DIANA TRELAWNY

THE HISTORY OF A GREAT MISTAKE

BY

MRS OLIPHANT

IN TWO VOLUMES

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DIANA.

CHAPTER X.

THE TWO LITTLE WOMEN.

Mrs Norton and her niece had received the tidings of the Hunstantons' approaching departure with consternation almost more profound, and certainly more simple in its exhibition, than had been exhibited by any of the other members of the party. Surprise, which at the first moment took the form of angry petulance and offence, had been the manner in which it showed itself in Sophy; and as her aunt lived only

in her and her wishes, the girl's angry vexation resolved itself into a mixture of offence and resignation in Mrs Norton. She calmed her child and soothed her, and then repeated Sophy's sentiments in a more solid form. "My darling, you must not blame Diana. Diana has been goodness itself. We never could have had this pleasure at all but for her thoughtfulness," she said, and then added: "I think, however, that Diana might have managed to let us know delicately what she meant—not forcing it upon us through the Hunstantons, if that is what she wants us to know." Sophy did not think whether Diana had or had not taken this underhand way of warning them that it was time to depart; but she was angry beyond measure and beyond reason. They both cried over the thought, shedding hot tears. "Just when we know everybody and are really

enjoying ourselves!" said Sophy. "Oh! how are we ever, ever, to put up with that nasty, windy Red House among the trees, with no society, after all that we have had here?"

"Oh hush, my darling!" said Mrs Norton; "this is what it is to be poor, and to have to do as other people like. Those who are rich can please themselves — it is only the poor who are shuffled about as other people like; but we must remember that we should never have come at all if it had not been for Diana."

"Would it have been worse not to come at all than to be sent away now?" said angry Sophy, at that height of irritated scepticism which would rather not be, than submit to anything less than perfect satisfaction in being. Could any one say they were ungrateful? Did not the ascription of praise to Diana preface everything they said, or at least everything that the

most reasonable of them said? For as for Sophy, what was she more than a child? and a child, when it is crossed, allows no wisdom or kindness even in God Himself, who ought to know better than to expose it to suffering. They made up their little plans together on the very morning after that momentous night. They would go to Diana, and find out what her intentions were—whether she meant them to go, whether they were to accompany her wherever she might be going, or go back with the Hunstantons. "She must at least see that it is reasonable we should know," Mrs Norton said, with a dignified and restrained sense of injury — as one above making an open complaint, whatever reason she might have. When it came to the moment of going down-stairs, Sophy indeed began to hesitate. She was afraid of Diana.

"I am sure you will talk to her better without me, dear auntie," she said. "When any one is cross I cannot bear it."

"That is because you are too sensitive, my love," said Mrs Norton. "Poor darling, who would be cross to you? and you are only afraid of Diana because of the time when she was your governess," she added, with a mild sense of superiority as of one who never was, nor had in her family any one who required to be a governess. But nevertheless, half by moral suasion, half by authority, Sophy was made to come and back up the elder lady by her presence. They went down-stairs slightly nervous it must be allowed. They knew that they were braver behind backs than when Diana looked at them with those large eyes of hers; but having made such a strenuous resolution, they could not withdraw from it now. They found Diana taking her

morning coffee with a book before her, as is the use of lonely people, and she received their visit quietly as a not unusual incident. She was not an early riser — that was one of her weak points —and they were early risers; and they naturally looked at each other with a glance of commentary and gentle moral indignation at her late hours.

"You are so like a gentleman sitting there with your book," said Sophy, with a sense of pleasure in finding something to find fault with. Diana closed the book and smiled.

"I suppose I should take that as a compliment," she said, "for Sophy, I know, has the highest opinion of gentlemen. Can one do better than copy them? You have been up for hours, and have done a great many things already, while I have been idling here."

"Yes—but then we have no maid to do anything for us; and if we want to have our things nice, we must get up early," said Mrs Norton. "We thought most likely you would be at breakfast, and that we should be sure to see you alone for a few minutes—you are always so much engaged now."

"Am I? I thought I was generally at my friends' disposal," said Diana, with a smile; and then there was a little pause. For even her smile when she looked up at them expectant, perceiving something that was on their lips to be said, alarmed the two little women. However, Mrs Norton, feeling the situation to be too serious for silence on her part, took courage and began—

"Diana—we don't want to disturb you, dear. We know you are sure to do what is best and kindest for everybody; but

we should just like to know, if you don't mind, what your plans are——"

"My plans! I don't think I have any plans," said Diana, surprised, and then she laughed and added, "To be sure, we can't stay here all the summer, can we? We are not at home, are we? That is what I always forget when I get settled anywhere."

"And not much wonder: for you can surround yourself with all kinds of comforts," said Mrs Norton, looking round her wistfully. To be sure, the third floor upstairs was not like the *piano nobile:* but she did not intend to seem to make any injurious comparison. The idea was suggested however, and Diana, who was very quick, took it up, and she coloured, and a pained look came upon her face. This was the kind of reproach to which she was most susceptible. It was as if she had been

accused of making herself comfortable at some one else's expense.

"I hope you are not uncomfortable upstairs," she said. "I thought the house was the same all the way up—no difference but the stairs."

"Oh no, Diana, dear!" cried Sophy. "Our drawing-room is not *half* so big as this. It is divided into two. This part is auntie's room in our apartment——"

"But that does not matter a bit," cried her aunt; "you must not think we are anything but comfortable, and quite happy, Diana, and most grateful to you."

"Never mind about being grateful," said Diana, "the comfort is much more important." She laughed and shook off her momentary offence. "If there is anything I can do to secure that, you must tell me," she said, kindly; "the Hunstantons' rooms perhaps might be better when they leave."

"Oh!" cried both the appellants, with a common breathlessness. "That was just what we meant to ask you about," Mrs Norton went on — Sophy, so to speak, running behind the skirts of the elder and more skilful operator. "We wanted to know if you thought—if you wished—what you think we ought to do? We came with the Hunstantons; and Pisa is not a place to stay in, in summer. But on the other hand, to go back to the Red House when you were away, Diana——"

"Yes, I understand; but shall I be away? If Pisa is not a summer place, I cannot stop in Pisa more than any one else."

"But you can go where you like, dear. There are a great many other places to go to. There is Florence, which you would like to see, and the Bagni di Lucca; and there is Switzerland, Diana. You can do

whatever you please; but we can't afford, can we, to do anything but go straight home?—if you think we ought to go straight home."

Diana looked from one to the other. There was a point in which she was the foolishest of women. She liked to satisfy other people, to give them the things they wanted. When she saw a secret coveting in anybody's eyes, instead of disapproving and reproving, the immediate thought in her mind was how she could get them what they wanted. Perhaps this was a temptation which she would not have felt had she always been Miss Trelawny of the Chase, accustomed from her cradle to be better off than other people, and feeling it natural. But the new power of giving, and of gratifying those wishes which she remembered to have entertained herself without being able to gratify them, was very

pleasant to her, and she could not resist it. She was not strong enough to deny herself in order to preserve the independence of Sophy and Mrs Norton. She looked from one to another, and saw the suppressed eagerness in their eyes.

"And you would like to go to Florence too — and Lucca — and to go home by Switzerland? Why not? It seems a very reasonable plan."

"But we cannot afford it, Diana."

"Oh, as for that, I can afford it. Don't say anything," said Diana. "Don't you see it would be no pleasure to me to go alone?—and evidently that is the natural thing to do."

"To be sure," said Mrs Norton, gravely. "It is not nice to travel alone: but then the expense. How could I put you to so much expense? I don't think it would be quite—right. I don't think——"

"As for the right and the wrong, I think we may take them in our own hands," said Diana, with a smile. "You must get the Bradshaw—that is what you must do, and settle the routes. Of course, we must go by Switzerland. And I had never thought of it! It is evident I want you to put things in my head."

"You are very kind, Diana. I am sure if I can be of use in any way to you who are so good to us—and, of course, it would not be nice for you to travel alone, I allow that: even for gentlemen, it cannot be so nice. But for a lady, and so young as you are still——"

Diana laughed. She was half ashamed of herself for seeing so clearly through this little air of reluctance and difficulty. "Evidently," she said, "I am too young to take care of myself. Any one who thinks differently does me an injury. Then

that is settled, is it not? It will be a great deal more pleasant having your company. I never like to do anything alone."

"Oh, Diana, what a darling you are! How good you always are!" cried Sophy, throwing her arms round her friend. "And I am such a nasty little thing! I thought you would not care a bit: that you would send us away with the Hunstantons by that horrid long railway, and never think —— Oh, I am so ashamed of myself! and you do love us, you do like to have us with you, Diana, dear?"

"Do you expect me to make protestations?" said Diana, shaking herself free with a little embarrassment, feeling compunctions on her own side that she could not be more effusive. "I ought to have thought of it before, but it did not occur to me. Yes, to be sure, we must see the snows. We have our time in our own

hands; we are not compelled to be at home by a certain day like Mr Hunstanton."

"Oh, Mr Hunstanton! he is so fussy, always interfering with everything—what does it matter when he gets home? I am tired of Mr Hunstanton!" cried Sophy.

"You should not speak so rashly, my dear. Mr Hunstanton has been very kind. *She* has never liked us much. She has always been jealous of Diana's love for you, never seeing how natural it was: but Mr Hunstanton has always been kindness itself. Oh, I am sure she will make disagreeable remarks now! She will say we don't mind what expense we put Diana to. I know exactly how she will look. But do not think anything of that—*I* do not mind, Diana. Do not imagine that I would take the pleasure out of your journey, dear, for anything any one could say——"

"And spoil our own pleasure, too, when

Diana is so kind," cried Sophy, with frank delight. "Oh, do you think my old travelling-dress will do, aunt?—or should I have another grey alpaca? Switzerland! I never, never thought of such happiness: though indeed," added the girl with a sigh, "I shall be very, very sorry to leave Pisa, too. I have never been so happy as here."

What was it that had made Sophy so happy? Diana looked at her with some curiosity, patting her softly on the cheeks.

"So many parties," said Sophy, "or at least as good as parties. We have never been at home for a whole week. There has always been something going on; and expeditions; and dances now and then. I have never been so happy in all my life before."

"Hush, hush, my darling! you would be just as happy at home. I *hope* my Sophy does not want constant amusement to make

her happy; but still it has been very pleasant, and, of course, we could not hope to have so much in a quiet country place."

"And in England! where, as Colonel Winthrop says, the skies are always grey, and the company bumpkins," said Sophy, with the sublime contempt of a traveller. What could Diana do but laugh as they played their little pranks before her. They were as good as two little white mice in a cage.

"You had better look into that serious question of toilet," she said, "and quite make up your mind whether another grey alpaca is necessary; for if we do go to Switzerland, there will be a great deal of travelling to do."

"What shall you wear, Diana?" said Sophy, growing serious; "for you know your merino that you came in will be too warm. I wish you would think of that a

little more. Yes, auntie, indeed I must speak. You know you always say that Diana never does herself justice."

"Do I?" cried Mrs Norton, colouring a little, while Diana laughed with great amusement. "I am sure Diana always looks well whatever she puts on. You have heard me say so a hundred times."

"Don't take any trouble on my account," said Diana. "I shall find something, never fear."

"And we are wasting all your time," said Mrs Norton. "Sophy, we must run away. If Diana has not the little things to do which we occupy ourselves with, she has other matters to think of. Dear Diana! how can I ever say all I think of your kindness! Nothing would make me accept it except the thought that we can perhaps, in our little way, make it pleasanter for you too."

She was very strong on this subject to everybody to whom it was mentioned afterwards. "Yes," she said, "we are going to Switzerland. Dear Diana does not like to travel alone; and, indeed, it is scarcely proper, for she is still quite what is considered a young lady, you know — though, of course, a very great deal older than my Sophy; and Diana has been so very kind to us that I like to do all I can to be of use to her. Sophy will enjoy it too. Oh, it is not at all disagreeable to me, I assure you," she said, smiling with gentle friendliness and resignation. The chaplain's wife, if no other, thought it was "so kind" of Mrs Norton to go to Switzerland with Miss Trelawny. "It took them all by surprise, I believe, and they had made their plans to go home: but they are such good creatures, so unselfish! They have changed all their

arrangements rather than that Miss Trelawny should have the annoyance of travelling alone." This was repeated over and over again that afternoon in the little church coterie at a choir practice, where there was quite a flutter of admiration over the unselfishness of the two little ladies. The glee-party was all there, with the exception of Mrs Hunstanton, whose absence, perhaps, was fortunate in the circumstances. As for Mrs Norton, she never departed from this ground even in her most private moments. "I am so fond of Diana that nothing is a trouble," she said, "she has always been such a friend;" and then it got whispered round, to the great admiration and surprise of everybody, that Miss Trelawny, though so great a lady, had once been Sophy's governess. What a wonderful thing it was! everybody said; exactly like a romance in real life!

The Snodgrasses, who were also at the choir practice, heard, like the rest, of Miss Trelawny's plan, and the excitement of the information brought the curate out of his corner. "I don't really care about going to Florence. I never did care," he said hurriedly to his uncle. "Switzerland is what I should like most." The rector shook his head, and called his dear Bill a goose; but yet, reflecting within himself that dear Bill was six feet high, and a fine specimen of a man (though not perhaps what is generally called handsome), and that Miss Trelawny had a fine fortune, and that Perseverance was the thing which carried the day, Mr Snodgrass thought that perhaps, by chance, so to speak (if it were not an impious thing to speak of Chance), he might direct his steps to Switzerland too. So that a whole party of people were moved, and their intentions

and destinations changed, by the impatience and disappointment of Sophy Norton at the prospect of an abrupt conclusion of her holiday. She thought herself, and with justice, an insignificant little person, yet it was she who had made all this commotion.

In the meantime Sophy's own head was full of her wardrobe, to the exclusion of other ideas. Should she have dresses enough for the summer? should she want another grey alpaca? or could she get on with what she had, with a new white frock, perhaps, and a dust-cloak? "There is nothing looks so nice as white," said Sophy, regarding her wardrobe with an anxious pleasure. "In fine weather, my darling: but it always rains among the mountains, and a white dress, or a cotton dress of any kind, looks poor in bad weather." This was a very serious ques-

tion: for indeed she had a grey alpaca already, which was too good yet to be taken merely for a travelling-dress. It was the one which had been made up on the model of Diana's beautiful new silk from M. Worth's. This was a very perplexing problem, and one which gave them a great deal of trouble; but yet it was a happy kind of care.

As for Diana, she had the faculty of putting aside the points that jarred in her friends' characters. She was aware that they were not perhaps so unselfish as they took credit for being, and she could not but laugh softly under her breath at Mrs Norton's solemn conviction that she "could be of use" to Diana. But what then?—what did it matter after all? It would be pleasant enough to go to Switzerland, and travelling alone was not very pleasant. So far the Nortons were right.

Diana feared (a little) the innuendoes of Mrs Hunstanton when she heard of the project; but otherwise it amused her (she did not put it on any higher ground) to see their pleasure, to indulge them with every luxury of a journey made *en prince*. To have everything you can desire, without ever having to think of the expense, how pleasant it was! How she would have liked it when she was poor! She did not say to herself that she had been as independent as she was poor, and would not have lightly taken such a pleasure at any one's hand. Why should she have remembered this? Sophy was not like her: and after all, to make these two little women perfect, to reform their characters, and mould them after her own model, was at once a hopeless proceeding and one altogether out of her way.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROPOSAL.

THE rooms on the third floor of the Palazzo dei Sogni were not like those in Diana's beautiful *appartamento*. The drawing-room, which was so spacious and lofty in the *piano nobile*, was low, and divided into two; one half of it was Mrs Norton's bedroom. In moments of excitement, and in the early part of the day, the door of communication was sometimes left open, though it was against all the English ideas of nicety and tidiness, in which these little ladies were so strong, to leave a bedroom visible. But what else could

be done, when Sophy was seized with that anxiety about her toilet, and the delightful sense of preparation for a further holiday whirled them both out of their sober routine? Mrs Norton had her excuse all ready if anybody should call—that is, if any lady should call—for the thought of a masculine foot crossing her threshold did not occur to her. "We have no maid," was what she would say, "and of course there are a great many things which we must do ourselves. Fortunately, I am quite fond of needlework, and Sophy is so clever, and has such taste. You would never think that pretty dress was made at home? but I assure you it is all our own work. The only thing is that we keep the bedroom door open, in order to keep this one as tidy as possible." Every visitor (being a lady) sympathised and understood: and gentlemen,

except the clergyman, never came. A clergyman, by virtue of his profession, has more understanding on these points —has he not?—than ordinary men; he is apt to understand how poor ladies have to employ themselves when they have no maid; in short, he has the feminine element so strongly developed as to be able to criticise without rushing into mere ignorant censure, as probably a gentleman visitor of another kind would have done. And no profane male foot ever crossed Mrs Norton's threshold. They were at their ease therefore next morning, after their interview with Diana, when they got up to the serious business of the day. There was no hurry; but the work was agreeable, the excitement of preparation agreeable, and then, to be sure, a hundred things might happen to hasten their departure, and it was always best to be

prepared. The door of Mrs Norton's sanctuary was accordingly standing wide open, revealing not only the Italian bed with its crackling high-piled mattress of *turchino*, but a large wardrobe standing open with all kinds of dresses hung up inside. The alpaca which was in question was spread out upon the sofa in the little drawing-room, and formed the foreground to the picture. They were both standing at a little distance contemplating it with anxious interest. Mrs Norton had her head on one side. Sophy had a pair of scissors in her hand. It was almost the most difficult question that had ever come before them.

"It is very elaborately made," said Mrs Norton, doubtfully. "The flounces would be very awkward in a travelling-dress. They are so heavy to hold up, and they get so full of dust——"

"But, auntie, I have heard you say it made all the difference to a dress when it was nicely made."

"Yes, that is very true; but a travelling-dress ought to be simple—it never ought to have a train, especially for a young person. You ought to be able to jump out and in of carriages, and never think of your dress. Besides, *that* would be so useful at home. You could wear it so nicely for Diana's little parties, or when she is alone——"

"Oh, auntie! I shall never care for these horrid little parties again."

"Hush, my darling! at least you must never *talk* like that. You will be very glad of them, Sophy, when winter comes."

Sophy shook her head: but the present matter was still more important. "Something new would be better, no doubt," she said, "for the evening—one of those

light silks that are almost as cheap as alpaca. When one has to get a new thing, isn't it better to have it for one's best? whereas an alpaca is never very much for a best dress, and would look nothing in the evening; and making a new common dress is just as troublesome as making a handsome one. And I might cut this a little shorter, or loop it up: and it would look nice when we stayed anywhere for a few days. Diana will insist on staying everywhere for a few days: I am sure she cannot really like travelling: and this with my white frocks when it is very fine——"

"I see your heart is set upon a new silk."

"No, indeed, auntie," said Sophy, half offended. "The only thing is, what should I do with two grey alpacas? If I were to take off the trimming here, and change this flounce——"

"Run, Sophy, run! there is some one at the door. Filomena has no sense—she will show them in at once."

"What does it matter?" said Sophy. "It can only be Mrs Hunstanton—I don't mind at all what she says. I should like her to know. She ought to be cured of her interfering. It will let her see who Diana cares the most for. It will show her——"

"Mr Hunstanton!" cried Mrs Norton, with almost a shriek. A *gentleman!* and actually the bed visible, and all the things hanging up. She made a dart at the door and shut it, then turned round breathless but bland. "This is a pleasure!" she said; "but you find us in great disorder. I am so sorry. We were just arranging a little against our journey."

"What journey?" said Mr Hunstanton. "Don't apologise. I like to have a finger

in the pie. You shall have my advice with the greatest pleasure. But what journey? Were you thinking really of returning with us? That would be good news: though I think I have perhaps something to say that may make a difference. Don't take away the dress: I am a great authority about dress—though my wife snubs me. Don't take it away."

"We are going with Diana," said Mrs Norton. "If we had been going home there is nothing I should have liked so much as going with your party. You were all so kind to us coming. But our first duty is to Diana. She has never been abroad before—she thinks she would like to return by Switzerland, and see as much as possible; and, of course, I could not let her go alone. And Sophy will enjoy it—though, indeed," said the little woman, with a sigh, "it will not be un-

alloyed pleasure to me. My circumstances were very different when I was there before. Still I must not be selfish; and, of course, I could not let Diana go alone. After all her kindness to Sophy, that would be too ungrateful — it is what I could not do——"

"Whew!" said Mr Hunstanton under his breath: and then corrected himself, and composed his countenance. "So you are going to Switzerland with Diana. Ah-h!—with Diana! That is a new idea. Bless me! I wonder what Diana will say to me if I spoil her trip for her? Mrs Norton, I have come to say something very important to you. It is not on my own account exactly. I am come as an ambassador; as—plenipotentiary. I have got something to say to you. Well, of course I don't know what you will answer; but it is not disagreeable. It is the sort

of thing I have always heard that ladies like to hear——"

Mrs Norton looked with unfeigned amazement at the beaming ambassador, whose enjoyment of his office there could, at least, be no doubt about. The smile on his face, the knowing look, the air of mingled fun and flattery which he put on, with a comical assumption of the aspect which the wooer he represented ought to have worn, half alarmed her. Though she was conscious to the bottom of her heart of her dignity as a married woman, with a late "dear husband" to refer to, yet the mild little lady was as old-maidish in her primness and over-delicacy as the most pronounced specimen of that type. What could Mr Hunstanton mean? Had he gone out of his senses? or was there anybody so rash and foolish as to think of addressing her, a clergyman's widow, in

this way? A momentary recollection of Mr Snodgrass flashed across her mind, and a slight blush came upon her matronly cheek.

"Oh, shall I run away?" cried Sophy, still more surprised, and most unwilling to go.

"No, no! Sophy must not go — why, it is all about Sophy!" cried Mr Hunstanton. "She must not go on any account. Mrs Norton, you know it isn't our English way; but whether it is that I have lived so much abroad, I don't know, but I think it a very rational way. Inquire first if there are any objections; and then if there are any objections, withdraw without humiliation. Oh yes, I have a great opinion of the good sense of an English girl; but still you know, Sophy, you are fallible, and sometimes a man is drawn on — and then sent to the right-about, as if he had no feelings at all."

Mrs Norton had taken time to compose herself during this speech. She dismissed the rector out of her mind abruptly, with something of the feeling with which she would have turned an impertinent intruder out of doors—indignant: though, indeed, it was not at all Mr Snodgrass's fault that she had thought of him. The excitement was scarcely less when the case was that of Sophy: but still that personal suggestion took the edge off her flutter, and made her listen more calmly. But there are limits to patience. She interrupted Mr Hunstanton with all the weight of authority. Here certainly she was mistress of the position; though it was not very clearly apparent what that position was.

"I have no objection to you as an ambassador, Mr Hunstanton," she said, "and I think it very right that any gentleman should address me first rather than to

disturb my child. But Sophy, pardon me, had better withdraw. The only reason for telling me would be that Sophy should not know—except afterwards, if I thought fit, through me."

"Oh, auntie!" said Sophy, under her breath. She stood, holding the dress in her hands, in natural curiosity and excitement, her pretty round face all flushed. She did not want to go; but she was dutiful though she was excited, and thought of nothing beyond remonstrance. Mr Hunstanton, for his part, lost his head altogether. He got up and took the dress out of her hands (not so awkwardly for a man, they said afterwards). When he had laid it down with clumsy care on the sofa, he took Sophy's hand, and drew her forward. "Sit down here," he said. "Come, Sophy, you needn't blush. I am not going to make love to you. We'll leave *him* to do that;

but I can't let you be sent away. It is her affair. Let her hear it. After all, there is nobody so much interested. Well now, look here—guess! You ladies have eyes more than we have for that sort of thing especially. Who do you suppose has sent me here to-day?"

Sophy sat where he had placed her, and looked at him, her soft little face crimson with excitement and pleasurable expectation, her blue eyes round and eager. She was a pretty little thing, and a man would be very well off, the ambassador thought, with such a fresh soft innocent creature always looking up to him. Mr Hunstanton was sensible enough to feel that a wife always looking up to you might be, on the whole, inconvenient now and then: but still it would be pleasant; and it would just suit Pandolfini, who was a solemn sort of personage. Where is the man that would

not like it? though the other sort of wife is of more use, perhaps; and he was content with his own lot. Sophy looked quite ready to accept any love-making that should come her way. Her lips were a little apart, her breath coming quick, her little heart all a-flutter, her whole mind absorbed in inquiry. Who could it be? Pandolfini was the romantic hero of Sophy's imagination, but there were two or three others whom she would not have frowned upon. Which could it be? Her eyes fixed upon Mr Hunstanton with growing eagerness. She made a pretty picture — all glowing innocence and ignorance, the most charming blank sheet of paper on which a man could desire to inscribe his name.

"Mr Hunstanton!" said Mrs Norton, shocked; "indeed I don't approve of my child being exposed to this. Sophy, you

had really better go away. It is quite improper—it is a sort of thing—we are not accustomed to——"

"I should hope not, I should hope not, my dear Mrs Norton; though I don't doubt that you knew all about it in your day. But Sophy is young enough to begin her experiences, and I trust we shall bring them to a close very suddenly. Now I am not going to keep you in suspense. Mrs Norton, you know him very well. You have had ways of seeing how much we think of him. My wife has the very highest opinion—and you know in many things Mrs Hunstanton is perhaps more *difficile* than I am. His means are not great. He has enough to be very comfortable, but not enough to make a great show according to our English notions" (here Sophy's countenance fell a little, for, to be sure, where everything was so vague, it was easy to add riches to the

fabulous unknown wooer); "but Sophy is not the girl to mind that: and he belongs to a very good family. She will be able to call cousin with half the princes in the Italian peerage."

"Mr Hunstanton!" cried Mrs Norton, breathless; "what is all this in comparison to more essential things? It depends entirely upon Sophy's feelings; and how can we tell till we know—not what he is, but who he is?"

"My dear lady, am not I just going to tell you? Sophy knows who he is. She has found it out in his eyes, as I did. Why, who should it be but Pandolfini? And a man any girl might be proud of—a fellow—though I say it that shouldn't—who knows English as well, and is as fond of it as of his own language — a most accomplished fellow! I verily believe just the best man living, and so modest you

would never find it out. There's the lover I bring you, Sophy; and if you don't appreciate him, you are not the girl I took you for. He deserves—simply the most charming wife in the world."

"The Cavaliere!" cried Sophy under her breath. In the first moment of awe the colour fled from her cheeks.

"Mr Pandolfini!" cried her aunt. Then she paused and looked at Sophy, who sat breathless, the blush coming back again. "Mr Hunstanton, I am sure you will not doubt we are very sensible of the honour he does us. Not that my Sophy would not be an ornament to any family; but till I know her feelings—— Yes; he is a very charming person indeed. I have the greatest respect for him—and admiration—a man that any one might be proud of, as you say; but till I know my Sophy's feelings——my darling?" the little woman

grew tremulous. It was a situation which she had never realised.

"Oh, auntie!" cried Sophy, throwing herself into Mrs Norton's arms. The girl laid her head upon her aunt's shoulder, and melted into sobs. "Oh, I am not good enough! I am not clever enough! It cannot be me he cares for."

"My darling! when Mr Hunstanton tells you——

"Oh, it must be some mistake—it must be some mistake!" cried Sophy, burrowing with her head in her aunt's bosom. Mrs Norton encircled her with tender arms. She felt that her child was behaving herself at this wonderful emergency exactly as she ought.

"You see how much overcome she is! You must let us have a little time, dear Mr Hunstanton. You can imagine the excitement, the agitation. She is so young. And

when I am so much upset myself, what should she be—at her age? But, indeed, it is I who have the most occasion," said the little lady, beginning to cry: for what shall I do without my Sophy?—not that I should think of that when her happiness is concerned."

"Oh, auntie!" cried Sophy, clasping her close, and burrowing more than ever, "I could never leave you—how could I ever leave you? You must always—always stay with me."

Mr Hunstanton rubbed his hands. "I see—I see!" he said, "it is too early for a direct answer; but I don't think Pandolfini need be cast down. I think there are indications that he will gain the day."

At this moment it became apparent to Mrs Norton that Sophy's agitation was too sacred to be witnessed by strange eyes, especially by a gentleman's eyes. En-

circling her child with one arm, and holding her close to her breast, she extended the other hand to Mr Hunstanton. It was too exquisite a moment for ceremony. "Dear friend," she said, amid her tears, "you see how it is. Leave me alone with her, and if you will come later—or I will write you a note: yes, that is the best, I will write you a note. No, I do not think he need despair."

"I understand—I understand—a note will be the best, which I can show him," cried Mr Hunstanton, delighted. "Good-bye—good-bye, Sophy. Yes—yes, I shall take myself off. Let her have it out; but it will not be long till Miss will be turned into Madame, I can see. Never mind the door. I hope I can open it for myself. Yes—yes, it is she that wants you most, poor little soul!"

Sophy raised herself from her shelter

when the ambassador was heard to go; her pretty little face was all stained like a child's with tears. "Oh, auntie!" she cried, looking her aunt in the face, then giving her a still closer hug; and then there followed a moment of mutual endearment, sobs, and kisses. "Oh, auntie, do you think it can be true? *Him.* I thought him so far above me. I never thought he would look twice at a little insignificant thing like me."

This was *selon les règles* too; and Mrs Norton felt with unfeigned satisfaction that Sophy was fully equal to the circumstances, and was saying and doing exactly what she ought. She pressed her to her breast with mingled love, respect, and admiration. Nothing inappropriate or out of place had come from Sophy's lips. In everything she had comported herself as the most anxious of aunts could wish;

and all the girls of England might have been there to take a lesson. Mrs Norton breathed a sigh of content as she pressed her child to her heart.

"My darling, you are too humble—not that I wish you different, Sophy. I like to see that my child is the only one that is unconscious of her own merits. But Love sees further. Dear fellow! Oh, what a happiness for me, my pet, to think, if anything happened to me, that I could leave you in such good hands!"

"But oh, auntie, *him!* I thought it was Diana he would care for——"

"Diana, Sophy? My dear, Diana is very handsome—for her age: but she is not like you. You know how fond I am of Diana; but gentlemen don't care for such clever women. They like some one to look up to them, not a person who is always standing on her opinion. No, my

darling, Diana will never attract a man of fine feeling like dear Mr Pandolfini. It is not just an equal he wants. He wants a clinging, sweet, dependent creature. And then youth, my pet, youth! that always carries the day."

"But oh, auntie, fancy any one being with Diana, and preferring poor little *me!*"

What more natural than that a flutter of gratified vanity should thrill through the girl! Mrs Norton shared it to the fullest extent. She said, "I never expected anything else. Though I don't set up for being clever, I know the world, and I know *gentlemen*. It is not talent that is necessary for that — you know I don't pretend to talent — but experience, and perhaps a little insight. Oh yes, I know what may be looked for. I know what gentlemen are; and you may take my

word for it, Sophy, a woman of Diana's age has no chance—especially when they look their years as dear Diana does fully, whatever your partiality may say."

"She *will* dress in such an old-fashioned way. I have spoken to her about it so often, and she never pays any attention. But oh, auntie! what will Diana say?"

"I don't know what she can say, dear, but congratulations. Dear Diana, she will be so glad of your good fortune. She always is so generous. She will be sure to want to help with your *trousseau;* and it is evidently such a pleasure to her that one never knows how to refuse."

"Oh!" cried Sophy, hiding her face, "it is too soon surely, surely, to think of anything of the kind. A *trousseau*, auntie! it scarcely seems — proper, — it scarcely seems—delicate."

"My darling, you are so sensitive!"

said Mrs Norton, taking her child once more into her close embrace.

It was not, however, till several hours later that she wrote her note to Mr Hunstanton. It was quite a model of what an acceptance should be: dignified, yet not too dignified; cordial, yet not too effusive. She appreciated Mr Pandolfini, but she knew the value of the treasure she was giving. "I shall be happy to see him this evening or to-morrow," she wrote. "They will be better able to understand each other when they meet by themselves; and I too shall be glad to have a talk with Mr Pandolfini." Mr Hunstanton rubbed his hands as he put this epistle in his pocket-book. "I knew they would be delighted," he said to himself, "and with good reason. Why he should have made such a fuss I don't know; for, of course, it's a capital match

for Sophy. And she'll make him a nice little wife, and give him a tidy, comfortable English home, which is a thing not very common in Italy. My wife, by the by, will be in a pretty way! She never could bear these two harmless little bodies. Why are women so queer? They never judge as we do. But here's a settler for them all," he said, chuckling and patting his breast-pocket. Certainly it was all done and settled, and put beyond the reach of uncertainty now.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOUSE OF DREAMS.

PANDOLFINI scarcely slept at all that night. His mind was full of dreams and visions, and an agitation beyond his control. He let himself in to his sombre *appartamento*, which was all empty, echoing and vacant, and lit his lamp from the taper which he had carried with him up the dark staircase. The rooms he inhabited were in an old palace which belonged to his family, but of which he had only a corner now. Up-stairs lived an old couple of his kindred who had their *terzo piano* by right of blood. In the higher storeys there were

some suites of smaller rooms let to smaller people. Down below in the *piano nobile* was an English family, the usual tenants of everything worth tenanting. His second floor contained some handsome rooms, and there was one at least which showed more signs of being lived in than seems natural to Italian rooms. It was somewhat richly hung with old tapestry. There was a carpet—unusual luxury!—covering the centre of the floor, and the walls which were not tapestried were clad with bookshelves. Books, too, were in all the corners, piled even on the floor, but carefully piled and in order, arranged by a hand that loved them. There was no sign of any one living but himself in the dark silent place, where his little open lamp with its three slightly flickering flames made a mere speck of light in the darkness, and his foot on the marble of the floor made

an echoing sound all through the house till it reached the sanctuary of the old soft Turkey carpet, from which long usage had worn the pattern here and there.

He put down the lamp on the table and threw himself into a chair. The figures in the tapestry were undecipherable in the dim light, except just opposite to it where a shepherdess and shepherd sat in eternal dalliance upon the little green mound beloved of such art. The soft and worn tints gave a certain faint cheerfulness to the wall, but all was dark around and as still as the night itself. Old Antonio, his faithful servant, slept in a corner somewhere, peacefully undisturbed by the master's comings or goings. The *donna da faccenda,* or woman-of-all-work, had long ago gone home to her family. This was all his establishment. The conversation he had just had, awak-

ened, as may well be supposed, a thousand thoughts in the Italian's mind. It had been all fervent poetry as he stood outside her door and walked home along Arno, hearing the bells chime her sweet name: Di—ana, Di-an-a, with its long, soft vowels, such as an Italian loves. But when he reached his own house, other thoughts not less thrilling or sweet, though more real, came into his mind. Was it possible that she should set foot here even—take up her abode here? He rose up from his chair when that fancy came to him, and stood with his breast expanded and his head held high, not feeling that he had breath enough for such a thought. Diana—and *here;* and then it occurred to him, perhaps for the first time, how poor and dark and silent it was, how worn and faded, how unlike a shrine for such a saint! What could

he do to it to make it better? Pandolfini was not of so poor a spirit as to think that Love (if for him such a thing could be) would despise his condition and surroundings. No; if, profoundest wonder of wonders, Diana should *love* him, as his friend took upon himself to promise, what to her would be the circumstances external to him? Nothing! He had forgotten that he had heard it said she was a great lady in her own home — forgotten even the superior wealth of her surroundings here. He cared nothing about these, and Diana would care nothing. If only the first might be true, there was nothing else to be taken thought of. The wonder of her loving him could not be greater if she were a queen.

But supposing —— then what could be done to make the faded things bright, to renovate, and warm, and light up his

house for her coming? He dropped back into his chair and began to think. Could any magic make these apartments worthy of her? Then he rose hastily, unable to be still in his excitement, and took up his lamp in his hand again, and began to go over the room, his head throbbing with agitating thoughts. Every new door he opened sent a thrill of echoes through the place, until at last they disturbed the rest of old Antonio, who sallied forth in alarm, his grey locks tumbled from his pillow, his eyes fiery yet full of sleep, a coloured counterpane wrapped round him for want of better. "Ah! it is only the *padrone*," cried Antonio, turning his back without another word, but with muttered grumblings in his throat. He was angry to be disturbed. "Surely he walks enough in the day to leave one tranquil at night," the old man grumbled, as he restored the

counterpane to his bed. Then a momentary thought struck him that it might not be the *padrone* at all, but his double, presaging evil. But after a moment's thought, Antonio dismissed that idea; for had not his quick eye caught that very thin place, not yet a hole, on the right leg of the *padrone's* pantaloons, which he had brushed so carefully that morning? No ghost risen from the grave could know about that thin place. So Antonio went grumbling yet calm to bed.

Pandolfini took little notice of this old grey apparition. He gave the old man a nod, and passed on. There were many empty rooms to go through, all furnished after a sort, all with cold glistening marble floors, dim great mirrors, into which his lamp gleamed with mysterious reflections, dark pictures, bits of tapestry, here a frescoed wall, there a richly decorated roof.

The remains of wealth, or rather the ghosts of wealth, were there standing with a forlorn pride in the midst of the cold and of the dim reflected lights. Of all the rooms he went into, only his own library could be called inhabitable, much less comfortable; and yet there was a faded grace and dignity in everything. Would she prize that and understand it? he wondered. Ah yes! Could it be possible that Diana did not understand everything, see everything with the noblest gentlest comprehension of all that had been noble, then she would not have been the Diana of his thoughts. She would understand. She would learn the story of the house, and its decadence, and its pride—all in a glance. But—would she prefer her English comfort, her warmth of carpets and close-drawn hangings, and the insular way of cushioning and smoothing over every sharp corner

—to this old chill splendour and poverty? He could not answer himself with any satisfaction; and his thoughts carried him further to his little farm in Tuscany, and the villa with its bare rooms and terraces, which had not even any trace of old splendour to veil the present poverty. Would it be better to dismiss the *forestieri* down below, who paid so good a rent for the *piano nobile*, and so make more room and a more seemly habitation—something more worthy of *her*? But then his foreign lodgers gave a very agreeable addition to his funds; and how could he do without that? or how adapt the villa for an English lady without spending of money which was impossible to him?

When the vague raptures of a dawning love change into plans of intending matrimony, the difference is very great. Had he known how rich Diana was, the simple-

minded Italian might have taken matters more easily perhaps than an Englishman would have approved of; but he was an Anglomane, and had picked up some reflections of English thoughts, which made him try anxiously now if there was any way by which he himself on his own finances could accomplish all this. And the question was grave, very grave, deepening the furrows on his forehead. When he paused from these reflections, and the first initial thought of all, — the idea that Diana— *Diana!* loved him, — came back to his mind, Pandolfini's heart recovered itself with a great throb of happiness beyond all imagining, an incredulous triumph of joy, which took away his breath. But then he fell back again into his anxieties, his questions. To realise this crown of all possible gladness and delight, what cares, what anxious self-discussions, what elab-

orate calculations must he go through! how could he make her life fair, and bright, and free from the pinchings which were in so many Italian houses, which he had learned by heart in his own life, and which, if they no longer existed for him now, might come back again were he to launch into greater expenditure and luxuries hitherto unknown?

He sat up half the night pondering all these strange new thoughts, which were penetrated now and then as by a sudden golden arrow, by that flash of consciousness which made everything glow and shine. But this very consciousness, this ecstasy, was the occasion and beginning of the care. After he had deliberated and deliberated till his very brain ached, he took paper and a pen, and began to put down his calculations. The very act of doing so, putting this wonderful hope, so to speak, into black

and white, and making his visionary preparations into a tangible thing which he could look at, thrilled him through and through again with touches of delight. He leant back in his chair, and laughed softly, so softly that the low utterance was more like a tone upon an instrument than the commonplace happiness of laughter. To him, to come to *him!* he who had never expected it, never hoped for it, since his first youth. Love! He was incredulous of it, yet believed in it to the bottom of his profound and passionate soul.

Thus he sat through the long night, feeling neither cold nor weariness, nor as if he could ever want such vulgar consolations as sleep, until Antonio's first stirring in the blue chill of the morning aroused him from his arithmetic and his thoughts. He started guiltily, and saw the flicker of his poor little lamp reflected in the dim

mirror at the end of the room, in the midst of a soft clearness of the day, which confused him, and gave him a sense of shame, as if some cool and calm spectator had suddenly looked over his shoulder and seen the follies that occupied him. Quickly and abashed he extinguished the lamp, gathered up all his papers carefully, opened the window to let in the morning air still somewhat chill: and feeling for the first time a little stiff and cold, crept noiselessly to bed, afraid to be found out by Antonio, who, however, was not deceived by this stealthy retreat, and knew very well by the smell of the suddenly extinguished lamp, and the creak of the opened window, that his master had been keeping unholy vigils. "Had he slept when all Christians ought to sleep he should have got up now," said Antonio, "instead of stealing to bed like a thief lest I should find him. Ah, *padrone*

mio! if you could but learn what was for your true advantage!" But that is what young men will never learn till it is too late, Antonio reminded himself: for his master was yet young to Antonio, a fit subject for lecturing and good advice still.

Pandolfini came out of his room at a respectably early hour after all, and with innocent looks that did all but deceive his old servant. "I hope I did not disturb you last night," he said, with hypocritical amiability; "I was looking for—a—book."

"The *padrone* did not disturb me last night," said Antonio, severely; "but this morning when I found the lamp still hot, and the *illustrissimo's* chair warm! *padrone mio*, it is not good for the health. There is a time to sleep, which is the night; there is a time, if you will, to make calculations to amuse one's self—to play, if it is necessary —and that is day."

"I am going to make use of the day," said Pandolfini, taking the cup of coffee which was his cheerless breakfast. And then he added, "Don't you think, my old Toni, that the olives at the farm might yield a little more oil? Marchese Rolfo has no better land than I have, and yet he sends more flasks to the market."

"Marchese Rolfo is an old miser; he wrings the trees and the poor men that keep them," cried Antonio; "and Gigi at the villa is as honest a man as any I know. The *padrone* forgets that it has been a bad year."

"It is always a bad year," said Pandolfini, ruefully. "I never knew it otherwise since I was a boy."

"Praised be God, yet we live! we are not, after all, at the mercy of the olives," said the old man, cleverly shifting his ground; then he added, in more insinuat-

ing yet judicial tones, "If, instead of making calculations on the *tombola*, as I see you have been doing, whether numbers or colours I know not, the *padrone* would make himself beautiful and marry one of those rich English ladies, who have more money than they know what to do with——"

"Fie, Tonino! is it better to be at the mercy of a lady, than of the olives?"

"That is quite different. They are only women at the best, however rich they may be; and a man is no man who cannot manage a woman; but the Providence of heaven which is inscrutable, which will send a frost when it is sunshine that is wanted, and torrents when one has but asked for showers, that is what no man can manage. The *padrone* may be sure that I give him good advice."

"And why not?" said Pandolfini, with

that smile which is confusion to all givers of advice. "Why not?" Was that an answer to make, as if it were some bagatelle? Antonio began to sweep energetically, careless of his master's coffee; and Pandolfini sallied out into the fresh morning. He was not a man so objectless as not to know what to do with himself when he happened to be earlier than usual. But to-day, what was there to do? He crossed the streets, and went and looked over the low wall at Arno sweeping on below. There had been rain, and the stream was very full. The hurry and sweep of the yellow water seemed to carry his soul with it as it flowed and flowed. But it carried everything with indifference, not to be diverted from its flowing!—all kinds of waifs and strays, and even a common boat which had got loose, and was blundering heavily down-stream, like the blind thing

it was, bumping here and there, carried along with a sort of labouring, piteous appeal for guidance. Pandolfini watched it with a kind of half amusement, half sympathy. It caught at last in a muddy corner under the first arch of the bridge, the only gloomy and dirty spot, so far as could be seen, in all the hurrying stream. Was this what Antonio called inscrutable Providence? — that strange, impersonal, half-heathen deity, to whose operations all Christendom attributes every evil with a sort of pious resentment?

When the boat was thus arrested in its course, Pandolfini roused himself from his fascination. He went into the little Church of the Spina, close to the river, and heard a Mass, though it was not his custom; and then he sallied forth again, and performed a multitude of little duties which he had neglected—a curious jumble. He paid a

few little debts; he went and looked at some pictures which he had long forgotten; he paid a few visits—to an old *canonico* in the cathedral, who had taught him when he was a boy, to an old servant, to a friend whom he had almost lost sight of—such visits as might be made any morning. It seemed to him afterwards that everything he had done was like the half-conscious act of a man taking leave of his old life. When the thought occurred to him it did not make him melancholy. It is only sad to take leave of a phase of life which is ending, when that to which you look forward is less happy. When it is the other way, is there not a secret exultation, a concealed happiness, even in the farewell?

It was too early yet to go to Hunstanton, to inquire into his success. Englishmen are not so early as Italians, and Pandolfini remembered with a smile all the ceremonies

that his friend had to get through before commencing any enterprise out of doors. First his breakfast—a meal unknown to the abstemious Tuscan, whose coffee was swallowed in two minutes; then the letters and newspapers which the post brought him; then his "business" in his study apart from the vulgar eye, a formula Mr Hunstanton went through religiously, as if he had his estate to manage on the second floor of the Palazzo dei Sogni. All these had to be gone through—and who could tell how many more? He gazed at the great house from the other side of the river before there was any sign of waking save in the rooms under the roof, where the tenants were out upon the *loggias*, and busy with their morning occupations like the rest of their country-folk, long before the drowsy English had opened an eyelid.

Then the *persianis* began to open one by one, and the mist of dreams cleared off. On the first floor the *persianis* had not been closed at all. How he knew Diana in that! how she loved the air, the morning sunshine, not yet too hot for pleasure, the soft gay shining of the morning, even the sounds beneath which more fastidious *forestieri* objected to! Nor hers the ear that was ready to be offended by lively voices of common life, by the morning noises and cries of humble traffic. Pandolfini's heart swelled, and a soft moisture of exquisite feeling came to his eyes. Though she was of the family of the Dreams, as he had said, no artificial gloom of drawn curtains, of hushed movement, was natural to Diana; the early sunshine, the morning bells, the herb-gatherers' cry in the streets, were no disturbance to her. The sweet homely stir of living was the

best call for her. He felt that it was in her to rise lightly as the lark to all the duties of that blessed common living, were they necessary; and the more homely they were, the more noble would Diana appear in them. So he thought, looking across from the other side of Arno with that exquisite moisture in his eyes, in that glory of the morning. As a matter of fact, the first English head that appeared at the windows of the Palazzo dei Sogni was Mrs Norton's, who pushed the *persianis* open with her own hand to air the rooms, and looked out like a little brown hen-bird, the grandmother, if there could be such an official, of the nest. She called to Sophy to make haste, to get ready, while she made the tea, and to come and look at the market people coming in from the country—or rather going away again, as they were by this time; and then

Sophy looked out with all her curls. But the watcher did not so much as notice these two, and Diana's balcony remained vacant. Notwithstanding all these beautiful thoughts about her, and notwithstanding that these thoughts were all true, Diana, as a matter of fact, was not, at this period of her life, an early riser, as has been already said.

Poor Pandolfini! He knew no more than the least interested passer-by the disastrous business his English friend was doing for him a little later on—nor how his fate was getting decided, and all the miraculous sweetness over which he was brooding, being turned to gall. He waited through all the long morning, remembering English habits, with a shrug of his shoulders, till "luncheon" — mysterious word! — should be over; reflecting, perhaps not quite justly as he did so, on

the portentous English appetite which demanded two meals so early in the day. Then, with a heart which did something more than beat, which gave leaps and bounds against his breast, and then paused breathless to recover itself, he rushed up the long stairs. Diana was on her balcony as he approached, and after a little wave of her hand to him, disappeared suddenly. What did that mean? His heart sank, then bounded again with excitement, anxiety, suspense. He rushed up to the Hunstantons' second floor like a whirlwind, and found himself in his friend's room, breathless, speechless, breaking in, he supposed, like a thief.

"Well?"—all the breath left in him, and all the fever of emotion, came forth in the one word.

"My dear fellow!" cried Mr Hunstanton, with both hands held out, "my dear

Pandolfini! I congratulate you! Well? —yes, of course, all's well as I told you. They are as pleased as possible—say they never thought of such a thing, as all women do—but feel sure there never was anybody so good, and so perfect and delightful. Bless you, I knew it! They are as happy as you are, all in a flutter; and you are to go up at once."

Pandolfini's eager countenance was as a gamut of all emotions as his friend spoke —the blank of utter anxiety, the leap of hasty delight, the cloud of doubt: and withal a touch of fastidious and troubled dissatisfaction impossible to describe. He grasped and held Hunstanton's hands, holding himself up by them, body and soul, and gazing at him with eyes that grew almost terrible in the strain.

"*They!*" he said, still breathless, with a long-drawn gasp, in a voice husky

with agitation. "They? Who is—the other?"

"My dear fellow! You to ask such a thing with your Italian notions! Of course, her aunt! You might have done it, being the lover; but you don't suppose I, an ambassador, could have made my proposals to little Sophy all alone! Love has turned your head."

Pandolfini dropped his friend's hands: a sudden darkness seemed to come over him and swallow him up. He staggered to the window, and stood there silent for a moment, looking blankly out.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SURPRISE.

DIANA had begun to feel the influence of the Italian warmth, and that sweet penetrating sunshine which is happiness enough without any more active happiness, when there is no active suffering to neutralise it. She spent the whole morning in her balcony, or close by it. The balcony was full of flowers; the sounds outside came softened through the golden warmth of the air, in which voices and sounds of wheels, and clatter of hoofs and tinkle of bells, were all fused together into a homely music. It filled her with

a sense of activity and living, though she was in reality doing nothing. As she sat idly among the flowers in the balcony, raising her head now and then, with the curiosity of true do-nothingness, when some special movement, something flitting across the level of her vision, attracted her, she could not but smile at herself. But it was not a common mood with Diana; it was a summer mood, to be indulged now and then, and bringing novelty with it. Summer in the depth of her own woods was still more sweet; but this affluence of life and movement, so magically hushed, soothed, harmonised by the warm atmosphere, was new to her. She leant back in her chair and trifled with a book, and indulged the curiosities of the moment, like any foolish idler capable of nothing better. The soft air held her entranced as in an atmosphere of serene

leisure and pleasantness. But it was not the afternoon languor of the lotus-eater, through which there comes a vague sadness of renunciation, a "we will return no more." Diana had never felt her life more warmly than as she sat, with an unconscious smile, absorbing into herself all that cheerful commotion of movement, idle if you please, but in sympathy with all the life and activity which was going on about. A friendly fellowship, a sense of kindness, was in her mind. It was all new and sweet to her, this quiet amid the world of sound, this soft spectatorship of humanity. She had toiled along these common paths in her day, and therefore understood it all better than any ordinary favourite of fortune could do: and this made her enter into everything with a genial fellow-feeling which it is difficult for those who have spent all their

life on the higher levels, to possess. Had any emergency happened, Diana would have been as ready to help as any busy woman in the street. But this *dolce far niente* overcame all her usual activities, and lulled her very being. She had seen Pandolfini come in, and had waved her hand to him, not going back within doors, as he thought, but only subsiding among her flowers. After that little movement of friendly salutation she saw him go out some time after, rushing, with his head down, and without even a glance at her balcony. Was anything wrong? had anything happened? She was sympathetically disturbed for the moment; but, after all, she knew nothing of Mr Pandolfini's affairs, and the idea floated out of her mind. She had the friendliest feeling for the Italian —more, she had that half-flattered, half-sorry sense that he thought more of her-

self than could ever be recompensed to him, which often makes a woman almost remorsefully tender of a man for whom she has no love. But that he did not look up, that he rushed out of the room with his head down, might not that mean only that he was more occupied than usual? "I hope there is nothing wrong," she said to herself; then dismissed him from her thoughts.

But a few minutes later Mrs Hunstanton came in also, with a little rush. There was care, and many puckers upon her brow. She got quickly over the usual salutations, kissed Diana with an *air distrait*, and dashed at once into her subject. "Have you seen Pandolfini this morning?" she said. It was a bad habit she had, and which a woman, if she is not very much on her guard, is likely to take from her husband, to call men by their sur-

names. Mrs Hunstanton was not particular on this point.

"I saw him come in some time ago—and I saw him go out," said Diana. "I see everything here. I have taken a lazy fit this morning: it is so pleasant——"

"But about Pandolfini," her friend cried, interrupting her. "Diana, I am dreadfully frightened that Tom has been making a muddle. I am sure he has got a finger in the pie."

"In what pie?" Diana was inclined to laugh, but restrained herself—for did not Mr Hunstanton manage to get a finger into every possible kind of pie?

"You know what I think of Pandolfini: you remember what I said to you the other night——"

"You said—nonsense: pardon me—but you know all that is utterly out of the question. It is unkind indeed to suppose

anything of a man which he does not betray himself——"

"As if he had not betrayed himself! As if you did not know as well as I do, and a great deal better! Diana, I am going to put it to you once more. Is there the slightest chance for him? Now, don't keep up your Noes from mere consistency's sake. I am sure some women do — till they repent it: but I should have no patience with you, who ought to know better! You are not a fool, Diana. You know something of life. You understand that a good, faithful, honest, honourable man—who loves you——"

The tears had come to Mrs Hunstanton's eyes. Tom was a great trouble to her often. He was always having a finger in everybody's pie—but still——she felt as he did that it was something to have a good, faithful, honourable man by your

side. Her view was perhaps even higher than his, though she was frank in owning that a married woman's life was no path of roses. She felt disposed to press matrimony upon Diana even more warmly, more sentimentally, than her husband had pressed it upon Pandolfini—but her hopes of success were a great deal lower. She looked wistfully at her friend through the moisture in her eyes.

"Must I reply to you seriously," said Diana, "as if there was really something in it? And yet you know so well what I must say. No, there could not be any chance—not if I wished it myself, which I do not."

"Why, in the name of heaven!—*why* should there be no chance?" cried Mrs Hunstanton, vehemently.

"Because—must I explain further?—I have got a trade, an occupation. Women

with that are better not to marry; and this would make me refuse any one."

"Everybody says that men are better managers than women, do business better, could look after your estate better than you could."

"Hush! I don't mean to try," said Diana, with a smile, "whatever anybody says; and I should not wish it, even without this reason," she said, with the ghost of a sigh.

"You sigh, Diana; you blushed the other night; you don't dislike Pandolfini?"

Diana put her hand lightly on her friend's eager mouth. "How can I dislike," she cried, with a voice full of emotion, "one who—cares for me? Oh, don't speak of it—don't make me think of it! I have—done as much myself, once. Yes, I need not blush to say it"—though she

did blush, down to the edge of her white collar and up to the roots of her hair. "So that I know. And I am grateful to him, but no more——"

"He would be content with that, Diana," said Mrs Hunstanton, red herself to her very finger-tips in the confusion and dismay of this sudden and utterly unexpected confidence, into which she felt that she had betrayed her friend.

"Hush! not another word. It is profane," said Diana, below her breath.

Mrs Hunstanton was standing behind her. She gave her a sudden hug with tremulous fervour, and kissed her forehead. She dared not ask any questions, nor, indeed, in the sudden shock and surprise, say anything on this wonderful new subject, which filled her mind with questions and suggestions. With a half sob she restrained herself from speech, and the

effort was no small one, as Diana felt. She turned half round in her chair, and met her friend's eyes.

"You see I am not without understanding, nor even careless," she said.

"I never thought so—I never thought so, Diana! I am too bewildered—I won't attempt to say anything. But that only makes it all the worse. I know Tom has been doing something. Tom has got him into some scrape or other. I saw him rush out, with his face like ashes, looking more dead than alive."

"I could have nothing to do with that."

"Heaven knows!" said the poor lady; "but Tom has. Of that we may be certain. Tom has a finger in the pie."

But Mrs Hunstanton knew nothing more. Her husband had been mysterious and lofty all the morning, breathing hints and

inferences, "I could, an if I would;" but he had been somewhat afraid of what his wife would say had he made her aware that he was ambassador for Pandolfini to Sophy. To Sophy! Mr Hunstanton knew that his wife was capable of snatching his credentials, so to speak, out of his hand, if he had betrayed their destination. But he had not been able to refrain from hints, which she had received with eager yet impatient ears. "Don't you meddle with Pandolfini's love affairs," she had said with irritation; but it was not to be expected that this vague caution could produce any effect.

Diana remained in her balcony after her friend had gone, but no longer in the same mood. She was agitated, not painfully, yet not happily. The past was long past, and she did not brood over it; but yet there was something as strange

as sad in this oft repetition of the same theme. Why should it be to the wrong people that love was so often given, vain love, not sweet to any one, either to those who felt or those who called it forth? By what strange fate was it that some man or woman should be always making his or her heart a gift to some one who cared nothing for it? Diana was in most ways happy — at least, happy enough — happier far than the greater part of humanity, and than many a woman who had got the desire of her heart. She was neither afraid to look back into the past, nor dissatisfied with the present. But yet, there had been hard moments in her existence; and when she thought of Pandolfini, the tears came into her eyes which she was no longer tempted to shed for herself. Poor Pandolfini! but he would get over it, as one must. There was noth-

ing unworthy in it, nothing to be ashamed of. A man does not break his heart for such a mistake, though it might be, she added to herself sadly, the turn of the tide for him, and change the colour of his days, as it had changed her own more or less. She was too wise to throw herself back into the personal phase of the question, or endeavour to revive within herself the feelings of the time when happiness seemed impossible for her, and all the glory of life over. Life was not over; she felt it and its greater purposes, and all that was best in it, rising strong and warm in her heart. And so would Pandolfini after a while. He was a man, and had compensations upon which women could not fall back; but yet she was sorry with a tender fellow-feeling, which brought tears to her eyes.

Late in the afternoon she received a

visit of a very different description. The Nortons had not known what to do. Pandolfini did not make his appearance as they had expected at once, and Sophy had even seen him hastening along the street, away from the Palazzo dei Sogni—with a mixture of surprise, consternation, and incipient offence. Fortunately she had not seen him come and go as the others had done, for it was hot up-stairs in the *terzo piano*, not shady and embowered as Diana was in her *loggia*, and even the most curious gazer could not spend the morning at her window. They supposed he would come in the evening, something must have occurred to detain him. But in the meantime, Mrs Norton was of opinion that it would never do to keep dear Diana in the dark, or to delay breaking to her the important intelligence that their plans were now changed: "Of

course, it must quite depend on circumstances whether we can go with her to Switzerland or not. Most likely dear Mr Pandolfini will wish——"

"Oh, auntie! how can you talk of such things?" said Sophy, giving her a vehement hug. But she was very willing to carry the news to Diana. Indeed, the two little ladies were in a state of excitement which precluded occupation. They could do nothing but sit with their two little heads together and talk; and what was the good of having such a wonderful thing happen if they did not tell somebody? "Besides, Diana has always been so kind, and always so fond of you, my darling," Mrs Norton said. "She has a right to know."

Accordingly, they fluttered down-stairs very important, though blushing and breathless, as became the kind of news they had

to tell, charging Filomena, their maid-of-all-work, to fetch them at once if Signor Pandolfini came. Somehow or other by instinct they hurried past the Hunstantons' door. "You may be sure *she* will not like it at all: but that, of course, is nothing to us," said the aunt; and they drew their skirts together and made a little run past the dangerous place. Diana had been out in the meantime, and coming back had sat down at her writing-table to read her letters and to ponder some proposals from her lawyers which required thinking of. Her lawyers, as has been said, were in a state of perpetual resistance to her schemes of liberality, holding back with all their might, and throwing every obstacle they could in her way: and her correspondence with them was interesting by reason of this long-continued duel, which was carried on now on their side with a respectful con-

sciousness of her power and ability to hold her own in the argument, which had not existed at first. She put her papers away when her visitors came with a certain reluctance, yet with her usual sympathy with other people. Probably it was nothing of any importance that those two little people had come to say: never mind—no doubt it seemed important to them: and it would have wounded them had she looked preoccupied. So she pushed her papers aside, and gave them all her attention. It did not occur to them that Diana could have anything to do more interesting than to hear their communication. They came in with a flutter of delicious excitement. This was the best of it: indeed it was scarcely so delightful to receive Pandolfini's declaration, as it was to tell Diana that Sophy was engaged,—ecstatic word!

"We have come to tell you of something

very important, Diana," said Mrs Norton. "When anything happens to Sophy she never can rest till you know: and this is so important, and it may alter your plans too: for of course it may not be possible for us to carry out——"

"Oh, auntie! Diana will think us so strange, so little to be relied upon——"

"What is this important news?" said Diana, smiling; "do not keep me in suspense."

And then, speaking both together, and with a great deal of blushing and hesitation, and choice of appropriate words on Mrs Norton's part and interruption on Sophy's, they managed to get out the wonderful piece of information that Sophy was "engaged."

"Sophy—engaged!" cried Diana, with all the surprise they had hoped for; "this is news indeed! Engaged! how cleverly she

must have done it, to raise no suspicions. Yes, of course I wish her every kind of happiness—but with whom?"

"Oh, indeed I was never deceived—I have seen all along how things were going," cried Mrs Norton. "Yes, to whom? I wonder if Diana would ever find out—I wonder! but no, no one, I feel sure, ever thought of such a thing but I."

Diana looked from one to the other, really puzzled and full of inquiries. "Is it —you must not be angry, Sophy—but I do hope it is the best man in the world, though we have laughed at him so much—William Snodgrass? Nay, don't be angry. He is the only one I can think of—I am at my wits' end."

"William Snodgrass! dear Bill!" said Sophy, mimicking the tone in which the rector spoke of the curate. "When you know I never could bear him, Diana!"

"Then, who is it?" said Diana, shaking her head, yet with all the calm of perfect serenity. She drew the girl towards her, and kissed Sophy kindly. "I need not wait for my good wishes till I have found out," she said. "If you are as happy as I wish you, you will be very happy. You wicked little thing, to steal a march upon us like this!"

"Oh, I did not steal a march upon you: oh, ask auntie," cried Sophy, burying her head on Diana's shoulder. The only thing that tried Diana's temper and never-failing indulgence was these clinging embraces, in which she did not know how to take her part.

"The fact is," said Mrs Norton, "that we have strained a point in coming to tell you so soon. But I could not bear that you should not know at once—you who have always been so fond of Sophy—indeed

I am sure a mother could not have been more kind. I said to her, Diana must know: I cannot put off telling Diana: especially as perhaps it may make a difference in her plans. Yes, indeed, I have seen what was coming. I have felt all along that more was in his ways than met the eye. Before you came over, Diana—when we were here first, and feeling a little strange—oh, *do* you remember, Sophy, how kind, how very kind, he used to be?"

Diana looked at them more and more surprised. Who could it be? Some young Italian whom she had not remarked—or some travelling Englishman, perhaps, who had just come back after "doing" Rome and Florence, as so many did. Both of these classes were to be found among Mr Hunstanton's friends.

"Yes, he always distinguished us—not even Sophy only, but me for her sake.

Just what such a chivalrous man would do. You will divine now, Diana, who it is. Dear Mr Pandolfini! And he is so modest. He had so little confidence in himself that it was Mr Hunstanton who came to us first to break the ice. He was so afraid she would say No."

Diana listened confounded. She looked from Sophy to her aunt with lips falling apart in her wonder and consternation. She did not hear anything Mrs Norton said after his name. "Mr Pandolfini! *Mr Pandolfini!*—are you sure there is no mistake?" she said with a gasp.

"Mistake! oh no, there is no mistake!" they both cried in a breath. Diana came to herself with a sudden sense of shame, for all the very different sentiments she had been putting into his mind. Her face was suddenly covered with a vivid blush. What an absurd mistake to make! She

had been so sorry for him; and all the time it was Sophy, and he was the happiest of men. She blushed, and then she laughed, but there was a kind of agitation in both; for to feel that one has so entirely misjudged a man, and been so vain, so secure of one's own superior attractions! It was too ridiculous! She felt angry and ashamed of herself. And then there was something so utterly incongruous, so absurd, in the conjunction—Mr Pandolfini! Could any one believe it? The two little women opposite enjoyed her surprise. They enjoyed even the discomfiture which they did not comprehend. Could Diana have thought of him herself? This was the thought that flashed across both their minds.

"I am sure I beg your pardon," said Diana. "You have indeed taken me entirely by surprise. I never would have

thought of Mr Pandolfini. *Mr Pandolfini!* Nay, you must not be angry, Sophy; but he is so much older, so much more serious, somehow so entirely different from you!"

"Is it not this harmony in diversity that makes the sweetest union?" said Mrs Norton, rising into eloquence. "Oh yes, it is so! Ah, my dear, I am not so clever as you, but there is something in experience that is never taught in books. I saw it all along. I perceived that dear Mr Pandolfini's delightful mind felt the refreshment of innocence like my Sophy's. He always kept his eye upon her. Often I have been surprised at it, how he should find out just when we wanted anything, just when he could be of use; not always at her side, as a young man would have been, but keeping his eye on her. Ah! that unobtrusive unselfish love is always

the deepest, and it is but few girls that call it forth. She ought to be very proud of such devotion: but I saw it all along."

Diana listened with her mind in a maze. Perhaps it was all true. Mrs Norton's instincts, her watchful maternal eye, and that minute observation in which gentle gossips excel, how should these have been deceived? Yes, yes, no doubt she must be right; and in that case what a vain self-admirer, what an absurd self-deceiver must Diana be! She was filled with such lively shame that it closed her lips. That she should have thought it was herself on whom Mr Pandolfini's heart was set, and that it should turn out to be Sophy! That she should be so sorry for him, driven to betray herself out of tender pity for him, when, lo, it turned out that he was the happiest man in the world! Once more Diana laughed,

coming round to see the comical aspect of her own confusion—for, after all, this did not matter to anybody but herself. And there was the greatest relief as well as a little disappointment in finding that the object of her unnecessary pity could so easily make himself happy, and had no need to be pitied — which was the drollest conclusion. "Pardon me for laughing," she said; "indeed I hope they will both be very happy. It is not ridicule but surprise."

"Ridicule! Oh no, there is no ground for ridicule," said Mrs Norton. "It is the most natural thing in the world to me. I have seen it all along."

CHAPTER XIV.

DESPAIR.

Pandolfini rushed out of the house in a state of misery and despair impossible to describe. He had not made any explanation to Mr Hunstanton of the real state of affairs. He was struck dumb; the earth seemed to open under his feet, and everything solid in the world to melt away. He stood giddy and miserable on the edge of this precipice, feeling that he did not dare to take any further step one way or another. The dilemma in which he found himself seemed more terrible than anything that had ever befallen mor-

tal man. In the first place, Diana was lost to him, there had never been any hope for him; all his delicious fancies of last night had been dreams founded on a lie. She had never thought of him, never considered him as more than an acquaintance: it was all a fiction, all a delusion, upon which his momentary but ecstatic hopes had been built. For the moment this crushed him almost more than the other practical side of the mistake, which he did not realise. Twenty-four hours before he had known equally that Diana was out of his reach, that for him to seek her was folly, that, however he might love, he must go upon his way, and make no sign: and that this brief climax of life to him, this love-dream, this unexpected undesired revelation of a something in existence which might have been higher than his sweetest hopes, and dearer

than his dearest dreams—was nothing, a passing vision of no real importance to him or to any one. He had known this very well yesterday; but it was infinitely more bitter to him to-day. Then indeed he had felt as if everything worth living for would go away with her, as if life would be utterly blank to him, without meaning or grace—but he had faced the blank, mournfully yet manfully, knowing that nothing better could be.

Now, however, after he had been led to deceive himself, had been forced into it, after such resistance as he was capable of making to an apparent joy which was the crown of all possible and impossible wishes, now!—— The bitterness, the keen sting of disappointment, the resentment with himself for ever having consented to this delusion, all mingled with and intensified the insupportable pang that tore him asun-

der, the sense that it was all illusion, that no one save himself in his folly had ever thought of Diana as his object: that she had known nothing of his love, and had not even given him the hearing, the consideration, which were implied in a refusal. This it was that wounded him most wildly, driving him almost mad with its sting. Had she refused to listen to his suit, yet she would have known it at least, would have been aware that he loved her, obliged to carry the knowledge of that fact along with her wherever she went; and, being courteous and sweet, and full of tenderness for others, Pandolfini knew that in that case she would have given him many a compassionate and gentle thought. But even of this he was robbed, for she did not know. The very possibility of a hearing, the suggestion, had never been his. Diana knew nothing of his heart, had

never thought of him at all, would never think of him more. Could it be possible that any man had ever had such a wrong done him? To be buoyed up with hopes which were dashed by a refusal, ah, that might have been hard to bear! but how much harder to know that these hopes had never existed, that they were delusion and mistake and nothing more! There was a stifled rage and mortification in his misery, rage with himself for ever having believed it, mortification beyond words at the depth of vanity and folly in himself which was thus revealed to him. Poor Pandolfini! it had not been vanity: but this was how in his misery it appeared to him. Fool! to think that Diana, *Diana!* could waste any thought upon such as he!

This fancy drove him forth wildly from Mr Hunstanton's presence. He dared not

speak, or make any answer, in case of betraying feelings which the good Hunstanton could not understand; and it was some time before he realised the real practical effect of his good Hunstanton's proceedings. A vessel cannot be filled above its measure, and Pandolfini was too much overwhelmed with the absolute loss of Diana to take into his mind the fact that this loss involved something else equally appalling. He was not to have the *gentil donna*, the princess of his dreams; but that was not all. Something had been thrust into his arms instead. Something? What? He stood still in the middle of the street when the fact burst upon him, and gave a sudden wild cry of despair. It was not so wonderful there as it would be here that a man should cry aloud in the extremity of suffering. What was this that was thrust into his arms instead? When he stood there

and fairly contemplated what had happened to him, any car of Juggernaut that had driven over him and crushed him into a shapeless mass upon the stones would have done Pandolfini a kindness—or so at least in his wretchedness he thought.

Mr Hunstanton did not understand his visitor's strange change of mood. To come in so eager, white with anxiety, breathless with excitement,—and then, when the good news was told him, to stand aghast for a moment, to walk away to the window, to make no reply. These were all the acts of a madman. Was his head turned?—was there a screw loose somewhere, as was the case so often with "these Italians"? Next time, no doubt, he would be laughing and crying with joy—always excitable, always in one extreme or another. Mr Hunstanton forgot the peculiarity of his friend's character, and classed him thus

summarily with his race, by way of getting rid of a cold shiver of doubt, a momentary uncomfortableness on his own part, as to whether he had, as he had intended, carried out Pandolfini's instructions to the letter, and acted for him according to his wishes. He quenched out this alarming thought by the reflection that a foreigner, and especially an Italian, acted exactly opposite to what an Englishman would do in the circumstances. He felt it so much, that was how it was. It overpowered him. These foreign fellows, even the best of them, let themselves go. They gave in to their feelings. They had not the self-control which is peculiar to the Briton, and did not even think self-control necessary. That was all about it. Pandolfini was so much overcome by his success and happiness that it took all power of speech from him. He was (no doubt) actually struck dumb from

excess of feeling. By-and-by he would come back and throw himself on his friend's neck, and thank him for his exertions. There could be no doubt that this was how it would be.

Yet, nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that there was a cold shiver, a cloud of doubt, an uncomfortable sense of uncertainty in Mr Hunstanton's mind. He did not feel at his ease, or happy. There was something in his friend's look, in the blank misery of his eyes, that discomfited him. He sat in his study for an hour or two, very uneasy, listening to all the steps that went up the stairs. He even posted Gigi, his servant, at the door, to bring him news if Paudolfini should came back. And when there was nothing to be heard or seen of the truant, and the day began to decline, and the hour of the Ave Maria approached, which was the end of all

things, the good man could dissemble his anxiety no longer. He went out stealthily (for it was time to dress for dinner) to look for his friend; and found him after a long walk very near his own house, standing by the parapet looking down into the Arno. The early moon had come out into the sky, while yet the glories of sunset were not over. Pandolfini was staring intently at the reflection of the moon in the water — he was entirely absorbed in it. When Hunstanton touched him on the shoulder, he woke slowly, as one in a dream.

"I say, Pandolfini, my good fellow, this won't do, you know," he cried. "I daresay you like to dream in this way. All fellows in love (I suppose) do; so they say, at least. But you must not give yourself up to that till you have seen them. You ought to go and see them.

English ladies, you know, are not accustomed to that kind of courtship. I took upon myself to break the ice for you, and they took it very well, on the score, you know, that this was how things were done by your country folks, and that it was your modesty and so forth. But they expected you to go and follow it up; so did I. English ways are different. We don't understand that sort of way of making love by proxy. To tell you the truth, I should not have let any one do it for me. But you must follow it up. You ought to have followed it up before now."

"Follow it up?" said Pandolfini. He had returned to his gazing into the river, after rousing up momentarily to hear what Hunstanton had to say.

"Yes, to be sure," cried the other, getting more and more nervous, taking him by the arm in his fright and impatience, and

shaking him slightly. "My good fellow, you must rouse up. It is not like you. It is not quite *nice*, you know, after sending such a commission to a girl, not to go yourself at the very first moment when you understand she is disposed to hear you. It is not — well, it doesn't look quite—honourable."

Pandolfini gave a start of quick resentment, and looked at his friend, who had begun to be extremely anxious. Mr Hunstanton's ruddy countenance had fallen. He was limp and colourless with suspense. A look of fright had taken the place of that fine confidence which usually distinguished him. "Good heavens! *have* I put my foot in it?" was what he was saying to himself, and the reflection of this question was very plainly to be read in his face.

"What did you say?" said Pandolfini,

somewhat hoarsely. "Follow it up? Yes, I understand: yes, yes, I go. You are right; I do not doubt you are right. But it is all—strange to me—and new," he added, with a kind of smile which was not very consoling. It was a smile, however, and Hunstanton did his best to feel satisfied.

"To be sure, to be sure," he said, encouragingly. "This sort of thing is always new—and strange. Don't be afraid. You'll soon get used to it. You'll find it come quite natural," he added, slapping his friend on the back in a way that was intended to be jocular. "Come along, though, you must not be shy. If you make haste, you have time yet before dinner—indeed they dine early, I know."

"Before—dinner? but I am not dressed. I am not ready for the evening," said Pan-

dolfini, spreading out his hands with an air of dismay.

"Dressed! fiddlesticks! at a moment like this. Pandolfini, you really disappoint me," cried Mr Hunstanton, feeling more uncomfortable than ever. "If you are going to shilly-shally like this, why on earth did you employ me? Think of that poor girl, after committing herself, kept waiting and wondering all this time, and not knowing what to think."

"I will come—I will come," said Pandolfini, hoarsely; and he made half-a-dozen rapid steps in the direction of the Palazzo dei Sogni: then he stopped abruptly. "My best friend," he said, with a smile, "you will let me follow you after, in a little—a very, very few minutes? This is, as you say, a moment——it raises the heart—there is much to think of. But I will come, almost as soon as you are there.

Yes, I give you my word. But it is alone that I must go."

"Surely, surely," cried good Mr Hunstanton. "We'll see you after, in the evening. God bless me! the fellow didn't think I meant to go with him to Sophy," he added within himself. "If that is manners in Italy, thank heavens it is not in England; and catch me making love for any man again! As sure as I am a living man, I thought he was going to cry off," Mr Hunstanton said to himself, with a cold perspiration breaking out all over him. He never had, he acknowledged afterwards, such a fright in his life.

When he was left alone, Pandolfini returned to his gaze over the parapet. He did not venture to look at the moon in the sky; but the reflection of her, all broken and uneven by the crisp of the little wavelets which the evening breeze

was ruffling upon Arno — that he might still look at for a moment. His eyes were dry and burning, and yet it was as if he looked at that moon through the mist of tears. Words came into his mind, words of her language, all of which had seemed dedicate and sacred to her in this sweet dream-time that was now so fatally past. He was not so familiar with English that this line should return to his ear at such a moment, as it might so easily have done to a natural-born subject of the greatest of poets — but yet it came. He knew his Shakespeare almost as well as he knew his Dante, and what could an Italian say more?—

> "The imperial votaress passed on,
> In maiden meditation, fancy free."

He said these words over and over to himself; and by-and-by the bells began to chime all round him, telling the Ave

Maria. Hail, all hail, oh blessed among women! This was more than Pandolfini could bear. He put his hands up to his ears, and crushed the sound out till it was over. When the tingling air was still again, he turned resolutely on his way. He was still in his morning dress, the excuse which had served him with Hunstanton: but what did it matter? He did not feel that he could trust himself even to pause again, much less turn back. He went with steady determination along Arno, seeing the lights shine in the river, with a wavering glimmer and movement: and in himself, too, notwithstanding his steady pace, there was a wavering play of giddiness, a sense of instability, the earth reeling under his feet, the heavens revolving about him. He went on all the same to the palace of the dreams, where he had given all

that was in him to give, for nothing—and where now, strange flicker of human vanity and mutual ignorance, another heart was about to be given him for nothing—for less than the asking. He would not look at the light in Diana's window, he went straight up past the door where his heart had beat last night with such wild gasps of expectation and hope. Had he obeyed his impulse then, burst into her presence, and told her! Had he but done it! Then at least she would have known, and he would not have been so utterly deceived. This thought swept into his mind as he passed, but he gave it no willing entertainment. He went up with a resolute step, up, beyond even the Hunstantons', to Mrs Norton's door.

They had given him up for the day, with a little vexation, a little disappointment, and were wondering whether they

would meet him in the evening as usual, and how they ought to comport themselves. As for Mrs Norton, she was beginning to think she had been rash, and to regret her acceptance of the suitor on Mr Hunstanton's word alone. It was nonsense, she felt, to talk of such a man as Pandolfini as too timid to plead his own cause. Had she been too rash? Sophy, whatever thoughts might be hers, made no sign. A lover was like a new doll to Sophy: it was more. It gave her importance, made somebody of her in a moment: and she was not going to do anything which could pull her down from this enviable elevation. She would not say she was disappointed or alarmed; but all her senses were on the alert, and she heard his step coming up the stair with a rising throb of the heart. "It may be only a parcel—it may be only the newspapers,"

she cried, clinging to her aunt. "If it is him, my darling, I must rush away. It is you he will want to see first," cried Mrs Norton; but even while she said this, Pandolfini walked into the room. They both uttered a simultaneous cry of surprise. He was very pale and excited, but quite calm in external appearance. Mrs Norton made an effort to free herself from Sophy, and with a smile to him, was hastening away.

"Madam," said Pandolfini, "what can I say to you? The good Hunstanton has authorised me to come. He tells me that you have been so kind, so generous, as to confide to me the happiness of one most dear. How can I repay such trust as you have had in me? It will be not a matter for words; but that I may live to show it from year to year."

"Mr Pandolfini," said Mrs Norton, not without dignity—"you are a good man,

and a man of honour. This is why I have not hesitated to do what might otherwise seem imprudent, and commit my best treasure to you."

She could not have made a more appropriate speech, or one that was better timed. "I pray God," he said, gravely, "that this best treasure may not find you imprudent, nor that you have done what you will regret." And he took Sophy's hand and kissed it. The seriousness of his face did not relax, neither did his paleness warm with any gleam of colour as he did so. Sophy blushed in a rosy warmth of happiness. She was surprised, indeed, that he should let her hand go so easily. Not so do the lovers in books, of whom the girl had heard and read. And there was a pause, in which none of the three knew exactly what to do or to say.

"Have you dined?" said Mrs Norton,

to make a way of escape for herself; for, of course, what he wanted was to get rid of her, she felt sure. What so natural? "You know we dine early; but I was just going to order tea. As you are going to have an English wife," she added, with a laugh which jarred dreadfully with the portentous gravity of his aspect, "you must learn to like such an English meal as tea;" and pleased with this little speech, which she felt to be both graceful and appropriate, the good little woman hurried towards the door.

"Nay," cried Pandolfini, hurriedly stopping her. "I have only come in a great hurry to—to thank you for a confidence so generous. I have not sufficient of time to stay. It is to my regret, my great regret. But I could not let the evening pass without saying how I thank you. What I feel — what — gratitude — what

devotion! The evening must not pass without this."

"But cannot you stay with us?" said Mrs Norton.

"And oh! can't you come this evening as usual? — it is one of Diana's nights," cried Sophy, with countenance aghast.

"Alas!" he cried, with a face in which there was misery enough for that or a much greater misfortune. "What can I do? I am rent asunder. I have my heart in two places. But I cannot come. I have—business. Indeed it is not possible. I must hasten away."

"Oh," cried Sophy, "I call that hard—very hard: not to be together the first night. You have never had business before——"

"No; I have never had business before. It is more needful now that I put my

affairs in order," he said, and looked at her with an attempt at a smile.

"Of course we understood that," said Mrs Norton. "Of course, my darling! it is quite reasonable. Dear Mr Pandolfini must have many things to do: but you must allow it is natural that Sophy should be disappointed — the first night, as she says," added the aunt, with a look at Pandolfini. Once more he took Sophy's hand and put it to his lips.

"She is an angel of goodness," he said with fervour, kissing her hand again; but then he kissed Mrs Norton's hand (which seemed to Sophy unnecessary), and after a very few words more, hastened away,— leaving them, it is needless to say, somewhat dismayed, they could scarcely tell how — and yet overawed and dazzled. They stood and looked at each other for a moment or two in silence. There was

a half-pout on Sophy's lips, and a look about her eyes, as if for small provocation she might cry; but she ventured on no other demonstration. And then Mrs Norton took the matter up, and put down all objections with a high hand.

"Now, Sophy, my pet," she said, "I congratulate you with all my heart—but you see now you have got to deal with a gentleman, not with a poor old auntie that does everything you wish whether it is convenient or not: with a gentleman, my love—one who has business that cannot be trifled with, you know. And you must just make up your mind to have him when you can, not whenever you like. For, my love, you have entered on a new phase of life, and this is what you must make up your mind to, now."

There was something in the grandeur of this address, and the strange thrill with

which she felt the reality of the new position, which silenced Sophy. She stopped in the middle of her pout. It might not be so satisfactory, but it was more imposing than anything she had dreamed of. A lover who only kissed your hand, that was not according to Sophy's preconceived idea of lovers—but it was very imposing. And then, of course, he was an Italian, and this must be the dignified Italian way!

CHAPTER XV.

THE SPOSA.

THERE was a certain solemnity about the party in Diana's rooms that evening. Sophy and Mrs Norton came down-stairs in their best dresses, with an air of importance not to be mistaken; and was it not quite natural that they should look important? No human circumstances can possibly be more interesting than those of the bridegroom and bride who have chosen each other from the world, and who present themselves to the world smiling, hand in hand, the ever-renewed type of human progression: primitive beginning,

over again, of a new world. The completeness of the position was spoiled by the fact that the *fiancé* was not present; but that was not the fault of the little ladies, who knew nothing about his reasons for being absent,—or rather supposed that they did know all about them, and had the privilege of representing their new piece of property, and explaining for him. "I am so sorry Mr Pandolfini will not be able to be here," said Mrs Norton. "He would have liked it of all things, I need not say; but he had business to attend to. It is easy to understand how he should have business, looking forward, as he is, to a change in his condition — to such a change! and he felt sure that you would excuse him, Diana."

"Surely," said Diana; "there is nothing to excuse." She was looking grave, more thoughtful than usual—or so at least two

or three people in the room thought, who were thunderstruck by the unexpected news of Pandolfini's engagement. Mrs Hunstanton, who watched her very closely, and who was in a state of suppressed excitement, which she scarcely could manage to conceal, thought that her friend was pale. But that was probably her own imagination, which was very lively, and at the present moment extremely busy, inventing motives and sentiments all round.

"Oh, but indeed he would think it necessary to excuse himself. He has such fine feelings, and he knows all you have been to our darling, Diana. He knows how fond you are of her—taking almost a mother's interest: and of course he would have been here to show his gratitude, if it had been possible. Every kindness that has ever been shown to my Sophy will be doubly felt by him."

This the little lady said with an expansion of her little person and swelling of her bosom, which, even amid her consciousness that something was in all this more than met the eye, struck Diana with a sense of the ludicrous which she could not control. She laughed in spite of herself.

"I am sure Mr Pandolfini will feel everything he ought to feel," she said; "but you must not teach him to be grateful when there is no occasion for gratitude. You know it is not a sentiment I care for."

"Yes, I know, dear Diana," cried Mrs Norton, kissing her suddenly. "You never will allow any one to thank you. But is it not all owing to you? But for you we never should have come here; and if we had not come here, the chances are we never should have met dear Mr Pandol-

fini. So we owe it all to an ever-watchful Providence—and to you."

Diana could not but smile at the conjunction. "It is Providence you must thank," she said; "I don't think I counted for much in it. Is Sophy very happy? That is the chief thing to think about."

"She is in a maze of happiness," said Mrs Norton, fervently. "She is so humble-minded. She thinks so much more of others than of herself. That he should have thought of a poor little thing like me, she is always saying: and I cannot persuade her that she is good enough for any man, and, indeed, too good for most—as you and I know, Diana—not if I were to talk for a year. We know her value, but she is too innocent to know it. And oh, what a blessing, my dear, what a blessing that one so well fitted to appreciate her should have fallen to Sophy's share!"

"Diana!" cried Mrs Hunstanton in her ear on the other side, drawing her away; "how can you have the patience to listen to that little—— What is to be done now? Oh! what is to be done? My heart is breaking for that poor man: and it is all Tom's fault."

"I do not know what you mean," said Diana. "There is no poor man in question; there is a happy man."

"Diana! how can you insult him by thinking so? Oh, poor Pandolfini! He is being made a sacrifice, a victim—and what can I do? It is all Tom's fault."

"Indeed, you are doing Mr Hunstanton wrong. I only blush for myself that ever took up such a foolish fancy. It is far, far better as it is. I told you we had no right to conjecture a man's feelings; and you see for once I am proved to be right: though you over-persuaded me, and I am

ashamed of it," said Diana, with a blush and a laugh. "However, fortunately there is no harm done."

"O Diana, how I wonder at you! It is you who are doing poor Pandolfini wrong. He think of that little doll! He trusted his cause to Tom, thinking, perhaps, there was no need to name the name—as, indeed, there was not to any one with eyes in his head: and Tom like a fool, Tom like a busybody—oh, heaven forgive me! I don't mean to say any ill of my husband, but that is how he has behaved,—Tom has gone and pledged this poor man's life to somebody he can never care for, somebody quite unworthy of him. Diana, you may be cool about it; but I think it will break my heart."

"But you have no evidence of this,' cried Diana, in consternation. She looked at the smiling Sophy, all pink with blushes

and beaming with smiles as she received everybody's congratulations, and at Mrs Norton, important and stately as became the aunt of a bride-elect. The incongruity between this little fluttering pair and the grave and dignified Pandolfini was striking enough, but to imagine their easy commonplaceness entangled in such a tragical complication of mistake and misery and inevitable suffering, seemed beyond the reach of ordinary imagination. Diana turned quickly to her friend, who, half hidden behind, regarded the scene with a face full of anxiety and distress. Mrs Hunstanton's puckered brows, her eyes in which the tears seemed ready to start, her paleness and trembling, were almost as great a visible contrast to the complacent happiness of the Nortons as was Pandolfini to the girl who was going to be his wife. "Mrs Hunstanton," said Diana,

in a low tone, "this is the wildest fancy. It is not possible. You can have no proof of it. Mr Hunstanton is—is——he is the kindest of men. He would not hurt a fly. How could he do such a thing, and make his friend unhappy? No, no; I cannot believe it. It is you and not he who have been mistaken."

Mrs Hunstanton caught Diana by the arm. She poured into her ear the whole story, partly as divined by herself, partly as confessed by her husband, who kept, as Diana could see, prowling uneasily round the central group, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the door. His wife had made him wretched enough, but he had done what could not be undone; and there was always the chance that his wife might have been wrong, a supposition so much more likely than that he was in the wrong himself. Her reproaches had

made Mr Hunstanton extremely uncomfortable, and no doubt there was something in the corroborative evidence of Pandolfini's very strange behaviour, which of itself had given him a thrill of terror. And business! What business could the Italian have to detain him? He did not for a moment believe in this, but notwithstanding Mrs Norton's assurance to the contrary, still looked for Pandolfini's arrival. It was absurd! He could not mean to stay away to-night: when he came Mr Hunstanton had made up his mind to ask him point-blank what it all meant. Had he, or had he not, given him a commission? and had he, or had he not, Mr Tom Hunstanton, carried out his wish? This would, beyond all manner of doubt, make everything clear.

Not even this hope, however, could still Mrs Hunstanton's nervous restless-

ness. She went from Diana, by whom she had sat so long breathing out her pains and fears, to Mrs Norton, who was now little inclined to be questioned, and who felt that a great deal was due to her new position. A feeling of being attacked had come into her mind, she could scarcely tell why, and when Mrs Hunstanton crossed over the room to come to her, the little lady immediately buckled on her armour. Mrs Hunstanton was too anxious to pick her words. She came and sat down by the important aunt, with the air of troubled haste and agitation very clearly visible in her face.

"I have not come to congratulate you," she said, "because I was so very, very much surprised. I hope you will excuse me, Mrs Norton. You know it is not from want of interest in Sophy, but—were not you very much surprised your-

self when this happened? Did it not strike you as very strange?"

Mrs Hunstanton took credit to herself for putting the question so very gently, and "saving their feelings." It seemed impossible to her that any one should resist such an appeal as this.

"Surprised!" said Mrs Norton. "Oh, no indeed! I was not surprised. I had seen it all along."

"You had—seen it all along?"

"Surely. Yes, I had seen it. Indifferent eyes may be deceived, but nothing can blind me where my Sophy is concerned. Yes: our dear Pandolfini is not the kind of man that is demonstrative, you know; but had you asked me three months ago," said Mrs Norton with gentle pride, "I could have told you exactly what was going to happen. I knew it all along."

She looked at her questioner with a

serene smile, and Mrs Hunstanton, for her part, could only gasp and gaze at her with a consternation beyond words. But she would not give up even for this distinct repulse.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, rallying her forces; "but — you won't mind my speaking frankly? Nobody else has thought so, Mrs Norton. He has seemed to entertain very different thoughts. I, for my part, have been quite deceived. I hope you will forgive me for saying so, but I have been watching Mr Pandolfini very much of late, and I never suspected it was Sophy that was in his mind."

Mrs Norton smiled with gentle superiority. "I don't know what you expect me to say, Mrs Hunstanton. I have seen it, as I tell you, all along; and he must know best himself, one would suppose. When a gentleman proposes to a young lady,

people do not usually set up their ideas of what they expected. He is the one that must know best."

"I know—I know:" said Mrs Hunstanton, driven to despair, and to a humility not at all in her way. What was there to answer to such a reasonable statement? She could not ask directly whether it was her husband who had done it all, and if it was only his word they had for Pandolfini's sentiments. She was thoroughly wretched, and thoroughly subdued. "Have you seen him this evening?" she asked, faltering. That was the nearest approach she could make to the question she was longing to ask.

"Oh yes," said Mrs Norton, with smiling confidence. "He was with us just before we came here, and he was so sorry not to come with us. Knowing as he does our obligations to Diana, and feeling

all her kindness, it quite grieved him not to come."

"To Diana!" Mrs Hunstanton repeated the words mechanically, catching them up without any clear comprehension of what the other said. Then she said, somewhat incoherently, "But you must have been startled, at least surprised, yourself — it must have taken you by surprise."

"On the contrary," said Mrs Norton, meeting with a serene countenance the eyes full of care and trouble which her companion turned upon her, "I have already told you I had expected it all along."

The inquirer withdrew baffled, with trembling lips and a clouded brow, leaving the little woman victorious. Mrs Hunstanton was not used to such utter discomfiture, and bore it badly. She withdrew into a corner near the door. Perhaps Pandolfini

would come after all, and she might waylay him, though she did not see what end would be served by so doing; for how could she ask him if it was true that it was Sophy and no other who was his choice? But Pandolfini did not come to answer any of these questions. He had never stayed away before.

The little community was convulsed by the news, but ended by accepting it, as what else was possible? It was not the first time that a community has been utterly taken by surprise by the announcement of a marriage. The small coterie at Pisa went through all the not unusual round of refusing to credit the report, being compelled to believe it, accepting it under protest, then forgetting the protest, and taking the matter for granted. At first it was supposed that the whole party would hasten home to prepare for an

English wedding; but by-and-by it was rumoured about that Pandolfini did not wish to go to England for his bride, and that as there was nothing to wait for, the marriage would take place in Pisa, and the bride enter at once her Italian home. Some people wondered at this, some thought it very sensible, some were surprised at the ardour of the middle-aged lover, and some at the readiness of the girl's friends to let her go; but, on the whole, it was quite reasonable, and the English visitors, who were all on the wing, were much amused by the excitement of such an unexpected event. They were doubly amused by the fact that Mrs Hunstanton, under whose auspices the Nortons had appeared in society, was evidently disturbed, rather than pleased, by the marriage; and that Sophy's great friend and patroness, the rich Miss Trelawny, did not throw her-

self into the arrangements with any enthusiasm.

And, of course, there were not wanting good-natured bystanders who averred that these ladies were disappointed, and that Miss Trelawny had intended the Italian for herself. Diana was but little disturbed, as may be supposed, by these insinuations, which, indeed, she never heard of; but she was disturbed by the complication of affairs, which she could not refuse to see through, now when it was fairly beneath her eyes.

Pandolfini was a very strange lover. He had become suddenly immersed in business —so much occupied that his visits to his betrothed were always hurried and brief. This was made necessary, he told them, by all the changes that had to be made, and successions rearranged, in consequence of this unexpected step in his life: and

they were fain to accept the explanation. The strangest of all was, that notwithstanding that deep sense of obligation to Diana which it was Mrs Norton's delight to set forth, he never appeared in Diana's rooms again. Once only they met by chance in Mrs Norton's little drawing-room, when all was nearly settled. He came in hurriedly, seeking Mrs Norton, whom Diana also, by some unusual chance, had come to look for; and there they met alone, for both of the little ladies were out engaged in that occupation of shopping which furnishes the unoccupied female mind with so many delightful hours. Pandolfini was struck dumb by the sight of Diana, and she, as she hastened to explain how she came to be there, was so startled by his altered looks as almost to break down in her little speech. "They are out," she said hurriedly; "I had just come to look for them." And then

she paused, faltering—"You are—ill—Mr Pandolfini?"

"Ill? No, I am not ill. I am as I always am."

"Not as you used to be," said Diana, kindly; and then she added in haste, "but it is so long since I have seen you, that you may well have changed in the meantime. And I have never had the opportunity of congratulating—of wishing you—happiness."

He looked at her for a moment with all his heart in his haggard face; then, turning suddenly away with an imploring gesture, hid his face in his hands.

What was she to do or say? There was no contesting now what she could read as in a book—the despair that had kept him out of her presence, that made him incapable either of meeting her eye or deceiving her now. He had no wish to deceive her,—if,

indeed, there was one thing more than another for which his forlorn heart had longed, it was that she should know.

"Forgive me," he said, in a broken voice, "I can have no disguises from you."

Diana was too much discomposed to know what to say. Such a tacit confidence seemed wrong, almost a treachery to poor little innocent Sophy, who had no conception of this secret, and could not have understood it had she known. She said gently, "You must let me wish you well at least. I do that from the bottom of my heart."

He looked at her with piteous eyes, doubly dark with a moisture which the powerful mechanism of pain had forced into them, but which was too bitter and concentrated to fall and relieve the brain from which it was wrung. "Think of me sometimes," he said. "You know how it

is with me. You, who are kind to all, sometimes think of me a little. That will help me to bear. I will do—my duty."

"Oh, Mr Pandolfini!" cried Diana, the tears rising warm and sudden into her eyes. "Let me give you some comfort if I can." The moment was too bitter, the encounter too real, as of two souls in the wilderness, to warrant any pretence on either side that they did not understand each other. "Once the same thing happened to me. I have gone through the same. There was one whom I cared for, but who made me no return. I do not hesitate to tell you. For a time it seemed worse than death: but now it is past, and I am no longer unhappy. So will it be with you."

"Ah, my God, my God!" he cried, with sudden passion, "can such things be? You!—was he mad or blind?" Then a smile came over his haggard face, which

was more pathetic than the previous look of misery. "This is to comfort me," he said. "Yes, it is just; it was more pitiful for such a one than for me."

"I meant—it will pass away—and all will be well," cried Diana, trembling. "Oh, believe me. I speak who know. It will be so with you."

"You think so," he said, gently shaking his head. "*Generosissima!* You show me the wound to heal mine. But it will not be so with me. I wish no healing: yet I will do—my duty," he added, in a low and broken voice.

"God bless you, Mr Pandolfini!" she said, holding out her hand.

This overcame him altogether. He fell upon his knees and kissed it, as men of his faith kiss the holy mysteries, and then looked at her with trembling lips and dim eyes, as we look at those we are never to

see more, and stumbling to his feet, turned and hurried from the room. The tears were falling frankly and without concealment from Diana's eyes. She was touched to the heart. Oh that such things should be! that the best of life should thus be thrown away like a flower on somebody's path to whom it was nothing. She had forgotten Sophy altogether in the anguish of sympathy and fellow-feeling. That complication, adding as it did so much misery and difficulty, seemed to fade altogether in presence of the pang which she herself understood so thoroughly, and seemed to feel again.

She had barely time to dry her eyes when she heard some one coming, and turned her back to the light to avoid a too curious gaze. It was Sophy who came in, complaining. "O Diana!" she cried, with a little start, "you are here! that was why

he went away. It is very hard to see so little of him, and when he does come to be out and have him sent away."

"Oh, Sophy, my pet, don't be unjust," said Mrs Norton; "how should Diana send him away? Of course he must have felt it hard that you should be out when he snatched a moment from his business. Was he very much disappointed, Diana? I am sure you would say everything that was kind."

"Yes: he was surprised to find me here waiting for you—as I was surprised to see him," said Diana, with an unconscious sense of apology. "He did not—stay—I came to ask you to look at—some patterns," her voice failed her. She could not add the trivial message which in reality, with that indulgence which Mrs Hunstanton never could understand, was the reason of her visit: for Sophy's *trousseau*, which was

causing her so much delightful occupation, was for the most part Diana's gift.

"Patterns!" they both said in a breath, in tones of interest which drove away all recollection of Mr Pandolfini's visit which they had lost.

"You shall see them, if you will come to me down-stairs," said Diana, glad of this easy means of getting away.

And they spent an hour or two delighted and yet anxious in the perplexities of choice, and never noticed either of them any traces of tears that might be lingering about Diana's eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SYMPATHISING FRIEND.

THE spring days lengthened into summer while the preliminaries of the marriage still went on. The Hunstantons could not retard their usual day of departure for any event of such secondary importance as the marriage of Sophy Norton. "To be sure, poor Pandolfini is our friend, and for him one might be tempted to stay," Mrs Hunstanton said; "but the Nortons—the Nortons are only *protégées* of Diana's. But for her I should never have noticed them. It is her whim to spoil these two silly little women. But though I am so

fond of Diana, I have never humoured her in this; and for us to remain would be absurd." So, though they lingered a week or so, that was all. The Snodgrasses, uncle and nephew, had gone on to Florence and to Rome. The other members of the little party were dispersing on all sides. Only Diana remained to keep the bride-elect and her anxious but triumphant aunt company. And Diana had hesitated. She had wished to go with the Hunstantons straight home, but for the complaints and outcries of the two little ladies. "Oh, will you go and forsake us?" Sophy cried. "Will you leave me to be married without one friend near me?" "Indeed, Diana, I did not expect you would leave us," said Mrs Norton. "I should not have undertaken it if I had not felt sure of you. And how can I go through it all without some support?—without some one to lean upon?"

Diana, though she smiled at these arguments, remained. There were, indeed, a great many things in which she was a support to the fluttering and nervous pair, who were half overjoyed by the approaching elevation, half frightened by the loneliness of their position. Mrs Norton especially was apt to be invaded by doubts. Whether she ought not to have insisted that her niece should be married at home: whether it was not too much of Mr Pandolfini to have asked of her (though so flattering to dear Sophy and lover-like was his impatience to make her his own): whether people might not think she was too anxious to have everything settled: or that it was not quite ladylike to allow things to proceed so rapidly. All these doubts Diana had to satisfy three or four times a-day.

And there were other difficulties still

more important which the helpless little pair could not have got through without her. Pandolfini, who was always so busy, whose occupations continued to increase as his marriage drew nearer ("which, of course, was very natural," Mrs Norton said, with a certain chill of doubt in her confidence, while Sophy loudly complained of it, though without any doubting), never got into the familiar intimacy which generally characterises such moments of preface and beginning, and was accordingly of no more help to them than if he had been still merely their acquaintance, Mr Hunstanton's friend—much less, indeed, for Mr Hunstanton's friend had always been friendly and serviceable, and full of genial help, in those cheerful days when he was not overpowered by business. This gleamed across Mrs Norton's mind dimly by times, affording her a half-revelation — a mo-

mentary unwilling perception of differences which she did not wish to fathom. But, so far as any one knew, these perceptions were not shared by Sophy, who went on her way, with occasional grumblings, it is true, but with too much thought of herself to think very much of Pandolfini. Naturally, is it not the bride who is the most interesting? She has her clothes to think of, and her approaching promotion to the dignity of a married lady—a dignity which it was very fine to attain at so early an age. And there were all her new duties, as her aunt called them,—the management of her house, which she must learn to do in the Italian fashion, and her servants. It troubled Sophy that she did not know how many servants she was to have, and that she had never been asked to go and see the house, or to choose new carpets or curtains, as other brides had to

do; but then, on the other hand, it delighted her to find that she might call herself Contessa, and would be elevated quite into the nobility by her marriage. In Italy she might only be Signora, but in England she would certainly be My Lady, Sophy reflected — and her whole being thrilled with the thought. This was a discovery, for Pandolfini had not cared for the bare and insignificant title, and all his Italian friends called him by his Christian name, according to the custom of the country. Sophy called him Pandolfo, too, though seldom when addressing himself. It was not a pretty name. If he had been Alonzo, or Vincenzo, or even Antonio; but Pandolfo!—Pandolfo Pandolfini! It was like Robert Roberts, or John Jones—not a pretty name; but then, to be a Countess! That would sweeten any name, so that it would smell as sweet as any rose.

Thus the arrangements went on strangely enough, Sophy being the only one of all concerned who did not, as time progressed, feel in them a certain strangeness and mysterious something behind. The rector and his nephew came back before the time fixed for the wedding, though it was growing hot, and Mr Snodgrass was anxious to get home. The curate was generally the one who yielded, not the one who led, but he had steadily held to his determination to come back to Pisa, and succeeded, as was natural. The rector was one of those who had guessed Diana to intend the Italian for herself, being of the opinion that the aim of every woman, however elevated, was to "catch" a man, one way or other; and he was not without hope now that his dear Bill's constant devotion might at last get its reward. Many a heart is caught in the rebound, and if

Bill was not very good-looking, he was at least a cleanly Englishman, not one of "those Italians." To be on the spot might be all-important for him; so his uncle yielded and came back to Pisa, though it was hot, and even volunteered his services to perform the marriage—the Protestant marriage, as it was called with contempt by the old Canonico, Pandolfini's cousin, who was to perform the other ceremony. It was a bitter pill for the rector to hear himself called a Protestant, but there was no help for it. The Canonico only took snuff, and smiled, when the English priest called himself a Catholic. Rome repays to the highest Anglican, and with interest, the spurns which he is so fond of administering to patient merit, when it takes the form of Dissent. The Canonico had asked if Sophy was a Protestant or a Christian, when he first

heard of the marriage, and treated with absolute cynicism all Mr Snodgrass's protestations. But, on the other hand, Mrs Norton could not be happy without the blessing of her own Church; nor did she think it suitable that the niece of her late dear husband, who was for so many years a most respectable clergyman of the Church of England, should be married without it. How could she tell what the priest said in his Latin? but about the English service there could be no manner of doubt. So the rector swallowed the opprobrious epithet of Protestant, and declared himself ready to perform the rite. Diana would no doubt be there. She would be compelled to veil her feelings, and to witness the marriage: and, in the rebound, who could tell what dear Bill's presence might do?

The curate deluded himself with no such

vain hopes. Diana's presence was like the sun to him. Without it he faded and drooped, though otherwise he was not much like a flower. He was a heavy Englishman, not clever or endowed with much insight, yet he had a heart in his capacious and clumsy bosom. And to those who possess that organ, some things are visible which genius itself, without it, could scarcely see. It has been said that Pandolfini had chosen the ponderous silent young Englishman as the object of his special bounties, having divined him, and the sentiment which was his soul. It was young Snodgrass's turn now to divine his friend, and he did it sadly, with a true brotherly, friendly sorrow for the evil he had discovered. He was not contented with the plea of business which Sophy accepted, and which all the others had to accept. He sought the much-occupied

bridegroom out, even in the depths of his dark palace, and resisted all attempts to send him away. "I will wait till you are ready," he said, and pretended not to see what miserable pretence of work it was which his friend at last pushed away. He got him out against Pandolfini's will, who went with him, as was evident, only to get rid of him the sooner. But the curate was not to be shaken off. He went again and again; he watched with all the anxiety of friendship. He perceived how little Pandolfini saw of his bride, and how eagerly he seized upon every excuse to avoid being with her. He saw how, when the bridegroom paid the hurried visits which necessity demanded, Diana avoided him, and that under no circumstances did these two see each other, who, when he left Pisa, had been meeting every night. And, above all, the curate saw the misery in

Pandolfini's eyes. He said nothing for a long time, for he was not quick of purpose, or ready to seize what could be done; but at length the spectacle became too much for the good-hearted fellow.

They were walking one night by the Arno, very silent, saying nothing to each other. It was after a half-hour spent with the Nortons: Pandolfini had apparently caught at the chance of the curate's company to carry him through this visit —and though Snodgrass was not quick of observation, he could not but remark, having his attention roused and on the alert, the curious character of the scene of which he was a spectator. Pandolfini was not indifferent; nothing of the ease and calm of that unexcited condition was in the anxious pathetic tender apology of the tone in which he replied to Sophy's little *espiégleries* and reproaches. "Are

you always to be so drowned in business —always business? you never had any business when we knew you first," she cried, pouting. He looked at her with a melancholy in his eyes which went to the curate's heart: but it did not succeed in reaching the observation of Sophy, who had other things to think of than the looks of her betrothed: he was her property, and about him she entertained no doubt.

"No," he said, "I had little business then: but now—have I not new objects of thought and provisions to make——"

"Oh, Signor Conte, if I am going to be such a burden on you——"

"Nay, not a burden. You do me a wrong, Sophy. If I can but provide what will make you happy——"

"Oh, you foolish old thing; did you think I meant it?" cried Sophy, looking up in his face, with the pretty affectation

which love thinks adorable, but which chill eyes of bystanders see with less complacence. The Italian shrank for a moment from the caressing gesture of the two clasped hands which she laid upon his arm. Then he took courage, and stooping kissed the hands.

"If I can but make you happy, poor child," he said, with a suppressed sob in his voice. Mrs Norton at this moment called the curate's attention, and led him to the other end of the room to show him something. She was always watchful to "let them have a little time by themselves." "Forgive me," she whispered, "but, of course, they have little things to say to each other," and the poor little lady cast furtive glances over the curate's shoulder to see if the lovers' interview grew more familiar. But Pandolfini very gently had freed himself from Sophy's hand. He rose

and stood before her, talking low, but not in a tone which augured any special confidence. Snodgrass thought that the very sound of it was enough to break any one's heart. It was like the tender pitying tone in which bad news is broken to a child. Why was he so sorry for her, so sadly kind and gentle? Her little follies did not offend him, as they might have done a more warm lover. He was indulgent to everything — kind, with a melancholy appeal to her forgiveness in everything he said. The curate perhaps was proud of himself for his penetration. He had never so divined any one before.

"You see they are not just like common lovers," said poor little Mrs Norton, who felt that she had to put the best face upon it, and now wreathed her face in smiles to conceal the anxiety in her mind. "He is so much older than she—and more ex-

perienced—and so clever. But you can't think how he appreciates my Sophy's sweetness. He quite worships her. When he talks to her in that voice it brings the tears to my eyes. It is so tender!" cried the anxious woman, looking for confirmation in the curate's face.

"Yes, it sounds very — melancholy," said young Snodgrass, who, notwithstanding the new insight in his eyes, and the ache of sympathy in his heart, could not help being a little commonplace in speech.

"Melancholy! It is tender — that is what it is! He thinks everything is angelical that she does or says. And nobody who does not know her as we do can tell what a darling my Sophy is," said Mrs Norton, with tears in her eyes.

The curate made some inarticulate sound of assent; but he did not himself think

Sophy angelical, and there was something in all this that affected him with a confused pang of sympathy, different from anything he had ever felt before. The mystery, the concealed despair on one side, the wistful veiled anxiety on the other, and Sophy's superficial childish light-heartedness, her little commonplace coquetries and affectations between, — he was not clear-headed enough to discriminate these: but the whole affected him with sentiments he could not define nor get the better of. He stood up in the corner, as was his usual habit, a very serious shadow, heavy in soul as in person, and looked on. And it seemed to him that he could scarcely keep silence even here. As they were leaving when the strange visit was over, he made a pause on the way down-stairs. "Do you never go to see Miss Trelawny?" he

asked, putting his arm suddenly within Pandolfini's. The Italian started violently, turned round, and looked him in the face, then hurried on. He was taken by surprise, and in his agitated condition shook as if he had received a blow. Nothing more was said for some time. They walked silently on together side by side in the cool of the soft summer night, for it was late—and reached the Arno without a word. It was a beautiful night. Once more the stars were out, blazing like great lamps out of heaven; and along the long line of street the lights twinkled, reflecting themselves in the water like stars of earth. Pandolfini's steps gradually grew slower, till at last he stopped altogether, forgetting and seeming to lose himself as he gazed at those reflections in the dark softly flowing stream.

"Pandolfini," said the curate, "I can-

not bear this any longer. You must not do it; you ought not to do it. It is more than you can bear."

"What is more than I can bear?" he asked, dreamily, not turning to his questioner, keeping his eyes fixed on the river below.

"Pandolfini," cried the other, too much agitated by all he had heard and seen to take much thought what he was saying, "you know what I mean well enough. Do you think I am blind and cannot see? Once you divined me. I felt it, though we said nothing about it. And now it is my turn. I am not so clever as you are, but I would do anything in the world to help you. Pandolfini, you can't go through with this marriage; it is impossible to——"

"Not a word—not a word!" cried the Italian, raising himself hurriedly. "It is

late, and I go back to my—business. Yes, it is true: is it extraordinary that one of my country should have business? We have talked enough to-night."

"We have not talked at all," cried the curate. "Oh, Pandolfini, let me speak! God knows what sympathy I have for you—more than words can tell! But why make it worse by this? You are trying yourself beyond what any man can bear. Stop while there is time, for the love of heaven!"

"My friend, you are kind, you are good," said Pandolfini, with a tremor in his voice; "but there are things of which one does not speak, not to one's own soul."

"Why should there be?" cried Bill Snodgrass, in generous excitement. "Oh, listen to me! Don't do in a hurry what you would repent all your life. She—

might suffer for a day, but you for ever. Oh don't, for the sake of false honour, bind yourself so! Don't go on with it! this marriage——"

"Silence!" said the Italian, with a hot flush on his face. "Silence, silence!" Then his tone changed to something of the same grieved and tender sound which it took when he addressed Sophy. "Friend," he said, with pathetic gentleness, "why rob me of your sympathy? I will know how you think if you say nothing; but to advise will make an end of all. See! what you are talking of will soon be to me the foundation of my life. That is sacred: that no man must discuss with me. No more, not a word, or I shall lose you—too."

You—too! Who was the other, then, whom he had lost? The curate made an effort to speak again, but was silenced still

more summarily; and thus they walked slowly in silence to Pandolfini's house, where they parted with only a mutual grasp of the hand. Young Snodgrass's mind was distracted with generosity, pity, and distress. He walked about in front of the great dark doorway where his friend had disappeared, with a mind torn in pieces with diverse thoughts. Should he follow him, and make one last attempt?—but he felt that to be indeed useless. Then a thought came into his head that brought a sudden gush of warmth to the chill of his anxiety. He would go to Diana. If any one could help, surely she would do so—she who was always ready to help; or at least she would tell him if anything could be done. He went back to the Palazzo dei Sogni without taking time to think, and, all hot and hasty, rushed into her presence before he allowed him-

self to consider what he was doing. Diana was alone. She was seated by her writing-table, on which lay a number of papers; but she had pushed her chair slightly away, and had a book in her hand, which probably, at the sound of her visitor's entering, she had dropped upon her knee. Her solitary figure in this attitude, the papers neglected, the book dropped, all seemed to imply to Snodgrass a loneliness which never before had associated itself in his mind with Diana. For the first time in his life he felt, and wondered at himself for daring to feel, a kind of pity for the princess of his thoughts. She, too, was lonely, solitary, no one near her to make the world brighter; for which purpose poor Bill Snodgrass, who knew that he was capable of nothing but boring her, thought he would willingly have given his life.

She rose up with a friendly, sweet salutation when she saw who it was. She was glad to see him—was it possible? For once in his life he *had* brightened her by the sight of his heavy reverential face.

"I am very glad you have come," she said, in answer to his stammered salutation, "for I was feeling lonely, which is not usual with me. Everybody whom I know gone—and our little friends up-stairs are very busy, of course," she added, with a smile.

The curate had not time to think, as he probably would have done otherwise, that the idea of these little friends neglecting Diana was incredible. His mind was too full of his mission, which filled his homely countenance with purpose and eagerness. Diana saw this almost before she had completed what she was saying. She added hastily, in a different tone,

"Something has happened—you have come to tell me of something? Is it news from home?"

"No," he said: "Miss Trelawny, perhaps it is something quite foolish or more; but you understand—and you will pardon me if I am wrong. Pandolfini—he is in a condition I cannot understand."

"Is he ill?" He thought she grew paler, and clasped her hands together as if something moved her.

"No, not that I know of: except that he is haggard and worn—a shadow of himself. It is about this—marriage."

Diana had made a step towards him with warm and anxious interest at Pandolfini's name. She now drew back again, a cloud falling over her. She did not make any reply, but only shook her head, and her countenance grew very grave, the smile, which was always lurking some-

where, ready to be called forth, fading altogether from her face.

"You will do nothing, Miss Trelawny, you who help every one! and yet how few are in such trouble? For you must see how unsuitable it is—how it is killing him."

"Hush!" said Diana, as Pandolfini had said before; "if it is going to be, nothing unkind must be said—nothing it would hurt us or them to think of hereafter. And it is not for us to discuss," she said, with a slight faltering in her voice; "they only can tell——"

"But, Miss Trelawny, it is not for gossip, nor in the way of intrusion into other people's affairs. But, Pandolfini, he has read my heart, and now I feel that I can read his," said the curate, stammering and growing red. Must not she know what he meant in both cases? She stood with her

hands clasped, her head drooping, but no consciousness about her, thoughtful, and almost sorrowful, as if she knew all that he would say. "Oh, Miss Trelawny," he cried, with generous zeal, "could not you interfere? Could not you set things right? There are things a man must bear, and I don't say you could—save him—or any of us from: give us, I mean, happiness. But this is madness, despair—I don't know what—and it will kill him. Oh, Miss Trelawny, will not you interfere?"

"How can I interfere?" cried Diana, piteously. "What can I do?" The tears were in her eyes. "Of all helpless people on the earth, am I not the most helpless?" This was said passionately, an unintended confession of her own share in this misery, which she instantly repented. "Forgive me," she said, with a deep blush; "I am speaking extravagantly. But, Mr

Snodgrass, think what you are saying. What could I do? There is nothing, nothing in which I can help him. God help them both! I wish some one would take me home," she cried again, suddenly. "It is too much for me, as well as for you. But all this is useless. There is nothing either you or I can do."

You or I! The man was generous. He had given the last proof of it in making this appeal. But when she said "You or I," poor Snodgrass forgot Pandolfini. It turned his head.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WEDDING-DAY.

THE marriage took place on the first day of June—or rather that was the beginning of the repeated and laborious processes which made Sophy Norton into the Contessa Pandolfini. What a delight it was to take out the first handkerchief embroidered with a coronet, one of those which Diana had got her from Paris. Sophy took it out, and shook that delightful sign of new-born nobility into the air on the day of the legal ceremony, which was the day before her two ecclesiastical marriages. She would not lose a moment that she could help.

And the melancholy bridegroom, and the occupations which took him away from her, faded into nothing before this privilege. Diana might be richer, and had been always more splendid than she—but Diana had no coronet. As for Diana, she was engaged in preparing for her journey, and was present only at the English or Protestant marriage, when she managed to keep as much as possible out of sight, and avoided the bridegroom entirely, notwithstanding the researches after her of Mrs Norton, and of the bride herself, whose efforts to produce Diana to say good-bye to dear Pandolfo were repeated and unwearying. "Where is Diana? what does her packing matter? besides, she does not pack—why should she, with a maid to do everything for her?" This was said with a slight tone of grievance, for it had not occurred to Pandolfini, though he furnished that poor

little faded coronet, to provide a maid. Sophy, when she had put off her bridal dress after the strictest English rule, forgot her dignity so far as to run down-stairs in her own dignified person to "hunt up" Diana. "Mr Pandolfini does not want good-byes," said Diana; "and see, I have taken off my pretty dress. You would not like me to present myself in this grey garment, all ready for travelling. God bless you, Sophy!—and you can explain to Mr Pandolfini if you like: but be sure he is not thinking of any one but you."

"I hope not," said Sophy, demurely; "but you need not call him Mr Pandolfini now, Diana. We did so in the old times when we knew no better. But I shall not permit him to give up his title any longer. You might say Count, I think."

"I will say his Lordship, if you like,"

said Diana, kissing the unconscious little creature. She smiled, but there was a meaning in her eyes which heedless little Sophy, on the heights of glory and her coronet, understood as little as any child.

"You need not laugh," said the Countess Pandolfini, gravely; "of course it is not the custom here. But I am sure a Count ought to be My Lord in England. It is just the same as an Earl—at least, my title is just the same as Lady Loamshire's, and far, far older nobility. English lords are nothing in comparison with Italian." Sophy's handkerchief, as has been said, was embroidered with a coronet, and so was everything else she had upon which she could have it worked or stamped. It was worth being married for that alone.

"I think they are calling for you," said Diana. "Thank you, little Countess, for

coming to me on this great day. All the servants shall be taught to say My Lady when you come to see me at home. Good-bye now: and I hope you will be very happy—and make your husband happy," Diana added, with an involuntary change of her voice.

"Oh, of course we shall be happy! and it will not be long before I shall make Pandolfo bring me to England. Good-bye, good-bye, Diana. Oh, how I wish you were only as happy as I am! I wish there was another Pandolfo for you. Yes, I am coming, aunt; good-bye, good-bye. I shall take your love to him, shall I? Oh yes, I will let you send him your love; and very soon I shall make him bring me to England: and I shall write to you in a few days, and—good-bye, dear Diana, good-bye."

Diana went out upon her balcony to see

them go away. The flowers and plants had grown high, and she stood unseen under the shade of the *loggia*. She felt that some one stood beside her as she looked down and watched the grave Italian leading out his gay little bride. What a butterfly Sophy looked, as she fluttered into the carriage which was to convey them to the villa! "Poor little Sophy, too," said Diana, involuntarily, with a sigh.

"Are you sorry for *her*?" said the curate, who had come in unbidden at the door which Sophy had left open. He had not presumed, poor fellow, but he had come and gone with greater confidence, and taken a humble but secure place, half friend, half devoted follower, the last of Diana's court, since the evening when he made that appeal to her. The rector thought his dear Bill was making way,

and that perhaps, after all, the heart might be caught in the rebound. "Are you sorry for *her*?" he said with surprise; "she is not sorry for herself."

"Yes, poor little Sophy," said Diana, "she deserved some pretty young man like herself, who would have run about with her, and understood all her little vanities. I hope she will never be sorry for herself: but it will not be a very cheerful life."

"I think of him," the curate said, in a low voice.

Diana did not answer for a time. Something came into her throat and stopped her. Then she went on after a pause, "Sophy will be more of a woman than you think. She would have made you a good little wife, Mr Snodgrass."

"Me!" He made a step away from her in the shock of surprise and indignation.

He was not vain, he thought; but he who cherished so lofty, so noble a love—he to have Sophy suggested to him, or such as she! This, from Diana, went to poor Snodgrass's heart.

"Yes," she said, looking at him with a smile in her clear eyes. "You are angry, but it is true. A girl like Sophy, young and fresh and sweet, who would think there was no one in the world like you, and would be good to your poor people, would make you more happy than anything else — though perhaps you do not think so now."

Poor curate! this sudden dash of cold water upon him, in the very midst of the subdued exhilaration with which he found himself by Diana's side, talking to her more freely than he had ever ventured to talk before, was very hard to bear. He thought, if it was possible for Diana to

be cruel, that she was cruel now. That she could smile even, and jest — for it must be intended for a jest — at such a moment, when he, for his part, had come ready, as it were, to follow with her the funeral of poor Pandolfini! Was it not, if one might dare to permit such a thought, heartless of Diana? But she gave him no time to think. She had her packing to attend to, and all the last arrangements to make for leaving Pisa next day. Diana had resisted various proposals to "join a party" of tourists going northward. She was starting straight for home, from which she declared she had been only too long away. The Snodgrasses and Mrs Norton were to dine with her in the evening — to drink the health of the newly married, and conclude this little episode of their life—and she had no more leisure now. She came in lightly from

among the oleanders and aloes, in the soft grey dress which she had put on in such haste, as her excuse for not showing herself. It was too simple a garment — too like her governess days to suit Diana — and she had some reason of her own, perhaps, for putting it on; not any reason, one would think, however, for sad thoughts. She came in with a light in her eyes which had been somewhat veiled of late. "Now I must be busy," she said, smiling upon her visitor as she dismissed him. The last week or two of warm Italian weather, and of these distracting melancholy contemplations, had stopped many things, or retarded them. Life itself had grown languid in sympathy: but now that was all over; the deed was done for which heaven and earth had seemed to be waiting, and there could be no more lingering, musing, over it now.

The little party, which was so shrunken out of its old dimensions, showed as curious a mixture of feelings as could well be seen, when it met that evening round Diana's table. Mrs Norton was subdued by the reality of the event to which she had been looking forward so long. Never till now had she thought of it as affecting herself. The little lady might be selfish for her Sophy, but she was not selfish in her own person; nor did she think of her own comfort as opposed to that of her niece. So that now, when Sophy was gone—she and her boxes and preparations, and her voice and her footstep, all gone—a sudden collapse ensued for poor Mrs Norton. The sense of her loneliness came upon her all in a moment. She was happy now, she had said fervently; she had placed her child in the care of a good man, who would love and cherish her; and now, whatever hap-

pened to herself, Sophy would be safe. But even as she said the words the sense of her loneliness had seized upon the poor little woman, and brought up a sob into her throat. Sophy was provided for. Sophy had a husband and a coronet—the last an unhoped-for glory — but she, had she lost Sophy? She was brave, and choked back the sob, and upbraided herself for her selfishness, but still this constriction of the throat would come back. "I am rather worn out, that is the fact," she said to Diana, unable to conceal the break in her voice, but laughing brokenly too; "we are so subject to our bodies. I never would allow I was tired, though S-Sophy warned me. If I b-break down, you know what it means, Diana—only t-tiredness and nerves —that is all." And then she cried, and sat down to table, faltering and trembling, but trying to laugh, with the conviction that

the sound, though far from mirthful, would make it apparent that she cried for joy.

As for the rector, he was full of the correctest sentiments, and kept his eye upon Diana and upon dear Bill to see what progress they were making. He made them little speeches as to the advantages of matrimony. "It is the one mistake I have made in my life," said the rector. "It is true that my nephew, who is as good as a son to me, saves me, in some degree, from the loneliness. But I never should advise any one to follow my example. I hope my dear Bill will judge better," Mr Snodgrass added, with some solemnity. Diana was the only one who laughed, and this fact amused her still more than the primary cause of her merriment. Mrs Norton put her handkerchief to her eyes, while the curate sat in dumb worship with his eyes

turned towards the object of his constant thoughts.

"Ah, Mr Snodgrass, perhaps you will feel as I do. One would make any sacrifice for the happiness of one's children, and then after, one suffers — not that I mean to complain. To see Sophy happy will be happiness enough for me, if her dear husband is spared to her. But I know what that is," said poor little Mrs Norton, subsiding into her handkerchief.

"We must not think of anything gloomy to-night," said the rector. "I trust, indeed, that our dear friends the Pandolfinis will be long spared to each other, and that they will combine the good qualities of both nations. It will be a lesson indeed in Italian society to see the beauty of an English home. There is nothing like it, my dear Mrs Norton. I have travelled as much as most men. I may say I am

acquainted more or less with European circles: but an English home, and a marriage of true affection, as we have every reason to believe this is——"

"So was mine, Mr Snodgrass," said Mrs Norton; "and oh, Providence was very kind to me. There are very, very few like my dear husband. The bishop always said there was no one he trusted in so much. He was adored in the parish. Rich and poor followed him to his grave. It was as if every family had lost a member. And what is life to those who are left? Forgive me, Diana. I know I am not so gay as I ought to be: but a wedding always, more or less, b-brings back the recollection of one's d-desolation."

"Quite true," said the rector; "and to a solitary man like myself, the consideration that I have made one great mistake in life——"

"Then why don't you —— ?" cried Diana, in whom this mutual lamentation roused the dormant sense of humour, delivering her from her own thoughts, which were not too gay. She could not complete her sentence, however, as she intended, feeling a real pity for the poor little lady opposite. "You, at least, Mr Snodgrass," she said, "why don't you mend your mistake? There is time enough yet." The rector smiled. He was pleased by the suggestion, though he did not mean to follow it. "No, no," he said. "To be told by you, Miss Trelawny, that it is not too late, is a compliment indeed; but I give up in favour of Bill here, who is my representative. Dear Bill must mend my mistake, not an old man like me."

Dear Bill did not say anything. He had fallen back into his normal condition, and only gazed at Diana with dull but faithful

eyes. He had forgiven her the sharp and unexpected blow she had given him, but it had killed his little confidence, his sense that there was a secret understanding between them. He to be made happy by marrying a Sophy! how little she knew!

And yet how much better it would have been for him than for Pandolfini! Diana could not but think, with impatient regret, as she looked at them all, playing their little parts round the table, where they were never to sit again. Sophy would have made the curate a very good little wife. She would have led him insensibly down from those unattainable wishes which held him suspended between earth and heaven, and brought him back to the calm delights of the parish, which was his natural sphere and hers. They would have harmonised by infallible instinct and power of natural attraction, after perhaps a little

interval of difficulty. But Pandolfini! what link could there be between the little English clergywoman who would have been so useful in a parish, and the grave Italian whose habits were as alien to hers as his race? Poor Pandolfini in these few weeks had ceased even to be an Anglomane. He had gone back upon his native habitudes, upon his old relations; he had turned even his English books, in temporary disgust, out of their places. Fortune had dealt with him hardly, turning his preferences—the tastes which he had cultivated with a certain pride—into weapons of his downfall. Diana did not know all this, as she allowed herself to fall back into a review of all that passed after her guests were gone on that last evening. She was going away alone as she had come. All that had happened since her arrival here had passed over her without touching her. As she had come,

so she was going away. The lamps were burning low, the soft night air was blowing in gratefully at the windows. The great picture of the Count dei Sogni, which had hung over her so long, seemed to look mildly, regretfully, half reproachfully at her through the gloom. He, too, poor Pandolfini, was of the Sogni: and she herself, and all the chances of this strange mortal life, what were they but *Sogni* too? "We are such stuff as dreams are made of," said Diana softly to herself, the tears coming to her eyes as she stood there alone in the great dim room, the curtains swaying softly behind her in the air of the night, and dim reflections showing all about like ghosts, repeating her tall white figure in the old dim mirrors. It had been nothing but a caprice on her part to come here—a mere fancy, without any seriousness or purpose in it. If she had but stayed at home—

gone on upon her quiet round in her own sphere, where her duty was! Why was it that this whim of hers should have brought a cloud upon the life of a good man? Life seemed to melt away and resolve itself into shadows, through those tears of visionary compunction that were in her eyes—a vain show, a phantasmagoria, momentary and delusive, strong gleams of light and rolling darknesses in which no meaning was. The vague whiteness that moved in spectral distance in the mirror far away from her at the end of the room, far-off reflection of her own solitary figure, seemed to Diana as real as herself. What had they to do, the woman or the reflection, in this stately dwelling of the past?—brought here for a moment to pass across the surface of the mirror which had reflected so many things, to work unwitting and unwilling evil, and then to pass away—yet never to pass away

having once been here. Diana hid her face in her hands, oppressed and bowed down by this visionary sense of intrusion, of harm, yet unreality. Not three months, not more than a moment in life: yet enough for so much to happen in, more important than many quiet years. So the great and the little mix and perplex each other, ever increasing the strange confusion of this world of shadow, till the brain turns round, and the heart grows sick.

She rose up quickly, and threw out her hands, as if throwing something away. "This must not be," she said aloud to herself; "this must not be." And she gathered up from the table all those little tokens of personal presence which change the aspect of a place of habitation, and make it into the likeness of its tenant,—took up a shawl which had been thrown upon a sofa, a book which lay on an old

cabinet, a little basket of odds and ends already collected. With a certain reverence, as we collect the possessions of the lately dead, she carried them all away. The room was left, when she closed the door, as it had been when she came in to it —the faded old furniture all ranged in its place, the great portrait looking down from the dimness of the old wall. Was it the same? A sweetness breathed in upon the air that had not been there before, a glimpse of flowers through the window, a greenness of leaves,—and on the carpet one little sprig of myrtle with its feathery globe of blossom, which had come from Sophy's marriage-wreath, and had fallen as she went out from Diana's hand. No more—yet something still.

Pandolfini at this moment was standing out on the terrace of his villa, looking

across the Tuscan garden of rich cultivation about. The grey olive-trees were dark in the monotony of the night, the soft hills all shrouded, the distant Apennines lying like shadows against the shadowy horizon. Here and there the gleam of a firefly gave a touch of light, and the roses were all a-bloom upon the hedges, betraying themselves by their sweetness. He stood alone and gazed out upon the dark, seeing nothing, yet somehow receiving the shadowy monotones of the night into his soul, as Diana was receiving the ghostly reflections and shadowed calm of the lonely room. All shadows, without and within; but he was at one of those points of existence when everything is too vivid and actual to permit of dreaming. His whole life was changed; he was another man, with new duties, new burdens, new companion-

ship. How he was to make his toilsome way among them he could not tell. There was a heavy dew in his eyes, essence of pain and wonder at all that had happened to him,—at this revolution which was, yet was not, his doing,—at the new claims, all so terribly real, undeniable, true. How had it come about? What fate had led him by strange paths to this transformation of existence? He could not tell. It seemed a gratuitous interference as of some potent spirit who wished him ill, and had led him astray. The world was as dark to him as the fields, with impulses of pity, of generous devotion, of honour and kindness, lighting it fitfully like the fireflies: but for himself all dark—no comfort in it, nor any visible hope. Yet his mind was hushed with the very greatness of the crisis. It was done, and the agitations

were so far calmed; his fate was decided. But when the moon rose Pandolfini retreated before it, covering his eyes. The dark was more congenial. He wanted no soft angelical face to shine upon him, no light to follow him at that moment of his life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTERWARDS.

DIANA reached home when the country was in the full glory of summer. She, too, was like the summer, her friends said—more beautiful than ever she had been—with just a touch of sunburn from her journey, which ripened her paleness and made her eyes more brilliant. The whole county hurried to the Chase to meet and greet her, and tell her how well she was looking, and that foreign travel evidently agreed with her. "But, all the same, you must not go again, for we cannot spare you," they cried. Nothing could go on

without Diana. "And we were so sadly afraid you meant to stay and spend the summer in Switzerland," said young Lady Loamshire (she whose title, Diana remembered with a smile, was the same as Sophy's). Nobody could have a more flattering reception. There was a general feeling of escape that so precious a possession as their virgin-princess had been got back in safety. The county did not like her to move: even when she went to London, it was never without fears that somebody might snap her up, and marry her before any one could interfere: and how much more "abroad," where there were always needy foreigners on the strain to catch rich English ladies! She and the county had escaped a great danger—they could not sufficiently pet and caress her when she got back. In the delight of her safety they were all quite satisfied to hear

that Sophy Norton had made such a good marriage. "Only I hope the poor man was not taken in. They think all the English are so rich," said one of those who had been afraid that Diana would be "snapt up." This was an old lady who had as much fear for the conventional fortune-hunter as so many other old ladies have of the Pope. But Sophy Norton was nobody: she was a cheap ransom to pay for Diana, and only interested a very few people, who were amused or delighted or irritated, as the case might be, to hear that so insignificant a person was now the Countess Pandolfini. Diana did her full justice, and gave her the benefit of her coronet, by which all the servants, and especially the maid who had charge of the Red House, were deeply impressed. Diana's own household did not like it. They thought it extremely forward of a

little thing who owed so much to Miss Trelawny to marry a titled gentleman, though it was some little solace to remember that foreign counts were not much to swear by. But the maid at the Red House felt her bosom swell with pride as loftily as Sophy's own. "I don't believe as she'll be a bit proud, but just as friendly with Miss Trelawny as ever," Mary Jane said, "though a married lady, and a titled lady stands more high like in the world." The Trelawny household did not know what to answer to this taunt. They made hot protestations on behalf of their mistress that she might have married half the gentlemen in the county, and had her pick and choice of titles; but of course they could not give proof of this assertion, and Mary Jane's statement as to the superiority of a married and titled lady was unquestionably true.

"Then they were really married?" said Mrs Hunstanton; "he did not get out of it? I hoped he would up to the last moment. Honour is a great thing, but that is carrying honour too far, Diana. I could not have done it. Perhaps you could who are more high-minded——"

"We are not called upon to judge," said Diana, "so we need not inquire who could have done it. I hope they may be very happy——"

"Do not be fictitious," cried Mrs Hunstanton. "Happy! Sophy would be happy with her new dresses anywhere."

"And her coronet," said Diana, smiling.

"Her — coronet! do you mean to say you encouraged her in such folly? Diana, I never can understand you. Are you a cynic? are you a——?"

"Fool, perhaps. I will save your feelings by saying the word myself. Yes, I

suppose I am a fool: for I—miss them," said Diana, half laughing, half crying. "It is quite true. Their little ways, their little talk, their kindnesses, and even their little amiable selfishnesses—yes, I don't deny it. I miss them: so I suppose I am, as you say, a fool."

"I never said it. Amiable selfishness! —what sort of a thing is that? No, Diana, I don't understand you. You are either the goodest, or the strangest, or the most——"

"Foolish—it is that. There are so many sensible people in the world," said Diana, apologetic. "Yes, I had it embroidered for her on all her things. It was funny, but how it pleased Sophy! And why not? Lady Loamshire has her coronet on her handkerchiefs, and her husband's grandfather, you know, after all, was only a—cheesemonger: whereas the Pandol-

finis—— But you know that better than I do."

"Lady Loamshire! how can you be so ridiculous! She is a great personage. She is an English countess."

"And Sophy is an Italian one. What difference is there besides?"

"What are you two arguing about?" said Mr Hunstanton. "I will set it right for you, if you will tell me. To be sure, the Pandolfinis. Tell me all about them, Diana. I suppose they are very happy, and all that. They went to the Villa for the honeymoon, English fashion? Ah, Pandolfini always was an Anglomaniac; and I am very glad he has an English wife. I had a hand in that. Did my wife ever tell you, Diana——?"

"Oh yes, I told her—she knows everything," said Mrs Hunstanton, with a suppressed groan; "but when you tell your

wise deeds, if I were you I would leave that out. If ever a man had his heart broken by his friend——"

"Yes, listen to her, Diana. She wants me to believe that I spoke to the wrong person—a likely thing! For you know I managed it all. Pandolfini put it into my hands. And she says I made a mistake!" said Mr Hunstanton, rubbing his hands. "Now I put it to you, Diana, as an impartial person, supposing even that I was a fool, as she makes me out, who was there else to propose to? That's the question. I defy you to answer that. If it was not Sophy, who could it be?"

The two ladies said nothing. They exchanged a half-guilty furtive glance, not venturing even to look at each other openly. Mr Hunstanton was triumphant; he rubbed his hands more and more.

"You perceive?" he said, "that is the weak point with women — not but what I have the highest respect for your judgment, both of you. You are delightfully rapid in your conclusions," added Mr Hunstanton, with *naïve* originality, "and jump at a truth which we might not reach for weeks with the aid of pure reason: but the practical argument has little favour with you. When I ask you, What other lady was there? What other could *I* have been sent to? neither the one nor the other of you can find a word to say."

"No," said Diana; her voice sounded flat and trembled a little. "No," she said, "I think—you must have done what was best."

Mrs Hunstanton gave her an indignant glance: but what could they say? It was not possible to utter any name, or give any indication between them. They

were even a little overawed by the determined simplicity of the appeal.

"I thought you would own it," he said, delighted with his victory. "No, no, I made no mistake. I am not in the habit of making mistakes. They were not like each other on the surface, but I have always heard that harmony in diversity is the great secret of happiness. It was silly of him, though, to give in about the title. What does it signify to call yourself Count? Among English people it is more a drawback than anything else, when there is neither money to keep it up, nor any particular distinction. But I suppose Sophy liked it."

"Yes—Sophy liked it very much indeed."

"I should think Sophy would like it!" cried Mrs Hunstanton, "and her aunt. A title of any kind delights a silly woman. And to think of that foolish little pair, one

on either side of poor Pandolfini! Yes, Diana, I know you have said that you agree with Tom. He will quote you now, whenever they are mentioned. He will say you are entirely of his opinion."

"I will say—as I have always said—that Diana is the most sensible woman I know," said Mr Hunstanton, "the most reasonable to see the force of an argument: and the most candid—even when she is convinced against her will."

"I have no patience with either of you," cried Mrs Hunstanton, getting up and going away.

This was all that was said upon the subject of Pandolfini. Mr Hunstanton, rubbing his hands with a chuckle of triumph over his own victory and his wife's discomfiture, remained master of the situation. And the ordinary life was resumed, as if this little episode had never been. Regi-

nald, the delicate boy to whom Mrs Norton had been so kind, asked often if she was not coming back again. There was no one like her at bezique, he said. His mother was very kind, and would play with him when she was put to it, but Reginald could see that it bored mamma. Whereas Mrs Norton was never bored : she liked it—she was always jolly — was she ever coming back ? Diana could give no answer to that question. And in the course of the following year she had more than one temptation to transfer the Red House to other tenants. But she was as faithful as Reginald to her foolish little neighbours. And the house remained empty, with Mary Jane in possession, who was very fond of talking of Madam the Countess, which she understood was her little mistress's correct style and title ; and thus a whole year went away, and another midsummer made the woods

joyful. Diana had little leisure left her to think of the two small people whom she had kept warm like birds under her wing, but nevertheless she went sometimes and looked at the vacant nest, and still kept it vacant, and missed them a little, which was stranger still. The curate, who also had resumed all his former habits, and spent his life, when he was not in the parish, following Diana with dull faithful eyes that never left her, met her one day near the deserted house. He had been visiting the gamekeeper, who was disabled by some accident, and was going home by that short cut through the park. How his heart beat when he came upon her all alone! It was very seldom he saw her alone. It reminded him of that day when he made his appeal to her about Pandolfini and she spoke to him of "you and I." Would she ever say such words again?

"I have been carrying news to Mary Jane," said Diana, "of the birth of a little Pandolfini. She wants to know if the baby is a little lord like Lady Loamshire's baby; but, alas! it is only a little girl."

"Has it come to that?" said the curate, startled—though he ought to have known better with all his parish experiences.

"Oh yes," said Diana, with a smile, "it has come to that. Sophy will be a charming little mother, and the baby will make her very happy."

"You always had a great opinion of—Madam Pandolfini."

"Yes," said Diana, and she laughed, looking up at him. "I thought she would have made the very wife you want, Mr Snodgrass; but, unfortunately, I thought of it too late."

Thank God! the curate said devoutly

within himself. For he knew, and she knew—and he knew that she knew—that he must have married Sophy had Diana willed it. He would have resisted, but he would have yielded—and been happy. How sorry Diana was that it had not occurred to her in time! "You would have been a very happy couple," she said. "Don't say anything. I am sure of it. What a help she would have been in the parish!" And to this he could not say no.

"I don't know if you will like me to ask," he said, faltering, and feeling it safe to change the subject, "but—do they get on? are they — comfortable? I knew — all about it, you remember — at the time."

"Did you?" she said, ignoring all that had passed between them on this subject. "I have never asked if they were com-

fortable, Mr Snodgrass; but why should we doubt it? There is always a little risk with people of different nationalities; but Sophy always writes in high spirits."

"She was in high spirits on her wedding-day!" the curate muttered, furious with Sophy, for whose sake Diana treated him with such unusual severity. He had a double grievance against her now.

"And should not you like your bride to be in high spirits on her wedding-day?"

"Oh, Miss Trelawny, how hard you are upon me! when you know I shall never have any bride," said the young man, with a look which he meant to be eloquent. They had come to the avenue by this time, and were about to part.

"Till we find a second Sophy," she said, and gave him her hand, smiling, as she turned towards the house. He stood

for a moment looking after her with dull but wistful eyes. Nothing but that smile would ever be his from Diana. But if a second Sophy could be found! The curate turned and went on with a little shiver of conscious weakness. Did not he know, and did not she know, that what she commanded he would do? But perhaps along with this fear and consciousness there was a little flutter of anticipation, too, in the curate's faithful breast.

Some weeks after this conversation another event occurred which surprised everybody. It happened when Diana was out, so that for a full hour the servants had the privilege of discussing what had happened before any elucidation was possible. It was in the afternoon that it happened — the drowsiest moment of the day. Common cabs from the station carrying luggage very seldom appeared

in the beautiful avenue, and the butler knew that no visitor was expected. But Diana's servants did not dare to be uncivil. It was Mrs Norton who was in the cab, and her big box, made for Continental travel, which weighted that humble vehicle above. "The Red House —oh, I would not take the liberty," she said, with a little tremor in her voice as she stepped out. She was as dignified as travel and weariness would permit, though her bonnet was not so neat as usual. "If you will be so very good as let the man wait in the stableyard till I see Miss Trelawny. Oh, is she out? I am very sorry," said the little lady, growing pale. "I think I must wait and see her. I think I shall have time to wait and see her. I wonder if there will be time before the train." She was so tired and nervous, and ready to cry

with this disappointment, that Jervis made bold to inquire if all was well with Madam and the baby. "She said, 'Oh, the Countess is very well, I thank you, Jervis,'" he reported, when he went downstairs, "as grand as possible. But you take my word there's some screw loose. Meantime, I'll take the poor old girl a cup of tea." This is how our servants speak of us, with that familiar affection which is so great a bond between the different classes of society; and Mrs Norton found Jervis so respectful and so kind, that her heart swelled within her as she sat in Diana's little morning-room, and sipped her cup of tea. It was so good, and the house was so large and quiet, with that well-bred calm which exists only in an English house, the returned wanderer said to herself—oh, so different from old Antonio, who delivered

his opinions along with every dish he served. When Jervis went down-stairs she wept a little, and stifled her sobs in her handkerchief. What would Diana say? Would she blame her for this step she had taken? Would she advise her to go back again by the next train? Mrs Norton had not ventured even to have her big box taken down from the cab, which stood looking so shabby in Diana's stableyard. She was proud, though she was so humble-minded, and she would not make any appeal to Diana's generosity, or look as if she expected to stay. When she had finished her tea and her crying, she went to the mirror and straightened her bonnet, and tried to look as if she had never known what a tear was. But when Diana came in all smiling, and cordial as of old, and looked at her with indulgent kind eyes that found no fault

and expressed no suspicion, Mrs Norton broke down. She threw herself into her friend's arms, regardless of her bonnet. "Oh, Diana, here I am back again a poor old lonely woman. And — I could not be in England without first coming to see you; and I feel as if I had nobody but you——"

"What is the matter?" cried Diana, in alarm. "Sophy—— ?"

"Oh, Sophy is very well; indeed there is nothing the matter. I—I got home-sick I suppose. I — wanted my own country. She has her baby now, Diana, she has her friends: she is fond of her own way: and—oh, she does not want me any more!"

"Well," said Diana, cheerfully, "and so you have come home? How sensible that was!—the very wisest and best thing you could do."

"Oh, do you think so, Diana?" The little lady brightened under these words of commendation. "But I have no right to presume upon coming *home* after all this long time," she said, wistfully. "And I know, dear, it was Sophy you cared for. How could it be me? I was always g-glad to think that it was S-Sophy that was cared for. But now she has her baby, Diana, and I am only a trouble to her. She does not want me. Oh, Diana, she would not be so frivolous if he did not leave her so much! No, no, I am not blaming him; he was always kind, you know, but he did not understand us,—he never made a companion of her. And now she has so many friends, and talks Italian like a native (she always was clever at languages), and they chatter and chatter, and I do not understand a word, and then she calls me cross. *Me* cross, Diana!

And such strange ways with the baby, as if I knew nothing about babies. She even told me so, that I never had one, and how could I know? And so strange altogether—a strange man, and a strange house, and no pleasant fires, and such strange food! Oh, my dear, what could I do? He was very kind, and asked me to stay, but she—she!—never asked me. She didn't w-want me—oh, Diana! I think it will b-break my h-heart!"

"Hush! here is Jervis," said Diana. Mrs Norton stopped short in the midst of her sob. She gave herself a rapid shake, raised her shoulders, cut short the heave of her little bosom. No other check could have told so effectually. It is one thing to break your heart, but to give way before the servants is quite another thing. She was not capable of such a breakdown. What Jervis saw when he

came in was a little figure very erect upon the sofa, with shoulders squared and bonnet straightened, and a smile upon her face. "Oh yes, Diana, the Countess is quite well, and the baby is a darling," said the deceitful little woman. She did not think it was deceitfulness, but only a proper pride.

And the end was that Mrs Norton was taken in "for good," and her big box dislodged from the cab, and carried to a pretty room very near Diana's. She was not sent away even to the pleasant solitude of the Red House. When Mrs Hunstanton heard of this, she came over in hot haste to know, first, how long it was going to last; second, how Diana could be so incredibly foolish; and lastly, whether anything was to be found out about the pair whom even she now was compelled to call the Pandolfinis. But Mrs Norton, it need not be said, put on triple armour

of defence against the assaults of this unkindly critic. She met her with smiles more impenetrable than chain-armour. The dear baby was so well, and Sophy was so well, she had taken the opportunity to run over and see her friends. "For, however happy one may be," Mrs Norton said with feeling, "and however great may be the happiness one sees around, one's heart yearns for one's old friends." Thus the enemy was baffled with equal skill and sweetness: and no one ever heard from Diana why it was that Sophy's aunt had come back. She took to watching over Diana, growing pale when she coughed, and miserable when her head ached, as she had watched over Sophy; and settled down into her pretty rooms, with pretty little protestations that it was too much—far too much! yet pious hopes that she might be of use to Diana, who was so

good to everybody. And Mrs Norton clearly saw a Higher Hand in all that had led to this final arrangement, which was so happy a solution of all difficulties. "The hand of Providence was never more clear," she would say with cheerful solemnity from her easy-chair. "If Sophy had not had that cough, neither Diana nor any of us would have gone to Pisa, and we never should have met dear Count Pandolfo, and Sophy would never have married him. And if Sophy had never been established in Italy, and so comfortable, you would not have thought of taking me into your own delightful house, and making me so happy. Oh, how thankful we should be, Diana! This is how everything works for good. It is seldom, very seldom, that one sees it so very clear!"

Was it so clear?—was it all for this

that the Palazzo dei Sogni had witnessed so many agitations, and that life had changed so strangely for that one grave Tuscan, whose days were so full of business, and whose little English wife had so many gossips? Poor Pandolfini! Diana made no answer to her guest's happy trust in the Providence which had made such elaborate arrangements for her comfort. That chapter of life was over, whatever might have been in it,—over and closed and ended, till the time when the harvest shall be gathered, and all shall be known—where the tares came from, and where the wheat.

But Pandolfini never brought his wife to England, notwithstanding the impulse of mingled recollection and jealousy which made her long to go home when she heard of Diana's adoption of her aunt. "Go, Sophy, if you will: but this little one is

too young to travel," he said. And Sophy, grumbling, stayed at home. After all, the man had the best of it. What flower of happiness so exquisite as this child could have come into his barren days, but for Mr Hunstanton's mistake? Mrs Norton betrayed that he had carried it away, according to the custom of his Church, and had it christened the day after it was born, without even consulting the mother about its name. He had called it Stella, though that was not a family name even. Why Stella?—though it was a pretty name enough. And it is not quite clear that even Diana knew why.

THE END.

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