A Heart−Song of To−day

Annie Gregg Savigny

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A HEART−SONG OF TO−DAY
(DISTURBED BY FIRE FROM THE 'UNRULY MEMBER')
A NOVEL.
BY MRS. ANNIE G. SAVIGNY.

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A HEART−SONG OF TO−DAY
(DISTURBED BY FIRE FROM THE UNRULY MEMBER.)

CHAPTER I. A PRETTY WOMAN LAYS A PLOT, AND HIRES A GARDENER.

“By Jove! I have missed her; you are a very Circe, Mrs. Tompkins.”

The speaker, one of the handsomest men I have ever seen, started to his feet as a beautiful Italian mantel clock rang in silver chimes the hour of midnight.

“Sit down again my dear Captain, I have not told you all, and am a wilful woman and must have my way. I know whom you have missed,” she said truly, for Sir Tilton Everly has informed her, out−come her woman wit to prevent the meeting. “Is she anything to you?”

“No, and yes, as all women beautiful or fascinating are, I love you all.”

“You have large capacities, Captain Trevalyon, but I must make you love one woman and only one, or I cannot sleep content,” and the black amorous eyes rest on his face.

“Ye gods! a confession,” thought Trevalyon. “Awkward for me as I want Haughton to have the innings; she is good fun and doesn't bore one, but I've missed Vaura again, fool I was to come.”

“You don't seem curious” continued Mrs. Tompkins, rolling a small table on which was the *debris* of a *petit* champagne supper, from between them.

“Curious! a prerogative of your sex, fair madame, though any of your secrets would be *chic* enough to tempt a man to encroach,” he answered gaily, drawing a chair near his own.

“Especially when 'tis of a woman who lives for him alone,” and the handsome wealthy widow sank into the chair opposite him.

“Yes, for an hour, for a day, and 'tis pleasant so you see I know you gay butterflys,” he said, lazily placing a foot−stool under the pretty feet of his companion.

“Not so,” she said slowly, and with a new tenderness in her tones. “Not so; but first I brought you here to tell you your friend Colonel Haughton made me an offer of marriage this moaning. What say you; would you regret my fetters and wish me free? It shall be as you say.”

Only that Mrs. Tompkins' attention was wholly given to her companion, she would have noticed the heavy curtains opposite her and separating her boudoir from a small morning−room pushed aside, and a pair of wrathful blazing eyes watching her every movement; had either been near enough, they would have heard a muttered oath at her last words.

“As I wish! 'tis well I am his friend, *chere* madame, for there are not many men would bid you to the altar with another, but I say take him, there is not a better fellow in the kingdom, and here is my benediction,” and he laughingly lifted her hand to his lips.

“And is that all you care for me? Heavens! what different stuff we are made of, you can bid me to another, while I could *kill*. Nay, don't start. Yes, could kill a woman you might love. And the speaker looked her words, while there was almost a sob in her voice as her bosom heaved convulsively.

“My dear Mrs. Tompkins, you honor me too much; believe me, 'tis but a passing fancy on your part.”

“Passing fancy, never! Listen; you say you love no woman in especial, wed me; love begets love; I am the wooer I know, but you are as handsome as a god, and I have been always one to speak as I feel; yea, and get what I want most days,” she added, leaning forward and smiling into his mesmeric eyes. “Come to me,” and her heart was in her words. “Come, you are poor in wealth, men say I have millions in gold, try and love me and—”

“And—and what next—Kate—by gad, a pretty speech, allow me to congratulate you. How do, Trevalyon; at your old game of slaughtering hearts?” The speaker had come from behind the curtains and was the owner of the wrathful eyes; a heavily built man of medium weight, a bold man with a handsome black beard, though the top of his head was bald. “You were always a good shot, Trevalyon, when the target was a heart,” he repeated savagely.

“'Twas you, who bagged the delicate game, if I remember you aright, Delrose,” said Trevalyon, with the utmost *sang−froid* as he leaned backwards and with his right hand fondled his long tawny moustache.

“George Delrose, what makes you here? You are Lucifer himself, I believe,” said Mrs. Tompkins wrathfully, pushing his hand from her shoulder and starting to her feet.

“I gave strict orders to Peter to admit no one to my presence. I shall discharge Him, and at once.”

“Take it easy, Kate, *I* have *promoted* him to *my* service.”

"From gold lo brass is no promotion; he knows not the value of metals."

"Jove! how like they are, the same bold handsome style, reckless to the last degree," thought Trevalyon.

"They are both a passport to society! all a man wants to−day! so, my pretty Kate don't look so severe, I have one, you have the other," said Delrose audaciously, and attempting to take her hand.

"No, I won't take your hand, go away this moment," and a decided foot went down, "leave Captain Trevalyon and myself to conclude our interview."

"You forget the proprieties, Kate, and though I like not the fruit, I'll play gooseberry," and seating himself he coolly poured out a glass of champagne.

"Shall I make my adieux, Mrs. Tompkins; it grows late?" said Trevalyon, about to rise from his chair.

"No, stay awhile," said his hostess softly, for she thought Delrose might go and she might so act on the feelings of Trevalyon by the magnets love and gold as to win. In the meantime he thought as he stroked his moustachs lazily, "a dashingly handsome woman, pity she has let that dare−devil Delrose get some hold over her."

Major Delrose drank like a thirsty man, then folding his arms glared defiantly at Kate who returned his gaze while trembling with wrath, her eyes flashing.

"George Delrose, you are a coward to force yourself into a woman's presence. Go this moment! I command you, or I shall summon the household. Are you going?"

"No, by the Horse Guards! *I am not*!" and the flush of anger deepened on his cheek. "I tell you, Kate, I am not a man to be made a football of; don't, if you have a remnant of pity in your heart, drive me mad by talk of marriage with another."

"And why not, pray?" inquired Mrs. Tompkins, recklessly, the next instant regretting her foolhardiness, and before the eyes of the men, one of whom she had a passion for; the other who had a passion for herself, that she had outlived; and now with quick resolve and latent meaning, knowing the intruder's love for coins, continued: "Even did the Sultan of Turkey fancy me to adorn his harem, when I pined for freedom, he would not despise the American eagle done in gold as an exchange for my liberty."

"Cold, glittering metal *versus* warm, loving heart of woman, and such an one as you, never!" he answered, following her cue and looking her in the eyes.

"I care not, he cannot afford to offend me," thought Mrs. Tompkins, and so only showing a velvet paw, making a step towards him, her rich crimson robes of velvet trailing after her, now offered her hand. "Here is my hand, George, bid me good−night, and like a good fellow go at once, and I forgive you."

"Dismiss Trevalyon first, I am an older friend than he," he answered sulkily.

"I shall not; this is my boudoir, and, thank fate, I am my own mistress."

"Then, by the stars, I stir not one inch!"

Both reckless, both determined, how would it end? and so Trevaylon thought, as he said, coolly:

"What is the use of acting like this, Delrose? You certainly made your *entree* later than I, if you are making a point of that; but a soldier is usually more yielding to woman's wish."

"Not often, Trevalyon, when her wish is the will of a rival," he answered hotly.

"The fancy of a woman *a present*," thought Trevalyon. "But I must end this, for he won't. I am in no mood for trifling, I have again missed seeing Vaura. Mrs. Tompkins is charming in a *tete−a−tete*, but with the *entree* of a soldier on the war−path," and stepping towards his hostess he said gallantly: "So fair a foe, dear Mrs. Tompkins, surrounded by soldiers, is unfair; I beat a retreat. May I carry a comforting message to the gentleman who called upon you this morning?" and the blue mesmeric eyes rested on her face as he bent his handsome Saxon head for her reply.

Her dark eyes met his in a pleading way, but she read no weakness there, and thought as she gave him her hand:

"A man with an unsatisfied longing for another woman is difficult to subdue, but if George had not intruded himself, I should not have let him go till I had brought him to my feet, but I shall be revenged on him, and win my love yet," and her hand lingered in his, while she said:

"You may, he is your friend; you will be much with us."

"Thank you, for the two−fold kindness. Now gladly shall I be your Mercury. Good−night," and lifting her hand to his lips, he was gone.

“Then you really mean to wed Colonel Haughton?” enquired Delrose in unsteady tone.

“Come and sit beside me, Kate; you sat beside that other man. Gad! I feel like shooting the follow.”

“Mere bravado; gentlemen only meet their equals.”

“Don't take that tone with me Kate, or by heaven he shall suffer.”

“Good−night Major Delrose,” she said mockingly. “I leave your presence, *sans ceremonie* as you entered mine.”

And with the gas−light lighting up red−robes, jewels, coal−black tresses and a smile all cruel, she was about to leave him.

“Stay, Kate, I command you. How will it be when I set the London world on their ear, over your parentage, daughter of a nobody, your gold from the Cosmopolitan Laundry.”

Kate winced.

“It would be then a Haughton's turn to leave *sans ceremonie*; make up friends, Kate,” and his face softened, and going over he led her, though unwillingly, to a seat beside his own.

“What a bore a persistent lover with a long memory is,” thought Kate. “But I cannot afford to quarrel with him.”

“You are not serious, Kate. You will never sever the tie that binds us?”

And bold man, though he was, his voice trembled as leaning forward he strove to read the inmost thoughts of the woman who has played with his affections at will.

“You said you loved me once, Kate, but I fear your heart had no part in the matter, my devotion amused you, my bold wooing was a novelty, the soldier in me was a change after the King of Laundry?”

“How dare you name the source of my wealth and to me!” she said haughtily.

“Because, my dear, I know your weak point; and even though I anger you, anything to turn your thoughts to myself; you must admit, Kate, that it is hard lines for me; marry me, dear, and I am your slave, my love for you will never change; it is as fierce and passionate as ever.”

And leaning forward his hands on her knees, he strove in vain to imprison hers.

“While mine has changed,” she said coldly; “love would indeed be a tyrant, could we not roam at will.”

And a vision of mesmeric eyes with a smile, sweet as a woman's came to her. At her words Delrose buried his face in her hands and groaned heavily, as though his heart would break. Then looking up into her face, he said in thick tones.

“Have you no pity for me?”

“None, you have crossed my path, you have clouded my sky.”

Had she pity for him, fool that he was to ask. Has the owner of the favourite at Goodwood pity for the jockey who swoons in a death−sickness, causing the next to come in a head's length? Has the eagle pity for the young mother's wail for her babe as he carried it aloft to feed the young? No, she told herself she had spoiled him, allowing him the *entree* to her presence for the past seven or eight years at will. She cared for him too for his bold, fierce, passionate nature, that is—in a way, if only he would not insist on monopoly, but she would be willing to barter one clasp of the hand, one look from the eyes of gay, genial, handsome, fascinating Captain Trevalyon for the total banishment of her bold wooer.

“I have crossed your path, clouded your sky, and is this all the comfort you give me for years of devotion?” he said slowly, and in a broken voice. “Crossed your path because my love lives, while yours for me is dead; crossed your path, clouded your sky, because I am constant and wish to have you for my wife; wish to keep you in my arms. Lincoln Tompkins never knew; our world never knew; crossed your path? By the stars, Kate, I will not give you up!” And there is a sudden fierceness in his tones, while his breath comes hard and fast. “Crossed your path? 'tis Trevalyon who has again crossed mine. Gad! how I hate him.” And he set his teeth. “To think, too, that with your high spirit, you should plead to him for his love.”

“George Delrose, dare to repeat one word of a conversation you played the sneak to listen to, and you shall come to grief.”

And she started to her feet, receding several paces from him in rage and mortification.

“Kate, dear, forgive me,” and he is beside her; and strong man that he is, he holds her by force in his arms until she is still.

“It is my love for you that maddens me. My queen, my beauty, come back to me. Give your thoughts to

me—you must, you shall."

"What shall I do with him?" she thought. "I love the other man, but if I cannot win him, I shall gratify my ambition by marrying Haughton Hall, and in petting my idol gratify myself; and so to pet my old love until it's all over."

And now puss begins to purr.

"There, George dear, I give in; you leave no room for other fetters than your arms. Let me go."

"Yes, my beauty, in a minute. You have been so cold to me of late, I am famished. You will only marry me, Kate, only me. Say yes, dear; Haughton would never suit you. But I cannot speak calmly of him or of any other man in connection with yourself."

And he grew again fearfully excited.

"As for that fellow, Trevalyon, the club gossips have it that for years he has had a hidden wife, and, depend upon it, it's true, these curled darlings generally do that sort of trick."

"Stop; I may turn this to my future advantage," thought Kate, quickly; "let me go, George, and you may sit beside me. There, that is better. I wonder if this story is true; I remember you told it me at New York as false; but I dare say at that time, not being jealous of him, you were, after the manner of men, letting him down easily. Yes, we shall take it for granted it is true. He is handsome enough to have got into some matrimonial scrape ere now."

"I am regaining my old influence over her," thought simple Simon.

"Listen, George, a minute longer; you have seen this Miss Vernon, Vaura Vernon, niece to Colonel Haughton. Describe her."

"Hang it, Kate! Leave the Haughton connection alone," he said, jealously. "Talk about ourselves."

"I am just starving for a kind word."

"Which you won't get till I please. What makes you here? Just think of that, and then say would any other woman be as kind. Now run over the Vernon charms, if any."

"When she will, she will," he said sulkily. "I have only seen her in the 'row' and that once, she was ahead of me so I did not see her face, but she sat her horse well and her figure is perfect. I overheard Wingfield at the 'Russell' club rooms, telling Chaucer of the Guards (who is wild to meet her) that there is nothing to compare with her in the kingdom, that she is a perfect goddess. Now are you satisfied.

"Yes, yes; let me think a minute."

"Just the woman to attract; I must get her out of my path and separate her from my haughty handsome idol, my king, my love," she thought slowly, her black eyes wearing an intent look, her large lips tightly compressed. Her companion did not break upon her reverie, he sat quiet, studying her profile as he had often done before; there was a certain witchery in the hour, the lateness, the stillness, the roseate lights above them, then what we have all felt, the sweet bliss of sitting in enforced quiet beside a loved one; our brain is quiet, our hands idle; we dread to break the spell, we then as at no other time literally live in the present.

Delrose scarcely moved a muscle; from shoulder to elbow the red velvet of her gown mingled with his black coat sleeve. For some time she had seemed to be drifting away from him, and their present *tete−a−tete*, though compulsory on her part, was to him paradise. During the season when the London world knew no monarch, save the king of revels. She had laughed at his prayers for a quiet half hour, tossing him instead, as she did to her parrot, now a few careless words, now a sugar plum. At present the season is waning, and a great dread has taken possession of him, lest she should slip away from him altogether, for Dame Rumour has given the widow of the American millionaire in marriage to more than one. The demon of unrest hath gat hold on him and every night ere going to one or other of the many distractions open to him, he paces the square opposite her windows to see who is admitted. More than once Col. Haughton and the man he most fears, Trevalyon, have alighted from the handsome dog−cart of the latter; to−night as we know, he, with the madness of jealousy upon him, on seeing his hated rival enter at eleven p.m., bribes a servant to admit him one hour later. Eve had not confided in him that Trevalyon had come only on a written invitation from herself couched in such terms as he could not refuse. And the woman beside him thought silently, seemingly oblivious of his presence. "I fear I have no chance with him; he is pre−occupied with her; a man always is until he tires of one. I must marry the Colonel. Household gods are permitted in Christendom; he is my god and shall be then as now my idol."

And with a little laugh and a sigh she turned her face quickly, brushing his beard (he was so near), and had laid his hand on hers as she sighed.

“My queen,” he whispered eagerly, “of whom have you been thinking all this time? Say of me, and not of him.”

“You men all go in for monopoly, George dear, but who is the obnoxious 'he' this time?”

“Trevalyon, of course; did I not hear you—”

“Stop! or we shall quarrel; if you must know, my thoughts were of you; and I thought you were not such a bad fellow after all as Trevalyon; it would be a terrible thing, George dear, did he inveigle Miss Vernon, for whom he seems inclined, into a marriage with him.”

“What the deuce need you care? She is nothing to you. Ah! I begin to see,” he continued thoughtfully; “you would not regret had he a taste of the Tantalus punishment.”

“I have some conscience left,” she said merrily, “which is paying you an indirect compliment, and if you wish to please me you will revive this old scandal, so as to prevent this naughty fellow posing as bigamist; and now promise me and tell me good−night.”

“And you forgive me everything and restore me to favour, my queen, while I swear he shall never marry Miss Vernon nor any other woman he covets.”

“Yes, you may come to me for your reward, if you effectually prevent Miss Vernon posing as his wife. I shall be sweeter than honey in the honey−comb to you then. But till then, pleasant dreams.”

“Before I leave, you must tell me when I may see you alone, for this banishment is killing me.”

“Killing you! indeed; all gammon; never saw a man look as though he enjoyed his beef and beer better; no, go do my bidding, and in your effort to keep out Mormonism you will punish your foe and I shall reward you.”

“But when, Kate, when; you don't tell me; may I come to−morrow?” persisted her lover, eagerly.

“No, I am steeped to the lips in engagements.”

“But I *must*, Kate; a soldier is accustomed to daily pay.”

“Don't be persistent, George, or you shall be off duty forever.”

“You know you have your foot on my neck, dear, and you take advantage.”

“Most men would not object to its shape or weight,” she said saucily drawing her robe, exposing a very pretty foot encased in cream hose, and a black satin boot fitting as perfectly as any Madame Vestris ever wore.

“I am conquered, my queen,” he said softly; “only let me come, and in your own time.”

“Well put, and now be off; I'll write you, as the letter writer says, at my earliest convenience.”

“Good−night; may it come soon.”

“Remember your mission.”

“I shall revive it with a vengeance.”

And bending down something very like a lovers' parting took place. Passing into the hall he stepped noiselessly out into the night; the closing of the door roused the sleeping footman, who, as he locked the door and saw his mistress pass from her boudoir to her sleeping apartments, thought sleepily as he put out the lights—

“Peter won't get the sack for letten' him in after all; my lady is sweet on him, I'm thinking, and I'm not in for Pete's place.”

CHAPTER II. A RARE SOCIETY BOUQUET.

Come now and unroll with me one corner of the still, the silent past, and I shall read you a few pictures in the old time life at Haughton Hall, County Surrey, England.

This one, a twelvth night scene of 1854, will interest us: Scene is one of the drawing−rooms at the fine old stately mansion of grey stone, Elizabethan in its grandeur of tower and pinnacle, its spots of decay lovingly draped by the hand of Dame Nature, ivy constant and clinging as though its robes of green loved the old grey stone. The south wing, built by a Haughton two hundred years ago (for his Spanish bride noble as beautiful, an Espartero by birth) alone is lighted. We shall glance through this window. Ah! a priest of the Anglican Church; before him stands a girl beautiful as an angel; beside her a handsome man, dark and bronzed; on the third finger of her left hand he slips the ring of gold which binds them as closely as its unbroken circle. A sweet woman lying on a lounge with the seal of death on her brow before whom they kneel and receive her blessing. The actors are Ethel Haughton, Captain Vernon, —th Light Cavalry, and the poor invalid who only lived to give her daughter in marriage. On the 27th March, same year, the British Lion and Russian Bear met in combat; our troops went out and among them Captain Vernon, when, sad to relate, his name was one of the first of our brave soldiers on the death−roll at Petropaulovski; we met with a repulse and he fell. His sweet young bride did not long survive him, dying of a bitter loneliness called heartache, leaving a lovely infant, the child Vaura.

TABLEAUX VIVANTS.

No. 2.

Fourteen years later, bringing us by the hand of time into 1868. Same scene—Haughton Hall, morning—and ah! What a dream of beauty, a child, woman now. In the sweet, somewhat sad pleading of her expression, one catches a glimpse of the tender, loving woman of later years, and so her companion, to whose arm she clings, sees her, judging from the half wondering, wholly loving sympathy in his eyes. Her movements are rapid, graceful and lithe as a young gazelle; she has evidently expected a loved guest who has disappointed her. For now her eyes are suffused with tears; she looses his arm and clasps her hands appealingly as she points to an open letter on a table. A vacant chair, slippers, and a *petit* dinner untasted. He consults his watch, strokes caressingly the bright brown hair reaching to her knees, and fluffy as the coat of a water spaniel. Now taking her hand in adieu, bends his noble head, and with a smile sweet as a woman's, would kiss her, but she is no child this morning and he draws back with a look half wonder in his eyes. The sweet girl too, after turning her flower face upwards, droops the large luminous brown eyes and with a pretty blush takes instead his right hand between her own and presses her rose−mouth to it in a farewell greeting.

The actors are Vaura Vernon (the infant of last scene) who has been expecting her loved uncle, Colonel Haughton, who is at Baden−Baden held in the fascinations of its gaming tables. The handsome man to whose arm she clung is Lieut. Trevalyon of the —th Middlesex Lancers; but lately returned from the East, where, at Delhi, &c., his many daring acts of bravery are still in the public mouth. By invitation he is at Haughton, but his friend cannot tear himself from Germany—it is his ruin; and he yields to the importunities of his bewitching little friend to go and bring him home from this evil.

TABLEAUX VIVANTS.

No. 3.

Trevalyon gone; Vaura, weeping bitterly, is discovered by a handsome youth who, bounding in at the open window, throwing himself at her feet with many caresses, bids her be consoled, points to the dilapidated hangings, seems to contrast her surroundings with his own wealth, displaying his diamond jewels, his watch, his well−filled purse. She seems to be half frightened at his words; when gazing up at a portrait of her uncle, showing him a little worn and sad, a sudden resolve seems to seize her; she evidently consents to his wish, for his face glows and he embraces her, while drying her tears. She now leaves the room, returns in out−door costume; he, laughing and excited, braids her lovely hair; her sweet face is a trifle pale; a jewelled comb holds together the heavy braids. She now pets two or three dogs, feeds her birds from her hand, climbs on to a table, kisses the portrait of her uncle, the tears starting afresh, picks a few blossoms from her favourite flowers, and they make their exit.

TABLEAUX VIVANTS.

No. 4.

A few days later—Same scene.

Enter a lady, purely the Gaul in face and gesture, excited though decided in manner; with her two Frenchmen, the one a priest, the other a man of law. Following, and looking grief−stricken to the last degree, comes the youth of last scene. Vaura follows pale and sad, her uncle's arm around her; priest takes a ring from Vaura's finger; with a sharp instrument cuts it in twain. Lawyer takes a paper, reads, holds it in view of all, then tears into smallest fragments. Youth grows fearfully excited, tries to snatch it. Lady says a few words to him, her teeth set; he yields in despair. They all then kiss the Book, evidently making oath.

The past is again veiled, and we love the actors too well to endeavour to solve what they have apparently sworn shall not be revealed. The following eight years of Vaura's life have been spent chiefly at Paris, at the Seminaire of Madame Rocheforte, bringing us to 1877, the intangible present, a mere cobweb dividing as it does our past, as it silently recedes from our winged future.

CHAPTER III. THE FATES SPIN WITH THREADS OF BLACK.

We now return to Captain Trevalyon, as he leaves the residence of Mrs. Tompkins, No. ——Eaton Square. He quickly seats himself in his dogcart, still standing at the door. When grasping the reins from his servant drives rapidly to Park Lane and the town house of his friend, the Lady Esmondet, who loves him well, as all women do who have his friendship; and with whom, now that he has left the army, he spends (during the season) much of his time. But now his thoroughbreds, King and Prance, have sped so quickly through Belgravia that their destination is reached.

“Just as I feared, Fate is against me,” he thought, glancing at the house; “nothing has delayed them, they are off, I have again missed her.”

Aloud he says to his servant: “Sims, go to the door and enquire if Lady Esmondet has really gone; if so, has she left any message for me.”

“Yes, sir.”

Returning, he hands a letter to his master, saying:

“Her ladyship left this with the housekeeper for you, sir, and Grimes says, sir, they waited 'til the last minute for you, sir.”

Not delaying to peruse the written words of his friend, he drove with all speed to the Great Northern Station, only to learn that the train had left on time at midnight, when, turning his horses' heads once more, and for his hotel, he has soon reached the “Langham.” On gaining his own apartments his great dog Mars gives a whine of satisfaction at the return of his master, who, throwing himself wearily into a favourite chair, while the smoke from his cigar curls upwards, takes from his pocket the delicate epistle with the perfume of violets upon it, and which reads as follows:

“Lionel, *mon cher ami*, I feel it in my heart to scold you. How is it you are not with us? The Claxtons will hear of no further delay. So while they get into travelling gear, must have a one−sided leave−taking with you, as we must needs leave Park Lane without a hand−clasp. Vaura, always lovely, is more bewitching than ever tonight, as she talked earnestly to Travers Guy Cyril, you will remember him. She looked not unlike Guido's Beatrice; (I don't mean the daubs one sees, but Guido's own), the same soul−full eyes, Grecian nose, and lovely full curved lips. Guy, always melancholy, Vaura, always sympathetic, the reflection of his sad eyes lent to hers a deep tenderness; that he loves her hopelessly, poor fellow, is only too evident, he bid us adieu for a New York trip, thence, he seemed to think, no one cared. And so, lives are parted; one is inclined to quarrel with Fate at times; she bids you to the “Towers” and elsewhere; Vaura and self to the Scotch Lakes, afterwards to gay Brighton. I would you were with us, *cher* Lionel, but your long−deferred visit to your place is an absolute necessity, so, much as one regrets the moves of the 'miscreator circumstance,' one must submit. And now for a note from Dame Grundy, with our gay friend, Mrs. Eustace Wingfield, as mouthpiece. 'Posey Wyesdale openly affirms that when she again plumes herself in colours you will play Benedict; moreover, that 'tis for her sake you are a bachelor.' Mrs. W. laughingly commented thereon, saying, 'If astonishment could resuscitate a corpse, the Duke would be an unbidden guest.' Poor darling, I shall miss his kindly face in our Scottish tour. I should like to see you range yourself, *cher ami*, but your hands are too full of tricks to play a losing game. Apropos to your wish to see me again at God's altar, again to link my fate, my life, with another. *Listen, for I know you will not betray me.* In my youth I loved, in my prime I love the same man; my dead husband comes in between; my love does not know he has my heart; nor did he when a girl. I, at the command of stern parents; said him nay; he of whom I speak is the kind, unselfish, warm−hearted, trusting Eric, Colonel Haughton. I write this as I cannot speak of it, and so that you will understand my resolve to remain single; also, Vaura tells me that on her arrival from Paris on this afternoon, her uncle informed her that he has made an offer of marriage to the wealthy Mrs. Tompkins. Vaura is full of regrets, as from what our friends say, his choice is extremely *outre*. For myself I shall try and be content. And now adieu to the subject, the pain at my heart will be more keen, my smile (for a time) forced, that is all. 'Tis well that our life teaches us to wear a mask. Adieu, the bustle of departure in the hall bids me hasten. Trusting you will find your tenants more satisfied (for 'tis their comfort we must think of to−day), and I really believe under Simpson they will not grumble. Farewell. Vaura has just appeared at the door to bid me come. I asked her if she

had any message for you, 'Tell him,' she said laughingly,' to think of me sometimes if he has time, and then perhaps he himself will travel by the same road his thought has gone before, for I should dearly love to see him again,' For myself, do not forget me, for I feel particularly lonely to−night; Eric lost, and you not here. Ah, well, the cards have been against me, that is all; join us somewhere when you can; *au revoir*."

"ALICE ESMONDET, "Park Lane, 15th June, 1877.

"CAPT. TREVALYON, "The Langham, London City."

"Jove! how sorry I am" he exclaimed thoughtfully as he finished reading, then puffing his cigar, now vigorously then allowing it to die out, he thought silently. "Detained on this afternoon by Simpson, my new steward. Then my club dinner having guests I could not go to Park lane, afterwards the crush at the Delamere's when I missed them in the crowd, then the preremptory summons to Eaton Square when I went, thinking it would be to Haughton's interest. Yes, the Fates are decidedly against me, and that gay little message from Vaura Vernon. I shall conquer destiny and meet them somewhere next autumn. And Alice Esmondet! confessing a tender passion for Haughton. She would have been just the woman for him. How dull of him not to see it; but for a soldier and a society man he knows less of the women than any man of my acquaintance. Now for a man who has, I may say, forsworn matrimony, I take pride in my knowledge of the sex, the sweetest bit of humanity we have. I wonder what manner of remembrance Vaura has of me, if merely as an old−time friend of her uncle and herself. I have not seen her, I may say, since, as a young officer, I went to the Hall as to my home, a returned 'hero of Delhi,' in newspaper parlance. She was the loveliest little child—woman at that time, I had ever seen. Jove! how fast one's thoughts travel backward eight years. I remember Haughton Hall was heavily mortgaged and my friend at Baden−Baden getting deeper in debt; the life of a country squire palled upon him, when at his father's death he returned at his mother's wish as heir; pity he was obliged to leave the army. The outcome is this marriage for gold to redeem the place from the Jews, lost for distraction's, sake. However, a−something occurred on my yielding to dear little Vaura's wish to go and induce him to return, and he has been a saved man ever since, giving up the dice from the time of his hurried return in consequence of a telegram he received before I reached him; I don't know what the motive power was, as he did not confide and, as a matter of course, I did not force his confidence. The Hall is still in debt but he manages to keep the Jews quiet and to make a decent living out of a few tenants. The lovely Vaura has her mother's portion. 'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody good, and his becoming a slave of the ring will be for my good as the old place will again be open and Vaura Vernon, the woman now, will again grace it by her presence, and until she marries, lend a new brightness, a new distraction to my life. Jove! now I come to think of it she will surely marry next season, and I shall not have her long; with her face, form, colouring, eyes and the sweet syren voice that the men are raving of, some one of them will make her say him yea; then the spice of originality about her is refreshing, also having had so much of the companionship of Lady Esmondet, she is a woman of common−sense and of the world, no mere conventional doll. Had Haughton not been blind and have married my friend what a paradise the Hall would have been to me? Until Vaura married I must always remember that contingency. 'Tis absurd of dear Lady Esmondet wishing me to range myself, she knows my resolve not to wed is as earnest as though I was in the garb of a monk. I feel bothered and unsettled; how I wish I had been at Park Lane to−night; a trip to the Highlands would have been the very tonic I require. Sir Andrew Clarke could not prescribe better, but it is too late now, its a horrible bore to go up to Northumberland and the 'Towers' alone, though when one has had as much trouble with one's tenants as I, one must victimise oneself, I suppose. 'Tis a grand old place, picturing as it does the feudal times, if only it were not so desolate. I wonder what Lady Esmondet or Vaura would think of it, how lovely she would look standing in the Tower windows with the fresh air blowing her beautiful hair and her gown close about her; but I forget it is late, and I am dreaming, her hair will be confined in some womanly fashion and she is not for me, no, Mars, you and I are lonely wanderers," and the dog is patted, the lights are out while the weary man throws himself on his couch to pass a restless night with heavy sleep at sunrise.

CHAPTER IV. OF MADAME.

At eleven o'clock the following day Mrs. Tompkins leisurely sips her cocoa as she breaks her fast in the pretty morning room at No. —— Eaton Square, her step−daughter, an American born and bred, is her companion, a tiny young woman all pale tints, colourless face, sharp features, sharp little eyes always watery, always with a red rim about them giving the paleness of their blue a pink shade. When off guard the mouth is resolute, the eyes wearing a stealthy cunning look; the mask on, 'tis an old−child face with a wondering expression of innocence about it. The grasshopper in the Park yonder might claim kinship and Darwin there find the missing link in the wee figure clothed in its robe of grass green, all waist and elbows. She had no love for her step−mother whom she had been taught by hirelings to consider her natural enemy and with whom she could only cope with subtle craftiness.

Mrs. Tompkins' maid now enters with a note upon a salver; on reading it her mistress simply writing the word “come” on the reverse side of one of her cards, seals with her monograph, addressing the envelope to “Colonel Haughton” she smiles as she thinks “I shall soon seal with my crest.”

“Take this to the servant, Masoff, and give my strict orders to Peter to admit only Colonel Haughton or Capt. Trevalyon until after luncheon.”

“Yes, madam.”

“And, Mason, bid Sarah be in readiness to attend Miss Tompkins, who will drive to Bayswater in half an hour for the day. John will have the close carriage at the door.”

“Yes, madam.”

Here is the heart wish of Blanche fulfilled, but she does not show it, saying:

“Why must I go to that stupid place, step−momma? Such a mean crowd.”

“Because I wish it; at all events, you pretend such affection for your old school−teachers when with them, that to cover your aversion to visit them it is my duty to insist on your going there when a drive would benefit you. Should their nephew, Sir Tilton Everly, be with them, tell him (as I want him to−morrow) he may as well return with you.”

Blanche made a *moue*, saying poutingly, while feeling that a *billet−doux* was safe in her pocket:

“I was due at the Tottenham's this morning: Cis was coming shopping;” which was a romance of the moment.

“Tell John to drive around to Gloucester Square, and you can take her with you.”

“No, I shall not. What do you want Sir Tilton for? Might be Vanderbilt, the fuss you make over him.”

“I know you dislike him; mere envy, Blanche, for his devotion to myself, which is absurd,” with a satisfied glance at the mirror opposite. “Men being born hunters will hunt you for the golden dollar; me, for myself. So as you have breakfasted, away; try and be civil to Sir Tilton, and bring him back to dinner with you at eight o'clock; ta−ta.”

As Miss Tompkins paced the corridors to her own apartments she muttered:

“I'll be even with you some day, Mrs. T.; didn't see you fool my popa nine years for nothing, and take all his kisses and more than two millions of money from me, when you didn't care a cent for him; 'twas the black−bearded major, not popa's lean jaws then; now, it's Capt. Trevalyon, who is as handsome as the Prince of Wales, and too awfully nice for anything. Never mind, you'll be sold as bad as one of Barnum's. I handle my million when I come of age, which will be New Year's day, 1878; then you'll see if all the men love you, and think me a fright just because I havn't your big black eyes and catlike ways.”

Two footmen in dark green livery, with yellow facings, having removed the *debris* of breakfast, Madame, alone, consults her mirror, which reflects her rose−pink gown (the reds in all shades being her colour), which fits her *embonpoint* figure like a glove; slightly over the medium height, black browed, determined, daring and impulsive; a woman who will have her way where her appetites are concerned; easy−going when steering her own way with her own crew down life's current, while with a coldly cruel smile her oar crushes the life−blood from any obstacle in her course. She touches a bell, her maid appears.

“Mason, what do you think; am I paler than usual?”

“No, ma'am, you are looking very well.”

“So my mirror tells me; nevertheless, as I am to say yes to a second husband this morning,” and the large

white teeth show as she smiles, “I think a slight blush would be becoming.”

“Perhaps so, ma'am, but I like your white skin, it shows off your black hair and eyes real well, better than all the English colour; and so you are going to marry again, ma'am; well, I thought the gentlemen wouldn't leave you alone long, ma'am.”

And the confidential maid applies with skill a slight touch of rouge to the cheek, which only has colour when the somewhat fierce temper causes the blood to mount.

“There, that will do; don't prate of what I have told you.”

“I have kept your secrets for ten years, ma'am.”

“You have, and may you keep them as many more, and here is a gold dollar for the term;” and her mistress tossed her carelessly two fives in the precious metal. “See that I am not disturbed, and only admit as I have given orders.”

Alone she moves towards the hangings, through the opening in which Major Delrose had stealthily watched the night before, and through which she passes, giving him as she does only a passing thought. 'Tis a pretty room, this boudoir of Madame, with its gaily−painted hangings, its windows in stained glass, letting in the sweet June breath from the park. Too great a display of wealth, perhaps, but in the taste of the best New York artists, who revel in the gorgeous, and who have had full play for their talents at No. ——Eaton Square. The black−brow'd mistress picks up a novel (Mrs. Southworth's last); when, throwing herself onto a lounge, her well−shaped feet encased in her favourite black satin boots stretched out, she endeavours to get the thread of the tale; but thought is too busy, the book falls to the floor as her reverie grows deeper.

“No, he will not come; my idol, my king. I saw it in his eyes; he is pre−occupied with Miss Vernon, and I hate her;” and a cruel look comes to the mouth and eyes. “But stay, perhaps he does love me, but is unselfish enough to let his friend win; if I was even half sure of this I should make short work of stately Col. Houghton; but no, a man would not love me by halves,” and for an instant her thoughts flew to Major Delrose. “Let me see now what is my plot or game; with George, my ambition would not be gratified, for he has no estate; nor could I ever bask in the presence of the man I adore; by marrying the Colonel I gain both ends. Then his niece, Miss Vernon, is in my path; she is haughty; I shall so act upon this trait by showing her my dislike to her presence as to rid myself forever of it; let her beware! vitriol and Mason would do their work; yes, I must keep friendly with Delrose; her haughty spirit will aid me here; this 'hidden wife' story once afloat, and a royal princess would as soon sign a contract with a prophet of Utah. I fear the fierce, passionate temper of George; but my woman's wit will be brought to play to keep him quiet; Trevalyon will necessarily have a surer footing at Haughton than he, as in this case I shall see; in an underhand way the Colonel has his wish, and the pith of all my musings is that if George will not aid me in reviving the Fanny Clarmont, hidden wife scandal, *I shall do it without him*. One thing in my favour is, that as he swears against matrimony, people will say the secret reason is out of—Why! Eleven forty−five; my future spouse should soon appear; how my heart would beat, and every pulse throb and burn, if it were my king; now, I am as cool as the czar of Wall Street. My sleeves fit well; this make suits me,” and she pushed to the wrist her bracelets of the golden dollar. “And my boots also; I do take as much pride in my foot as the men do in their moustache. What am I gaining in return for myself and my gold? A great place and name, and also revenge on my father, whom I may meet, and who kept me from position, not allowing me to know even his whole name—Vivian only, this and nothing more; he, a British officer, in a mad impulse (I am like him) marries my mother, nobody's daughter, and a ballet dancer, during a run he made to New York city just thirty−five years ago; my sire repents in sackcloth and ashes, dragging us with him; sells out; living by his wits anyhow and anywhere, chiefly at gaming places abroad. At a German suburb once he had left us, my late husband came to our cottage to enquire his road; as he was an American, my mother nearly swallow'd him whole; I did, on seeing his diamonds and knowing of his wealth; Lincoln Tompkins, beautiful! cognomen, and a 'cosmopolitan laundry' millionaire; my proud father nearly offered to kill me on his return, but in spite of the haughty Vivian we were married; and at his death he left me a rich woman. A year or so ago I came here to gratify ambition; and so, yes I think I may be satisfied; my capital is over two millions in gold, besides good speculations, quick wit, tact enough for my purpose— blood, I was going to say—and American confidence, pet name, cheek. Yes, I shall be able to hold my own with the best of 'em. Had I married George, he would have been savagely jealous of other men; had it been my idol, he would have been my ruler; as it is, self shall rule.”

Peter here announces Colonel Haughton. Madame arises, apologising for her recumbent position, but not

before her future husband has had time to admire her foot, ankle and shapely arms, for, though her love is not for him, he is a man and she an inbred coquette, and as a man he admires her; he has loved but once the fair−haired Alice Esmondet, who chilled his heart by her refusal, he tells himself she is always so calm and freezing she could never love and so he goes to his fate who meets him all smiles and out−stretched hands saying—

"You are finding out my little weaknesses too soon, Colonel, you will not now have the courage to repeat your words of yesterday."

"If all women looked as charming, indulging their nap over a novel we should never scold." And her hand in his he led her back to the sofa. "My friend Trevalyon as well as your own card bid me 'come'; it is then, as I wish, dear, your consent to honor me with this hand?"

"Yes, if you do not tell of how nearly you won a pair of gloves."

"Instead; I shall tell of winning this fair hand on your waking, when we wed as now." And his dark moustache is on her lips; "your kisses are all mine, is it not so, my wife?"

"Can you doubt it? you have conquered."

"You will think me impatient, dear, but I want you to take my name at once."

"At once! and still, have your own way, my lord. I, like yourself, have only myself to please."

"At last, I shall feel settled, Kate; the dear old place will again ring with happy voices, old friends will be there," and he whispered low and tenderly, "In time, I trust, an heir will prattle at our knees, how happy would my dear mother be could she see our union consummated, my life arranged for."——

"This Lady Esmondet, Colonel, is she a very old friend?"

"Very; and I am one of those men who must lean on some woman; I fear at times I have tried her patience severely."

"What kind of woman is she?"

"Well, I can scarcely describe her; how do you mean, dear. In personal appearance? no, for you have seen her?"

"Yes, we have met; I mean in other ways, saint or sinner?"

"Neither; a happy medium, quite the woman of the world though; exclusive in her choice of friends, but true as steel when she does care for one, gentle, kind and sympathetic."

"How is it she has not repeated the experiment matrimonial?"

"Well, I do not know; with me she invariably changed the subject, and I did not press it, for I fancied she loved her husband so well she had no heart left for another."

"'Tis all very well to love a husband, Colonel, but to be faithful to his corpse is unnatural, while men with beating hearts are above ground."

"True, and now about our own plans, how soon may I claim you, dearest, say this day week?"

It was just her wish, she would be nearer Trevalyon, while Delrose would be effectually shut out unless he consented to a friendly alliance, when he could aid her in forever separating the man she loved from the fascinating Miss Vernon.

"Is not a week from to−day too awfully soon, Colonel?"

"Not a day, dear; everyone is leaving town, we can take our trip together."

"When he will, he will; you may have your way, but I have a will too, my lord, which you will find out some day" she said with a hearty laugh, "for the present it is that we, during the week, say to−morrow, take a run down to Surrey and your place. I can then see what changes I shall make, and everything can be in readiness for us by November."

"Delightful! how I wish Lady Esmondet and my niece, Vaura Vernon, were here to come with us."

In spite of herself a cloud came to Kate's brow, and she said carelessly—

"Oh, I don't know, this trip is just as well taken by ourselves."

"Anything you please, dear; they are far away at all events," but he sighed as he spoke.

"Your niece should marry, Colonel, my step−daughter shall; it is a great bore to have young ladies to settle in life."

"Vaura will have London at her feet next season; heiresses all go, so will Miss Tompkins, and for her own sake, I do not doubt."

"Now that you have given me the idea of making up a party to run down to Surrey, I rather like it. There are

the little strawberry blondes, Mrs. Meltonbury with her sister, Mrs. Marchmont, my step−daughter, Sir Peter Tedril (who goes down to “Richmondglen,” to−morrow at all events), your friend Captain Trevalyon, and mine Sir Tilton Everly; we would be as gay as crickets. How do you like us?”

“A pleasant party; but, as I should like to make sure, if possible, of Trevalyon, I fear I must leave you at once for the club, as after luncheon he drives out to Richmond with some friends to dinner.”

“Yes, yes, make sure of him; there, that will do, you men are all alike in your taste for affectionate good−byes.”

And in a last caress, her heart beats as it has not done to−day, for her idol may be with her to−morrow.

“You have not told me, my wife, what train it would be most agreeable for you to take.”

“Oh! any that will suit Captain Trevalyon” she said, hurriedly, “I mean you and he, I leave it to you, only be quick, else you may miss him.”

“If I were a jealous man, your eagerness,” he said merrily—

“But you are not, and you know, I only do it for your sake, you are such friends.”

“Thank you, dear, and he is so fond of the Hall, And as you have not seen him lately you can wish him *bon voyage* as he leaves sooner than we do, but I forget, you must have seen him last night to give him your welcome message for myself.”

“Yes, at the Delamer's for one minute; I hoped to see you there, for your doleful face haunted me since morning, so I just had time to bid him say to you 'come,' which we know was a romance.”

“What a kind little wife I am winning; Trevalyon deserves that I should deny myself by leaving you too soon, for the content he brought me in your message, especially as he is feeling cut up about having missed seeing Lady Esmondet and my niece yesterday afternoon and evening.”

“Just so, we must pet him and make sure of him; dine with me to−night at eight, the rest of the party will be here, you can then state your arrangements; ta, ta.”

Seeing from the window the tall, soldier−like figure safe down the steps and making rapid strides through the square, she throws herself on to a lounging chair, with both her hands pressed to her side, says whisperingly—

“These heart throbs are all for you, my idol; oh, that he will be in time. How stupidly tame he is, but you will be the elixir of life to me; I shall be a Haughton of Haughton, and you shall be there, and I shall keep you out of matrimony, and my life will be all bliss.”

“Luncheon is served, ma'am.”

CHAPTER V. MADAME SHUFFLES THE CARDS.

The following morning the weather perfect, with not a cloud in the sky, the party, after her own heart and all accepting, while dining at Eaton square, the previous night, in a robe *a la derniere mode*, Mrs. Tompkins is content and in her gayest spirits; two large hampers containing choice wines and dishes to tempt the palate of an epicure had been sent down by earliest train in case the cellar and larder at Haughton should fail.

“For Heaven, save me from a hungry man,” she had said in the ear of the strawberry blondes; “I don't want to see him before breakfast; after dinner, I love them.”

At the station were Colonel Haughton with Captain Trevalyon, the former less calm than usual with just a pleasant touch of excitement and eagerness about him in the having won the wealthy Mrs. Tompkins for wife; he must wed gold, and so with his aristocratic name, belongings and air *distingue* as bait, the angler had caught the biggest catch of the season. Captain Trevalyon's handsome face is lit up with pleasure, his mesmeric blue eyes now smiling, would draw the heart from a sphinx; for the friends have been congratulating each other over the coming opening of Haughton Hall, over the intense pleasure of again being under the same roof daily with Lady Esmondet and Vaura, with their charming knowledge of human nature, causing a great charity and pleasant cynicism with no malice in it of the shams and pet weaknesses of society.

“Take my word for it, Trevalyon, there is nothing to equal Vaura in the kingdom. I wish you had been at Park Lane the night before last.”

“Don't name it, Haughton, I have been quarrelling with fate ever since; promise me that the next time you see an opening to my joining them you will let me know.”

“That you are in earnest your face tells me; though ten years my junior, you loved my darling as a child as much as I, and I promise. But eyes right, old fellow, here comes the carriage and the green and gold livery of my bride−elect; attention is the word.”

“And plenty of it,” laughed his friend, as they stepped to the side of the carriage and shook hands with the four ladies as they alighted.

Madame could not have chosen better foils for her own voluptuous style than the three women, all angles—looking as she always did, as though she had been visiting Vulcan, and feeding on the red−hot coals beneath his hammer, while quenching her thirst from a cantharus given her by the hand of Bacchus himself. “The strawberry blondes” (as Mrs. Tompkins made their hearts glad by naming them) are decidedly red−haired (in common parlance), and robed in sky−blue suits and hats, all smiles, frizzes, bustles, elbows and pin−backs. Blanche Tompkins, poor little thing, looks cold and pinched in her steel−grey satin suit and hat, with silver jewellery, the red rim around her eyes more pronounced than ever. As they drive into the station yard she peers intently about, and a wee smile just comes to her face as her hand is taken by Capt. Trevalyon.

“I need not ask you how you are, dear Mrs. Tompkins, your looks tell me,” said Col. Haughton.

“No, I am not one of the ill−kine, Colonel,” laughed his bride−elect.

“Nor yet one of the lean−kine,” said Trevalyon gaily.

As the other ladies gathered about, a small London swell, who had come forward with a beaming face, saying:

“Here we are again,” and whom Mrs. Tompkins presented to Col. Haughton and Capt Trevalyon as “Sir Tilton Everly.”

“Excuse me, sir; the carriages are filling up, sir.”

“My man is right; we had better secure seats; allow me,” said Col. Haughton, giving his arm to Mrs. Tompkins.

The others were at the steps waiting for her to take her place, but a quick glance had let her see that one of the six seats is occupied; and determined to have the man she loves beside her, she says quickly:

“Never mind precedence, 'tis only a picnic; every one of you secure seats; I shall wait here with the Colonel for Sir Peter Tedril.”

“Oh, yes, like a dear thing; we shall die without Sir Peter,” cried Mrs. Meltonbury.

“Oh, yes, we must have dear Sir Peter,” echoed her twin.

“Oh, yes, we must all have dear Sir Peter until there is a lady Peter; good time, you all remember him,

though," exclaimed Mrs. Tompkins.

Here Tims comes forward, saying:

"Sir Peter Tedril's servant is yonder, sir, with a message for Mrs. Tompkins, sir; may I bring him, sir?"

"Certainly, and at once."

The man approaches, touching his hat, saying:

"My master bid me meet you here, madam; a telegram arrived last night, ma'am, calling him by the early train to Richmondglen; but master will meet you at the Colonel's place, ma'am, and return with your party to London, ma'am."

"Very well; and here is a gold bit to drink to the health of your girl."

"You are very good, ma'am."

And with a grin of satisfaction, he drank English beer to American liberality.

On stepping to the door of the carriage, Capt. Trevalyon offered his seat to his friend.

"Not so; we cannot spare you," cried Mrs. Tompkins. "I should have all these ladies as cross as bears, Sir Peter *non est* and you away; no, the Colonel is gallant enough to leave you to us; he will have so much of *some one* a week from yesterday."

"No help for it, I suppose," said the victim, ruefully eyeing Everly seated comfortably between the strawberries, the stranger having vacated his seat for another coach. Everly was blind and deaf to the Colonel's wish, taking his cue from his neighbour's, who had said in an undertone:

"Don't stir, we are afraid of him, and you are so agreeable and nice."

And the guard locked the door, saying respectfully:

"No help for it, sir, I'll find you a seat."

CHAPTER VI. LOVE AND LOVE−MAKING.

“This just too lovely; you are not going to weep over the exit of the Colonel?” said Mrs. Tompkins rapturously.

And the sleeve of her jersey brushed Trevalyon's arm as she whispered above, glancing sideways.

“Enforced exit, you mean; with so seductive a neighbour one cannot but pity the absent.”

But Mrs. Marchmont must be given an occupation, as she is immediately her opposite neighbour; Trevalyon will then not feel it incumbent on him to notice her, and will then be hers as though in a *tete−a−tete*; and so with the imperiousness that newly−acquired wealth lends to some natures, she says:

“Here, Fairy, is Agnes Fleming's latest; as I warn you I shall monopolize Capt. Trevalyon until we reach the Hall of 'Haughton,' when some one else will go in for monopoly of me.”

“Yes, you poor dear thing, he will;” and she tittered; “but when the cat is away mousey can play; consider me asleep over my novel.”

The absurdity of her remark struck Trevalyon so forcibly that he could not restrain a laugh.

“I don't believe you pity me one bit,” said Mrs. Tompkins in a low tone, looking into his eyes reproachfully.

“Not one bit.”

“Even after what I have told you?”

“Even after that,” he answered, in lowest of tones; for they are in such close contact she can see what he would say as his lips frame the words.

“You are the only man who has been cruel to me.”

“How so?”

“Oh, because,” and the eyelids droop, for the lashes are long and black, though she would fain, look forever into the blue eyes above her. “Oh, because it is simply a woman's reason; give me your own.”

“You are cruel, because to whom much is given, of him is much required.”

“You flatter me; but let us look on the reverse side; I am a lonely man, I may say without kith or kin; I am almost sworn against wedded ties, but I love you all, have given much and require much.”

And the easy *sang−froid* habitual to him gave place to a sadness of expression, a tired look, that ere now had made women weep. Mrs. Tompkins, impulsive to a degree, would fain have ordered everyone from the coach, taken his head to her breast, and bid him rest; a tremor is in her voice as she asks:

“Why will you not marry?” And for one moment she is willing to cut her heart out so he is happy; the next, ready to tear the heart from any woman who could make him so.

He sees by her tones the effect he is producing; he must again don his mask, and not excite her pity by reference to the sadness of his inner life, caused by his dead father's griefs; he had been foolish, but he had wished her in an indirect way to know that as no woman held his whole heart neither could she; and so, almost in his old easy tones, he says:

“Why not marry? I prefer you to frame some pretty imaginings to bore you on our pleasure jaunt with my own; and here we are at our English Frascati, Richmond the enchanting. Have you ever sunned yourself in Italy, fair madame?”

“No, nor should I care to; the Italian is too lazy, too dreamy for me.”

“Then you cannot enter into the spirit of Thompson's 'Castle of Indolence?'“

“There is no spirit in it; no, I had rather sell peanuts at a Broadway corner, roast chestnuts on a Parisian boulevard, or flowers in Regent Street, than wade through one stanza of his sleepy poems.”

Trevalyon laughed, saying:

“How full of active life and vim you are; now, I, at times, could write of dreamy idleness *con amore*. Do you never weary of our incessant hunt after some new sensation?”

“Never! 'tis the very main−spring of my existence, 'tis what I live for.”

“How will you manage to kill time at 'Haughton' Hall out of the season?”

“You will be there,” and the black eyes meet his unflinchingly. “And if not I am a great wanderer.”

“Some distraction shall dull my senses till you come.”

“But, you poor little fire−eater, supposing your liking for me to be real,” and no ear but hers heard his whispered words “with my knowledge of Haughton's noble nature, I should curse myself did I cause him one jealous pang.”

She pressed close to him as she breathed tenderly—

“Trust me my idol he shall never dream of my idolatry.”

And the passionate face is transfigured in a tenderness new to it, for her passion has grown doubly strong in this drive from London, and she hugs to herself the thought that her love will beget his, all shame for its avowal is foreign to her breast, reckless and impulsive, her wish is her will.

“Your heart is as loving and untamed as Eve's, you must not tempt me to forget that he is my friend.”

“I *must*.” And the jewelled fingers (for her gloves are off) cling to his as he assists her to alight, for Richmond passed they are at the village of 'Haughton,' and the guard has called—

“Ladies and gentlemen for the Hall please alight.”

A covered carriage and dog−cart are down in answer to the telegram of Colonel Haughton who has already alighted and meets his guests as they emerge from the carriage.

“Here we are again,” says small Sir Tilton Everly, “Such a jolly drive, I am glad you invited me, Colonel Haughton; never was past Richmond proper before.”

“No?” said the Colonel carelessly, and, stepping quickly to Mrs. Tompkins, says, “It has been dreary banishment to me; allow me.”

“You look like a man who has missed his dinner; or, as John Bull, outwitted by brother Jonathan,” said his bride elect with a latent meaning as laughing heartily she takes his arm to the carriage.

“Or had a John Bright man step in before him at the election.”

“Confound his impudence,” thought Colonel Haughton, saying, “I am not, a Mark Tapley.”

“Any man with a spice of gallantry” said Trevalyon coming to his friend's aid, “would feel as if Siberian banishment had been his portion, had he been separated from so fair a group of ladies.”

Are the men doing anything to 'Rose Cottage' Trimmer,” enquired his master of a shrewd looking man in brown and buff livery.

“Yes, sir, it's in good order now.”

“This lady is my new tenant, anything you can do Trimmer to meet her requirements will oblige me.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Thank you Colonel Haughton, you are very kind,” said Mrs. Marchmont.

“Don't mention it, anything I can do will give me pleasure.”

“It is a sweet spot; my darling child, Miranda, is a naturalist and will collect many insects.”

“From the Hall?” said Blanche with her innocent air.

“No, no, dear, from the grounds.”

“Drive on, Trimmer, I shall take the dog−cart.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What a sweet spot and how quaint the shops look,” said Mrs. Marchmont as they were rapidly driven through the village.

“Not quaint, but vacant” laughed Mrs. Tompkins, “the whole thing has a vacant air about it, the inhabitant looks as though he was born yesterday and wondering what day it was; I'd rather see a yankee whittling a stick with his saucy independent air; hat on the back of his head so he can see what is going on, than any one of 'em.”

“I could buy out the whole lot myself,” said Blanche jeeringly, with her small head turning as if on a pivot.

“What a delightful feeling,” said Mrs. Meltonbury, admiringly, “Yes it's just too lovely. If my poppa was here he'd throw no end of dimes and pea−nuts among 'em; always had pea−nuts in his pockets; how they stare, it's just too funny for anything.”

“How wealthy he must have been, I just adore money!” said the Meltonbury.

“I believe you,” answered Blanche laconically.

“Pity you have that husband out in Ontario, Melty,” said Mrs. Tompkins, “or I should soon find you another millionaire, you ought to get a divorce, plea; he is Canadian Government *attache* not your *attache*.”

“What a dear thing you are; it would be too sweet.”

“Which, the millionaire or the divorce,” at which there was a peal of laughter.

“I am afraid sister referred to the man,” sighed Mrs. Marchmont, “but how sad for poor dear Meltonbury.”

“He'd survive it,” said Blanche sententiously.

“As I live there is Lord Rivers and a man worth stopping for. Halt, coachman,” cried Mrs. Tompkins eagerly.

And they stopped in front of the D'Israeli Arms where a group of gentlemen were watering their horses.

“Ah! how do Mrs. Tompkins,” said Lord Rivers lazily wheeling his handsome bay and lifting his hat to the group.

“Whither bound?”

“For 'Haughton' Hall, you are coming I hope, now don't say no for I shall not listen if you do.”

“Too bad, but I am due at Epsom, a little trotting race is on, and if not the lord of Haughton, whom I met up the road, did not give me an invitation.”

“But I do,” said Madame with emphasis.

“He is a lucky fellow,” he said slowly and taking in the situation.

“So I think,” she said laughing, and remembering she had Trevalyon for to−day continued hastily, “we open the Hall for no end of revels at Christmas, I must have you then.”

“I shall slumber and dream of you until that time,” and with a long side glance from his sleepy eyes the Epicurean peer put spurs to his horse to overtake his friends.

“Drive on, coachman.”

“What deep eyes Lord Rivers has; he quite looks one through. What a pity such a sweet man should have such an ugly, disagreeable wife, I never thought she would be even a possible choice for any man,” said the Marchmont.

“Better for us, it makes him sigh for the impossible,” said Mrs. Tompkins.

“And 'tis such a sweet mission for a woman, that of consoler,” sighed the Marchmont.

“To a man,” said Blanche with her innocent air.

“Of course to a man; a woman would suspect a latent pity for which she would reward you with her claws,” said Mrs. Tompkins.

“Sweet consoler, I shall send to Pittsburg for a cast−iron heart and buy out some druggist's court plaster,” said Blanche. “You shall console a husband next season, I am determined in this.”

“Indeed! who have you got me ticketed for?” and the pink eyes turned towards her step−mother.

“Little Sir Tilton would be just her height, dear Mrs. Tompkins,” and Mrs. Meltonbury clasped her hands in ecstasy.

“Mrs. Tompkins will tell you how I love him,” said Blanche disapprovingly.

“Yes Melty, Blanche cannot endure him and besides he is my little beau,” said Madame with an air of proprietorship.

But the Hall of the Haughtons is reached, and the carriage rolls through the wide open gates. At the pretty lodge door stands the keeper and his wife, he pulls off his cap while she curtsies low, their future mistress tosses them a gold bit at which more curtsy and bow. What a magnificent avenue through the great park, the oak and elm mingling their branches and interlacing their arms overhead, through which a glimpse of blue heavens with golden gleams of sunlight are seen. A turn in the road and the grand entrance is before them, on either side of which are flower beds in full bloom. A conservatory is all around the octagon south wing, now bereft of its floral beauties excepting its orchards and ferns. It is really a fine old place, large and massive, in grey stone and with the grandeur of other days about it; the arms and motto show well in the sculptor's work over the entrance; the words “Always the same” and “Loyal unto death,” standing out brave and firm, as the Haughtons have for generations unnumbered. On the steps stand the master of Haughton, beside him his friend of years, Trevalyon, behind them their acquaintance, small Sir Tilton Everly. In the background, on either side of the Hall, are the household, only a few for their master has an uncomfortably small income, but they love him and will not leave him for filthy lucre's sake. But they are glad of the news that their master will marry and that a good time is coming for them.

“Thrice welcome to Haughton Hall, my dear guest,” said Col. Haughton, taking the hand of his bride−elect and leading her up the steps; “your future mistress, and if you are as faithful to us both as you have been to myself you will do well.”

“Thank you kindly, master,” said the old butler.

“We will, we will, sir,” was echoed from all sides.

After a substantial luncheon, at which they were very merry, Sir Peter Tedril joining them at table, there was a scattering of forces, Col. Haughton giving his arm to his future wife in introducing her to her future home.

“You say I am to make all things new if I please, Colonel.”

“Even to remodelling myself, my dear Kate.”

“Wise man, for I am accustomed to get my way, most days,” she added, with a side glance at Trevalyon.

And in her inspection she admired or ridiculed, laughed at or condemned, old time−worn tapestry and furniture mouldings and decorations, as ruthlessly as though mere cobwebs. It was finally decided that their tour would be at once, and to New York and Paris, from whence renovators and decorators should be imported; two or three apartments ^only were to be held sacred; old things were to pass away, all was to become new. The future mistress threw a good deal of vim into her walk and talk, doing all in a business−like manner, determined that Haughton Hall should be unequalled for luxurious comfort. Moreover, doing her duty in allowing her future husband to monopolize her for two or three hours; so earning her reward in Trevalyon in the drive by rail home to the city. The demeanour of Haughton in these hours pleased her; he was not lover−like, but properly admiring and tractable. Once before his mother's portrait he was very much affected, regretting she could not see his happiness, while she inwardly congratulated herself that the stately dame only lived on canvas.

“And now, I suppose, we have 'done' (excuse the slang) the spacious, and I must say, the very complete home of your fathers, Colonel; and I may close my notebook,” she said, with a satisfied but somewhat relieved air.

“Excepting the north tower, which you would please me very much by making the ascent of; it is selfish, but I shall have you a little while longer to myself, especially as I agree with you that I had best stay here until tomorrow evening to set some of my people to work.”

“Two heads are better than one, Colonel,” and her pulses throb; another *tete−a−tete* with her idol made easy.

“Yes, dear, I should have been obliged to run down within the week had I not remained.”

“True, and now for the tower; which is the door?”

“Up a dozen steps; I shall have to leave you while I go back for the open sesame.”

“In here? 'tis dark; but never mind, run away.”

“It is my armoury, and should be locked; but the negligence of the servants gives you a resting place, it is so near the tower; this large leather chair you will find comfortable.”

“Thank you, that will do; lift over that box with the dynamite; look about it for my feet.”

“Beautiful feet! and my wife's,” he whispered low.

“Ta, ta. I have plenty to occupy my eyes.”

“Yes, I take quite a pride in my armour, from our own and foreign lands; with the *sabre de mon pere*, Indian idols, Highland targets, and many relics of my happiest days.”.

“There, there, that will be very comfortable; by−by.”

His footsteps have scarce died away when she is conscious of not being alone, and though in the dim light, her nerves are strong and do not give way; still she slowly arises humming an air, and as if to have a nearer view of an Indian curiosity. Scarcely has she done so than she is clasped in the strong arms of a man who has come from behind her, and pillows her face closely to his breast to prevent a scream, and so she shall not recognize him. She dreaded the return of Col. Haughton, now that events are shaping themselves fairly well; her immediate fear is lest any escapade should cause him to return with her to London, which would perforce prevent her immediate escort by the man she loves. So she allowed a tremor to pass through her, thinking to excite pity—which she did, for he slightly loosened his tight hold.

“Let me go and I shall not scream; you may have my money or jewels,” she said in gasps.

“I only want you, my beauty,” said a voice she knew well—the voice of George Delrose. And her face is rudely kissed again and again.

“I hope you are satisfied; I shall not ask you how you came here, for as I have before had occasion to remark, you are Lucifer himself,” she said in cutting accents.

“Kate, don't, or you will kill me; I must know your moves or I shall go mad.”

And the strong man groans for his weakness, pressing his forehead with both hands.

“Tedril met me at the 'Russel Club' after dining with you last night; he then told me he was coming here at your invitation. Seeing how dreadfully cut up I was he changed his plans, and to give me a chance of a word with you ran down on first train to his place; we then rode over; he managed an *entree* to the Hall and secured me a

retreat here, loitering about the park himself until luncheon. He tells me you are to marry Haughton; I reeled at his words, and would have fallen; but 'courage,' I told myself, 'she is not so cruel'; tell me, my beauty, that they lie; you could never love such an iceberg."

"You know me well enough for that, George."

"Had it been that other to whom I heard you—"

"Overheard, you mean; but one word of that, and I scream out."

"I repeat," and his voice grew fierce in its intense rage; "had it been even said you were to wed him, I would have shot him; the other you would be wretched with, so I am safe there."

"I confess to the being curious; did you hear the whispered nothings of the Colonel as he left me?"

"No, I was behind the coats−of−mail at the end of the room; but I should not have been jealous; a man *must* make love to you; it is yours for *me* I dread will change; your words to Trevalyon are burned to my memory; *but he shall never have you, I have sworn it*."

And in spite of herself she trembled, not for herself, but for the man she loved; but recovering herself quickly, and wishing to quiet him before the Colonel returned, said:

"How could I possibly marry a man with a hidden wife?"

Delrose, taking her face in his hands, tried in vain to read her heart; sighing heavily, he said:

"Oh, Kate, could you love me faithfully, devotedly, as I do you, what a life ours would be; but you are a slave to fancy, a creature of impulse, and I am now a mere barrier in your path, to be kicked aside at will; yet knowing this, I love you as ever, with the same old mad passion; and should you desert me, Heaven help me;" and the ring of truth and despair in his tones would have touched the heart of another.

But Kate, accustomed to eat greedily of life's sugar−plums, only stamped her foot impatiently at his persistence, saying:

"You are just a great big monopolist, George, and don't want our world to look at me, even through a glass case; the idea of you being jealous of a man whom we both agreed to sit on if he play bigamist; you forget our partizanship."

"See how quickly a kind word from you calms me my queen, but its too bad, beauty, I must hide again. I hear him returning."

"I shall go and meet him so he shall not lock you in."

"You were not long, Colonel, but I am quite rested and now for the tower stairs key, which way?"

"This way, but I need not have left you; Trimmer tells me the door is unlocked and our guests in advance of us.

"Oh, how lovely, it will save time looking them up; 'tis four−forty−five now, and at seven the up train is due."

In twenty minutes the ascent is made and madame stepped among her friends, her short navy blue satin skirt being just the thing to get about in easily; 'twas a handsome robe too with its heavy fringe and jets with bonnet to match, black silk jersey, heavy gold jewellery and jaunty satchel with monagram in gold slung over her round shoulder. She looked well and carried her head high and had her under jaw and mouth been less square and heavy she would have been handsome.

"What a band of idlers you look," she said "after my hard pilgrimage."

"Refreshingly *dolce far niente*, I should say," said Trevalyon lazily.

"How do you like the view, ladies?" enquired the Colonel, which gave Sir Peter Tedril his opportunity.

"Have you seen him?" he said in an undertone,

"I have."

"Thank Heaven, it's over! you look so calm I feared it had to come."

"I don't wear my heart on my sleeve."

"The Colonel did not see him," he again asked.

"No, I did and alone in the armory."

"Where I left him, poor fellow."

"That will do; the others may hear."

"Allow me to adjust the telescope for you, Tedril," said Trevalyon. "I know it well, now, Mrs. Tompkins, you have a fine view taking in as you see a ravishing bit of Richmond a very embodiment of rest, at least where you are gazing, with the music which you are to imagine of the Thames at its feet."

“Enough;” she said, “I am no poet, and with me a little of that sort of thing goes a long way; turn it on something practical, if it will range so far.”

“Shall it be London, Guildford, or *chic* little Epsom, fair Madame?”

“Give me London.”

“Our gilded Babylon, *versus* ethereal skies, with lights and shadows that would send an artist wild,” said Trevalyon, gaily readjusting the telescope.

“Why, Trevalyon, such sentiments from you,” exclaimed the Colonel, while the others gathered around.

“'Tis a practical age, I like his view,” said Everly.

“Do you, well take it; my eyes pain me,” cried Madame.

“I wish I could take the pain too,” he answered gallantly.

“You have taken both, sweet child; we had better all be off, every body. Time flies.”

“He does; it tires one to think of him,”' said Trevalyon, consulting his watch.

“'Tis *so* sweet up here,” sighed the Marchmont. “I am feasting my eyes on Rose Cottage.”

“'Tis near dinner time, Mrs. Marchmont,” said Blanche.

“When you will sigh, fish of sea, fowl of air *versus* Rose Cottage,” said Tedril.

“Though following Sir Peter's lead from the depths to the heights, 'tis only to feed the inner−man, therefore as we grow prosaic we had best descend to the level of Rose Cottage,” said Trevalyon.

For he felt that he was losing himself in memories of the past, here he had sat many hours with Vaura and his friend, now everything would be so changed; he knew it was foolish, but since he had seen a colored miniature of her in her uncle's possession in all the beauty of womanhood, he craved for her living presence, and he felt that the first step as he now made it down the old stairs brought him nearer the consummation of his wish. He was glad his arrangements to leave London at sunrise were complete; he wished the up trip was over; he did not pine for another *tete−a−tete* with Madame; she was capital company, but she belonged to his friend; he only hoped he would be able to hold her that was all. On their descent, after a few minutes adjournment to the dining−room where delicious tea with walnuts in sweet butter and salt and scraped Stilton cheese in rich French pastry were duly relished, besides cold ham, chicken with sparkling hock and Malmsey. And now again, merrier than birds, away to the station; this time Mrs. Tompkins and the Meltonbury take the dog−cart with Colonel Haughton. They outstrip the carriage; but now all alight.

“Gentlemen and ladies for the carriages, please take seats at once,” sang the guard.

“How are you off for room, guard,” enquired the Colonel.

“Seats in this one for two, sir.”

“Sir Tilton, might I trouble you to take charge of my step−daughter; I know it will be a bore,” she added in an undertone, “but I shall reward you my dear little poppet.”

“Seats for five more, guard,” shouted Tedril, for the engine was almost off.

“This way, sir.”

The strawberries with hasty good−byes are on board with Tedril.

“Dine with me to−morrow evening, Colonel. By, by,” said Mrs. Tompkins pleasantly, for he was so easy and she would have Trevalyon up.

But the latter, lifting his hat, said:

“It is not *au revoir* with me, dear Mrs. Tompkins, but *bon voyage*; and,” he said, lowering his voice, “imagine the rice and slippers, for I heartily wish you every happiness.”

“What nonsense,” with a frown and little stamp of foot. “Wish me your wishes up; you are coming,” and her eyes showed both anger and disappointment.

“Carriages, carriages;” shouted the guard, and with a pardon Madame almost locked the door on the skirts of Mrs. Tompkins as the Colonel was saying hurriedly:

“I persuaded him to wait for the midnight and keep me company.”

CHAPTER VII. ORESTES AND PYLADES.

“And how glad I am you did, dear old friend,” said Trevalyon warmly, as they took the dog−cart for home, talking by the way long and earnestly as they drove slowly and absently. After dinner they stretched their limbs on rugs on the lawn under the peaceful June sky; they had not been here many minutes when their mutual friend the rector, Mr. Douglas, strolled across the park to smoke his pipe with them.

“You see it did not take me long to hear of your advent,” he said taking the easiest of attitudes on a garden seat.

“And I need not say I am glad of it, Douglas; I am only sorry you did not come over and dine with us; had Trevalyon not been with me I should have found you out ere this.”

Leaving Haughton and Douglas to talk of old times and the new, Trevalyon lay perfectly still, alternately dreaming and smoking, now there is a lull, and he says:

“Neither of you have the remotest idea of how I enjoy this rest; I have been a good deal bothered lately and have had an unsettled feeling,” here he noticed the rector give him a searching look, “and this is paradise; in fact I doubt if we earn Elysian Fields by comparison; we shall find the restful peace more enchanting we only long for (I suppose as long as one is mortal one longs for a something), a few charming women, then we would have a realm for Epicurus himself. Evening, and pure, soft tints everywhere, the long shadows blending to disappear in the dark, like the last waves of unrest, the young moon languidly rising to lighten loving faces of those in this haven of peace, the fragrance of yonder blossoms as they sip the dew, the graceful forms from the sculptor's hand standing in their whiteness amid the green grass, and the soft sighing leaflets stirred by the air above them, seeming to breathe to them their evening song of love. Haughton dear fellow, you have a magnificent place here, and God grant,” he added with fervor, “you may be full of content and happiness.”

“God grant it,” said his friend earnestly.

“Amen,” said the rector: “then the gossips are right, you are about to come to God's altar, to join yourself in matrimony with a wealthy American.”

“I am; do you think I am right; tell me as an old and trusty friend,' he said gravely.

“Every man should marry, you should know whom to choose, being a cosmopolitan as you are; the Hall should be occupied; you are a good and faithful steward, giving to the poor with no niggard hand, and out of your present small income; yes, you should decidedly marry and you should as decidedly have an heir,” he added smiling.

“As you think it wise, I wish I had put on the shackles before, especially as a home for my darling Vaura is my strongest motive, and now she will marry and I might have had her with me all these years; as for an heir I bother myself very little about it; in my early manhood I loved, and had I been loved in return,” he said bitterly; “heirs would now, I expect, have been numerous, and now it is all her fault,” he said weakly, “if my venture does not bring me happiness.”

“Never mind the past, my dear fellow, we have done with it,” said the rector kindly, “be true to the wife you are taking; 'Loyal unto death' (your own motto), or dishonour, which, God save us all from, we have nothing to do with; the man who is loyal to his wife has a right to expect equal devotion on her part.”

“Your own wedded life has been very happy,” said Trevalyon earnestly.

“It has; heaven grant you both the same! Trevalyon, you will pardon an old friend (and a friend of your father's also); you have said you have been a 'good deal bothered lately,' is it anything you can confide in me—it lightens care to share it?”

“I thank you, Douglas; you are very kind. I have a visit to my place on the *tapis*, and when this is the case my heart is full of sad memories; my tenants, too, under my late steward's *regime*, have been extremely disaffected; so I take the Great Northern at sunrise on to−morrow for Northumberland. I have been feeling very much lately the burden of my lonely life, the outcome as it is, of my dear father's blighted hopes; grief−stricken; desertion.”

“Pardon me, you are under some promise of celibacy to your father, I believe.”

“I am.”

“It was no oath?”

“No, I was glad by a promise to relieve his poor troubled mind, and my knowledge of women made it easy.”

“Grant me still another question. I am not, I need scarcely say, actuated by mere idle curiosity?”

“Any question you like, Douglas.”

“Have you never met a woman who has caused you to regret your promise.”

“Never!”

But a new and strange feeling stirred his heart−strings, that perhaps, had he met the child Vaura, now the woman, he could not answer so. There was a pause on his answering Douglas, with the single word—“Never.”

“It is due to you, that I should give a reason for my questions. My son, Roland, writes me, that the story of your elopement with Fanny Clarmont, has been revived, and with a good deal of vim and sensation as to her being your hidden wife thrown in.”

“Indeed,” said Trevalyon, carelessly, “what a dearth of scandal there must be in Dame Rumour's budget, that she must needs revive one of a dozen years ago.”

“Ah,” thought the rector, “what a pity it is true.” But not so Haughton, who, starting to a sitting posture, said excitedly:

“You take it too coolly, Trevalyon, stamp it out at once, and for ever! you know, you never married her.”

“Dame Rumour says I did,” he answered with the utmost *sang−froid*.

“Nonsense; saddle it on the right man, my dear fellow; mark me, 'tis *his* doing; whatever may be his present reason, he is now, as, then, thoroughly unprincipled, and always your foe.”

“Tis true, Haughton; but the weather is too warm for a brawl,” he said, lazily.

“Eleven! o'clock,” exclaimed the rector, “I must bid you both good−night; Haughton, you have my best wishes; we shall be more glad than I can say to have you among us again, and the other dear ones, Lady Esmondet and our sweet Vaura; good−bye, Trevalyon, I am full of regrets, that in giving you Dame Rumour's words, I have lent an unpleasant tone to your thoughts.

“You have nothing to regret, Douglas, I am too well accustomed to Dame Rumour's pleasantries; she only serves poor Fanny Clarmont up in a new dress; as 'hidden wife,' she has never been presented before. Good−bye; I wish I could remain at the dear old place all night, then we would both stroll across the park with you.”

“That would have been pleasant; hoping soon to meet again; good−night, and fare you both well.”

The rector gone, the dog−cart is again in requisition; at the station, Haughton says heartily—

“Good−bye, dear old friend; I am sorry you will not be with me to the last, but I shall look forward to your spending a couple of months with me in the autumn, ere going up for the season; good−night, I feel all the better since our talk.”

“Good−bye, Eric, good−bye; my heart is to full for many words. God bless you! Farewell.”

And with a long, firm pressure of the hand and look from the eyes, the friends, with the friendship of Orestes and Pylades, part.

CHAPTER VIII. MADAME AND HER GARDENER.

One word of Mrs. Tompkins, on the up trip to the city, a few hours previous, as she cares for her little plot digging with smiles as sunbeams; frowns as showers. On the guard locking the door, she was astonished to find, besides the strawberries and Sir Peter, her head gardener, who smiled as he stroked his beard in satisfaction; he loved this woman (so like himself) with the strongest passion his heart had ever known, and here she was coming in to him, making his heart throb with joy, while she, more in love with his rival than ever, by this day's social contact, still, in pique at his falling into Haughton's plan to remain, and so (though he knew she loved him) letting her return in other company, gave her a certain relish for this man's bold love−making, and whom she could also use in nourishing her plot to keep Trevalyon free. So now, while instructing Delrose in the manner of the plot, she let him love her with his eyes, while with smiles and caressing words, she bound him in stronger chains than ever.

"When may I come, my beauty?" he whispered feverishly, at the door of No. ——Eaton square.

"Now," she said impulsively, she would so perfect her plot; "and you, my dear little strawberry blondes, with Sir Peter and little Tilton, to whom I owe a sugar−plum, for taking care of Blanche," who yawning said—

"I just hate an English rail−car, locked up like Oscar Wilde's blue china, with only Sir Tilton to talk to."

Major Delrose was in a fool's Paradise, all night, and swore to leave no stone unturned in effectually preventing the marriage of his rival with Miss Vernon, Madame him such was the wish of Trevalyon's heart. Tedril favoured Delrose's suit in every possible way; Haughton Hall was four times the size of Richmondglen. Sir Peter represented his division of the county only on sufferance; and, he knew it right well, should Haughton marry money, he would be persuaded to stand for Surrey, he had refused, heretofore, on the plea of absenteeism and lack of gold; and so he, Tedril, greatly preferred that Delrose should win; but his fierce passions would not brook his, Tedril's, coupling any man's name with hers; but after this run to Surrey, he knew she would wed Haughton, while, as now, throwing dust in his friends eyes. And so it was in four days, the announcement of the marriage of 'Kate Vivian Tompkins, relict of the late Lincoln Tompkins, Esq., of New York, U.S., to Eric, Col. Haughton, of Haughton Hall, Surrey, England,' appeared in the *Court Journal and Times*, at which Major Delrose raved and swore, said some queer things, which went the round of the clubs, for the usual nine days, then for the time, it was forgotten in, the newer scandal of Captain Trevalyon, one of society's pets, having a "hidden wife."

"Well, the darling is handsome enough to have half−a−dozen," said gay Mrs. Eustace Wingfield.

"I am ready to bet a box of gloves (twelve buttons) that a dozen women have as good as asked him," laughed another butterfly.

"Forestalling the advanced method in Lytton's 'New Utopia,'" said Mrs. Claxton.

"There would be an absence of the usual mother−in−law difficulty," lisped a young Government *attache*, meekly, who had recently married the only child of her mother.

"Or, if so, she would pose *not* as Mark Twain's, but as M. Thiers," said Wingfield, jestingly.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Posey Wyesdale, weeping profusely; "it is invented by some person who is jealous of his overwhelming love for me; but I'll let them see I shall marry him all the same."

"Give me your attention, young ladies," said Madame de Lancy, privately, and with a business−like air, to her eight daughters, who were out. "It is commonly reported that Capt. Trevalyon has a 'hidden wife;' but as it may be a complete falsehood, I wish you all—all, remember—for we do not know his style, and one of you will doubtless suit him; I repeat, I wish you all, to be tenderly sympathetic and consoling in your manner towards him; it is unfortunate that the season is just about over; but much may be done in one meeting, and I shall tell your father to invite him to dinner to−morrow; I shall have no one else to distract his attention from yourselves."

And in her own mind she decided that Mrs. Trevalyon should have at least four of her sisters on her hands to settle in life.

CHAPTER IX. VAURA IN A MEDLEY.

The mighty god, Society, having descended from his London throne, and with a despotic wave of the hand bid his slaves forth to some resort where fashion reigned; as a matter of course, you and I, *mon ami*, must go with the stream if we would not be ostracised altogether; we should dearly love to take a lazy summer jaunt with some of them; our dear Lionel Trevalyon, in his lonely pilgrimage to the North Countree, would be glad of companionship; I wish it had been his pleasant fate to make his exodus with his old friends, the Lady Esmondet and Vaura Vernon; but it was not to be. And so, through the moves of the "miscreator circumstance," we are all separated until now, when I am more than glad to tell you that Lady Esmondet, with Miss Vernon, have arrived this day, 2nd Nov., '77, at Dover, having come up from gay Brighton, and are hourly expecting Col. and Mrs. Haughton, who had left by the White Star Line for New York immediately on their marriage; thence, on sending home the most artistic of American fresco workers and decorators, they spent a month amid the gay revellers at Long Branch and Saratoga; back again to the old shores and Paris, choosing from this great storehouse of the beautiful, gems in art, both to please the senses and delight the cultured and refined. With the face of Trevalyon seldom absent from her thoughts, Mrs. Haughton unconsciously chose much that would have been his own choice also. A page, in the hotel livery, tapping at the door of the sitting−room, *en suite* with the sleeping apartments engaged by Lady Esmondet, coming forward, hands a telegram.

"This has just arrived, your ladyship; any answer, your ladyship?"

"No; it merely states they have left by one of the new lines."

"We are looking for one to come in very shortly, your ladyship."

"That is convenient; it will allow of their dressing and dining with comfort; and, boy, see that their rooms are warm and lighted."

"Will it please your ladyship to dine here, or at the *table d'hote*?"

"Here the room is large, warm, and will answer our purpose very well."

"Yes, your ladyship."

"How delightful, Vaura dear, that we shall not be detained, but can leave on to−morrow."

"Yes, godmother darling, the fates have golden threads on their distaff for you and I to−day."

"I trust your uncle will not deny me," said Lady Esmondet, a little absently; "if so, I shall feel doubly lonely just now."

"He has married a wife; therefore cannot refuse to lend me to you until we both go to Haughton Hall hand in hand; do not think for one moment that I shall allow you to go alone to Italy."

"You belong to your uncle as well as to me, dear."

"Yes," she said, slowly; "how much I wish," and she was beside her godmother caressing the smooth bands of fair hair; "how I wish you and he had had enough of love between you to blend your lives in one."

"Do not even think of what now is an impossibility, dear," she answered hurriedly and evasively, while a faint flush came to her cheek as she pressed her hand to her side.

"Ah, poor darling," thought Vaura, "she cared for him;" and with a latent sympathy she said tenderly: "How oft in one's journey through life one closes one's eyes to the shimmer of sunbeams on the grand, majestic ocean, or the calm and peaceful lake; only opening them to the glare of the gas−light, the song of the night bird."

"How often, indeed," said her godmother, sadly; "but by the prancing of steeds in the court yard," she continued, smiling bravely, "one must conclude the steamer has arrived."

"'Tis well one can don society's mask at will," said Vaura.

"Yes, dear, and 'tis quite unnecessary to bare one's heart to the million," she answered, with her usual composure. "You are looking charming, dear; that seal−brown velvet fits you exquisitely."

"Worth says I am curves, not angles," said Vaura, gaily; "he says he would prefer to fit a grasshopper, *a la mode*, than many women who pine for his scissors."

"You should always bare your arm to the elbow; the shape is perfect, and your old gold jewelry blends both with the warm brown of your gown and the roses and lace at your throat. I wonder a little what Mrs. Haughton, how strange it sounds, but one grows accustomed to, anything, I wonder what your uncle's wife will think of

you."

"It matters not," replied Vaura, her beautiful head erect. "I know she is no fit mate for a Haughton and an innate feeling causes me to wish most fervently that she, with the golden dollar bequeathed to her, had never set foot on proud Albion's shores."

"They are in the corridor, dear; make the best of her for your dear uncle's sake," said her god−mother, breathlessly.

"Do not fear for me, dear godmother, especially as poor misguided uncle has wed so that I forsooth, shall find in Haughton Hall a fitting home, and yet, I, above all, should not speak in such tone, our race are capable of a noble self abnegation, even I at fourteen, but I dream aloud, dear godmother, forgive me."

"Surely, dear, with me alone, you may think audibly."

In a few minutes during which Vaura's eyes idly rest on the last beams of the western sun as they kiss the soft bands of hair and bring out the mauve tints in the rich satin robe of her now silent companion, when the door is opened wide, by a page admitting Col. and Mrs. Haughton, with Miss Tompkins, followed by Sir Tilton Everly.

"My dear friend and darling Vaura, how glad, glad I am to see you both; you give the place quite a home look; Mrs. Haughton, Lady Esmondet and my niece Vaura, and here is my wife's step−daughter, Miss Tompkins, a devotee of the American Eagle, and Sir Tilton Everly."

"I should say so," said Blanche, "our Eagle would make short work of the furs of your Lion and not lose a feather."

"He would first be obliged to turn dentist and claw−remover, Miss Tompkins," said Vaura merrily.

"Miss Vernon," said Mrs. Haughton stiffly, "allow me even thus early in our acquaintance to make a request of you which is that you ignore the odious sirname of my step−daughter, simply calling her Blanche."

"Certainly, Mrs. Haughton, though it is out of order, if your step−daughter also wishes it."

"Oh yes, it don't make five cents difference, Miss Vernon; popa had to give up Annabella Elizabeth my real name; Mrs. T. didn't take to it, she only took Tompkins because it was set in diamonds."

This was said with the most child−like expression on the wee white face, but one could detect venom in the tone of voice. For answer there was a frown and an impatient stamp of foot as her step−mother says coldly.

"Lady Esmondet will excuse us, Blanche, while we change our travelling dresses."

"Certainly."

Sir Tilton flew to open the door; the Colonel seeing them to their appartments, and their maids in attendance, returned to the loving rest of his home birds.

"Well, uncle dear, how do you feel after your run to and fro?" said Vaura, affectionately, and going behind his chair, drew his head backwards, kissing his face in welcome.

"Passing well, dear; here, take this chair beside me, and let me look at you; the Scotch lakes and sea−bathing have agreed with you, and with Lady Alice also," he added kindly.

"Eric, what did you think of New York," enquired Lady Esmondet, to divert his attention from her personally.

"Oh, it is just a large handsome city, with cosmopolitan cut in its very corner store, representing much wealth in its many fine buildings; there is a good deal of taste displayed in its burying grounds, and parks, and nearly all has a look of rapid growth about it, so different to our London."

"As our old slow−growing Oak in comparison with their Pines," said Vaura; "and what of the people generally?"

"Just what we know them to be, dear, full of energy and active life; sleeping never, I do believe, or if so, with eyes open."

"So full of mercury that it tires one even to think of them," said Vaura lazily.

"A great people though, Miss Vernon; strongly imbued with the spirit of the age, Progress," said Sir Tilton, who, from his corner, had never withdrawn his gaze from Vaura's face since the exit of the other ladies.

"True; but what a spirit of unrest is Progress, always flying, only resting on the wing to scatter to the winds a something new, to take the place of the old," said Vaura, thoughtfully.

"But, Vaura, dear," said Lady Esmondet, "it is astonishing how comfortably we *en masse* keep pace with your flying spirit, eager to pick up its novelties."

"True, ladies, and elbow each other in the race," said Sir Tilton.

"I know I am old−fashioned," remarked the Colonel, a little sadly; "but our life of to−day does not come up to

my ideal, as when a soldier on furlough I used to return to my dear old home; there, if anywhere on this lower sphere, peace and happiness reigned."

"You may well say so, Eric, with your noble father, sainted mother, and Vaura's mother, my dear friend, your sweet sister, Ethel, as inmates;" and in that instant their eyes met, full of sympathy. And be it what it may, an electric spark, the true speech of heart to heart, or what; the knowledge came to him for the first time of what he had lost, and a nervous tremor ran through him such as he had never felt at Delhi or Inkerman under shell or rifle fire. And the woman who had been too proud to show her love unasked, did not know whether she was glad or sorry that he had at last tasted of the tree of knowledge.

Mason here threw open the door for her mistress and Miss Tompkins, who enter, both having made elaborate toilets, the former in a gown of rose pink brocade, the latter wearing sky−blue silk, each lavish in their display of jewels.

"Dressed before you, after all, Miss Vernon," cried Mrs. Haughton, with latent malice. Even small Sir Tilton raised his eyebrows; for one moment Vaura was non−plussed; "underbred poor uncle," was her thought as she said quietly: "I have dined in salons at Brighton in this gown, Mrs. Haughton; I have listened to Patti robed as you see me."

"How mean of step−momma," thought Blanche.

"Never saw anyone to compare with her," thought the little baronet.

"Is it possible, Miss Vernon? You must excuse me, but I really thought it your travelling dress."

Waiters were now busy with the dining table at the end of the room, partially separated by folding doors; tempting *entrees*, steaming dishes, with delicious dainties, are now arranged.

"Surely, we dine at the *table d'hote*," said Mrs. Haughton, hastily; "you should have seen to it, Colonel; you know I prefer it."

"Pardon, Kate; I was unaware of this arrangement, dear."

"I am the culprit, Mrs. Haughton," said Lady Esmondet. "I thought we should all be warmer here; the air is chilly this evening."

"Oh, certainly, as you wish it; only when I take the trouble to dress for the *table d'hote*, I like to be seen," she answered, stiffly; "but we go to the theatre afterwards; and now, Sir Tilton, your arm." And clearing her brow, she seats herself at table, her husband opposite, with his friend on his right.

"You have no hotels at London to compare with ours of New York city, Lady Esmondet," she said.

"You have, Mrs. Haughton, I believe, the verdict of the majority of the travelling public with you; though I have found the Langham, and others among our leading hotels, most comfortable."

"The difference between our system and theirs," said the Colonel, "is that ours savor of the British home, in the being chary of whom we admit, and a trifle pompous; while the French and Americans, as a people, are better adapted to make hotel life a pleasant success."

"Because you are too awfully too, and we are free and easy; that's what's the matter," said Blanche.

"Also," said Vaura, "the hotel and American are both of to−day."

"You havn't given us the newest London scandal, Sir Tilton," said Mrs. Haughton, thinking of her plot.

"Political or social?" he asked, somewhat guardedly.

"Social, of course; I don't care a fig for the country."

"Well, to lead off with, the pretty Miss Fitz−Clayton, who was to have married Lord Menton, instead fell in love with her pater's tallest footman; and on her fortune they have been cooing all summer at the Cap de Juan; next," he hurriedly said, "Capt. Trevalyon's hidden wife is on; last, two separations and a new beauty."

There was a moment's pause, each thinking of Trevalyon, when Vaura said carelessly, to cover her quickened heart−beats:

"Here he comes, with his mouth full of news."

"This story about Trevalyon is a lie direct, Everly," said the Colonel, hastily.

"Dare say, Haughton."

"The prettiest bit of your news, Sir Tilton, is Cap de Juan," said Vaura, apparently absorbed in the delicacies on her plate; but thinking, "can it be true of the ideal knight of my childhood."

"Poor Lionel, how disgusted he will be," said Lady Esmondet, wearily.

"Still, men do do such things; why not he?" said Mrs. Haughton, daringly; "and after all, as none of us are

going to marry him, we need not care."

"One feels for one's friends when maligned, that is all," said Vaura, carelessly.

"Well, supposing it be false," continued Mrs. Haughton, with morbid curiosity, watching the beautiful, expressive face of her rival—"which I don't believe, how could he clear himself?"

"I cannot say, Mrs. Haughton; it would be easier to name an antidote for the sting of the snake than for the tongue of Dame Rumour."

"All I can say is, I believe it," said Mrs. Haughton, aggressively; "he is handsome enough to have induced more than one woman to make a clandestine marriage with him."

"I regret to hear you say so, Kate," said her husband, gravely.

"Mrs. Haughton is to be excused, Eric; she does not know Lionel as we do."

"The animal man is the same everywhere," continued Madame, recklessly.

"The serious trouble I see in it for Capt. Trevalyon," said Lady Esmondet, "is, that did he contemplate matrimony, this scandal afloat would be a barrier to his union."

"If he were not so careless, he could stamp it out at once," said the Colonel, impatiently. But he is careless, and Mrs. Haughton exults as she remembers it, and at the success of her plot; for does not Lady Esmondet admit it would be a bar to his union; she feels a morbid pleasure in noting critically the varied charms of her rival, as an innate feeling tells her Miss Vernon might become; and she thinks: "For you he scorned my love; pride, though you die, will keep you apart; he will come to me yet."

CHAPTER X. VELVET PAWS CONCEAL CLAWS.

“Eric, I have a favour to ask of you,” said his friend; “I am going to Rome for a few weeks, and want Vaura with me.”

“I had rather you had made any other request of me, Alice; when, and why do you go?”

“On to−morrow, after I have had an interview with Huntingdon, my lawyer (you will know him), who comes from London by appointment; and by the advice of my physician, who declares I require change.”

“Change, change, that is always their cry,” he answered, regretfully; “take my advice, Alice,” he continued, eagerly; “come to Haughton instead.”

“Rome first, Eric, thank you; home and Haughton afterwards; a few weeks will soon pass, as you say,” she continued, taking his arm from the table. “I wonder what amount of change we can digest; we get nothing else; never at home; what, with the season at London, watering places, or abroad, home only at Christmas, and some of us don't even do that; but you will lend Vaura to me?”

“Yes,” and her arm is pressed gently as he finds her a seat; “though it is hard. What do you say, Vaura; but your face tells me you like this change also.”

“I regret this catching only a glimpse of you, dear uncle; but we, butterflies, are here to−day, gone to−morrow. I love Haughton, and long for Rome; poor humanity, how unrestful; yet with all our change, the most *ennuyee* of mortals.”

“You will, I suppose, take Miss Vernon up with you for the season, Lady Esmondet?” asked Mrs. Haughton, eager to know if her wish to rid herself of Vaura companionship would be gratified.

“Yes, if her uncle will give her to me; for myself, I have set my heart on having her with me at Park Lane.”

“I am glad of that, and the Colonel must agree, for I have not my plans matured; if we are at No. 2 Eaton Square, my house will be full as a box of sardines. You are sure to come for the season, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes! habit, habit; I could not miss my—every thing (I was going to say) that London gives; the crush at the balls, seated comfortably with some pleasant people about me, chatting of the newest flirtations, if those (among the unmarried) of last season ended in matrimony; if so, what then? a pleasant yokedom or no? What divorce or separation is on the *tapis*; bits of club gossip, &c.”

“With some racy scraps, political, which you would take to as for your dinner *entrees*,” cried Vaura gaily.

“True, Vaura, and any new passage at arms between our good Queen Victoria's prophet, Earl Beaconsfield and that earnest defender of the Liberal faith, Gladstone; and, this winter, if I mistake not, we shall have stirring times, we are getting ourselves into a tight place; England will have to keep one eye on the East, the other on her Armoury.”

“I wish the war party were stronger,” said Colonel Haughton, earnestly, “we shall have no soldiers among the rising generation, if Bright's policy be carried out continuously.”

“War is too horrid for anything; one has no one to flirt with,” cried Mrs. Haughton.

“You forget our older men and boys, Mrs. Haughton,” said Vaura, gaily, “who, when not given a chance for the cold steel of the battle field, are ever ready to bare the breast for the warm dart of Cupid.

“Wouldn't give five cents for 'em,” cried Mrs. Haughton, “I want the soldiers; so if this man Bright pleases me in this matter, though I care not a dime for politics, I am with him.”

“Hear! hear!” exclaimed Everly. “I was beginning to think I was alone in the field, and, though a Bright man from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot, I was commencing to feel rather flat, in fact, anything but bright. What is the use of civilization? if we are to go on butchering our neighbours, or allowing them to make targets of us for every imaginary cause. Why be civilized in some matters, and in others remain savages? If a man strike me I shall knock him down, if he strike someone else even, in whom I am interested, he must fight his own battles, and let me look after my own interests. So, with England; I don't want to see the sons of the soil turned out to fight like dogs, when there is no occasion for it, by so doing, allowing the commercial and agricultural interests of the country go to ruin, and saddle us with an enormous debt. No! a thousand times no.”

“You grow eloquent, Sir Tilton,” said Vaura “and were you only with us, I should congratulate you on your power of speech. As it is, I can only lament that so much earnestness is lost to us; do, Sir Tilton, go in an unbiased

mood to the House next session, give close attention to the arguments of Beaconsfield on this question, and then, I have no doubt, a man of your sense will come out in the right colours next election, and you will laugh at the time you did not want to see the dear Czar, or Sultan, blister their hands, or soil mother earth, while our brave fellows gave it them in the Balkans, or at Constantinople."

"No, no, I believe, I am a Whig; I know I am a Liberal, and it is the right side for our day."

"Now I think," continued Vaura, "one should be a stronger Tory than ever to−day; what with Fenianism, Socialism, Nihilism, if we would see a monarchy left standing, our peers with a voice, we must, even though inwardly acknowledging the other opinions to suit the progressive spirit, we must stand firm; we are not yet advanced, or you, or not I should say, Sir Tilton, to give us anything as perfect to take the place of our British Parliament."

"You have taken your first step towards us, Miss Vernon. I congratulate you on being a Liberal−Conservative," exclaimed Sir Tilton, gleefully.

"Ah! I should not have named my flying spirit," said Vaura, laughingly.

"No, that's where you were weak, dear," said her uncle, "you forgot your party."

"The carriage is waiting, sir," said the Colonel's man.

"Very well, Tims; tell the maids to bring wraps for their mistresses."

"The warmth of the fire is inviting," said Lady Esmondet, for they have been sipping their coffee by a bright fire.

"Which means you think the opposing element outside the reverse, godmother mine."

"Yes, Vaura, what do you say to keeping me company."

"With pleasure; I dare say we have seen whatever is on."

"Twelfth night," said Blanche; "I guess I'll stay too; Sir Tilton; a game at euchre."

"With pleasure, Miss Tompkins, though the game is new to me," he said, seating himself where he could have a good view of Vaura.

"Kate, dear, do you care to go?" enquired her husband.

"No; the play is not to my taste; Shakespeare is heavy."

"Heresy, heresy!" exclaimed Vaura; "surely, Mrs. Haughton, you don't condemn, 'As you like it,' 'Much ado about nothing,' and the bill for to−night—and with brilliant Neilson! for their heaviness—I doubt if Rosalind, Beatrice, or Viola would agree with you, unless it be Viola, who may have found the Duke; so, thank Fate, our lovers are more quick witted."

"I should have jilted him, at once and for ever!" cried Mrs. Haughton.

"One would think the keen eye of love could have penetrated her disguise," said Mrs. Haughton.

"Especially in pleading the love of an imaginary sister," said Vaura; "our men would have suggested making love to the lips that were by."

"All I have to say is," said Mrs. Haughton, suppressing a yawn, "that the way the Duke went a wooing would never have suited me; I like a man with a spice of boldness in his love−making; a sort of stand and deliver fellow."

"Who would not take no," said the Colonel.

"Yes, not like the poor victimised Quakeress we hear of; a man looked her way for seven years, then said grace before he took the first kiss."

"What an abstainer," laughed her husband; "as for the lazy Duke, he should have stormed the castle and ran off with Viola."

"After which, I should have wished him a good night's rest; as I do all and each of you," said Lady Esmondet, rising, and moving towards the door.

"Not a bad idea," echoed the Colonel, "as we leave for Surrey in the morning, that is, if you can manage the early, Kate?"

"Yes, though rising early is a relic of serfdom, still it is better than vegetating here all day."

"Thank you;" turning wistfully to Vaura, he continues—

"I am really sorry you are not going with us, dear; but, promise me, Alice, that you will both be with us for the ball and Christmas festivities?"

"It's a long look till Christmas, Eric; but, should the 'miscreator circumstance' not prevent; consider us with

you; and, now good−night, you, and all; and a restful sleep.”

“Good night, everyone,” said Vaura, “pleasant dreams; my own dear uncle, good night,” and with a soft, white hand on each cheek, her beautiful face is turned upwards for his kiss.

“Blanche, you little gambler, away with you,” said her step−mother.

“Good night, Sir Tilton, think it over: and what merriment you will miss, and of how I shall miss you, if you don't come down with us.”

“Don't think it possible just yet, but first day I can; with thanks, yours, good night.”

And now the small baronet alone, and not yet inclined for rest, throws himself back in an easy chair, his hands in his pockets, and shoulders in his ears, thinks himself into such a deep thought that the clock striking two causes him to start.

“So late,” he murmured, mechanically winding his watch. “What a reverie I have been in! three−quarters of an hour since they left me! Ah, Tilton, this wandering will never do, one cannot have everything, and the other one is true, and makes sure of me. What a ripe, rare loveliness; tut, tut, keep your eyes from her, my boy.”

And he, too, has gone to the quiet of his chamber and leaves the room to silence and gloom, save for the fitful gleam of an expiring coal in the grate.

CHAPTER XI. ON THE WING.

The god of slumber did not long hold sway over the senses of our friends, but even so, time, the relentless, striding ever along, did not leave them any spare minutes. Breakfasting at nine, with the exception of Lady Esmondet, and Mrs. Haughton, who partook of their first meal in their own apartments, the one being rather delicate, the other accustomed to indulge the body; all were more or less eagerly active; poor Lady Esmondet in sympathy with her old love, each now thinking by change, to divert the mind from the might have been; Mrs. Haughton loved the prospect of her throne at the Hall, and of daily wooing the love of her idol to be domesticated there. Blanche, the wee white mouse, longed for the greater freedom to be alone, or to play detective over others, that a large estate would give her.

Everly just now had so many conflicting emotions he scarcely knew which was uppermost. As for Vaura, she looked forward with intense pleasure to a lengthened sojourn in the immortal city; knowing life at Haughton under the present *regime* would be distasteful to her.

"The gentleman from London, my lady," said Somers, entering and presenting the card of Mr. Huntingdon.

"Very well; he is, I suppose, in our sitting room?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Now, Vaura, *ma chere*, take flight to Poppingay's, and bring your maid, who can carry my parcels. You will find what I require at his shop. I am so glad to know you are with me for some time, dear."

"*Au revoir!* I shall be fleet as a deer."

Now Lady Esmondet, turning her steps in the direction of the Haughton apartments, entering, said:

"I have come to wish you *bon voyage*; my lawyer is here; I know there will be a general exodus of you all soon, while I am closeted with him—he is a little bit of a tyrant and cross as a bear, if interrupted."

"A man would be a bear if he could be cross to you, Alice," said Col. Haughton, noting, regretfully, how delicate she looked.

"So that he does not give me a bear's hug, I shall survive it."

"It would be very pleasant this raw morning. Farewell, Lady Esmondet, a gay trip to you," said Mrs. Haughton.

"Good−bye, Alice," and her hand is held tightly; "take care of yourself; I know you will of Vaura. Remember Christmas at Haughton."

"Farewell, Eric; I shall not forget," and the blue eyes met his kindly.

"Awful fuss you make over that woman, Colonel."

"She is a very old friend, Kate."

"Yes, I know, and as cold and polished as your grand−mother's diamonds. If she does respond to your warm invite, she will freeze us all, so we shall have to use all the timber to thaw out."

"You do not know her yet, dear."

Vaura only returned in time to say a few hurried words of parting. The carriage in which Mrs. Haughton and Blanche are seated is waiting her uncle at the door, watch in hand.

"Only a minute, and we are off," he cried, on seeing Vaura and her maid appear. "God bless you, darling; good−bye, good−bye," he said, kissing her affectionately; "do not fall in love with any Italian, I want you to marry at home."

"Not even Garibaldi," said Vaura archly, though a tear glistened. "Just fancy my home, a lone isle of the sea. Good−bye, dear uncle; take good care of him, Mrs. Haughton. Good−bye, Blanche; there is a mine of pleasure in store for you at Haughton; *bon voyage* all."

"She is lovely enough to win even Garibaldi from thoughts of Italy, past and present," said her uncle, lovingly.

"Colonel, I wish you would press Sir Tilton to come with us," said his wife; "I have grown so accustomed to him, I could do without Mason easier."

It was rather of a bore to the Colonel, this running in couples; when he married a wife, he did not marry this acquaintance of hers; but just now he feels that he himself deserves the lash as the fair face of the lost Alice arises

before him, and knowing that the Hall would not now be open for guests only for his wife's gold. So the answer the son and inheritor of the estate makes to the daughter of the ballet−dancer is,

“Certainly, dear; anyone that will give you pleasure;” and turning to Sir Tilton, who is driving to the station with them, says: “You had better run down with us, Everly, if you have nothing else in view.”

“Thank you, Colonel; have pressing business at London;” to quiet his duns, which he did not deem necessary to communicate; “but can and will be with you a month from now.”

“You are very disagreeable, Sir Tilton, and not worth a cent.”

“You are right,” thought the small baronet.

“I want you to teach my pug tricks,” continued Blanche poutingly.

“Come soon, dear baronet,” said Mrs. Haughton; “by−by; remember me.”

“Could a man do otherwise? Pleasant trip; goodbye.”

And the iron horse is off, leaving the man about town who plays his cards with a winning hand, alone on the platform.

“I shall hasten back to the hotel, they may not yet have left;" meaning by 'they,' Lady Esmondet and Vaura. “It will look quite natural to see them, and say the others are safely away.” Hurrying along, he reached the hotel to hear they had left “ten minutes previously; just leaving twenty minutes till she sails, sir,” said the porter.

Hailing a passing cab, Everly offered double fare if in time. Fortune favoured him in allowing him to be in time to assist another gentleman (whom he thought to be on tantalizing intimate terms) in looking after the comfort of the travellers.

“Delighted I'm in time to be of any service, Miss Vernon,” he said, heartily; “afraid you are going to have rain.

“I am protected, Sir Tilton,” she said, smilingly, and holding up her arm in water−proof ulster.

“Many women, when they don the armour of protection, so ill become it, that we are fain to see them unprotected; but you are born to wear anything, and look so well we don't want any new fashion.”

“Always allowing, Sir Tilton, for the natural changeableness of man, which would assert itself in spite of a momentary wish.”

“You could hold us at will,” he said, picking up a rose that had fallen from her bouquet; “may I?” and it is carefully put on his coat.

“Trust me, Sir Tilton,” she said, gaily; “I have made your sex (loving it, as I do) a study. Charles Reade was right; you are 'born to hunt something;' it certainly is not the old, which is past, but the new; yes, say what you will, an innate love of variety—even to our gown,” she added, merrily, “is an inherent part of your nature.”

“Vaura, come, or you will be left on the dock in the enforced guardianship of Sir Tilton Everly,” said Lady Esmondet.

“Adieu, Sir Tilton,” said Vaura; “breathe a prayer to Neptune that our wardrobe is complete without day or night caps.”

“*Bon voyage*; shall be at Haughton Hall to welcome you;” and, lifting his hat, he was again left to his own devices, while Vaura, taking the arm of Mr. Roland Douglas, went aboard the boat.

“Who is your handy little man. Vaura?” asked he.

“Sir Tilton Everly.”

“Of where?”

“Of everywhere, my dear boy.”

“Might be going there now, judging from the way he is tearing up the street.”

“Perhaps he is on a mad tear after Mrs. Haughton.”

“It's all very well, Vaura, to try, now the dear little fellow is away, to shunt him off on to Mrs. Haughton, he's not on a mad tear after them; you mow 'em down, tares and wheat, together.”

“I feel quite agricultural,” said Vaura, laughing, as they joined Lady Esmondet, who was talking to a Government *attache*, from London. “Mr. Douglas calls me a mowing machine.”

Here, Mr. Bertram came forward to shake hands with Vaura.

“I was beginning to think you would not cross to−day, Vaura,” said Lady Esmondet. “Sir Tilton seemed unable to tear himself away.”

“It's getting too much for my feelings, Vaura,” said Douglas, in serio−comic tones; “tares again.”

“What's the joke?” asked Bertram; “the fellow had a green and yellow melancholy look about him, I noticed.”

“Again! pile on the agony, tares and wheat are green and yellow.”

“Tares and wheat,” remarked Bertram. “If that's your text, Douglas, I shall tear myself away, and pace the deck alone, if Lady Esmondet, or Miss Vernon, won't take pity on me; I don't care for sermons, nor to be classed with the tares. Who is the mannikin, Douglas,” continued Bertram.

“What's his name, and where's his hame; she dinna choose to tell,” said Douglas.

“You are a greater tease than ever, Roland; I did tell you, but on the way you lost it; but now again give ear—”

“Not only mine ear,” he interrupted, “but my whole being, fairest of Surrey enslavers.”

“Well, Roland, the irrepressible, from the lips of the women who love him, the mannikin is, dear or *cara mia* before Tilton Everly to his men friends, and Sir Tilton Everly to society; art satisfied?”

“By no means,” he said slyly.

“He is only a gay little sunflower,” said Lady Esmondet.

“Sunning himself in woman's smiles, and perhaps, who knows, laying up somewhere out at interest, the smiles he gives in return, but, Roland *mon cher*, Vaura is not his banker (she has always a hand full of trumps and they are hearts).”

“Yes, there are many bankrupts on your hands, Vaura. I'm beginning to think you've no heart, that's why the mowing business is done,” said Roland, half jestingly.

“Happy thought, my dearest boy; at my birth, Cupid, being short of hearts, sent word by Mercury that Vaura Vernon would have to go without, until such time in her life as she was able to win the hearts of some half dozen men; as it would take so many to make a good−sized womanly organ called a heart. Mercury further said I must send so many men away heartless, I would suddenly find myself in possession, of that lovable piece of palpitation; I would then find that piece of feminine sighs too much for me, and would immediately exchange it for a manly one; so you, see, Roland, I cannot have worked enough yet with the agricultural implement; it's hard lines, you cruel boy, and you only jest about, the mower,” this she said in mock earnest tones; and continued laughingly, “but then, I shall love only one; now, it is awfully pleasant to love you all.”

“From all I hear at home and abroad the mower has been in sure hands,” remarked Bertram smilingly.

“Dame Rumour hath many ears to fill,” replied Vaura.

“By the way, Vaura, did Sir Tilton Everly say the Haughtons took the 10.30?” asked Lady Esmondet.

“Yes, Dover has been deserted for Surrey; and the untiring little, baronet follows in a month, and confided to me that he would be at my uncle's to welcome us.”

“The plot thickens,” laughed Roland.

“But Roland Douglas,” said Lady Esmondet, “he should be there; he belongs, in some sort of way, to the wife of the Lord of the Manor, in a 'do−as−I−bid−you' kind of way; in their relations towards each other, one sees the advertisement for a person to 'make himself generally useful,' clearly defined; fashionable women of to−day affect such relations with men, and I suppose it is all right, as fashion has made it orthodox.'“

“We find it a too pleasant fashion to object to it,” answered Bertram; “still rumour has it that Mrs. Haughton has been a great flirt, and if I were in Haughton's shoes, I should turn the cold shoulder to this Everly, or any other man; should they stay much at the Hall, time may, with the ponderous hospitalities of the county, hang heavy to one who has lived at New York pace, and just for pastime, she may flirt.”

“I should think no woman married to Col. Haughton could, or would, think to kill time with any other man,” said Vaura, warmly, a slight curl on her perfect lips.

“Bravo, Vaura,” said her godmother; “a woman is of very slight value if, when she marry a man worth going to the altar with, she, after a few moons wane, looks about like Moore's 'Lesbia,' for some one to keep *ennui* at bay.”

“Hear, hear,” said Bertram; “but to−day we have so many marriages of convenience that the society of some affinity is sought for distraction's sake.”

“It's awfully nice to have an affinity for some one else's wife; but, by Jove,” said Douglas, “if I were married, and caught a fellow hanging about my wife, I'd just want to handle one of Vulcan's heaviest, and tap him on the head.”

“Spoken like a Briton on his preserves,” laughed Vaura.

“How these fellows without an income manage to keep to the front is more than I can tell,” said Douglas; “now, this Everly, though he doesn't exactly wax fat and shine, he isn't one of the lean kine either.”

“I bet my life,” said Bertram, “he is angling in his aunt's flower garden for a gold−fish.”

“A boarding school would be a good field,” said Lady Esmondet.

“Just the spot,” cried Douglas; “and the gilded fair who would pay his debts would win all the school prices from the gushing aunts.”

“I read,” said Bertram, “the other day, a good story in the *Scottish American*, entitled 'Endless Gold.' A fellow, Brown hadn't a *sou*, but always declared he would win an heiress; his friends laughed at him; but one evening, on a great cotton lord, Sir Calico Twill, making a speech, he put in 'hear, hear' at the right time. The old man, pleased, invited him home to supper; there he met his heiress, fell in love (to make a long story short), proposed, and was referred to papa.”

“'What is your fortune?'“ enquired the pater.

“'Well, I don't exactly know,' said Brown; being uncertain whether it was a three−penny or four−penny bit under his tobacco jar. 'But, give me your daughter, and I promise she shall have endless gold.'

“'Come, don't exaggerate, Brown,'“ said the tickled Twill.

“'Scarcely in my case,' said Brown; 'as be we ever so extravagant, we should never be able to set through it.'“

“'Are you telling me truth?'

“'Truth; I swear it.'

“'Then take her, my boy, and her eight thousand a year; how pleased I am she has been saved from fortune−hunters.'

“They were married; Brown made the money fly; bills came in. Scene: Sir Calico in a rage.

“'Where is the endless gold you promised?'

“'Here,' said Brown, coolly, taking his wife's hand and showing her wedding−ring; 'and what just fits one of my Wife's taper fingers I am quite sure we could never get through.'“

“'There is one thing in our favour, papa,' said his daughter; 'no one can say I have married a fool.'“

“Not bad,” laughed Douglas.

“Henceforth,” said Vaura, merrily, “I shall, in imagination, see small Everly and his kind labelled 'Endless Gold.'“

“That little Tompkins will be in the market again this coming season,” said Bertram; “I wonder who the successful angler will be.”

“Unhappy heiresses,” said Douglas, mockingly; “Cupid's darts are not for thee.”

“Thank heaven,” said Vaura; “the man who takes my hand for the walk through life will not take it for the gold he will find in its palm.”

“The knowledge that the soft hand in his was his own,” said Bertram, “would so fill him with ecstacy, with one look at the face, that the precious metal would be only in his thoughts as a setting for the pearl he had won.”

“Bravo, Bertram,” said Douglas.

“*Merci*, Monsieur,” said Vaura, smiling; “you flatter my poor charms; but we cannot deceive ourselves; this is, as Mark Twain says, the 'gilded age,' and in going to the altar one of the two must have the yellow sovereign.”

“Yes, Vaura, you are right; one or other, it matters not, must have a full hand,” said her godmother.

CHAPTER XII. SOARING!—THENCE TO THINGS OF EARTH.

“By the way, Roland, *cher garcon* have your people yet returned to Surrey?” enquired Vaura.

“The first detachment, consisting of the governor, with mother, now delight the flock with their presence; and the paters, pipe, flock and sermons again occupy his attention. The damsel Isabel is still at Paris, whither yours truly is journeying to carry the child home to our parents.”

“I suppose Robert is still at Oxford?” said Lady Esmondet.

“No, at Rome; by the way, you and Vaura will see him; he is incumbent of St. Augustine's.”

“How strange it will be to see my old playmate (sad, wound up in himself kind of boy he was) doing clergyman's duty,” said Vaura.

“You should have heard,” said Douglas, eagerly, “the pitched battles he and I fought at vacation over the vexed question of High and Low Church. I just went for him; and anyone overhearing would have thought me an itinerant pedlar of theology—in the vulgar tongue, street preacher—scorning all form as Papal; one would have thought me encased in Gladstonian armour of Disestablishment, to have heard my harangue. Poor Bob; in vain he expatiated on the glories of the ancient fathers; in vain he took all the saints out for an airing; in vain he talked of the ritual coming to us from the Jews of old; in vain he asserted that Ritualism had brought life and vigour into a slumbering church; in vain he talked of the old fox−hunting clergy; in vain he talked of what a glorious thing for our church to give in a little, and Rome to give in less; of how union would be strength, and of the brave front we would show to all Christendom; of all we could do in stamping out infidelity and rationalism; in fact, he was sanguine of taking in everybody; all dissenters were to join us *en masse*. Upon my word, Bob was eloquent; I assure you, he was so enthusiastic, that in my mind's eye I saw the whole human family— black, white, and copper−coloured, London belles and factory girls, swells and sweeps—all with one voice singing the most pronounced of High Church hymns, a cross in every hand, and all clothed, not by Worth or a London tailor, but in the garb of monk and nun. His earnestness so carried me away that I did not awake to myself and things of earth until I felt the pins sticking into my flesh under my monkish robe. I then thought it time to don the armour of the Low Churchman, and come to the rescue of the human family, engaged, clothed and ornamented as above. So, to slaughter the vision, I fell to by telling him he belonged to the Anglo−Catholics; was as one with the Greek Catholics, and any liberal Catholics in the Latin Church who did not accept extreme Roman Catholic views.”

“And what answer did you receive from Father Douglas?” enquired Bertram; “did he acknowledge the truth of your charge?”

“Yes, by Jove, he did; he acknowledged that the union of the Anglican with the Roman communion was the dearest wish of his heart; that he would strain every nerve in the struggle to bring about its fulfilment; that though, no doubt, infidelity was making rapid strides, still churchmen generally united in thinking that before long, and for the common good, petty differences would be sunk in the grand magnitude of the act of the union of the churches, when infidelity would be drowned in the waves of truth.”

“And a grand, majestic scheme,” said Vaura; “but we are too easy−going in our religious paces to carry it out; to be sure, we all go to church to−day; but why? Because, forsooth, it is respectable and fashionable. But, I believe that where the ceremonial is conducted in the most imposing manner—and the worship of the King of Kings could not be conducted with too much splendour—that there, we gay butterflies of to−day, are compelled to think of whose presence we are in, are awed into the thought of whose honour all this is done in. Yes, one there has other thoughts than one's neighbour's *tout ensemble*.”

“There is something in what you and Robert say, Vaura,” said her godmother; “but, to tell the truth, I bother myself very little as to our church differences. Disestablishment, by Hon. Gladstone, is a real unrest to me.”

“Oh, I don't know; let it stand or fall by its own merit,” said Douglas.

“Yes, I go with Gladstone,” cried Bertram; “that 'stand and deliver' tithe business has given the church a bad odour in the nostrils of dissenters.”

“Still, I fear, should we sever Church and State,” said Vaura, “that other old institutions will topple over. Events seem every day to be educating us up to preparing us for greater changes than disestablishment. 'Tis, indeed, 'a parting of the ways.' The Church Established seemed a strong wall or fortress supporting other (some

would say) old fancies. I must confess in this, our very pleasant age of novelties, I like to know there is something old still in its niche of time."

"Yes, I see; I must now sing a requiem over the departing forms of Miss Vernon and Father Douglas, as they pass into the arms of Pope Pius at Rome," said Roland, jestingly.

"Not over me, my dear boy; I am too comfortable where I am. I expect you, Mr. Bertram, are this moment wondering that a woman of to−day can interest herself in anything so old as the Church; but methinks even the butterfly (that we are named after) is in a quieter mood when the sun is behind a cloud, and he cannot see the beauteous flowers; we, too, have our dreamy quiet."

"Yes, yes; you, at all events, are not a soulless woman," said Bertram, earnestly.

"There are many of us, Mr. Bertram," said Lady Esmondet, "who actually never think of anything old unless it be our old relations."

"And then, only, if they are on the top rung," laughed Douglas.

"You people are for once forgetting our old china," said Vaura, gaily; "our love's all blue."

"The governor told me to ask you, Bertram," said Douglas, "how you get on with Royalton at Saint Dydimus?"

"We don't get on at all; he has no more inclination for the church, than I have; I pity these younger sons just ran into some fat living as a *dernier ressort*."

"He is just the fellow," said Douglas "to hail as a godsend disestablishment, when he will be compelled to graze in more palatable pastures."

"Oh, when Church and State are severed, primogeniture will follow; then he will get a slice of the estate of the pater," said Vaura.

"And for the younger sons a more comfortable dinner than of herbs," said Bertram.

"Then you think the 'stalled ox' brings one more content in our age of comforts," said Lady Esmondet.

"Undoubtedly."

"And I am at one with you," continued Lady Esmondet, "for it means a full hand, a full purse, without which one might as well be extinct; for one could not pay Society's tolls; yes, the yellow sovereign is all powerful; one may do as one pleases if one fills Grundy's mouth with sugar−plums; she will then shut her eyes and see with ours, for have we not paid our tribute−money? Yes, gold is the passport to society; a chimney sweep, with pots of gold, would find a glad welcome where the beggared son of a belted earl would be driven forth. But, after all, 'tis an amusing age, and one must adapt oneself to one's time. I own there are some unpleasantnesses, as when one meets, as Mrs. Ross−Hatton did, a maid−servant from her mother's household; one would grow used to these mongrels in time, I suppose, as this is the age of progress."

"If no secret, where was the field of action for mistress and maid, godmother mine?"

"No secret whatever, dear; they met at the Lord Elton's, Prospect Hall; you know they are considered exclusive, and, as usual, there were some of the best set there. At one of their dinners a Sir Richard and Lady Jones were invited; my friend did not see their *entree*, being seated in a deep recess with Lord Elton, admiring some rare gems in *bric−a−brac*. She was so intently engaged that, merely glancing upwards as her host stepped forward in welcoming them, to her amazement a coarse, underbred woman stepping towards her, offered her hand, saying: 'I am Lady Jones; I have met you somewhere before.' My friend, giving her a calm British stare, without noticing the hand, said haughtily: 'Yes, I have seen you as one of my mother's household; as under−cook, or something in that way.'"

"By Jove, what a send−off," laughed Douglas.

"I expect at the moment she devoutly wished she had never climbed to a higher rung; but for the *denouement*, godmother."

"Lady Jones beat a retreat immediately, Sir Richard following. Lord Elton, after a word of apology to my friend, told her he was aware they were *nouveaux riches* when invited; but that Jones, a newly−fledged M.P., had also much influence, and he wished to make use of him; so had persuaded Lady Elton to send them cards. 'It does not signify, my dear Lord Elton,' my friend replied; 'I have before now met the most *outre* people with comparative indifference; if the woman had been silent she would, with her vulgar pretensions, be with you now; too bad for you that I have been in the way, dear old friend; I have hopes I shall outgrow this class prejudice, though somewhat faint ones.'"

"'You will, dear Mrs. Ross−Hatton, should you keep pace with our age,' Lord Elton replied.

"Your friend showed a good deal of courage," said Bertram, "to give so direct a cut. I forget who she was, I was abroad at the time of Ross−Hatton's marriage."

"She was a Sutherland; Fido Sutherland, a beauty and a belle, and proud as Lucifer," answered Lady Esmondet.

"And brave as a lion," said Vaura; "for 'tis the fashion to fall down, as the Israelites did in days of yore, and worship the golden calf."

"I fear we are not going to have a passage altogether free from storm," remarked Bertram; "see to the west, that black cloud rolling towards us."

"I think we shall have passed its line of travel ere it catches up to us," said Lady Esmondet.

"By the way, Bertram, did you hear that Capt. Liddo, of the Grenadiers, made this trip in six hours in a small canoe. What do you think of that?" asked Douglas.

"Good enough; though I'd rather make the run in the usual time in our present company. When did Liddo do it?"

"On last Derby day."

"So, so. How long a stay do you make at Paris, Lady Esmondet?"

"I have not decided."

"Ah, that is too bad; I enjoy anticipation, and should like to dwell on the thought of many pleasant hours with you and Miss Vernon."

"We shall be able to manage many hours together at all events, for we can patronize the same hotel," replied Lady Esmondet.

"It is that I know such pleasant arrangement to be impossible that I speak, some friends having taken a French flat for me."

"Ah, I do regret this is the case," said Lady Esmondet.

"At all events, Bertram, we can enter the gates together hand−in−hand, four−in−hand; so cheer up, old fellow," cried Douglas.

"Roland, *mon cher*," said Vaura, "you must bring Isabel from Madame Rochefort's to our hotel, even for a few days, ere your return to Surrey."

"Exactly my plan, fair demoiselle."

"That is" she continued, merrily, "if you promise to be submissive, and not become a monopolist; for when you, Isabel, and myself are together, I feel as if I had lost myself; I don't know to whom I belong; you want me, Isabel wants me, until I don't know where I am."

"Belong to me, Vaura dear," he said, earnestly, and only heard by her, "and all will be well;" aloud he said: "Submissive! yea, as a lamb; by the beard of the Prophet I swear it."

"It would not be such a long look to swear by your own; you have a very handsome one."

"*Merci*, dear Lady Esmondet; I shall take greater pride than ever in it, now it has developed a new use."

"Or, being a true believer, you might have used Aaron's," said Vaura; "only that then would the Prophet have no rest, even in the tomb."

"One requires rest there," said her godmother; "for the demon of unrest hath got us in this lower sphere."

"And it's quite right that it should be so, godmother mine; and in keeping with our ceaseless song of 'I'd be a butterfly.'"

"You are a clever actress, Miss Vernon," said Bertram; "but I am inclined to think there is a latent depth of character, a womanliness in you that our gay butterflies of fashion lack."

"You flatter me, Mr. Bertram."

"Not so, Miss Vernon; in our day there is much to make even a woman think; you are a thinking woman, still one has but to look at your eyes to know that in spite of your graver moods you have a keen zest for what is pleasant in—"

"In this 'Vale of Tears,'" put in Douglas.

Vaura's bright expressive eyes smiled, as looking upwards, she said, feelingly:

"Yes, even though 'much salt water here doth go to waste,' one must— some think, not I—support the weeping human who named our pleasant world a 'Vale of Tears.' No, 'tis better to let one's thoughts dwell on the

song of the nightingale than the voice of the night−bat; We fear too much, and hope too little; 'tis best to dwell in the sunlight while we may."

"Yes, 'tis better to laugh than be crying," said Lady Esmondet; "and though one must go through life with one's eyes open, one need not follow the example of Matthew Arnold's 'Sick King in Bokhara,' and keep them only open to the saddening sights of sin, sorrow, and despair, that the world we know, somewhere, has so much of; one can only do what one can for those in distress; give one's mite, and give it with a kindly smile, in our world of so much to do."

"So many worlds so much to do, so little done such things to be," half sang Vaura; "but here we are at the French port, and so soon."

"One does not often find this a short trip," said Lady Esmondet; "but time has flown, all because of congenial companionship."

"Yes, he has gone too quickly for once," said Bertram; "everyone for his own pleasure; so, as I have a through ticket, I trust none of you wish to linger."

"By no means, with fair Paris our goal," cried Vaura.

"Why, surely, Bertram, you heard the solemn compact entered into on our arrival at Paris hand−in−hand, and the bearded oath I swore to be as amenable to the wishes of *la belle* Vernon as though I were a Jack on wires; and, I appeal to all, could I promise more?"

"Yes," laughed Vaura; "you could promise to be quiet for five minutes, and endeavour to bear a slight semblance to a stolid, deliberate, dignified, wrapt−up−in−himself Briton."

"Alas! and alas for a transformation scene," sighed Douglas.

"Vaura, dear," said Lady Esmondet, "I forgot to tell you I received a note from Felicite, saying they have not as yet left for Normandy, and that we shall find them at their house in the Avenue de l'Imperatrice."

"Ah! that will be pleasant; I love the de Hautervilles root and branch; and wondered a little at their meditating a trip, with the ball for Eau Clair on the *tapis*."

CHAPTER XIII. ADAM.

Our friends being safely in the rail coach *en route* for the city of cities, a word of Roland Douglas; he is eldest son of the Rector of Haughton (whose acquaintance we made in earlier days on the lawn at Haughton, in chat with Col. Haughton and Trevalyon); his father is a Scotchman, who had accepted an English living at the request of his English wife. Roland, heir to a fine property from a Scotch uncle, had, since leaving Cambridge, been left to his own devices, they all frequently spending their holidays at his place, Atholdale, Dunkeld; but his home was with them, he telling them "he was too gregarious a fellow to live alone," that if the ghosts at Atholdale would be agreeable and change their hours of liveliness from midnight to midday, "he might manage to live there." And the rectory was glad to have the life of its circle in its midst.

The three Douglas children, with Vaura Vernon, had been playmates, and the days spent at Haughton Hall were among their most pleasant reminiscences. Bright, merry Roland, with courtly Guy Travers, were favourites of Vaura, each vieing with the other to win her favour, fighting her battles with biped and quadruped, both boys coming to love her with the whole strength of manhood, only to eat their hearts out alone, as others, now in her womanhood, were doing, while Vaura would tell herself, not without a heart−ache, that, "it grieved her to say them nay, but she cared for them only in the dance, only in the sunshine; that in the quieter walks of life, she would long for a spirit more in kinship with her quieter, her higher nature."

Vaura had spent so much of her life with her uncle and godmother, that the men they loved to have about them had probably spoilt her taste for the very young men of to−day. Both she and her godmother, had many friendships among men, believing the interchange of thought to be mutually improving. Indeed, in most cases they trusted their faithfulness, their sincerity, more than that of their own sex. And, alas! with good reason, men having a larger share of that greatest of gifts, charity! their knowledge of human nature making them rarely censorious, their education giving them larger, broader views; how many women, alas, are essentially censorious, uncharitable and narrow−minded. Yes, nature has been lavish in gifts to Adam, as opposed to Eve.

Roland Douglas had not as yet told his love to Vaura, a great dread mastering him lest he had not won her love, for her merry banter and kind sisterly manner led him to fear her heart, that he coveted beyond all that earth could give, was not for him, but he told himself he must speak, and that soon, for longer suspense was more than he could endure; he hoped that her sympathetic nature might tell in his favour, and that in pitying his great loneliness, she would come to him.

CHAPTER XIV. OF LIONEL TREVALYON.

Meanwhile our friends are rapidly nearing Paris, and, even as we speak, their train is at the depot.

“Ah, here we are, and our pleasant journeying *pour le present* a thing of the past,” said Lady Esmondet.

“How long a stay do you make here?” asked Bertram, giving her his arm to a *carrosse*.

“The Fates only know; *la belle* Paris offers so many attractions, that I have decided not to make up my mind in the matter, for I always am seduced into staying a much longer time than I had previously intended; there is always so much to amuse one.”

“And such a legion of people to see,” said Vaura; “there is no place like Paris for enchaining one, and causing one to love one's chains.”

“Look, quick,” cried Lady Esmondet, hurriedly, “some one; is that Captain Trevalyon over there, evidently looking for some one, or is it his spirit?”

“It is he in the flesh; and looking anything but *spirituel*,” said Vaura as she thought, “Yes, she would know him anywhere; her knight; so different to any other man she meets.”

Yes, Vaura, so we all think when our king comes; beware, guard your heart, if you would not yield to this fascinating man who slays at will.

“Stay, foolish heart,” thought on Vaura, “you are even now feeling less interest in Roland, who would die for you; fill thy whole being with a careless gaiety, and leave no room for a softer feeling to master thee; remember the 'hidden wife,' and even should she not exist, remember hearts are his game.”

“Ah, the dear fellow sees us, and is pushing his way towards us,” said Lady Esmondet.

“The *dear* fellow,” said Douglas. “that's the way all you ladies speak of Trevalyon, lucky fellow.”

“And he, from what I hear, takes their homage as his right,” said Bertram.

“Oh! yes, as coolly as possible,” said Vaura, gayly; “he's a bit of philosopher, you know; I remember I used to wonder if he had feelings like common mortals, and if all his loves were platonic; I vow I have a great notion to become a disciple of Plato myself; 'twould save one a world of heart−ache.”

“Treason, treason,” laughed Douglas; “better be a follower of Epicurus.”

“What nonsense you people do talk,” said Bertram, in mock reproof, “and neither of you mean a word of what you say. I now prophesy; that out of revenge, Cupid will wound your large heart, Miss Vernon, and you will give up to some thrice fortunate man; as for you, Douglas I prophesy many a bumping heart−ache.”

“And how long, oh prophet, do you give us of freedom; how long before our chains are forged?” enquired Vaura, jestingly.

“Ere the chill of winter is felt in our land,” Bertram answered in mock earnestness.

“And the cry of the farmer is heard, as he sees the black frost on the spring wheat,” laughed Douglas.

“Delighted to see you, Lady Esmondet,” said Trevalyon, taking off his hat and shaking hands; “and you also, Miss Vernon, it is more than ages since I have had any more than a glimpse at you. Allow me to welcome you all to fair Paris; Colonel Haughton assigned me the very pleasant role of attendant cavalier during your stay here, as also body guard to your royal highnesses on your journey to the Immortal city, whither I too am bound; why, Douglas, you here, and wherefore? I thought you had not yet deserted your winged loves at Atholdale; any good shooting this season?”

“Yes, pretty fair,” answered Douglas, disappointed at the way things were turning out, and wishing Trevalyon at South Africa, or any where, so he was not by Vaura's side. He knew Trevalyon to be a man of cultivated intellect, with a fascination of manner all women succumbed to, with fully ten years more experience of life than his own, and with a nice knowledge of all types of women. He knew him to be the dread of all mothers with marriageable daughters, both for themselves as disturbing their calm resignation as to what husband Fate had given them, as also the sad havoc he made among their brood; of how they plumed their feathers at his coming and drooped them at his going, causing many an eligible suitor to retire from the field. Society wondered that Trevalyon did not range himself, seeing so many beautiful women his conquests. He shrugged his shoulders when chaffed by his men friends as to his flirtations and cruelty, and would say:

“A slave of the ring is not a *role* I have any wish to play; at all events none of the pretty women I have flirted

with so far have had the power to hold me as her own. And until I meet a woman who can hold me, and keep me from a wish to rove, I shall keep my freedom."

Then he would laugh and say: "After all, *mon ami*, I am not as cruel, cold, or flirting as yourself. Your motto after as well as before marriage is: *Si l'amour a des ailes n'est−ce pas pour voltiger*. Better to act on that principle prior to (as you say I do), than after marriage, as I know you all do; better not put the shackles on until one meets a woman who will cause one not to feel them. As to your charge of heartlessness against me, trust me; you say I know them; under the amiable exterior of some of the most gentle−voiced and loveliest, there throbs a cruel heartlessness.

"After all there is a good deal of the feline in woman, witness the many marriages, ninety−nine out of every hundred are made by our fashionable women, for money or position? Yes, they like the warm corner, it matters not who gives it; and the man who loves them, and whom they love—in a way, may eat his heart out alone; for no, they will not listen to his pleadings, he has no gold. And they marry a man to whom they are perfectly indifferent, not so to his belongings, these they love with all the love of their feline hearts. No, I am not cruel, I only amuse myself as you do, and in the way each likes best."

He acknowledges there must be women who are heroines, and perhaps he may yet meet them, but as yet, he "only knows in God's world there must be women men might worship."

"*Sans doute*," he says: "When petticoat does remain tender and true, it is hard upon her that her lord should prove false and fickle, given the warm corner our fair 'sisters, cousins, and our aunts,' are content to purr; they shine in society, and have gained what is the very end and aim of their existence, a wealthy marriage."

It is no wonder that poor Douglas, knowing the manner of man Trevalyon was, dreaded his companionship for Vaura; what if she should charm, as she certainly could if she would, the game would all be up for him; and even should Vaura, knowing his reputation as a successful male flirt, be on her guard. If Trevalyon determined to win her, the many fascinations of manner he was master of, he having made woman a study, would cause her, he feared, to succumb at the last. He felt unmanned, and decided to leave them and go at once for Isabel, and proceed back to England. For of one thing he felt sure, and that was that Trevalyon would be attracted by Vaura, if it were only for her originality, the freshness of her thoughts, her gay droll cynicism with no malice in it, merely showing she went through life with open eyes; her sunny temperament and gay conversation, to say nothing of her dear loveable self, and as he turned to look at her, her laughing grey eyes looking like stars, and a smile on her perfect lips, as she chatted gayly, he inwardly moaned at what he might never call his own.

"Come, Roland," Vaura cried, "there's room for thee, most grave and reverend *seigneur*; for you do look as grave as an owl this moment. Is thy favourite pipe missing, or hast lost thy pet brand of that panacea for thy every ill, tobacco?"

"No, I am not bereft of my old friend, my meerschaum pipe; but, being only a mere sham," he added with a forced laugh, "I don't expect it to develop qualities that will console me at parting with you and Lady Esmondet, whose remembrance of me, I hope, will prove more than a sham."

"A pretty speech, Roland," said Vaura, stepping from the carriage to speak to him; "but I protest against this parting."

"You forget, Vaura, what my mission, at least my avowed mission, was," he said, in an undertone, "incoming to Paris; I shall now go for Isabel. And away, you have a man with you now who never thinks or cares for the hunger and thirst of the men near him; he drinks the cup of sweets to the dregs himself. Good−bye; think of me sometimes, for you must know you are always in my thoughts."

And stepping forward with Vaura, he placed her in the carriage, and wishing all good−bye and much enjoyment, saying to Vaura and Lady Esmondet: "Don't fail to make the Hall blithe and gay at Christmas by your presence;" lifted his hat and was gone. Trevalyon was not slow to see this little by−play, and his mental conclusion was:

"Another fellow gone, stricken by a fair woman face, well I don't wonder, by Jove; for the beautiful little girl has developed into a lovelier woman, a man need not be ashamed to be the conquest of a face figure, and I've heard men say, mind, like Vaura Vernon possesses; heaven be praised for the retreat of the Douglas, though had the Douglas been wise he'd have kept the field, or tried to, but now I, while guarding my heart, shall talk to her; it will be a pleasant way to kill time, and her vivacity, merry banter, chit−chat, or grave to gay, or who knows, tender humours, will be a pleasant study in Rome for the next month or two."

“Well, here we are snug at last,” said Lady Esmondet, as they rolled along to their hotel in a comfortable carriage; “and I am not sorry, for *je suis tres fatiguee*. But I am really sorry Roland has gone; you will have to exert yourself, Lionel, if you don't want us to miss him, for we shall be altogether at your tender mercy.”

“It is such seductive happiness the knowing you are leaning upon me, that I, Trevalyon, warn you both I shall do all I can to cause you not to regret the Douglas.”

“You forget, *ma chere* godmother,” said Vaura, “that we also have Mr. Bertram; he is a man of weight,” she added laughingly, “and can surely share the weighty matter of our amusement with Captain Trevalyon.”

Mr. Bertram has his weighty agency on his mind, you know; he is one of the agents sent by government to attend to our interests at the coming exposition, and as the Prince of Wales, heaven bless him, has personally interested himself to make the huge show one great success, they will all vie with each other in their different departments; indeed, I expect Mr. Bertram will only now have time to fly in occasionally to have a look at us. How about your lazy club life, Mr. Bertram?”

“Yes, Bertram, your luxurious go−as−you−please existence is at London; you *a* Paris,” said Trevalyon gayly.

“I fully expect my gossips at the club won't know me on my return; I shall be a skeleton frame, rack and bones, and my aldermanic rotundity will be in the streets and audience chambers of Paris.”

“A man of your size, Bertram, won't regret a few pounds of flesh weighed in the balance as against the success of our exhibits,” said Trevalyon.

“Not while I remember,” answered Bertram, “Gladstone's remarks in the *Fortnightly Review*, his almost prediction (unless we bestir ourselves): That England's daughter, the Great United States of America, may yet in the near future wrest from us our position in manufacturing of Head servant to the household of the world. Many of we British want a rough reminder like that.”

“Yes,” said Vaura, “some of our manufacturers forget that younger nations are wide−awake and eager to pass us by at a hand−galop, while we go dozing through time with our night−caps on.”

“We are England, that's enough, and we cannot realize that the world moves. We plume ourselves upon the time when we handed from our docks everything to poor indolent Europe, or only for the ignorant colonies,” said Lady Esmondet, ironically.

“*N'importe, chere* Lady Esmondet,” answered Trevalyon, merrily. “Our manufacturers will wake with a start in 1878, and forego both night− caps; they won't have time to brew the one or don the other in surprise at exhibits from the poor colonies and the ingenious Americans.”

“I have no doubt our manufacturers with myself will not be off with our old loves, while we can keep them; my comforts are safe, for I seduced one of the cooks from the club to come here with me; so night or day caps are to the fore,” said Bertram.

“I thought,” replied Trevalyon, “for a man of your taste, you had a most contentedly jolly look; no wonder, when we know the way to the aldermanic heart is through the aldermanic stomach.”

“Capt. Trevalyon,” laughingly said Vaura, “besides the *recherche* little dinner Mr. Bertram has bid us to, I want you to cater to— another sense and let us see the immense Hotel Continental!”

“Consider the Continental on the programme, my dear Miss Vernon; Mr. Bertram's *chef de cuisine* will cater to the inner man,” answered Trevalyon.

“Women sometimes eat,” said Vaura, demurely.

“How gay the streets look,” remarked Lady Esmondet, “it is always a *fete* day *a* Paris.”

“A month or two ago the bands in the parks filled the air with music,” said Vaura; “now it is filled with the murmur of many voices, see the little chesnut−seller doing his part.”

“Here we are, *Hotel Liberte le Soleil*,” said Trevalyon, as the carriage stopped.

“And here we part,” said Bertram, “not, in the language of the poet, 'to meet no more,' but to meet on to−morrow eve at my appartments, and I shall inform my cook that three of England's epicures honour me, and to get up something better than frogs' legs.”

“We shall expect ambrosia,” laughed Lady Esmondet.

“*Tres bien*, I shall not forget,” said Bertram, as he made his adieux.

“Au revoir, Bertram,” cried Trevalyon. “And for your life don't forget a dish of turtle's liver from Voisin's.

“We have teased him enough at all events,” said Lady Esmondet; “but as for turtle's liver, I am rather chary of it as yet. But do my eyes deceive me, or is it petticoat government here?”

“Yes, feminine rule is the order of the day,” replied Trevalyon.

“How important we look in possession of office, desk and stool; I was not aware we had mounted so high anywhere outside the United States,” said Lady Esmondet.

Here a man in neat livery stepped forward to show them to their suite of apartments, which Trevalyon, at the written request of his friend, had secured, who now seeing his companions *en route* for their rooms, bent his steps in the direction of the office to complete the necessary business arrangements.

CHAPTER XV. HEART−STIRS.

As our friends followed the servant, a child's cry proceeded from one of the salons as they passed; the page had a comedy face, and Vaura thinking his reply might amuse, asked:

“Do the babies take care of each other?”

With a farcical expression, the man answered unlocking the doors:

“*Oui*, Mademoiselle.”

“Women crow everywhere, for men are no where, and babies anywhere.” The maids seeing to bath and toilette, their mistresses met in the comfortable *salon* which was entered on either side from each sleeping chamber and small boudoir; soon in pleasant converse, or pauses of quiet, as friends who know and love each other can indulge in; Lady Esmondet and Vaura passed the time until the *entree* of Trevalyon to escort them to the *salle a manger* and *table d'hote*; as he sees them he thinks, “how charming they look refreshed and re−robed, each wearing gown and neck−gear, artistic in draping and colour. How is it that some women have (Vaura always had it), some innate gift in robing, causing one's eyes to rest on them and not tire, again both possess a subtle charm of manner; Vaura has as veil a voice that woos one as she speaks. Haughton shall have my warmest thanks for giving me such companionship; dear old fellow, he did not forget my request.” And stepping to Vaura, he hands her a bouquet of sweet tea−roses, saying:

“You see, Miss Vernon, your Knight of the Lion Heart, as in days of yore you dubbed me, has not forgotten the button−hole bouquets you used to make as child hostess; it is not aesthetic, as from your fingers; this is only from the basket of one of the people.”

“*Merci*; as your unfashionably retentive memory bring me so much of sweetness, then am I happy in your being unfashionable.” And as she fastened a few to her corsage, placing the remainder in a vase, she continued: “See, god−mother dear, my sweet tea−roses with their perfumed voice will remind us of our usual excursion on to−morrow.”

“And may I know what this usual excursion is?” asked Trevalyon, as he seated himself between his companions at table.

“Surely, yes,” said Vaura; “one we almost invariably make on coming abroad, should we be located at an hotel for many days, where they don't as a rule, cater to one's olfactory nerves, we journey to some of the conservatories and rob them of many odorous blossoms, to brighten our temporary home; this time we carry a large order for Haughton Hall, so large indeed, that I should not wonder; did the vendors take us for market gardeners; robbing sweet sunny Paris to brighten and perfume our London fog.”

“Or perhaps,” said Lady Esmondet, “as there is so much discussion is Canadian newspapers over Free Trade *versus* Protection; the great unread may mix us so up that we buy before duty is laid.”

“Take my word for it, Lady Alice, did the Frenchman look upon you as despoilers, in the long run, he would not even try to resist making your purse as trash for to−day.”

“Were I a flower vendor,” said Vaura, “I should be a follower of Bastiat, and gather my roses while I may, by selling cheap as I could and buying cheap.”

“Are you feeling better, Lady Alice, though to my eyes you are looking much as when last I saw you; Haughton tells me you are going to Italy for change,” he said kindly.

“Yes, I don't feel quite myself, Lionel; and Italy will be sun−warm, what I require, my physician tells me; but the air on the water has given me such an apetite, I feel better already.”

“The very scene we are in is enough to cure one; so bright, so gay, *chic* in every way,” said Vaura.

“Yes, 'tis brimful of animation,” said Trevalyon; and the *salle a manger* is preferable to privacy; when one travels, 'tis more of a change to live its life, the continuous noise, bustle and excitement take one out of oneself.”

“Which is a panacea for all one's ills,” said Vaura.

“You have not yet told us your experience in the office; was the major−domo very peremptory?” asked Lady Esmondet.

“No; on the whole she bore her high seat meekly enough.”

“Now to me,” said Vaura, “it is more preferable to, as women did in days of yore, buckle on the armour for

some brave Knight, see that helmet and breast−plate are secure, and send him forth into the world's turmoil; yes, I am content to live my woman life."

"Because you know your power and feel it sweet, is why you are content," he said in low tones, letting his mesmeric eyes rest on her beautiful face.

"But is it true, Lionel," said Lady Esmondet, (as they left the table, followed by many eyes), "is it true that at Bordeaux, Lyons, Marseilles, &c., women fill manly offices?"

"True, 'tis true, and I must tell you a funny incident bearing on this question. My friend, Ross Halton, was over at New York immediately after their recent monster elections; a friend of his was defeated; his agent telling him there was foul play somewhere, for numerous votes promised him were eventually polled for the other side; passing the house of a party man, out of curiosity he went in to ascertain if he had been true to his colours; on asking him, the man looking sheepish, hanging his head, said: 'The wife's democrat, sir,' while a quick determined, little woman stepped forward, saying: 'he,' pointing to her husband, 'sees you or your agent once a year, when you come to buy his vote; he lives with me!'"

"Whither are we drifting?" said Lady Esmondet, sinking into a chair.

"Whither are we drifting," echoed Vaura, with animation, "as sure as Fate, into the 'Gy' and 'An' of Bulwer's New Utopia; but talking of woman's rights, reminds me of the rights of man. Did you say dear uncle gave you your charter to meet us so opportunely, and locate us so pleasantly.".

"I did, *ma belle*; but you scarcely heard, as at the time you were listening to the adieux of the Douglas."

"Ah, yes, poor Roland," and Trevalyon saw that a little sigh was given, but there is no sadness in the dark eyes turned again to him, as she says, "and poor uncle; I wonder what the county people will think of Madame."

"She can make herself popular if she will; she at all events has the wherewithal to buy their vote," said Lady Esmondet, as she buried herself in *London Truth*.

"Yes, that's true, I suppose she will take," said Vaura, musingly.

"You don't know how delightful I find the being again with you, Miss Vernon," said Trevalyon, earnestly. "Such a lapse of time since the old life at Haughton."

"Yes, I remember well," and the rose deepened in her soft cheek, "so well the last time I saw you there."

"Do you; I am glad you do not forget what I never shall," and he leaned forward, looking at her almost gravely.

Vaura too, in her long look backward, had a tremulous softness in her expression, with a far−away look in the eyes, vividly recalling the lovely child−woman to his memory. Rousing herself, she says: "Lady Esmondet, *ma chere*, you should bury yourself in your couch instead of *Truth*, it grows late; and I am to take care of you."

"In a few moments, dear, I am on something that interests me," she said, without raising her eyes from the paper.

"And I," said Trevalyon, "am forgetting a friend in my apartments; lonely and alone in a strange place."

"Your friend," said Vaura, with a swift thought to the hidden wife, "must think you the extreme of fashionable to receive at the witching hour of midnight."

"My friend does not care whether I be fashionable, but worships me, and would be with me morning, noon and night."

"You speak as if you believe," she said, veiling her eyes, and idly picking off the leaves of the roses.

"Yes, past doubting; not being a Christian, I am the only god my friend worships."

"Women have spoiled you, Capt. Trevalyon; you boast of our idolatry." For the first time he partly reads her latent thought; and saying, hurriedly, "Stay here five minutes," rising quickly, left the boudoir.

"What has he gone away so hastily for?" enquired Lady Esmondet, turning from the newspaper. "Lionel, dear fellow, is usually so easy in his gait."

"To see some one who worships at his shrine; said he would return in five minutes;" she answered, carelessly.

"Oh! he did not say who?"

"No, it might have been awkward."

"Why? what do you mean, *ma chere*?"

"It might relate to the hidden wife story."

"Nonsense, Vaura; mark my words, he has no more a hidden wife than you have a hidden husband."

"Yes, yes, I know, and should not be hasty, for *errare est humanum*," she said quickly, brushing something

very like a tear from her bright eyes.

“I am so glad, dear,” said Lady Esmondet, apparently not noticing her emotion, “that your uncle hit upon this plan of Lionel being our travelling companion, there is so much adaptability in him, he gives one quite a restful feeling.”

“Own at once,” she answered, recovering herself, “that 'tis pleasant to have a man about one, and that we have not drawn a blank in our present squire *des dames*.”

“Just my thought, dear; but he is coming, or it may be they, for Lionel is talking to some one.”

“The deity and his votary; now do you forgive my faith and credulity, Miss Vernon,” he said, sauntering in with a noble dog at his heels.

“Splendid fellow,” cried Vaura, impulsively, drawing his head to her knee, laying her cheek against it; looking up at his master she said: “Forgive me, I misunderstood you; remembering you only as my old−time Knight of the Lion Heart, I feared the world of women had spoiled you.”

“You know how to heal when you wound,” he answered gently.

“Is he not a Leonberg?” said Lady Esmondet, as the dog went to her side to be caressed.

“Yes, and they are the best dogs in existence; dear old Mars, it would be strange indeed were I not attached to him, he never tires; in all my wanderings is always faithful.”

“And 'man is the god of the dog,' which a moment ago I did not remember; you will not have to remind us of the old adage, 'love me, love my dog,' for we shall love the dear old fellow for his own sake,” said Vaura.

“Yes, indeed, Lionel,” said Lady Esmondet; “you need have no fear of banishment on his account.”

“Thank you,” he said, receiving and giving to both a warm hand−clasp. “Depend upon it, if Mars has any battles to fight for you, he will not put to shame his name; and now we leave you to woo the god of slumber.”

CHAPTER XVI. LIFTING THE VAIL.

The following morn the sun arose and smiled his greeting on gay Paris—methinks Old Sol weeps, when clouds come between his beams and the gayest of cities. Lady Esmondet and Vaura enjoyed their drive through the beautiful boulevards out into the suburbs, and to one of the largest public conservatories; the gardens were a scene of enchanting loveliness, laid out in the perfection of artistic taste; the friends roamed whither their will led, revelling in the perfumed air and beauty of colouring.

“Here,” said Vaura, “one could be content to sing, 'I'd be a butterfly,' all day long.”

“Yes, but only, *ma chere*, for a summer day.”

“I am afraid you are right, godmother mine, and that when winter with the gay season came on the boards of life, I should prove faithless and sing, Oh, for the sights and the sounds of the season for me!”

“But we cannot linger longer, Vaura; we must go to the office and leave our order.”

Having left an order that astonished the clerk, they took a reluctant leave of this lovely floral nest. They ordered the man drive towards the city in the immediate vicinity, of which Vaura alighted at a neat cottage to visit a blind *protegee*, one Marie Perrault, daughter of a one−time actor of no mean repute, who had taught elocution at the Seminaire where Miss Vernon had finished her education. Monsieur Perrault had assisted Vaura in the getting up of theatricals, she having developed such excellent histrionic powers. Perrault secretly hoped she would yet make her *debut* from the boards of his favourite Lyceum Theatre Francais.

Marie was overjoyed at the pleasant surprise of a visit from her benefactress, whose face, lovely as it was, and lit up with the joy of living, gay chit−chat, and sweet−scented blossoms she carried seemed to brighten, as with sunbeams, her darkened life. Vaura stayed long enough to leave her gifts of fruit, flowers, and kind words for M. Perrault; and left for the Seminaire of Madame Rocheforte, there she lunched, and learned that Isabel Douglas had left for England, immediately on the arrival of Roland.

“Isabel is a sweet girl, and her brother a noble fellow,” said Madame, earnestly; “and I conclude from what she tells me that her brother loves you with one great love. I feel for you like a mother, Vaura, so you will understand my speaking, and I hope love will creep into your heart for him.”

“I trust you are mistaken, Madame, for it would grieve me very much, more indeed than I can express to cause him pain.”

“I hope you will change, *ma chere*; woman is fickle; and when he pleads, as I am sure he can, you will not look on his handsome face unmoved.”

“He has made a conquest of you, *chere madame*,” said Vaura, gravely kissing her on both cheeks in adieu.

“*Oui*, *ma chere*, but,—for you.”

“*N'importe*, madame; remember 'that men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love.'“

“You know better, Vaura.”

And as she walked in the direction of her hotel (attended by one of the school servants) she told herself that there was not always truth in the words, witness dear Guy and others; poor Roland too; she hoped he would not take it to heart. On entering the hotel her maid met her with a message from Lady Esmondet bidding her dress at once for Mr. Bertram's dinner. Vaura, telling Saunders to be expeditious—she would wear her biscuit colored satin, old lace, coral ornaments—is soon robed; her fluffy hair, almost bronze in its brightness and so luxuriant giving her maid no trouble, is as an old time saint hath it, 'a glory to her,' while the warm tints of her rich beauty is set off by the colour of her gown.

“You are a treasure, Saunders,” said her mistress; “I find you have dressed me so quickly I shall have time for a little reading; go tell Lady Esmondet I now await her pleasure to leave.”

“You are so easy to dress, miss; you see, Mademoiselle, your eyes and complexion don't want doing up; now when I was maid to the Misses Verlingham—”

“Spare me the mysteries of the *toilette*, Saunders, and do my bidding; mysteries indeed,” thought she, half−laughing, “what would the poor men say could they see the war−paint putting on for their slaughter,” and picking up one of W. H. Mallock's novels she sank into a cosy corner. In half an hour Saunders returned, saying that Lady Esmondet with Capt. Trevalyon were waiting in the *salon*. Enveloped in a carriage wrap of white wool,

with the dainty hood of satin of her gown covered with old lace, she joins her companions, with a “may I.” Capt. Trevalyon loosens the fleecy wrap and fastens with a diamond pin some damask−roses and yellow pansies to her corsage. As they roll speedily along, Lady Esmondet calls on Vaura to give an account of herself in the hours of her absence.

“I was beginning to think, dear, that M. Perrault was renewing his entreaties that you should take to the boards of the Theatre Francais.”

“I did not meet him, else doubtless he would,” she answered.

On Lady Esmondet's remark, she thought (in the flickering light) a cloud came to Trevalyon's brow, and now that a converse sweet, broken and changeful was taking place between Vaura and he; Lady Esmondet gave herself up to thoughts of the past engendered by the cloud on the brow of her friend, usually so calmly careless, and she thought he naturally would dread one so lovely and gifted living the life of theatres, if it were only that in his interest in her, she would drift away from them; and home life in the fascinations of an actress existence. And a divorce suit of some thirty years ago, which as a very young girl of fourteen, she remembered—all now came again to her memory,—in which the principal actors were Lionel's father, Hugh Trevalyon and his beautiful wife Nora. Both were passionate lovers of the drama; the Trevalyons frequently wintered at Paris, where they made the acquaintance of one of the principal actors of the day. He was a handsome man with a charm of manner none could resist, and as fate would have it, living at the same hotel, he so ingratiated himself into favour with both, who in their admiration of his talents almost deified him, that he was the recipient of an invitation in his idle days to the Towers; while there, an overwhelming passion for his beautiful hostess completely mastered him. She, always fascinated by his seductive manner, when he pleaded, gave way, feeling that she had met her master; accustomed to worship his talents, she simply felt she was his if he willed; finally at the close of a night of revelry, ball and theatricals at the Towers she gave up, consenting, nay willing, to elope at his wish, with only a passing thought to her little boy and once loved husband; she was his; he was her god, and she never dreamed of the man she had taken for better or for worse; her husband sued for and obtained a divorce, the actor marrying his love at once, but she only lived for two short years passing in her beauty and frailty from the judgment of society to the judgment of high heaven. “Poor fool,” said many a fair dame with a contemptuous shrug of shoulders, “why was she so verdant as to elope? with a husband as adoring she might easily have kept her place in society and her actor too.” And so when they met they passed her by, she not having the wisdom of the world. And Lady Esmondet from the corner of the carriage thought on; of how Lionel's father on his wife's desertion of him had gone to the dogs, rushing into all kinds of mad dissipation up to the time of his wife's death, when he became a confirmed misanthrope, living in absolute seclusion until his own death some two years agone; while going to destruction for distraction's sake, poor man, he had reduced his income to about L8,000 per annum. Before his death he had imbued Lionel with a distrust of women, endeavouring to extract an oath of celibacy from the son whom he loved, and who loved him. “Never trust one of the frail sex with your name and honor, my son,” he would never tire of saying. Lionel did not make an oath as his father prayed, but said wearily, “Never fear, father, I shall trust none of the gay butterflies further than I can see the brightness of their wings; much less give them, any one of them, the chance to sully our escutcheon with another blot,” and continuing he would woo his poor father to quiet by saying, “No, I know them too well; our motto is theirs, they are “always the same, always. *Toedet tandem, eadem fecisse*,” and again he would woo him to quiet by “No, do not grieve for me, father, I shall not wed unless an angel descends for my benefit; but did she, she would be then a fallen angel,” and the poor, broken−hearted man died in his son's arms, contented in his wish. But even now, Lionel feels that as the child Vaura had a charm for him, so the fair woman opposite him has, and that if he but yields to it, it may master him; for his race are “always the same, always” in one thing which is, a love lasting as time for one woman; though having many *affaires de coeur*; they feel one *grande passion*, one wedded love, never marrying a second time. And the *carrosse* rolls along, and Lionel with an irresistible craving, even if he comes to grief, which he tells himself there is no fear of, feels the pulse, as it were, of Vaura's heart, to see if the world has left unspoiled the tender, sympathetic, true and loving nature of the child he knew so well. “You are right, Capt. Trevalyon, sympathy, true, soul−felt, and earnest, never dies; it is the *root* of wedded happiness; alas, how many lives are wrecked through the absence of it,” she says sadly, but he feels, and not without a heartache, that she is oblivious almost of his presence; her lovely face in its frame−work of lace is turned from him, as she thinks, “and yet, pity is divine! yet; knowing this, what have I shown poor Guy.” The erratic life poor Lionel led, and which had been

almost compulsory, the weary cynicism which was the outcome of the life enforced upon him, by his mother's frailty and his father's lasting grief thereat, often palled upon his real nature. But as he never expected to meet a woman who could hold him, he frequently gave himself, epicurean−like, to the pleasure of the hour.

After leaving the army, and when the glittering wings of butterflies and their surroundings wearied him, he would leave the gay cities, and travel much in foreign lands, in cold bleak northern latitudes, or sunny climes, studying human nature, and giving some thought to its many phases, with the different creeds men hold at times on seeing the self sacrificing lives of the sisters of charity, on witnessing noble deeds which should be written in characters of gold, but which they did in the most humble self abnegation. When he looked upon these and knew them to be the outcome of the Roman Catholic Church he would think surely the Church that gives birth to such lives must be the Church for the saving of men. But then some glaring inconsistency of those within her pale would recur to his memory, and he would turn with a sigh from some pictured Christ, or the peaceful beauty of the madonna. Well might Lionel exclaim, “In this age of seeming, what is truth! for what grade of society has not its shams! in what church are there not hypocrites as saints! in what government is there not imperfection! in what political campaign is there not a bribe given! in what age were there so many Churches.” In what age was religion so fashionable! Yes, to−day, it is not charity which covers the multitude of sins, it is the cloak of religion, and yet 'tis not the fault of creeds, 'tis *errare est humanum*. Ah me! we gay nineteenth century butterflies are a favoured generation; we are so respectable you know; we give the Church her innings, and that ancient firm of Bacchus and Comus have their innings also. Such thoughts as the above often came to Lionel, in his lonely wanderings far away from the gay cities, a life which he adorned with such gay abandon when one of them.

And now lady Esmondet awakes to the present with a start (as the carriage stops,) and from her silent thoughts on the past, as she had gathered it from Eric Haughton and from Lionel himself.

CHAPTER XVII. CHIC AUJOURD'HUI.

Captain Trevalyon assisted his friends to alight in front of a handsome house in a fashionable avenue.

“Can this be the right address,” said Lady Esmondet. “It is a private residence *et regardez*, by the gas−light in the entrance one can see the arms of a noble house cut in the stone.”

“Yes,” answered Trevalyon, “we are all right; a patrician mansion knocked down by the hammer, now simply *numero troisieme*, Avenue de l'Imperatrice, and if Bertram is as comfortable inside as he is fashionable outside then we may expect turtle's livers *a la Francaise*, the choicest of wines in this hot−bed of grapes, this land of vineyards, dishes that would tickle the palate of a Lucullus, the cosiest of after dinner chairs, French coffee, which means a good deal, the brightest of fires, and faces, sweet notes of song,” with a glance at Vaura, “and the most delicate of cigarettes, so delicate as not to entail the punishment of banishment from two ladies fair.”

“What a luxurious picture you draw, Captain Trevalyon,” said Vaura gayly, “and what an epicure! you dwell with such pleasure upon each dish, your livers, your—”

“*Pardonnez*,” answered Trevalyon, laughing; “not mine, the turtle's” and continuing with mock gravity, “I never expect mine to be dressed at Voisin's.”

“Horrible! a too warm anticipation of torment,” cried Vaura.

“Torment!” said their host, stepping forward as a servant announced them, and tortures are obsolete words in gay Paris and even in the reign of terror, such a fair vision would surely have escaped. “A hundred thousand welcomes,” he continued, shaking hands with all, “and I feel sure no bachelor under the McMahon *regime* is so highly favoured as Edward F. Bertram to−night.”

“Listen,” cried Vaura, “Mr. Bertram will put to shame the gay gallants of Paris, in the making of pretty speeches; I believe the air of this room is conducive to that sort of thing; I feel inclined to say something complimentary on the beauty and comfort of our host's surroundings myself.

“Relieve my curiosity, Mr. Bertram, and tell me where you are?” said Lady Esmondet, as she leaned back and placed her feet on the softest of fender stools; “we came to dine with a bachelor in something of bachelor, live−by−myself style, and we find ourselves in a noble mansion.”

“Yes, Bertram,” said Trevalyon; “I was aware of the capacity of a London alderman, in catering to the comfort of his pampered body; but, I repeat Lady Esmondet's question of where are you.”

“And I answer,” said the voice of gay Mrs. Eustace Wingfield, as she entered, “in one of the most fashionable of French flats on Avenue de l'Imperatrice, the fourth flat of said number Eustace and I are fortunate denizens of, and I can assure you, the inmates are such pleasant people that, yours truly, with Eustace, are oftener to be found in these sunny quarters than at Eaton Square, London.”

“You are happy,” said Vaura, “never out of the sunshine.”

“Yes, I like it,” said Mrs. Wingfield; “I can't live in the shade, and Mr. Bertram has me to adore for giving him the sun−light of this dwelling. I saw by the papers he was to make his exodus from London, so I telegraphed him to come here, and bring on a box of French novels we had forgotten.”

“One does sometimes forget the most important part of one's luggage,” said Vaura.

“But,” said Trevalyon, “I'll wager Bertram did not forget your mental food.”

“Not he, with his aldermanic taste for spicy dishes,” said Vaura.

“No, the temptation would be too much for him, with the *piece de resistance*, an uninteresting husband, side dish, paragon lover, *entree*, neglected wife with flavourings thrown in, scandals, duels, etc.,” said Trevalyon.

“How well he knows the condiments,” remarked their host in sly tones, and rubbing his hands softly; “but talking of condiments, reminds one of dinner, and that Everly should be here.”

“I hear a footstep on the hill which doesn't grow fainter, fainter still,” said Mrs. Wingfield.

“Here we are again,” said Sir Tilton Everly, entering, and shaking hands with all, continued: “I hope, Bertram, I havn't kept your dinner waiting.”

“No, no, my dear fellow, my dinner waits for no man.”

“You see our gallant host makes an exception in our favour, Sir Tilton,” said Lady Esmondet.

“He considers the length of our toilette,” said Mrs. Wingfield.

"And train," laughed Vaura, as Trevalyon caught his foot in her trailing skirts, in crossing behind to offer his arm.

"Go where one will," said Trevalyon, covered by the hum of voices; "one is sure to fall in with Everly."

"Yes, uncle Eric says he reminds him of the clown at a circus, with his cherry cry of 'here I am again.'"

"He seemed to me to be a sort of pet monkey of Mrs. Haughton; I hope he will not deem it necessary to transfer his little attentions to you, or I shall feel inclined to tell him that I am your knight *pour le present*, and show him my colours, in shape of telegram from your uncle (if I may not wear yours)," he added in persuasive tones.

"You can still be my knight errant," and her soulful eyes turn to his face, "he, one of my retainers."

"No divided honours for me, *ma belle*."

Here their chit−chat is interrupted by the subject of their converse, addressing Miss Vernon, across the table.

"Just come from Haughton Hall, Miss Vernon?"

"Yes."

"All well I hope? more especially my uncle."

"Never saw him looking better; I just ran down for twenty−four hours."

"How is the place looking? I don't mean the exterior, the park and grounds are always beautiful (and thank heaven cannot change), but the interior."

"Gorgeous! never saw anything to equal it."

"The festivities were brilliant, I presume?"

"Should say so; the county were tongue−tied in admiration; couldn't find words."

"You had no time for the birds, Everly, I suppose," said Trevalyon.

"Yes, a couple of hours of it; and what with the ball, dinner, fireworks, hurrahs, &c., and killing of birds—"

"And young women," cried Mrs. Wingfield.

"But in the time," laughed small Everly, "we really made some fine running on the feathered tribe."

"Ostrich feathered?" said Vaura.

"Nay, let him alone for that; else would Mrs. Haughton have made some running or gone for him? excuse the slang," said Mrs. Wingfield, mischievously.

"Many of us would be sportsmen in the case of a rival," said Vaura.

"The divided skirt would come to the front with pistols and coffee for two," cried Bertram.

"Yes, I should give her all the mud my tongue could throw," said gay Mrs. Wingfield.

"There will be sport in Hall as field, when the hounds meet, if I'm not mistaken," said the newsy little baronet.

"Why, how so? Sir Tilton," exclaimed Vaura.

"Well, you see, Miss Vernon, there was a lively discussion at luncheon one day as to the next meet; when Mrs. Haughton announced her intention of following the hounds, the Colonel objected on the ground of non−experience."

"No," said Lady Esmondet; "Rotten Row is her experience, and 'tis scarcely a hunting field."

"Unless for the praise of men," said Vaura.

"Or a husband," cried Mrs. Wingfield.

"But about the field, Sir Tilton; do you think Mrs. Haughton will take it?" asked Vaura.

"I am sure she will, for I overheard her the same day make a bet of L500 that she'd ride grey Jessie with the hounds next meet."

"So, so!" exclaimed Bertram, "the lady means it."

"And who might the favoured participator in her bet be, Everly?" enquired Trevalyon carelessly.

"With Major Delrose, late of the —th Middlesex Lancers."

"With Delrose!" exclaimed Trevalyon, now fully aroused; "is Delrose at Haughton?" and as he spoke he gave a swift glance at Lady Esmondet, who thought silently, "Delrose, the man who was mixed up in some way with Lionel in the Fanny Clarmont scandal; there will be mischief."

"No, left same train as I did, very unwillingly though; extracted a promise from Mrs. Haughton, that if time hangs heavy, he may return; amusing fellow, though the Colonel doesn't seem to take to him."

"Not the same stamp of man," said Bertram.

"But Haughton is right about the field, Everly," said Trevalyon; "one requires other experience than the Row."

“Better not curb her, though,” answered Everly sagely.

“She thinks it as easy to run down the hare as the men; but the hare wants other bait than gold,” said Lady Esmondet.

“So do we,” said Bertram, decidedly.

“Yes, I do not think by any means that men, as a rule, are sordid.”

“Before I met Eustace,” said Mrs. Wingfield, “I made up my mind only to marry a horsey man, to make sure of one common interest, which there is often an absence of.”

“Mrs. Wingfield! Mrs. Wingfield!” cried Bertram.

“Mr. Bertram! Mr. Bertram! were you a benedict, you would say my forethought was sweetly touching.”

“And here have I, a lonely bachelor,” he continued; “been regretting the non−existence of my Madame Bertram, though none could grace the head of my table better than the lady now seated there.”

“*Merci*,” said Lady Esmondet, “you are such a host in yourself that you leave us nothing to regret in the absence of Mrs. Bertram.”

“Why,” said Trevalyon sadly, in a low tone to Vaura; “why, will we continually make a jest over those poor creatures unequally yoked together.”

“Very frequently, I think,” she said softly, “to hide a deeper feeling; though it hurts us painfully to do so.”

“I vow I'd rather be a jolly old bachelor like Mr. Bertram, with plenty of money, than husband to the Queen of Sheba, were she not defunct,” exclaimed Mrs. Wingfield.

“What a boon to men and society is a woman without marriageable daughters,” laughed Vaura.

“Yes,” said Everly; “she can air her private opinions on the marriage question.”

“With the right one, what a restful paradise it would be,” said Trevalyon to Vaura's ear alone. And there was such a weariness in his tone, that she gave him one swift sympathetic glance; for in spite of herself her heartstrings were stirred, but she must not give way, so says lightly, as following Lady Esmondet's signal, they leave the table, the gentlemen refusing to linger:

“To say 'marriage' under *any* circumstances to be 'bliss,' is rank heresy to your well−known views; but I understand your present impulse is engendered by seeing our dear friend playing hostess.”

“Not so altogether; you also are near,” and her arm is involuntarily pressed to his side.

“Well, ladies fair and gallants gay,” said Mr. Bertram, as he found a comfortable lounging chair for Lady Esmondet, “we have just time for a cup of coffee and a cigarette, ere we roll away in a *carrosse* to the Theatre Francais.”

“To the theatre!” exclaimed Trevalyon; “I was not aware this was on the *tapis* for this evening.”

“Yes,” said Lady Esmondet, “Mr. Bertram and I arranged it; M. Octave Feuillet's play, the “Sphynx,” is on. I begin to think it was selfish on my part, you all look so comfortable; perhaps we had better abandon it.”

“Put it to the vote,” cried Mrs. Wingfield.

“And no bribery,” echoed Vaura.

“I fear if it is put to the vote,” said Lady Esmondet, “mine will be bought, by the beseeching look of Capt. Trevalyon, for a stay at home.”

“See what it is to have an expressive face, Trevalyon,” said Everly; “it has gained you one vote, in spite of the rule Miss Vernon made of no bribery.”

“I thank you for your sympathy, Lady Esmondet; but I fear yours would be the only vote recorded in my favor, so the 'Sphynx' must needs make us her own.”

“As she did many an unhappy mortal in days of yore, in her Theban home. I wonder if they looked as resigned in their martyrdom as poor Capt. Trevalyon does,” said Vaura.

“I used to think Oedipus finished her,” said Trevalyon.

“Only for his day,” said Vaura; “'twas too long a look till Octave Feuillet; he should have asked Lynceus to give a glance.”

“The Cyclops might have lent him an eye,” said Bertram.

“Are you always as indifferent to the stars of the stage Captain?” enquired Mrs. Wingfield, as she gently puffed away her delicate cigarette. “What Eustace would do without his distractions in that way, heaven only knows.”

“He will outgrow it; most men have stage fever, as most babies have measles,” he answered evasively.

“And now for our mantles and away,” said Lady Esmondet, rising.

“And may the mantle of resignation fall on the shoulders of poor Capt. Trevalyon,” said Vaura, taking his offered arm, and as the hand leaning on his arm pressed closely, she said in low tones, “you had my unregistered vote.”

“*Merci*,” he said, pressing her hand.

CHAPTER XVIII. THEATRE FRANCAIS.

They found the theatre crowded from pit to dome. And the advent of our little party, as they took possession of their box, caused no little sensation even in that galaxy of beauty and fashion.

“By the lilies of France,” said a Parisian, putting up his glass; “though not the three graces, one of them is there.”

“Yes, by the memory of Bonaparte, she is worth a long look,” said his companion, gazing at Vaura.

And two of the occupants of Mr. Bertram's box were indulging much the same thought. Lionel's handsome face wore a warmer look than ordinarily, as he chatted to Vaura, leaning on the back of her chair.

“She has the vivacity of the French woman, with a beauty all her own,” he thought. “Her voice holds me, and my love of the beautiful is satisfied, as I look on her sweet mouth and warm eyes; but, pshaw, she is a flirt, and I am almost in her toils! what is coming over me?” and he gave a start as he almost spoke the last thought aloud.

“Why, what is the matter Capt, Trevalyon?” asked Vaura; “you started just now as though you had seen a ghost of the departed; a moment ago you seemed to be enjoying the play, but now you look melancholy; go over to Mrs. Wingfield. You see, *cher ami*, you do not credit to my powers of pleasing; so avaunt. But,” she added, “you may come back some other time.”

“You deserve better company than I, just now, *ma belle*, and Everly is aching to be with you.” And rising, he took the chair Everly vacated, near Mrs. Wingfield.

“What have you done to Trevalyon? Miss Vernon,” said Everly, as he seated himself beside her. “In five minutes his expression changed from unclouded happiness to the blackness of despair; queer fellow to wear such a look beside you.”

“What a flattering tongue is yours, Sir Tilton; but I shall not be astonished at any outpourings of that sort from you; considering you have come from Haughton Hall, and the practice you have had in soft nothings while there.”

“Had *you* been there I should have been inspired to say something original.”

“It would be a treat, for compliments do grow so hackneyed; I sometimes agree with the poet,” she added gaily, “'that there is nothing original in us, excepting original sin.'“

“Your uncle wished for your presence often.”

“I take it quiet as a compliment, and his bride so new.”

“And many others wished to sun themselves in your presence.”

“I am glad they remember me, and if Old Sol will give England plenty of his gleams, and we have a mild winter to suit Lady Esmondet, we shall be at Haughton Hall for the Christmas festivities.”

“If the clerk of the weather be a decent fellow, who will take a bribe, Tilton's the boy to stuff him, and my reward will be a waltz at the ball, and do please let me make sure of it now.” Taking out his tablets, “just write your name and the date here; oh, thanks abundantly, and I'm sure, the weather fellow will be all square.”

“And now I incur the jealousy of woman; cruel man to bring upon me such punishment, but I forgive you as you know nothing of womanly sweetness to woman, so here is my name for number four waltz. But *regardez*, we have missed a point, every eye is turned to the stage, Mlle. Croizette looks for the moment as though transformed into one of the Furies. So fierce her looks, such terrors from her eyes.”

“Poor thing, so she does,” said Sir Tilton laughing.

“But really Sir Tilton, I wish we could guess what its about. Another riddle from the Sphynx, you must be a second Oedipus and guess for me; or go over and ask some of the others, they look as though they have been feeding ravenously of the tree of knowledge.”

“Draw your chair a little this way, Vaura, *ma chere*,” said Lady Esmondet, who came over as Sir Tilton arose. “We shall all form one little group then, and it will be more pleasant.”

Here Sir Tilton coming up, decidedly objected to the move, wishing to monopolise Vaura.

“You are cruel, Lady Esmondet; ask Miss Vernon, if I have not been more amusing than the Sphynx. You know,” he said audaciously, “we actually did not see the little by−play between the rivals Mlle. Croizette and Sara Bernhardt, which is a proof we were not doing badly in the way of entertaining each other.”

“Fie! Sir Tilton,” said Vaura merrily, “acknowledge the compliment paid you, though our gay friends have

had the Sphynx, they also have had time to long for our society," and as she drew near a few paces, Everly had time to say softly:

"One thing to be thankful for, we did not miss them."

"Small men make large boasts," thought Vaura amusedly.

"Miss Vernon," said Bertram, "you missed the best thing of the evening, or I suppose so by the fact of Everly having come over with his finger in his mouth to ask what the house came down for."

"You will relieve my woman curiosity," she answered smiling, "of course Sir Tilton will not own to the being curious, save on my account."

"No man could refuse a request of yours, else you deserve a punishment for," he added in a low tone, "making game of small hearts."

"Vaura dear, you have missed such a passage−at−arms, between Croszette And Bernhardt," said Lady Esmondet.

"Oh, such fun," exclaimed Mrs. Wingfield, "in the middle of a telling speech by Mlle. Croizette, the wicked little Bernhardt, came coolly up and asked her 'where she lived?' or something of that sort; Croizette, livid with rage, forgot her part—something we never saw her do before, but answered Sara in words that told, for though triumphant she trembled."

"Her sister Fury trembled and retired," said Trevalyon, "strange freaks rivalry leads its victims into—"

"I could almost imagine," said Vaura, "you all to be mistaken for the Croizette has immense influence at the Conservatory, where they both studied, and is a complete child of the stage, but if your ears have played you no tricks, if I mistake not, Sara has had her fun."

"Not a doubt of it," said Bertram.

"Oh, that is too real," said Lady Esmondet, turning pale and looking from the stage, referring to the death−scene by poison of the wicked heroine of the play.

"Yes, her struggles are so natural as to be anything but pleasant to witness," said Vaura.

"If it were good form for a woman to retire for a stimulant," said Mrs. Wingfield, "then would I make my exit, for I feel quite overcome at the sight."

"What inestimable privileges lordly man enjoys," said Vaura.

"What a talented little *morceau* is Sara," said Trevalyon.

"She is smaller since la Croizette looked to kill," said Lady Esmondet.

"The fire from the eyes of Croizette was too much for her; she has gone to hide within herself," said Vaura.

"No wonder she doesn't show even through a glass," said the little baronet.

"Else," continued Vaura, "the *role* of 'Forgiving Virtue' is too much for her; she *shrinks* from it."

"She might be more expansive in the other *role*," laughed Bertram.

"She is a handful of the essence of talent," said Trevalyon, "and always good form whether the form of a Venus or no."

"True," said Lady Esmondet, though she cannot quote in a personal sense of the "heavy cloak of the body still as weighed against a cultivated intellect, roundness of form is a mere bagatelle."

"I humbly appeal to you all," said Bertram in seriocomic tone, "is my rotundity a mere bagatelle?"

"Lady Esmondet says so, and it must be true," said Trevalyon laughingly.

"Of course it is; anyone to look at you would say the same," said Everly.

"My advice, Bertram," said Trevalyon, "is, on your return to England, to retire to the cool shades of oblivion and try the 'Bantam' system: that is if Owen Cunliffe does not send you there, for having while in Paris been attentive to the fair sex instead of to the interests of our Isle."

"Don't follow any such advice, Mr. Bertram!" exclaimed Mrs. Wingfield.

"Your fat makes you so jolly."

"Fat! did you call me fat, Mrs. Wingfield? If the play was not opportunely over I should be obliged to tear myself away from your fascinating presence, in grief, at such an epithet hurled at my devoted head, I—I mean body. I may well exclaim, 'save me from my friends' when these are the unctuous compliments they pay me," the victim exclaimed with averted face and uplifted hands.

On our friends rising to leave the theatre, Sir Tilton, making sure of escorting Vaura to the carriage, was in the act of putting her cloak over her shoulders, when Lionel offered his arm; Vaura taking it turned her head smiling

her sweetest, with a word of thanks to small Everly, who returned it with a look of half−comical disappointment, and with one long step was at Mrs. Wingfield's side, saying:

“Never mind your cloak, Mrs. Wingfield; cool and easy does it; take my arm, Mr. Bertram will probably come up at an opportune moment and robe you, this is the latest and most successful manner of escorting a lady to her carriage.”

“There is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip,” said Mrs. Wingfield, laughingly; “you had your innings the early part of the evening, it is only fair her *preux chevalier* should have his revenge.”

“Yes, I've been bowled out this time, but Don Juan isn't going to have any more innings if Tilton knows anything.”

“What courage the atom has,” thought Mrs. Wingfield, but she said, “Don Juan, indeed, 'Satan reproving sin,' what about a certain Mrs. H., that you sigh to the inconstant moon for. But we are nearing the others and the carriage; so a truce to confidentials. Adieu.”

On the ladies entering the carrosse, the gentlemen bidding adieu *pour le present*, saying they would walk, Sir Tilton stepping back a pace enquired of Vaura “If he should have the pleasure of seeing her on that night week at the de Hauteville ball?”

“Yes, we are due there, and make an exception of their ball, we are such friends, but go to no more crushes presided over by Terpsichore while *a Paris*. *Au revoir*.”

CHAPTER XIX. FOR A FAIR WOMAN FACE.

“What an irrepressible fellow Everly is,” thought Trevalyon, as he sauntered along the avenue towards his hotel; having heard his question to Vaura (as to the ball), “he manages to get a card for everything. I should not regret his departure for anywhere; our little *coterie* was perfect without him. Vaura is extremely lovely and fascinating, she, of course, is the magnet that draws him; what a presumptuous little poppet he is, a mere fortune−hunter, hanger−on of society to dare turn his eyes in her direction. But am I not taking too deep an interest in this sweet Vaura Vernon. I must guard my heart; she is a flirt, I must beware. Another tender billet from Mrs. Haughton, and full of this hidden−wife falsehood; I have been careless, never even having told Haughton the truth of the matter. Every seven years, it seems to me, there is a rehash of by−gone villifications; one must only grin and bear it, but I do feel it terribly just now, not because it is what it always was, 'a lie direct,' but because of my close companionship with my dear friend and bewitching Vaura.”

Let us now follow small Everly, and read some of his thoughts; with rapid steps he is soon at his destination, where, seating himself in a huge easy chair which almost hides his small body, draws a table to his side, on which are placed his pipe, glass of punch, with some letters.

“Gad, a missive from Aunt Martha,” he exclaimed. “Whether it be sugar or vinegar it will keep until I do the others.”

One was from his lawyer telling him the Jews were after him; with a muttered exclamation of “they must wait,” he threw it aside. The others were from acquaintances—mere chit−chat; “and now for the old girls,” he thought, which on opening a bank draft for L50 dropped out. “Gad! almost a holocaust,” he said, picking it from the dying embers in the grate. “And now for the letter.”

“MY DEAR NEPHEW,—Enclosed you will find a draft for fifty pounds; it is extremely inconvenient to remit you even such a small sum, but I promised your mother on her death−bed to give you all the assistance in our power, as also did your sister Amy; and so please heaven we shall, as we are quite aware that the trifle you inherit from your father is extremely small for the maintenance of an English baronet. Moreover, considering it an honour to the house of Morton that an Everly should have linked himself thereto, we have decided to let you have Johnston's rent for the future, and regularly. But, dear nephew, remember you cannot afford to make a mere love−match; you must marry an heiress. Your setter Hecate has had pups, which we shall nurse tenderly for you, as they represent money. But the school bell rings me away, and, dear nephew, from you I go with my pupils into the mysteries of pounds, shillings and pence. You will laugh and say you and they are always associated in my mind; and it is so, for, you are both things of worth. When you marry some rich young lady (you know whom I tell you you can win), I shall pay a master to take the arithmetic class. Make your old aunts glad with the news of a wealthy marriage being arranged for you. Acknowledge draft.

“With much love, from your affectionate Aunt, “MARTHA MORTON.

“Sir Tilton Everly, “Paris, Hotel European, 2nd Nov., 1887.”

“It will please the aunts if I write instanter, so here goes.”

“DEAR AUNT MARTHA,—Draft received, came in handy, can assure you. You are a jolly pair of relations for a fellow to have; never wanted the needful more. I know I shall have to marry money; I expect I guess correctly as to the girl you mean, but tallow candles are out of fashion. I know the gilding is thick, and debts are a bother. But you never fear for Tilton, he may yet win a glorious beauty and great expectations from a titled relation. Eureka! I can tell you; aunts you have no idea what a fuss society makes over me. Glad Hecate has done something for a living, or rather for mine. Goodnight or morning, for it is one a.m.

“Your devoted Nephew, “TILTON EVERLY.

“Miss Morton's Seminary, “Bayswater, Suburbs, London Eng. Nov., 5th, 1877.”

“Yes, 'pon my life, the old girls are right, I must have the sovereign for my name; pity I was born with a taste for the beautiful; my father was wanting in forethought on my account, or he would never have wed penniless Rose Morton; here am I over head and ears in love with a peerless beauty, with not much or not enough of the needful to keep us both in style; there is not a doubt though that she will inherit from that stately godmother of hers. Never say die, Tilton, my boy; she smiled on you to−night, go in and win; why, the very thought of her

sends the blood dancing through my veins; splendid figure, perfect as a Venus. She knows naught of my relations to that young schemer, and if my love by a stern fate says nay, she is too much accustomed to conquests to boast; and the other who is ready to marry me any day will, never know anything to erect her spine about; a week from tonight the de Hauteville ball, I shall there know the best or worst; if I fail it won't be because of aught wanting in myself, but because I cannot win over the Lady of Esmondet; then, if so, I shall hide my groans under an M.P., and the gold of my lemon−face, to whom I shall not exactly play count to her, Miss Kilmansegg, for I could not act such a villain's part; but I must have some hobby to ride, to make up for the sacrifice of self; and now to bed and sleep or dream.”

CHAPTER XX. QUICKENED HEART−BEATS.

On the morning of the de Hauteville ball, Trevalyon broke his fast somewhat earlier than usual, purposing to indulge in a long ride. In passing the salon of Lady Esmondet and Vaura, the door of which had been pushed open by his dog Mars half an hour previously. Trevalyon made a momentary pause, he could not see Lady Esmondet through the opening, only our sweet Vaura, who listening to her godmother, idly ate of some fresh fruit, while the other fair hand caressed Mars. She looked a very child of the morning, so charmingly bright, in a pale blue quilted satin dressing gown, with low turned down collar; not wishing to interrupt her godmother who read aloud an English letter she spoke to Trevalyon silently, standing in the opening door−way, only with the eyes and her own syren smile; the temptation to linger was too much for him, and he was about to enter when turning, as he heard a step coming quickly along the corridor from the visitors grand elevator, saw Sir Tilton coming towards him carrying a huge bouquet. And knowing for whom it was intended, preferring not to be a witness to the presentation with a "*Bonjour*, Everly," and "How do, Trevalyon;" they went their different ways, the one into the light of woman's eyes, the other into the lights of the streets of Paris.

Sir Tilton, with a laughing "Any admittance to a devoted subject," and a gay *entrez* from Vaura was in the boudoir.

"I thought I heard Captain Trevalyon's voice; was he not with you?" enquired Lady Esmondet as she shook hands with Everly.

"Yes, Lady Esmondet, he was outside and lingered a moment, but was able to resist the temptation to enter to which I had to succumb," with an admiring glance at Vaura.

After half an hour spent in gay chit−chat, Lady Esmondet, consulting her watch, reminded Vaura of their purposed drive; and with a promise asked by Sir Tilton, and given by Vaura, that she would wear one of his flowers on that evening, they parted.

In a short time Lady Esmondet and Vaura were seen driving along the fashionable parks and streets of Paris, and no carriage attracted more attention than the one in which they were seated. They met many friends and acquaintances among whom were Mr. and Mrs. Eustace Wingfield.

"One does not often see them together," said Lady Esmondet. "Still, I am sure, they suit each other better than most married people."

"What a queer world it is," remarked Vaura; "even *ma chere* godmother is rather cynical as regards the happiness of most married lives. What is the reason of it all? Is it that man who, as Charles Reade says, is 'born to hunt something,' is no longer happy when the chase is over. And woman, what of her? Is it that 'tis only the excitement of the hunt we care for, that our heart has no part in the matter."

"You know the world, Vaura, and you know you are right—still you will marry, and be happy; for your heart will go with your hand, and you know your power to make the man you will love happy."

"Sympathy, soul−felt and earnest, is more than love which sometimes changes, or passion and fancy which always evaporate," answered Vaura, seriously; "but," she added, "who, among the butterflies of to−day, cares for all this: A. marries B., because he can give her a title; B. marries A., because she brings him money—it's all a debit and credit system."

"Yes, Vaura, dear, Tennyson says truly, 'we men are a little breed.'"

But a warmer light deepens in Vaura's eyes as a vision of a handsome face, wearing at times a weary look, flashes across her memory, and she thinks some men are worth loving, and are not of the "little breed."

"What a bold−looking woman; I wonder who she is," said Lady Esmondet. "She's passed us several times; that was an aristocratic man beside her, and quite a youth. She wears her rouge too extravagantly."

"She has yet to come to the knowledge that she's anybody," answered Vaura, contemptously; "looks to me like greed and vice, and man is not the worse animal of the two."

"Thanks, Miss Vernon," said the voice of Trevalyon, riding up beside the carriages as he lifted his hat.

"Thanks, though it is rather a doubtful compliment, for I am all at sea as to what animal you are so kind as to give us the preference to."

"I don't know that I shall tell you, Captain Trevalyon, for you men make it your boast, that we only are

curious."

Here the same smart turn−out, with its pair of beautiful bays come again towards them, and to the surprise of Lady Esmondet and Vaura, the woman smiled and nodded to Trevalyon. Vaura turning quickly towards him, saw that he took no notice of the recognition and that his face wore a stern look.

Everly driving with a friend, passed them at the moment, saw the nod and smile and of how they were received. "That little smile from Ninon Tournette, puts a spoke into your wheel, my fine fellow," he thought; "no matter though your face did look as though hewn out of stone." Aloud he said, "Miss Vernon will see he is donning the garb of modesty in her honour."

"So Vernon is Mademoiselle's name," said his friend de Vesey; "I saw her at the theatre the other night, and by the lilies of France, she is lovely enough to make a man play the saint for one look from her eyes."

There was a second or two of rather an awkward pause which Lady Esmondet broke by saying—

"The bays are lovely, but I'd rather keep the woman at bay, Lionel; or perhaps she thought you an acquaintance."

"Yes and no, *chere* Lady Esmondet; a dozen years or so ago, I was going through my stage fever, which most men take to in a natural sort of way, though I scorn to make it any excuse for my folly; for you, dear Lady Esmondet," he added with a weary sigh, "are aware I, above all men, should have given way to no such weakness, it was not that it bore any fascination for me, on the contrary, I was as one who never lays his opera glass aside; but, Old Time was leaning on his staff just then and everything went slow; so to make things more lively, I was persuaded by some men to go in with them into a new scheme, viz., lease a theatre; the woman who has just past then, a handsome young woman, was one of the actresses; I sold out at the close of one season, since, going very occasionally I have seen this woman, *la* Tournette, act a few times. She has severed her connection or rather the management did with her some six or seven years ago. I know nothing of her life now; she is *outree* in style and presuming to bow to me, especially in your company."

"Her bow was a feeler to find out where she is, in society, or out," said Lady Esmondet; "and," she continued, "we are to blame; we show her every day that the mighty god society accepts gold."

CHAPTER XXI. LA BELLE VERNON.

The suite of apartments at the de Hauteville mansion in which the family received, were a scene of almost unrivalled splendour. The host, Monsieur Henri Eau Clair de Hauteville, as he stood beside Madame, receiving and welcoming their guests, being a very small and very pale, quiet−mannered man, was almost lost beside the large, handsome woman and merely bowed like a Chinese Mandarin, looking like a tired school−boy, who wanted to be in bed and tucked in comfortably.

"Poor little man, how refreshing the summons to supper will be," said Lady Esmondet, as they waited in the crush to go forward to the smile, bow, and contact of finger tips.

"See how Madame stands it all," remarked Lionel. "It's astonishing what vim gentle women can throw into fatiguing social demonstrations."

"The fragile creature knows society is large−eyed," said Vaura.

On our friends turning to leave the reception room, Eau Clair, the eldest son of the house, for whom, he having attained his majority, this entertainment was given in honour of, came towards them to welcome his mother's old friend, and to tell Miss Vernon of how glad he was at her return to Paris. (He had met Trevalyon before).

"I must congratulate you, my dear boy," said Lady Esmondet, "as well upon your coming of age as upon the brilliancy of the ball."

"*Je vous remercie*, Lady Esmondet; *mais*," he added, "I have just come from your Cambridge University, and shall speak in your tongue, which I like well."

Here some old friends came up, and several gay dancing men, Everly amongst them, and Vaura's programme was soon full. She tried to secure a few dances for rest, by this means to give a few minutes to chat with Lionel, but no one would allow it.

"Don't be cruel," said one.

"Your flower−face must go to the ball−room," said another.

"Take pity on us; we don't carry a bouquet," said a third.

"So we will that you are near," said another.

At last she was carried off by Eau Clair.

"How beautiful your ball−room is, Monsieur Eau Clair," said Vaura. "What multitudes of flowers; how many green−houses have you laid bare? There will not be one rose−bud in all Paris for the Marshal McMahon's *fete*, but that will not grieve you, a Bonapartist."

"Of this I am sure, Mlle. Vernon, if I have left him any roses they are not the sweetest, for well I know the beauteous butterfly of to−day loves their sweet odour."

Dance succeeded dance, and all went merry as a marriage bell, to divine music by two of the most perfect bands in Paris; and now Everly claims his innings, and is happy.

"Have mercy on me, Sir Tilton," laughed Vaura, "and forgive me this dance (besides, we have another together), and you don't know how sweetly amiable I shall be, if you'll find me a seat beside Lady Esmondet."

"Consider yourself seated, and your martyred subject not far off, fair Mademoiselle."

They found Lady Esmondet with Mrs. Wingfield and Trevalyon in an ideal refreshment room.

"Glad you've found us, *ma chere*," said Lady Esmondet.

"I need not ask how you are enjoying the ball," remarked Trevalyon, "your eyes tell me."

"And they say true; how could it be otherwise Sir Knight? with music that thrills one, and a light foot treading a measure to the sweet notes," answered Vaura. "Is not this a charming room, Miss Vernon? invisible music, birds and flowers; the Parisian is born for this kind of thing."

"It is just a poem, Capt. Trevalyon."

"And Bob Fudge in the flesh, brings us back to reality," said Mrs. Wingfield; and following the direction of her eyes, they saw a very young man devouring with admiring glances, the delicacies around him.

"I am quite sure," laughed Vaura, "he will go through the bill of fare just as Moore's Bob, of one *pate* of larks, just to tune up the throat; one's small limbs of chickens, done *en papillote*, one's erudite cutlets dressed all ways

but plain, &c. Oh, dear, he fatigues one," she added gaily; "yes, an ice, Sir Tilton."

"Depend upon it," said Trevalyon laughing, "Dick will receive a letter from Bob, that, 'there's nothing like feeding.'"

Here Eau Clair joined them, having missed Vaura from the ball−room.

"Have you seen the Claytons this evening, Vaura?" enquired Lady Esmondet.

"Yes, god−mother mine, and dancing with vigour and a sublime indifference to time that was amusing."

"They exchanged partners with another Quakerish looking couple, and have been in the heat of the fight, ever since," said gay Mrs. Wingfield.

"'Merrily danced the Quaker's wife, merrily danced the Quaker,'" sang Vaura.

Here a Spanish noble came up, and with a courtly bow, reminded Vaura that this was his waltz, and in animated chit−chat, they left the room.

"A handsome couple," said Mrs. Wingfield; "and I noticed the Spaniard has had two dances with *la belle*." News, not too utterly delightful to Trevalyon and Sir Tilton.

"The Marquis admires Miss Vernon, so mother says; and no man can find him at fault," said Eau Clair, rising, and leaving the little group.

"Would you, ladies, like to go to the ball−room?" asked Lionel, anxious to be near Vaura.

"Thank you, yes," answered Lady Esmondet, divining his motive.

"And will you take pity on me, and a risk on my waltzing powers?" asked Sir Tilton of Mrs. Wingfield.

"I would not risk anything so important as a waltz, Sir Tilton; but as I have already tested your capabilities as a dancer away I go on your protecting arms."

"Or into them," laughed her partner, as entering the ball−room they went careering at full speed down the small spaces.

"Beg pardon, Lord Lisleville," cried Sir Tilton, as he dashed against an ancient beau with a long rent−roll, who with his *fiancee*, a pretty little French girl, who had been trying to put him out of step in order to dance with her young Lochinvar. Sir Tilton, knowing the circumstances, pitied the little Parisienne who had been dolefully doing her duty all the evening; so determined to come to her aid, hence the collision, which throwing the noble lord almost on his back, sent his wig flying several yards off which the dancers swept with their trains. The gay *petite* was wicked enough to put her handkerchief, not to her eyes, but to her mouth, to veil her smiles as she gave herself up to her young lover who had been eating his heart out all the evening. Lord Lisleville, with inward curses on Everly and his own temerity in attempting to dance on a waxed floor, with his gouty leg and bought curls, was a droll figure, as with his handkerchief tied over his head and his face a whirlpool of wrath, he was knocked hither and thither by the dancers in the vain attempt to recover his gay tresses.

Vaura and her partner laughed heartily over the amusing scene.

"How innocent Sir Tilton looked, and one could see it was intentional," laughed Vaura; "no more dinners at the ancestral home of Lord Lisleville; no more shooting for the culprit," she continued.

"How happy the betrothed looks now," said Del Castello, "Cupid's bow is powerful."

"I know myself," said Vaura, "of several cases where young girls have been persuaded to marry old men from the fact being pointed out to them of the happy marriage of M. Thiers. Madame Dosme, poor little Emily's mother, was the woman born for him, only she, unfortunately, was encumbered with a husband."

"It was a most singular household," said Del Castello. "Thiers, though undoubtedly a superior man, had no claims to divinity or to be enshrined on the Dosme altar with three adoring women ever worshipping, while there are many men, could they gain one woman, would be to her alone as constant as the sun. Pardon, Mlle., but I am Spanish and cannot be cold with you. I ever think of Venus and my breast is bare for Cupid's dart."

"The boy is blind," said Vaura, archly.

"I feel him an unerring marksman, though," he said passionately.

Here Sir Tilton, with Mrs. Wingfield, passed them, when Vaura called out gaily:

"Don't you tremble, Sir Tilton, when you think of the wrath of the wigless Adonis?"

"Like an aspen leaf, fair *belle*, but never mind, I've given him a wigging."

They are now beside Lady Esmondet, and the strains of music changing from the waltz,

"That means our waltz is over, Marquis Del Castello, and I have enjoyed it thoroughly, thanks to your perfect step."

"Your own fairy step had much to do with making our waltz one I shall never forget; may I call tomorrow?"

"You may."

Trevalyon coming up at the moment, and seeing Vaura in all her lovliness, for lovely she was in cream white satin, sleeves merely a band, neck low, a circlet of gold of delicate workmanship round the throat, fastened in front with a diamond large as a hazel nut, bands of gold in same design, on perfect arms midway between shoulder and elbow; and the poor fellow hungered to have her all to himself for even a few minutes, so with forced gaiety he said:

"Now, Mademoiselle, I, as your guardian, must insist on your taking a little rest and under my protection, for, should I allow you to take it with any other, the gay gallant would have the queen of the night back amidst the revelry.

"But what am I to do, Lady Esmondet—Captain Trevalyon," she said with a sweet sense of willingness about her; "I belong to M. de Vesey for the next dance?"

"Go and rest," said Lady Esmondet; "and if your partner cannot find you it will be his loss."

Lionel had roamed about a good deal during the evening thinking much of a letter he had received that morning from Colonel Haughton, and of the love he was battling against in his own breast, for Vaura. In his walks to and fro he had come across a small conservatory on the other side of the house, far from the busy throng, and entered as well from the grounds as from a boudoir of Madame's; thither he led Vaura, not unwillingly, a sweet sense of being taken care of, a nameless feeling of passive languor, a sense of completeness pervaded her whole being, as Lionel, putting her hand through his arm and for a moment holding it there in a protecting sort of way, led her through long corridors until they reached the luxurious boudoir of their hostess, where, seating Vaura in a lounging chair, the perfection of comfort, and placing a soft foot−stool for her dainty slippered feet, he quietly seated himself near her.

He longed to take her to his heart, and tell her of his great love for her, which had grown so strong as to completely master him, he could scarcely refrain from crushing her in his arms and telling her she must be his; he had suffered much this evening in seeing her, even in the dance, in the arms of other men; ever since he had left Lady Esmondet's side, an hour ago, he had done nothing but pace through lonely corridors thinking of the letter from Eric Haughton, which ran thus:

"Trevalyon, *cher ami*,—

"Must go to the point at once, as what I hear has troubled me. Mrs. Haughton tells me there is *no* doubt *you are married* to *Fanny Clarmont*, and as Delrose is frequently here and lounging about with her, I suppose *he has told her*; I know he was mixed up in the affair; I'm sorry for you if it's true, old fellow. She also says, but it's a *woman's mistake I am sure*, that you are half engaged to Blanche; *be careful* that you don't make Vaura love you; you were always a sort of hero with her; she is too lovely and lovable to have *her life spoiled*; take care of my two loved women in your charge.

"Yours as ever, "ERIC HAUGHTON.

"Captain Trevalyon, "Hotel Liberte le Soleil, Paris."

"And now I have passed the Rubicon," he thought, "and know past doubting that she has the love of my life, and that life without her, will be worse than death," this he thought, seated near this fair woman; near, and far, for he must not speak to her with this cloud upon his name; he knew it was false and only spread for revenge, but would not society pity Vaura; pity and he writhed with inward pain, at the thought that his wife would be pitied for having gone to God's altar with a man, whom Dame Rumour said, had a hidden wife; one moment he thought he would fly to England and make Delrose tell the truth at the point of the sword, but he knew his man, and that threats would not avail; again, if he left Vaura now, there were many men about her, one of whom she might choose, and the thought was maddening. If he could only get them into Italy, they would be quieter there. He must mature his plans, see how it was best to cope with his enemies; would he write Haughton the facts? no, he must try and find out Fanny Clarmont's address, and get her to write such a letter as he could publish, exonerating him from all act or part in her elopement; but how to do it, unless he could work on Delrose, but the man never had any feelings, save for himself; he must see. And as he looked on Vaura, as she sat, her head thrown back among the cushions, lips slightly parted, and looking at him from dreamy eyes half closed; a pain came to his heart as he thought, if he could not get Fanny's confession, Vaura would never rest in his arms, for she would not go to him with the truth unproven. And still he thought she shall love me, for, look what she has done for me, she has done

what no woman heretofore has been able to do, she has inflamed me with a passionate love for her as untamable as the lion; she belongs to me. And as he thought this he rose, but almost staggered with conflicting emotions, as he stood close to her.

"Vaura, my darling, are you rested?" he said, his voice anything but steady.

"Yes," she answered dreamily; "but why did you break the spell? it is so seductive here, I half thought you a magician and this a scene of enchantment."

"I broke the spell, darling, because I could bear no longer the——"

Here footsteps were heard, both on the gravel walk outside the small conservatory and in the corridor by which they had entered the boudoir. And though the occupants did not see Del Castello, he saw them at the same time as Everly with De Vesey (a gay Paris beau to whom Vaura had been engaged for this dance, now over) crossed the threshold. De Vesey, on seeing the situation, and not caring to be *de trop*, was for retreating, but Everly was in no mood for this, now that his dance and his only one for the night was on the *tapis*. He, like any other man, would have feared to leave the woman he loved with a man so fascinating as Trevalyon. Vaura, in the second or two of their hesitation, had time to recover outward composure. Lionel folded his arms, moved a pace or two backwards, and stood like a statue; the muscles of his face throbbed, but in the dim rose−tinted light Everly and De Vesey coming from the glare of the lustres and torches of the ball−room did not see clearly.

"*Pardonnez*, Mademoiselle, but Sir Tilton Everly would continue his search until our belle of the evening was found," said De Vesey, apologetically.

"Not so loud, Monsieur De Vesey," Vaura answered in a whisper. "This is the temple of the god of Silence, and Captain Trevalyon and I have been worshipping at his shrine. I perceive you are both," she added, moving on tiptoe towards them, "feeling the influence of the place, and you don't look as though you care to pour incense. So let us back to Comus and revelry. *Au revoir*, Capt. Trevalyon."

Vaura managed while speaking to detach from her corsage some violets and a crushed rose, which, when Everly and De Vesey were not observing, she dropped at Trevalyon's feet; and turning her head as she took Sir Tilton's arm, gave him her own syren smile from eyes and lips—and Lionel was alone. Del Castello who had been a witness to this scene from the outside of the conservatory now entered, and coming forward stood facing Lionel.

One would look far before meeting two as handsome men as these two rivals for the love of one woman. Capt. Trevalyon, with some of the best Saxon blood in his veins, of *distingue* bearing, tall, broad−shouldered, blue−eyed, blonde, tawney mustache, short side whiskers, face somewhat bronzed by exposure on the battle field and in travel: a man, a manly man every inch of him, a man whom woman adored and man leaned on, unless when his foes and rivals.

Del Castello truly the nobleman, tall, dark, and handsome.

The Spaniard was the first to speak.

"Pardon my intrusion, Monsieur, but I cannot rest until I know the truth; I have seen Mademoiselle Vernon several times walking and driving at places of public amusement, but never have been fortunate enough to obtain an introduction to her until to−night, though I have made repeated efforts so to do. Her beauty and grace had made a deep impression upon me, which now that I have had the great joy of conversing and dancing with her has ripened into love so strong as not to be subdued, and which, excuse me, Monsieur, for saying, I believe only a Spaniard or perhaps an Italian could feel. You English are so cold; Mademoiselle is not, but reminds me of the women of my own love−warm, sun−lit land. It was my intention to have called upon Mademoiselle Vernon at her hotel on to−morrow ere the sun had set, to ask her if she would be the light of my life by doing me the great honour of accepting my name, hand and fortune. I had been roaming through the grounds meditating upon her many charms, and of how best I could make my offer so as not to agitate her by its seeming prematureness, when I was very much troubled on coming to the conservatory (meaning to enter) to see you, a powerful rival, in the blissful retirement of this boudoir with the woman I have, perhaps unfortunately, conceived, such passionate love for. I was as if chained to the spot and, when you were alone, determined to enter and ask you if my worst fears are true. Are you a successful suitor for the hand of Mademoiselle Vernon? Are you, Monsieur, anything to her?"

This had been, to say the least of it, a very trying night for Lionel—and it seemed his troubles were not yet over. He knew the Marquis Del Castello to be a *parti* the bluest blood in his own land would be more than satisfied with. He was the possessor of a noble and princely estate, and this man, with all these advantages, was a suitor for the hand of the woman he loved with an overwhelming passion. And the Spaniard had said she could

not be loved as he loved her. Ah, well! what does man know of man? Only this, what he chooses more than “language,” as Talleyrand says, “was given us to conceal our thoughts;" for we smile when the heart is breaking; we weep to conceal the joy we are feeling; and Lionel listened and suffered. He had never been a man to make his moan into the ear of men and women, for the sympathy of society is curiosity! and man listens and forgets, and woman listens and talks; she cannot help it, poor thing. Can the snake do other than charm—then sting?

And Vaura had conquered and enslaved him, but was still unsubdued—so he thought,—and though peerless among her sex, she is only a woman. And how will it be if I allow this man to pour his love tale into her ear with all the impassioned eloquence his countrymen possess. “Oh, darling!” and he groaned inwardly, “I cannot put you to the test; I *cannot* speak yet;” and he must not. All this poor Lionel thought, as with folded arms he listened to the Spaniard, and to his concluding words of “Are you anything to Mademoiselle Vernon?” he merely bowed. The temptation to dismiss this smooth−tongued Southerner, with the warmth of the south in his words, with the looks of an Adonis, ere Vaura should listen to his pleadings, was too much for him. Ah, well, though we love him much, this Lionel Trevalyon, he is only mortal. “After I have made her love me, I shall tell her of this man's proposal of marriage,” he said to his aggrieved conscience. After all is there not an instinctive leaning in the hearts of most of us towards the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance? Immediately on our conscience becoming seared as with a red−hot iron through some act its sensitiveness shrinks from, we, feeling this inward shrinking away as if from our lower nature invariably bring out the whip and lash our poor weak flesh by way of atonement. And so Lionel thought now as he bowed to Del Castello's question of “are you anything to her?” and thought while doing what hurt his conscience—“I shall tell her after.”

“Then my worst fears are realized,” said Del Castello to Lionel's bow. “But, Monsieur, you cannot expect me with my heart's great loneliness fresh upon me to congratulate you on being before me in your wooing. *Adieu*, I shall leave Paris at sunrise, and it will be a sorrowful gratification to me to know that the incomparable Mlle. Vernon will, from your lips, learn why I fly.” And saying this, the Marquis left Lionel to the solitude of Madame's boudoir.

CHAPTER XXII. THE BLIND GOD TAKES SURE AIM.

After leaving Trevalyon, Vaura, with her attendant cavaliers, bent their steps in the direction of the ball−room, the sweet sounds of distant music sounding louder and yet louder as they moved.

“Woe be to that incarnation of selfishness in yonder boudoir,” exclaimed Everly; “if he be the means of my losing this dance with the fair Queen of the Revels,” looking admiringly at Vaura's full and rounded neck, throat and arms.

“You won't call it petty larceny, Everly, when you pour maledictions on his head. 'Pon my heart it's too bad of him to carry off the most precious freight of the ballroom; thereby causing two forlorn individuals, whom he has defrauded of their rights, to wonder about like disembodied spirits with distended eyes, and white of visage. I can assure you, Mlle. Vernon, Everly, in our search for your fair person, peered into passages where the darkness might be felt, it was in this way. Passing one of the *salons* I saw a group of ladies and gentlemen, and thinking you might be one of the number, and the music just striking up for my dance with you, *la belle de la nuit*, I entered the *salon*, gazing eagerly amongst them, coming away, as you know, disappointed. Sir Tilton in this way distanced me. I took no thought of the whereabouts of such an insignificant atom as he, continued De Vesey, laughing; but, continuing my search for you, came suddenly upon a queer bit of architecture, a many−sided sort of landing wherefrom there were three staircases and three landings; which was I to choose? I was meditating, when from the wall close beside me proceeded a most plaintive wail, rather, on my honour, like an infantine donkey. I listened going close to the wall, when I discovered the mellifluous accents proceeded from the throat of the missing giant, Sir Tilton. I put my ear to the wall and told the poor boy to speak in accents loud; he confessed that seeing a spring in the wall he touched it—it opened, he entered where he was mantled in Egyptian darkness, and could not make his exit. I was his deliverer. When he emerged, he looked like a ghost, and in feeble accents told me of why he had gone into solitude, which, as I see my partner seated like patience on a monument waiting for me, I shall leave him to be the hero of his own tale; and as I hear, fair Mlle., that you are going to desert Paris and turn your face south, I must needs say *bon voyage*, though my heart aches at our loss;” and lifting her hand to his lips, the gay Parisien left them to claim his partner.

“At last,” said Everly, with fervor, and almost unconsciously his face full of an agitation he could not conceal.

Vaura's practised eye told her what was coming, and fain to escape it, said gayly:

“Yes, at last, Sir Tilton to relieve my curiosity by explaining M. de Vesey's words.”

Here a lively air from a French clock attracted her attention.

“Listen, Sir Tilton, two o'clock.”

“Yes, fair queen of the revels, 'tis time I told you another story, my heart is aching for your sympathy,” he said brokenly.

“You have my sympathy, Sir Tilton; nay, we must not linger,” she added, on his turning into the dreamy light of an ideal little flirting room.

“I pray you to do so, Miss Vernon. I have something I *must* say to you,” he said feverishly.

“Wait until time says *now*, Sir Tilton, for with the warning notes we have just heard in my ears, I should not be a good listener.”

“You are tired of me, and want to give your sweetness to some other man,” he said despairingly, yet fiercely.

“*Carita! Carita!* Sir Tilton,” and pitying him she said, knowing just how he was feeling; “see there is one couple you have made happy to−night,” as the little prospective bride of Lord Lisleville with her lover passed, with smiles to Sir Tilton.

“Fools' paradise, she belongs to Lord Lisleville; that wouldn't satisfy me.”

“You are a spoiled boy, you want too much.”

“I want you, my enchantress.”

“But you can't have me, Sir Tilton, I belong to the heir of the house for the last dance,” she said, wilfully misconstruing his meaning, so gaining time, lost to him.

“You are cruel, you gave up my dance for Trevalyon; you won't give up De Hauteville's for me.”

“Eau Clair made me promise faithfully,” and with pretty persuasiveness had her way to the ball−room. “Drop

all sentiment, Sir Tilton, I like you best, your own gay care for naught self; see," she added, kindly as they neared the music and revellers, "see the gay butterflies are as *chic* (even if their wings have lost some of their bloom); the scent of the rose as sweet as at the first dance; be your own gay rollicking self once more."

"I cannot! for my star of the night I love you; don't start, it is no new story to you that a man's heart lies crushed at your feet. Since it was my fate to meet you, your face is ever before me. I followed you here, running away from Haughton Hall. I have dreaded Trevalyon as a rival, as well as others, but he in especial. Oh! my heart's light, say you are not going to give your loveliness up to a man they say has a hid—well, well, no more of him, only don't shrink from me, I shan't name him; but my heart only beats for you, heaven." And Vaura feels his whole frame tremble as he says feverishly: "pity me, and make her love me; and now what have you to say to me, you can make my life what you will; for heaven's sake give me hope."

"Poor fellow, your words grieve me more than I can say; I had no idea of anything of the sort; you have my warmest friendship.

"Don't; don't speak of friendship!" he said excitedly, when it is you, you with your warm heart−beats, your love I want; great heavens, why did you ever cross my path?"

"I shall regret the doing so, if it has caused you pain, Sir Tilton, but in time you will forget me."

"You are cruel; and speak as a surgeon to a physically sick man."

"My words are meant kindly, Sir Tilton, though they seem as the lance to the sick man."

"Men say women are cruel, so they are; do you know, for your beauty I have played the traitor to another; but heaven help me," and poor little Sir Tilton groaned; "I could not marry her while I was free to ask you to be my wife, and now I am just good for nothing, and never shall be; God help me!"

Vaura's heart was full of pity for this gay boyish little Sir Tilton, and looking into his face pityingly, said:

"Poor fellow, go back to your bethrothed and be happy in time with her; she, nor none other shall know you ever had a roving fancy for me, and this is a butterfly age and our wings were given us to fly; so *n'importe*, you need only send your bride to me if she ever scolds, and I shall tell her she has the gayest, kindest little baronet in all Britain."

And so Vaura chatted to give the poor little man time to catch up to his heart−beats.

Here Lionel passed them on his return from the boudoir of Madame, where he had been since Vaura was taken from him, and Del Castello had left him; he heard part of Vaura's remark, and seeing Sir Tilton's downcast attitude, took in the situation at a glance; and as he passed with a grave smile to Vaura and a pressure of his hand on the crushed rose and violets at his breast, he mentally observed:—

"Another life given her to do as she wills with, another heart crushed as she has crushed the life from this rose; ah, well, the saints hath it that they are the weaker vessel, but they are stronger than we after all. Look at me, year after year I have boasted of my strength, and now I am as wax in her hands; I, who thought to bask in her loveliness for an idle hour, only as I might bask in the loveliness on canvas, the creation of some heaven born painter; I, who thought to coolly criticise her acquaintance with this actor who has tried to win her beauty and talents to the stage, ere I asked her to be my wife— ere I put away the prejudices of a lifetime against wedded life. Prejudices! that were the outcome of my mother's sin, my father's blighted life; I know I always loved her as a girl−woman, for she was always womanly. Now I adore her with the love of a life; with a love that has never been frittered away, for I have never loved the soulless creatures whom I have amused myself with." And hastening his steps he was soon by Lady Esmondet's side.

"What a wanderer you have been," said his friend, welcoming her favourite and pleased to see (as she surmised) some of Vaura's violets in his coat.

"Where is Vaura? truant that she is, you were the one to take her away, and I hoped you would bring her back."

She noticed he wore the exhausted look of a man having gone through some very powerful emotional feeling, whether of joy or sorrow she could not tell. His eyes turned ever wistfully towards the grand entrance to the ball−room, and he wore her flowers, so she could only hope there had been no trouble between them. She felt half in love with him herself, as most women did who came under the influence of his rare fascination of manner "his eyes possess some mesmeric power," they said, "to draw their hearts at will." Have we not all felt the wonderful power of such eyes, at least, once in our lives, eyes that once having felt as it were, we always feel; eyes that charm us and bid us look and not forget.

“He is learning to love her,” thought Lady Esmondet, as she saw that his eyes turned ever towards the door; “and it will be the happiest day of my life (none too happy),” she thought with a sigh, “if I see these two lives blend in one; Vaura is *difficile*, so is he, but she cannot resist him, and their lives would be full of completeness. They would be the happiest couple in London; why did he start as through fear, when Everly mentioned Delrose as a visitor at the Hall; I know there was a scandal some twelve years ago, when they were both mixed up with Fanny Clarmont. I do hope there is nothing in it to cause him real uneasiness. Vaura will make a great sensation this coming season; she has made some conquests to−night, that cream−white satin with her diamonds and these old fashioned gold bands, suit her to perfection. She enjoys wielding the sceptre and she does it with such seeming unconsciousness, and absence of vanity that is very charming, never boasting of her conquests even to me.” But where can she be all this time, I wonder, and with whom? so breaking in upon Lionel's reverie, she repeated her question of, “Where and with whom is Vaura? she has missed two or three dances.”

“Everly was the happy man not two minutes ago,” he said.

“That bird of passage; 'tis a wonder she wastes her sweetness upon him.”

“Poor Everly! I am very much inclined to think his heart will be heavy after to−night,” said Lionel, thinking of his downcast look as he passed.

“'Tis his own fault; little men are so aspiring,—always on tip−toe,” answered Lady Esmondet.

“Yes, I suppose he has himself to blame, the bat cannot gaze at the sun, unless to his own detriment.”

“One thinks of an angel and lo! she appears,” exclaimed Eau Clair, coming up, “and there's no doubt as to whose colours Everly wears, but by the lilies of France had he detained La Belle Vernon from her rightful sovereignty of the ball−room five minutes longer, I should have hunted the Everlie−in−wait−robber, and have taken from him our belle. But see how *enerve*, embarrassed, the robber looks, the enchantress has been exercising her fatal spells.”

Here Vaura with Sir Tilton, looking pale and haggard, approached all three, guessed his whispered question to Vaura, of “Can you give me no hope?” and saw Vaura shake her head as her lips framed the word “no.” Then there was one long pressure of the hand, a look from Everly, as of one looking on the face of the dead, and he was gone. Alone, or to wed without love, and for gold! Ah, me! this life of ours teems with bitterness, but on to the merry−makers we do not care to follow Everly. We grow cynical perhaps as to the good there is in life, but we get used to it in time; to this something we have lost as we get used in time, to the unloved partner by our side. Such is life.

Vaura was looking very sweet and lovely, as with a tender pity she took leave of her conquest, Sir Tilton; her face had a soft paleness, and her lips looked a deeper red than usual from the contrast; there was a languor in her movements, and she felt she would like to rest in the easy chair, beside Lady Esmondet, with Lionel near; and dream waking dreams after all the excitement of the night. But there were the conventionalities, her dance with Eau Clair, and then, home, so she said:

“Well, dear god−mother, here at last; are you dying of *ennui*? I feel very wicked, and it has been selfish of me to remain so long, but this is the last, I shall soon be with you.”

And taking Eau Clair's arm she was again moving to the enchanting music of the waltz, which tends more to bewitch the souls of men than the music of any other dance, its gentle swaying motion, its soft bewilderingly seductive strains of music, are something to have felt the pleasurable sensation of. As they were moving the length of the room, Vaura noticed Lady Esmondet leave it, as also that her footsteps' were slow and languid as though she was weary; so saying:

“I really must tear myself away, Monsieur Eau Clair, Lady Esmondet has left the room, and I am sure she is fatigued. You will laugh at me for suddenly remembering my dear chaperon at such an opportune moment when our dance is a thing of the past. There seems to be a general exodus, so,” she added gaily, “if we follow them, even two such important personages as we are will not be noticed in our absence.”

“We shall go with the stream and all will be well.”

“But whither do they lead? What is on the *tapis*?”

“They go to take part in an old family custom that tonight must be done.”

“And if when done 'twere well, 'twere well 'twere done quickly,” answered Vaura.

And they followed the stream and Vaura could not but see that Eau Clair and herself received a good deal of attention as they moved, many eyes following them. They soon reached a suite of elegantly furnished *salons* gay

with flowers, gems of art from the deft fingers of the sculptor, master−pieces from the artistic brush of some of the greatest painters living and dead, decorated the walls or stood in their respective niches, foreign and domestic birds of rare beauty and throats full of song, with the exquisite scent of flowers about them, the brilliant scene, the soft laughter of the incoming guests sounding so similar to some of their own notes, causing the feathered songsters to burst forth into melody, adding another charm. Vaura and Eau Clair were among the last to enter, and they walked up to the end of the room the *cynosure* of all eyes; as they neared a chair placed alone at the head of the room, Vaura saw Lady Esmondet with a gay coterie of friends with Lionel in the group. Vaura turned her head as she passed with a smile, and the lines to Venus from Pitt's Virgil flashed across Lionel's memory:

"And turning round her neck she showed
That with celestial charms divinely glowed."

Vaura was accustomed to admiration, so this which looked so much like a march of triumph did not disturb her self−possession; she laughed and chatted with her companion all the length of the *salons*.

"These servants of yours, Monsieur Eau Clair, remind one as they pass in and out so noiselessly among your guests laden with the champagnes and ices they carry so deftly of the automata in the new Utopia they are perfect; but what is not perfect in the de Hauteville mansion."

"Take this chair which I hope will be the perfection of comfort for the belle of our ball."

"Give me a Frenchman for a gallantry," said Vaura gaily, and seating herself comfortably. To her surprise Eau Clair, standing beside her, said as follows:

"*Charmantes Demoiselles, Mesdames et Messieurs*: It has been a time honoured custom in our family for generations, that on the heir to the estate attaining his majority, on his throwing off the careless garb of *garcon*, and donning the somewhat grave habiliments," taking up the corner of his dress−coat with a smile, "of the man. It has been the custom, I say, at the revels given in his honor, that he should elect as the belle the fairest of the fair—a custom that has my warmest approval; *a dieu ne plaise* that any one of my descendants should be ungallant enough to discontinue it; indeed rather than our fore−fathers should father such an one," he said in gay tones, "I prefer that I, Eau Clair, should be the last of our name. I admit that my predecessors may have at times found the pleasant task of choosing somewhat *difficile*. But for me, *Dieu merci*, Mlle. Vernon's advent in Paris has left me no choice. And without paying any point−blank compliments to her charms, I now present to her as is usual on this occasion, this bagatelle, at the same time expressing the hope that loving our city as she does, she will soon return to us, come with all her beauty and grace, and sojourn among us, leaving her own northern clime," and kneeling on one knee, Eau Clair handed a small box of rare Japanese workmanship to Vaura. He then drew a small, elegant stand to her side and gently taking the box from her hand, laid it on the table, touched a spring when the lid flew open, disclosing to view a bouquet holder and fan, both works of art. The handle of the fan was of gold inlaid with precious stones, the fan of feathers of brilliant hues. The bouquet holder was of elegant design in gold, studded with diamonds and on one side the words "To la belle Vernon, 1877" inlaid in diamonds of larger size, the whole one glitter of brightness. A small bouquet of delicate odeur was here handed by a servant on a salver to his young master, and Eau Clair saying, "Let me be the first to fill the holder with fragrance," put the flowers into the golden receptacle.

Vaura rising and taking Eau Clair by the hand made a step or two forward now loosing his hand said:

"*Cher ami Monsieur Eau Clair, Mesdames et Messieurs*, I feel that a mere conventional *je vous remercie* would be too cold and lifeless and in every way distasteful to me, on this occasion, and though I have never made a speech heretofore, and this being literally my maiden speech, please forgive me what pleases you not. Though, fair demoiselles, I have been chosen the belle, I feel as I gaze upon the galaxy of beauty around me that I," she added in gay tones, "have no occasion to blush at my own loveliness, for I feel that the gods have been so lavish in their gifts of everything that is lovely that they have surely become bankrupt and have kept no charms for me, and that Monsieur Eau Clair must have looked at my poor graces through rose−coloured spectacles when he called me *la belle* and made me the recipient of gifts fit for a queen. I little thought, *cher ami*," she continued, turning slightly towards Eau Clair, "when saying to you a few moments ago that this had been an ideal evening, that two such ideal gifts were in store for myself. I need scarcely tell you that they will be always among my most valued treasures, recalling as they will such pleasant reminiscences to my mind of one of the most delightful evenings I have ever spent. And a word to you, fair demoiselles" turning towards the assemblage of guests with a smile, "never turn your bright eyes from your own land for your lovers and husbands, for your men carry the belt

from the universe! Yes, from the world for gallantry, and some of the kindest and best husbands I have met are from among the so−called' fickle' Frenchmen. Thanks for your kind wish, Monsieur Eau Clair, that I shall soon return to fair, bright Paris. I do love your city and your land so much that he to whom I may yet give my heart and life will I know, if he love me, come often to your dear shores and Paris. Ere many more suns have risen I turn my face southwards to that old art world, sunny Italy, which I love well. But there one sometimes has a feeling of sadness in thinking of what she was, especially her Rome, which one does not experience here. I am at one with your great Victor Hugo when he says, 'It is in Paris that the beating of Europe's heart is felt. Paris is the city of cities. Paris is the city of men. There has been an Athens, there has been a Rome, there is a Paris.'"

Here Vaura seated herself. While speaking in her clear tones with a depth of feeling in her manner and varying expression efface, her beauty was felt by all. There was now a brighter hue than usual in her cheeks, and her dark eyes shone like stars with the excitement of the moment. The immediate family of de Hauteville now came forward offering their congratulations, and many of the guests did her the same honor.

"Will *la belle* permit one of her most humble admirers to offer his congratulations and offering?" said the voice of Lionel beside her, and with a warm pressure of the hand, he slipped into the holder beside the bouquet three small sprays, one of white pink, one of Peruvian Heliotrope, and a small bit of black thorn. Vaura, an ardent lover of flowers was also mistress of their language, so she read silently commencing at the white pink. "'I love you,' 'fair and fascinating,' but there is a 'difficulty.'" "Where and what is the difficulty, I wonder," she thought, and turning her large bright eyes to his face with a smile in them and on her lips, was how she answered him.

"I must congratulate you on your maiden speech, Mlle. Vernon," said the small host in his small voice. "When you can make such an excellent impromptu one, I feel sure we men in our efforts would be put to shame, were we to listen to a studied one from *la belle*," and the little man retired behind madame's drapery.

"*Merci*, monsieur, my poor little speech did not show you half my gratitude for such undeserved honors."

The guests having drank the health of the heir and *la belle de la nuit*, began to disperse and soon after warm farewells to the family and heartfelt wishes that they should soon meet again, our friends were in their carriage and rapidly driving to their hotel.

Lionel was very quiet, saying little, but ever and anon with a careful hand drawing Lady Esmondet or Vaura's wraps around them, not that the night, or rather morning, was cold but Vaura had danced so often and there had been so much of excitement in the night for her, and besides it was delightful to him to have her at last near him where he could feel her presence and know that the others were all away; to feel that when his hand touched her cheek, neck, or arm in his loving care in keeping her from the night air, that she did not shrink from his touch, but rather leaned to it. And he was happy, and so was she, but he did not know it, he only knew he was near her.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE WEB OF DIFFICULTY.

The morning after the de Hauteville ball Lady Esmondet and Vaura met at the breakfast−table, at noon, Lady Esmondet not looking paler than usual. Vaura was pale for she had slept none, her eyes looking larger and her dainty and flexible lips a deep red. She was quite like her own sweet self though, in spite of fatigue, and her soft cardinal silk morning robe, loose at the throat, and turned down collar of white muslin and lace. In her belt the pink, heliotrope, and black−thorn sprays; and Lionel was content with the picture as he opened the door and came forward. Vaura was pouring out a cup of coffee for Lady Esmondet, her shapely hands, so soft and white, coming from the cuffs of muslin and lace (she never could be seduced into wearing the odious stiff linen collar and cuff's some women's souls delight in).

Lionel thought: “Shall I ever call her wife, and when I come in have a right to take these two dear hands in mine and press them to my heart as I bend down to kiss her sweet mouth.” He said, “*Bonjour*, ladies fair. I have come to see how you are feeling after the revels of the past night.”

“And to refresh your own poor tired self with a cup of coffee,” answered Vaura, handing him one.

“You see, Lionel,” said Lady Esmondet, “we are waiting upon ourselves, the maids are doing the necessary packing, as we have not altered our plans to leave Paris at sundown; I hope we are not hurrying you away?”

“Not at all; did you leave me, I should follow by next express; there would be nothing to hold me here, if you were gone.”

“Nothing,” said Vaura softly; “and Paris so full of beautiful, brilliant women.”

“Not now,” he answered, looking into her eyes with a grave look.

Vaura gave one little sigh as she let her eyes stay on his. And this man felt that he must feel this woman in his arms or his heart would break.

There was a tap, tap, at the door and Somers entered, bringing her mistress, letters; there were several from friends, with one from Colonel Haughton to his niece and one from Mrs. Haughton to Capt. Trevalyon, which ran thus:

“MY HEART'S IDOL,—

“The Colonel has written by this mail to Miss Vernon, stating his wish that she and Lady Esmondet come *without fail* to the Christmas festivities. I am not partial to either of them (this is under the rose) they are too high strung for me; but, my king, I must have you; you don't know how jolly I can make life for my pets; Blanche won't look at Sir Peter Tedril and I know it is you she wants, you may have her and her million, you will be near me then; the Colonel, poor sedate old fellow, would not like it, but that don't signify, because he wishes (now that your secret marriage to Fanny Clarmont has become public talk) that there were a thousand miles between your handsome person and Miss Vernon; I wish you had some of the love for me that the black−bearded Major has; I cannot keep him away, but he *shall* if you will only come, my king; my king, if you were only with me I should thaw your proud heart in spite of yourself, my haughty, handsome god; come *at once* on receipt of this; *how* can you stay with *two icebergs*, when *burning lava*, like my heart, is aching with its long waiting for you.

“In love, yours, “KATE.

“P.S.—Persuade the icebergs not to come here; tell them Italy was made for them.”

On writing and mailing above, Madame was content, as she sat in her own boudoir with feet on a high stool stretched out. That will bring him; my plot is spreading; ha! ha! ha! I planted it well; nothing like getting scandal well rooted; he has been careless, and society doesn't forgive that; had he only paid tolls, married somebody's daughter, given dinners and balls; society would have snapped her fingers at this story, and though Delrose had said to her 'but he never wed her Kate, at least he said so, but I daresay he lied.' But she used the scandal, as we have seen, employing the useful firm of Mesdames Grundy &Rumour; giving them also whispers of how poor little Blanche was half engaged to him—if she could bring him to her feet she would love him; if not, she would make her revenge tell. He should not wed Vaura Vernon, if a woman's tongue sharp as a two−edged sword could cut their lives apart. She would be content to repeat the little act of barter that the young man did for Marguerite with Mephistopheles, for Lionel's love. She had learned and practised society's creed, and paid its tolls; surely now she was free to have her pets, and love them too; whether it were a poodle dog or a man, whether it were a

trip to her pet club at London of the cane and cigarette, or a drive to Richmond.

And Lionel thought, as he again glanced over his letter:

“What a bore it is that I did not years ago clear myself; delays are dangerous; this woman has already planted a doubt in Haughton's mind; and heavens, if she succeed in doing it here, my life will be as lonely as was my poor father's,” and unconsciously, he gave a deep sigh.

Vaura looked up quickly from a letter from Isabel Douglas; and Lady Esmondet said:

“No bad news, I hope, Lionel.”

“No, and yes, dear Lady Esmondet; my opponents hold some good cards, and the play is against me that is all. But Miss Vernon has something pleasant to tell us from her home batch.”

“Lady Esmondet had seen that the letter for Lionel was from Haughton Hall, and guessed his opponent is that woman, and the cards are against him, poor fellow.” And Vaura said:

“Isabel Douglas says firstly that she is going to wed the curate, Rev. Frederick Southby; secondly, they are as gay as butterflies at Haughton Hall; that Madame, newly installed, though she be, leads the fashion to the old gentry, who were, when she was not, both in the cut of her garments, and in the novelties in the manner of her entertainments. She gives me Roland's opinion. Mrs. Haughton is one of society's sky−rockets, a high flyer, determined to make her world stare; bold in her daring ascent; but by her glittering colours leading their gaze from the steady quiet shine of the heavenly bodies; though she says 'all the country people cannot claim to be heaven− born.'“

“But I think Roland's a good criticism,” said Lady Esmondet.

“She goes on to say,” continued Vaura, “the Hall is restored to its ancient magnificence, the ball and dinners on their return were grand or rather gorgeous, for gorgeous is Mrs. Haughton's style. Am often there—we are to dance some new dances at Christmas, and there is an importation at the Hall from London, of, as Roland says, 'a pocket edition of the light fantastic toe;' really, Vaura, my feet are something to fold up and put away; I am so much ashamed of the flesh and bone nature has given them, when I look at his they are too small; but he could easily carry himself in his own violin case. What are you doing with Sir Tilton Everly? At luncheon, yesterday, at the Hall, someone said they had heard from a friend at Paris that the wee mon had been seen in same box with you at the theatre. Mrs. Haughton looked as black as night at the news, as he was wanted for to−night to represent Cupid to her Venus in the tableaux; don't weave your spells round the truant, Vaura, dear, else you will gain the dislike of Miss Tompkins and her mother; he belongs to them, one would think they had bought him in the city, as they did their pug dogs. The other day I heard Mrs. Haughton say to Miss Tompkins. “If Everly did not come up to time for to−night, after his tight dress and wings, bow, &c., and my flesh−coloured, spun silk dress, all O.K. from London I'll play him a trick at Christmas; I'll write him we are too full, and can't put him up.””

“Will you? you ain't going to play all the tricks,' said Miss Tompkins, as Mrs. Haughton left the room, they did not see me, I was buried in a great big chair reading a note from Fred. But I must close, dear; write me a long letter, and so give pleasure to

“Yours lovingly, “ISABEL DOUGLAS.

“MISS VERNON, “Hotel Liberte le Soleil, Paris.”

“How changed the dear old place must be,” said Lady Esmondet, as Vaura ceased reading, “I would that the place could have been restored by some other means, but if your uncle is content, I, needn't moan.”

“Whatever else may be said, one thing is sure: that Lincoln Tompkin's gold could not have been put to better use,” said Lionel.

Here Somers knocked and informed her mistress the carriage waited.

“Bring me my wraps here, Somers. and then continue the packing, and when callers come, Miss Vernon and myself are not at home until dinner hour.”

“Yes, your ladyship.”

“Anything important on the *tapis* for to−day?” asked Trevalyon.

“Yes,” answered Vaura, consulting her tablets, “Worth's studio comes first on the list; he sends word he has something aesthetic, thence to purchase music, “Les Folies” Galop, by Ketterer; duet from “Il Trovatore,” “*Vivra Contende il Guibilo*,” “*Mira di Acarbe*,” etc., you must sing with me when we fold our wings for a while in some temporary home at Rome, Capt. Trevalyon.”

“I shall, it will give me very great pleasure.”

"Thank you; oh! yes, I must not forget to look into Monsieur Perrault's cottage, and leave a parcel for Marie." So saying, Vaura entered the adjoining−room to robe for the carriage.

"And what will you do with yourself, Lionel, until we meet at dinner?"

"I shall devote the hours to trying to find out the present home of Fanny Clarmont, for" said Lionel, coming beside his friend, "I *must* clear myself; my enemies are on the war−path. Haughton's last letter shows by its tone, they have influenced him; Delrose never liked me, and—"

Vaura entering ended the confidences.

"This letter," said Vaura, "my maid tells me, was given to your servant, Capt. Trevalyon, by a man in livery, to be handed to me; it is in an unknown hand, I have not one minute to spare it now, will you kindly pocket it, and on our journey you and it will be near me and I can read it at will. Thanks, but you look very weary," as she put the letter into his hand, she laid her other hand for a moment on his, and looking kindly into his face, "for Lady Esmondet and my sake, go and rest until our return."

"I cannot, dear Miss Vernon; do you remember," he said in a low tone, with his hands on the flowers in her belt, "the silent language these flowers speak?"

"I do."

"Well, I now go out alone to try and unweave the web of difficulty."

Vaura returned the close pressure of his hands, and the look in his eyes, and he was gone, while she, turning to her god−mother, said quietly, "we had better go, dear."

They also left the boudoir.

Lionel, without loss of time, walked quickly to the lodgings he knew had been occupied by Fanny Clarmont some years before; but on reaching them, the landlady informed him that five years previously, Madame Rose (as she was known), had left her comfortable quarters, remittances not being so frequent, and had taken cheaper rooms, *numero cinq, Rue St. Basile*; thither Captain Trevalyon journeyed, only to find that Madame Rose had again shifted her quarters; after some difficulty, the address she had left in case Major Delrose should either call or send a cheque, was found; it directed him to miserable lodgings in one of the poorest streets of Paris; on his enquiring for Madame Rose, a woman told him she was gone; she had been very ill and he could gain further information from Father Lefroy, and she directed a little urchin to go and show the gentleman the priest's house; Trevalyon putting a sovereign into her hand, thanked her and followed the boy. They soon reached their destination, a small, white, many−gabled old−fashioned windowed house, with bright flowers in boxes attached to the window−sill. Father Lefroy was full of hospitality and welcomed Captain Trevalyon, telling him he was ready to tell him of Madame Rose and her movements for the past three years. "Three years ago, the woman with whom you spoke, Monsieur, and who directed you to me, sent for me, saying, 'Madame Rose is very ill and she and her little boy have no money for food.' I went at once, and found her words true; the child was crying for bread, and I could see it was want that had brought illness to the poor mother. I had food brought and stimulants to give her temporary strength, then conveyed her and her little son to our convent of St. John, where she was nursed by the good sisters; while there she became a member of our holy faith. You are a friend of hers, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Well, she told me her history, and of how nine years ago, this Major Delrose, with whom she eloped—"

Lionel's heart leaped; "Here is proof," he thought.

"Deserted her, she then left her comfortable lodgings, went to others and gained a scanty support for herself and boy by giving singing lessons. She has given her boy to us to be educated for the holy priesthood; she herself has taken the veil and is now Sister Magdalen in a London convent, not cloistered, but is one of the sisters of mercy; and now, Monsieur, before I give you her address, tell me truthfully why you want it, your reason will be safe with me."

Trevalyon told him faithfully, and the priest's answer was to, write on a slip of paper as follows:

"To the Mother Superior of the Convent of St. Mary," London, England.

"Grant Captain Trevalyon an interview with sister Magdalen (Madame Rose), and assist him in every way in your power to gain his end, which is good."

"LEFROY, "Priest of St. John's Chapel, Paris."

Here a tap at the door called the priest; returning he said:

"Captain, Trevalyon, I must bid you adieu, my time belongs to the church, and I trust you will find that the

church will aid you in making the truth tell."

"I thank you, Father Lefroy; accept this gold for God's poor."

"*Merci*, adieu."

"Adieu."

Lionel returned to his hotel with a lighter heart, though as yet he did not quite see how to cope with his enemies, how to make the truth, as the priest had said, tell. He must think it out. The three friends met at the *table d'hote* in travelling costume, all in good spirits, each anticipating pleasure from the month's sojourn in Italy. Lady Esmondet was in hopes her health would be materially benefitted, and was going, as we know, also for distraction's sake; Col. Haughton, as a benedict, was a new situation she had yet to grow accustomed to. A man who is in a woman's life for many years as he, chief friend, chief adviser, to go out from one suddenly into another life with another woman, gives one a terrible feeling of lonliness; hard, very hard to bear.

Vaura just now had a sweet sense of completeness in being near and leaning on, as it were, Lionel every day, though a latent feeling told her with warning voice that she should not give way. This very morn, an English gipsy in the pay of Mrs. Haughton, having gained admittance to the hotel and to herself; a fierce looking woman richly dressed in the garb of the Bohemian, her face very much muffled, having caught cold she said, crossing the channel, had told her "man with a wife will sue for your hand. Beware of him leddy, for danger and death I read in your hand." Not that she paid much, if any, heed to the mere words of a gipsy, only this, that the hidden wife story would recur to her memory; but her dear old−time knight was drawing her nearer to himself every day, and because of the mental suffering he was undergoing on account of this very story; and it could not be otherwise with her intensely sympathetic nature, together with her pity for his past griefs; and so she gave herself up to the delicious completeness of her present, hourly deferring to him, leaning on him more and more. "It pleases him, poor fellow, but it will be a terrible awakening for me if this story be true; but I must ease his present pain even though I suffer; it is a necessity of my being" she told herself; so giving up to the hour, she, epicurean−like, let the present suffice.

Before leaving the hotel for the depot, putting a sovereign into the hand of a porter, she desired him to see that the beauteous flowers in their apartments were conveyed to M. Perrault's cottage. On arriving at the depot, which the electric light made bright as the whitest moonlight, they saw many friends come to say farewell.

"Such an important exodus from our city cannot take place without many a heartfelt *bon voyage*," said Eau Clair de Hauteville, gallantly.

"And while our heart weeps at our loss, we anticipate with joy your speedy return" said another, holding Vaura's hand in a tight pressure.

"*Au plaisir, tout a vous*," said another brokenly in a whisper.

"My table will be lonely," cried Bertram, "until grace, beauty and wit dine again with my emaciated self."

"You fill one end of your table, Bertram," said Trevalyon, "and your cook the other; to be sure, you have the sides, but wings are not bad when tender, and I have no pity for you with a Wingfield near."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mrs. Wingfield and Bertram, the former saying:

"Though I am always ready, Captain, to be side−bone−wing or Wingfield to Mr. Bertram's soup, turbot, or mutton, Eustace is never very near, as now, but he is absent here because I told him he must show with me at a crush in an hour's time, and as he mortally hates slow crushing, he is truant and I shall have to appear alone."

"What a tyrant the mighty god *Society* is," cried Bertram, "ignores a man's tastes; expects him to flatten himself at a crush immediately after a good dinner."

"Try and be ours again at Christmas," de Vesey was saying to Vaura.

"Without fail" said another "our city is glorious at the birth−day of the Christ."

"And *la belle* Vernon should not fail to lend us her beauty at that time," said Eau Clair, thinking as did the others that her rare loveliness in the white light was as of an angel.

"She goes with the golden summer," said a southerner.

"The beauteous birds go south in your company, Mile. Vernon, may they sing sweet songs for you as they wing their flight," echoed a poet.

"I love the birds as I do your sunny climes, and as we journey, should I hear their sweet notes, shall remember your words," she said softly, her syren voice full of music, as with a last hand−clasp and wave of handkerchief the guard shut the door and the fire horse dashed on his way and from gay Paris.

CHAPTER XXIV. SLAIN BY A WOMAN.

Our travellers having a carriage to themselves made each other as comfortable as it is possible for human nature of to−day to be, accustomed to the cushion, footstool, and lounge of life.

“Farewell, once more, charming Paris,” said Lady Esmondet, “was there no England with its loved associations and many friends, then would I live my life in thee.”

“So should I,” said Vaura “the French are a dear, delightful people, really living in the flying moments, their gay cheerfulness acting on one as a stimulant; the veriest trifles are said by them in a pleasing manner all their own; yes we have much to envy the versatile Gaul for.”

“I fear,” said Lionel looking tenderly into her face, “I fear you will feel, in our life together once more, a little dull, as if a cloud had crossed the sunbeams, after your recent gaiety, triumphs, conquests, and what not.”

“You do not know my nature” she said, her large dark eyes looking at him reproachfully, “'tis like coming home. Even the gay songsters methinks love to know their nests await them; one's life spent in the cold glitter of triumphs and conquests would be most unsatisfying, unless one knew of one heart, one's home to rest at even; one other nature akin to ones own to share one's inner higher life, that to the world is closed.”

“Yes, natures akin, what bliss,” said her godmother, dreamily partly taking up the refrain of Vaura's words; partly going with thought which had quickly sped the “injurious distance” to Eric and the woman he has married.

“Just my conviction,” said Trevalyon with feeling, “natures akin; men talk of moulding some woman after marriage to their views of life; women talk of leaning on their husbands, I do not mean physically, for this is womanly, and I love a womanly woman, but mentally, what a drag; now I do not refer to education, for each could in that case give to the other, the information acquired from books being different; but to have constantly to instruct one's wife into one's tastes, habits, opinions in natures akin; each is perfect in the other; each goes out in the fulness of sympathy, heart to heart.”

“What! a rest!” said Lady Esmondet, with a sigh.

A grave yet tender look met in the mesmeric eyes of Lionel and the soulful eyes of Vaura, as she said softly:

“Yes, only in natures akin can there be that fulness of sympathy which makes marriage one's earthly heaven;” and now that same far−away look comes to her eyes, as she thinks “poor fellow, poor, poor Guy;" and yet, 'tis only pity.

There was a lull in the conversation for a few moments, each busy with thought, when Lady Esmondet said, following her reverie,

“Tell us, Vaura, something more of Haughton news; does Isabel mention any of the novelties introduced?”

“Yes, godmother mine, and prepare yourselves at dinner, for Hebe, who waits, will be an equal.”

“Never!” said her companions in same breath.

“'Tis true, 'tis pity, and pity 'tis 'tis true;' at some signal or given time, Isabel says the servants are dismissed when some of the ladies wait, bearing the cup, or, etc.”

“I must say I should object, 'however bright, however young' my Hebe,” said Trevalyon; “her train would surely become entangled, and I defy Jupiter to be sweetly calm with iced champagne spilled down his neck or on to his knee.”

“I should say not,” said Lady Esmondet; “a most preposterous novelty to introduce.”

“Isabel says everything at table; takes the usual routine when there is a state dinner.”

“I should hope so.”

“When alone (that is with merely the home guests), she says they frequently wear some fancy costume at dinner.”

“What! changes; but I suppose I am old−fashioned,” said Lady Esmondet.

“And so am I, for I should feel as ill at ease, as the family portraits, could one invest them with speech and hear their lamentations,” said Trevalyon.

“Yes, you both forget this is the age of novelties; I am inclined to think could Solomon of old go to and fro some evening even through our British Isles, he would draw a pen through his time−honoured proverb of 'There is nothing new under the sun.'“

“Haughton tells me we shall scarcely know the old place; I confess should like to see it much, as it was full of loved associations.”

“Parts of the Hall did really require the tools of the workman; but I hope my dear mother's rooms have been left undisturbed to any great extent. It is well for us who have not gone to the extreme in our craze for the novelties that those who have cannot plant their ladder to the sky and retint in aesthetic, or according to Oscar Wilde, colours.”

“More letters, Lionel; your friends have not forgotten to remember you.”

“No, nor my foes, for by every mail comes something anonymous, telling me kindly of my blackened reputation; but I should not trouble either of you so much above and beyond the petty scandal making and loving herd; but it is very wearying and wearing to me; I sometimes think I should leave you on account of it, and grapple with this difficulty at once and forever;” the moisture was in Vaura's eyes as he looked at her wearily with a long drawn sigh.

“You must not play into their hands, poor fellow, by seeming to notice their game,” said Lady Esmondet, musingly, “until you see your own way clear to face them, by telling them and proving it a 'lie direct.'“

“Yes, dear Lady Esmondet, you are right; I shall not.”

“And depend upon it,” she continued, “unless in very exceptional cases, there is a woman at the bottom of every particle of scandal.”

“What do you say to this charge, Miss Vernon?”

“In the words of one who has written much my sentiments I shall tell you. 'In days of yore, when the world was young and men were as brave and women fairer than they are to−day, when men to men were as faithful as Orestes to Pylades and women as sisters; when men and women had a simple faith which knew no fainting fits and believed as children in the fairy wand of the fairies, in the power over men's destinies of the gods and goddesses; in those days it came to pass that Juno, who was jealous of her husband, Jupiter, and quarrelled with him over his many escapades, one day said unto him: Behave thyself and I shall throw the apple of discord and scandal to earth, and it shall come to pass that amongst the mortals my sex, not yours (for to woman, not man, have we given the undying gift of curiosity), shall catch it as it falls, and it shall come to pass that as many as shall eat of it shall hunger and thirst for scandal, and finding none shall form themselves into *clubs*, and meet, not in the Temple of Truth, where Minos, son of Jupiter, sits as supreme judge, and where falsehood and calumny can never approach; but where she who has eaten most greedily of the apple shall throw most mud at all outside sisters who have not eaten, which the listeners with itching ears shall catch up, and repeat on the wings of the wind, and Boreas, Auster, Eurus, and Zephyrus shall carry the refrain over all the land, and so we, with the other immortals, watching the strife among mortals, shall learn to live happily together.' 'And what then, fair Juno? you forget it will surely come to pass that the women who eat shall transmit to their offspring an undying thirst for scandal and power of invention therein.' 'Amen, O all−wise Jupiter; but it shall come to pass also that she shall only transmit this taste to her own sex; so, *n'importe*, here goes,' and with a gay '*bon voyage*,' she threw the apple to earth and us; you see, Captain Trevalyon; but thank the fates there are some of us who have not eaten.”

“And you stand out so bright in the loveliness of true women that one forgets that your sex do bespatter themselves with the mud they throw. What a pity it is; how many lives are severed by it,” said Lionel, wearily; “but to something sweeter than my worries. Here is the letter you left in my charge, Miss Vernon, and a few lines to myself from my cousin, telling me she and Uncle Vincent have arrived at London and the Langham.”

“Indeed!” said Lady Esmondet; “quite a change for your cousin.”

“Quite so; Judith has lived her life, I may say, at New York.”

“Has Sir Vincent's health improved?”

“I regret not materially; though he says, so Judith tells me, that he already feels, the benefit of the change,” he said, somewhat absently, for he is watching Vaura's changing expression as she reads. Her head is bent toward the letter, the fluffy brown hair in its natural wave meeting the brow; the lovely lips soft and full with a slight quiver in them; the small bonnet is off; the luxuriant hair in a knot behind fastened by pins of gold; her cloak, which he—himself had unfastened and removed, leaves her figure in its perfection of *contour*, robed in its gown of navy blue velvet, a sculptor's study; her heartbeats are quicker and her cheeks wear a deeper rose as she reads the farewell words of the Marquis Del Castello.

“Peerless Mlle. Vernon, allow me, one of your most devoted admirers, the sad consolation of a last word of

farewell. I have silently adored you for several months, and your own heart will tell you that now, suddenly coming to the knowledge that another life is to be made happy in yours, I cannot yet bear to look upon your loveliness as belonging to another. But I want to ask you to accept (from one who would give you all) the shelter of my villa Iberia for yourself and companions, during your stay at Rome; you will find it pleasantly situated, and at such time in the future that I may visit it, there will be a melancholy pleasure to me in the thought that the fairest of Saxon lilies, the most beauteous of English roses, with the warmth of the South in her nature, with the poetry of my own land in her heart, has been among my flowers, paintings, and my books. I feel sure, dearest Mlle. Vernon, that your heart will not deny me this small favour, and may your life be peaceful as an angel's, and joyous as a butterfly in a garden of roses.—Another captive.

"Yours, "FERDINAND DEL CASTELLO. "Paris, November, 1877."

Vaura was more than slightly agitated on reading the farewell words of her Spanish admirer. It was so unexpected, and she, so sympathetic, feeling for him in his heart−ache, also feeling that had there been no Lionel Trevalyon this Spaniard might have won her heart; and glancing up she saw that the *Saturday Review* was laid aside, and the tired blue eyes on her face—when is it otherwise now?—and giving one little sigh as she smiled, the sigh being for Del Castello, gone out in his loneliness, and the smile for him. But poor Lionel did not know her heart. Man cannot fathom the depths of woman's nature. They both may stand on the brink of a deep clear river, as he looks with her into its transparent mirror he only sees the reflection of her loveliness, for her heart is deep as the bed of the river; but when she sees his face reflected, his heart is laid bare. And so Vaura Vernon, being only a woman, knew Lionel had come to love her, for his eyes followed her every movement. The strong man was slain and she was content while he craved for more, he would fain be sure, by feeling her in his arms, and his lips on hers; and so he sighed, for had not her uncle forbidden him on his honour to speak? And she smiled, for she knew before long she would be held to his heart.

She thought it best to tell her companions at once, in part, the drift of Del Castello's words; so saying, "Neither of you can guess whom the written words I have just perused are from, so I shall tell you. They come from the Marquis Del Castello."

The rose deepened in her cheek on meeting Lionel's eye, for she thought, "I wonder if the Marquis suspected the truth?" And a sharp pain came to Trevalyon's heart in his dread of what her answer would be.

"In his billet," continued Vaura, "he very kindly offers us the villa Iberia during our stay at Rome; of course in the most gallant and poetic manner of speech, as befits one of his race. During our first dance at the de Hauteville ball he told me it was his intention to go at once to his Italian villa, but it seems he has changed his mind, for in his letter he speaks of going there at some future time. And so, what think you, god−mother mine; do you feel inclined to be a guest of the absent lord and master?"

"It is for you to decide, *ma chere*."

"Be it so; I feel inclined to please him in this matter; but perhaps our kind escort has made other arrangements," turning to Trevalyon.

"No, *ma belle*; I had intended sending a telegram from Lyons to the proprietor of my favourite hotel (securing apartments), knowing him to be a very decent fellow; but now, perforce," he added with an intent look, trying to read her, "my would−be landlord must go to the wall, while the doors of the villa obey the open sesame of yourself and its master."

"While we make our *entree*," said Vaura.

"And now as to our route," said Lady Esmondet.

"I should say," said Trevalyon, "through the Mount Cenis pass, to Turin, thence, by easy rail stages down to Rome, so that you will not be too fatigued; we should spend a day in the virgin−white, the spotless cathedral at Milan. Florence would be another rest, all among its flowers and time−honoured works of art; also resting a few days at the foot of the mountains, where we could enjoy walks and drives up the magnificent mountain slopes, and through ravines too wondrous in their beauty to be ever blotted from one's memory."

"Oh, yes; your route would be delightful," said Vaura eagerly; "by all means, god−mother dear, let us linger by the way."

"Yes, we can afford a few days to the pure loftiness of the mountains; the life of to−day is so practical, if full of shams that a day with nature is as a tonic to one's higher, inner, self."

"Just as I have felt, dear Lady Esmondet, when the social atmosphere at London has become too narrow for

me; you both know, how at times, what has been sufficient for one, suddenly develops the bars, as it were, of a cage, which one must burst to breathe freely. How many months have I spent in these woods upon the mountains, with only my good dog, leaving my man domiciled at some pension below; the terrific grandeur of the peaks resting against the blue heavens, the majestic crags, restful valleys with verdure clad, or awfully steep precipices, all speaking to me of a higher power, were company enough. The beautiful lake of Bourget, has charmed me so that I must stay my steps, and did; gazing long into its mirrored surface. Then from its calm, the mighty torrents, wildly dashing and foaming, held me, when my mood was so; the many views from Chambery, too, woo one to linger. There was one old ruin, which, if we come upon, I think you would greatly admire; it was on the ascent, down near Genoa, and where we could rest. Some Brothers of Saint Gregory, I think, is their order; such a quaint little chapel they have, which you should sketch, *ma belle*."

"I shall; and many other artist bits, I have ever longed to be so placed as to be able to do so."

"Lionel, have you ever tasted the Alpine trout? To me they are excellent."

"Yes, frequently, and always with an appetite. Their home is in a lake 8,290 feet above the sea level."

"No wonder Roland Douglas has spoken so highly of them," said Vaura gaily; "their relations of the sea are quite under−bred. What stupendous pieces of work the mountain passes are," she continued; "I wonder, could Hannibal see them, what he would think of dynamite *versus* vinegar, to blast rocks with."

"Or poor, untiring Napoleon and his weary soldiers," said Lady Esmondet.

"What men there were in the bygone," said Lionel with twice our strength, twice our endurance; we are weary; though making the run cushion at back, stimulant in hand."

"We want backbone; our spinal column has given way, by reason of our fore−fathers' energy," said Vaura, laughingly.

"We certainly could manage an extra backbone very well," said her god−mother; "ah! what strength I had, when I journeyed South in seventy−five, I remember we went by rail from Bale to Milan, *via* the St. Gotthard road; words are lifeless in describing the scenery along this route, being grandly, magnificent; one winds in and out among the mountains; at times in gazing out the coach windows, one's breath is a prayer, one trembles so at the terrific peaks soaring up and up so far above one."

CHAPTER XXV. IN THE SUNBEAMS.

Our friends having reached Lyons, where they had business, and would rest for the night, we shall leave them and meet them again on the mountains. Suffice it to say they enjoyed the varied grandeur, beauty and magnificence of the scenes through which they passed, as natures alive to the beauties of natural scenery alone can; the weather was charming, the coach not uncomfortable, and three happier in each other, or handsomer faces, had never before looked out upon the many charms of landscape. The snow−topped mountains, the small white fleecy clouds chasing each other across the blue sky, and looking as though gathered from the snow−flakes on their peaks. The varied tints of the trees, looking from a distance like a huge bouquet in the hand of Dame Nature; again, a mountain stream dashing headlong down, down, gathering strength as it rolls until lost in some sudden curve or wild projection. A gleaming crag with belts of pine now burst upon the view, in its rich dark dress, while here we have the delicate tints of the valley. Let us kneel here as we gaze on the giants of the forest, as they spread their huge arms and rear their proud heads to the sky, and thank heaven that in some favoured spots the timber is not the prey of the ruthless destroyer, man. What new country in God's world but has been shorn of its beauty to gratify man's unsatiable love of clearing; and the ignorant clod is not the only despoiler, for peer and peasant rival the great Liberal Leader in wielding the axe, the one to pay his debts, the other because he is only a clod; and Mother Earth is made barren, and her heart dry and hard, and she cannot give nourishment to the seedlings committed to her care.

For a few days of pure mountain air and scenery, we again meet Lady Esmondet and her companions, lingering at a small town east of Genoa; on the last day of their stay, they have taken a conveyance and, Sims as driver, in descending by another road they came suddenly upon one of those mediaeval castles, or rather its ruins, the greater part having fallen to decay.

“Eureka,” exclaimed Lionel; “the quaint spot I have wished to see again; and which you should sketch, Miss Vernon.”

The Brothers of Saint Gregory had, with tool and hammer, made the most of the ruins remaining; and here some twenty lived, sheltering the weary traveller. Our friends were almost close to the ruin ere observing it, it being hidden partly by a magnificent belt of pine, partly by a freak of nature, in shape of huge upheavals of rock, thrown up as it were from the earth's bowels, and in the clefts of which rocks, beautiful moss, hardy trailing plants, and ferns grew luxuriantly. Here the Brothers had built a tiny chapel, one side and part of roof being formed of these rocks, the other side, remainder of roof, and western entrance, were of stone and marble. The eastern end of beautiful specimens of Italian marble, the altar of pure white, its many coloured background throwing it out in all its purity; seats of rude stone; the floor strewn with sweet scented leaves and twigs, sending up when crushed by one's foot, a sweet odour as of incense. On our travellers nearing, a magnificent voice full of melody, fell upon the air.

“What a grand singer!” exclaimed Vaura, as they with one consent, deserted the carriage.

It was a Christmas anthem, “*Regina coeli loetare, alleluia, quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia, etc.*“

“'Tis a beautiful spot, and a great and rich voice,” said Lady Esmondet; “I wonder if petticoats are admitted.”

“Even if not,” said Vaura, “we can sit on the rocks or grassy seats and fill our ears with music, which, after we descend, will lift us to the heights once more.”

In following a narrow, irregular path, which led to the iron gate of the garden, Lady Esmondet, becoming separated from her companions, Vaura climbed to a rock; just a foot−hold, to endeavour to ascertain her whereabouts; Lionel overtook her, as becoming dizzy, she would have fallen.

“Spring into my arms; there, that is it; do not fear,” he said breathlessly.

“I was foolish to attempt it when you were not near,” she said softly, as he loosened his hold on the level path.

“How glad I was to be in time, and you cannot know how my heart leaped when you had to come, to me and I held you in my arms, even for a moment,” he says brokenly.

They come now to a few yards of narrow path, a steep precipice at one side. With a whispered “may I?” his arm is around her in guiding her steps; no word is spoken and we all know the silent ecstasy of such moments. A turn in the path and they come upon Lady Esmondet, seated on a rocky seat (she having taken a safer way) and

listening to the sweet voice still singing.

“I wonder if they will admit us,” said Lady Esmondet.

“I can try,” answered Lionel, and moving down the few natural steps to the iron gate of the garden, rang the bell.

The gate was opened by a priest, an elderly man, severe of aspect, but courteous in manner, and a man of letters from his intellectual cast of countenance. In very good English, he said:

“In the name of Saint Gregory, I welcome you; whether you come for food for the soul or body, our prayers are yours, and our poor fare awaits you.”

“Thank you, sir priest,” said Lady Esmondet; “we shall just admire your chapel and garden and go on our way.”

“We were attracted from the direct path by a magnificent voice within your walls,” said Vaura.

“Yes, Brother Thomas is greatly gifted; well for him that his great powers are given to good, rather than to evil. The sacred festival of the birth of the Christ is so near, and our brother sings at Paris the joyful songs of his nativity. This being a Saint's day, some of the younger brothers of our order have begged our sweet singer of the churches to pour forth the notes of his melody, that they also, may feel as the Parisiens, the wonderful power and charm of his song.”

“Such melody stirs one's very soul!” said Vaura earnestly, her large eyes full of moisture as the music thrills her.

“What a lull there seems!” said Lady Esmondet, “now that his voice is still.”

“Yes!” said Vaura, “as if nature herself had been listening.”

Lady Esmondet now introduced to Father Ignatius herself and companions, and as they followed the winding path from the chapel to the ruins, whither to the habitable wing they are bending their steps to partake of some slight refreshment, they come suddenly upon the owner of the throat, full of song, who is now kneeling beside a large urn, in which are some live coals, upon which he has just laid some elegantly bound volumes; he is pale and emaciated, but with the remains of wonderful beauty; with folded hands and eyes closed turned heavenward, on hearing footsteps he looks and would have started to his feet and flown, but by a visible effort restrained himself. On observing his agitation, Trevalyon suggested the turning into another path, but the stern priest objected.

“Yes! pray do,” said Lady Esmondet, “there is a lovely shrub I should like a nearer view of.”

“Be it so; I perceive, Monsieur, I mean,” checking herself, “Brother Thomas is not yet free from the pride that lacks humility, that you being of the world he has left forever, have still power to stir his feelings, he was ashamed of his garb, but must steel his heart against such emotion.”

“Poor fellow,” said Vaura, in pitying tones, “he looks ill, and is perhaps weak and nervous, his habiliments look stiff and new, not seeming a part of him as yours, he has perhaps but lately joined your brotherhood, and all is strange as yet.”

“You are right, Mlle. Vernon, his garb is as new as it is new for him to lift up his voice in the church, and while you partake of our poor fare, I shall pass away the time in telling you something of him.”

They now enter the noble vaulted stone entrance with its ancient workmanship and massive proportions, seeming in its substantial build to defy the destroying hand of time. The spacious hall has been converted by the brothers into a refectory; the priest bidding them to the table on which were dried fruits from the northern, with fresh from the southern climes, English walnuts and biscuits, with a bottle of old French wine. Before his guests partook of the food, the priest kneeling, made the sign of the cross, asked a blessing, then seating himself a little apart, spoke as follows:

CHAPTER XXVI. A MOUNTAIN IDYL, OR AN ALPINE ROMANCE.

“About eight months ago at last Easter−tide, and while the ladies of Sainte Marie were attending mass in their little chapel, situated about a quarter of a mile east from the road by which you descend to Italia, a traveller was carried into their midst more dead than alive, in a faint, having been struck down by the fell hand of disease suddenly, and while making his way over the mountains; the hireling who drove the conveyance had carried him in, well knowing the convent and hospital to be a harbour of rest for the sick and weary, having deposited his living freight upon one of the rude benches of the chapel, bringing also his luggage, left him in God and our Lady's hands. The mother superior at the close of mass, hastily summoned the strong−armed portress, who with the assistance of the officiating priest, carried him to the adjoining hospital. You all doubtless observed traces of unusual beauty in Brother Thomas, but in the emaciated form you have seen, can form no conception of his comeliness, ere wasted by slow lingering fever; yes! he was handsome, wondrously so. In critical cases of illness, the mother is wont to call me to aid, I having studied the science of healing in the great schools of Europe and England, ere taking the vows of our order; in the character of physician I saw much of Monsieur—I mean Brother Thomas. As a penance for evil, wrought by him upon mankind, he has permitted me to tell his story, but as he is dead to his own former world, and as a punishment, to no more speak his name. Suffice it to say he is a man of culture, a man of letters. You have heard his voice, and he was born among the great. Alas! when one sees to what base ends education is applied plied, one is inclined to regret the early days. At one time in the strangers illness, he was so nearly passing through the valley of the Shadow of Death, as to make it incumbent upon me to open his luggage in order to ascertain his name and address, whereby to communicate with his friends; in an iron box I was horror−struck to find volume after volume, his own work, which rivalled Voltaire in its teachings. I trembled to think of such godless productions within the walls of a holy convent and of the awful responsibility resting upon myself; should I allow such instruments of evil to exist? did it not seem providential, my being placed in such a position as to be able in a few minutes, by the aid of fire, to destroy the labour of years, and so give to the church another victory over Satan?

“I saw him from time to time, and as it proved to be a low wasting fever, he was with the sisters four long months. Among the nuns who attend the sick, is a beautiful young English girl, of patrician face and mien. And now a word of her; eighteen years ago, it was a *fete* day at Rome, and among the seductions offered to the senses of man, was that of the stage; one of your most gifted of English stars held men chained in fetters wrought by her beauty and talent, night after night, in their boxes at the theatre, while the priests of the Lord wept at the altar, because of the deserted sanctuary; but it was carnival time, and men, at that season, forget the God who gave them power to enjoy. In one of the churches, at midnight, a lady closely veiled, entered, carrying a bundle, and going up to the altar, without reverence and in haste, deposited her burden at the foot of the cross. The officiating priest directed one of the sextons to follow her in haste, but the lady was too quick for him. A carriage was in waiting, which a gentleman with hat over brow, and muffled about throat, speedily drove off, almost before the lady was seated; they were soon lost in the maddening crowd, for humanity held high revel; the jester was abroad, and theatre, with amusement and music hall, poured forth their devotees, though the ball, both in palace and street, would be kept rolling all night. The emissaries of the church learned that your star of the London stage left Rome closely veiled, and attended by a stranger, a gentleman, at midnight. Enough said; only this, that her business manager and waiting woman had been sent on to Venice, the next scene of triumph, the morning of the same day. The child, a lovely girl infant, wore robes of wealth, rich muslin and lace, and was lolled in a carriage rug of the skin of the seal, five hundred pounds, in English gold, was pushed loosely into the bosom of her dress, and three lines of writing were found there also, which read as follows: 'Communicate, in case of infant's death, with ——' giving name of banking house at London; 'until that time we have instructions to pay L200 yearly, for her benefit, *if not* annoyed by efforts to ascertain her parentage.' That child is the young Saxon nun, now at the convent of Ste. Marie; a convent has been ever her home, and she loves its life, early showing a strong inclination for the study of medicine, for the past five years she has been an apt pupil of mine; with great beauty, cleverness, and persuasive manner, she, at the sick−bed, has gained already many souls within the true pale. And now, to continue of the illness of Monsieur, now Brother Thomas, as I have already made you aware, a low fever caused him to remain at

the convent for the space of four months. Sister Fidele, a French nun, shared the fatigue and duty of ministering to the sick man's wants, with the young Saxon sister, whose life I have told you of. She is with us Sister Faith; a name given to her by his Holiness, Pope Pius, her child−like belief and peaceful beauty of expression, suggesting it.

“But to proceed, Sister Fidele, seeing her patient was ever restless and unsatisfied during the absence of Sister Faith, informed the Mother Abbess, saving: 'He is a heretic, mother, and if you permit Sister Faith to be more with him her prayers, zeal and gentle pious converse may impress his godless soul.'

“Thus it was that Sister Faith spent all her time not devoted to necessary rest at the bedside of Monsieur. But, alas for the weakness of man, instead of the piety of her teachings impressing his soul, or the sacredness of her office shielding her from such passions, her great beauty had kindled in his heart the flame of a moral love. I as her father confessor learned of the unlawful words spoken to her; my indignation and sorrow were great. But when she assured me that to her he was only a soul to be saved, that her life was only happy in doing good for the beloved Church, that no earthly love could ever enter her soul; moreover, that she firmly believed the stranger was beginning to feel the beauties of our holy faith I abandoned my resolve to bring him hither, and instead left him in her hands. At first he tried every fascination of which he was master to make her love him and fly with him. I need not tell you without avail. Then her gentle piety seemed to have touched his heart. He permitted her to send for me. I obeyed the summons joyfully, for I well knew what a triumph over Satan his conversion would be, and his own wish or consent to see me made me hopeful. We conversed by the hour on knotty theological questions, he talking well and seeming at times half persuaded to be a Christian, but as if too proud to humble himself. The blessed saints made intercession for him, for our prayers were heard; and I had the great triumph of baptising and administering to him the blessed sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. After he had received he begged of me a private interview, and then implored of me to give him Sister Faith to wife. He said her great faith and gentle converse had made him think, 'If these things be, how great is my condemnation.' It was she who had taught him to say or think it possible he might ever say: 'Whereas I was blind I now see.' He said he had great wealth, and if she was his they would give much gold to the Church.

“But I could not grant his wish. Six months before his advent amongst us our sweet−faced sister had taken, the black veil; had she been in her novitiate I might by personal application to his Holiness have granted his prayer. He bowed his head in grief. I told him of the unchanging vow of celibacy of priest and nun, and of the immovableness of the Church; I feared he would have a relapse and removed him hither, where he has since taken our vows, and is now a brother. You have heard his wondrous power of song, and, as I told you, goes soon to Paris. He grieves yet to the very heart that Sister Faith cannot be his, but his penances are severe, and I am in hopes the saints will strengthen him to subdue the flesh altogether to the spirit; 'tis so new to him to sing the songs of the Church that he practices at whatever hour allowed him; but has been anxious to destroy his infidel writings that I have given him an hour to−day and tonight at midnight for the work.

“Such, noble guests, is a page in our new brother's life,” concluded the priest.

“And a most interesting page, reverend father,” said Lady Esmondet.

“What a checkered life his has been,” said Lionel thoughtfully, as they wended their way from the quiet seclusion of the monastery out to the carriage which was to convey them once more to the busy life of the world.

“Yes, none more so,” said the priest; “how kind is Providence to lead this wayward soul at last, and in its great pride to the cross, and through the piety of a young maiden.”

Here the heavy, iron gate of the garden is reached and they bid the hospitable, though austere, monk adieu.

“Could we see the beautiful Sister Faith?” enquired Vaura; “if we in our descent into Italy, call at the convent of Ste. Marie, I feel so interested in her, she deserves perfect happiness; do you think reverend Father, that she is so?”

“Your own lovely face, Mademoiselle, looks as if it had never been clouded by sorrow. The face of Sister Faith is unclouded as your own, and we know that the trials of the world can never reach her, the protecting arms of the church enfold her; I am full of regrets that you cannot see her, she is now praying devotedly to the saints that Brother Thomas may be given strength to banish her image altogether from his heart, as well as attending two cases of fever among the inmates.”

“Are you not afraid, in her great self−abnegation, that her own health will give way?” inquired Lady Esmondet.

“No, she is gifted with wonderful health and strength, one quiet hour in the cell restores the vigour lost in days and nights of fatigue; and now adieu, and may the blessing of St. Gregory go with you, and I thank you in the name of Christ's poor, for the gold you have given.”

“Adieu, adieu, farewell!”.

And our friends are again *en route*.

“Depend upon it,” said Lionel, “in ages to come, the good Sister Faith will be Ste. Faith of the Alpine mountains.”

“Poor young creature, I cannot but think,” said Vaura, her eyes suffused with tears, “that she would be happier in the bright world, loved and loving, than in the cloister.”

“What a gifted couple they would have been,” observed Lady Esmondet.

“Brother Thomas has lived and knows what life is, and I cannot help thinking the cloister, will not bring him peace,” said Lionel.

“What a power in the church the nuns are,” said Vaura; “not in her grand ceremonial, not in her unity, not in her much gold dwelleth her greatest and most powerful arm, but in her gentle sisterhood.”

“True,” said Lionel; “though I cannot but think, that the church would have gained more had they united the Saxon nun with the now Brother Thomas; what a power their united lives, and with much gold; his influence will not tell immurred in a cell.”

“I am sure we shall not soon forget the story of poor Brother Thomas and Sister Faith,” remarked Vaura.

“There was a time,” said Lionel, “when I used to wonder that so many fellows gave up this life of ours and buried themselves in a monastry, but as I listened to the priest I felt that if a man is feeling that the love of the one woman he craves can never be his, that, as an escape from the speculative eye of Mrs. Grundy, a cell might look inviting.”

“So you give Mrs. Grundy credit for a speculative eye, Lionel,” said Lady Esmondet, amusingly.

“What else is she but a speculator? she is ever busy, always alive and speculating with some unfortunate beings, name or fame,” said Lionel bitterly.

“I am glad we have run away from her; she cannot be with us on the mountains, so rest easy for to−day, Lionel,” answered Lady Esmondet.

“No,” said Vaura, earnestly; “the Alpine heights are too pure and too lofty for her, she loves the heated gaslit *salon*, with the music of many voices; but we are all the better for an outing with Dame Nature, I do love her so, with her sunlit air, her breezy fan, her robes of green, while her children, the brook and field, sing and laugh, they are so merry and so rich; yes, I love her so, I should just like to take her in my arms; see the birds in the trees as we pass, she rocks them to sleep, for as she breathes she sways the branches to and fro, and so gives a tuneful accompanyment to their song ere they rest.”

And so in gay chit−chat or more serious converse, the descent into fair Italia is made. The grand passion of Trevalyon's life becoming more earnest, and completely mastering him for this sweet woman; the companion of his journey; for not only her grace and rich beauty made him her captive, but her tender womanliness, underlying her vivacity, charmed him, and his eyes were seldom off her face as she sat opposite him; he was never tired of watching the ever−warying expression of her countenance; and poor Lionel, subdued at last, felt he must clear himself to Eric Haughton, and have her ever beside him.

Her grey eyes were luminous as stars with a warmer light as they sometimes rested on his; there was a wild rose bloom on her cheeks painted by nature, with the invigorating air of the mountains. Sometimes, with a gay *abandon*, she tossed aside head−gear and cloak, and with Lionel, descended from the carriage to cull some rare moss or late flower, or make the ascent of a higher spot to view some lovelier scene; just now she is looking more than usually lovely. In this prelude to real love−making, as was now taking place daily between Lionel and Vaura; what a magical softening of expression there is, what a sweetness of languor in the eyes, a tremulous sighing from the waiting heart; and yet, she is blissfully happy, for she knows that she is loved by a man whom she will love, aye, does, with all the sympathy and passion of her nature.

CHAPTER XXVII. GRUNDY'S LASH CAUSES HEART−ACHE.

On the evening of the sixth day, our friends leisurely arrived in the city of the Caesars; on coming in at the depot, Trevalyon, hiring a landau, they, with Sims and the maids following, proceeded to the villa Iberia. They learned that the noble owner had been there three days previously, and had then given his own servants a holiday, hiring English in their stead, thinking the comfort of his guests would be better attended to by this arrangement.

"The Marquis must have come here immediately after the ball," said Lady Esmondet, "I heartily wish he were here to welcome us."

Her companions were silent, both busy with thought; Trevalyon's were not altogether pleasant, his proud spirit recoiling from self at the part he had played in the boudoir of Madame de Hauteville.

"Had I not," he told himself, "had I not bowed to Del Castello's question of 'are you anything to her?' he would have been here to do his wooing; we, at an hotel, and yet, it was only human, but, bah! how mean; but was I to give up any place I may have in her heart, and yield her to the influence of his southern tongue, merely because I am held in honour not to speak, and am just now a foot−ball for Dame Rumour. God help me, darling, I couldn't; you might, in *pique* at my silence, have given way to his warm words; you belong to me; I have only you, and should I lose you, one of two courses would be mine; either to make an endless beast of myself for distraction's sake, or become misanthrope, like my poor father." So thinking, he unfastened the cloak of the woman whose beauty and sweet womanliness, had made him captive.

In the hall, the butler saying:

"Dinner will await your ladyship's pleasure in half an hour; our master, his noble lordship, commanded cook to have it ready every evening, on arrival of nine o'clock express, so your ladyships and the English gentleman would find comfort."

"Your master is very thoughtful," said Lady Esmondet.

One of the household now ushered them to their respective apartments.

"What an air of complete comfort pervades the whole place, said Vaura.

"Yes," said Lady Esmondet, "I am rather *difficile* in such matters, but I must confess, the place is charming in its warmth and luxury."

Here they parted to dress, Lady Esmondet being conducted to a luxurious room on the ground floor, opening on to a verandah; there was a suspicion of chilliness in the air, so a bright fire burned in the open fire−place; fresh flowers bloomed in old Roman jars, while the walls were gay in the brightness of a few choice paintings.

"Yes, one could pass a winter very comfortably here," mused the occupant, as Somers fastened her robe of pearl−gray satin, "and that we are so well placed is all the outcome of the beauty of face and form of one woman."

Miss Vernon was led by a maid up a few steps, covered in the softest of velvet pile, so deep and rich as to cause one not to feel the pressure of the sole of one's foot, and now into two rooms built out in a projection, and the villa Iberia, being located on a knoll, commanding one of the finest views of the Eternal City, the occupant of these rooms feasted his eyes on a scene unrivalled in Italy. Here also, a cheerful fire glowed in the fire−place; the long, narrow windows were hung in a pale, blue tinted satin, the walls painted in choice studies by deft Italian fingers; the opening between the rooms was hung in unison with the windows, and on the satin, clusters of the rose in every hue were embroidered; easy chairs, lounge, satin bed coverlid, and soft carpet, were of the same soft tint, with the warmth of the rose thereon. The air was fragrant, for the hyacinth, rose, and many a gay foreign sister, vied with each other in perfumed welcome to the flower face bending over them, and drinking in their sweets.

"And he has done all this for me," she mused, giving herself up to Saunders to have her hair dressed. "How glad I am," she thought looking dreamily at her reflection in the mirror, for a very passible loveliness, "but Lionel was always my ideal cavalier, he loves me now," and she smiled softly, "and has brought into existence in my heart a passionate love he little dreams of, poor fellow; I have hitherto played with men's hearts, so they say, but not intentionally; Heaven knows I merely enjoyed their free submission, their love, as my natural food; I always enjoyed dainties, and men's hearts were as such to me; I could never endure the bread and butter of life, but I

wrong myself or I am of little worth; one is apt to have luxurious inclinations, at an hour and in a scene like this," she thought as she toyed with one of the gold perfume bottles, in the form of a Cupid, standing on the breast of a sleeping man, and aiming for his heart. "I know I have drunk in the pleasure their looks of love and warmth of words have given me, not thinking perhaps enough of to what end it might lead, but if I dream here any longer, I shall experience much the same sensation as sleeping Richard at Bosworth Field, while my ghosts of the departed, rise up before me, and while I think pityingly of poor Cyril and many more, let me also remember the deserved cut I gave Sir Edward Hatherton, when he laid his insignificant title, his supreme vanity and egotism, with his mean heart at my feet, while boasting of his broad acres, making too sure he had but to ask, and be accepted with thanks. Yes, though I have hurt some brave manly hearts, I have given a check to the vanity of that man that will send him into the corner to think that there are some women, even in this age of barter, who, though they love acres of the dear warm mother earth, they will not give their loveliness and powers of loving for the broad acres of which he is lord."

And so fair Vaura pondered, as Saunders with deft fingers performed her easy task of robing her mistress, and now she has finished, and both maid and our sweet Mlle. Vernon are satisfied with the result. And well they may, for her cardinal satin robe fits her full bust and figure like a glove, her eyes are full of dark and tender depths, her lips red as the rose, while the rose bloom of the mountain air has not faded from her cheeks, and neck and arms being bare gleam in their whiteness.

Trevalyon met her at the foot of the steps to lead her to the dining−room whither Lady Esmondet has already gone; they immediately seat themselves ami do justice to the tempting little dinner awaiting them.

The room is handsome and furnished with a mixture of English comfort and solidness with French brightness the furniture being of carved oak, while the carpet and hangings are of a gay Paris pattern, the table bright with silver and decorated with flowers, its dinner service of old Sevres china, each piece of beautiful delicate design, while the dishes would have tempted an anchorite from his cave. Over the mantel−piece of purest white marble was a painting, evidently the work of a master, representing Bacchus riding in a chariot, and on his head among his curls vine leaves, in his hand a cup. The whole painting had a warmth of color and gay dashing style, with a life−like look about it very pleasing.

"One almost expects to see the merry god lift the cup to his lip," said Vaura; "he looks so life−like."

"It is a remarkably well executed thing," said Trevalyon.

"The whole villa," echoed Lady Esmondet, "has a cheerful brightness pervading it that would dispel the chronic grumbling of a Diogenes or an Englishman."

"Even Gladstone," cried Vaura, gaily, "would here forget that Beaconsfield wants a 'war supply.'"

"And I, Trevalyon, shall so lose myself in the intoxicating sweetness of the hour as to forget that on my return to England I have to enter the arena of the strife of tongues, and combat Dame Rumour in facing a 'difficulty.'" At the last word be looked meaningly at Vaura, and with quickened heart−beats she remembered his flowers, and knew what would come when the 'difficulty' was faced and removed.

"The absent Marquis likes well the form of the god of wine," said Lady Esmondet, directing her companion's gaze towards a group of statuary on a small inlaid stand, and reflected in a pier glass, representing Anacreon smilingly advancing, carrying in his arms the infants Bacchus and Cupid.

"'Tis a pretty group, extremely *chic*," said Vaura.

"What think you, Vaura, of the painting behind you?" inquired Lady Esmondet.

On turning slightly she saw the pictured face of the owner of the villa, the eyes of her admirer seemed so steadfast in their gaze that a faint blush suffused her cheek as she said:

"A true likeness of a true friend, for we are most comfortably placed by his kindness; indeed I think when the day comes to leave the villa we would fain remain."

"It is a handsome face," said Trevalyon.

"It is," said Vaura, as she played with the dainties on her plate and sipped her glass of sparkling Moselle.

"On leaving here it will be for either the crush of the London season or Haughton Hall under the new *regime*," said Lady Esmondet, "and I know just how I shall feel: as a man who, coming home after a day with the hounds, is enjoying a pipe in slippered feet when reminded by madame of the state dinner he has forgotten."

"Either London or the dear old place will be an awakening," said Vaura, as they wend their way to the *salons*.

"Yes." said Trevalyon, "for nowhere could one better enjoy the *dolce far niente* of Italian languor than here.

Del Castello, I fancy, lives his life."

"*Dum vivimus vivamus*," said Vaura.

The salons are a suite of three; taken separately, of medium dimensions; but when the heavy hangings are drawn aside which divide the apartments they form one long handsome room, extending the entire length of the villa, at one end of which is a conservatory where bloom flowers of great beauty, the tiny structure being in miniature form of the villa; it was entered from the *salon* by sliding doors of stained glass; a smiling statue of Flora was placed near the entrance and seemed to welcome one's approach.

"It is a bower of beauty," said Vaura. The moonlight streaming in from the heaven−illumined gardens outside, bringing into life the scarlet blossoms of the camelia and the satin of her gown, and lending to her beauty a transparent softness, her eyes seeming darker and with a tender light, as she says, looking out upon the garden:

"It is a living idyl in the white moon light; did I gaze long enough, strange fancies would come to me, the statuary would be living marbles, while the leaves of the palm−tree and olive would sing to me of their story as given by the dead poets."

"We must revel in the beauties of the gardens, when to−morrow comes, Vaura: I am going to be very early tonight," said Lady Esmondet.

"It must have been a great disappointment to Del Castello," said Trevalyon, inwardly applying the lash, "to winter elsewhere."

"*N'importe*," said Lady Esmondet, seeing the sadness of expression, "we, have so much of the London fog; he, has his villa and the south always."

"But he could have been here with all his elegant *recherche* surroundings, only for me," and as he silently thought the lash went down.

In the villa, many things beautiful and rare occupied their attention; in the small library were some deep German and English books on philosophy, with Tennyson in every style of dress; also Byron, with novels of all tone and colour; as Vaura moved about among the treasures of the absent Marquis, Trevalyon, watching her intently, tortured himself by imagining that she handled everything lovingly, read snatches from his books tenderly.

"What a couple they would have been," he thought, as Vaura's syren voice read aloud some marked passages from the poets; "even if I can clear myself of this hateful scandal, I have only the gloomy 'towers' to offer her, while he has his sunny palaces in the lands or climes she loves so well."

And Lady Esmondet seeing his intent gaze following Vaura, and observing his quiet thought,

"He is unhappy, and dreads lest she come to love the handsome Spaniard, while daily amongst his treasures, with his silent pictured face watching her from the walls; I wonder how it is; has she refused him, and accepted the villa as slight atonement, or is this the beginning of the end, and that she will give herself to him; alas for dear Lionel if so."

"How selfish I am," said Vaura, impulsively closing the book from which she had read aloud a few marked passages in the sadly sweet "Prisoner of Chillon." "You both look weary, how is it I did not notice it before? come away god−mother mine; uncle Eric would say I am not redeeming my promise to take care of you; goodnight, Captain Trevalyon," giving him her hand, the soft touch of which seemed as a new revelation to him, reinvigorating him as it were, but only in the contact, for alone he is again a prey to gloomy forebodings which crowd upon him, so as to seem to stifle him; loosening his collar and tie, and throwing himself on the bed, he tells himself, "What am I, in comparison to him? his unclouded life, at least as far as human eye can tell, with the looks of an Adonis, his immense wealth, his southern blood, eloquent tongue, and life in climes kissed by the sun. I fear he will woe her again; and is it in woman to come to me; even though I give the love of my life in preference to all that the Fates give in him; alas! my knowledge of them tells me no; yes, I know she has smiled tenderly on me, bat is not this because of her old remembrance of me—as part of her by−gone life in her loved home; yes I fear it is, or because she is playing with my heart as she has with others; heavens, how unmanned I am, Father," and his hands are clasped reverently, "pity me, steep my soul in forgetfulness, and let me remember naught, save that Thou ruleth all," when, as if in answer to his imploring cry, slumber, fitful it is true and broken by dreams came to him; when now fully awake again in slippered feet, and with his pipe, he noiselessly steps out into the night, pacing the verandah to and fro, or leaning against one of its columns, thinks on of the past and present, when in the dim future, the vast unknown, he feels the necessity of calm; else this scandal will so

overwhelm him in the waves of unrest, as to cause his life to be a wreck, and Vaura to be indeed, and in truth, lost to him forever more. In the determined quiet of a man controling self, he now again, this time undressing, takes to his bed and gains an hour's sleep ere it is time to rise for a new day.

CHAPTER XXVIII. HEART−STIRS TO DIVINE MUSIC.

At break of day, springing from bed, and after a cold plunge bath, feeling more like himself, he went out into the half slumbering city; but the sunbeams give their roseate kiss and mists roll up the great mountain slopes, and the lazy Italian rubs his black eyes not seeing the beauties in nature that surround him—they are part of his life—but only wondering how easiest he can pass the day, while Trevalyon bending his steps to a favourite restaurant, after a pretty fair breakfast, for the fresh air of the morning has given him an appetite, hiring a horse, goes for a long ride, and turning his horse's head for the country, determines by getting away with nature to find that old self that he has lost, or by thinking out his plan to how best use the information received from Father Lefroy, recover his customary tranquility of mind, for just now he is torn by doubts and fears; he should be in England, but dreads to leave Vaura, lest the Marquis hearing of his departure would endeavour personally to press his suit. And so putting spurs to his horse he is nearer the pure lofty mountains on whose breast he hopes to find peace.

While at the villa, the woman he loves, after a somewhat sleepless night in which she is haunted by the faces of her Spanish admirer and the hero of her early girlhood, descends from her room to find Lady Esmondet not yet up, though it is luncheon hour, and Trevalyon away for the day. The afternoon is occupied until it is time to dress for dinner by visitors. With dinner comes Lady Esmondet, Trevalyon not having returned it is a *tete−a−tete* affair; afterwards in the salons, the conversation drifts from fair Italia, the after−luncheon visitors, and the London *Times* to Lionel.

“Poor fellow, one can easily see how unsettled and worried he is at times over this wretched scandal,” said Lady Esmondet.

“I should treat the whole matter with perfect contempt,” Vaura answered haughtily.

“In this instance it won't answer.”

“Why not? if he is sure it is false.”

“Vaura! Vaura, you know it is false.”

“The fact is, god−mother, I know nothing about it, nor do I care to, unless he tells me himself; my life, that is my woman life as you know, has been spent *a* Paris, and so my ears have not been a receptacle for London scandal.”

“Dear Lionel has been too independent.”

“Yes, god−mother, that's just it; it's his character; had he had a town house, a French cook, and given half a dozen big dinners during the season, he might indulge in secret marriage if his fancy ran that way, and society would smile at him through rose−coloured spectacles.”

“Too true, Vaura, *ma chere*; Madame Grundy is an odd mixture of inconsistencies; should a vulgar *parvenu* pay society's tolls in shape of boastful charities, balls and dinners, he is one of the pets of the season, and is allowed any latitude as to his little weaknesses. Had Lionel made atonement by marriage, all would have been forgiven; but he has dared to please himself, and so they at the first chance pelt their idol.”

“Their idol, yes,” said Vaura, musingly; “could this falsehood be the invention of some disappointed woman who has taken for her motto the words of Honorius, that 'there is a sweeter strain than that of grief−revenge, that drowns it.'“

As she ceased speaking, the voice of Trevalyon is heard quieting Mars, who is leaping wildly in welcome. And now he is with them; and as with smiles and warm hand−clasps he is welcomed, he feels that this is home. Vaura, who has been colouring some photographs, lets her hands fall idly to her lap, as she listens to the manly voice which, coming in and joining its music with their own, she feels makes their life complete.

“Yes, I have dined, thank you, and do feel more like myself than I have done since the weight of this scandal has been upon me; but I shall not worry myself or you with naming it. I turned my horse's head east, and always find a day with Nature so exalts and uplifts my whole being that life, again is filled with the calm, clear star of hope, and that my burden of care falls to the dust under my horse's feet; my spirit is again buoyant; I again live. And what have you both, my charming home angels, been about? you look yet as if a sun−warm bath would be your best medicine, Lady Alice.”

“You are right, Lionel; you have had the sunbeams to−day; I must bask in them on to−morrow (D.V.) I feel

fatigued even yet, though lazy enough to have kept my room until dinner hour."

"You have explored the gardens, I suppose, *ma belle*."

"No, that is a pleasure to come; I, too, was lazy today."

"I am selfish enough to be almost glad, as we can roam there to−morrow together," and there is a lingering emphasis on the last word as his blue eyes in a long gaze rest on her face.

"Come, Lionel, you and Vaura give me some music; draw the screen between my eyes and the firelight; I shall lie on this lounge and listen."

"Is not this an ideal music−room?" said Vaura, "opening as it does into the conservatory; and see Euterpe, standing in her niche, with flute and cornet at her feet, violin and guitar on either side, and the perfection of pianos, with this sweet−stringed harp;" and, sinking into the low chair beside it, she drew her fingers over the strings.

"I perceive," said Lionel, handling the flute, "your friend is a maker of sweet sounds."

"Awake the echo."

"To hear is to obey, *ma belle*."

Whereupon Lionel, looking down at the face upturned to him as her head lay on the cushioned chair−back, or droops as she draws her fingers across the harp−strings; and with the fever of love hot within him he sang in his sweet tenor the songs of Italia with the passion of a living love breathing in their every note and word.

Thus song after song was softly sung, Vaura sometimes blending her voice with his, and he was so near, and it was an intoxicating hour; and Trevalyon, bound in honour not to speak his love, forgot that one of our poets, Sterne I think, says that "talking of love is making it," and sings on, as he drinks in fresh draughts from the warmth of her eyes, and her face is pale with emotion, her lips, that "thread of scarlet," and her neck, gleams in its whiteness as her bosom heaves with her quickened heart−beats, as she feels his meaning in his warm words; and fearing for herself, she is so sympathetic, and knows it is only because of the "difficulty," that he has not spoken, starts to her feet, laying her hand gently on his arm, says softly:

"You must be tired."

"Tired! no; this hour has been so perfect, my heart yearns for many such."

"See, my god−mother has deserted us unnoticed; ah! what a spell is there in music."

"The magnetism of your dear presence; ah, Circe! Circe what spells you weave," and there is a tender light in his eyes. She lets him look so, for a second, when she says gently, giving him her hand in good−night; "it would not do to leave you all the power of witchery," and she lets him put her hand through his arm and lead her to the foot of her stairs, where, with a silent hand−clasp they part for the night.

Dismissing her maid, whom she found asleep on the rug before the fire:

"I dare say you are tired, Saunders; you may retire; give me my dressing gown; there, that will do, I shall comb out my hair."

And, arrayed in dainty dressing gown, of white embroidered flannel, the combing of the bright tresses is a lengthy affair, for thought is busy; "Yes, this intense sympathy, this earnest tenderness, this languor and sweet sense of a new joy in living, all mean that I love him; and, as 'tis so, I am not at one with the poet when he says, "tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all;' lost! lost! what a world of loneliness it would be to me, what a world of loneliness in the very word; my love, your mesmeric eyes seem to be on me now; I wonder," and a smile comes to the dark eyes and the sweet mouth, "I wonder what you would think of me in this robe; but what nonsense I am dreaming," and the *robe de nuit* is on; the short, fluffy hair pushed up a little from the eyes, which close as the soft cheek presses the pillow, and Somnus, the sleepy god, claims his dues.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE UNRULY MEMBER IS HEARD.

The following morn is bright and glorious, the mountains, ah! the grandeur of them, their peaks in changing hues as the sun's breath grows warmer, cut the azure of the heavens, and rest there; one involuntarily feels on a morning like this one cannot love nature intensely enough; and now, Old Sol, giving his brightest beams to the Italian, who loves him, shines into every corner of the Eternal City, from the King in his palace, and the Pope in the palace of the Vatican, to the peasant stretched on his door−step; for the good king Victor Emmanuel is sick, and the bright beams shining through his window, cheer him; and he thinks of his people who are poor and ill, and also welcomes the sunbeams for their sake. And his gentle Holiness, Pius IX, in walking past the great painting of the Transfiguration, thinks “how glorious it looks in the sun's rays,” and he too was glad. And the lazy peasant lying in the sun, stretched himself and was glad, for surely many noble ladies and gentlemen would be abroad in the sweet warm air, and he would beg many *soldi* and buy macaroni.

Vaura, usually an early riser, but not having slept until dawn, was only awakened an hour ago by a sunbeam opening her eyelids, so that it was luncheon hour ere she made her appearance in the aesthetic little morning−room, whither Lady Esmondet had ordered it to be brought; on entering kissed her god−mother, and giving her hand to Lionel, her eyes drooping under his long gaze,

“You look quite yourself, god−mother mine, after your nights rest,” she said.

“Yes, I am feeling very well to−day; but your roses are of a pale tint, how is that?”

“Whose roses could bloom with undimmed lustre surrounded by flowers of such brilliant colouring?” she answered, evasively, indicating by a gesture the floral beauties filling the vases and jars, not wishing to own before Lionel her sweet sleeplessness of the night.

Captain Trevalyon's man now brought letters from the post−office.

“Ah,” said Vaura, taking her share, “one from Haughton Hall in the handwriting of madame, and to me.”

On opening it a very well−executed photograph of the Hall fell to the floor, which Lionel picked up, while Vaura read aloud as follows:

“DEAR MISS VERNON,—

“I enclose you a photo of the Hall as I have made it. It was a perfect barracks when I saw it first; see what money can do. The American eagle is a great bird, eh? You must marry money. I shall have a gentleman here at Christmas with lots of land and a title. The Duchess of Hatherton would sound well.”

“A *bete noire* of yours,” said Lady Esmondet.

“Yes,” said Vaura, carelessly, with a shrug of shoulders, going on with the letter.

“I must also settle Blanche this coming season. You observed, I suppose, how, much flesh she had; well, she loses weight every month; secret pining I expect for that naughty”—and Vaura stopped short as she saw the name, a curl of contempt coming to her lip as she read silently—“Trevalyon. She thought by his attentions that he loved her, poor thing; but the Colonel and myself would or could never hear of such a match, as he has a snug little wife hid away somewhere. I have Major Delrose a good deal with me. Your uncle doesn't care for him, neither would you; but the Colonel, dear man, is considerate, and don't expect everyone to be cut after his cloth; and as you will never be able to come north in the cold weather you won't meet him. Give my love to the willowy Marchmonts. We are the gayest of butterflies.

“Your frolicsome, “KATE HAUGHTON, “Haughton Hall, Surrey, England.

“MISS VERNON, “The villa Iberia, “Rome, Italy. “November, 1877.”

To Delrose at Haughton madame, after mailing above, had said:

“I have settled Miss Vernon at all events; she will not show up at Christmas. I know she hates the Duke of Hatherton so I told her he is coming, and I don't know as yet whether he is. It takes a woman to outwit a woman.”

“I cannot see,” Delrose had answered, “why you don't want her, Kate.”

“Because you are blind, you goose; if she came Trevalyon might, and you don't want him; and I don't want her, and so I please you, you ungrateful man.”

To Trevalyon by same mail came:

“My own idol, come to me and Delrose shall go; I have written Miss Vernon that he is here, because I *don't*

want her freezing ladyship. Everyone says you are so naughty in having a hidden wife; they will cut you I am sure; but I *love you all the more for your naughtiness*; only come to yours evermore.—KATE HAUGHTON."

Trevalyon, giving a weary sigh on reading above, tearing it in two, tossed it into the fire; now opening one from his cousin Judith, he read as follows:

"DEAR COUSIN,—Father is not at all well; the trip across, as I feared, has been too much for him; the suburbs of New York, our home, suited him better than foggy London; however, dear father was obliged to come on business, as he has informed you when last able to write. He wishes me to enclose to you a scrap from the 'society' columns of *one* of *our* New York newspapers. 'We give a tid−bit of scandal (from a London paper), in brief, as the hero is a nephew of our Sir Vincent Trevalyon, of ——. Capt. Trevalyon (of the Towers, Northumberland), a gay society man, fascinating and handsome, is about to bring from her seclusion, his hidden wife; some years ago he had eloped with a friend's spouse, friend now has shuffled off mortal coil; outcome, my Lady Trevalyon, who will be the sensation of the coming season.' Father says to tell him on you honour, what truth there is in above—and I am,

"Yours very sincerely, "Judith Trevalyon, "The Langham, London, Nov. 77.

"Capt. Trevalyon, "The Villa Iberia, "Rome, Italy."

On reading above, Trevalyon, with sudden impulse, and craving for sympathy, handed it to his old friend.

"Too bad, too bad, Lionel; how grieved I am for you."

At the same time, Vaura, who had turned again to her lines from Madame, on reading over, said as she discussed her luncheon.

"This bit of duck will be a palatable *morceau* as compared with my letter from Haughton; Madame does not write to please, she merely pleases to write."

Seeing Trevalyon very grave and silent, she said with kindly intent, and to change the current of his thought. "I suppose, god−mother, you have sketched out your plans for the day long before I joined you."

"No, we could come to no decision, so have left it for you to arrange."

"*Tres bien* if so, from the glimpse I have through the window, I suggest that our first trip be to the gardens."

"Happy thought; Lionel, will you ring the bell like a good fellow?"

Somers answering, her mistress said:

"Bring me suitable wraps for the garden, please, and tell Saunders to do likewise for Miss Vernon."

The maids now appear with out−door robings; Lady Esmondet is made comfortable, when Lionel goes to Vaura's assistance; 'tis a pretty red−riding−hood and cloak attached, and contrasts charmingly with her soft gray cashmere gown, her short brown hair and sweet face look well coming from the warm red setting of the hood.

"Never mind it; it was never meant to fasten," she says, seeing his grave eyes on her face, instead of the fastening; he does not speak but only thinks, "My enemies will not let me call her mine;" she is sure he can see the colour come and go in her face as her heart beats irregularly, and says gently, putting up her soft hands, "never mind it;" for answer he allows the hook and eye to fasten holding her hands for a moment in his. They then followed their friend through the French window down the few stone steps to the gardens. There were many flowers in bloom and the green of the orange and lemon trees was as rich as when the year was young. The villa of white marble was built on a gentle rising knoll, prettily wooded, at the foot of which running through a glade was a tiny streamlet clear as crystal, which with its ripple and the singing of the birds lent music to the air. On the highest garden site was built a tower from whence an extensive view of the city is gained, with its spires and palaces, together with the violet sea, and the ever changing majestic mountains. The lower part of the tower is an arbour covered with roses and vines. The orchard was on the high plateau on which the villa stood, laying in part at the back and side of the mansion; the lawn and flower garden were separated from the orchard by a smiling wood nymph and grim satyr who each held an end of a chain of silver.

"The laughing nymph looks as if bent on making the grim satyr give way to mirth," said Vaura.

"It is a pretty idea," said Lady Esmondet, "the having one's orchard so laid out as to be an ornament to one's grounds, instead of as we do, merely as a place to grow fruit."

"Yes, I think so," said Lionel, "and at my place the lawn is strewn by acorn, apple and the pear."

"The apple blossom is beautiful," said Vaura; "but whom have we here," catching sight of a statue through the trees.

"None other," said Lionel, "than the powerful Populonia who protects the fruit from storms."

“And placed high enough!” said Vaura “to see the storm a brewing, with us it would be a great dog *versus* a small boy.”

They now descend terraced steps arched by trellised roses and come to a fountain fed by a spring down in the deep cool dell.

“Shall we drink from the brook by the way?” half sang Vaura, and stooping, picked up from a small projection a silver goblet, filling she handed to Lady Esmondet; there was another which, taking herself, said, “and now for my toast, 'May the absent Marquis, who has an eye for the beautiful in Nature and Art be always surrounded by both.'“

“Amen,” responded Trevalyon, “which is the best I can do, seeing Del Castello did not remember me in providing two goblets only.”

“Dual solitude,” said Vaura in low tones, her god−mother having gone on.

“The very mention of it makes my heart throb,” he whispered.

“What delightful gardens,” said Lady Esmondet returning “beside this fountain, under the shade of olive trees, it must be delightfully cool the hottest of summer days, and a favourite spot, if one may judge from the number of seats about.”

“'Tis another Eden,” said Vaura, “from the mountains yonder to the green shade of myrtles, olives, and orange trees, lit up by the pink and red blossoms at their feet.”

“You will revel here in the early morning, *ma belle*, if you have the taste of your childhood.”

“You remember me, then?” and the dark eyes look up from under the red hood.

“I have never forgotten,” he says, quietly.

“Don't you think, Vaura, dear?” said Lady Esmondet, “we had better return to the villa and decide what we shall do with the rest of the day.”

“Yes, I suppose so, dear; though one would fain linger here longer.”

As they retrace their steps, Trevalyon, decided for them, that the air being delightfully warm and balmy, a drive up and down the Corso, would be pleasant. The fresh air and new scene dispelled all Vaura's languor, and heightened the spirits of her companions.

“The Corso is even gayer than usual,” observed Lady Esmondet.

“And with its best bib and tucker on, if I am any judge of *la toilette*,” said Lionel.

“To receive three *distingues* travellers,” laughed Vaura; “I wonder who society will jot us down as in her huge note book.”

“As the Briton abroad,” said Lady Esmondet, “to revel in the sunbeams, which our gold cannot buy from our leaden skies.”

A carriage now passed, in which were seated two ladies, evidently English, who bowed and smiled to Lady Esmondet and Trevalyon.

“Who are your friends?” enquired Vaura; “I have seen them somewhere, but forget when and where.”

“They are the Duchess of Wyesdale and her daughter, the Lady Eveline Northingdon,” answered Trevalyon, as Lady Esmondet bowed to other acquaintances.

“The little Duchess, who is insane enough to think Lionel in love with her,” thought his friend, remembering gay Mrs. Wingfield's gossip, and that her name had been coupled with Trevalyon's; it was only that she was a foolish little woman, and let society see that she had a penchant for Captain Trevalyon. At that time the Duke was alive to bear the title and represent the estate in Wiltshire, the Scottish moors and shooting box, with the town house in London; very useful in that way, so his Duchess told herself, and in truth, only in that character, did the fair, frivolous Lady Wyesdale appreciate her easygoing fox−hunting spouse.

“You can run the season very well without me,” he would say, “while I do a little shooting; you are just cut out for London, while the conventionalities bore me.”

And so it came to pass, that at their London house, Irene, the Duchess, (or, as she was commonly called, Posey, from her maiden name of Poseby, and from her habit of posing on all occasions), reigned in her own way. In the autumn of '76, the Duke had been called to his long home; he had been knocking down birds on the Scottish moors. Coming home late one night to dinner in high spirits, and exultant over his full bag, he found a telegram from his friend, Gerald Elton, a keen sportsman, asking him to “telegraph him *immediately* at Edinburgh, if he was at the 'Bird cage;' if so, he would join him at once.” “Bless my life,” said poor Wyesdale to a friend with him;

“Elton is the very man we want, no end of a shot, and rare fun; but I must send my telegram off at once, or I'll lose him; but how am I to come at pen and ink in the 'cage' is more than I know; oh, yes, I remember when I came down last, Posey would have me take pen and ink (and a great bore it was) in order to telegraph her of my return; don't know why women are such a bundle of nerves, they oughtn't to be nervous at the return of a husband; but where did I put it, hang me if I know; if I find it the boy can ride over with it, if not I must go myself; oh! I remember, it's in the other room on a shelf with collars and cuffs; birds are not particular, so I never wear 'em;” without a light he went in, feeling along the shelves with his hand, unluckily for him overturning the inkstand, knocking the penhandle against the wall, and the rusty pen full of ink, into the palm of his right hand, where it broke; he and his friend extracted most of it, putting sticking plaster over the wound. He would not trust a verbal message to his sleepy keeper, now full of beer; so soon on horseback and away.

Elton arrived in due course, to find his friend with his arm in a sling, swollen and painful.

“You'd better have a surgeon, old fellow, or you'll not fill another bag this October.”

Not until his arm had turned black would he consent; then the surgeon was called, he looked grave, saying that a great part of the pen had not been extracted; that ink, pen, and rust had done their work, and to save his life the arm must be amputated. This the poor fellow refused to do, saying he would rather die than sever his good right hand from his body.—If he could not hold a gun, nor ride Titan with the hounds he would go. He would be sorry to leave Evy, but Posey could do very well without him, and breathing a prayer for his soul, Harold, Duke of Wyesdale, was gone.

And now after her year of fashionable mourning, his widow is pluming herself in colours, and Dame Rumour hath it that the somewhat fair, slightly faded dowager Duchess having buried her dead, will not say nay to another wooer. She was, as usual, posing in a corner of her carriage, and priding herself on her slight, girlish figure; wore no wraps; looking blue and chilly, for when one was driving the air was just fresh enough for something warmer than a gown of pale blue silk.

“Why will women go about looking as if Jack Frost had just given them a chilly embrace?” said Lionel, his gaze dwelling admiringly on Vaura's warm beauty, arrayed in short, tight−fitting black velvet jacket, small white plush bonnet, scarlet feathers and scarlet and white strings tied at one side of her pretty chin.

“The azure heavens framing fair angels; quite a sufficient robing, and appropriate; oh! grumbler,” laughed Vaura.

“She is no amazon, and should wear other than silken armour, *ma belle*.”

“Cupid's darts can easier penetrate,” said Vaura, gaily.

“Not through a chilled heart, as compared with a warm one,” he answers, quietly.

“Can one be cold in Italia. I do believe Old Sol pauses over us in his chariot, and smiles love−warm smiles upon us all,” she continued.

“What a shame to see such pretty beasts in harness, Lionel, as those attached to our landau,” observed Lady Esmondet.

“Yes, they are a fine pair and well matched.”

“The one with a mane a trifle the longest,” said Vaura, “reminds me of Oriole that I used to ride when a girl at Haughton.”

“Yes,” said Trevalyon, “I was just going to ask you if you noticed it. What merry rides those were! what would I not give to (with my dearly bought experience of life) commence over again from those days.”

“I remember feeling quite the woman in the scamper across country with you and dear uncle in my long habit; neither of you knew how I hated to don my short frock on my return.”

“You were always a charming little hostess; and a few yards more in a draper's shop, instead of about your ankles detracted nothing from your charms.”

“I did the best I could in taking time by the forelock, to be able to put in a word or two with your lordship and Uncle Eric; I read old periodicals and new, ancient history with modern philosophy and science notes.”

“And they have you now, Vaura dear,” said her godmother. “A womanly woman, every inch of you.”

“You are partial, dear; yet I did in those days long for an Ovid and a metamorphosis.”

“Do you remember the day I extricated you and Isabel in the Tower?”

“Yes,” she said, a warmer rose coming to her cheek, “but my knight promised to blot that page from his memory.

“And so he endeavoured; but to no purpose.”

“My brave knight was also an unmerciful tyrant.”

“In the fines he levied,” he said, leaning towards her; “they were the sweetest he ever had.”

A soft light came to Vaura's face, as leaning into her corner she gave herself up to thoughts of the bygone. And she smiled now her woman's smile in the eyes that were on her face. And yet sighed as she thought of the jealousy of her boyish lovers of bygone days, for Roland Douglas and Guy had rebuked her for so often in the tales she wove for their amusement, having Lion Heart as the favoured knight.

“My girlish days at Haughton Hall were very, very happy,” she said, quietly.

“And yet you would not go back to them and leave the dear present,” said Lionel, looking into her eyes with his mesmeric look, and holding her hand tight as he assisted her from the carriage after Lady Esmondet, at the door of the villa.

“How know you, my brave lion−heart; you belong to those days, but I am content.”

CHAPTER XXX. WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

They had been luxuriating for about four weeks in the art treasures collected in the Eternal City. Their eyes feasted on so much of loveliness in gazing upon living marbles and speaking forms on canvas that Vaura was often moved to a feeling akin to pain as she thought:

“Oh, the pity of it; the pity of it, that the gods among men, living, breathing men, who created these soul−stiring things should be themselves dead!”

On returning from a long ride one morning Vaura and Lionel found a gay party of callers chatting with Lady Esmondet; amongst them was Vaura's old friend, Robert Douglas. The Duchess of Wyesdale was also there; come with the avowed purpose of calling upon Lady Esmondet and making the acquaintance of Miss Vernon, but in reality to see Captain Trevalyon, whom she had watched for in vain, having expected him to call since the day they had met on the Corso. But “he cometh not,” she said, was still the burden of her song, so she determined to “beard the lion in his den,” though she would be obliged by so doing to become acquainted with Miss Vernon, and she was one of those women who, invariably envious of a more beautiful sister, keep them at arms' length. She could not but own to herself how beautiful Vaura was. The men raved of her, and she, the faded little dowager duchess, disliked her accordingly. She had already outstayed the bounds of politeness, but being determined to gain her point said, languidly, to her hostess:

“I really must trespass upon your kindness a little longer, dear Lady Esmondet, I wish so much to meet Miss Vernon.”

So that, as it was late when Vaura and Lionel returned, it came to pass that Saunders met her mistress at the hall door with a request from Lady Esmondet that she would come immediately to the morning−room without waiting to change her habit. So Vaura entered, gay, radiant, and with a fresh bloom upon her cheek, engendered partly by gentle caresses of the invigorating air, partly by the warmth in the looks and words of the handsome man by her side.

She made her way in answer to a look from her god−mother at once to her side, where the introduction took place.

“Her complexion is very well got up,” thought the *petite* faded Duchess, as she bowed carelessly, and who had used tints and washes ever since her sixteenth year. “I wonder whose wash she wears,” and with a conventional word or two she turned with *empressement* to Lionel, greeting him warmly, as Vaura crossed the room to where her old playmate sat, giving only a passing word to acquaintances.

Lady Esmondet thought, as she glanced at the Duchess of Wyesdale, roused almost to animation in her reception of Captain Trevalyon, “Lionel is the magnet that has drawn her here; she has not forgotten her old penchant for him.”

On seeing his hostess disengaged a young Frenchman, wearing the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour, won by a brave act in the Franco−German war, stepped to her side; he held in his hand a volume he had been admiring,—views of the lovely lake scenery of the British Isles.

They were soon discanting warmly upon their respective beauties, and became so interested that Lady Esmondet scarcely noticed that she was bidding adieu to the fashionable butterflies who had been killing time in her presence for the last hour or two. At last they are all gone with the exception of the Duchess, who has risen to make her exit, and Robert Douglas, who is remaining to luncheon. The Duchess is just saying to Lionel:

“Oh, you are *sure* to be here, and you won't refuse *me*, I *know*; I'd rather be Juliet to your Romeo in my tableaux than—. But, oh, dear, the others have heard us, and I did so hope it would have been a little secret between *us*, you know.”

And Lady Wyesdale affected a childish look of terror as she turned to her hostess, saying:

“You won't think us very dreadful, Lady Esmondet?”

“Oh, dear, no; there's nothing dreadful in a pictured love scene.”

But in reality she felt annoyed that this silly woman should pretend to an understanding between Captain Trevalyon and herself.

“And you won't tell Miss Vernon,” she continued, beseechingly, “I want her to be surprised.”

Vaura and Rev. Robert had joined the group as Captain Trevalyon was saying, laughingly,

"I cannot promise you, Lady Wyesdale, I am in Lady Esmondet's hands; if, as I expect the 12th of January sees her at Haughton Hall, I cannot possibly be with you, unless my photo in the garb you wish will suit."

"Of course he will say so before them," thought the Duchess, aloud, she says tapping him on the arm with her cardcase, "Come to my box at the Theatre to−night, I want to consult you about something, since dear Harold died," and a corner of her handkerchief went to her eyes, "I often feel so alone."

"Thanks, I shall wait upon you as early as possible; to−night I go to the Quirinal."

"So sorry," and making her adieux she added "I cannot have you."

"Yes, Emmanuel is Victor to−night," said Vaura gaily.

The butler announced luncheon, and Priest Robert gave his arm to Miss Vernon, saying:

"And that is a woman! how are we of the clergy ever going to waken a throb of life into the soul of such!"

"Were you in the pulpit at this moment, Robert, I am inclined to think you would discourse as St. Paul on idle−wandering−about−from−house−to− house−women; he was severe on my sisterhood,"

"They were not your sisterhood, you have no part with such."

"There would be a double lecture from St. Paul," said Lionel as he took the end of the table, "could he enter the Russell Club, Regent Street some day what a Babel of tongues, what tid−bits of gossip would electrify him."

"Yes," said Robert Douglas, "a men and women's club would scarcely agree with his views of what our human nature should live for."

"I hear it is extremely difficult for a pretty woman to become a member of Eve's she is as a rule black−balled; so a fair face does not always win," said Lionel.

"I think it would be extremely stupid to belong to an exclusively women's club; so much of gossip would kill me," said Lady Esmondet.

"I don't know," said Vaura, "whether either of you gentlemen are aware of how by a clever *ruse* our gay friend Mrs. Eustace Wingfield, notwithstanding her good looks, became a member of Eve's. She told my godmother and I of it soon after the occurrence."

"I have never heard of it," said Robert Douglas.

"Pray tell us," said Lionel.

"'Tis a long story," said Vaura, "in fact a three−volume one, but you shall only have a page or two. Between the President of Eve's the Hon. Miss Silverthorne and Mrs. Eustace Wingfield, there is an old feud dating from their school days."

While at school Mrs. Eustace, then May Raynor, was the very incarnation of fun and mischief, Silverthorne being extremely plain and severe in style. The Wingfield estate bordered on the school property. Eustace, prospective heir to his uncle, often ran down from London, much to the dismay of the lady principal, for he was no end of a flirt. May Raynor's pretty face attracted him from the first, but Silverthorne had a soft spot in her heart for him. Jealous of May she reported her to the principal; for revenge Wingfield cast languishing glances at Silverthorne in church. She never having had a lover actually informed the principal that, when he came to her to sue for her hand, she, as her guardian, was to say him yea. On May being married and out of the school−room, to her adored, she, Silverthorne, vowed revenge, if ever in her power, so that, when two seasons ago, Mr. Wingfield bet May a box, during *la* Bernhardt *saison*, against an embroidered dressing gown that she would be black−balled at Eve's, on Mrs. Clayton proposing her, the president, looking black, declared, on its being put to the vote on the following afternoon, she should have her two black balls, Mrs. Clayton informed May. "Now, what shall, be my card," exclaimed May, "for my bet shall be won. I have it," and staining her face yellow with green glasses and unbecoming attire, she attended a woman's right meeting at which her enemy was chairman. Seated immediately in front of the platform, Miss Silverthorne gloated over her changed looks. She was made a member. Her enemy saying to Mrs. Clayton, "How hideous she has become; how he will hate her!"

"What a green−eyed monster is jealousy," said Reverend Robert.

"But our gay friend won her bet and a stare at the Bernhardt, in spite of everything," laughed Trevalyon.

"But I fancy gay Mrs. Wingfield would not often be found at 'Eves;' such an army of plain women would be too many for her," said reverend Douglas.

"Oh! no," said Vaura, taking his arm back to the sunlit morning−room, "she only goes occasionally to throw a white ball for a pretty woman."

“I have sometimes come across her with Wingfield at the 'Abermarle'; she likes a little bass mixed with the treble of her life,” said Trevalyon.

“She is right,” said Vaura, “one would grow weary of continually piping to the same key.”

“Isabel tells me they are very gay at Haughton,” said Reverend Robert.

“Incessant revelry seems to be a necessity in the life of Madame,” said Lady Esmondet.

“Tastes differ, god−mother dear, the wild game of life that suits her palate would suit ours as badly, as (what she would consider) our tame game would suit her,” saying which she joined Lionel, a little apart at a table strewn with music which he wished her to select from.

“Do you believe in presentiments *cara mia*?”

“Yes; but I am wondrously content and don't want eyen to think of presentiments.”

“I don't either, *ma chere*,” he said, a little sadly, leaning his elbows on the table, his head for a moment upon them, “but I have one now that the Fates are putting black threads on their distaff for me.”

“Don't look so sorrowful or you will affect me.”

“Did you and I live in Pagan times, *ma belle*, I should be tempted to offer incense at their shrine, so pleasing, that their black threads would give place to gold and silver.”

“Your incense would be flattery; they are but women, what would they more,” she said smilingly.

“There are women, and woman,” he said absently, the grave look still in the eyes resting on her face.

“There is something more than usual troubling you; share it with me, do, and then you know you will only have half to bear,” and for one moment her soft hand is on his arm, her eyes full of sympathy on his face.

“It is only a presentiment, *ma belle*,” and his hand is laid on hers.

But now there is a tap at the door, and his servant says:

“Telegram from England, sir.”

“My presentiment,” he says, in same low tone.

“Face it bravely, it is not, I trust, bad news.”

“It is,” he says gravely, “for I must leave you.”

Vaura turned pale, and Lady Esmondet said:

“No bad news I hope, Lionel?”

“Yes, dear friend, it is from Judith, and states that “Uncle Vincent is no better and wishes to see me,” but she does not say at once, or if there be any danger.”

“I am sorry, Sir Vincent is no better, but every cloud has its silver lining; you may not really be obliged to go; he may rally,” she said kindly.

“Yes, that is true, I shall telegraph my cousin to know if I must go at once; if not, you will be leaving Italy so soon we may yet journey together.”

“I hope so,” continued Lady Esmondet.

“But 'tis hard for her,” said Vaura, “a stranger in a strange land; can I do anything for her, write some of our friends to call upon her, anything, only tell me, the Claytons, are kind,” and she is beside him in a moment.

“You are very thoughtful, but Judith is extremely self−reliant.”

“Do not give way to depression, Trevalyon,” said Reverend Douglas; “our paths cannot all be those of pleasantness.”

“Don't go, Robert, I want you to dine with us at seven; only the Marchmonts.”

“Thank you, Lady Esmondet, I shall be with you, but for the present, *au revoir* as I have even−song.”

“I am grieved at this,” said Lionel sadly, “for something tells me I shall have to go; I have known very little of Uncle Vincent; you are aware, dear Lady Alice, that he and my poor father were not friendly; my cousin is independent; and as I said before self−reliant to the last degree.”

“It will not be so hard for her in that case,” said Lady Esmondet.

“I am selfish enough to regret we have anyone to dinner, if I am obliged to leave you on to−morrow.”

“I was just thinking so,” said Lady Esmondet, “our evenings together have been perfect, but alas for changes; and Vaura, dear, the landau is at the door, you know we arranged for a drive.”

“Yes, I remember, but let it wait.”

“We may not have another opportunity, Lionel, for private converse; you will write; and Vaura and I shall (D.V.) be at London on the 4th or 5th; and shall meet you again at Haughton Hall.”

“Yes, I shall meet you there,” he answered thoughtfully; “my plans are not yet matured, but I want you to be *certain* to telegraph me of your return; I shall meet you at London.”

“Fate is cruel to send you away, and at Christmas, but I am forgetting your poor uncle,” said Vaura kindly.

“I shall telegraph of our return without fail, Lionel; and now about yours to your cousin, had you not best run away and attend to it, we shall only take a short drive, and be here as soon as you.”

“Come with us,” said Vaura, “it will save time.”

“So it will, and to kill the time I feel that is left to me with you, would be a Sacrilege.”

“What route do you take, Lionel?” enquired his friend.

“You are aware I have a commission for Clayton, at Florence, so must first go thither, thence to Bologna, then to Turin, Paris, Calais, Dover and London.”

“Shall I ring for Somers, godmother dear, to bring your cloak and bonnet, while I go and don my wraps?”

“Thank you, yes.”

Trevalyon, now going quickly to do his friend's side, said:

“I have but a moment, but I want you to know that this mischief is brewing for me at the Hall, and it has rapidly fermented; 'society,' tasting of its bubbles.”

“I was sure of it, Lionel, and it is the brew of that woman and Major Delrose.”

“Yes; and their aim is so to damage my reputation that I cannot gain the woman, and the only one I have ever longed for as my own loved wife.”

“Heaven grant that there machiavelian manoevres may end in failure.”

Here the sweet face and small white plush bonnet, scarlet strings and feathers appear at the door, so a truce to confidentials.

“I shall be so lonely if Fate takes me out of your life even for a short time,” and Vaura's hand is tightly clasped as he assists her into the landau.

“We shall be lonely also.”

“I hope so.”

“I must say our lives have been very complete at the villa,” said Lady Esmondet; “our cup of content has been full.”

“To the brim;” and his eyes turn at last from Vaura's face as he says, “you had better drop me here, at the telegraph office while you turn into the Corso,” and stepping from the landau, lifting his hat he was gone.

“I wonder,” said Vaura, “should poor Sir Vincent die, if Miss Trevalyon will return to New York.”

“I am sure of it; Lionel tells me his cousin dislikes English life as much as she likes that of her ain countree.”

Vaura fell into a reverie; after some moments, waking to herself, said:

“I did not show you the interesting epistle I received from Mrs. Haughton, in which she says, 'society' hath it that Capt. Trevalyon rejoices in a 'hidden wife.'“

“A pure invention got up to hurt him.”

“But why?” she asked with assumed carelessness.

“Because he is not at a certain woman's feet, she has joined herself with black Delrose, his enemy of years, is my surmise, and I think the *denouement* will prove me correct.”

“Poor dear uncle; his life is not an idyl.”

“His mistake, Vaura, *ma chere*, is a weight of care to me, that I try in vain to shake off;” and something very like a tear glistened as she spoke.

The friends were unusually silent in the drive home. Arrived there they separated to dress for dinner; Vaura threw herself on her lounge to rest and think. “Poor, uncle Eric, what a woman he has put on the shackles of matrimony for; and now her attempt to injure our friend; poor Lion, my heart is full of pity for you and you do not know it, because you cannot speak until the “difficulty” is overcome; ah! me, what a world of lies it is, for that this 'hidden wife,' is a myth, and an inspiration from Lucifer to Madame, I am quite sure of. But alas! should their be one grain of truth in the bushel of lies, and that he cannot prove to 'society's' satisfaction that 'twas only a grain of youthful folly, that his manhood in its nobility had nothing to do with it. If he cannot do this, then he will never ask me to be anything more to him than what I shall always be, his friend; poor darling, what with his father's grief at his misguided mother's frailty, he has drank deep of the waters of bitterness; the unruly member set in motion by scandal, envy, hatred, or malice as motive power, is more to be dreaded as agent of evil, than dynamite

in any form. But I must ring for Saunders and dress for dinner.”

CHAPTER XXXI. SOCIETY'S VOTARIES SMILE THOUGH THEY DIE.

“Here are some roses, Mademoiselle; the Captain cut them before he went out and bid me keep them fresh for you.”

“Very well, Saunders, I shall wear them this evening; that is, the yellow ones; put the others in a vase, or give them to me, I shall, while you get out my ruby velvet; I am pale; it is high waist and no sleeves; take out my gold ornaments and bracelets—the plain gold bands; an old lace collar, with roses, shall be my neck−gear; hand me my vinagrette; I have a slight headache; and please comb my hair gently, it will be pleasant, yes; that will do.”

“Your hair is a fortune to you Mademoiselle, so long and thick.”

“Yes, it is, but I like it best because of its fluffiness; it is no trouble; weatherproof and waterproof.

“So it is, Mademoiselle.”

“Now for my gown.”

“It fits beautiful, Mademoiselle.”

“Yes, I am quite satisfied with it.”

And well she may be, for the robe might have grown on the perfect form, every curve and roundness of figure being followed by the close clinging velvet; and the arms, bare to the shoulder, fit models for a sculptor, shone fair as the flesh of a child−blonde against the rich ruby of the velvet, The perfumed bath had refreshed her, and though a trifle pale, from heart emotion as to Lionel's probable leave−taking; her lips always wore a “pretty redness,” her eyes had a tender look, while the fluffy bronze hair had its own beauty as it shaded the brow.

“You are looking charming, *ma chere*,” said Lady Esmondet, whom Vaura met in the hall.

“Thank you, dear, your eyes are partial, I fear.”

“No, no, not as you imply.”

As they entered the drawing−room, Robert Douglas came from a comfortable corner where he had been studying a small work of Thomas a Kempis, which he quietly returned to his pocket saying smiling:

“You see I am here to welcome you; I made myself at home and came here immediately at the close of even−song.”

“We feel complimented that you prefer our society to those very ecclesiastical looking quarters of yours,” said Lady Esmondet.

“And where the ancient fathers look from the walls in wonderment at the priest of to−day, as he pores over printed records of their bygone lives.”

“Why, Vaura, how did you know that the pictured fathers grace the walls of my humble retreat?”

“From Isabel.”

“Ah, I wondered, for my study is never entered by a strange foot, it is my rest.”

“Is not your rest a misnomer, Robert? for from all I hear, you literally rest nowhere,” inquired Lady Esmondet.

“In my opinion, Lady Esmondet, a priest of the church should never rest, but always have his armour on, for there is 'so little done, so much to do.' Thank God we are waking up at last; look at the priest of to−day (I say it in all humility) as compared with the priest of fifty years ago.”

“True, true,” answered Lady Esmondet, “but, don't you think that the zealous Low Church clergy are doing as much for the human race as you are?”

“Undoubtedly, for the human race; but not for the church, for their people often lapse into dissent.”

“I don't believe in extremes; I respect the man who is thorough,” said Vaura, seeing that Capt. Trevalyon had entered and seated himself beside her god−mother, evidently wishing to talk with her, and so, to help him, taking up the thread of the argument herself.

“But Vaura,” said the priest, “don't you think that in the Ritualist, you have the man who is thorough?”

“Not exactly, he is extreme; the man who is thorough has no uncertain sound; he neither culls from Rome her vestments, nor from Dissent her hymns; both Rome and Dissent are thorough, why shouldn't he. But a truce to argument, a gentleman's trap stops the way,” she said smiling, “is even now at the steps; his back is this way, so I cannot name him; he talks to his servant, in bottle green livery, who has a decidedly Hibernian countenance.”

“Oh,” said Capt. Trevalyon, starting to his feet, “Lady Esmondet, it must be an Irishman, an acquaintance of mine, Sir Dennis O'Gormon, who wanted very much to make the acquaintance of the ladies of the villa Iberia. I had forgotten all about my asking him for to−day.”

“It makes no difference, Lionel, 'tis little wonder you forgot such a small matter in the many more important you have had.”

Here a servant announced Sir Denis O'Gormon.

“Ah, O'Gormon, glad to see you. Lady Esmondet, permit me to present to you Sir Dennis O'Gormon. Miss Vernon allow me to introduce Sir Dennis; Douglas, I believe you and O'Gormon have met before.”

Lady Esmondet and Miss Vernon shook hands with and welcomed their guest, Lady Esmondet saying graciously, “Any friend of Captain Trevalyon is always welcome.”

“Thank you, Lady Esmondet, but by my faith, Trevalyon's a lucky fellow, and one whom I have always envied but never more so than now,” he continued laughingly, “when with all my fascinations I am only welcomed by two charming women for his sake.”

Mrs. Marchmont and Miss Marchmont were now announced. The two ladies floated in the most approved style towards their hostess, who rose to welcome them. They were ethereal in every respect, clad in a thin material of pale green, neck bare and elbow sleeves, and looking more like sisters than mother and daughter. Sandy of complexion, blue eyed sharp of feature; the mother having the advantage in flesh, the daughter being all the angles joined in one.

“I hate a thin woman,” was the whispered criticism of Sir Dennis to Trevalyon, with a suppressed emphasis on the word “hate.”

Trevalyon smiled, giving a side glance at Vaura's rounded form, as she bent gracefully with extended hand in welcome.

“Faith, you may well look in that direction,” remarked the Irishman, detecting him. “She's fair enough to seduce a look from His Holiness himself.”

Here Lady Esmondet introduced Sir Dennis O'Gormon to the Marchmonts; Trevalyon and Douglas having met them before.

The butler now announced dinner, when Lady Esmondet taking the arm of Sir Dennis assigned Mrs. Marchmont to Trevalyon, when Douglas handed in Vaura and Miss Marchmont.

Lady Esmondet found Sir Dennis a pleasant neighbour, who devoted himself equally to Vaura on his left and to his hostess at the head of the table. As usual the table was decorated with the rarest of flowers, which sent forth their delicate perfume from a large stand, the design of which was an imitation of the famed terraced gardens of Semiramis: the shrubs and trees represented in miniature by the most delicate ferns and mosses; the whole a triumph of nature and art. Choice flowers stood in a tiny bed of moss in front of each person. Many delicate desert dishes were not only tempting to the palate, but pleasing to the eye, while the wines in the cellar of the noble Don Ferdinand were well known and appreciated.

“Del Castello has a snug place here, Lady Esmondet,” observed Sir Dennis.

“Extremely so, Sir Dennis. We are much more comfortably placed by the kindness of the Marquis than we should have been at an hotel.”

“He is a fine generous soul, always remembering that he is not the only member of the human race,” said Sir Dennis (who had met him).

“It is a charming little winter home,” said Vaura. “I shall regret to leave it.”

“You won't, I hope, leave for some time yet?”

“Yes; much as we love it,” she answered; smiling, “we go north ere spring has thawed the sceptre out of the frozen hand of winter.”

“I am sorry to hear that. But you don't surely go as soon as my friend Trevalyon?”

Vaura hesitated a moment, not wishing to be a messenger of death at a dinner table, when Trevalyon came to her aid, cutting Mrs. Marchmont short in a dissertation on the merits of shaded wool versus plain, by saying,

“Pardon me, Miss Vernon. I may be obliged, O'Gormon, to leave for England sooner than I expected; if so, it will be alone.”

“One of the penalties of bachelorhood, Trevalyon; by my faith, 'tis a lonely loneliness.”

“I thought most of you glory in the freedom of winging your flight when you please, without having to say, by

your leave," said Vaura, gaily.

"Not always," said Trevalyon, quietly.

"What do you say, Lady Esmondet. Don't you think a fellow is happier and less lonely when he cuts bachelor life?"

"Depends on the cards in his hands, and how he plays them, Sir Dennis," answered his host, laconically.

"True, Lady Esmondet, and if the cards are his, the game is won, the difficulty over," said Trevalyon, with a glance at Vaura, "and bliss secured."

"Faith, you're right, Trevalyon."

Here Miss Marchmont's shrill voice was distinctly heard above the general hum, in animated discussion, saying,

"Oh, I'm sure he comes from the East."

The Rev. Douglas was evidently much amused and disputing the point; Miss Marchmont continued,

"The dear creature has such a beautiful colour—so bronzed."

"I'll lay any wager 'the dear creature' means a soldier," said Trevalyon to Vaura.

Vaura smilingly assented.

"A soldier," exclaimed Mrs. Marchmont in horror; "oh no, Capt. Trevalyon, nothing so naughty; it's Miranda's last pet."

"But we women are given to petting the red−coats, Mrs. Marchmont," said Vaura with a laugh in her voice.

"They're too wild for dear Miranda," said Marchmont mater; "the pet you mean is the last sweet insect you have collected; is it not, my dear child?" she said, anxious for the fair fame of the owner of the fine exhibit in elbow and collar bone.

"Yes, mamma, you are right, but I am so sorry Mr. Douglas is not at one with me; I feel convinced the dear potato bug comes from the east; he is of brilliant colouring and luxurious habit."

Rev. Robert Douglas laughingly shook his head, and Sir Dennis said:

"Miss Marchmont, you cannot imagine the wager Capt. Trevalyon was laying when you talked about the 'bronzed beauty;' he wanted some one to take him up at ten to one you meant a dashing cavalry man, or a 'go−as−he−please' infantry."

"Order! order! O'Gormon," interrupted Trevalyon, laughing.

"Oh! I'm shocked, Capt. Trevalyon," cried Miss Marchmont seriously, "that my dear potato bug, with all his innocent ways, its care of its eggs,—."

Here a general laugh went round the table, except from Marchmont *mere*, who tried in vain to catch the fair Miranda's eye, who continued bravely, "should be taken for anything so wild as a soldier, who doesn't do anything so useful. But I must convert you, Mr. Douglas," she continued, returning to the siege; "it would be such a sweet study for a clergyman; I shall lend you Cassels' Natural History, and you must promise to read it for my sake," she said gushingly.

Meanwhile, Trevalyon tried in vain to catch the drift of conversation between Vaura and her neighbour, but no, Mrs. Marchmont, though inwardly afraid of this squire of dames; and of his intellect, determined to appear at ease, and so talked on the one engrossing idea of her life; the last conundrum in fancy work, the last fashionable incongruity in the blending of colours. And poor, victimized Lionel longed to breathe in Vaura's refreshing breadth of thought; on his tormentor pausing to recover breath, it was not as balm to a wound to hear Sir Dennis say pleadingly:

"The gardens of the Collona palace are looking lovely in their tints of emerald; it will transport me to my loved isle, Miss Vernon, if you'll walk with me there some day; though our damsels are not fair as the companion I desire, and her rich beauty would add grace to the spot."

"Come, come, Sir Dennis, no flattery, I am jealous for the beauty of those gardens, and do not want to hear, even in jest, my poor looks would add to their charm," she answered gaily, and evading his question.

Here Lady Esmondet, feeling for Lionel's torture, catching Mrs. Marchmont's eye, rose from the table, leaving the gentlemen to discuss the merits of bottles of no plebeian length of neck.

"How sweetly English the fire in the grate looks," observed Mrs. Marchmont.

"Yes, it does; but while at home we really require it to keep away cold, here it is more to remind us of the warm sun gone to rest," said Lady Esmondet.

“There's no doubt the dear Spaniard, the Marquis Del Castello, has an eye for luxurious comfort,” said Vaura, as she sank into the corner of a *tete−a−tete* sofa and fell into a reverie of Lionel's probable leave−taking.

While Mrs. Marchmont seated herself in an Elizabethan chair, Miranda placing herself on a footstool by her side and laying her head with its thin sandy curls on her knee.

“What a child you are still, Miranda,” said her mother, sentimentally, as she fondled the high cheek−bone.

“You are quite companions,” said Lady Esmondet.

“We are bosom friends; more than sisters since the departure of my dear husband.”

“Mr. Marchmont has been dead some time, I believe.”

“Yes, some twelve years; but, dear Lady Esmondet, Miranda will tell you that I always speak of dear Charles as departed, gone before; more as if he had gone out to buy me some new fancy work, you know; the word 'dead' upsets my nerves so,” and the sandy head drooped and a hand was laid on the forehead.

“Yes; dear mamma has such refined feelings.”

“Yes,” said her hostess, absently, for she heard a messenger arrive, a tap at the door of the dining−room, and knew the message was for the temporary master of the house, an answer to his telegram, and wished the Marchmonts back to their own quarters, so that the complete little trio were alone; but she is forgetting Madame Grundy, so says:

“I believe you intend wintering in Italy.”

“Yes, we have rented Rose Cottage to a friend of Mrs. Haughton's, a Major Delrose, late of the —th Lancers.”

“Oh, it's *your* cottage he has rented,” said Lady Esmondet, awaking to interest.

“Yes; Major Delrose took an awful fancy to it, and Mrs. Haughton, dear thing, took a good deal of trouble in making our arrangements; neither Miranda or myself are strong.”

“Strong! What an odious word to apply to us. It smells of milk and milk−maids; we would be uninteresting without our pet ailments.”

“Excuse me, my child, I know a zephyr could waft us away.”

“Pull−backs would be rather in the way of the onward movement of the zephyr, don't you think?” inquired Vaura, ironically, and glancing at the figure of the speaker, who with her daughter wore, at the instigation of Mrs. Haughton (who laughed with her men friends at the objects they were), skin−tight chamois under−clothing, and with only one narrow underskirt beneath the dress, express the figure so that nothing is left to imagination.

“Ah! Miss Vernon, don't be severe; Mrs. Haughton, dear thing, says you have no pet sins, but if you will only wear tights, I shall send in my own name for them,” she said coaxingly.

“*Merci*! madame,” said Vaura lightly, “but Worth has not yet told me my pleasure in life would be enhanced by the encasing of my body in tights, so I shall content myself with myself, as you see me.”

“I'm so sorry you won't.”

“Yes; but I believe I interrupted you; you were saying something about Mrs. Haughton having kindly smoothed away difficulties in the way of your wintering in Italy;” this she said roused to interest for her uncle's sake, “and this Major Delrose, how was he mixed up with Mrs. Haughton?”

“Oh! yes, Miss Vernon, the dear tights put everything else out of my head; well, as I was saying, Major Delrose longed to be near the Hall, and as the Colonel does not take to him, you see he is a little attentive to Mrs. Haughton, and the dear thing likes him, dear Charles was just like the Colonel, if men have handsome wives they don't like men to admire them; so Mrs. Haughton, dear thing, hit upon this plan, and they both arranged it with us one day they were in, and we were not strong, I mean we were delicate, so we remain as long as the Major wants Rose cottage, then we go to London to my sister, Mrs. Meltonbury, for the season.”

“Ah! I understand, quite a friendly arrangement,” answered Vaura, a trifle sarcastically. Here a diversion was caused by the entrance of the gentlemen.

The fair Miranda raised her sandy head from her mother's knee and looked languishingly at the priest, who smiled as he took a seat beside her.

“I am so glad we have you in Rome during our stay,” observed Mrs. Marchmont, gushingly, “you will be such company for Miranda while I am embroidering; the sweet child was saying she should so much like to go to you for confession.”

“Confessing! who is confessing?” said Sir Dennis, as he entered, “faith for once I would not say no to playing priest where there is a lovely penitent to shrive,” and he glanced at Vaura and was making for the sofa beside her,

but Lionel with one long step gained their mutual goal, saying:

“Priest Douglas will not allow you to entrench upon his preserves, O'Gorman.”

“Faith! you wouldn't either,” said the Irishman with a side glance at the sofa.

“But tell me,” continued Trevalyon, “confess, reverent Father, dost thou at confession bestow the gentle kiss of reconciliation?”

“You should not disclose the secrets of the confessional, Robert,” said Lady Esmondet, coming to his aid.

“No! trust me,” answered Robert, and Miss Marchmont hung her head and blushed.

“It would be a pleasant little *denouement* when the penitent was a pretty woman,” said Trevalyon laughingly.

“*A propos* of the confessional, did any of you ever come under the torture of that modern Inquisition, the 'Confession Book?'“ said Vaura.

“Yes, yes,” cried the gentlemen simultaneously.

“Oh! don't denounce them, Miss Vernon,” exclaimed Miss Marchmont pathetically. “I could not exist without mine; it is so interesting to read aloud from at a picnic, tennis party, or five o'clock tea. Indeed, my confession book was one of the chief sources of pleasure at Rose Cottage, wasn't it, mamma?” and she stroked her mother's hand caressingly.

“It was, Miranda; and Miss Vernon must promise to write down all her secrets in your book on her return to England; Blanche Tompkins has it in charge; you will promise to write, Miss Vernon, won't you?” and the thin lips were pursed into a smile.

“The saints forbid,” laughed Vaura, “that I should put the surgical knife, as it were, to my heart, and lay bare all its latent workings for the express delectation of five o'clock teas—and women!”

“Oh! do, dear Miss Vernon,” said Miss Marchmont coaxingly, “your heart would be so interesting.”

The gentlemen laughed.

“Nearly as much so as the potato bug,” said Vaura in an undertone to Trevalyon; aloud, she said gaily:

“No, I rebel, and most solemnly affirm, that, as you tell me Mrs. Haughton says I cultivate no pet sins, and as she is your oracle, I abide by her decision; with no pet sins, what could I say? that, as to colours, Worth supplies me. That, though I be ostracised by Mrs. Grundy, I still have the courage left in me to affirm that I don't and won't climb the dizzy heights or flights, to pour incense on that shrine alone. And that, were I on the rack, I should gasp forth that the woman who invented torture−books has not my heart−felt love.”

“Hear! hear!” said O'Gormon, clapping his hands, “'when found, make a note on,' Miss Marchmont, and you have Miss Vernon's confession.”

“Yes now I should never have thought of that; you Irish think like lightning; let me see if I can recall what Miss Vernon said,” and the sandy locks are thrown backwards as the blue eyes dwell on the painted ceiling.

“But, Miss Marchmont,” said Trevalyon, in pretended earnest, “it would be unorthodox, and spoil your book, unless you extract a promise from Miss Vernon, only to pour incense at the feet of the brilliant Earl.”

“Oh certainly, thank you, Capt. Trevalyon; pardon me, Miss Vernon,” cried the owner of the torture−book, in great dismay, “excuse me, but everyone contributing to my book, must admire the dear Earl more than anyone departed or with us (Gladstone after, if you wish); of course,” she added apologetically, “one does not care to remember he has Jewish blood, yet against that fact is, that he has never eaten pork, such a nasty, vulgar meat.”

“Remember, Miranda sweet, that Miss Vernon, having spent so much of her life in France, cannot perhaps know that it is the fashion to worship the Earl.”

“From Earl Beaconsfield to music is a long look, but let us take it,” said Lady Esmondet; “Miss Marchmont, will you sing for us?”

As Miranda asked Rev. Robert what it should be, Vaura said in an undertone to Trevalyon:

“I do admire the clever Earl immensely, and not only because it is the decree of the god of fashion.”

“I wish we had the evening to ourselves,” he murmured, “what do you think of the Irishman?”

“He is lavish of the superlative degree; is good−hearted as his race; and for the time being, feels intensely,” she answered.

Miss Marchmont, now asking her mother to join her in the duet, “Come where my love lies dreaming,” they glided arm in arm to the piano, and now Miss Marchmont implored of some one to come where her love lay dreaming, in a shrill treble, while her mother repeated the request in a very fair alto.

O'Gormon challenged Vaura to a game at chess.

Lionel fell into a brown study of his future plans to undo the mischief done by a woman's tongue. The poor fellow often glanced at Vaura in all her loveliness, and a pain came to his heart as he looked, for he thought of how he was leaving her, not knowing if she loved him, and with other men about her; and of how, with the torture that he might lose her weighing him down, he was going out from her alone to find Sister Magdalen, and see if she would openly reveal all. She had been reticent and guarded for years, and he was not in a mood to hope much.

But now he hears the clear voice of Vaura cry, “checkmate,” and O'Gormon leads her to the piano.

Vaura gave them a gem of Mozart's, then some gay opera airs, then, in response to their pleading for some song, gave “Il Bacio,” in her full rich tones.

Sir Dennis stood by the piano and looked his admiration.

“You seem fond of music, Sir Dennis,” said the fair musician, as she leisurely turned over the music with him in search for a song from “Traviata.”

“Fond of it! I adore it, and sometimes the musician.”

“A double tax on your powers of adoring,” said Vaura, gaily, as Sir Dennis placed the song before her, but though her notes were clear and sweet as a bird's, her heart was sad at the thought of the parting between Lionel and herself, and just now she had no sympathy with the free−from−care spirit of the song “Gaily Thro' Life I Wander.”

During the song Capt. Trevalyon was summoned from the room. It is a telegram, and runs thus:

“THE LANGHAM HOTEL, “LONDON, England, Dec. 24th.

“My father cannot live, and wishes to see you. Physician says come at once.” JUDITH TREVALYON.

“Capt. Trevalyon, “Villa Iberia, Rome, Italy.”

“Sims, this telegram calls me to England. You say there is an express at midnight. It is now 10.30, go at once and take some necessary refreshment; pack my luggage, leaving out my travelling gear; get your own box, and have them conveyed to the depot, express them through to London, to the Langham, and be ready to leave with me by the midnight train; and don't forget Mars.”

“Yes sir; and what time, sir, shall I order the trap to take you to the *depot*, sir?”

“At 11.30 sharp, Sims.”

“Yes, sir.”

Captain Trevalyon hurried back to the salons just as Vaura finished her song. He made his way to Lady Esmondet, in order to get a word in her ear, as Sir Dennis monopolised Vaura; but Mrs. Marchmont was full of a new folding screen Mrs. Haughton had ordered from London.

“The dear thing wanted something novel, so had the three 'Graces' painted on a sky−blue plush ground, suspended in the air; over them (as it were) hangs an open umbrella in rose−pink; oh! it's too lovely for anything, Lady Esmondet; you will be entranced when you see it, Captain Trevalyon,” and she folded her hands and turned her pale blue eyes upwards.

To Captain Trevalyon's relief, Vaura asked him to sing something, and seeing it was hopeless just now, to have a word with Lady Esmondet, he hoped when his song was over and their glass of champagne drank, there would be a general exodus ere it was time for him to leave; so he moved towards the piano, and playing his own accompaniment, sang one of Moore's melodies, “Farewell, but whenever you welcome the hour.”

Vaura sat at a small table near the piano. Sir Dennis, with the sanguineness of his race, thought she was interested in his chit−chat and in a book of Italian views, but her thoughts were with Lionel, for she caught his eye, and “minds run in grooves,” and he knew that she under stood, his silent farewell; she felt her heart ache, and would have risen and gone to him, but “men may suffer and women may weep,” but the conventionalities must be attended to, or the mighty god, society, stares and frowns; and so Lionel sung parting words to the woman he loved, and to his friend; and surely Moore would have been moved to tears had he heard the depth of feeling thrown into his words. When he was singing, the silver chimes softly rang eleven o'clock, so knowing he had no time to lose, he quietly left the room.

Vaura's heart throbbed quickly for she thought, “he has gone.”

But the Marchmonts, much to her relief and Lady Esmondet, saying they must “really tear themselves away,” a rather prolonged leave−taking took place between Reverend Robert Douglas and Miss Marchmont, into which Mrs. Marchmont was drawn.

“Well, I don't know, Miranda sweet,” she says, “that I can promise to take you to St. Augustine service

tomorrow afternoon. I am going to high mass at St. Peter's, and shall be fatigued."

Vaura, who was standing near, listening to O'Gormon's adieux, and anxious to do anything to hasten their leave−taking, said quickly:

"I shall likely go, and shall call at your hotel for Miss Marchmont."

Miss Marchmont was gushing in her thanks.

"Oh! don't forget, Miss Vernon, I wouldn't miss hearing Mr. Douglas intone the service for worlds."

"The creature, not the creator," thought Vaura. But now at last the guests have departed and the friends are alone.

Lionel sees them go from the garden walk which he is pacing up and down, ready to go and waiting for the trap. He has gone out urged by conflicting emotions, head aching, and in the air hoping to gain calm. It is now 11.15; fifteen minutes yet. "If I could only see her alone."

Fortune favours him, for Lady Esmondet having heard from Saunders (while Vaura is engaged with the Marchmonts) that Captain Trevalyon is about somewhere, as he does not go until eleven thirty, taking in the situation, tells Vaura to go to the *salons* for a little while and she will join her after she gives some directions to her maid.

So Vaura returns and, wishing to be quite alone before Lady Esmondet joins her, steps into the conservatory, but there her sense of loneliness is so complete, that she returns to the *salon* immediately adjoining, and drawing the heavy brocade curtains dividing it from the others, she feels that she can give herself up to thoughts of Lionel; she knows now that he is gone; she would give worlds to have him by her side; she throws herself onto a lounge with her great white arms in a favourite attitude thrown above her head. But in the moment of her entrance into the conservatory, Lionel had seen her from the garden and came in noiselessly to make sure; she is alone, and he is now gazing at her through the glass door; her bosom heaves, her flower face is lovely in its transparent soft paleness, and her eyelids are wet with the tear−drops she will not let fall, her lips move and he opens the door on its noiseless hinges, she says softly:

"Oh, darling, why did you go?" and she throws herself on her side and buries her face in her arms. Now Lionel fearing to hear the wheels of the trap to take him away, makes a noise with the door as if he had only come, and so Vaura thinks as she starts to a sitting posture and her heart beats wildly as she says, putting both hands to her side, "Oh, you are not gone, I am so glad."

"But I am going, and in a few minutes, Vaura darling," and he seated himself beside her; "you must know I love you with the whole pent−up love of my life," and his arm was round her. "You know, darling, I told you of a difficulty and I did not mean to speak until it was removed, but my heart has ached and I am so unmanned I have not known sometimes what to do or how to bear up; I have been in torture, darling, lest other men should win your love. Oh! my love, my beautiful darling, say you will not give your heart to another, that you will wait until I can plead my cause."

"I shall wait, dear Lionel."

"God, is it so, darling, darling?" and the soft hand was pressed and the lovely head was drawn to his breast and the rose−mouth was kissed again and again.

"There, that will do, won't it, Lionel, for to−night; we have waited so long," and the large grey eyes with their warm love−light, looked into the tired blue of the eyes so near her own now with a great passionate love looking from them.

"Darling love," and his cheek was on hers, "I feel so full of bliss and content, and my nerves all throbbing, I don't think I can ever let you go; oh, you don't know how I love you. I used to boast of my strength with women beauty; but with you in my arms, heaven, what bliss! Vaura, darling, I feel half delirious; and yet a full rich joy in living and loving could not turn a man's brain."

And now the hall bell is pulled furiously; Vaura starts up and to her feet.

"Put your soft arms around my neck, darling, and give me a good−bye kiss; it will be a talisman from evil and help me through my lonely travels."

And her arms are clasped tightly round his neck, and his head bends down to the sweet lips.

"Good−bye, dearest Lion," and the eyes rest on his and she whispers, "I am not sorry I came back alone to the *salons*."

"My love; how can I leave you."

“You must.”

And Lady Esmondet calls and Lionel hurries to the ball, and with a tight hand−clasp with his friend and a whispered, “I shall and most conquer my enemies.”

“You will, Lionel.”

And Lady Esmondet knew by the light in his eyes that he had spoken and she was glad.

Having promised Vaura to join her she now turned her steps towards the *salons*, but thinking, “No, she will not want me to−night,” retraced her steps to her own room; and while her maid disrobed her, the lonely woman thought: “What a perfect union theirs will be; both handsome, gifted, and with much gold, for I shall settle L3,000 per annum on Vaura. Sir Vincent will do something for dear Lionel. Ah, me; what I have missed in my wedded life, I who could have loved a husband of my own choice so fondly, so truly. Eric, Eric, you alone would have made me happy; but I am growing old, I am looking back; it is folly. Alice Esmondet, you must not give way to melancholy, life is sweet to you even if you are not a winner of all good in life's game—. Give me a few drops of red lavender, Somers; there, that will do; now leave me and go to rest.”

Vaura's whole being was filled with such intense happiness as she sank into a corner of the sofa where Lionel had found her a short time before that she would not move and so perhaps break the spell.

Emotional natures will know how she felt; as one does on waking from a dream of the night, so rich, so full of sweetness, so full of delicious languor one does not move a muscle lest the sensation pass.

At last she moves with a great sigh. “My darling, mine,” she thought, “and he loves me; come back to me, Lion,” and the great fair arms were clasped at the back of her head, then thrown down to the knees, and the hands go together, while a smile, oh, how sweet and tender, comes to the mouth, and the eyes are wet with their warmth and feeling.

“I'm glad you spoke before the 'difficulty,' is overcome, for if you can never undo it you will know that I always loved you. Men who would have satisfied most women have wooed me in vain. And now could any one of them who have charged me with cruelty see me. Yes, dearest Lion, I am every inch a woman and am subdued at last, and longing, longing, dear heart, to feel your arms about me and see the light in your mesmeric eyes. I have been waiting for you so long, love; come back to me, for I cannot do without the sweet, grave smile, the look from the tired eyes. Do you know, darling, as you are whirling away to northern climes that I am dreaming the hours away thinking of you; it is one o'clock, love, good night.”

And Vaura, in all her loveliness, and full of a dreamy languor, went to her chamber. Saunders heard the light step in the silent household and followed her mistress.

“You must be sleepy, Saunders; put away my robe, lace, and jewels, and go.”

“I am not tired, Mademoiselle; I have just had a nap in the house−keeper's room; you'd best let me run the comb through your hair, Mademoiselle.”

“Very well, Saunders, but be quick; I am tired.”

“The household are sorry, Miss, that the Captain is away; we were proud to have such a handsome master, and so free−handed; but it wasn't for what the Captain gave; it was his own kind ways, and we'll be wishing his servant back too, Mademoiselle; he was so merry. But his master was so kind, Sims could but be happy.”

“Even the hirelings love him,” thought her mistress; aloud she says:

“I am quite sure Capt. Trevalyon was a kind master, Saunders, and Sims was a faithful servant, and looked the essence of good humour. Good−night, you can go now,”

“Good−night, ma'am; what time shall I call you for your bath, ma'am?”

“At half−past nine.”

“Yes, ma'am.”

And the white *robe de nuit* is on, and this sweet woman glances at the mirror, and smiles at the fair face with the bright brown curls on the brow, the throat as fair as the soft robe of muslin, all a mystery of embroidery and shapely clingingness.

CHAPTER XXXII. TREVALYON GONE, VAURA KILLS TIME.

Christmas Day, the birth−day of Christ, dawned fair, beautiful, and bright, and was ushered in by many a peal of sweet sounding bells.

The heavenly east was so gloriously bright as old Sol mounted upwards, as to cause many a devout Roman (as he wended his steps to worship the Creator, at the altar, in one or other temple whose doors stood wide open, admitting a gleam of sunlight onto the figure of the sleeping babe, and the adoring faces of the worshippers, to cause him) to imagine as he gazed upward, that the heavenly Host caused all this flood of light in the warm, glorious east, by their smiles of approval at man's attempt to adore.

Vaura woke from a late sleep as Saunders tapped at the door; slumber had only come to her by sweet snatches during the hours of the night; but she lay happy in the dreamy quiet; and the face of the man she loved was ever before her. On waking, as her maid knocked, her first feeling was that something was wanting; that something had gone out of her daily life, and she gave a long deep sigh. Then the sweet sense, that she was loved, came to her; not that the knowledge of this man's love was just come to her—she had known it for some time, but they had both reached that stage when mutual pledges of love were craved for, and which to fill their whole being with the fulness of content, with the fulness of a satisfied bliss, had become a necessity.

The first thing that met her eye on rising, were a few crushed flowers on the seat of her favourite chair. Tied around the stalks was a delicate point−lace handkerchief; on the tiny square of muslin was written, in the handwriting she knew so well, Vaura Vernon; among the blossoms were a few written words:

“My heart aches at leaving you without a word of farewell My brain is in a whirl. I feel as though I shall go mad if you give your love to another; save me by writing me. Writing! how cold. God help me!—Your LIONEL.”

Capt. Trevalyon, not thinking to see Vaura, had, before going into the garden, gone to her boudoir, and placed this mute farewell on her chair.

“Now my darling knows,” she thought as she pressed them to her lips.

There were warm Christmas greetings exchanged between the two women friends, on meeting in the breakfast room. When the servants were released from duty, duty, Lady Esmondet said:

“Dear Lionel has left us something to remember him, at least for to−day, Vaura, *ma chere*, see here,” and she held up two vinaigrettes she had been admiring; on the cover to the stopper of one was the name “Alice Esmondet,” on the other, “Vaura Vernon.” Both bottles were small and both gold; on one side of Vaura's were the words, “I am weary waiting, L. T.,” in very small letters, while a tiny wreath of forget−me−nots encircled the words; blue stones, inlaid, formed the flowers; round each was a slip of paper—with the words: “With love and Christmas wishes, from Lionel Trevalyon. For the crush at St. Peter's.”

“Kind and thoughtful, for we shall feel his gift refreshing in the crowd,” said Lady Esmondet.

“Poor dear, far away; we shall miss him on this bright Christmas morn,” said Vaura, as she read the words, “I am weary waiting.”

“But I am forgetting my gift to you, and one from dear Uncle Eric,” and Vaura took from a small box a lovely locket, on one side was a miniature copy of Haughton; on the other the lovely face of the giver. “And this from Uncle for you came to me on yesterday;” and Vaura presented a photo of Col. Haughton.

“How sweet it is to be remembered, Vaura, and it's a good likeness of your dear uncle. And here is a gift from myself, a mere bagatelle, but I hope you will like it,” and she handed Vaura an acknowledgement from Worth of an order for a ball−dress, to be at Haughton Hall on the 5th January, 1878.

“Thanks, god−mother mine, your thoughts are always of some one other than of Alice Esmondet.”

“Not at all, dear.”

“I shall be glad to return to England now,” and there was a tender light in Vaura's eyes; “that is, dear god−mother, if you have laid up a sufficient store of strength.”

“I have, *ma chere*, and if the revelry at Haughton isn't too much, I shall be able not only to stand, but enjoy the season; I feel very strong, and had I had a happy life—I mean, dear, had I married where my heart was—all would have been right; this 'eating out the heart alone' is not good for one. I have taken all the tricks I could, and made the most of the cards in my hand, but they have not been to my liking.”

“My hand shall follow my heart,” said Vaura, earnestly; “how I wish yours had, dear.”

“Yes, it has been hard for me; but Fate, the dealer, is giving you good cards.”

“How think you, godmother; is the game ours?”

“You will win.”

“How did you know?” she said, softly, coming over to Lady Esmondet, and stooping to kiss her.

“By the great light in his eyes when he bade me adieu, and the heart−shine in your own; it has been the wish, of my life lately; God is giving you a paradise in life, dear.”

“He is.”

“This plot to damage Lionel's reputation is a something too mean,” said Lady Esmondet indignantly; “in Mrs. Clayton's last letter to me she asks me to 'decline to receive him, unless he publicly acknowledges his hidden wife;' she says, though 'the women still will pet him, their husbands are down upon him;' she further says, 'Clayton says he has no right to run loose with a hidden wife somewhere;' she says it has been in two or three papers. I declare, Vaura, if it were not for the feeling I have that we shall be a comfort to your uncle, I do not care to go to Haughton.”

“Poor Lionel,” said Vaura, thoughtfully, “he has got himself into a wasp's nest. Suppose we don't stay at Haughton, excepting for the ball, then go quietly to your town house.”

“Yes, dear, as we pass through London I shall give orders that my house be in readiness any day to receive us; so, dear, if after we stay for a short visit we find it a bore, we shall go up.”

“And be voted Goths and Vandals for showing our faces before the season opens; and Mrs. Grundy says 'Come;' what slaves we are!” said Vaura.

Now there is a tap at the door, and a servant enters with contributions from the post.

“Any orders, your ladyship?”

“Yes, the landau is to be at the door to take us to St. Peter's in an hour; at the close of mass we shall drive to the Duchess of Wyesdale, with whom we lunch; further orders there. And here, Barnes,” continued Lady Esmondet, taking out her purse, “distribute this gold to the household, excepting to Somers and Saunders, whom I shall attend to personally; and see that no poor go empty−handed from the villa on this, the Day of Days.”

“Thank you, your ladyship, you are very kind, and we all wish you and Mademoiselle a good Christmas.”

“Thank you, Barnes.”

“The man in bottle−green livery coming to the door,” said Vaura, as she left the breakfast−table, “is servant to our friend of Erin.”

In a few moments Saunders brought her mistress a beautiful bouquet, with the card of Sir Dennis, on which was written, “A merry Christmas to Miss Vernon.”

“What think you of the Irishman?” asked Lady Esmondet.

“Oh, I hardly know; he is a great good−natured creature; if his heart be proportioned to the rest of his frame, the future Lady O'Gormon will require to be intensely lovable.”

“The cards are quite artistic this year,” said Lady Esmondet; “but of yours, I think the one from poor Marie Perrault the most *recherchee*.”

“She encloses me a few lines; poor girl, she makes a great fuss over the few bits of gold I sent her. I have just read a letter from Mrs. Wingfield; after a good deal of chit−chat she says: We are staying at the Lord Elton's place, Surrey, and are quite lively over the Trevalyon's 'Hidden Wife' story; the men are mad that he runs loose, while they are held in bondage with the fetters that he should be held in also. I declare, god−mother dear, one is inclined to think envy is the motive power that rules the human family.”

“Indeed, yes; envy, hatred and malice are a prosperous firm who will not fail for want of capital.”

“This Major Delrose, that the Marchmonts named, must be a sworn enemy of poor dear Lionel?”

“He is, and of years.”

“Ah! an intuitive feeling told me so; and at Rose Cottage; and the woodland at the outskirts of our grounds hides it from the Hall; and a man and woman could meet and plot unobserved; but, god−mother mine, let us away to dress; the first bells are sounding their sweet musical invitation, and I shall try to forget Mrs. Haughton; for, among Christ's gifts to men, I perhaps have not valued that most excellent gift of charity.”

Vaura is first robed, but Lady Esmondet enters the hall from her boudoir in a few moments. They are now in the landau, and rapidly driven to that most stately of modern sanctuaries, a type in its magnificent architecture and

strength of the pride, riches, and unity of the wonderful system it represents.

Vaura wears a robe of seal brown velvet and tight jacket of seal fur, a small *ecru* velvet bonnet with scarlet geraniums among the lace.

Lady Esmondet wishes Lionel could see the sweet face, and the far−away look in the great expressive eyes. The vast building was crowded to the doors; the singing of mass grand to sublimity, and “the holy organ's rolling sound was felt on roof and floor,” its vibrations thrilling the hearts of the worshippers. The majestic grandeur of the interior of this stately edifice, with its many altars, was on this holy festival, enhanced by many beautiful decorations, chaste in design and of costly value. Rare gems, vessels of gold, and vessels of silver, the gifts of princes, sparkled on altars of perfect workmanship, while beauteous flowers raised their heads from priceless vases, trying in vain, with their sweet odour to drown the fumes of incense, wafted from the censor in the hands of the acolytes.

High mass being concluded, Lady Esmondet, with Vaura, slowly emerged from the sacred edifice. O'Gormon and a young Italian attached to the Quirinal having waited for them at the door, conducted them to their landau, when with warm Christmas greetings they parted to meat for lunch with the Duchess of Wyesdale. On reaching their destination they found their slender waisted hostess, with her daughter, the Lady Eveline Northingdon, with a few English and Italian notabilities, assembled in the *salons*. The Duchess looked blank on seeing that Capt. Trevalyon was not in attendance; for to tell the truth, she had only invited Lady Esmondet and Miss Vernon because she could not very well bid Trevalyon to lunch and ignore his hostess.

For though he had only given her a few careless flatteries, they were her food; still he had looked into her eyes and smiled. It was only a way he had, but she was a silly little woman, and vain, telling herself that in the old days she was sure he loved her hopelessly, but the Duke then lived, and British law was in the way, a woman could not marry more than one man at one time. She little knew that the mighty eagle, as he soars to his home in the mountain heights, with his bold glance wooing the sun, would as soon love the puny night hawk as would Lionel Trevalyon waste his heart's strongest feelings on such a frail butterfly as Posey Wyesdale.

So, now, on the *entree* of our friends without Trevalyon the Duchess, as she greeted them, called out in her thin treble,

“Where's my truant cavalier? You have never come without him? That would be too cruel.”

“We have; simply because he has left Rome and Italy.”

“Left Rome without bidding me *adieu*,” screamed Posey, “how cruel! Eveline, ring for my drops; the shock makes me feel quite faint. Tell me how, and why, Lady Esmondet?”

“His uncle, Sir Vincent was dying,—is now probably over the border.”

“To a death−bed! how unfortunate! What shall I do without him for my tableaux?” she was moved to tears—for the tableaux.

“What a pity the mighty Angel of Death would not stay his hand even for the tableaux of an English Duchess!” said Lady Esmondet, with veiled cynicism.

“Yes, I think he was very cruel,” sobbed the Duchess.

“Never mind, mamma,” said Eveline, soothingly “Some one else can take his place, and perhaps Capt. Trevalyon will now be a baronet, and that will be so nice. You like him, so it will make it all right.”

“So it will,” said Posey, drying her eyes, “if it's so, is it, Lady Esmondet?”

“Yes, Lady Wyesdale, Capt. Trevalyon succeeds to the baronetcy.”

Lady Esmondet's remark was carried with different variations to the end of the *salon*, where Vaura sat. She was immediately besieged with questions.

“What is this rumour, Miss Vernon,” asked an Englishman; “is Trevalyon to be raised to the peerage?”

“For his looks of an Adonis and many fascinations,” cried one.

“No, for his many *affaires de coeur*,” laughed another.

“Or that his 'hidden wife' is coming forth,” said a London man, who read the news.

“More likely for some knightly act, by his Queen rewarded,” echoed a soft−voiced Italian.

“Or his vote is promised for the war supply,” said the London man.

“*Carita, carita*!” said Vaura, laughingly, and turning to the London man, “You forget the party motto, 'no bribery,' Mr. Howard, and if you all lend an ear, I shall tell you that instead of a peerage, our friend, as far as I know, is plain Capt. Trevalyon.”

“Heresy, Miss Vernon, for he is not 'plain,' and you women will have it that he is a peer in our age.”

“A peerless way of putting it, Mr. Howard,” laughed Vaura.

“Luncheon is served, my lady,” said the butler.

“Somebody take in everybody,” said the Duchess. “We always go to luncheon *sans ceremonie*.”

And so fate willed Signor Castenelli (the young Italian who had accompanied them to the landau) to Vaura. The table was gay with Sevres china and *majolica* ware, but the viands were poor and scanty, and the victuals few and far between. One man of healthy appetite could easily have laid bare dishes that had been prepared for seven, when five morning callers having been invited to remain, so lessened the *morceau* for each guest. The Duchess having decided on getting all her wardrobe from the magic scissors of Worth, had determined to retrench in the matter of wines, etc., not putting faith in the adage that “the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.”

“Believe me,” she would say to her butterfly friends, “I know men's tastes, and they would rather feast their eyes than their stomachs.”

You may be very wise, Posey Wyesdale, but trust me, a man has no eyes for either you or your gown, if after a long ride or much calling he finally, in an evil hour, succumbs to your invitation to lunch and you give him a mouthful of chicken and one slice of wafer−like bread and butter, the mighty whole washed down with a cup of weak tea or thin wine; rather would he (curled darling though he be) return to the primitive custom of his forefathers and feed the inner man at the much−despised mid−day dinner on steaming slices of venison or beef, while he slaked his thirst in a bumper of British beer. But as O'Gormon said to Castenelli, on dining with him on that same evening: “Faith, all that was on the table of Lady Wyesdale wouldn't add to the hips of a grasshopper.”

“No, a fellow wouldn't have to try your larding system to get himself into waltzing shape; did your little. English duchess cater for him,” had laughed Castenelli.

But let us return to the Duchess of Wyesdale and her guests.

It seemed to Lady Esmondet, who was seated near her hostess, who plied her with questions as to Captain Trevalyon's whereabouts and possible doings, an insufferable bore to be there. To Vaura, who was more pleasantly placed; it seemed as though a few sentences were said, a few mouthfuls eaten, and the feast over.

“How is your noble king; Signor Castenelli,” inquired Vaura.

“Our beauteous flowers will not bloom, nor our sweet−song birds sing another summer for him; my heart weeps as I say it, Signora.”

“Yes; he is a fit king for so fair a land, and I sincerely trust for your sake and Italy, your fears will not be realized. The gentle Pius IX. is also stricken down.”

“Yes, Signora, but our Holy Father's loss could be more easily replaced than that of our beloved temporal sovereign.”

“Yes; a few solitary closetings of the Cardinals, a few ballots taken, a few volumes of smoke, and the Pope lives again.”

“You like my city, Signora?”

“I love it. Ah! how much have you here to enoble, to refine, to educate; what great souls have expanded in an atmosphere laden with the breath of a long, never−dying line of poets, orators, sculptors and painters. Yes, Signor Castenelli, it is a noble heritage to be Roman−born.”

“Thanks, Signora Vernon, for your gracious tribute to my country. But alas, we are fast becoming inoculated with the progressive spirit of the age; the American is among us.”

“You should extol him, Signor Castenelli, it is the fashion with us to welcome him, his note−book and his gold.”

“He is too energetic for me,” said the Italian, as Vaura taking his arm followed others to the salons and from the feast.

“He is a man of his time; you and I, Signor, are old−fashioned in regretting that many of the old land−marks are doomed; the spirit of the age is insatiable and his votaries are never idle in sacrificing in his honour, and if we'd be happy we must not weep. I confess I regret that your historic, not over clean, but picturesque Jews quarter, the Ghetto, is to give place to your new palace of justice; it is rather an incongruity (to me) that it should rise as if from the ashes of hearth−stones round which in days of yore figures sat to whom justice had been very imperfectly meted out.”

“True, true, Signora Vernon, and I don't like to see them all go, and your sympathy is sweet. The American is

a giant in his time; but we are not as they, he is literally a man of to−day; he has to be always in a hurry to make his name tell. We have done all that, but he is wrong to say we are dreamers," and his eyes flashed; "our blood is as full of fire as in the days of the Gracchi, the Caesars."

"Theirs was a grand age, but ours is gay, and could we be promoted backwards, I fear me," she added gaily, "we would long for our telephone, our electric light, our novels, our mutual club life, our great Worth, our lounging chairs, and many other pet luxuries."

"True, Signora," answered Castenelli, in the same tone, "and I can answer for myself; were a *belle* of those days to step from the canvas for my approval, I should tell her to sleep on, and give place to her more beautiful and gay sister of my own day."

"In the name of the butterflies of to−day, I thank you," said Vaura gaily.

"How long do you grace Rome with your presence?"

"One short week and a day, Signor; and I shall not leave your sun−warm Italia without regret, replete as it is with so much that charms the mind and senses, none so soulless I hope, but would feel as I shall on bidding adieu to one of the choicest gardens Dame Nature revels in."

"Why leave us so soon?"

"Fate wills it, and there are home revels to which we are bid, and the crush of the season after, where we shall only see our wings glisten by Edisons or the now doomed gas−shine, for fog reigns supreme in the day−time, and poor old Sol is hid from us."

"London belles would shine by their own beauty even in Egyptian darkness."

For the Italian took pleasure in the beauty of the fair woman beside him, her expressive face changing as some word touched her heart, or again gay, reflecting a nature ever ready to respond in sympathy with the feeling of those who pleased her.

"One of your countrymen writes me from your metropolis," taking a letter from his pocket; "I shall read you a line or two: 'Our city will soon be bright with the beauty of fair women, handsome men, superb robings, gay equipages, prancing steeds. Rumour hath it that one of our favourite belles is sunning herself in your land. Don't mar the beauty of our constellation by detaining her with you after the season opens for we must have *la belle* Vernon.' Would that I had the power, was my thought as I read."

"Your friend exaggerates my poor charms, Signor."

"With so much of beauty to choose from, mademoiselle, London society is critical, and my friend only endorses its verdict."

"Well, Signor, London will have something of weightier matter to decide this coming season than the passing beauty of woman. Our parliament have the vote on the war supply, and as Beaconsfield cannot go into the strife empty−handed on the issue of that vote hangs the destiny of many lives."

"Think you the Bright or peace party will be strong enough to prevail?"

"No; England's sons are ever jealous of their country's honour. There is a strong popular feeling against any encroachments by the Russian Bear. Our young officers are ever eager for a chance to distinguish themselves, and our men," she added gaily, "have fists all knuckles, always doubled for a good hard blow."

"Well, it seems to me an expensive undertaking that your bold countrymen meditate. Turkey is lazy and luxurious."

"Yes; not a fit sentinel for a dangerous post; still, what are we to do? We cannot uproot them and plant in their place the trusty Scot or brave Celt; no, we must even pay high wages to bad servants until wiser heads than ours in some future generation devise some better way of guarding our eastern possessions. But our pleasant chat is over, Signor, Lady Esmondet is making her adieux."

"And you leave so soon, Signora; I am jealous of London. May I see you again?"

"Surely, Signor; we go many places to take a last loving glance."

"Give me something definite, I pray you."

"Well, the palace of the Vatican on to−morrow morning. I must have another long look at the painting of the Transfiguration. In the afternoon a drive in the gardens of the Borghesian villa. In the evening the theatre and the exquisite voice of Patti. And now what say you, grave and reverend Signor; will you remember your lesson while I say *au revoir*," and with a gay smile and a warm pressure of the hand from Castenelli Miss Vernon, after saying her farewell to Lady Wyesdale and her daughter, followed her god−mother to the landau.

“You seem to have enjoyed your chat with Signor Castenelli,” said Lady Esmondet, as they drove away; Miss Vernon to pick up Miss Marchmont for even−song at the Church of St. Augustine, Lady Esmondet for home.

“Yes, he is pleasant to me, as most of his countrymen are; there is a fervor about them, with all their languor, that is refreshing after our stoical Briton; I fear me you were not so well placed, the little Duchess seemed to fasten upon you.”

“She did, and entertained me with an unceasing catechism as to Lionel's whereabouts, his deeds past and present; seems to fear his cousin, Judith Trevalyon; in fact, plainly shows her old predilection, is as aforetime, alive in her breast; is anxious to know how we became so intimate with him; whether he goes to Haughton Hall; whither the woman your uncle has married has invited her; says she does not leave Rome until the middle of January; wants to know if we shall be there for the Twelfth−night ball; wonders if Lionel will retire for a fashionable six weeks' mourning. Says there is a rumour that he is engaged to half a dozen women, and has a wife and children somewhere; is crazy (to use her own expression) to know if you are, as report says, engaged to Del Castello, etc., etc., and asked me point−blank, if I like dear Mrs. Haughton.”

“What a whirl the brain of the slender waist Duchess must be in, and what a bore she was to you; so she also goes to Haughton. Fancy uncle on one side, and Major Delrose, the Rose Cottage people, Mrs. Meltonbury, Peter Tedril, Hatherton, etc., on the other; Madame well knows how to mix up the brandy cocktail and poker of midnight, with sober 9 o'clock whist and old port, but the scales are weightier on one side. But behold the naturalist, waiting at the door with prayer book in hand, ready for her devotions.”

CHAPTER XXXIII. WARM WORDS BRIDGE CRUEL DISTANCE.

Lady Esmondet, Vaura, and Robert Douglas ate their Christmas dinner quietly together. “I shall feel lonely when you leave Rome,” said the priest, as he bade them a warm goodnight.

“Naturally, you will miss us; we are almost a part of your old home,” said Lady Esmondet.

“I have no doubt, Roberto, that the Marchmonts will be very kind to you when we are gone,” said Vaura, smilingly.

“Yes, she will be good to a lonely priest,” he answered absently; then recovering himself, “but I should not say lonely; have I not the Church.”

As a footman fastened the hall−door after the Rev. Robert, Vaura said:

“The Church will soon not be sufficient to fill up his life; at least the naturalist will make him feel so.”

“How differently *cher* Roland would range himself,” said Lady Esmondet, thinking of his hopeless love for Vaura; “that girl with her bugs and beetles, her sandy locks and sharp elbows, would drive him distracted. I wonder what affinity Robert can have with such an one.”

“Why doth he love her? 'Curious fool, be still; is human love the growth of human will?' saith the poet. So, god−mother dear, for aught we can say, they must e'en join the legion of impossible unions. But we are both weary, and had best to bed and sleep or dreams.”

“Yes, 'tis late; good night, dear; we have both missed Lionel to−day.”

“We have; he little dreams how much.”

And as Vaura's robes were unfastened, and the deft fingers of her maid made her comfortable for the night, a tall figure and handsome face, tawny moustache, shading lips sweet yet firm in expression, tired eyes that were generally grave, but could flash or be tenderly loving, rose before her.

“'Twas only last night,” she though, as she laid her soft cheek on the pillow, “he was with us, and I feel as though we had been parted for ages; and he suffers by all these rumours; and my dearest is in a tangled web of difficulty and I am not near to give him my sympathy, and poor dear uncle is not happy either; and it's a woman's work, but this making of moans is unnatural to me; I must make Time fly, and when I am once in England, my aim shall be to make those two men regain their old happiness; good−night, Lionel, I am weary to see your face again, to hear your words of love and feel your arms about me, for the sweet feeling that I belong to you seems only a dream; come back, come.”

The following day the programme of which Vaura had spoken to Castenelli, was gone through. But as Vaura wished just now that the days would quickly join themselves to the great past, we shall not linger; but say, that on nearing the painting of the Transfiguration, a figure caught her eye, it was that of the young Italian Castenelli, who, with the dark rich colouring, clear cut features and soft brown eyes that Roman blood gives, looked as though he might have stepped from the canvas on the wall.

The painting in its glorious beauty held them in silent admiration for some time. Vaura drew a long breath as she turned away, saying:

“The man who painted the figure of the Christ in its God−like sanctity of expression, must have been inspired. What a volume of sermons it preaches!”

As the Italian had tickets of admission to the Tower of St. Peter's, Vaura decided to make the ascent. The double walls of the dome are passed through as quickly as possible, as Vaura's time is short. But the view from the top! who can describe it? Not I; my pen falls lifeless; it would take a Moore to sing of; a Byron to immortalise; a Longfellow, a Whittier or a Tennyson to make an idyl of; it has sent artists wild; the eye rests lovingly on the hill−crests of the Sabine, Volscian and Albano on the one side, then turns to the city with its temples, its palaces, the historic past showing in their very stones. Then the Coliseum and the Forum, each speaking their own story; then the eye turns to the winding Tiber; and finally rests on the deep calm waters of the violet Mediterranean in the far away.

“Ah, Signor Castenelli, it is too much for one day; 'tis no wonder the Italian is a poet. You dwell in a maze of beauty in nature and art. Dame nature with you wears such a rich warm dress; 'tis little wonder your canvas, aye, and your own faces show such sun−warm tints.”

“You should dwell with us, Signora; you feel the poetry of our land.”

On parting from the Italian he tendered to Vaura for herself and Lady Esmondet his box at the theatre, as being more favourably situated than the only one Captain Trevalyon had been able to procure, and at Vaura's invitation he dined at the villa Iberia, escorting them afterwards to hear the wonderful voice of Patti.

On the morning of the 28th a telegram arrived from Lionel which read as follows:

“To Lady Esmondet. “Villa Iberia, Rome, Italy.

“Sir Vincent Trevalyon died at 11 p.m. the 27th inst. Shall write to−day.

“LIONEL TREVALYON, “The Langham, London, England. “28th December, 1877.”

“Poor Sir Vincent gone. And so generations pass. When death bowls out one man another takes the bat; so now Captain is Sir Lionel Trevalyon,” said Lady Esmondet, as she read the telegram.

“Yes. None shall triumph for a whole life long, for death is one and the Fates are three,” said Vaura.

On the 30th came from Lionel two letters, extracts from which we shall give.

“DEAR LADY ESMONDET,—

“Every moment of my time is occupied, but know you will be interested in my doings, so drop you a line. My cousin with my lawyer and self read the will. By it my uncle bequeaths to me $500,000 in gold. I was surprised at his generosity. The whole of his fortune would be mine if I and Judith could marry; that would not suit either of us as we are totally unsuited to each other. Judith leaves by steamer The Queen for New York on the 1st January. My poor uncle lived for three hours after my arrival. He was in great pain, suffering from Bright's disease, but brain clear; seemed to cling to me; he told me he wished I could persuade Judith to marry me and try and make her more womanly and live at my place in the north; but God forbid that our lives should be linked together. What a contrast she is to Vaura. Should Judith ever be guilty of giving up her freedom it will be to a man who admires the divided skirt, etc., etc.”

EXTRACTS FROM LIONEL'S TO VAURA.

“....Yes, darling, the words I have written, what are their worth in telling you of my great love for you! You don't know how I hunger to look again into your warm, expressive eyes, to hold you to my heart. If you were only with me, my love, I should drink so freely of your tender sympathy, that with it as a tonic to my weary waiting heart, I could go forth into the midst of the news−mongers, into the nest of wasps, and conquer and untangle the web of difficulty in a few short days. But you, alas! are far away, and I have only a few minutes of past bliss to feed on when I kissed your sweet lips, when you made life a paradise by leaning your dear head on my breast. My love, my love, I cannot be long without you. You must come to me whether I can prove to society, with its shams, that Mrs. Grundy has lied in giving me a hidden wife or no; you must come to be my own love, no matter who says nay. My heart, my heart, you are mine; mine by right of the subjection the fetters you have placed me in, and woven for me. Mine by right, for you have taken my boasted strength from me. Mine, mine, no matter what the world may say. My life, my love, write to me; I am half delirious. I am in torture; full of jealous fears less you may forget me. I regret once and again that I left you. Remember, darling, I shall be always jealous, for I know the magnetic force of your charms. I am mad, I know I am, when I think you are so far, such 'lengths of miles' from me. Ask Lady Esmondet to come on at once and stay a day or two at her house here (it is well warmed—I have been to see) in pity to the man you have slain, and who loves you past all you can know; love, come. I am doing all I can, my own, to conquer the difficulty; I have already been to the offices of our great daily, and one editor apologized, saying the news of my 'hidden wife' was a temptation to him in the 'silly season.' For heaven's sake, my heart's darling, don't let anything you may hear against me turn your heart from me. The very thought of such a triumph for Mrs. Grundy in her *role* of social astronomer, as she sits in her watch tower, telescope in hand, turns my brain. My heart aches for a letter, for though my written words seem to me cold; I shall devour yours, simply as coming from your pen. Come to me quick, my love; I must have a letter and I must have you. In a stationer's to−day I saw a photo of you in a case with those of Mrs. Cornwallis West, Langtry and Wheeler, there were just the four; you all sold, my darling, at five shillings each. The stationer said, condescendingly, 'that you would all bring a higher figure, but he merely wished to educate the masses to a high standard of beauty. His monetary benefit was quite a minor consideration.' The fellow's manner amused me; but you see, love, that the future Lady Trevalyon in thus educating the masses reigns in the heart of mankind, and not only in the heart of the man who only lives in her love....”

“I am more than glad, Vaura, *ma chere*, that Dame Fortune is playing so smilingly into dear Lionel's hands,”

said Lady Esmondet, as she read aloud the letter she had received from Trevalyon on the morning of the 30th. Yes, more than glad, for the legacy of $500,000 and the title, will do more to close the gaping eyes of society, and lips of Dame Rumour, than any red−tapeism in the form of libel suits; or living proofs, from living truthful lips."

"True, god−mother dear, and 'tis well we are women of our day, or the knowledge that a man may, if he will, live the life of a Mormon in Utah, on the quiet; and if he present a wife well gilt with gold, and a title, to society; society will fall prostrate; or this knowledge might mystify us."

"Yes, we hive eaten of the tree of knowledge, Vaura dear; we know society's deal and the cards she bids us play; no matter though we don't like our hand."

"Poor Lionel does not relish the play just now, manly, brave, and true as he is," said Vaura, pityingly.

CHAPTER XXXIV. BRIC−A−BRAC.

The morrow dawned, fair and bright, and Vaura looked as bright and fresh as a goddess of day, as she stepped, from the door of the villa, robed in a gown of blue velvet, tight jacket of same, and a small bonnet of a lighter shade, with long tan kid gloves; her cheek was warm with the colour her quickened heart−beats gave, and the love− light shone in her eyes, for she had again just re−read Lionel's loving words, and knew her own would soon make his heart glad.

O'Gormon came up the walk as she descended the verandah steps.

“Good morning, Miss Vernon.”

“*Bonjour*, Sir Dennis; sorry I am deserting the villa as you are making your *entree*.”

“Fortune favours me, in that you are not already gone. May I not be your escort, and attend you?”

“Well, I scarcely know; I am not going to the Colonna gardens,” she answered gaily.

“No matter, I am only too willing to follow you blindly; whither thou goest I go; thy will shall be my will; thy goal my goal.”

“Then to the dusty shop of Pedro; to the rescue of some trifles in the matter of bric−a−brac.”

“But, am I not sufficient escort without yon trim female; give her a holiday to go buy ribbons to 'tie up her bonny brown hair.'“

“You may take an hour's pleasure, Saunders; I do not require your further attendance.”

And now they bend their steps in the direction of the old town, and turning into a short, narrow street, ascend the high stone steps of an old house; so old one wondered it held together; in fact, many stones had fallen from the front wall, giving it a hollow−eyed appearance. The whole *quartier* in which they now are, presents a dilapidated front. But when they enter the old, mouldy apartment, lit up with so much of the beautiful, they forgot the gloomy, damp street; the uninviting exterior of the building; the weird old man in charge; everything but the gems by which they are surrounded. Here were some rare bits of Sevres and Dresden china, there some modern tile painting, here some old Roman jugs, jars, and vases; there the sweet face of a Madonna looks down, as if in pity, on a Greek dancing girl. Here a goblet, fit for a kingly gift; there a zone to win the good graces of some pretty little ballet dancer. Here were Romish missals in rare old inlaid coverings, side by side with garters studded with precious stones, destined for the leg of woman.

Vaura, an ardent admirer of the choice in bric−a−brac, was in her element amid this confusion of beauty, while her companion preferred the living charms of a lovely woman more than anything the world of art could show; so, not a purchaser, he seated himself on a chair with more carving than comfort to recommend it, and watching Vaura, fell into a reverie: “She is the most priceless gem in the casket, and though my governor left me as heritage the waste acres, and nothing but an income of debts to keep up Castletruan, unless I marry money, by my faith a fellow could live on love with Vaura Vernon, better than on stalled ox without her.”

Here he gave a start knocking down a porcelain vase at the weird voice of Pedro from behind, saying:

“You don't examine my poor wares, mi lord.'

“The shattered remains of that vase are typical of the *denouement* of the idle dreams I was dreaming,” he muttered, as the wily Italian, full of regrets, picked up the fragments, naming double the value of the vase, and thinking,

“He would not have spent a *soldi*, the Signora occupies all his thoughts; so Pedro, you are in good fortune that the English lord was startled at the sound of thy voice; the intention was good, Pedro, so is the result.”

Vaura now signified to the Italian her wish to purchase bric−a−brac to the extent of a golden goblet, beautiful in design and of early Roman handiwork. A group of statutory, representing Venus and Adonis, at once piquant and charming, with an exquisite painting of the Dying Gladiator pathetic in the extreme.

“He is a grand athlete,” said Sir Dennis.

“Yes, and a land−mark of Home, in the by−gone. Ah! Sir Dennis, there has been more martyr's blood shed in the immortal city than that of the early Christians; when one thinks of the use the Coliseum was put to, when one thinks of the Roman women with their warm beauty, of their men beautiful as gods, who graced with their presence scenes where men like that met a death of torture, one weeps for human nature with its stains, its blots.

Ah! well, even the flowers one loves best are bespattered in the mire, and soiled by the skirts of mortals with not too clean a record, and the pure snow−flake as it falls goes down with smut from the chimney upon it, it is only the trail of the serpent which is over all."

"The wells of pity in your eyes are deep and full enough to take in more than the Dying Gladiator; he is dead; there are living men," said the Irishman with the susceptibility of his race.

"Why, Sir Knight of Erin," said Vaura gaily, as she turned from the painting, "you are not going to ask me to weep over all suffering humanity, from the Pole, not North but Siberian; the Sultan, whose siesta, is disturbed by the call to arms; to your own Pat with his real or imaginary wrongs."

"To the shades of oblivion with Pat and the Pole,—they don't fill the world."

"And in the meantime the shades of evening will be upon us if we don't hasten. Pedro, you will send my purchases with the vases and model of St. Peter's Lady Esmondet bought yesterday, to the Villa Iberia, and be expeditious, as the servants are now packing our belongings for England."

"Already packing!" said the Irishman, as they turned their steps homeward, "that sounds like the first note of a fare−thee−well."

"A true and fairly−well made remark, oh, Son of Erin!"

"Your voice is glad as the bird−notes of my own Isle, which means you'll smile as you say farewell."

And so in gay chit−chat Time seemed as naught until the villa was reached. Sir Dennis lunching with them when as afterwards the ladies having P.P.C.'s to make, he took a reluctant leave.

The following three days were spent in leave−takings to the beauties abounding in and around the city; sometimes attended by Signer Castenelli, sometimes by the warm−hearted Irishman, and again by Priest Douglas; they walked again and lingered in the gardens of the Colonna palace they loved; the dear warm earth which was kissed so lovingly by the sun's rays as not to be cold to the bare brown feet of the child−peasant; and sent up such bright flowers for the vase of the King. Their glance rested often on the deep blue of the heavens above them, as though to carry its majestic arch with them to lift the leaden clouds from off the spires of London, which seemed as though weighed down to earth, as the souls the bells in their tower called to worship, were weighted with the clouds in the struggle of life.

And so Father Time, who to Vaura for once seemed to walk with stealthy step, still with inevitable tread brought the world and humanity to the fourth day of a new year.

On the third a letter had come from Col. Haughton to Lady Esmondet, which ran thus:

"MY DEAR OLD FRIEND,—

"Your letters are so full of health that I don't think I'm selfish in saying to let nothing tempt you and my hearts−light, Vaura, to stay away any longer; when you come you will not blame me for wanting you both; my married life has not been of very long duration, and yet, and yet my new made wife ... but you will see if there is anything to see; you are not a curious woman, Alice, God forbid; but you will know in the social atmosphere which surrounds me, if I needlessly fear for the honour of my name.

"The preparations for the ball are on a gorgeous scale and my *bete noire*, Major Delrose, is up to the neck in, floral decorations. And my lady's gown, mine and yours, too; did we say him yea; his nose is broad enough to enter into everybody's business; and his back is broad enough to bear anything I may write you.

"Be sure and be here on the morning of the sixth, so you can rest for the night's frolic; and Vaura, whose health is too splendid to feel much fatigue, can chat with me and look about her.

"I see by the *Daily News* that Trevalyon has succeeded to the baronetcy; he writes me he will be here for the ball; I feel just now in the humour for a long talk with my old friend.

"I'm really grieved he should have got himself into such a mess as to have married some years ago some female he has been hiding ever since. It is common gossip here; some name her as a ballet dancer; some as pretty daughter of his late father's lodge−keeper; some, as wife of a friend; in whatever dress Dame Rumour presents her, she's a toothsome bit for Mrs. Grundy. Whatever truth there's in it the wasps sting Trevalyon all they can; but the butterflies smile and say: 'if he has, he's handsome enough to take out a license for anything.' I have regretted since hearing the news and seeing it in the papers, that he was in daily intercourse with Vaura; but again, if he is bound as I fear, I can trust to his honour not to endeavour to gain her affections.

"Isabel Douglas was married on New Year's' day; we were invited; Blanche and I went; the laughs at the Hall were the loudest, so Mrs. Haughton remained. Isabel looked hopeful and happy, and an ideal Scotch lassie as she

is. I am writing in the recess at the end of the library, and merry voices and gay laughter reach me here; but the sounds come not from any of my personal friends; none are with me as yet; we have Mrs. Meltonbury, the Fitz−Lowtons, two De Lancy girls, Peter Tedril, Everly, and Major Delrose at Rose Cottage—means Major Delrose at the Hall. So you see, Alice, a congenial spirit would be congenial. Read above to Vaura; she is a woman of the world, and knows its walks and ways. Come soon. And from

"Yours, "ERIC HAUGHTON, "Haughton Hall, Surrey, England.

"To both, love and kind thoughts, "January 2nd, 1878."

"TO LADY ESMONDET, "Villa Iberia, Rome, Italy."

The outcome of above letter was to cause Lady Esmondet and Vaura to make immediate preparations to reach Haughton Hall.

"We should be there; the hand Madame holds is too full of tricks," said Lady Esmondet, energetically, as she finished reading the letter aloud.

"We can go to−night by the midnight express," said Vaura, impulsively.

"I should like it, dear, but you are full of engagements for to−morrow, and we are due at the Opera tonight."

"Trifles, all; as you are willing, we shall be on the wing to−night."

Tres bien ma chere; I shall give the orders, but there will be three or four pairs of wistful eyes looking for your *entree* at the opera, to−night."

"Yes, until the curtain rises," said Vaura gaily.

On the afternoon of the same day (the third) Castenelli, with a couple of friends, also O'Gormon, on calling at the villa, heard a rumour of the departure from the servants (who were all astir, their ladies being out driving), the Italian p'shawed and said to his friends:

"It is not so, the beautiful Signora told me she would be at the Duchess of Wyesdale on the night of the fourth for a concert and ball; they leave at sunrise on the fifth." And so was content that the servants were mistaken. Not so O'Gormon, who hearing the same story, and knowing their intention to attend the opera went thither, and not seeing them was for leaving, but the Wyesdale signaled him to her side, and so off duty only at the close; saw her party to the carriage, and throwing his toga over his evening dress, hurried to the depot. And none too soon, Lady Esmondet was already in the coach and Vaura about to follow, when the tall figure of the Irishman came up hurriedly.

"Surely you are not going to leave us, Miss Vernon, and so hush our heart−beats as we listen in vain for your footfall."

"I am, and my heart is a trifle sad, as I say so."

"And has a great gladness, or you would not make us sad by going."

"Well, yes, Sir Dennis, glad and sorry; I go home! You are Irish and will know the feeling; one loves with one's whole heart, and one's life, one's home and friends; one loves with passion; and for a year, or a day, fair warm Italia, where one has met loving words and kind hearts, and yours is one Sir Knight of Erin," she added with feeling, as she returned his tight hand clasp.

"The last whistle, by my faith, I wish it were for me too."

And the guard locked the door and in a few minutes, miles separated these two who had so lately spoken, Sir Dennis still staring at space, while a new pain came to his heart.

CHAPTER XXXV. HEART TO HEART.

We shall not accompany our friends on their home−bound journey. Time will fly with greater speed if we relate not the talks and incidents by the way, but simply meet them at London, whither Lady Esmondet had telegraphed Trevalyon of their arrival. Accordingly, on their coming in at the station at 9 p.m., on the evening of the 5th, Lionel, all eagerness, met them.

“So kind of you to meet us, Sir Lionel,” said Lady Esmondet, for Madame Grandy was about.

“Only a pleasure, dear Lady Esmondet. Someone told me you and Miss Vernon were due,” and turning to his servant, “Here, Sims, are the checks; get the luggage stowed safely away until to−morrow morning, and send the maids on to Park Lane.”

“Yes, sir; all right, sir.”

“You look tired, poor fellow,” said Vaura, sympathetically, as they were driven to Park Lane.

“Tired, yes, waiting for you. God only knows how I have missed you, darling.”

“How about the nun you spoke of in your letter, Lionel?” inquired Lady Esmondet, “will she aid you? What a long story you have to tell us.”

“Yes, and one until lately I had will nigh forgotten, for in spite of Dame Rumour's falseness I have not been the principal actor in it. For to−night only does she triumph, ere, to−morrow's sun has set I hope to be at or very near Haughton Hall with those who will lift the veil from the past, and put in Dame Rumour's hands another version of the scandal.”

“We shall have a long evening together, Lionel; you can stay with us, I suppose.”

“Only until I see you comfortably settled, dear Lady Esmondet, in still untangling the web of 'difficulty,'“ and Vaura's hand is pressed. “I have a twelve−mile drive in a suburban train to the monastery of St. Sebastian.”

“Nuns and monks, the *denouement* will be interesting,” said Vaura.

“Will they win, that's the question; the other hand is full of knaves and tricks,” said Lady Esmondet.

“They shall,” answered Lionel, earnestly, and holding Vaura's hand, “I hold a hand that gives me strength to win.”

Park Lane is now reached, the servants are in the hall to welcome their mistress, when the house−keeper says:

“If it will suit your ladyship, dinner will be served in twenty minutes or half an hour.”

“Say half an hour, Grimes.”

“Surely you can stay and dine with us, Lionel?” said his friend.

“You know, dear Lady Alice, how much I would wish it, but I must be off in less than half an hour.”

Whereupon remembering the “Golden Rule,” saying she would go and talk with the housekeeper, and so again these two who feel such completeness in each other, such fulness of satisfaction, such an ecstasy of love, are alone in the sweetest of solitude, dual solitude, and in silence, save for the deep full heart−beats.

“Let me take off your jacket, my own darling.”

“I can, dear Lionel; you look too tired to do anything but rest.”

But he does as he wills, the jacket of seal, and bonnet of velvet are off, the long tan gloves laid aside, the fluffy hair is caressed, a strong arm is about her, the perfect shaped head is again on his chest, and the sweet mouth and warm eyes are kissed rapturously.

“Rest; yes, love, I want rest, and can only rest so, with you in my arms; away from you I am nervous and agitated, afraid lest some one take you from me; my life, my love, oh! darling, darling, you don't know how dependent I am on you; on your love, your sympathy; you have not told me and I long to hear you say so; tell me if you love me, darling.”

“Love you!” and she started to a sitting posture, “bend your face towards me, dearest, that you may read the truth in my eyes.”

And now with a soft hand on each cheek, she continues.

“Love, you dearest, does the sun−flower love its god? Does the mother her first born? Then, do I love thee, my heart's dearest, with an unchanging tender love, and with all the intensity of my woman self.”

For answer, she is drawn to a close embrace, and there are ecstatic moments with only throbbing eyes to the

rhythm of heart−beats.

At last Vaura breaks the silence, by saying softly:

“'Tis time for you to leave me, Lionel, and yet I cannot spare you.”

“I cannot go, my own, mine, mine; oh! darling, you do not know the joy, the paradise I feel as I hold you in my arms, and think that you, my beauty, you, whom men rave of, you actually love me; God be thanked,” and the love−warm kisses come to the sweet flexible lips.

At this moment, Lady Esmondet considerately talking to Mars at the door, gave the lovers time to get a conventional number of inches between them, ere she entered.

“I fear it is time you were off, Lionel; it is really too bad you cannot dine with us.”

Lionel standing up, and laying one hand on Vaura's head, as it rested on the cushioned back of the sofa, said:

“I feel as if I had drank of the elixir of life; you don't know how courageous I feel, now that I have you both back, when the difficulty is removed, I shall begin to live!”

“How the women will envy me!” she said, looking up lovingly at the handsome face full of grave earnestness, the tired look gone from the mesmeric eyes.

“You will both be wondrously happy, each a gainer in the other,” said their friend earnestly.

“Do you think you will be able to go down with us, Lionel dear?”

“No, darling, I am sure not; I cannot say what train I shall take until I reach the monastery; there we decide.”

“The plot thickens, a monk makes his *entree*,” said Vaura gaily.

“Yes, and I shall not tell either of you more of the play, the act will be more interesting, only this, tell Col. Haughton that after dinner, on to−morrow evening three unbidden guests will appear with myself, and that we shall carry a more highly spiced dish than any they have partaken of; further, that it is my wish that the Hall guests hear of the ingredients, so that they can tell the recipe to the London world. Good−bye, till to−morrow night, dear friend; good−bye, darling.”

“Good−night, Lion, we shall be on the look−out for you; so don't tire our eyes.”

“I shall feel your eyes, love, and shall hasten.”

“Be sure, Lionel, that you come with winning cards.”

“I shall, dear Lady Esmondet; *au revoir*.”

“How greedily the gossips will partake of the dish in preparation for them! What an exciting scene we shall have!” said Vaura, as dinner over and servants dismissed, the friends chatted over a cup of coffee before retiring.

“Yes, indeed, dear; oh! if Lionel could only find this Mrs. Clarmont, with whom they said he eloped, and that she would reveal the facts, what a triumph!”

“But, if in reality; this Major Delrose was her favoured lover, he may yet have influence enough over her to stay her tongue,” said Vaura, thoughtfully.

My own fear, dear, especially as I believe there was a child.”

“And you say that in the bygone he was an admirer of my uncle's wife?”

“So Dame Rumour hath it.”

“So, so, we all aim at something; the Delrose ambition was to pose as king o' hearts. Strange freak of fortune, that this all comes into the Haughton life; we must now only hope that the clouds in our sky will soon disperse. But, god−mother darling, we had best follow the advice of the liege lord of the wilful Katherine, and 'to bed.'“

CHAPTER XXXVI. KNAVES ARE TRUMPS.

Vaura spent the night of the fifth in dreamy wakefulness; Lionel's looks, caresses, and loving words seeming hers still; and to−morrow eve; the glad joy of his presence would be again felt; and her sympathy and love for him were so tender and heartfelt, that she lost herself in an intoxicating sense of languor, sweet beyond expression, and which she could scarcely rouse herself from, when her maid, on the morrow bid her arise.

Both her god−mother and self, being a good deal excited over the coming events, on meeting at breakfast, spoke either in disjointed sentences, or were buried in thought.

“In all your conjectures, ma chere, you have never made one as to your ball dress; if you will like it, and if it is due.”

“It is useless, god−mother dear; I always adore Worth, and he is always on time.”

“Dear me,” said Lady Esmondet an hour later, as they, in travelling gear, awaited the carnage to take them to the Southern station, “how time drags, I wish we were off.”

“In our eagerness, we have dressed too soon, god−mother; but still, waiting is insufferable. Poor uncle! I wonder what people are at the Hall? what a scene is on the *tapis*! and what a bore the *expose* of truth is and will be to poor Lion! But, thank heaven, here is the carriage.”

At the station they meet Mr. Clayton, who has run up to town on business. He will be with them to the next station, when he takes a branch line to the Lord Elton's, where his wife is; later in the day they run down to Haughton Hall for the ball.

“You will see no end of changes at the old place, Miss Vernon; I would give something to see your face as you make your *entree*. I should, in that case, see as many changes as yourself. At the revels each evening, variety holds full sway.”

“*Tres bien*,” she answered carelessly (for she will not lay her heart bare), “some have it that 'variety is the spice of life;' if so, as you and I care nought for a mere existence, we must swallow the spice and smile on the caterer.”

“Exactly, as the guests do. By the way some one told me Trevalyon was a good deal with you while abroad, but you may not yet have heard that there has been no end of talk about him; the papers have him; in both *Truth* and the *Daily News* I read of the scandal myself, and am shocked beyond expression, that a married man should have been running loose all these years; and to my thinking, it makes matters worse that she was the wife of a friend; it was a traitorous act: did he confide in you while abroad? did he tell you of his base act?”

“Yes, and 'tis all false as the face of society, and hollow of truth as many of her gems; but the false face will soon be torn off, and the ring of the true diamond will be heard,” she said, with impulsive fervor.

“Indeed! you surprise me, Miss Vernon; but I shall be really glad if Trevalyon comes out a free man and can prove himself so to the suspicious eye of society.”

“Conveniently blind, Mr. Clayton, when she chooses.”

“Distended and greedy in Trevalyon's case; he has been too independent of her,” he said thoughtfully; “but here is my halting place, sorry to leave you both, but only till to−night.”

It was the lightning express, and there was no other stopping place until they reach the village of Haughton, Here they stayed just long enough to allow the Hall people to make a speedy exit. On our friends alighting they were a little surprised to see Blanche Tompkins followed by Sir Tilton Everly (who, on seeing them, looked not unlike a whipped cur), emerge from a second class coach.

“Some of the spice of variety we were to look for,” said Vaura, in an undertone.

“*Oui, ma chere*, and I am sure we are both prepared not to be astonished at the seasoning, no matter what shape it may take.”

Blanche was gaily dressed in a seal brown silk suit, trimmed with ermine, a large brown beaver flat with ostrich feathers; the wee white mouse face almost hidden, the sharp little pink eyes—for pink they looked—the rims red as usual, and a cold in the head giving them a swollen appearance. She had not forgotten her golden loves, for, from ears, throat, and wrists, dangled many yellow dollars. With a whispered, “Don't let the cat out of the bag till I bid you, or you're not worth a cent,” she stepped over to Lady Esmondet and Vaura, saying: “I'm sure

you're too awfully surprised for anything to see me."

"Not at all, Miss Tompkins,"' said Lady Esmondet. Here Sir Tilton came up, lifted his bat, while both ladies shook hands with him.

"You have a truant look about you, Sir Tilton," laughed Vaura; "do you foresee a fair woman's frown for your absence?"

"Don't chaff me, dear Miss Vernon; I can't stand it just now."

"Fact is," said Blanche, with cunning effrontery, "I wanted some gay fixings for the ball, so I took the rail to London, got 'em, stayed all night with the Claytons, and am bringing back to Mrs. Haughton her dear little Sir Tilton."

"Why, we met Mr. Clayton, and he says they are staying at Oak Hall at the Lord Eltons," exclaimed Vaura amusedly, and to see how Blanche would extricate herself.

"See you know too much; but don't say anything, for here is the trap, with the Colonel inside, I suppose, and he's too awfully too, I'll tell you later on; Mrs. Haughton don't do all the tricks."

"But should you have been missed, what then?"

"Oh, that's too easy, Miss Vernon; I've been too awfully busy with my maid; headache, anything that comes first."

"A pupil of Madame would naturally learn how to shuffle the cards," said Lady Esmondet, a trifle cynically, and, *sotto voce*, "I am too awfully sleepy to take you in, Lady Esmondet," said Blanche, yawning.

A covered carriage with two servants, drives to the steps; the Colonel is not inside; leaving one man to look after their maids and belongings, they enter, and are soon on the well known road.

"I wonder my uncle did not meet us; especially as he must have received our telegram."

"Surely he is not ill! How was he when you left the Hall, Miss Tompkins?" inquired Lady Esmondet.

"A one, and it's too awfully funny he wasn't down. But I remember, whenever he and Mrs. Haughton have a spat, and they had one (this time hare and hounds), he clears out and takes to the lodge, so perhaps he never spotted your telegram."

Lady Esmondet and Vaura, exchanging glances, fell into deep thought, while Blanche and the small Baronet carried on a half−whispered conversation, with a yawning accompaniment from the young woman.

CHAPTER XXXVII. WEE WHITE MOUSE WINS A POINT.

But the reverie and wagging of tongue is over and ceases, to give place to society's mask, for the picturesque lodge with its gabled roof and climbing vines is in sight, and in the twinkling of an eye the great gates are reached, which are wide open, for 'tis the entrance to Liberty Hall under the present *regime*. Leaning against the door post is a tall military looking figure, smoking vigorously, as men will, if life's springs want oiling. Both ladies see him, and Vaura's face is at the window.

“Halt, John,” shouts his master, for the man is a new servant, and driving full speed for the Hall. “My two darlings, how glad I am to see you both,” and kisses with long hand−clasps are exchanged.

“And we are more than glad to see you again, dearest uncle.”

“Blanche, you here! and Sir Tilton; it was kind of you to meet them.”

“Yes, we tripped down, as you had cut and run,” tittered Blanche.

Here the Colonel took Sir Tilton's offered seat, who, getting out, said he would prefer to walk up the long avenue.

“You must both make your home with me, dears, else it will not be home,” said the Colonel feverishly, as he leaned forward, taking a hand of each, and gazing eagerly first into one face, and then into the other.

“We shall, for a while at least, Eric,” said Lady Esmondet tenderly.

“And what do you say, Vaura dear; you will not leave me and Haughton Hall again?”

This he said with nervous haste, as though even in the rest her return gave him, he must have a surety of it's continuing.

“I shall not even think of leave−taking, dear uncle, but if I should, I shall pack you up and take you with me,” she said pityingly, noticing how he leaned on her, and also the reckless tone in which he spoke before Blanche; turning to Miss Tompkins, he continued in same tone:

“Who ran down the hare last night?”

Here was a puzzler for *la petite*, but she was equal to the occasion, even though she was at London.

“No conundrum, Colonel, with the Major as hare.”

“Gad, I must get rid of him; they all see it.”

“And they all do it, Colonel,” tittered Blanche; “keep cool; the Major keeps cool—to you;” this she said, liking the Colonel, but thinking him, to use her own expression, “soft.”

“You see, Alice,” he said, turning to his old friend with a half−smile, “the only rose in my path has a D before it.”

“A rose without beauty or fragrance, Eric, which will cease to bloom by to−morrow; waste not a thought upon it.”

“You give me strength, Alice.”

“I should, else friendship's cords would be weak indeed.”

“It is very strange that Mrs. Haughton should keep the man about her, if she is aware it is an annoyance to you,” said Vaura indignantly.

“Ah! but they were too sweet for anything, even in poppa's life time,” said Blanche with her innocent air. Mrs. Haughton would think it too awfully cruel (just to please the Colonel) to tell him good−bye.”

“Heartless in me to suppose for one moment, one's husband's feelings to be of more consideration than those of one's male−friend,” said Vaura cynically.

“See, Vaura, the changes,” said her god−mother, as the end of the avenue reached the Hall, renovated and partly modernised, burst upon their view.

“Verily, old things have passed away, and all become new,” said Vaura.

“Excepting the south wing, dear, which is of sufficiently modern date to have contented Mrs. Haughton; also the north tower which I begged off, only allowing it to be strengthened below.”

“Dear old tower; yes, 'tis old, and in its clinging dress of ivy; I am glad; but in the language of Sir Tilton, 'here we are again.'“

As the carriage rolled up to the steps of the grand entrance a few ladies and gentlemen, equipped for riding,

were on the steps or already mounted. Mrs. Forester, a gay London huntress, Mrs. Cecil Layton, of the same feather, two De Lancy girls, who wished they were the other two, a couple of army men, with one of the matches of the county, whom both sisters were willing to worship, but were too shy to adore, with eyes too prudish to bend the knee.

“The beautiful Miss Vernon! by Wolsley,” exclaimed Chancer of the Guards in an undertone to Everett of the Lancers. “Wish I wasn't promised to the huntress for the afternoon.”

“Wish she heard you,” laughed Everett.

“Which one?” said his friend gaily, as with one bound he is at Vaura's side, not missing his opportunity which he had sworn to take, should it offer, of an introduction; he now stood bareheaded as he tendered the muff she had dropped; his handsome face aglow with satisfaction, as he took Vaura's offered hand as she thanked him, on her uncle presenting him. There was rather more loitering by Vaura's side than the Forester liked, so she, by a sly manoeuvre, caused her horse to rear violently; it had the desired effect, and in a few moments they were careering across the park in the wake of the rest of the party.

“The dear old place! though it is changed I love it, and am glad to be here once more,” said Vaura, feelingly, inwardly telling herself, “my love will be here to−night.”

“Where is your mistress, William?” inquired his master of a servant in the brown and buff livery of the house.

“In the ball−room, sir.”

“Tell her some guests have arrived, and await her in the morning−room; and here, present these cards.”

“Always an ideal room of mine if unchanged,” said Vaura, entering the well known apartment.

“No, Aurora, still welcome one to her blue and gold bower, with the perfume of flowers about.”

“Mrs. Haughton wished it altered; but as the New York renovator or decorator condescended to say: 'if done over, it would be really quite pretty,' she yielded to my wish; I knew, dear, your love for at as it is.”

Here the servant returned from Madame, saying: “Mrs. Haughton sends her compliments, and will her ladyship and Mademoiselle excuse her, as she is giving the painter a last sitting for the picture which is to be framed and hung for to−night; and will be happy to welcome their ladyships in the ball−room if not too tired.”

“That will do, William, you may go,” said his master. “And now that we are alone, let me tell you, you will do anything but admire this painting.”

“Is it not true?” asked Lady Esmondet.

“Yes, in every detail; it's not that—you will see.”

“What will you do, god−mother mine? Rest here awhile, go to the dining−room and refresh the inner−woman? See, Madame, I protest against; you are too fatigued.”

“I am, dear, and prefer to go to my room. Somers may bring me something on a tray. Eric, kindly ring the bell.”

William answered, coming in with Somers, to whom he had given the housekeeper's message to show Lady Esmondet “the green room.”

The Colonel's brow darkened.

“Are you sure you have Mrs. Haughton's own orders correctly, William?”

“Yes, sir; my mistress gave them to Simpson in my hearing; and Miss Vernon, please sir, is to have the pink room,—first room, sir.”

“There must be some mistake about the green room; it is dark, cold and gloomy; in the east wing, too.”

“Never mind, Eric, I shall survive it, with a bright fire, and at Haughton.”

“The pink room is cheerful, large, and with a boudoir,” he said, troubled.

“William, show Somers the pink room, that she may conduct her mistress hither; I shall take the green room,” said Vaura, decisively, “which I feel sure was the wish of our hostess.”

“Go, Somers, and do your bidding,” said her mistress; “thank you, Vaura dear, you are always thoughtful for me; and should the green room be gloomy, come and share mine.”

“What a restful pair of women you are,” said the Colonel, earnestly. “I feel as if I had taken a narcotic, my nerves have become so quiet; they have been going at race−horse speed. Ah!, how much I have needed you!”

“In meeting, one feels what one has lost by parting,” said Lady Esmondet, gently.

“True, Alice, I am at one with you, and feel your words to the last degree of bitterness.”

“Come, come,” said Vaura, brightly, “see the sunlight streaming in upon the sky−like walls; so our lives will

be happy now in union once more."

"You are a sunbeam, Vaura; and here comes Somers to lead me to the room of pink."

"Which I hope will prove the pink of perfection, god−mother mine; and now, uncle, to see Madame, on and off the canvas, ere I retire to my vernal apartment."

On the way to the ball−room the corridors were almost deserted, the fair sex either closeted with their maids discussing the war−paint for the midnight revels, or wooing the god of slumber with a narcotic; the men flirting with their unwearied sisters anywhere, or killing time with the balls in the billiard−room.

But the ball−room is reached; over the velvet hangings which drape the entrance, and which are of scarlet, on which are painted blue grapes with their green vine leaves; for contrast, the yellow sun−flower, with heavy, many−coloured fringe;—as a heading to the drape are the words in letters of gold formed by leaves of the vine: "Dedicated to Comus and Kate." It was a fitting room for revelry, with its gaily painted walls and ceiling, now with its ropes of natural blossoms festooning windows and chaining gasalier to gasalier. The door of the long conservatories were open, and so the air was redolent of sweetness almost intoxicating.

Vaura's face showed no surprise at the scene which met her gaze. On the dais at the end of the room were grouped Mrs. Haughton, who reclined in the corner of a lounge, her well−shaped feet resting on a footstool; she wore the divided skirt, with loose tunic waist; it was of blue Lyons velvet, richly braided with scarlet silk braid, low shoes of blue velvet with scarlet silk stockings; her black hair in rings on her forehead, meeting brows of gipsy darkness, her white teeth showing as she laughingly drew the cigarette from her mouth on the approach of her husband and his niece.

"It shall be hung for to−night, Mr. ——," she said imperiously, if jokingly, in reply to the artist's protest that his work 'would not be dry;' "if," she continued, "it has to be baked dry in the cook's oven, or by the fire in the men's words engendered by their champagne lunch!"

There was a general laugh.

"The dear thing must have her way," lisped the Meltonbury, from the floor where she sat, cross−legged, also in divided skirt.

"My work will be spoiled, then," said the artist, ruefully.

"Then dry it by the flame in the Colonel's eyes as he nears and takes in my trousers, and hang it so he gets a double show," exclaimed Madame, recklessly.

"Or the heat from the orbs of Everly as he gazes on the approaching belle would do the business," echoed Delrose.

"Heat, indeed!" cried madame, "and, Miss Vernon, he's emerald green jealous of you! never mind, dear little Sir Tilton, I'll pet you by−and−by; here, come and lift, down one of my feet, the Major or Sir Peter may have the other; and now adieu to the gay *abandon* and for the conventionalities, if I can."

"Honours are divided," cried Delrose, lifting down one foot.

"So is the skirt," said the Colonel, with grave dignity. "Kate, I wish you would dress in a manner befitting your station."

"Your niece will tell you, Colonel," she said, rising to welcome Vaura "that men's eyes are women's mirrors; what I see there pleases me; you are in the minority and feel considerably sat upon, and not—" she added, laughingly, "so comfortable in your trousers as I in mine; take it coolly Colonel, and the flame in your eyes will die out, 'tis as the flicker of an old−fashioned candle; the electric, light the newest flame for me."

"Pardon, Kate, I accept the trousers; being only your husband and in the minority (as you say), I am old−fashioned; the latest flame puts me out."

And the latent meaning in his words was read by more than the speaker.

"You don't say how you like the painting, Miss Vernon," said Delrose, on being presented, "the divided skirt would suit your style immensely."

"Anything would," said Sir Tilton, almost savagely, and in a half growl.

"'Tis merely the accident of birth, Major Delrose," she said, carelessly; "had I been cradled in the land of the Sultan—the land of trousers—they would fit into my life as my gown by Worth does *a present*."

And she was so more than lovely as she spoke, and her frock of navy blue velvet trimmed with fox fur, small bonnet blending in hue with her gown, with scarlet geraniums and strings, all becoming to her sweet womanliness, her perfect figure, lithe as a young fawn and rounded as a Venus, held the men's gaze, while the

women bit their lips with envy. For we repeat that envy is the motive power that moves and sways their little world, and though they will band themselves together to pull the pedestal from under the feet of a more favoured sister, there would be mutiny in the band did one display a charm.

But Vaura, ever connected in the mind of Mrs. Haughton with Trevalyon, and the wish never dying in her breast to have him at her feet, hence her question, which she would much prefer not to have asked in the presence of Delrose, but, accustomed to obey impulse, she said:

“And Captain Trevalyon, Miss Vernon, what of him? Will he come for the ball, or has he gone to visit his hidden wife of *Truth* and the *News*; sly fellow that he is?”

Her tone was too eager to please Delrose. “Confound the fellow, I must lose no time,” he thought, savagely, as Vaura replied, laconically:

“Sir Lionel Trevalyon will be here for the ball.”

“Trevalyon to be here to−night! You never told me, Vaura.”

“I have not had an opportunity, dear uncle,” she said, taking his arm, with a “We shall meet again at dinner” to madame; as they left the room she continued: “He bid me tell you, dear, that he comes after dinner with three unbidden guests, and that he wishes that the Hall guests may learn from their words of the ingredients of a dish of scandal, so that they will tell it to the London world!”

“It is of his hidden wife, I presume. Yes, of her ingredients he can now tell; she *is his wife*. Of the woman previous to the altar knot man knows naught. *She is masked!”*

“Society is a fencing school, dear uncle; we all have our masks and foils.”

“Not all, Vaura; we all pay society's tolls, for we live to enter the arena, but we are not all masked.”

“You will be glad to see your old friend again, uncle?” she said questioningly, anxious to know how the man she loved would be welcomed.

“Yes and no, dear; his hand−clasp will strengthen, me but not you. Trevalyon's hand enclosing woman's is weakening to them, and he has been much with you; were it not for this scandal—.”

“Which by mid−night,” she said quickly, “the nightbirds will have, by the flutter of their wings, blown into the right current, and from poor Lionel.”

“So, so, Vaura, you speak warmly; it is as I feared; he has made you care for him.”

“He has.”

“I am sorry for you, Vaura, and glad for him; peerless, as you, are, a man should woo you with spotless breastplate; but I love Trevalyon, and if he can in any way clear himself, but I fear he cannot,” he said gravely.

“'All's well that ends well,' dear uncle; he *will* clear himself.”

“After dinner, you say?”

“Yes, but no preparations; he wishes to come in with the three unbidden guests unnoticed.”

“Yes, but if he or they, I suppose, are to come with 'mouth full of news,' to tell publicly, I think he is wrong not to let it be known, otherwise they (some of them) may not appear until the ball opens.”

“Let it be as he wishes, dear uncle; they are epicurean enough not to fail your good board, even though ignorant of the highly seasoned desert. But some one sneezed! we have a listener! yes,” she continued breathlessly, “my hearing is very acute, and see! something between a man and woman, gliding softly down the dim corridor.”

“Yes, we had better separate; go and rest, dear; we have, I fear, been talking to the Hall through some one else, and I feel somewhat excited over your news and shall smoke it off.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII. MADAME IN A FELINE MOOD.

A window in the library looked out upon the avenue, and a carriage approaching could be distinctly seen. Vaura, in the long ago, had frequently sat in this window, to watch the return of her uncle; aye, and of the man whom she now loved better than life itself. She was sure she could distinguish a conveyance from the village, and the occupants devoid of the gay trappings of revelry, from the guests in their comfortable carriages. Accordingly, as Madame had changed (for to−night), the dinner hour to half−past nine, at nine o'clock, Vaura, a soft beam of loveliness, with light foot−fall, entered the library and took her station at the watch−tower above mentioned. She was scarcely seated ere she was aware she was not the only occupant of what she had felt sure would be a deserted room; she would have risen, but her heart was there, and the words she heard chained her to the spot; the voices were those of Mrs. Haughton and of Major Delrose.

“I will have my way, Kate!”

“You will, I know; but can't you wait?”

“What for? For you to have Trevalyon fooling round you. Gad, if he comes near you, I'll shoot him.”

“I am sorry I told you Melty followed them and heard.”

“I'm not, for there's a devilish mystery about his coming; I wish she'd heard more.”

“But she didn't, dear George; and that he comes at all does not look well for our plot, eh? She may yet get him, not I; and so you will remember, sweet Georgie; if so you don't win the game.”

“Kate, you madden me.”

“You do seem a little that way; there, go away, you are crushing my flowers. Heaven knows you ought to be satisfied, I have given you enough.”

“I shall have you *all to myself*.”

This he said with such fierce emphasis as to cause Vaura to tremble; not so Madame, for she loved this man for his boldness only (a tamer nature would have palled upon her long ere this), but the feline nature in her triumphed at times, and she tortured him.

“But, dear boy,” she continued, “you have not carried out your bargain, and so no reward.”

“I know I promised to separate them, and so I have, and shall; you don't see all my hand, my queen, there'll be the devil to pay when I do. I got a letter from New York this summer I shall yet turn to our advantage, even if I do stretch a point.”

“Why did you not show this letter you speak of to me? Take your head away, you don't care a fig that my flowers will wear a dissipated recumbence; remember the dinner and ball.”

“Hang the flowers, the dinner and everything; I want you.”

“But suppose I like queening it among the English nobility a trifle longer. You see Trevalyon is—”

“You rouse the devil in me, Kate; look you, I won't and can't stand this any longer; name that man again to me in that fooling way and by the stars I'll shoot him. You *belong to me* as much as our—. But you know you do. Heaven is my witness, Kate, if you don't end this humbug I will, and in my own way.”

“I sometimes think it would have been better had we never met; you are so fierce and jealous.”

“No you don't, for our love is the same, our natures the same. The burning lava of my love suits you better than the, ah, dear me, gentlemanly affection of the Colonel, or than Lincoln Tompkins' innocent pride in you.”

“How about the other men?” she said, teasingly.

“Leave them to me, I'll handle them should they cross my path. *You shall* come with me to−night, my plans are laid; you will never regret it. You would soon tire of the child's play here, no excitement; after the ball I away from Rose Cottage. Our life at New York and elsewhere will be one long draught of champagne. You must come with me to−night, or look you—” and he hissed the words between his teeth, “I'll make you.”

“My flowers again,—and the dinner bell; I'll tell you yea—perhaps, by−and−by.”

Vaura, with her hand on her heart to still its violent throbbing, lingered until sure of their retreat. She now emerged from the recess in which she had been completely hidden. The others having entered from the end door had seated themselves in the first recess, there being only the double row of book shelves between them. The whole length of the room was in this way, shelves jutting out from either side, and a dim, very dim light

pervading.

“Oh, what shall I do? How can I appear with their voices in my ears, their words stamped upon my memory,” she murmured, “and yet I must, for my poor darling comes after. I must try to forget their words or my brain will be too full. What a scandal for our house. But to the conventionalities,” and with rapid steps she reached her apartments. “Quick, Saunders, a wine glass of Cognac, I am not well. There, that will do; how do I look?”

“Like a picture, Mademoiselle.”

CHAPTER XXXIX. TREVALYON THROWS DOWN THE GLOVE.

The dinner on this Twelfth−night, fraught as it was with so much of the effervescence of the champagne of life to so many, was a dinner fit for an emperor. The gold plate, the glassware, each piece a gem. Sweet flowers looked up from their delicate design in moss beside each person, or from elegant vases. The hostess was recklessly gay and *abandon*, looking like a scarlet poppy with dew upon it, robed as she was in satin of scarlet, the whole front of the dress and corsage being embroidered in poppies from pink to scarlet, their leaves of pearls; her necklet, armlets, and earrings were diamonds, rubies and pearls. A handsome woman, without doubt, loving life and its *bon−bons*.

“We only make the run once,” she would cry, “let us take it effervescing.”

Vaura is peerlessly beautiful and brilliant as her diamonds, her large hazel eyes bright as stars, her lips a rose, throat, neck and arms gleam in their whiteness as does the satin of her gown. Ah! Lionel, much as we love you, we are happy in the thought that Vaura is your rest. Colonel Haughton notices that his niece often glances at him, and that beneath her gay repartee or brilliant converse, there underlies some powerful excitement which he attributes wholly to the *expose* of the truth by Lionel.

“And so you enjoyed Rome,” said Capt. Chancer to Vaura, who had been assigned to him, so causing him to be the envy of the other men.

“Intensely! dear sun−warm, love−warm Italia.”

“Yes, one loves to live and lives to love while there. I hope you did not leave your heart behind you, Miss Vernon.”

“Nay, you should congratulate me had I done so, and by your own words of 'one lives to love while there.'“

“Yes, and on my warm heart; for, though old Sol laughs in gay Paris, his temple is in warm Italia,” she said, gaily.

“Your eyes tell whether your heart's warmth depends upon the zone you dwell in.”

“Are you wise in trusting in truth from woman's eyes?” she said softly, and looking into his face.

“In some cases, yes; they are *en verite* the language of the soul.” And his gaze plainly shows his admiration. “You sing, I am told?”

“A little; it could not be otherwise if one has lived so much in the south as I; the voice of song seems the natural language for one's varying emotions.”

“You will sing me one song to−night?”

“Yes, if you care; instead of a waltz.”

“I want both.”

“And you look like a man who has his way most days.”

“In trifles, yes; in things longed for, never!'“

“Well, if so; as the song and waltz are trifles to make your assertion true, you must have them.”

“I am in paradise, and shall try to forget that did you consider them things of moment, you would never have granted them,” he said, earnestly laying down knife and fork as he turned to gaze wistfully into the face of the fair woman near him at last.

“You have the nattering tongue and eyes of your sex, Capt. Chancer, and you and the other men are to blame if I have promised more than I can perform; for I have been unable to say nay to your pleadings, being in a passive mood to−night.”

And the eyelids with their wealth of curled lashes were uplifted, as she smilingly looked into his face, for her thoughts were of Lionel; his, of her.

“Of all women's moods, I love her best in the dreamy languor of passiveness.”

“To mould us as wax in your hands, to love us till you tire, as we do a bird or a flower, and then sigh for another mood; you see I know you in all your moods and tenses,” she said softly.

“You know us till we meet you,” he said earnestly, as a servant refilled his champagne glass.

“Tis Greek meeting Greek” she said gaily, though her heart throbbed wildly, for she alone heard a slight bustle in the hall and the voice of the man she loved.

“No, fairest of women, 'tis the war of love!”

“A pleasant strife with its heart−stir; its weapons, the emotions.”

“No wonder, that were we a very Achilles, you rob us of our strength.”

Here Trevalyon's servant entering, handed his master's card to Delrose; on the back of which he read: “Are you prepared to own up as to the part you played in the Clarmont escapade? if not, I shall clear myself.”

“Tell your master I am neither a babe nor suckling,” he answered defiantly, his brow black with hate and rage as he tore the card to pieces, throwing it towards the man.

There being a sort of free−masonry between Madame and Delrose, the movements of each being rarely unobserved by the other, she was about to play into his hands by signalling her sisterhood to rise from the table, when Sir Lionel Trevalyon was announced, who, hastily coming to her side, taking her hand in salutation, said:

“You will kindly give me a few moments, Mrs. Haughton; oblige me, please, by keeping your seat.”

Madame was recklessly abandon, and Sir Lionel had asked her with his mesmeric eyes, or she would not have disobeyed the pressure of the Delrose boot upon her fours in scarlet satin, (for she did not pine for the whiteness of the lily in boots or hose), “It is too tame, not *chic*,” she would laugh, and say adding, “a fig for its purity.”

“Welcome, thrice welcome, Trevalyon, my dear fellow,” cried the Colonel warmly. “Here, Winter,” to the butler “attend to the comfort of Sir Lionel Trevalyon'“

“I thank you, Haughton, you are always kind, but I have dined.”

There was another pressure of the Delrose boot which, this time, had the desired effect, emphasised as it was by a meaning look.

Lionel, with one hand on the back of Colonel Haughton's chair, smiled his greetings, and as his eyes rested for a moment on Vaura, knowing her intensely emotional nature, and seeing her quickened heart beats, her cheek paling, her lips scarlet by contrast, her large eyes full of sympathy, he was glad to change the scene to the great drawing rooms. On Madame answering the Delrose signal by rising from the table, saying, “Say your say in the greater comforts of the drawing−rooms, Sir Lionel, as you have dined; come away, the gentlemen will not linger to−night; here, give me your arm and I shall be well taken care of between two such gallants as Lord Rivers and yourself.”

“As you will, fair Madame, and you I know will not say me nay when I ask you to bid all your guests come, as I have a word to say to them of the 'hidden wife,' society gives me.”

“The bait is sufficient,” she said laughing, though baffled, “they will all follow like a lot of hungry fish.”

“Gad! Trevalyon,” cried Lord Rivers jokingly, “she must be old! enough to come out.”

“I am relieved that Trevalyon is going to make a clean breast of it; English society is degenerating,” said Lord Ponsonby in severe tones to Lady Esmondet.

“Trevalyon looks as he did in the east,” said Chancer to Vaura, “when one of the blacks cut poor Cecil Vaughn's throat when he lay dying, then robbed him; Trevalyon caught him in the act as he rode up, Cecil haying asked his orderly to bring him to receive his dying messages.”

“No need to tell me the result Capt. Chancer. I read Sir Lionel's expression as you do, treachery lived and was extinct.”

“But dear Miss Vernon, who are Cecil and the black this time? I know there has been some by−play, to which I have been oblivious, but no man would blame me.”

“Not while I have heard for you,” giving him a bewildering smile.

“Which means you have had no ear for me,” he said, regretfully seating himself beside her on a *tete−a−tete* sofa, for they have now reached the *salons*.

“Not so, *cher* grumbler, for I have two ears, and while Sir Lionel's rather mournful notes entered first; your pretty nothings were blown in upon them so quickly, by some more mirthful sprite as to send his to my memory, while yours are in my ear still.”

“There is so sweet a bewitchment in your healing touch, as to make a man not regret his wound.”

“Come, trot her out, Sir Lionel,” said Madame saucily, as she passed Vaura and Capt. Chancer, “and after I have opened the ball Lord Rivers can have her, and you and I from a *tete−a−tete* chair, will pronounce upon candle−moulds and ankles.”

“Trevalyon will take the ankles,” said Lord Rivers lazily.

“At last we are going to bag our game and I, my gold−mounted riding whip,” said the huntress, who with

Major Delrose seated themselves near Vaura and her cavalier.

“Why how?” asked Delrose quickly and absently, for he had been intently watching the movements of Mrs. Haughton and her escort's.

“By the bow of Diana, Major, I believe you are off the scent, though you heard me make the bet with Sir Peter Tedril on Trevalyon's wife, I bet my dog against a whip he'd take this ball as a door to trot her out by, and so make his peace with Mrs. Grundy.”

“You and your dog are always game, and I take sides with you; if he brings her out at all it will be here,” he said, absently. But now a look of savage hate comes to his face on seeing Mrs. Haughton smile caressingly on Trevalyon.

“Confound him,” he muttered, “he bags game at will.”

“Yes, his eye and touch of his hand bring us down every time. I wonder when he'll introduce her; one thing I'll wager that we women will all be hounds and run her down to, earth.”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Forester, I must run over to Rose Cottage, I have a word to say to my servant, Simon.”

“Oh, that's too bad! hurry back, Major, ours is the first dance,” and turning to Sir Tilton, who had strolled up, “one would think the hounds were after him, instead of poor Sir Lionel Trevalyon, as we have all been lately.”

“What a terrible expression came into Major Delrose's face just now, as he looked at Sir Lionel Trevalyon,” said Vaura to Chancer, “if ever man was born to hunt something he looked the man.”

“Yes? I did not notice, but have always thought there was a latent jealousy and dislike in his breast of Trevalyon.”

“One goes hand in hand with the other,” she answered.

CHAPTER XL. BLACK DELROSE USES EMPHATIC LANGUAGE.

Delrose flew rather than walked to Rose Cottage muttering curses on Kate and Trevalyon as he ran. “D—−him, he has always had the best of it whenever he and I have crossed lances. Kate has loved him best all along, and did he hold up his finger she'd not go with me to−night. But by the stars she shall! I have got the upper hand of her at last by the help of the coming—. We are a daring, reckless race. Yes, she is mine at last, I can make her come, but curse that fellow, she cares most for him, but she and her gold shall be mine, and I love her as the panther its mate, as the lioness her whelps, for is she not of my blood? though I have not told her what I have known for years that the Capt. Vivian, forsooth, her father, is my first cousin. Vivian Delrose, in our family surnamed the reckless. What is she saying to him now? Heavens how hot my brain is! Gad, how far to the cottage! Even though it be to an *expose*, I wish I was back. I must not lose sight of her, the two hours before we are off may do me mischief—he may fall in love. She is looking splendid; all fire, gown and all! ha, ha! but,” and he hissed the words between his teeth, “let him stand in my way and she woos a corpse. And now to throw as many stones in his path as Satan shows me how,” and springing, rather than walking into Rose Cottage he surprised Simon in the act of discussing a bottle of Burgundy with himself. An empty decanter with the remains of some ham sandwiches were on the table. Ellen, the cook, with flushed face lay on the sofa in a deep sleep. Conspicuous on the table embroidered by the aesthetic fingers of Miranda Marchmont, were groups of potato bugs and a vial, on which in the handwriting of Delrose was the word “Chloral.”

“What the devil do you mean, Simon,” shouted his master, “what fool's game are you after! Nice way you're attending to my orders. What are you playing with this chloral for?”

“Well, you see, sir, cook's been spoons on me ever since you and I put up here. She was so dead gone on me when she know'd we was to go to−night—”

“You scoundrel! didn't I tell you you were to keep dark as to our leaving?”

“Please, sir, I only told her to see how she'd stare, and then I drugged her so she can't blab, out of that bottle I've seen you use, sir (with a cunning leer), more nor once. She wants to come with us, sir, she's so gone on me, sir.”

“And you are gone on that bottle, or you wouldn't gabber like a fool; it's my belief you were born in a wine cask and nursed on a bottle; here, drop that glass,” and snatching it from his servant's hands, he threw the contents out of the open casement; “what's that! moving away from under the window; look here, you fool, something white! only I know everyone is at the Hall, I'd say it was a girl or woman.”

“No, sir; it's only the white goat as Miss Marchmont pets; she's startled me afore now, sir.”

“Very well, listen; I have work for you to do, hark you, for I shall not tell it twice: Sir Lionel Trevalyon has arrived at the Hall; you know my feelings towards him.”

“You don't exactly doat on him, sir.”

“No; well, mark me, he has brought some people with him to swear falsely, and to clear him of all part in running off with Col. Clarmont's wife (some twelve years ago); he wants to father her on to me; as his game is to marry the new beauty, Miss Vernon; but, my man, if you will stick to it that he was the man (that all the regiment had it so), not I, your wages are doubled next quarter. And now, look you, the work I have for you since you know so well how to use this bottle, is, to get with all speed to the Hall; they will be having refreshments; you add a *good sound sleep*, on the plea of getting a cup of strong coffee which will steady you; force your way into whatever room they are; I wish you had not been such an ass as to take to the bottle to−night; your game is to say nothing of Paris, or of the part I played with that little fool of a Clarmont. And now away.”

“Yes, sir; and I'll not fail you; it's work I like; and if I can do *his* cup, there will be no harm, I suppose, sir?”

“None; and you'll not regret it; only don't make a blundering idiot of yourself with all that Burgundy inside of you; put the chloral in your pocket carefully. And now for the Hall at once, and with me.”

With rapid strides (Simon rather unsteady in his gait, but a wholesome dread of his master sobering him at every step) they are soon within range of the illuminated windows, and now separate to make their *entree* at doors for big and little flies.

CHAPTER XLI. AN EXPOSE, SOCIETY ON TIP−TOE.

Immediately after dinner, Blanche, who wished to perfect her own little plot, had commanded the attendance of that squire of dames, Everly, down at Rose Cottage, for half an hour, saying to him:

“Everyone will be at the Hall; cook Ellen is my friend; her plot being that I marry the Major; she is sure he talks to Mrs. Haughton for my sake (shows how perfect their tricks have been), and she (Ellen) is to be my maid and marry Simon; she's a good creature, Baronet, so she won't have her way; they never do down here; we gobble up all the *bon−bons*; so you be up to time; slip off after you lead Cis back from dinner; my plot wants trimming; and walls have ears here; there won't be a soul down there, or a body which would be worse.”

“But I shall be missed,” whined small Everly.

“Spoken like an English baronet, who don't see how small it is; you've *got* to come to help me fix my plot.”

So after dinner, and in the corridor to the *salons* the wee white mouse excusing herself to her cavalier, flew softly to a cloak−room; it was only a minute, and the cloak enveloped *la petite* ; when, with hood drawn well over the forehead, and the satin−dressed feet pushed into over−boots, she is off. Quickly she sped in and out among the trees, the wind blowing her cloak open, giving her the appearance in the shadow of a white−breasted bird on the wing, now flying, now resting in the shade, to listen for the footsteps of her expected companion when within a stone's throw of the cottage she stood.

“He's too utterly mean for anything; I see I shall have to bribe him every time,” she thought; “but here he comes; I'll give him a fright,” and throwing her cloak off, though chilled, she hid in the shadow and waited; but, no; it is not the expected, but Delrose flying, as we have seen him, to speak to his man.

“What's to pay now? I'll step in and hide, and not pad my ears either; he's expected too, I see, for the parlour is lit up.”

In a moment Everly is forgotten in her loved game of detective. First, under the window where she was almost discovered by Delrose (as we are aware), next, the back door is entered, housemaid and small boy at the Hall, no one sees her enter, Ellen's loud breathing covering her footstep; in a few seconds she is in a pantry between dining−room and parlour. Here she heard every word that passed between them, master and man.

“The plot thickens, you bet; what a lovely time I am having, and what a thunder and lightning wretch the Major is; I don't suppose I can save those poor people, they have got ahead of me this time, in more ways than one,” murmured wee Blanche, now leaving the cottage, only having given the others time to be out of sight. Half way to the Hall she meets the tardy little Everly, to whom Mrs. Forester had said, “What's up, Sir Tilton? you're as absent as a hound that's lost the scent; you are all cut up, your eyes are Miss Vernon's, your personality is the sofa's, away and find yourself, you're too tame for me, and send me Major Delrose.”

“How awfully late you are,” exclaimed Blanche, breathlessly, “here give me your arm.”

“I regret what has been unavoidable, so many men buttonholed me” (he did not say they were duns).

“All right, Baronet, we havn't time to talk much, I'm out of breath, but I am going to have that show tonight.”

“Oh! Blanche, I do wish you would wait, say even for a day or two,” implored small Everly.

“Well, I guess perhaps I will,” she said cunningly, not meaning to defer her intention for even an hour, “but you must do something for me then.”

“Anything, anything,” he cried eagerly.

“That's all O.K.; first, I must have surgeon Strange from the village double quick.”

“Why, you are not ill! if so, Sir Andrew Clarke is—”

“I know he is at the Hall; don't interrupt me, he is too big a man for what I want; you must send one of the servants for Strange; I know he is to come to the ball, but if he hasn't come, fetch him right along; next, you are to be too awfully sweet for anything to Mrs. Haughton.”

“Oh! Blanche, not too pronounced. I owe half the men money and want to keep in the back ground.”

“I'll pay them all off to−morrow.”

“Well, I suppose I must; first, you want Strange, but you don't seem ill, too bad if you have to miss the dance.”

“Oh, he'll fix me up in no time; there, *ta−ta*, you go that way to the stables; mind, right along to me, that will fetch him.”

And the wee innocent−faced this time, white mouse is in the salons quicker than it takes to tell it, even though she had first paid a flying visit to the apartments of Mrs. Haughton. “Wonder if the Colonel will dream on the cake, or take to tragedy,” was her mental ejaculation on what she saw there.

Just as she entered the drawing−rooms, Trevalyon, who had evidently had a word with Delrose, judging from the look of defiance on the face of the latter as he left his side, now walked up to Colonel Haughton, seated at the end of the rooms beside Lady Esmondet, with whom he had been conversing earnestly, and said:

“Haughton, dear friend, kindly ask your guests to give me their attention for a few minutes.”

On the Colonel complying with his request, Trevalyon meanwhile glancing at the gems of art around him; behind him in a niche stood a statue of Venus smiling down upon the blind god who had been making a target of her breast in which were many arrows. Vaura giving him strength by being so near, what woman whom Lionel Trevalyon would love, but would be near him. Ah! heaven, thou hast given such bliss to a few of us, as makes us long for immortality.

But Lionel is about to speak; looking around him, a settled purpose in his handsome face, he said in his musical voice:

“One could not, even in one's dreams, picture a fairer garden of society's flowers as listeners, while one tells of a plot nourished by the sting of its wasp, and smiles of its beauteous butterflies; each of our plots has its name, you all know the name of your last, you have given it to the *News* and *Truth*, and have designated it 'Trevalyon's hidden wife;' while I have come to the conclusion that, here and now, I shall introduce the wife you have given me; her *entree* and recital of how you have come to give her to me will be as fragrant spice to your dish of small talk, as you tread a measure in yonder ball−room.”

On Trevalyon speaking of his purpose to introduce his 'hidden wife,' Delrose, who seemed to have lost all control over himself, with muttered oath, left Mrs. Forester's side, and, with rapid strides, went down the room and seated himself behind a small sofa on which were seated Mrs. Haughton and Lord Rivers, seeming too comfortable, Delrose thought; overhearing Rivers say lazily, “I wish we lived in Utah,” pressing the hand concealed in the folds of scarlet satin.

“I wonder how Lady Rivers would like me; as the last, the dearest one,” had said Madame, her white teeth showing.

Lord Rivers gave her a side−long glance.

“There'd be the devil to pay,” said Delrose, savagely, as he sank heavily into the chair behind them; folding his arms on the back of their sofa, and between them, and leaning forward.

“You look black enough to be his dun,” said Lord Rivers, carelessly.

As Sir Lionel ceased speaking, a lady, in the garb of a cloistered nun, and closely veiled, had entered with slow, uncertain step; Sir Andrew Clarke, stepping forward, offered a seat, saying, “Allow me; you seem about to faint.”

“No; I thank you,” she said hurriedly, “I feel quite well again, with the exception of a slight dizziness.”

But in a moment, Trevalyon is beside her, whose arm she quietly takes, while he led her up the long drawing rooms, the *cynosure* of all eyes, giving her at the head of the room, an easy chair. At the first sound of the voice of the nun, Delrose had started violently, muttering,

“By thunder, her voice, but no! not from behind a nun's veil.”

“Unveil the statue, Delrose,” whispered Lord Rivers; for society was watching and listening with itching ears for more, and a pinfall could have been heard.

“Unveil her, she'll let you, if she have any charms to show,” he continued lazily.

“My dear boy, do keep quiet; or perhaps you'd like to run away till the farce is over,” said Madame, caressingly, for she has a *penchant* for the peer beside her; he is a new distraction and will amuse her until she can secure a *tete−a−tete* with the man who has some rare fascination for her, as Lionel Trevalyon has for many. But no, Delrose will not stir from beside the woman who has magnetised him for years. And as he keeps his position, he mentally curses Lord Rivers for his temporary monopoly of her.

Trevalyon had stepped over to Vaura on pretence, or with the excuse of borrowing her fan for the nun, he not feeling strong enough to wait any longer for a pressure of the hand; as she turned her exquisite face upwards, oh, the torture that he could not take her to his heart; but, his “hidden wife,” and all the eyes. But he managed while, as if learning how to open the fan and while the attention of Chancer was momentarily engaged, to whisper, “oh

darling, this ordeal is too much, why did I not fly away with you."

"My own darling," was all her eyes and lips could silently frame. But his hand brushed her arm, and with a sweet pain from heart to heart, he went from her side strengthened for the fight.

"Shall I introduce you, sister, to Mrs. Haughton and a few of my personal friends?"

"Not so, Sir Lionel, I thank you; I am dead to the world and am only here to perform a duty; the hearing of names would stir sad memories in my heart and unfit me for my task," and motioning him to bend down towards her, she said in tones only heard by him:

"Your kind heart requires sympathy; go and stay near that lovely lady you spoke to just now."

"I shall, and shall be near you also."

And though by this time half a dozen men had grouped themselves about the beauty, he got into a corner behind her, where, when they spoke, her breath fanned his cheek, or in turning, the soft bronze of her hair brushed his face.

The nun now standing up, spoke in quick, nervous tones, as follows:

"You all know why I am here; an odd figure truly in such a scene. I have been one of you, so know exactly how out of place is one in my garb, where all is gold lace and revelry. I regret to have detained you, but you gentlemen will not mind when beauty and grace are so near; and you ladies will not tire, as curiosity, your strongest trait (pardon, I, too, am a woman) is about to be gratified in my words. Vanity has been my curse, and even now it hurts me to humiliate myself to you all, so much so, that, though I pity a man who has wrongfully suffered condemnation through me for many years, I would not exonerate him were it not at the command of the church. Twelve years ago I was a young bride, and with my husband, an officer high in rank in our army, was at London. I was called pretty; I know I was worldly, foolish and vain. My husband, a very superior man (as I see men now), might have done something with me had I submitted to his guidance, but I was but seventeen, if that is any excuse for my wickedness. The officers of our regiment were as gay as their kind. I thought them all in love with me; I know men well enough since to be aware that their love was winged, and lighted where fancy willed, and *pour passer le temps*. My own fickle fancy," and her voice faltered, "was held by two men, antipodes each of the other; the one fair as an angel of day, who, had he bid me to his arms, ah well' though I shame to tell you, his will would have only been my wish."

Here Delrose's face grew black as he muttered, "there, too."

"The other man, dark as a storm−tossed sky, bewitched me also, and he did will that I should be wholly his, and conquered; I, at last, giving him my whole heart, and passionately loving him and him alone." Here the slight figure swayed and would have fallen, but Vaura and others were beside her; in a moment she again stood erect, waving them away saying: "'Tis the weakness of the flesh; but let me do my poor weak nature justice, I could conquer my feelings better, but that the wine I drank on entering after my journey, and to nerve me to my task, was drugged."—sensation—"but to my penance; I consented to leave my husband, and with the man of whom I last spoke; on pretence of visiting friends, I went to Paris; my lover obtaining leave of absence at the same time for himself, and with deep cunning, inducing his brother officer to do likewise; for though unlike, still, both as gay society men and of the same regiment, were a good deal together. The one honourable, the other, as I have found him to my sorrow. The one 'in all his gay *affaires de coeur*, never desecrating a hearth−stone;' this he told me on seeing" here her voice broke, "on seeing my love for him; I hope he will forgive my breach of confidence; this was previous to my dark lover having gained my heart. We lived as man and wife at Paris; he, returning to his regiment before his leave had expired, told me I must write to his brother officer at his hotel to come and see me on a certain day; I obeyed blindly; he came, and my lover managed so that his own servant should call at the same time with messages from England, bogus and with no reference to himself. The servant (the same man who drugged my wine to−night) returned to his regiment with the information that I was living *a* Paris with the other officer, who, returning to England, on his furlough lapsing, was called out by my husband, who was worsted in the duel. My lover was waited on by the man he had wronged (I mean his brother officer, not my husband), who implored him to own up. My lover said it would ruin him; he had nothing but his sword; he must get his promotion; he would marry me as soon as his Colonel secured a divorce, etc. The other man consented to bear the stigma, as it would be best for me, and until a divorce was obtained, the man of honour sold out; my lover was promoted. So does the green bay tree flourish. The divorce was obtained; my lover, though visiting me frequently, and always unsuspected, at each visit swore to marry me at the next, but instead, deserted me just three months

previous to the birth of our child, with no means of support, moving from lodging to lodging, living by the sale of my jewels; at last when these failed, getting bread for myself and child by giving a few music lessons to the poor people's children. But now, hearing that the man for whom I had given up all, had sold out, and now the avowed admirer of a wealthy American at New York, U.S.A., I gave up; my pitiable loneliness, poverty, failing health were too much and I completely broke down. You will wonder how I, in my retirement, heard of his unfaithfulness. Just about eight years ago, a creature who had once paid me compliments, a dissolute man, found me out, telling me my lover had sent him; he renewed his odious addresses. Some of my women hearers will be shocked to hear me tell of declarations of love of this kind, but when a woman takes the step I did, she must accept such; one cannot play with pitch and escape defilement, and though I loathed the messenger and his words it would have been an incongruity to say so; so when he said I had best take the sunny side of life's boulevard with him, with forced calmness I refused and decidedly. On his taking a reluctant leave, I fell into a death−like swoon, and so, good Father Lefroy, the parish priest found me. But to hasten (you can easily I believe I had been an extremely careless religionist). The kind sisters of a neighbouring convent brought me and my little son to their hospital, and nursed me back to more than my former health. I embraced their faith, and at my earnest entreaty they accepted me as a member of their order, and I trust by zeal in good works to atone for the wickedness of my past life. My boy, I have given as a sin offering to the church. And now the penance imposed upon me is finished, save in a few concluding words. I say most solemnly, upon oath, that what I have said and am about to say is the truth. The man I spoke of at first, as handsome as an angel of day, and to whom you have given me as hidden wife, is Sir Lionel Trevalyon. The man with whom I eloped, and who finally won my love, is the father of my child and is Major Delrose; for I am none other than Fanny Ponton, at one time wife to Colonel Clarmont." At these words, the poor thing gave way, but the wee white mouse, who had gradually from pillar to post reached the head of the room is beside her, first sending Everly to the side of Madame, saying, "Make love to her openly, to−night, and to my banker to−morrow." And now the pink eyes peer through the black veil as she whispers, "you'll have another 'pick me up;' where's the small bottle? I saw them and the priest is aching to come right along. What a dear little boy, but the bottle, quick!"

"You are very kind; it is in my pocket." A wine−glass is brought and the contents swallowed.

In the meantime Colonel Haughton, Claxton, Wingfield, and others came forward, congratulating Sir Lionel, while some of the loveliest women, glad of his freedom, did likewise. Meanwhile Sir Peter Tedril had "come hastily to the little group around Madame, just as she was saying jestingly to Delrose—

"Come, George, own up, you and the nun are a black pair. Hadn't I better go and pat and purr over *dear* Sir Lionel?"

"None of your chaff, Kate, I am in no mood to stand it; the ball is at *his* feet now, it will be at *mine* ere sunrise," he said savagely, and with latent meaning.

"That's right, Delrose," said Tedril, mistaking his purpose. "Whether she is yours or his does not signify; throw down the gauntlet; give her the lie; tell her she is an adventuress; anything! to put a spoke in Trevalyon's wheel; all the women go with him; a man has no chance," drawing himself up to his full height of five feet five inches, and pulling his whiskers furiously; "even with a handle to his name, and an M.P.; if you don't care to go in yourself, let Rivers, Everly, or myself be your spokesman."

"Leave me out, Tedril, please," said Lord Rivers lazily; "I'd rather be all eyes and ears just at present," drawing closer to Madame, and being for the moment proprietor of her fine arm, lace wraps telling no tales. "I vote Delrose kiss and make up, so we see the statue unveil." At this there was laughter, when Rivers continued: "Don't look black as a storm−tossed sky, Delrose, as the veiled lady hath it. I dare say honours were divided between you and Trevalyon."

"Both soldiers, they went to war and vanquished a woman, eh, Georgie?" said Kate, still laughing; "they all do it. Even my spouse, Saint Eric, is laying siege to that women in violet velvet."

"While scarlet is our colour," cried Everly, gallantly, as Mrs. Forester and others joined the group, while the huntress exclaimed—

"Speak, Major; say you deny the wooing and the wooer. Black isn't our colour, so for fun we'll pelt the robed one."

Delrose, pushed to it and full of hate to Trevalyon, excited, and as was usual, reckless (knowing also what his plot was for this very night; knowing, too, how that act would be canvassed at dawn; when society! in her chaste

morning robe would look shocked at what she would wink at at midnight, and in her *robe de chambre*), electrified the groups of wasps and butterflies, in their musical mur−mur and whirr−whirr, by standing up and saying, in a tone of bravado—

"A pretty plot and well got up for a fifth−rate theatre, but not for a drawing−room in Belgravia I need scarcely say I deny the charge, the object of which is to free a man from a 'hidden wife' to enable him to wed a new beauty with us to−night. (Sensation). Sir Lionel Trevalyon has lately come into the possession of much gold; the Church of Rome hath a fancy for the yellow metal; if the woman robed as a nun be a nun, then she is only adding to the coffers of the church by speaking the words we have heard. If she even be the one−time wife of poor Colonel Clarmont, society, knowing a thing or two (excuse the slang), will place no reliance on the story of such an one."

To attempt to describe the effects of the words of Delrose on the gay groups of revellers would be impossible. Butterflies and wasps forgot for a moment their beauty and their sting. It was as though Dame Rumour and Mrs. Grundy were struck blind and dumb, their lovers faithless, or Worth dead! But now the Babel of tongues fills the air, and silence lays down her sceptre to go forth into the night alone.

"Isn't it too delightful! a double scandal!" cried one.

"Alas! alas! that my day should be in such an age," said Lord Ponsonby.

"I wonder who it is darling Sir Lionel wishes to marry," said another. At this remembering rivalry got on the war path, as each looked critically at the other.

"Trevalyon would be a decent fellow enough if you did not all kneel to him," growled a county magnate. "I wish he would go to Salt Lake city and take his harem with him."

"I wonder if he has his eye on me," cried gay Mrs. Wingfield; "you men do sometimes take a fancy to other men's belongings. If he does I shall have to succumb instanter. Eustace, dear fellow, has rather a consumptive look, now I come to notice him."

"He may drop off in time," laughed the huntress; "but I am afraid I've lost my whip," she added, dolefully, brushing past Colonel Haughton, standing beside Lady Esmondet, and conversing in an undertone with Claxton and Trevalyon.

"Lost your whip!" exclaimed her host with forced gaiety; "that dare−devil has picked it up, then."

"Say that he only has the whip−hand *pour le present*, dear Sir Lionel," said Mrs. Wingfield, taking both his hands in a pretty, beseeching way.

"Or we women shall eat our hearts out in pity for your chains," said Vaura softly, coming near him.

"You are a pretty group of gamblers," he said, thinking there had been a wager among them; "but I must win when fair hands throw the dice."

Delrose had unconsciously given his foe some ecstatic moments, for the crowd so pressed about him to hear what answer he would make to the bold denial of the black−bearded Major that Vaura was close enough to hear his heart−beats, and to whom he whispered brokenly—

"All the nun's words will not avail, darling, after his false denial; I must bring on my other proofs for both our sakes, beloved."

"Poor, tired Lion.; I wish I could help you," she whispered from behind her fan, and he felt her yield to the pressure of the crowd and come closer.

"You do, sweet; I feel *just now* strong and weak; you understand?"

One glance up from her fan and he is satisfied.

But the conjectures as to whether Sir Lionel will or can reply to Delrose are put to rest by his voice again filling the air—

"To seem, and to be, are as unlike as are the hastily constructed bulwarks of the savage tribes as compared with a solid British fortress; we soldiers know this, and that Major Delrose. should still entrench himself behind the flimsy *seeming* of days of yore, where he was safe through my careless good−nature (we shall call it), in allowing it to be supposed that I had robbed Colonel Clarmont of his wife, submitting to the stigma so that his act would not stand in the way of his promotion as this poor nun has told you; you will wonder why I was careless. Because, for reasons of my own, I had forsworn matrimony, as I then thought, for all time. But Madame Grundy has lately revived this scandal, making a lash for my back with it for the hands of Dame Rumour. I have determined to stamp it out at once, and for ever! And now to pull down the bulwarks of Major Delrose." And holding up his hand, a signal agreed on with his servant, Sims at once ushered a priest and a small boy, who was

masked, and who walked, as if asleep, up to the head of the room. Father Lefroy, saying a word to the nun in an undertone, lifted the boy to a chair beside her; now, standing beside them, in calm measured tones, he spoke as follows:—

"We priests of the church have too many strange experiences to be very much astonished at any new one, yet I must say that to hear the words, on oath, of one of our pious sisterhood doubted is a novel sensation. Major Delrose is unwise in his present course of action, as he has by such prolonged a most painful duty on the part of the church. Sir Lionel Trevalyon will pardon me for saying he was wrong in wearing the mantle of dishonour for another; the lining, a good motive, was unseen by the jealous eye of society, hence, when the lash was put into her hands by revenge or envy, her motive power, it, the lash, went down; Sir Lionel Trevalyon has had his punishment. With unwearied exertion he has found Sister Magdalene through Paris, at London, and she has spoken the truth, and Major Delrose knows it. Moreover, and in connection with his name, we have examined papers, letters to Sister Magdalene, previous to and after her elopement, thus proving her words. Again, I may say here, for I have grave doubts of his having done so, six months ago I received from Father O'Brien, of New York city, same mail as he wrote Major Delrose, whose acquaintance he had made in that city in 1873, and believing by his words that he was an intimate friend of the house of Haughton, wrote him, as I say, of dying messages, and a few lines to a niece of Colonel Haughton, by name Vaura Vernon, and from Guy Cyril Travers."

At this, Vaura started, turned pale and visibly trembled, putting her hand to her side, when half a dozen men started to their feet; but Lionel quietly put her arm within his and led her to a seat behind a large stand covered with rare orchids and beautiful ferns, where, did she not revive, the open doors of the conservatory lent a means of speedy retreat.

"My own love, be brave; it was six months ago," he whispered, bending over her, and puzzled at her great emotion; "I know it, dear; and yet dead, poor, poor Guy: I have been always unpitying towards him. But did he say he was dead! let me hear; he will tell more; but in this crowd!" And she leaned forward, her large eyes glistening, the rose mouth quivering. Lady Esmondet silently joined her, as did her uncle, who, ever and anon shot fiery glances of contempt at Delrose, who, with bold recklessness, still leaned forward on his folded arms, between Madame and Lord Rivers. But the priest, instead of continuing aloud, came to Vaura's side, saying quickly and in low tones:

"Pardon; this is; yes, I see it is society's rarest flower—Miss Vernon; you have been hidden from me by those who would sun themselves in your smiles; else had I seen you, whom I know from the London shop−windows: should have told you quietly of Father O'Brien's letter, as I see by your emotion, black Delrose has been faithless to his trust."

"He has; tell me of poor Guy; did you say he is dead?" she asked, in broken accents, her eyes full; "tell me quickly; now, here; I can bear it."

"It was only a scrawl; he was dying, and signed your—your husband; he had been stricken down by fever; your name was ever on his lips; he said you loved Paris, and he would be buried there; he had loved you all his life; he was glad to go; you were not to shed one tear for him, but to make some one blest by your love; your miniature was to be buried with him; he is in paradise; you must not weep for him, and so cause others to weep for you."

"I shall not forget to remember your kindness," she said, giving her hand, the tears welling her eyes; "Sir Lionel Trevalyon will perhaps bring me out to your monastery."

"I thank you, and for our Order," and moving away to his former position, he continued:

"I have now finished my task, self−imposed and in the ends of justice; Sir Lionel Trevalyon is free to go to God's altar with the proudest and fairest woman in the world; and may the blessing of heaven rest upon his union. Had he not exposed the facts, he could not have wed, while your lips framed the word—bigamist!"

Here the boy started violently, put up his hands to his face, tearing off the mask, and rubbing his eyes.

"Where am I, Father Lefroy? you're not on the square; you said I was going to see my mother; come, own up; what did you say I was coming where every one wore masks for?" and he stamped on the one he had torn off (and which they thought it best he should wear, so that at a certain point, if necessary, his strong resemblance to his father should be suddenly revealed).

"So they do wear masks, my son, though you do not see them."

"I am not your son; this is my father," he said with emphasis and pride, drawing from his pocket a miniature

of Delrose; “we're square now; you hid this from me, but I found it out; you cannot put me on bread and water, for I've good as cut and run.”

“George, dear, be a good boy; I am your mother,” said the poor nun, tearfully.

“You! well, it is your voice; but why didn't you speak to a fellow in the coach, and lift up that nasty black veil; here, I will.”

And before she could stop him, he had mounted the chair and torn the whole head−gear off, exposing the face of one−time Mrs. Clarmont.

“'Tis she! 'tis she!” echoed many voices;—girls, now matrons, remembered the pretty little thing in their first season as Mrs. Clarmont; *chaperons* and men, who had and hadn't flirted with her, remembered her as Fanny Ponton.

“Let me go to her,” said Vaura, gently; “what is my grief to hers?”

“Ah, poor thing, what a sad fate has yours been; do not hide your face again from your poor little boy and us; dear me, what a weight it is; one would almost smother beneath its folds.”

“Oh, I must veil,” cried the poor thing.

“No; leave it off, daughter; it is my wish society shall see in you Trevalyon's 'hidden wife;' all have heard your words; mine and this lad's,” said the priest, sternly.

Nearly every inmate of the long rooms had eagerly and excitedly pushed and crowded, squeezed and crushed as near as possible to the principal actors in the scenes they had witnessed, making very conspicuous the attitude taken by the group in and about the curtained recess; namely, the scarlet−robed hostess; Lord Rivers, pleasantly placed, and too lazy and epicurean to move; Delrose, in the blackness of alternate rage, hate and defiance, longing to cut the scene, but unwilling to leave the field to Lord Rivers, and those he termed his foes; Kate, afraid to stir, for he had said between his teeth, “You won't go near them.” Tedril, with the huntress, stood beside them; while small Everly, accustomed to the *role* and remembering the mutual promise of Blanche and himself, sat at the feet of Madame, alternating fanning or saying something pretty to her, nerved to his task by the fact that Tisdale Follard, who had just bought his M.P., had told him “he must and would have his money at dawn.”

But the boy with eager eyes is pushing his way through the crowds and down to the sofa of Madame; all gazing after him; but nothing abashed, he elbows his way (a bold fearless boy, a very Delrose, with nothing of his mother in him); now with an intent stare at his father, then a long look at the miniature, said with a great sigh and slowly:

“No; I suppose you're not my *pater*; when I find him he won't scowl at a fellow,” with a loving glance at the likeness, which was of Delrose in full−dress uniform, smiling and handsome, taken with his thoughts full of his triumphant *affaire de coeur* with Mrs. Clarmont.

“I am no mean sneak, sir; so I'll show you the likeness of my father to excuse my staring at you like a cad;” and he handed it to Delrose who did not take it, Kate doing so, but he had recognised the case on the boy taking it from his breast.

“Thanks, no;” he said, with affected bravado, for society eyed him; “the young monkey plays his part well; if the thing even is of me, light fingers at times lighten one's belongings.”

“It is of you, dear Georgie,” said Kate, recklessly; “your family is increasing.”

“If you say so, it must be so,” he said, his bold black eyes meeting hers.

Mrs. Haughton now handed the miniature back to the boy, who, after returning it carefully to his pocket, said proudly, and looking fixedly at his father:

“If you were a boy, I'd give you one right out from the shoulder for what you've said of me;” and turning on his heel, he was making his way for the head of the room, when Madame, obeying impulse, called out laughingly:

“How have your owners called you my little man?”

“George Delrose Ponton is my name, Madame;” and with one hand to his breast, where the miniature lay, he again pushed his way through the groups of revellers.

“A speech from the throne could not have been given with more dignity than the poor fatherless little fellow gives his name,” said Vaura, pityingly.

“My dear mother has fainted, sir;” the boy said, ignoring priest and women, and instinctively choosing the face full of strength and sweetness, the face men and children trusted and women loved—that of Lionel Trevalyon.

“Poor boy, poor thing, so she has while our attention has been diverted.”

The meeting of father and son had been more than she could bear, and at the answer of Delrose to their child, she had fallen back in her chair in a dead faint.

“Poor creature, no wonder she gave way, I must get her out of this crowd.”

“Bring her to my boudoir, Sir Lionel; touch that bell, Sir Tilton, please,” cried Mrs. Haughton, thinking exultantly, “now is my opportunity to have him to myself, I shall open the ball with Lord Rivers at once, and then—” Mason appearing “lead the way to my boudoir and attend to this lady who has fainted.”

“When she revives she will like some one besides a strange maid with her,” said Colonel Haughton, as Lionel picked, the nun up in his strong arms; “you had better go too, Vaura dear.”

Trevalyon looked his approval saying “come.”

“Yes, you come, too,” and the boy's hand slipped into hers.

And so Vaura, her trailing skirts of cream satin, front width richly embroidered in gold floss, with the perfume of tea roses from her corsage and bouquet she carried, in all the fulness of her rich beauty, with proud head bent as she chatted with the dark−eyed, black−haired boy beside her, followed Trevalyon with his burden and the priest who walked at his side.

CHAPTER XLII. ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE.

“Outwitted this time,” mused Madame, greatly mortified at seeing Vaura retire with the group, “but I must make one more appeal to him alone,” and tapping Lord Rivers on the arm with her fan, said gaily, “To the halls of Comus; we want a change of scene, black is a trying colour.”

At this moment Blanche, her hand on Everly's arm, entered from the dining−room, whither with cunning forethought she had told him just five minutes previously she wished to go, with “I feel played out after all this sensation, we had best go for something exhilirating,” thinking, as she returned “he'll stand it better now, and I'm not one moment too soon,” leading her unsuspecting escort up to Madame, who stood leaning on the arm of Lord Rivers, her husband near welcoming late arrivals; and the air was sweet with perfume, and laden with the ceaseless murmur and everlasting whir−whir with the music of the laughter of the beautiful, the noble, and the fair, and as they follow, and crowd around Madame, their goal, the ball−room, some condole with others on their later *entree*, saying, “Oh, darling! what! you have missed such a sensation!” or “Oh! you should have been here earlier, Lady Eldred, our pet of pets, Sir Lionel Trevalyon, is free;" or “a nun nobodys child, and no end of fun, Stuart,” again, “no end of a time, Delrose has posed as Lucifer, Trevalyon, as all the angels.”

“Vaura Vernon is here, I am among her slain; she's a nymph, a goddess and a woman; she's the only one for me,” said Chancer, feelingly.

“All the others are frocks and frizzes,” laughed his friend, who had never seen her. “Listen, Chancer, what's the go now? that little girl with all the tin, red eyes, pads and bustles, is getting up a row of some sort; let's get in.”

The face of Mrs. Haughton was a study and the groups about her reflected the various emotions depicted there. For Blanche had said, the white mouse, wearing her innocent air “Oh, step−moma darling!”

“Never used a term of endearment before; going to say something nasty,” thought Mrs. Haughton.

Oui, ma chere Madame; yours is an unerring instinct; does not puss purr, then scratch? does not the snake charm, then sting? And so the white mouse said, “Oh, step−moma darling, just one minute, I've been up to a lark, and now present myself to you as Lady Everly; of course you will feel too awfully small for anything, when I take precedence of you; but you are so fond of the Baronet, it was nice of me to keep him in the family;” this she said without a shadow; of self−consciousness, so intent was she in watching the effect of her words on her Step−mother, using her pocket−handkerchief at every word, her escapade in the park adding to the red of the eyes and tiny nose, looking too as if her robes would fall off the green satin waist, so low, and velvet train so heavy. Oblivious was she of even the small baronet, on whose arm she leaned, and who trembled with nervousness and mortification at the manner blanche had chosen to offer them up to Mrs. Grundy. The wedding cards the lady of Everly had presented, ere making her little speech, were dropped to the floor, while madame said haughtily.

“Blanche Tompkins, you are mad to parade yourself in this manner,” and smiling cynically, “your attendant cavalier wears quite a jubilant air, looking so proud of his proximity to such a conventional belle of the evening. What with 'hidden wife,' and this little farce, the place smells of brimstone; let us all away,” she said with a forced laugh, “to the halls of Comus and a purer sphere; Lord Rivers, your arm.”

“Everly,” demanded his host, “what is the meaning of all this?” having heard from Tisdale Follard, not two hours before, that Mrs. Haughton had given him permission to press his suit with Miss Tompkins, Madame always considering Everly her own property.

“Allow me one moment,” said Delrose following Kate in her exit. “I find I must bid you and the Colonel adieu; I go to London by the midnight, from whence I think, across the water.”

In spite of herself the colour came and went in Kate's cheeks.

“Are they all mad,” she thought; “is he acting or what?”

The Colonel, relieved, and still feeling that he did not much care, now that he had the sympathetic friendship of Alice Esmondet near, whether he remained at Rose cottage or no, still said, giving his hand.

“I wish you a pleasant trip.”

“I doubt it,” said Delrose inwardly; outwardly, “thank you,” and being a born actor, continued carelessly, “I shall be as happy and free from care as the waves on the sportive ocean, for congratulate me, I bring my bride with me, no 'hidden wife,' though the *News* and *Daily* will have us; *Truth* also, will have a hand in,” and he added

lightly, “when a man knows editors and that ilk will shortly wet their pens for him, he may as well whet the appetite of society by saying only this and nothing more. In my bride of the sea, you will see a fair cousin of my own, the daughter of Vivian Delrose,” and turning to Kate, whom he had furtively watched said, as he bid her adieu, “by gaining a wife I lose a hostess, who has won my heart.” With a few careless words to the others, this man than whom no other ever held his own through life and in spite of fate better, now made his exit.

CHAPTER XLIII. WEE DETECTIVE PLAYS A WINNING CARD.

From the time Fanny Clarmont has appeared like a ghost of the departed, Delrose determined to get rid of the bother of it all by going at once to Rose Cottage; the huntress to whom he had been engaged for the first dance he handed over to Tedril. He would write Kate from the cottage, but first, he would punish her for torturing him, by lingering with Trevalyon and giving her smiles to Lord Rivers, by a public little speech as to his leave−taking, and keep her preoccupied by his avowal as to who was to accompany him, (she knowing naught of their relationship) as to give her no taste for flirtation. (Simple Simon could not read her, she is a woman!)

"It is now nearly eleven o'clock, I shall keep her in suspense for half an hour or so, then she is mine. Gad! I have won a prize, a fierce, passionate, untamable, flesh−and−blood beauty, full of love or full of hate, strong in body, mind and appetite; and she does care for my devotion, we were born for each other; what a life we shall have, thank fate I never was foolish enough to throw myself away on that little, timid, shrinking, silly Fanny Clarmont," and he leaped and ran to Rose Cottage, some times with a loud laugh, startling the night birds, as he thought of the woman and her gold.

Kate had shivered as with a chill at Delrose's words, when Lord Rivers had said:

"Come and take a glass of something warm, you have been standing too long."

"You are kind," she said, recovering herself, "it gives one a chill to lose two men in one night; yes, thank you, a glass of champagne, t'will be a more pleasant sensation than the three brides, but let them beware; I shall have their husbands at my feet again; and now for the dance."

"I shall make you forget them."

"You may."

"A deserted room; a dim, religious light; a female form too tempting to resist," he said, lazily, and in her ear.

"Well," said Kate, drooping her eyelids, knowing what the result of this speech would be.

"Well, my charmer," and the kiss and embrace were given.

"You naughty man, but I do really need some extra support for my spinal column, and it's awfully pleasant, but dear Grundy won't allow it, so we must wait for our waltz."

And the pair hurried along the corridors and took their places at the head of the room, and the ball was opened.

Col. Haughton, as we are aware, had demanded an explanation of the words of Blanche from Sir Tilton. The rooms had been deserted, save by those to whom a dish of gossip was as the essence of life, and who now listened with itching ears to Sir Tilton's reply, while they tried to remember the extent of the eccentric little bride's wealth. Whether she would buy a house in town; nearly all deciding that they would patronize or cultivate her.

"She is *outree* and bad form, but she has the dollar and she'll be game for those who havn't," said a London beau to Chancer, who hadn't gone to the ball−room, but was eating his heart out in feverish impatience for his waltz (the third dance on the programme) with Vaura.

"Sorry you didn't like it, Colonel, but Blanche would have our marriage private." He did not add that he said no word to dissuade her; as the Jews would have none of him, and his friends had buttoned up their pockets telling him "to wipe out old scores first."

As it was, wife, trip, special license and all that had cost him not a *sou*, except the ring, and his freedom, which he considered ample equivalent.

"Yes; it's all my fault, Colonel; but you are too awfully nice to be angry with a bride, you know; and besides," she added in a stage whisper, the pink eyes peering about, a childish look of anxiety coming to the wee white face, as if to protect herself against listeners who would carry her words to Madame in reality; aching to see some of her step−mother's pets within earshot, to be sure her words would carry.

Fire away, little one, 'tis an ancient war you are waging of woman *versus* woman; make your bullets; many are by who will pelt with true aim.

"And besides, Colonel, Mrs. Haughton is so fond of Sir Tilton she would never, no, never, have let me have him, so I let him make love to her up to the very last, and she—"

At this juncture Colonel Haughton, whose nerves were terribly unstrung, breathed an inward blessing upon

Lady Esmondet, who, laying her hand on the shoulder of the little one, said, “Tell us where you were married, dear?”

“Oh, that's all square; at St. Alban's yesterday at Matins; but it was an awful pity; scarcely anyone saw us. Guess it's legal though, eh, Tilton?”

“When did you leave Haughton Hall, Everly?” inquired his host, almost fearing some indiscretion would be brought to light.

“Yesterday, a.m., first train; took carriage for St. Albans; Blanche telephoned for suite of apartments at hotel; left London to−day; so here we are again.”

The absence of his hostess and Vaura, also the look of respect in the faces of his creditors all gave the little baronet courage to speak.

“Show me the marriage certificate, Everly. Ah, that's right, and I congratulate you both; Blanche is her own mistress, and—”

“And, Lady Everly, don't give up the situation to anybody,” a comical look of importance on the wee face. Any men in the rooms who had the haziest knowledge of the little man about town, now swarmed small Everly with congratulations on his golden future, excepting Tisdale Pollard, M.P., who did not care to have his debt paid by Everly from the pocket of Blanche. But he must not forget himself; he will console himself with the Tottenham money bags; so giving his arm to Cecilia, bosom friend of Blanche, they join the group; the Tottenham pouting.

“What's the matter, Cis?” cried Blanche. “You have a greenery yellowy look, and remind me of Bunthorn and the forlorn maidens all rolled up together and sent in by parcel post.”

“If I do, it's your fault, Blanche, and you are extremely unkind,” she said, tearfully. “You know you promised only the other day that when you were married I should be first bridesmaid and choose my own frock, and I did, and it just suited my complexion, especially in church, with the lights from the stained windows upon it. I just dreamed of it night and day; it's really too disappointing!”

“Is that all, Cis? I might as well cry because my pug is a shade lighter than my new winter costume I ordered to match his coat. Don't cry and you shall have a chair in my boudoir just to suit your complexion (for I am going to buy an awfully nice town house).”

“Might have said we,” thought her husband, but he swelled himself like Froggie in the fable.

“Now, Cis,” continued *la petite*, “isn't that a nice sugar plum for you?”

“Sugar plum for me!” said Stuart, who thoroughly enjoyed a bit of chaff with wee Blanche, “Sugar plum for me! Think I require one to console me for Sir Tilton running off with you?”

“You're too big a humbug to get any from me, Mr. Stuart. Barnum's umbrella wouldn't begin to take you in; if you try and be a good young man, perhaps you'll get one over there,” she added irreverently.

“Why, that's in the direction of Mrs. Haughton's boudoir, you very naughty girl,” laughed Stuart. “I wonder if I would, though; I must find some one to sympathise with.”

“Bunthorn again,” laughed Mrs. Wingfield; “you had better apply for the vacant footstool.”

“Never get a softer seat, Stuart,” said small Everly, looking as important as the lords of the Berlin treaty.

“I'm too awfully too ashamed of you, Baronet,” said his bride. “You're as demoralized as all the New York theatres rolled in one.”

“Lady Everly,” said Stuart, solemnly and consulting his tablets, “I am aware of your weakness for small people,” with a side glance, “small plots and puzzles. Read this one for me, please: where am I to find Miss Tompkins, to whom I am engaged for this dance?”

“Guess you'll have to put up with Lady Everly,” she said, saucily.

“You don't care to go to the ball room yet, Alice; we have so much to say,” said Col. Haughton, bending down to the sweet, calm face looking up to his so earnestly, and marking the deepening lines of care and unrest.

“No, Eric; sit down beside me, you look weary; I have seen so little of you of late.”

“And the guests come and go or talk in groups of this night of sensation; or in these luxurious soft−lighted *salons*, give themselves up to the delicious intoxication of some loved presence. How many a passionate heart throb, how many sweet pains are engendered in one's heart, how many sighs given and returned, what tender passages on such nights! And what would a ball be without this undercurrent of what we call flirtation; in reality, this yearning for the one in the multitude.

“Why, Chancer, what's come to you, man? You remind one of a spirit in Elysian fields in search of its mate,”

said Stuart, as he strolled about with Lady Everly on his arm.

“Pretty scene, Chancer,” said Lord Rivers, lazily, and stationing himself in the curtained entrance to look out for some one to kill time with until his hostess is his own again. “Fine show of arm and neck there; pretty woman that; ah, there's an ankle; trust them, they all know their good points. Fine pair of eyes; there's a neck for you; but what's the matter with you, man, now I come to look at you you wear a lost look; is it Fate, Fortune, or one of the Graces?”

“The three in one, Rivers,” he said with a half−laugh.

“Did you say you had lost some one, Capt. Chancer? Perhaps I can tell you; I know every nook and corner in the hall,” said the Meltonbury, insinuatingly, coming from the other side of the curtains, where she had ensconced herself to watch for the return of Madame on hearing Lady Everly's speech in the stage whisper.

“How angry the dear thing will be,” she thought importantly, “when I tell her.” And now in her character of social astronomer she levels her glass at Chancer.

“Oh, thank you, I shall be so obliged,” he said eagerly; “I am in search of Miss Vernon; our waltz is on.”

“So! so! no wonder you are eager,” but Chancer is out of hearing, so swiftly has he followed Mrs. Meltonbury to the boudoir of Madame.

“An armful, seductive enough for Epicurus himself,” thought Lord Rivers; “and so is my superb hostess, full of fire and great go; the Colonel is too quiet to master her; wonder what attracted them; gad! what a different linking there would be if all existing marriages were somehow declared null and void. Kate Haughton and Vaura Vernon would be the most powerful magnets at London; even as it is, they will. Clarmont will be rather surprised to hear that Delrose was the partner of the fair Fan's flight; gad! he managed that well; Trevalyon is so devilish handsome and *distingue*, I wonder Delrose won; but I forget, Trevalyon had no *penchant* that way; believe he has for the fair Vernon though; who wouldn't? If she tell him yea, I wonder what sort of a married woman she will develop into; they say she is perilously seductive and fascinating; but my charmer said she'd have an ice quietly with me in her boudoir, at a quarter to eleven; it's that now; splendid eyes she has, and what a shoulder and arm! but, ah! this won't do; I must look after my interests.”

And the lazy epicurean musings give place to eager activeness on seeing in the distance the trailing red satin skirts of Madame; her fine arm in its whiteness resting on the black coat sleeve of Capt. Chancer.

CHAPTER XLIV. DUAL SOLITUDE.

Let retrace our steps and thoughts to the time Lionel, with Sister Magdalen in his arms, the priest at his side, Vaura and the boy, child of Fanny Ponton, made their sensational exit down the long lengths of the luxurious *salons*. Mason had ushered them into the deserted boudoir of her mistress, where every sense was pandered to; here one was lulled into waking or sleeping dreams by the ever soft light, dim and rose−tinted; or when old Sol rode high in the heavens, triumphant in his gift of day, sending his beams through stained windows or rose−silk hangings. The soft light shone alike upon gems in sculpture and art on the walls painted in dreamy soul−entrancing landscapes, or gay grouping of the Graces; if the pictured female loveliness was clad only in feathery clouds of fleecy drapery, the few thought the painter might have been more lavish of robing; but the room was warm with gay laughter, warm with the sweet breath of warm hearts, with the warmth of the rose−tinted lights clothing the ethereal loveliness on its walls; and now, falling on one of the loveliest women in the kingdom, thought Trevalyon, as laying his burden on a soft velvet lounge, his eyes dwelt on Vaura's beauty, for they are alone once more, Father Lefroy having left the boudoir with Mason to summon Sir Andrew Clarke, as they could not restore the nun unaided.

“In dual solitude once more, my beloved;” and she is in his close embrace; her large eyes in their soft warmth rest on his; one, long kiss is given—one long sigh.

“Save for the boy, darling,” Vaura smiles; releasing herself, her quickened heart−beats deepening the rose−tints in her cheeks.

Here the physician entered, having despatched Mason for his servant with medicine case.

“Too great a strain upon her nerves, poor thing,” said Sir Andrew Clarke; “most trying scene for her; then the narcotic administered, as she has informed us, by the servant of her betrayer; I heartily congratulate you, Trevalyon, on the light she has thrown upon this matter, and none too soon, either, as Delrose is leaving England. You have no idea, Miss Vernon, I assure you, of the talk there has been; our newspapers are a great power in all English−speaking lands, and their managers being aware our colonies take their cue from them (in a great measure), do as a rule keep their heel on Rumour's tongue, unless it wags on oath.”

“Yes; and as a rule shut their eyes to the yellow sheen from the gold in her palm, Sir Andrew,” said Vaura, earnestly thinking of how Lionel had suffered from it all.

“True, most true; but the revival of this scandal with the unwearied persistence of its sensational colouring and reproduction from week to week, lead one to suppose gold lent life and vim to each issue; though again, *I am sure*, our great papers are above a bribe, and it must have been vouched for on oath. Do you purpose interviewing the newspaper men, Trevalyon?” he inquired, taking the medicine chest from his servant and dismissing him.

“I think not (more than I have done); I dislike paper war and *oath was made* as to the *truth* of the *lie* to the managers; I suppose I am lazy; at all events I am epicurean enough to hug to my breast the rest after unrest;” and the mesmeric eyes meet Vaura's, while Esculapius is searching his medicine case.

“Poor fellow, you do require rest,” she said, gently turning her face up to Sir Lionel's, for she is seated at the table, both elbows thereon, chin and cheeks supported in her hands; “if we put ourselves in his place, Sir Andrew, fancy what rest we should have, in the full glare of a stare from Mrs. Grundy, while the unruly member of Dame Rumour wagged in our ear. If I were in your place, Sir Lionel, I should give no more thought to the matter; you have given the truth to−night to gentle woman, who will give it to the London world; Adam will only taste through Eve's palate; and the mighty Labouchere, Lawson &Co. will cry joyfully, 'hear! hear!'“

Both the men laughed.

“You see, my dear surgeon, Eve endorses my policy, and thinks the sisterhood a better mode of communication than telephone or telegraph!”

“Could have no better newsmongers as a rule, Trevalyon; but there are Eve and Eves, and when I have a secret to confide, I shall tell it to your charming supporter; and when I have spoken, shall feel sure "tis buried, and her fair person the grave of it.'“

“*Merci*! Sir Andrew, your secret will be safe; and now that I have such a mission, from this hour you are my medical adviser, as you will have a double interest in knowing my pulse beats. But, see, the skill of my Esculapius

triumphs."

"'Tis so; the nun revives," echoed Sir Lionel, withdrawing his gaze from Vaura's face.

"Revives! I am glad to hear that," cried Madame, entering, her hand on the arm of Capt. Chancer, whom she had met at the door, and followed by the priest.

"Yes; I am glad she is better, for I want a private word with you, Sir Lionel. Capt. Chancer has come to carry off Miss Vernon; the priest to carry off the nun, and—"

"With all our world in couples linked, her *tete−a−tete* will be secured," said Vaura to Chaucer's ear, as they made their exit, and banishing thoughts of poor Guy Travers, the sensational events of the evening having for the time blotted from her memory the words of Madame and Delrose in the library before dinner.

"Any newer sensations, Capt. Chancer, since our pleasant little chat in the *salons*?"

"In my heart—no," he said quickly; "(with you a man must grasp his opportunity to speak of himself, you are in such request); I have the same dull pain engendered by you, and which you alone can heal; do you believe in affinities—love at first sight? yet you must; I am not the only man, others have suffered, and not silently;" and there is a ring of truth in his words which she reads also in his handsome manly face; but she says gently:

"Don't let us talk sentiment in this maddening crowd; there's a dear fellow," returning greetings to right and left; "but listen instead to that waltz, a song of love itself."

"Oh, yes," he said eagerly; "the song you promised you will not deny me?"

"If you care, yes; after our waltz; and now ere we lose ourselves in the soul−stirring music, tell me, did I hear aright, have Blanche Tompkins and Sir Tilton Everly joined their fate together?"

"They have; Lady Everly announced the fact herself."

"Ah! instead of the *Morning Post*; 'All's well that ends well;' but wee mouse plays a game all hazard, my dear soldier; she has taken the plaything from under the paw of puss; puss will purr, arch her soft neck, look lonely and loving, and win him back."

"What a power you women are! When the great powers met at Berlin, we should have sent you to represent your sex;" and his face is lit up with the flame from his heart as they stand in position, so that step and note will be in rhythm, and his eyes rest on the fair flower face, while he breathes the odour of tea−roses and clematis from her corsage.

We shall leave them so, not an unpleasant parting, and return to the boudoir of Mrs. Haughton.

CHAPTER XLV. BLACK DELROSE AS A MARKSMAN.

“And now, reverend sir,” she had said, turning quickly and imperiously to Father Lefroy, on the exit of Vaura, and waving her hand towards sister Magdalen, “the left is your right. Ah! Sir Andrew, pardon, I did not see you, you are in great demand in the drawing rooms.”

“You flatter me, Mrs. Haughton,” he answered, with a shrug of shoulder as he accepted his dismissal.

Sister Magdalen now sat up, saying feebly, “Where am I; oh! yes, I remember it all, how dreadful, my poor head,” and turning her pale, grief−stricken face to the priest, said sadly, “When do we leave, father?”

“I go at once, daughter, but the great London physician who has just left the room having restored you to consciousness, says positively, you must remain here until to−morrow; come George, my son, we have no more time to spare here, our duty is done.”

“No, I shall not go with you,” cried the boy, going over to Lionel, taking his hand.

“You must, you are under age,” said the priest sternly; “your mother has given you to us.”

“Then, she is my dear mother no more,” and one could see that he strove manfully to swallow the lump in his throat, “and if you force me I'll cut and run.”

Here Mason entered.

“Do you know whether the house−keeper has a vacant room, Mason,” inquired her mistress hastily.

“No, ma'am,” she said, “just now we are full ma'am.”

“Very well, give orders instantly that Sir Tilton Everly's traps be taken to Miss Tompkins' appartments. Assist this lady to Sir Tilton's room, the boy also, and bid a servant drive this clergyman to the village. Admit *no one* to my presence.”

“Yes ma'am,” said the discreet maid, not moving a muscle of her face.

“I shall send for you both ere this time to−morrow,” said the priest, shaking hands kindly with Lionel.

“You would make a good general officer, fair madame, where speedy dispatch was necessary,” said Lionel gallantly.

“Twas easy, a man and woman sleep−double, a priest and a nun are parted; make yourself comfortable on yonder lounge, I am coming to look at and talk to you, my long lost star, my king.”

“Most fellows would envy me,” he thought, stretching, himself on the lounge for he was really fatigued, and if he is made prisoner, may as well rest.

“George would kill me, could he see me,” thought Kate, seating herself on a pile of cushions close to his chest, “but what did he tease me about going off with a Cousin for, I know it was false, but if I can even now win the love of this man, I shall defy him and pretend to have taken him literally.” And letting her lace wraps fall about her, sinking into the cushions, leaning forward, both arms folded on his chest, this recklessly, impulsive; black−browed woman looked her prisoner full in the eyes. Being a man, his face softened. She saw it, and there was a moment's silence save for the cooing of the lovebirds hanging in their gilded cage in the roseate light.

“Could I not content you my king? you have been cruel to me; cease to be so, and though I can be fierce, cruel, and vindictive to others, I shall be always gentle to you; you know by my letters that my love is unchanged, let me rest here, my king,” and the head with its shining black tresses sank to his chest, “and I shall teach you so to love me that you will lose even the memory of other women. Speak, my king, but only to tell me you accept my all,” and her voice sank to a whisper.

“How can I, you poor little woman?” and he smiled, but sadly, for he thought for one moment of how weak is poor humanity, with the boy Cupid's fingers on one's heartstrings; the next, he determined to heal the wounded heart at his feet—though with the lance.

“Your fancy, will pass, *chere madame*, and your husband is my friend,” and he added in her ear, “you have a man whom you honour with especial favor.”

“But why do I?” she said, almost fiercely and starting to a sitting posture, “why, I only admitted him for distraction's sake; you know full well 'twas you I loved and not the man I have married, or the lover you credit me with,” she said, in an aggrieved tone, forgetting the years ere she had met him. “I hoped by so doing to drink of the waters of Lethe; but it has not been so, though losing myself at times in a whirl of excitement; your name,

your face, with your wonderful eyes, from nearly every album I handled, and I was again in subjection; perchance you had been recalled to my memory by some idle word in the moonlight when I became an iceberg to my companion, and my whole being going out to meet yours, when, for return, an aching loneliness. Listen, my king, my master," and she started to her feet powerfully agitated, every pulse throbbing, Trevalyon stood up quickly, coming to her side, taking her hand in his while one arm supported her, for she trembled.

"Calm yourself, you poor little woman, this passion will soon pass; I shall be away, other men will teach you to forget me, be kind to poor Haughton for my sake (if I may say so) and your own, and now, dear, that your passionate heart is beating slower, let me bring you to the *salons* ere you are missed."

"Your voice is full of music, else I would not stay so still," and again he feels her tremble for she thinks of the flying moments of her losing game, and of her fierce lover as victor. "But there is no time to be−so sweetly still," and her voice sinks to a whisper, "or else I could be forever so, see, I kneel to you; nay, you must let me be," and the words came brokenly and more passionately than any ever having passed her lips, "you, and you only, have ever had the power to subdue me." Here her face changed to a sickly pallor as of faintness, a tremor ran through her whole frame, and saying in a breathless whisper, "Great heavens! your life is in danger, follow my cue; will you take care of the boy?"

"I will, Mrs. Haughton; pray arise."

While he was speaking, crash, crash, went the plate glass in the window behind him, and black Delrose, looking like a very fiend, bounded in, taking up a bronze statue of Achilles, hurled it at Trevalyon, who only escaped from the fact of having stooped with the utmost apparent *sang−froid* to pick up a rose his fair companion had dropped from her corsage. Achilles, instead of his head, shattering the greater part of a costly mirrored wall, with ornaments on a Queen Anne mantel−piece.

"This will settle him," he now yelled furiously, and about to fire from, a pocket pistol.

"Hold!" cried Kate, "'twas no love scene."

"By heaven, 'tis well, or he had been a dead man," he said furiously, lowering his arm. "Explain yourself, Trevalyon, or you—"

"Beware, George," said Kate, breathlessly.

"I shall not, Kate; you have maddened me and by the stars he shall say why you knelt to him. I suppose you would like me, forsooth! to admire the *nonchalante* manner of his posing at the time," and turning like a madman to Trevalyon, shaking his clenched fist in his face, said fiercely, "by the stars you shall speak. Why did she kneel to you?"

"Calm yourself, Delrose," he answered quietly, for the first time pitying this passionate woman, "Mrs. Haughton is the wife of my friend!"

"Men always respect such facts," sneered Delrose; "no, that won't go down; Kate, you or he shall tell me or I shall not answer for the consequences."

Kate, fearing for Trevalyon, answered quickly:

"I was imploring him to look after your boy, and not allow the priest to spoil him for a soldier."

"You swear this?"

"You, I know, are satisfied with nothing else."

"That won't do; do you swear you asked him to do this as you knelt," he said, slowly and jealously.

"I do."

"And what says this squire *des dames*?" he continued sneering and turning suspiciously to Trevalyon.

"That Mrs. Haughton has condescended to explain the situation or I shouldn't, and that a gentleman never questions the word of a lady," he answered coolly, and haughtily continuing, "may I be your escort back to the *salons*, Mrs. Haughton."

Kate seeing the look of impatient hate settling in the eyes of her lover, said hastily,

"Thanks; no, Sir Lionel;" she would have added more but for the jealous gaze of Delrose, who said as she went to Trevalyon's assistance in opening the spring lock.

"Yes; go, Kate, to your last act in the farces of Haughton Hall, you must then come to my assistance with the drop curtain." While he speaks the hands of the man, impatient to be with the love of his life, and of the woman, sorry to let him go, meet in the folds of the hangings, the woman sighing as she presses his hand to her heart and so they part.

CHAPTER XLVI. DISCORD ENDS; HEART'S−EASE AT LAST.

With quick steps and eager glances at the groups of gay revellers, whom he passes with a few hurried words of greeting and thanks for their congratulations on his “hidden wife,” he looks in vain for Vaura. At last, and his handsome face and mesmeric eyes are lit with happiness, her voice comes to him from a music−room. He pushes his way through the crowds, for poor Chancer has been doomed to disappointment in his wish to have this fair woman sing to him alone, for when the now full rich notes, now sweet to intoxication, of her mezzo−soprano voice fell on the air, the languid, sentimental or gay stayed their steps to listen.

Lionel has now reached the piano, and stands beside Lord Rivers, who leans on his arms, noting with critical and admiring eye Vaura's unequalled charms.

“Yes,” was his mental verdict, “never saw more lovely bust and shoulders; then her throat, poise of her head, like a goddess, glorious eyes, lips full and velvety as a peach.”

A warmer light comes to the large dark eyes and tender curves to the lips as the sweet singer meets the gaze of her betrothed husband. One look and he feels that the words are for him: “Thou can'st with *thy* sunshine *only* calm this tempest of my heart.”

More than one man were at one with Lord Rivers and Chancer in feeling the advent of Trevalyon to be extremely inopportune, when at the closing words he drew nearer, and Vaura, with her own bewildering smile, allowed him to carry her off. Just as they move away Everly hurried towards them, handing to Vaura a tiny three−cornered note, with a whispered “from Blanche,” and he was gone. The recipient, glancing in the direction, sees in the distance the pink eyes and wee mouse−face peering through the crowd and gesticulating distinctly to Vaura to “read at once.” Her written words were:

“Bid Sir Lionel take you to the north tower instanter; it's all O.K., warm as toast and lighted, so the ghosts won't have a show; but you will. Such a picnic! As soon as I can tire out, Sir Peter in our waltz I'll be on hand. B. EVERLY.”

“Well, darling, what say you?” and the handsome Saxon head is bent for her reply.

“Yes, Lion, dear, and at once. It just occurs to me it may throw some light on a mysterious conversation I overheard in the library, and which the excitement of the night had well nigh caused me to forget.”

“Indeed; then we shall hasten, love.”

And turning their steps in the direction of the tower, first through corridors bright with the light from myriads of gas jets, which lit up Vaura's warm beauty and the brown sheen of her hair, followed by admiring, loving, or envious eyes, they now reach the more dimly−lighted halls, and turn into one at the foot of the spiral staircase, which they ascend slowly, Lionel's arm around his fair companion, her trail skirts thrown over her left arm. The stairway is lighted as Blanche had said.

“Not even a ghost, my own,” and his face is bent to hers.

“Only one of a past longing, dearest; how I longed for you in the tower of St. Peter's. Oh! the view from the top, Lion.”

“I know it well, love; but say you missed me, my love, ascending with yours, even this arm supporting you.”

“I did dearest, even there, and you know it well, as also I longed for the sympathy of heart to heart, soul to soul in a view which lifts one to the heavens, and would take a poet to describe.”

“My own feelings, love; the majesty of the view, and from such a height, overpowers one. Yes, sweet; dual solitude, as now, is paradise. Do the stairs fatigue you, my own?”

“No, Lion,” and for a moment they stand still, his arm around her. The soft white hands draw his face near her own, “no, darling,” and the sweet tones are a whisper, “'tis only the languor of intense happiness; in ecstatic moments, as now, one feels so.”

For answer his lips press hers in a long kiss, and she is taken up in his strong arms and not loosed until the ascent is made and the octagon room reached; there he leads her to a seat, and throws himself on a cushion at her feet.

“What a Hercules I am about to bestow my fair person upon,” she said, gaily, “for I am no light weight for a maiden. Ah! poor Guy; that reminds me, darling, I have something to tell you which—”

“Which will have to wait until you are my own dear wife, for,” and his head is wearily laid on her knees, “I can wait no longer. You know, Vaura, dear, what my life has been, since as a little fellow in jacket and frilled collar, a child of about seven, my father was deserted by her to whom he had trusted his name and the honour of our house. But I cannot speak of it, it brings my poor half−crazed father back to earth, and I see him again before me, a victim to his trust in a woman. Then, my storm−tossed life; living now wholly for a pleasure that palled upon me, again, losing myself in dreams of what my life might have been with a loving wife, part of myself, making me a more perfect man by her sympathy in a oneness of thought, for you know, beloved, I could never have loved a woman who, for love of me, or because I had moulded her character, had adopted my views of life. No, woman is too fickle for that. I, in meeting your inner self, for we nearly all have those inner thoughts, life, and aspirations, in you, I know, our natures are akin, we can when we will, and just as our mood is, talk or be silent; look into life more closely, or only at its seeming; discuss and try to solve old, deep, and almost insoluble questions that, in our inner life, have puzzled us more than once, my own, or my bright twin−spirit of the morn,” he added, brightening. “We can only see and look no further (when our mood is so) than from the cloudless sky to the sunbeams or starlight reflected in our own eyes. Yes, beloved, I have earned my rest; my spirit has at last found its mate. You will make my life perfect, love, by giving yourself to me. To−morrow, come down quietly to the rectory, our old friend will make us one. My place at the north is lonely without us; say yes, sweet?”

“In one little week, Lion, I shall have you here all the time. It will be bliss for us, after your unrest and mine; for you if you were obliged to leave here for any reason that may develop,” and a look of startled anxiety comes to the lovely face, “but, no; she would never leave him; another flash of thought comes to me, darling, of the 'mysterious conversation' I spoke to you of, but it cannot have had any real meaning. I shall again banish the dreadful thought.”

“Do, beloved; it has been a trying night for all of us,” and he rises from the cushioned seat, and seating himself beside her draws the dear head to his chest.

“It has, Lion; and now I must tell you of an episode in my life in days of yore, in which poor Guy Travers took a prominent part. Poor fellow, he is dead, and, perhaps, as the poet hath it, sees me 'with larger other eyes,'“ and a slight pallor comes to the sweet face.

“Thank God, he has taken him, darling, whatever it is you have to tell me; for it is not cruel in me to say so, as had you loved him you would have wed, and had he lived he would have eaten his heart out in loneliness, for I have been told he loved you. Say on, my own, though I care not to know, save that you wish to speak. I am in a perfect rapture of bliss, and shall listen, if only to hear your voice, the sweetest music I have ever known.”

“You will remember, Lion, when I was about fifteen, you came here from the east, expecting to meet uncle Eric. But, alas! as you are aware, he was held in the fascinations at Baden−Baden, with debts accumulating, the place going to ruin. He wrote saying, unless he married money he would have to shut up the Hall, but for my sake he was willing to enter an unloved alliance. Ah, how long ago these days seem; and now, in this rest, dearest, pillowed so, I almost lose myself in the dear present.”

“Do, love, forget all about the past, tell me no more.”

“I must, and in a few words, for, hark! the clocks tell the last quarter before midnight, Blanche, whom we have forgotten, will be with us, and so, to hasten; you left me sorrowfully to go to him and see what could be done. Poor Guy was guest of the Douglas family. You are perhaps aware that from Guy's French mother came all their wealth; but, to hasten, Guy was nearly eighteen, a handsome boy, and in love with my child self. I liked him, as I did Roland Douglas, though I can never remember the time, darling, that those magnetic eyes of yours and dear, kind face didn't haunt me. Guy never left my side, and Roland being of same mind there were many battles over the proprietorship of my small person. At last Gay triumphed, in this wise; I had confided my troubles to him, when he persuaded me to elope (nay, don't start, darling, 'twas only a two days' trip), in this, way (as he said) I would be a heroine, and save the Hall for my dear uncle, else he would wed for my sake some *outree* manufacturer's daughter and make himself wretched in a *mesalliance*. I could *save* my uncle. What joy! With no thought of self we went to Gretna Green and were married, and not by the blacksmith, but by a dissenting clergyman; the next day we, as conquering heroes, were on our return to the Hall, when Guy's mother, with Uncle Eric, to whom she had telegraphed, met us, not with smiles, but frowns. In short, dearest, our marriage was declared null and void. Guy's mother, whom it appeared, wished him on coming of age to wed a Parisian heiress, declared she would stop his allowance, but, as a matter of course, with no legal tie binding us, we were again in

our old position. And so my dream to free Haughton was frustrated by a woman, but, oh, Lion, my love, for my eventual good; for try as I have I could never have given my woman heart to poor Guy. He loved me throughout his life, and with wealth poured his all at my feet. But no more, dearest, I hear Blanche."

"How wretched the poor fellow must have been, beloved; and how blest am I."

"Hush, dear, here they are;" and Vaura is at one of the windows as Everly says:

"Here we are again."

"Guess you're just about tired out waiting; but I see you hav'nt been here long enough to read this," said the white mouse, taking a card from a stand; "it says 'if you miss supper, down stairs.'"

"Here it is, Blanche, all right."

"We were, I suppose, to rise to it," said Vaura.

"And something worth mounting for, and not to be sneezed at either," cried Lady Everly, as her husband rolled a small table from a recess.

"If this is the picnic you promised us, Blanche, commend me to your choice of dishes," said Vaura, inwardly hoping nothing unpleasant would transpire relative to Mrs. Haughton.

"And now that we are comfortably placed," said Blanche, excusing herself to fly to the window giving a view of Rose Cottage. "Now," she said cheerfully, "we shall each propose a toast; mine being, success to the plans and plots of this evening."

"Amen," said Trevalyon, thinking of Vaura and himself.

"Excepting one," said Vaura earnestly.

"Excepting one!" echoed Everly.

"No, I shan't be left," cried Blanche quickly, and in a low tone to her spouse, "you cannot refer to the one we are here to witness."

There was no reply.

"Miss Vernon, your exception has nothing to do with Mrs. Haughton?" continued *la petite* inquiringly.

"It has; but I am imaginative; tell me, did Mrs. Haughton appear in the supper−room?"

"I should just say so, and as gay as a lark, with Lord Rivers."

"But, Blanche, you know you only looked in, and Mrs. Haughton may have done likewise."

"You're a goose, Tilton; Capt. Stuart and I had gone through a dish or two before you all came in; I was born hungry."

"Believe you," laughed her husband.

"My poppa's pet name for me at dinner was ostrich," said wee mouse, rapidly discussing breast and wing of duck, etc. "Sir Lionel, here's a conundrum for you; what is the thirstiest animal?"

"Man," he answered demurely.

"One for you; you are placed, Tilton," and the pink eyes peered at a window.

"I hope you feel comfortable in your niche, Sir Tilton," laughed Vaura; "ask another, Blanche, and place Mrs. Haughton *a present*; I cannot get her off my mind."

"All O.K.; I only have waited until you had refreshed the inner man."

"Women never eat," said Vaura, with an amused glance at the little one.

"One didn't just now," said the small Baronet.

"How observant you are, Tilton; and now for Mrs. Haughton, did she remain long in the supper−room, Baronet?"

"No, she excused herself just as you and Stuart made your exit; one plea, finger hurt; some point of her jewellery entered."

"Which she made a point of and didn't return, eh?"

"No."

"Excuse me," she said quickly, and going to a window giving an open view down into Rose Cottage, and throwing the heavy curtains behind her; the windows of the cottage being all aglow with lights, the interior of parlour and dining−room could be distinctly seen.

"Sir Lionel, come quick! look over there," she cried, giving him the field−glass.

"Great heavens, what does it mean?" he exclaimed. "Move, Blanche, Lion, one of you, and make room for me quick," cried Vaura, breathlessly.

“No, darling; you had better stay where you are,” he said excitedly, forgetting at such a time their companions were ignorant of their engagement.

“Poor Haughton, surely, Lady Everly, you do not consider yonder scene a fitting subject to make game of?”

“Yes and no; if you knew how the poor dear Colonel has been sold, and my poppa before him, you'd say 'tis best. She has been too many for them; yes, it's better ended by an elopement.”

“Then my worst fears are realized; and their words were no idle seeming, as I half hoped,” said Vaura in quick, nervous tones. “You may as well gratify me, Lion dear, by giving me a glance at how a blot is put upon the escutcheon of a heretofore stainless name,” she said despairingly, yet haughtily.

“It will be too much for you, darling; let me take you down stairs; I must go to poor Haughton. We should prevent this.”

“You can't and I am glad; I've known it for hours, but I wouldn't let any one know; if you stop them now, what do you gain?”

“Quite a scandal,” said small Everly, regretfully, for Vaura's sake, whom, as she stands helpless to prevent, wishing to fly to her uncle, yet dreading the scandal, shall fall without warning, and the house full of guests, upon his dear head. In proud despair she looks pleadingly at Lionel for sympathy, and Everly, his heart beating, longs to do something for her.

“Can I help you in any way, dear Miss Vernon? Shall I ring the great alarm bell, rouse the village and the Hall. Only let me be of use to you,” he says hurriedly.

“I thank you, Sir Tilton, make room for me at the window. Ah, heavens! It is too true. Go down at once, Lion. Though I don't know for what, still go. But don't go near that man, darling; tell Mr. Claxton and the old butler, as well as my uncle's man; see what they say,” she cried, breathlessly.

“I cannot bear to leave you, love; will you be brave?”

“I will! I am!” but her voice trembled.

“Sit down and rest; you tremble,” and leading her to the window, he brings her to a cushioned seat, pressing the hand on his arm to his side, whispering,

“Be brave, darling; remember your poor uncle was not happy, so he is spared much. Come down when you feel calm enough to face Mrs. Grundy.”

He is gone and bounds down one hundred and seventy−five steps between his heaven and a lower sphere.

Vaura throws herself face downwards, making every effort to meet the inevitable with calmness.

“I'll read off their movements, Miss Vernon,” said wee Blanche, “and so keep you from going to sleep. Melty enters with furs, Mrs. Haughton stands as you saw, her red robes thrown off, the D—−rose laughingly assists the maiden fastening a dark travelling robe, evidently in haste, consulting his watch; points to the table, showing his teeth, meaning he is laughing; he, I expect, gives the feast as a reason of their delay; and he's about right, for thereon stand long−necked bottles and dishes. Melty leaves the room; he tells Mrs. Haughton something that astonishes and pleases her, for she gives him a hug; goes to a side−table puts yellow money, cannot tell the coin from here, in a sort of pattern. “Can you see what it means, Tilton, my eyes are tired,” and the pink eyes are rubbed red. “No, I cannot decipher the words. Yes, the last is, 'cousin;' stay, I've got another, 'my,' that's all I can make out, the other words are in the shadow.””

“What does it mean? 'my cousin,'“ said the young detective; “oh! I have it, he said he was going to marry a cousin. I thought he romanced when be said so, but I suppose they are the cousins. Well, pity to spoil two houses with them say I, but they are off. Both hug Melty, Mrs. Haughton waves hand in the direction of the dollar. By−by, step−momma. By the shade of Lincoln, how Melty claps her hands in glee on seeing her wages in gold; she hastily pockets; one or two pieces roll to the floor. Ellen, the cook, enters, lamp in hand, unsteady of gait; Melty stoops to conquer the gold, picks up a shower− stick to get it from a corner, knocks with one end the lamp out of the shaky hand of the maid.”

“Jove, what a blaze!” exclaimed Everly, who had been alternately flattening his nasal organ against the window pane, or gazing around at Vaura, who, at his last words, starts to a sitting posture, and says, controlling herself to speak calmly:—”

“I am going down stairs at once; what a terrific blaze. Are you coming, Blanche, or Sir Tilton?”

“Yes, yes; come, Blanche.”

“I wonder what is known by the guests and household, and if Sir Lionel has had them pursued?” cried Vaura

brokenly, as they rapidly descend the stairs.

“Some of the men In the house guessed what Delrose's game was,” said Everly, “and we thought the only women in the secret were Mrs. Meltonbury and Mason, the maid, but Blanche seems to have been aware of their plot.”

“I am surprised at you, Blanche, seeming to be *au fait* in the matter, and keeping it secret; but I forget, you thought it best they should fly.”

“Yes, it was for the best, Miss Vernon, and the small white mouse can keep dark when she chooses; the tongues of the other women were bought,” she said cunningly.

“Yes, tied by a gold bit. Sir Tilton, you are tied to a born detective, said Vaura.

“He is,” says the wee creature laconically.

Here they meet Trevalyon, out of breath and racing up for Vaura.

“How do you feel now, darling?” he says pantingly.

“Rest a minute, Lion, you are out of breath; Sir Tilton, kindly open that casement.”

“There is no way of opening this one; bad fix. Trevalyon is very short of breath.”

“Unloose his collar,” she said hastily, and taking a diamond solitaire off her finger, handing it to Everly, said quickly, “cut the pane.”

Trevalyon had sank on to a step; Vaura drew his head to her knee while Blanche held her vinaigrette to his nose; in a minute or two his breathing came naturally and he said:

“Too bad to have frightened you, darling, and you too Lady Everly, but really, it was scarcely my fault,” with a half smile, “you must blame the stairs, they seemed all at once to become too cramped and stifling. Ah! I thank you Everly, that air is refreshing; I am quite myself again,” and he would have stood up.

“No, no; rest a minute,” said Vaura gently.

“Yes, sit still; you are our patient, and all the patience we have till we hear from you all about Melty's fire−works,” said Blanche eagerly.

“Rather Lucifer's bonfire over the old Adam in that woman,” said Vaura, contemptuously.

“Clayton was dreadfully shocked when I told him, and we decided not to name their flight until to−morrow; he and I, with my man and the butler (trump of an old fellow he is), fairly ran to Rose Cottage and succeeded in getting out, unharmed, Mrs. Meltonbury and a maid; we sent my man to the village to hurry up the firemen, and then I flew back to you, dearest, knowing you would be anxious as to your uncle. I left him looking more like himself than I have seen him for years, quietly talking to Lady Esmondet and Mrs. Claxton; in my haste to be with you I out−ran breath and then had to wait her pleasure to catch up to me. No fear of the revellers suspecting anything; the ball is at its height and the hells were not rung. They took the midnight express through to Liverpool; thence they sail to New York.”

“Did you compel Melty to own up to that much?” said the little detective, her tiny, white race full of interest.

“We did; and pursuit would he useless.”

“When a Haughton weds and is dishonoured, divorce, not pursuit, will lie his action,” said Vaura, her beautiful head erect; and now for our revenge, a sweeter strain than that of grief; we shall descend and so cover their retreat by our sparkling wit, and gay smiles, that they shall not be missed.”

“Mrs. Haughton would get left anyway,” said Blanche; “for the crowd all want to stare at you.”

“Flashes of light and warm tints in a golden summer sky versus evening in her red robes sinking to the west,” said Trevalyon, pressing Vaura to his side as they follow their companions.

“One for you, Sir Lionel,” cried *la petite* looking over her shoulder.

And Lionel bends his handsome head down to the fair woman whose face is unturned to his. He says, whisperingly, while his face is illumined with happiness.

“A few days, beloved, and then we shall lead, till I weary my wife with the intensity of my love, the life of the lotus−eaters.”

“Yes, my own tired love, yes; our home, until our world bids us forth, shall be a very 'castle of indolence,' 'a pleasing land of drowsy head, 'twill be of dreams that wave before our half−closed eyes, and of gay castles in the clouds that *pass* forever flashing round our summer sky.'“

And the large dark eyes are full of love's warm light, as the ayren voice dies away to a murmur.

THE END.