MADAM

BY

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MADAM.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHILE this intercourse was going on, and Mr. Everard became more and more the associate of the ladies, the little shock that had been given them by the result of Johnny's excitement on the night of the accident grew into something definite and rather alarming. Johnny was not ill—so far as appeared, he was not even frightened; but he continued to see 'the lady' from time to time, and more than once a cry from the room in which he slept had summoned Rosalind, and even Mrs. Lennox, forgetful of her rheumatism. On these ocasions Johnny would be found sitting up in his bed, his great eyes like two lamps shining even in the dim glow of the night-light. It was at an hour when he should have been asleep, when Nurse had gone to her supper, and to that

needful relaxation which nurses as well as other mortals require. The child was not frightened, but there was a certain excitement about this periodical awakening. 'The lady! the lady!' he said. 'Oh, my darling,' cried Aunt Sophy, trembling, 'what lady? There could be no lady. You have been dreaming. Go to sleep, Johnny, and think of it no more.'

'I sawed her,' cried the child. He pushed away Mrs. Lennox and clung to Rosalind, who had her arms round him holding him fast. 'I never was asleep at all, Rosy; I just closed my eyes, and then I opened them and I sawed the lady.'

'Oh, Rosalind, he has just been dreaming. Oh, Johnny dear, that is all nonsense; there was no lady,' Aunt Sophy cried.

'Tell me about her,' said Rosalind. 'Was it a strange lady? Did you know who she was?'

'It is just *the* lady,' cried Johnny impatiently. 'I told you before. She is much more taller than Aunt Sophy, with a black thing over her head. She wouldn't stay, because you came running, and she didn't want you. But I want the lady to speak to me—I want her to speak to me. Go away, Rosy!' the little fellow cried.

'Dear, the lady will not come back again to-night. Tell me about her. Johnny, did you know who she was?'

'I told you: she's just *the* lady,' cried Johnny, with the air of one whose explanation leaves nothing to be desired.

'Oh, Rosalind, you are just encouraging him in his nonsense. He was dreaming. My darling, you were dreaming. Nurse, here is this little boy been dreaming again about the lady, as he calls her. You must give him a dose. He must have got his little digestion all wrong. It can be nothing but that, you know,' Aunt Sophy said. She drew the nurse, who had hastened up from her hour's relaxation in alarm, with her into the outer room. Mrs. Lennox herself was trembling. She clutched the woman's arm with a nervous grasp. 'What does he mean about this lady? Is there any story about a lady? I am quite sure it is all nonsense, or that it is just a dream,' said Mrs. Lennox, with a nervous flutter in the bow of her cap. 'Is there any story (though it is all nonsense) of a haunted room or anything of that sort? If there is, I shan't stay here, not another day.'

The nurse, however, had heard no such story: she stood whispering with her mistress,

talking over this strange occurrence, while Rosalind soothed and quieted the excited child. Amy's little bed was in the outer room, but all was still there, the child never stirring, so absolutely noiseless that her very presence was forgotten by the two anxious women comparing notes. 'He always keeps to the same story,' said Nurse. 'I can't tell what to make of it, ma'am, but Master Johnny always was a little strange.'

'What do you mean by a little strange? He is a dear child; he never gives any trouble; he is just a darling,' Aunt Sophy said. 'It is his digestion that has got a little wrong A shock like that of the other day—it sometimes will not tell for some time, and as often as not it puts their little stomachs wrong. A little medicine will set everything right.'

Nurse demurred to this, having notions of her own, and the discussion went on till Rosalind, who had persuaded Johnny to compose himself, and sat by him till he fell asleep, came out and joined them. 'It will be better for you not to leave him without calling me or someone,' she said.

'Miss Rosalind!' cried Nurse, with natural desperation. 'Children is dreadfully tiring to have them all day long, and every day. And

nurses is only flesh and blood like other people. If I'm never to have a moment's rest day nor night, I think I shall go off my head.'

All this went on in the room where little Amy lay asleep. She was so still that she was not considered at all. She was, indeed, at all times so little disposed to produce herself or make any call upon the attention of those about her, that the family, as is general, took poor little Amy at her own showing and left her to herself. It did not even seem anything remarkable that she was so still—and nobody perceived the pair of wide open eyes with which she watched all that was going on under the corner of the coverlet. Even Rosalind scarcely looked towards her little sister's bed, and all the pent-up misery and terror which a child can conceal (and how much that implies!) lay unconsoled and unlightened in poor little Amy's breast. Meanwhile Johnny had fallen fast asleep, untroubled by any further thought of the apparition which only he was supposed to have seen.

This brought a great deal of trouble into the minds of Johnny's guardians. Mrs. Lennox was so nearly breaking down under a sense of the responsibility, that her rheumatism, instead of improving with her baths, grew worse than

ever, and she became so stiff that Rosalind and Everard together were needed, each at one arm, to raise her from her chair. The doctor was sent for, who examined Johnny, and, after hearing all the story, concluded that it was suppressed gout in the child's system, and that baths to bring it out would be the best cure. He questioned Mrs. Lennox so closely as to her family and all their antecedents, that it very soon appeared a certain fact that all the Trevanions had suffered from suppressed gout, which explained everything, and especially all peculiarities in the mind or conduct. 'The little boy,' said the doctor, who spoke English so well, 'is the victim of the physiological sins of his forefathers. Pardon, madam; I do not speak in a moral point of view. They drank Oporto wine, and he sees what you call ghosts; the succession is very apparent. This child,' turning to Amy, who stood by—'she also has suppressed gout.'

'Oh, Amy is quite well,' cried Aunt Sophy; 'there is nothing at all the matter with Amy. But it cannot be denied that there is gout in the family. Indeed, when gentlemen come to a certain age they always suffer in that way, though I am sure I don't know why. My poor father and

grandfather, too, as I have always heard. Your papa, Rosalind—with him it was the heart.'

'They are all connected. Rheumatism, it is the brother of gout, and rheumatism is the tyrant which affects the heart. No, my dear young lady, it is not the emotions, nor love, nor disappointment, nor any of the pretty things you think; it is rheumatism that is most fatal for the heart. I will settle for the little boy a course of baths, and he will see no more ladies; that is,' said the doctor, with a wave of his hand, 'except the very charming ladies whom he has a right to see. But this child, she has it more pronounced; she is more ill than the little boy.'

'Oh no, doctor; it is only that Amy is always pale; there is nothing the matter with her. Do you feel anything the matter with you, Amy, my dear?'

'No, Aunt Sophy,' said the little girl in a very low voice, turning her head away.

'I told you so; there is nothing the matter with her. She is a pale little thing. She never has any colour. But Johnny, doctor—oh, I hope you will do your best for Johnny! He quite destroys all our peace and comfort. I am afraid to open my eyes after I go to bed, lest I should see the lady too; for that sort of thing

is very catching. You get it into your mind. If there is any noise I can't account for, I feel disposed to scream. I am sure I shall be seeing it before long if Johnny gets no better. But I have always supposed in such cases that it was the digestion that was out of order,' Mrs. Lennox said, returning, but doubtfully, to her original view.

'It is the same thing,' said the doctor, cheerfully waving his hand; and then he patted Johnny on the head, who was half overawed, half pleased to have an illness which procured unlimited petting without any pain. The little fellow began his baths immediately, but next night he saw the lady again. This time he woke and found her bending over him, and gave forth the cry which was now so well known by all the party. Mrs. Lennox, who rushed into the room the first, being in her own chamber, which was near Johnny's, had to be led back to the sitting-room in a state of nervous prostration, trembling and sobbing. When she was placed in her chair and a glass of wine administered to her, she declared that she had seen it too. 'Oh, how can you ask me what it was? I saw something move. Do you think,' with a gasp, 'Rosalind, that one can keep one's wits about one,

with all that going on? I am sure I saw something—something black go out of the door—or at least something moved. The curtain? oh, how can you say it was the curtain? I never thought of that. Are you sure you didn't see anything, Rosalind?'

'I saw the wind in the curtain, Aunt Sophy: the window was open, and it blew out and almost frightened me too.'

'Oh, I could not say I was frightened,' said Mrs. Lennox, grasping Rosalind's hand tight. 'A curtain does bulge out with the wind, doesn't it? I never thought of that. I saw something —move. I—wasn't frightened, only a little nervous. Perhaps it was—the wind in the curtain. You are sure you were frightened too?'

'It blew right out upon me, like someone coming to meet me.'

Aunt Sophy grasped Rosalind's hand tight. 'It must have some explanation,' she said. 'It couldn't be anything super—— You don't believe in—that sort of thing, Rosalind.'

'Dear Aunt Sophy, I am sure it was the curtain. I saw it too. I would not say so if I did not feel—sure——'

'Oh, my dear, what a comfort it is to have a cool head like yours! You're not carried

away by your feelings like me. I'm so sympathetic, I feel as other people feel; to hear Johnny cry just made me I can't tell how. It was dreadfully like someone moving, Rosalind.'

'Yes, Aunt Sophy. When the wind got into the folds, it was exactly like someone moving.

'You are sure it was the curtain, Rosalind?'

Poor Rosalind was as little sure as any imaginative girl could be; she too was very much shaken by Johnny's vision; at her age it is so much more easy to believe in the supernatural than in spectral illusions or derangement of the digestion. She did not believe that the stomach was the source of fancy, or that imagination only meant a form of suppressed gout. Her nerves were greatly disturbed, and she was as ready to see anything, if seeing depended upon an excited condition, as any young and impressionable person ever was. She was glad to soothe Mrs. Lennox with an easy explanation. But Rosalind did not believe that it was the curtain which had deceived Johnny. Neither did she believe in the baths, or in the suppressed gout. She was convinced in her mind that the child spoke the truth, and that it was some visitor from the unseen who

came to him. But who was it? Dark fears crossed her mind and many a wistful wonder. There were no family warnings among the Trevanions, or it is to be feared that reason would have yielded in Rosalind's mind to nature and faith. As it was, her heart grew feverish and expectant. The arrival of the letters from England every morning filled her with terror. She dreaded to see a black-bordered envelope, a messenger of death.

CHAPTER XLVI.

JOHNNY throve notwithstanding his visions. He woke up in the morning altogether unaffected, so far as appeared, by what he saw at night. He had always been more or less the centre of interest, both by dint of being the only male member of the party and because he was the youngest, and he was more than ever the master of the situation now. He did not mind his baths, and he relished the importance of his position. So much time as Mrs. Lennox had free from her 'cure' was entirely occupied with Johnny. She thought he wanted 'nourishment' of various dainty kinds, to which the little fellow had not the least objection. Secretly in her heart Aunt Sophy was opposed to the idea of suppressed gout, and clung to that of impaired digestion. Delicate fricassees of chicken, game, the earliest products of *la chasse*, she ordered for him instead of the roast mutton of old. He had fine custards and

tempting jellies, while Sophy and Amy ate their rice pudding; and in the intervals between his meals Aunt Sophy administered glasses of wine, cups of jelly, hunches of sponge-cake, to the boy. He took it all with the best grace in the world, and an appetite which it was a pleasure to see—and throve and grew, but nevertheless still saw the lady at intervals with a pertinacity which was most discouraging. It may be supposed that an incident so remarkable had not passed without notice in the curious little community of the hotel. And the first breath of it whispered by Nurse in the ear of some confidant brought up the landlady from the bureau in a painful condition of excitement, first to inquire and then to implore that complete secrecy might be kept on the matter. Madame protested that there was no ghost in her well-regulated house. If the little boy saw anything it must be a ghost whom the English family had brought with them; such things, it was well known, did exist in English houses. But there were no ghosts in Aix, much less in the Hotel Venat. To request ladies in the middle of their 'cure' to find other quarters was impossible, not to say that Madame Lennox and her charming family were quite the most

distinguished party at the hotel, and one which she would not part with on any consideration; but if the little monsieur continued to have his digestion impaired (and she could recommend a most excellent tisane that worked marvels), might she beg *ces dames* to keep silence on the subject? The reputation of an hotel was like that of a woman, and if once breathed upon—— Mrs. Lennox remained in puzzling and puzzled silence for some time after this visit was over. About a quarter of an hour after her thought burst forth.

'Rosalind! I don't feel at all reassured by what that woman said. Why should she make all that talk about the house if there wasn't some truth in it? It is a very creepy, disagreeable thing to think of, and us living on the very brink of it, so to speak. But after all, what if Johnny's lady should be something—some—appearance, some mystery about the house?'

'You thought it was Johnny's digestion, Aunt Sophy.'

'So I did; but then, you know, one says that sort of thing when one can't think of anything else. I believe it *is* his digestion, but at the same time, how can one tell what sort of

things may have happened in great big foreign houses, and so many queer people coming and going? There might have been a murder or something, for anything we know.'

This suggestion awoke a tremor in Rosalind's heart, for she was not very strong-minded, nor fortified by any consistent opinion in respect to ghosts. She said somewhat faintly, with a laugh, 'I never heard of a ghost in an hotel.'

'In an hotel? I should think an hotel was just the sort of place, with all kinds of strange people. Mind, however,' said Aunt Sophy after a pause, 'I don't believe in ghosts at all, not at all; there are no such things. Only foolish persons, servants and the uneducated, put any faith in them' (it was the entrance of Amy and Sophy in the midst of this discussion that called forth such a distinct profession of faith); 'and now your Uncle John is coming,' she added cheerfully, 'and it will all be cleared up and everything will come right.'

'Will Uncle John clear up about the lady?' said Sophy, with a toss of her little impertinent head. 'He will just laugh, I know. He will say he wished he had ladies come to see him like that. Uncle John,' said this small critic,

'is never serious at all about us children. Oh, perhaps about you grown-up people; but he will just laugh, I know. And so shall I laugh. All the fuss that is made is because Johnny is the boy. Me and Amy, we might see elephants and you would not mind, Aunt Sophy. It is because Johnny is the boy.'

'You are a little impertinent! I think just as much about Amy—and the child is looking pale; don't you think so, Rosalind? But you are never disturbed in your sleep, my pet, nor take things in your little head. You are the quietest little woman. Indeed I wish she would be naughty sometimes, Rosalind. What is the matter with you, dear? Don't you want me to talk to you? Well, if my arm is disagreeable, Amy!'

'Oh no, no, Aunt Sophy,' cried the child, with an impetuous kiss, but she extricated herself notwithstanding, and went away to the further window, where she sat down on a footstool, half hidden among the curtains. The two ladies, looking at her, began to remember at the same moment that this had become Amy's habitual place. She was always so quiet that to become a little quieter was not remarked in her as it would have been in the

other children: she had always been pale, but not so pale as now. The folds of the long white curtain, falling half over her, added to the delicacy of her aspect. She seemed to shrink and hide herself from their gaze, though she was not conscious of it. 'Dear me!' said Aunt Sophy, 'perhaps there is something, after all, in the doctor's idea of suppressed gout being in the family. You don't show any signs of it, Rosalind, heaven be praised! or Sophy either; but just look at that child, how pale she is!'

Rosalind did not make any reply. She called her little sister to her presently, but Amy declared that she was 'reading a book,' which was, under Mrs. Lennox's sway, a reason above all others for leaving the little student undisturbed. Mrs. Lennox had not been used to people who were given to books, and she admired the habit greatly. 'Don't call her if she is reading, Rosalind. I wonder how it is the rest of you don't read. But Amy always has her book. Perhaps it is because of reading so much that she is so pale. Well, Uncle John is coming to-morrow, and he will want the children to take long walks and I dare say all this little confusion will blow away. I wish

John had come a little sooner; he might have tried the 'cure' as well as me, for I am sure he has rheumatism, if not gout. Gentlemen always have one or the other when they come to your uncle's age, and it might have saved him an illness later,' said Aunt Sophy. She had to go away in her chair in a few minutes for her bath, and it was this that made her think what an excellent thing it would be for John.

When she had gone, Rosalind sat very silent with her two little sisters in the room. Sophy went on talking while Rosalind mused and kept silent. She was so well accustomed to Sophy talking that she took little notice of it. When the little girl said anything of sufficient importance to penetrate the mist of self-abstraction in which her sister sat, Rosalind would answer her. But generally she took little notice. She woke up, however, in the midst of one of Sophy's sentences which caught her ear, she could not tell why.

'Think it's a real lady?' Sophy said. It was at the end of a long monologue, during which her somewhat sharp voice had run on monotonous without variety. 'Think it's a real lady? There could be no ghost here, or

if there was, why should it go to Johnny, who don't understand, who has no sense. I think it's a real lady that comes in to look at the children. Perhaps she is fond of children; perhaps she's not in her right mind,' said Sophy; 'perhaps she has lost a little boy like Johnny; perhaps——' here she clapped her hands together, which startled Rosalind greatly, and made little Amy, looking up with big eyes from within the curtain, jump from her seat. 'I know who it is—it is the lady that gave him the toy.

'The toy—what toy?'

'Oh, you know very well, Rosalind. That is what it is—the lady that had lost a child like Johnny, that brought him that thing that you wind up, that runs, that Nurse says must have cost a mint of money. She says mint of money, and why shouldn't I? I shall watch to-night, and try if I can't see her,' cried Sophy; 'that is the lady! and Johnny is such a little silly, he has never found it out. But it is a *real* lady; that I am quite certain, whatever the children say.'

'But Amy has never seen anything, Sophy—or heard anything,' Rosalind said.

'Oh, Rosalind, how soft you are! How

could she help hearing about it, with Aunt Sophy and you rampaging in the room every night? You don't know how deep she is; she would just go on and go on, and never tell.'

'Amy, come here,' said Rosalind.

'Oh, please, Rosy! I am in such an interesting part.'

'Amy, come here—you can go back to your book after. Sophy says you have heard about the lady Johnny thinks he sees.'

'Yes, Rosalind.'

'You have known about her perhaps all the time, though we thought you slept so sound and heard nothing? You don't mean that you have seen her too?'

Amy stood by her sister's knee, her hand reluctantly allowing itself to be held in Rosalind's hand. She submitted to this questioning with the greatest reluctance, her little frame all instinct with eagerness to get away. But here she gave a hasty look upward as if drawn by the attraction of Rosalind's eyes. How strange that no one had remarked how white and small she had grown? She gave her sister a solemn momentary look, with eyes that seemed to expand as they looked, but said nothing.

'Amy, can't you answer me?' Rosalind cried.

Amy's eyelids grew big with unwilling tears, and she made a great effort to draw away her hand.

'Tell me, Amy; is there anything you can't tell Rosalind? You shall not be worried or scolded, but tell me.'

There was a little pause, and then the child flung her arms round her sister's neck and hid her face. 'Oh, Rosalind!'

'Yes, my darling, what is it? Tell me!'

Amy clung as if she would grow there, and pressed her little head as if the contact strengthened her, against the fair pillar of Rosalind's throat. But apparently it was easier to cling there and give vent to a sob or two than to speak. She pressed closer and closer, but she made no reply.

'She has seen her every time,' said Sophy, 'only she's such a story she won't tell. She is always seeing her. When you think she's asleep she is lying all shivering and shaking with the sheet over her head. That is how I found out. She is so frightened she can't go to sleep. I said I should tell Rosalind; Rosa-

lind is the eldest, and she ought to know. But then, Amy thinks——'

'What, Sophy?'

'Well, that you are only our half-sister. You *are* only our half-sister, you know. We all think that, and perhaps you wouldn't understand.'

To Rosalind's heart this sting of mistrust went sharp and keen, notwithstanding the close strain of the little girl's embrace which seemed to protest against the statement. 'Is it really, really so?' she cried in a voice of anguish. 'Do you think I am not your real sister, you little ones? Have I done anything to make you think——'

'Oh no, no! Oh, Rosalind, no! Oh no, no!' cried the little girl, clasping closer and closer. The ghost, if it was a ghost, the 'lady' who, Sophy was sure, was a 'real lady,' disappeared in the more immediate pressure of this poignant question. Even Rosalind, who had now herself to be consoled, forgot, in the pang of personal suffering, to inquire further.

And they were still clinging together in excitement and tears when the door was opened briskly, and Uncle John, all brown and dusty and smiling, a day too soon, and

much pleased with himself for being so, suddenly marched into the room. A more extraordinary change of sentiment could not be conceived. The feminine tears dried up in a moment, the whole aspect of affairs changed. He was so strong, so brown, so cordial, so pleased to see them, so full of cheerful questions, and the account of what he had done. 'Left London only yesterday,' he said, 'and here I am. What's the matter with Amy? Crying! You must let her off, Rosalind, whatever the sin may be, for my sake.'

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE arrival of John Trevanion made a great difference to the family group, which had become absorbed as women are so apt to be, in the circle of little interests about them, and to think Johnny's visions the most important things in the world. Uncle John would hear nothing at all of Johnny's visions. 'Pooh!' he said. Mrs. Lennox was half disposed to think him brutal and half to think him right. He scoffed at the fricassee of chicken and the cups of jelly. 'He looks as well as possible,' said Uncle John. 'Amy is a little shadow, but the boy is fat and flourishing,' and he laughed with an almost violent effusion of mirth at the idea of the suppressed gout. 'Get them all off to some place among the hills, or if it is too late for that, come home,' he said.

'But, John, my "cure"!' cried Mrs. Lennox; 'you don't know how rheumatic I have be-

come. If it was not a little too late I should advise you to try it too; for, of course, we have gout in the family, whatever you may say, and it might save you an illness another time. Rosalind, was not Mr. Everard coming to lunch? I quite forgot him in the pleasure of seeing your uncle Perhaps we ought to have waited, but then, John coming off his journey wanted his luncheon; and I dare say Mr. Everard will not mind. He is always so obliging. He would not mind going without his luncheon altogether to serve a friend.'

'Who is Mr. Everard?' said John Trevanion. He was pleased to meet them all, and indisposed to find fault with anything. 'Why should he go without his lunch?'

'Oh! he is very nice,' said Aunt Sophy somewhat evasively: 'he is here for his "cure," like all the rest. Surely I wrote to you, or someone wrote to you, about the accident with the boat, and how the children's lives were saved? Well, this is the gentleman. He has been a great deal with us ever since. He is quite young, but I think he looks younger than he is, and he has very nice manners,' Mrs. Lennox continued, with a dim sense which began to grow upon her that explanations were

wanted, and a conciliatory fulness of detail. 'It is very kind of him making himself so useful as he does. I ask him quite freely to do anything for me; and, of course, being a young person, it is more cheerful for Rosalind.'

Here she made a little pause, in which for the first time there was a consciousness of guilt, or, if not of guilt, of imprudence. John might think that a young person who made things more cheerful for Rosalind required credentials. John might look as gentlemen have a way of looking at individuals of their own sex introduced in their absence. Talk of women being jealous of each other, Aunt Sophy said to herself, but men are a hundred times more! And she began to wish that Mr. Everard might forget his engagement, and not walk in quite so soon into the family conclave. Rosalind's mind, too, was disturbed by the same thought; she felt that it would be better if Mr. Everard did not come, if he would have the good taste to stay away when he heard of the new arrival. But Rosalind, though she had begun to like him, and though her imagination was touched by his devotion, had not much confidence in Everard's good taste. He would hesitate, she thought, he would ponder, but he would not

be so wise as to keep away. As a matter of fact, this last reflection had scarcely died from her mind when Everard came in, a little flushed and anxious, having heard of the arrival, but regarding it from an opposite point of view. He thought that it would be well to get the meeting over while John Trevanion was still in the excitement of the reunion and tired with his journey. There were various changes in his own appearance since he had appeared at Highcourt, and he was three years older, but on the other side he remembered so well his own meeting with Rosalind's uncle that he could not suppose himself to be more easily forgotten. In fact, John Trevanion had a slight movement of surprise at sight of the young intruder, and a vague sense of recognition as he met the eyes which looked at him with a mixture of anxiety and deprecation. But he got up and held out his hand, and said a few words of thanks for the great service which Mr. Everard had rendered to the family, with the best grace in the world, and though the presence of a stranger could scarcely be felt otherwise than as an intrusion at such a moment, Everard himself was perhaps the person least conscious of it. Rosalind, on the other hand,

was very conscious of it, and uncomfortably conscious that Everard was not, yet ought to have been, aware of the inappropriateness of his appearance. There was thus a certain cloud over the luncheon hour, which would have been very merry and very pleasant but for the one individual who did not belong to the party, and who, though wistfully anxious to recommend himself, to do everything or anything possible to make himself agreeable, yet could not see that the one thing to be done was to take himself away. When he did so at last, John Trevanion broke off what he was saying hurriedly—he was talking of Reginald at school, a subject very interesting to them all—and, turning to Rosalind, said, 'I know that young fellow's face; where have I seen him before?'

'I know, Uncle John,' cried Sophy; 'he is the gentleman who was staying at the Red Lion in the village, don't you remember, before we left Highcourt. Rosalind knew him directly, and so did I.'

'Yes,' said Rosalind, faltering a little. 'You remember I met you once when he had done me a little service; that,' she said, with a sense that she was making herself his advocate, and a deprecating conciliatory

smile, 'seems to be his speciality, to do people services.'

'The gentleman who was at the Red Lion!' cried John Trevanion with a start. 'The fellow who——' and then he stopped short and cast upon his guileless sister a look which made Mrs. Lennox tremble.

'Oh dear, dear, what have I done?' Aunt Sophy cried.

'Nothing; it is of no consequence,' said he; but he got up, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, and walked about from one window to another, and stared gloomily forth without adding any more.

'But he is very nice now,' said Sophy; 'he is much more nicely dressed, and I think he is handsome—rather. He is like Johnny a little. It was nice of him, don't you think, Uncle John, to save the children? They weren't anything to him, you know, and yet he went plunging into the water with his clothes on, for of course he could not stop to take off his clothes, and he couldn't have done it either before Rosalind, and had to walk all the way home in his wet trousers, all for the sake of these little things. Everybody would not have done it,' said Sophy with importance.

speaking as one who knew human nature. 'It was very nice, don't you think, of Mr. Everard?'

'Everard! Was that the name?' said Uncle John incoherently; and he did not sit down again, but kept walking up and down the long room in a way some men have, to the great annoyance of Mrs. Lennox, who did not like to see people, as she said, roving about like wild beasts. A certain uneasiness had got into the atmosphere somehow, no one could tell why, and when the children were called out for their walk Rosalind too disappeared, with a consciousness that wounded her and yet seemed somehow a fault in herself, that the elders would be more at ease without her presence.

When they were all gone John turned upon his sister. 'Sophy,' he said, 'I remember how you took me to task for bringing Rivers, a man of character and talent, to the house, because his parentage was somewhat obscure. Have you ever asked yourself what your own meaning was in allowing a young adventurer, whose very character I fear will not bear looking into, to make himself agreeable to Rosalind?'

'John!' cried Mrs. Lennox with a sudden scream, sitting up very upright in her chair, and in her fright taking off her spectacles to see him the better.

'Yes,' cried John Trevanion, 'I mean what I say. He has managed to make himself agreeable to Rosalind. She takes his part already. She is troubled when he puts himself in a false position.'

'But, John, what makes you think he is an adventurer? I am quite sure he is one of the Essex Everards, who are as good a family and as well thought of——'

'Did he tell you he was one of the Essex Everards?'

Mrs. Lennox put on a very serious air of trying to remember. She bit her lips, she contracted her forehead, she put up her hand to her head. 'I am sure,' she said, 'I cannot recollect whether he ever *said* it, but I have always understood. Why, what other Everards could he belong to?' she added in the most candid tone.

'That is just the question,' said John Trevanion; 'the same sort of Everards perhaps as my friend's Riverses, or most likely not half so good. Indeed, I'm not at all sure that your

friend has any right even to the name he claims. I both saw and heard of him before we left Highcourt. By Jove!' He was not a man to swear, even in this easy way, but he jumped up from the seat upon which he had thrown himself, and grew so red that Aunt Sophy immediately thought of the suppressed gout in the family, and felt that it must suddenly have gone to his head.

'Oh, John, my dear, what is it?' she cried.

He paced about the room back and forward in high excitement, repeating to himself that exclamation. 'Oh nothing, nothing. I can't quite tell what it is,' he said.

'A twinge in your foot?' cried Mrs. Lennox. 'Oh, John, though it is late, very late in the season, and you could not perhaps follow out the "cure" altogether, you might at least take some of the baths as they are ordered for Johnny. It might prevent an illness hereafter. It might, if you took it in time——'

'What is a "cure"?' said John. Mrs. Lennox pronounced the word, as indeed it is intended that the reader should pronounce it in this history, in the French way; but this in her honest mouth, used to good downright

English pronunciation, sounded like 'koor,' and the brother did not know what it was. He laughed so long and so loudly at the idea of preventing an illness by the 'cure,' as he called it with English brutality, and at the notion of Johnny's baths, that Mrs. Lennox was quite disconcerted and could not find a word to say.

Rosalind had withdrawn with her mind full of disquietude. She was vexed and annoyed by Everard's ignorance of the usages of society and the absence of perception in him. He should not have come up when he heard that Uncle John had arrived, he should not have stayed. But Rosalind reflected with a certain resentment and impatience that it was impossible to make him aware of this deficiency, or to convey to him in any occult way the perceptions that were wanting. This is not how a girl thinks of her lover, and yet she was more disturbed by his failure to perceive than any proceeding on the part of a person in whom she was not interested could have made her. She had other cares in her mind, however, which soon asserted a superior claim. Little Amy's pale face, her eyes so wistful and pathetic, which seemed to say a thousand things and to appeal to Rosalind's knowledge

with a trust and faith which were a bitter reproach to Rosalind, had given her a sensation which she could not overcome. Was she too wanting in perception, unable to divine what her ittle sister meant? It was well for her to blame young Everard and to blush for his want of perception, she who could not understand little Amy! Her conversation with the children had thrown another light altogether on Johnny's vision. What if it were no trick of the digestion, no excitement of the spirit, but something real, whether in the body or out of the body, something with meaning in it? She resolved that she would not allow this any longer to go on without investigation, and with a little thrill of excitement in her, arranged her plans for the evening. It was not without a tremor that Rosalind took this resolution. She had already many times taken Nurse's place without any particular feeling on the subject, with the peaceful result that Johnny slept soundly and nobody was disturbed; but this easy watch did not satisfy her now. Notwithstanding the charm of Uncle John's presence, Rosalind hastened upstairs after dinner when the party streamed forth to take coffee in the garden, denying

herself the pleasant stroll with him which she had looked forward to, and which he in his heart was wounded to see her withdraw from without a word. She flew along the half-lighted passages with her heart beating high.

The children's rooms were in their usual twilight, the faint little night-lamp in its corner, the little sleepers breathing softly in the gloom. Rosalind placed herself unconsciously out of sight from the door, sitting down behind Johnny's bed, though without any intention by so doing of hiding herself. If it was possible that any visitor from the unseen came to the child's bed, what could it matter that the watcher was out of sight? She sat down there with a beating heart in the semi-darkness which made any occupation impossible, and after a while fell into the thoughts which had come prematurely to the mother-sister, a girl, and yet with so much upon her young shoulders. The arrival of her uncle brought back the past to her mind. She thought of all that had happened with the tears gathering thick in her eyes. Where was *she* now that should have had these children in her care? Oh, where was she? would she never even try to see them, never break her bonds and claim

the rights of nature? How could she give them up—how could she do it? Or could it be, Rosalind asked herself—or rather did not ask herself, but in the depths of her heart was aware of the question which came independent of any will of hers—that there was some reason, some new conditions which made the breach in her life endurable, which made the mother forget her children? The girl's heart grew sick as she sat thus thinking, with the tears silently dropping from her eyes, wondering upon the verge of that dark side of human life in which such mysteries are, wondering whether it was possible, whether such things could be?

A faint sound roused her from this preoccupation. She turned her head. Oh, what was it she saw? The lady of Johnny's dream had come in while Rosalind had forgotten her watch, and stood looking at him in his little bed. Rosalind's lips opened to cry out, but the cry seemed stifled in her throat. The spectre, if it was a spectre, half raised the veil that hung about her head and gazed at the child, stooping forward, her hands holding the lace in such an attitude that she seemed to bless him as he lay—a tall figure, all black save for the whiteness of the half-seen face.

Rosalind had risen noiselessly from her chair; she gazed too as if her eyes would come out of their sockets, but she was behind the curtain and unseen. Whether it was that her presence diffused some sense of protection round or that the child was in a more profound sleep than usual, it was impossible to tell, but Johnny never moved, and his visitor stood bending towards him without a breath or sound. Rosalind, paralysed in body, overwhelmed in her mind with terror, wonder, confusion, stood and looked on with sensations beyond description, as if her whole soul was suspended on the event. Had anyone been there to see, the dark room with the two ghostly silent figures in it, noiseless, absorbed, one watching the other, would have been the strangest sight. But Rosalind was conscious of nothing save of life suspended, hanging upon the next movement or sound, and never knew how long it was that she stood, all power gone from her, watching, scarcely breathing, unable to speak or think. Then the dark figure turned, and there seemed to breathe into the air something like a sigh. It was the only sound; not even the softest footfall on the carpet or rustle of garments seemed to accompany her movements,

slow and reluctant, towards the doorway. Then she seemed to pause again on the threshold between the two rooms, within sight of the bed in which Amy lay. Rosalind followed, feeling herself drawn along by a power not her own, herself as noiseless as a ghost. The strain upon her was so intense that she was incapable of feeling, and stood mechanically, her eyes fixed, her heart now fluttering wildly, now standing still altogether. The moment came, however, when this tension was too much. Beyond the dark figure in the doorway, she saw, or thought she saw, Amy's eyes, wild and wide open, appealing to her from the bed. Her little sister's anguish of terror and appeal for help broke the spell and made Rosalind's suspense intolerable. She made a wild rush forward, her frozen voice broke forth in a hoarse cry. She put out her hands and grasped or tried to grasp the draperies of the mysterious figure; then as they escaped her, fell helpless, blind, unable to sustain herself, but not unconscious, by Amy's bed upon the floor.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Down below in the garden of the hotel all was cheerful enough, and most unlike the existence of any mystery here or elsewhere. The night was very soft and mild though dark, the scent of mignonette in the air, and most of the inhabitants of the hotel sitting out among the dark rustling shrubs and under the twinkling lights, which made effects, too strong to be called picturesque, of light and shade, among the many groups who were too artificial for pictorial effect, yet made up a picture like the art of the theatre, effective, striking, full of brilliant points. The murmur of talk was continuous, softened by the atmosphere, yet full of laughter and exclamations which were not soft. High above, the stars were shining in an atmosphere of their own, almost chill with the purity and remoteness of another world. At some of the tables the parties were not gay; here and there a silent English couple sat and looked on,

half disapproving, half wistful, with a look in their eyes that said, how pleasant it must be when people can thus enjoy themselves, though in all likelihood how wrong! Among these English observers were Mrs. Lennox and John Trevanion.

Mrs. Lennox had no hat on, but a light white shawl of lacey texture over her cap, and her face full in the light. She was in no trouble about Rosalind's absence, which she took with perfect calm. The girl had gone no doubt to sit with the children, or she had something to do upstairs—Mrs. Lennox was aware of all the little things a girl has to do. But she was dull, and did not find John amusing. Mrs. Lennox would have thought it most unnatural to subject a brother to such criticism in words, or to acknowledge that it was necessary for him to be amusing to make his society agreeable. Such an idea would have been a blasphemy against nature, which of course makes the society of one's brother always delightful, whether he has or has not anything to say. But granting this, and that she was of course a great deal happier by John's side, and that it was delightful to have him again, still she was a little dull. The conversation flagged even

though she had a great power of keeping it up by herself when need was, but when you only get two words in answer to a question which it has taken you five minutes to ask, the result is discouraging, and she looked round her with a great desire for some amusement and a considerable envy of the people at the next table who were making such a noise! How they laughed, how the conversation flew on, full of fun evidently, full of wit no doubt if one could only understand. No doubt it is rather an inferior thing to be French or Russian or whatever they were, and not English: and to enjoy yourself so much out of doors in public is vulgar perhaps. But still Mrs. Lennox envied a little while she disapproved, and so did the other English couple on the other side. Aunt Sophy even had begun to yawn and to think it would perhaps be better for her rheumatism to go in and get to bed, when she perceived the familiar figure of young Everard amid the shadows, looking still more wistfully towards her. She made him a sign with great alacrity and pleasure, as she was in the habit of doing, for indeed he joined them every night, or almost every night. When she had done this, and had drawn a chair towards her for

him, then and not till then Mrs. Lennox suddenly remembered that John might not like it. That was very true—John might not like it! What a pity she had not thought of it sooner? But why shouldn't John like such a very nice, friendly, serviceable young man? Men were so strange! they took such fancies about each other. All this flashed through her mind after she had made that friendly sign to Everard, and indicated the chair.

'Is anyone coming?' asked John, roused by these movements.

'Only Mr. Everard, John; he usually comes in the evening—please be civil to him,' she cried in dismay.

'Oh, civil!' said John Trevanion; he pushed away his chair almost violently, with the too rapid reflection, so easily called forth, that Sophy was a fool and had no thought, and the intention of getting up and going away. But then he bethought himself that it would be well to see what sort of fellow this young fellow was. It would be necessary, he said to himself sternly, that there should be an explanation before the intimacy went any further, but in the meantime, as fortunately Rosalind was absent (he said this to himself with a forlorn sort of

smile at his former disappointment), it would be a good opportunity to see what was in him. Accordingly he did not get up as he intended, but only pushed his chair away as the young man approached with a hesitating and somewhat anxious air. John gave him a gruff nod but said nothing, and sat by, a grim spectator, taking no part in the conversation, as Mrs. Lennox broke into eager, but, in consequence of his presence, somewhat embarrassed and uneasy talk.

'I thought we were not to see you to-night,' she said. 'I thought there might be something going on, perhaps. We never know what is going on except when you bring us word, Mr. Everard. I do think, though the Venat is supposed to be the best hotel, that Madame is not at all enterprising about getting up a little amusement. To be sure, the season is almost over. I suppose that is the cause.'

'I don't think there is anything going on except the usual music and the weekly dance at the Hotel d'Europe, and——'

'I think French people are always dancing,' said Mrs. Lennox with a little sigh, 'or rattling on in that way, laughing and jesting as if life were all a play. I am sure I don't know how

they keep it up, always going on like that. But Rosalind does not care for those sort of dances. Had there been one in our own hotel among people we know—— But I must say Madame is rather remiss; she does not exert herself to provide amusement. If I came here another year, as I suppose I must, now that I have begun to have a "koor "——'

'Oh, yes, they will keep you to it. This is the second year I have been made to come. I hope you will be here, Mrs. Lennox, for then I shall be sure to see you, and——' Here he paused a little, and added 'the children,' in a lower voice.

'It is so nice of you, a young man, to think of the children,' said Aunt Sophy gratefully; but they say it does make you like people when you have done them a great service. As to meeting us, I hope we shall meet sooner than that. When you come to England you must——' Here Mrs. Lennox paused, feeling John's malign influence by her side, and conscious of a certain kick of his foot and the suppressed snort with which he puffed out the smoke of his cigar. She paused; but then she reflected that after all the Elms was her own, and she was not in the habit of con-

sulting John as to whom she should ask there. And then she went on, with a voice that trembled slightly, 'Come down to Clifton and see me; I shall be so happy to see you, and I think I know some of your Essex relations,' Mrs. Lennox said.

John Trevanion, who had been leaning back with the legs of his chair tilted in the air, came down upon them with a dint in the gravel, and thus approached himself nearer to the table in his mingled indignation at his sister's foolishness and eagerness to hear what the young fellow would find to say. This, no doubt, disturbed the even flow of the response, making young Everard start.

'I don't think I have any relations in Essex,' he said. 'You are very kind. But I have not been in England for some years, and I don't think I am very likely to go.'

'Dear me!' said Mrs. Lennox, 'I am very sorry. I hope you have not got any prejudice against home. Perhaps there is more amusement to be found abroad, Mr. Everard, and no doubt that tells with young men like you, but I am sure you will find after awhile what the song says, that there is no place like home.'

'Oh no, I have no prejudice,' he said

hurriedly. 'There are reasons—family reasons.' Then he added with what seemed to John, watching eagerly, a little bravado, 'The only relative I have is rather what you would call eccentric. She has her own ways of thinking. She has been ill-used in England, or at least she thinks so, and nothing will persuade her—— Ladies, you know, sometimes take strange views of things.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Lennox, 'I cannot allow you to say anything against ladies. For my part I think it is men that take strange views. But, my dear Mr. Everard, because your relative has a prejudice (which is so very unnatural in a woman), that is not to say that a young man like you is to be kept from home. Oh no, you may be sure she doesn't mean that.'

It does seem absurd, doesn't it?' the young man said.

'And I would not,' said Aunt Sophy, strong in the sense of superiority over a woman who could show herself so capricious, 'I would not, though it is very nice of you, and everybody must like you the better for trying to please her, I would not yield altogether in a matter like this. For you know, if you are thinking of public life, or of any way of distinguishing

yourself, you can only do that at home. Besides, I think it is everybody's duty to think of their own country first. A tour like this we are all making is all very well, for six months or even more. *We* shall have been nine months away in a day or two, but then I am having my drains thoroughly looked to, and it was necessary. Six months is quite enough, and I would not stay abroad for a permanency, oh! not for anything. Being abroad is very nice, but home—you know what the song says, there is—— Rosalind! Good heavens, what is the matter? It can't be Johnny again?'

Rosalind seemed to rush upon them in a moment, as if she had lighted down from the skies. Even in the flickering artificial light they could see that she was as white as her dress and her face drawn and haggard. She came and stood by the table with her back to all the fluttering crowd beyond and the light streaming full upon her. 'Uncle John,' she said, 'mamma is dead—I have seen her—Amy and I have seen her. You drove her away, but she has come back to the children. I knew, I knew, that sometime she would come back.'

'Rosalind!' Mrs. Lennox rose, forgetting her rheumatism, and John Trevanion rushed to

the girl and took her into his arms. 'My darling, what is it? You are ill—you have been frightened.'

She leant against his arm, supporting herself so, and lifted her pale face to his. 'Mamma is dead, for I have seen her,' Rosalind said.

CHAPTER XLIX.

When Rosalind came to herself she had found little Amy in her white nightgown standing by her, clinging round her, her pretty hair all tumbled and in disorder hanging about the cheeks, which were pressed against her sister's, wet with tears. For a moment they said nothing to each other. Rosalind raised herself from her entire prostration, and sat on the carpet holding Amy in her arms. They clung to each other, two hearts beating, two young souls full of anguish yet exaltation: they were raised above all that was round them, above the common strain of speech and thought. The first words that Rosalind said were very low.

'Amy! did you see her?'

'Oh yes, yes, Rosalind!'

'Did you know her?'

'Yes, Rosalind.'

'Have you seen her before?'

'Oh, every night!'

'Amy, and you never said it was mamma!'

They trembled both as if a blast of wind had passed over them, and clasped each other closer. Was it Rosalind that had become a child again and Amy that was the woman? She whispered with her lips on her sister's cheek.

'How was I to tell? She came to me—to me and Johnny. We belong to her, Rosalind.'

'And not I!' the girl exclaimed with a great cry. Then she recovered herself, that thought being too keen to pass without effect.

'Amy! you are hers without her choice, but she took me of her own will to be her child; I belong to her almost more than you. Oh, not more, not more, Amy! but you were so little you did not know her like me.'

Little Amy recognised at last that in force of feeling she was not her sister's equal, and for a time they were both silent. Then the child asked, looking round her with a wild and frightened glance, 'Rosalind, must mamma be dead?'

This question roused them both to a terror and panic such as in the first emotion and wonder they had not been conscious of. Instead of love came fear; they had been raised above that tremor of the flesh, but now it came upon

them in a horror not to be put aside. Even Rosalind, who was old enough to take herself to task, felt with a painful thrill that she had stood by something that was not flesh and blood, and in the intensity of the shuddering terror forgot her nobler yearning sympathy and love. They crept together to the night-lamp and lit the candles from it and closed all the doors, shrinking from the dark curtains and shadows in the corners as if spectres might be lurking there. They had lit up the room thus when Nurse returned from her evening's relaxation downstairs, cheerful but tired and ready to go to bed. She stood holding up her head and gazing at them with eyes of amazement. 'Lord, Miss Rosalind, what's the matter? You'll wake the children up,' she cried.

'Oh, it is nothing, Nurse. Amy was awake,' said Rosalind trembling. 'We thought the light would be more cheering.' Her voice shook so that she could with difficulty articulate the words.

'And did you think, Miss Rosalind, that the child could ever go to sleep with all that light; and telling her stories, and putting things in her head? I don't hold with exciting them when it is their bedtime. It may

not matter so much for a lady that comes in just now and then, but for the nurse as is always with them—— And children are tiresome at the best of times. No one knows how tiresome they are but those that have to do for them day and night.'

'We did not mean to vex you. We were very sad, Amy and I; we were unhappy, thinking of our mother,' said Rosalind, trying to say the words firmly, 'whom we have lost.'

'Oh, Rosalind, do you think so too?' cried Amy, flinging herself into her sister's arms.

Rosalind took her up trembling and carried her to bed. The tears had begun to come, and the terrible iron hand that had seemed to press upon her heart relaxed a little. She kissed the child with quivering lips. 'I think it must be so,' she said. 'We will say our prayers, and ask God, if there is anything she wants us to do, to show us what it is.' Rosalind's lips quivered so that she had to stop to subdue herself, to make her voice audible. 'Now she is dead, she can come back to us. We ought to be glad. Why should we be frightened for poor mamma? She could not come back to us living, but now, when she is dead——'

'Miss Rosalind,' said the nurse, 'I don't

know what you are saying, but you will put the child off her sleep and she won't close an eye all the night.'

'Amy, that would grieve mamma,' said the girl. 'We must not do anything to vex her now that she has come back.'

And so strong is nature and so weak is childhood, that Amy, wearied and soothed and comforted, with Rosalind's voice in her ears and the cheerful light within sight, did drop to sleep, sobbing, before half an hour was out. Then Rosalind bathed the tears from her eyes, and hurrying through the long passages with that impulse to tell her tale to someone which to the simple soul is a condition of life, appeared suddenly in her exaltation and sorrow amid all the noisy groups in the hotel garden. Her head was light with tears and suffering, she scarcely felt the ground she trod upon, or realised what was about her. Her only distinct feeling was that which she uttered with such conviction, leaning her entire weight on Uncle John's kind arm and lifting her colourless face to his—'Mamma is dead: and she has come back to the children.' How natural it seemed! the only thing to be expected; but Mrs. Lennox gave a loud cry and fell back in

her chair, in what she supposed to be a faint, good woman, having happily little experience. It was now that young Everard justified her good opinion of him. He soothed her back out of this half faint, and, supporting her on his arm, led her upstairs. 'I will see to her, you will be better alone,' he said as he passed the other group. Even John Trevanion, when he had time to think of it, felt that it was kind, and Aunt Sophy never forgot the touching attention he showed to her, calling her maid, and bringing her eau-de-cologne after he had placed her on the sofa. 'He might have been my son,' Mrs. Lennox said; 'no nephew was ever so kind.' But when he came out of the room and stood outside in the lighted corridor there was nothing tender in the young man's face. It was pale with passion and a cruel force. He paused for a moment to collect himself, and then turning along a long passage and up another staircase made his way with the determined air of a man who has a desperate undertaking in hand, to an apartment with which he was evidently well acquainted on the other side of the house.

CHAPTER L.

THE Hotel Venat that night closed its doors upon many anxious and troubled souls. A certain agitation seemed to have crept through the house itself. The landlady was disturbed in her bureau, moving about restlessly, giving short answers to the many inquirers who came to know what was the matter. 'What is there, do you ask?' she said, stretching out her plump hands, 'there is nothing! there is that Mademoiselle, the young Anglaise, has an *attaque des nerfs*. Nothing could be more simple. The reason I know not. Is it necessary to inquire? An affair of the heart! Les Anglaises have two or three in a year. Mademoiselle has had a disappointment. The uncle has come to interfere, and she has a seizure. I do not blame her; it is the weapon of a young girl. What has she else, *pauvre petite*, to avenge herself?'

'But, Madame, they say that something has been seen—a ghost, a——'

'There are no ghosts in my house,' the indignant landlady said: and her tone was so imperious and her brow so lowering, that the timid questioners scattered in all directions. The English visitors were not quite sure what an *attaque des nerfs* was. It was not a 'nervous attack;' it was something not to be defined by English terms. English ladies do not have hysterics nowadays; they have neuralgia, which answers something of the same purpose, but then neuralgia has no sort of connection with ghosts.

In Mrs. Lennox's sitting-room upstairs, which was so well lighted, so fully occupied, with large windows opening upon the garden, and white curtains fluttering at the open windows, a very agitated group was assembled. Mrs. Lennox was seated at a distance from the table, with her white handkerchief in her hand, with which now and then she wiped off a few tears. Sometimes she would throw a word into the conversation that was going on, but for the most part confined herself to passive remonstrances and appeals, lifting up now her hands, now her eyes, to heaven. It was half

because she was so overcome by her feelings that Mrs. Lennox took so little share in what was going on, and half because her brother had taken the management of this crisis off her hands. She did not think that he showed much mastery of the situation, but she yielded it to him with a great and consolatory consciousness that, whatever should now happen, *she* could not be held as the person to blame.

Rosalind's story was that which the reader already knows, with the addition of another extracted from little Amy, who had one of those wonderful tales of childish endurance and silence, which seem scarcely credible, yet occur so often, to tell. For many nights past Amy, clinging to her sister, with her face hidden on Rosalind's shoulder, declared that she had seen the same figure steal in. She had never clearly seen the face, but the child had been certain from the first that it was mamma. Mamma had gone to Johnny first, and then had come to her own little bed, where she stood for a moment before she disappeared. Johnny's outcry had been always, Amy said, after the figure disappeared, but she had seen it emerge from out of the dimness, and glide away, and by degrees this mystery had become the chief

incident in her life. All this Rosalind repeated with tremulous eloquence and excitement, as she stood before the two elder people, on her defence.

'But I saw her, Uncle John; what argument can be so strong as that? You have been moving about, you have not got your letters: and perhaps, perhaps——' cried Rosalind with tears, 'perhaps it has happened only now, only to-night. A woman who was far from her children might come and see them—and see them,' she struggled to say through her sobs, 'on her way to heaven.'

'Oh, Rosalind! it is a fortnight since it began,' Mrs. Lennox said.

'Do people die in a moment?' cried Rosalind. 'She may have been dying all this time; and perhaps when they thought her wandering in her mind it might be that she was here. Oh my mother; who would watch over her, who would be taking care of her? and me so far away!'

John Trevanion sprang from his chair. It was intolerable to sit there, and listen and feel the contagion of this excitement, which was so irrational, so foolish, gain his own being. Women take a pleasure in their own anguish,

which a man cannot bear. 'Rosalind,' he cried, 'this is too terrible, you know. I cannot stand it if you can; I tell you, if anything had happened, I must have heard. All this is simply impossible. You have all got out of order, the children first, and their fancies have acted upon you.'

'It is their digestion, I always said so—or gout in the system,' said Aunt Sophy, lifting her handkerchief to her eyes.

'It is derangement of the brain, I think,' said John. 'I see I must get you out of here; one of you has infected the other. Come, Rosalind, you have so much sense—let us see you make use of it.'

'Uncle John, what has sense to do with it? I have seen her,' Rosalind said.

'This is madness, Rosalind.'

'What is madness? Are my eyes mad that saw mamma? I was not thinking of seeing her. In a moment I lifted up my eyes, and she was there. Is it madness that she should die? Oh no, more wonderful how she can live; or madness to think that her heart would fly to us—oh, like an arrow, the moment it was free?'

'Rosalind,' said Mrs. Lennox, 'poor Grace

was a very religious woman: at that moment she would be thinking about her Maker.'

'Do you think she would be afraid of Him?' cried Rosalind, 'afraid that our Lord would be jealous, that He would not like her to love her children? Oh, that's not what my mother thought! My religion is what I got from her. She was not afraid of Him—she loved Him. She would know that He would let her come, perhaps bring her and stand by her: perhaps,' the girl cried, clasping her hands, 'if I had been better, more religious, more like my mother, I should have seen Him in the room too.'

John Trevanion seized her hands almost fiercely. Short of giving up his own self-control, and yielding to this stormy tide of emotion, it was the only thing he could do. 'I must have an end of this,' he said. 'Rosalind, you must be calm—we shall all go distracted if you continue so. She was a good woman, as Sophy says. She never could, I don't believe it, have gratified herself at your expense like this. I shall telegraph the first thing in the morning to the lawyers, to know if they have any news. Will that satisfy you? Suspend your judgment till I hear; if then

it turns out that there is any cause——' here his voice broke and yielded to the strain of emotion: upon which Rosalind, whose face had been turned away, rose up suddenly and flung herself upon him as Amy had done upon her, crying, 'Oh, my mother! oh, my mother! you loved her too, Uncle John.'

Thus the passion of excited feeling extended itself. For a moment John Trevanion sobbed too, and the girl felt, with a sensation of awe which calmed her, the swelling of the man's breast. He put her down in her chair next moment with a tremulous smile. 'No more, Rosalind—we must not all lose our senses. I promise you if there is any truth in your imagination you shall not want my sympathy. But I am sure you are exciting yourself unnecessarily; I know I should have heard had there been anything wrong. My dear, no more now.'

Next morning John Trevanion was early astir. He had slept little, and his mind was full of cares. In the light of the morning he felt a little ashamed of the agitation of last night, and of the credulity to which he himself had been drawn by Rosalind's excitement. He said to himself that no doubt it was in the

imagination of little Amy that the whole myth had arisen. The child had been sleepless, as children often are, and no doubt she had formed to herself that spectre out of the darkness which sympathy and excitement and solitude had embodied to Rosalind also. Nothing is more contagious than imagination. He had himself been all but overpowered by Rosalind's impassioned certainty. He had felt his own firmness waver; how much more was an emotional girl likely to waver, who did not take into account the tangle of mental workings even in a child? As he came out into the cool morning air it all seemed clear enough and easy; but the consequences were not easy, nor how he was to break the spell, and recall the visionary child and the too sympathetic girl to practical realities, and dissipate these fancies out of their heads. He was not very confident in his own powers; he thought they were quite as likely to overcome him as he to restore them to composure. But still something must be done, and the scene changed at least. As he came along the corridor from his room, with a sense of being the only person waking in this part of the house, though the servants had long been stirring below, his ear

was caught by a faint quick sound, and a whispering call from the apartment occupied by his sister. He looked round quickly, fearful, as one is in a time of agitation, of every new sound, and saw another actor in the little drama, one whose name had not yet been so much as mentioned as taking any part in it—the sharp, inquisitive, matter-of-fact little Sophy, who was the one of the children he liked least. Sophy made energetic gestures to stop him, and with elaborate precaution came out of her room attired in a little dressing-gown of blue flannel, with bare feet in slippers, and her hair hanging over her shoulders. He stood still in the passage with great impatience while she elaborately closed the door behind her, and came towards him on her toes, with an evident enjoyment of the mystery. 'Oh, Uncle John! hush, don't make any noise,' Sophy said.

'Is that all you want to tell me?' he asked severely.

'No, Uncle John: but we must not wake these poor things, they are all asleep. I want to tell you—do you think we are safe here and nobody can hear us? Please go back to your room. If anyone were to come and see me, in bare feet and my dressing-gown——'

He laughed somewhat grimly, indeed with a feeling that he would like to whip this important little person: but Sophy detected no undercurrent of meaning. She cried 'Hush!' again with the most imperative energy under her breath, and swinging by his arm drew him back to his room, which threw a ray of morning sunshine down the passage from its open door. The man was a little abashed by the entrance of this feminine creature, though she was but thirteen, especially as she gave a quick glance round of curiosity and sharp inspection. 'What an awfully big sponge, and what a lot of boots you have!' she said quickly. 'Uncle John! they say one ought never to watch or listen or anything of that sort: but when everybody was in such a state last night, how do you think I could just stay still in bed? I saw that lady come out of the children's room, Uncle John.'

The child, though her eyes were dancing with excitement and the delight of meddling, and the importance of what she had to say, began at this point to change colour, to grow red and then pale.

'You! I did not think you were the sort of person, Sophy——'

'Oh, wait a little, Uncle John! To see ghosts you were going to say. But that is just the mistake. I knew all the time it was a real lady. I don't know how I knew. I just found out, out of my own head.'

'A real lady! I don't know, Sophy, what you mean.'

'Oh, but you do, it is quite simple. It is no ghost, it is a real lady, as real as anyone. I stood at the door and saw her come out. She went quite close past me, and I felt her things. and they were as real as mine. She makes no noise because she is so light and thin. Besides, there are no ghosts,' said Sophy. 'If she had been a ghost she would have known I was there, and she never did, never found me out though I felt her things. She had a great deal of black lace on,' the girl added, not without meaning, though it was a meaning altogether lost upon John Trevanion. Though she was so cool and practical, her nerves were all in commotion. She could not keep still: her eyes, her feet, her fingers all were quivering. She made a dart aside to his dressing-table. 'What big, big brushes—and no handles to them! Why is everything a gentleman has so big? though you have so little

hair. Her shoes were of that soft kind without any heels to them, and she made no noise. Uncle John!'

'This is a very strange addition to the story, Sophy. I am obliged to you for telling me. It was no imagination, then, but somebody who for some strange motive—— I am very glad you had so much sense, not to be deceived.'

'Uncle John!' Sophy said. She did not take any notice of this applause, as in other circumstances she would have done; everything about her twitched and trembled, her eyes seemed to grow large like Amy's. She could not stand still. 'Uncle John!'

'What is it, Sophy? You have something more to say.'

The child's eyes filled with tears. So sharp they were, and keen, that this liquid medium seemed inappropriate to their eager curiosity and brightness. She grew quite pale, her lips quivered a little. 'Uncle John!' she said again, with an hysterical heave of her bosom, 'I think it is mamma.'

'Sophy!' He cried out with such a wildness of exclamation that she started with fright, and those hot tears dropped out of her

eyes. Something in her throat choked her. She repeated, in a stifled, broken voice, 'I am sure it is mamma.'

'Sophy! you must have some reason for saying this. What is it? Don't tell me half, but everything. What makes you think——?'

'Oh, I don't think at all,' cried the child. 'Why should I think? I saw her. I would not tell the others or say anything, because it would harm us all, wouldn't it, Uncle John? but I know it is mamma.'

He seized her by the shoulder in hot anger and excitement. 'You little—— Could you think of that when you saw your mother—if it is your mother? but that's impossible. And you can't be such a little—such a demon as you make yourself out.'

'You never said that to anyone else,' cried Sophy, bursting into tears; 'it was Rex that told me. He said we should lose all our money if mamma came back. We can't live without our money, can we, Uncle John? Other people may take care of us, and—all that. But if we had no money what would become of us? Rex told me. He said that was why mamma went away.'

John Trevanion gazed at the little girl in

her precocious wisdom with a wonder for which he could find no words. Rex, too, that fresh and manly boy, so admirable an example of English youth; to think of these two young creatures talking it over, coming to their decision! He forgot even the strange light, if it was a light, which she had thrown upon the events of the previous evening, in admiration and wonder at this, which was more wonderful. At length he said, with perhaps a tone of satire too fine for Sophy, 'As you are the only person who possesses this information, Sophy, what do you propose to do?'

'Do?' she said, looking at him with startled eyes; 'I am not going to do anything, Uncle John, I thought I would tell you——'

'And put the responsibility on my shoulders? Yes, I understand that. But you cannot forget what you have seen. If your mother, as you think, is in the house, what shall you do?'

'Oh, Uncle John,' said Sophy, pale with alarm, 'I have not really, really seen her, if that is what you mean. She only just passed where I was standing. No one could punish me just for having seen her pass.'

'I think you are a great philosopher, my dear,' he said.

At this, Sophy looked very keenly at him, and deriving no satisfaction from the expression of his face, again began to cry. 'You are making fun of me, Uncle John,' she said. 'You would not laugh like that if it had been Rosalind. You always laugh at us children, whatever we may say.'

'I have no wish to laugh, Sophy, I assure you. If your aunt or someone wakes and finds you gone from your bed, how shall you explain it?'

'Oh, I shall tell her that I was—— I know what I shall tell her,' Sophy said, recovering herself; 'I am not such a silly as that.'

'You are not silly at all, my dear. I wish you were not half so clever,' said John. He turned away with a sick heart. Sophy and those unconscious, terrible revelations of hers were more than the man could bear. The air was fresh outside, the day was young: he seemed to have come out of an oppressive atmosphere of age and sophistication, calculating prudence and artificial life, when he left the child behind him. He was so much overwhelmed by Sophy that for the moment he did not fully realise the importance of what she had told him, and it was not till he had walked

some distance, and reconciled himself to nature in the still brightness of the morning, that he awoke with a sudden sensation which thrilled through and through him to the meaning of what the little girl had said. Her mother—was it possible?—no ghost, but a living woman. This was indeed a solution of the problem which he had never thought of. At first, after Madam's sudden departure from Highcourt, John Trevanion went nowhere without a sort of vague expectation of meeting her suddenly, in some quite inappropriate place—on a railway, in an hotel. But now, after years had passed, he had no longer that expectation. The world is so small, as it is the common vulgarity of the moment to say, but nevertheless the world is large enough to permit people who have lost each other in life to drift apart, never to meet, to wander about almost within sight of each other, yet never cross each other's paths. He had not thought of that—he could scarcely give any faith to it now. It seemed too natural, too probable to have happened. And yet it was not either natural or probable that Mrs. Trevanion, such as he had known her, a woman so self-restrained, so long experienced

in the art of subduing her own impulses, should risk the health of her children and shatter their nerves by secret visits that looked like those of a supernatural being. It was impossible to him to think this of her. She who had not hesitated to sacrifice herself entirely to their interests once, would she be so forgetful of them now? And yet, a mother hungering for the sight of her children's faces, severed from them, without hope, was she to be judged by ordinary rules? Was there any expedient which she might not be pardoned for taking—any effort which she might not make to see them once more?

The immediate question, however, was what to do? He could not insist upon carrying the party away, which was his first idea; for various visitors were already on their way to join them, and it would be cruel to interrupt the 'koor' which Mrs. Lennox regarded with so much hope. The anxious guardian did as so many anxious guardians have done before: he took refuge in a compromise. Before he returned to the hotel he had hired one of the many villas in the neighbourhood, the white board with the inscription *à louer*, coming to him like a

sudden inspiration. Whether the appearance which had disturbed them was of this world or of another, the change must be beneficial.

The house stood upon a wooded height, which descended with its fringe of trees to the very edge of the water, and commanded the whole beautiful landscape, the expanse of the lake answering to every change of the sky, the homely towers of Hautecombe opposite, the mountains on either side, reflected in the profound blue mirror underneath. Within this enclosure no one could make a mysterious entry; no one at least clothed in ordinary flesh and blood. To his bewildered mind it was the most grateful relief to escape thus from the dilemma before him; and in any case he must gain time for examination and thought.

CHAPTER LI.

MRS. LENNOX was struck dumb with amazement when she heard what her brother's morning's occupation had been. 'Taken a house!' she cried, with a scream which summoned the whole party round her. But presently she consoled herself, and found it the best step which possibly could have been taken. It was a pretty place; and she could there complete her 'koor' without let or hindrance. The other members of the party adapted themselves to it with the ease of youth; but there were many protests on the part of the people in the hotel; and to young Everard the news at first seemed fatal. He could not understand how it was that he met none of the party during the afternoon. In ordinary circumstances he crossed their path two or three times at least, and by a little strategy could make sure of being in Rosalind's company for a considerable part of every day, having indeed come to consider

himself, and being generally considered, as one of Mrs. Lennox's habitual train. He thought at first that they had gone away altogether, and his despair was boundless. But very soon the shock was softened, and better things began to appear possible. Next day he met Mrs. Lennox going to her bath, and not only did she stop to explain everything to him. and tell him all about the new house, which was so much nicer than the hotel, but, led away by her own flood of utterance, and without thinking what John would say, she invited him at once to dinner.

'Dinner is rather a weak point,' she said, 'but there is something to eat always, if you don't mind taking your chance.'

'I would not mind, however little there might be,' he said, beaming. 'I thought you had gone away, and I was in despair.'

'Oh no,' Mrs. Lennox said. But then she began to think what John would say.

John did not say very much when in the early dusk Everard, in all the glories of evening dress, made his appearance in the drawing-room at Bonport, which was furnished with very little except the view. But then the view was enough to cover many deficiencies. The room was rounded, almost the half of the wall being

window, which was filled at all times, when there was light enough to see it, with one of those prospects of land and water which never lose their interest, and which take as many variations, as the sun rises and sets upon them, and the clouds and shadows flit over them, and the light pours out of the skies, as does an expressive human face. The formation of the room aided the effect by making this wonderful scene the necessary background of everything that occurred within; in that soft twilight the figures were as shadows against the brightness which still lingered upon the lake. John Trevanion stood against it, black in his height and massive outline, taking the privilege of his manhood and darkening for the others the remnant of daylight that remained. Mrs. Lennox's chair had been placed in a corner, as she liked it to be, out of what she called the draught, and all that appeared of her was one side of a soft heap, a small mountain of drapery; while, on the other hand, Rosalind, slim and straight, a soft whiteness, appeared against the trellis of the verandah. The picture was all in shadows, uncertain, visionary, save for the outline of John Trevanion, which was very solid and uncompromising, and produced a great effect amid

the gentle vagueness of all around. The young man faltered on the threshold at sight of him, feeling none of the happy, sympathetic security which he had felt in the company of the ladies and the children. Young Everard was in reality too ignorant of society and its ways to have thought of the inevitable interviews with guardians, and investigations into antecedents which would necessarily attend any possible engagement with a girl in Rosalind's position. But there came a cold shiver over him when he saw the man's figure opposite to him as he entered, and a prevision of an examination very different from anything he had calculated upon came into his mind. For a moment the impulse of flight seized him; but that was impossible, and however terrible the ordeal might be it was evident that he must face it. It was well for him, however, that it was so dark that the changes of his colour and hesitation of his manner were not so visible as they would otherwise have been. Mrs. Lennox was of opinion that he was shy—perhaps even more shy than usual from the fact that John was not so friendly as, in view of what Mr. Everard had done for the children, he ought to have been. And she did her best accordingly to

encourage the visitor. The little interval before dinner in the twilight, when they could not see each other, was naturally awkward, and except by herself little was said; but she had a generally well-justified faith in the effect of dinner as a softening and mollifying influence. When, however, the party were seated in the dining-room, round the shaded lamp, which threw a brilliant light on the table, and left the faces round it in a sort of pink shadow, matters were little better than before. The undesired guest, who had not self-confidence enough to appear at his ease, attempted after a while to entertain Mrs. Lennox with scraps of gossip from the hotel, though always in a deprecating tone and with an apologetic humility; but this conversation went on strangely in the midst of an atmosphere hushed by many agitations, where the others were kept silent by thoughts and anxieties too great for words. John Trevanion, who could scarcely contain himself or restrain his inclination to take this young intruder by the throat and compel him to explain who he was, and what he did here, and Rosalind, who had looked with incredulous apathy at the telegram her uncle had received from Mrs. Trevanion's lawyers, informing him that nothing

had happened to her, so far as they were aware, sat mute, both of them, listening to the mild chatter without taking any part in it. Mrs. Lennox wagged, if not her beard at least the laces of her cap, as she discussed the company at the *table d'hôte*. 'And these people were Russians, after all?' she said. 'Why, I thought them English, and you remember Rosalind and you, Mr. Everard, declared they must be German—and all the time they were Russians. How very odd! And it was the little man who was the lady's husband! Well, I never should have guessed that. Yes, I knew our going away would make a great gap—so many of us, you know. But we have got some friends coming. Do you mean to take rooms at the Venat for Mr. Rivers, John? And then there is Roland Hamerton——'

'Is Roland Hamerton coming here?'

'With Rex, I think. Oh yes, he is sure to come—he is great friends with Rex. I am so glad the boy should have such a steady, nice friend. But we cannot take him in at Bonport, and of course he never would expect such a thing. Perhaps you will mention at the bureau, Mr. Everard, that some friends of mine will be wanting rooms.'

'I had no idea,' said John, with a tone of annoyance, 'that so large a party was expected.'

'Rex?' said Mrs. Lennox, with simple audacity. 'Well, I hope you don't think I could refuse our own boy when he wanted to come.'

'He ought to have been at school,' the guardian grumbled under his breath.

'John! when you agreed yourself he was doing no good at school: and the masters said so, and everybody. And he is too young to go to Oxford; and whatever you may think, John, I am very glad to know that a nice, good, steady young man like Roland Hamerton has taken such a fancy to Rex. Oh yes, he has taken a great fancy to him—he is staying with him now. It shows that though the poor boy may be a little wilful, he is thoroughly nice in his heart. Though even without that,' said Mrs. Lennox, ready to weep, 'I should always be glad to see Roland Hamerton, shouldn't you, Rosalind? He is always good and kind, and we have known him, and Rosalind has known him, all his life.'

Rosalind made no reply to this appeal. She was in no mood to say anything, to take

any part in common conversation. Her time of peace and repose was over. If there had been nothing else, the sudden information only now conveyed to her of the coming of Rivers and of Hamerton, with what motive she knew too well, would have been enough to stop her mouth. She heard this with a thrill of excitement, of exasperation, and at the same time of alarm, which is far from the state of mind supposed by the visionary philosopher to whom it seems meet that a good girl should have seven suitors. Above all, the name of Rivers filled her with alarm. He was a man who was a stranger, who would insist upon an answer, and probably think himself ill-used if that answer was not favourable. With so many subjects of thought already weighing upon her, to have this added made her brain swim. And when she looked up and caught, from the other side of the table, a wistful gaze from those eyes which had so long haunted her imagination, Rosalind's dismay was complete. She shrank into herself with a troubled consciousness that all the problems of life were crowding upon her, and at a moment when she had little heart to consider any personal question at all, much less such a one as this.

The party round the dinner table was thus a very agitated party, and by degrees less and less was said. The movements of the servants —Mrs. Lennox's agile courier and John Trevanion's solemn English attendant, whose face was like wood—became very audible, the chief action of the scene. To Everard, the silence, broken only by these sounds and by Mrs. Lennox's voice coming in at intervals, was as the silence of fate. He made exertions which were really stupendous to find something to say, to seize the occasion and somehow divert the catastrophe which, though he did not know what it would be, he felt to be hanging over his head; but his throat was dry and his lips parched, notwithstanding the wine which he swallowed in his agitation, and not a word would come. When the ladies rose to leave the table, he felt that the catastrophe was very near. He was paralysed by their sudden movement, which he had not calculated upon, and had not even presence of mind to open the door for them as he ought to have done, but stood gazing with his mouth open and his napkin in his hand, to find himself alone and face to face with John Trevanion. He had not thought of this terrible ordeal. In the hotel

life to which he had of late been accustomed, the awful interval after dinner is necessarily omitted, and Everard had not been brought up in a society which sits over its wine. When he saw John Trevanion bearing down upon him with his glass of wine in his hand, to take Mrs. Lennox's place, he felt that he did not know to what trial this might be preliminary, and turned towards his host with a sense of danger and terror which nothing in the circumstances seemed to justify, restraining with an effort the gasp in his throat. John began innocently enough by some remark about the wine. It was very tolerable wine, better than might have been expected in a country overrun by visitors. 'But I suppose the strangers will be going very soon, as I hear the season is nearly over. Have you been long here?'

'A month—six weeks I mean—since early in August.'

'And did you come for the "cure"? You must have taken a double allowance.'

'It was not exactly for the "cure"; at least I have stayed on for—for other reasons.'

'Pardon me if I seem inquisitive,' said John Trevanion. 'It was you, was it not, whom I met in the village at Highcourt two years ago?'

'Yes, it was I.'

'That was a very unlikely place to meet—more unlikely than Aix. I must ask your pardon again, Mr. Everard: you will allow that when I find you here, almost a member of my sister's family, I have a right to inquire. Do you know that there were very unpleasant visitors at Highcourt in search of you after you were gone?'

The young man looked at him with eyes expanding and dilating—where had he seen such eyes?—a deep crimson flush, and a look of such terror and anguish that John Trevanion's good heart was touched. He had anticipated a possible bravado of denial, which would have given him no difficulty, but this was much less easy to deal with.

'Mr. Trevanion,' Everard said, with lips so parched that he had to moisten them before he could speak, 'that was a mistake, it was indeed! That was all arranged: you would not put me to shame for a thing so long past, and that was entirely a mistake! It was put right in every way, every farthing was paid. A great change happened to me at that time of my life. I had been kept out of what I had a right to, and badly treated. But after that a change oc-

curred, I can assure you, and the people themselves would tell you. I can give you their address.'

'I should not have spoken to you on the subject if I had not been disposed to accept any explanation you could make,' said John Trevanion; which was but partially true so far as his intention went, although it was impossible to doubt an explanation which was so evidently sincere. After this there ensued a silence, during which Everard, the excitement in his mind growing higher and higher, turned over every subject on which he thought it possible that he could be questioned further. He thought, as he sat there drawn together on his defence, eagerly yet stealthily examining the countenance of this inquisitor, that he had thought of everything and could not be taken by suprise. Nevertheless his heart gave a great bound of astonishment when John Trevanion spoke again. The question he put was perhaps the only one for which the victim was unprepared. 'Would you mind telling me,' he said with great gravity and deliberation, 'what connection there was between you and my brother, the late Mr. Trevanion of Highcourt?'

CHAPTER LII.

THE moon was shining in full glory upon the lake, so brilliant and broad that the great glittering expanse of water retained something like a tinge of its natural blue in the wonderful splendour of the light. It was not a night on which to keep indoors. Mrs. Lennox in the drawing-room, after she had left her *protégé* to the tender mercies of John, had been a little hysterical, or at least, as she allowed, very much 'upset.' 'I don't know what has come over, John,' she said; 'I think his heart is turned to stone. Oh, Rosalind, how could you keep so still? You that have such a feeling for the children, and saw the way that poor young fellow was being bullied. It is a thing I will not put up with in my house—if it can be said that this is my house. Yes, bullied. John has never said a word to him! And I am sure he is going to make himself disagreeable now, and when there is nobody to

protect him—and he is so good and quiet and takes it all so well,' said Mrs. Lennox, with a great confusion of persons, 'for our sakes.'

Rosalind did her best to soothe and calm her aunt's excitement, and at last succeeded in persuading her that she was very tired, and had much better go to bed. 'Oh yes, I am very tired. What with my bath, and the trouble of removing down here, and having to think of the dinners, and all this trouble about Johnny and Amy, and your uncle that shows so little feeling—of course, I am very tired. Most people would have been in bed an hour ago. If you think you can remember my message to poor Mr. Everard; to tell him never to mind John; that it is just his way and nobody takes any notice of it;—and say good night to him for me. But you know you have a very bad memory, Rosalind, and you will never tell him the half of that.'

'If I see him, Aunt Sophy; but he may not come in here at all.'

'Oh, you may trust him to come in,' Aunt Sophy said; and with a renewed charge not to forget, she finally rang for her maid, and went away, with all her little properties, to bed. Rosalind did not await the interview which

Mrs. Lennox was so certain of. She stole out of the window, which stood wide open like a door, into the moonlight. Everything was so still that the movements of the leaves, as they rustled faintly, took importance in the great quiet; and the dip of an oar into the water, which took place at slow intervals, somewhere about the middle of the lake, where some romantic visitors were out in the moonlight, was almost a violent interruption. Rosalind stepped out into the soft night, with a sense of escape, not thinking much perhaps of the messages with which she had been charged. The air was full of that faint but all-pervading fragrance made up of odours, imperceptible in themselves, which belong to the night, and the moon made everything sacred, spreading a white beatitude even over the distant peaks of the hills. The girl, in her great trouble and anxiety, felt soothed and stilled without any reason by those ineffable ministrations of nature which are above all rule. She avoided the gravel, which rang and jarred under her feet, and wandered across the dry grass, which was burned brown with the heat, not like the verdant English turf, towards the edge of the slope. She had enough to think of, but for the moment, in the hush of

the night, did not think at all, but gave herself over to the tranquillising calm. Her cares went from her for the moment, the light and the night together went to her heart. Sometimes this quiet will come unsought to those who are deeply weighted with pain and anxiety; and Rosalind was very young: and when all nature says it so unanimously, how is a young creature to contradict, and say that all will not be well? Even the old and weary will be deceived, and take that on the word of the kind skies and hushed, believing earth. She strayed about among the great laurels and daphnes, under the shadow of the trees, with her spirit calmed and relieved from the pressure of troublous events and thoughts. She had forgotten, in that momentary exaltation, that any interruption was possible, and stood, clearly visible in the moonlight, looking out upon the lake, when she heard the sound behind her of an uncertain step coming out upon the verandah, then, crossing the gravel path, coming towards her. She had not any thought of concealing herself, nor had she time to do so, when Everard came up to her, breathless with haste, and what seemed to be excitement. He said quickly, 'You were not in the drawing-room, and the window was

open. I thought you would not mind if I came after you.' Rosalind looked up at him somewhat coldly, for she had forgotten he was there.

'I thought you had gone,' she said, turning half towards him, as if—which was true—she did not mean to be disturbed. His presence had a jarring effect, and broke the enchantment of the scene. He was always instantly sensitive to any rebuff.

'I thought,' he repeated apologetically, 'that you would not mind. You have always made me feel so much—so much at home.'

These ill-chosen words roused Rosalind's pride. 'My aunt,' she said, 'has always been very glad to see you, Mr. Everard, and grateful to you for what you have done for us.'

'Is that all?' he said hastily; 'am I always to have those children thrown in my teeth? I thought now, by this time, that you might have cared for me a little for myself; I thought we had taken to each other,' he added, with a mixture of irritation and pathos, with the straightforward sentiment of a child; 'for you know very well,' he cried, after a pause, 'that it is not for nothing I am always coming; that it is not for the children, nor for your aunt, nor for any-

thing but you. You know that I think of nothing but you.'

The young man's voice was hurried and tremulous with real feeling, and the scene was one, above all others, in harmony with a love tale; and Rosalind's heart had been touched by many a soft illusion in respect to the speaker, and had made him, before she knew him, the subject of many a dream; but at this supreme moment a strange effect took place in her. With a pang, acute as if it had been cut off by a blow, the mist of illusion was suddenly severed, and floated away from her, leaving her eyes cold and clear. A sensation of shame that she should ever have been deceived, that she could have deceived him, ran hot through all her being. 'I think,' she said quickly, 'Mr. Everard, that you are speaking very wildly. I know nothing at all of why you come, of what you are thinking.' Her tone was indignant, almost haughty, in spite of herself.

'Ah!' he cried, 'I know what you think; you think that I am not as good as you are, that I'm not a gentleman. Rosalind, if you knew who I was you would not think that. I could tell you about somebody that you are very, very fond of; ay! and make it easy for

you to see her and be with her as much as ever you pleased, if you would listen to me. If you only knew, there are many, many things I could do for you. I could clear up a great deal if I chose. I could tell you much you want to know if I chose. I have been fighting off John Trevanion, but I would not fight off you. If you will only promise me a reward for it; if you will let your heart speak; if you will give me what I am longing for, Rosalind!'

He poured forth all this with such impassioned haste, stammering with excitement and eagerness, that she could but partially understand the sense, and not at all the extraordinary meaning and intention with which he spoke. She stood with her face turned to him, angry, bewildered, feeling that the attempt to catch the thread of something concealed and all-important in what he said was more than her faculties were equal to; and on the surface of her mind was the indignation and almost shame which such an appeal, unjustified by any act of hers, awakens in a sensitive girl. The sound of her own name from his lips seemed to strike her as if he had thrown a stone at her. 'Mr. Everard,' she cried, scarcely know-

ing what words she used, 'you have no right to call me Rosalind. What is it you mean?'

'Ah!' he cried with a laugh, 'you ask me that! you want to have what I can give, but give nothing in return.'

'I think,' said Rosalind, quickly, 'that you forget yourself, Mr. Everard. A gentleman, if he has anything to tell, does not make bargains. What is it, about someone, whom you say I love——' She began to tremble very much, and put her hands together in an involuntary prayer. 'Oh, if it should be—Mr. Everard! I will thank you all my life, if you will tell me——'

'Promise me you will listen to me, Rosalind; promise me! I don't want your thanks; I want your—love. I have been after you for a long, long time; oh, before anything happened. Promise me——'

He put out his hands to clasp hers, but this was more than she could bear. She recoiled from him, with an unconscious revelation of her distaste, almost horror of these advances, which stung his self-esteem. 'You won't!' he cried hoarsely; 'I am to give everything and get nothing? Then I won't neither, and that is enough for to-night——'

He had got on the gravel again, in his sudden, angry step backwards, and turned on his heel, crushing the pebbles with a sound that seemed to jar through all the atmosphere. After he had gone a few steps he paused, as if expecting to be called back. But Rosalind's heart was all aflame. She said to herself, indignantly, that to believe such a man had anything to tell her was folly, was a shame to think of, was impossible! To chaffer and bargain with him, to promise him anything—her love, oh heaven! how dared he ask it?—was intolerable. She turned away with hot, feminine impulse, and a step in which there was no pause or wavering; increasing the distance between them at a very different rate from that achieved by his lingering steps. It seemed that he expected to be recalled after she had disappeared altogether and hidden herself panting among the shadows; for she could still hear his step pause with that jar and harsh noise upon the gravel, for what seemed to her, in her excitement, an hour of suspense. And Rosalind's heart jarred, as did all the echoes. Harsh vibrations of pain went through and through it. The rending away of her own self-illusion in respect to him, which was not

unmingled with a sense of guilt—for that illusion had been half-voluntary, a fiction of her own creating, a refuge of the imagination from other thoughts—and at the same time a painful sense of his failure, and proof of the floating doubt and fear which had always been in her mind on his account—wounded and hurt her, with almost a physical reality of pain. And what was this suggestion, cast into the midst of this whirpool of agitated and troubled thought?—'I could tell you; I could make it easy for you to see; I could clear up——' What? oh what, in the name of heaven! could he mean?

She did not know how long she remained pondering these questions, making a circuitous round through the grounds, under the shadows, until she got back again, gliding noiseless to the verandah from which she could dart into the house at any return of her unwelcome suitor. But she still stood there after all had relapsed into the perfect silence of night in such a place. The tourists in the boat had rowed to the beach and disembarked, and disappeared on their way home. The evening breeze dropped altogether and ceased to move the trees, while she still stood against the

trelliswork scarcely visible in the gloom, wondering, trying to think, trying to satisfy the questions that arose in her mind, with a vague sense that if she but knew what young Everard meant, there might be in it some guide, some clue to the mystery which weighed upon her soul. But this was not all that Rosalind was to encounter. While she stood thus gazing out from her with eyes that noted nothing, yet could not but see, she was startled by something, a little wandering shadow, not much more substantial than her dreams, which flitted across the scene before her. Her heart leaped up with a pang of terror. What was it? When the idea of the supernatural has once gained admission into the mind, the mental perceptions are often disabled in after emergencies. Her strength abandoned her. She covered her eyes with her hands, with a rush of the blood to her head, a failing of all her powers. Something white as the moonlight flitting across the moonlight, a movement, a break in the stillness of nature. When she looked up again there was nothing to be seen. Was there nothing to be seen? With a sick flutter of her heart, searching the shadows round with keen eyes, she had just made sure

that there was nothing on the terrace, when a whiteness among the shrubs drew her eyes farther down. Her nerves, which had played her false for a moment, grew steady again, though her heart beat wildly. There came a faint sound like a footstep which reassured her a little. In such circumstances sound is salvation. She herself was a sight to have startled any beholder, as timidly, breathlessly, under the impulse of a visionary terror, she came out, herself all white, into the whiteness of the night. She called, 'Is there anyone there?' in a very tremulous voice. No answer came to her question; but she could now see clearly the other moving speck of whiteness, gliding on under the dark trees, emerging from the shadows, on to a little point of vision from which the foliage had been cleared a little farther down. It stood there for a moment, whiteness on whiteness, the very embodiment of a dream. A sudden idea flashed into Rosalind's mind, relieving her brain, and without pausing a moment she hurried down the path, relieved from one fear only to be seized by another. She reached the little ghost as it turned from that platform to continue the descent. The whiteness of the light had stolen

the colour out of the child's hair. She was like a little statue in alabaster, her bare feet, her long half-curled locks, the folds of her nightdress all softened and rounded in the light. 'Amy!' cried Rosalind—but Amy did not notice her sister. Her face had the solemn look of sleep, but her eyes were open. She went on unconscious, going forward to some visionary end of her own from which no outward influence could divert her. Rosalind's terror was scarcely less great than when she thought it an apparition. She followed, with her heart and her head both throbbing, the unconscious little wanderer. Amy went down through the trees and shrubs to the very edge of the lake, so close that Rosalind behind hovered over her, ready at the next step to seize upon her, her senses coming back, but her mind still confused, in her perplexity not knowing what to do. Then there was for a moment a breathless pause. Amy turned her head from side to side, as if looking for some one, Rosalind seated herself on a stone to wait what should ensue. It was a wonderful scene. The dark trees waved overhead, but the moon, coming down in a flood of silver, lit up all the beach below. It might have been an allegory

of a mortal astray, with a guardian angel standing close, watching, yet with no power to save. The water moving softly with its ceaseless ripple, the soft yet chill air of night rustling in the leaves, were the only things that broke the stillness. The two human figures in the midst seemed almost without breath.

Rosalind did not know what to do. In the calm of peaceful life such incidents are rare. She did not know whether she might not injure the child by awaking her. But while she waited, anxious and trembling, Nature solved the question for her. The little wavelets lapping the stones came up with a little rush and sparkle in the light an inch or two farther than before, and bathed Amy's bare feet. The cold touch broke the spell in a moment. The child started and sprang up with a sudden cry. What might have happened to her had she woke to find herself alone on the beach in the moonlight, Rosalind trembled to think. Her cry rang along all the silent shore, a cry of distracted and bewildering terror: 'Oh, mamma! mamma! where are you?' then Amy, turning suddenly round, flew, wild with fear, fortunately into her sister's arms.

'Rosalind! is it Rosalind? And where is

mamma? oh, take me to mamma. She said she would he here.' It was all Rosalind could do to subdue and control the child, who nearly suffocated her, clinging to her throat, urging her on: 'I want mamma—take me to mamma! she cried, resisting her sister's attempts to lead her up the slope towards the house. Rosalind's strength was not equal to the struggle. After a while her own longing burst forth. 'Oh, if I knew where I could find her!' she said, clasping the struggling child in her arms. Amy was subdued by Rosalind's tears. The little passion wore itself out. She looked round her, shuddering in the whiteness of the moonlight. 'Rosalind! are we all dead, like mamma?' Amy said.

The penetrating sound of the child's cry reached the house and far beyond it, disturbing uneasy sleepers all along the edge of the lake. It reached John Trevanion, who was seated by himself chewing the cud of fancy, bitter rather than sweet, and believing himself the only person astir in the house. There is something in a child's cry which touches the hardest heart: and his heart was not hard. It did not occur to him that it could proceed from any of the children of the house, but it was too full of

misery and pain to be neglected. He went out, hastily opening the great window, and was in his terror almost paralysed by the sight of the two white figures among the trees, one leaning upon the other. It was only after a momentary hesitation that he hurried towards them, arriving just in time, when Rosalind's strength was about giving way, and carried Amy into the house. The entire household, disturbed, came from all corners with lights and outcries. But Amy, when she had been warmed and comforted, and laid in Rosalind's bed, and recovered of her sobbing, had no explanations to give. She had dreamed she was going to mamma, that mamma was waiting for her down on the side of the lake. 'Oh, I want mamma, I want mamma!' the child cried, and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER LIII.

ARTHUR RIVERS had come home on the top of the wave of prosperity; his little war was over, and if it was not he who had gained the day, he yet had a large share of its honours. It was he who had made it known to all the eager critics in England, and given them the opportunity to let loose their opinion. He had kept the supply of news piping hot, one supply ready to be served as soon as the other was despatched, to the great satisfaction of the public and of his 'proprietors.' His well-known energy, daring, and alertness, the qualities for which he had been sent out, had never been so largely manifested before. He had thrown himself into the brief but hot campaign with the ardour of a soldier. But there was more in it than this. It was with the ardour of a lover that he had laboured—a lover with a great deal to make up to bring him to the level of her he loved. And his zeal had been rewarded. He was coming home, to an important post, with an

established place and position in the world, leaving his life of adventure and wandering behind him. They had their charms, and in their time he had enjoyed them; but what he wanted now was something that it would be possible to ask Rosalind to share. Had he been the commander, as he had only been the historian of the expedition; had he brought back a baronetcy and a name famous in the annals of the time, his task would have been easier. As it was, his reputation—though to its owner very agreeable—was of a kind which many persons scoff at. The soldiers, for whom he had done more than anybody else could do, recommending them to their country as even their blood and wounds would never have recommended them without his help, did not make any return for his good offices, and held him cheap; but, on the other hand, it had procured him his appointment, and made it possible for him to put his question to Rosalind into a practical shape and repeat it to her uncle. He came home with his mind full of this and of xcitement and eagerness. He had no time to ose. He was too old for Rosalind as well as not good enough for her, not rich enough, not great enough. Sir Arthur Rivers, K.C.B., the

conquering hero—that would have been the right thing. But since he was not that, the only thing he could do was to make the most of what he was. He could give her a pretty house in London, where she would see the best of company, not the gentle dulness of the country, but all the wits, all that was brilliant in society, and have the cream of those amusements and diversions which make life worth living in town. That is always something to offer, if you have neither palaces nor castles, nor a great name nor a big fortune. Some women would think it better than all these; and he knew that it would be full of pleasures and pleasantness, not dull—a life of variety and brightness and ease. Was it not very possible that these things would tempt her, as they have tempted women more lofty in position than Rosalind? And he did not think her relations would oppose it if she so chose. His family was very obscure; but that has ceased to be of the importance it once was. He did not believe that John Trevanion would hesitate on account of his family. If only Rosalind should be pleased! It was, perhaps, because he was no longer quite young that he thought of what he had to offer; going over it a thou-

sand times, and wondering if this and that might not have a charm to her as good, perhaps better, than the different things that other people had to offer. He was a man who was supposed to know human nature and to have studied it much, and had he been writing a book he would no doubt have scoffed at the idea of a young girl considering the attractions of different ways of living and comparing what he had to give with what other people possessed. But there was a certain humility in the way in which his mind approached the subject in his own case, not thinking of his own personal merits. He could give her a bright and full and entertaining life. She would never be dull with him. That was better even than rank, he said to himself.

Rivers arrived a few days after the Trevanion party had gone to Bonport. He was profoundly pleased and gratified to find John Trevanion waiting at the station, and to receive his cordial greeting. 'My sister will expect to see you very soon,' he said. 'They think it is you who are the hero of the war; and, indeed, so you have been, almost as much as Sir Ruby, and with fewer jealousies; and the new post, I hear, is a capital one. I should say you were

a lucky fellow, if you had not worked so well for it all.'

'Yes, I hear it is a pleasant post; and to be able to stay at home, and not be sent off to the end of the earth at a moment's notice——'

'How will you bear it? that is the question,' said John Trevanion. 'I should not wonder if in a year you were bored to death.'

Rivers shook his head, with a laugh. 'And I hope all are well,' he said; 'Mrs. Lennox and Miss Trevanion.'

He did not venture as yet to put the question more plainly.

'We are all well enough,' said John, 'though there are always vexations. Oh! nothing of importance, I hope; only some bother about the children and Rosalind. That's why I removed them; but Rex is coming, and another young fellow, Hamerton—perhaps you recollect him at Clifton. I hope they will cheer us up a little. There is their train coming in. Let us see you soon. Good-night!'

Another young fellow, Hamerton! Then it was not to meet him, Rivers, that Trevanion was waiting. There was no special expectation of him. It was Rex, the schoolboy, and young Hamerton who was to cheer them up—Rex a

sulky, young cub, and Hamerton, a thick-headed rustic. John went off quite unconscious of the arrow he had planted in his friend's heart, and Rivers turned away, with a blank countenance, to his hotel, feeling that he had fallen down—down from the skies into a bottomless abyss. All this while, during so many days of travel, he had been coming towards her; now he seemed to be thrown back from her—back into uncertainty and the unknown. He lingered a little as the train from Paris came in, and heard John Trevanion's cheerful 'Oh, here you are!' and the sound of the other voices. It made his heart burn to think of young Hamerton—the young clodhopper!—going to her presence, while he went gloomily to the hotel. His appearance late for dinner presented a new and welcome enigma to the company who dined at the *table d'hôte*. Who was he? Some one fresh from India, no doubt, with that bronzed countenance and hair which had no right to be grey. There was something distinguished about his appearance which everybody remarked, and a little flutter of curiosity to know who he was awoke, especially among the English people, who, but that he seemed so entirely alone, would have taken him for Sir Ruby him-

self. Rivers took a little comfort from the sense of his own importance and of the sensation made by his appearance. But to arrive here with his mind full of Rosalind, and to find himself sitting alone at a foreign *table d'hôte*, with half the places empty and not a creature he knew, chilled him ridiculously—he who met people he knew in every out-of-the-way corner in the earth. And all the time Hamerton at her side—Hamerton, a young nobody! There was no doubt that it was very hard to bear. As soon as dinner was over he went out to smoke his cigar and go over again, more ruefully than ever, his prospects of success. It was a brilliant moonlight night, the trees in the hotel garden standing, with their shadows at their feet, in a blackness as of midnight, while between every vacant space was full of the intense white radiance. He wandered out and in among them, gloomily thinking how different the night would have been had he been looking down upon the silver lake by the side of Rosalind. No doubt that was what she was doing. Would there be any recollection of him among her thoughts, or of the question he had asked her in the conservatory at the Elms? Would she think he was coming for

his answer, and what in all this long interval had she been making up her mind to reply?

He was so absorbed in these thoughts that he took no note of the few people about. These were very few, for though the night was as warm as it was bright, it was yet late in the season, and the rheumatic people thought there was a chill in the air. By degrees even the few figures that had been visible at first dwindled away, and Rivers at last awoke to the consciousness that there was but one left, a lady in black, very slight, very light of foot, for whose coming he was scarcely ever prepared when she appeared, and who shrank into the shadow as he came up, as if to avoid his eye. Something attracted him in this mysterious figure, he could not tell what, a subtle sense of some link of connection between her and himself; some internal and unspoken suggestion which quickened his eyes and interest, but which was too indefinite to be put into words. Who could she be? Where had he seen her? he asked, catching a very brief momentary glimpse of her face; but he was a man who knew everybody, and it was little wonder if the names of some of his acquaintances should slip out of his recollection. It

afforded him a sort of occupation to watch for her, to calculate when in the round of the garden which she seemed to be making she would come to that bare bit of road, disclosed by the opening in the trees, where the moonlight revealed in a white blaze everything that passed. He was for the moment absorbed in this pursuit—for it was in reality a pursuit, a sort of hunt through his own mind for some thread of association connected with a wandering figure like this—when some one else, a new-comer, came hastily into the garden, and established himself at a table close by. There was no mistaking this stranger—a robust young Englishman still in his travelling dress, whom Rivers recognised with mingled satisfaction and hostility. He was not then spending the evening with Rosalind, this young fellow who was not worthy to be admitted to her presence. That was a satisfaction in its way. He had been received to dinner because he came with the boy, but that was all. Young Hamerton sat down in the full moonlight where no one could make any mistake about him. He recognised Rivers with a stiff little bow. They said to each other, 'It is a beautiful night,' and then relapsed respectively into

silence. But in the heat of personal feeling thus suddenly evoked, Rivers forgot the mysterious lady for a moment, and saw her no more. After some time the new-comer said to him, with a sort of reluctant abruptness, 'They are rather in trouble over there,' making a gesture with his hand to indicate some locality on the other side of the darkly-waving trees.

'In trouble——'

'Oh, not of much importance, perhaps. The children—have all been—upset: I don't understand it quite. There was something that disturbed them—in the hotel here. Perhaps you know——'

'I only arrived this evening,' Rivers said.

The other drew a long breath. Was it of relief? Perhaps he had spoken only to discover whether his rival had been long enough in the neighbourhood to have secured any advantage. 'We brought over the old nurse with us—the woman, you know, who—— Oh, I forgot, you don't know,' Hamerton added, hastily. This was said innocently enough, but it offended the elder suitor, jealous and angry after the unreasonable manner of a lover, that anyone, much less this young fellow, whose pretensions were so ridiculous, should have

known her and her circumstances before and better than himself.

'I prefer not to know anything that the Trevanions do not wish to be known,' he said sharply. It was not true, for his whole being quivered with eagerness to know everything about them, all that could be told; but at the same time there was in his harsh tones a certain justness of reproach that brought the colour to young Hamerton's face.

'You are quite right,' he said; 'it is not my business to say a word.'

And then there was silence again. It was growing late. The verandahs of the great hotel, a little while ago full of chattering groups, were all vacant; the lights had flitted upstairs; a few weary waiters lounged about the doors, anxiously waiting till the two Englishmen—so culpably incautious about the night air and the draughts, so brutally indifferent to the fact that Jules and Adolphe and the rest had to get up very early in the morning and longed to be in bed—should come in, and all things be shut up; but neither Hamerton nor Rivers thought of Adolphe and Jules.

Finally, after a long silence, the younger

man spoke again. His mind was full of one subject, and he wanted some one to speak to, were it only his rival. 'This cannot be a healthy place,' he said; 'they are not looking well—they are all—upset. I suppose it is bad for—the nerves——'

'Perhaps there may be other reasons,' said Rivers. His heart stirred within him at the thought that agitation, perhaps of a nature kindred to his own, might be affecting the one person who was uppermost in the thoughts of both—for he did not doubt that Hamerton, who had said *them*, meant Rosalind. That she might be pale with anticipation, nervous and tremulous in this last moment of suspense! the idea brought a rush of blood to his face, and a warm flood of tender thoughts and delight to his heart.

'I don't know what other reasons,' said Hamerton. 'She thinks—I mean there is nothing thought of but those children. Something has happened to them. The old nurse, the woman—I told you—came over with us to take them in hand. Poor little things! it is not much to be wondered at——' he said, and then stopped short, with the air of a man who might have a great deal to say.

A slight rustling in the branches behind caught Rivers' attention. All his senses were very keen, and he had the power, of great advantage in his profession, of seeing and hearing without appearing to do so. He turned his eyes but not his head in the direction of that faint sound, and saw with great wonder the lady whom he had been watching, an almost imperceptible figure against the opaque background of the high shrubs, standing behind Hamerton. Her head was a little thrust forward in the attitude of listening, and the moon just caught her face. He was too well disciplined to suffer the cry of recognition which came to his lips to escape from them, but in spite of himself expressed his excitement in a slight movement—a start which made the rustic chair on which he was seated quiver, and displaced the gravel under his feet. Hamerton did not so much as notice that he had moved at all, but the lady's head was drawn back, and the thick foliage behind once more moved as by a breath, and all was still. Rivers was very much absorbed in one pursuit and one idea, which made him selfish; but yet his heart was kind. He conquered his antipathy to the young fellow who was his rival, whom (on that

ground) he despised, yet feared, and forced himself to ask a question, to draw him on. 'What has happened to the children,' he said; 'are they ill?' There was a faint breeze in the tree-tops, but none down here in the solid foliage of the great bushes; yet there was a stir in the laurel as of a bird in its nest.

'They are not ill, but yet something has happened. I believe the little things have been seeing ghosts. They sent for this woman, Russell, you know—confound her——'

'Why confound her?'

'Oh, it's a long story—confound her all the same! There are some women that it is very hard for a man not to wish to knock down. But I suppose they think she's good for the children. That is all they think of, it appears to me,' Roland said, dejectedly. 'The children—always the children—one cannot get in a word. And as for anything else—anything that is natural——'

This moved Rivers on his own account. Sweet hope was high in his heart. It might very well be that this young fellow could not get in a word. Who could tell that the excuse of the children might not be made use of to silence an undesired suitor, to leave the way

free for—— His soul melted with a delicious softness and sense of secret exultation. 'Let us hope their anxiety may not last,' he said, restraining himself, keeping as well as he could the triumph out of his voice. Hamerton looked at him quickly, keenly; he felt that there was exultation—something exasperating—a tone of triumph in it.

'I don't see why it shouldn't last,' he said. 'Little Amy is like a little ghost herself; but how can it be otherwise in such an unnatural state of affairs—the mother gone, and all the responsibility put upon one—upon one who—— For what is Mrs. Lennox?' he cried, half-angrily; 'oh yes, a good kind soul—but she has to be taken care of too—and all upon one—upon one who——'

'You mean Miss Trevanion?'

'I don't mean—to bring in any names. Look here,' cried the young man, 'you and I, Rivers—we are not worthy to name her name.'

His voice was a little husky; his heart was in his mouth. He felt a sort of brotherly feeling even for this rival who might perhaps, being clever (he thought), be more successful than he, but who, in the meantime, had more

in common with him than any other man, because he too loved Rosalind. Rivers did not make any response. Perhaps he was not young enough to have this feeling for any woman. A man may be very much in love—may be ready even to make any exertion, almost any sacrifice, to win the woman he loves, and yet be unable to echo such a sentiment. He could not allow that he was unworthy to name her name. Hamerton scarcely noticed his silence, and yet was a little relieved not to have any response.

'I am a little upset myself,' he said, 'because you know I've been mixed up with it all from the beginning, which makes one feel very differently from those that don't know the story. I couldn't help just letting out a little. I beg your pardon for taking up your time with what perhaps doesn't interest you.'

This stung the other man to the quick. 'It interests me more, perhaps, than you could understand,' he cried. 'But,' he added, after a pause, 'it remains to be seen whether the family wish me to know—not certainly at second-hand.'

Hamerton sprang to his feet in hot revulsion

of feeling. 'If you mean me by the second-hand,' he said: then paused, ashamed both of the good impulse and the less good which had made him thus betray himself. 'I beg your pardon,' he added; 'I've been travelling all day, and I suppose I'm tired and apt to talk nonsense. Good-night.'

Jules and Adolphe were glad. They showed the young Englishman to his room with joy, making no doubt that the other would follow. But the other did not follow. He sat for a time silently with his head on his hand. Then he rose, and walking to the other side of the great bouquet of laurels, paused in the profound shadow, where there stood, as he divined rather than saw, a human creature in mysterious anguish, anxiety, and pain. He made out with difficulty a tall shadow against the gloomy background of the close branches. 'I do not know who you are,' he said; 'I do not ask to know; but you are deeply interested in what that—that young fellow was saying?'

The voice that replied to him was very low. 'Oh, more than interested: it is like life and death to me. For God's sake, tell me if you know anything more.'

'I know nothing to-night—but to-morrow—you are the lady whom I met in Spain two years ago, whose portrait stands on Rosalind Trevanion's writing-table.'

There was a low cry: 'Oh! God bless you for telling me. God bless you for telling me.' and the sound of a suppressed sob.

'I shall see her to-morrow,' he said. 'I have come thousands of miles to see her. It is possible that I might be of use to you. May I tell her that you are here?'

The stir among the branches seemed to take a different character as he spoke, and the lady came out towards the partial light. She said firmly, 'No; I thank you for your kind intentions;' then paused. 'You will think it strange that I came behind you and listened. You will think it was not honourable. But I heard their name, and Roland Hamerton knows me. When a woman is in great trouble she is driven to strange expedients. Sir,' she cried, after another agitated pause, 'I neither know your name nor who you are, but if you will bring me news to-morrow after you have seen them—if you will tell me—it will be a good deed—it will be a Christian deed.'

'Say something more to me than that,'

he cried, with a passion that surprised himself; 'say that you will wish me well.'

She moved along softly, noiselessly, with her head turned to him, moving towards the moonlight, which was like the blaze of day, within a few steps from where they had been standing. The impression which had been upon his mind of a fugitive—a woman abandoned and forlorn died out so completely, that he felt ashamed ever to have ventured upon such a thought. And he felt with a sudden sense of imperfection, quite unfamiliar to him, that he was being examined and judged. He felt, too, with an acute self-consciousness, that the silver in his hair shone in the white light, and that the counterbalancing qualities of fine outline and manly colour must be wanting in that wan and colourless illumination. He could not see her face, except as an abstract paleness, turned towards him, overshadowed by the veil which she had put back, but which still threw a deep shade; but she gazed into his, which he could not but turn towards her in the full light of the moon. The end of the examination was not very consolatory to his pride. She sighed and turned away. 'The man whom she chooses will want no other blessing,' she said.

A few minutes after Jules and Adolphe were happy shutting up the doors, putting out the lights, betaking themselves to the holes and corners under the stairs, under the roofs, in which these sufferers for the good of humanity slept.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE incident of that evening had a very disturbing effect upon the family at Bonport. Little Amy, waking next morning much astonished to find herself in Rosalind's room, and very faintly remembering what had happened, was subjected at once to questionings more earnest than judicious—questionings which brought everything to her mind, with a renewal of all the agitation of the night. But the child had nothing to say beyond what she had said before: that she had dreamt of mamma, that mamma had called her to come down to the lake, and be taken home; that she wanted to go home, to go to mamma—oh, to go to mamma! but Rosalind said she was dead, and Sophy said they were never, never to see her again. Then Amy flung herself upon her sister's breast and implored to be taken to her mother. 'You don't know how wicked I was, Rosalind. Russell used to say things, till I stopped loving mamma—oh, I did, and did not

mind when she went away! But now! where is she, where is she? Oh, Rosalind! oh, Rosalind! will she never come back? Oh, do you think she is angry, or that she does not care for me any more? Oh, Rosalind, is she dead, and will she never come back?' This cry seemed to come from Amy's very soul. She could not be stilled. She lay in Rosalind's bed, as white as the hangings about her, not much more than a pair of dark eyes looking out with eagerness unspeakable. And Rosalind, who had gone through so many vicissitudes of feeling—who had stood by the mother who was not her mother with so much loyalty, yet had yielded to the progress of events, and had not known, in the ignorance of her youth, what to do or say, or how to stand against it—Rosalind was seized all at once by a vehement determination and an intolerable sense that the present position of affairs was impossible and could not last.

'Oh, my darling!' she cried; 'get well and strong, and you and I will go and look for her, and never, never be taken from her again!'

'But, Rosalind, if mamma is dead!' cried little Amy.

The elder people who witnessed this scene

stole out of the room, unable to bear it any longer.

'It must be put a stop to,' John Trevanion said, in a voice that was sharp with pain.

'Oh, who can put a stop to it?' cried Mrs. Lennox, weeping, and recovering herself and weeping again. 'I should not have wondered, not at all, if it had happened at first; but after these years! And I that thought children were heartless little things, and that they had forgot!'

'Can Russell do nothing, now you have got her here?' he cried with impatience, walking up and down the room. He was at his wits' end, and in his perplexity felt himself incapable even of thought.

'Oh, John, did you not hear what that little thing said? She put the children against their mother. Amy will not let Russell come near her. If I have made a mistake, I meant it for the best. Russell is as miserable as any of us. Johnny has forgotten her, and Amy cannot endure the sight of her. And now it appears that coming to Bonport, which was your idea, is a failure too, though I am sure we both did it for the best.'

'That is all that could be said for us if we

were a couple of well-intentioned fools,' he cried. 'And indeed we seem to have acted like fools in all that concerns the children,' he added with a sort of bitterness. For what right had fate to lay such a burden upon him—him who had scrupulously preserved himself, or been preserved by Providence, from any such business of his own?

'John,' said Mrs. Lennox, drying her eyes, 'I don't think there is so much to blame yourself about. You felt sure it would be better for them being here; and when you put it to me, so did I. You never thought of the lake. Why should you think of the lake? We never let them go near it without somebody to take care of them in the day, and how could anyone suppose that at night——'

Upon this her brother seized his hat and hurried from the house. The small aggravation seemed to fill up his cup, so that he could bear no more—with this addition, that Mrs. Lennox's soft purr of a voice roused mere exasperation in him, while his every thought of the children, even when the cares they brought threatened to overwhelm him, was tender with natural affection. But, in fact, wherever he turned at this moment he saw not a gleam of

light, and there was a bitterness as of the deferred and unforeseen in this sudden gathering together of clouds and dangers which filled him almost with awe. The catastrophe itself had passed over much more quietly than could have been thought. But lo, here when no fear was, the misery came. His heart melted within him when he thought of Amy's little pale face, and that forlorn expedition in the stillness of the night to the side of the lake which betrayed, as nothing else could have done, the feverish working of her brain and the disturbance of her entire being. What madness of rage and jealousy must that have been that induced a man to leave this legacy of misery behind him, to work in the minds of his little children years after he was dead! and what appalling cruelty and tyranny it was which made it possible for a dead man, upon whom neither argument nor proof could be brought to bear, thus to blight by a word so many lives! All had passed with a strange simplicity at first, and with such swift and silent carrying out of the terrible conditions of the will, that there had been no time to think if any expedient was possible. Looking back upon it, it seemed to him incredible that anything so extraordinary should have taken

place with so little disturbance. *She* had accepted her fate without a word, and everyone else had accepted it. The bitterness of death seemed to have passed except for the romance of devotion on Rosalind's part, which he believed had faded in the other kind of romance more natural at her age. No one but himself had appeared to remember at all this catastrophe which rent life asunder. But now, when no one expected it, out of the clear sky came the explosions of the storm. He had decided too quickly that all was over. The peace had been but a pretence, and now the whole matter would have to be reopened again.

The cause of the sudden return of all minds to the great family disaster and misery seemed to him more than ever confused by this last event. The condition which had led to Amy's last adventure seemed to make it more possible, notwithstanding Sophy's supposed discovery, that the story of the apparition was an illusion throughout. The child, always a visionary child, must have had, in the unnatural and strained condition of her nerves and long repression of her feelings, a dream so vivid as, like that of last night, to take the aspect of reality; and Rosalind, full of sympathy, and with all

her own keen recollections ready to be called forth at a touch, must have received the contagion from her little sister, and seen what Amy had so long imagined she saw. Perhaps even it was the same contagion, acting on a matter-of-fact temperament, which had induced Sophy to believe that she too had seen her mother—but in real flesh and blood. Of all the hypotheses that could be thought of, this seemed to him the most impossible. He had examined all the hotel registers, and made anxious inquiries everywhere, without finding a trace of Mrs. Trevanion. She had not, so far as he was aware, renounced her own name. And, even had she done so, it was impossible that she could have been in the hotel without some one seeing her, without leaving some trace behind. Notwithstanding this certainty, John Trevanion, even while he repeated his conviction to himself, was making his way once more to the hotel to see whether, by any possibility, some light might still be thrown upon a subject which had become so urgent. Yet even that, though it was the first thing that presented itself to him, had become in fact a secondary matter. The real question in this, as in all difficulties, was what to do next? What could

be done to unravel the fatal tangle? Now that he contemplated the matter from afar, it became to him all at once a thing intolerable—a thing that must no longer be allowed to exist. What was publicity, what was scandal, in comparison with this wreck of life? There must be means, he declared to himself, of setting an unrighteous will aside, whatever lawyers might say. His own passiveness seemed incredible to him, as well as the extraordinary composure with which everybody else had acquiesced, accepting the victim's sacrifice. But that was over. Even though the present agitation should pass away, he vowed to himself that it should not pass from him until he had done all that man could do to set the wrong right.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he was walking into Aix with the speed of a man who has urgent work before him, though that work was nothing more definite or practical than the examination over again of the hotel books, to see if there he could find any clue. He turned them over and over in his abstraction, going back without knowing it to distant dates, and roaming over an endless succession of names which conveyed no idea to his mind. He came at last, on the

last page, to the name of Arthur Rivers, with a dull sort of surprise. 'To be sure Rivers is here!' he said to himself aloud.

'Yes, to be sure I am here. I have been waiting to see if you would find me out,' Rivers said behind him. John did not give him so cordial a welcome as he had done on the previous night.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I have so much on my mind I forget everything. Were you coming out to see my sister? We can walk together. The sun is warm, but not too hot for walking. That's an advantage of this time of the year.'

'It is perhaps too early for Mrs. Lennox,' Rivers said.

'Oh no, not too early. The truth is, we are in a little confusion. One of the children has been giving us a great deal of anxiety.'

'Then perhaps,' said Rivers, with desperate politeness, 'it will be better for me not to go.' He felt within himself, though he was so civil, a sort of brutal indifference to their insignificant distresses, which were nothing in comparison with his own. To come so far, in order to eat his breakfast under the dusty trees, and dine at the table d'hôte in a half-empty hotel at Aix,

seemed to him so great an injustice and scorn in the midst of his fame and importance, that even the discovery he had made, though it could not but tell in the situation, passed from his mind in the heat of offended consequence and pride.

John Trevanion, for his part, noticed the feeling of the other as little as Rivers did his. 'One of the children has been walking in her sleep,' he said. 'I don't want to get a fool of a doctor who thinks of nothing but rheumatism. One of them filled my good sister's mind with folly about suppressed gout. Poor little Amy! She has a most susceptible brain, and I am afraid something has upset it. Do you believe in ghosts, Rivers?'

'As much as everybody does,' said Rivers, recovering himself a little.

'That is about all that anyone can say. This child thinks she has seen one. She is a silent little thing. She has gone on suffering and never said a word, and the consequence is, her little head has got all wrong.'

By this time Rivers, having cooled down, began to see the importance of the disclosure he had to make. He said, 'Would you mind telling me what the apparition was? You will

understand, Trevanion, that I don't want to pry into your family concerns, and that I would not ask without a reason.'

John Trevanion looked at him intently with a startled curiosity and earnestness. 'I can't suppose,' he said, 'when it comes to that, much as we have paid for concealment, that you have not heard something——'

'Miss Trevanion told me,' said Rivers—he paused a moment, feeling that it was a cruel wrong to him that he should be compelled to say Miss Trevanion—he who ought to have been called to her side at once, who should have been in a position to claim her before the world as his Rosalind—'Miss Trevanion gave me to understand that the lady whom I had met in Spain, whose portrait was on her table, was——'

'My sister-in-law—the mother of the children—yes, yes—and what then?' John Trevanion cried.

'Only this, Trevanion—that lady is here.'

John caught him by the arm, so fiercely, so suddenly, that the leisurely waiters standing about and the few hotel guests who were moving out and in in the quiet of the morning stopped and stared with ideas of rushing to the

rescue. 'What do you mean?' he said; 'here! How do you know? It is impossible.'

'Come out into the garden, where we can talk. It may be impossible, but it is true. I also saw her last night.'

'You must be mad or dreaming, Rivers. You too—a man in your senses—and—God in heaven!' he said, with a sudden bitter sense of his own unappreciated friendship—unappreciated even, it would seem, beyond the grave—'that she should have come, whatever she had to say, to you—to anyone—and not to me!'

'Trevanion, you are mistaken. This is no apparition. There was no choice, of me or any one. That poor lady, whether sinned against or sinning I have no knowledge, is here. Do you understand me? She is here.'

They were standing by this time in the shadow of the great laurel bushes where she had sheltered on the previous night. John Trevanion said nothing for a moment. He cast himself down on one of the seats to recover his breath. It was just where Hamerton had been sitting. Rivers almost expected to see the faint stir in the bushes, the evidence of some one listening, to whom the words spoken might, as she said, be death or life.

'This is extraordinary news,' said Trevanion at last. 'You will pardon me if I was quite overwhelmed by it. Rivers, you can't think how important it is. Where can I find her? You need not fear to betray her—oh, heaven, to betray her to me, her brother! But you need not fear. She knows that there is no one who has more—more regard, more respect, or more—— Let me know where to find her, my good fellow, for heaven's sake!'

'Trevanion, it is not any doubt of you. But, in the first place, I don't know where to find her, and then—she did not disclose herself to me. I found her out by accident. Have I any right to dispose of her secret? I will tell you everything I know,' he added hastily, in answer to the look and gesture, almost of despair, which John could not restrain. 'Last night your friend, young Hamerton, was talking—injudiciously, I think'—there was a little sweetness to him in saying this, even in the midst of real sympathy and interest—'he was talking of what was going on in your house. I had already seen some one walking about the garden whose appearance I seemed to recollect. When Hamerton mentioned your name——' (he was anxious that this should be made fully

evident) 'she heard it: and by-and-by I perceived that some one was listening, behind you, just there, in the laurels.'

John started up and turned round, gazing at the motionless glistening screen of leaves, as if she might still be there. After a moment—'And what then?'

'Not much more. I spoke to her afterwards. She asked me, for the love of God, to bring her news, and I promised—what I could—for to-night.'

John Trevanion held out his hand, and gave that of Rivers a strong pressure. 'Come out with me to Bonport. You must hear everything, and perhaps you can advise me. I am determined to put an end to the situation somehow, whatever it may cost,' he said.

CHAPTER LV.

THE two men went out to Bonport together, and on the way John Trevanion, half revolted that he should have to tell it, half relieved to talk of it to another man, and see how the matter appeared to a person unconcerned, with eyes clear from prepossession of any kind, either hostile or tender, gave his companion all the particulars of his painful story. It was a relief; and Rivers, who had been trained for the bar, gave it at once as his opinion that the competent authorities would not hesitate to set such a will aside, or at least, on proof that no moral danger would arise to the children, would modify its restrictions greatly. 'Wills are sacred theoretically; but there has always been a power of revision,' he said. And he suggested practical means of bringing this point to a trial—or at least to the preliminary trial of counsel's advice, which gave his companion great solace. 'I can see that we all acted like

fools,' John Trevanion confessed, with a momentary over-confidence that his troubles might be approaching an end. 'We were terrified for the scandal, the public discussion, that would have been sure to rise—and no one so much as she. Old Blake was all for the sanctity of the will, as you say——and I—I was so torn in two with doubts and—miseries——'

'But I presume,' Rivers said, 'these have all been put to rest. There has been a satisfactory explanation——'

'Explanation!' cried John. 'Do you think I could ask, or she condescend to give, what you call explanations? She knew her own honour and purity; and she knew,' he added with a long-drawn breath, 'that I knew them as well as she——'

'Still,' said Rivers, 'explanations are necessary when it is brought before the public.'

'It shall never be brought before the public!'

'My dear Trevanion! How then are you to do anything—how set the will aside?'

This question silenced John; and it took further speech out of the mouth of his companion, who felt on his side that if he were

about to be connected with the Trevanion family, it would not be at all desirable, on any consideration, that this story should become public. He had been full of interest in the woman whose appearance had struck him before he knew anything about her, and who had figured so largely in his first acquaintance with Rosalind. But when it became a question of a great scandal occupying every mind and tongue, and in which it was possible his own wife might be concerned—that was a very different matter. In a great family such things are treated with greater ease. If it is true that an infringement on their honour, a blot on the escutcheon, is supposed to be of more importance where there is a noble escutcheon to tarnish, it is yet true that a great family history would lose much of its interest if it were not crossed now and then by a shadow of darkness, a tale to make the hearers shudder; and that those who are accustomed to feel themselves always objects of interest to the world bear the shame of an occasional disclosure far better than those sprung from a lowlier level whose life is sacred to themselves, and who guard their secrets far more jealously than either the great or the very small. Rivers, in the depth

of his nature, which was not that of a born patrician, trembled at the thought of public interference in the affairs of a family with which he should be connected. All the more that it would be an honour and elevation to him to be connected with it, he trembled to have its secrets published. It was not till after he had given his advice on the subject that this drawback occurred to him. He was not a bad man, to doom another to suffer that his own surroundings might go free: but when he thought of it he resolved that, if he could bring it about, Rosalind's enthusiasm should be calmed down, and she should learn to feel for her stepmother only that calm affection which stepmothers at the best are worthy of, and which means separation rather than unity of interests. He pondered this during the latter part of the way with great abstraction of thought. He was very willing to take advantage of his knowledge of Mrs. Trevanion, and of the importance it gave him to be their only means of communication with her; but further than this he did not mean to go. Were Rosalind once his, there should certainly be no room in his house for a stepmother of blemished fame.

And there were many things in his visit to

Bonport which were highly unsatisfactory to Rivers. John Trevanion was so entirely wrapt in his own cares as to be very inconsiderate of his friend, whose real object in presenting himself at Aix at all he must no doubt have divined had he been in possession of his full intelligence. He took the impatient lover into the grounds of the house where Rosalind was, and expected him to take an interest in the winding walks by which little Amy had strayed down to the lake, and all the scenery of that foolish little episode. 'If her sister had not followed her, what might have happened? The child might have been drowned, or, worse still, might have gone mad in the shock of finding herself out there all alone. It makes one shudder to think of it.' Rivers did not shudder; he was not very much interested about Amy. But his nerves were all jarred by the contrariety of the circumstances as he looked up through the shade of the trees to the house at the top of the little eminence where Rosalind was, but as much out of his reach as if she had been at the end of the world. He did not see her until much later, when he returned at John Trevanion's invitation to dinner. Rosalind was very pale, but

blushed when she met him with a consciousness which he scarcely knew how to interpret. Was there hope in the blush, or was it embarrassment—almost pain? She said scarcely anything during dinner, sitting in the shadow of the pink *abat-jour*, and of her Aunt Sophy, who, glad of a new listener, poured forth her soul upon the subject of sleep-walking, and told a hundred stories, experiences of her own and of other people, all tending to prove that it was the most usual thing in the world, and that indeed most children walked in their sleep. 'The thing to do is to be very careful not to wake them,' Mrs. Lennox said. 'That was Rosalind's mistake. Oh, my dear, there is no need to tell me that you didn't mean anything that wasn't for the best. Nobody who has ever seen how devoted you are to these children—just like a mother—could suppose that; but I understand,' said Aunt Sophy with an air of great wisdom, 'that you should never wake them. Follow to see that they come to no harm, and sometimes you may be able to guide them back to their own room—which is always the best thing to do—*but never wake them*; that is the one thing you must always avoid.'

'I should think Rivers has had about

enough of Amy's somnambulism by this time, John said. 'Tell us something about yourself. Are you going to stay long? Are you on your way northwards? All kinds of honour and glory await you at home, we know.'

'My movements are quite vague. I have settled nothing,' Rivers replied. And how could he help but look at Rosalind, who, though she never lifted her eyes and could not have seen his look, yet changed colour in some incomprehensible way? And how could he see that she changed colour in the pink gloom of the shade, which obscured everything, especially such a change as that? But he did see it, and Rosalind was aware he did so. Notwithstanding his real interest in the matter, it was hard for him to respond to John Trevanion's questions about the meeting planned for this evening. It had been arranged between them that John should accompany Rivers back to the hotel, that he should be at hand should the mysterious lady consent to see him; and the thought of this possible interview was to him as absorbing as was the question of Rosalind's looks to his companion. But they had not much to say to each other, each being full of his own thoughts as they sat together

for those few minutes after dinner which were inevitable. Then they followed each other gloomily into the drawing-room, which was vacant, though a sound of voices from outside the open window betrayed where the ladies had gone. Mrs. Lennox came indoors as they approached. 'It is a little cold,' she said, with a shiver. But Rivers found it balm as he stepped out and saw Rosalind leaning upon the verandah among the late roses, with the moonlight making a sort of silvery gauze of her light dress. He came out and placed himself by her; but the window stood open behind, with John Trevanion within hearing, and Mrs. Lennox's voice running on quite audibly close at hand. Was it always to be so? He drew very near to her, and said in a low voice, 'May I not speak to you?' Rosalind looked at him with eyes which were full of a beseeching earnestness. She did not pretend to be ignorant of what he meant. The moonlight gave an additional depth of pathetic meaning to her face, out of which it stole all the colour.

'Oh, Mr. Rivers, not now!' she said, with an appeal which he could not resist. Poor Rivers turned and left her in the excitement of the moment. He went along the terrace to

the further side with a poor pretence of looking at the landscape, in reality to think out the situation. What could he say to recommend himself, to put himself in the foreground of her thoughts? A sudden suggestion flashed upon him, and he snatched at it without further consideration. When he returned to where he had left her, Rosalind was still there, apparently waiting. She advanced towards him shyly, with a sense of having given him pain. 'I am going in now to Amy,' she said; 'I waited to bid you good-night.'

'One word,' he said. 'Oh, nothing about myself, Miss Trevanion. I will wait, if I must not speak. But I have a message for you.'

'A message—for me!' She came a little nearer to him, with that strange divination which accompanies great mental excitement, feeling instinctively that what he was about to say must bear upon the subject of her thoughts.

'You remember,' he said, 'the lady whom I told you I had met? I have met her again, Miss Trevanion.'

'Where?' She turned upon him with a cry, imperative and passionate.

'Miss Trevanion, I have never forgotten the look you gave me when I said that the lady

was accompanied by a man. I want to explain; I have found out who it was.'

'Mr. Rivers!'

'Should I be likely to tell you anything unfit for your ears to hear? I know better now. The poor lady is not happy, in that any more than in any other particular of her lot. The man was her son.'

'*Her son!*' Rosalind's cry was such that it made Mrs. Lennox stop in her talk; and John Trevanion, from the depths of the dark room behind, came forward to know what it was.

'I felt that I must tell you; you reproached me with your eyes when I said—— But if I wronged her, I must make reparation. It was in all innocence and honour—it was her son.'

'Mr. Rivers!' cried Rosalind, turning upon him, her breast heaving, her lips quivering, 'this shows it is a mistake. I might have known all the time it was a mistake. She had no son except—— It was not the same. Thank you for wishing to set me right; but it could not be the same. It is no one we know. It is a mistake.'

'But when I tell you, Miss Trevanion, that she said——'

'No, no, you must not say any more. We know nothing; it is a mistake.' Disappointment, with at the same time a strange poignant smart, as of some chance arrow striking her in the dark which wounded her without reason, without aim, filled her mind. She turned quickly, eluding the hand which Rivers had stretched out, not pausing even for her uncle, and hastened away without a word. John Trevanion turned upon Rivers, who came in slowly from the verandah with a changed and wondering look. 'What have you been saying to Rosalind? You seem to have frightened her,' he said.

'Oh, it seems all a mistake,' he replied vaguely. He was, in fact, greatly cast down by the sudden check he had received. In the height of his consciousness that his own position as holding a clue to the whereabouts of this mysterious woman was immeasurably advantaged, there came upon him this chill of doubt lest perhaps after all—— But then she had herself declared that to hear of the Trevanions was to her as life and death. Rivers did not know how to reconcile Rosalind's instant change of tone, her evident certainty that his information did not concern her, with

the impassioned interest of the woman whom he half felt that he had betrayed. How he had acquired the information which he had thought it would be a good thing for him thus to convey, he could scarcely have told. It had been partly divination, partly some echo of recollection; but he felt certain that he was right; and he had also felt certain that to hear it would please Rosalind. He was altogether cast down by her reception of his news. He did not recover himself during all the long walk back to Aix in the moonlight, which he made in company with John Trevanion. But John was absorbed in the excitement of the expected meeting, and did not disturb him by much talking. They walked along between the straight lines of the trees, through black depths of shadow and the white glory of the light, exchanging few words, each wrapt in his own atmosphere. When the lights of the town were close to them, John spoke. 'Whether she will speak to me or not, you must place me where I can see her, Rivers. I must make sure.'

'I will do the best I can,' said Rivers; 'but what if it should all turn out to be a mistake?'

'How can it be a mistake? Who else

would listen as you say she did? Who else could take so much interest? But I must make sure. Place me at least where I may see her, even if I must not speak.'

The garden was nearly deserted, only one or two solitary figures in shawls and overcoats still lingering in the beauty of the moonlight. Rivers placed John standing in the shadow of a piece of shrubbery, close to the open space which she had crossed as she made her round of the little promenade: and he himself took the seat under the laurels which he had occupied on the previous night. He thought there was no doubt that she would come to him, that after the hotel people had disappeared she would be on the watch and hasten to hear what he had to tell her. When time passed on and no one appeared, he got up again and began himself to walk round and round, pausing now and then to whisper to John Trevanion that he did not understand it—that he could not imagine what could be the cause of the delay. They waited thus till midnight, till the unfortunate waiters in the verandah were nearly distracted, and every intimation of the late hour which these unhappy men could venture to give had been given. When twelve

struck, tingling through the blue air, John Trevanion came finally out of his hiding-place, and Rivers from his chair. They spoke in whispers as conspirators instinctively do, though there was nobody to hear. 'I cannot understand it,' said Rivers, with the disconcerted air of a man whose exhibition has failed. 'I don't think it is of any use waiting longer,' said John. 'Oh, of no use. I am very sorry, Trevanion. I confidently expected——' 'Something,' said John, 'must have happened to detain her. I am disappointed, but still I do not cease to hope; and if in the meantime you see her, or any trace of her——' 'You may be sure I will do my best,' Rivers said, ashamed, though it was no fault of his, and, notwithstanding Rosalind's refusal to believe, with all his faith in his own conclusions restored.

They shook hands silently, and John Trevanion went away downcast and disappointed. When he had gone down the narrow street and emerged into the Place, which lay full in the moonlight, he saw two tall dark shadows in the very centre of the white vacancy and brightness in the deserted square. They caught his attention for the moment, and

he remembered after, that a vague question crossed his mind, what two women could be doing out so late. Were they Sisters of Charity, returning from some labour of love? Thus he passed them quickly, yet with a passing wonder, touched, he could not tell how, by something forlorn in the two solitary women, returning he knew not from what errand. Had he but known who these wayfarers were!

CHAPTER LVI.

Two days after this, while as yet there had appeared no further solution of the mystery, Roland Hamerton came hastily one morning up the sloping paths of Bonport into the garden, where he knew he should find Rosalind. He was in the position of a sort of outdoor member of the household, going and coming at his pleasure, made no account of, enjoying the privileges of a son and brother rather than of a lover. But the advantages of this position were great. He saw Rosalind at all hours, in all circumstances, and he was himself so much concerned about little Amy and so full of earnest interest in everything that affected the family, that he was admitted even to the most intimate consultations. To Rosalind his presence had given a support and help which she could not have imagined possible, especially in contrast with Rivers, who approached her with that almost threatening demand for a

final explanation, and shaped every word and action so as to show that the reason for his presence here was her and her only. Roland's self-control and unfeigned desire to promote her comfort first of all, before he thought of himself, was in perfect contrast to this, and consolatory beyond measure. She had got to be afraid of Rivers; she was not at all afraid of the humble lover who was at the same time her old friend, who was young like herself, who knew everything that had happened. This was the state to which she had come in that famous competition between the three, who ought, as Mr. Ruskin says, to have been seven. One she had withdrawn altogether from, putting him out of the lists with mingled repulsion and pity. Another she had been seized with a terror of, as of a man lying in wait to devour her. The third—he was no one; he was only Roland; her lover in the nursery, her faithful attendant all her life. She was not afraid of him, nor of any exaction on his part. Her heart turned to him with a simple reliance. He was not clever, he was not distinguished; he had executed for her none of the labours either of Hercules or any other hero. He had on his side no attractions

of natural beauty, or any of those vague appeals to the imagination which had given Everard a certain power over her; and he had not carried her image with him, as Rivers had done, through danger and conflict, or brought back any laurels to lay at her feet. If it had been a matter of competition, as in the days of chivalry, or in the scheme of our gentle yet vehement philosopher, Roland would have had little chance. But after the year was over in which Rosalind had known of the competition for her favour, he it was who remained nearest. She glanced up with an alarmed look to see who was coming, and her face cleared when she saw it was Roland. He would force no considerations upon her, ask no tremendous questions. She gave him a smile as he approached. She was seated under the trees, with the lake gleaming behind for a background through an opening in the foliage. Mrs. Lennox's chair still stood on the same spot, but she was not there. There were some books on the table, but Rosalind was not reading. She had some needlework in her hands, but that was little more than a pretence; she was thinking, and all her thoughts were directed to one subject. She smiled when he

came up, yet grudged to lose the freedom of those endless thoughts. 'I thought,' she said, 'you were on the water with Rex.'

'No, I told you I wanted something to do. I think I have got what I wanted, but I should like to tell you about it, Rosalind.'

'Yes?' she said, looking up again with a smiling interrogation. She thought it was about some piece of exercise or amusement, some long walk he was going to take, some expedition which he wanted to organise.

'I have heard something very strange,' he said. 'It appears that I said something the other night to Rivers whom I found when I went back to the hotel, and that somebody, some lady, was seen to come near and listen. I was not saying any harm, you may suppose, but only that the children were upset. And this lady came round to hear what I was saying.'

His meaning did not easily reach Rosalind, who was preoccupied, and did not connect Roland at all with the mystery around her. She said, 'That was strange; who could it be? some one who knew us in the hotel?'

'Rosalind, I have never liked to say anything to you about—Madam.'

'Don't!' she said, holding up her hand;

'oh don't, Roland. The only time you spoke to me about her you hurt me—oh, to the very heart; not that I believed it: but it was so grievous that you could think, that you could say—that you could *see* even, anything——'

'I have thought it over a hundred times since then, and what you say is true, Rosalind. One has no right even to see things that—there are some people who are above even—I know now what you mean, and that it is true. You knew her better than anyone else, and your faith is mine. That is why I came to tell you. Rosalind—who could that woman be but one? She came behind the bushes to hear what I was saying. She was all trembling—who else could that be?'

'Roland!' Rosalind had risen up, every tinge of colour ebbing from her face; 'you too!—you too——!'

'No,' he said, rising also, taking her hand; 'not that, not that, Rosalind. If she were dead, as you think, would she not know everything? She would not need to listen to me. This is what I am sure of, that she is here and trying every way——'

She grasped his hands as if her own were iron, and then let them go, and threw herself

into her seat, and sobbed, unable to speak, 'Oh, Roland! oh, Roland!' with a cry that went to his heart.

'Rosalind,' he said, leaning over her, touching her shoulder, and her hair, with a sympathy which filled his eyes with tears, and would not be contented with words, 'listen; I am going to look for her now. I shan't tire of it whoever tires. I shall find her, Rosalind. And then, if she will let me take care of her, stand by her, bring her news of you all——! I have wronged her more than anybody, for I thought that I believed; see if I don't make up for it now. I could not go without telling you—I shall find her, Rosalind,' the young man cried.

She rose up again, trembling, and uncovered her face. Her cheeks were wet with tears, her eyes almost wild with hope and excitement. 'I'll come with you,' she said. 'I had made up my mind before. I will bear it no longer. Let them take everything; what does it matter? I am not only my father's daughter. I am myself first of all. If she is living, Roland——'

'She is living, I am sure.'

'Then as soon as we find her—oh no, she

would go away from me: when you find her, Roland—— I put all my trust in you.'

'And then,' he cried breathlessly, 'and then? No, I'll make no bargains; only say you trust me, dear. You did say you trusted me, Rosalind.'

'With all my heart,' she said.

And as Rosalind looked at him, smiling with her eyes full of tears, the young man turned and hurried away. When he was nearly out of sight he looked back and waved his hand: she was standing up gazing after him as if—as if it was the man whom she loved who was leaving her. That was the thought that leaped up into his heart with an emotion indescribable—the feeling of one who has found what he had thought lost and beyond his reach. As if it was the man she loved! Could one say more than that? 'But I'll make no bargains, I'll make no bargains,' he said to himself. 'It's best to be all for love and nothing for reward.'

While this scene was being enacted in the garden, another of a very different description, yet bearing on the same subject, was taking place in the room which John Trevanion, with the instinct of an Englishman, called his study.

The expedient of sending for Russell had not been very successful so far as the nursery was concerned. The woman had arrived in high elation and triumph, feeling that her 'family' had found it impossible to go on any longer without her, and full of the best intentions, this preliminary being fully acknowledged. She had meant to make short work with Johnny's visions and the dreams of Amy, and to show triumphantly that she, and she only, understood the children. But when she arrived at Bonport, her reception was not what she had hoped. The face of affairs was changed. Johnny, who saw no more apparitions, no longer wanted any special care, and Russell found the other woman in possession, and indisposed to accept her dictation, or yield the place to her, while Amy, now transferred to Rosalind's room and care, shrank from her almost with horror. All this had been bitter to her, a disappointment all the greater that her hopes had been so high. She found herself a supernumerary, not wanted by any one in the house, where she had expected to be regarded as a deliverer. The only consolation she received was from Sophy, who had greatly dropped out of observation during recent events, and was as much astonished and

as indignant to find Amy the first object in the household, and herself left out, as Russell was in her humiliation. The two injured ones found great solace in each other in these circumstances. Sophy threw herself with enthusiasm into the work of consoling, yet embittering, her old attendant's life. Sophy told her all that had been said in the house before her arrival, and described the distaste of everybody for her with much graphic force. She gave Russell also an account of all that had passed, of the discovery which she believed she herself had made, and further, though this of itself sent the blood coursing through Russell's veins, of the other incidents of the family life, and of Rosalind's lovers; Mr. Rivers who had just come from the war, and Mr. Everard who was the gentleman who had been at the Red Lion. 'Do you think he was in love with Rosalind then, Russell?' Sophy said, her keen eyes dancing with curiosity and eagerness. Russell said many things that were very injudicious, every word of which Sophy laid up in her heart, and felt with fierce satisfaction that her coming was not to be for nothing, and that the hand of Providence had brought her to clear up this imbroglio. She

saw young Everard next day, and convinced herself of his identity, and indignation and horror blazed up within her. Russell scarcely slept all night, and as she lay awake gathered together all the subjects of wrath she had, and piled them high. Next morning she knocked at John Trevanion's door, with a determination to make both her grievances and her discovery known at once.

'Mr. Trevanion,' said Russell, 'may I speak a word with you, sir, if you please?'

John Trevanion turned round upon his chair, and looked at her with surprise, and an uncomfortable sense of something painful to come. What had he to do with the women servants? That at least was out of his department. 'What do you want?' he asked in a helpless tone.

'Mr. John,' said Russell, drawing nearer, 'there is something that I must say. I can't say it to Mrs. Lennox, for she's turned against me like the rest. But a gentleman is more unpartial like. Do you know, sir, who it is that is coming here every day, and after Miss Rosalind, as they tell me? After Miss Rosalind! It's not a thing I like to say of a young lady, and one that I've brought up,

which makes it a deal worse; but she has no proper pride. Mr. John, do you know who that Mr. Everard, as they call him, is?'

'Yes, I know who he is. You had better attend to the affairs of the nursery, Russell.'

This touched into a higher blaze the fire of Russell's wrath. 'The nursery! I'm not allowed in it. There is another woman there that thinks she has the right to my place. I'm put in a room to do needlework, Mr. John. Me! and Miss Amy in Miss Rosalind's room, that doesn't know no more than you do how to manage her. But I mustn't give way,' the woman cried, with an effort. 'Do you know as the police are after him, Mr. John? Do you know it was all along of him as Madam went away?'

John Trevanion sprang from his chair. 'Be silent, woman!' he cried; 'how dare you speak so to me?'

'I've said it before, and I will again!' cried Russell—'a man not half her age. Oh, it was a shame!—and out of a house like Highcourt—and a lady that should know better, not a poor servant like them that are sent out of the way at a moment's notice when they go wrong.

Don't lift your hand to me, Mr. John. Would you strike a woman, sir, and call yourself a gentleman? And you that brought me here against my will when I was happy at home. I won't go out of the room till I have said my say.'

'No,' said John, with a laugh which was half rage, though the idea that he was likely to strike Russell was a ludicrous exasperation. 'No, as you are a woman I can't, unfortunately, knock you down, whatever impertinence you may say.'

'I am glad of that, sir,' said Russell, 'for you looked very like it; and I've served the Trevanions for years, though I don't get much credit for it, and I shouldn't like to have to say as the lady of the house forgot herself for a boy, and a gentleman of the house struck a woman. I've too much regard for them to do that.'

Here she paused to take breath, and then resumed, standing in an attitude of defence against the door, whither John's threatening aspect had driven her:—'You mark my words, sir,' cried Russell, 'where that young man is Madam's not far off. Miss Sophy, that has her

wits about her, she has seen her—and the others that is full of fancies they've seen what they think is a ghost: and little Miss Amy, she is wrong in the head with it. This is how I find things when I'm telegraphed for, and brought out to a strange place, and then told as I'm not wanted. But it's Providence as wants me here. Mrs. Lennox—she always was soft—I don't wonder at her being deceived: and besides she wasn't on the spot, and she don't know. But, Mr. Trevanion, you were there all the time. You know what goings on there were. It wasn't the doctor or the parson Madam went out to meet, and who was there besides? Nobody but this young man. When a woman's bent on going wrong she'll find out the way. You're going to strike me again! but it's true. It was him she met every night, every night, out in the cold. And then he saw Miss Rosalind, and he thought to himself —here's a young one, and a rich one, and far nicer than that old—— Mr. John! I know more than any of you know, and I'll put up with no violence, Mr. John!'

John Trevanion's words will scarcely bear repeating. He put her out of the room with more energy than perhaps he ought to have

employed with a woman; and he bade her go to the devil with her infernal lies. Profane speech is not to be excused, but there are times when it becomes mere historical truth and not profanity at all. They were infernal lies, the language and suggestion of hell even if—even if—oh, that a bleeding heart should have to remember this!—even if they were true. John shut the door of his room upon the struggling woman and came back to face himself, who was more terrible still. Even if they were true! They brought back in a moment a suggestion which had died away in his mind, but which never had been definitely cast forth. His impulse when he had seen this young Everard had been to take him by the collar and pitch him forth, and refuse him permission even to breathe the same air:—'Dangerous fellow, hence; breathe not where princes are!' but then a sense of confusion and uncertainty had come in and baffled him. There was no proof, either, that Everard was the man, or that there was any man. It was not Madam's handwriting, but her husband's, that had connected the youth with Highcourt; and though he might have a thousand faults, he did not look the cold-blooded villain who would make his

connection with one woman a standing ground upon which to establish schemes against another. John Trevanion's brow grew quite crimson as the thought went through his mind. He was alone, and he was middle-aged and experienced in the world; and two years ago many a troublous doubt, and something even like a horrible certainty, had passed through his mind. But there are people with whom it is impossible to associate shame. Even if shame should be all but proved against them, it will not hold. When he thought an evil thought of Madam—nay, when that thought had but a thoroughfare through his mind against his will, the man felt his cheek redden and his soul faint. And here, too, were the storm-clouds of that catastrophe which was past, rolling up again, full of flame and wrath. They had all been silent then, awestricken, anxious to hush up and pass over, and let the mystery remain. But now this was no longer possible. A bewildering sense of confusion, of a darkness through which he could not make his way, of strange coincidences, strange contradictions, was in John Trevanion's mind. He was afraid to enter upon this maze, not knowing to what conclu-

sions it might lead him. And yet now it must be done.

Only a very short time after another knock came to his door, and Rosalind entered, with an atmosphere about her of urgency and excitement. She said, without any preface:—

'Uncle John, I have come to tell you what I have made up my mind to do. Do you remember that in two days I shall be of age, and my own mistress? In two days!'

'My dear,' he said, 'I hope you have not been under so hard a taskmaster as to make you impatient to be free.'

'Yes,' said Rosalind. 'Oh, not a hard taskmaster: but life has been hard, Uncle John! As soon as I am my own mistress, I am going, Amy and I, to—you know. I cannot rest here any longer. Amy will be safe; she can have my money. But this cannot go on any longer. If we should starve, we must find my mother. I know you will say she is not my mother. And who else, then? She is all the mother I have ever known. And I have left her these two years under a stain which she ought not to bear, and in misery which she ought not to bear. Was it ever heard of before that a mother should be

banished from her children? I was too young to understand it all at first; and I had no habit of acting for myself; and perhaps you would have been right to stop me; but now——'

'Certainly I should have stopped you. But, Rosalind, I have come myself to a similar resolution,' he said. 'It must all be cleared up. But not by you, my dear, not by you. If there is anything to discover that is to her shame——'

'There is nothing, Uncle John.'

'My dear, you don't know how mysterious human nature is. There are fine and noble creatures such as she is—as she is! don't think I deny it, Rosalind—who may have yet a spot, a stain, which a man like me may see and grieve for and forgive, but you——'

'Oh, Uncle John, say that a woman like me may wash away with tears, if you like, but that should never, never be betrayed to the eyes of a man!'

He took her into his arms, weeping as she was, and he not far from it. 'Rosalind, perhaps yours is the truest way: but yet as common people think, and according to the way of the world——'

'Which is neither your way nor mine,' cried the girl. 'And you can say nothing to change my mind; I was too young at the time. But now—if she has died,' Rosalind said, with difficulty swallowing down the 'climbing sorrow' in her throat, 'she will know at least what we meant. And if she is living there is no rest but with our mother for Amy and me. And the child shall not suffer, Uncle John, for she shall have what is mine.'

'Rosalind, you are still in the absolute stage—you see nothing that can modify your purposes. My dear, you should have had your mother to speak to on this subject. There are two men here, Rosalind, to whom . . . have you not some duty, some obligation? They both seem to me to be waiting—for what, Rosalind?'

Rosalind detached herself from her uncle's arm. A crimson flush covered her face. 'Is it—dishonourable?' she said.

In the midst of his emotion John Trevanion could not suppress a smile. 'That is, perhaps, a strong word.'

'It would be dishonourable in a man,' she cried, lifting her eyes with a hot colour under them which seemed to scorch her.

'It would be impossible in a man, Rosalind,' he said gravely; 'the circumstances are altogether different. And yet you too owe something to Roland, who has loved you all his life, poor fellow, and to Rivers, who has come here neglecting everything for your sake. I do not know,' he added, in a harsher tone, 'whether there may not be still another claim.'

'I think you are unjust, Uncle John,' she said, with tremulous dignity. 'And if it is as you say, these gentlemen have followed their own inclinations, not mine. Am I bound because they have seen fit—— But that would be slavery for a woman.' Then her countenance cleared a little, and she added, 'When you know all that is in my mind, you will not disapprove.'

'I hope you will make a wise decision, Rosalind,' he said. 'But at least do nothing—make up your mind to nothing—till the time comes.' He spoke vaguely, and so did she, but in the excitement of their minds neither remarked this in the other. For he had not hinted to her, nor she to him, the possibility of some great new event which might happen at any moment and change all plans and thoughts.

CHAPTER LVII.

ROSALIND left her uncle with the thrill of her resolution in all her veins. She met, as she crossed the ante-room, Rivers, who had just come in and was standing waiting for a reply to the petition to be admitted to see her which he had just sent by a servant. She came upon him suddenly while he stood there, himself wound up to high tension, full of passion and urgency, feeling himself ill-used, and determined that now at last this question should be settled. He had failed indeed in pushing his suit by means of the mysterious stranger whom he had not seen again; but this made him only return with additional vehemence to his own claim, the claim of a man who had waited a year for his answer. But when he saw Rosalind there came over him that instant softening which is so apt to follow an unusual warmth of angry feeling, when we are 'wroth with those we love.' He thought at first that she had

come to him in answer to his message, granting all he asked by that gracious personal response. 'Rosalind!' he cried, putting out his hands. But next moment his countenance reflected the blush in hers, as she turned to him startled, not comprehending and shrinking from this enthusiastic address. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, crushing his hat in his hands. 'I was taken by surprise. Miss Trevanion, I had just sent to ask——'

Rosalind was seized by a sort of helpless terror. She was afraid of him and his passion. She said, 'Uncle John is in his room. Oh, forgive me, please! If it is me, will you wait —oh, will you be so kind as to wait till Thursday? Everything will be settled then. I shall know then what I have to do. Mr. Rivers, I am very sorry to give you so much trouble——'

'Trouble!' he cried; his voice was almost inarticulate in the excess of emotion. 'How can you use such words to me? As if trouble had anything to do with it; if you would send me to the end of the earth, so long as it was to serve you, or give me one of the labours of Hercules——Yes, I know I am extravagant. One becomes extravagant in the state of mind

in which—— And to hear you speak of trouble——'

'Mr. Rivers,' said Rosalind, humble in her sense of guilt, 'I have a great many things to think of. You don't know how serious it is; but on Thursday I shall be of age, and then I can decide. Come then, if you will, and I will tell you. Oh, let me tell you on Thursday—not now!'

'That does not sound very hopeful for me,' he said. 'Miss Trevanion, remember that I have waited a year for my answer—few men do that without—without——'

And then he paused, and looked at her with an air which was at once fierce and piteous, defiant and imploring. And Rosalind shrank with a sense of guilt, feeling that she had no right to hold him in suspense, yet frightened by his vehemence, and too much agitated to know what to say.

'On Thursday,' she said, mechanically; 'on Thursday—— You shall not complain of me any more.' She held out her hand to him with a smile, apologetic and deprecatory, which was very sweet, which threw him into a bewilderment unspeakable. She was cruel without knowing it, without intending it. She

had, she thought, something to make up to this man, and how could she do it but by kindness—by showing him that she was grateful—that she liked and honoured him? He went away asking himself a thousand questions, going over and over her simple words, extracting meanings from them of which they were entirely innocent, framing them at last to the signification which he wished. He started from Bonport full of doubt and uneasiness, but before he reached his hotel a foolish elation had got the better of these sadder sentiments. He said to himself that these words could have but one meaning. 'You shall not complain of me any more.' But if she cast him off after this long probation he would have very good reason to complain. It was impossible that she should prepare a refusal by such words; and indeed if she had meant to refuse him could she have postponed her answer again? Is it not honour in a woman to say 'No' without delay, unless she means to say 'Yes'? It is the only claim of honour upon her, who makes so many claims upon the honour of men, to say 'No' if she means 'No.' No one could mistake that primary rule. When she said 'Thursday,' was it not the last assurance she

could give before a final acceptance, and—'You shall not complain of me any more'? This is a consequence of the competitive system in love which Mr. Ruskin evidently did not foresee, for Rosalind, on the other hand, was right enough when she tried to assure herself that she had not wished for his love, had not sought it in any way that she should be made responsible for its discomfiture. Rivers employed his time of suspense in making arrangements for his departure. He was a proud man, and he would not have it said that he had left Aix hastily in consequence of his disappointment. In the evening he wrote some letters, vaguely announcing a speedy return. 'Perhaps almost as soon as you receive this,' he said, always guarding against the possibility of a sudden departure; and then he said to himself that such a thing was impossible. This was how he spent the intervening days. He had almost forgotten by this time, in the intensity of personal feeling, the disappointment and shock to his pride involved in the fact that the lady of the garden had appeared no more.

In the meantime, while all this was going on, Reginald was out on the shining water in a

boat, which was the first thing the English boy turned to in that urgent necessity for 'something to do' which is the first thought of his mind. He had taken Sophy with him condescendingly for want of a better, reflecting contemptuously all the time on the desertion of that beggar Hamerton, with whom he was no longer the first object. But Sophy was by no means without advantages as a companion. He sculled her out half a mile from shore with the intention of teaching her how to row on the way back, but Sophy had made herself more amusing in another way by that time, and he was willing to do the work while she maintained the conversation. Sophy was nearly as good as Scheherazade. She kept up her narrative, or series of narratives, with scarcely a pause to take breath, for she was very young and very long-winded, with her lungs in perfect condition, and her stories had this advantage, to the primitive intelligence that is, that they were all true—which is to say that they were all about real persons, and spiced by that natural inclination to take the worst view of everything, which unfortunately is so often justified by the results, and makes a storyteller piquant, popular, and detested.

Sophy had a great future before her in this way, and in the meantime she made Reginald acquainted with everything, as they both concluded, that he ought to know. She told him about Everard, and the saving of Amy and Johnny, which he concluded to be a 'plant' and 'just like the fellow'; and about the encouragement Rosalind gave him, at which Rex swore, to the horror yet delight of his little sister, great *real* oaths. And then the story quickened and the interest rose as she told him about the apparitions, about what the children saw, and finally, under a vow of secrecy (which she had also administered to Russell), what she herself saw, and the conclusion she had formed. When she came to this point of her story, Reginald was too much excited even to swear. He kept silence with a dark countenance, and listened, leaning forward on his oars with a rapt attention that flattered Sophy. 'I told Uncle John,' cried the child, 'and he asked me what I was going to do? How could I do anything, Rex? I watched because I don't believe in ghosts, and I knew it could not be a ghost. But what could I do at my age? And besides, I did not actually see her so as to

speak to her. I only touched her as she passed.'

'And you are sure it was——' The boy was older than Sophy, and understood better. He could not speak so glibly of everything as she did.

'Mamma? Yes, of course I am sure. I don't take fits like the rest; I always know what I see. Don't you think Uncle John was the one to do something about it, Rex? And he has not done anything. It could never be thought that it was a thing for me.'

'I'll tell you what, Sophy,' said Rex, almost losing his oars in his vehemence; 'soon it'll have to be a thing for me. I can't let things go on like this with all Aunt Sophy's muddlings and Uncle John's. The children will be driven out of their senses; and Rosalind is just a romantic—— I am the head of the family, and I shall have to interfere.'

'But you are only seventeen,' said Sophy, her eyes starting from their sockets with excitement and delight.

'But I am the head of the house. John Trevanion may give himself as many airs as he likes, but he is only a younger son. After all, it is I that have got to decide what's right for

my family. I have been thinking a great deal about it,' he cried. 'If—if Mrs. Trevanion is to come like this frightening people out of their wits——'

'Oh, Reginald,' cried Sophy, with a mixture of admiration and horror, 'how can you call mamma Mrs. Trevanion?'

'That's her name,' said the boy. His lips quivered a little, to do him justice, and his face was darkly red with passion, which was scarcely his fault, so unnatural were all the circumstances. 'I am going to insist that she should live somewhere, so that a fellow may say where she lives. It's awful when people ask you where's your mother, not to be able to say. I suppose she has enough to live on. I shall propose to let her choose where she pleases, but to make her stay in one place, so that she can be found when she is wanted. Amy could be sent to her for a bit, and then the fuss would be over——'

'But, Rex, you said we should lose all our money——'

'Oh, bother!' cried the boy. 'Who's to say anything? Should I make a trial and expose everything to take her money from Amy? (It isn't so very much you have, any of

you, that I should mind.) I suppose even, if I insisted, they might take a villa for her here or somewhere. And then one could say she lived abroad for her health. That is what people do every day. I know lots of fellows whose father, or their mother, or some one, lives abroad for their health. It would be more respectable. It would be a thing you could talk about when it was necessary,' Rex said.

Sophy's mind was scarcely yet open to this view of the question. 'I wish you had told me,' she said, peevishly, 'that one could get out of it like that; for I should have liked to speak to mamma——'

'I don't know that we *can* get out of it like that. The law is very funny; it may be impossible, perhaps. But at all events,' said Reginald, recovering his oars, and giving one great impulse forward with all his strength, which made the boat shoot along the lake like a living thing, 'I know that I won't let it be muddled any longer if I can help it, and that I am going to interfere.'

CHAPTER LVIII.

ROLAND HAMERTON did not find any trace of her. He had pledged himself easily, in utter ignorance of all ways and means, to find her, knowing nothing, neither how to set about such a search, or where he was likely to meet with success in it. It is easy for a young man in his fervour to declare that he is able to do anything for the girl he loves, and to feel that in that inspiration he is sure to carry all before him. But love will not trace the lost even when it is the agony of love for the lost, and that passion of awful longing, anxiety, and fear which is perhaps the most profound of all human emotions. The fact that he loved Rosalind did not convert him into that sublimated and heroic version of a detective officer which is to be found more often in fiction than in reality. He, too, went to all the hotels, as John Trevanion had done; he walked about incessantly, looking at everybody he met, and trying hard in his bad

French to push cunning inquiries everywhere—inquiries which he thought cunning, but which were in reality only very innocently anxious, betraying his object in the plainest way. 'A tall lady, English, with remains of great beauty.' 'Oui, monsieur, nous la connaissons;' a dozen such lively responses were made to him, and he was sent in consequence to wander about as many villas, to prowl in the gardens of various hotels, rewarded by the sight of some fine Englishwomen and some scarecrows, but never with the most distant glimpse of the woman he sought. He did, however, meet and recognise almost at every turn the young fellow whose appearances at Bonport had been few since Rosalind's repulse, but whom he had seen several times in attendance upon Mrs. Lennox, and of whom he knew that he was understood to have been seen in the village at Highcourt, presumably on account of Rosalind, and was therefore a suitor, too, and a rival. Something indefinable in his air, though Roland did not know him sufficiently to be a just judge, had increased at first the natural sensation of angry scorn with which a young lover looks upon another man who has presumed to lift his eyes to the same *objet adoré*; but presently there arose

in his mind something of that same sensation of fellowship which had drawn him on the first night of his arrival towards Rivers. They were in 'the same box.' No doubt she was too good for any of them, and Everard had not the sign and seal of the English gentleman about him—the one thing indispensable; but yet there was a certain brotherhood even in the rivalry. Roland addressed him at last when he met him coming round one of the corners, where he himself was posted, gazing blankly at an English lady pointed out to him by an officious boatman from the lake. His gaze over a wall, his furtive aspect when discovered, all required, he felt, explanation. 'I think we almost know each other,' he said, in a not unfriendly tone. Everard took off his hat with the instinct of a man who has acquired such breeding as he has in foreign countries, an action for which, as was natural, the Englishman mildly despised him. 'I have seen you, at least, often,' he replied. And then Roland plunged into his subject.

'Look here! You know the Trevanions, don't you? Oh yes, I heard all about it—the children and all that. I am a very old friend,' Roland dwelt upon these words by way of

showing that a stranger was altogether out of competition with him, in this respect at least. 'There is a lady in whom they are all—very much interested, to say the least, living somewhere about here: but I don't know where, and nobody seems to know. You seem to be very well up to all the ways of the place; perhaps you could help me. Ros—— I mean,' said Roland, with a cough to obliterate the syllable, 'they would all be very grateful to anyone who would find——'

'What,' said Everard slowly, looking in Roland's face, 'is the lady's name?'

It was the most natural question; and yet the one man put it with a depth of significance which to a keener observer than Roland would have proved his previous knowledge; while the other stood entirely disconcerted, and not knowing how to reply. It was perfectly natural; but somehow he had not thought of it as a probable question. And he was not prepared with an answer.

'Oh—ah—her name. Well, she is a kind of a relation, you know—and her name would be—Trevanion.'

'Oh, her name would be Trevanion? Is

there supposed to be any chance that she would change her name?'

'Why do you ask such a question?'

'I thought, by the way you spoke, as if there might be a doubt.'

'No,' said Roland after a moment, 'I never thought—I don't think it's likely. Why should she change her name?'

Everard answered with great softness, 'I don't know anything about it. Something in your tone suggested the idea, but no doubt I am wrong. No, I cannot say, all in a moment, that I am acquainted——' Here his want of experience told like Roland's. He was very willing, nay anxious, to deceive, but did not know how. He coloured and made a momentary pause. 'But I will inquire,' he said, 'if it is a thing that the—Trevanions want to find out.'

Roland looked at him with instinctive suspicion, but he did not know what he suspected. He had no desire, however, to put this quest out of his own hands into those of a man who might make capital of it as he himself intended to do. He said hastily, 'Oh, I don't want to put you to trouble. I think I am on the scent.

If you hear anything, however, and would come in and see me at the hotel—to-night.'

The other looked at him with something in his face which Roland did not understand. Was it a kind of sardonic smile? Was it offence? He ended by repeating, 'I will inquire,' and took off his hat again in that Frenchified way.

And Roland went on, unaided, somewhat discouraged indeed, with his inquiries. Sometimes he saw in the distance a figure in the crowd which he thought he recognised, and hurried after it, but never with any success. For either it was gone when he reached the spot, or turned out to be one of the ordinary people about; for of course there were many tall ladies wearing black to be seen about the streets of Aix, and most of them English. He trudged about all that day and the next with a heavy heart, his high hopes abandoning him and the search seeming hopeless. He became aware when night fell that he was not alone in his quest. There drifted past him at intervals, hurried, flushed, and breathless, with her cloak hanging from her shoulders, her bonnet blown back from her head, her eyes always far in

front of her, investigating every corner, a woman, so instinct with keen suspicion and what looked like a thirst for blood, that she attracted the looks even of the careless passers-by, and was followed, till she outstripped him, by more than one languid gendarme. Her purpose was so much more individual than she was, that for a time in the features of this human sleuth-hound he failed to recognise Russell. But it was Russell, as he soon saw, with a mixture of alarm and horror. It seemed to him that some tragic force of harm was in this woman's hand, and that while he wandered vaguely round and round discovering nothing, she, grim with hatred and revenge, was on the track.

CHAPTER LIX.

When John Trevanion questioned Everard, as already recorded, the young man, though greatly disconcerted, had made him a very unexpected reply. He had the boldness to say what was so near the truth that there was all the assurance of conviction in his tone, and John, on his side, was confounded. Everard had declared to him that there was a family connection, a relationship, between himself and Mr. Trevanion, though on being more closely questioned, he declined to explain how it was, that is, he postponed the explanation, saying that he could only make the matter clear by reference to another relation, who could give him the exact information. It was a bold thought, conceived at the moment, and carried through with the daring of desperation. He felt, before it was half said, that John Trevanion was impressed by the reality in his tone, and that if he dared further, and told all his tale, the

position of affairs might be changed. But Rosalind's reply to the sudden declaration which in his boldness he had made, and to his vague, ill-advised promises to reward her if she would listen to him, had driven for some days everything out of his mind; and when he met Roland Hamerton he was but beginning to recall his courage, and to say to himself that there was still something which might be done, and that things were not perhaps so hopeless as they seemed. From that brief interview he went away full of a sudden resolution. If after all this card was the one to play, did not he hold it in his hand? If it was by means of the lost mother that Rosalind was to be won, it was by the same means alone that he could prove to John Trevanion all he had promised to prove, and thus set himself right with Rosalind's guardian. Thoughts crowded fast upon him as he turned away, instinctively making a round to escape Hamerton's scrutiny. This led him back at length to the precincts of the hotel, where he plunged among the shrubbery, passing round behind the house, and entered by a small door which was almost hid by a clump of laurels. A short stair led from this to a small entirely secluded

apartment separated from the other part of the hotel. The room which young Everard entered with a sort of authoritative familiarity was well lighted with three large windows opening upon the garden, but seemed to be a sort of receptacle for all the old furniture despised elsewhere. It had but one occupant, who put down the book when Everard came in, and looked up with a faint, inquiring smile. The reader does not need to be told who was the banished woman who sat here, shut out and separated from the external world. She had thought it wise, amid the risks of travel, to call herself by the name he bore, and had been living here, as everywhere, in complete retirement, before the arrival of the Trevanions. The apartment which she occupied was cheap and quiet, one of which recommendations was of weight with her in consequence of Edmund's expenses; the other for reasons of her own. She had changed greatly in the course of these two years, not only by becoming very thin and worn, but also from a kind of moral exhaustion which had taken the place of that personal power and dignity which were once the prevailing expression of her face. She had borne much in the former part of her life

without having the life itself crushed out of her; but her complete transference to a strange world, her absorption in one sole subject of interest which presented nothing noble, nothing elevated, and finally the existence of a perpetual petty conflict in which she was always the loser, a struggle to make a small nature into a great one, or rather to deal with the small nature as if it were a great one, to attribute to it finer motives than it could even understand, and to appeal with incessant failure to generosities which did not exist—this had taken the strength out of Mrs. Trevanion. Her face had an air of exhausted and hopeless effort. She saw the young man approaching with a smile, which, though faint, was yet one of welcome. To be ready to receive him whenever he should appear, to be always ready and on the watch for any gleam of higher meaning, to be dull to no better impulse, but always waiting for the good, that was the part she had to play. But she was no longer impatient, no longer eager to thrust him into her own world, to convey to him her own thoughts. That she knew was an endeavour without hope. And, as a matter of fact, she had little hope in anything. She had done all that she knew

how to do. If anything further was possible she was unaware what it was: and her face, like her heart, was worn out. Yet she looked up with what was not unlike a cheerful expectation. 'Well, Edmund?' she said.

He threw down his hat on the table, giving emphasis to what he said.

'I have brought you some news—I don't know if you will like it or not, or if it will be a surprise. The Trevanions are after you.'

The smile faded away from her face, but seemed to linger pathetically in her eyes as she looked at him and repeated, 'After me!' with a start.

'Yes. Of course all those visits and apparitions couldn't be without effect. You must have known that; and you can't say I did not warn you. They are moving heaven and earth——'

'How can they do that?' she asked; and then, 'You reproach me justly, Edmund; not so much as I reproach myself. I was mad to do it, and frighten—my poor children.'

'More than that,' he said, as if he took a pleasure in adding colour to the picture; 'the little girl has gone all wrong in her head. She walks in her sleep and says she is looking for her mother.'

The tears sprung to Mrs. Trevanion's eyes. 'Oh, Edmund!' she said, 'you wring my heart; and yet it is sweet! My little girl! she does not forget me!'

'Children don't forget,' he said, gloomily. 'I didn't. I cried for you often enough, but you never came to me.'

She gave him once more a piteous look, to which the tears in her eyes added pathos. 'Not—till it was too late,' she said.

'Not—till you were obliged; till you had no one else to go to,' said he. 'And you have not done very much for me since—nothing that you could help. Look here! You can make up for that now, if you like; there's every opportunity now.'

'What is it, Edmund?' She relapsed into the chair which supplied a sort of framework on which mind and body seemed alike to rest.

Edmund drew a chair opposite to her, close to her, and threw himself down in it. His hand raised to enhance his rhetoric was almost like the threat of a blow.

'Look here!' he repeated; 'I have told you before all I feel about—Rosalind!'

'And I have told you,' she said, with a faint rising colour, 'that you have no right to

call her by that name. There is no sort of link between Miss Trevanion and you.'

'*She* doesn't think so,' he answered, growing red. 'She has always felt there was a link, although she didn't know what. There are two other fellows after her now. I know that one of them, and I rather think both of them, are hunting for you, by way of getting a hold on Rosalind. One of them asked me just now if I wouldn't help him. Me! And that woman that was the nurse at Highcourt, that began all the mischief, is here. So you will be hunted out whatever you do. And John Trevanion is at me, asking me what had I to do with his brother? I don't know how he knows; but he does know. I've told him there was a family connection, but that I couldn't say what till I had consulted——'

'You said *that*, Edmund? A—family connection!'

'Yes, I did. What else could I say? And isn't it true? Now, here are two things you can do: one would be kind, generous, all that I don't expect from you; the other would at least leave us to fight fair. Look here! I believe they would be quite glad. It would be a way of smoothing up everything and

stopping all sorts of scandal. Come up there with me straight and tell them who I am; and tell Rosalind that you want her to cast off the others and marry me. She will do whatever you tell her.'

'Never, never, Edmund!' She had begun to shake her head, looking at him, for some time before he would permit her voice to be heard. 'Oh, ask me anything but that!'

'Anything but the only thing,' he said; 'that is like you; that is always the way. Can't you see it would be a way of smoothing over everything? It would free Rosalind—it would free them all: if she were my——'

She put out her hand to stop him. 'No, Edmund, you must not say it. I cannot permit it. That cannot be. You do not understand her, nor she you. I can never permit it, even if—even if——'

'Even if——? You mean to say if she were —fond of me——'

Mrs. Trevanion uttered a low cry. 'Edmund, I will rather go and tell her, what I have told you—that you could never understand each other—that you are different, wholly different—that nothing of the kind could be——'

He glared at her with a fierce rage, by which she was no longer frightened, which she had seen before, but which produced in her overwrought mind a flutter of the old sickening misery which had fallen into so hopeless a calm. 'That is what you will do for me—when affairs come to an issue!—that is all—after everything you have promised, everything you have said—that is all; but I might have known——'

She made no reply. She was so subdued in her nature by all the hopeless struggles of the past, that she did not say a word in self-defence.

'Then,' he said, rising up from his chair, throwing out his hands as though putting her out of her place, 'go! That's the only other thing you can do for me. Get out of this. Why stay till they come and drag you out to the light and expose you—and me? If you won't do the one thing for me, do the other, and make no more mischief, for the love of heaven—if you care for heaven or for love either,' he added, making a stride towards the table and seizing his hat again. He did not, however, rush away then, as seemed his first intention, but stood for a moment irresolute,

not looking at her, holding his hat in his hand.

'Edmund,' she said, 'you are always sorry afterwards when you say such things to me.'

'No,' he said, 'I'm not sorry—don't flatter yourself—I mean every word I say. You've been my worst enemy all my life. And since you've been with me it's been worst of all. You've made me your slave; you've pretended to make a gentleman of me, and you've made me a slave. I have never had my own way or my fling, but had to drag about with you. And now, when you really could do me good—when you could help me to marry the girl I like, and reform, and everything—you won't! You tell me point-blank you won't! You say you'll rather ruin me than help me. Do you call that the sort of thing a man has a right to expect—after all I have suffered in the past?'

'Edmund, I have always told you that Miss Trevanion——'

'Rosalind!' he said. 'Whatever you choose to call her, I shall call her by her name. I have been everything with them till now, when this friend of yours, this Uncle John, has come. And you can put it all right with

him if you please, in a moment, and make my way clear. And now you say you won't! Oh, yes, I know you well enough. Let all those little things go crazy and everybody be put out, rather than lend a real helping hand to me——'

'Edmund!' she called to him, holding out her hands as he rushed to the door; but he felt he had got a little advantage and would not risk the loss of it again. He turned round for a moment and addressed her with a sort of solemnity.

'To-morrow!' he said. 'I'll give you till to-morrow to think it over, and then——I'll do for myself whatever I find it best to do.'

For a minute or two after the closing of the door, which was noisy and sharp, there was no further movement in the dim room. Mrs. Trevanion sat motionless, even from thought. The frame work of the chair supported her, held her up, but for the moment, as it seemed to her, nothing else in earth and heaven. She sat entirely silent, passive, as she had done so often during these years, all her former habits of mind arrested. Once she had been a woman of energy, to whom a defeat or discouragement was but a new beginning, whose resources were manifold; but all these

had been exhausted. She sat in the torpor of that hopelessness which had become habitual to her, life failing and everything in life. As she sat thus, an inner door opened, and another figure, which had grown strangely like her own in the close and continual intercourse between them, came in softly. Jane was noiseless as her mistress, almost as worn as her mistress, moving like a shadow across the room. Her presence made a change in the motionless atmosphere. Madam was no longer alone; and with the softening touch of that devotion which had accompanied all her wanderings for so great a portion of her life, there arose in her a certain re-awakening, a faint flowing of the old vitality. There were, indeed, many reasons why the ice should be broken and the stream resume its flowing. She raised herself a little in her chair, and then she spoke. 'Jane,' she said, 'Jane: I have news of the children——'

'God bless them,' said Jane. She put the books down out of her hands, which she had been pretending to arrange, and turned her face towards her mistress, who said 'Amen!' with a sudden gleam and lighting up of her pale face like the sky after a storm.

'I have done very wrong,' said Mrs. Trevanion; 'there is never self-indulgence in the world but some one suffers for it. Jane, my little Amy is ill. She dreams about her poor mother. She has taken to walking in her sleep.'

'Well, Madam, that's no great harm. I have heard of many children who did——'

'But not through—oh, such selfish folly as mine. I have grown so weak, such a fool. And they have sent for Russell, and Russell is here. You may meet her any day——'

'Russell!' Jane said, with an air of dismay, clasping her hands; 'then, Madam, you must make up your mind what you will do, for Russell is not one to be balked. She will find us out.'

'Why should I fear to be found out?' said Mrs. Trevanion, with a faint smile. 'No one now can harm me. Jane, everything has been done that can be done to us. I do not fear Russell or anyone. And sometimes it seems to me that I have been wrong all along. I think now I have made up my mind——'

'To what? oh, to what, Madam?' Jane cried.

'I am not well,' said Mrs. Trevanion; 'I am only a shadow of myself. I am not at all

sure but perhaps I may be going to die. No, no—I have no presentiments, Jane. It is only people who want to live who have presentiments, and life has few charms for me. But look at me; you can see through my hands almost. I am dreadfully tired coming up those stairs. I should not be surprised if I were to die.'

She said this apologetically, as if she were putting forth a plea to which perhaps objections might be made.

'You have come through a deal, Madam,' said Jane, with the matter-of-fact tone of her class. 'It is no wonder if you are thin; you have had a great deal of anxiety. But trouble doesn't kill.'

'Sometimes,' said her mistress, with a smile, 'in the long run. But I don't say I am sure. Only, if that was so—there would be no need to deny myself.'

'You will send for the children and Miss Rosalind.' Jane clasped her hands with a cry of anticipation in which her whole heart went forth.

'That would be worth dying for,' said Madam, 'to have them all peaceably for perhaps a day or two. Ah! but I would need to

be very bad before we could do that; and I am not ill, not that I know. I have thought of something else, Jane. It appears that they have found out, or think they have found out, that I am here. I cannot just steal away again as I did before. I will go to them and see them all. Ah, don't look so pleased; that probably means that we shall have to leave afterwards at once. Unless things were to happen so well, you know,' she said, with a smile, 'as that I should just really—die there: which would be ideal—but therefore not to be hoped for.'

'Oh, Madam,' said Jane, with a sob, 'you don't think, when you say that——'

'Of you, my only friend? But I do. You would be glad to think, after a while, that I had got over it all. And what could happen better to me than that I should die among my own? I am of little use to Edmund—far less than I hoped. Perhaps I had no right to hope. One cannot give up one's duties for years, and then take them back again. God forgive me for leaving him—and him for all the faults that better training might have saved him from. All the tragedy began in that, and ends in that. I did wrong, and the issue is—this.'

'So long ago, Madam—so long ago. And it all seemed so simple.'

'To give up my child for his good, and then to be forced to give up my other children, not for their good or mine? I sometimes wonder how it was that I never told John Trevanion, who was always my friend. Why did I leave Highcourt so, without a word to anyone? It all seems confused now, as if I might have done better. I might have cleared myself at least; I might have told them. I should like to give myself one great indulgence, Jane, before I die.'

'Madam!' Jane cried, with a panic which her words belied, 'I am sure that it is only fancy; you are not going to die.'

'Perhaps,' said her mistress; 'I am not sure at all. I told you so; but only I should not be surprised. Whether it is death, or whether it is life, something new is coming. We must be ghosts no longer; we must come back to our real selves—you and I, Jane. We will not let ourselves be hunted down, but come out in the eye of day. It would be strange if Russell had the power to frighten me. And did I tell you that Reginald is here, too, and young Roland Hamerton, who was at

Highcourt that night? They are all gathered together again for the end of the tragedy, Jane.'

'Oh, Madam,' cried Jane, 'perhaps for setting it all right.'

Her mistress smiled somewhat dreamily. 'I do not see how that can be. And even if it were so, it will not change the state of affairs. But we are not going to allow ourselves to be found out by Russell,' she added, with a certain sense of the ludicrous. The occasion was not gay; and yet there was something natural—almost a sound of amusement—in the laugh with which she spoke. Jane looked at her wistfully, shaking her head.

'When I think of all that you have gone through, and that you can laugh still! But perhaps it is better than crying,' Jane said.

Mrs. Trevanion nodded her head in assent, and there was silence in the dim room where these two women spent their lives. It gave her a certain pleasure to see Jane moving about. There was a sort of lull of painful sensation, a calm, and disinclination for any exertion on her own part; a mood in which it was grateful to see another entirely occupied

with her wants; anxious only to invent more wants for her, and means of doing her service. In the languor of this quiet life it was not wonderful that Mrs. Trevanion should feel her life ebbing away. She began to look forward to the end of the tragedy with a pleased acquiescence. She had yielded to her fate at first, understanding it to be hopeless to strive against it; with perhaps a recoil from actual contact with the scandal and the shame which was as much pride as submission; but at that time her strength was not abated, nor any habit of living lost. Now that period of anguish seemed far off, and she judged herself and her actions not without a great pity and understanding, but yet not without some disapproval. She thought over it all as she sat lying back in the great chair with Jane moving softly about. She would not repeat the decisive and hasty step she had once taken. She could not now, alas! believe in the atonement which she had then thought might still be practicable in respect to the son whom she had given up in his childhood; nor did she think that it was well, as she had done then, to abandon everything without a word—to leave her reputation at the mercy of every evil-speaker. To say

nothing for herself, to leave her dead husband's memory unassailed by any defence she could put forth, and to cut short the anguish of parting, for her children as well as for herself, had then seemed to her the best. And she had fondly thought, with what she now called vanity and the delusion of self-regard, that by devoting herself to him who was the cause of all her troubles, she might make up for the evils which her desertion of him had inflicted. These were mistakes, she recognised now, and must not be repeated. 'I was a fool,' she said to herself, softly, with a realisation of the misery of the past which was acute yet dim, as if the sufferer had been another person. Jane paused at the sound of her voice and came towards her—'Madam, did you speak?

'No, except to myself. My faithful Jane, you have suffered everything with me. We are not going to hide ourselves any longer,' she replied.

CHAPTER LX.

A RESOLUTION thus taken is not however strong enough to overcome the habits which have grown with years. Mrs. Trevanion had been so long in the background that she shrank from the idea of presenting herself again to what seemed to her the view of the world. She postponed all further steps with a conscious cowardice, at which with faint humour she was still able to smile.

'We are two owls,' she said. 'Jane, we will make a little reconnaissance first in the evening. There is still a moon, though it is a little late, and the lake in the moonlight is a fine sight.'

'But, Madam, you were not thinking of the lake,' said Jane.

'No,' her mistress said; 'the sight of a roof and four walls within which are ——that is more to you and me than the most beautiful scenery in the world. And to think for how

many years I had nothing to do but to walk from my room to the nursery to see them all!'

Jane shook her head with silent sympathy. 'And it will be so again,' she said, soothingly, 'when Mr. Rex is of age. I have always said to myself it would come right then.'

It was now Madam's turn to shake her head. The smile died away from her face. 'I would rather not,' she said, hurriedly, 'put him to that proof. It would be a terrible test to put a young creature to. Oh no, no, Jane! If he failed how could I bear it?—or did for duty what should be done for love? No, no; the boy must not be put to such a test.'

In the evening she carried out her idea of making a reconnaissance. She set out when the moon was rising in a vaporous autumnal sky, clearing slowly as the light increased. Madam threw back the heavy veil which she usually wore, and breathed in the keen sweet air with almost a pang of pleasure. She grasped Jane's arm as they drove slowly round the tufted mound upon which the house of Bonport stood—then, as the coachman paused for further instructions in the shade of the little eminence on the further side, she whispered

breathlessly that she would walk a little way and see it nearer. They got out accordingly, both mistress and maid, tremulous with excitement. All was so still—not a creature about—the lighted windows shining among the trees; there seemed no harm in venturing within the gate which was open, in ascending the slope a little way. Mrs. Trevanion had begun to say faintly, half to herself, half to her companion, 'This is vanity: it is no use—it is no use,' when suddenly her grasp upon Jane's arm tightened so that the faithful maid had to make an effort not to cry out. 'What is that?' she said in a shrill whisper at Jane's ear. It was nothing more than a little speck, but it moved along under the edge of the overhanging trees, with evident life in it—a speck which, as it emerged into the moonlight, became of a dazzling whiteness like a pale flame gliding across the solid darkness. They both stood still for a moment in awe and wonder, clinging to each other. Then Madam forsook her maid's arm, and went forward with a swift and noiseless step very different from her former lingering. Jane followed breathless, afraid, not capable of the same speed. No doubt had been in Mrs. Trevanion's mind from the first. The night air

lifted now and then a lock of the child's hair and blew cold through her long white night-dress, but she went on steadily towards the side of the lake. Once more Amy was absorbed in her dream that her mother was waiting for her there: and all unconscious, wrapped in her sleep, had set out to find the one great thing wanting in her life. The mother followed her, conscious of nothing save a great throbbing of head and heart. Thus they went on till the white breadth of the lake flooded with moonlight lay before them. Then for the first time Amy wavered. She came to a pause: something disturbed the absorption of her state, but without awaking her. 'Mamma,' she said, 'where are you, mamma?'

'I am here, my darling.' Mrs. Trevanion's voice was choked and scarcely audible in the strange mystery of this encounter. She dared not clasp her child in her arms, but stood trembling, watching every indication, terrified to disturb the illusion, yet hungering for the touch of the little creature who was her own. Amy's little face showed no surprise, its lines softened with a smile of pleasure; she put out her cold hand and placed it in that which trembled to receive it. It was no wonder to Amy in her

dream to put her hand into her mother's. She gave herself up to this beloved guidance without any surprise or doubt, and obeyed the impulse given her without the least resistance, with a smile of heavenly satisfaction on her face. All Amy's troubles were over when her hand was in her mother's hand. Nor was her little soul, in its soft confusion and unconsciousness, aware of any previous separation, or any transport of reunion. She went where her mother led, calm as if that mother had never been parted from her. As for Mrs. Trevanion, the tumult of trouble and joy in her soul is impossible to describe. She made an imperative gesture to Jane, who had come panting after her, and now stood half-stupefied in the way, only prevented by that stupor of astonishment from bursting out into sobs and cries. Her mistress could not speak; her face was not visible in the shadow as she turned her back upon the lake which revealed this wonderful group fully against its shining background. There was no sound audible but the faint stir of the leaves, the plash of the water, the cadence of her quick breathing. Jane followed in an excitement almost as overpowering. There was not a word said. Mrs. Trevanion

turned back and made her way through the trees, along the winding path, with not a pause or mistake. It was dark among the bushes, but she divined the way, and though both strength and breath would have failed her in other circumstances, there was no sign of faltering now. The little terrace in front of the house, to which they reached at last, was brilliant with moonlight. And here she paused, the child standing still in perfect calm, having resigned her very soul into her mother's hands.

Then for the first time a great fainting and trembling seized upon her. She held out her disengaged hand to Jane. 'What am I to do?' she said with an appeal to which Jane, trembling, could give no reply. The closed doors, the curtained windows, were all dark. A momentary struggle rose in Mrs. Trevanion's mind, a wild impulse to carry the child away, to take her into her bosom, to claim her natural rights, if never again, yet for this night—mingled with a terror that seemed to take her senses from her, lest the door should suddenly open, and she be discovered. Her strength forsook her when she most wanted it. Amy stood still by her side, without a movement,

calm, satisfied, wrapped in unconsciousness, knowing nothing save that she had attained her desire, feeling neither cold nor fear in the depth of her dream.

'Madam,' said Jane in an anxious whisper, 'the child will catch her death. I'd have carried her. She has nothing on but her night-dress. She will catch her death.'

This roused the mother in a moment, with the simplest but most profound of arguments She bade Jane knock at the door, and stooping over Amy, kissed her and blessed her. Then she transferred the little hand in hers to that of her faithful maid. A shiver passed through the child's frame, but she permitted herself to be led to the door. Jane was not so self-restrained as her mistress. She lifted the little girl in her arms and began to chafe and rub her feet. The touch, though it was warm and kind, woke the little somnambulist, as the touch of the cold water had done before. She gave a scream and struggled out of Jane's arms.

And then there was a great sound of movement and alarm from the house. The door was flung open and Rosalind rushed out and seized Amy in her arms. She was followed by half the household, the servants hurrying

out one after another; and there arose a hurried tumult of questions in the midst of which Jane stole away unnoticed and escaped among the bushes, like her mistress. Mrs. Trevanion stood quite still, supporting herself against a tree while all this confused commotion went on. She distinguished Russell, who came out and looked so sharply about among the dark shrubs that for a moment she felt herself discovered, and John Trevanion, who appeared with a candle in his hand, lifting it high above his head, and inquiring who it was that had brought the child back. John's face was anxious and full of trouble; and behind him came a tall boy, slight and fair, who said there was nobody, and that Amy must have come back by herself. Then Mrs. Lennox came out with a shawl over her head, the flickering lights showing her full, comfortable person—'Who is it, John? Is there anybody? Oh come in then, come in; it is a cold night, and the child must be put to bed.' All of them stood about in their individuality, as she had left them, while she looked on in the darkness under the rustling boughs, invisible, her eyes sometimes blurred with moisture, a smile growing about her mouth. They had not changed, except the boy—her

boy! She kept her eyes on his face, through the thick shade of the leaves and the flickering of the candles. He was almost a man, God bless him—a slight moustache on his upper lip, his hair darker—and so tall like the best of the Trevanions—God bless him! But no, no, he must not be put to that test—never to that test. She would not permit it, she said to herself, with a horrible sensation in her heart, which she did not put into words, that he could not bear it. She did not seem able to move from the support of her tree even after the door was closed and all was silence again. Jane, in alarm, groped about the bushes till she had found her mistress, but did not succeed in leading her away. 'A little longer,' she said faintly. After a while a large window on the other side of the door opened, and John Trevanion came out again into the moonlight, walking up and down on the terrace with a very troubled face. By-and-by another figure appeared and Rosalind joined him. 'I came to tell you she is quite composed now—going to sleep again,' said Rosalind. 'Oh, Uncle John, something is going to happen; it is coming nearer and nearer. I am sure that, either living or dead, Amy has seen mamma.'

'My dear, all these agitations are too much for you,' said John Trevanion. 'I think I must take you away.'

'Uncle John, it is not agitation. I was not agitated to-night; I was quite at ease, thinking about—oh, thinking about very different things; I am ashamed of myself when I remember how little I was thinking. Russell is right, and I was to blame.'

'My dear, I believe there is a safeguard against bodily ailments in that condition. We must look after her better again.'

'But she has seen mamma, Uncle John!'

'Rosalind, you are so full of sense——'

'What has sense to do with it?' she cried. 'Do you think the child came back by herself? And yet there was no one with her—no one. Who else could have led her back? Mamma took away her hand and she woke. Uncle John, none of you can find her; but if she is not dead—and you say she is not dead—my mother must be here.'

Jane had dropped upon her knees, and was keeping down by force, with her face pressed against her mistress's dress, her sobs and tears. But Mrs. Trevanion clung to her tree and listened and made no sound. There

was a smile upon her face of pleasure that was heartrending, more pitiful than pain.

'My dear Rosalind,' said John, in great distress, 'my dearest girl! I have told you she is not dead. And if she is here we shall find her. We are certain to find her. Rosalind, if *she* were here, what would she say to you? Not to agitate and excite yourself, to try to be calm, to wait. My dear,' he said, with a tremble in his voice, 'your mother would never wish to disturb your life; she would like you to be—happy; she would like you—you know—your mother ——'

It appeared that he became incoherent, and could say no more.

The house was closed again and all quiet before Jane, who had been in despair, could lead Mrs. Trevanion away. She yielded at length from weakness; but she did not hear what her faithful servant said to her. Her mind had fallen, or rather risen, into a state of semi-conscious exaltation, like the ecstasy of an ascetic, as her delicate and fragile form grew numb and powerless in the damp and cold.

'Did you think anyone could stand and

hear all that and never make a sign?' she said. 'Did you see her face, Jane? It was like an angel's. I think that must be her window with the light in it. And he said her mother—— John was always my friend. He said her mother—— Where do you want me to go? I should like to stay in the porch and die there comfortably, Jane. It would be sweet; and then there could be no more quarrelling or questions, or putting anyone to the test. No test! no test! But dying there would be so easy. And Sophy Lennox would never forbid it. She would take me in, and lay me on her bed, and bury me—like a good woman. I am not unworthy of it. I am not a bad woman, Jane.'

'Oh, Madam,' cried Jane, distracted, 'do you know the carriage is waiting all this time? And the people of the hotel will be frightened. Come back, for goodness' sake, come back!'

'The carriage,' she said, with a wondering air. 'Is it the Highcourt carriage, and are we going home?'

CHAPTER LXI.

THE day had come which Rosalind had looked forward to as the decisive moment. The day on which her life of submission was to be over, her independent action to begin. But to Rivers it was a day of almost greater import, the day on which he was to know, so far as she was concerned, what people call his fate. It was about noon when he set out from Aix, at a white heat of excitement, to know what was in store for him. He walked, scarcely conscious what he trod on, along the commonplace road; everything appeared to him as through a mist. His whole being was so absorbed in what was about to happen, that at the last his mind began to revolt against it. To put this power into the hands of a girl—a creature without experience or knowledge, though with all the charms which his heart recognised: to think that she, not much

more than a child in comparison with himself, should thus have his fate in her hands, and keep his whole soul in suspense and be able to determine even the tenor of his life. It was monstrous, it was ridiculous, yet true. If he left Bonport accepted, his whole career would be altered; if not—— There was a nervous tremor in him, a quiver of disquietude which he was not able to conquer. To talk of women as wanting votes or freedom, when they had in their hands such unreasonable, such ridiculous, such monstrous power as this! His mind revolted though his heart obeyed. She would not, it was possible, be herself aware of the full importance of the decision she was about to make; and yet upon that decision his whole existence would turn. A great deal has been said about the subduing power of love, yet it was maddening to think that thus, in spite of reason and every dictate of good sense, the life of a man of high intelligence and mature mind should be at the disposal of a girl. Even while he submitted to that fate, he felt in his soul the revolt against it. To young Roland it was natural and beautiful that it should be so, but to Rivers

it was not beautiful at all; it was an inconceivable weakness in human nature—a thing scarcely credible when you came to think of it. And yet, unreasonable as it was, he could not free himself or assert his own independence. He was almost glad of this indignant sentiment as he hurried along to know his fate. When he reached the terrace which surrounded the house, looking back before he entered, he saw young Everard coming in at the gate below with an enormous bouquet in his hand. What were the flowers for? Did the fool mean to propitiate her with flowers? or had he, good heavens, was it possible to conceive, that he had acquired a right to bring presents to Rosalind? This idea seemed to fill his veins with fire. The next moment he had entered into the calm of the house, which, so far as external appearances went, was so orderly, so quiet, thrilled by no excitement. He could have borne noise and confusion better. The stillness seemed to take away his breath.

And in another minute Rosalind was standing before him. She came so quickly that she must have been looking for him. There was

an alarmed look in her eyes, and she too seemed breathless as if her heart was beating more quickly than usual. Her lips were apart as if already in her mind she had begun to speak, not waiting for any question from him. All this meant, must mean, a participation in his excitement. What was she going to say to him? It was in the drawing-room, the common sitting-room, with its windows open to the terrace, whence anyone wandering about looking at the view, as every fool did, might step in at any moment and interrupt the conference. All this he was conscious of instantaneously, finding material in it both for the wild hope and the fierce despite which had been raging in him all the morning—to think not only that his fate was in this girl's hands, but that any vulgar interruption, any impertinent caller might interfere! And yet what did that matter if all was to go well?

'Mr. Rivers,' Rosalind said at once, with an eagerness which was full of agitation, 'I have asked you to come—to tell you. I am afraid you will be angry. I almost think you have reason to be angry. I want to tell you: it has not been my fault.'

He felt himself drop down from vague

sunlit heights of expectation down, down, to the end of all things, to cold and outer darkness, and looked at her blankly in the sternness and paleness of a disappointment all the greater that he had said to himself he was prepared for the worst. He had hoped to cheat fate by arming himself with that conviction; but it did not stand him in much stead. It was all he could do to speak steadily, to keep down the impulse of rising rage. 'This beginning,' he said, 'Miss Trevanion, does not seem very favourable.'

'Oh, Mr. Rivers! If I give you pain I hope you will forgive me. Perhaps I have been thoughtless—I have so much to think of, so much that has made me unhappy—and now it has all come to a crisis.'

Rivers felt that the smile with which he tried to receive this, and reply to her deprecating anxious looks, was more like a scowl than a smile. 'If this is so,' he said, 'I could not hope that my small affair should dwell in your mind.'

'Oh, do not say so. If I have been thoughtless it is not—it is not,' cried Rosalind, contradicting herself in haste, 'for want of thought. And when I tell you I have made

up my mind, that is scarcely what I mean. It is rather that one thing has taken possession of me, that I cannot help myself. If you will let me tell you——'

'Tell me that you have resolved to make another man happy and not me? That is very gracious, condescending,' he cried, scarcely able to keep control of himself; 'but perhaps, Miss Trevanion——'

'It is not that,' she cried, 'it is not that. It is something which it will take a long time to tell.' She came nearer to him as she spoke, and putting out her hand touched his arm timidly. The agitation in his face filled her with grief and self-reproach. 'Oh,' she said, 'forgive me if I have given you pain! When you spoke to me at the Elms, you would not let me answer you: and when you came here my mind was full—oh, full—so that I could not think of anything else.'

He broke into a harsh laugh. 'You do me too much honour, Miss Trevanion; perhaps I am not worthy of it. A story of love when it is not one's own—— Bah! what a savage I am! and you so kindly condescending, so sorry to give me pain! Perhaps,' he cried, more and more losing the control of himself, 'you may

think it pleasant to drag a man like me at your chariot wheels for a year; but I scarcely see the jest. You think perhaps that for a man to stake his life on the chance of a girl's favour is nothing—that to put all one's own plans aside, to postpone everything, to suspend one's being —for the payment of—a smile——' He paused for breath. He was almost beside himself with the sense of wrong—the burning and bitterness that was in his mind. He had a right to speak; a man could not thus be trifled with and the woman escape scot free.

Rosalind stood, looking at him, turning from red to pale, alarmed, bewildered, overcome. How was she, a girl hemmed in by all the precautions of gentle life, to know what was in the heart of a man in the bitterness of his disappointment and humiliation? Sorry to have given him pain! that was all she had thought of. But it had never occurred to her that the pain might turn to rage and bitterness, and that instead of the pathos of a rejected lover, she might find herself face to face with the fury of a man who felt himself outraged, and to whom it had been a matter of resentment even that she, a slight girl, should have the disposal of his fate. She turned away to

leave him without a word. But feeling something in her that must be spoken, paused a moment, holding her head high.

'I think you have forgotten yourself,' she said; 'but that is for you to judge. You have mistaken me, however, altogether, all through. What I meant to explain to you was something different—oh, very different. But there is no longer any room for that. And I think we have said enough to each other, Mr. Rivers.' He followed her as she turned towards the door. He could not let her go, neither for love nor for hate. And by this time he began to see that he had gone too far; he followed her, entreating her to pause a moment, in a changed and trembling voice. But just then there occurred an incident which brought all his fury back. Young Everard, whom he had seen on the way, and whose proceedings were so often awkward, without perception, instead of entering in the ordinary way, had somehow strayed on to the terrace with his bouquet, perhaps because no one had answered his summons at the door, perhaps from a foolish hope that he might be allowed to enter by the window, as Mrs. Lennox, in her favour for him, had sometimes permitted him to do. He now

came in sight, hesitating, in front of the open window. Rosalind was too much excited to think of ordinary rules. She was so annoyed and startled by his appearance, that she made a sudden imperative movement of her hand, waving him away. It was made in utter intolerance of his intrusion, but it seemed to Rivers like the private signal of a mutual understanding too close for words, as the young fellow's indiscretion appeared to him the evidence of privileges only to be accorded to a successful lover. He stopped short with the prayer for pardon on his lips, and bursting once more into a fierce laugh of fury, cried, 'Ah, here we have the explanation at last!'

Rosalind made no reply. She gave him a look of supreme indignation and scorn, and left him without a word—left him in possession of the field—with the other, the accepted one, the favoured lover—good heavens! standing, hesitating, in his awkward way, a shadow against the light. Rivers had come to a point at which the power of speech fails. It was all he could do to keep himself from seizing the bouquet and flinging it into the lake, and the bearer after it. But what was the use? If she indeed loved this fellow,

there could be nothing further said. He turned round with furious impatience, and flung open the door into the ante-room—to find himself, breathing fire and flame as he was, and bearing every sign of his agitation in his face, in the midst of the family party streaming in from different quarters, for luncheon, all in their ordinary guise. For luncheon! at such a moment, when the mere outside appearances of composure seemed impossible to him, and his blood was boiling in his veins.

'Why, here is Rivers,' said John Trevanion, 'at a good moment; we are just going to lunch, as you see.'

'And I am going away from Aix,' said Rivers, with a sharpness which he felt to be like a gun of distress.

'Going away! that is sudden; but so much the more reason to sit down with us once more. Come, we can't let you go.'

'Oh no, impossible to let you go, Mr. Rivers, without saying good-bye,' said the mellow voice of Mrs. Lennox. 'What a good thing we all arrived in time. The children and Rosalind would have been so disappointed to miss you. And though we are away from

home, and cannot keep it as we ought, this is a little kind of feast, you know, for it is Rosalind's birthday; so you must stay and drink her health. Oh, and here is Mr. Everard too. Tell him to put two more places directly, Sophy. And how did you know it was Rosalind's birthday, Mr. Everard? What a magnificent bouquet! Come in, come in; we cannot let you go. You must drink Rosalind's health on such an important day.'

Rivers obeyed, as in a dream; he was exhausted with his outbreak, remorseful, beginning to wonder whether, after all, *that* was the explanation? Rosalind came in alone after the rest. She was very pale, as if she had suffered too, and very grave; not a smile on her face in response to all the smiles around. For notwithstanding the excitement and distress in the house, the family party on the surface was cheerful enough, smiling youthfulness and that regard for appearances which is second nature carrying it through. The dishes were handed round as usual, a cheerful din of talk arose; Rex had an appetite beyond all satisfaction, and even John Trevanion—ill-timed as it all seemed—bore a smiling face. As for Mrs. Lennox, her voice ran on with scarcely a pause,

skimming over those depths with which she was totally unacquainted. 'And are you really going away, Mr. Rivers?' she said. 'Dear me, I am very sorry. How we shall miss you. Don't you think we shall miss Mr. Rivers dreadfully, Rosalind? But to be sure you must want to see your own people, and you must have a great deal of business to attend to after being so long away. We are going home ourselves very soon. Eh! What is that? Who is it? What are you saying, John? Oh, some message for Rosalind, I suppose.'

There was a commotion at the further end of the room, the servants attempting to restrain someone who forced her way in, in spite of them, calling loudly upon John Trevanion. It was Russell flushed and wild—in her outdoor clothes, her bonnet half falling off her head, held by the strings only, her cloak dropping from her shoulders. She pushed her way forward to John Trevanion at the foot of the table. 'Mr. John,' she cried, panting, 'I've got on the tracks of her! I told you it was no ghost. I've got on the tracks of her; and there's some here could tell you more than me.'

'What is she talking about? Oh, I think the woman must have gone mad, John! She

thinks since we brought her here that she may say anything. Send her away, send her away!'

'I'll not be sent away,' cried Russell. 'I've come to do my duty to the children, and I'll do it. Mr. John, I tell you I am on her tracks, and there's two gentlemen here that can tell you all about her. Two, the young one and another. Didn't I tell you?' The woman was intoxicated with her triumph. 'That one with the grey hair, that's a little more natural, like her own age—and this one,' cried the excited woman sharply, striking Everard on the shoulder, 'that ran off with her. And everything I ever said is proved true.'

Rivers rose to his feet instinctively as he was pointed out, and stood asking with wonder, 'What is it? What does she mean? What have I done?' Everard, who had turned round sharply when he was touched, kept his seat, throwing a quick, suspicious glance round him. John Trevanion had risen too, and so did Rex, who seized his former nurse by the arm, and tried to drag her away. The boy was furious. 'Be off with you, you —— or I'll drag you out,' he cried, crimson with passion.

At this moment, when the whole party was in commotion, the wheels of a carriage sounded in the midst of the tumult outside, and a loud knocking was heard at the door.

CHAPTER LXII.

It was difficult to explain the impulse which drew them one after another into the ante-room. On ordinary occasions it would have been the height of bad manners; and there was no reason, so far as the most of the company knew, why common laws should be postponed to the exigencies of the occasion. John Trevanion hurried out first of all, and Rosalind after him, making no apology. Then Mrs. Lennox, with a troubled face, put forth her excuses—'I am sure I beg your pardon, but as they seem to be expecting somebody, perhaps I had better go and see——' Sophy, who had devoured Russell's communications with eyes dancing with excitement, had slipped from her seat at once and vanished. Rex, with a moody face and his hands in his pockets, strolled to the door, and stood there, leaning against the opening, divided between curiosity and disgust. The three men who were rivals alone remained,

looking uneasily at each other. They were all standing up, an embarrassed group, enemies, yet driven together by stress of weather. Everard was the first to move; he tried to find an outlet, looking stealthily from one door to another.

'Don't you think,' he said at last, in a tremulous voice, 'that if there is—any family bother—we had better—go away?'

'I suppose,' said Roland Hamerton, with white lips, 'it must be something about Mrs. Trevanion.' And he too pushed forward into the ante-room, too anxious to think of politeness, anxious beyond measure to know what Rosalind was about to do.

A little circular hall, with a marble floor, was between this ante-room and the door. The sound of the carriage driving up, the knocking, the little pause while a servant hurried through to open, gave time for all these secondary proceedings. Then there was again an interval of breathless expectation. Mrs. Lennox's travelling servant was a stranger, who knew nothing of the family history. He preceded the new-comer with silent composure, directing his steps to the drawing-room; but when he found that all the party

had silently thronged into the ante-room, he made a formal pause half way. No consciousness was in his unfaltering tones. He drew his feet into the right attitude, and then he announced the name that fell among them like a thunderbolt—'Mrs. Trevanion'—at the top of a formal voice.

She stood upon the threshold without advancing, her black veil thrown back, her black dress hanging in heavy folds about her worn figure, her face very pale, tremulous with a pathetic smile. She was holding fast by Jane with one hand to support herself. She seemed to stand there for an indefinite time, detached and separated from everything but the shadow of her maid behind her, looking at them all, on the threshold of the future, on the verge of the past; but in reality it was only for a moment. Before, in fact, they had time to breathe, a great cry rang through the house, and Rosalind flung herself, precipitated herself, upon the woman whom she adored. 'Mother!' It rang through every room, thrilling the whole house from its foundations, and going through and through the anxious spectators, to whom were now added a circle of astonished servants, eager, not knowing what was happening. Mrs.

Trevanion received the shock of this young life suddenly flung upon her with a momentary tottering, and but for Jane behind her, might have fallen, even as she put forth her arms and returned the vehement embrace. Their faces met, their heads lay together for a moment, their arms closed upon each other, there was that murmur without words, of infinite love, pain, joy, undistinguishable. Then, while Rosalind still clasped and clung to her, without relaxing a muscle, holding fast as death what she had thus recovered, Mrs. Trevanion raised her head and looked round her. Her eyes were wistful, full of a yearning beyond words. Rosalind was here, but where were the others, her own, the children of her bosom? Rex stood in the doorway, red and lowering, his brows drawn down over his eyes, his shoulders up to his ears, a confused and uneasy embarrassment in every line of his figure. He said not a word, he looked straight before him, not at her. Sophy had got behind a curtain, and was peering out, her restless eyes twinkling and moving, her small figure concealed behind the drapery. The mother looked wistfully out over the head of Rosalind lying on her bosom, supporting the

girl with her arms, holding her close, yet gazing, gazing, making a passionate, pathetic appeal to her very own. Was there to be no reply? Even on the instant there was a reply; a door was flung open, something white flashed across the ante-room, and added itself like a little line of light to the group formed by the two women. Oh, happiness that overflows the heart! Oh misery that cuts it through like a knife! Of all that she had brought into the world, little Amy alone!

'My mistress is not able to bear it. I told her she was not able to bear it. Let her sit down. Bring something for her; that chair, that chair! Have pity upon her!' cried Jane, with urgent vehement tones, which roused them from the half-stupefaction with which the whole bewildered assembly was gazing. John Trevanion was the first to move, and with him Roland Hamerton. The others all stood by looking on; Rivers with the interest of a spectator at a tragedy, the others with feelings so much more personal and such a chaos of recollections and alarms. The two who had started forward to succour her put Mrs. Trevanion reverently into the great chair; John with true affection and anguish, Roland with a

wondering reverence which the first glance of her face, so altered and pale, had impressed upon him. Then Mrs. Lennox bustled forward, wringing her hands; how she had been restrained hitherto nobody ever knew.

'Oh, Grace, Grace! oh, my poor Grace! oh, how ill she is looking! Oh, my dear, my dear, haven't you got a word for me? Oh, Grace, where have you been all this time, and why didn't you come to me? And how could you distrust me, or think I ever believed, or imagine I wasn't your friend! Grace, my poor dear! Oh, Jane, is it a faint? What is it? Who has got a fan? or some wine? Bring some wine! Oh, Jane, tell us, can't you tell us, what we ought to do?'

'Nothing,' said Mrs. Trevanion, rousing herself; 'nothing, Sophy. I knew you were kind always. It is only—a little too much—and I have not been well. John—oh yes, that is quite easy—comfortable. Let me rest for a moment, and then I will tell you what I have come to say.'

They were all silent for that brief interval; even Mrs. Lennox did nothing but wring her hands; and those who were most concerned became like the rest, spectators of the tragedy.

Little Amy, kneeling, half thrown across her mother's lap, made a spot of light upon the black dress with her light streaming hair. Rosalind stood upright, very upright, by the side of the mother whom she had found again, confronting all the world in a high, indignant championship, which was so strangely contrasted with the quiet wistfulness and almost satisfaction in the face of the woman by whom she stood. Jane, very anxious, watching every movement, her attention concentrated upon her mistress, stood behind the chair.

When Mrs. Trevanion opened her eyes she smiled. John Trevanion stood by her on one side, Rosalind on the other. She had no lack of love, of sympathy, or friendship. She looked from between them over Amy's bright head with a quivering of her lips. 'Oh, no test, no test!' she said to herself. She had known how it would be. She withdrew her eyes from the boy standing gloomy in the doorway. She began to speak, and everybody but he made some unconscious movement of quickened attention. Rex did not give any sign, nor one other, standing behind, half hidden by the door.

'Sophy,' she said quietly, 'I have always

had the fullest trust in your kindness: and if I come to your house on Rosalind's birthday that can hurt no one. This dreadful business has been going on too long—too long. Flesh and blood cannot bear it. I have grown very weak —in mind, I mean in mind. When I heard the children were near me I yielded to the temptation and went to look at them. And all this has followed. Perhaps it was wrong. My mind has got confused; I don't know.'

'Oh, Grace, my dear, how could it be wrong to look at your little children, your own children, whom you were so cruelly, cruelly parted from?'

Mrs. Lennox began to cry. She adopted her sister-in-law's cause in a moment, without hesitation or pause. Her different opinion before mattered nothing now. Mrs. Trevanion understood all and smiled, and looked up at John Trevanion, who stood by her with his hand upon the chair, very grave, his face full of pain, saying nothing. He was a friend whom she had never doubted, and yet was it not his duty to enforce the separation, as it had been his to announce it to her?

'I know,' she cried, 'and I know what is your duty, John. Only I have a hope that

something may come which will make it your duty no longer. But in the meantime I have changed my mind about many things. I thought it best before to go away without any explanations; I want now to tell you everything.'

Rosalind clasped her hand more closely. 'Dear mother, what you please: but not because we want explanations,' she said, her eyes including the whole party in one high, defiant gaze.

'Oh no, dear, no. We want nothing but just to enjoy your society a little,' cried Mrs. Lennox. 'Give dear Grace your arm, and bring her into the drawing-room, John. Explanations! No, no! If there is anything that is disagreeable let it just be forgotten. We are all friends now; indeed we have always been friends,' the good woman cried.

'I want to tell you how I left home,' Mrs. Trevanion said. She turned to her brother-in-law, who was stooping over the back of her chair, his face partially concealed. 'John, you were right, yet you were all wrong. In those terrible evenings at Highcourt'—she gave a slight shudder—'I did indeed go night after night to meet—a man in the wood. When I

went away I went with him, to make up to him —the man, poor boy! he was scarcely more than a boy—was——' She paused, her eye caught by a strange combination. It brought the keenest pang of misery to her heart, yet made her smile. Everard had been drawn by the intense interest of the scene into the room. He stood in the doorway close to young Rex, who leant against it, looking out under the same lowering brows, in the same attitude of sullen resistance. She gazed at them for a moment with sad certainty, and yet a wonder never to be extinguished. 'There,' she said, with a keen sharpness of anguish in her voice, 'they stand together; look and you will see. My sons—both mine—and neither with anything in his heart that speaks for me!'

These words, and the unconscious group in the doorway who were the only persons in the room unaffected by what was said, threw a sudden illumination upon the scene and the story and everything that had been. A strange thrill ran through the company as every individual turned round and gazed, and perceived, and understood. Mrs. Lennox gave a sudden cry, clasping her hands together, and Rosalind, who was holding Mrs. Trevanion's

hand, gave it such a sudden pressure, emphatic, almost violent, that the sufferer moved involuntarily with the pain. John Trevanion raised his head from where he had been leaning on her chair. He took in everything with a glance. Was it an older Rex, less assured, less arrogant, but not less determined to resist all softening influences? But the effect on John was not that of an explanation but of an alarming, horrifying discovery. He withdrew from Mrs. Trevanion's chair. A tempest of wonder and fear arose in his mind. The two in the doorway moved uneasily under the observation to which they were suddenly subjected. They gave each other a naturally defiant glance. Neither of them realised the revelation that had been made, not even Everard, though he knew it—not Rex, listening with jealous repugnance, resisting all the impulses of nature. Neither of them understood the wonderful effect that was produced upon the others by the sight of them standing side by side.

John Trevanion had suddenly taken up a new position; no one knew why he spoke in harsh distinct tones, altogether unlike his usual friendly and gentle voice. 'Let us know, now,

exactly what this means: and, for God's sake, no further concealment, no evasion. Speak out for that poor boy's sake.'

There was surprise in Mrs. Trevanion's eyes as she raised them to his face. 'I have come to tell you everything,' she said.

'Sir,' said Jane, 'my poor lady is far from strong. Before she says more and brings on one of her faints, let her rest—oh, let her rest.'

For once in his life John Trevanion had no pity. 'Her faints,' he said; 'does she faint? Bring wine, bring something; but I must understand this, whatever happens. It is a matter of life and death.'

'Uncle John,' said Rosalind, 'I will not have her disturbed. Whatever there is amiss can be told afterwards. I am here to take care of her. She shall not do more than she is able for; no, not even for you.'

'Rosalind, are you mad? Don't you see what hangs upon it? Reginald's position—everything, perhaps. I must understand what she means. I must understand what *that* means.' John Trevanion's face was utterly without colour; he could not stand still—he was like a man on the rack. 'I must know

everything, and instantly; for how can she stay here, unless—— She must not stay.'

This discussion, and his sharp unhappy tone seemed to call Madam to herself.

'I did not faint,' she said, softly. 'It is a mistake to call them faints. I was never unconscious; and surely, Rosalind, he has a right to know. I have come to explain everything'

Roland Hamerton had been standing behind. He came close to Rosalind's side. 'Madam,' he said, 'if you are not to stay here, wherever I have a house, wherever I can give you a shelter, it is yours; whatever I can do for you, from the bottom of my heart!'

Mrs. Trevanion opened her eyes, which had been closed. She shook her head very softly; and then she said almost in a whisper, 'Rosalind, he is very good and honest and true. I should be glad if—— And Amy, my darling! you must go and get dressed. You will catch cold. Go, my love, and then come back to me. I am ready, John. I want to make everything clear.'

Rosalind held her hand fast. She stood like a sentinel facing them all, her left hand clasping Mrs. Trevanion's, the other free, as if in defence of her. And Roland stood close

behind, ready to answer any call. He was of Madam's faction against all the world, the crowd (as it seemed to these young people), before whom she was about to make her defence. These two wanted no defence; neither did Mrs. Lennox, standing in front wringing her hands, with her honest face full of trouble, following everything that each person had said. 'She is more fit to be in her bed than anywhere else,' Mrs. Lennox was saying; 'she is as white—as white as my handkerchief. Oh, John, you that are so reasonable, and that always was a friend to her—how can you be so cruel to her? She shall stay,' cried Aunt Sophy, with a sudden outburst, 'in my house—I suppose it is my house—as long as she will consent to stay.'

Notwithstanding this, of all the people present, there was no one who in his heart had stood by her so closely as John Trevanion. But circumstances had so determined it that he must be her judge now. He made a pause, and then pointed to the doorway in which the two young men stood with a mutual scowl at each other. 'Explain that,' he said, in sharp staccato tones, 'first of all.'

'Yes, John, I will explain,' Mrs. Trevanion

said, with humility. 'When I met my husband first——' she paused as if to take breath—'I was married, and I had a child. I feel no shame now,' she went on, yet with a faint colour rising over her paleness. 'Shame is over for me: I must tell my story without evasion as you say. It is this, John. I thought I was a deserted wife, and my boy had a right to his name. The same ship that brought Reginald Trevanion, brought the news that I was deceived. I was left in a strange country without a friend—a woman who was no wife, with a child who had no father. I thought I was the most miserable of women; but now I know better. I know now——'

John's countenance changed at once. What he had feared or suspected was never known to any of them: but his aspect changed; he tried to interrupt her, and coming back to her side, took her other hand. 'Grace,' he cried, 'Grace! it is enough. I was a brute to think —Grace, my poor sister——'

'Thank you, John; but I have not done. Your father,' she went on, unconsciously changing, addressing another audience, 'saw me, and heard my story. And he was sorry for me—oh, he was more than sorry. He was young

and so was I. He proposed to me after a while that if I would give up my boy—and we had no living, nothing to keep us from starvation—and marry him, he would take care of the child; it should want for nothing, but that I must never see it more. For a long time I could not make up my mind. But poverty is very sharp; and how to get bread I knew not. The child was pining, and so was I. And I was young. I suppose,' she said in a low voice, drooping her head, 'I still wished, still needed to be happy. That seems so natural when one is young. And your father loved me: and I him—and I him!'

She said these words very low, with a pause between. 'There, you have all my story,' with a glimmer of a smile on her face. 'It is a tragedy, but simple enough, after all. I was never to see the child again; but my heart betrayed me, and I deceived your father. I went and—looked at my boy out of windows, waited to see him pass—once met him on a railway journey when you were with me, Rosalind—which was all wrong, wrong—oh, wrong on both sides: to your father and to him. I don't excuse myself. Then, poor boy, he fell into trouble. How could he help it? His

father's blood was in him, and mine too—a woman false to my vow. He was without friend or home. When he was in great need and alarm, he came—was it not natural?—to his mother. What could be more natural? He sent for me to meet him, to help him, to tell him what to do. What could I do but go—all being so wrong, so wrong? Jane knows everything. I begged my poor boy to go away; but he was ignorant, he did not know the danger. And then Russell, you know, who had never loved me—is she there, poor woman?—found us out. She carried this story to your father. You think, and she thinks,' said Mrs. Trevanion, raising herself with great dignity in her chair, 'that my husband suspected me of—of—I cannot tell what shameful suspicions. Reginald,' she went on, with a smile half scornful, 'had no such thought. He knew me better. He knew I went to meet my son, and that I was risking everything for my son. He had vowed to me that in that case I should be cut off from him and his. Oh yes, I knew it all. My eyes were open all the time. And he did what he had said.' She drew a long breath. There was a dispassionate sadness in her voice, as of winding up a history all past. 'And what was I to do?' she resumed.

'Cut off from all the rest, there was a chance that I might yet be of some use to him—my boy whom I had neglected. Oh, John and Rosalind, I wronged *you*. I should have told you this before; but I had not the heart. And then, there was no time to lose, if I was to be of service to the boy.'

Everything was perfectly still in the room; no one had stirred; they were afraid to lose a word. When she had thus ended she made a pause. Her voice had been very calm, deliberate, a little feeble, with pauses in it. When she spoke again it took another tone: it was full of entreaty, like a prayer. She withdrew her hand from Rosalind.

'Reginald!' she said, 'Rex! have you nothing to say to me, my boy?'

The direction of all eyes was changed and turned upon the lad. He stood very red, very lowering, without moving from his post against the door. He did not look at her. After a moment he began to clear his voice. 'I don't know,' he said, 'what there is to say.' Then after another pause: 'I suppose I am expected to stick to my father's will. I suppose that's my duty.'

'But for all that,' she said, with a pleading

which went to every heart; her eyes filled, which had been quite dry, her mouth quivered with a tender smile—'for all that, oh, my boy! it is not to take me in, to make a sacrifice: but for once speak to me, come to me; I am your mother, Rex.'

Sophy had been behind the curtain all the time, wrapped in it, peeping out with her restless, dancing eyes. She was still only a child. Her little bosom had begun to ache with sobs kept in, her face to work, her mind to be moved by impulses beyond her power. She had tried to mould herself upon Rex, until Rex, with the shadow of the other beside him, holding back, repelling, resisting, became contemptible in Sophy's keen eyes. It was perhaps this touch of the ridiculous that affected her sharp mind more than anything else; and the sound of her mother's voice as it went on speaking was more than nature could bear, and roused impulses she scarcely understood within her. She resisted as long as she could, winding herself up in the curtain; but at these last words Sophy's bonds were loosed; she shook herself out of the drapery and came slowly forward, with eyes glaring red out of her pale face.

'They say,' she said suddenly, 'that we

shall lose all our money, mamma, if we go to you.'

Mrs. Trevanion's fortitude and calm had given way. She was not prepared for this trial. She turned towards the new voice and held out her arms without a word. But Sophy stood frightened, reluctant, anxious, her keen eyes darting out of her head.

'And what could I do?' she cried. 'I am only a little thing, I couldn't work. If you gave up your baby because of being poor, what should we do, Rex and I? We are younger, though you said you were young. We want to be well off too. If we were to go to you, everything would be taken from us!' cried Sophy. 'Mamma, what can we do?'

Mrs. Trevanion turned to her supporters on either side of her with a smile; her lips still trembled. 'Sophy was always of a logical mind,' she said with a faint half-laugh. The light was flickering round her, blackness coming where all these eager faces were. 'I—I have my answer. It is just enough. I have no—complaint.'

There was a sudden outcry and commotion where all had been so still before. Jane came from behind the chair and swept away, with

that command which knowledge gives, the little crowd which had closed in around. 'Air! air is what she wants, and to be quiet! Go away, for God's sake, all but Miss Rosalind!'

John Trevanion hurried to open the window, and the faithful servant wheeled the chair close to it in which her mistress lay. Just then two other little actors came upon the scene. Amy had obeyed her mother literally. She had gone and dressed with that calm acceptance of all wonders which is natural to childhood; then sought her little brother at play in the nursery. 'Come and see mamma,' she said. Without any surprise Johnny obeyed. He had his whip in his hand, which he flourished as he came into the open space which had been cleared round that chair.

'Where's mamma?' said Johnny. His eyes sought her among the people standing about. When his calm but curious gaze found out the fainting figure he shook his hand free from that of Amy, who led him. 'That!' he said, contemptuously; 'that's not mamma, that's the lady.'

Against the absolute certainty of his tone there was nothing to be said.

CHAPTER LXIII.

Rivers had stood listening all through this strange scene, he scarcely knew why. He was roused now to the inappropriateness of his presence here. What had he to do in the midst of a family tragedy with which he had no connection? His heart contracted with one sharp spasm of pain. He had no connection with the Trevanions. He looked round him half contemptuous of himself, for someone of whom he could take leave before he closed the door of this portion of his life behind him, and left it for ever. There was no one. All the different elements were drawn together in the one central interest with which the stranger had nothing to do. Rivers contemplated the group around Mrs. Trevanion's chair as if it had been a picture. The drama was over, and all had resolved itself into stillness, whether the silence of death, or a pause only and interruption of the continuity, he could not tell. He

looked round him, unconsciously receiving every detail into his mind. This was what he had given a year of his life for, to leave this household with which he had so strongly identified himself without even a word of farewell and to see them no more. He lingered only for a moment, the lines of the picture biting themselves in upon his heart. When he felt it to be so perfect that no after experience could make it dim he went away, Roland Hamerton following him to the door. Hamerton, on his side, very much shaken by the agitating scene, to which his inexperience knew no parallel, was eager to speak to someone, to relieve his heart.

'Do you think she is dead?' he said under his breath.

'Death, in my experience, rarely comes so easily,' Rivers replied. After a pause he added, 'I am going away to-night. I suppose you remain?'

'If I can be of any use. You see I have known them all my life.'

'There you have the advantage of me,' said the other sharply, with a sort of laugh. 'I have given them only a year of mine. Good-bye, Hamerton. Our way—does not lie the same——'

'Good-bye,' said Roland taken by surprise, and stopping short, though he had not meant to do so. Then he called after him with a kindly impulse, 'We shall be sure to hear of you. Good luck! Good-bye.'

Good luck! The words seemed an insult; but they were not so meant. Rivers sped on, never looking back. At the gate he made up to Everard, walking with his head down and his hands in his pockets, in gloomy discomfiture. His appearance moved Rivers to a kind of inward laugh. There was no triumph, at least in him.

'You have come away without knowing if your mother will live or die.'

'What's the use of waiting on?' said young Everard. 'She'll be all right. They are only faints; all women have them; they are nothing to be frightened about.'

'I think they are a great deal to be frightened about—very likely she will never leave that house alive.'

'Oh, stuff!' Everard said; and then he added half apologetically, 'You don't know her as I do.'

'Perhaps better than you do,' said Rivers; and then he added, as he had done to Hamer-

ton, 'Our ways lie in different directions. Good-bye. I am leaving Aix to-night.'

Everard looked after him surprised. He had no good wishes to speak, as Roland had. A sense of pleasure at having got rid of an antagonist was in his mind. For his mind was of the calibre which is not aware when there comes an end. All life to him was a ragged sort of thread, going on vaguely without any logic in it. He was conscious that a great deal had happened and that the day had been full of excitement; but how it was to affect his life he did not know.

Thus the three rivals parted. They had not been judged on their merits, but the competition was over. He who was nearest to the prize felt, like the others, his heart and courage very low; for he had not succeeded in what he had attempted; he had done nothing to bring about the happy termination; and whether even that termination was to be happy or not, as yet no one could say.

CHAPTER LXIV.

MADAM was conveyed with the greatest care and tenderness to the best room in the house, Mrs. Lennox's own room, which it was a great satisfaction to that kind soul to give up to her, making the little sacrifice with joy.

'I have always thought what a nice room to be ill in—don't you think it is a nice room, Grace?—and to get better in, my dear. You can step into the fresh air at once as soon as you are strong enough, and there is plenty of room for us all to come and sit with you; and, please God, we'll soon have you well again and everything comfortable,' cried Mrs. Lennox, her easy tears flowing softly, her easy words rolling out like them. Madam accepted everything with soft thanks and smiles, and a quiet ending seemed to fall quite naturally to the agitated day. Rosalind spent the night by her mother's bedside—the long, long night that seemed as if it never would be done. When at

last it was over, the morning made everything more hopeful. A famous doctor, who happened to be in the neighbourhood, came with a humbler brother from Aix and examined the patient, and said she had no disease—no disease—only no wish or intention of living. Rosalind's heart bounded at the first words, but fell again at the end of the sentence which these men of science said very gravely. As for Mrs. Trevanion, she smiled at them all, and made no complaint. All the day she lay there, sometimes lapsing into that momentary death which she would not allow to be called a faint, then coming back again, smiling, talking by intervals. The children did not tire her, she said. Little Johnny, accustomed to the thought that 'the lady' was mamma, accepted it as quite simple, and returning to his usual occupations, drove a coach and four made of chairs in her room, to her perfect satisfaction and his. The cracking of his whip did not disturb her. Neither did Amy, who sat on her bed, and forgot her troubles, and sang a sort of ditty, of which the burden was 'Mamma has come back.' Sophy, wandering long about the door of the room, at last came in too, and standing at a distance, stared at her mother

with those sharp restless eyes of hers, like one who was afraid to be infected if she made too near an approach. And later in the afternoon Reginald came suddenly in, shamefaced and gloomy, and came up to the bed, and kissed her, almost without looking at her. At other times, Mrs. Trevanion was left alone with her brother-in-law and Rosalind who understood her best, and talked to them with animation and what seemed to be pleasure.

'Rosalind will not see,' she said with a smile, 'that there comes a time when dying is the most natural—the most easy way of settling everything—the most pleasant for everyone concerned.' There was no solemnity in her voice, though now and then it broke, and there were pauses for strength. She was the only one of the three who was cheerful and at ease. 'If I were so ill-advised as to live,' she added with a faint laugh, 'nothing could be changed. The past, you allow, has become impossible, Rosalind; I could not go away again. That answered for once, but not again.'

'You would be with me, mother, or I with you; for I am free, you know—I am free now.'

Mrs. Trevanion shook her head. 'John,'

she said, 'tell her; she is too young to understand of herself. Tell her that this is the only way to cut the knot—that it is the best way—he most pleasant—John, tell her.'

He was standing by with his head bent upon his breast. He made a hasty sign with his hand. He could not have spoken to save his own life, or even hers. It was all intolerable, past bearing. He stood and listened, with sometimes an outcry—sometimes, alas! a dreadful consent in his heart to what she said, but he could not speak.

The conviction that now is the moment to die, that death is the most natural, noble, even agreeable way of solving a great problem, and making the path clear not only for the individual most closely concerned, but for all around, is not unusual in life. Both in the greater historical difficulties, and in those which belong to private story, it appears often that this would be the better way. But the conviction is not always sufficient to carry itself out. Sometimes it will so happen that he or she in whose person the difficulty lies will so prevail over flesh and blood, so exalt the logic of the situation, as to attain this easy solution of the problem. But not in all cases does it succeed.

Madam proved to be one of those who fail. Though she had so clearly made out what was expedient, and so fully consented to it, the force of her fine organisation was such that she was constrained to live, and could not die.

And, what was more wonderful still, from the moment when she entered Mrs. Lennox's room at Bonport, the problem seemed to dissolve itself and flee away in unsubstantial vapour wreaths like a mist, as if it were no problem at all. One of the earliest posts brought a black-edged letter from England, announcing the death of Mr. Blake, the second executor of Reginald Trevanion's will, and John, with a start of half-incredulous wonder, found himself the only responsible authority in the matter. It had already been his determination to put it to the touch, to ascertain whether such a will would stand, even with the chilling doubt upon his mind that Mrs. Trevanion might not be able to explain the circumstances which involved her in suspicion. But now suddenly, miraculously, it became apparent to him that nothing need be done at all, no publicity given, no scandal made. For who was there to take upon him the odious office of reviving so odious an instrument?

Who was to demand its observance? Who interfere with the matter if it dropped into contempt? The evil thing seemed to die and come to an end without any intervention. Its conditions had become a manifest impossibility —to be resisted to the death if need were: but there was no need; for had they not in a moment become no more than a dead letter? Might this have been from the beginning, and all the misery spared? As John Trevanion looked back upon it, asking himself this question, that terrible moment in the past seemed to him like a feverish dream. No one of the actors in it had preserved his or her self-command. The horror had been so great that it had taken their faculties from them, and Madam's sudden action, of which the reasons were only now apparent, had cut the ground from under the feet of the others, and forestalled all reasonable attempts to bring something better out of it. She had not been without blame. Her pride too had been in fault; her womanish haste, the precipitate measures which had made any better solution impossible. But now all that was over. Why should she die now that everything had become clear?

The circumstances got revealed to some extent in Aix among the English visitors who remained, and even to the ordinary population in a curious version, the point of the rumour being that the mysterious English lady had died with the little somnambulist in her arms, who, it was hoped for the sake of sensation, had died too. This was the rumour that reached Everard's ears on the morning after, when he went to seek his mother in the back room she had inhabited at the hotel, and found no trace of her, but this legend to explain her absence. It had been hard to get at his heart, perhaps impossible by ordinary means; but this news struck him like a mortal blow. And his organisation was not like hers. He fell prostrate under it, and it was weeks before he got better, and could be removed. The hands into which this weakling fell were nerveless but gentle hands. Aunt Sophy had 'taken to' him from the first, and he had always responded to her kindness. When he was able to go home she took 'Grace's boy' to her own house, where the climate was milder than at Highcourt; and by dint of a quite uncritical and indiscriminating affection, and perfect contentment with him as he was, in the virtue of his conva-

lescence, did more to make of Edmund Everard a tolerable member of an unexacting society than his mother could ever have done. There are some natures for whose treatment it is well that their parents should be fools. It seems cruel to apply such a word to the kind but silly soul who had so much true bounty and affection in her. She and he gave each other a great deal of consolation and mutual advantage in the course of the years.

Russell had been, like Everard, incapable of supposing that the victim might die under their hands: and when all seemed to point to that certainty, the shock of shame and remorse helped to change the entire tenor of her life. She who had left the village triumphantly announcing herself as indispensable to the family and the children, could not return there in circumstances so changed. She married Mrs. Lennox's Swiss servant in haste, and thereafter spent her life in angry repentance. She now keeps a Pension in Switzerland, where her quality of Englishwoman is supposed to attract English visitors, and lays up her gains bitterly amid 'foreign ways,' which she tells any newcomer she cannot abide.

And Rosalind did what probably Mr.

Ruskin's Rosiere, tired of her seven suitors, would in most cases do—escaping from the illusions of her own imagination and from the passion which had frightened her, fell back upon the steady faithful love, which had executed no hard task for her, done no heroic deed, but only loved her persistently, pertinaciously, through all. She married Roland Hamerton some months after they all returned home. And thus this episode of family history came to an end. Probably she would have done the same without any strain of compulsion had these calamities and changes never been.

THE END.

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