COLONEL DACRE.

VOL. II.

COLONEL DACRE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"CASTE," "MY SON'S WIFE," "PEARL,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BOOK IV

DRIFTING.

COLONEL DACRE.

CHAPTER I.

"IS IT WISE?"

"You're a right woman, sister, you have pity,
But want the understanding where to use it!"

"WALTER, what do you mean? Is it wise? is it right? Do you know what you are doing?"

These questions had been asking themselves so constantly in Olivia's heart, during the last few weeks, that at last they forced themselves into words. She had come noiselessly into the library, and noiselessly close up to her brother's side, as

he stood looking out of one of the windows. Clasping his arm with both her hands, resting her cheek against his shoulder (this old Olivia had strangely youthful ways with those she loved), she asked those questions in a little, almost breathless, gust of passion. Her eyes could see what he saw, and what she saw provoked her to speech.

Colonel Dacre—who, just now, was, politically, a good deal occupied, trying to secure the return, as one of the county-members, of a friend—had just come back from Monkstowe. No one had known that he was yet back, Olivia had come upon him by accident. What he was studying was the group upon the lawn. Fair Alice, in her white morning dress, was the chief light of the picture. An Ophelia-like figure. Her hands, with her work in them, had dropped upon her knee; her head was a little raised, the expression of her face was of intent listen-

ing, while her eyes gazed straight before her out into the evening sky. Daylight was just beginning to fail, and the fairness of that rapt young face seemed both to attract and to reflect the soft fading light, as a white flower might do. Julian, lying on the ground near her, was reading aloud; now and then he glanced up at her. Grace was with them, a little in the back-ground. She had been sketching, and now paused in her occupation of putting away her brushes and colours to attend to the last lines Julian would be able to see to read.

Colonel Dacre knew what the book was; he had read it, and he had left Julian reading it three hours ago when he had started. It was "Mirèio"—that simple, lovely, and most pathetic Provençal love-poem. Julian had so thoroughly and appreciatively studied it in the original that he was able to

give a fluent and graceful English rendering of it.

At Olivia's touch, at Olivia's questions, Colonel Dacre had not started, neither had he stirred, except to put his hand on his sister's. Now, when Julian closed his book, and, evidently, spoke about it to Alice, Colonel Dacre said,

"I won't affect not to understand what you mean, my good sister. As to wise—there are different kinds of wisdom. As to right—yes, I do think that what I am doing is right. I think, too, that I know quite well, very clearly, what it is that I am doing." His face had a curious grim mixture of mirth and melancholy as he spoke the last words.

"If she were already your wife you would not act in this way?" whispered Olivia.

"Good Heavens, no!" was answered with suppressed energy. "But," he then went

on to say, very quietly, "from no mistrust, no doubt of either my wife's or my friend's honour and loyalty, but from fear of imperilling their peace and happiness."

"Is there not now reason for the same fear?" Olivia still spoke in a whisper.

"No, Olivia, because no harm now done need be irreparable."

"Brother, I don't understand you. Don't speak riddles to me; tell me plainly what you mean, what you are thinking, what you are intending?"

"It is hardly here, and now, that we can speak of such things."

"To me you have no need to do more than hint them. I shall be quick to catch the sense of what you say."

"For one thing, then, Olivia, I do not mean to make that fair child my wife while she only thinks she loves me, as girls love their lovers, because she does not know

what love is, and is ignorant of almost all the world of other men. I think to do so would be mean and wrong. I intend that she should know and choose. I believe that I would give Alice to Julian—perhaps it is more straightforward to say that I believe I shall give Alice to Julian, without insurmountable anguish, when I am certain that Julian can, as is so natural, make Alice more happy than I could make her."

"Julian make Alice more happy than you could make her! Julian be anything to Alice when weighed against you, Walter! Oh! it is not for Alice that I have any fear, but I do think that you are ungenerously and unjustly, in order to satisfy your own morbid scruples, endangering young Julian's happiness!"

To this, spoken in a tone of profound conviction, Colonel Dacre only answered with a smile.

"You don't believe me," Olivia persisted —"no matter; time will show. But, Walter, how comes it that, all at once, you are giving yourself up to the possession of sad and wild thoughts and fancies?"

"There is no wildness in the thoughts and fancies that have grown upon me gradually, Olivia; if there is sadness, well, sadness is not at all times in itself an evil."

"Not for the young and careless; but you, brother—you surely have had your share of shadow and sadness, and should now know something of sweetness and sunshine."

"If such is God's will, so it will be," was said by Colonel Dacre, in a profoundly reverential manner.

"And it surely must be His will," broke from impetuous Olivia. "Indeed, I have no fear as regards my Alice. Her love for you, having grown with her growth, and

strengthened with her strength, is too deeply ingrained, too completely part of herself, to be lightly shaken."

"I don't doubt, thank God, but that Alice will always love me. But with what kind of love? There is love and love, Olivia. From the first day they met, even before they met, when I knew they were just going to meet, I felt sure that Alice and Julian must love each other. My hope was that unrestrained familiar intercourse, as between brother and sister, might cause the love between them to be such as is between brother and sister. This hope may yet be realised. I don't say it will not be. We shall see. To one thing I cannot be blind, that, under Julian's influence, Alice is blossoming out as a flower-bud blossoms into a flower in genial sunshine. You and I, Olivia, have been too old for her, in danger of letting her too soon forget and

lay aside all youthful light-heartedness."

Colonel Dacre spoke with a measured quietness, through which even Olivia could hardly detect the intensity of his consciousness of the difference to him implied by the coming true of this or of that almost coldly spoken of contingency. In just the same tone he went on:

"I cannot imagine that I could endure to contemplate the surrender of Alice to any other man than Julian. To Julian I can imagine myself not only able to surrender her, but unable not to do it, should I be convinced that it is for the happiness of both. I believe Julian to be as completely *sans tache* as is the child herself."

Miss Dacre was awed by his quietness. It made all exclamation, contradiction, remonstrance seem foolish and futile. The feeling came over her that her brother would be inexorable and inflexible, deaf to

all pleading of hers for himself; that what was to be would be, and she had only just to stand passive, and see Providence work out its work in the lives around her.

Hiding her eyes a moment on the shoulder of this beloved brother, she sighed out a silent prayer for his happiness. When she lifted her head again, she expressed a dreamy sort of wonder whether about this young Julian there was not some bewitchment, something which fooled them all into loving and valuing him far beyond his real worth. She could not understand how she had been able to take so calmly even a hint that her Alice could ever be the wife of any man but her brother, for whom, it now seemed to her, she had reared and nurtured Alice from the beginning.

Meanwhile, the group upon the lawn was moving. Grace, assisted by Julian,

towards whom, since his accident, she was less ungracious, had finished putting together her sketching properties; Alice had folded up her bit of embroidery, and they were all coming towards the house. Dinner was to be late to-day, because Colonel Dacre had expected to be detained late, but it was getting towards dinner-time now. Alice, suddenly aware of Colonel Dacre's presence at the window—there was just light enough left to show her his face there—smiled such a lovely complete sort of smile of welcome as seemed to him to illumine all the space between them, and as made Olivia say, in low-toned triumph,

"Does Alice, God bless her, smile in that way for anyone but you, Walter?"

The brother and sister passed out on to the terrace to meet the home-coming group. Colonel Dacre lifted Alice's face

between his hands and kissed it, a rare demonstration, saying, as he did so,

"Bless you for that smile of welcome, you sweet good child!"

CHAPTER II.

A HAPPY AFTERNOON.

"O Lieb, O Liebe!
So golden schön
Wie Morgenwolken
Auf jener Höhn!

Wie herrlich leuchtet
Mir die Natur!
Wie glänzt die Sonne!
Wie lacht die Flur!"

ON the same day on which Miss Dacre and her brother had had that little talk, by the post that came in at dinner-time Julian got a letter from Mrs. Burmander. It was now past the middle of September. Julian was just beginning to

dispense with the sling in which he had so long worn his arm, but the arm was as yet weak and stiff, and Alice was still his amanuensis. The weeks had flown with Julian since he came to Heatherstone—he had "never in his life anywhere been so happy," as he frankly stated to anyone who cared to hear him.

Now Mrs. Burmander wrote to say that she and the General were coming back to Greythorpe immediately. The accounts Julian had received from them had been far more consistently good than he had expected. The General had some reason to triumph in the complete success of his scheme. His Marian had experienced a wonderful respite from suffering. But now the weather would soon be growing unsettled, and the General wished to bring his invalid home to Greythorpe for a rest, while they held consultation where they

should winter. The light went back out of Julian's tell-tale young face as he read of this immediate return. He himself was surprised and shocked to recognize how the prospect of leaving Heatherstone darkened the other prospect of seeing Mrs. Burmander and the General again. He remained pre-occupied with self-reproachful self-questioning for some minutes after he had read the letter; and during those minutes he was watched, though he did not know it, both by Olivia and by Colonel Dacre.

When he had roused himself, and had quite frankly expressed his regret, mingled with pleasure, Colonel Dacre said,

"Even if you feel obliged to leave us at once, Julian—and I don't see why you should, for, evidently, they can get on well without you—you might still, while you cannot use your own hand, be driven over

every day for your morning's work with your little secretary."

"You are quite too good to me," Julian answered, gravely. "But I feel as if I had already overtaxed Alice's time—I won't say her patience, for I fancy that is inexhaustible."

Just then no more was said on the subject.

Colonel Dacre was missing for a couple of hours in the later part of the evening. He returned just as they were all beginning to think of going to bed, and told them he had ridden over to Greythorpe.

"I thought I should like to make sure that the servants there were ready for their master and mistress. Knowing the General as I do, I was not much surprised to find that he and his wife had already arrived; fortunately, everything was comfortably prepared."

At this news Julian was heartily vexed.

"I ought to have been there to receive them."

"I explained that you only this evening had Mrs. Burmander's letter. The poor old General was quite angry with me because I could not honestly say that I thought his wife looked stouter and stronger. She is anxious to see you, Alice, so I promised that Julian would drive you, or rather that you would drive Julian, over to-morrow afternoon. Julian is to remain with us, however, for a few more days at least. The General, having had everything his own way, does not seem anxious to be under his tyranny again immediately."

The next morning was wet. Olivia prophesied a thorough wet day. But by eleven o'clock it began to clear, and after lunch the weather was perfect, fresh and

jubilant, clear-shining after rain; the dust was laid on the road, and washed from grass and tree; it was just an exquisite phase of that exquisite time of the English year —September.

"And what are you going to do, Lonel?" Alice asked, as Colonel Dacre, settling her in the pretty pony-carriage, expressed his pleasure in the loveliness of the afternoon for their drive in a true-ringing voice that had nothing in it to trouble the sunshine of the sunny time. Alice was looking very happy, but the words were not without wistfulness.

"Work, Alice," he answered, cheerily. "I am a slave till this election is over. I must work in the spirit of those words of the old Greek, which some one has translated—

'Work as though work alone thine end could gain,
But pray to Heaven as though all work were vain!'"

"A capital motto for any of us for our life-work!" said Julian, as he seated himself beside his fair charioteer, with a very life-enjoying expression of face.

Colonel Dacre looked the harness over, as was his habit, then gave the word for their start. He watched them out of sight. Alice did not forget to turn round and wave her hand to him just before the last corner was turned.

It seemed to Alice to-day as if her ponies trotted along full of joy in their work and of love for it. She never once needed to take her whip from its socket.

The road lay chiefly along hill-top lanes, with wide margins of moorland turf, dotted with great grey boulders and with scraggy hawthorns, and adorned with a profusion of hare-bells, of blooming thyme, and other hardy upland wild-flowers. Once the road crossed the open moor,

where the air seemed most vivid life, and the marvellously mellow sunshine a thing of which one desired to preserve the remembrance against dark days to come—that, knowing such brightness and beauty had been, one might believe it would be again.

And here Alice had a little fright. The air seemed to intoxicate her steeds, and their pace became faster than Julian, responsible for Alice's safety, thought safe. Alice could not, for the moment, control them when Julian told her to pull them in; her fright was lest in his anxiety to help her he should injure his still weak arm; but a pull of his vigorous left arm brought the ponies immediately to their senses.

Once the road dipped into a shallow, musical hollow, through which ran a fern-fringed, forget-me-not bordered stream. Julian, when he got out to walk up the

ascent out of this hollow, gathered a handful of the flowers. He did not offer them to Alice, but, somehow, something his eyes said, happening to meet hers as he laid them on the seat of the carriage, quickened the beating of Alice's heart.

Julian, this afternoon, was sunny as the sunshine itself. His manner to Alice was unconsciously caressing, his eyes were full to overflowing of unspeakable tenderness; and yet not one word that could, by any possibility, have been perverted into love-making or flirtation, was spoken by him to Alice. Therefore there was nothing to put her on her guard, as there was nothing to startle Julian's own conscience, honour, and loyalty.

There were seldom any dangerous silences when Alice and Julian were together. This afternoon he talked almost continuously—talked of things in which he was most

interested, and which she found intensely interesting, and Alice, listening, basked in the sense of the sweetness, the pleasantness, the goodness of life, and did not know, was unwarned by any suspicion, that the sweetest sweetness of the soft sunny air,—scented with brown sun-burnt late honeysuckles, with wild clematis, and the aromatic fresh-mown aftermath,—came to her from no outward inanimate thing,—from no definite saying or doing of any kind, but just from something touched and stirred in her own heart.

It is difficult in this generation to believe in such ignorant innocence and simplicity as Alice's, but her education, it must be remembered, had been peculiar, and the very fact that she loved and was loved by Colonel Dacre sealed her eyes.

When they reached Greythorpe, Alice gave a little unconscious sigh; she looked

lovingly round before she passed in-doors, and said,

"How wonderfully beautiful the light over everything is! It is an exquisite, a delicious afternoon."

Julian did not trust himself to answer her, having some vague notion that he might say something a little warmer than he had any right to say. They spent two or three peaceful pleasant hours with Mrs. Burmander, and then came the evening drive home again.

Mrs. Burmander detained Alice a moment after Julian had left the room, to see that the carriage was ready. Holding both Alice's hands, and looking very earnestly into her face, Mrs. Burmander asked,

"Is all truly well, my child?"

The perfect unconsciousness of Alice's questioning eyes almost, but not quite,

deterred her from saying anything further.

"When I saw your dear Colonel last evening, I did not think he seemed so cheerful as he used to be. Nor did I think him looking well. Is all really well, dear child?"

"I hope so," Alice answered earnestly. "I had not noticed that there was any difference in Lonel—that he was not looking well."

Then those words she had spoken, "I had not noticed," seeming to reproach her with culpable indifference, with selfish preoccupation, with she did not know what, she blushed suddenly, overpoweringly, and her eyes filled with tears.

To hide her blushes and her tears she stooped to kiss Mrs. Burmander, who said,

"You will forgive this freedom from

a dying woman, dear. Your Colonel is one who would sacrifice everything that is his to his friend. I feared lest, perhaps, this writing for my boy, and all the kindness shown to him, of which I have heard, might, possibly, have taken you too much away from one whose very life you are."

"Perhaps it has," said Alice candidly. "A thousand thanks for your words. Yet," she added, "when I come to think, it is Lonel who has been so occupied, so much away. I think, too, he over-tires himself—about Sir John Lister's election, you know."

"It is just like Walter Dacre to spend himself without sparing, when the reward is to be reaped by some one else. It is time he had a loving little wife to take care of him, Alice. He is not of the strongest now, he has gone through too much. God guide and guard you, child!"

At the solemnity with which these last words were spoken all colour fled from Alice's cheeks and lips.

Alice went bewildered away; bewildered by her own changed sensations. It had been such a happy afternoon, and now the strangest re-action set in. All had seemed so good, and now all, and especially she herself, seemed so different from good. Her heart felt heavy, a melancholy languor overpowered her.

What could it mean?

The one thing she was distinctly conscious of was, a longing to see her Lonel, to see if she could find any change in him, to put her arms around him, tacitly to ask his pardon for her unconscious fault. She stood in the late sunshine on the door-step, drawing on her gloves in a sort of dull dream. And this mood continued even after they were in motion. When Julian

spoke his voice seemed to come from far off.

"I'm afraid you're very tired, Alice," Julian said, noticing the great change in her, the pale stillness and grave silence.

"I don't think I can be tired. What have I had to tire me?" was Alice's absently spoken answer. She was looking straight out in front of her, with a hopeless expression on her face. Not that she was feeling hopeless, she was simply bewildered. And yet her face took upon it that hopeless look!

"Something is the matter," Julian urged with tender concern. "I don't know if you are tired or not, but something is the matter."

She did not turn her head, and therefore did not meet his eyes. Her answer was true and simple.

"Yes. I feel that something is the mat-

ter," she said. "I am trying to find out what. As yet I don't think I quite know what it is."

"You are not ill?"

"Oh no, it is nothing of that sort."

"Of what sort, then? This is very mysterious. Such a sudden change! Won't you tell me what you partly know or think is the matter?"

"I will try, if you wish. It began when Mrs. Burmander said to me, just when she was bidding me good-bye, that she did not think Lonel looked well, and did not think he looked cheerful. I think I must feel as I do, because I am so grieved, so ashamed, that my eyes should not have been the first to see any change in him." Alice said no more, because a sudden sob broke her voice.

Julian questioned no more. The grave heaviness of spirit which had lightened

for Alice, since she had spoken, lay upon him. He seemed suddenly to have so much to ponder, that he had only just begun to recognize the presence of something in his mind needing to be thought about, when they drew up at Heatherstone.

Julian's innocence of evil, and his guilelessness, were, though not so complete, more wonderful than Alice's. He had rejoiced to find himself increasing in loving reverence for his friend's lady-love; this had been one of the sources of his happiness in this happy time. He liked to like anything his friend liked, he would love to love what his friend loved, laying this love at his feet.

The humility of his self-judgment, and his exalted estimate of his friend, had alike prevented him from suspecting any rivalry between himself and Colonel Dacre,

and would continue to prevent this, even after a consciousness that all was not as it should be, within his own heart, had been awakened.

CHAPTER III.

"WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"

"Cet homme juste avait un caractère timide en désaccord avec sa forte constitution, mais il ne manquait point de la persistance des hommes du Nord. S'il entrevoyait toutes les difficultés, il se promettait des les vaincre sans se rebuter; et, s'il avait la fermeté d'une vertu vraiment apostolique, il la temperait par les grâces d'une inépuisable indulgence."

ALICE looked anxiously at the windows as they drew up at Heatherstone without seeing anything of Colonel Dacre.

"Lonel must be out," she said.

She did not seem thoroughly convinced of this, however, but was in haste to look

for him. She stepped from the carriage before Julian could help her, as soon as a groom was at the ponies' heads, and flitted out of sight; he did not exactly know where she had gone, he did not attempt to follow her.

She had gone to the library, where, if he was at home, she expected to find Colonel Dacre. He was there, sitting with his back to the glass door, which still stood open—for the evening was warm—and through which she entered the room.

He had been writing; she saw a little pile of letters ready for the post. He was doing nothing just then. His arms were on the table, his head was resting on his hands. He was stooping forwards. It struck Alice that his attitude was one of dejection—that the room looked chill and gloomy, and he solitary and sad. Alice moved softly to his side, she put a

hand upon his arm, and knelt down by his chair.

"You, Alice! Home again already, my darling!" His arm thrown round her gathered her to him, and for a moment he rested his cheek upon her head. "I didn't hear the carriage. The roads are soft after the rain."

But Alice withdrew her head that she might look at him.

"Already!" she echoed. "Why, I have been away a long, long time."

"Did you feel it long, Alice?"

"Not while it was passing—except the drive home."

"And that seemed long? Why?"

"Because I was in a hurry to get home to you."

"Why?" he questioned, not without gentle irony.

"Because Mrs. Burmander said to me

that she thought, when she saw you yesterday, you did not look well, or seem cheerful."

"The fancies of a sick woman," Colonel Dacre interrupted, brusquely, and with a tone of annoyance; for something in Alice's face made him think, "I fear the mischief is done. I fear Mrs. Burmander has, by some word, done what I forbade Olivia to do—has troubled my child's unconscious quiet-heartedness." By-and-by, however, he doubted if any such mischief had been done.

Alice went on: "When Mrs. Burmander said that, everything seemed to change, and my heart began to ache, and it has ached ever since."

"The dear little heart is too sensitive!"

"If you are not well, and if you are not cheerful, it is I who ought to have been the first to notice it, Lonel. So I began to

reproach myself, and to think that I had been letting other things, and, chief among them all, Julian's book, too much engross me."

There was no added tinge of colour on Alice's face as she said that; it was uplifted, and her eyes met his frankly.

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, my good child," he hastened to assure her. "Has not all you have done for Julian been done at my request? I am sorry poor Mrs. Burmander should have troubled you with her sick fancies. I was tired last evening. My ride to Greythorpe was in addition to my day's work. I should be grieved indeed, Alice, to know that any thought of me ever stands between you and any pleasure and brightness your life would otherwise have. You are very young yet, Alice, while we—Olivia and I—have had our youth."

"What has that to do with anything I have said, Lonel?" The girl's voice had a touch of sharp impatience.

"A great deal, dear, if you only knew," he answered her very gently.

Alice was wistfully studying his face, straining her eyes to make out its expression. It was in shadow, while hers caught the spiritual sort of light caused by the mingling of moonlight with the end of daylight. After some moments of silence, during which things she did not know she had noticed were remembered by Alice, and thoughts of the germs of which she had been unconscious sprang suddenly full-grown to life, she said, very timidly and plaintively,

"Lonel, it seems to me that you have changed a little towards me lately. Why is it, Lonel? Is it only that you are so busy? Or is there any other reason? Is there

something that you are not quite pleased with me about?"

"I can answer you at once, Alice—that there is nothing I am not quite pleased, and more than pleased, with you about. But tell me, dear, how am I changed? What do you mean?"

She did not immediately answer. She pondered a few moments. Then she touched his hand with her lips before she said,

"It is as if you had left off wanting to have me always with you. Or as if you were trying to teach me to do without you."

"You are fanciful this evening, little Alice. Mrs. Burmander has infected you. I must not let you go to her again. You know, dear, how busy I have been during the last weeks, and not about anything with which I could associate you. Would

you have had me take you with me to the Town-Hall at Monkestowe, for instance, Alice? I like, as you know, to go thoroughly and heartily into anything I undertake. Electioneering certainly cannot be done by halves! And so you are jealous of poor Sir John?"

He took her face between his two hands, and smiled into her eyes—eyes so deeply blue, and so darkly shaded, that they often looked black. No smile of hers answered his; he saw she was not deceived, therefore not satisfied. He went on:

"Is not the fact of my being so busy, joined to the other fact that I could be sure you were pleased and interested even when I was not with you, enough reason why I should lately have been less exacting?"

"Exacting!" she echoed. Then she asked, in rather a forlorn little voice, "Do

you want me to be pleased and interested without you, Lonel ?"

"How can I frame my answer to such a question ?" he replied, trying to speak as if he were in jest. But the next moment he added, gravely, and the full deep tone of his rich voice so thrilled Alice that she shivered, "I want—I hope I want—first and chiefly, whatever shall be for my Alice's most true and most lasting happiness."

Alice drooped her head and was silent. She was perplexed. She had a feeling as if she needed to say, and to ask, things too delicately difficult to be put into words; so she took refuge in silence.

Colonel Dacre, too, was, for a few moments, silent, gently smoothing the golden hair she had ruffled when she pulled off her hat. Then, in a cheery voice, he began,

"Now, Alice, I am waiting to hear all

about it. You must have a great deal to tell me—of Mrs. Burmander's travels, for instance."

"You saw her yourself yesterday, Lonel," was Alice's languid answer.

"But I was with her only a very short time, and she was tired. The drive must have been very pleasant this afternoon, Alice. Was it otherwise an altogether happy afternoon?" he questioned, trying to rouse her to talk on trivial matters.

"The drive was very pleasant, and it was, otherwise, an altogether happy afternoon—except for what I have told you, which spoiled the coming home."

As she spoke she lifted up her face, and he fancied he saw some of the brightness of "the altogether happy afternoon" come back into it. Then she asked,

"And you, Lonel—have you not been out at all?"

"No, I have not been out at all." He tenderly mimicked her compassionate tone. "But there is no need to look so pitifully at me on that account, dear. At my time of life, Alice, one's chief happiness, save in very exceptional cases, must come from work. It is you young things who should have plenty of play in the sunshine and fresh air."

Alice was not quick enough to find anything to take hold of—to ask an explanation of—in these words; but she felt dumbly and blindly smitten and bewildered by them. It seemed to her that Colonel Dacre spoke as if—as if it could only be in some dream of hers that he had asked her, little Alice Fairfax, to be his wife.

Her thoughts lagged behind as he went on talking—telling her about the prospects of his friend, Sir John, at the coming

election. When, springing over a gap, they came up with him, he was no longer speaking of Sir John, or of the election, but of Julian.

"We shall miss him very much when he leaves us, Alice, which will, I suppose, be in two or three days. Perhaps, however, you, dear, won't be sorry to be released from your secretaryship? You are, perhaps, growing a little tired of such close work?"

"Oh! no, indeed. It is very pleasant to me to feel of use; and, besides that, I am so very much interested in the book."

"Very pleasant to you to feel of use, and especially pleasant to feel of use to Julian. Anyone would feel that. There is such a charm about him. And, Alice, I believe him to be as true and as noble as he is sweet and gracious. I love him so dearly, Alice, and, I believe, so justly, that

I don't think there is anything that is mine I would not sacrifice for his true happiness."

Alice said nothing, not knowing what to say, though he seemed to pause for her answer.

"If it should ever come to a question of sacrifice between us, Alice," he went on, after that moment's pause, "it stands to reason that it should not be he, but I, should make the sacrifice. And then my credit in making would be less than his in willing, as I know he would will, to make it."

"I don't understand you, Lonel."

"Think how young he is, therefore how much he would give up if he gave up anything; while I—but we won't speak of that. Then Julian is so organized as to feel everything intensely, while I—of course the wear and tear of life have taken

the fine edge off my sensibilities. Julian ought to be happy. The good things of life ought to be heaped up for him. He ought to be very happy."

Alice had a consciousness of intense melancholy in Colonel Dacre's heart, in spite of the effort at cheeriness in his manner. She said timidly,

"Lonel, you are not happy! Something is troubling you."

Then, as he did not answer, she changed her tone to one of question, "Are you happy, Lonel?"

"My child, how can I be otherwise, while you love me; or even without your love, if I knew you happy?"

"While I love you!" echoed Alice. "You speak as if a time could come when I should not love you! Have I not grown up in the love of you? Can I be Alice, and not your Alice? Can I be your Alice and not love you?"

Alice's voice was agitated; her words, spoken with soft passionateness, poured balm and healing into his breast; and yet he answered them, as he had answered Olivia.

"My child, I believe you will always love me; but, Alice, there is love—and love."

When he had spoken that short sentence, he would have given a good deal to be able to recall it. It was spoken too soon; even if it ever should be spoken, this was not the time.

Alice showed wounded wonder. Her colour deepened, her eyes filled, her lips parted as if to speak. Then she drooped her head meditatively, and turned very pale.

"I have done it now," thought Colonel Dacre, "what I would not let anyone else do."

But in this thought he was mistaken.

His words had not raised the images, or made the impression, he believed they had. At that moment the first dinner-bell rang.

Alice, always dutiful, rose mechanically in obedience to its summons, to go to her dressing-room. As she was moving slowly from his side, he felt he could not let her go—at that moment—in this way.

"Alice," he said, just as she reached the door.

The word was a cry, and his arms were outstretched. She turned, went back to him, was taken into those arms. He could feel that she was, as he was, greatly agitated. He had never before, in all their quiet intercourse, allowed himself to flutter her by his own loss of self-restraint. And now she was half-frightened, painfully and deeply shaken.

How could she guess, she could not

guess, that there was something of the despair and anguish of farewell in that unwonted passionateness with which he strained her to his breast.

"It is not, then, that he does not love me as he used to do," thought Alice. "What is it, then? What can it mean?"

"Forgive me, Alice," he said, as he released her.

"For what?"

"Forgive me if I have said anything that has pained you, anything that has sounded like reproach."

"I don't understand you to-day, Lonel. But I know, for certain, I have nothing to forgive. If you have said anything that has sounded like reproach, it can only have been because I most deeply deserved it."

"It is not so, Alice. You have deserved not a shadow of reproach. Just one

thing I would say, Alice—remember, child, in anything that may happen, that it is not, and never can be, in your power to do anything for my happiness that is not also for your own. Perhaps you do not now understand me, but you will when the time for action comes. Then remember what I have said, and dismiss from your mind any idea of self-sacrifice for my good, if at any time any such idea should arise. It would be worse than futile, any such self-sacrifice; it would defeat its own object, and bring about two-fold, three-fold misery."

"When you have time, Lonel, please speak to me again, and explain more fully what you mean."

Alice's tone was humble; but it was, also, soothing and tender.

"What I mean is so simple, Alice. I want you to be happy; to be happy," he repeated. "That is all my meaning."

"Then you, my Lonel, must be happy," she answered him, gravely, with a slight but quite perceptible accent on the "my." And then she left him, amazed!

It was a full-grown woman, no child, no mere girl, or so it seemed to him, who had spoken those last words. It seemed to him that Alice's face had had something angelic in its expression as she said them. Dare he take home their suggestion of infinite joy?

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE RIVER.

"What's this? what's this? Is this her fault or mine?
The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most?
Ha!
Not she; nor doth she tempt."

THAT same evening, before dinner was over, Tom Blatchford, like a fresh wholesome west wind sweeping through a previously somewhat sultry atmosphere, broke in upon Heatherstone.

Grace was the only person whom his appearance did not take by surprise. She was quietly triumphant in the knowledge that he had not been able to endure more

than three months of the self-banishment which was to have been so indefinitely prolonged. She and Tom had met in the grounds the day before, and there had been a reconciliation. But she had kept her secret; even though the reconciliation had been so complete that she had given Tom her promise to marry him soon, "if he would be good." Tom was in gloriously high spirits. He was looking robustly handsome, and Grace felt very proud of him; nevertheless she could not help treating him in as repressive a style as if she had taken for her model, the "Scornful Lady," who says,

"Believe me, if my wedding-smock were on;
Were the gloves bought and given, the licence come;
Were the rosemary branches dipp'd, and all
The hippocras and cakes eat and drank of;
Were these two arms encompass'd with the hands
Of bachelors, to lead me to the church;
Were my feet in the door; were 'I John' said;
If John should boast a favour done by me,
I would not wed that year."

This was not the first meeting, as we know, of the two young men; but they had hardly been brought into anything like close quarters, one with the other, before. Mr. Blatchford, after contemplating Julian, from a respectful distance, something as a rough Newfoundland might a thorough-bred deer-hound, "took to" him with hearty enthusiasm, while Julian cordially liked and admired Tom.

Mr. Blatchford's one idea that first evening seemed to be "to stir them up" at Heatherstone—to arrange for pic-nics on the hills, or in the woods, excursions up the river, rides, drives, or walks, anything for movement and out-door life. The fine weather could not be expected to last more than another week or two at the most, he said; he said that Grace looked moped, that they all did, that the only sensible thing would be to be out all day during the few

fine days that might yet be to be had.

His effect upon them all was very much that of a boisterous, not over-rude, Autumn wind, sweeping out cob-webs, and, for the time, freshening the morbid air of stagnant places.

He would not leave till he had planned, and pledged them all to join in—refusing to excuse either Colonel Dacre or Olivia an excursion to a ruined Abbey some miles up the river. The evening of to-morrow would be the evening of the full moon; so to-morrow they must go, he decided. Some could go by water and some by land; he didn't care which way he went, provided Grace went the same way.

"Her way's to be mine, or mine hers, for the future," he said significantly. And she said, in his ear, quite as significantly,

"If you boast, Master Tom, I will make you pay dearly for your boast."

In the morning it was "Tom's weather," as they all said at breakfast. Not the shadow of a cloud to give the shadow of an excuse for a change of plan. And, indeed, probably they were all glad that the day's routine should be a little different from usual.

Alice had come down that morning looking pale and tired. She had not slept much, but had not found that the night had brought wisdom or counsel. Her disturbance was, as yet, far too vague. Just a sense of present mystery and of approaching difficulty; of her life having suddenly changed from its perfectly peaceful simplicity, and its singleness of interest, to something more complicated and perplexing. Something, somewhere, was going wrong; when she had succeeded in finding what this wrong was she trusted to be permitted to set it right. Poor little

soul! she had too small an experience of life to have any idea of the magnitude of that aspiration.

She had paused in her prayers the evening before, to try to find out how, in them, to touch this trouble; but it had been as if, when she tried to see into the heart of meaning in things, then all her thoughts had folded up, bowed their heads, and hidden their faces; as will the wind-flowers in a southern vineyard when a cold breath from the mountains breathes along their gaudy lines.

After many efforts, with always the same result, she had simply repeated, yet more fervently, her prayers that God would make her good, and Lonel very happy, and so had left the matter.

Everybody that day seemed to find Tom Blatchford's tireless fun and good-humour infectious. It was a merry day—even a

happy day, to them all; even to those who, more or less indistinctly, felt trouble in the air.

Now and then the cloud, and the sense of mysterious evil lying in wait, came down upon Alice, and made her feel timid and nervous. If she were close to Colonel Dacre, and not near Julian, everything seemed comparatively natural and right; but if Julian's look met hers she felt as if under some crippling, intimidating spell, which made her unable to behave with her usual simplicity and directness. Julian, quick to feel the change in her, and fancying, too, that she to-day avoided him, could not hinder his eyes from once or twice, when they encountered hers, expressing something of pained pleading.

Alice found herself wishing for the day when Julian would have left Heatherstone —wondering if, then, things would feel as

they used to feel, and be as they used to be.

Just at sunset, when the river, between the black-green alders of its banks, was a river of rosy gold, and the full moon was sending its mellow, prevenient radiance up the south-eastern sky, they all gathered together on the little landing stage previous to starting for home.

"Who would drive, and who would go by water?" was the question.

Grace preferred to drive; Olivia considered herself too heavy for the boat.

"Which will you do, Alice?" Colonel Dacre questioned.

"Whichever you prefer, Lonel. Whichever you are going to do."

"I suspect you, dear, of preferring the river. Am I right?"

"If you will row me, I should like it very much!"

"Of course I will row you, and I, too, shall like it very much," he echoed, with loving, gleeful mockery.

Miss Dacre and Grace got into the Heatherstone carriage, an ostler from the inn standing by the horses' heads. Mr. Blatchford, intending to drive them, sent off the servants and hampers in his own carriage, which, it seemed to him, would not be wanted. Colonel Dacre settled Alice in the boat, wrapping her soft white shawl round her so as to leave her arms free for steering. Just as he was taking up his oars and hugging, with a secret suppressed rapture, the thought of the beautiful hour alone with Alice which was to be his, his glance fell on Julian. He had meant that Julian should go home on the box of the carriage with Tom. It struck him that Julian's tell-tale young face looked wistfully disconsolate as he gazed on the

boat, the shining river, and the "shining maid."

Immediately Colonel Dacre said,

"Will you come with us, Julian?"

"If I may. But I am only cargo, lumber—no use as crew, you know."

"We will take you, nevertheless," was the hearty answer.

Julian's face had cleared and lightened, and yet his heart reproached him, as it well might, for weak selfishness.

Then, just as they were pushing off—just as the oars dipped into the water—a little commotion arose on the shore. Mr. Blatchford shouted out that the Colonel was wanted to set things right. Colonel Dacre got out of the boat and went to the carriage, to see what was the matter.

"You must drive, Dacre," Tom said, too surly to be ceremonious. "Grace declares that the horses are fresh, the road danger-

ous; that I have had too much champagne to know what I'm about; and, in short, that she won't trust herself to be driven by me. She might have had the sense to say this before I'd sent off the coachman."

"I'd no idea you'd have the want of sense to send him off! I knew nothing about his going," Grace answered, angrily.

"Grace, you must get the better of this folly," Colonel Dacre said, displeasedly. "It is just folly, and nothing else! Blatchford is as steady of eye and hand, and as fit to drive, as I am."

"Dear Uncle Walter, indeed it is not folly, but reasonable precaution. I am quite sure he is not to be trusted. You don't any of you know the mad nonsense he's been talking."

Grace spoke so earnestly, and flushed so warmly, that Colonel Dacre turned grave eyes upon Mr. Blatchford; who, at that

moment, looked coldly calm and haughty.

"Will you change places with Alice, and let Blatchford row you?"

"And upset me into the river, in order to have the satisfaction of pulling me out again? No, certainly not. I wonder you can propose such a thing, Uncle Walter!"

"There would be some fun in that!" muttered Tom, a mischievous quiver appearing about the corners of his mouth.

"This is very vexatious, Grace. Blatchford's carriage is gone too far to be recalled. Julian can neither row nor drive, because of his arm. You will allow Tom to do neither; I suppose, therefore, you require me to do both."

"Uncle, I really am very sorry to disturb everybody's plans in this way, but, if you knew——"

"The only way to settle it," broke in

Tom, "will be to let Jack row Alice and Julian home."

Jack was a lad known to them all, the son of the people who kept the riverside inn. Jack was more at home on the water than on the land, and perfectly to be trusted, as far as skill and steadiness went. Mr. Blatchford had a strong conviction that in making this proposal he was doing as he would be done by—as regarded Julian.

After a little more discussion, after Colonel Dacre had spoken to Alice, and had given some very special cautions to Jack, it was in this way that things were arranged. They were not a happy carriage-full. Colonel Dacre was displeased with Grace, whose conduct he thought more selfish and unreasonable than it really was; he was, also, personally disappointed, and he could not forget a certain frightened and

reproachful appeal in Alice's eyes. Tom was angry and offended, sat nearly silent on the box beside Colonel Dacre, did not once look round at Grace. Grace resented Tom's behaviour, and her uncle's, as she thought, unjust harshness. And Olivia had the troubles of everybody on her heart.

Meanwhile the boat was gliding down the river. Jack rowed, Alice steered, and Julian sat opposite her.

"What a selfish, self-willed young woman Miss Dunn is!" commented Julian. "It is quite a marvel to me to remember how much I admired her a few weeks ago. Of course I still see that she is very handsome, but—I don't envy Mr. Blatchford! I should find it difficult to believe in, still more difficult to have any pleasure in, the love of a lady who treated me as Miss Dunn treats Mr. Blatchford."

"But she really does love him," answered Alice, "and the fault is not always all hers. He is very rough and trying sometimes."

Then silence fell. The evening air was balmily soft and warm and still. The glow of the western sky was in Julian's eyes; Alice faced the rising moon. Alice's hat was on her knee. The slight wind of their going ruffled the little golden cloud on her snow-white forehead. By-and-by the hat slipped to her feet. Julian reverently picked it up.

"Won't you take cold? Hadn't you better put it on?" he asked, bending forward to give it to her.

The glance that encountered his was timid.

"Let it lie beside me, please. The lace blows into my eyes, and I can't see where we are going, when I have it on."

"And you're not afraid of taking cold?"

"Oh no—not on such an evening!"

He was not himself aware of the tone in which he spoke, any more than of the expression of his eyes. The tone was tender and reverent, as if he spoke from the knees of his heart; while his expression would have told her, had she known how to interpret it, that she seemed to him this evening, sitting there against a background of sunset glory, and with the soft effulgence of the mellow moonlight upon her face, the most exquisitely marvellous fair thing the imagination of poet or of painter could conceive.

Julian looked to the right and to the left; he turned and spoke with the boy behind him, but in spite of himself his gaze would come back to Alice, her spell was upon him.

And Alice was so conscious of the intensity of the eyes she tried not to meet, was so frightened at the tumult of her heart which troubled the silence, that it was a relief to her when he broke that silence, saying,

"Would you mind singing a little song I once heard you sing——. Colonel Dacre asked for it, I remember, one evening when we were all on the highest terrace—I don't know its name. It was a quaint little fancy, about a lily and the sun and the moon. I have often wished to hear it once more. Would you mind singing it?"

"I know the song you mean. Oh yes, I will sing it, if I can."

Alice felt much more ready to cry than to sing, especially that song. It had never had any meaning for her till now. Now, as she thought of it, its meaning flashed upon her. But no, that is saying too much;

rather some faint suspicion of what it might mean dawned upon her. The lily, who had all night been looked upon by the moon, who had exchanged fragrant and gentle vows of eternal friendship with her gentle wooer, opens her heart and the golden wealth of her chalice to the warm rays of the morning sun. Something of humility in Julian's way of asking made Alice wish not to refuse.

Alice sang one verse so softly and so tremulously that Julian signed to the boy to cease rowing, the sound of the oars hindering him from catching the low sweetness. This gave Alice an excuse for singing no more.

"We must not stop," she said, "for I know Lonel will be anxious till he sees us home."

"I have often wondered," Julian said, "and often been on the point of asking,

what was the origin of that name of yours for Colonel Dacre. May I know?—will you tell me?"

"It was my nearest approach to Colonel when I couldn't speak plainly. Lonel liked it, and so I have kept to it ever since."

"I can quite believe Lonel liked it," echoed Julian, with some grimness.

"Sometimes I think it sounds rather foolish now," Alice went on; "but it is pleasant to have a name of my own to call him by. 'Walter' or 'brother' is Olivia's name for him. For Grace he is 'uncle,' or 'Uncle Walter.' For me he is Lonel—my Lonel," she added softly.

And she said the words in the tenderly-awed sort of voice in which a devotional nature speaks a sacred name.

"Lonel is a most happy invention, and the owner of the name a most happy man," Julian said with a little unreasonable irri-

tation in his voice, and with a glow of something in his eyes different from anything she had seen in them before.

A confused sense of misery, of anger, and of ecstasy overwhelmed Alice. If it had not been for the presence of the boy, and also, probably, for some restraining instinct, she might have burst into tears, her heart seemed swelling with them, and have cried to Julian, "What is it? What is the meaning of it? Why, all at once, does everything seem wrong and unhappy, and yet more beautiful than ever—intolerably beautiful?"

Hardly knowing what she did, ready to do anything to break the sort of spell upon her, Alice, forgetting all about her steering, stretched over the side of the boat, trying to grasp some water-lilies they were passing by.

"Alice, Alice, for Heaven's sake, take

care!" cried Julian, throwing his weight as much as he could to the other side, and seizing Alice's arm. Just in time. She had all but lost her own balance and overbalanced the boat.

"I am sorry. I beg your pardon," Alice said, penitently. "I had forgotten what kind of boat we were in; and they looked so wonderful in the moonlight."

"You must forgive me my roughness," he answered, looking at the soft white arm he had not yet released, from which her loose light sleeve had slipped back as she had stretched after the lilies. "I'm afraid I've set my mark here."

Hot and strong was Julian's desire to set his lips where his fingers had been. He was miserably conscious of the traitorous guiltiness of that desire.

"We will get some of the lilies for you without danger of upsetting the boat," he

said, as he took his hand from her arm.

"Never mind; it is of no consequence. I think we had better get home."

But the boy had pulled the boat among them. Julian gathered a few of the fairest, shook the water from them, and laid them on Alice's lap.

She did not thank him, but she kept her eyes fastened on the flowers. The next reach of the river they rounded brought them in sight of Heatherstone, set high above them, with its foreground of softest lawns, its background of rich woods, beyond which, over the tree-tops, showed the line of the moor, looking grand and full of glamour in the perfect moonlight.

On the little landing-stage by the boat-house stood Colonel Dacre, awaiting them.

CHAPTER V.

MOONLIGHT.

"Brave spirits are a balsam to themselves;
There is a nobleness of mind that heals
Wounds beyond salves."

"GOOD children!" Colonel Dacre said. "I hardly expected you so soon."

In a moment Alice was beside him, her lilies in one hand, the other in all haste put through his arm.

At once Alice found it easier to breathe; the world was, at once, a more natural, though a less wonderful world; and she felt a sense of right, of rest, of safety.

The boy was bidden, when he had secur-

ed the boat, to come up to the house for his supper. Colonel Dacre gave this order while Julian told him of the narrow escape Alice had had. His arm tightened over Alice's hand, but he did not say anything. He neither scolded Alice, nor praised Julian, but he put his arm round Julian's shoulders. They were all three very silent as they walked up the deep lane and the steep meadows towards the house. But Alice could have talked now, she had lost that painful sense of oppression and of danger.

When they reached the house, Julian at once went in-doors. Colonel Dacre detained Alice, who declared she was not tired, for a turn along the drive and through the shrubberies.

"This is like an Indian moonlight, Alice," he said.

"I sometimes think, Lonel, that you must have been more happy in India than

you are in England. You sometimes speak as if you liked India better than you like England."

"I had more to do there, Alice."

"Sometimes, too, quite lately, you speak as if you thought it possible you might some day go back to India."

"It is possible, Alice."

"Do you mean to take me there?" asked Alice, emboldened to this question by a desperate desire to clear up the mystery that seemed thickening about her.

"Heaven forbid! My ideal of happy home life would certainly be life in England, not Indian life. Nevertheless I am both fond of and proud of my profession, and, if circumstances pointed out to me that that was the best thing to do, I could return to the old life and the old work not without a certain sense of satisfaction."

Colonel Dacre's voice was not quite as

clear as usual. Something either in what he had said, or in the way he had said it, made Alice shiver. I suppose there are not many men who, even when they believe themselves to have "quite determined" upon some course of action, fly straight as an arrow to its mark along that course. Colonel Dacre did not. There were things in his conduct at times that looked irresolute and inconsistent. The nature of man being complex, even when we keep, in the main, along the self-appointed path, we are liable to be drawn aside, now a little in this direction, now in that; we doubt, diverge, and deviate, even though never faltering as to what the goal is we desire to reach ultimately.

"Lonel," Alice said suddenly, after a short silence, "can't you treat me like a grown-up woman yet? Won't you tell me your

thoughts? Can't you trust me, and speak to me plainly?"

"I trust you absolutely, Alice. If there is anyone I don't quite trust, it is myself! I have duties to discharge towards you, dear. My relation to you is not quite an ordinary one. I consider myself to be the earthly guardian of your happiness, Alice. I must take care that it is not sacrificed through youthful error and inexperience, or generous rashness and misplaced heroism on your part; and, on mine, the most consummate egotism and selfishness."

"Keep me always with you, always close to you, Lonel! That is how you can best make me happy. It is then I feel safe and good. Make me of use, of use to you—not to other people, but to you. Don't treat me as something you are afraid to touch lest it should be spoilt. Don't try to do without me, and don't make me do without you!

Why should you always prefer another before yourself, and just because a thing is precious to you want to give it away?"

"My little Alice!" she was sobbing against his arm. "You are over-tired, over-wrought! It was selfish of me to keep you out."

"No, no, no. It is not that! Don't always think it is that sort of thing. Don't treat me like a sick child, that for everything is always to be petted."

"My darling," he said, remonstratingly, for she spoke with growing excitement.

"It is not what you think. At least it is all quite different from what I think that you think. I am beginning to be woman enough to understand you, to begin to understand you, and, Lonel, it is something more than I can bear! Your goodness—your goodness! Oh, Lonel, never let me go, keep me always with you; when I am

with you I feel calm, and happy, and good; when I'm away from you everything comes to feel wrong. Oh, Lonel, hold me tight!"

She clung to him, sobbing and palpitating. The poor white water-lilies, so cool, so fresh, so shining a while ago, were sacrificed between them; they lay unnoticed on the ground at their feet. She clung to him, as if she felt some power, beyond her unaided strength to resist, tugging at her, to pull her from him.

Colonel Dacre, trying to soothe and quiet her, felt a strangely harrowing pathos in her words. Better than she understood herself, he thought he understood her. Being in his way, and, according to his light, a duteous soldier of God, he, presently, when she was calmer, said,

"Alice, my sweet child, I am sure you feel and know that, in some ways, every human being must stand alone, so far as

human aid goes, leaning on God alone. We can none of us pass through life without passing through trials and experiences in which no human help avails. If such an hour has come to you, you will face it bravely! We are all soldiers, and we must not run away to hide our eyes and stop our ears at the approach of battle."

Pushing her hair back from her eyes and forehead with both hands, Alice looked up into Colonel Dacre's nobly grave face. Some kindred nobility in her, some germ of heroism, something beyond mere girlish sweetness, and almost instinctive dutifulness, was smitten into life at that moment.

"Thank you, Lonel," she said, with soft fervour, "I will try with all my might," and she tightly clasped her hands, "not to be a coward, but to be brave—to be brave and to be good when I am away from you, not only when I am with you.

I'm not worthy ever to be with you, not worthy ever to be anything to you, if I can't be this."

"That is my brave girl!" he exclaimed. "You are all that is sweet and pure and true. You only needed to be brave to be perfect!" After some moments' meditation he added, "But there may be mistaken bravery, Alice, as I said just now, misplaced heroism. God guard you and guide you! I want you to feel free to come to me at any time and tell me anything. Most of all I want you to know that it is out of the nature of my love for you to accept sacrifice from you. You can only love me for my happiness if you can love me for your own. If there is any one thing in this world about which I feel 'I could not bear it,' it would be to have to know that I had come between you and a more complete and more natural sort of happiness. I don't

know that you understand me, Alice—I much doubt if you do—but remember what I say, and if the time comes, when the time comes, that you need to understand my words, the understanding of them will come to you."

She was looking at him and listening to him with an intentness that was devout. She was not sure enough of her own comprehension of what he meant, to make him any answer, till she had thought about it a good deal. He did not wish her to make him any answer, or to think about what he had spoken, just at that time, and he hastened to add,

"Now, darling, run through the library, and that way escape to your own room. I should like those dear eyes to be bathed, and that tangled silk smoothed, before anyone else sees you."

"How good you are!—how good you

are!" she murmured, laying her cheek against his breast. "If you don't mind, I don't think I will come down again this evening."

"Better not, perhaps. I will say you are tired, which I'm sure you must be." He took her to the library-window, and then she went in and up to her own room.

Colonel Dacre did not enter the house immediately.

"Am I wise? Am I foolish? Should I say more? Should I say less? How will it end?" he questioned; then, after a long pause, "God grant it end for the best —for her!"

He felt sure that, more or less consciously to herself, a struggle was beginning in Alice's heart. Just as had she been already his wife he would have felt it his duty, in all ways, to shield her from temptation, he now felt it his duty to let

her be tempted. He had no right, he told himself, to make Alice his wife while she was as ignorant as a child of the kind of influence that might be brought to bear upon her in intercourse with a man like Julian, near her own age, and gifted richly with all those gifts and graces which commend such a man to women.

He was prepared to give up Alice, for her own happiness, and to one whom he loved so well and thought so worthy of her as Julian. He did not attempt to realize what it would be to do it; it was enough for him to know, as he did know, that, once thoroughly convinced of its being for her good, he would not be able not to do it.

But he had not yet, by any means, come to be sure that he should have to do it. It was possible that Alice would not be given up—that the devotion, duty, and reverent

affection for him in which she had grown up might be a stronger thing than any love Julian could wake in her. It was possible—he could quite fancy it of Alice—that she would not be able to find happiness in any love that did not go hand in hand with what she held to be duty.

Colonel Dacre valued courage, even in a woman, and he believed he had seen signs of that high kind of courageous determination to go beyond duty, which is heroism, lying dormant in Alice's nature, ready on occasion to spring into life. She was, too, he judged, a creature of so constant a nature that any such new thing as love for Julian might prove feeble to prevail against the deeply-rooted, beautiful devotion of all her young life.

What, then, of Julian? If he, Colonel Dacre, were to bear off the priceless palm of the devoted love of this peerless little lady,

was Julian's length of fervid years to be sacrificed to his few? Well, but, for Julian, surely the world held other women; no other Alice, but fair, pure, sweet, true, loving women.

Olivia thought her brother looked bowed down and worn that evening. It was a silent supper-party. Tom Blatchford had gone home after a stormy scene with Grace. Julian's thoughts hovered about the absent Alice.

"The child is tired, and will not come down again to-night," Colonel Dacre had told his sister, and the simple words seemed to Julian full of a pathetic and passionate suggestion.

Next morning Alice's eyes sought Colonel Dacre's with such devout vows in them that he felt inclined to bid her veil them, lest they should be seen and understood by anyone else. And yet Alice, before she had

been able to lie down in quiet that night, had done what anyone seeing her do would have thought to be at variance with the spirit of these vows.

When she reached her room she suddenly remembered her water-lilies. As suddenly she felt that she could not leave them lying there, to be found, perhaps, by Julian in the morning, maimed and crushed! She was too pitiful of Julian, or of the flowers, perhaps of both, to be able to endure that thought.

As softly and fearfully as if she had been stealing to a clandestine rendezvous, Alice, when they were all at supper, stole down the stairs and out into the moonlight; she gathered the wounded flowers into the upper skirt of her dress, and regained her room.

Julian, for whom she had an unrecognised feeling that there might be great pain

in store, should not have the little pain of finding the flowers he had taken trouble to gather for her lying neglected.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT IT MEANT.

"Oh, that honesty,
That ermine honesty, unspotted ever.
Oh, virtuous goodness, keep thyself untainted:
You have no power to yield, nor he to render,
Nor I to take."

WHEN Alice woke—this was but two days later—on the last morning of Julian's stay at Heatherstone—and remembered that it was the last morning, she believed that she was glad to remember this; or, at least, that she would have been glad but that others, notably Julian himself and Colonel Dacre, were sorry. All possibility

of happy ease in their intercourse seemed gone, without her being able to understand why and how. Her manner to Julian had changed; he felt the change, and he no longer looked or seemed happy. Alice was always feeling "sorry" for Julian, and yet was warned, by some instinct, that it was not safe to show this "sorrow."

For some nights, now, Alice had not been able to sleep soundly. Her hitherto so quiet and child-like nature was unused to agitation, and already she was beginning to suffer physically from the few days of inward disturbance.

Now, on this morning, when she honestly believed herself to feel glad, as far as she only and separately was concerned, to remember that to-day Julian would go, in spite of her "gladness" her heart felt heavy, her head ached, she was languid and listless.

Through the wakeful hours of the last

few nights Alice had shed some tears; and her weeping had not been without some bitterness of remorse. She accused herself of having fallen short of that undivided allegiance which she owed to Colonel Dacre, in letting Julian and Julian's book too much engross her and interest her.

But, even now, it had not occurred to Alice to dread that her love for Colonel Dacre could waver, or weaken, or suffer change. That he could have a rival in her heart, for her heart's best love, was an idea too monstrous to be entertained. Her exalted estimate of Colonel Dacre, and of the honour and the happiness it should be for her to be his wife, helped to blind her—if, indeed, she were blinded.

Then, too, Alice was not by nature impulsive, passionate, or lightly impressionable; she was more given to the more commonplace and old-fashioned virtues—such

as constancy, devotion, affectionateness, loyalty, and truth.

On this last morning, Colonel Dacre took it for granted that Alice would go to her task in the library, as on any other morning. It would have been difficult for Alice to say whether it were most cowardice, or that courage to which she had been recently stimulated; most lassitude, or loyalty, which hindered her from declining, as she longed to decline, to write for Julian that particular morning.

With Julian it had been an intense feeling of the impossibility of giving up these last hours of the exquisitely miserable happiness, or happy misery (for so he had come to feel it), of having Alice all to himself, which had hindered him from listening to the promptings of prudence, and finding some reason for escaping from what he had begun to recognize as temptation. He

had made up his mind that this one morning should be absolutely the last of such mornings—that he would resolutely refuse to avail himself of Colonel Dacre's offer of Alice's continued services; and by this resolution he had quieted his conscience.

To justify, or to explain, Colonel Dacre's course of conduct towards these young creatures, it should be understood that Colonel Dacre's views of love, of such love as should be between man and wife, were peculiar; perhaps too exalted and too ideal to be other than absurd and impracticable for the mass of ordinary humanity. What Colonel Dacre called love was not a thing into which noble natures could fall, or not fall, according to the more or less of occasion and opportunity. The love he would desire to have from his wife, the only love that could satisfy him from his wife, would be a love of which he could believe

that it was so much his only, that it would not have been had it not been for him! Therefore if Alice could love Julian better than she loved him, according to his theory she was Julian's, not his. And the sooner they all recognized this, if this is what had to be recognized, the better for them all. Were Colonel Dacre's views universally adopted, there would, perhaps, not be many marriages, but there might be no unhappy ones.

When Colonel Dacre, who had been for a few minutes with them in the library, left them alone to begin work, Alice immediately stretched out her hand to take up her pen from the ink-stand, to be ready. Julian's eyes fixed themselves on that little hand with a dim, yet not fully defined consciousness that its kind little fingers had now too close a hold of his heart-strings to let his honour and his conscience draw free

breath. Acting on sudden impulse, he took Alice's hand in his and said hurriedly,

"I can't dictate to-day, Alice, I'm not sufficiently my own master. It's no use troubling you."

Alice looked up into his face, while he still held her hand; her expression was first only of surprise, inquiry, it was not shocked or angry; then it deepened and softened with pity (she could not help having pity!), for Julian looked so ill, she thought, so pale, and with such dark shadows round his eyes. Then Julian met that pitying look of Alice's with one so reverent, and yet so passionate, that Alice's lids drooped, and the colour stole softly up over her whole face.

"Has no one noticed," began Julian, with irritation and anger in his voice, and in his heart a feeling that there was no one could care for her as he would care, "how

more than ever fragile you have been looking lately? Is it that I have let you work too hard for me, Alice?"

The tenderness of tone of that last question contrasted strangely with the almost roughness of the first. Perhaps Alice felt Colonel Dacre both reproached and wronged, for her tone was very cold, as, withdrawing her hand from his, she said,

"I am quite well, there is nothing the matter. It is your fancy." At this tone of hers, such distress and concern came into Julian's face, that Alice instantly softened. "It is you who look ill!" she said; and added, rather as if she were coaxing a sick child, "Had we not better try and finish the chapter, so as to come to a better place for leaving off, as this is our last morning?"

There was a slight tremor in her voice as she said "our last morning," and, perhaps, there was moisture in her eyes.

"Why is this our last morning?" Julian questioned, impetuously, resenting the fact that Alice should assume it to be so, without wavering in his resolution that it should be so.

If Julian had not been almost as young, almost as inexperienced as Alice herself—had he not, too, so far shared her exalted estimate of Colonel Dacre, that the idea of *successful* rivalry was not one that could occur to him as a possibility—his conduct would not have had whatever it now had to excuse it.

"I thought—I believed—you were going home to-day, to Greythorpe," said Alice, in answer to his question. She said it timidly and hesitatingly.

"And if I am—don't you remember that

Colonel Dacre was so good as to propose——"

"Lonel was, is, so good, always, but—"

"Perhaps you have forgotten to what I allude; or, perhaps you are, by this time, weary of your office. Possibly I have overtaxed your kind patience."

Alice's eyes had been fixed on the point of her pen; she now lifted them to his with frank candour, and said,

"You know it is not so! Why do you speak in that way? You know I am not tired of my office—you know you have not overtaxed my patience."

"If this is true—and I have believed you to be truth itself—why then take for granted that this is our last morning of work together? Why should I not drive over, as Colonel Dacre suggested? Why should we not go on with our work?"

"Lonel's suggestions are always for the

benefit of others. Should not some one take thought for him? Should not we? You, who are his dear friend, and I, who hope to be his wife?" She had said that very bravely, but now something in Julian's eyes—bent in their full power on her—made her blush and falter for a moment; then she nerved herself to go on, fearing he had misunderstood her. "I only mean that I think I have been rather selfish in the way I have given myself up to the pleasure of being of use to you, and to your book; and I think that, just now, when Lonel is so busy, I might help him, if I tried. You will so very soon be able to write for yourself," she added, in a tenderly apologetic, consolatory tone, "that it won't make very much difference to the time when your book will be finished, will it?"

"And you think, Alice,"—he said her

name with a sharpness that sounded angry —"that it is only for the sake of the work done for me by your hand that I value the hours we have passed together?"

Alice began to tremble. She did not know of what she was afraid—of him, or of herself, but she rose from her chair, yielding to the one impulse she understood, which was to fly—to get away.

But Julian caught her hand. The slumberous quiet of his soft deep eyes was quite broken up, and they glowed with a sort of passionate despair.

"Don't leave me in anger!" he cried to Alice. "What have I done? How have I displeased you? Do you know how you have changed towards me during the last few days?"

"I am not angry—you have not displeased me. I—it—you——. Please let me go!" panted poor little Alice.

He dropped her hand. Her face was now white, now red. The red reflected itself on his forehead—he was ashamed.

Alice drove back her agitation, steadied herself; unconsciously conscious of mysterious danger, she rallied all her poor little forces; she thought of Lonel's exhortation to her to be brave. With a feeling that it was loyal to Lonel, kind to Julian, wise for herself, she said, distinctly and with a touching simple dignity,

"It is better—I think it is better—that things should be a little different."

"You mean?"

"I think you know my meaning," she answered, quite proudly. "Whether you do or not, if you are generous, and if you are true—to Lonel, I mean, loyal to Lonel—I think you will not press me to speak more plainly about a thing it is so difficult to

put into words. It is for your sake that I would rather not."

Alice could not have told at what moment the knowledge was born in her which dictated those words in that manner. To Julian both words and manner carried the conviction that, for the love she suspected, she despised him. This, more than anything else could have done, lost him his last hold on self-restraint. By speaking out his heart's passionate despair, he could not injure his friend, or lower himself further in Alice's esteem. There burst from Julian the words,

"But I am not loyal!—I am a traitor! —I love you!"

"I will not believe it!" answered Alice quickly, in hot anger—"I will not believe it! And," she added, with grief deeper than her anger had been, "I think it would

almost break Lonel's heart to have to believe it."

"It is his own fault. Whom but himself can he blame?"

"If it is a fault to trust his friend, it is a fault as noble as himself."

Alice spoke loftily, and moved towards the door. She had no compassion for Julian when he blamed Colonel Dacre. But he followed her, and detained her.

"Alice, for pity's sake, and you have pity, now I have said so much, let me say a few words more. You can think no worse of me."

His tone was now of such humble, despairing sorrow as spoke to the core of the girl's tender heart.

"Yes, I have pity," she said; "it hurts me to know that you suffer, as you must suffer, being so wrong. But why, having already said too much, should you say

more? It can do no good, Julian."

Perhaps she had never pronounced his name with more musical sweetness, more lingering tenderness.

"It can do this good," he said, "that you will understand me in the future—that you will not believe me to have been a deliberate traitor, but will know that I was traitorously surprised and betrayed by my own heart. Believe me at least to believe that the full extent of my own madness was only known to me at the moment of my confession of it to you. Will you believe this, Alice?"

"Yes—oh! yes," she answered, and did not trust herself to say more.

The woman and child curiously struggled for mastery in Alice during all that passed between her and Julian. Her manner sometimes was just that of a kind, good child trying to console another child who

has been naughty, and is sorry; while at others it was that of a loyal, loving woman, through whose womanhood ran a strain of heroism.

Suddenly Julian's mood changed again, and he said, angrily,

"After all, why should I humiliate myself in the dust? It is not I who am so much to blame—it is Dacre, who has been rash to madness, to cruelty; unless, indeed——" Here a wild hope gave one throb of life, and was immediately stifled. "Rash to madness!" he repeated. "He has tried me beyond what any man not made of marble, whose heart was human, and whose blood was not ice, could bear. Your gentle presence, your sweet voice, your dear loveliness—did he think no man but himself could feel, and hear, and see these things? Alice, what could he mean? —of what could he be thinking? Alice,

you will not tell me that the fault is all mine, and none of his, if I love you, that I love you ?"

Alice, profoundly shaken by the desperate passion of Julian's face and Julian's voice, nevertheless pushed pity aside, roused by this attack on Colonel Dacre.

"Nothing is ever, nothing ever can be Lonel's fault," she answered. "If he erred in trusting you too far, his error was a noble one. He thought too well of you, he whose nature is so far from harm that he suspects none !"

"Alice, Alice, Alice, not that tone ! Don't madden me by making me feel how you despise me. Forgive me—tell me that you forgive me."

"Indeed I don't despise you, Julian. Indeed I am sorry for you. If I have anything to forgive I heartily forgive you. I know," she added, pitifully, "how hard you

will find it to forgive yourself." Again she moved to the door.

Julian dropped his face into his hands and believed himself alone. But at the door Alice paused. Her pain in his pain was acute, her pity profound, but it was not this which brought her back. She moved to Julian's side, and she spoke Julian's name. He lifted his face and looked at her. The expression she then saw was one long to haunt her, though she understood nothing of what it meant.

After speaking his name she paused. That look of his face so shook her, made her heart beat so wildly.

That pause, short as it was, was long enough for Julian, during it, to pass through more than one phase of feeling. First of treasonable, treacherous hope; then of recognition, that the emotion of her face was purely that of purest pity, and of

recognition also, that, had it been otherwise, had he seen, in those fair innocent eyes, any reflection of his own passion, the most precious thing to him in the whole world would have been lost out of it. Alice would have ceased to be Alice, his ideal Alice—deep-hearted for loving devotion, for tenderness and for compassion—adorably child-like in the very perfection of her womanhood.

"Julian," Alice repeated, and before she had added many words to that tenderly-spoken first word, the tears were streaming freely and quietly down her face. "I hope I have said nothing harsh, nothing that has needlessly hurt you. It grieves me very sadly to know that you are unhappy. But because you are good, because you will try hard only to feel and do what is right, you won't be unhappy long. When you have been away a little while you will be able to

fancy it was a dream, to forget all that it is better not to remember.

Julian could not suppress the grimmest ghost of a smile. Alice added—her tears blinded her to his smile—

"I will remember in my prayers to ask God to help you to—to be good. But, Julian, what I most came back to say was, tell Lonel everything."

"Tell Lonel everything!" Julian echoed, looking bewildered.

"Lonel will be deeply pained, deeply sorry," Alice went on. "I would have liked to spare him, but I can't have a secret from him—everything would feel wrong if I did. He trusts me never to have a secret from him. It will be best you should tell him. He won't be angry. He will know you would have helped it if you could. And he will help you. Lonel can help anyone in anyway."

"God bless you, you pitiful angel! He shall know everything, And, Alice," he added, stimulated to rise above himself, "don't let pain and pity for me trouble your sweet peace. My hatred of myself would make life intolerable if I thought it would. I will fight through this trial, rise above this temptation, and be, please God, more of a man, a better man for it. No man could be ever anything but the better for loving so pure a creature."

With wistful eyes he held out his hand. Alice put hers into it. He held it a moment to his lips, a moment against his cheek; then Alice softly drew it away and fled.

She locked herself into her room and sat down to think about it. To her own surprise, she burst into such distressful crying as she had never cried before. Checking herself, trying to find out the

cause of this crying, she murmured, "Poor Julian!" and burst out afresh. By-and-by it was "poor Lonel" around whom her soft pities chiefly hovered, thinking of the complicated sorrow he would have in Julian's sorrow. It did not occur to Alice that in what had happened there was any cause for personal pity—that any of the pain of which her heart was full was for herself.

CHAPTER VII.

GENEROUS RIVALS.

"And in that journey we will bear us so
That each man staring on the rivalled twain,
Shall rub the contradiction of his eyes,
And strain and mutter, 'Which is Galahad?'"

JULIAN, unconscious of time, remained where Alice had left him. He threw his arms across the table, buried his head upon them, and so continued. He was young enough, inexperienced enough, to yield himself up, fully and frankly, to his misery.

Thus Olivia found him. Such an attitude, and the fact, known to her watchful

anxiety, that Alice had fled from the library and locked herself into her own room, were enough to assure Olivia that the crisis she had been foreseeing had come.

"My poor boy!" said a voice from behind Julian, the first intimation that he was not alone. Soft and cool hands were pressed against his temples.

This unexpected sympathy was too much for Julian's young manhood. Olivia, standing by him through the momentary outburst of tumultuous emotion, for the first time in her life could have found in her heart to lay heavy blame on her brother.

"You have been too hardly tried," she said softly. "It was not wise, or kind, or just, or right." Then she whispered, with a heart-pause of dread, "And Alice?"

Julian lifted up his head and looked into her face.

"How can you ask? Alice is Alice!"

"Which means——?"

"How can you need to ask what it means?" Julian's tone was impatient. "It means that she is unwaveringly true and loyal."

"Thank God!" said Olivia, fervently; then she added, "Forgive me if my gratitude seems heedless of your suffering, poor boy! Alice is his all."

"Believe me, Miss Dacre, I would not have it different."

"I do believe you." After a pause she went on to say, "You are so young, and you are so richly gifted, all the possibilities of life are open to you. You will conquer yourself, for you are brave, and you will win for yourself some noble kind of happiness, which will have in it no hurting, haunting thought of being gained at the cost of your friend."

"There!" cried Julian, dashing his hand across his hot eyes, and springing to his feet. "Don't despise me, Miss Dacre," and he kissed her hand. "Where is your brother?" was then his abrupt question.

"Must he know?" asked Olivia, reluctantly.

"Alice says so," was Julian's all-sufficient to himself answer.

At this moment Colonel Dacre came into the room.

"The morning's work over?" he asked, cheerily; adding immediately, "But where is Alice?"

"Julian has something to say to you." Olivia spoke drily and left them together. Julian's pain was bitter in her mouth, as that of a young son in a mother's.

Then Colonel Dacre felt as if sentence for life or death was about to be pronounced on him. He sat down, turning

his back to the light, rubbing his hand across his brow and eyes, still further to hide any change of his countenance.

"I have only," said Julian, "to set myself at your feet, and to set your foot on my neck, telling you that, in spite of the love between us, and in spite of the gratitude I owe you, I have dared to love your Alice."

"Ah! how could you help it?"

"That is not all, nor the worst."

"What more?"

"I have let her know my love."

"And she?" Sharp, short, severe sounded that question.

"Can you know so little of her as to ask?"

"You mean she does not return your love?" Again Colonel Dacre's hand was passed over his face, held this time over his mouth.

"I begin to think it is I who am the

more worthy of her!" burst out Julian, passionately.

"My boy, I will not deny that. Are you sure she does not love you?"

"Love *me!*" Julian laughed a short, joyless laugh, and spoke those words with self-scorning emphasis.

"Are you sure—quite sure?" the older man insisted; on which Julian cried,

"Dacre, are you mad?—or trying to make me so?"

"It seems unlikely she should not love you, whom we all love." Colonel Dacre spoke in a muffled-sounding voice, still screening his face with his hand.

"God knows that I believe myself to speak the truth, when I say that I had no thought, no hope even, that she could love me," said Julian.

There was silence; broken, by-and-by, by Colonel Dacre saying,

"If this is so—if Alice does not love you, it is not you, Julian, who must ask my pardon, but I who must ask yours."

"How so? If you too absolutely trusted to my honour, I can hardly, except in a moment's madness, reproach you for that."

"I thought you must love Alice, but I thought, also, that Alice must love you. I was prepared—I believe I was prepared—"

"But she does not, will not, cannot, shall not, must not love me!" broke in Julian. "That is what you meant, then! You noble, foolish, generous, stupid, blundering fellow! You have been dreaming a nice little drama of self-sacrifice—of giving your blessing to the young people, and leaving yourself nothing. I understand it now. But you're wrong—all wrong, splendidly, gloriously wrong!" Subsiding from excitement to dignified gravity, he added, "And I tell you, God

knowing that I believe it, that, if Alice had fallen off from loving you to love me, she would, in so doing, have cured me of my love for her."

Both Colonel Dacre's hands were now slowly rubbing themselves over his face.

Julian sometimes walking to and fro, sometimes pausing before the table strewn with his papers, was too deeply immersed in thought, or feeling, to wonder at the Colonel's long silence. He looked at the fair lines of Alice's writing, at the pen she had used, at a late white rose which had dropped from her brooch, which had touched the warm whiteness of her throat. Would there be any treason to his friend in possessing himself of that, and hiding it in his bosom?

He started and changed colour, when, just as he had taken the flower caressingly between his fingers, the silence was ab-.

ruptly broken by a question that sounded harsh.

"What are your plans?"

"Plans?" he echoed.

"My thoughts have hurried too far ahead, I see. Of course, as yet, you have formed none."

"While Mrs. Burmander lives I shall go where she goes."

"Her life is, probably, at longest, a matter of months. And after?"

"Before I came here I had some thought of going to Africa."

"Why Africa?"

"Because my friend, Home, is going there."

"For what?"

"To buy land, settle on it, civilize the natives, found a colony."

"A quite ridiculously inappropriate destiny for you, Julian."

"Do you think so?"

"I do indeed. At least, promise me that you will not take any such step hastily—not without forewarning me amply. You are strangely dear to me, Julian—strangely dear—as dear as a son. I——if anything should happen to me——"

"What do you mean, Dacre?" Julian asked sharply. "You are all right? There is nothing the matter with you?"

"No. And yet—in short, some strong instinct urges me to exact a promise from you that you will not go to Africa. In fact, the idea is ridiculous. You, an elegant, highly-civilized, highly-cultured young hero, what is Africa to you, or what could you be to Africa?"

"You are a little cruel to laugh at me."

"I, my boy—laugh at you! Not I. Suppose I tell you frankly what is in my mind—that you should try if you can win

Alice, when Alice knows I wish her to be won."

"If so won—when won, she would not be worth the wearing. She would not be Alice! It is no use, you generous, proud fellow! This time self-sacrifice is not possible for you. Make haste to be happy, and then——"

"And then—what?"

"And then?—how can I tell? We shall see. Only, then, I shall the sooner learn only to love Alice as an honourable man may love the wife of his friend."

Why just now, to-day, Colonel Dacre should speak to Julian on the subject he next touched, he would have been puzzled to tell.

"I have often reproached myself," he began, "for having kept one chapter of my life secret from you, Julian—the short chapter of my married life.

You didn't know I had been married?"

"You!—you are jesting."

"It is too sad a story to be approached by a jest, even after the lapse of years—almost as many, probably quite as many, as those of your life. My married life lasted barely six months."

"She died?"

"She drowned herself; in the madness of jealous misery—not that I loved anyone else, but that I did not love her."

"You did not love her?"

"Not when I married her. I married her from pity, as the only way of helping and saving her."

"That was like you."

"No doubt it was," was assented sadly, "for it was not wise. She loved me passionately. She was a passionate child, in whom, during the few months we were together, I found the promise of a noble-

minded woman. But the sudden strain upon her of learning, in my absence, that I had married her in pity, without love, was too great. She drowned herself."

"What a tragedy!"

"I suppose there are many such in life, as unsuspected."

"Does Alice know of this?"

"Only Olivia, who was the innocent cause of the end." After a pause, he added, "She was very beautiful, very loving, and very young. I, too, was young then, but she was seven or eight years younger."

No more was said between them on that subject. A few minutes after, they left the library together by the window. Alice saw them in the grounds.

"He is not angry with poor Julian. How good he is! How good he is!" she thought, and then she cried afresh.

Before they parted Colonel Dacre said,

"Forgive my troublesome, perhaps painful persistence; but are you sure, Julian, quite sure, that you saw no sign, not that Alice loves you, but that she would be ready, at my bidding, to learn to love you?"

"I am sure, quite sure. I'm sure, too, I'm right in saying that, could she be so light as to forget all the gratitude, reverence, duty, and love which bind her to you, I should lose all that is noblest and best in love, if I still loved her. No more on this string, Dacre, for my sake, your own, and hers. We are all wronged when you touch it."

"You once said, Julian, that something in Alice always seemed to you more in harmony with the before sunrise half-hour of a Summer morning than with any other time or season. Perhaps her sun has not risen, and she does not yet know what love is."

"You can't think so. You are not yourself to-day."

"Perhaps not. But ever since I engaged myself to Alice, I have had, at times, a strong, strange sense of the wrong to her, and the unnaturalness of a union between her youth and my middle age. Since I have seen you two together this has increased." He was speaking with a dreariness of tone very unusual in one of his equal temper. "God knows I love her; you all say—you, she herself, Olivia—that she loves me! And yet I don't know what presentiment sticks to me that——"

"You are superstitious! I shouldn't have thought it."

"Nor I."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT ALICE SAID.

"Shall not the people
Say liberally hereafter—'There's the lady
That lost her father, friend, herself, her faith too,
To fawn upon a stranger.'"

AT dinner-time Julian was not there. Colonel Dacre covertly watched Alice. If he found any difference in her, it was that her eyes, when she looked at him, and her manner, when she spoke to him, were a little more noticeably tender, because she knew he had suffered for and through his friend.

"Are you coming out, Alice?" he asked

her after dinner. They had dined earlier, to suit some arrangement of Grace's. "The evening is soft and warm; we shall not have many such evenings."

"I am coming, if you are going," she answered almost gaily, and ran to fetch a light shawl.

To Colonel Dacre's surprise, they had not been many minutes together before Alice began the subject he had been wishing but fearing to approach. She slipped her hand caressingly within his arm, and said,

"You kind Lonel! From my window I saw you with poor Julian, and I saw that you were not very angry with him."

"I was, as I had good cause to be, far more angry with Walter Dacre, Alice."

"No one ever, not even you, has any right to be angry with him. He never deserves anger. If, sometimes, he makes

a mistake, it is because he is more generous, more humble, more noble, than any one else in all this world."

Colonel Dacre, looking down on Alice, saw a flush on her fair face, and a bright, keen earnestness in her eyes.

"It is well for you to think as you say," he answered; "but I know the man better. In this instance he has been selfish and inconsiderate. He has exposed one, if not two people, deservedly dear to him, to the chances of suffering, to serve his own ends."

"I will not have you say so."

"I must think it all the more, then, sovereign lady."

So far they had both spoken lightly enough. But this was not what Alice wanted. By-and-by she began, in quite a different tone,

"Lonel, will you be so very good as to

speak to me quite plainly about what it is that is in your mind—that has changed you lately, and made you seem less happy?"

"I will try." And then he paused, finding it incredibly difficult to put into words the thought so long familiar to his heart. "You must forgive me, Alice," he said, "if, in trying to speak, as you wish, plainly, I seem to speak roughly. Your love for me, Alice, has always seemed to me, in a certain sense, too good to be true, to use a homely phrase. I mean—not that I don't think you true—not that I don't think you truly love me. But, Alice, as I said to you once before, there is love and love. It is only the love that is what your favourite calls 'the love of men and women when they love their best' that it could satisfy me and make me happy to have from my wife. How were you, poor child, to know whether

or not it was this you could give me? How was I to know? Perhaps it was not till Julian came among us that I troubled myself much with doubtful speculations. Then, when I saw you together, the naturalness that you should love each other made me feel more forcibly the unnaturalness that I, who am old enough to be your father, should bind your golden youth to my grey years. At all events, I felt to need to know—for my sake, as for your own—whether, after knowing intimately such a man as Julian, so gifted and so loveable, your love was still not his, but mine."

Alice was wounded; her voice showed it. It was something like this she had dimly suspected; but to hear it spoken, so quietly, so plainly, seemed to bruise and to wound her.

"All this seems to me very strange," she said. "That you should have needed to

try and to prove my love for you! To lose my love for you—and to love anyone better than you surely would be to lose it —would be to lose myself, or so it seems to me. And then to love, instead of you, anyone, like Julian, not much older than I am myself, not so much wiser, or so very much better!" There was a proud, aggrieved, an almost scornful expression in Alice's face till she added, "Poor Julian!"

Then her face softened, and her voice quivered a little, for, as she said "poor Julian," that pale, passionate, despairing last look of his appealed to her.

"Lonel!" she added, quickly, with one feeling and another her heart felt so sore —for Julian, for Lonel, for herself—that she hardly knew what she said, "I can hardly bear to feel myself thinking that anything you have done is not right, but surely you haven't been right in this?"

"Just what I said but now. I have not, Alice. And it is on me, and not on Julian, that the suffering should fall. Therefore, Alice, if you can find in your heart any consciousness that, if you let yourself, you could love Julian, don't stifle that consciousness—let it have way."

"Lonel, are you tired of me?—are you wishing to be rid of me? I can't feel that you're speaking to the girl whom you have taught to believe you would make your wife."

"It is so difficult, Alice, for you to understand your own heart. It would be so natural that your love should have gone out to Julian. Julian is——"

"Almost a stranger," interposed Alice, hurriedly; "while you—why, you know I have just grown up loving you! Love of you has filled my mind and my heart.

There is no room in me for loving any stranger."

"While I believe absolutely in your truth, Alice, it is strangely difficult for me to believe that nothing of your love should have gone out towards Julian."

The tender sadness of his tone, and something in the simple words, penetrated Alice's heart with uncomprehended pain, but she answered in hot haste,

"And if it had, he is so far worthy to be your friend that he would have thrown it back to me. And if it had, I am so far worthy to be your wife, that I would have plucked it back again. I would die, and let him die, sooner than be false to you, Lonel."

What was he to think? Only that she was the more deceived?

He only answered her by a pressure of

the hand upon his arm. He let those fervid words of hers be the last words spoken on that subject. He let their talk drift to other matters. He kept her out with him in the soft calm evening, till the flushed face had only its usual delicate but healthful rose, and then they went in to Olivia.

When Alice afterwards thought over what he had said, she felt deeply dissatisfied; she did not feel that he believed her; and so great was her faith in Colonel Dacre that to feel he did not believe her was to make her doubt, and ready to disbelieve herself.

When, sleepless, she watched the rising of the waning moon, caught the sweet late Summer scents, as a soft breath of the dry warm wind shook the jasmine and clematis about her open casement, she found herself sighing, "Poor Julian!"

wondering about him, wishing she could see his face bright and happy once more, and so remember it; and so be helped by that remembrance of it to forget that different, more dangerous, aspect of it.

"Poor Julian!" Alice murmured, as at last she fell asleep.

BOOK V.

ALICE.

CHAPTER I.

"POOR JULIAN."

> "Wait, and Love himself will bring
> The drooping flower of knowledge changed to fruit
> Of wisdom. Wait—my faith is large in Time,
> And that which shapes it to some perfect end."

JULIAN left the neighbourhood without there having been any further meeting between him and Alice. Almost directly he returned to Greythorpe a sudden change to cold weather made General Burmander in great haste to remove his wife. He had planned that they should go first to the south coast of England, then to the south of France. He was ready to fight Winter

and the world for one more month, week, day, or hour, in which he might keep his Marian, and know she did not suffer much.

Alice had driven over to Greythorpe with Olivia to bid the invalid good-bye. Her hands had been held in Mrs. Burmander's, her face had been earnestly scrutinized by Mrs. Burmander's eyes, Mrs. Burmander's parting words had been a prayer for God's guidance of Alice towards all good; but there had been no confidential talk between them; they had not even been alone. Julian was absent. He had run up to town on the General's business, and was to return next day, to start with them for the south.

As she drove home again with Olivia, Alice felt strangely, unaccountably depressed. She longed to rest her forehead on Olivia's shoulder and cry, but how could she have explained her tears? The part-

ing from Mrs. Burmander was a pathetic pain, yet truthful Alice knew that this was not—she did not, even to herself, pretend to think it was—the pain which caused the hot ache that longed to be relieved by tears. Inadvertently Mrs. Burmander had said "poor Julian" when she spoke of him, and it was those words which had set going that pain in Alice's heart. Poor Julian! Pity for Julian seemed to Alice to be that pain's key-note. That pain kept hold of her; as days passed, and weeks, it was still there. Poor Julian! His pale face, as she had last seen it, would too often be between Alice and her book, her work, her music, and the pathetic Autumn beauty of the world. Nothing could have so much helped her to forget him as to have seen him again, even for five minutes, and to have seen him bright, buoyant, active, occupied with other people and

other things. That would have wiped out the painful impression which made her thoughts too often painfully busy with—"poor Julian."

When Alice was with Colonel Dacre, occupied for Colonel Dacre, as he let her occupy herself, copying letters and documents; hunting out passages he wanted, or pretended to want, extracting from newspapers, restoring order to the chaos that had engulfed his affairs, she was for that time quite satisfied, quite happy, not crossed by any thought of "poor Julian;" that pain was numb.

And then came all the bustle of the long-impending and long-prepared-for election. Colonel Dacre's friend was triumphantly returned, in chief part owing to Colonel Dacre's influence of character, position, person, and purse. Whenever it was possible, Colonel Dacre now had Alice with him. How proud

she felt of him, and of herself as belonging to him, when she saw him among other men! What noble dignity she found in all he did —what noble wisdom in all he said—what high-bred courtesy and winning grace in the suave gravity of his manner—what sunshine of heart-goodness in his smile! To belong to him gave value, distinction, meaning, and honour to her life. It could not but bring happiness also. Anyway, Alice could not imagine herself leading a life apart from Colonel Dacre—a life in which she was nothing to him. Whom ever else she loved, she surely loved him first and best! If she ever compared Julian with her Lonel, how slight, boy-like, unsubstantial, merely sweet and graceful, seemed young Julian. Poor Julian!

When the unusual bustle and excitement of Alice's life was succeeded by a more than usual quietness—Colonel Dacre had to go

to town, and remained away a week—she had to resume her burdensome consciousness of something got wrong which she could not set right, of something lost which she could not recover. The week of Colonel Dacre's absence seemed to her not merely a weary week, but a sinfully wasted and unprofitable week. She failed in everything she undertook, because of her preoccupation, and yet failed more than in anything else in coming to any understanding of the real nature of that preoccupation. There could be no doubt in Colonel Dacre's mind of the warmth of his welcome when he came back.

On one of the first evenings after he had come back, when they were all together in the smaller drawing-room, Colonel Dacre's attention was arrested by a little talk about a book which took place between Grace and Alice.

That room, with its soft lamplight, and its bright wood fire, made, with its inhabitants, a cheery pleasant picture. At the centre table, which was strewn with gay-coloured wools, sat Olivia, busy with her Christmas gifts for the poor. She was now again wearing that brown velvet gown which so entirely suited her, and which so thoroughly harmonized with the dim richness of the old-fashioned, home-like room.

On one side of the fire, with a reading-lamp on a small table, all to himself, sat Colonel Dacre, hidden behind his "Times" from Grace and Alice, who shared a similar lamp and table on the other side. For a wonder there was a novel, a new novel, in the house, and Grace and Alice were engaged upon different volumes of it. It was a powerfully-written story, by a new writer, who, perhaps, had put into it the passion of personal experience, and might never write

anything more. It was making some sensation, and Colonel Dacre had brought it home to Heatherstone with him.

"Well, Alice, how do you like it?" Grace asked, as Alice laid down her third volume, folded her arms and gazed thoughtfully into the fire. They were sitting close, and spoke, as they supposed, only for each other. "I do not like it at all," answered Alice, without removing her eyes from the fire.

"And why do you not like it at all?"

"That is just what I was beginning to try and find out. I had got no further than a resolution to read no more novels."

"Not, even, such good novels as this, Alice?"

"Is this good, Grace? It is clever and powerful; but it doesn't seem to me good. It seems to me a justification of selfish wrong-doing. Faith and duty are made to

seem common, uninteresting, plodding virtues; while to yield oneself up to passion, without any care for consequences, to oneself or to others, is made to be glorious and heroic!"

"What would you have had different?—I read the third volume first, so I know how it ends. Would you have had the girl marry her old love, even when she knew that her heart had transferred itself to the other man? Is that how you understand faith and duty? It is not my notion of them. If I left off caring for Tom, if I cared for anyone else more than for Tom, I would never dream of marrying Tom, let the world say what it might."

"Of course not!" answered Alice. "But I blame the girl for letting her heart transfer itself. She could have hindered that in the beginning, but she never tried."

"It is so easy to talk in cold blood," re-

plied Grace, "but to act may not be quite so easy."

"I didn't say anything of what would be easy, Grace—that has nothing to do with it. But she seems to have had no feeling that faithfulness and constancy to the man whom, nevertheless, she is always made to own to be the nobler, and the more worthy of her love, were worth struggling to maintain. All the sympathy of the reader is claimed for the people in the book who let themselves get overpowered by passion, which is inconsistent with duty. Duty is spoken of as if it were a poor dull thing, a virtue only fit for mean and common people."

"An old-world, out-of-fashion thing, in short," said Grace. "Now Love is Lord of all!"

"But why, Grace, should love, which is always called one of the passions, be treat-

ed so differently from any other passion? Why should it not be guided into the right way, recalled if it wander towards the wrong? Why should it not be controlled by reason, and influenced by considerations of honour, gratitude, loyalty?"

Grace was looking at Alice with rather a mocking expression. She was just about to say, "You know very little of what you are talking about," when some movement of Colonel Dacre's reminded her of the possibility that he could hear what they were saying, so she remained silent. After a few moments Alice spoke again.

"If," she said, "this girl in the story had, in the beginning, made any effort to conquer herself, to resist the passion which she is made to call 'traitorous,' she could have done it. But she never seems to make one effort; yet it isn't that she is taken by surprise, for she is always ana-

lyzing her feelings. And, then, too, it is so monstrous that she should be described as unselfish, when the fact that she destroys the happiness of the man who loves her so much beyond her worth, and to whom she is bound by every possible tie, never seems to trouble her to any extent that could interfere with her happiness. Surely," Alice went on, in the excitement of the subject, speaking much more than was at all usual with her, "if she had been anything of a noble woman—and we are told that she was noble—she would have gathered all her forces together, strained every nerve, died—sooner than not conquer herself. But, no; this is what she would have done if she had not been base. A noble woman would simply have found it impossible to love against honour, duty, gratitude, loyalty, judgment, and conscience. What could there be left of her to love with? And

then the hero! A man who could lie in wait to make love to, and plot and scheme to win the love of, a woman bound to one he called his friend! Oh! Grace, it seems to me a bad book, about bad people!"

"Uncle Walter, you hear that!" cried Grace, sure that he was hearing.

Colonel Dacre laid down his paper and rose from his chair. He looked down upon the two girls, as if about to speak; then he checked himself, and turned suddenly towards the fire, so that they could not see the expression of his face.

"Are we to have no music to-night, Alice?" he asked.

Almost before he had finished speaking Alice had risen, and was moving towards the adjoining music-room. Of late Alice's devout alacrity in meeting any wish of his seemed to Colonel Dacre to have exaggerated itself to an extent that sometimes

pained him. Did it mean that she was afraid of him? Did it mean that she was afraid of herself?

Almost always (though Alice did not know this, as how should she? whether Colonel Dacre knew it or not, as, possibly, he was beginning to suspect it) Alice's treatment of Colonel Dacre was just what would have been beautiful in a devoted daughter towards a father loved with profound veneration; and now this loving veneration was touched to more special tenderness and toned to pathos, as it might be in the heart of such a daughter when she has felt, or is about to feel, the commencement within her of a struggle for mastery between the old allegiance and something new.

Colonel Dacre followed Alice to the music-room, and opened the piano for her. When she had seated herself she turned to

look at him, asking, "What shall I play?" He did not immediately answer her. He laid his hand lightly on her head, and looked down into her eyes with an expression that made her heart glow with a noble kind of happiness, and stimulated heroic resolve.

CHAPTER II.

OLIVIA'S "LITTLE WORD."

"I have a heart, but if it could be false
To my best vows, ever to love again,
These honest hands should tear it from my breast,
And throw the traitor from me."

THINGS had, outwardly, been going on much as usual at Heatherstone, for a good many weeks, when Olivia came late into Alice's room one evening. Alice was just ready to get to bed. She was sitting, in the pretty blue and white room, wrapped in a pale blue dressing-gown; she had been reading in her Bible, and the book was still open in her hands when Olivia looked in.

"If I disturb you, dear, I will come again presently."

"You don't disturb me. I had finished reading. Please come in."

"I want a little word with you, Alice—a word that is burning a hole in my heart till I speak it. Come to me here by the fire."

Olivia seated herself. Alice took a stool at her feet, leant an arm on her lap, and looked up into her face, wondering.

Olivia did not immediately speak, but sat gazing into the fire. Alice studied the fire-lighted face, tracing its likeness to Colonel Dacre, when suddenly some tricksy turn of leaping firelight, or some devil's device, showed her, instead, what seemed to her an unmistakeable likeness to Julian. Alice turned her face aside. This slight movement roused Olivia, who asked abruptly,

"Alice, what is the matter with my brother?"

"Is there anything new the matter?" was Alice's startled question.

"It seems to me that there is. Either some new trouble, or some steady increase of a trouble not new." A pause. Then Olivia questioned, "When was the last time that Walter said anything to you about wishing you to be his wife, Alice?—anything that seemed as if he thought of marrying?"

Alice's colour changed from red to pale rapidly. She answered,

"In the Spring—early last Spring, he spoke of the Autumn. When Autumn came he said nothing. Now it is early Spring again, and he says nothing."

"In short then, Alice, he has never spoken of it since young Julian came among us?"

"No, never once since then," assented Alice.

Olivia took Alice's face between her hands, and looked piercingly down into the depths of Alice's eyes.

"Walter says you are thin and pale, Alice. Alice, if you love Julian tell me so frankly. Anything will be better than suspense. You do not love Julian?" The tone was one that acknowledged and apologized for so monstrous a question.

"*You* can ask that!" And stinging tears rushed into Alice's eyes. "It is Lonel I love. I love him more than ever! My heart aches with wondering so much about him—what he is feeling, what he is thinking, what he is believing, what it is pains and grieves him, what I can do different to please him, to show him how I love him!" Alice spoke with soft rapidity. "Every night," she went on—"almost

every night, I cry myself to sleep, thinking that Lonel looks sad and suffering. Sometimes I feel as if I must go down on my knees, and kiss his feet, and tell him I won't leave off kissing them till he lets me know what troubles him."

"Do that, Alice. Make him speak."

"But I think he has said all to me that he means to say. It seems to me I never now have the chance of speaking to him alone; or, if I have the chance, then I feel afraid to use it."

"Your love has not cast out fear then, Alice."

"It almost had once, but now——. It seems to me that what is so natural has happened. And, yet, though I feel it natural, it grieves me very deep down. Am I not right?—don't you see it? I don't mean that he doesn't love me—oh, he loves me only too much!—but still, in some

ways, I disappoint him. I am too childish. But, if he would let me be with him almost always, as I used to be, why then I should grow older and wiser much faster."

Olivia looked steadily into the clear eyes of the fair young thing.

"You are mistaken there, Alice. If Walter does not have you with him as he used to do, you are quite mistaken in this guess at the reason. Child, child, you are the very light of his life! Speak to him to-morrow, Alice. If, when you are on your knees at your prayers, you are sure, quite sure of your own heart—pluck up your courage, my own girl, for his sake and for my sake, and ask Walter to say when he will marry you."

Olivia waited for no answer, but having kissed Alice, and very fervently prayed God to bless her, went away.

When Alice was left alone, she softly moved

about the room for a little while; then she was a long time on her knees: after that she dropped into Olivia's chair. Could she do what Olivia had bidden her to do? She thought she could—she thought she would. Her whole being was at high tension. She did not lounge back in the chair into which she had sunk. She sat very erect. Her hands were clasped tight in her lap—even her feet were arched rigidly, her brows were close-knit and her mouth firm-set. She looked a fragile young thing, but it was easy to see that somewhere in the slight soft girlish frame an heroic spirit had its home. A spirit indomitable, and resolute —"to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

"To-morrow," she presently said aloud —"I will speak to him to-morrow."

She sat on, thinking, thinking, thinking, always of her Lonel: his nobleness, his

tenderness, his every virtue. If, to-night, her thought at all touched Julian, it was only to pity "poor Julian," with a pity that but for its soft sweetness had not been free from scorn.

"To-morrow—I will speak to him to-morrow," Alice, by-and-by, said again, when her to-morrow was already to-day.

She laid herself down on her bed, softly smiling, softly blushing, eager for to-morrow, when she hoped to bring a happy light back into those intense eyes of Colonel Dacre's, a satisfied content to that grave mouth. Hoping this for him, for herself she hoped rest; the rest of being taken into his loving arms—the rest of feeling that he was at rest—the rest of consciousness that things were right, as he was happy.

"It is very long since I have had that rest," she said. "Perhaps that is why I

am so tired now—always so tired." It was almost while saying this that she fell asleep.

What had of late so tried Alice was perhaps, chiefly, the strict watch she had kept upon herself. The pain of her "pity" for "poor Julian" did not wear out. She honestly believed that she thus "pitied" him, not so much because he loved where he was not loved, as because he had been so unfortunate as to wrong his friend, to pain his friend. Nevertheless, she would have been better pleased with herself had she been able to banish Julian from her thoughts more completely. That she should love Julian, while to love him meant to be false to her Lonel, whom she could not doubt she loved, was simply impossible. That she should love Julian, while every loving thought of him was a wrong to her Lonel,

was a monstrous thing, of which Alice did not suspect herself to be capable! A good young wife who, by some disastrous combination of events, had been surprised into too warm a friendship, too eager an interest, in the friend of her older husband, could not have been more strenuous in her efforts at all self-conquest, more severe in self-judgment, than Alice was; and yet it was true, beyond all doubt, that, if she loved Julian, she had no suspicion that this was so.

In times to encourage by requiring heroic action Alice might have shown herself a heroine; but, in these days, those amongst us who are heroic must be so, for the most part, to their own consciences only, without any show of heroic deeds.

Alice, surely, was right when she argued with Grace that much more than we are inclined to admit could we rule and curb

our hearts and inclinations in this matter of Love, as in all other matters.

And yet, perhaps, it were safer to say that idleness, weakness, vanity, selfishness, self-indulgence, moral flabbiness, absence of all spiritual bone and muscle, want, most of all, of any real religiousness, generally have more to answer for than Love, in all morbid manifestations of passion.

"Love, Lord of all," has too many follies and crimes committed in his profaned name, his profaned name taken in vain, when some baser name should be used.

CHAPTER III.

TO-MORROW.

"And must the lady be the wooer, sir?
Suing to you as you should sue to her?
Stooping to take your love up in her hand,
That, seeing it there holden, you may stand
Conscious of worth? Making herself the glass
'Fore which the shadows of your virtues pass."

COLONEL DACRE was out great part of next day. Alice wearied herself in watching for him, in going to and fro, and up and down, trying to meet him. Vainly, till evening; then at dusk she found him alone in the library. He was seated by the fire, in an easy-chair, doing nothing; his back was to the door by which she came

into the room. It had been a raw cheerless early March day, blowing, snowing, and sleeting. The pleasant firelight was a good exchange for the sulky, sappy daylight. At the sound of the opening door, Colonel Dacre, without looking round, said,

"I did not ring. You need not bring lights here."

The door closed, and he believed himself to be alone, till two arms laid lightly round his neck, a soft cheek just touching his cheek, and that faint perfume of violets which hung about everything of Alice's, at once convinced him of her presence, and bewildered him, holding him in tranced stillness, afraid to move lest this sweetness should prove to be no more than a freak of fancy. Alice was the first to speak. If she had meant to begin with the question Olivia had bade her ask, her courage, for the moment, failed her.

"Why do you sit here alone, Lonel?" was all she said.

"So it is you, your own self, little one! And not only your phantom." He put his arm round her and drew her to his side.

"I have been watching for you all day, Lonel."

"You wanted me? For what? Why?"

"I wanted you because—because I wanted you! Because you are my Lonel, and I am your Alice."

"God bless you, my darling!"

The tone in which this was said seemed to Alice infinitely sad. Alice slipped down on to the rug at his feet. She leaned her arms on his knee, rested her chin on them, and gazed up into his face; and presently the firelight played her the same trick that it had done the night before, showing her this time, what startled her, as being, in spite of difference of age, more sameness

than likeness to Julian, in the face at which she was looking. She felt inclined to shrink away. But she did not. She laid her cheek down upon her arms, and turned her eyes to fix them on the fire.

"I never noticed it while he was here," she thought; "that seems so strange."

Colonel Dacre put his hand tenderly upon the fair head, and felt a glow of warmth and pleasure, long a stranger there, gather about his heart. Nevertheless he said, almost directly,

"Had you not better get up, dear child? Shall we go together to the drawing-room, or—had you something to say to me here, Alice?"

"Yes, Lonel, I have something to say to you here. I want you all to myself a little while. I want the rest of leaning here, with your dear hand on my head. It does me good, and I am so tired."

"Are you not well, Alice?" was asked in quick alarm.

"Quite well, only tired. I want rest, and there is no rest for me except when I am close to you. I am tired with being always, for so long, so far off. Why, Lonel, why have you kept me so far off?"

"Are you crying, Alice?" He lifted up her face, with very gentle hands, and looked into it. It was wet with tears.

"Oh, that is nothing. But this constant aching of my heart—that is something—that is what tires me so."

"That must be cured, Alice."

"I want it cured. And only you can cure it, Lonel."

"I need hardly say that what I can do, I will."

"Then you must be different, Lonel, and not make me feel, as I always feel now, as if I had grieved and pained and dis-

pleased you. You used to be often grave, but you used often, too, to look so dearly, so blessedly happy. But now you have hardly ever any other look than the one which makes my heart ache."

"These are your fancies, my child, or a reflection of your own changed mood. For, Alice, you have changed. The flower that bloomed out so brightly last Summer seems to have shut up its petals again."

"You have left me without any sunshine."

"I hope to see brighter sunshine than you have ever known shine into your life before many months are gone."

Alice pondered for half a minute, for half a minute struggled with herself. Then, taking one of his hands in both hers, looking up into his face, unconsciously leaning all her soft sweet weight against him, she asked,

"Do you mean, Lonel, that you will then let me be your wife, as you promised me I should some day be?"

There was nothing childish in the simple directness with which Alice put this question. Her manner was nobly grave. She was self-justified and fearless in her own consciousness of unselfish purpose.

Colonel Dacre recognized what this meant; saw far deeper down than Alice could. He experienced a curious shock of acute pain, as if he were learning for the first time what he thought he had long known. That Alice—whether or not she had any love for Julian—loved him, Colonel Dacre, fondly, devotedly, with a love that had no touch in it of the love a girl gives her lover, a wife her husband! It seemed to poor Alice that his face and his voice were more than grave—stern—as he answered her,

"No, Alice, it is indeed not that I mean!"

"Then, Lonel, why is it not that you mean? Why, Lonel, why may I not hope for that?" Alice's voice was sharpened by suffering—his pain, perhaps, rather than her own. Whether his or her own, anyway there was pain and suffering.

"Because, Alice, you are young, and I am old! Because, Alice, there has gradually grown upon me a settled conviction that I should do you cruel wrong if I accepted the sacrifice of all your sweet Spring of youth to my sapless Autumn. The words are spoken now, Alice! That is well; there need be no more misunderstanding, or half-understanding, one or the other, between us. There need be no less love between us, child, but we may both know what love it is. You may relax the strain and stress you have put upon yourself, trying to love

me as it is not natural a girl so young should love so old a man. You have behaved nobly, Alice, bravely, and I am proud of you, my good child."

"Lonel, you have spoken, but I, too, have to speak. It is not so much more than a year ago that you promised me to make me your wife soon. I am not that time younger. I love you no less, but more. I will not release you from your promise, and I don't think I have done anything that should forfeit my right to its fulfilment."

Olivia's words of the night before,—"Child, child, you are the very light of his life!"—appealed to Alice, and, through everything Colonel Dacre said, she seemed to hear some confirmation of their truth. He did not immediately speak. Alice went on—

"Lonel, can you tell me that it seems to

you now less for your happiness that I should be your wife than it did that time ago?"

"It does, Alice."

She looked startled for an instant, then she said,

"Ah! you mean because you think it less for mine. But, supposing you knew certainly that I should be very happy—as, indeed, I have no doubt I shall be—what then?"

"What then? Why——" His heart gave a great bound; the hot blood mounted to his temples and clouded his eyes. His sentence got no further. Alice said, very softly, very distinctly,

"Lonel, there is no reason, there will be no reason, there can be no reason, why things should change from what they were when we both seemed happy, except for the change that what we looked forward

to then should come true." Between tears and laughter she went on—"What a shocking thing you are making me do, Lonel—ask you how soon you will marry me!"

"Beware, Alice, beware, in your unbounded generosity, your innocence, your heroism, you are setting yourself a task too hard for you, or for any woman."

"What task, Lonel? If you mean the task of loving you, that is a task I came to so early, and have been at so long, that it is no harder than breathing, and it is as sweet as breathing sunshine and fresh air."

She said this with a little tone of tender dignity, and, getting up, moved a little way from him, and stood looking into the fire. Had she prevailed? If not, what more could she say? How could she plead any further? He rose from his chair and stood opposite to her, looking at her—the

soft, fair, girlish creature, with so resolute a face. Presently he took both her hands in his, and said, in a voice of profound emotion,

"Alice, however this may end, and I can say no decisive word to-night, I dare not trust myself, too much is at stake, but however this may end, remember that I hold you to have gone beyond duty, if there is a point to which the noblest of us can stretch that is beyond duty. I mean that——After all, it is impossible for me to say what I mean. I can only repeat that I am proud of you. I can only pray God's choicest, rarest, and sweetest blessings on this dear head!" He pressed her head against his breast a moment; then he made one fresh effort, and added—"Try to be light of heart and of an easy mind now, Alice. Let yourself rest. Whatever happens, however it all ends, you have

done your duty, and more. Happy he or she of whom that can be said!"

Was he resigning her, or claiming her? She put her face up for his kiss. He gave it, then drew her hand through his arm, and asked that she would give him some music. They went so together to the drawing-room, where Olivia sat. Both faces showed signs of late emotion, both looked nobly happy. Olivia's dark eyes flashed her pleasure. Did she interpret or misinterpret what Colonel Dacre's bright elasticity of that evening, and Alice's shining, serene content, indicated?

Mr. Blatchford dined at Heatherstone that day. Between him and Grace there was wrangling, as usual, but Miss Dacre fancied that, on Tom's side, the wrangling had a sterner, more serious tone in it. When he bade Olivia good night, he said,

"You'll hear of some desperate deed

soon, Miss Dacre! When you do, don't blame me, or say you were unwarned."

But for a twinkle of fun in Tom's eyes, and at the corners of his mouth, Olivia might have been alarmed.

Grace, yawning very ostentatiously, as she put her work together, preparatory to going to bed, remarked,

"Well, our next parting will really be our last, I suppose? We are to have a last ride together to-morrow afternoon. And then if Tom can't have everything settled his own way, which I have no idea of allowing, why, then, he says he is going away, 'for good and all!'"

"Take care what you are about, Grace. Tom looked serious to-night. You'll never love anyone as you love him, and—I don't think you'd be a happy old maid!"

CHAPTER IV.

JULIAN AGAIN.

"'Just as we were so happy!' so she said,
And drooped the pretty golden-crested head,
And felt the pressure of a fear unsaid
Heavy and cold at heart."

AT breakfast-time the very next morning Alice found something in Colonel Dacre's face, as he read one of his letters, which made her ask, laying her hand on his arm as she spoke,

"May I know what is the matter?"

For the moment they were alone. Alice had come down before Grace or Olivia, and had just made the tea. Colonel Dacre

took Alice's hand from his arm—he raised it to his lips, then held it in his own hand. In his face she fancied there was pity for her, as well as grief for himself.

"I have bad news from Fiordimare," he said. "Mrs. Burmander, it seems, has been gone some weeks. The letter in which Julian told us of this must have been lost. He alludes here to her sufferings, which, at the end, must have been terrible, as if he had before told us all about them."

Alice did not speak. She knew that this news, though sad enough, was not the bad news she had to hear. She had turned very pale, and kept her eyes fixed on Colonel Dacre's face. Colonel Dacre went on:

"This letter is dated a fortnight since. I have been for some time wondering that I did not hear, but the posting of it was delayed, as a few lines added later explain,

by an accident which has happened to Julian. Poor unfortunate young fellow! It is indeed soon for him to be laid on the shelf again."

"A serious accident?" Alice's pale lips questioned; her hand had made a little start in his.

"That I must go and see; that I must judge of for myself. He makes light of it, as you will find, but these lines written, as I suppose, by the lady to whose house he seems to have been taken, are not reassuring. I must go myself at once, and see exactly what is the truth."

"Oh! Lonel, must you? Just as we were going to be so happy!"

His grasp of her hand was tight, he slightly smiled.

"I'm afraid you think me very selfish for saying that," Alice went on. "But it does seem hard—I can't help feeling it

hard that you never, never, never seem to get any peace and happiness."

This was, in truth, the first aspect of the matter to Alice, or, at least, the first of which she was conscious. Perhaps there had been a preceding shock of something different, but now she felt more annoyed with Julian than anxious about him. He was going to be troublesome again, and to disturb his friend's repose.

"Couldn't you send a telegram to the doctor, asking for further particulars? It may be something quite unimportant, and it is such a long way for you to go. Do you think you need go at once?"

"I don't think about it, Alice—I know I must go! You wouldn't have me leave the dear young fellow to the care of strangers? Are you so ungrateful, dear, or so forgetful?—or so little tender?"

Alice only answered, straining his hand between both hers,

"It seems so very hard, so very sad, to lose you, to let you go—just now."

Miss Dacre and Grace just then came into the room. The news was told to them while a hurried breakfast was going forward; routes, maps, and time-tables were studied; afterwards a bustle of preparation filled the morning, though Colonel Dacre could gain nothing by leaving till the afternoon. To make a great stir, to be doing something, seemed to be a satisfaction to them all.

Alice waited on Colonel Dacre, watched him, and hung about him; her heart seemed to grow heavier and her spirits more oppressed every hour. She seemed jealous that any other hands should do anything for him; she insisted on doing for him such things as Olivia would ordinarily have done,

and everything belonging to him seemed to have acquired a new and dearer sacredness. Her tireless feet went up and down for him, and to and fro, or lingered beside him. When he begged her to spare herself and to rest, she answered, with a sort of bitterness in her tone,

"There will be plenty of time to rest afterwards, by-and-by, when you are gone."

As she finished saying "when you are gone," she pressed her face against him and burst into bitter crying.

He said to her, amongst many other things, in trying to calm and soothe her,

"We must hope for the best, Alice. Julian is young and healthy. There is every reason to believe that, with God's blessing, he will pull through, even if, as I fear, it is something serious that has befallen him."

When he said that, Alice stayed her cry-

ing. She lifted up her face and looked strangely upon him.

"Julian, no doubt, will do well enough!" she said. "But you, Lonel, you—when will you come back again? I feel as if—as if—as if you would never come back again!" And on that she burst once more into that bitter crying, which had been for a moment arrested.

The next word he said was a word that called upon her powers of self-restraint:

"Alice, my darling, this makes things doubly hard for me—and they are hard enough already."

After that Alice cried no more till he was gone; nor did she say any more sorrowful sayings till he was gone; but there was a new and a heart-rending pathos in their parting; and when he was gone, Olivia was alarmed by the violence of the girl's crying and sobbing, as she threw herself

into Olivia's arms—alarmed with more than one kind of alarm. How much part had Julian in this sorrow? she could not help asking herself.

When Alice was calmer, she said to Olivia:

"What is it?—and why? I never felt like this before. My heart is as if it would break with the thought that something is going to happen to Lonel—that he is gone for ever!"

"Good heavens! Alice, child! Take care what you say!"

"Forgive me for saying it! I couldn't help saying it. It seemed as if it would be said."

"You are over-tired, Alice, and not well."

"We have seen him start on journeys before," Alice continued, "longer and more

dangerous journeys, and I never felt anything like this. I seem to know that I shall never be Lonel's wife. I have never been able to imagine myself his wife; his child, his servant, anything to him that was not to be equal with him—but not that—not his wife!"

"Alice, you are morbidly fanciful. Let us have our cup of tea, and a walk before it gets dark. Unless you will lie down—will you, dear? Could you sleep, do you think?"

"Oh no, I should like to get out-doors. I'd far rather walk."

"I should think Grace would be home soon," Miss Dacre said, as she poured out tea.

"They did not start till much later than they had intended. Tom kept her waiting till so late. She was almost not going at

all, but Tom got so angry, when she said she wouldn't go, that Grace was quite frightened."

"She did not go when she bade Walter good-bye, then?"

"Oh no, not for a long hour after."

Olivia and Alice, each making a dreary pretence of cheerfulness for the sake of the other, took their walk drearily through the dreary afternoon.

When they returned to the house, a drizzling rain was beginning to fall, and Grace was not yet home.

One hour passed, and two; it was then blowing hard, and raining in torrents. They began to be a little anxious about Grace. Not very anxious, however, since she was with Tom, whose property she was—who would be sure to take care of her. They settled it that, probably, Tom,

when the weather became so bad, had taken her to the house of his old aunt, at Monkstowe. Still they kept expecting to see Tom himself, or to get some message from him. It would not be like Tom to leave them in unnecessary anxiety.

The evening wore on. No Tom appeared, and they received no message. Alice was restless. She wandered often into Grace's room, to see that the fire burned bright, and that everything was ready for her when she should come home. A good many fires might burn out and be re-lighted between now and then!

Everything Alice did this evening felt to her as if it were done in a dream. The things about her did not seem real things, they were shadows or memories. The reality of things seemed gone out of her life with Colonel Dacre—to Julian?

Poor Julian!

Olivia dispatched a groom to old Mrs. Blatchford's, at Monkstowe, to assure herself that Grace was safely there; but, before the groom returned, a note, addressed to Colonel Dacre, was put into Olivia's hand; which note made her aware that the man would bring back no such assurance!

CHAPTER V.

A LONG WAY HOME.

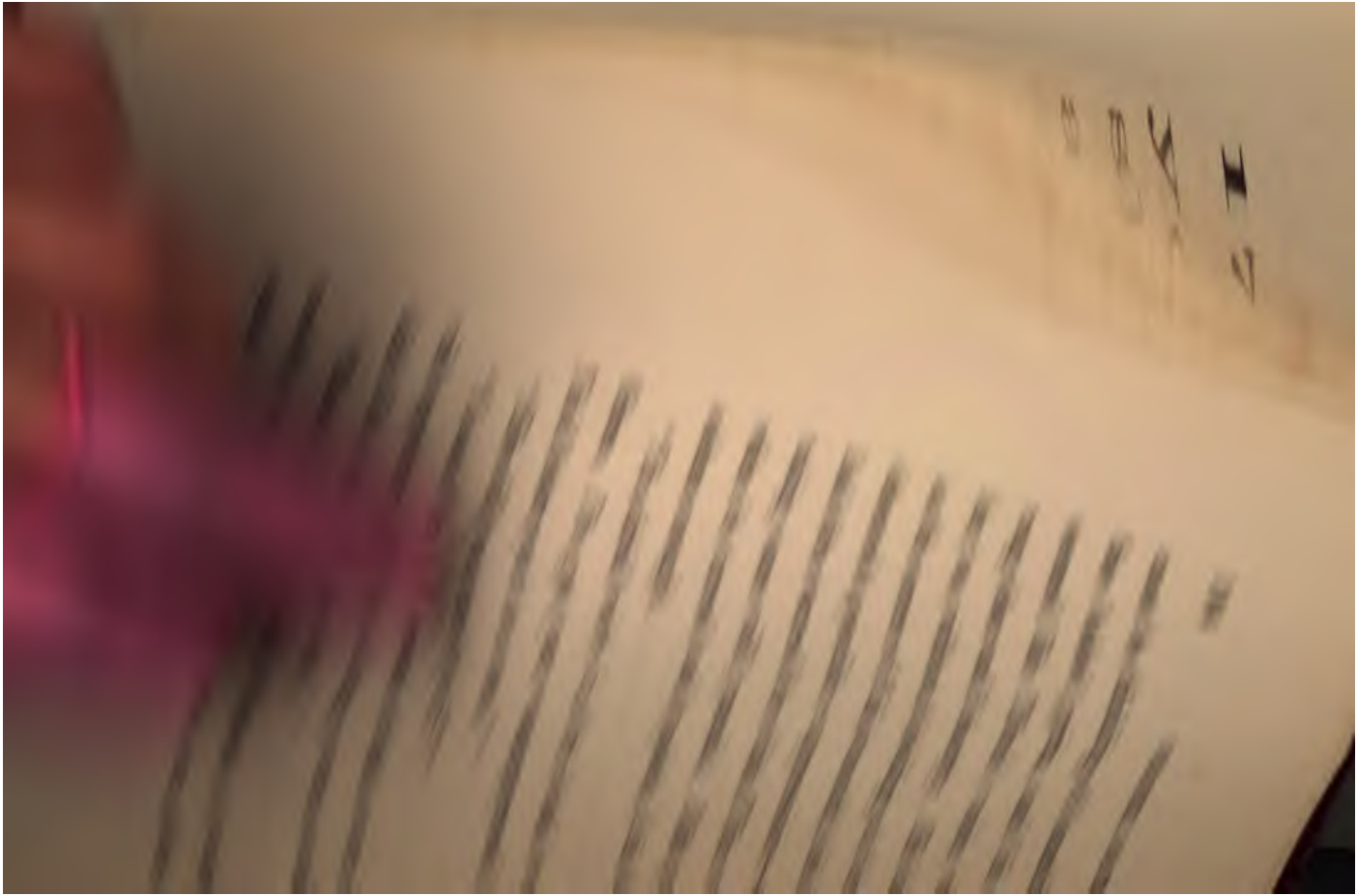
"Lady, you forced me on this harmless fraud!
By your proud humours and tyrannic frowns,
Drove me to plot your overthrow. A man,
I could hot arm me with my manly arms
Against a woman. Warring against you,
I borrowed your own weapons."

ABOUT the time when Olivia and Alice were first beginning to expect Grace back, Grace had said,

"Surely, Tom, this will be a very long way home."

"Rather long, but safe to bring us home at last—at least, so I hope and believe."

Grace glanced at Tom, and decided he



A quarter of an hour after that, there was no seeing Tom's face, or much of the road; the thickness of the atmosphere brought night on quickly; and then the wind rose and blew gusts of rain right in their faces. This was more than Mr. Blatchford had calculated upon; he broke into imprecations, hearty, rather than polite.

"Never mind the weather, Tom; I don't mind the rain. It never does me any harm to get wet. But it is so dark! I do wish we were near home. You are sure you have not lost the way?"

"Quite sure. It's very good of you, Gracie, to say you don't mind the weather, but I mind it for you. However, all's well that ends well, as this ride of ours will, no doubt. It's no use to cry over broken eggs or spilt milk. The only thing to be done is push on."

"Though I don't mind the weather, Tom, I do mind the bad language you used about it."

Tom's momentary pangs of tender penitence for a crime as yet only known to himself ceased. There was a good long silence, broken presently by Grace, who said,

"Tom, I'm sure we must have taken the wrong turning—I'm sure we're not getting any nearer Heatherstone."

"I know the country too well for there to be any danger of my losing my way, dark or light," answered Tom, stoutly.

"Then it was very foolish of you, and very wrong of you, to choose so long a way, when we started so late. I can't imagine what you can have been thinking about." Grace spoke very crossly.

"No," muttered Tom, not very distinctly, "I don't suppose you can. And I'm thank-

ful you can't. Any way, I didn't think of its raining and blowing in this confoundedly unpleasant manner."

Again silence. Then Tom asked,

"Are you very tired, Grace?"

"Yes, I am very tired indeed," Grace replied, with a sort of savageness.

"And very cold?"

"Yes, very cold indeed. My hands are so numbed that I can hardly hold the reins. It is a fortunate thing that my poor Winnie seems not to have the slightest disposition to run away."

"Put these on," urged Tom, taking off some warm woollen mittens which Grace had made for him, and a warm muffler, which, having been worn inside his coat, was quite dry.

"Indeed I will not. I am not quite selfish enough to do that, Tom."

"It wouldn't be selfish—quite the con-

trary. If you won't use them, I'll just pitch them into a pond by the road-side. Come, there's a good girl. I've got Winnie's head all safe. Don't hurry. Put them on comfortably. The muffler's not a bit wet; it was inside my coat."

Grace had to yield. She put on the mittens, and Tom managed to tie the ends of the muffler behind her waist, to hold her horse, and to give her a very hearty kiss, almost at the same time.

"Now, then, the road is good here. Let us ride fast to warm ourselves," he urged.

"If I can get Winnie along, but she is very stupid, and keeps stumbling. I never knew her so sluggish, when her head was turned towards home, before."

"Curious," commented Tom, in the suppressed voice that did not sound like Tom's voice. A few moments afterwards he burst into long, hearty peals of laughter.

"What a fool I am! A brute, too, you think, Grace!"

"I certainly can't quite imagine what there is to amuse you in our present plight. There! she was all but on her knees. I'm not sure she didn't touch them."

"Confound her! Give her a good cut every minute or so, and keep her awake," was Tom's advice, after he had dismounted, and had examined the mare's feet, to make sure she hadn't picked up a stone.

"But, Tom, I'm so tired; it is almost more than I can do to sit up, and I've such a pain in my side, Tom. How far are we from Heatherstone now?"

"Keep up your courage, Gracie. It won't be long before you are able to rest now."

Tom began to feel seriously uneasy. He had not calculated upon such a rough night, upon Grace's getting so soon tired,

nor, last and worst, on Winnie's going lame, as he was well aware she had done. He thought of changing saddles, but he did not know that his horse would carry a lady, and the dismounting and remounting Grace would be formidable in such wind and wet. They had been out three hours, and all that time had been riding away from Heatherstone. They could not, therefore, be less than twenty miles from it, even, although they had ridden slowly, in deep converse, the first part of the way. Tom judged that they must still be three or four miles from Easterwick, which was their destination.

Tom produced a silver pocket-flask.

"Take just a sip from this, dear, to help you along. Wipe the mouth first with your handkerchief."

"Why?—who used it last?"

"I did."

"If it is only you, I don't mind. I don't care to wipe it."

"Oh! Grace," said Tom, penitently, "if only you'd always been as good as that to me, I'd not have done what I have done."

"And what have you done?" she asked, quickly alarmed, because of her indefinite feeling of something odd and unusual about Tom this evening.

"Many things that have vexed you, dear, besides bringing you this dreary long ride."

Winnie now went so lame that Mr. Blatchford dismounted to lead her; he trudged along ruefully between the two horses, and wished the adventure fairly over, and he and Grace out at the other side of it, with all his heart.

"What lights are those, Tom?" Grace by-and-by asked.

"Lights!—those!—oh! that must be

Easterwick." Tom tried to speak carelessly.

"What are you talking about? Easterwick!—why, Easterwick is about five-and-twenty miles from Heatherstone."

"About that. So you have a right to be tired, Grace; you really have had a long ride. I think thirty miles is nearer the mark than five-and-twenty."

There was a little pause, very awful to Tom; then Grace asked,

"Tom, are you mad? What do you mean? If you are making me the victim of one of your disgraceful pranks, I will never forgive you—never!"

Between fright and fatigue, Grace was very near crying. Tom plodded on through mud and mire, and did not immediately answer. Grace tried a coaxing tone.

"Don't tease me, dear Tom. What with the cold and tiredness, I'm quite ill. Don't

be teasing. Tell me you don't really mean that we are close upon Easterwick."

"I do really mean that we're close upon Easterwick, and glad enough I am of it, too. I am not mad, either, but in my very sober senses."

"You've lost your way, then, after all, and, after so much boasting, don't like to confess it," Grace said, tentatively and timidly. Then she added, "Oh! Tom, how can we get home to-night?"

"We can't—it's impossible."

"But we must—we will! It shall not be impossible. If I die on the road home, I will not stay at Easterwick to-night. Of course you knew I should not. Why, think of Aunt Olivia and Alice growing more and more anxious every hour, without a notion of where I am, or what dreadful accident has happened to me."

"I have guarded against that. I left a

letter to be delivered to them this evening. They ought to have it about this time. It was addressed to the Colonel, for I knew nothing about his journey when I wrote it; but, of course, Miss Dacre will open it."

They had each of them to shout their remarks, because of the wind and the rain.

"What are you thinking about? What do you mean? If you have entrapped me in this way, if there is no mistake, if you have done this on purpose, I will never forgive you." She spoke in growing excitement. "As long as I live, if I live to be a hundred, I will never forgive you!"

"No hysterics now, Grace." Tom took a tone more like a husband's than a lover's. "And, if you value your reputation, no scene at the inn. We are going to 'The Golden Fleece;' we are expected there. Dismount quietly. Do as I tell you. Re-

serve your reproaches and your tears for a fitting opportunity. Are you not my promised wife? Don't I mean to marry you to-morrow? Is it likely I shall be careless of your honour? Do just as I tell you to do, and say nothing that will betray you, or it will be the worse for you, and, therefore, for me, dear." Tom had let Winnie stop, and had come close up to Grace to say this.

Grace was thoroughly cowed or stunned, by physical fatigue and mental amazement. Tom thought he detected a sound of quiet sobbing.

"When we are in a warm room, and have had something to eat, we will talk rationally," he said. "I will explain everything to you, and you will find you have nothing to be angry about. Only, be cautious before the people of the house. No demonstrations of any kind—take

everything for granted. If you care at all for appearances, you will take my advice." Having so delivered himself, Tom went back to Winnie's head, and they splashed and plodded on again.

Tom had spoken with preternatural solemnity, and from this solemnity of Tom's, so opposed to his usual gay and careless manner, all he said acquired a mysterious sort of importance to the bewildered senses of poor exhausted Grace. She even, by a great effort, left off crying, because Tom cautioned her that her tears might make a false impression. But she began, at the same time, to try to master her thoughts, to make up her mind what she could do, for she had not the slightest idea of letting Tom have his own way—of just falling in with his arrangements.

CHAPTER VI.

SURRENDER.

"Your mad servant, mistress, is now your master."

WHEN they reached "The Golden Fleece" Grace was perfectly passive. She let Tom take her off her horse, and give her his arm upstairs into a large, bright, comfortable room—the inn's best parlour—where a great wood fire was blazing, and everything prepared for them. The table was spread with all manner of good things, both substantial and elegant; there was great display of best china and best silver; there were even, on the table

and in other parts of the room, bouquets of choice hot-house flowers—azaleas, roses, and lilies-of-the-valley—filling the over-warm atmosphere with an almost overpowering fragrance. Everywhere a profusion of wax-lights. The contrast with the cold, wild, wet, miserable night outdoors was, therefore, as strong as possible.

The light, the heat, and the perfume of the flowers turned Grace faint and dizzy. She sank into the chair to which Tom led her and closed her eyes.

Tom went away to give some special orders about the poor lamed Winnie, and, meanwhile, the landlady buzzed about Grace, full of respectful solicitudes and offers of service, urging her to go into the adjoining room and let her wet clothes be at once removed—a suggestion which feebly added to Grace's amazement, as she wondered what the woman supposed she was to

put on. But, for all answer, Grace shook her head—she had no energy to speak or to move; besides, after Tom's solemn warnings, she thought silence the safer.

Tom came back, talked cheerily to the landlady, who was making the tea, bustled about, and ordered this and that. Grace tried to watch him, tried to understand what he said. But when she opened her eyes everything danced about in a way that made her deadly sick. She closed them, and there was sudden darkness and silence. For the first time in her life Grace had fainted. She could not more effectually have punished Tom.

When she recovered she was alone with Tom. Tom was on the rug before her, chafing her hands in his. Presently, in spite of her feeble remonstrance, he had pulled off her boots, and was chafing her feet, too, and holding them in his warm

hands before the fire. When he thought them quite warm he put them on a foot-stool, which he routed out of some corner of the room. Then he took off her wet hat, and let down her wet hair. His next proceeding was to bring her a cup of tea, and to stand over her while she drank it; which she let herself do, hoping to find that it would rouse her.

"Our last ride together, as it was to have been, will be a memorable one to us, Grace, but by no means the last, please God," Tom remarked.

Grace made him no answer.

"You are not so pale now—you feel better, poor little Gracie!" he next said.

Still no answer, and this not from sullenness, as Tom feared, but because she was trying, with all her might, to gather together her scattered senses—to understand

the situation, and to make up her mind what she had better do—what she could do.

Stupefied by sheer fatigue, she was conscious of but one desire—to fall asleep. She knew there was something she ought to be very angry about—something she had to take a resolution about, but the warmth of the fire, and her feeling of intense weakness, overcame her. Tom's gentleness, and the habitual sense of safety with Tom, soothed her; her head fell back against her comfortably-cushioned chair, her eyes closed, and she fell fast asleep.

"Poor little Gracie!—quite tired out," were the last words she heard. "Too tired to scold, too tired to be angry, too tired even to understand!" he added. "So far I've got off better than I could have expected, but, by-and-by, comes the tug of

war! When she wakes refreshed—and I daren't let her sleep long in those damp things."

Tom contemplated Grace's slumbers for a few moments admiringly. The long lashes resting on the pale cheeks, and the loose-hanging hair, made her look younger than her years, he thought—and more soft and tender than he had ever seen her look since she was a child. He heaved a great sigh, almost touched to penitence.

"If I weren't so sure that it will be for her happiness in the end, I'd be ready to hang myself," he said.

Tom was hungry, and he sat down to the table, prepared to make a hearty supper. But the notion of possible danger to Grace, from sleeping even a short sleep in those wet clothes, disturbed him. He stole softly out of the room to find the landlady, and ascertain that the woman he meant

should act as Grace's maid had arrived with the luggage.

"An hour ago and more, sir, and the lady's room's all ready—a good fire in it, and everything comfortable. I begged the lady to go and change her dress, but she's just tired out, seemingly."

"That's it—she's just tired out. When I ring send the woman up."

Mr. Blatchford went back to Grace.

It seemed a thousand pities to wake her, and he would willingly have postponed the battle. She looked so sweet and so lovely in her tired sleep, and he knew she would at all events not be sweet to him when she woke. He looked at her ruefully. Then, taking his courage in both hands, he wakened her with a hearty kiss.

Opening her eyes, Grace looked up at him in a bewildered way; then she looked round the room.

"I would gladly have let you sleep on," Tom said, "but I did not dare, in those wet things."

"I'm quite rested now, and quite ready to start for home."

"For Heatherstone?"

"Of course. I have no home but Heatherstone."

"You must put that notion aside. For the future your husband's home will be your home."

"It will be soon enough to talk of that when I have a husband."

"Which will be long before this hour to-morrow."

"Don't waste time in talking nonsense. Of course we can have some kind of vehicle. Go and arrange for our starting at once. That you obey me in this is the only possible condition on which I can ever forgive you."

Grace, sitting very erect, looked at Tom with the ominous frown, of which he was in no slight dread, beginning to contract her brows.

"Do you think, Grace, I brought you here just to take you back again? Do you think that would have been a gentlemanly or a manly proceeding? Remember I made, and I make, no pretence of having lost my way. Everything was pre-arranged."

Tom's tone was stern and decided now. He did not look like a man to be trifled with. Grace had tried carrying things with a high hand, and felt she had failed.

"I insist on going home to-night!" stormed Grace.

"It is impossible! Your horse is dead lame, and mine will not carry a lady; there is no vehicle of any kind to be hired here. My own carriage will be here the first thing in the morning, to take us on to Oldbo-

rough, where we shall be married by special licence, and whence we shall start for anywhere you please."

"You villain!—you maniac!—you——Do you dream I will submit, sir? No, I will leave this house at once, if I leave it on foot—if I die upon the road!"

Grace was now "beside herself" with rage.

"You will do no such thing," Tom answered, coolly. "What you will do, Grace, is to go to the next room and change your things. You will find our good old nurse Hexter there, with clothes of yours which she got from your own maid. She will wait upon you. You can go to bed at once, leaving me in possession here; or you can come back to me when you have changed your dress, and let us have a good talk. That would be jollier, only I think that you should rest. One thing is cer-

tain, Grace, that five minutes longer you must not keep on those clothes."

"I will keep them on all night—I will sleep in them—they shall be the death of me!" was Grace's passionate cry.

"I have too good an opinion of your sense, Grace, to believe that you will do anything so foolish; and I would take them off myself before you should run any such risk."

Grace, having got up from her chair, and taken a few steps in the room, was glad to sit down again; she could hardly stand, much less walk.

"A mad, disgraceful business!" she still scolded. "And you think I will give in? You have forgotten that I have some spirit —some pride, some temper! You cruel, deceitful, cowardly Tom! What have I done that you should use me so?—that you should set such a trap for me—that

you should bring such disgrace upon me? Oh! Tom, how could you do it?"

"Come into the trap and see if it is such a bad place after all, Gracie." And Tom opened his arms. But Grace's gesture of angry repugnance reminded him to hide the melting of his heart. Long experience had shown him that to put himself at Grace's feet was to have Grace trample upon him. If he was to carry the thing through successfully, he must do it sternly. There would be time for tenderness and apology afterwards.

"No disgrace will be brought upon you unless by your own folly," he said. "This is not the way in which I should have preferred making you my wife; but I was weary of your tyrannies and waywardnesses—of your delays."

"You cannot force me to marry you."

"That is quite true," Tom answered,

pulling fiercely at his moustache, and looking at himself in the mirror. It cut him to the heart to say anything cruel and ungenerous to Grace. "But, after such an escapade as this of ours," he went on, "it would be better that you should re-appear in society as Mrs. Blatchford. Tongues will wag, and, once set in motion, they seldom keep strictly to the truth."

That speech made the blood boil in Grace's brain, and throb visibly in her temples. It gave her strength, too; she sprang up as if she knew nothing of fatigue and faintness. She clenched her hands, and stamped her feet, and poured out on Tom a torrent of invective.

Many a man might have been frightened at the thought of having for a wife a woman whom passion could transform into such a fury. Not so Tom, who had known Grace from a baby.

"Hit me, Grace, if you think that will do you good," he said. "Let me put on your boots; you will hurt those bits of velvet if you stamp like that, and yet you make no noise!"

Grace dashed her hand against the marble mantelpiece and cut it, and looked as if she meant to dash her head there too.

But Tom took her hands and held them, and she could not stir.

"They are mine," he said. "I will not have the poor little, soft, pretty things bruised and hurt."

With one hand of his he held her hands, the other arm he put round her, and forced her back into the chair. Still holding her hands, he stood before her, looking so masterful that Grace, possessed by a sudden sense of the futility of all resistance, burst into passionate tears of humiliation, indignation, confusion, amazement, subjection.

Tom then released the struggling hands, and she covered her convulsed face with them. She wept—now loud, now low, tempestuously, hysterically, bitterly, heart-brokenly. If Tom deserved punishment, he got it now.

His face showed that he was getting it. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the moisture off his forehead as he waited. When she had exhausted herself and was quiet, he said,

"I shall teach you to forgive me, Grace. As your husband, you'll find me more yielding than, as your lover, I'd ever promise to be. I'm not a fellow for promises, but just see if I am not good to my wife! Come, Grace, look up, give me a smile. Let us have done with tragedies."

But Grace moaned.

"I didn't think you could have used me so. My heart is broken. I'm disgraced

for ever. I can never hold up my head again."

"That is all nonsense, Grace. Your heart isn't broken, and you're not disgraced for ever. And Mrs. Blatchford shall hold up her pretty head as high as she pleases."

"What can they possibly think of me at home?"

"The truth. I took all the blame upon myself. They know it's all my doing."

"There's something so ridiculous, so theatrical about it, Tom." Grace said this between laughing and crying, and altogether relenting.

Mr. Blatchford seated himself on the side of her chair, and took her into his arms.

"There," he commented, "she's got over her tantrums, and she's going to be a good, sensible, forgiving darling."

Grace did not resist or withdraw herself. She let herself be soothed and petted.

Probably she even felt a sense of sweetness and of rest in yielding and ending all struggle. Presently she let Tom ring, and give her over to the charge of the old nurse. A fine old woman, between sixty and seventy, without a silver thread in her yellow hair, and of a very imposing appearance in the handsome grey silk gown Mr. Blatchford had given her to wear at his wedding.

"She's been very angry with me, nurse," Tom said, "and very hard upon me; but she's forgiven me now, at last."

Left alone, Tom, after picking out the best of everything to be sent to Grace, took his delayed supper with hearty appetite, and in gloriously good spirits.

Then, when the table had been cleared, and when he had heard from Mrs. Hexter that Grace was in bed and in a soft warm sleep, he stretched himself upon a sofa be-

fore the fire, and slept till morning—his wedding morning. He had meant to keep vigil, to meditate. But he had gone through a good deal, and slept instead.

He woke with the first stir in the house, caused by the arrival of his own carriage and his portmanteaus. He made a most careful toilet, and then, returning to the parlour, nervously awaited Grace. She breakfasted in her own room, and only left it to get into the carriage.

The marriage took place without let or hindrance. After pauses in London and Paris, to attend to the neglected necessities of Grace's wardrobe, they proceeded to Rome. Olivia and Alice went to see Grace in London. Grace would have preferred postponing the meeting, but Miss Dacre insisted upon seeing her before she went abroad. In Rome Tom would have been intolerably bored, had it not been for the

slight distraction of hunting in the Campagna; for Grace, rather maliciously insisted upon conscientiously culturing her taste by studying "everything." It is not certain that Grace enjoyed, with all the zest she would have expected, this process of "culture." Her brightest and sunniest memories of Rome were of rides with Tom across the Campagna, and saunters with Tom in the Borghese and the Pamfili gardens—where the Spring foliage and the Spring grass seemed so refreshingly English—while they discussed where and what like their home should be.

BOOK VI.

MRS. WINTER.

CHAPTER I.

HOW IT WAS WITH JULIAN.

"For Love himself took part against himself."

DIRECTLY after the burial of his Marian, poor old General Burmander rushed away from Fiordimare, where she had suffered so terribly—where she had died—where everything spoke to him of her.

He left Julian to make all after arrangements. Julian was himself to choose marble for her monument; he was to design the monument himself, and himself to superintend its execution. It had been

her own wish to be buried in the little enclosed thicket of fragrant shrubs, close to the sea, and in shadow of the great, "good" Pines, which is the English burial-ground at Fiordimare.

"She always liked your taste better than mine, boy," the poor old fellow sobbed out; "she tried not to show it, but I always knew it."

General Burmander's was not a dignified grief. He wished to die, or to forget; nothing between seemed possible. To rush away from the place where everything reminded him of her—from Julian, whose pale face spoke to him of her—was his first impulse. He was ready to catch childishly at every outward distraction—to run about the world, trying to leave grief and misery behind him. Even in the very first days of his sorrow he was able at times, for five or ten minutes, to set it

aside; but then those five or ten minutes would be followed by a terrible outburst, as of accumulated anguish. He was like a child who will suspend its passionate screams of grief or anger while some sudden sight or sound calls off its attention, and then begin again with increased violence.

So Julian, having lost her between whom and him had been love almost as that between mother and son, was left alone at the villa at Fiordimare; feeling, too, pretty much alone in all the world.

When that monument, of which he made a labour of love, was finished—when he had attended to all his dead friend's last wishes—looking over all her papers, burning some, arranging others, as she had instructed him—Julian was free, as he felt, to go or stay here or there, any whither,

within the limits of his promise to Colonel Dacre.

The lease on which the villa had been taken would not expire for a good while; as well, therefore, he felt, remain there as go any other where. Perhaps, if he dared touch it, he could finish his book here. And he would be glad to study the people and the dialects of the districts close around.

Did he dare touch his book?

He believed himself enough of an "artist" to be able to so far set aside that, when he once got fairly to work, they should not distract him, dangerous associations connected with that often-interrupted and much-delayed book.

The first thing Julian found it needful, or, at all events, expedient to do, was to copy, so that he might put away, all Alice's pretty manuscript. For out from between

its leaves would occasionally fall a flower, or the petal of a flower; and he would remember how that flower had been worn by Alice, or held by Alice, or gathered by Alice, on this or that special day or hour; and had, for this or that reason, been preserved as sacred by him; and memories, more dangerous than these faded flowers, would fly out upon him from between the fair writing of those pages.

He could not, therefore, "work" on lines written by Alice, paper on which her hand had rested, over which her breath had wandered, communicating to it, as it seemed to him, her own sweetness. When he found himself, as it appeared to him without consent of his own will, dreaming such dreams of Alice as he had no right to dream, holding to his lips, or to his cheek, what she had consecrated, he resolved to lose no time in copying this treacherously

precious manuscript, and then in consigning it to the flames. He would make a fire in the villa garden, a fire of myrtle and of lavender, of cassia and orange-flowers, of bright-burning, dry vine-branches, and of spicy-scented fir-cones, and then it should be burnt there, with all due solemnity.

Was Julian, as yet, a tender and fantastical, rather than a passionate lover? Julian was not fortunately circumstanced for conquering his love, especially love of an ideal and dreamy nature, such as was now his for Alice. He needed companionship of a bracing kind, and a more bracing atmosphere. And he was alone in the romantic, languorous, richly-perfumed climate of Fiordimare. He was not in strong health either. He had devoted himself with self-forgetting thoroughness to Mrs. Burmander, and the last few weeks of her life had been so harrowingly painful, from

the intensity of her physical suffering, and so soul-piercingly pathetic, from the perfect resignation and loving trust with which these sufferings had been borne, that the strongest nerves and toughest sensibilities might have been taxed.

And now, as he worked earnestly at that copying, he seemed to live back in those dangerously dear and happy months at Heatherstone, to be again in the beautiful old library, to scent the Summer scent of sun-warmed roses and lime-blossoms. Looking up, he would expect to see the deep purple of the wooded gorge, on the opposite slopes some harvest-fields, above all the rim of the moor, and—between him and all other beauty—what had so slowly and so subtly grown to mean, for him, the quintessence of all beauty—the fair head of Alice! Its pale golden cloud of hair moving at the slightest breath, of even a

page turned quickly; the delicately noble and spiritually shining face intent attention, as she bent it over her writing, or interested patience, as it was lifted, waiting for what was to come next; lightly-parted lips of softest rose, letting a little pearly gleam through, if she asked a question, and eyes——

Then Julian would remember how it was the rare intelligence which seemed to him to shine out of those eyes that had first drawn his notice upon Alice, whom he had before been inclined to pass over slightingly, as too merely girlish a creature to engage his mature and serious interest. Recalling those eyes now, their deep, soft, grave gaze would seem to penetrate to his heart of hearts, and awaken slumbering honour, to rouse him to the consciousness that of Alice, who was soon to be, who even now might be, his friend's wife, he

had no right to sit and dream fantastically romantic fancies.

He would rise, push open the jalousies, and look out, to remind himself of what was the real world about him; look out on what seemed to him a dry and weary glitter of white, and gold, and blue, as he looked past fruit-and-blossom-covered orange and lemon-trees, to the blinding flash of the Mediterranean under intense sunlight; and a parched longing for the grey and the green, the cloud and the dew, the brooks and the birds of England, would possess him. But with such longing, Julian knew, thoughts of Alice were too intimately associated for him to dare yield to its prompting.

"When she is his wife I will dare see her—not before! Then I shall see in her his wife—only his wife. My friend's wife,

in whom I shall learn, in time, to find another friend."

Yet, even while he said this to himself, he could not reconcile himself to the notion of Alice as Colonel Dacre's wife. He had no feeling of this as a thing that was to be.

By-and-by, when that copying was ended —when the fragrant bonfire had consumed the precious pages, and Julian, watching the holocaust, had felt as if he were assisting at the sacrifice of all that could make life desirable, things began to improve with him. As he worked on he began to be conscious that close to him, where he would soon reach to it, was that something indefinable, unattainable by any effort for those to whom it does not come without conscious effort, that "joy in doing" which is the crown of life—it may be, at times, a crown of thorns, yet always a crown, for the true "artist"—joy in

doing which is, perhaps, more than anything else akin to joy in loving. (Joy in loving of course including that love of God, which should be the greatest joy of love, and which is surely what "religion" should chiefly be.) Both these, joy in loving and joy in doing, by lifting us out of and above ourselves, take from us more than can anything else that "burden of being," consciousness of the weight of existence, which is often the "misery" of those who have no right to be miserable. So are Art and Love the good things of life.

The true artist or the true lover is true artist or true lover in proportion as he can live out of or beyond himself in Art or Love. Possibly, judging by this rule, there would be found far fewer true lovers, even if no more true artists, than the world supposes. But, possibly, a few more true artists. Not meaning, necessarily, only

those true artists who, being great men and women, do great work to enrich the world; but, also, lesser men and women, who, true-hearted and single-minded, raise themselves to the level of artists instead of remaining labourers (for is not the difference between art and labour more one of "how" than "what?") by the completeness of devotion with which they surrender themselves to their work.

"Thank God for work! Thank God that I can love my work, and live in it!" So said Julian, right fervently and right reverently, one afternoon, as he put his work away, with a sense of longing impatience for the morrow, which should, as he hoped, find him refreshed and ready to resume work. A morrow that was indeed for him far off!

When he had finished his frugal dinner, and had written a few letters, which he

put in his pocket-book, and meant should go by to-morrow's early post, he went out for an evening walk—little dreaming, poor young fellow (and yet he was hardly to be pitied), that he was going towards an adventure that would make that beloved work impossible for days and weeks and months. (Very light, though, even that knowledge would have been, had he known also under what circumstances the interrupted work would be one day at last resumed.)

Julian—"poor Julian"—was one of the so-called "unlucky" ones, who are always encountering accidents and adventures; sometimes from ill-chosen seasons of preoccupation, sometimes from quick-sighted courage and splendid rashness shown in behalf of other people.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JULIAN.

"Something like
That face, methinks, I should have somewhere seen;
But floods of woe have hurried it far off
Beyond my ken of soul."

HALF-WAY between Fiordimare and Boccaridente, and about a quarter of a mile from the walls which enclose the gardens of the princely villa known as the Villa Castelluccio, two ladies returning towards the villa from an evening walk in the direction of Boccaridente, were greatly alarmed (or rather the elder of the two was greatly alarmed—the younger was not of

a nature to shrink from anything which promised adventure) by the gesticulation of, as they supposed, a maniac, coming along the road towards them.

The supposed maniac was Julian, and presently, saying something they did not understand, he rushed up and seized hold of them. He half dragged, half pushed them, as he could, some paces backwards. Then came a great dust or smoke—they couldn't tell which—and a deafening sound of thunder.

When the dust cleared off, Julian, whose last effort had been one great further push, was lying on the ground near them.

Julian had detected a movement on the recently-quarried hill-side, towards which his eyes had been drawn by some lovely effect of the sunset-light—a movement which he thought preceded, as it was proved it did, a land-ship. A considerable mass

of rock fell; but the main bulk of it bounded from point to point, missed the road, and thundered down into the sea. The road, nevertheless, was strewn with various-sized fragments, and one of these had struck and had felled Julian.

It had all happened in such a flash that the ladies needed to pause to draw breath before they recognised what really had happened, their own marvellous escape and Julian's overthrow.

Then the younger of the two—a girl whom Julian had noticed when he had once or twice met her, because of her fair-haired beauty, which reminded him, at first sight, of Alice, and who had returned his notice with bolder eyes and franker scrutiny than at all accorded with his idea of maidenly modesty in a fair-haired girl who presumed to have even that superficial likeness to Alice—this girl now, after stooping down

to examine Julian, whom she declared to be dead, told her older companion—somewhat to that lady's consternation—who Julian was, where he lived, how long he had been at Fiordimare, and other particulars about him more or less true.

Not, of course, stopping now to ask how the girl had become possessed of all this information—though, even now, making a mental note of it as a thing needing to be inquired into—Mrs. Winter (that was the name by which the elder lady was known) despatched her pupil to the villa to summon assistance for carrying Julian there, where he must remain, at least till a surgeon had seen him, and examined into the nature and extent of his injuries—for there was no other house within a mile.

Then, kneeling on the road beside him, she cautiously lifted his head from the dust

on to her knee, and tried to discover where he was injured.

"Not dead! surely he is not dead!" she cried, in a shocked voice, seeing how young and how beautiful was the face which looked liked a dead face.

Blood was oozing from a wound on his temple; but it was not a wound that could, she thought, when she had wiped it with her handkerchief, and looked at it, be of importance.

And in this she was right; it was not this that was Julian's serious hurt; and yet the face on her knee looked like a dead face. Bending her cheek to his mouth, she could feel no faintest respiration, but, putting her hand over his heart, she thought she detected a feeble fluttering.

"Thank God!" she said. "Poor boy! There would be grief indeed for your mo-

ther if you had died. It is just a face for a mother's loving worship," she added, as she bent her own close over it.

Julian looked always younger than even his young years. He wore no beard or whisker, and his slight moustache was of silky softness. His present death-like pallor brought out the delicately fine chiselling of his features, and added darkness to his dark brows and lashes.

The lady who gazed down on him thought she had never seen a more perfectly beautiful face, only it was too like the beauty of death. Her gaze of compassionate admiration by-and-by grew intent and perplexed, as that of one trying to remember.

"I have it now," she thought. "It is like the face of that dead Christ in Giottino's picture in the Uffizi Gallery—a younger and a darker face, they said, than any other

painter has painted as our Lord's—a face that strangely impressed itself upon me as like——"

At this moment Julian opened his eyes. They were full of pain and of confused trouble; they gazed up perplexedly into the very beautiful eyes that so compassionately gazed down upon him. The likeness to the pictured face of the dead Christ disappeared with the opening of the eyes, and gave place to another likeness—to a far more complete likeness than any she had found in the picture to the face of which the picture had reminded her.

In that soft evening light, and under the softening influence of emotion and of pity, not only that lady's eyes were beautiful, but her whole countenance was beautiful, with a noble and sorrow-chastened kind of beauty. She was not young.

A mutual fascination seemed to hold

Julian's eyes fixed upon the lady's, the lady's on Julian's, till Julian tried to move, to lift himself on his elbow, in order to look round. When he found he could not —even wondering pained him.

"Was anyone hurt?—was Alice?" he moaned out.

He spoke too faintly for Mrs. Winter to be able to catch his words, though she bent lower, trying to hear them. One of Julian's last conscious thoughts, before he was struck down, had been to save the fair hair which was like Alice's from being dabbled with blood; and now the idea of Alice, as associated with the accident, was stamped upon his jarred and bewildered brain.

Julian's eyes sought about restlessly. What he saw was a young moon setting behind some olives, silvering their soft greyness with its last light; a group of

umbrella-pines, showing their quaint contours against a melon-coloured sky, while a delicate veil of violet-hued haze rested on the sea. Not an English scene. The air was soft and balmy; but it was not English air. It was full of rich Spring odours, but too rich and too spicy for those of an English Spring—of the almond-scented white-flowering heath with which the hill-side was covered, and, from further off, the perfumes from the fields of flowers, fields of violet, of jasmine, and of rose, and from the large orange and lemon orchards belonging to the villa.

Julian sighed heavily, oppressed by what seemed like the weight of the waves of deadly sickness which kept flowing over him. He said, just audibly,

"I suppose it is all a dream."

She caught these words, and answered them.

"Alas! no, my poor boy, it is no dream —you are hurt."

"And Alice?"

"It is only you who are hurt; there is no Alice here. Do you know where you are most hurt? Can you tell me if you are in much pain? Never mind—don't disturb yourself; we will have it all seen to soon."

Her voice sounded to herself other than her own for very sweetness—the cooing, soothing sweetness of a mother's to a sick child. It had a strange effect on Julian; it seemed to him penetratingly sweet, and, in its sweetness, bewilderingly familiar; it seemed to creep to the marrow of his bones and to the innermost recesses of his heart, as no other voice, in all his life, had ever done. He did not think of answering it. Waiting for the voice to speak again, he swooned again—a long, long swoon this

time, which spared him consciousness of pain when he was, by-and-by, lifted and moved.

"He is dead," the servants from the villa pronounced.

"No, no, he is not dead," the lady answered them sharply.

CHAPTER III.

STORGÉ.

"Of what he dimly understands,
'It cannot be,' the fool will say;
Know thou to-morrow in his hands
Will hold a lamp to light to-day."

JULIAN was carried into the great drawing-room of the villa, and the surgeon who superintended his removal, while he was still insensible, from the sofa on which he had first been laid to a hastily-prepared bed, prophesied that it would be many days before he could even leave that bed. But for a case not of a nature, as he said, to postpone itself, which called him

to the mountains, he would have remained all night. This being impossible, having done the little that could now be done, and instructed Mrs. Winter what further could be done in certain emergencies, he took his leave, promising to come again at the first possible minute. There might be injury to the spine, concussion of the brain—one or both, he said; on his next visit he would be better able to determine. The kind of night passed by the patient would help him to a guess as to the extent of the mischief. Madame, he hoped, would herself be able to keep watch this one night; to-morrow he would send in a "sister." He had despatched a mounted messenger to Genoa for ice, which was to be used freely, if anything approaching to delirium showed itself.

When Dr. Valery was gone, and her pupil, after some difficulty, got rid of for

the night, and Mrs. Winter took up her position by her patient's bed, she had time to recognise the awkward dilemma in which she had placed herself. Had she, moved by his beautiful face, yielded too unreflectingly to her impulsive compassion for the young stranger, and forgotten her duty as governess and duenna?

Mrs. Winter's pupil, Miss Flora Kennedy, only child and heiress of Sir Everard Hope Kennedy, was a very intractable young person. Her mother had been a woman of great beauty, whom Sir Everard, when very young, had married for that beauty. She was of low birth, and, a few years after her marriage, which had taken place when she was only seventeen, had begun to prove herself of lower conduct. To run away with one of her husband's grooms had been the final step of her career. Happily for her husband, sparing

him world-wide exposure, and letting it be possible to hush up the affair, it was in a full sense final. She was thrown from her horse, and killed almost immediately—that is to say on her flight, within a few hours of the time she left her house. To her husband she was self-convicted, by a letter she had left behind; to some of the servants, by arrangements she had made. Still, there had been no complete *esclandre*.

Sir Everard quitted the country on foreign diplomatic service, leaving Flora, then five years old, with his mother. But that high-minded old lady did not more than a year or two survive the wreck of her son's life. Flora was transferred to the guardianship of an aunt, who, finding the responsibility too great, begged her father to choose a governess for her. Sir Everard, who had then lately become acquainted with Mrs. Winter, and had formed a very high esti-

mate of her character, laid all the circumstances of his life, and all his fears lest he should see the mother over again in the daughter, before her, and asked if she would take entire charge of the girl. Mrs. Winter had now, for nearly ten years, had this entire charge of Miss Kennedy. She frankly told Sir Everard she feared she had no influence for good over her pupil. To which he had made the bitter answer that, the mother's blood being in the girl's veins, the fact that she had been kept till now from active evil, laid him under an inexpressible obligation.

Flora needed as much a warder as a governess; she did not seem to have any affectionateness in her disposition, nor any sense of honour or modesty, while her craving for the attention and admiration of men was a sort of mania—a delirium.

"What have I done?" cried poor Mrs.

Winter, as she looked on Julian's face, which she judged so beautiful, and thought how probably Lady Flora's fair locks, and fair flesh, and tint of strawberries and cream, would snare so young a man's fancy.

Already she had had a specimen of the sort of difficulty she would have to encounter. The good old Dr. Valery had been obliged to put the girl out of the room almost by force, before he examined his patient; so perseveringly had she pressed upon him her services and assistance. Under the plea of "gratitude to her deliverer," Mrs. Winter foresaw how Flora would surpass herself in a style of conduct with which she found it all the more difficult to deal, as it was impossible to know how far it was to be laid to shameless impudence, how far to stupid ignorance.

"What have I done?" again and again

cried poor Mrs. Winter. But she tried to console herself by the consciousness that she could not have done less, or differently, and that Sir Everard—whose only slavery was to the maxim "*noblesse oblige*," his one violation of which, in marrying unworthily, he had repented all his life since—would be the first to justify her. Besides, at the worst, if her stranger-guest should not be able to be moved for a long time, and if Flora was not to be kept within bounds, she could, immediately on the arrival of his friends, leave them and the sufferer in possession of the villa, and take Miss Kennedy elsewhere.

"His friends!" Who, she wondered, were his nearest friends? Had he a mother? If so, she certainly would want to be beside such a son at such a time.

It was only during the first two or three hours of her watch by Julian that Mrs.

Winter had leisure for meditation. After that, her patient's growing restlessness and fever, which, towards morning, increased to violently delirious excitement, occupied her, mind and body. One horror seemed always before his eyes. That mass of rock was always falling, or about to fall, on Alice. The name of Alice, pronounced in all variety of tones, of terror, of despair, of tenderness, was always on his lips.

"Alice is not here. Alice was not hurt. No one was hurt but you, poor boy. You saved everyone else and got hurt yourself." So she kept assuring him. Sometimes he seemed to understand, and was, for a few moments, quiet; sometimes the sense of her words did not seem to penetrate to him; and yet the sound of her voice soothed him. Presently, saying, "Try to rest, try to sleep. Alice is safe.

Only you are hurt. Try to rest, try to sleep." She laid her soft cool hand upon his burning forehead,—the ice for which she was longing had not even now come. Again, even to herself, her voice had sounded unfamiliar for very sweetness. Was it that she tried to speak to him as she, who herself had known what it was to be a mother, felt his mother must have spoken had she been beside him then?

While her hand lay on his forehead Julian fell asleep. He slept at least an hour; and, while she watched his sleep for that hour, her eyes never taken from his face, a strange yearning wistfulness of passion grew upon Mrs. Winter. Once, moved to do it by irresistible impulse, she softly stooped over him, lower and lower, nearer and nearer, till her lips touched his smooth white lids "For your mother," she said to herself; and she added, "And for my son."

Then she fell into profound realization of the joy and the sweetness of being mother to such a son. That mother's kiss set upon those white lids woke the mother's hunger in her heart—a dear, delicious, for her dangerous, hunger.

"And my boy, if he lives, may be such another," she thought, "as beautiful as this boy. The little dark head which lay in my bosom may, by this time, be such a head as this! Ah, Heaven, shall I ever meet him and know him? Could I meet him and not know him? Could I know him and not claim him? Not claim him for my own, my very own?"

Her thoughts grew passionately agitating. Was it possible that her mental disturbance communicated itself to Julian? After much moaning and restless movement Julian sprang up with a shout of horror.

After this his delirium grew more and

more violent, and she failed in any effort to soothe him. The ice had, by this time, come, and she used it diligently, but, apparently, without any good result.

With the earliest daylight, Miss Kennedy, coquettishly arrayed, came into the room, urging Mrs. Winter to take some rest and leave the patient to her.

The girl's fair hair, catching the first sunlight, caught, also, Julian's attention. He spoke to her, confused, incoherent words, of which she caught only the one word "Alice."

He mistook her, then, for Alice! Alice was, of course, the girl with whom he was "in love!" Flora thought this very interesting; she thought, too, it would be amusing pastime to make this handsome young Mr. Farquhar jilt "Alice," falling "madly in love" with herself.

Miss Kennedy was destitute of imagina-

tion, but was just able to fancy-sketch such a little programme as this.

If her hair were something like Alice's, and her fairness, there the likeness ended. Instead of Alice's large sweet serious orbs, Flora had "pig's eyes;" instead of Alice's especially spiritual expression, Flora's was of the flesh, fleshly.

The girl's presence in the room increased Julian's disorder; but it was not at once, nor without difficulty, that Mrs. Winter could make her go away, and send, in her place, their good old faithful Swiss maid, Rosalie.

Dr. Valery was indeed welcome when, at last, he came, bringing with him a Sister of Charity, whom he strongly recommended to act as nurse.

Mrs. Winter now conscientiously tried to abandon the sick boy to the care of Sister Martha and of Rosalie, and to devote

herself scrupulously to the usual routine of her duties with her pupil. It was hard to her, beyond anything she could have believed, to do this; she was keenly alive to every sound from the sick-room, and intensely conscious of Julian's acute suffering; the effort to keep away from him made her heart sick.

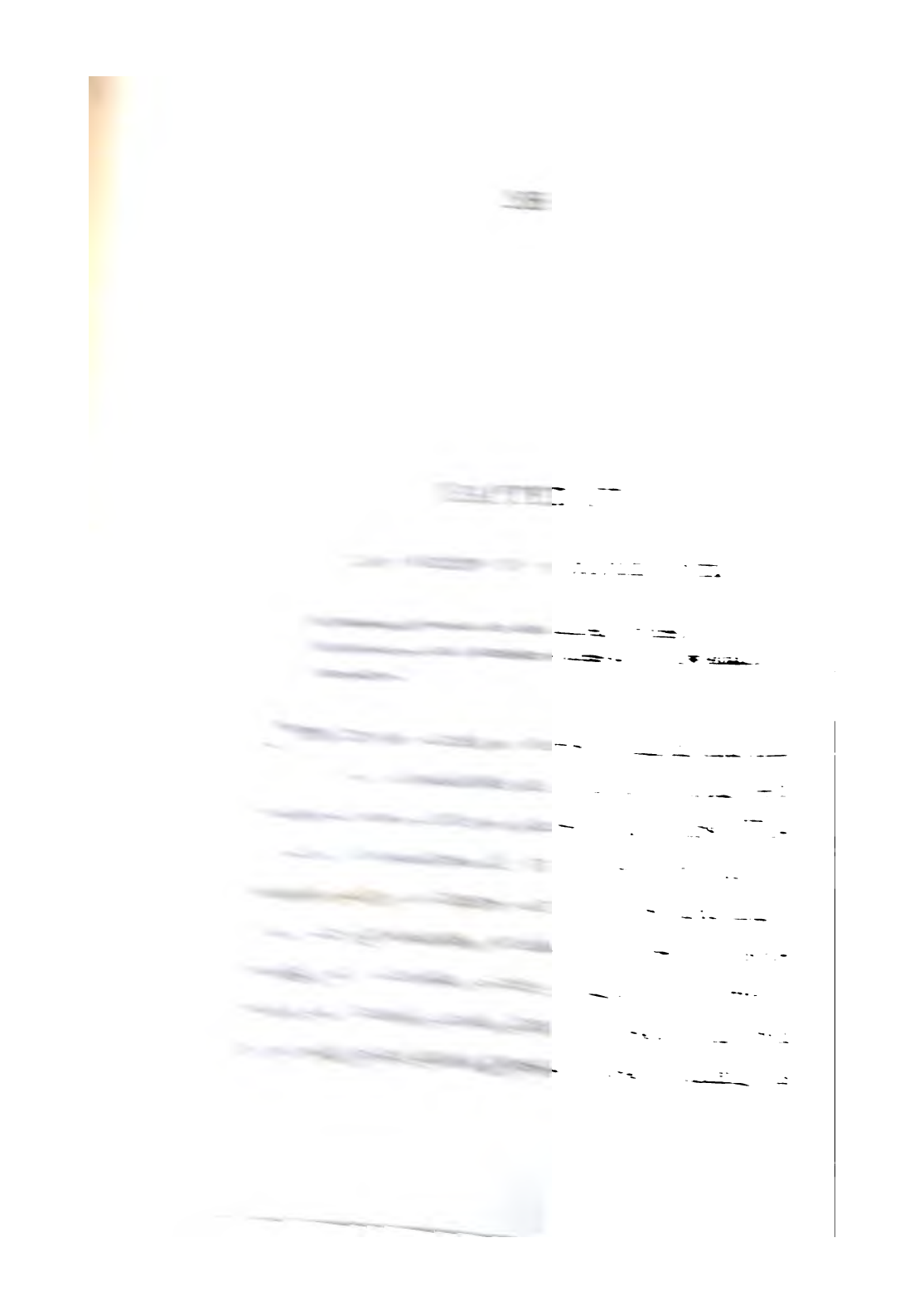
How grateful she was when, just at this time, relatives of Sir Everard's came to Fiordimare, and took Flora a good deal off her hands! As one of the party was Sir Everard's sister, she could trust Flora to them, and know that on them would fall the responsibility if anything should go wrong with the girl while she was in their keeping.

Mrs. Winter, after all, was really Julian's chief nurse. She took a share of the night-watching in turn with Rosalie, in order to leave Sister Martha fit for the arduous

duties of the day; and she took always by far the larger share. There was steadily and rapidly growing in her a feeling for her patient that made it dificult for her to overcome jealous reluctance that anyone else should do anything for him.

On the first day of Julian's sojourn at the Villa, Mrs. Winter had written to Sir Everard, just then in London, a full account of the accident, and of what she had done and arranged, asking his further instructions. His answer had been little more than an expression of his absolute confidence in her wisdom and her prudence. He left her *carte-blanche* in every way. He spoke of himself as over-worked, over-wrought, harassed by incessant and incompatible claims upon him. His short letter had two hasty postscripts. The first merely said that he trusted to her not, in her conscientious scruples and

anxieties about her charge, in any way to forget or to slight the obligations they were under to this young stranger. In the second, he said he had just heard what made it probable he should be in Marseilles within the next few weeks, *en route* for the East. If so, he would be particularly glad if she would meet him there with his daughter.



question with herself. From day to day, care for him, anxiety about him, service of him, more and more completely engrossed her, and she grew to feel as if she herself had a right to him, greater than anyone else could have; grew to feel this, however, without any inward recognition that she had any such feeling. She had learnt from Flora that young Mr. Farquhar had lived at Fiordimare with General and Mrs. Burmander, whom she knew by name. She might suppose, therefore, that they were his nearest relatives or dearest friends; and she knew that Mrs. Burmander was dead, and that the General was travelling. So day followed day, and no steps were taken towards bringing Julian's friends to him. Dr. Valery had always said that his life was in no danger. But, by-and-by, came a morning when, as letters were brought to Mrs. Winter while she

sat in Julia's room, having sent Sister Martha to get her breakfast and a mouthful of fresh air, he woke, and his attention fixed itself upon them. The sound of his feeble voice called her immediately to his side. A few moments before she had been watching his death-like sleep, and then had moved to the window.

"Letters," he said; "the sight of them reminds me that I should write, if only two lines, to my friends in England. They must wonder. Is it long that I have lain here?"

His voice was so weak that she had to stoop close over him to catch what he said; but he looked calm and collected. She knew that he was better, that the looked-for favourable turn had come; his eyes had power and concentration in them, for the first time since many days.

"You are much better," she said, in a

tone of soft, suppressed joy, gently pushing back the damp, dark hair from his forehead, with a tenderly motherly gesture, as she spoke.

Even at that moment she was conscious that, after the first instinctive movement of joy, followed a heart-sinking and sickness; premonition, perhaps, of the emptiness and desolation that must reign in her when—the "better" changed to "well,"—he should be gone.

"Yes," answered Julian; "thanks to you, I am much better. I have known of your goodness, of your loving-kindness, when everything else seemed the most horrible hot muddle and darkness and anguish."

Her beautiful eyes softened with moisture—a lovely flush that took years from her age suffused her face; but she only said, in that tone of ineffable sweetness that was for him only,

"You must not speak. You are very, very weak as yet, poor boy."

"But may I try to write—three lines?"

"First let me give you some breakfast. Then let me write for you."

The breakfast, which was of strong soup and wine, was no sooner taken than Julian fell asleep again. That day and the next he said no more of writing. He was too weak to think or to remember; he slept the chief part of his time. Then, her conscience reproaching her, she, at a time of day when he was at his strongest, asked if he would tell her to whom he would wish her to write for him.

But Julian begged to be allowed to try to write with his own hand. She set him up with pillows, and brought him pen and ink and paper.

"Is it to your mother you are going to write?" she asked faintly.

Julian only answered by a shake of the head. He had no energy to spare for explanations.

She could not help seeing what he wrote, for she had to try to steady his hand. But as he began, "Best beloved friend," the name of the person to whom he wrote was not betrayed to her.

"Let me address it for you?" she pleaded, as Julian fell back exhausted. "To whom?"

And she held her pen suspended, ready to write. But Julian had fainted; the effort had been too much.

Everything then was, of course, set aside. But, afterwards, feeling that Julian's own lines made too light of his condition, Mrs. Winter herself wrote, and slipped into the same envelope what she thought a fair account of his state. In the evening Julian asked if his letter had been

posted. She reminded him that it had not even been addressed, and again offered to address it.

"If I could do it myself they would be so much less alarmed," he said. "Let me try to-morrow."

When "to-morrow" came Julian was stronger. He addressed his letter, and also made Sister Martha search his note-book for the delayed letter—the one he had written before his accident, and only now remembered. This he enclosed with his yesterday's feeble scrawl.

It chanced that this day Mrs. Winter was on duty with Flora, and all day hardly saw Julian. And Julian's letter was posted while she was out; and she knew no more than before to whom Julian wrote as "best beloved friend."

That night, when Mrs. Winter, in the middle of the night, brought him his medi

cine, Julian, not quite awake, looked up at her and said—

"Who are you?"

"Mrs. Winter, your nurse," she answered him, softly, flushing as she spoke. The question seemed to move as well as to surprise her.

"That isn't what I mean," he said: "But no matter, I suppose I've been dreaming about you; I suppose it was in my dream that I've always been going to find out something about you—something about having known you before—and yet not in this life. Oh! I've been dreaming, and the dream has left a strange, confused feeling—that is all."

He drank what she offered him, and fell asleep again. But no inclination to sleep weighed on his nurse's lids that night or morning.

A few days later Julian began to be very

cautiously moved on to a sofa, and the sofa wheeled into another room, every afternoon, to escape the afternoon sun. Miss Kennedy immediately, when she was at home, showed a wonderful fancy for sitting in the garden, and at just that part of it on to which looked the window in which Julian lay.

At first it seemed to Mrs. Winter that a love-affair between these young people must be inevitable, unless she took some decided step; and the decided step of herself going away with Flora, which, a week or two since, had seemed so easy, seemed now not difficult, but impossible. In fact, this poor lady's every thought, night and day, every hope, every care, every prayer, had come to be centred on this sick young stranger. He had saved her life, certainly; but she had never known till now that life was so precious to her that

she should feel like this to any stranger who should save it. Either she could not, or she dare not, understand herself.

No mother, ambitious for her son, could have felt more passionate pain at the prospect of that son's marrying unworthily than Mrs. Winter felt about the danger to Julian from Flora's golden locks. To Mrs. Winter, just now, her position was one of infinite difficulty. Her feelings with regard to her guest were obtaining more and more complete mastery over her, and she needed to keep strictest watch and ward over herself, as well as over her pupil, lest she should betray herself to Flora's misapprehension and ridicule.

This she had already done, in a manner, to an extent, of which she had no suspicion. If Flora were stupid about things high and noble, she, nevertheless, had a good deal of keen craftiness and low cunning.

Poor Mrs. Winter's cheeks must have grown hot and her heart burnt within her had she overheard what Flora one evening said to Julian.

She had evaded Mrs. Winter, and had entered Julian's room from the garden, bringing with her a basket of oranges she had just gathered, and which, sitting, while she did so, where Julian could see her, she had prettily decorated with orange-leaves and blossoms.

"I would come and see you much oftener if I could, Mr. Farquhar," Miss Kennedy volunteered, when her present had, of course, been courteously received. "I am sure you must be horridly dull here. And I'd read to you, and talk to you, and amuse you, and we'd have great fun, but for that ridiculous old governess of mine, who is in love with you herself, and so frightfully jealous that I can hardly ever escape from

her. Whenever I propose to come and see you she forbids it, and says I shall do you harm. Isn't she an absurd old thing?"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Julian, half in reproof, half in real bewilderment.

"Of Mrs. Winter, of course. When I do anything she doesn't like, she always threatens to complain of me to papa; and papa is a person, and the only person, of whom I *am* afraid. Are you inclined to marry your grandmother, Mr. Farquhar? She is almost old enough to be that. She is quite ready to have you, if you will have her. She takes the greatest care to keep you to herself. And one day—she didn't know I was looking—I saw her kiss you when you were asleep!"

Julian, being weak, blushed—for himself, for Mrs. Winter, or for Miss Kennedy?

"This basket of oranges is very pretty,

Miss Kennedy," he said—"quite a little work of art, in its way. I admire it exceedingly. But I cannot admire—excuse me if I speak too frankly—your manner of speaking of a very estimable and beautiful lady."

"Beautiful! you call her beautiful! What do you call me, then?"

"Very pretty," he said, smiling at the frankness of the girl's vanity. "You made a charming picture under the orange-trees just now."

"You call Mrs. Winter beautiful just to teaze me, I know," pouted Flora. "You can't really admire her. Why, she's as dark as you are, and certainly old enough to be your mother. Papa admires her, and I used to be afraid he meant to make her my step-mother; but then papa's not young as you are, and papa is fair. I like men to be dark, but I think all women should be light—should have white

skins and fair hair; don't you think so?"

"No, I think that would be wearisomely monotonous. And I know ladies of dark complexion whom I think beautiful—as I have told you I think Mrs. Winter."

"But your Alice is fair—as fair as I am, perhaps?"

Again the rich blood rushed hotly over Julian's pale face.

"Of what, of whom are you speaking, Miss Kennedy?" he asked very haughtily.

"Of your lady-love, your Alice. Ah! you see I know all your secrets."

The girl laughed so loudly that Sister Martha came in.

"Mademoiselle is too noisy for a sick-room," she said; "and here is Madame, who seeks you to go out."

"Just what I said, the jealous old cat!" Flora remarked confidentially; then louder, "Good-bye, Mr. Farquhar. I shall

come again soon, and then you shall tell me all about Alice." So saying, the girl ran away to change her dress.

Miss Kennedy had made Julian feverish, with a mixture of irritation and a deeper sort of annoyance.

"Dear Mrs. Winter, how I pity you!" he said; "what a dreadful young person! Are you obliged to put up with her? She is just the sort of girl who ought to be shut up in a convent to keep her safe."

"We shall soon leave you in peace now," answered Mrs. Winter, and her voice and her eyes were intensely sad.

"Do you think I wouldn't put up with her for your sake?"

Julian spoke energetically, and he took and kissed Mrs. Winter's hand, and sent a thrill of happiness to her heart.

"How your mother must love you!" she said, with soft fervour. Speaking the

thought, feeling, or question which had been always, from the first, in her heart.

"I have no mother," was Julian's answer; and then, when she felt she could have given—what? not the world, for Julian was in it!—anything precious to her that was not Julian, had she had anything—for answer to just one or two questions—she was called away.

CHAPTER V.

AS BETWEEN MOTHER AND SON.

"Thou bear'st thy father's face,
Frank Nature, rather curious than in haste,
Hath well composed thee."

WHEN Dr. Valery came next day he wished that his patient should try to stand and walk. He did not know, he said, how otherwise to judge of the extent of the injuries he had sustained. To Mrs. Winter, who knew what the good doctor feared, the moment when Julian's feet were set on the ground, and when, leaning one hand heavily on her arm, the other on Sister Martha's, he tried to walk, was such

a moment of deadly anxiety, as his mother must have felt had she been there.

"I am feeling for his mother, for his dead mother," she said.

"Thank God!" she cried, pressing his hand to her throbbing heart, when Julian had managed a few steps, which brought him face to face with a mirror, into which he looked with an invalid's pathetic sort of interest and curiosity about himself, and the changes in himself, since he last looked at his own image.

"How my moustache has grown!" he remarked, with languid, pleased surprise. "And how funnily my hair is brushed!"

He smiled at himself as he said this, and Mrs. Winter's caressing, maternal smile answered his smile, as their eyes met in the mirror. At that moment Dr. Valery, who had been intently watching, ejaculated,

"What a likeness!—as between mother

and son. So, at least, one might say, but for the too great youth of Madame," the kindly, clever old man supplemented, gallantly.

The eyes which met each other in the mirror dilated with a startled expression, and this similarity of expression increased whatever other likeness there might be.

"I let you stand too long," Mrs. Winter said, in a barely audible voice, as Julian's thin face flushed, and then faded to more than its former waxen sort of pallor.

"He stands too long," was echoed by the good doctor. "Quick, to the couch, or he faints. There! I am well content. For the first trial all has gone bravely. I banish my worst fears."

When Mrs. Winter had re-arranged Julian's pillows, and the nurse had given him a restorative draught, keeping behind Julian's couch, where he could not see her, and speaking in a voice that did not seem like her voice, Mrs. Winter said,

"My too great youth is in the good doctor's imagination. My son, were he alive, would now be some years older than our patient. I married young. My son, were he now alive, would be five-and-twenty: our patient, I should say, is barely twenty."

"I am more than that. I am, as far as I know, just about the age you say your son would be."

Julian felt as if he spoke in a dream, as if everything was floating away from him. Mrs. Winter, who had been standing, suddenly sat down. Her face, turned towards the window, was averted from them all. For some seconds there was complete silence in the room. The doctor was feeling his patient's pulse.

"A little agitated. He must have complete quiet," was his verdict. Then, approaching Mrs. Winter to take his leave, Dr. Valery was startled at the curious

change, transfiguration, as it seemed, that had come over her face. He would have said something, but that, by a gesture, she seemed to implore his silence. He departed wondering.

Mrs. Winter had not moved when the nurse came to her side and whispered that Julian had fallen asleep, and that she would go into the gardan for a quarter of an hour's fresh air, if Madame were free to remain. Miss Kennedy was with her friends till the next day. Madame was free to remain. Sister Martha went. Then, after looking round, as if to assure herself either that she was alone, or that she was in the real live world, not in a dream, Mrs. Winter moved to where she could look upon the sleeping boy. Her boy! as she called him to herself. She had no consciousness of time. She sat motionless, and never took her eyes from his face. Motionless, except

once, when she stretched her arms towards him, and her lips formed some words. The words were not spoken. The arms were drawn back, and folded across her breast. When, by-and-by, Sister Martha returned to the room, Mrs. Winter left it. Julian still slept.

Mrs. Winter locked herself into her own chamber, and threw herself upon her knees by the bed. Burying her face, she prayed, in a manner that might well be called wrestling with the Lord and with her own soul—for guidance as to what to do, and power to do it—if——. When she rose she was much exhausted, but she was quite calm.

"I must be sure," she said—"I am sure. My heart knew from the very first, and yearned towards him as only a mother's could. But I must prove it to myself, so that I may never doubt afterwards."

She was wise enough to wait, however,

till any impression caused by Dr. Valery's comment on the likeness between them, any emotion which had called the blood to Julian's pallid face, should have had time to die away. This soon happened. In Julian's state of feebleness and languor memory took little hold of anything. Mrs. Winter could detect no change in Julian's manner towards her—no accentuated interest, or curiosity, or affection.

On the next Sunday Flora was again to be with her relatives; and Sister Martha, her patient's state permitting, was to have some free hours. During this time Mrs. Winter trusted to be able, without rousing suspicion in Julian, to secure as much proof as she needed—as much proof as her reason needed; her heart no longer needed any.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.