

John Greswold, Vol. II

Caroline Wigley Clive

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CHAPTER I.

RATHER sooner than was anticipated Lord Ennavant arrived, and came into the room where we were working together. He threw himself into an arm-chair, and at once desired the worst and the best to be told him.

"It's like drawing a tooth," said he, "to come into this horrid room and this chair. I know it will all be right by the time I get out of it, but you make me go through torments before that happy moment arrives. So now for it. Do your worst, and end by giving me command of the money."

"Just as I had arranged with the banker, to give you credit for necessary expenses for the next three months "

"That can't be helped. It makes not the slightest difference to this sum. This is a wholly **unnecessary** expense."

"With a little prudence, and the great storm that swept down your Gloucestershire timber, you might have got on till rent day, and then paid the banker with the rents, neglected the butcher, and gone on again."

"Well, I'm glad you think 5000*l.* is an equivalent for only a little prudence. So I have committed no great excess after all. It ought to be all the easier for you to supply me."

"It is, however, not easy at all," said Mr. Pointz, gloomily. "But I have met with one expedient, the success of which I shall know in the course of the evening, and would have sent you word "

"If I had not been in such a devil of a hurry? But I want to be clear of the thoughts; for although I never make

myself miserable except in this accursed room, there is always the sense that I shall have to go through it, till it is done. So what is it?"

"I have offered to sell the living of the Homestead to a man, with as good as immediate possession."

"Oh, that can't be. I've given it away."

"Impossible!"

"Mr. Greswold knows I have," said he.

"You have it not to give," said Mr. Pointz. "It belongs to the man to whom you are in debt."

"No, it belongs to Edward Winspear, my cousin. I promised him that should it become vacant he should have it."

"Of course that was conditional to possessing it yourself. He is too much a man of honour to remind you of a promise of which the conditions are altered."

"And what becomes of me, if I say one thing and do another?"

"It is no matter what you say, if you have spoken of a thing which you have not, either to give or to keep. That thing is already passed from your power; you have no power to touch it twice."

"But the first touch was for Edward. This wretched horse-race has nothing to do with property that can concern him."

"Well, where else shall we get the money?"

"Hang that civil, undeniable voice of yours. It always means you must come to my proposal at last."

"No, I beg you to supply a suggestion?"

"As if I knew anything in the world about it; as if I had the smallest idea what I have, what I owe, what I want."

"You can think of nothing besides the living, then?" said Pointz.

"You know that only too well."

"There's one thing to be said. More church patronage is in your power; for instance, the living of Ball is worth more than this. Why not propose that to Mr. Winspear instead of the Homestead."

"That's the very thing," cried Lord Ennavant. "It is worth more, is it?"

"Yes; by 200*l.* a-year."

"But is that living vacant too?"

"Not exactly."

"How much does it want of being so?"

"Nay, nobody can calculate on human life."

"How old is the holder?"

"Oh, never mind. He's quite forty, or more."

"Forty! an infant. Why, he has thirty more years to live, by the Bible."

"Well, as to that, the Homestead itself is not ready. Mr. is ill, but may recover; there is no reason why he should not recover."

"May he? Then you can't get the money for his living, my dear Pointz, and I am right again."

"But I meant to tell you that the gentleman to whom I wrote is willing to look upon the Homestead as immediate possession, and offers me 5000 l. for the next presentation. True, you may have to present some very old life to whom my client would be the immediate successor."

"What are you talking of? I don't understand you in the least. But do you mean that I should do Edward no grievance no injustice if I could promise him this other thing? Mr. Greswold, you know best. Tell me, did he look upon what I said as any serious promise?"

"You said you would write," I answered. "I told him so, by your desire."

"Ay, write, if the thing could be managed," said Mr. Pointz.

"Nay, tell me exactly," interposed Lord Ennavant; "tell me the words he said. Let me understand?"

"It seemed to be an agreeable prospect to him," I began.

"But did he say he depended on it? Did he consider that I had taken any engagement that is what I want to know?"

"His words, I think, were 'I will never remind him of it,'" I answered, feeling how much higher my friend stood than this needy young patron.

"He took it in the right light," said Mr. Pointz. "He was aware of the impossibility."

"He and you," said Lord Ennavant to me, "can afford to act magnificently. Bare payment of debt is enough for me. Pull me through somehow," he added, to Mr. Pointz, rising and shaking his leg right in his boot. "Well, good morning; it's a sorry business," and he left us as hastily as he came, trotting away down the drive as fast as his excellent hack could carry him.

"Now, he'll trouble himself no more," said Pointz, "till the next debt drives him again to my 'horrid room.'"

These things look ugly enough when they are passing, and people at a distance see them long afterwards, and see nothing else; but close at hand they slide into a man's general hospitality, and power of exercising it; into his good-humour, and desire to please, his good shooting, pleasant table; and though one's esteem diminishes, nothing outward is altered, and there is no lesson taught to the man by the world's conduct towards him.

Thus it went with Lord Ennavant; he forgot the whole transaction, at least showed no signs of recollecting it, except that, I think, he asked Edward less frequently than before to his house. But then, it is true, this was the

season for great shooting parties, which Edward did not very much frequent, and to which the host generally invited other pheasant-shooting lords and squires; but he occasionally included every neighbour he had, partly to oblige them and partly that he took pleasure himself in the joyous circle he thus assembled.

I was present at one of these latter parties, and I remember it struck me, amidst all the festivity and luxury of the scene, that we did not compose an assembly which he would have invited to meet his more fastidious friends.

Never mind, thought I, I'll take what comes. Never was nicer shooting than I had to-day at the corner of that covert, and never was better fun than we had after dinner yesterday.

While I thus meditated, I went into the library to get a newspaper before dinner, and here I unexpectedly lighted upon a circle very unlike what I thought was there; Lady Ennavant was present, a sight not seen here at this hour on ordinary occasions; and opposite to her was a very fine lady, in travelling costume, who seemed languidly getting through a little talk necessary between arriving and going to her room.

A young lady, not pretty, but very well dressed, sat opposite the fire talking to our host, who looked bored with her incessant chaff, and made use of me as a means of escape.

"What do you want the *Times*? Somebody has taken it away. Look here, I think I put it down in the ante-room yes," and he went with me out of the room to search for it, where it certainly was not.

"Two fine ladies," said he, "dropped from the skies on my mother, who they say invited them. She has made a mistake, I suppose; bores, both of them."

Then availing himself of the diversion afforded by the newspaper, he turned away to his own rooms, and left the ladies to themselves.

I withdrew upstairs, much grieved at this interruption to our easy condition; nor were my expectations falsified by the event, for that sort of gloom pervaded the dinner table which comes over men who are accustomed to men's parties, and who find themselves dumb in the presence of high-bred women.

The mother, Mrs. Nation, sat by our host and bored him to death; but all the anecdotes and allusions which were trite or vapid to him were mysteries to the rest, and they could neither enter into them nor neglect them. The daughter, Camilla, sat between two of our best fellows; and before the soufflé's and gelée's arrived, gaped in their faces without any reserve. She "hoped they would forgive her; but whether they did or not, she must gape," she said. "It was peculiar to her when she felt very stupid. She was sorry to be so stupid, and could not think the reason."

The poor men on each side were mystified up to a point of desperation; I could not help smiling to see them, and I believe the lady observed this.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN the whole party was reassembled in the drawing-room, she made violent efforts to appropriate Lord Ennavant, and when at last he found an unanswerable reason for talking to some one at the other end of the room, she ran her eye insolently along the men, who were huddled together about the fire, and fixing upon me bade me bring her a footstool, if I would be so very good. This service rendered, she went on

"I came from Hertfordshire this morning only; the thing is arranged, you'll be glad to hear, so that we shall have the pretty little phaeton just as before; all right; ain't you glad?"

"Not I, indeed," I answered. "I have not the least conception of what you are talking."

"Is it possible?" said the lady.

"Nay, why not?" I said. "Surely you must perceive that we are all very ignorant country indwellers. I am sure I cannot be wrong in attributing such discernment to you?"

"That's well said," cried she, laughing loudly, "and, to tell truth, I did not expect you would understand me; but I hoped to mystify you."

I bowed in acknowledgment.

"But don't go away," she went on. "Who are you, pray? What is your squiredom your status in the world. There will be plenty of time, as it strikes me, this evening, to give us your history, beginning, 'When I was a pretty boy with auburn ringlets.'"

"A fabulous period," said I, "no more authentic than the hairs of Cassiopeia."

"What a schoolroom word!" said she. "In human English, who are you?"

"I will tell you; my brother is "

"Oh, hang your brother!" said the lady, "I don't want to hear of him, nor even of your grand-aunt, though she should be a Perkins. Who are **you**?"

"I am one of the "

"I see something you don't like to tell. But I myself don't care the least in the world. It is perfectly indifferent to me who my companion is; **what** he can say may be another thing. Are you the park-keeper? or are you a scion of the family come on the wrong side of the blanket? It's not your fault, you know."

"Good heavens," thought I, "can she know what she is saying?" and I felt the colour rise to my forehead. She laughed with delight. "No fault, nor merit either," said I, rallying. "But I am not **that**. Rather I am 'The tenth transmitter of a foolish face.' Do you know, Miss Nation, who said that?"

"Was it Tennyson?" said she.

"No, it was not Tennyson," I answered, chuckling, and somehow she thought I had much more meaning than I had, and broke off her chaff.

Next day there was a steady down-pouring of rain, which prevented everybody from stirring out. Billiards were resorted to but quite spoiled for the real players, by the participation of Miss Nation. She affected great science, and talked in the most ridiculous manner of the movements of the game; they did not know whether to laugh or cry, and all who could escape preferred conservatory and a cigar, or the anteroom and a newspaper, to the young lady and the profaned billiard table.

Under these circumstances she availed herself of me, and employed me to fetch and carry, to hold skeins of worsted, even to waltz in the long gallery, while an old companion the house played waltzes on the pianoforte. She enticed me to say, or rather, as it were, laid down the lines on which I saw the exact plan prepared for me to say silly complimentary things; each one of which I did say, well amused myself at the part allotted. I was called stupid, I begged pardon for it, and was re-admitted to favour. I was severely tapped with a paper-knife, and I

kissed my arm where her hand had administered the blow; and in short made myself her humblest slave, and was exhibited as such to the rest.

Before dinner that day, nearly all the party assembled, I had been summoned by the lady to stand beside her chair, on pretence of giving her an account of certain arrivals; and knew she intended me to remain there, and to give her my arm to dinner, in order to set all the holders of county rank at defiance. I was doing my best to maintain my post, by quizzing according to my ability my good friends and neighbours, and had the false happiness of hearing her false laugh, by which she loudly solicited the attention of those about her.

"And what is that species of womankind?" she inquired, as the door again opened. "A girl coming in alone," she added, putting up her eye-glass. "Not a bad-looking rustic either," and looking, I beheld Ruth enter the room.

I was dumb; I felt the hot blood rush into my face, but had no words with which to continue the unmeaning dialogue, in presence of my most real feelings. And while I hesitated I saw Lady Ennavant, who had beckoned Ruth to her, bring her towards my new mistress, and introduce the girls to each other, evidently in the hope of relieving herself from the burthen which the fine lady was to her.

Miss Nation bent her head disdainfully and heard Ruth's attempts at conversation with the stiffest civility; then turned again to me, and said familiarly, and but half aside

"This is a favourable sample, I suppose, of the natives;" but I heard her as one talking profanely of sacred things. I instantly left her side, and went round to Ruth, who shook hands with me, and in answer to my inquiries said she was here in compliance with a summons from her aunt, who had sent over a message asking her to come to Winspear Castle.

"I see why now," she added, in a low voice; and at this moment dinner was announced.

I offered Ruth my arm, which she took, and not a moment too soon, for me at least, for Lady Ennavant came up, saying

"You shall give your arm to Miss Nation as you are near her Oh, I beg your pardon," seeing that my arm was gone, "Mr. , take Miss Nation;" and the young lady moved off, looking at me with a curiosity which seemed partly made up of compassion for my ignorance of the blessing I might have enjoyed.

I perceived during dinner that she talked a great deal to her cavalier, and very loudly; but being indifferent to what she might be saying, I did not listen; and enjoyed the unexpected happiness of Ruth's society, with a full return to the sincerity and simplicity of feeling and purpose, of which I had lost sight while forced to act a part with the artificial young lady.

In the drawing-room I found that Ruth and Camilla were on opposite sides, the former talking to one or two dowagers of the county, the latter reading a novel which she did not lay down when we came in, but in which she looked absorbed in that manner which people put on when they mean to be disturbed.

It was not for me, however, to interrupt her studies; I left that to more worthy in rank, and betook myself to Ruth, whom, with great humility, I addressed, and was proud and pleased when I got her into conversation.

I had quite forgotten the swift Camilla, and was much annoyed when her voice from the other side of the room sounded my name across the intervening space, and I found myself compelled to attend to the summons. She wanted a shawl which she had left in the saloon she said, and which I thought (though in the morning I should not have thought so) a footman might as well have fetched; and this I was compelled to look for and come back without, inasmuch as it was not there; I took up, however, an enormous open-carriage cloak, being resolved to

baffle the clang of laughter with which I knew it was her intention to receive my return from the fruitless journey, and inquiring if that was right, I proceeded to put it over her shoulder, with so much discomposure to her head—dress, that she could not persuade herself my innocence of face and voice was genuine.

She had, however, to make the best of it, in order to avoid whatever ridicule would otherwise have fallen upon her, and she availed herself of her right to send me to and fro, to detain me in talk, and to make me her slave for the hour.

CHAPTER III.

MEANTIME my impatient eyes ever wandered to Ruth, who, perfectly at ease, and offering herself with utter simplicity to the assistance of her aunt in disposing of her company, moved about with quiet grace, as unconscious of me as I was painfully conscious that she wasted no thought upon me. Miss Nation perceived my pre-occupation, and she was irritated at being postponed to anyone else, even by a humble country acquaintance.

"You don't know what I'm saying," cried she; "you can't hear what's the matter? Oh, I see, you have eyes only for that Miss Something or other by the pianoforte. Are you going to marry her?"

Again the bold Camilla succeeded in flushing my face with the burning blood.

"No, no," I cried, fearful that Ruth might overhear.

"Oh, you are afraid of carrying matters so far," said she. "It is a mere neighbourly flirtation; I understand."

"What do you please to mean by It," asked I. "It is my obedience to you, my countrified amazement at your high breeding, my rustic ignorance of your tone, your manner. I hope you'll excuse me; but I never saw anything like you, and I can't admire enough. It's of no use now to remember that not to admire is the only art that can keep a man happy; alas! that reflection comes too late!"

She looked at me with sinister eyes. It struck her that I was not to be trampled upon without some show of resistance at least. She let me go, by a sudden call on her other neighbour to stir the fire; and the moment I was free I wandered off to the side of Ruth, who, alas! received me with an indifference which chastised me for the part I had just played, and which quite absorbed all those feelings that might otherwise have returned to Miss Nation. That lady, for her part, displayed some little pique, for she never said another word to me; and next day when she left the house, purposely stumbled over me as one unseen, in order to show that she had merely meant "to break my heart before she went to town."

"What an odious creature!" I said to Mr. Pointz, as we talked her over.

"Nevertheless she must be Lord Ennavant's wife," said he.

"His wife! and he scarcely spoke civilly to her."

"No, he does not know it; but it **is** so. He wants money, of which she has a vast store; and she and it are to be had by the first man who has got anything she fancies to give in return."

"And her fancy is set on a coronet, is it?"

"Yes; she came here, knowing there was one on sale, to see if she could buy it."

"But the wearer looks very little disposed to sell."

"I don't know that. At present he does not see the absolute necessity. But he will."

"And then he'll marry her, getting nothing but money, and flinging away his own happiness, and deceiving her into giving away hers."

"As to his own he has forfeited his right to it; he has sold it by spending twice as much as he has, and the girl's object is not at all to be happy, it is to be a countess."

"Well, well, they have an object each of them; and if they are satisfied, the sooner they marry the better."

"Why so?" said Pointz, laughing.

"Nay, his marriage would secure the estate in the direct line. It is always good to have an heir to a great estate, is it not?"

"Yes: but there are plenty of sons at his uncle's. The Colonel also, would make a capital head of the house."

"Do you think so? He is very useful where he is, and they are all very happy. It would be a great change in their habits."

"Not by any means a disagreeable one; though I do believe, except the elder lady, there is not one of them lets the idea enter into their speculation."

"I'm sure they don't. They have laid all their plans, quite beside any such notions; they are very happy, they are getting on very well, the boys are all training for professions."

"The girls," said Mr. Pointz, taking up my words, where I hesitated, "likely to make charming wives are not they?"

"For anything I know," said I, in answer very gravely.

"Well, " said Pointz, "they are very wise to keep their own position as their sole point of view. In the first place Lord Ennavant is very young, and if he marries, the first male child that is born to him, enables him to cut down timber and resettle most of the estate without waiting till it comes of age, or indeed does anything but breathe the vital air."

"Indeed!" said I, drawing a draught of vital air which did me infinite good, for the statement removed so much of long fear and doubt whether Ruth would not soar above me before I had gained such an interest in that noble heart as would secure it to me independently of every possible change of circumstance. "Then in a twelvemonth all Colonel Winspear's share of the property and title too may be cut off," I added.

"Nay, that is carrying on the matter desperately," said Pointz, "considering that the first step towards a wife is not yet taken. Let us say two years."

"Two, three, a dozen, for aught I care," said I, lying unconscionably as I did say it.

Yes, indeed, Ruth was in all my thoughts; everything that happened or was done, bore in some way or other upon Ruth. In the morning, my first thought was what chance existed that I should see her; if I saw her I analysed every look and word; and, after being happy all the time I could prolong my stay near her, I was miserable because

perhaps she took leave of me without looking me in the face, or with three fingers instead of her whole hand.

When I knew that she was going out, or when I had to leave home, I felt a conviction that she would meet some one before I saw her again who would amuse her better than I, whom perhaps she would love; who would certainly love her. My brain was always contriving reasons for passing her door, for going into paths where I had ever met her, for doing services to people in whom she had any concern. I weighed every word and look to find some interest excited in her bosom for me. Alas! it was in vain; friendly, equable, kindly, as she was, I could not think any warmer feeling ever arose; and compelled as I felt myself to look contented, and try to be agreeable, it was often with death in my heart that I watched her in society, and was forced to acknowledge that she often forgot my very existence.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETIMES, however fate was my friend, and forced me on her notice. For instance, one summer's evening as I was riding at no great distance from the Homestead, I observed an unusual number of rough-looking men who were strangers to me proceeding in one direction.

The neighbourhood was so far removed from any extraordinary excitement in general, that I could not but remark the circumstance, and when I had question several of the men, and received unanimously for answer that they were going nowhere particular, I determined to go there myself also, and followed the direction in which they were seeking it.

In no long time I perceived the attraction of the living stream. A broad meadow spread itself between two low ridges of hill a little distance from the high road, and when, in pursuit of the scattered group, I had quitted the road and come upon the grassy heights, I perceived below me a crowd collected in the meadow, who were pressing round a space cleared in their centre, and here a number of men were hurriedly setting up ropes upon posts which others were driving into the ground, and which they had nearly formed into a large circle, out of which they drove all such spectators as attempted to occupy it.

It was plain they had fixed on this secluded spot for a pugilistic encounter, and I drew as near as I could, looking with tranquil delight at these preparations for violence.

While thus engaged my ear was caught by what seemed the echo of my own name, but being predisposed by the place and circumstance to doubt the possibility that any one present should desire my company, I gave no attention until a repetition of the impression roused me to give heed, and then looking round on all sides I perceived at some distance from the crowd two figures, the last I was thinking of at the moment, though at no time was one at least very far from my thoughts. They were no other than Colonel Winspear and Ruth, and the former, as soon as he had caught my eye, beckoned to me to come near.

"I must stop this breach of the peace," said he to me, when I came up. "I want a magistrate. Is Mr. Pointz at home?"

"Yes," I answered; "I think so. Shall I go for him?"

"No, I must go. Lend me your horse, and, Mr. Greswold, will you take Ruth to the farm-house across there? It is by an unlucky accident that she is here."

I dismounted of course at once, and without a moment's delay he sprang into the saddle, and trotted away at a great pace.

"We were walking," said Ruth to me, "and without the least notice came upon this crowd. What is it all? Is my father safe?"

I explained that he was so undoubtedly; that the crowd would probably make no opposition when ordered by magisterial authority to disperse, and that Mr. Pointz would have but to go among them with the constable and declare his purpose to commit anyone who persisted in the unlawful meeting, in order to get rid of the whole assembly.

"But suppose they do persist?" said Ruth.

"Oh, why then but they will not."

"My father will be exposed to their insolence as much as Mr. Pointz."

"He will do whatever Mr. Pointz does, I suppose," I answered; "but I am certain there is no kind of danger."

"One more on their side might make them safer," said Ruth. "You will stay here, will you not?"

"I will secure your safety first," I said, "and then I am ready for anything."

"My safety? then you are not sure that there is no danger?"

"None whatever for a man, not the slightest; but for you it is different. Inconvenience there may be the disagreeableness of a crowd pray let me go with you till all such danger is passed?"

"As far as the farm-house," said Ruth; and into this she herself retreated, insisting that I should watch the scene which lay just below the garden, and should give her my promise that if I saw any occasion to join her father when he should reappear, I would do so without thinking any more of her.

The house was placed upon the slope of the hill, exactly above the meadow wherein the assembly was held. From the edge of the garden therefore I watched all that went on below. It wore a formidable appearance to any one unacquainted with the character of an English mob, whose respect for the law enables the single arm which possesses authority to sway the brute force of multitudes. Here were hundreds of men assembled to do and witness what they knew to be illegal, and yet they did not trust to their power to do so, but to their concealment from the individuals who had a right to forbid them.

Expectation rose every moment, and the loud hum of voices reached me where I stood, as the champions came from the opposite sides attended by their seconds, and entered the ring prepared for the combat.

At the same time I saw, hastily coming over the brow of the opposite hill, Colonel Winspear and Mr. Pointz, both on horseback, and making their way with all speed towards the crowd. The crowd also became aware of the interruption coming upon them, and from amongst their ranks rose an angry murmur of voices, increasing rapidly as the moment of collision approached, and becoming so loud and so unlike the former mere hum of the multitude, that Ruth rushed from her retreat, and came with frightened eyes to look down on what might befall her father.

What we saw, standing there together, was exciting to her especially for she could not believe in the safety of two men who were thus alone on one side, while dense hundreds formed the party opposed to them.

Mr. Pointz was an old man, whose white hair fell round his head in masses; he retained the upright character of his spare frame, but the feebleness of age was apparent, though what he did asserted the vigour of his will. He

rode one of a favourite race of horses, for which he was well known in the neighbourhood; a small, fiery-looking Arab, docile as a dog, but excitable and demonstrative, as was natural to its high blood and high keep.

Colonel Winspear, on the other hand, as he sprang from his horse, and gave it into the care of some one he knew among the crowd, stood by the old man and his haughty little steed, a perfect model of manly proportions in their best perfection. His strength, his vigorous health, his air of command, seemed a match for the wills of all the multitude around him, and laying his hand lightly on the Arab's bridle, he moved forward at its side in among the crowd.

Ruth could not bear it without an effort to guard him from harm.

"You could help," said she to me, laying her eager hand on my arm; "it would be better if a third person were there. See how the people press upon them. They are stopped the horse strikes out his foot there, see, they give way a little, and my father is deeper in the crowd. Oh! run, Mr Greswold, share his danger; will you not?"

"I wish there were any danger to share," I cried, "that I might obey you; but I will see you safe into the house, and join them instantly. You **must** do that first;" and catching her hand, I ran with her to the door.

What pleasure to say you **must** to Ruth, to oblige her to obey me, though in so small a matter. And then I rushed down the hill, and forcing my way through the crowd, which, like broken ice, was melting in fragments behind the authorities, I made my way up to the other side of the Arab, and with all the pride and folly of youth, rejoiced in the tumult, and in feeling my strength against resistance.

"Gently, Greswold," said Colonel Winspear, smiling at me; "you and Al Raschid hit too hard. The people are dispensing already."

And, indeed, above the tumult of agitated men, Mr. Pointz made his voice heard, forbidding them by his authority as a magistrate from proceeding with the unlawful combat they came to witness, and declaring that whoever countenanced it after this warning he should commit to the constable, who with a hang-dog look of dislike to his office, was behind him.

The crowd heard, and many a murmur, many an oath arose; they began to look at one another, and to acknowledge that it was all over with their amusement. The pugilists had disappeared; figures could be seen retreating up the hill side; the assembly was breaking up.

We stood firm, pacifying the Arab while the flood pushed by us, the less courteous as some little violence was the only gratification they could obtain for their own disappointment. Business likewise was attended to. I felt among the stress of the multitude a sudden increase of the pressure, and then the hand of one of them deep in my pocket. I was as quick as he, and grasping the hand with a malignant intensity, I gave it a wrench which made my heart glad, and then loosed it, for there was no good in getting such a little billow as this on the back of the big wave.

I saw a fellow going off nursing his right hand, and I was not good nor pitiful, but wished venomously he might be suffering all the pain which his action suggested. I should have been glad of more of the same sort of thing, but Mr. Pointz and Colonel Winspear shared none of my amusement, and desired only the end they came for; which, being obtained, they disentangled themselves with speedy deliberation from the crowd, and we were presently all three once again alone together.

"And now," said the latter, "I have some business here still to do; let me keep your horse, Mr. Greswold, and be so kind as to see Ruth in safety to her home. I know I may trouble you."

Proud and pleased, I eagerly accepted the office, and at a few bounds rejoined the lady of my idolatry, who had beheld with anxious eyes the scene she but half understood, and now came forward to receive the assurance that all was over.

"You are to take care of me?" said she, laughing, as I delivered my message from her father. "What is there to be afraid of more than on all the other days, when I go everywhere on my own errands."

I tried to make the most of wandering spectators of the late combat and the unusual influx of strangers.

"At all events," said Ruth, "my father gives you the commission let us go on."

"Very much against your will, I fear," said I, a little grieved and a little piqued.

"Not in the least," said Ruth, looking up at me. "Why should it be?"

And the question was proposed as though I could answer it, and give some reason she was not aware of.

"Are you busy?" said Ruth, after a few seconds' pause. "If you are, don't hesitate for a moment to say so. I am perfectly safe."

"And I perfectly useless," I answered; "but let me obey Colonel Winspear, and yet not disobey you. Do not forbid me to accompany you?"

"Not I, certainly," said Ruth; "I only wanted to save you trouble."

And nothing could be plainer than that in fact she thought me quite as unconcerned as herself, whether we went on together or alone. Like other foolish fellows in love, I said to myself, "It would be better if she hated me," but a passing incident occurred which tempted me to hope that at least I was no more unsuccessful in interesting her than were others.

CHAPTER V.

WE were within sight of the Homestead, and at about half a mile distant from it across the fields, when we saw Lord Ennavant riding at a good pace toward the castle. He also perceived us, and, turning his horse in our direction, came across a hedge and ditch which was between us, and pulled up in our front, looking well as he reined up his beautiful steed. He addressed Ruth half as Miss Winspear, half as Ruth, undecided which to say, and, leaping from his horse, gave it to his groom, and walked on by her side. She told him at once what had been the adventure of the evening, and he, to whom all the light biography of the folks about him was matter of considerable interest, took great delight in the details.

"And the little Arab laid about him, did he? Was he frightened?"

"No, merely excited; he shook his head and danced with one foot forward, like a horse at Franconi's, and the crowd thought he meant malice."

"And Pointz I can fancy him sat like a part of the Arab, grave and pale, and full of business; and my uncle looked like a man who would allow no joking, forcing his way as if it were no laughing matter, and must be over at once; while Mr. Greswold was delighting, I suppose, in the scuffle, and looking out for the chance of a fight."

"That's very well imagined," said Ruth, "as far as I could see from the bank."

"Why did you hazard yourself to look at them?" said Lord Ennavant to her. "You should have thought more of the many whom you safety claimed."

"It could concern nobody so much as me," said Ruth; "and I found no occasion whatever to doubt it. My father, however, fancied there might be some peril from the crowd about, and asked Mr. Greswold to look to me home, but there's no kind of occasion."

"I think," said he, "I, as your cousin, ought to claim that privilege;" but to this I put in a decided negative, pleading the commission I had received.

"Nevertheless," said Lord Ennavant, growing more earnest in proportion as he failed to receive any approving sign from Ruth, "won't you let me plead that Miss Winspear's home and mine are in the same line, while yours lies in the opposite direction?" But I could not see the force of this argument, and persevered in discharging my trust.

"Say, Miss Winspear," I urged, "could I answer to Colonel Winspear if I did less than he enjoined me?"

"He would not care," said Ruth.

"Exactly," said Lord Ennavant, triumphant; "you allow that I should have the superior claim."

"Claim! for what?" said Ruth.

"To see you to your own door."

"No, not at all there's no claim belonging to anybody but myself. Nobody else has anything to care about in the matter."

"At least, decide between us," said Lord Ennavant.

"It does not signify the least in the world," said Ruth. "I think I will go alone. I shall like that much best thank you both. Good-bye good-bye!" and turning away she lightly took the path to the Homestead, and left us looking at each other.

"Plantés," said Lord Ennavant; "that little girl has the hardest heart I know she cares for nobody."

The fact which had thus struck him increased the fancy which I suspected he had already entertained to insinuate himself more or less into this hardest heart. He took a fit of making her small presents, and offering her such attentions as were practicable; and though with indomitable clear-sightedness, I perceived that he must be merely amusing a passing fancy, it vexed me to the heart to think that the mother no doubt cherished ambitious projects, and that it was too possible Ruth herself might be won by such fair, though, as I said to myself, false appearances.

One morning that I called at the Homestead with one of those numerous errands invented by my imagination to gain me admittance, Ruth came into the room prepared, in her grey cloak, for walking, and held an open note towards her mother. "Ennavant," she said, "has sent to propose a drive to the lake, and will be here in half an hour. You will go, won't you? and take Katie. I am going to the school, mother."

"Can't you put off the school? He won't care for Katie, my dear."

"Oh, no; I don't care for driving, at all events. I really am busy."

"I know that, but you might afford yourself this pleasure."

"Only it would be none; and tell him, please, I am very much obliged for the books he sent me, and give them back, will you?"

"But you have not read them?"

"Oh, yes, I looked at one; but I do not want it. It is very good no doubt of him, but I really had rather he would not trouble himself. I can't think why he supposes I like such rubbish."

These words were all honey to my ears. Ruth, if indifferent towards me, was at least equally insensible towards the homage offered her from other quarters; and, in fact, it seemed that her time was too much occupied, her attention too much excited by the interests in which she was an actress, to allow space for any new thoughts and wishes to enter her heart. The time might yet come when other objects would interest her, and when the happiest of human beings might obtain a share of those calm, honest, and affectionate feelings which had as yet no expression except for her home and those who occupied it. The possibility lighted up the future, as a twilight hardly yet different from the night, promises to become the bright-coloured morning of a summer day; and I could not but consider within myself what chances there existed for me that such a blissful lot might yet be mine.

I did not avoid a suspicion that my friend Mrs. Winspear would have looked kindly on me had I ventured to lift my hopes to her daughter. She had an affection for me, through remembrance of the service I had rendered her, and I perceived that she cast about for information as to my views and situation in life. Plainly the future prospects of her two girls must be a subject of anxiety to her, for the chief part of Colonel Winspear's income was for life merely, and the straitness of even their present circumstances was a matter of every-day observation.

It was not, therefore, without the prudential views as well as the keen sight of a mother, that, as I fancied, Mrs. Winspear observed the impression made upon me.

"Yours is a charming old place!" said she to me, reverting to her acquaintance with it when she had been staying with her son. "It looks like what it is indeed; is it not? the home of whole generations of the same family. The very stones of the oldest part tell of centuries."

"Yes, indeed," said I. "The same people and the same name were there in the time of Edward the Confessor. We have been so stupid and so good as never to have increased, and never very much diminished, the number of our acres."

"One shall find your name, therefore, in Mr. Drummond's book? You are one of his nobility of England."

"Yes, if he has done us justice. Only we are not Saxon, I fear. Our ancestors came over with Emma of Normandy."

"It is all the same," said Mrs. Winspear; "you have been there how long?"

"Hard on nine hundred years."

"That comes of the excellent law of entail," said Mrs. Winspear. "Those old properties are saved by entail on the male heir; and so, no doubt, yours has been."

"No doubt," said I.

"No possessor ought to have the power of alienating so valuable an object," she went on "don't you think so?"

"Well," I answered, "I don't think about it."

"No, of course no, I am sure you don't; you have too great an affection for your brother; you wish him too well. But one cannot shut one's eyes. What a sad thing his state of health is. I am afraid he can never recover."

A charming place and a sad state of health! I could not but smile at the conjunction, although I knew myself too well to fear such meanness in my heart as ever so to speculate myself. That she should do so, however, was a pleasant assurance of favour to me.

It was an irritating one at the same time; for what was all the favour in the world if none was entertained for me by Ruth? It was but smoothing the whole path to Paradise, yet mocking me with exclusion at the end. It was but making me welcome to that which, at the same time, it was impossible to gain. I could not feel that I was anything but an outside stranger to Ruth. Cheerfully greeted, cheerfully dismissed; my visits looked upon as belonging to the family, not to her; any trifling offering I could make such as a rare fern, or a strange bird thanked for, because her mother would like it for the fernery, or her brother for his specimens; my horse, my dog, getting observation because they were handsome, not because they were mine; and thus did I come and go, go and come welcome, but not expected; greeted, but never waited for.

Meantime, though I was pretty sure that the father and mother were clear-sighted to Lord Ennavant's ultimate indifference, how could I be certain that the man who had so much to recommend him, might not produce some stir in the heart he so assiduously assailed? His advantages were obvious, and might win him a liking for the owner of them. He was a master of rank, place, and all the immediate advantages of fortune. He was able to offer amusements and presents which were altogether out of my sphere; he was emboldened by his habitual welcome in the world, to presume upon a welcome from her, and he had all the habits of a man to whom society was kind, and whose good taste kept him from every shade of vulgar presumption.

It was true that I knew he was wanting in the purpose of life, and in all the qualities useful and self-acting which Ruth possessed; but could any one assert that those were the things to take her fancy, or might she not add one to the example of the many who exactly love the one person nobody expects them to love? And that might be, even to her own bitter disappointment afterwards; yet did I dare say a word? Did I dare presume on anything she might feel, or he might fail to feel? Not I; I had to watch and suspect and chafe, and see him lavish his time and means upon her. As for me, I had none of his adventitious advantages to recommend me. I was in the category of those that work he of those that play.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE spring morning, mild and sunny it was in Easter week Mr. Pointz fixed with me to drive to a farm a dozen miles off, there to meet the agent of the estate, who was to bring a new tenant with him, and arrange the drainings, the hedgings, the repair of buildings necessary when a change of occupancy takes place. He had a capital dowagering phaeton, low and light, driven by a postilion, so that the occupants had nothing to do but to lean back and cross their hands on their knees like women.

It was pleasant enough. The air met us full of the spells of fresh earth and budding leaves; "birds and bees and many-coloured things" were in the woods and on the commons; the sky was clear as it seemed up into infinity; and from a greater height than the eye could mark such a point, the ear caught the song of a lark.

I was contented; I was conscious of well-being; but my ease faded away, when from a turn taken by the road in the ascent of a hill we saw Lord Ennavant's drag descending the upper part of the same road, and approaching us. He was driving it himself, and it contained a party whom he was escorting on some idle errand or other.

Beside him, on the box, there sat a young man, one of his own contemporaries and companions, and immediately behind, Ruth and her father occupied the places on the coach. Who else composed the party I did not know, except the Dowager, who was inside with the glasses up.

He stopped as we came alongside, and in his cheery, pleasant way greeted to us both. His mother had something to say to her kinsman, Mr. Pointz, and let down her glass to speak to him. I jumped from the phaeton and got on the wheel, finding some subject to force a talk with Colonel Winspear, and by that means with his daughter.

The master of the team joined in it.

"I have presented my cousin to bring her sketch-book to Holmer Abbey, and we shall eat our luncheon among the spiders and the slugs of the keep. Will you come with us; you have never been there?"

"Do," said Ruth, "you had better. Here is room;" and she gathered together her cloak and her drawing-book, which filled a place at her side.

"Oh, no, no!" I cried, jumping down from the wheel, for I knew very well I was going on duty, and had no right over myself, to sit by the side of Ruth, and enjoy a whole day doing nothing. Why did she say there was room? How could she know but what my fortitude would give way, and I should do as she proposed? she proposed it, too, carelessly, just as if she were not putting me to a trial like that of a man on the rack, who could relieve his agony by saying a single word.

It was the thought that she did propose it carelessly, quite indifferent whether I accepted or not, which perhaps strengthened me to abide by my duty. At all events, I did so, and the conference at the carriage window being over, I made the most cheerful return possible to the adieux bestowed on me, and resumed my place in the phaeton.

"How like a couple of fools we look" (thus ran my ungracious meditation on Mr. Pointz and his carriage); "the old fool and the young one, dragged where two quiet horses and one young postillion please. How giddily that skilful driver guides his team down the hill; there he checks them at the turn just enough to get easily round, and now he spins on again turning, too, and talking to Ruth. I wish, I wish with all my heart, the leaders would get off the road, and the whole concern be dashed down the slope, and everybody killed except Ruth, and I be the one to save her."

Meantime Mr. Pointz was droning something about twenty-five shillings per acre. I assented to everything, and only woke to what he was saying when I heard him laugh, and turned very angrily upon him to see what there was to laugh at.

"Never mind," said he, "take a cigar;" and he held out his case to me and offered a light. So we puffed on and arrived at our journey's end.

CHAPTER VII.

THE following week all the household of the Castle moved to London; first, the Dowager, and a few days afterwards, her son. This was to my infinite relief, for now these drives, these visits, these presents of grapes and forced cherries, would be over. The presents it was true went to the mother, but the daughter if she pleased could not be ignorant that they were made to her.

Lord Ennavant drove round by the Homestead on his way to the station. I watched him arrive, and not five minutes after go away again. Next time that I met Ruth, I could not help saying that I had noticed how hasty was

his visit.

"Was it?" said Ruth; "very likely, but I was not in the house, nor heard anything on the subject. He said he was coming to bid us farewell, but my mother was at home, so there was no necessity for me to stop within for that ceremony."

To this I quite agreed, and by degrees, as the days wore on, I regained a quiet to which I had lately been a stranger, and was beginning to rejoice in it, when it struck me that there was a change for the worse going on at the Homestead.

I did not understand it, but certainly when all the circumstances of each week were accumulated, there was something at the end of it, less happy, less cheerful than had been at the beginning. There was an alteration in the calm, contented eyes which used to meet me, a want of interest in little matters which looked as if some great interest pressed too hardly on attention. I could not be certain, but I was very much awake to whatever signs I could observe.

It was late one grey sombre evening that I took my way to the Homestead, not to trouble them with my presence, but because it contained all that at this time had any interest for me in life, and vainly I followed the path nearest to it in the hope of meeting with one or other of the inmates. No one appeared, and then the desire to hear or see something of what was going on beneath that beloved roof, overpowered my better resolution, and fancying or forcing some excuse, I let myself go where I wished I were, and found I was at the gate before I scarcely knew it. Thence I could see the best part of the enclosure surrounding the house, and in a minute or so I perceived that Ruth herself was there, walking quickly through the avenue of lime trees, rather as it should seem for exercise than pleasure.

I pushed open the gate and joined her. I knew very well that Colonel Winspear was not at home, and therefore it was that I asked for him.

"No," said Ruth; "but he will return to-night. Have you any message for him which I can deliver?"

I declined the offer, and said I would try to see him another time, and then made a movement to go away, but turned again and inquired whether she had seen the chestnuts in the park since their full glory of blossoms had come upon them.

"I have not," said Ruth. "My mother is not well, and has wanted me. I came out at dusk to get a little air and a brisk walk up and down the avenue."

"Then I am hindering you. I will go. Good evening!"

"Good evening!"

"Yet I am very sorry to hear Mrs. Winspear is ill," I said, beginning to move by her side as rapidly as she pleased to walk. "I hope it will soon pass away."

"I hope so," said Ruth.

"I would give the world," I said, "to be of the least service to you and your family if I knew how."

"And if you had the world to give " said Ruth, smiling. "Some people never propose to give a less price than the world."

"Do you think I would not if I had it?" cried I.

"Well, it is a great thing to give. So many kingdoms which you would be king of, and so many nice places close by the sea in warm climates; and all the hunters in all the stables, and all the pearls in the Indian Oceans, and all the palm trees about Palmyra. You ought to think a long time before you gave all that in order to help us to eggs for breakfast, for that would be about the least service you could render."

"And cannot you believe me more serious than that?" I said. "You who understand so quickly; you whom I saw seizing the very key to the poor bereaved mother's feelings, is there no meaning for you in mine?"

"Yes, certainly," said Ruth, seriously. "I am sure you are a very kind friend glad when we are prosperous, and sorry when you see us in trouble."

"Indeed you do me justice, and it is the dread of intruding on you which holds me silent when I fear that something goes wrong."

"To be sure;" said Ruth, "you are quite in the right; and to tell you the truth, I have seen that you suspected there was a secret grief among us, and I was grateful to you for forbearing to speak of it."

"You were?" I cried; "and to **me**. Did you think so far kindly of me? Indeed you saw clearly; but it was of your share alone in it that I thought."

"Really," said Ruth, after a moment's pause, and with a slight air of embarrassment. "How you knew my part, I cannot tell but do not talk of it. It is my own affair, and no one has a right to interfere in it."

And with that she turned away, but I would not give up the opening which chance seemed to have made to obtain for me a portion of her confidence.

"I know not," I said, "whether I clearly understand you; but this I know, that if it be within the compass of my will and my power I would give, that is I would use all the power I have to be of the least that is to be of use."

"Never mind it, however," said Ruth. "Thank you for your good wishes, and take no notice."

"You speak so, because I am too obtuse to understand, in the matter of your quick intellect and your clear apprehension; but at least I can offer whatever I have not yet given whatever remains to me of myself; and you know, yes, I am certain you know, I have everything to beg, to entreat from you, but have already lost all to you."

"Now indeed I do not understand **you**. In what way have we caused you any loss?"

"Unwillingly, I am afraid. Oh, Miss Winspear oh, Ruth, can you treat me thus?"

"How?" said Ruth, startled that I used her Christian name. "Indeed I do not in the least understand to what you allude."

"Oh! to nothing, since it is thus. That which would be life to me, is yet nothing since you look on it thus."

"You say 'thus,'" said Ruth, "but how? I am very bad at guessing riddles, and since you speak in them I must renounce comprehending. Let us say no more except that I beg you to continue still the course I thought you were kindly taking. You can't help observing, but refrain from speaking; every family has its private matters, and a stranger does harm by meddling with them."

"I am a mere stranger then; I am an unwelcome stranger. You despise, you dislike me; you will be glad if I promise never to enter your door again. And if it be not beyond human force, I will do so."

"I cannot comprehend your meaning," said Ruth, "but this is mere nonsense. You have been, you are very welcome; we are glad to see you, when neither you nor we are busy; you have rendered us a great service."

"Oh, for the sake of heaven, do not say that word again. It is of no use to break a man's heart, and ridicule it for breaking. Nay, I have not offended you," I cried, as she turned away. "Forgive me; at least do so much, and I will go."

"It is time for me to return to the house," said Ruth. "Besides, it begins to rain. Good evening! Will you have an umbrella?"

"It **is** time," said I. "Farewell," and I turned away, stopping after a few yards and turning, but Ruth was already at the top of the avenue, and in another minute lost to my sight within the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE night was wet, and the wind high and boisterous, but through the whole of that night did I continue in sight of the house into which Ruth had disappeared. She had left me in a bewilderment through which I could see no clue. I imagined a hundred meanings for that mystery with which she supposed me acquainted; and among them many a wild supposition passed through my brain. Above all towered the idea that she must have comprehended the outbreak of my passion; it was not possible she should have been so blind to it as her words would lead me to suppose. Why had I not wrung an answer from her by words plainer still than those I had used yet could words be plainer? Yes; if I could but see her again, I would cry 'I love you!' and be able to tell myself her answer; but should I have advanced my own cause by obtaining that answer? Had not she said, "a stranger who meddles only does harm;" yet, on the other hand, she had said, "You have been, you are very welcome" words by themselves of such enchanting meaning, but uttered at that time, with that voice, they denied their own import. What could be in her thoughts?

I gazed on the lights in the windows, aware that the same rays I saw, saw her, feeling as though they could show her to me. I moved round the house, wherein I knew she was moving. I sat down in the profound silence, and every sound that broke it made me start up and draw near to listen.

I often resolved to go away, but returned with the sensation that I should die if a space and blank were between her dwelling and me that night; something would happen; at least, I should not know what was happening; at least, while I remained I had tangibly before me the spot where she as well as I recollected those strange words of hers, and where she could explain them to me if she would.

It was past midnight and all seemed at rest and silent within doors, when I heard horses coming up through the field road, which separated the Homestead from the highway. One gate after another closed more audibly, and the trot of the horses sounded louder and louder each time that it was resumed after passing through them.

Two riders at last became visible as the hoofs clattered over the stones of the courtyard. I was under the shade of a tree as they passed, and could perceive plainly that the one next me was the master of the house, who Ruth had said was expected. He said a few words to his companion, which seemed like an apology for the reception he would meet with so late. The reply made me fancy it came from Lord Ennavant, "Yes, all right; I like things uncomfortable," and I believed I recognised his voice, but what should bring him here his own home being so near what had he to do in the house of Ruth?

They gave their horses to a boy who rushed out as they came close up to the stable, awakened probably by the near sound; and walked on to the door, which I could see was unclosed before they came up to it, and I fancied that Ruth had been watching for her father, and that **her** hand it was which had been so ready to welcome him, or must I say **them**, for another besides her father had entered those doors.

My heart overflowed with jealousy that any one had a right to go in for shelter under the roof that sheltered her; that any one might speak familiarly with her, while I who had approached the nearest subject in the world, was an alien at her door. This stranger would touch her hand and bid her good night; rise next morning, and see her again; be sure of seeing her; the hours would pass over them jointly; he need not torment himself for means to meet her and be with her; the current of the day would bring that happiness in its regular course.

"Folly, folly," you may say, if you have never been in love, but what is your saying to me, who have been?

I did not leave the house until the dawn began to break in the east, and then as light came over me, the feelings which had shown themselves so freely in the total solitude the night drew back like the moth and the bat into artificial darkness, and were unseen though alive under the exterior covering.

I made my way home; dressed carefully, washed out the redness of my eyes, brushed out the disorder of my hair, thrust down the agitation of my bosom, and was as indifferent and selfish as usual when I joined Mr. Pointz at breakfast.

As soon, however, as I could have done with him, I took my horse, and with one sole purpose, traversed fields and woods, and in every likely and unlikely place did my endeavours to meet Ruth, for to go to her house I had made impossible. If any one spoke to me, what **his** object might be, mine was to discover whether he could give me a clue to meeting her.

I did not dare propose her own name, but I went round it with all my skill,

"By—the—bye," I said, stopping the peasant who had just asked his question, and was plodding off, "have you seen by chance any of Colonel Winspear's family? I want to speak to the Colonel?"

"Nooa," the clod answered, and moved on.

"You have not by chance seen the Colonel, have you, to—day?" I asked of a shepherd, "I have something to say to him."

"A did see him two hours since; a was at home, for I saw him a—smoking in 's garden."

But at last came a better answer.

"Yeas; he and the young madam and my lord was riding down Obrey Common not a quarter of an hour ago."

Here was a hope. I answered with an indifferent "Oh!" and turned on the pursuit. It was the gain of one momentary point, which, after all, is nothing to the great governing hope of life, but at least imitates, and wears the look of success. He had told me truly. My hasty pursuit before long brought me in sight of the group, and as I drew near I recognised in that third person that it was indeed Lord Ennavant. I joined them for a moment, as a passer—by might do, and they, continuing their progress, seemed to include me in their party, so that I rode forward with them.

Ruth acknowledged me with that sort of reserve which accompanies an ordinary meeting next day when the last meeting has been out of the common course. She seemed glad to have another person than me to talk with, and

forced forward some subject with Lord Ennavant.

His gay, careless way soon involved them both in a laughing conversation; and I gathered that he had come from London yesterday, on particular business, as he said, and had found his own house in the hands of painters, that he had turned back with the intention of returning straight to London, to the ruin of the business he had come on, but having accidentally met Colonel Winspear had ventured to propose taking up his abode for a couple of nights at the Homestead.

"But how could you **not** know that they were painting your house?" asked Ruth, "I thought you had had Joen Owns from London to consult him about it."

"I certainly must have forgotten that," said Lord Ennavant; "I am sure if I had remembered it I never could have left London, for my time was full of engagements."

"And what becomes of them?" said Ruth.

"They become to-morrow just what they would have become had I fulfilled them to-day," said he; "they belong to the past. I shall be missed at eight o'clock to-night, for I was to have been the twelfth at a carefully composed dinner. I have still to be regretted, hoped for, despaired of, cursed; I shall have a place in their heads for a few hours, but it will be the same to-morrow, and I shall have enjoyed this far-off ride."

"That will be past too, won't it?" said Ruth.

"Will it? It did not strike me in that light," said Lord Ennavant.

I listened with tingling ears; I was afraid there was a discovery to be made; I would not acknowledge that I was afraid; yet my jealous eyes could not gaze enough on the man who was conversing so familiarly with Ruth, seeking to satisfy myself that nothing had passed to justify this familiar visit to her house, this light but assiduous gallantry. Ruth, too, listened and answered readily. As for me, I was absolutely speechless, all my soul being gone forth to observe. Colonel Winspear spoke to me, but I did not know what he said; I answered at random; I addressed Ruth, and observed only that I interrupted what she was saying to Lord Ennavant. I did not know what she said to me in reply, and altogether I was so little what I ought naturally to have been, that Colonel Winspear said to me

"You are busy, I daresay; we are trespassing on your time; you must not let us do that," and taking violent offence, snapping indeed, at a friendly hand, like a dog in pain, I answered that the next morning must relieve them of my society, and being there arrived, I hastily made my bow and trotted away.

Trotted! ay, as soon as I was out of sight I gave my horse his head, and as fast as he was inclined to gallop, excited by my hand, pressed by my heel, did I tear over the open Down. The fury of jealousy burned within me, and mad exercise seemed to give it some other prey to consume besides my own heart. I galloped till I felt the gallant brute begin to relax in his own voluntary exertion, and then, as suddenly as I had started, I checked him into the slowest pace he would adopt, and with utter dejection begin to ponder upon what had passed.

Was this the secret to which Ruth had referred last night? Had she been wishing for, but not hoping, the declaration which perhaps had been made? After all, I might be quite mistaken in fancying any understanding between her and her cousin. Without his place and name certainly he could have no chance of acceptance; set him before her simply as his own qualities made him, and his addresses would be out of the question. Could the lofty, generous, true Ruth be moved to marry farms and houses, a title, and a case of diamonds?

Then I turned bitterly upon myself. Why had not I those things? with them my chances would have been better than his. I knew it. I knew I was worth more than Lord Ennavant; better educated; better gifted; a better man; yet I was a bad match, as it is called; **he** was a good one. Then, are not the adventitious circumstances of the world valuable? Oh, invaluable! up to the height of Ruth.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was a great pleasure to me when Lord Ennavant, after two more days' abode there, left the Homestead and returned to London. The next thing heard about him was that he had engaged to spend the autumn with a friend on an excursion to Iceland. This did not look like an engagement, and at all events I was glad that he could willingly absent himself from Ruth.

His mother came to the castle with the intention of making it her residence for the rest of the year. She was in poor health, and wished for quiet. All was to be economical and prudent; and Mr. Pointz looked forward to months of absence on the part of the owner of the estate, during which he should be able to apply his own salutary measures of reform.

A few days, however, before the journey was to begin, Lady Ennavant, who had been driving in a cold bright evening, was seized with inflammation, and next morning was ill enough to make a doctor indispensable, and the doctor considered it equally indispensable to send for her son.

He came as rapidly as a special train could bring him, and attended on her with all the devotion of one who, among a hundred companions, feels that no future relation of life can be again what he and his mother are to each other.

She did not die, but she recovered to a state so precarious that he renounced all thoughts of leaving her until her health should be such as to make it less uncertain at parting whether they ever again should meet, and took up his abode at the castle.

He had other houses; why, oh why, I meditated, did not the dear and kind dowager fall ill at one of those? why did it happen here? And during the many hours when she preferred to be alone, he had scarcely any resource this autumn except the Homestead, whither he often repaired to get rid of the unoccupied time.

It was but seldom, comparatively, that I could secure a chance of being there. I had no claim upon them, and I saw with the bitterest jealousy another free to go and come, and assuming, as if by right, the place which to me would have been the highest privilege that earth could bestow.

It was, however, a pleasure, though an astonishment to me to find that he availed himself of his privilege less frequently than he might have done. It seemed to me that he went to the house chiefly to get rid of his own society; and when he was there it appeared as though to help him to do so was often a burden upon the hands of the inhabitants. Not that he was wanting in vivacity, nor, as long as novelty lasted, in topics to talk about; but to see him to advantage one should be confined to holiday-times; he did not stand the test of everyday life.

The passion or flirtation—feeling which he manifested for Ruth seemed to have subsided to a lower pitch during his absence in London, and he no longer behaved towards her as the eager admirer he had lately been.

Ruth appeared very insensible to his actions while they lasted, but could I be certain that she really continued so? Might he not have produced an impression on her, though hers began to pall on him? Certainly the gloom I had already observed increased; she was as active as before, but stiller; she was as useful, but not so bright; she smiled in her father's face, but it was a smile which expressed some meaning; it was not the spontaneous light of her

sweet lips.

Towards myself I was conscious of a degree of restraint on her part since our evening conversation in the garden, and knew not whether to brave breaking through it or not. I certainly got fewer invitations to the house, but on the most candid examination into the cause of this, I did honestly attribute it to something going wrong in the family rather than to any loss of kindness on the part of Colonel or Mrs. Winspear to myself. One day I made my way into the Homestead on pretence of borrowing an Act of Parliament from Colonel Winspear, and had afterwards joined his wife and daughter where they were sitting under the plane-tree. An autumn sun beaming on autumn flowers made the garden a sheet of glory; and the woods which covered the indentations of the hill-side lay partly in deep shadow, partly in a bright light which caught the golden sycamores and scarlet wild cherry in their autumnal garments.

Ruth had some plain work on her knee, and was sewing, not for amusement it was evidently but for utility. She made way for me on the bench and silently worked on, while her mother asked me about this or that little matter of interest.

"The view would be improved, I think," said I, "if that spruce fir were out of your way. It is of no use in any manner, is it?"

"None," said Mrs. Winspear, "but I don't care to ask Ennavant even so small a favour as that."

"It is impossible he should have a choice one way or other, is not it?"

"No doubt he would say 'Yes' to anything I asked but he would forget to give orders to have the thing done, and one does not like to remember what the promiser has forgotten."

"He is not a man to be depended upon, that's certain," I said.

"And never was," said Mrs. Winspear. "He was always that sort of boy whose faults the people about him excused by his being a good boy whatever mischief he did was done merely to amuse **himself**; and one might scold him for an hour and never get him to be angry."

"That easy temper of his makes him a great smoothen of society," I said; "he is very acceptable as long as there is amusement enough, and his share is a large one; but I think he would hang heavily where only he wanted to play and the rest to work. He would hardly stand the large microscope of every-day life."

"He shows himself most useful to his mother," said Ruth, speaking for the first time. I was vexed that she took up his cause, and went on spitefully

"I daresay; I have no means of judging every son would probably take a journey to see a mother whose life was in danger."

"Yes, I daresay that too," said Ruth; "but he also stays her very faithfully; and there are many things which one likes a man for doing, though one should hate him not doing them."

"People often do right," I said, "and are none the better liked for it." Ruth made no answer, but went on working at her long seam; her mother finding that nothing was said made some commonplace answer; and I was so nettled at Ruth's silence, that I could not help getting back to the same subject.

"I wonder," said I, "whether Lady Ennavant is not often very glad when he has done amusing her for the day, and she can rest from his subjects."

"There is no reason whatever for thinking so," said Ruth, rather hastily, and as I thought the colour slightly rising in her face. "Mother," she said, her manner changing abruptly, "Ennavant is there;" and rose to receive him, for he was coming through the garden, and was close at hand before we perceived him.

"She's better, thank you," he said, in answer to inquiries about his mother, "but she has sent me to you on an errand which very much concerns her health."

"To me," said Mrs. Winspear; "how can I do anything for her?"

"You have got something she wants to borrow," said he.

"Is that possible? but you are giving me a riddle to guess. What is it?"

"My cousin here," said Lord Ennavant.

"Ruth," said Mrs. Winspear, smiling.

"Can I be of any use to her?" asked Ruth.

"Indeed you can," he answered. "She is nervous and tired of being ill; and she wants some friend to be kind and pleasant. I am too stupid, and by degrees, when we are alone I find her talking about matters which concern me, though I always begin about her garden or her school in order to be agreeable to her."

Ruth laughed, and did not disdain to meet my eye with a brief glance of intelligence.

"If my mother can spare me," she said, "I will try my best with pleasure, and if I find the same bad success attend me, I will remember your candour, and give up at once."

"Thank you heartily," said he. "Oh, you won't fail; you can do ever clever thing that women do, and you are so quiet, so still, as Germans say; and that's quite different from still in English, is it not? and very, very different from what a man is in every language."

He then made some civil speech to Mrs. Winspear, and said, "that in hopes to succeed in his errand, he had brought the phaeton and trusted to drive Ruth back." So it was agreed, and with burning ill-will I saw her take her place by his side and accompany him. I bowed to her in the coldest and most formal way I could, and then bitterly repenting took a sudden leave of the Homestead and ran at full speed over the fields, a short cut, so as to meet the phaeton where the road came across the footpath, and with all humility made her the friendliest of obeisances. She answered it as though she had seen neither the coldness nor the warmth of my two salutations.

CHAPTER X.

AND now came a hard time for me a time in which, however near to Ruth, it was impossible for me to get a glimpse of her. She remained with her sick aunt much longer than either she or her mother had contemplated at first, and was shut up in the castle and its gardens as if she had been in a convent. Only it was a convent with the difference of a young man in it a young man, too, with all the **prestige** of being the owner of everything bright and pleasant therein. One whom my jealous heart acknowledged as her admirer, and whose admiration must increase as he came to be her companion day after day.

I had not an easy moment while all this was fresh in my mind; I could count every pulse which beat so fast and so hard in my heart. I had no time to remember to be hungry; I fell asleep, and woke up to the most lively

consciousness of the trouble I was in. All the while I was as silent on the subject, and as commonplace as usual in my relations to other people, except that I did not see the point of their jokes, although I laughed at them assiduously.

But such a state of things never goes on long together. People must fall ill, or rise out of their trouble. Time as it passes makes the impression less hostile, by mixing others or wearing out the sharpness of the first. Some new phase of the painful circumstance arises on which the mind is glad to dwell in place of the first: it begins to look about for relief, and to extract the healing part instead of the first poison. If nothing of this happens if the body and mind are not elastic and self-helpful, they yield, and the man is beaten.

But I was young, and did not like to be miserable; and although I was not so honest as to confess this to myself, the fact was the same, and sent me in quest of relief.

The sixth day of Ruth's visit I betook myself to the Homestead, and finding Mrs. Winspear at home I soon brought the conversation to her daughter.

"Lady Ennavant is so much the better for a kindly young girl about her," said Mrs. Winspear, "that I fear I shall not get Ruth back very soon. She herself is willing to stay at present."

"No doubt," I answered, savagely enough, "there must be a great deal to interest her there."

"True; but it does so because she is of so kindly a nature, for her aunt's state is very precarious; and of course it is very dull for a young girl to be quite alone with an invalid."

"Quite alone?" I cried; "is not "

"No," said Mrs. Winspear; "nobody is there. Ennavant took the opportunity which Ruth's visit afforded him to do something from home which he is obliged to do."

"Ay, business must occasionally force a person to attend to it."

Mrs. Winspear made no comment.

"A day now and then," I went on, impatient to learn all about his reasons for leaving Ruth when he might have been near her, "is quite imperative."

"He is not very rigid in attending to his affairs," said Mrs. Winspear, smiling. "No, I think he went on a visit for the Bradbush races."

"Did he, indeed!" said I, with a sense of relief, the first that I enjoyed.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Winspear, pursuing the course of her own meditations; "I don't quite like her being there; in such a melancholy scene, too."

"Nevertheless," I answered, "Miss Winspear's even spirits and superiority over all that ruffles other people, will carry her through such, and worse, discomfort."

"She has a great deal of self-control," said her mother.

"But I hope she has no need of self-control," I said. Mrs. Winspear very slightly, involuntarily, indeed, shook her head.

"You probably know," she answered, "that she has some need of her fine character to do all she does. You would fain learn more yes, I perceive you would; but I can tell you nothing beyond what you must have observed yourself. Do not ask me."

She rose as she spoke, as if to prevent me from speaking, and then broke the pause in which I looked awkward enough, no doubt, by laying her hand on mine, and saying

"Don't think ill of me; I am deeply indebted to you, and have your services ever before me. None of my own children are dearer to me."

I don't know what she had quite far away in view by these words, but the one ruling idea in my mind brought them to me under my own point of view. I could not believe she intended me so to understand them; and yet in the confusion of the moment I was not able to disentangle my ideas from that meaning. I squeezed her hand till the ring on her fourth finger hurt **me**, and muttered about happiness and possibility. She said some words, but they were only ghosts of words that do not lend themselves to be written, yet seem to have a meaning, and then rang the bell for coals, and said also that she was going to hear her little boy's Latin lesson, would I come too?

I declined that pleasure, and took leave or rather she took leave of me, and all that had passed became as if it had never been said, though at the same time it could never be otherwise than have been said.

I went away perplexed more than ever what was it that they all believed I must know, and must have observed; and yet that I did not know, and had not observed, anxious as I was and alive to impressions?

Something about Ruth! What trial was pressing upon Ruth? It was quite impossible it should regard her cousin Lord Ennavant, or it would have been hidden deeper even than it was. Surely that was quite impossible! And then that shadow of a word of Mrs. Winspear; but in my present mood so perverse was I, that upon reflection I hated her for it. If Ruth had any inclination for another, it was cruel, it was wicked in her mother to show me that my path would be clear supposing Ruth could have love **me**; but Ruth did not think of **him**, surely that was impossible! He went away from her when he might have stayed near her; he sacrificed the happiness of her society when there was no sacrifice required; and beyond all doubt it was out of the question that Ruth's regard, could have fixed on one who did not already adore her; one also whose character was so little worthy of her so slight, so selfish so dependent for his interests on the flimsy things of the world. Yet how easy he made life, how gay and smooth; her serious character might fancy merit in that might be deceived! But no, no; surely that conjecture must be impossible.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER week passed, and Ruth was still with her aunt. Lord Ennavant had returned, I knew, for I had met him coming back to the Castle, and I had not heard that he was gone out still he might be.

I rode out by the keeper's one afternoon, and affecting an errand, asked if his master was at home.

"Yes, sir, my Lord has a few guns to-morrow to shoot Maiton's coppice."

Guns! ay, true, it was November; my Lord and all were no longer men, they were guns. And what sort of society in a house was a gun? What should Ruth care for a gun? Or for a whip either? And what was he other or better than a whalebone whip or an iron gun? Would he just hold his wife

"A little better than his dog,

A little dearer than his horse?" It was well if she got so good a place as that; but why did she not come home; her aunt must be well, or dead, by this time. It did not matter which, so that Ruth were free to come home, for if she

were at home again I should see her, talk with her.

I could not get that ghost of a word of Mrs. Winspear's out of my head, and by distance and silence it grew in my imagination, and took a shape and proportion which probably, if looked at steadily, would have done as the star did to Béranger, *file, file, file, et disparaît*.

But over and over in silent words, I held an imaginary dialogue with Mrs. Winspear on the subject, the result of which was more or less satisfactory; and the desire for it to be real so grew, that at last I resolved once more to pay her a visit, and try if there was indeed any reality in what I had fancied I heard.

I was on the point of setting out next day, when a note was put into my hands from Mrs. Winspear herself, desiring to see me without delay. The coincidence was strange, such a thing had never happened before, nor was likely to happen. What did it mean?

At all events I lost not a minute in reaching the Homestead; and presuming on my summons by its mistress, availed my self of the well-known garden gate which led through the shrubbery, the footway to the house.

It was a mild November day, between autumn and winter, when a languid peace had come over the closing year, and all things contained in the year were at their end; all that we had hoped, lost, expected, and gained. I saw Robin in the garden, not as usual, busy on his own small affairs, or toiling over his allotted task, but standing unoccupied upon the grassplot, beneath the unleaved plane tree, neither at play nor at work. When he saw me, he came towards me, and said at once

"My mother is crying; can't you go to her?"

"What's the matter? Yes, yes, let me go; but what is it?"

"I don't know; she got a letter, and told me to go into the garden, and she shut the door, but I listened, and I heard her cry."

"What's the matter? Where's your sister?"

"At the Castle. My mother opened a letter from her first."

"Go and ask her if she will see me, will you, dear Robin? Beg her to let me in."

The little fellow did so, and I following closely heard the permission given.

The door was unbolted, and the boy withdrawing with tearful eyes, I entered the presence of Mrs. Winspear. She met me with a force smile, and words of welcome, but her self-command went no further than to hear me ask if there was any possible thing in which I could be of service. In answering me, her passion broke out, and it was long before she could find words to give her meaning utterance.

"I cannot explain to you it is not my secret," she said; "but there is help possible, and you may be the friend who will bring it; although at first I thought all was hopeless."

"Then only let me know what I can do; I wish it were already done."

"We are very poor," she began abruptly; "I have told you how often the want of money breaks my heart when I see my husband borne down by it."

"Indeed you have," I said.

"I know at this moment that he has exerted himself beyond his power to supply money for a certain need, and now when it is quite impossible he should procure more, there is an absolute necessity at least for want it, what will become of us? of a farther sum. There is one way, Mr. Greswold."

"Tell me," I cried. "May it be my privilege?"

"No, no; I did not think of that, but there is another. I am here alone. There is no time to apply to my husband for directions, the necessity is absolute for to-day, I only hope in Lord Ennavant; will you go to him, and bring him to me, explain what I want it is a very small matter for him, though all in all for me. Tell him the loan of one hundred pounds will save us. You can do this, if you will go to him."

"I will do my best," I said; and I acknowledge the first idea which occurred to me was that by getting occasion to go to the Castle I should have an opportunity of seeing Ruth. However, that was the hidden groundwork; I did desire to be of use to the trembling woman who had called me to her rescue; and at once, without delay, I left the house on the errand she had given me.

"I shall see her at last," thought I, as I ran forward on the path to Castle Winspear, and then I began arranging how to shape my errand so as to make it introduce me to her beloved presence. But while I thought it over, the reflection forced itself on me, that although the good-humoured young man would be eager to do what was asked, his only means of furnishing actual money would be through Mr. Pointz, with whose capacity for refusing I was well acquainted. Besides the thing must be done to-day; to obtain it by this means to-day was out of the question, and as the difficulties occurred to me, my pace slackened, till from a run it degenerated to a pensive walk.

"I may see Ruth," at last I concluded, "but I shall not help her mother;" and ashamed of my selfishness, I sought some other means. Now I had in my bank account more than the sum required myself; and my first idea was to bring it to Mrs. Winspear, and say it came from her nephew.

But when I had reviewed the plan with satisfaction a few times, it began to lose its attraction, and I was glad I had not been able to put it in practice at once. It was a crooked way to an end; in other words, an untruth; one thing was a fact, and the other was not. What commission had I to make it seem as if a thing were in the world which was not there. No; I would deal simply, whatever became of the convenience.

Accordingly I wrote a cheque in my own name, and returned to the Homestead in a much shorter time than I could have done had I been all the way to the Castle. I went straight through the garden to the room where I had left Mrs. Winspear, and would have pushed open the door, had not a sound within of voices stopped me. One was the voice of a man, the other was Mrs. Winspear, and she was speaking with tears in the sound of what she said, and bitter trouble.

I waited but a few seconds, for perhaps, thought I, what I bring may be the means of changing that grief into joy, and then I knocked. There was instant silence, and next the sound of a step lightly crossing the room within. I could not but laugh to myself "Poor dear Mrs. Winspear," said I, in my own thoughts; "fancy the tale I might make out of this! She with her rusty gown, and her early grey hairs, and her thoughts all running on how to save butter and eggs, caught concealing some unknown cavalier. And then she herself opened the door at which I had knocked, and no one was within, only her own manner said as plainly as words could have said, 'I have got a secret, and you are not so much as to suspect it.'"

"So soon," said she; "I did not expect you so soon. Why did not you come in without knocking?"

"Nay, I thought I ought to give you notice of my return, though indeed I am in haste to tell you that I had succeeded."

"Oh, my friend," she cried, "what do I not owe you?"

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Winspear, I wish you **did** owe me nothing, but I am obliged to confess do not be angry with me do not refuse me, that what I bring you is my own."

"Would he not lend it to me, then?" said Mrs. Winspear, drawing back.

"Oh, believe me, it is not that; but you are not aware of the difficulty in one case of the ease, the benefit, in mine. Would I not rather have you for my banker than that I should have my money in merely mercantile hands. I am nothing to them, and I am not absolutely nothing to you. I have had the happiness of being of use to you before; you know I would give my life for you."

"Most noble of friends most generous," said she; "but it is quite impossible."

"Why impossible?" I asked. "If you were forced to answer that question, what could you say? and merely to make such an assertion is not kind, is not gracious to me."

"Don't say that," she answered, tears rising in her eyes; and then I felt sure I should prevail, and so I did; but the consequence to me was that I could not say a word on the subject that filled my thoughts, for could I ask her to befriend my suit, after had laid her under some little obligation? There need be no answer to that question.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO Sundays after this, going out to enjoy a fine afternoon, I wandered as I always did, when under the guidance of my habitual thoughts, towards the Homestead. There was a steep wood near the house, slanting up which ran a path, and a terrace walk lay along the top of the wood, which this transverse path gradually joined.

The terrace commanded a view of the slanting path, and I sat down on the low wall, gazing over it in some hope Ruth might take this walk in the course of the day.

Nor was I wrong. Some distance below, where a wych elm bent over the bank, and with its roots made a seat beneath its branches, my first glance found Ruth and her two brothers with her. The three were so far off that the distance made their conversation one of dumb show to me, and it was by that alone I could give any guess as to the subject they were talking of. It was something that interested them.

Ruth and her younger brother, my friend Peter, sat side by side, and he had hold of her hand, which she had laid on his knee. Her eldest brother stood before them, and little as Englishmen are given to talk by gestures, he did seem to be enumerating something, or laying down one position after another by the movement of his hands. Ruth at one moment turned her head on Peter's shoulder, and, I believe, did so to hide tears, or some emotion, for the eldest caught hold of the hand that was free, and yet it was a little while before she re-turned her head to him, and when she did she rose suddenly and flung herself into his arms. Peter got up also, and those three Geschwister, those brethren, stood there seemingly consulting over or discussing some interesting passage in the life of one, or all, wherein they were giving a mutually helping hand.

Members of one family, who were called too young to bear the burthens of life for one another, they were all nobly-shaped creatures, according to the difference of their sex; creatures formed for parts in all the higher and sunnier actions of life, but enduring, I knew, present harms from poverty and adverse fortune. What might be the

prevailing feeling of this moment and interview I knew not; whether good or evil had befallen them I could not tell. I, who would have taken my full share of the sorrow, or rejoiced in the blessing, was quite excluded. I was alone there, and they were three.

With mortification, with envy, with sorrow, I watched them as they left the seat beneath the tree and ascended the path, approaching nearer and nearer the terrace where I stood. They were talking as they walked, and the few words which can be gleaned of the talk of persons approaching, passing, and disappearing, reached me; half words at first and at last, the full meaning of which one guessed from the two or three one fully heard.

"All goes well," I heard from Peter. "My sister in her proper place," said George. And Ruth, just heard by me, uttered two words which carried meaning as painful as death. "Dear Ennavant," she murmured; I heard, or conceived all this from what I heard, and it struck me that kind of blow on the heart which shows the very place where matter and spirit join. I drew back softly, so as to be certain not to meet them at the moment, and diving into the thicket of the wood, made my way beyond all paths, where I was safe to be alone. What but one thing could explain those fatal words? She was confessing to those two friends of her counsel since speech began, that her heart had wishes which were hardly hopes, though both of them looked on some prosperous change as certain.

Did that past emotion which I had witnessed beneath the wych elm, refer to these fraternal secret speculations on an event too probable, and which, if it made Ruth happy, would make me miserable for the immutable "for ever" of a young lover.

I walked no further that evening. I stayed among the thickest part of the wood until the light had faded; and then returned gloomily home, ready to say in words, though not to allow it in my silent conviction, that Ruth was about to enter the home of one beloved and accepted.

Things go on in their ordinary course, however little one's mind is running the old lines which agree with them; and every year that passes thickens the covering which one can and does throw over the rebellious emotions within.

I had some uninteresting employment to set about that Monday morning, and did set about it with the most dogged perseverance. Mr. Pointz was too selfish to wish himself disturbed by the troubles of his neighbours, and too unskilful in human nature to get at them even had he wished it; but he was not without penetration, and probably saw enough to divert himself with the ordinary subjects of ridicule. At all events, in the midst of a silence which both of us had observed while pursuing our several occupations, he broke out with the observation

"By—the—bye, I have not told you a piece of news Lord Ennavant, at last, is going to be married."

"No, you did not tell me," I said, writing on doggedly.

"It must come at last," he went on; "I only wonder it has been so long coming about."

"Do you?" I said. "Oh well, I know nothing about it one way or the other."

"Nor care?"

"No; I don't care."

"I wish," said Mr. Pointz, "you would take your horse and go over for me to Ellensmore this morning. You could do me a great service there."

Now in this I believed he meant to give me an opportunity of escaping from the agitation he knew himself to have excited. Therefore I answered with the best-made indifference.

"With all my heart, when I have finished this," I said, writing most beautifully and carefully to show how calm I was.

"Won't you go before?"

"I had rather not and I shall have plenty of time afterwards," I said, nailing myself to the paper I was busy with. There was a short silence. Then Mr. Pointz began again

"How little curiosity you have! Don't you care to know the name of the future bride?"

"No," I said savagely, but instantly corrected myself, and came back to the torture. "I suppose it is Miss Winspear?"

"I thought you would say that. No, indeed; it's the rich girl, Miss Nation; I told you he must marry her at last."

Still I wrote on, but found it would not do, and affected to come to the end of a paragraph and to have done. The first moment's relief was exquisite. It was that blaze of jewelled light which the sun gives when he sails out from the last cloud, whose final gush comes pattering down through the brilliant rays. Ruth was still free Ruth was still safe in the Homestead. If not mine, at least she was not another's.

But my next thought was indignant concern for Ruth. Was she to suffer mortification? Had she been led to form expectations and wishes by a man who preferred another? If I could but see her when first she heard the thing announced, I should be able to catch her real feelings, whatever they might be, and I became at once eager to be the first to bring her the news.

"Is it known?" I asked.

"Not yet. The affair was arranged only yesterday, and he has sent me a telegraphic message. You know her money is a matter of business to me."

"What did it say?"

"He said #s.d. in plenty. I am the happiest of men, &c., &c., &c. Here's the paper."

"Bravo!" said I. "Well, I may as well go to Ellensmore if you wish it."

CHAPTER XIII.

ELLENSMORE was close to the Homestead, and having done the errand Mr. Pointz had there devised, I went on to the latter place. The common sitting-room, where alone, for economy, they lighted their fire, was occupied on one side by the youngest boy, kicking at his chair legs, and rubbing up his hair as he sat murmuring his task.

Mrs. Winspear, very pale, and looking ill, was resting on the sofa, and as the sun fell upon her it caught my eye how worn and thin her black gown looked, although the collar and cuffs were as white as snow.

By the side of the fire sat Ruth, her colour a little heightened by the warmth. Her little sister was on her lap fast asleep, and I recollected hearing that the child was ill.

But this was not her only occupation. She had contrived to support the little girl in such a manner that she could employ both her hands upon a piece of coarse work, which perhaps did not require the nicest execution, and which looked an uneasy contrast to her delicate fine fingers.

"Don't make the least noise, John," said the boy, looking up somewhat revengefully for having himself been laid under a similar interdict, "or Ruth will scold you for waking Bessie."

"Never fear," said Ruth; "it is not probable that you will indulge in such excess as he calls the 'least noise,' and she won't wake for less."

"Why not?"

"Because," said Ruth, "her poor little eyes were never closed last night."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Because mine were not," said Ruth, smiling.

"She is such a sister," said Mrs. Winspear. "She will trust nobody but herself when Elly is ill."

"Nay, mother, I would indeed, but our few people are busy and tired."

And this was the hard work, the coarse business of that fine cultivated creature, who perhaps at this moment was falsely persuaded that the kindly affections of her hidden heart were about to be gratified under a home all luxury, splendour, and ease. When compassion mixes itself with idolatrous affection, the affection is maddened by it. One inclines to worship, through the intensity of desire to mitigate the blow which has been dealt; and I who came intent on striking one myself in order to resolve my own miserable doubts, could not now have ventured a word on the subject.

Besides, there was a dignity in the manner of her poverty and privation, such acceptance of it, as though her own natural gifts were forgotten, and her fortunes frankly adopted, that it seemed the act of a coarse barbarian to approach her secret, and to endeavour to wrest any involuntary expression from that calm guarded nature.

I renounced my purpose at once. I forsook the desire to penetrate into her thoughts, and submitted to learn what effect her cousin's marriage produced upon her only when she should have had time to fence her own feelings round with all her dignity.

Taking my part drearily, I made out a little talk with Mrs. Winspear, and acknowledging myself to be in the way, bade them good-bye, and departed as uncertain as I had come, and as much inclined to think the world and its hopes at an end.

Nor did I see Ruth again till everybody had talked of Lord Ennavant's marriage, and till it was the most familiar subject I could approach.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS spread from the Castle after a time that Miss Nation and her mother were coming there on a visit. Lady Ennavant was too delicate to change her warm house and southern county for the hazards of any other, and had been obliged to renounce all intention of visiting her future daughter-in-law, as on the first announcement of the marriage she had intended to do. The daughter, therefore, must come to the mother.

Just as the new year began these ladies arrived; they were to be alone with the family at first; after that the county was invited to a fête in their honour, which would close their visit; and in the course of the following month Lord Ennavant would follow them to London, where the marriage was to take place.

We all got cards for a ball one night, and a torchlight excursion to the shores of the small lake another. I saw Lord Ennavant one morning that he came on business to Mr. Pointz. He was unlike his usual self, grave, attentive to what was going on; and considered the arrangements proposed with due deliberation. Mr. Pointz made some casual allusion to this.

"I have been a week," answered he, "doing penance for all my merry days, now dead and turned to arithmetic. I can't look at their dead bodies lightly."

"The consequences **will** come, to be sure," said Mr. Pointz.

"Yes; there's the consequence, as you call it, up at the Castle; that's a good name, she shall have no other. What a heavy deadly-lively, intrusive consequence it is. Oh, Pointz! is there no way but this?"

"Nay," cried Mr. Pointz, in evident alarm, "everything is in the happiest way of arrangement; the fairest, too, my dear Ennavant," he added, smiling, "all brides are entitled to that word."

"Faugh," said the young man, relapsing into gloom; but laying his hand on the papers he added, with a laugh,

"Here is the fair part of the thing, and now good-bye, I am going to drive the consequence to Kantson and back. I can't do it under three hours, I'm afraid. Suppose, Pointz, I break both our necks down Castlehill? You don't seem to think so? Well, if you see any objection, I will not. Good-bye."

"I can't conceive that," said Pointz, when he was gone; "here's the way out of all his difficulties arranged to his hand, and he is not satisfied yet."

"Don't you remember her," I asked, "when she was at the Castle last year?"

"But just, I did not speak to her; but I know her worth. It would be very imprudent to neglect such a chance, since he has got it, merely because he does not like her very much."

So saying he went his way, and I went mine. But Mr. Pointz was not upon roses. His well-constructed scheme was more than once threatened with destruction, and Lady Ennavant had sent several times before the next fortnight was over to her cousin, to take counsel upon the state of affairs. He did not intend to betray the family secrets, but he had taken the habit of talking to me, and I learned therefore something of the way matters were progressing.

The affianced pair, it appeared, had anything but an easy time of it; both were excessively self-indulged, and although the gentleman was more inclined by disposition and good manners to bear and forbear, the lady lost the advantage which this fact would have given her by her anxiety for the marriage, which far exceeded his. Every day seemed to increase Lord Ennavant's indifference on this point, or rather his desire that such an event should never occur, and Mr. Pointz feared daily lest he and the estate should still be left on the rough billows of their difficulties, after enjoying the near sight of so ample and calm a haven. He had eyes for nothing but this one point. Let him but get them married and all was right; what the result to their personal happiness might be never interested him at all.

It seems that there differences of opinion between the engaged pair, on matters sometimes of importance and sometimes of none; and that instead of due submission on the part of the lover, he would on such occasions

further aggravate his fault by leaving his fair one to herself, to recover or not her equanimity. Quarrels had taken place, and I understood that he had made a serious offer to repair his errors, by renouncing all pretension to the blessing prepared for him; but that tears and faintings followed this proposition, and the most formal refusal to consent to such a settlement of their difference. These matters at the castle were under a veil, and seen but dimly, the thicker to me, perhaps, because my first thought on every change of prospect there, was the difference it made to the future of the Homestead.

It therefore made me happy when I saw the engaged pair riding or walking amicably together; and when, on the contrary, I met Lord Ennavant with his servant and his portmanteau, plainly bent on a bachelor excursion, I had a pang at my heart which he could little suspect. As little perhaps did I know his, and yet there was a recklessness about him which ought to have made one aware how much unhappiness was developed under that careless good-humoured nature. He would go the most extravagant distance to hunt, and when in the field, his mad career was talked of with laughter and wonder. There were the same gay good-humoured expressions when he met me, but they seemed like the flashes of an instant, and as if a more prolonged intercourse would show their utter extinction.

One morning it was that of the day when the ball was to take place I met him and Miss Nation riding together to a near meet of the hounds, at which she chose to be present. It was the first time I had come into her actual presence during this visit, and I was not so forward as to claim acquaintance until she should authorize me. She did not do so; she took pains to look me steadily in the face, and to turn away from all recognition. I therefore kept my bow to myself, and after a greeting from Lord Ennavant was going on, but he prevented me.

"You remember Mr. Greswold, don't you?" he said to her; "you met him last year."

"No, I do not," said Miss Nation.

"Surely; at all events, I must make you known to my friend now."

"Oh, you did introduce me to somebody, something like that name, some time; but I can't remember names or faces," and with half a nod, she made her horse turn short upon me. I moved out of the way.

"Now, I won't bear that," said Lord Ennavant, abruptly; and stooping to me he added, "she is quite charming, only she is in a devil of a temper with me; and vents it on you; but I can't be bullied," and he said this as he wheeled his horse round and followed his mistress.

I laughed and went my way; but was amazed, not ten minutes after, to see the same pair riding so as to meet me, looking as accidental as they could, and pretending to be in search of the hounds, which I knew were quite in an opposite direction.

"It seems **you** had forgotten **me**, had not you Mr. Greswold?" said the lady. "The moment my lord explained to me, I remembered you perfectly. How are you, pray?"

"My lord indeed," muttered Lord Ennavant with a smothered imprecation, while I hastened to say whatever civility I could think of; and as they rode on, thought within myself what heaps of ill-will to me, and acerbity between those two, this concession forced from the lady would entail. However, it interested me but little. I was glad that he kept the upper hand at all events, and hoped things would shake into their places, and no irreparable quarrel result from the vexed and irritable look which his naturally kindly face wore to-day.

At night, about half-past eight, Mr. Pointz came to my room to say that some commotion had occurred at the Castle, and that Lady Ennavant had sent for him to come immediately, before the time for the arrival of the ball guests. He had therefore ordered his brougham, and proposed that I should accompany him, and wait somewhere

or other in the Castle till the time for the guests to assemble. This was evidently best for the convenience of everyone, including the horses, and I made myself ready to set out.

The great hall was brightly lighted up, and some yet additional camellia plants were being arranged about the entrance. When we arrived, Mr. Pointz went directly to the private rooms, and I stood awhile looking on while the house-steward directed the operations. I said some words to him, I know not what, about the good effect of his arrangements, and he, glad it seemed to unburthen his mind, took the opportunity and broke out

"Glad you approve of it, sir, for I shall have no chance before the company arrives of knowing whether it is to my lord's satisfaction."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Are you not aware, sir oh, I thought Mr. Pointz knew perhaps as my lady had sent for him? This morning, sir, Miss Nation came back from hunting alone, and I was given to understand that my lord thought he should be late, and would not be home for dinner; but we were not to wait for him in fact, the ladies dined alone and we are so uneasy, sir, lest my lord should not be here at the beginning of the ball; for he's not come, and has to dress yet."

"But where is he don't you know?"

"No, sir; the groom that rode his hack gave it him after the hunting was over, and he rode away at a great pace, but did not say where he was going. Miss Nation and her mother take it sadly amiss."

"Was the hunting late?"

"Very late, sir nearly dark. They killed in gorse."

"Did not he come towards home?"

"Richard said the road he took might lead one way towards the Castle that is through Wissett's wood; but it led also to other places it's the direct road to Slugford station."

"Yes, the direct road to Slugford."

"It was about half-past five when they killed, and now it is nine."

"True what can have kept him?"

"Well, sir, you know yourself, sir, my lord is not very punctual, nor cares much for his engagements; but I rather think there was some little unpleasantness. You'll excuse me."

The prudent man here walked off, giving directions, and I went under the portico of the building, and listened eagerly for the sound of horses' feet on the ground, hardened by the frost which had set in since sunset.

The house lay in the bright moonlight, but more deeply bathed in its own artificial glitter. There it was, ample, ornamented; the result and type of riches spent upon the superfluities and luxuries of life. A number of labourers were occupied in removing the ladders used to light the coloured lamps which hung on the arch of entrance. They were earning their shillings in the course of the rich man's outpouring of pounds. The rich man was the powerful centre of all their labour; this great construction for his dwelling this great outlay for his amusement though he was bare in many another point to the strokes of fortune, yet he was above the instruments of it so much that they never questioned his eminence. They felt as if he had a right to be happier, greater, safer than they; and the ills of

life seemed as far from him as were hunger and need. Yet there are other ills severer even than those, and it did seem to—night as though the castle, instead of being a scene of festive enjoyment, were destined to be one of "broken hearts and heads."

I knew there was at this moment anger, anxiety, mortification, all veiled by those velvet curtains, all suffered along that splendid façade, and I thought of the young master, voluntarily absent, and willing, probably, to forfeit it all, if in exchange he might purchase his freedom.

One or two guests arrived. I saw the earliest those probably to whom it had been difficult to make themselves even so late as this. They were received with all the pomp of preparation, and ushered, as though all had been as smooth within as without, into the reception rooms.

A well-dressed lady was there and there had she been for the last hour a dependant of the family, all smiles and assurances that these early comers came exactly when expected, and they sat there with an occasional accession, conversation at the tide's lowest ebb, with company faces and sinking hearts.

CHAPTER XV.

MEANWHILE, taking care to avoid the miserable guests who had come too soon, and who could not retreat from the purgatory they had voluntarily incurred, I again went out to listen. The wind was rising, and clouds had come over the sky. The castle was in all its own brilliancy, but the face of nature had turned to gloom.

It was very strange that the master should not be returned. I longed to hear him arrive. Surely he would do so, for he was too kindly and polished to offer so grievous an insult as his voluntary absence would be. Yet who could answer for the effects of a serious quarrel upon one so indulged and spoiled as Lord Ennavant, however amiable by nature? He is angry, thought I; he is vexed about something. That strange woman has irritated the kindest temper that man can have. Who knows, if I could meet with him, whether I might not say some word, suggest some topic, which might soothe him, and perhaps prevail with him to return? I may as well try; and so meditating, I took up a plaid from the table, and set out (half feeling I was wrong in so doing) towards the wood mentioned by the groom. If I did not fall in with him soon, I would return, and most likely should find him at home before me; and then I should have had my walk for my pains. No matter, there was nothing to do at the Castle as yet.

Accordingly I set off. There was light enough (though the moon became more and more veiled) to make one's way easily, and I went along the darkened paths, seeing yet for some time the great glitter of the illuminated house behind the trees. By degrees I got further and further from the playing, into the working, parts of the world; I passed by the low cottage with its small fenced garden and its little heap of coal, sheltered by the eaves; the farmer's cattle in the dark fields, the tiny rivulet, scarcely trickling between two borders of ice, which had begun since nightfall to collect on either side. I was now on the border of the great wood, which was traversed by more than one path, where a horseman, seeking a short cut to the Castle, might have ridden. I listened eagerly for any sound that might direct me; but in the many occasional near or distant voices of the night could hear only the cry or motion of the brute inhabitants of the forest chiefly implying ease and satisfaction some few harsher; perhaps in pain, or enmity, or fear.

I went on at hazard, half ashamed beforehand of the ridicule with which I should be greeted if I succeeded in my search, and more than once smiling to myself to think how in an hour from this time we should be all in a lighted ball-room, instead of a dark wood, uncomfortably wandering in uncertainty. Still I could not bear to turn back, and pursuing my way through the forest paths I came at last upon a dry gully lying in a limestone fracture of rocks which grew narrower and descended more precipitously, as I kept on along the edge of it.

It became at last a chasm rather than a valley, and at length crossed at a right angle a path which seemed to

descend the side of the chasm, and probably remounted the opposite side. While I stood on the brink, thinking for a moment which way to take, there came suddenly on my ear from the depth below, a shrill weak sound, not that of a human voice, but as it seemed to me, the low neigh of a horse in distress. At that moment for the first time the thought that some physical evil might have happened rushed over me.

I cast my eyes round to question any appearance there to be seen, and I caught in a moment the fact that the ground was trampled by a horse's hoofs, so irregularly as to show that the horse had violently resisted what the rider had violently urged it to do. On the opposite side a sapling hung loose over the depth, as though lately pushed from its place and clinging as yet by the remains of its roots to the soil it had grown in. I caught hold of the bushes that grew down the bank and let myself down with utmost speed towards the bottom. As I neared it, the distressful neigh which I had heard before, sounded quite near below me, and in a few more seconds I saw at my feet a mangled horse, which from the scattered stones and soil had plainly fallen back from the bank above; and, lying partly under the horse, partly against the rock, was the man I thought to find in high fortune, high health, youthful strength dead.

"O God!" I cried, flinging myself beside him. "Lord Ennavant! speak, speak! Is this real?" Too real! The very warmth of life had ebbed. Life had been long away from its house. Away millions of leagues among the stars above, it might by now be travelling.

I tried to disengage the mortal frame from the horse. The wretched animal had broken its back and lay almost motionless, but still with the sense that it ought to obey the human being who wanted something of it. A vain effort to move, an alarmed expression in the eyes, piteously appealed to one's compassion, but at that moment I could scarcely disengage a thought from the human wreck before me.

All help was hopeless, and yet to call help was the first necessity of the moment. I struggled up the steep bank, and found, as I rose to the top, confirmation of the fact apparent before, that the horse had been urged to that mad leap and had failed in the desperate stride, with consequences fatal to its rider and itself. But I waited for no examination. I rushed along the narrow wood-path, conscious that it must lead before long to some abode of man, within or without the forest; and in fact at no very great distance, I began to see the flickering of a light among the trees, and heard, still a good way off, the gay humble notes of a violin, contentedly sounding to itself in the midst of a stillness which it neither disturbed nor heeded. I rushed on, and quickly found myself beside the hut of some charcoal burners, who had raised it in the midst of the forest, where they watched day and night the progress of their turf-covered heaps.

The flame I had seen came from a fire outside the pyramidal hut, at which two women were preparing food while the men and children sat or stood around.

Into this circle I darted, telling in few words that an accident had happened, and entreating them to go back with me, and to bring with them the means of conveying the man who had suffered to a place of refuge.

They were all prompt to help, and quickly arrange a sort of bier with a hurdle and some sacks thrown upon it, which four of them lifted on their shoulders, and with quick pace followed me along the narrow path. As we hurried forward, the one by whose side I ran inquired of me further particulars.

"Who is it, master; d'ye know?"

"Indeed I do; it's Lord Ennavant."

"The Lord!" cried the man, half stopping. "Then a can't be dead."

"Nooa, that can't be," said another.

"Well, get on, don't wait to talk. Alas! it's true."

Nor did they wait; they went forward quicker than ever, quicker than when they thought it was one of themselves who had fallen into trouble. But the subject was so piercing that words would come.

"It never can be my Lord," said one. "What should ail **him** to be dead in the forest?" another added.

"More by token, I met him myself after dark this very night."

"Did you," I cried; "where? What was he doing?"

"May be off two or three miles. A was doing nothing but swinging along the road."

"Riding very fast?"

"Ay, fast; but I had my cart in the track, and sought to pull it out of the way, for it was uncommon narrow; and the Lord said, 'Never mind, don't hurry, I'll get by.' And then a said, 'Thank you; good night.' And I answered him and said, 'Good night, my Lord.' Well, well, to think how 'good night' may prove vain words. But a can't be dead!"

"Yes, indeed, indeed he is. Here we are close by now. He lies down there, in the bottom of that gully yonder."

"In Carr's Hollow; how could he come there?"

"I don't know. Now then, how will you get the hurdle down?"

"We'll manage that. There, you two get on first, so; now then."

And rapidly they descended the steep bank.

Lying as I left him changeless for evermore, there was the young strong frame which this very evening had been full of vital activity. A few dead leaves had fluttered down upon him, beginning the kindly office of nature, which would have covered up the relics of mortality, and would again have absorbed them among her work of renewing life and beauty.

The horse still breathed and suffered beside him; the bright colours of his dress, the glitter of his spurs caught the moon's ray, and were all that remained of the pride of place and name which had been his that morning.

"Ay, dead many an hour," said one of the men under his breath; and then all stood still a few seconds, not ready to act in the first surprise of the actual sight of what had befallen. As for me, if it had not been for the consciousness that one's inner man is not to be made a spectacle for others to gaze at, I could have shouted his name aloud, or have fallen beside him, and vainly clasped the frame which nothing could warm again. A woman may do so, and does it; but a man habitually knows it would make him despicable, and does not. I stood up, therefore, and would not tremble, although the boltings of my heart seemed to be using up half the power of life. But it was no matter; I aided the men to raise the helpless frame upon the hurdle, and so to arrange it that we might bear it up the bank.

It was a difficult matter, and took time; we slowly clomb up with scarcely a word uttered, and that only a brief caution, or suggestion; reaching the top at last, and there pausing to get breath again for a few seconds.

In that silence the sound of the horse's faint neigh reached us, seeming to ask help. What could I do? This great ruin must be attended to first. Man's creature his pastime his broken plaything must bear, must die, as best it might.

Relieving each other by one at a time, we made our way towards the Castle. The wife of one of the men, who had followed us at a distance, came up as we went forward.

"Oh, good God!" she cried, approaching and gazing on the bloodless face. Then turned away with a sharp cry, covering her eyes as though unable to endure the actual spectacle.

"But he must not lie there in the cold air," she said; and hastily untying her cloak, slipped it from her shoulders, and reverently covered over the dishonour of death.

It was a kindly action, and put me on re-flecting how to make his home fit to receive this heavy news. I entreated the woman's help, and with a pencil wrote inside the cover of a letter the ghastly intelligence in few words to Mr. Pointz. She engaged to run on with it, and then I could let my attention rest wholly on the grievous burthen that we bore.

We got on as quickly as we could, and before long were out of the forest, and on the hard, frosty turf of the park, and in sight of the house over which such a dismal story had come. Again I saw the lights shining through the trees again I perceived the quiver of the coloured lamps in the air. I heard the roll of carriages, which were now following each other quickly up the drive, and one after the other stopped before the open door.

As we drew near, there was a group of three or four men, who came running towards us. Mr. Pointz was one; he was incredulous of the news which had reached him, and which seemed only like the truth of a dream; and he had not made known in words what had happened, only rushed out, saying enough to make a coming evil evident.

A rumour was already running among the servants, but though every one whispered it, nobody believed or acted upon it. Things were still going their way, as the action of life runs on for a few seconds, even after fatal blow has been struck. But the seconds were soon at an end. We, who bore the truth with us, and the few who were rushing towards us, met.

There was hardly a word spoken; a few horror-stricken whispers; a silent gaze upon those set features; a question; a gesture of anguish then hasty commands in a low voice to ride for the surgeon, and for others to stop the guests who were yet at any distance from the house.

We moved on again almost directly after the meeting.

"Carry the body in the back way," said the house-steward.

And thus was its master brought back to Winspear Castle.

Most of us remained up the whole night, which was occupied in the broken events following on the great scene of death. There was the hasty arrival of the surgeon, his steps so quickly directed to the chamber, breaking the silence which reigned over it; the mother's fearful eyes fixed on the face which she could not comprehend; the hysterical cry; the fainting which overcame her when his death was proclaimed, though she knew before that he was dead; the putting forth by persuasive violence from the chamber of those who clung to the couch, and who must depart to make way that the attendants on the dead might perform their services.

A space of time followed. Then the body had received its rites, and might again be visited. Then the sheet, and the garment adjusted for death, were seen taking place of the young man's garb which had been worn so lifefully in the morning.

The room was in dismal order. The windows open, the curtains drawn from around the bed, the chair set for the watcher, a shaded lamp the only light, the outline of the figure on the bed seen through the covering; a few

flowers laid for custom's sake on his pillow.

There was the hurried change of splendour and gaiety into grief and shade; a thousand lights put out; hundreds of guests stealing away; silence growing deeper and deeper; with occasionally a hurried step, a voice in hasty command, like the departing of life, still heard as it went out from the scene, and then came the settling down into the intensest stillness and the reign of sorrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE dawn of the winter's morning was just perceptible when I set out on my return home. As we say in our modern English, I was "beat," nothing can better express the collapse of one's energies, and the heavy weight with which some events oppress one.

I moved on, just enough alive to the scene to keep the right path home, but careless to every interest which remained in the world. The career which I had seen extinguished was all that impressed me, and I had more than once to brush away the tears which rose to my eyes as I walked along. Even the image of Ruth did but glance by me. I knew my hopes were lost, but was willing to accept such a conclusion; the entire and perfect loss was welcome, rather than the restlessness of doubt in a moment when the whole value of life seemed overthrown.

Cold and exhausted, I stood before the fire which had been kept burning for our return, and I suppose at last seated myself there in the great chair, and lost my misery in sleep. I did not know how I came there, when I was awakened later in the morning by the entrance of a housemaid, who started on seeing me, and whose presence at once renewed all the realities of the preceding night.

I asked if she knew what had happened.

"Yes," she said; "she and others had been at the castle to see the ball, and had come back early, as all had been put off."

It seemed to me as though the distance at which master and servant live from each other in our artificial state made the sufferings or joys of the master nothing but a spectacle to the inferiors, on which they seemed to have no right or inclination to do more than gaze.

I went straight to my room, and was changing my dress, when a written message was brought me from Mr. Pointz to say I should be wanted at the inquest, which was to be holden immediately on the body of the young master of the Castle.

I set out again along the same path that I had traced last night. Sleep had done its work in restoring the balance to my self-command, and in reducing the exaggerations of my view of things. But seen in their soberest point, they were indeed gloomy as an arctic storm. Youth and its prospects and plans suddenly driven into the abyss; life at its fountain frozen irretrievably, the sudden wrench which cast out so many from the plan they seemed to hold securely yesterday; then again that thought which was the silent companion of my heart, that I too had lost all in this shipwreck; all was dreary, all was heavy, all pressed upon the spirits as though no elastic movement could ever bring them to move again.

I came into the darkened house silently; all the observance of death was there close drawn blinds to every window; noiseless servants moving about on their several errands, the solemn faces, some most unaffectedly so, some in imitation merely. The most grievous that I saw was that of Mr. Pointz, who was still so bewildered with the stroke that had come across all his habitual thoughts that he appeared quite unable to conceive it. He was doing what ordinary acts of business fell to his share. He was able to do them, partly because expected to be able;

yet in fact I think they were as hard upon him as they would have been upon the secluded women, whom custom shuts up in their rooms with a book of sermons and their white pocket-handkerchiefs.

He led me into Lord Ennavant's sitting-room, where were assembled the twelve householders who had been summoned upon the order of the coroner. The room was in the ordinary state in which I had seen it so often. A bright fire burnt on the hearth, books and writing materials lay on the table. His cigar-case was there, his pocket-book, his amadou-case. all that he had left yesterday morning, never to change or touch again; a dog was stretched before the fire, which looked up expectingly as each person came in, but accustomed to the absences of its master, lay down again contented to wait for him.

The coroner sat at the table examining the witnesses, while the clerk recorded their testimony; but though the event was there, it was so far removed from all natural contingencies that it would not have been probable had it not been certain. The charcoal burner who had met Lord Ennavant in the evening, repeated what he himself had said to me. I related the manner of finding the body of our young lord; but when I found him his lips were as silent as the stones whereon he lay. The men who had borne him from the place of death told their story, but nothing except conjecture accounted for the fate of the man, who had been in this room yesterday the careless and exclusive owner.

The name of Miss Nation was mentioned more than once as having been with Lord Ennavant during the early part of the day. It was, however, plainly unnecessary to summon her as a witness, and whenever it is possible to spare a woman or a relation from appearing, the coroner observed it was the practice to do so.

Every one acquiesced, and it was proposed to adjourn now to the room where the human remains lay, when a message came to the door from the very lady in question. Her own servant, a very important man in plain clothes, entered with a face composed to unnatural lugubriousness, and delivered a missive to the effect that his mistress was willing to do violence to her own feelings for the sake of the beloved object she had lost, and to bear her testimony to the last hour of his life, lest blame should be cast upon one whose worth she alone, according to this statement of hers, could know.

The coroner read aloud, with hesitation, not readily comprehending the message; But recovering himself, he professed that he had satisfaction in finding it unnecessary to give Miss Nation the pain she dreaded, and that, with every sense of her fortitude and kindness in offering, he was able to dispense with her attendance.

Mr. Pointz heard, and was aroused by what he heard, but he let no word escape him, except to my private ear.

"That woman!" said he, "she wants to act the widowed Countess, and that's all she has been thinking since he died, although she makes even herself believe that she is full of fine feelings, and and fiddlestick!"

He grasped my arm, and I felt him tremble as we walked upstairs; he was hardly able to support himself, yet he kept as calm an exterior as he could; and he could, like all of us, since he really would. It was a matter of business upon which we entered that room, and the business was gone through quietly; we were called upon for calm action, and were permitted on the serious sympathy of men looking on early death.

One little circumstance alone heightened this expression of grave concern. A footman of the house had followed us into the room, an elderly man, who had long lived here, and whose family occupied one of the lodges; he had a little boy, his youngest child, who was in the habit of opening the lodge-gate when he saw Lord Ennavant coming, and was nearly always rewarded by his master's nod and word of thanks. The man brought in this child by the hand, and when nobody was very near, silently lifted him to see his master once more.

The little fellow at sight of the corpse grew very red, and involuntarily lifted his hand to his forehead to make his accustomed bow, struggling at the same time to be put down. That natural homage went to the hearts which were

being kept so orderly, and in more than one spectator the tears rushed to their hitherto dry eyes, and a word of pity or grief broke from them.

I went home to the house of Mr. Pointz, which I resolved should be no longer my home. I would not have remained doing services to Colonel Winspear (as yet nobody but the servants called them by their titles), no, not if he would have taken them for nothing infinitely less if I should be paid for them. But I would not annoy Mr. Pointz as yet on the subject. He was sadly enough employed at present to be spared where to spare was possible. From him I heard occasionally, during the dreary days which preceded the funeral, some particulars of the inmates of the castle. Especially I inquired about the mother, whose bereavement seemed enough to break her heart.

"It is! it is!" said Pointz; "one would think so at least; but I don't understand her. You know she is not a hard woman, nor a strong woman; what she feels she readily expresses, for she is simple and natural. Now she is not broken-hearted; she seems rather as if she were vexed that misery meets her at every turn, and to be looking about for some place or some thing where she can escape it. It is like bodily pain to her, which hurts badly, and is to be got rid of, if possible. It is not that she bears her grief, nor conceals her grief, either; but that she cannot endure to be wretched, and **is** not."

I could not but smile, as Mr. Pointz tried to disentangle his impressions, and used those plain words. Mr. Pointz saw it, and smiled also; but he was so sick at heart that he shrank from the feeling of a smile, and shook his head with an expression of disgust at himself.

"But you should see the other," he went on; "the bride that was to have been. She and her mother have decided that it is right they should stay here till the funeral is over; perhaps it is so, I am sure I don't know; but she is a mere actress, and her part is over-dressed. Such veils and flounces of black crêpe as you never saw! Such broad black rims to her paper that there is not room for the writing! Such hysterics every now and then, and between times such a scolding of her maid! Such good dinners ordered and eaten! The anxiety for the arrival of the post is intense. Has that anything to do with my kind, dear young Ennavant, lying dead on his bier? No, only with the importance of the Countess manquée. How I do hate that woman!"

"As much as **he** did," I said.

"Ah, yes!" he answered, in a changed voice. "Would she had never come here!"

I found further that Ruth had been entreated by her aunt to go to her, as soon as the catastrophe had befallen, and had complied.

"She is very silent," said Mr. Pointz. "I have never talked with her, but I see her moving about, grave and subdued. I believe at times she has been weeping alone, because she avoids looking one in the face with her honest eyes. She writes letters and sees people on business for her aunt, and is as useful and quiet as perfect women always are."

Time had run on to the last day before the one appointed for the funeral. I knew I could but once more look on the face which had been so familiar; and as the evening drew near I went in by a back entrance to the castle, and made my way up a private staircase to the door of the apartment.

Two women, who were watching in the ante-room, rose as I gently pushed open the door, and made their formal curtsies.

"Can I go in?" I said.

They answered "Yes," in a low voice, and I passed them and entered the chamber of death.

The coffin was placed upon the bed, and the curtains drawn all around. I put aside the one next to me, and stood gazing on the altered face, till, alone as I was, broken words of affection and of deep anguish stole out over the deathly—silent friend. The murmured expressions were suddenly arrested by what seemed a suppressed sob on the opposite side of the bed, and immediately the folds of the curtain were opened, and I saw that Ruth was sitting beside it.

She rose up, and with noiseless foot came and met me, and put her hand in mine.

"You grieve for him," said she. "It is a relief to me to find so much grief for him. I cannot leave him altogether to hired mourners, this last day. It seems a want of reverence for one who cannot ask it now."

"Besides," I answered, "you have been much his companion you miss him from your daily life."

"No, not that," said Ruth; "but I know the worth of **him** of whom there was no leave-taking. He was kind to me he was kind to all. There is not a living creature within these walls to whom he has not said or done a kindness. If I could but thank him once more! Your feel like me," she added.

"Is it so?" I said. "Is your feeling such as mine is? or Ruth in this solemn hour, I dare ask you, was that man beloved by you?"

"No," said Ruth.

That one word in her mouth bore with it all its simple meaning. I knew it for perfect truth.

"I thank you," I said.

She looked at me earnestly, and after meeting my eyes for a few seconds, she added, "You have fancied that was my secret? It was very different. I will tell you another time."

"Never! if not now," I said. "I shall never see you again perhaps. I feel that this moment is the close of a portion of my life which has been overfull; and the same relations never will come again. Have so much compassion as to give the rest of my days, at least, the case of understanding you."

Ruth's eyes left mine, and in a very low voice, she said briefly

"It was my brother."

"But how could he so affect you?"

"His position was false you know it. He has many excuses. Our duty was to work for him and the difficulties he had caused. I engaged myself to the service of a lady, and my father could ill endure it."

"I knew nothing, nor suspected anything of this," I said.

"It will be the story of a future day," said Ruth. "When we meet again I will tell you all."

"Never more," I said. "It is not for me to ask for your secret, nor to remind you of either pain or pleasure."

"It is your right," answered Ruth; "for, as I learnt but yesterday, you enabled my mother to save him in a moment of extreme peril."

"Your brother! was it he? I never inquired."

"You ought to know also," said Ruth, turning her head towards the bed, "he too served us. He learned my project and obviated the necessity."

"Did he, indeed? and you were grateful?" Then I remembered the word I had overheard her use in the wood.

"Yes; little thinking that those grateful feelings would soon wither in the dust."

"Alas!" I answered, "the Past is altogether passed. All good is gone from the things gone by. I, too, learn I learn you have been even better than I knew even more perfect."

"Why do you speak thus?" said Ruth. "It is not you or I who can call up any feeling at this moment. I answer your question I thank you for what you have done, but there is neither pain nor pleasure by the side of that ruined life and hope."

She moved softly back to the bed again and sat down by its side. "You must go now," she said. "It was gentle and generous in you to feel so truly about this last day. Goodbye, Mr. Greswold."

She held out her hand to me, and I took it into both mine. Ruth little knew with what anguish I held and loosed that hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER dreary day wore on, and then came the artificial pomp of the rich man's burial. Such must be, doubtless; but, for honour to the dead and relief to the living, there is no such funeral as the bare coffin borne by the hands of former neighbours, and followed by the few who loved and lived with him. Next came the change from the past and the preparation for the future inhabitants; the departure of the former; the resumption of life; the gamekeeper's gun heard in the woods, the workman's hammer in alterations which had been interrupted.

The new possessors were still in their old house, and, Mr. Pointz told me, intended to go abroad for a year or more, to allow time for old associations gently to withdraw from the Castle, means being adopted at the same time to pay the debts accumulated, by savings made on the income, and by the sale of outlying property.

I announced to Mr. Pointz that I could stay where I was no longer, and he was heartily vexed to be put to so much inconvenience. But that was no more to me than my uneasy feelings were to him, and with mutual selfishness we arranged to part.

I got a note one day while things were going on to this end, which put me much in mind of the one I had received on an autumn morning lately, when Mrs. Winspear had summoned me to that interview with her, which now I understood related to her son. It was from herself again, and again requested I would pay her a visit that very morning, if convenient, as she wished to speak with me.

I obeyed the summons directly, and once more reached the door of the Homestead which I had entered with so many changes of feeling. There was a great alteration, though all was still simple and modest; but the Homestead was the dwelling now of rich people, as hitherto it had been of poor. A servant in mourning livery was ready at the door; camellias and hot-house ferns, grown at the Castle, were arranged in the well-warmed entrance-hall; a

keeper's boy had passed me to the back entrance, carrying game; great fires burned in every room; and the mistress of the house, as I was ushered into her presence, rose up in the dignity of suitable silk and creêpe, which I contrasted in my own mind with that rusty gown on which I had spent my heartfelt concern at my last visit. "But the beautiful small white collar and cuffs **then** had been Ruth's work," I said to myself; "they are the care of a hireling now. And of course they are," I added to myself, knocking down the unreasonable whining of my imagination.

The lady received me kindly as she had done on the former occasion, but there was the difference of manner between one in great necessity for a service to be rendered her and the same person above all need of obligation. She had an embarrassing part, too, to play, for she purported returning to me the money she had borrowed; and to have been reduced to borrow from me was a humiliation which grated against her past and present sense of dignity.

It was not without grace, however, that she said she had begged to see me in order personally to offer her thanks for an obligation which she would now discharge, but never forget; and she produced a cheque open in her hand, in order (as I easily understood) that I might see it paid, interest as well as principal.

"And, Mr. Greswold," she went on; "I want to ask a favour of you again to-day; you will oblige me again, I hope, by granting it." Saying which, she took up a little maroon-coloured jewel-case from the table and offered it to me, the lid raised. There glittered diamonds pins or studs, I suppose. I shut it directly and laid it down. They were like flame in my hand.

"Thank you," I said; "I will take the kind offer, but not the diamonds. I will remember the one, and forget the other; that is as much as I can do. Pray believe me at once."

"I had no intention of aggrrieving you," said she, kindly, and with surprise.

"No, no, I know that; but you thought to be rid of me; and so you are I am going for ever."

"I heard, and am very sorry to hear it," answered she, gravely.

"Thank you; that's very kind of you. Will you say good-bye for me to all in your house? I cannot see them, doubtless."

"My husband," she answered, "has ridden out, and my daughter has gone over with her brother to Winspear."

"I was sure of it," I said. "Farewell, madam; it is all as it should be all exactly as I expected. I wish you good-bye."

We touched hands and parted. I felt her limp fingers in my hand, and contrasted them with the cordial expression of her face. The limpness of the hand seemed to be the compensation reserved to herself for the cordiality she thought it necessary to look with the face.

After this, all my desires were set upon leaving the neighbourhood; and the next morning but one I hustled up what remained of my preparations, and told Mr. Pointz I was going home.

"If you'll be so good as to leave things just as they are in my room for a little while, I'll come over once more, and take all away."

"Of course you will come over," said he, "often and often I hope; your room will always be ready for you, and I glad to see you."

"Many thanks oh, yes, I hope often to see you!"

So saying, I got into the dog-cart which waited to take me to the station, and drove out of the well-kept small park with many an adverse feeling.

I saw the chimneys of the Homestead as I drove along the short distance to the station, and figured to myself the actual presence which was moving and being there. Ruth was doing something kind or something useful; Ruth was adorning unconsciously the room she was in with her grace; into whichever room she passed she was a welcome and a useful presence, and I, absorbed in the idea and the idolatry of her, must renounce her for ever must extinguish the spark of hope which would heretofore blaze and show itself among the clouds of the future, till it had been rolled into darkness with all that had perished lately. Not that Ruth, if I had ever excited an interest in her, would have changed one jot for any change that had happened in her fortune. I was sure of that; but alas; I was certain of the cold truth, that such interest had never found its way into her heart; and as for the others as for her mother, I mean would she accept me now for her beautiful, her noble daughter? Would she not deny to herself that such a thought could have ever crossed her mind? And the father, he would have started, he would have smiled at the idea, and the brothers, they would have frowned. "Frown, smile, scorn!" cried I, stamping the ground, as I bounded out of the carriage; "you will never see me provoke you to it, nor care, except for the want of the one thing that signifies Ruth's love."

I had but ten miles of railroad to travel, so I was quickly at my destination, and walked up to the old house, and to the kindly mother, sister, and brother. My visits had been so frequent, as the distance was short, that my return was nothing to them, though a great deal to me. To me it was the end of the story, though they thought it but a leaf turned over in the conclusion of the chapter.

My brother had very much recovered, and was enjoying the restoration of health, and the power of occupying himself with business and society. He had returned from an engagement on purpose to receive me, for he alone had a pretty clear insight into the state of mind in which I came home again; but I myself hardly understood the feelings of this first evening. I could have been angry at everything everybody said or looked; I could have loathed my old home, and have talked of no plan except some one of leaving it; I could have misunderstood every attempt to amuse or please me, and have said such bitter words as would have left traces long after they were forgiven; but as it was I took the other course, and was ridiculously gay. I was complaisant; I was officiously pleasant and amusing. I laughed, and ate, and drank; I took notice of a certain air of fête which had been given to the dinner-table. Flowers were there, and favourite dishes which our old housekeeper used to provide for us upon gala days when we were children the return from school and birthdays. It had occurred to me during the morning, that I was indeed going home on my birthday, and I had impatiently "hoped to heaven," in my own heart, that those "poor foolish women would take no notice of it." But now I forced myself to take it all amiably, and especially to avoid mortifying our kind old servant by any expression of distaste which might have been reported to her.

"Mother," I said, "you have not forgotten that I am twenty-three to-day! What a pretty vase of flowers you have given me! I did not think so many were yet come into blossom. And here is my own pet dish, I declare that is very kind of Skelton; she has not forgotten me, I see."

My mother's face brightened; she seemed half to have doubted whether her boy was her own boy still, or whether a change had passed over him, and made the habits of that time, when he had been hers only, distasteful. I suppose, during my frequent visits home, I had been perverse under the irritating doubts and wishes which Ruth, and my then temporary absence from her, inspired. Now I was quite miserable, and therefore more easily seemed happy. "Forgotten!" said my mother; "no, indeed! and I was so glad to see you begin upon home again on your birthday, that I could not help expressing my welcome in these old trifles. Your health, dear John; and many, many a happy year to you. Welcome home!"

"Your health, your health," said my mother and sister. "Welcome home; and," added Maria, "may you be always as happy as you are now!"

"Yes, yes," I answered, "just as happy, I expect. Thanks all. I wish you to be even more so."

And having thus gone through the pain of the "bright sunny smile,
While the cold heart to ruin runs darkly the while," I found myself equal to anything. I took an interest in every neighbour, rich and poor. I listened admirably, I talked sufficiently, I entered thoroughly into the life to which I was returning with such internal distaste; and when bedtime came I put off the hour for separation, and was the last to consent that we should separate for the night.

When my mother and sister went at length, Robert and I betook ourselves to the little smoking-room, and lighted our cigars. I was silent now; my false spirits broke up in the presence of my single-minded and much-tried brother.

Neither spoke for a little while; then he said to me, in a way which seemed as though he implied we had done acting, and were in our natural characters again

"Here's a second false start you have made, John. You must take careful measures before you begin on the third."

"When will that be?" I asked, despondingly.

"Oh, before long, I hope. You are but just three-and-twenty. Time is all before you."

"Too much of it," said I. "What shall I do with it?"

"Nay, you will think better of that when you come to exert yourself."

"I don't know," I said. "Do you remember a story I believe it was true of a young schoolmaster, whose wife died a young wife after being ill, in the midst of great poverty. The head master thought it good for the poor fellow to exert himself; and bade him look over the boys' copies. The copy was this: 'Why should we strive against Fate?' and there were a dozen boys. He read this sentence through six lines each of twelve books; and when the school shut up, he began repeating it in a low voice, and went out and drowned himself."

"He was crazy," said my brother, after a moment's pause. "**You** have not given up the command of your manly reason and your free-will. John, do you remember another old story as old as my mother's lessons when we were children?

"For every evil under the sun

There **is** a remedy, or there's **none**.

If there's but one, be sure you find it;

If there's none never mind it.' That applies to you exactly John."

"So it does," I said; and having nothing to reply to this consolation, which silenced, if it did not console, I got up from my chair and threw away the half of my cigar. My brother, too, was thoughtful after he had spoken; and presently, as neither of us said anything more, he lighted his candle, and bade me "good night." "And a happy birthday," he added, smiling, "notwithstanding your disinclination to it."

"Good night," I nodded, and went off whistling to my room.

There, having bolted the door, I flung up the window as wide as it would go, and sat down, leaning out into the night on my folded arms. It was the 5th of last February, a night, as the reader will recollect, of severe frost; the

thermometer was down below fifteen degrees in the Southern counties. The cold was agreeable to me; the severe night-air, through which the stars shone innumerable, seemed, as did all other influences, to envelope me with careless disregard of the pain inflicted on the overlooked individual man. I liked my own bodily resistance to the adverse influence; I liked to be altogether angry with everything. "Yes (I thought within myself), I am come to the end of all first hopes and plans. What am I to look out for now? What are you pleased to recommend me? Travel perhaps; that will do perfectly, especially as it requires money, and as I have spent more money than I have got. Employment, then? Oh, exactly, it is so easy to find employment, having thrown away life in beginning and failing, up to twenty-three. Well, then, shall I stay at home, and die of panting in a narrow place? Shall I forget all, and be eighteen again? Yes, that's a capital plan excellent, most excellent. Turning back the stars on their course and earth in its orbit is the only difficulty. Well, well, the year is running to its end, and this birthday of mine is nearly over. The seven stars that never set, are going westward; the funeral car of Lazarus moves on, and the three mourners follow behind; they are above the fir wood, and that's the sign of midnight. Twenty-three years ago I was born into this world, and now the twenty-third is run out. The time is gone; the known things are all over, all buried in the darkness behind. Before me lies the great blank page of the future, and no writing is traced upon it. But it is nothing to me; I won't ask, nor think, nor hope, nor fear about it. The leaf of the book is turned, and there's an end the tale is told."

THE END.