to skim them over before the dressing bell.'

'Yes, I read one or two.'

'Anything new?'

'A fuller report of the X— case.'

'Ah, indeed! Is it decided?'

'Yes; verdict against him—marriage pronounced valid.'

'From what paper do ours copy?' asked Mr. Aubrey.

'From the London Times.'

'Didn't you read it?' enquired Mr. Melvor; 'I did.'

'What case is this?' Mrs. Denham asked.

'A case to prove a marriage,' answered Mr.

Aubrey. 'A certain dashing British officer, wishing to put off a lady's claim to bear his name and possible title—not to mention that he has performed the ceremony recently with a No. 2.'

'Ah, yes! I remember seeing something of it. Poor woman!'

'Poor woman, indeed!' said Francis, quietly. 'Don't waste your sympathy on an adventuress, dear Mrs. St. Clair.'

'Don't be harsh in your judgments, Mr. Josselyn. Why call her an adventuress?'

'Read her own confession; she followed him to the Crimea; she ran him down, she—'

'Stop; she may have done so, and that was very naughty, and unfeminine, and there I abandon her. We all of us will admit, won't we, madames, that a woman who runs after a man is an unnatural monster? So far, we have not a word in her defence. But he, he acknowledges, does he not, that she would not live with him on his own terms, however much she may in the first instance have run after him?'

'Yes.'

'Then she had principle, if not great modesty and decorum of manner?'

'Not she; she wanted his name, and the position that it would give her.'

'How do you know?'

'Let's hear the story,' said Bettina.

'The bare story is very simple,' said Francis; 'a pretty and attractive girl meets a handsome man above her own station in life; he is struck, she is flattered, still more by his rank than by his admiration.'

'Recollect this last is Mr. Josselyn's own conclusion. Stick to facts, oh, prejudiced traveler! and tell her story, not his.'

'Very well. They part; they correspond without meeting, till he gets to the Crimea, and there she goes at once as one of the band of volunteer nurses; sends after her admirer, and he falls again at her feet, but tells her he can't marry, first, because he had no money, and secondly, because his relations won't like it. So she then proposes a Catholic ceremony, not binding in law, but comfortable for her conscience, and it takes place.'

'He assuring her,' interrupted Bertha, 'in every possible way of his affection, and now pursuing her as steadily and as persistently with his devotion, as she ever did him in her thoughts, discussing with her the impossibility of legal marriage, but ready to go through any religious ceremony she choose. He gave her a ring—'

'He gave her a ring, and a priest blessed them, that's true.'

'But the gallant Major don't believe in



priests. In a year or so, when he grew tired of her, he left her, and without explanation or preparation, or apparent change of feeling, he married a rich widow, doing it all as secretly as possible at first, so as to prevent the interference of his real wife.

'But, my dear Mrs. St. Clair, what sort of a woman can she be? That speech to the Irish mob after the verdict in her favor!'

'My dear Mr. Josselyn, I am not defending the woman; I am indignant at the deed. Were you to murder the meanest man in the world, I should not the less consider you a murderer. The honorable Major had to pay a certain price for a certain piece of property, and it matters not whether the value received were at all proportionate to the sum disbursed. It was a *prendre on a laisser* on positive conditions. He didn't wish to *laisser* it, and when the payment grew burthensome, he denied the debt.'

'Come with me, Gerald; I'll show you the pretty picture,' said Cissy to the little boy. Cissy's feelings were in process of laceration from this discussion.

'What is your opinion, Ruth?' asked Mrs. St. Clair.

'Entirely with you. There is no excuse for him. I agree with the sergeant, who, when he answered a question 'upon his honor,' cried out, 'upon your oath, sir; I do not want your notions of honor.' I am heartily glad to see her righted.'

'Why, Ruth, where have you been studying the X— case?' asked Gerald, smiling.

'The papers came before we left; while waiting for all of you in the hall I saw them.'

'Dear Ruth,' said Francis, 'how can you be so hard upon the rougher sex? Indeed I thought you would come to my assistance against Mrs. St. Clair.'

'In the cause of strength and his, against weakness and truth, never! I may have thought Major X— unfortunate, if his fancy, being his master, had led him blindly to sacrifice his life and fortune to an unworthy woman; but a gentleman's plighted word, his sworn faith, can never be gainsayed, simply because he wears of his bargain.'

'Do you recollect that beautiful sentiment in the *Roman d'un Jeune Homme pauvre*? said Bertha; '*Il vaut mieux outre passer l'honneur que de rester en deca; en matiere de serments, tous ceux qui ne nous sont pas demandés sous la pointe du couteau ou a la bouche d'un pistolet, il ne faut pas les faire, car il faut les tenir*.'

'Voilà mon avis,' added Gerald, finishing the quotation, and bowing at the lady.

'What, you too, old fellow? I thought you would be with me,' said Francis; 'well, I suppose I may as well give up the defence, which I was, I beg Mrs. St. Clair to believe, only doing to bring out her 'enthusiasm,' and I am glad to proclaim in my natural character, that the honorable Major X— is a dishonorable scoundrel.'

'Why should you suppose, Francis,' enquired Ruth, 'that Gerald would side with you? Why suppose that any gentleman would uphold a creature who is a disgrace to his name and position?'

'Ah, here comes an avalanche,' cried Francis, playfully, holding up his hands. 'Don't throw your plate at my head, dear; you will certainly break the plate. Don't you know men always stand by each other? Mrs. St. Clair says so, and I say ditto to every thing Mrs. St. Clair says.'

'Gerald would never stand up for deceit and falsehood in any shape. I should disown him if he did,' Ruth said, smiling proudly.

'Well,' put in Phyllis, 'I think allowances should always be made for gentlemen when they fall under the influence of designing women.'

'Yes, poor things!' said Bertha contemptuously; 'poor, helpless men! I am so sorry for them. They go through a deal of danger.'

'I shall be very much obliged, therefore, to you two excellent ladies if you will kindly protect me, a tender creature, from the vengeance of that 'designing female,' my cousin, Mrs. Gray, who will perhaps poison my coffee presently,' said Francis, laughing.

'Don't you know, Francis, that Ruth permits no show on my perfections except from her own tongue? There is written upon me, invisibly but indelibly, a 'notice to quit,' addressed to all human kind. 'Stick no bills here.'

'I see it,' said Bertha, 'on your noble brow raising her hand.'

'Range undisturbed among the hostile crew,  
But touch not Gerald, Gerald is my due.'  
(Signed) RUTH GRAY.

Ruth laughed and said that she supposed there was no use to disclaim; so all rising they adjourned to the drawing room.

## CHAPTER XX.

Passing through the hall, they stopped to look at a large trunk.

'Oh,' said Phyllis, 'that is from dear Mrs. Armstrong, for me. From your aunt Charlotte, Mr. Fordyce. It is full of old brocade, —things ever so old. Dresses and coats, and all sorts of head gear. See, how beautiful! she lifted the lid, and presently everybody was

upon their knees examining the rich silks and embroidered velvets of an ancient date.

'Wasn't it good of her to give them to me? Here is the lovely pink and silver which she selected for you, Cissy. I wish we were going to have a fancy ball to wear them.'

'Why shouldn't we have a fancy ball to-night, all to ourselves?' said Arthur.

'Yes, that would be great fun.'

'Would you be willing to lend these treasures, Phyllis?' asked Ruth.

'Oh, certainly.'

Then began a scene of fun and laughter quite indescribable. Cissy, of course, had her pink and silver, and Phyllis set her eyes and hands firmly on a certain gorgeous yellow, covered with humming-birds. But to choose for the others was no easy task. The men especially were bent upon getting the best of the habiliments, and as there were but two handsome coats, there was quite a scramble for them.

Finally, a moderately just division of the spoils was made, and after a whispered colloquy between Mrs. Denham and Arthur McIvor, every one went off to dress; each promising not to be more than an hour in the robing process.

'But rouge!' exclaimed Bertha; 'where shall we get any rouge? and if we powder our heads without rouge we shall all look like grey owls.'

Mrs. Fordyce eagerly joined on: 'Ah, yes! rouge! that is a great difficulty. What shall we do? Of course nobody has any.'

'I have,' said Ruth.

'My dear Ruth, don't expose the secrets of your dressing-case,' said Gerald in a loud whisper.

'And of your color,' added Bertha, reproachfully.

'I defy you all,' answered Ruth, 'but I condescend to explain that I saw only yesterday a pot of Lubin's finest bloom, still among my 'effects,' where it has been since I went *en marquise* to a French ball last year.'

'Ah! honorably acquitted!'

'Valerie shall start on an excursion around the house with the article in question, for the use of both ladies and gentlemen. Oh, Geraldine, what a little monkey!'

Miss Geraldine came running towards her mamma, dressed up in a waistcoat, of which the flaps made a train for her, hotly pursued by Mr. Taunton, who was destined to appear in it presently himself.

Such peals of laughter began now to resound through the house; sudden dashes were made from room to room, and loud calls for curling-tongs, and Valerie, and rouge.

Valerie was in her element; so full of importance and suggestions, and pearl powder; modestly veiling her coffee-colored, French eyes, and mining her words; whisking thro the passage with her cap strings streaming behind her, and her trig little figure darting in and out wherever summoned.

At length, about nine o'clock, they began to re-assemble. Ruth, having been deprived of her maid's services, was almost the last to appear. As she entered the drawing room, she was greeted with quite a burst of admiration. Her dress, being one she had already worn, was more *soignée* in its appointments than the others. The powdered hair had artificial curls—the *bandeau* of brilliants and the graceful plumes became her vastly; so did the very rich colors of her skirts and train. The lace she wore was magnificent; her stately carriage suited the, sweeping robes; her dark eyes were doubly lustrous from the effect of the softly tinted cheek. Three black patches gave a coquettish charm to her smile, and she wielded her fan with the perfect nonchalance benefitting her toilette.

She was essentially of the type *grande dame*.

'Why, you are lovely,' cried Bertha, sailing up in red and white, with oceans of old blonde flowing over her, and large coral beads around her white throat.

'The same to you,' said Ruth, smiling.

Phyllis looked very handsome with her humming-birds, and her darkened eyelids, and Cissy was charmingly pretty in the pink and silver.

'But where is Mrs. Denham?'

'Not down yet,' answered Mr. Taunton, who was admirably got up. 'Both she and McIvor are missing still.'

Messrs. Fordyce and Aubrey now came forward, leading between them Mr. Browne, whom they protested they found trying to hide from his own knee breeches.

Of course this was fair game for Gerald, who joined in the comments for and against Mr. Browne's legs.

Francis touched Ruth's arm; she was gazing intently at Gerald, and started.

'Own that you think him perfection and nothing more,' said her nominal cousin.

'Certainly I do,' she answered frankly.

'I think Browne should petition the government to force every body back into tight-said Gerald. 'I predict that Browne would make a brilliant marriage if his calves had a chance.'

'He would be a greater lady-killer than our friend X—, whose case we have been discussing.'

'I go for what is in my head, not for what

carries it,' said Mr. Browne, good-humoredly.

'I protest against resuming the discussion of Major X—,' said Bertha; 'unless every body agrees that he ought to be hanged.'

'I don't at all agree,' said Mr. Browne; 'I think he is a plucky fellow, and behaved very naturally.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes, no man *can* love a woman long, to whom he is not legally united,' and Mr. Browne rounded his eyes and looked solemn, 'Every woman ought to feel that.'

'That is your opinion, is it? But you likewise believe the converse case, that he always loves one to whom he is legally united?'

'Of course.'

'How astute! I wonder from what you argue? Not from anything you ever said, surely. It never occurs to you that because marriage forces a man to stand *outwardly* by his word, inwardly he is not any the truer? Believe me, ere who would be false to a love *only* binding in honor, and which, by your creed, can be broken, will never keep any better the vows legally sworn, and which, in a measure, therefore, he must seem to respect.'

'Not my creed; God forbid!' said Mr. Browne, backing down before the indignant flash of Mrs. St. Clair's eyes; 'I have no opinion on the subject.'

'No experience, you say,' said Gerald mischievously.

'My opinion is,' said Bertha, 'that you had better leave off being proud of either your head or your heart, and accept even your legs instead!' turning her look upon him.

'That is one of Mrs. St. Clair's hard speeches,' whispered Francis.

'I know it,' said Bertha, candidly. 'Poor Mr. Browne is not aware that he is taking part in a comedy, and getting the sort of treatment, mentally administered, which, in Ravel pantomimes, passes for wit—hard kicks.'

'Do you think that Gerald suspects that we are lecturing him over everybody's shoulder?'

'Not in the very least. I do believe that he is sweetly unconscious, or else he plays into our hands with calm impertinence.'

'Yes, he helps us more than anybody.'

'I think Mr. Fordyce will have a fit, if I launch any more plain phrases at the X—case. He looks upon me now, why—see that.'

The door was thrown open with a flourish and two figures entered. The first was a little old lady, with a cap and wrinkles and black mittens and powdered hair and spectacles, and eyebrows like two strokes of Indian ink. She leaned one hand on her gold headed cane, and the other was firmly linked into the arm of a tall young creature who swam vivaciously by

her side with a huge fan and innumerable graces and airs.

The old lady stamped her way up to Ruth and introduced her daughter: 'My beloved Adeliza,' she said, 'an unsophisticated bud, of which in me you see the full blossom.'

Then groaning and puffing she sank into a chair, while the 'beloved Adeliza' by turns fanned her afflicted parent and made wondrous eyes at the gentlemen.

Of course they were immediately recognized—and Arthur Melvor as the 'bud' played his part as well as his venerable mamma, Mrs. Denham.

His pretty, boyish face, with its short curls and wreath of roses, was infinitely funny; and the way in which he managed his petticoats and hoops, and bridled and smiled, and looked and hesitated, did great credit to his powers as an actor.

Presently was heard the tuning of a violin, and in the entry appeared the plantation fiddler assisted by a friendly tamborine player from an adjoining estate—while at the open windows 'going' upon the piazza, sundry heads with bandana handkerchiefs proclaimed that the trimly maids were enjoying a sight of the fruit of their labors.

The evening grew into quite a frolic. Gerald's gay spirits, never needing much impetus to set them going, were at their highest pitch. Mrs. St. Clair was not far behind him, and Francis matched them both.

'No quadrilles to break the 'proprieties' of your brocades and powder!' exclaimed Ruth.

'Of course not,' said Gerald, 'may I ask the favor of the fair Adeliza's hand for a minuet?'

'Who knows the minuet?'

'Oh, it is all bows and curtesies and any time,' said Gerald recklessly.

'Well, it will be so for this evening. Mrs. St. Clair and I will 'lead the measure,' and make the figures as we go; but I think the 'Lancers' danced very slowly with extra salaams will save our time.'

'I don't think old Joe is up to the 'Lancers.' Can you play the 'Lancers,' Joe?'

'Nebber year of such a ting, Maussa,' responded Joe; so he was then requested to perform his slowest and best known tune, and Gerald led out the young belle, who tripped back several times to her mamma and whispered, and trembled with modesty before she could make up her mind to leave the maternal side.

Phyllis fell to the lot of Mr. Aubrey, and Mr. Taunton danced with Cissy.

In the midst of the gay laughter, and the many absurdities, Ruth gradually forgot the

anxiety which had weighed upon her since receiving her father's note.

Her voice frequently joined in the lively sallies which flew from side to side: the sage sentimentalities of Adeliza's mamma and the daughter's affectations; Gerald's bright and saucy face was by itself enough to amuse her. Unconsciously, she, after a while, ceased speaking to Mr. Fordyce and just watched the dance with happy eyes and a half smile. Mr. Fordyce finding that she was silent and inattentive to him, began to fidget about the table near which they were sitting. He had quite a taste for drawing, and thought he would sketch the scene. Ruth grew alive to her neglect of the little lawyer, and opened a drawer to find a sheet of thick paper. She gave it to him, and beneath was an envelope with 'good advice' scrawled on it in Gerald's hand. Taking it out, she found a slip cut from a newspaper, and reading the title, 'Jealousy,' remembered the very evening on which her love had given it to her. The smile deepened as her thankful heart recalled how sad she was in those early days when Gerald and she were first learning to understand each other. 'Did I ever need such advice in very truth?' she thought, quite forgetting that only on the previous evening there had been a slight spasm of the malady—but then it was but slight, whereas in those bye-gone days the case seemed fierce and chronic. Yet she sighed, too, as she glanced over these words of Dickens:

'Jealousy is as cruel as the grave: not the grave that opens its deep bosom to receive and shelter from further storms the worn and forlorn pilgrim who 'rejoices exceedingly and is glad' when he can find its repose; but cruel as the grave is when it yawns and swallows down from the lap of luxury, from the summit of fame, from the bosom of love, the desire of many eyes and hearts. Jealousy is a two headed asp, biting backwards and forwards. Among the deadly things upon the earth, or in the sea, or flying through the deadly night air of malarious regions, few are more noxious than is jealousy. And of all mad passions, there is not one that has a vision more distorted, or a more unreasonable fury. To the jealous eye, white looks black, yellow looks green, and the very sunshine turns darkly lurid. There is no innocence, no justice, no generosity, that is not touched with suspicion, save just the jealous person's own. And jealousy is an utter folly, for it helps nothing, and saves nothing. If your friend's love is going, or gone, to another, will your making yourself hateful and vindictive stay it or bring it back? If it is *not* leaving you, is there no risk in rendering yourself so unlovely?'

Commend me to all bereaven bears rather than to a jealous person, especially a jealous woman. There is neither reason nor mercy in her when once thoroughly struck through with this fearful passion. She renders herself altogether repulsive by it—an object more of dread than affection to those who have loved her best. And if she regain not her self command and return not to her senses, she frequently destroys utterly the attachments she most prized. Her friend may, indeed, refuse to forsake her; but it will be duty that bids him stay; and never will he be able to forget what an abject thing she has once appeared.

But let not any too rigorously judge the conduct of a jealous woman or a jealous man. Remember that the maniac *suffers*. To be sure, the suffering is from selfishness—often it is without a shadow of a cause; but still it is suffering, and it is intense. Pity it—bear with it. You may yourself fall into temptation. It is a sorer curse, a more certain and fatal blight to the heart on which it seizes, than it can be to those against whom its spite is hurled. Then while none should bend too far to the whims of jealousy, all should be patient with its victims; and also should be watchful and careful that it enter not their own heart.

The music—if the scraping of Joe's fiddle and the clatter of the tamborine can be called music—had ceased. Some one laid a hand on Ruth's shoulder—she looked up, and Gerald enquired:

'What are you studying, darling?'

'A mastered science—the symptoms of a cured malady—the 'diagnosis' of an almost forgotten case.'

He looked at the paper.

'You remember it?' she asked.

'Oh, yes, perfectly; weren't you naughty in those days? And haven't you improved since!'

'In everything?'

'Everything; vanity especially. I see why you so readily gave in to the notion of this *travesti*. That dress is charming—it suits your figure, style, face, air! And do you know that you were never so handsome in your life, my love, as to-night?'

Ruth's eyes sparkled with a tender lustre she said, almost shyly:

'Thank you. I think the angels in Heaven are not more beautiful than you, Gerald.'

He laughed.

'I think you are as great a goose as usual,' he said. 'But we must not stand flirting here in this outrageous way.'

As he nodded at her and went off, she rose and stood for a second motionless beside her chair.

In that moment there came a great rush of thought through her mind—her lonely childhood, her solitary girlhood, the luxury and the lack of sympathy in which she had passed her days till he came. But for him, what would she still have been? His sweet and dear affection had made a new world for her. Could she love him enough? But there was a weight upon her spirit, nevertheless. What could it be? The dark cloud that rested upon her was almost inexplicable. 'Is it papa?' she thought. 'Is he ill?'

'Why, Ruth, you should have an artist here to sketch that pose,' said Francis.

'What is the matter?'

'Don't move; put back your hand where it was, now look in that mirror and tell me what you see?'

She saw a magnificent figure, gorgeously arrayed; one full, round arm resting with drooping hand and pendant fan upon the back of the chair; the head partly turned over the shoulder, and the small throat proudly rising above a beautiful bust, closely imprisoned in its jewelled stomacher. The large, bright eyes looking steadfastly clear, and the softly-chiselled lips just parted, broke now into smiles as she saw what he meant.

'You and Gerald wish to make me quite foolishly conceited, I think,' she said.

'You will be petitioning the legislature, too, as well as Browne. Certainly, powder, patches, trains and rouge are your slaves, and you were better than a *Watteau* as I first saw you standing there. It was a delicious *tableau vivant*, and might have been lithographed as '*La Reverie*.' Of what were you thinking?'

Before she answered, Mr. Aubrey, who was hovering near, caught at the idea of *tableaux*.

He proposed that they should get up a few, then and there.

'But we should have no audience,' said Phyllis.

'No gauze screen,' said Mrs. St. Clair.

'Oh! we shall not be so fastidious as to demand all the accessories of preparation,' said Mr. Aubrey. 'And the audience will consist of those who are not at the moment acting.'

'That is, some of us will look our prettiest to be gazed at by the others till their turn comes to do likewise.'

'Just so; and that bow window will be a capital spot. Let's arrange the curtains so that they can drop across the entrance, and be withdrawn immediately; pieces of string will do it.'

In a very short time the tableaux were formally inaugurated by the simple process of congregating all the lights upon an *etage*

within the curtain of the bow window, and thus darkening the drawing room.

Mrs. St. Clair was deputed to lead the way and perform the first picture. She thought a few moments, and then selected Josselyn and Mr. Taunton to accompany him.

Gerald and Mr. Aubrey stood at each side, ready at a given signal to draw back the curtains. The word was spoken, and with only a slight hitch, the draperies parted and disclosed Bertha sitting in one of the high-backed *fauteuils*, Mr. Taunton kneeling at her feet and in the very act of kissing her right hand; while the left was receiving from Francis (who peeped cautiously from behind the chair) a very palpable love letter. 'A coquette to the life!' was exclaimed, and warm plaudits, of course, were duly given; twice was the scene exhibited, and then Mrs. Denham being called upon asked for the aid and presence of her 'daughter' and Mr. Aubrey.

The venerable dame was soon seen in a state of evident anxiety about this young creature's occupation. The listening attitude with partly bent head and uplifted hand, showed that her eyes no longer did their office, for very near stood the culprit—her waist encircled by Aubrey's presumptuous arm, and only half defending herself from the kiss which was threatening her rosy cheek. It was perfectly apparent that the blind grandmama suspected the smuggled presence of the young lady's lover.

This picture was succeeded by the 'Dull Lecture,' in which Phyllis figured as fallen asleep while listening to Mr. Fordyce reading. There was a general smile at the aptness of the representation, and Phyllis took the occasion to inform her lord that her choice was intentional, to signify that political news and law cases always wearied her.

Lastly, it was Cissy's turn; 'what should it be? She had no sort of invention. Would not Ruth take her place?'

'No; Ruth had from the first begged off—she was so stupid at such things.'

A general dearth of ideas seemed to fall upon the company; at last somebody said, 'The Inconstant,' that's a pretty picture and very easy.'

'Oh, yes! the old story—you know, a fair and a dark beauty, and a man,' said Ruth.

'Extremely comprehensive!' said Mr. Aubrey. 'It is Gray's turn or Browne's.'

'Not mine,' said Mr. Browne; 'I plead my right to choose, and I have a private tableau to finish off with.'

'Very well, then I will sacrifice myself,' said Gerald. 'Take this cord, will you, Browne,

and play scene shifter,' then turning to his cousin: 'Cissy, who will you have?'

'Ruth, if she will consent.'

Ruth again declined, but there was an outcry against her; so she yielded, and the three retired behind the curtain.

In a few minutes they were disclosed; Gerald was in the foreground whispering to Cissy and holding her hand to his heart; behind them, with a look of dismay and indignation and anguish, Ruth stood transfixed. It was the best picture of all, yet it gave least pleasure to some of the lookers-on.

'*La reste n'est pas toujours bon vin*,' said Bertha in a very low voice to Mr. Josselyn.

'Let us hope that it is only a 'might have been,' he answered.

As the applause died away, and the trio emerged, Gerald said laughingly to Ruth, drawing her close to him in the darkness of the drawing-room, 'Darling, did you feel as fierce as you looked?'

'Not quite,' she said. 'I am cured of all that, I trust, forever. Although I heard them saying "Mrs. Gray's expression is capital," I could not but feel that some time back I could have better looked the character of a jealous wife.'

'What a trump you are, darling! But you leave me now not a fault to peck at!'

He dropped her hand as the curtains parted once more, and Mr. Browne was seen kneeling on a cushion, with a telescope to his eye pointed at the group, while a large placard on his breast proclaimed him 'The real, original, drawing-room astronomer.'

The lights resumed their places, and supper was declared inevitable and necessary after all these varied efforts.

'This is our last regular meal under this hospitable roof!' exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, as his glass was filled with sparkling moselle, 'I devote this bumper to the happiest wishes, Mrs. Gray! May we all meet again here some day.'

'It rests with yourselves,' said Ruth courteously.

'Yes; since we have proved that you can spend a week in so dull a spot as this without cutting your throats in despair at so wasting your time, or ours, for bringing you here, let us trust that Beauchamp will get up a good name and become really popular.'

'Become! you are too modest, Mr. Gray,' said Bertha. 'It is popular.'

'It has been one of the pleasantest weeks of my life,' said Mr. Browne soberly.

'Well, mesdames,' remarked Mrs. St. Clair, rising, 'I don't know what your sentiments are about the hour, but I know that I start for

town at six o'clock, A. M., and I have at least six pounds of powder to brush out of my hair—so, very reluctantly, I say good night, wishing you all the luck to get rid of this beautifying, but very troublesome adornment, as quickly as possible.'

## CHAPTER XXI.

'I will say goodbye to you here,' Ruth said as she put in her head at Gerald's door.

'Come in, my child; why that doleful tone? Any one would suppose that we were parting for several years. Tie this cravat, there's a love; I never saw such an obdurate piece of silk. Oh, what a bow! Get away, you worthless woman. There! how do you like that?' He turned his head round to her with his chin in the air. 'But, what ails you, Ruth?'

'I don't know that anything ails me; what is it?'

'Why you look at me as if you were taking an inventory of my features. You will find them just the same to-morrow, believe me.'

'I hope I shall. Kiss me, dear, and let me go.'

'I am sure you are not well, Ruth. You had better give up this journey, even if your father is ill.'

'I wonder which of us is most absurd; I, or feeling as if we were parting for years, or you, for talking of my drive as a journey.'

'As if anybody could ever be as absurd as you! But don't stay longer than you can help; if you don't return to-morrow I shall come for you. You know how I will miss you.'

'Do you really, really miss me?' asked Ruth.

'Do you really, really need to inquire?' said Gerald affectionately. 'You know, darling, how I dislike to be forced to express my feelings; but this I will say, that never was man blessed with a love more true than yours for me, and never was love more thoroughly appreciated. How then can you doubt that your presence is absolutely necessary to my complete contentment? And it seems so strange for you to ask me such a question in this gray morning *apropos* of nothing.'

'And feeling perfectly sure as I do—never so sure—in all our wedded lives as now, of the wise provision which made me link my life with yours! But I hear Mrs. St. Clair's voice in the corridor. Goodbye my own darling.'

He folded her in his arms and strained her to his breast. Her whole soul was in her eyes as she bent back her head and looked with tenderness unspeakable into his face. 'Oh, my God! how I love you!' she murmured passionately. In the dim light her countenance was

radiant yet solemn. 'Goodbye,' and she was gone.

When Gerald followed to the dining room, the early party were hastily breakfasting. Mrs. Denham was feeding her parrot on toasted waffle, and exhorting him to eat like a Christian, and Mrs. St. Clair was descanting eloquently on the delights of rising with the dawn.

'It is, such a cheap and easy to be had pleasure,' said Francis, 'why don't you oftener indulge in it?'

'Simply because it is a habit which renders the possessor insufferable! How entirely I agree with Elia in his view! An early riser thinks that in performing that virtuous act he exonerates himself from doing any other, and is at liberty from that pedestal to lash the vices of all mankind—and spare his own.'

'Yes,' said Francis, 'just as severely virtuous women think that the exercise of that decency puts them at liberty to commit any other excess.'

'Not to mention,' said Gerald, 'that half the vinegar-faced females, who are so hard upon their sisters, and so soft upon themselves, had better remember the Spanish proverb and be humble: 'Impregnable is the castle that never has been stormed!'

'Scandal before sunrise!' exclaimed Bertha. 'What a picture to carry away of life at Beauchamp.'

'Is this what is called scandal?' asked Francis innocently; 'upon my word, the devil is not by any means so black as he is painted. Have I been scandalous, Ruth?'

'Scandalously brilliant for such early hours. Don't keep it up, or Bertha will run down before we start, and Mrs. Denham and I expect her to be very entertaining.'

The carriage came to the door at this moment, and there was a general move.

'I trust, Gerald, you will not forget to have lunch at 12 o'clock for your cousins. Pray, Francis, remember that Mr. Fordyce always takes brandy and water, and always requires to be pressed about it—make Gerald think of it. And when you dine by yourselves to-day don't let Gerald give the children anything at dessert that they should not have,' said Ruth, 'and'—

'And be sure, Francis, that you pin my napkin well over my shoulders, and see that I don't drink more than—how many glasses of wine, Ruth?' broke in Gerald, catching his wife by one end of her shawl.

'I understand, my dear,' said Francis. 'This precious creature shall be made to do all that is proper, so you can leave him with a tranquil conscience.'

'Adieu Beauchamp!' cried Mrs. St. Clair, stretching out her arms towards the fair lawn and the old oaks.

'Au revoir, you should emphatically say, dear Mrs. St. Clair. May we hope often to see you here.'

'What! are you really off!' exclaimed Arthur McIvor, rushing down stairs. 'Am I not to be permitted to embrace my honored mamma at parting?'

'You lost your filial privileges when you doffed your skirts,' said Mrs. Denham, springing into the carriage, and looking excessively coquettish.

'Ah! then he had them when he wore crinoline?' asked Gerald impudently.

'Did I positively imply it?' retorted the pretty widow.

'Don't forget me, Mr. Josselyn,' said Bertha, meaningly.

'Is this a spot for such tender suggestions?' ejaculated Gerald. 'Hide your blushes behind me, Francis, while I whisper your reply to this imprudent lady.'

'Not a bad idea that the answer should come through you,' said Bertha, glancing at Francis, who with bare head and pulling at his moustache, stood smiling beside their host.

'Well, there is nothing more to be said, drive on.'

Scarcely had the carriage rolled twenty yards upon the smooth gravel than there came a cry of 'stop,' and Gerald arrived breathless at the window.

'You did not say, Ruth, whether Francis was to send a boy with me to carry my gun when we go shooting to-morrow morning—what do you decide?'

He looked so handsome and so merry. His wife, as if involuntarily, touched his head with her caressing hand, and then blushed intensely as his laughing eyes reproved her.

'Decidedly, have the boy, unless you promise not to load the gun,' she jestingly replied.

'Certainly, Mrs. Gray,' Bettina said, as they once more drove on, 'you can boast of owning the handsomest creature in the world!'

'Yes, he is very handsome,' Ruth agreed frankly, 'but he has more than looks. Seldom has there lived any one with such a temper and such spirits. Don't let me speak of Gerald. You know how foolish I am.'

## CHAPTER XXII.

'Well, Gerald!' exclaimed Francis, lighting a cigar and setting himself into his chair; 'do you know I think you a monstrously happy fellow?'

'I am not complaining of my lot, am I?'

responded Mr. Gray, leaning across the table for the decanter of Madeira. 'But what at this instant elicits your remark, may I ask?'

'It is by no means the first time that it has struck me, but I feel in the humor for confiding to you my sentiments on the subject, and it is the sort of weather in which one feels like airing one's private convictions. Besides, except for that hasty day in Boston, it is, I verily believe, the first occasion of a *tele-a-tete* that we have had.'

'It is so. We have had no chance for one of our long, by-gone talks. Ruth and you are such cronies, and she has learned to endure smoke so patiently, that it has been a *vie a trois* ever since you have been here.'

'God bless her!' said Francis, heartily. 'What wouldn't she endure with patience?'

'I think I know a thing or two that she wouldn't endure,' said Gerald, half smiling. 'Throw away that cigar, Francis, and try one of these of mine. You always are torn by conflicting emotions, between your love of good tobacco, and your natural economical propensities. Upon my word, if I were not afraid to speak plainly, I should say that you are the d—dest stingiest fellow, to yourself, in the world.'

Francis playfully made a dash at him with his fist, which Gerald parried with the extended cigar case. Josselyn helped himself and walked to the door, which opened on the piazza, to throw out the maligned Havannah.

'You were always extravagant, and I have always felt obliged to save for both of us. The fact is, I have been taking care of you so long, and feel such a property-right in you, Gerald, that it would be very hard to bring myself to the consciousness that to seek to guide you, and scold you, is an interference.'

'An interference! why you are in a condition to need a straight waistcoat, young man, when you bring forth such nonsense as that. What are you diving after?'

'Gerald the second's top, which you were quite willing to let him set as a pinnacle to that mould of jelly just now, had I permitted it. He must have dropped it when his *bonne* carried him off.'

'Geraldine filled my coffee cup with a whole tea set of ancient acorns I think.'

'They are beautiful children.'

'Yes, pretty little monkeys.'

'I like that. You are as proud of them as their mother is. You don't deserve to have such babies, if you undertake to speak so dispassionately.'

'I like that,' retorted Gerald. 'In the name of Malthus, are you setting up for a connoisseur in children? Since when have you been seized with this mania?'

'Since I began to envy you the possession of such a wife and such children.'

'Envy is an evil passion,' said Gerald solemnly.

'Seriously, Gerald, I wonder if you comprehend the extent and value of your blessings?'

'Seriously, Francis, I do,' said Gerald, yawning.

'Look at your position,' Francis went on. 'What more could earth give you? You have youth, health, wealth, friends, intellect, good looks, education, —'

'No corns, and never a headache.'

'A wife, who is the most admirable of women, and two children, —'

'Who seldom cry.'

'What more could you have? What is there for you to wish for? Answer me, and don't look so doubting.'

'Contentment,' said Gerald, shortly—'forgetfulness.'

'Contentment? Forgetfulness?' repeated Francis, with surprise. 'Ah! true! That sad business across the water. Yes, that is a bitter drop in your cup; but I did not think it enough to spread its taste through all the draught.'

Gerald was silent.

'You have had no bad news recently?'

'No news at all. I presume all is right. There has been scarcely time to hear anything.'

'I fervently trust that neither your mother nor you will be made further unhappy in that quarter. Do you mean, Gerald, that —'

'Don't let us talk about it,' said Gerald. 'You know me of old, and my way of taking things. I never speak of what weighs upon me; nor do I ever let any one see its effect upon me. Do you recollect that time at school, when I was unjustly punished and accused—when for so long I had to bear averted looks from our uncle, who believed me guilty, and I was denied every possible pleasure. I felt ready to murder everybody, except you, and yet did I not look as pliant and cheerful, and didn't I play as many pranks, and seem as unconcerned as if I had not a care?'

'True. And when I wanted to condole with you and comfort you, you drove me away from the subject, with sarcastic sentences and practical jokes.'

'Precisely. I don't understand the thing which is called 'sympathy in trouble.' The way I behave to my troubles, is to ignore them utterly, or treat them, if possible, as a sort of gloomy fun.'



'Let me ask one question about this: How did Ruth take his coming back?'

'She had never heard of him till he returned.'

'Good God! And what did she say to you?'

'Three syllables of reproach, and three hundred of tenderness.'

'She is a trump!'

'She is a very noble woman,' said Gerald, calmly. 'Shall we have candles? They will not bring them till I ring, and it is quite dark.'

'No; I like this soft twilight.'

'As you please. I wonder if we shall have good sport to-morrow in the Trenton woods. You will find it hard riding, Francis, and yet you get so restive at the idea of keeping to your stand. The underbrush is perfectly uncleared. Old Josiah Trenton is a curious specimen of the uncultivated aristocracy. Just before you came, his brother, (Louis' father,) and himself, had a dispute about the hunt, and Josiah vowed that his idea was the best as to the course they should pursue. 'Drive the deer through them woods!' he said, scornfully. 'Do it! I swear, Bro. Tom, no use for skin 'em after you git 'em through.'

'Young Tom Trenton is an admirer of Cissy Clare, isn't he?' asked Francis, carelessly. 'She was engaged to him?'

'Not she,' replied Gerald. 'She refused him.'

'I doubt it.'

'What can you know about it?'

'Rather more than you do it seems.'

'Pooh! nonsense! I tell you she refused him.'

'I tell you she accepted him, and she would have married him, but Phyllis did not think him rich enough, and made her father make Cissy give back his ring, and ask the return of her heart.'

'It is an infernal lie that somebody has been foisting upon you,' said Gerald, angrily, 'and I don't believe a word of it.'

There was a silence of some few minutes, and then Francis said:

'Gerald, you and I are more than brothers to each other. If you saw me on the edge of a precipice, would you not risk your life to point out my danger to me?'

'I suppose I would.'

'Shall I not, then, risk your anger in pointing out a moral precipice to you?'

'Francis,' said Gerald, with closed teeth, an unfailing sign that the devil within him was rising; 'it is a dangerous thing to meddle too much with even a brother's affairs, unasked.'

'I am silent then,' said Josselyn; 'but I am bitterly mortified. Pray pardon my intrusion.'

'Oh, hang it all!' exclaimed Gerald, impatiently, but more good-humoredly: 'say your

say; have it out. You know I never could oppose you.'

'Thank you, old fellow,' and Francis grasped his cousin's hand warmly for a second. 'Let's get it over quickly. I think you are going it too strong with Cissy Clare, and she —'

'Don't breathe a syllable against her if you wish me to listen to you. She is just as good, and as innocent, and as child-like as —'

'As she can be. My dear Gerald, I don't blame her in the very least. I blame you.'

'For what, pray?'

'I will go no farther back than this morning: Your manner, from the time they breakfasted at 8 o'clock, till they left at 2. Had you chosen to look at your cousin, Mrs Fordyce, you would have seen plainly her disapprobation.'

'Phyllis has grown fretfully impatient of the attentions that Cissy receives from anybody.'

'You are mistaken. Mrs. Fordyce is a perfectly prudent, proper woman, and you may be sure that she will never bring her sister back to Beauchamp, to be exposed to your very compromising although it may be perfectly innocent, devotion.'

'Well, perhaps she is right.' Gerald jerked out his words, and filled his glass.

'Then, another thing,' Francis went on, not heeding, apparently, what the other had said. 'You were gambling with Taunton and Aubrey almost every night while they were here, after the ladies had gone to bed, and I found out unintentionally and accidentally from Ruth, that she believes that you never play, and that she supposed you to have been sitting smoking and talking with me, instead of being engaged in interminable games of 'draw poker' and 'faro' with those men.'

'She chose to think so, and I did not contradict her.'

'My dear fellow, why take to so fast apace? You have the brightest present, the most unclouded future, the least embittered past. —'

'Fair and softly Francis. What if I tell you that I am utterly and irretrievably wretched.'

'I will tell you that you are entirely mistaken.'

'Very well, then; listen to me. You talked just now of this being an evening for unrestrained confidence. You shall have mine. Much good may it do you, since you will persist in knowing my faults and follies. Where shall I begin? Oh, yes! You know, as a boy, I was spoony about Cissy Clare?'

'To my amusement, always.'

'That is neither here nor there. I don't think any of us ever fail to be amazed in some way at our neighbor's infatuation, while our own is possibly no better. I don't think that

Julia Otey was much cleverer than Cissy, and certainly she is not as pretty. You need not start up! We are fencing without foils, and you began it. Well, I played fast and loose with Cissy for years. I liked her well enough to like nobody better, and yet not sufficiently to give up my liberty for her. She is about my own age, you know, so we had a long siege of it. Just when I found that I was getting too nearly caged, I would haul off; but then, if any man came about her, I would immediately cut in and drive him from the track.'

'Extremely creditable conduct,' said Francis.

'Wasn't it? Tom Trenton's attentions carried me further than anything else. I did get jealous of him and questioned Cissy pretty closely. It was then she assured me that she had never been engaged to him; that she had refused him instantly. Had she ever thought of accepting him, I should have lost all faith in her.'

'She knew that very well, and answered accordingly.'

'Francis!'

'My dear Gerald, you are surprised that you, who could deceive her, were deceived by her.'

'I did not deceive her. I never have deceived her. I behaved atrociously, but I was only too open, with her, poor child!'

'Go on.'

'Not long after this conversation with Cissy, I went abroad. (When we crossed together, you remember, and you started again for the East, and we parted, to meet under such different circumstances!) I was absent twenty months, and came home in August; it will be four years this summer. Mamma wanted to see me, so I only staid a day or two at New Haven, and then came straight home. The Clares were on the Island. Uncle Clare had lost some money, and was economising, and cutting the girls down in their expenditures; and Phyllis was thinking that some of them ought to marry, and as Cissy's chances that way were greater than hers, and she was always a capital manoeuvrer, she took the earliest chance of consulting me, and asking me to make Cissy marry a Mr. Taylor, who was dancing attendance about her. I told Phyl that I was the last person to whom she should apply for such a purpose, as she knew my feelings, &c. I don't know whether I was quite in earnest when I began, but be-

tween teasing Phyl, and my real fancy for Cissy, I ended by saying a good deal.

'Gerald,' said Phyllis, gravely, 'this must cease. You must make up your mind one way or another. It is no use to keep up this sort of thing. Between your own behaviour, and aunt Ellen's encouragement, Cissy is acting very improperly. She will never marry while you are unmarried, and you are never going to ask her to marry you.' 'But,' I said, 'do you wish to make me believe that Cissy wants to marry me?' Phyllis nearly grew angry. 'I only mean that you are treating her shabbily, and that she is very foolish to permit it, and I intend to put a stop to it.'

'She was very right, and I commend her,' put in Francis.

'Of course she was right, and I knew it, too; but I did not wish to put a stop to anything, so I took Cissy to drive that afternoon, and laughed and talked nonsense to her, and enjoyed her pretty feminine folly, and thought her dimples, to look at, better enjoyment than the cleverest woman's conversation. Phyllis' face was dark as a thunder cloud when we came in, but she smoothed it off, and began to talk about a dinner party they were to have next day, and — Miss Desborough.'

Gerald's voice lowered at the name, and he drank another glass of wine. The pale moonlight stole in through the open doors and windows, otherwise the room was dark.

'Ah!' said Francis.

'Phyllis first gloated over the riches appertaining to that lady; then she spoke of her hauteur and her indifference to everybody. 'There is a conquest worth making, Gerald,' she said, as we sat apart and together, after tea; (for she settled poor Cissy down at backgammon with uncle Clare, and out of my reach.) 'If you could carry off that prize, you would do well; but not even you, invincible as you think yourself, could storm or undermine that castle!'

I was highly entertained at this effort to pique me, and showed Miss Phyl that I was too old a bird for such chaff; but, nothing daunted, she went on with shrewd hints about Ruth's weak points and habits, introducing them as if merely in discussion of her character, and saying nothing further about my having an interest in the possibility of bringing them to bear upon the person in question. I was to go to town in the early boat; so, on bidding good night, Uncle Clare hoped

that I would return to dinner and be introduced to Miss Desborough. 'An excellent match for you,' said my venerable relative; 'and with your expected fortune, she could not suppose you actuated by mercenary motives, which is her hobby.'

Cissy looked so sadly and sweetly at me that I answered, very decidedly, that I did not think it at all possible for me to dine with them, and finding an opportunity, I said to her, at the foot of the stairs: 'Miss Desborough and I may one day be good friends, for I like strong characters; but I shall never try to marry her, Cis; of that, rest assured.'

Gerald paused, and buried his head in his hands.

'Now, I am going to tell you something horrible, Francis.'

'Out with it. Better make a clean breast at once, and forever.'

'Better bury it forever, and not dig up the body, as I am doing now. Francis, we shall both repent this conversation. You will think worse of me than you ever dreamed of doing, and I may begin to dislike you for knowing my weakness.'

'Not a bit, Gerald, and you know it. Nothing could make me think ill of you. I might mourn, sincerely, over some unexpected escapade of yours, and sing penitential psalms with you, and wear a mental white sheet, sprinkled with the ashes of a repented error, but that is all. I could no more quarrel with you than I could with my own right hand.'

'We are told to pluck off our right hand if it offends us.'

'If said right hand, by its offenses, leads us into sin; but I want to lead this right hand out of sin and folly.'

'Probably it does not wish to be led,' said Gerald, shortly.

'Let me judge,' Francis rejoined. 'Tell me the story, just as it comes. Just as you used to pour out all your college and school deviltries to me, easing your mind of the burthen of them, and putting me under the necessity of setting all straight.'

'You can't set this straight.'

'Go on.'

'Well,' said Gerald, in a harsh, rapid voice, and striking upon the table as he spoke, with the handle of his fruit knife; 'I got to town very early—before breakfast. I went to my room. There lay a telegram on my dressing table. I opened it. It was dated the previous day. It contained the news of our dou-

le loss. It was from Mr. Lord,—short as telegrams usually are, and distinct as a lawyer generally is. But three lines, and yet, I entered that room a man with the world before him, and the contents of that brown envelope told me that I was irretrievably a beggar, or very near it. You guess the rest, don't you?'

'Go on.'

'For a moment I was stunned; but I swear to you, Francis, that my first thought was not the fortune—my second was. My third, the devil whispered!—it was a woman's name, ———. How soon my plan matured itself, I don't know. I think it was done in half a second. I deliberately sealed up the telegram in another envelope—made a moderate imitation of my own name from the back of the original for the address, and put it in my pocket. We breakfasted, and I told my mother that I was going again to the Island, but not to dine with the Clares, who were to have a party for Miss Desborough. I borrowed her coachman, and took my own boy, Jim, put on my shooting clothes, and started for rice birds at Hutter's Point. You wonder what that all meant? Phyllis had told me that Ruth's habit was to walk always late and alone on the beach. I had two notions: one was to come in and find her still at the Clares, and pique her, if possible, by my indifference of costume and manner, or to make her acquaintance in some accidental fashion, during her walk, if she took one that evening. On my way to the row boat, in which I intended going to Hutter's Point, I stopped a small boy, pointed out the house, bade him ring the bell and deliver the re-sealed telegram. I knew it would not be opened till my return. Confess, Francis that you are disgusted?'

'Not in the least,' said Francis, calmly. 'I wish to know how it turned out.'

'As most things do when satan takes them in hand, and so long as he is permitted to guide events, deviously well. I killed some birds and cooked them for my dinner in a lovely grove of live oaks, with tangled swings of wild grape vines interlacing their old trunks, and then I took a fancy to see if I could find a crane on one of those uninhabited islands opposite Rutledge-super-mare. By this time the wind was pretty high, and I thought things began to look unpromising. No woman would venture to walk out under such a sky, but I preferred not being on the sea myself; so, feeling anything but gay, and full of dissatisfaction with myself and everybody, finding

great difficulty in making the passage, and decidedly as much out of sorts with the world, and as melancholly and as wretched a rascal as ever breathed, I landed on the beach, far up at the east end. By Heaven, Francis! there came a rush of amazement and audacity over me, such as successful villains in every line of crime must feel, when the most sanguine and unlooked-for hopes are fulfilled by that unseen agency which often baffles our comprehension, by its strange playing into our hands. A figure stood three yards from me, motionless and silent. I approached it, and recognised a person whom I had often seen, but who, it appears, had never noticed me—Ruth Desborough.'

### CHAPTER XXIII.

As Gerald here paused, Francis lit another cigar from the stump of the old one, and asked tranquilly:

'You spoke to her?'

'Of course. And then something infernal and powerful stirred within my breast—a recklessness surpassing every sentiment of the kind I ever before experienced. The part I had to play became a real pleasure to me. I was interested in my own acting and—I did it to perfection. Knowing Ruth as I since have done, I see that it was a wonderful effort. Phyllis had given me instructions that were very useful, but with luck favoring me, I walked over the course in a manner that surprised even myself; although, without modesty, you who know a little of my career, I may say that I am not unused to facile conquests. But everything went for me. This was the evening of the last 'great storm'—an equinoctial gale that lasted three days, tearing down houses and frightening the people more than they were hurt.'

'But you did not stay on the beach?'

'Scarcely. On the contrary I offered my escort to the unknown lady immediately, and urged her to hasten home. Poor Ruth! poor dear Ruth! how stately and indignant she was when I accosted her! She has told me since how unspeakably impertinent she thought me! and in fact but for the fierce wind and the furious rain, I don't think I should have made any progress at all—but she grew grateful when she saw her danger; and, finally, the cards of our game were death, and I seized the four honours, and made the odd trick besides.'

'Your game, not hers.'

'Oh! she played her part too, poor soul, although comparatively a very innocent one. I soon perceived that she did not wish to be known; she was keeping dark as to her name

—my own. I had instantly disclosed; but it was plain that to her it was the name of a stranger.'

'Perhaps she had her concealments, too?'

'Who? Ruth? My dear fellow! she said that she had never heard of me before. You understand her very little, if you suppose that any statement, the most seemingly problematical, could be false when coming from her lips! No! her morbid suspicions were swept away by my admirably performed ignorance of herself, and my interest in this unknown woman. We were obliged, finally, to take refuge at the Fort, and there, as I expected would be the case, came the denouement of the drama. I found myself in the presence of my two cousins, and Ruth discovered that this was the young gentleman who had refused to make her acquaintance at their dinner that day.'

'Had Phyllis told her of your refusal?'

'Not exactly; but it transpired in a manner not unprovoked by me, and helped on by Phyllis, who looked like a triumphant conspirator when she saw me. To this day, Phyllis has never guessed the truth, but thinks that to her skillful inuendoes and her wise provisions, are owing the circumstances of that evening. You may well imagine that her delusion has never been made clear to her, and when the blow of my uncle's death fell upon them, Phyllis's excessive delight in her prophetic judgment was really amusing.'

'And Cissy?' said Francis, indifferently.

'Poor Cissy!' Gerald repeated with a softened voice, 'I was cruel to her as only a man can be cruel. I did not spare her one pang. Before her eyes I threw myself headlong at Ruth's feet, and treated Cissy with a careless impertinence that was disgraceful, but necessary. This was my most difficult part. Ruth suspected the existence of some understanding between Cis and myself, for it must be confessed that the poor child scarcely concealed her jealousy and her indignation. Phyllis tried to carry it off with a high hand, but the mine was nearly sprung once or twice. A word of indiscreet explanation would have shattered my hopes, for I read Ruth thoroughly even then. An unoccupied heart she might believe herself capable of filling, but to suppose it possible, for a man attached elsewhere, to seek her, except for her fortune, she would never credit.'

'What did Cissy do?'

'Oh, a dozen silly things, and she looked so sweet and mild and fair—it was abominable of me—but the die was cast, and I was bound to conquer my own feelings and Ruth Desborough's. My pride was aroused, too, in a very

little while—almost instantly. My attentions were public—it would not suit me to pass for a baffled wooer of the heiress.

'And had you no pity for Ruth?' asked Francis.

'She had and has no need for pity and Gerald, she has never known, she shall never know, by what dubious paths her happiness came to her. Miserable I may be, but she is happy.'

'It will not last. Sooner or later such a deception must come to an end, especially when you bring Cissy beneath her very roof, as if to invite her observation. Has Ruth never been jealous of your attentions to your cousin?'

'Dozens of times!'

'In the beginning?'

'From the beginning.'

'Did she question you?'

'Ah, there it is! Before she would engage herself to me—when I saw that she loved me—she made her acceptance hang on the balance of that question. That came hard upon me, Francis. There is something in a downright lie that goes against the grain dreadfully. But she asked me, 'on my honor,' had I ever been in any way plighted or entangled with Cissy?'

'And you answered —?'

'You see, things were desperate with me. Without being in love, I ardently desired to marry Ruth; I liked her. I had determined never to think of Cissy again, and those grave uncompromising eyes of hers which permit no halting, were upon me, I answered, on my honor, no.'

'Humph!' said Francis. 'She believed you?'

'She believes in me with the simple faith of the child in its mother, of the Christian in his God.'

'Gerald, how can you help loving her?'

'I do love her. I love her very dearly; I respect her nobleness of character, her singleness of purpose, her truth, her faithfulness—but she never was and never can be, not the woman I love, but the woman who is my love.'

Gerald did not see the curl of contempt which settled on Josselyn's lip, but gave no shade to his tone as he enquired:

'And in all this time she has never grown on you?'

'Sensibly; in fact, I lost myself during those two years, and more, that we were abroad. I think I had no regret, no remorse, no recollection while we were absent. It is on coming back here, it is on seeing again that faithful and unhappy child that I am overwhelmed by the thought of my fatal rash-

ness! Had I but been patient. Think of it! Situated as I would have been—with the comfortable fortune, which I owe to your generosity, Francis—and with that pretty creature whom I have loved since my boyhood, what a different man I should have been!'

'Very different, I think!' exclaimed Francis, significantly. 'Do you mean, old fellow, that you are really in love now with Cissy Clare?'

'I mean that she has a place in my heart that nobody has ever filled.'

'Allow me to say that it is the most unhealthy sentiment I ever heard of—I believe as utterly unreal.'

'As you choose.'

'And do you confide your feelings to her?'

'Certainly not. I respect Cissy as much as I love her. And —'

'Do you, for one instant, fancy that she could ever love you with the intensity and utter unselfishness of your wife?'

'Unselfishness! surely Ruth's love for me is selfish. Would she be willing to give me up, do you think, to secure my happiness at the price of her own in me?'

'My dear fellow, that proof of her love would be as supremely unhealthy and unreal in your present mutual conditions as the sentiment you think you have for your boyish fancy. But answer—do you for one moment suppose that Cissy Clare cares for you, or could care for you, as Ruth does?'

'No; I believe no human being could be more utterly devoted to another, soul and body, than Ruth is to me. 'Tis her own fault; I had loved her better had she less loved me. She is always on her knees to me—now, I adore the woman who requires you to be incessantly on your knees to her. My spoiled, petted, capricious Cissy, good natured and sweet-tempered, but used to adulation and loving me, would have made just the little on sehold idol that I should have worshipped.'

'And the agreeable and sensible companion, and the judicious mother of your children —'

'Yes,' said Gerald, shortly and decidedly, 'Cissy is not brilliant, but she is perfectly sensible and judicious. If I want brilliancy I can seek it in books or out of doors—but this is idle talk. What is, is. What has been done, can't be undone. I made a mistake—I acted with duplicity, and I bear the consequences.'

'You don't bear the consequences, and ah! how many men would give their right hand to have your consequences to bear! Don't regret your confidence, Gerald, it has taught me a lesson, it will teach me to endure my lot. Our happiness lies within ourselves most truly, since a position such as yours is not by

itself capable of making one so. But I entreat you, by virtue of our long intimacy, put aside this foolish fancy, which the most utterly unreasonable source of disquiet. Would that you could see Miss Clare with my eyes, then I could be quite content to let you see Ruth with your own. That she should be overshadowed by such a shape as that!'

'We have said enough,' said Gerald, rising, 'more than enough.'

'One word more; for God's sake conceal from Ruth forever all that you have told me. You do blind her successfully, but 'ware the day she discovers the merest suspicion of the truth.'

'To whom do you tell it! My life would be a pleasant and tranquil one!' exclaimed Gerald, laughing and stretching his arms. 'Come. I am tired by all this gloomy retrospection. I hate talking about disagreeable things which can't be bettered. If I were being led to the gallows, you know I should jest with Jack Ketch. Let's have a game of billiards.'

'Your life a tranquil one! Yes, I think so,' said Francis, 'a very tranquil one so far as Ruth was concerned. You should know her best; but it strikes me that were she to find out for herself that she has been the victim of this long series of deceptions, her course would be plain and undeviating.'

'In what way?'

'She would never forgive it, and she would leave you.'

'Ridiculous!' said Gerald, laughing disdainfully. 'Nothing could separate Ruth from me—but I should have a wearisome time, striving to set things straight again. And I should be very seriously sorry to make her unhappy.'

'Oh, Gerald! you say so, and yet you run the risk every day of your life. Be just, be generous. I scarcely know what to advise—perhaps to tell her all would be best—even to the length of confessing your sin from the first guilty beginning—even to telling her the truth about the telegram, and all that—and pouring into that faithful heart all your follies—telling her how you have learned to love her and to mourn the unworthy commencement of your acquaintance. She would be, perhaps, your best help against any renewal of this sentimental nonsense . . . . .'

'Tell her then what is just as untrue as anything I have ever told her,' interrupted Gerald. 'You don't know, Francis, how much it will cost me to pursue the path I have marked out as the right one—but although I never intend to see Cissy again—never intend to trust myself in her society. I cannot forget her, nor speak of her to Ruth as you would have me. It would be false—false as all the

rest. Don't you see now that I am driven into all kinds of dissipation by the misery of my position? What but this has made me spend hours with those men, gambling? What but this makes me drink a vast deal more than is good for me . . . . .'

'Oh, by Jupiter! Gerald, that is coming it a little too strong! You have a natural turn for gentlemanly potations. You know that two glasses of whiskey punch, judiciously administered, would make you confess a murder—or commit one; and as for cards, my dear fellow! . . . . .'

Gerald broke into a laugh. 'Yes, I am afraid if I were at the gates of Heaven, and St. Peter looked agreeable to the notion, I might pause to propose a hand at 'poker' before entering. But for all that, it is only too seriously true, that when I remember where I am, and where I might have been, I am ready to hang myself, and as a solace, fly to Barclay's or the bottle.'

'Very well,' Josselyn said, heaving a great sigh. 'If a man is bent upon being unhappy and making a fool of himself . . . . . Let us take a game of billiards, as you proposed.'

'What a beautiful night!' said Gerald, going towards the piazza.

'Promise me, old fellow,' said Francis, following him, and laying his hand upon his shoulder just as they reached the doorway, 'promise me that no inadvertence on your part, no more foolish attentions to Cissy, will awaken Ruth, by any chance, from her happy slumber.'

'Your warning comes too late, Francis. I am here,' and Ruth stood before them.

'Ruth!' cried Josselyn, springing to her side. He took her hand and looked into her face. The hand was cold and rigid, and lay passive in his grasp; the face, seen by the pale moonlight, was set like the face of a corpse; like the face of one who had passed away in agony and in despair.

Gerald leaned against the door post, motionless and haughty; a slight, contemptuous smile played about his lips. Lucifer was unchained and defiant.

Ruth's great eyes were fixed upon Francis, and slowly, deliberately, harshly, her voice broke the silence.

'Why did you beckon to me, Francis? I do not regret it, but I don't understand it.'

'Beckon to you?' He thought her reason had gone.

'Yes,' she said. 'The horses were restive. I got out and sent them round by the stable entrance, and walked up the avenue. You came to this door, looked at me, and signed to

me to come here, instantly disappearing. I fancied some plot of yours. I knew not what—I felt so gay, so joyous; my visit to town was all a mistake; my father wrote Beauchamp when he meant Bellair; it was a slip of his pen. 'Twas to Bellair he went on Wednesday; I hurried back from town; I—I did what I supposed you intended. I stole quietly into the piazza—Oh, God! Oh, God!

The cry of anguish seemed wrung from her against her will. Gerald advanced towards her:

'Dear Ruth,' he said, 'this is—'

'Don't let that man speak to me, do not let him touch me!' she exclaimed hoarsely and fiercely. 'Protect me from him, Francis. You are of his sex, but not such as he. This house is mine: he must quit it.'

'Let him speak to you—let me leave you together,' whispered Francis imploringly. 'This is most unfortunate—'

'Unfortunate!' repeated Ruth scornfully. 'That is the word you use! Yes: even you an honorable and God fearing gentleman, you find no word but unfortunate to bestow upon such an act as this. Had this person been detected concealing an ace at cards, or had his hand shaken with terror if standing up to be shot at, you would have turned your back upon him, disowned him, loathed him, but it is only *unfortunate* that he should be a liar, a schemer and a smooth-faced, smooth-tongued villain—because I am a woman.'

Vehement and energetic as were her words, her voice was not raised nor did she move. Slowly she uttered them, as if each were a sword thrust sent deliberately to its mark.

'Ruth, I beseech you to listen to me—to listen to Gerald. You throw away your whole life at this moment. It is my fault, it was my fault. I insisted upon an idle confession of an idle fancy. There is no reality in all this. For God's sake, speak Gerald—'

'I threw away my life when I thought I had found it, on that 24th of November, when I stood at the altar.'

'Those whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder,' said Francis softly.

'Aye! If God hath joined them together. But as well say that if you ask a blessing on a murder it becomes a sacred act, as say that such—. Let this end at once and forever. I am no child, no idiot pining away in grief. Look at me, Francis. Is there sorrow in my face?' She brushed back the dark masses of hair from her ghastly white cheek and brow.

'Is there any soft influence at work, think you, in me? You have heard of me as cold, hard and fierce; you met me—what I shall never be again. My old self has arisen within me. I thank God for it. No gentle word nor thought shall ever again have the mastery. I leave such things to my fair rival—to the beauty whose image has never left the faithful heart—oh! that such 'a mere white curd of asses milk' should have such power! Power to rob a man of decency and honor!'

She turned and left them. Her steps echoed down the piazza, and a great silence followed.

'What will you do?' asked Francis at length.

'Nothing.'

'Leave matters as they stand? how can you?'

'I think I have already informed you this evening that I never yet saw the earthly good of interfering or ripping up old things. Your diplomacy has had a good result. I don't know what you contemplate. By the way, Ruth says you beckoned to her; perhaps you have prepared all this, and wish to bring me on my knees to my wife?'

'Gerald, you need not try to quarrel with me. You need not knit your brow, nor set your teeth. No insult you could offer me would move me now. I am too profoundly wretched. I try to understand what she means—ah, yes! I went to throw out my cigar, it must have been then that the motion of my hand and arm she took for a signal. Great Heaven! don't stand yawning and stretching yourself there. Of what stuff are you made?'

'Flesh and blood and bones, I fancy. At least it looks so.'

He rang the bell for lights. 'Will you go to the billiard room now, Francis?'

'No,' said Francis vehemently.

'My dear fellow,' said Gerald, after a moment, and leaning his elbow upon the chimney piece of the empty grate, 'you have brought an immense *ennui* upon me, have the goodness not to increase it by looking as if the world had tumbled to pieces, and the accident was destroying your comfort entirely.'

'Are you mad, or simply unfeeling?' asked Francis.

'Neither. I regret what has occurred more than you can do. When Ruth is cool, I will make it straight—but I have got a tough work before me.'

'Very. So tough that—. I tell you Gerald you over-rate your power with your wife,

and you shock me by your indifferent air. For God's sake go to Ruth, try to console and reassure her; yet—'

'Yet what?'

'I fear it will be unavailing.'

Gerald slightly smiled. A servant entered, brought more candles and stood expectant before his master.

'What the devil do you want? What are you loitering for?'

'The coachman sent to know when you wanted the carriage, sir?'

Gerald bit his lip, and the dark flush of his cheek and bright flash in his eye were dangerous to see.

'In a half hour,' he answered, and as the servant left the room he brought his clenched fist down upon the marble of the chimney with a heavy blow. 'She orders me from her house—she will find it difficult to bring me back. It is a false move, for she must make the next herself, and that must bring her to my feet.'

Francis slowly shook his head.

'Are you for a midnight drive with me?'

'No; I stay with Ruth. I shall not desert her.'

'Try and bring her to reason, then,' said Gerald sauntering out of the room.

'Is this my life-long friend,' mused Francis; 'is it thus that the light hearted, a little selfish, but noble boy ends in the man? Is this what I called his *insonniance*, his happy temper?'

Heaven have mercy upon this household, for Satan's clutch is upon it just now!

Restlessly he paced the piazza. 'How will it end? How will it all end? And the gentle moon looked down upon the placid scene; wealth and nature combined to make Beauchamp a residence for a prince, and all evil passions were at work to render it a desert.'

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

Ruth Gray's bedroom was a luxurious and charming one—with its lace lined curtains, the rose colored silk flushing through the delicate meshes—the white enamelled walls almost panelled with pictures—pictures of flowers and children, and shepherdesses. The *Duchesse* mirror had upon its draped toilette-table the gold topped contents of a superb dressing box. Large *armoires a glaces* flanked it on either side—deep comfortable chairs and low cushioned seats were in every direction. The basin and ewer were marvels of porcelain beauty—within the draped curtains of an alcove beyond, was the bed with its *corrupted* of lace likewise, and its great French pillows in their richly bordered cases.

It was the apartment of a Parisian coquette transferred to the banks of a Southern river, a view of which might be had from either of the two windows which opened upon the piazza. The Venetian blinds were closed now—the room was darkened—not a sound was heard—yet it was not unoccupied.

Ruth was seated motionless and alone; her hands were tightly clasped around her knees—her eyes were fixed and tearless. So had she sat for hours—since she had silently given breakfast to Francis, and looked to her children. She was not restless, nor impatient, nor angry—she was only stony. She did not seem to feel sorrow or regret, or anxiety—she seemed to feel nothing. The life was taken out of her—it was the shell of a woman.

There came a low knock at her door—twice repeated. She rose and opened it—Francis stood there, with his kind, manly face.

'I fear I am in your way, Ruth,' he said; 'I shall go to town, and have come to bid you goodbye.'

She held out her hand without a disclaimer. 'Goodbye,' she said, as if mechanically.

The light in the corridor fell full upon her haggard eyes, her wretched, blank face.

Francis paused. 'May I come in?'

She hesitated, then moved aside and made way for him to enter. He sat down.

'My dear Ruth, let me be a peace maker—it is my right—it was I that made the mischief—'

'You!' she repeated, 'you made the mischief? 'Twas you that made him a liar and a dastard?'

'Hush, my dear, dear Ruth—you are his wife—'

'No!' rang out her harsh, metallic voice 'In the sight of man, I am his wife; but in the sight of God I never have been. No miserable wretch who parades her painted charms in the public street is less the wife of her temporary companion, than I am the wife of Cecilia Clare's husband. His heart, his thoughts, his wishes, his hopes, his life were hers—what makes a marriage?'

'Ruth, you are not reasonable—'

'Spare me,' she interrupted. 'I respect and admire you—spare me commonplaces. Gerald Gray,' she shuddered as she spoke his name, and how could Josselyn but remember the lingering caress with which she used to utter it! 'Gerald Gray is the father of my children. God have mercy on them, innocent sufferers by another's crime! They are mine, but they have no longer any parent but me. He will not dare take them from me—if he does, the law shall judge between us.'

'Will you not let him justify himself—speak for himself—?'



'Are you mad? or do you think me so! Is there any peace or life possible between two people—and have you forgotten his last reply to your urgent request? Am I so abject in your eyes that you see no bounds to my weakness? Cease to urge me. The man for whom you plead is unworthy of your pleading, and I am not so unworthy as to be touched by it.'

'Do you really think that Gerald does not mourn this fatal secret coming to your knowledge as it did? Do you not know that he feels it bitterly? That pride alone keeps him from you now?'

'Have you forgotten Major X?' said Ruth bitterly. 'Had my marriage been illegal, how long since would it have been disowned and annulled? Question for question, Francis; and now leave me, I implore you.' She looked like some wild animal at bay; her head turned restlessly from side to side, and she half rose from her seat.

'Oh! dear Ruth, be the true woman that you are—the woman who always forgives *quand même*.'

'You remind me of what I would give worlds to forget,' cried the poor tortured creature, springing to her feet. 'Forgive! what have I not forgiven? What would I not forgive save the knowledge that he sought me without loving me, and lied to me from first to last! Oh, Francis! I could reveal such a tissue of systematic falsehood—such a dark record of unflagging deceit! such blind worship on my side! such unutterable tenderness lavished on the man who *endured* my affection, and pined for the caresses of Cecil Clare! I thought I had no vanity—and I am one *throb* of wounded self-love to the core of my heart. I would grieve for my lost lover, for my wasted passion—and I can only think how I loved him! I ought to be overwhelmed with sorrow, and I am fierce with anger. In a word, I have been duped—duped from first to last—duped in my only belief—duped by the only thing I absolutely trusted! Don't pity me—I am not entitled to pity or sympathy, for it is my pride which is in the ascendant—my pride which has been humbled. I am not a deserted wife—I am a tricked woman!'

'Dear Ruth, I know what you suffer—only too well I know it. But have patience—every thing will come right. I don't believe in this retrospective admiration of Gerald's—don't tear your hand from me—think of what she is, and can you believe that any man in his senses could sincerely prefer her to you?'

'He may be a madman then—it matters little to me, but—so much the worse for my children.'

'Think of the *esclandre*. For those children's sake, be patient.'

'Enough,' cried Ruth; 'you speak as a man. You speak by the rules of your *caste*. Further words are useless; you do not understand me; you do not comprehend that were he to begin to love me from this hour, I could never love him again. What did I love? The truth, the honor, the nobleness of his character. I saw a shadow in the water and caught it to my heart of hearts. I loved what never had a substance within my reach. I held intangible, unexisting air. I crowned myself with a breath of idle wind, and fancied I was a queen. Is there anything to love in that man? I don't know what it is! He has blue eyes—but there are plenty of blue eyes in this world; he is amusing—but any actor of a French theatre is more so; 'tis a bundle of rags on a scare-crow, at which for four years I have looked with reverence. Your hand gave the flaunting deceit a fillip, and lo! I am cured.'

'Yes, my hand! I wish it had been withered ere it performed so senseless an act.'

'Why so?' asked Ruth, sinking into her chair, and speaking with a monstrous hard tone; 'recollect what you said, sooner or later it would come. So desperate a passion could not be long concealed or controlled. A man could not live in the same atmosphere with such a syren without succumbing to her charms. True, he concealed it well. How he has spoken slightly of poor Cissy to me! Francis, you see how weak I am—I am sneering at that insignificant girl who has had the luck to blast my life. Listen to my request—don't draw me on to further folly. Farewell; you are—'

'Dearly attached to you, Ruth; your warm and faithful friend.'

'If I ever believe in anything again, I will believe that.'

'Believe it now, I entreat you, and give me one word, one token to carry to Gerald, that may guide him through this darkness.'

Ruth looked fixedly at him, partly opened her pale lips, closed them, turned away and walked to her writing table. Her back was to him. She placed her left hand before her. There was her wedding ring. Twice she turned to take it off and her courage failed—one wrench and it rolled upon the desk. With firm pen and steady fingers she wrote:

'I wore this ring as a pledge of the sworn love, honor and faith of a gentleman; I return it to the giver knowing him now to be a liar, a trickster and a scoundrel.'

It was soon done, the ring enclosed, the envelope sealed.

'Should he ever wish to explain himself, th

will assure him of my reception,' she said to Francis.

He took it doubtfully. Like a brother he folded his arm about her and pressed a kiss upon her forehead with a murmured 'God bless you and comfort you, my child!'

A slight shiver ran through her whole frame; she said nothing more, and stood there like a statue; cheek, brow and hands deathly cold.

As Francis closed the door she sank upon her knees, and with her left and ringless hand passionately held to her lips, she tried to stifle the great sobs which convulsed her.

## CHAPTER XXV.

Francis was extremely unhappy and uncomfortable when he left Beauchamp, his first thought, of course, was to hunt up his cousin. He found Gerald at his mother's, with the most provoking look of calm indifference upon his very handsome face. No trace of a sleepless night nor an evil conscience disfigured those regular features and beautiful eyes.

He welcomed Francis as unconcernedly as possible. Joselyn was not gracious nor amiable.

Mrs. Gray was evidently quite unaware of anything unusual having happened, and enquired why he had left Ruth and the children?

'Gerald told me that he had to come away on account of some business—'

'Because I had to come, mamma. I did not tell you why,' Gerald put in, smilingly. 'How women will jump to conclusions and fill up sentences.'

Yes, my child, but of course, some business brought you, and you were quite content to leave dear Ruth under Francis' care, and now, here is Francis running to town, too! I have a great mind to go to Beauchamp myself, since you outrageous boys are so careless.

'Better not, you will meet Mr. Desborough, perhaps, and that will bore you intensely.'

'Ah! Mr. Desborough is there! Why didn't you say so at once, and save me all my conjectures?' Upon which, Mrs. Gray rose to leave the dining-room, adding, 'Really, Gerald, you have a way of keeping back things that is perfectly unaccountable.'

'Gerald,' Francis exclaimed, as the door closed behind Mrs. Gray; 'what are you going to do? It is useless trying to put me off. I brought on this business and it is my place to get it all straight if possible.'

'When Ruth sends for me, I will return—not sooner.'

'She will never send.'

'*Tant pis pour elle*.'

'Do you think it will be *tant misery pour vous*?'

'Perhaps.'

'Pray let me understand you. Are you pleased at the prospect of a rupture between yourself and Ruth? Is it this which gives so bright a look to your countenance?'

'I am intensely pleased to leave off acting—to be myself. I never could have had the *hardness* to tell Ruth, but since she chose to go eaves-dropping, and you chose to go prying, and you both heard the exact truth. I feel lighter at heart than I have done for years. I am very much attached to Ruth; I don't desire to quarrel with her; I regret most intensely that I ever deceived her about the reality of my feelings, and I am quite determined to avoid the society of other people. If all that doesn't satisfy her, why she can sulk as long as she pleases.'

'And you are not grieved, not sad?'

'Not in the least. I can look men honestly in the face to-day, a thing I have not been able to do to my own satisfaction, this long while. Moreover, I wonder you are not surprised as I am, at my gentleness. If I were not full of kindness towards Ruth, I should find it difficult to pass over her words and manner and actions last night. She counted upon my good temper, or she would never have dared to order me out of the house, and this will show you how much inclined to bear with her. I mean that I should so soon pass over such an outrage.'

'You should write to her, at least.'

'Francis, have you never heard the old proverb about coming between the bark and the tree?'

Joselyn sighed and said no more.

Days passed and not one word or sign came from Beauchamp. These were miserable times for Francis, who felt restless, uneasy, unoccupied. He watched Gerald and discovered no visible mark of unhappiness or relenting. Mrs. Gray spoke constantly of Ruth and of the children; wondered that she had not heard from her daughter-in-law, and returned to question Gerald as to what was said in his letter from his home. As usual he gave her evasive answers. Joselyn did not dare to enlighten her, and did not care to press Gerald further.

Frequently he thought of going back to Beauchamp and seeing if he could effect any change there, but he felt that such a step was utterly useless. Everything must come from Gerald and one might as well have tried to melt a sea of ice by talking to it, as try to make an impression upon that serene young gentleman. He did not like to deliver up the envelope with which he had been charged; the contents were plain enough to the touch, and

he feared the words were not conciliatory. He had a natural dread of precipitating matters in a final outbreak, and lingered from day to day, hoping that Gerald's paternal affection might bring about a change in his intolerable cheerfulness. He encouraged Mrs. Gray to talk about the twins, and Gerald joined in with animation and delight; then the grandmother hinted as grandmothers sometimes will do, that a few details in their bringing up might be altered to advantage; but Gerald instantly took up the cudgels for Ruth, and protested that the children were perfectly managed.

Francis caught himself looking gratefully at Gerald, and could not but consider how absurd was his position—thanking the husband and his oldest and dearest friend, for speaking justly of the wife whom he had never seen till a month ago.

A week had gone by and Francis had almost fixed upon a day for leaving the South. He was carrying a heavy heart with him, and felt that his visit had been the cause of a misfortune that the laying down of his life would not now avert or conjure away. He and Gerald had ceased to speak on this all-important topic. He began to fear that perhaps he had already spoken too much. Left to themselves this couple might come to an understanding. He trusted to those holy voices healing the wounded depths of poor Ruth's heart; the desire to see them might exorcise the demon of pride from the mind of the offending party.

Francis could not blame Ruth. He could not think any step she might take too harsh or too hard, he might pray that she should be all softness and forgiveness, but he felt that she had been tricked, outraged, insulted.

If the confidence he had forced from Gerald had remained only with himself it would have appeared a lighter crime. Things that are not widely known, will, to the best of us, seem less damaging, than a smaller matter more generally circulated. We are called upon to bear the indignation of others, as well as to air our own.

Francis, however, (shocked as he was) while listening to Gerald, did not so fully appreciate the cowardice and meanness of his friend's action, till he found expression in Ruth's lips. But Gerald was correct in saying that this unhappy conversation would bring disunion between them. Never could their intimacy be again what it had been. Francis felt himself Ruth's champion—her sincere partisan. If their marriage no longer united Mr. and Mrs. Gray, there could be no question in Joselyn's mind as to the side on which he must range himself. If he must choose between them—justice and inclination were equally in the balance of the duped and unloved wife.

He was very sad about it; the genial, boyish, frank brightness of Gerald was irresistible and charming. His saucy fondness for Francis apparently untouched and unaltered, (unless they grazed the now tacitly forbidden ground), had always been Francis' delight. The gay nonsense and shrewd good sense, the sparkling folly and keen satire, the outward carelessness and the apparent under-current of affection in Gerald were rare and great gifts. Left early an orphan with an elder brother, morose and indifferent, and a sister as uninteresting as she was selfish, Francis had from their earliest days, attached himself to his 'sort-of cousins.'

With the exception of one woman already hinted at, Gerald was the single being that his affectionate nature had fastened itself upon. And there was no possibility for him to respect Gerald as he had done. It is wonderful that he felt his Southern visit a failure—wished to end it, and hoped that apart, the old feelings would settle back after a while to their former condition everywhere. It was evident that his presence did no good to himself nor to any body—his absence might be more serviceable.

He announced his intentions to Gerald, who urged him not to go.

'I will stay on one condition,' said Joselyn, hastily.

'My dear Francis, living among those woods so long has blunted your perception; you used to know me, once upon a time.'

A servant entered with a note, which he handed to Joselyn; 'From Mrs. St. Clair.'

Gerald looked at his cousin and smiled knowingly.

'Tell Mrs. St. Clair's servant to wait, Tom. Ah, has the bewitching Bertha returned? She left town in another direction just after the visit to Beauchamp. Any secret?'

'None, whatever; she wishes to see me.'

'Wishes to see you! What the devil does she wish to see you for? That woman runs after every man—'

'Well, at least she never run after you. I think the running was the other way, wasn't it, Gerald?'

'What do you mean, you smiling serpent?' asked Gerald, smiling himself.

'You can ask her,' said Francis, pocketing his note and walking off with a nod, while Gerald laughed and aimed a book at his head, dropping it as his cousin disappeared and letting the gayety die out of his face, like a mask suddenly discarded.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Bertha looked unusually grave and worried as she welcomed her guest.

'Tell me what this means?' she asked.

She put in his hand a letter directed Francis Jesselyn, Esq., and with it a note to herself.

'May I ask of your kindness, dear ("Mrs. St.," lined out, and Bertha written over it,) to give the enclosed with your own hands to its address. He may explain if he will—all that he chooses. If he does, don't be grieved for me—any more than you would be for yourself, had you dreamed a pleasant dream, and then waked up to life.'

'There is no signature—but I know the hand as Ruth's—of course. It came yesterday—I only returned late last night. I could not guess where you were—I had supposed at Beauchamp—and I sent to the town house and found that both you and Mr. Gray were in Locust street—so I immediately wrote in search of you. What does it all mean?'

Joselyn opened the letter, while his impatient companion sat watching him eagerly. Having finished reading, he told her all that had passed.

Bertha was shocked, indignant, distressed; not so much surprised as he anticipated, for she said at once, 'I guessed from the beginning that there was foul play somewhere—I never quite believed in Gerald Gray's disinterested attachment. I am not amazed to find that he married her for her money, and that alone—but I am astonished at his fancying himself in love with such an empty-headed insignificant doll! Truly you men are strange beings!'

'Have you no hope of an adjustment of all this wretched business?' she went on presently.

'None. I fear that Ruth has taken her stand firmly, and I cannot find it in my conscience to urge her farther. How can I ask of her what in my own case—Mrs. St. Clair, these matters have brought us very near each other. By Ruth's implied request I have told you the whole story—it is her secret more than anybody's. She is the real sufferer, and has the right, therefore, to make what confidante she pleases, if by so doing it can ease her weary lot of one future or present pang. I will go beyond this.' He got up and walked twice across the room. 'You remember that evening we were telling stories—playing that game at Beauchamp; you recollect what I said perhaps—the man who went away to make a fortune, and was so cruelly jilted and deceived by the woman he loved—it was part of that programme you and I had laid out to

open Gerald's eyes and close Ruth's. It was a tale commonplace enough, but Gerald knew both the hero and the heroine. I wished to recall to him the misery he knew that I had endured—to awaken some consideration lest he should plunge his wife into the same sort of grief which he had sought six years ago to arouse me. I was the man of whom I spoke. That lady I found on my return last year, a rich widow, childless, handsomer than ever, wondrously improved in manner and person from the young girl to whom I was engaged when I was a college boy and she, a bright-eyed, unformed, simple little creature. She speedily succeeded in meeting me. My heart leapt with a momentary joy and triumph when with modest and yet passionate words, she continued to let me see that she could yet be mine—that she mourned sincerely a rash and foolish act—that my absence and her mother's persuasion had overcome her constancy and truth. Did I waver? Not for half a second. She had been false—she had lied—she had deceived me—there could be no trust again between us two. I believed her to be sincere now—but that did not wipe out what she had been. Her vanity can be content to know that I love nobody else, that I am true to the innocent and dear child to whom I plighted my faith so many summers since, but the lofty and lovely widow who usurped the nature of my lost love, shall never replace her. We could not be happy; I should make her miserable, for she could never command my esteem.'

'Ah me!' sighed Bertha.

'You see,' pursued Francis, speaking quickly, 'it is a grievous thing to say, but Ruth no longer respects Gerald—she can no longer believe in him, nor trust him. The most that they could do would be to drag out a wretched existence of external politeness and inward chafing.'

'He would not care,' said Bertha shortly.

'No—he would not care,' Francis repeated. 'I am thinking of her. She will be like a machine with some damaging rust, some obstructing object introduced among its wheels and works; it will run a while longer, but only by jerks and starts, and presently the whole thing will break with a crash, or just come to a dead lock, and stop.'

'Yes; as you first saw her, he has made her; now, she will neither go back to her former self, nor yet remain as she is.'

'Perhaps her children may do her a world of good.'

'Perhaps so,' said Bertha, despondingly. 'And her letter to you? What is it?'

'You can read it,' Francis said, handing it.

MY DEAR FRANCIS:

Briefly I would thank you for your kindness and sympathy. Never fancy that I reproach you for what you consider your unhappy interference.

My father is with me; he consents (without entirely approving,) to my plans and wishes. I shall endeavor to be a better daughter than I ever yet have been. My children are well.

I have received this note; have the goodness to return it to the writer. It is evident that you have not executed the commission with which I charged you. It is my deliberate intention never, so long as life last, to exchange speech, look, nor written word with him.

For the future, my lawyer shall be my medium, if annoyed.

God bless you, Francis. When I believe in any human creature, I shall believe in you. Farewell. RUTH.

'So he has written to her,' said Bertha.

'So it seems; the letter is unopened. It appears to be short.' Josselyn shook his head sadly. 'It is a miserable business. Would to God that my conscience could acquit me of having aided in it!'

'Would to God that Gerald Gray had been less a scoundrell!' cried Mrs. St. Clair, indignantly. 'And to think that she, the sufferer, will be blamed, canvassed, discussed, picked to pieces, and condemned, while that wretched creature will get off with hardly a word of remark.'

'I cannot think so,' said Josselyn.

'Perhaps not,' Bertha added more quietly. 'After all, Ruth is very rich, and that does cover such a multitude of sins!'

'You have not a very high opinion of your fellow beings, M<sup>s</sup>. St. Clair,' said Francis, half smiling.

'I have the most ardent desire, believe me, to think well of them, but upon my word I can't find the opportunity to do so. All these weary years that I have plodded through this wicked and beautiful world of ours, I have tried so hard to find people whom I could admire, esteem, love. Is it my fault? is it theirs? I don't discover any that I can do more than put up with—very few even of these.'

'You are not misanthropic, *pourtant*?'

'Very far from it—I have such credulity and such unfaltering faith in goodness somewhere, that I am forever in pursuit of what I ought by this time to know, that I, at least, will never find.'

'Happily, you please others more than they please you.'

'Do I? I doubt that extremely—and so would you if you knew better, not me, but

those who surround me. For instance, I am called presumptuous and inconstant, because I have an opinion of my own on most points, and because I cannot choose but give up the society of those whom I find to be false or treacherous. I have no doubt I appear to be both presumptuous and inconstant in the eyes of that majority with whom conformity passes for modesty and a fluent egotism, for constancy. Besides, let us admit a sad truth. If I wished to be, not exactly understood, but considered reasonable and right, I need only get in a decently honest way, twenty thousand dollars a year! Even the wisest and noblest, most just and generous people are liable to this moral affection. It can't be helped. If I were wise I would not quarrel with it—if I were very cool, I should perhaps admit its justice—being only what I am, it chafes and angers me. But it gives me hope for Ruth. She can never fall very low in the estimation of her fellow-citizens, and of the world at large so long as Mr. Desborough pays such an enormous State and city tax.'

'You are bitter.'

'Very—but consolatory, am I not? Think what a chance you run of always running right in your neighbor's eyes, no matter how zig-zag your path! I see you now, you and all the rest of *les gens riches*, doubling and twisting, now here, now there—now making a curve, and now flying off at an angle, but followed by admiring looks and the cheerful cries, 'How straight he walks!'

Josselyn smiled.

'Oh, how frightfully matter-of-fact you have driven me into being. Disclaiming against money-worship! I shall owe you a grudge forever and forever.'

'Pray don't. I am to tell you good-bye for a great while now,' and he rose.

'You are leaving the South?'

'Yes—leaving it sadly, reluctantly and yet willingly. You will not desert Ruth? She likes you —'

'Desert her, never.'

'She may take this blow quietly after all, and settle down into a calm, woman-of-the-world.'

'How well you understand her,' said Bertha, a little scornfully. 'I should recover from such an experience, and in time wonder at my folly—give balls, ride over people's heads, travel, educate my children, and be a very important member of society. But Ruth—her life is ended here. You see Heaven's gifts are equally apportioned. The gay coquetry, the sparkling wit, the imperious attraction of some women—here the speaker slightly colored and turned away her eyes, for Josselyn,

with half sad playfulness, bowed to her—'are wanting in our Ruth, but *en revanche* she has what is much rarer—a steadfast heart,' and Bertha, in her turn, bowed to her companion. 'A heart like Ruth's loves but once, and in ceasing to love it almost ceases to live. It has pleased Providence to give over this treasure to the keeping of a man who has acted very much like the cock in *Ætop* who found the diamond when he was seeking for a grain of corn. Gerald Gray don't care for this sort of diamond. He scratched and scratched in that *tas de fumier*, this world, till Fate brought the luck, he could not appreciate. True, he clapped his wings and crowed mightily at first—but—well! if ever he gets his grain of corn, I hope she will choke him in the swallowing thereof!'

'I hope he will never have the opportunity.'

'Amen,' said Bertha.

'I will ask a favor of you. Will you grant it? Should anything occur, however slight, in this matter, write me. Here is my address at Boston—wherever I may be, your letter will follow me.'

Bertha promised, adding, 'We are baffled conspirators, but at least we do not throw the blame of our failure upon each other.'

#### CHAPTER XXVII.—AND LAST.

Mrs. St. Clair to Francis Josselyn:

BEAUCHAMP, April 20, 1860.

My Dear Mr. Josselyn:

I wonder where these pages will travel before you open them! I might speculate for a while upon their possible journeyings, and almost write, 'The Adventures of a Letter' in anticipation, were it not that I seldom guess aright, and so, might simply expose myself to your ridicule, instead of awakening your amazement at my prophetic genius.

Ah me! you will be as little of a wizard as I am of a witch, should you conclude, from this commencement, that I am in a gay mood and have bright news to tell. You see my date—Beauchamp—'beautiful Beauchamp,' as we called it last year, when mirth and music echoed through its stately corridors, and charming women dotted the lawn towards sunset, making the old oaks bright with their presence and their sweeping skirts. How like a dream of long ago, seems that time, as I stand now each evening watching the slanting rays coming through the low-hanging boughs, and feeling sad and sick at heart.

What a changed spot it is! Ruth has been very ill—so ill that it is matter of wonder that she should still be alive, and likely to live. Her cousin, Mrs. Price, an elderly, well-meaning, sort of woman, very considerably let me

know of her danger. I came up at once, and have been here more than six weeks. It has been an anxious, wretched time. Mr. Desborough is not a man of much sensibility nor of very strong feeling, nor of any delicacy. His returning to live permanently with his daughter, has I make no doubt, been a terrible ordeal to her, patiently borne but very wearing to soul and body. His incessant allusion to her domestic misery, his rough ideal on the subject, his efforts to bring about a reunion, have, I fancy, done more to produce this fever, than she would admit, or he understand.

How strange it is that among some of the noblest men, and some of the otherwise purest-minded women, there should exist such extraordinary ideas of marriage—ideas so foreign to common decency of thought and life, that one listens with never-ending surprise to their words, and watches with something very like disgust their actions! Knowing this, why should I wonder that poor Mr. Desborough, who is so scantily gifted as I hinted above, should urge his daughter to live with a man whom she has long ceased to love. My limited acquaintance with human nature has taught me, therefore, a fact, which does not raise said nature in my estimation—viz, that almost all men, and very nearly all women, think that if a husband is content to endure the society of a wife, no matter in what light she holds him, she must thankfully accept her position, and consider herself highly virtuous and respectable while occupying it! Heaven help such virtue and such respectability! I'd rather see myself breaking stones upon the roadside—or, what is nearer my views of the fit depository for such pinchbeck qualities—beating hemp in Bridewell! (Is hemp still beaten in Bridewell?)

For the honor of womankind be it said, our dear Ruth was never likely to accept such sentiments, nor to model her life upon the *soi-disant* proprieties, as set forth by Mrs. Grundy. She had in honesty and truth given herself to a man utterly devoid of principle; it was a fatal mistake, but remediable so far as her honor lay. Her happiness had gone, but not her sense of decency; and although her father might urge every possible reason of policy and prudence, and although Mrs. Gray wrote her long strictures on a wife's duty (!), and although Mr. Clare once undertook to appeal in his most grandiloquent way to the fact of her children, threatening her with the terrors of 'society,' and winding up with that original phrase of exhortation, 'Let the dead past bury its dead'—they only had the power

to harass and annoy, not to shake her firm resolve.

And Gerald, you will naturally ask, what of him? Probably he writes to you, possibly his letters are as frolicsome and gay as—the bells which dance on the top of a fool's cap. If so, they are perfect exponents of his countenance and manner. It is delightful to see so happy-looking a creature! 'His good conscience,' say his friends. Surely 'the devil does take care of his own till——' I mean to write a moral tale with that title some day, and Gerald Gray shall be my hero. I used to think once that he must wake up to the value of what he has thrown away,

*Le prix d'un cœur qui nous comprend;  
Le bien qu'on trouve à le connaître  
Et ce qu'on souffre en le perdant,*

But any such fancy soon melted away before the fact of that cameo profile in its smiling calm. He may suffer sometimes, but it would be from indigestion not remorse; and I think he feels—a long run of ill-luck at faro.

I have never heard that he has made any especial effort to be reconciled to his wife. I am told that he 'speaks forgivingly and kindly of her, and never suffers a harsh word against her to pass his lips!' Heaven does not grant me patience, when I am forced to listen to such speeches as this, (You were always so amused when I exclaimed 'Heaven grant me patience!' You said I went so far from my actual condition, with my petition,) and certainly among the preposterous, *enraging* things of this age of *simulacres* nothing surpasses the humbug of such remarks. Oh! the delicious satire of Thackeray when he writes, 'What more can one say of the Christian charity of a man, than that he is actually ready to forgive those who have done him every kindness.' But so it is, and I make no doubt that there are plenty of people who look upon Gerald Gray as a martyr of mildness, because, after having lied to and cheated an unoffending woman—after having gone out of his way with infernal skill to break her heart and ruin her life, he does not sum up his career of *successful* villainy for has he not still the fortune she gave him?—by abusing her at street corners, or taxing her with infidelity.

Ruth's illness was slow in developing itself; it is still slower in leaving her. She is wrecked soul and body—the former, I still fervently trust, will recover its healthy tone, the latter is gone forever. It is pitiable to see her; I am sure you would not recognize her. Her beauty of expression, her clearness of skin, her roundness of proportion, have disappeared. Two great desperate eyes look out on vacancy

from a ghostly white face—two poor thin arms are crossed over her sunken chest, and the bony fingers pluck restlessly at her sleeves, or else hang drooping and listless beside her. This physical change is painful enough to witness, but it sinks into nothingness when one studies the fearful ravages of her grief as shown in the deep lines which furrow a face that one year since, was bright, soft, feminine, and so happy. Do you remember—did you ever notice a certain sunny-sweet look, a kind of earnest radiance with which Ruth used to glance up into the eyes that were, alas! the eyes of her idol? It was, I think, the most beautiful, imploring, confiding, touching, loving look that ever lived under human eye-lids. It pleased me to watch for it, as I would for any perfect thing in nature or art, but several times then I caught myself murmuring, 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols.' I often recur to that all-absorbed look when I sit by Ruth now. She seldom speaks—she hardly seems to breathe. Gradually under one pretext or another, she has divested her bedroom of its pretty, coquettish air, and there she lives, with bare walls, and a still, solemn, tomb-like primness hanging over everything. I always feel on entering, as one does when the extreme hour has passed and he or she lies in the last sleep, while we, with 'bated breath' and slow step come in gently and reverently, as if we feared to awaken or disturb the dearly loved whom no earthly sound can now reach. There is the same stillness and hush ever present in Ruth's room—not the quiet bustle and noiseless movements of a sick-chamber, but the silence which is felt only in the presence of Death.

Her children seem puzzled about her and half afraid of her. When Geraldine—overcoming the first awe which always appears to paralyze them on visiting their mother—when Geraldine begins to speak, and says saucy things with all her wretched father's careless grace, his merry laugh, and a certain indolent shrug of her plump shoulders, I have seen the unhappy mother shrink from her with a sort of horror; while the little one, startled and half-crying, runs to me for protection.

Gerald has more of Ruth's own disposition and I fear may grow into a morose and reserved man, under the sad influence of his home. He has her eyes too, and is less like his father than the girl; and yet, of course it is so, I am sure she loves best the one whose appearance affords her the most constant pang, the keenest dart of memory.

The only change ever visible on this human mask, is when she sometimes fixes a gaze of agony upon the unconscious baby sitting at

her feet, and then, perhaps, a single tear will roll down the poor wasted cheek.

Fortunately, their real names are not often mentioned—they have been so long called *Mimi* and *Petit Gros*. I would not dare utter the dyssyllable Gerald before her. Once only has Mr. Gray threatened to remove these children; he was met by a perforce peremptory announcement from Mr. Desborough that Ruth would apply to the law for her protection. The Court might decide against her, but the scandal and the exposure he did not care to face.

So matters stand, as well as I can see them and read them. Dreary enough they are, and detailed as I have made them, I fear that they are not clear.

How can I describe the desolate look, the weary restlessness, the stony calm of this tortured and stricken woman. No one could thoroughly comprehend it, unless they had in some degree suffered as she suffers. If she would only be angry, or cross, or indignant—be *something*—but she simply seems to have no life except a consciousness that——. I was interrupted here by a message from Ruth—a circumstance so rare that I hastened to her, throwing down my pen in the middle of my sentence and not resuming it till two days after. With a lighter heart, I take it up to tell what has transpired. We are going abroad, to Switzerland for the summer, Italy for next winter. Dr. Meadows orders the change imperatively. I hope many things from it. Ruth was very obstinately opposed to moving, and she sent for me, trusting, I believe that my unwillingness to quit her would induce me to be on her side—but she argued incorrectly. I offered to accompany her. Perhaps others of us wear shoes more or less tight, and hope to ease the pinching by walking on new roads.

I told her that I was writing to you; a faint color flushed into her face as she raised her sad eyes to mine. 'Give him my——,' she hesitated and added slowly, 'tell him I have not forgotten him, and hope that he is well and happy. He is kind and good,' she went on in an under tone. Then turning her head half impatiently, as if forcing herself to speak what she did not wish to utter, 'Tell him I valued his letters, although I never answered them. When last he saw me, and a shiver ran through her wasted limbs, while the flush grew and settled into a dark red spot on each cheek, 'I was mad and fierce. My pride and anger must have shocked him by their unbridled expression—it was not sorrow he saw, but frenzy.' I stooped and kissed her without a word; she caught my hand and whispered, 'Tell him I will try to pray—to

forgive my enemies—some day—but not yet—not yet.'

The flush faded, and a deathly pallor overspread her face, she fainted in my arms, and was very ill all that night. Yesterday, she rallied again, and to-day she is decidedly better.

Our preparations have begun. I leave Beauchamp to-morrow to arrange my own affairs—a troublesome business, for we do not know how long our *exile* will last. There are dark mutterings in the political heavens, and some wise people talk with apprehension of 'secession' and 'civil war.' God avert such calamities! but if the North forces them upon us, we will meet the storm, and quit ourselves like men—like the descendants of those great and glorious spirits who won our first independence. Abolitionism has 'waxed fat and kicketh.' 'The negro' is found to be as good political capital as any other whim or ism, for unscrupulous demagogues, and I greatly fear that even among those to whom we might naturally turn for wisdom and sound policy should such a crisis arrive, we will discover that there is something stronger to their minds than honesty—something mightier than real patriotism. To go with the tide is so much easier than to stem it. When madness rages at the North, who will be found to breast the tempest? Assuredly not your admiration, Hon. E. E., of whom one of his and your Boston fellow-citizens wrote me some time since: 'You people of the South may think as much as you choose of the 'Pet of the Ledger,' but I advise you not to trust in him. *We don't*. He has no back-bone.' But I hope no such frightful contingency will arise. Should the South secede, it cannot be but that there will remain enough common sense among our ex-brethren to understand that gunpowder will not cement a Union, nor the bayonet bring about fraternal relations. Meanwhile Mr. Desborough has transferred large sums to England and France. He is a very prudent man, and if these United States become one vast lunatic asylum, we shall not starve abroad. Recollect, however, that I am intensely Southern; and as you value my good opinion hold yourself aloof from the (truly) 'vain doctrine' of coercion. The 'society' of my native State is not congenial to my feelings nor my taste—how should it be? Is there a spot where a fierce crusade could be waged unceasingly against this poor little woman who answers to my name?—but, nevertheless, I am proud of my people as a people, and I will stand up for them to the last hour of my life. I could not understand the existence of a traitor to the soil; and man or woman, born among us,



who lifts sword or voice in defence of a dissolved Union, against my, his or her State, I should look upon as a blot, a renegade, a wretch not worth the cord with which I should like to see all such hanged! But I do not believe in the possibility of this winding-up to our model Republic. Separation may take place—war, never! With every confidence in the folly of the Northern Demos, he can scarcely push it so far as that. *Qui vivra verra.*

One word in conclusion now, of your friends in this part of the world. Bettina Denham is married. Mr. Brown is the happy man, and she looks very handsome and perfectly contented—but he has already suppressed the parrot and pronounces Arthur McIvor to be a dandy, and very uninteresting. Messrs. Taunton and Aubrey are as well dressed and as agreeable as usual. I trust that one of them, at least, will be profoundly overwhelmed by my departure. I am indifferent as to which, but my vanity demands the inconsolable condition of one. Mrs. Fordyce is the proud mother of a son—I can't find out if it is 'the softened image of its sire,' but I presume that it is as yet wigless.

The fair Cecilia is fairer than ever; but has the trumpet of Fame been silent about her? do you need me to inform you that she has at length rewarded the constancy and courage of Tom Trenton? Even so; a year ago when this business was first whispered in polite circles, some eyes looked askance on smiling Cissy, and prudent Phyllis brought her powers to bear on matters generally.

The doors of Gastle Clare were virtually and virtuously closed upon their cousin, and much fierce skirmishing took place, I make no doubt, both inside and outside of those respectably painted portals. But Cissy soon dried her tears. In the first place such an innocent young thing (only twenty-six years of age,) could not but feel horrified at meeting a man who was separated from his wife, although necessarily her pure mind could not take in the idea that she had had anything to do with it. Mr. Clare played the role of the 'indignant father,' when it leaked out, as such things will, that his hopeful nephew fancied himself in love with Cecilia, and acknowledged to having married Ruth simply for an establishment. I could not help speculating as to what would have been his behaviour if the news had been followed by Ruth's death, and the liberty of the afflicted widower to choose her successor; for I am afraid even a divorce would not have been considered a fatal and insuperable divider of

these two faithful hearts, in the opinion of that respectable old humbug.

But Ruth's grief did not kill her, and divorce was not possible, so Tom Trenton was encouraged and swallowed the bait. To do the bride justice, she looked like a white lily, and had more dimples than I could count, when I saw her in her white and silver finery. She was simpering and giggling with all the intelligence of one of Maëzel's automata, and from a distance Gerald was watching her, when my eyes intercepted the glance. He had the grace to color slightly and turn away. I did not see him speak to 'the fair, the inexpressive she,' who seemed serenely satisfied and deliciously inane. I do not doubt but that she will be a very admirable wife. Her feelings could never prey upon her looks, nor interfere with her duties. She was born to marry somebody—she meant to make a good match—she has done very creditably after all, and will settle into a comfortable, well-disposed matron.

I wish her much happiness and a great many children.

Mr. Desborough speaks of joining us when we are settled. Dr. Meadows goes with us now. In spite of his sixty years, he has all the vivacity and energy of a youth, and we shall fare admirably under his guidance. Without him I should have feared to undertake so responsible a charge.

Looking back over the many pages of this letter, I am shocked to see their number; but yet if you will consider them as the winding up of a story in which both you and I have been actors, you will acknowledge that it could not have been shorter. It is almost a romance, is it not? the history of this past year, since the day we first met at Beauchamp until this one, when I am telling you good-bye before quitting my country for an uncertain period. What will be the ultimate fate of the heroine? Neither you nor I can guess. If I dream a future for her, I cannot but reject the solitary life it naturally promises; and in spite of the useless folly of such retrospection, I think of the only man worthy of her, and sigh because they never met, when meeting might have secured their mutual happiness. How useless indeed! Just because they are suited for each other, they never would have found it out. Adieu. In all sincerity,

Your friend, faithfully,

BERTHA ST. CLAIR.

THE END.