

JUST A LOVE STORY

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"Have you any of your last monthly salaries left?"—*Page 17.*

JUST A LOVE STORY

BY

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JUST A LOVE STORY

CHAPTER I.

A VISIONARY

THE sun was sending slanting rays through a western window into Mr. Beaufort's modest house, as he wended his way slowly, very slowly, home. He was a middle-aged man, with a slight stoop and grey hair, which he wore falling over his shoulders. His face was handsome but slightly discontented; his mouth had some bitter lines round it; his whole expression was irritable. In all respects he looked like a man who had missed the right

turning in life. He walked up two or three shallow steps to the suburban villa in Bayswater where he lived, and opened his own hall door with a latch-key. The house bore all the evidence of belonging to the cheap suburban class. The entrance-hall was extremely narrow, and the stairs which led to the storey above both narrow and steep. The ground floor was arranged after the method of thousands of other similar houses—namely, a drawing-room to the front, and a dining-room to the back—the two divided by folding doors. The drawing-room had a bay-window, through which the sun was now sending floods of yellow light ; the dining-room had French window-doors, which opened on to steps leading into a dreary little square of ground, called, for the sake of the name, a garden. Nothing could be more commonplace than the house, nothing more absolutely everyday than its arrangements, and Mr. Beaufort entered it now with one of his habitual sighs. He was an ambitious man, and considered that

he had a soul very far above his petty surroundings.

When he came into the hall, sounds of laughter and gay young voices greeted him.

“Those girls again!” he muttered, under his breath. “Giddy-pates—silly, laughing giddy-pates!” Then he opened the drawing-room door and went in.

It was an untidy room, but by no means ugly or inartistic in its arrangements. Four girls occupied it—four busy, active, energetic girls.

“Here’s father,” said Patty, the youngest, and instantly four tongues ceased to chatter, four pairs of lips no longer smiled, and all eyes were turned with a look of expectation, though scarcely of pleasure, on the fretful-looking man who had disturbed some pleasant chatter.

“Is tea ready, Patience?” he said, addressing the girl who had exclaimed on his entrance.

She was a little creature, with a slight figure, and brown softly tinted face ; her eyes and hair

were also of a gentle tone of brown ; her manner was bright and unassuming.

“ Patty, we are starving for tea ! ” said Ethel, the eldest sister ; while Constance got up from where she was kneeling on the rug, and began to smooth and arrange her hair before a small glass which stood over the mantelpiece.

Patty darted off apologetically, saying she would see about tea at once, and then a fourth figure rose very slowly out of the depths of an easy-chair, and a full, rich, pleasant voice said very brightly :

“ Have you brought us any good news, Uncle Egbert ? ”

“ No, Elizabeth, I have not,” he replied. “ Publishers have no discernment, no knowledge, no wisdom, these days. There, my dear,” he added, looking with a suddenly softened expression into the beautiful face of his young questioner, “ I did not mean to worry you with my affairs. One of you girls let me know

when tea is ready—I am going down to my study.”

He left the room and the three girls looked at one another.

“There!” said Constance, “it’s just as I thought—he has been disappointed again. Why won’t he try to get some steady work in his profession, instead of dabbling in literature? Of course I knew that poem would never be accepted! Who wants long, stupid, tiresome poems these days? Oh, I have no patience with father, frittering away his talents as he does!”

“Still, you might be a little sorry for his disappointment,” said Elizabeth, sinking gracefully once more into an easy-chair. “I do wish the publishers would be lenient—he’d have been so delighted, the dear old man!”

“It’s very easy for you to be sorry for him, Betty,” said Ethel, the eldest of the girls, “but you are not a fair judge—you are an outsider and independent—you have lots of money of

your own, and can get no end of pretty dresses—and whatever you wear you look lovely in—oh, dear!—whereas we——”

“Poor old Ethel!” said Betty, springing to her feet, running to her cousin, and kissing her affectionately: “I am so sorry! I wish I could divide my money amongst you all; but I thought you were very glad to be in the Post Office.”

“I’m not,” said Ethel; “I hate it—it’s a most grinding life, and in this hot weather it is quite intolerable. No, sixty pounds a year is not worth the suffering of earning it.”

“We are hardly treated,” broke in Constance; “I don’t think girls ought to have to earn their living; and, I repeat again, I have no patience with father. You are not a fair judge, Elizabeth, and it is very tiresome your taking his part.”

“But Patty takes his part too,” said Elizabeth; “and she has much the dullest life of you all.”

“Oh! Patty—poor little thing! she'd pity any one who even wore a frown; but she is quite a child still, and she will be wiser by-and-by.”

“Never, I hope,” said Elizabeth, with fervour; “I love her for her tender heart.”

Then she rose and went out of the room, walking across the little drawing-room in indolent but graceful fashion, and stepping up the narrow stairs to her own bedroom, which was fairly large, and was on the first floor, with the air of a young princess.

Here she changed her morning dress for a very pretty evening one—put some choice cut flowers into her hair; and when Ethel and Constance were going into the room where Patty had prepared the tea, Elizabeth was seen sailing downstairs in her lovely dress, ready to go off with her chaperon, a lady who was now waiting for her at the door in a brougham.

“It is hard on us,” said Constance; “I almost wish we did not live in the same house; it keeps me in a continual fret to see Elizabeth

looking so beautiful and happy, and having such a good time."

"Hush!" said Ethel, "she may hear you ; you know we could not do without her money."

"Good-bye, girls," called out Elizabeth in her gay voice ; "I'll bring you back all the stories I can to cheer you up. Good-bye, Patty-pan !"

"Good-bye, dear Betty," said Patty, running eagerly out of the little sitting-room where tea was waiting. "I hope you'll have a lovely, lovely time. You do look so sweet!"





CHAPTER II.

A CONSOLER

THE girls took their places at the tea-table, and looked round for their father.

"He's not coming," said Patty; "I took him down his tea to the study; he's not very well; he's had another trouble."

"Now look here, Patty," said Constance, speaking with energy, "Elizabeth is not here to take your part, and you really must listen to us. It's perfect folly your speaking of father's silly disappointments with publishers as *troubles*. If he would only take them to heart, and give up writing useless poetry, they might be regarded as blessings in disguise."

"How can you, Constance," said Patty, her brown eyes flashing; "how can you speak in that contemptuous tone of what our father writes? his lovely, lovely thoughts! It is a great sorrow to me their not appearing before the world. This is my trouble as well as father's, and I cannot think how you can be so unkind as not to feel it also. Did you see his face this evening? Why, he looked five years older."

"Don't waste your temper, my dear," said Ethel in her most tantalising voice; "we won't discuss the subject. Constance, how are you getting on at that type-writing office? Are you likely to earn anything worth speaking of? You see, as our father will spend his time over poetry, and Patty will encourage him, you and I must put our shoulders to the wheel."

"You are horrid," said Patty, letting the lids droop over her eyes, so that no one might see the quick tears which filled them; but the next moment she was laughing merrily at some

smart remark of Ethel's, and then her April face became full of sadness when Constance complained of headache, and said she knew she should lose her health unless she had some change. Certainly, to look at her, outsiders would have said that Patty was far too sympathising, and that she would undoubtedly wear herself out before her time if she took everybody else's troubles so strongly to heart.

In the course of that same evening, as Mr. Beaufort was sitting in his tiny study downstairs, with quires of loose manuscripts scattered before him, his pen in his hand, and deep meditation on his brow, he was roused by a gentle tap at the door.

"Who is that? I don't want to be disturbed!" he called out.

"I won't disturb you, father," said Patience, coming in with the air of a privileged child. "I have brought my work; and if you are inclined to be kind to me——"

Mr. Beaufort's brow relaxed. Something

like the dawning of a smile played round his lips.

"Well, well, Patty, what a little trouble-the-house you are ! What is your particular whim now, my dear ? You know this is my busiest hour. I have got the dawning of a great conception, Patience, and I am jotting down my first rough ideas."

"Yes, father ; I am sure it will be something lovely. Here, I will sit at your feet—that will be quite cosy. Now, won't you tell me about it ?"

"No, my dear ; no. To speak of an unformed idea takes the bloom off it."

Here Mr. Beaufort's hand stroked his young daughter's brown head indulgently.

"This will be a great work, Patience," he continued ; "this new idea must succeed."

"Of course it must, father."

"Your sisters don't believe in me, Patty ; but you and Elizabeth do."

"Oh, yes ; and we admire your writing so

much ! Con and Ethel will quite agree with us some day. I think, father, it's rather a good sign of a work for the publishers to refuse it."

"Well, my dear, I am not discouraged. I was for an hour or two, but I have got over it. It is, on the whole, the best thing that could have happened to me. The poem on Troy rejected by Messrs. Santley and Gibbs is nothing like as great as the poem about—ahem ! the poem which is to be written. When I appear before the world, Patience, it will be as the author of something vigorous, unique, magnificent. You will be proud of your father some day, my little girl !"

"I am now," said Patty, with fervour ; "only I'm sorry you are tired of the poem about Troy, for I am not ; I love it. I thought you would read me some more to-night. That was what I came to ask you."

"No, my dear, I cannot ; it would upset my embryo thoughts. The new poem is to be something altogether different. It is to be

modern, satirical ; it will contain some lashes to punish the sins of the multitude. There, there ! I will not speak of it, my child, only I must hasten to perfect my ideas, and then get them into verse. I shall use occasional rhyme in this poem ; blank verse, the finest of all, is above the heads of the poor triflers of the nineteenth century. I must stoop to be popular, Patience ; but I can afford this slight concession, for my theme is splendid. Ah ! the publishers won't refuse this poem ! Fame and money and all will come with it, never fear ! ”

“ We do want money,” said Patty, with a little sigh—hastily suppressed. “ I am awfully sorry to trouble you, father, but the quarter's rent has been due for over a month now, and Mr. Payne sent round for it again this afternoon.”

“ My dear Patience ! how indiscreet you are ; nothing so disturbs the flow of imagination as allusion to these sordid cares. Now, my child, I really must beg of you to leave me in peace.”

Patty's brown cheeks grew a little pale.

"But Mr. Payne said——" she began.

"My dear, you must consult with your sisters; they are both earning, and must contrive to make up the amount between them. Long before next quarter-day I can pay it back. A poem such as I am about to be engaged on will be worth hundreds of pounds. Speak to Ethel and Constance about the rent, and leave me in peace."

Patty slowly, very slowly, left the room. As wearily as if her small feet were weighted with lead, she crept up the basement stairs, and crossing the hall, once more entered the drawing-room. Constance was reading a story by the light of a shaded lamp. Ethel was putting clean frills on the dress she wore at her office.

"Oh, Patty," she exclaimed, as her young sister appeared, "you might finish this for me. It would be a delicious luxury to sit doing nothing. I do ache all over!"

Patty might have remarked that Ethel generally indulged in the luxury of doing nothing every evening ; she was not fond of reading, and considered that her toils at the Post Office abundantly entitled her to any amount of idling at home.

“ There, you little thing ! you’ll be glad of something to do,” she said, tossing the yards of frilling and the black cashmere body into Patty’s lap.

“ I think,” said Constance, suddenly raising her eyes, and speaking abruptly, “ that the style of wearing ribands round the neck and sleeves is much more economical, and prettier, than frilling. Why don’t you adopt it, Ethel ? Those constant frills of yours really act on my nerves.”

Ethel tossed her head, and leaning back lazily in her chair, stifled a yawn. Patty worked for bare life ; suddenly she flung down the body of the dress, let all the frilling stream in wild confusion on the floor, and spoke with desperate energy :

"Sisters, do tell me! have you any of your last monthly salaries left?"

"Bless the child!" said Ethel, "what is she after now? A new frock, eh? Oh, come now, Patty-pan, that last grenadine is quite presentable still."

"No, no," said Patty, tears springing to her eyes, "it's the rent—it's the dreadful, dreadful quarter's rent—it has been overdue for a month, and Mr. Payne is so angry, and father has no money to give to it, and he said I was to—ask—you——"

"Well, here's a pretty state of things," said Constance, flinging down her book and beginning to pace the floor. "Father buries himself in his rubbishing poems, and expects us to keep the roof over him. You know perfectly, Patty, it's most unfair. I pay fifteen shillings a week, as it is, to the house expenses, and Ethel does even more than that—don't you, Ethel?"

"I give eighteen shillings," said Ethel; "it's the most monstrous thing I ever heard in my"

life. Did he really and truly say you were to come to us, Patty?"

"Yes," said Patty, in a very tearful voice. "He said next time he could meet it; he expects to be quite rich next quarter."

"So likely!" replied Constance. "Well, look here, Patty: I have got no money—not a penny. How much is the quarter's rent?"

"It's ten pounds twelve," said Patty. "The landlord says it's very little, and that when the lease is up next year he must raise it; and there's the gas and the water-rate, too. I don't know what's to be done."

"Nor do I," said Ethel. "I really and truly think this is too hard on us; father buries himself in his books, and does not give a single thought to how the roof is kept over his head, nor how the bread and butter and beef and mutton get on his table. How can he suppose that I can do much on sixty pounds a year? And as to poor Con, she has not even that."

"I'm very unhappy about it," said Patty.

“ There, Ethel darling, the frills are sewn in so nicely ! I do think, sisters, that if we could make a great effort just for this one quarter that things might be better next. I have a reason for this—a great reason. You know, Ethel and Con, our father is a genius, and you know, too, that all the books of story and history tell of the darkness and misery which accompany genius, until, all of a sudden, the world sees the real, beautiful thing, and then—— ! That will be the way with father ’ concluded Patty, her eyes shining.

“ Really, Patience,” exclaimed Ethel, “ you do talk the most absolute rubbish ! We have all got to live, and not to think about possible geniuses.”

“ Yes,” said Patty, sobering down instantly ; “ and we must pay the quarter’s rent. I wonder how much I could get for my pretty little pearl ring ? I’m quite willing to sell it, and the gold chain that my godmother gave me.”

“ You wouldn’t get much for either of them,

child. Oh, what an awful nuisance this is! Con, my dear, there's our last chance of a little summer trip shattered at a blow!"

"I'll tell you what it is," said Constance; "if this kind of thing goes on, I'll go into lodgings on my own account. I will call my earnings my own, and not render myself liable to be deprived of them at a fell swoop any moment. Well, Ethel, we are in for it, I suppose. I'd better go round to the dressmaker the first thing in the morning, and countermand that new dress; and please, Patty, go into the hall, and bring me back that letter which waits to be posted. I meant to have gone to Richmond with Edith Grey and her brother on Saturday, but, of course, I should have had to pay my share, and now I shall have no money. There, Patty, don't stare at me with those round eyes. I am going to finish my book, whatever happens; only I do wish—yes, I do, that I was not Constance Beaufort, but her rich and lucky cousin, Elizabeth Cunningham."



CHAPTER III.

THE WORTH OF A BREAKFAST

AFTER all her trouble, Patty Beaufort slept soundly. She was quite accustomed to these periodical outbursts about the quarter's rent. She never remembered the time when the gas was paid before the supply was threatened to be cut off. She never could recall her father bringing back much money, nor the family purse being anything but very, very slightly provided for. Mr. Beaufort was a barrister by profession but he infinitely preferred literature to law and as, notwithstanding all his efforts, the successful in literature had never come to him, so also, because he so utterly neglected

them, the briefs which might have been his gradually ceased to arrive. His wife had died when Patty was a baby. During her lifetime, and for some years after her death, the family lived on the capital of her very small fortune. When that at last was expended, Ethel and Constance were supposed to have finished their education. Ethel obtained a situation in the General Post Office, and Constance found a rather precarious living by shorthand and type-writing. Patty stayed at home and kept house, but it was Elizabeth Cunningham who in reality kept the house going. She was an heiress on a small scale, and when she came of age would of course become completely her own mistress. At present her guardians wished her to live with her uncle, Mr. Beaufort, and they paid £200 a year for the scant comforts she was to receive in his household. She was a very warm-hearted and affectionate girl, however, and it never occurred to her to complain of the often badly provided board, and the many evi-

dences of poverty which were all too apparent in No. 24 Beatrice Gardens, Bayswater.

The next morning Patty rose with the lark ; it was the middle of summer, and fresh and joyous as the birds the young girl awoke.

“ Oh, that rent ! ” she said to herself, as she hastily dressed, and brushed out her curling brown hair—“ how cross the girls are about it ! Poor darlings, I really don't wonder—they have to work so hard ; and Ethel looks very pale, and wants a change. Con will be bitterly disappointed, too, without her new dress, and her expedition with the Greys on Saturday Poor old Con ! poor old Ethel ! Still, the rent must be paid, and father will be able to do it all himself, and pay the girls back this loan by next quarter-day. I wish Ethel and Con would believe in father. I know he feels their want of sympathy. Oh, what a lovely morning this is—notwithstanding that horrid rent, I feel as if I must dance.”

Patty skipped about her room, hummed a

favourite air in a very untrained little voice, put her head out of her bedroom window, which was very high up, but had all the better air for being so, and having got a good fresh draught of the delicious summer breeze into her lungs, she ran briskly downstairs.

Patty had a reason for getting up when the rest of the household was sleeping. She and old Jane (their one servant) had a good deal to do at this hour. Jane was a very old and rather feeble domestic, and could not have got through the household work, nor prepared a breakfast fit for that important young person, Miss Cunningham, to eat, without Patty's help.

But this early rising on the part of the youngest Miss Beaufort was kept a profound secret from the rest of her family. If any of them suspected it, they certainly never spoke of the fact.

"Here I am, Jane," said Patty, on this brilliant morning. "I have dusted the dining-room, and put father's study in order. Now what have we for breakfast?"

Jane happened to have a touch of rheumatism, and was a little tart in consequence.

"There's the 'as usual' for breakfast, Miss Patty," she replied; "'am and cooking eggs—them eggs you get twenty to the shilling—there's the bread and the Dorset. Now, Miss Patty, you're not going to make up any fallals this morning! Give them the usual—fried heggs and fried 'am—what more need they be wanting?"

"I'm going to make an omelette," said Patty with decision. 'Fetch me the herbs, Jane dear, and then you can sit down on your chair by the fire and nurse your poor stiff knee."

"It isn't right, Miss Patty," said Jane; "it isn't as it should be. The kitchen is too hot for young things like you on a summer's morning. If I was you, Miss, I'd let Miss Cunningham eat what I can cook for her, instead of flushing up your cheeks and reddening your eyes over the fire with that omelette. There, there! dear sakes! you're not going to put three eggs into

it! Why, wherever are we going to get any more?"

"It must be made properly," said Patty firmly; "I am going to make a large omelette, enough for every one's breakfast."

"Oh yes, Miss Patty, I know how much of it you'll eat. It's sinful waste, my dear—sinful waste! And tell me, lovey—have you spoke about the water-rate to your pa, yet? It's to-morrow they're coming to cut off the supply."

"Oh, is it really?" said Patty, her young face flushing. "Oh, what a worry money is! I'll see about it, Jane, of course. Thank you for reminding me."

"Dear heart, you'll grow old before your time; what with the cooking, which is well known to wither up the youngest complexion, and what with the money worrits, which is also known to bring forward the grey hairs most plentiful, there'll be nothing young about you soon."

“ Oh, won't there !” said Patty, as she dished up her omelette. “ See here, Jane ! I feel like a baby this morning, and not all the money cares in Europe could oppress me.”

“ Bless you, dear !” said the old servant. “ Now I'll take up the breakfast, and you run up to your room and make yourself fit to be seen.”

When the Beaufort family assembled at breakfast there was no trace of last night's disturbance visible on any one's brow. Patty was her usual brown-eyed, bright little self. Ethel and Constance were both in a hurry, and drank up their coffee and ate their share of the delicately prepared omelette in business fashion. Mr. Beaufort buried himself behind his newspaper, and Elizabeth toyed with her breakfast, and looked more beautiful even than usual in a white washing dress.

“ Patty,” she said suddenly, towards the close of the meal, “ I have a delicious scheme in my head. I want to consult you about it after breakfast.”

“And I want to speak to you, too, Patty,” said Ethel; “just come with me into the drawing-room for a minute.”

When Ethel said this, Constance sighed profoundly, and Mr. Beaufort raised his head from his paper.

“My dear,” he said, arousing himself, and bringing back a look of reality to his dreamy eyes, “are you ill? That sigh sounded quite sepulchral.”

“I want a little pleasure,” said Constance fretfully, “and I can’t have it—that’s why I sigh.”

“My dear child, can’t have pleasure! and you not yet one-and-twenty! Take it, my dear Constance; don’t devote all your time to that useless type-writing and shorthand. Young girls are made for pleasure, my dear—remember that.”

Here Mr. Beaufort rose from the table.

“Have you any message, Elizabeth?” he said. “I am just going round to my club.”

"None, thank you, Uncle Egbert," replied Elizabeth—"or, yes, you may bring me in a shilling's worth of cut flowers from the florist's on your way home."

She took the money out of a dainty little purse, and handed it to her uncle. He took it abstractedly, slipped it into his waistcoat pocket, and once more stopped to glance at Constance.

"Go to a little music this afternoon, my dear, if you can," he said, patting her on the shoulder, and then he left the room.

"Poor Con!" said Elizabeth, when they were alone, in her rich, pitying voice; "it is hard on you that uncle should be so obtuse!"

"Oh, it's maddening," said Constance. "Betty, I do wish you would not give father the money before he brings you in your commission; you know perfectly well he will forget all about the flowers."

"All right," said Elizabeth. "I intend him to. The dear old man will think that shilling

grew in his pocket, and will spend it. Con, may I take you to hear some music on Saturday ? ”

“ No, Betty, no ; I can't stand any favours until I feel better. Now, just don't remark me ; I'll be all right by to-night.”

She left the room as Patty re-entered it.

“ Ethel has told you, Patience,” she said, shaking her head at her little sister, and lowering her voice to a whisper. “ She and I can only do eight pounds between us.”

“ Oh, I'll manage the rest,” said Patty, bravely ; and then she went back into the breakfast-room, where Elizabeth sat, looking so luxurious and rich and handsome and idle.





CHAPTER IV.

UNEXPECTED NEWS

“**A** PENNY for your thoughts, Patty-pan!” said the rich cousin, in her full half-languid tones ; “you have got a little frown between your pretty brows; you are intensely, aggravatingly bustling and active. Do you realise for half a moment that we are likely to have a scorching day, and that the thermometer even now is not far from eighty degrees in the shade ?”

“Oh, the poor girls ! Oh, is it really ?” said Patty, running to the window, and putting her head out. “I declare I don’t know which is best for poor people, very cold weather, or very hot. Of course, I don’t mind ; I’m never too

hot, and never too cold, but Ethel and Con do feel the heat fearfully. How I wish—how *I wish* I could give them something !”

“What, Patty ?”

“Oh, an impossible thing—a long holiday, and a delicious time in the country ; they can’t have it, and there’s no use fretting. Betty, do you really want me ? for, if you don’t, I’m afraid I must run away—I really have to be rather busy this morning.”

“Look here,” said Elizabeth, rising from the breakfast-table, and putting her arm round her slight little cousin’s waist, “you have not told me why you have that pucker between your brows, and why you are so horribly, feverishly active. Patience, is there anything the matter ?”

“Only the kind of things we have resolved not to talk about,” said Patty, firmly. “You know, Elizabeth, when you came to live with us, you agreed, and we agreed, that you were not to hear about our money worries. I’m a little anxious this morning, but it will come all right.

Now, Betty darling, be kind to me, 'and distract my mind by telling me what you did and how you enjoyed yourself last evening."

Elizabeth suddenly caught Patty by both hands.

"You dear little thing!" she exclaimed, "that reminds me that I have a little bit of an anxiety which you alone can disperse, a little feathery cloud, darling, which you can send out of my blue sky."

"What is it, Elizabeth? I always thought you did not know what clouds meant."

"Oh, my dear, I have my worries, like every one else. Come into the drawing-room with me, Patty—the heat of this room is unendurable."

Patty instantly opened the folding doors, pulled forward the snugest of the easy-chairs in the drawing-room for her cousin's reception, and then seated herself on the floor by her side.

"Go on, Betty; I'm so glad you are going to confide in me."

"You always were a dear little thing, you know, Patty-pan——"

"Oh, I think I'm a very cross, worried little thing very often—but you are not going to talk just about me, Betty?"

"And I am really much fonder of you than of Ethel and Constance."

"I don't think you ought to be. I do wish you wouldn't be personal—it is not interesting."

"Oh, Patty, what a demure little mouse! There, I won't tease her, nor make her brown eyes flash. Now for my news and my worries. Patty, who do you think I met at Lady Anstruther's last night?"

"Do tell me, Betty."

"No less a person than my aunt, Mrs. Forrester."

"Oh!"

"What a very solemn little 'Oh!' A great deal hangs on that meeting, Patience."

"Oh!" said Patty again, opening her eyes very wide.

"Now listen, my dear—the first thing she said was, that whatever happened, whoever was made miserable, let the plans of hundreds of people be upset by it, still I was to go away to Scotland with her next week."

"Why, Betty, you have arranged to spend August in Switzerland."

"Of course, you darling! of course—our plans all arranged, our party made up. I ventured to break the news to Aunt Fanny. My dear, she was not the least affected. 'You must change your plans—you must make other arrangements, my dear,' she said; 'you are to come with me—I insist—it would be inhuman to refuse. I am not well—I am ordered change. If you do not come with me I shall have to go alone—you cannot coldly propose anything so horribly unfeeling, Elizabeth.' These were her very words, Patty, and when she said them her eyes filled with tears. She is very pretty, and she certainly did not look at all well, and if I had not been so desperately sorry

for myself, I might have felt a little pity for her."

"And what did you decide, Betty dear? I am desperately sorry for you, but it does seem hard that the poor lady should have to go alone."

"Those were just my thoughts, Patty-pan, so I proposed you should go with her instead of me."

"I—I—go to Scotland! *Betty!*"

"My dear mouse, your eyes can shine extremely prettily, and when you get that colour in you: cheeks you look bewitching! How I should like to dress you to advantage, and show you to the world as a very presentable little person! Now, darling, what is it? Aunt Fanny was quite pleased, and you are to come with me to lunch with her to-day."

"But, Betty, it should have been Constance or Ethel; they have both to work so hard, and I am wanted at home."

"Home must do without you, my dear. You

will only be away a few weeks ; and as to Con and Ethel, they could not get away just at present. But even if they could, dear old girls that they are, they would not suit Aunt Fanny at all."

"I don't know how I am to go," repeated Patty. "Of course I should like it—oh, how I should love it!—but your aunt is a rich woman, Elizabeth."

"Yes, darling, enormously rich."

"And I am poor. She will go to grand houses. I shall—I shall——"

Patty blushed painfully. "I don't think it can be done, Betty dear. God has put me into quite a different place in the world. Betty, I would help you if I could, but I fear it cannot be done."

"Sit down, Patty, and look at me. You will want for this expedition a dinner-dress, and you will want two new morning-dresses, and you must have a new hat and gloves, and lots of things. I will lend you some of my ornaments,

and you can borrow one of my trunks. Now, you are going for me—to save me from a great disappointment. Here are four five-pound notes, Patty. You are so clever and so handy, that perhaps you can rig yourself out for that much.”

“Oh, for a great deal, great deal less!” said Patty, and here again she coloured and stopped, and then her face grew very pale.

“You will require it all, Patty. You cannot go with Aunt Fanny unless you are properly dressed. If there is any over—which I don’t for a moment expect—keep it for pocket-money, dear. It will be sure to come in handy. Oh, who is that tiresome person knocking at the door?”

“It’s only me; and I want Miss Patty,” said Jane.

“I’ll be back in a moment, Betty,” said Patty, as she ran out of the room.

“The man has called again for the gas

account, Miss Patty," whispered Jane. "I sent him off, and said it should go by post; but I do hope you minded your pa about the water-rate before he went out, Miss. It would be an awful muddle if it was cut off."

"Oh, it won't, Jane, not really. I know I shall be able to manage, Jane; if Mr. Payne calls about the rent, please tell him that I will see him; show him into father's study, please."

"So I will, dear heart. Bless you, child, how you change colour this morning! Now, hark you, Miss Patty, there are to be no more omelettes; them as won't eat 'the usual' must go without."

Patty returned quickly to her cousin's side.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Betty," she said, and somehow the light of expectancy and rapture had died out of her face: it looked grave now, a little hard, a little old, for her seventeen years. "Jane was talking to me;

one or two things are worrying her. Yes, I'll go with Mrs. Forrester to the country—that is, if she likes me when she has seen me; and I'll take the money, if you are quite, quite sure you can spare it."

"My dear child, I do it absolutely for myself. Spare twenty pounds! Why, that is absolutely a *bagatelle*. Oh, Patty, I do love you for being so obliging!"

"And may I do just what I like with the money, Elizabeth?"

"Yes, yes; make yourself smart with it—that is the main thing. Aunt Fanny likes those who are with her to be nicely dressed, so I know you will do me credit, my dear little mouse. I wish I could go with you, and help you with your shopping, but I expect you will make things go farther if you are alone. You are such a wonderful manager, you know. Oh, fancy, it is ten o'clock! I promised the Brewsters to go with them to the Academy this morning;

I must rush away at once, but I will meet you at Aunt Forrester's at 1.30. Take a cab, and drive there, Patty ; Mrs. Forrester, 30 Abbott Street, Park Lane, is the address. Now, good-bye, darling ; take care of your money."





CHAPTER V.

BANK-NOTES

ELIZABETH ran upstairs, singing as she went, but Patty sat motionless on the floor of the drawing-room. Four crisp Bank of England notes lay in her lap, her soft brown eyes wore a strained and troubled expression; had any of her family come in at that moment they would scarcely have recognised the bright and happy girl who, however she sympathised with anxiety, seldom allowed it really to worry her.

“I can do it,” said Patty, suddenly springing to her feet; “the money is quite my own, and Elizabeth need never know. Father must be allowed to write that new great poem in peace



‘Patty sat motionless on the floor of the drawing-room’—Page 42

—he must not be worried with small little sordid trifles. I would not leave him at all just now, only of course I must earn Elizabeth's money by setting her free to go to Switzerland. Oh, dear yes—I can manage to make myself quite presentable for ten pounds, and the other ten will pay the balance of the rent, and settle the gas and the water account. I'll do it—yes, I'll do it this moment—it can't be wrong. How surprised poor old Jane will be !”

Patty flew downstairs to the kitchen.

“Jane,” she said, “after all, I can't wait in to see Mr. Payne ; but here is his rent—here in this little parcel, all made up to the last farthing. Be sure, Jane dear, you ask him for a receipt ; whatever we are, we must be business-like, you know ; and don't give the receipt to father, please, Jane, for he is so apt to destroy all the receipts. Father has a great deal on his mind, just now, Jane, and he must on no account be worried.”

“Another fallal ?” inquired Jane, in a con-

temptuous tone; "oh, I know him and his ways. You need not tell me about your pa, Miss Patty—him and me has nothing in common—I'm all for the useful, he's all for the ornamental."

"Jane, my father is a genius. Why, some of his poetry is quite sublime."

"Oh, well, dear, sublime is that sublime acts. Yes, I know about the rent—the receipt to be signed, and on no account took to the master. Well, what else, Miss Patty?"

"Only you can pay the water-rate, Jane—and—and—the gas-bill. Oh, Jane, am not I a little witch?"

"Well, to be sure, dear, you are wonderful—and your cheeks are burning like peonies, and your eyes are as bright as stars. How did you get the money, Miss Patty? Did the master find some handy, after all? Well, I'll take to believing in poetry, if it can turn out solid Bank of England notes like these—beautiful new notes they are, too, and lovely to

touch. Where did you get them, Miss Patty?"

"Oh, that's my secret, Jane. Now I am going out. Please pay these three accounts for me, dear Jane, and keep all the receipts, will you?"

Patty ran upstairs to her tiny bedroom, put on a pretty little dress of grey cashmere, and with a real black lace scarf round her neck—her choicest bit of finery—and a shady black hat, ran down the steps, and out into the street.

"She's the best of them all," said old Jane, as she watched her from the kitchen window, and, to my mind, the prettiest, too—but, bless her! what ails her this morning, dear lamb? she walks so slow like down the street, and when she gave me that money she didn't look like the Miss Patty that had made the omelette at breakfast-time. I wonder now who gave her the money—not the master, I'll be bound—no, no, I know him better. Well, I do pity any poor girls that have the misfortune to be

the daughters of a man that goes in for writing sublime poetry."

In the meantime, Patty, notwithstanding her somewhat slow steps, soon found herself at the stores. There she made some modest but well-chosen purchases. Not four dresses, but the materials for two, which could be made up at home, were bought. A nice little travelling cloak was looked at longingly, but relinquished with a sigh. A new umbrella had to be purchased; also a bonnet for Sunday wear. By this time the ten pounds had dwindled down to an alarming extent, and Patty, having further added to her toilet two or three pairs of gloves, and some neat little strong walking-shoes, hurried away, feeling miserably the limits of two five-pound notes.

"Oh, I shall look very presentable," she said to herself. "I am really all right, only I haven't got an evening dress; but perhaps I shall not want one while I am at Mrs. Forrester's. Well, anyhow, I don't feel sorry about

that money ; only I trust Elizabeth won't ask me what I have purchased."

Mrs. Forrester turned out to be very sociable and pleasant. She took kindly to Patty on the spot, assured her that they would have a very pleasant time together ; and before she and Elizabeth left the house, the day and hour when Patty Beaufort was to meet Mrs. Forrester at King's Cross was finally arranged.

" Bring any little fineries you may happen to have with you, my dear," called out the good lady as the girls were taking leave. " I don't intend to be dull when I am away, and I always like to see girls looking bright and pretty about me. It is also possible that Louis Stanhope will join us, and he is frightfully fastidious. Not that he had need to be about you, my dear Miss Beaufort. At this present moment your dress is simple, but quite in good taste."

Elizabeth Cunningham laughed.

" You must not frighten my dear little Pattypan, Aunt Fanny," she exclaimed. " She is

always a grave little mouse, and dislikes gay colours. Come, Patty. I'll see that she is all right, Aunt Fanny—I know your little fads."

"Ah, Betty—what will Louis say when he misses your face?" said Mrs. Forrester. "Yes, Miss Beaufort, it is very kind of you to take pity on me, but the fact is, I should like you both to come with me."

Betty laughed again a little noisily, and with a certain excitement, or Patty fancied so, when she remembered that laugh of her handsome cousin's later on. The two girls hastened home, and at the evening meal that night Betty formally announced the arrangements she had made for Patience.

"You must all do without her," she said, looking round with some defiance in her gaze; "Patty begins to look pale, and this is such a splendid opportunity for her—is it not, Uncle Egbert?"

Mr. Beaufort raised his short-sighted eyes,

peered above his spectacles first at Elizabeth, then rather wistfully at Patty.

“My little one!” he said, touching her shoulder very slightly, “the house won’t seem itself without you, but I am glad you are going.”

Patty struggled to look bright, felt desperately inclined to cry, and finally rising from her seat, rushed downstairs to her father’s study, buried herself in a great armchair, and burst into tears.

“Why have I got this load on my heart?” she murmured. “Why am I not just wild with delight? Was it wrong of me to take Elizabeth’s money to pay those bills? Poor father! I hate leaving him, and yet in no other earthly way could the rent, and the gas, and the water-rates have been paid!”

“Patty, you here!” exclaimed Mr. Beaufort’s voice at this instant. “My dear child, why are your eyes so red? I am getting on with my poem in a very—yes, I may say—satisfactory

way, my dear. I hope to complete the first book to-night. Has any one been troubling you, Patty ?”

“ I am a little troubled at going away from you, father, as—I am so much interested in the poem.”

“ Ah, yes—the poem—it will repay all your interest, my dear little girl. Are you going out anywhere this evening ? Oh, never mind me—never mind me. I shall be quite absorbed in my work—I shall not miss you.”

“ Father, you forget—I am going to Scotland next Tuesday.”

“ Oh, ah—so Elizabeth Cunningham said. I should like you to be going to the Highlands, my dear—I should not object to revisiting them myself; if needful, they would always give inspiration. Not that I require it with this poem; but if you do go to the Highlands, Patty, you might send me an account of any sunset effects which particularly impressed you. View the grand scenery, if possible, in solitude,

my dear, and note down your impressions with fervour. Mine is so practised a hand that I can soon cull the gems of your immature thought."

Patty smiled, devoutly hoped that she might see the Highlands in order to have the honour of aiding her father's great poem, and left the room.

Upstairs that evening there was a grand consultation over the little girl's toilet. The white washing dress she had purchased, and the soft neutral-tinted cashmere, were approved of by her elder sisters, who promised to help her to make them up. Elizabeth tossed over the little array of carefully chosen apparel with some disdain.

"You must get a lot more things than these, Patty," she said. "Aunt Fanny really is particular, and gets into such a state if the people around her are not nicely turned out. You have not seen about your evening dress yet, have you?"

“N—no——” said Patty, blushing and stammering.

“Well, come to me if you want more money, dear ; you are my representative, and must do me credit.”

Elizabeth went lazily out of the room, returning in a few moments with a delicate piece of worked muslin on her arm.

“Here, Patty, this is not a bit in my style ; take it, with my blessing. It will make up rather well, and Indian muslin drapes so prettily that you might venture to try home hands on its manufacture ; but don’t forget, whatever happens, to have one stylish costume made by a good dressmaker.”

Once more Elizabeth bade her cousins good-night, and the three girls were left alone in Patty’s room.

“I must say, Patty-pan, you don’t look very joyous at the thought of your promised trip,” said Ethel ; “what a wobegone face ! Don’t I wish I were in your shoes !”

“Oh, how I wish you were, Ethel! I don’t think I ever felt so wretched in my life.”

“Nonsense!” snapped Constance; “if you are wretched at going to the Highlands, you have no business to go. I have no patience with such sentimentality! you really are too silly, Patty. Here am I, toiling from morning till night to make two ends meet, and to help the family purse, and here is Ethel doing likewise, and neither of us has a chance of a treat worth mentioning this summer. Whereas you, who always have an idle life, and have never earned sixpence in the whole course of your existence, go off like a fine lady, provided with clothes and all, to enjoy yourself, and *then*—pretend you don’t like it! Come, Patty, whatever you are, don’t turn affected; that would really be the very last straw.”

Constance slammed the door of Patty’s room, and retired to her own, for she was feeling very cross and tired, and envious, poor girl; but Ethel stayed behind, and Patty, tempted by

her unlooked-for sympathy, could not help confiding what she had done with some of Elizabeth's money.

"And I know I have not half enough things to take away with me now," she said, "and I suppose it really was stealing; but it didn't seem like it."

Ethel looked very grave while she listened to this narrative.

"I suppose it was not quite right of you," she answered; "but it is a relief to have all those wretched bills paid. Don't cry, Patty; Elizabeth, of course, will not mind what you do with the money, if you are properly dressed; and I will speak to Constance, and we will both do all in our power to rig you up, and to help you to put those dresses together."





CHAPTER VI.

CHANGE OF SCENE

IN a drawing-room which contained two large bay-windows, and which itself was low-ceiled and curiously wainscoted, three or four girls and two or three men in boating costume were idly chatting and laughing. The bay-window stood open, and the warm summer breeze came into the room fresh and pure, and straight from the sea. A wide gravel sweep was seen directly from the windows, and then one or two smoothly cut tennis-courts, each of which formed a complete terrace to itself. Two of the girls wore tennis costumes, and one of them even still held her bat in her hand.

"I wonder what they will do to entertain us to-night?" said this girl, in a rather pettish tone to her companion; "tennis is all very well, but one does not care to come from London just for the sake of playing tennis with one's cousins;" here she cast an indignant, or would-be indignant, glance at a certain curly head of brown hair which was visible just above the top of an armchair. The said head never turned, nor even glanced in her direction, and after a short expectant pause Miss Rose Neville began again.

"I wish you would listen to me, Philip and Louis; what amusements have we planned for this evening? There are several people coming. I wish we could get up some entertainment for their benefit—what a pity, what a great pity, we did not think of that before."

"I cannot tell you how immensely thankful I am that the brilliant thought did *not* come into your fertile brain a week ago, Rose," replied the owner of the curly head, now

rising to his feet, and stretching himself with some weariness. "My dear cousin, fancy the fatigue of preparing that performance ; think of the daily rehearsals, and as we have none of us a scrap of talent amongst us, imagine the complete failure of the climax ! Amusements for to-night !—what more can reasonable people require on a lovely summer's evening than to talk with their neighbours ? Ah ! here comes Miss Beaufort ; I have not the slightest doubt she agrees with me."

A graceful little figure, in a very simply made white dress, now appeared at the open window. The Patty Beaufort of Beatrice Gardens was a good deal changed and brightened. Her face had always shown capabilities of fun ; now it fairly sparkled—her brown eyes danced, and her pretty cheeks glowed with colour. She had been playing tennis, not in a proper tennis costume, but with an energy and zest which abundantly compensated for any lack of the requisite toilet.

"In what way?" asked Patty, as she paused for a moment at the open window.

"Oh, come in, come in, Miss Beaufort!" exclaimed one or two of the girls, while Mr. Stanhope, the owner of the brown head, moved slightly aside to let her pass.

"I can't come, thank you," replied Patty. "I am hurrying off to Mrs. Forrester; she has sent for me. I just heard some words as I was passing, and they made me curious. What is it that I am to agree with Mr. Stanhope about?"

"That you and I are to talk to one another alone for two hours this evening as hard as ever we can," answered the young man, audaciously. "Thereby, Miss Beaufort, we shall provide abundant entertainment both for ourselves and our neighbours."

"For shame, Louis!" said his cousin Rose; "Miss Beaufort does not like to say how frightfully bored she would be!"

"No, I should not," said Patty. "I should

like it, if Mr. Stanhope would let me talk. I love to hear my own voice, and I like to make up stories, and tell them to all those who are willing to listen."

She laughed gaily, and ran off before any one could prevent her.

"What a pretty little thing she is!" said one of the girls.

"I don't know—I think she's an awful little flirt!" said Rose, rather crossly. "Now, Louis, you need not stare at me in such a reproachful way. Of course, I know what you think of Miss Beaufort just at present. I wonder how long this new fancy will last! Why, Louis, you are not really angry with me! What is the matter? You know I was only joking. Oh, if you like, I will say Miss Beaufort does not know the meaning of the word flirtation."

"You need not defend her," said Stanhope, in a tone which, with a slight effort, he made to sound extremely careless. "She is a very bright girl, and at present quite unspoiled.

How long she would remain so in your society, my dear cousin, I should not like to say. Phil, there is a little breeze stirring now. It is not quite so abominably hot as it was two hours ago. Shall we have a stroll by the river before dinner?"

The other man, who was short and red-faced, responded to this with alacrity; and Rose, angry, but determined not to show she was hurt, took up a book she was reading, and pretended to absorb herself in its contents.

Meanwhile, Patty found her way to Mrs. Forrester's special sanctum. This good lady had brought her young companion to stay in a large house, at this time of year full with many guests. There was good shooting near St. Bevis, all the surrounding country being moor; and Mrs. Forrester's cousin, Mrs. Neville, liked to fill her house, from cellar to attic, with most willing guests. Mrs. Forrester was a privileged visitor, and she and her hostess had been

engaged in a very animated conversation in the latter's exquisite little boudoir when Patty appeared.

"Ah, here comes Miss Beaufort," said Mrs. Neville, rising to her feet. "I have a hundred things to do, so will leave you now, Fanny, in good hands, I have no doubt."

She smiled graciously at Patty, and sailed out of the room. She was a graceful woman—not unlike her pretty daughter Rose—but Patty did not take to her. She had an instinctive distrust of both mother and daughter, and was always glad to find herself alone with Mrs. Forrester and away from them.

"I have sent for you, Patty," said Mrs. Forrester, "to say that we will leave here on Friday; my cousin does not like it, but I have had a sudden summons South again, and—— Why, what is the matter, child?"

"South?" repeated Patty; "South means London, or near London. Then I shall be going home."

She sighed a little, the colour coming and going on her face.

Mrs. Forrester watched her with some interest.

"You would like to go home again, Patty?"

"For some things—beyond words; for others——"

"Yes, my dear, for others——?"

"For others, no," replied Patty, steadily.

Then she drew herself up and spoke with emphasis :

"I have been over three weeks with you, and I have been so happy, Mrs. Forrester, and I—I have forgotten lots of things, which really are part of my life; indeed, nearly all my life. It is much better for me to go home now before I get accustomed to the—to the things that belong to rich people, Mrs. Forrester. If you leave here on Friday, shall I get to Beatrice Gardens that night, and ought I to write now and tell them? I wonder how father has got

on with his——” Here she stopped abruptly, and her face, which had been a little downcast, grew wonderfully bright and joyous. “I cannot help saying that, all things considered, I *am* very glad to get home,” she finally added.

“Come here, Patty,” said Mrs. Forrester; “you are a strange little girl—very strange; but I like you—and could get on with you. You are honest, and in these days honesty of speech and heart are rare. Yes, my love, I am going South; I am going to stay with some delightful friends of mine in Surrey, but you are not going to Beatrice Gardens yet awhile. No, nothing of the sort; you are coming with me; I cannot do without you until Elizabeth comes.”

“What! is Betty coming to stay with you?” asked Patty, in a startled voice.

“Yes; she will join us at the Morrisises the first week in September. Now, Patty dear, to revert to another topic: what are you going to wear this evening? There will be a large party

at dinner, and some more people are coming in the evening. I want you to look particularly nice, my dear child."

Patty coloured painfully.

"I have got my white nun's veiling," she began.

"Yes, dear; but you will excuse me, you have worn no other dress at dinner since we came to St. Bevis."

Patty's cheeks grew white—she remembered Elizabeth Cunningham's words, that Mrs. Forrester liked those who were with her to be suitably dressed. A horrible, guilty feeling with regard to the ten pounds which she had not spent on clothes came over her.

"Betty gave me a beautiful Indian muslin, but it is not made up," she began.

"Oh, my dear, what a pity! Why did you not tell me so? My maid could soon have put it together for you. Well, dear, I am sorry; if you have nothing but the white nun's veiling ready, of course there is no help for it. I know,

my dear, you cannot afford gay clothes, but Elizabeth told me—I mean she gave me to understand when you came in her place—that——” A pause on the speaker’s part. “Elizabeth had lots of money—I do call it rather shabby. Well, dear! well, dear! wear the white nun’s veiling, only get plenty of fresh hothouse flowers to put with it.”

“I am sorry,” began Patty, with a burning face. “I don’t think you ought to blame Elizabeth; I—I—— Oh, Mr. Stanhope, you startled me! I did not hear you come in.”

“I have been here for a full moment. I heard some words about a very pretty dress. I do hope there was nothing I should not have listened to.”

“No, Louis; I am delighted to see you—sit down there, my dear boy. Patty dear, you may run away; I shall not need your company while I am so well entertained.”

Patty ran out of the room with crimson cheeks. How much or how little had Mr.

Stanhope heard? How dreadful—how dreadful to have dear Elizabeth blamed—dear, generous Betty!

“Oh, how I wish I had never come! How I wish I had not spent the money on something else!” thought the poor little anxious, overburdened girl. “I suppose this white frock is detestably shabby; but I don’t mind about that, not really; it is just the feeling that Mrs. Forrester thinks Betty has treated me badly. She thinks badly of her, and it is my fault. Oh, I must explain everything to Mrs. Forrester to-morrow; and yet that will be very unpleasant, too, for I shall have to tell her how dreadfully, dreadfully poor we are at home. Why *will* people mind how girls dress, particularly when the girls themselves don’t care? It does not make me unhappy to see Miss Neville in such exquisite dresses, and Miss Constantine always looking so very fashionable. I’ve had such a happy three weeks, and never thought about my dress, but I’m afraid I shall think of it from this

minute, for I see Mrs. Forrester is beginning to be ashamed of me. Well, well, it can't be helped ; poor little white nun's veiling, you must go on. When I am back again with father, and listening to his glorious poem, I shall forget all these little troubles."

Patty dressed herself—she would never accept the services of Mrs. Forrester's grand maid—twined her thick brown hair in shining coils round her head, and ran downstairs to see what flowers she could coax from one of the gardeners, who was a very quaint old Scotchman, and had taken a fancy to the "bonny little leddy," as he called Patty.

At the door of the principal conservatory, however, she was met not by the old gardener, but by Stanhope, who came to meet her with a quantity of wild clematis and delicate ivy in his hands.

"You are just the person I was coming to seek, Miss Beaufort," he exclaimed gleefully. "I heard Mrs. Forrester saying something

about you wearing real flowers to-night, and I heard you speak of a white dress. Instantly I conjured up a picture : a little lady with shining eyes and radiant colour, with garlands of natural green about her. Behold ! what could match your dress better than these ? Let me arrange them."

"How kind you are !" said Patty gratefully.

"Kind ! Not at all. I want you to outshine Rose Neville. When I have just given you the finishing touches, and put a wreath of this delicious, graceful wild clematis round your hair, she will be devoured with jealousy. A Parisian dressmaker turns her out in first-rate style to-night ; but even Paris cannot come up to Nature. Now, come back to the drawing-room ; here is a mirror—behold yourself."

Patty laughed and blushed ; saw a radiant little head becomingly attired ; a dress which no longer looked shabby, for festoons of clematis cunningly showing here and there gave it just the colour and effect which it needed.

“Mrs. Forrester will be pleased!” said Patty.
“I am most grateful to you.”

“What! not one word of being glad to look pretty yourself?”

“Of course I am glad—here are some people coming—thank you again, Mr. Stanhope. I shall feel so comfortable and contented all the evening now.”

The evening passed off with at least perfect satisfaction to two people at St. Bevis. Stanhope, having begun by making Patty look extremely pretty, and having caused her, by a few dexterous touches, to appear one of the most gracefully dressed girls of the party, considered it further his duty to pay her all attentions within his power. No one could be more agreeable than Stanhope when he pleased; and he now laid himself out to win soft glances from Miss Beaufort's pretty brown eyes—to unlock her very innocent little heart, and get her to show him some of the treasures which lay within.

The two wandered about the grounds on this delightful summer's evening, and Patty told Stanhope something about her home, and a good deal in particular about her father. Stanhope said he had a great sympathy for geniuses, and in particular for those geniuses who were not recognised as such by their fellow-men. He confided to Patty, with a certain lowering of his voice and a look of intense sympathy in his handsome eyes, that he, too, had once been guilty of writing a poem which, on account of its superior merits alone, had never seen the light. Might he read a stanza or two of this work to Miss Beaufort? She, who had so often heard her father's effusions, would be sure to know whether his were worth anything.

Patty promised to listen, and then she told Stanhope of her father's wish that she should send him some of her ideas with regard to sunsets in the Highlands.

"Mrs. Forrester is not going to the High

lands, after all, and father will be disappointed," she continued.

"But I was at the Trossachs a week ago, Miss Beaufort, and saw the sun both rise and set ; I will get up early to-morrow morning and write down all my ideas on the subject."

Patty again thanked her companion, and went into the house with her heart beating to a gay measure, and all sorrow and humiliation for the time being was put out of sight. It was a very good thing to be young—it was delightful to feel that a few flowers and leaves could transform a shabby little homely dress into one graceful enough and pretty enough to make a girl look really well dressed ; altogether, this evening was a complete success.

Patty noticed no censorious glances as she returned to the gaily lit drawing-rooms. Stanhope, however, was not so unobservant, and he once more took up his place with a certain spirit of defiance at her side.

Rose Neville asked him to sing with her, and

with a rather sulky face he was obliged to comply, but when the song was over he once more sought out Patty, and again his brow grew clear, and his lips had smiles about them.

Patty went upstairs that night as if she were treading on air—she could have kissed those withered clematis leaves as she tenderly extricated them from her bright brown hair.

“Oh, dear wild flowers!” she exclaimed—
“how happy, how brilliant you have made my evening!”

Just then there came a knock at her room door.

“If you please, Miss Beaufort,” said Davies, Mrs. Forrester’s maid, “my mistress would like to see you for a few moments in her dressing-room before she goes to bed.”





CHAPTER VII.

FRIVOLOUS AND A FLIRT

MRS. FORRESTER was sitting in a very becoming wrapper by a small fire, which, summer as it was, was by no means disagreeable in her lofty chamber.

“Come here and sit by me, Patty!” she exclaimed; “I am not at all sleepy, and I don’t think you are either—your eyes are so bright. Oh, you have taken off that very becoming dress. My dear, I did not know you had such artistic tastes; the idea of wearing natural wreaths of wild clematis was quite a brilliant one. The effect was perfectly charming, and you did not overdo it—just enough, and no

more ; I congratulate you, Patty ; I have no doubt that your little idea will become quite fashionable. I saw several girls glancing at you enviously."

"It was not my idea," began Patty, then she stopped ; she could not make out why she found it difficult to say the next few words—"Mr. Stanhope brought me the clematis, and put it on my dress and in my hair."

"My dear Patty !" Mrs. Forrester raised her eyes and looked hard at the innocent, downcast face of the girl who stood by her side ; then she, too, checked something she was going to say, and stretching out her hand, drew Patty down to the stool at her feet.

"It was kind of Mr. Stanhope to take such trouble for you, Patty. He is a good fellow, and has considerable taste. A little too much of a flirt, perhaps, for a man who is—who is—however, never mind, dear : you and I have plenty to think about, and need not analyse the somewhat superficial character of our friend

Louis Stanhope. I sent for you to-night, Patty, to tell you, amongst other things, that a letter has arrived by the last post which will oblige me to leave, not on Friday, as I intended, but to-morrow, Wednesday evening. We will sleep in Edinburgh to-morrow night and go on to London the next morning—there I shall stay for a single night; and you will allow me, Patty dear—it would be a great pleasure—to give you a new dinner dress. I have something so delicious in my mind's eye! I fancy I see you dressed as I should like, and I want to consult my pet dressmaker, Mrs. Craven, on the subject. Why, what is the matter, Patty?—how you change colour, dear!”

“Only,” said Patty—“only—I don't think I ought to take the dress—I don't think so, really; it is very kind of you to offer it; but I think it would be better for me to dress according to my true position. I am a very poor girl, and I really don't mind people knowing, and nobody expects girls like me to have much dress. If

you will allow me, when I am in London I will buy something white and make it up myself; please, I would much rather not have the grand new dress made by the grand dressmaker; and please, Mrs. Forrester, I am very tired now, and may I go to bed?"

There was quite a new dignity about Patty; she rose to her feet—her eyes shone, she seemed to have grown taller.

"I wonder," thought Mrs. Forrester, when she was left to herself, "if that silly, handsome, good-natured boy has really touched her heart? Poor little thing—poor, dear, sweet little thing! that can never be allowed; I am glad we are going away to-morrow; and I must talk to Louis; I must just remind him of Elizabeth Cunningham."

Patty in her own room was doing a somewhat remarkable thing; she had pretended to Mrs. Forrester that she was very tired, but there was certainly no fatigue in her present animated movements; she took the carefully preserved

clematis blossoms, and opening the window wide, flung them out into the night air.

"There," she said, speaking with great fire and passion, "you may go! For a little time I thought you very pleasant and pretty, but it was evidently wrong of me to allow Mr. Stanhope to put them in my hair—and he is frivolous, and he flirts. Well, never mind, the clematis has vanished, and I need never think of it, nor of this evening again; *I* don't care—only I hate Mrs Forrester to look at me as she did to-night!"

Then Patty closed the window, and finally got into bed, and shutting her eyes tried to sleep. Of course she would never think again of the sprays of wild clematis, but nevertheless she dreamt of nothing else all night.

At breakfast, the next morning, Mrs. Forrester calmly announced her intention of leaving that afternoon. This little piece of information was received by various people in various ways. Mrs. Neville, in her character

of hostess, expressed much sorrow at losing her beloved friend, and earnestly begged her to reconsider her decision, and at least remain at St. Bevis until Friday. Rose rather feebly seconded her mother, but a gratified expression, which for half a moment flickered over her face and was then hastily suppressed, was seen by Patty, who sat at the breakfast-table, feeling a little sore, a little defiant, and also, it must be confessed, a little miserable. Mr. Neville, a very good-humoured insignificant man, joined the chorus of regrets; so also did Miss Constantine and Philip Neville, Rose's first-cousin. Stanhope, however, alone said nothing of regret, but towards the close of the meal, leaning forward with a certain lazy movement, he addressed Patty directly.

"Miss Beaufort."

His voice was so distinct, so peremptory, that every one stopped talking, and all eyes were turned, first on him and then on Patty.

"Ah," said Stanhope, glancing round at the

other occupants of the breakfast-table, "I have done just what I wished—I have arrested all your attention, and now each person present can bear me witness when I declare that Miss Beaufort cannot leave St. Bevis until she has redeemed her promise to me."

"I—redeem my promise!" said Patty; "I have not made any promise." She blushed uneasily, and laughed a little.

"Oh, Miss Beaufort—oh, how short is a woman's memory! and it was only last night you said you would let me read them to you—you would give me the assistance of your valuable judgment. Now, do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember now," said Patty.

"What is it? Do, *do* tell us!" said Miss Constantine: "I am burning with curiosity."

"No, Miss Beaufort, that would not be fair," said Mr. Stanhope; "the secret is our own, and we positively will share it with none. I have alluded to it thus publicly to secure you to myself for at least half an hour after breakfast.

Mrs. Forrester, will you spare Miss Beaufort to me for half an hour, if I promise to take great care of her?"

"Yes, yes, you silly boy! Patty dear, don't be longer than half an hour, for we really must catch the two o'clock train from here."

"Thanks," said Stanhope, rising with alacrity. "Ladies, you all observe how reluctant Miss Beaufort is to give me this half-hour. Never mind, Miss Beaufort! the penance will soon be over, the promise fulfilled. Think of the horrors of a broken promise, and rejoice that I have kept you to your word."

Patty laughed. Under existing circumstances, she hated going with Stanhope; but the fuss of not going with him would have been unendurable.

"Why did you make me look so remarkable?" she said, when they were walking under some shady trees in the garden.

"Why? Now, Miss Beaufort, need you ask? Don't you know, just as well as I do,

that each of those ladies would have made it the one and sole occupation of her morning to keep us apart? There was nothing for it but to take the bull by the horns."

Stanhope was still speaking in a semi-playful tone, but his handsome eyes looked in earnest; and poor Patty's foolish little heart began to beat to the same measure which had caused it to feel so deliriously happy the night before.

"I must remember that he is a flirt," she said to herself—"I must not forget what Mrs. Forrester said: that his was a slight nature, and that he was a flirt."

"Will you read me the verses, please, Mr. Stanhope?" she said, in a stilted little voice. "Half an hour soon goes, and I shall really be very busy this morning."

"Oh, you shall hear the verses presently; I want to talk about other things first. Now, why do you think Mrs. Forrester is going away in such a hurry to-day?"

"Why? How can I possibly tell?"

"Shall I tell you? She is going because I talked to you so much last night."

"Mr. Stanhope, I wish you would read me the verses and let me go in."

"We will come to the bower at the end of this walk; you shall hear them there. Why do you turn your head away when I speak to you?"

"I did not know that I was doing so."

"You are doing so—it is a very rude habit. Any one can see, Miss Beaufort, that you are not used to society."

"I wish you would not tease me, Mr. Stanhope. I really must go back to the house."

"So you shall, after you have heard the verses. Now, let me ask you some questions—promise to answer them."

"If I can."

"You certainly can. They are very simple; even an average intellect of six could master them. Instead of worrying Mrs. Forrester, I ask you a thing or two about your proposed

plans. Where do you go to-night when you leave St. Bevis?"

"To Edinburgh."

"Oh! and where to-morrow?"

"We are going back to London to-morrow."

"Indeed! and then?"

"And then--and then," continued Patty, "I wanted to go home to my father and sisters, but Mrs. Forrester wishes me to go with her to a place in Surrey—I don't know the name."

"I think I can guess. You are going to Chalford, to the Morrisises."

"Yes, the people are called Morris. I am to stay there with Mrs. Forrester until my cousin Elizabeth Cunningham comes."

"Oh, yes; and she—when is she coming?"

"She was to be in England the second week in September, and would go straight to Mrs. Forrester."

"And you would go home then?"

"Oh, yes; I should not be wanted. No one wants me when Elizabeth is there."

"Oh—ah—hum! Miss Beaufort, you are a person with very little penetration. We have seen a good deal of each other for the last three weeks, and in all that time you have never once discovered that I know your cousin Miss Cunningham very well."

"You know Elizabeth?" said Patty, turning round, with her eyes and cheeks glowing. "How I wish you had mentioned it! You know our Betty? Is not she lovely?"

"Yes; she is both beautiful and good. Now we have reached the bower, and I will fulfil my share of the promise, and read you my verses. Don't smile, don't let a quiver even flicker on your eyelids; prepare for tears, if you will, and any amount of solemn emotions. After I have read you the verses, I will remember that only one short half-hour of your society am I permitted to enjoy, and will say, '*Au revoir*.'"

"Good-bye, you mean," said Patty.

"No; *Au revoir*."



CHAPTER VIII.

HE WOULD NOT MISS



ON the evening of the next day Mrs. Forrester and Patty arrived in London. They put up at the Grand Hotel, and Patty who felt a little bewildered by so many rapid changes, and owned to a headache which she said was caused by the noise of the great express from Edinburgh, was very glad to lay her head on her pillow in the stately bedroom which she occupied near Mrs. Forrester.

“This is the strangest move of all,” thought Patty to herself; “here am I close to home, and yet not at home. It all seemed comprehensible and easy enough up in Scotland, but

here—here—oh, how I hate this great, big, lonely place!”

“The child looks pale!” mentally commented Mrs. Forrester, as Patty poured out her coffee for her next morning. “I hope—I do hope she has taken no serious harm at St. Bevis. Louis Stanhope is not the safest man in the world to leave a girl with, but who would have supposed that he would have singled out a little insignificant thing like that for his special attentions? Pretty?—well, yes, she is rather pretty, but she is nowhere beside Elizabeth Cunningham. In Elizabeth’s presence no one would bestow a second glance on Patty.”

“Patty,” said Mrs. Forrester, aloud, “as you *won’t* have the dress—as, contrary to all prudence and common sense, you insist upon refusing my munificent offer, and prefer making up another of those babyish nun’s-veiling robes for yourself—I see no reason why you should not spend a couple of hours with your family. I can buy the nun’s veiling for you, and if you

start for Beatrice Gardens at once you will have a nice little time with your people, and can meet me here at lunch."

"How good you are, Mrs. Forrester!" said Patty, in delight.

"Ah, my dear, and what bright cheeks and eyes! How glad I should be if any one would look like that at the thought of seeing me!"

Patty ran up to the good lady, bestowed a little kiss upon her, and a few moments later was bowling merrily away in a hansom in the direction of Beatrice Gardens. Jane received her with a shriek of delight, told her that her pa was in his study, that both the young ladies were out, and that the house was in all respects as usual.

"We goes through the daily round, my dear, just as ordinary—sweeping, dusting, mending, making, and cooking. If it wasn't for the cooking, I'd say life was fair and easy, Miss Patty; but, oh my word! I do weary of that! The

usual for breakfast—you know what I mean, Miss Patty—bacon and eggs; the usual for dinner—joints hot and joints cold, with a mince of the remnants; the usual for tea——”

“Oh, Jane, Jane!” here interrupted Patty, “you know that I remember about the meals. There, you dear old thing! I have brought you such a pretty Cairngorm brooch. And, Jane, I have seen Edinburgh! and, oh! such grand, wonderful scenery! And I can tell you something about cooking soon, Jane, when I am settled at home once more. Now, do tell me how my father is!”

“Oh, my dear, it's rather more than the usual with him. He's that deep in his papers that I think he'll fairly bury himself in them; and ‘Jane,’ says he, a fortnight back, ‘Jane, I forbids you to dust the study. You're not to bring duster nor brush inside the room, Jane. You has my orders; for I won't have my papers disturbed, Jane,’ says he. Well, Miss Patty, the master he's more grey than ever, and more

dreamlike than ever, and the way he dabbles in ink is truly awful. The other day he was leaving the house with a great blot of it all down one side of his nose, and *he* didn't see, for never, I believe, does he look in the glass, blessed man! Oh, Miss Patty, I did want you to run and tell him; for he might say it was no calling of mine; but I couldn't bear to think that he, who was so chokeful of genius, should be laughed at, and perhaps have the little boys in the street jeering at him. So, with my heart in my mouth, I up and said, 'Excuse me, sir, but you're a bit blotty—for going abroad in the street, I mean, sir.'—'I'm *what*, my good Jane!' he answers.—'Blotty, sir,' I says; 'and if you'll condescend to take one good stare at your himage, you'll know what I means.' With that, I held up a little glass I was hiding behind my apron. He laughed, and said, 'Thank you, Jane;' and ran up to his room and made himself wonderful smart. Oh, he's a blessed man; but when it comes to the question of money,

the most mortal aggravating that ever drew breath."

"Well, Jane, I must go to see him now ; and I'll look in on you in the kitchen presently."

"Oh, you do look sweet, my pet—pretty's no word for it ! Dear, dear, you've got quite an *hair*, Miss Patty !"

Patty laughed, and tripped downstairs, and knocked at the door of the little study. A deep voice said, "Come in !" She entered immediately. A grey head, bending low over piles of papers, was raised at her approach, and two absent, spectacled eyes surveyed her—at first, with only languid interest. Then the eyes brightened—her father held out his hand, and drew Patty to his side.

"My dear," he said, "you have come home ! I am glad to see you. The poem is three-parts done, Patty. I am at present engaged—this very moment engaged—over one of my most brilliant passages : an invocation—a seer's vision—terrible, majestic. I cannot be inter-

rupted. I will see you at dinner, my child."

"But I am going back to Mrs. Forrester, father dear—this is just a little passing visit. I am so sorry, but you won't see me at dinner."

"Don't be sorry, my child—I frankly confess that I shall not notice your absence. My thoughts are all inward just now. I may not even appear at dinner-time. Jane knows my ways—she will not disturb me. Good-bye, love. God bless you! I—I—your father sees light at last, child. There, don't disturb me."

The grey head was bent low again—the pen was seized. Patty might have been miles away for all that her father knew of her presence.

She went to the kitchen, some tears (which she could not keep back) springing to her bright brown eyes.

"Jane, I do not think my father seems at all

well—he looks so wild, so gaunt, so sorrowful. Does he eat enough?”

“Bless you, love—yes! I sees to that.”

“Well, I shall be very glad to be at home again. I am so sorry to miss Ethel and Constance.”

“Yes, my dear, they’ll be fretted when I tell ’em. They’re out all day, as you know, dear; and in the evening, now that the weather has got cooler, they often go for a little bit of a stroll, and it freshens them up fine.”

“And how are you off for money, Jane?”

“Oh, my dear, my dear, we are managing! You go off and enjoy the rest of your holiday, and don’t fret about the money part before you need. After all, the next quarter’s rent won’t be due for a good while; and as you settled the last, and paid for the water and gas, there can’t be many money troubles just now, Miss Patty.”

Patty’s face, which had been rather pale, now turned crimson.

“Oh, that water and that gas!” she exclaimed.

“That I could forget them and how I paid for them! Jane dear, I will take your advice, and keep money worries out of my head until I come home.”

“And don’t hurry back, darling—don’t, now. It does me good to see you looking so bonny, and with such an hair. You has been with very fine quality of late, I make no doubt, Miss Patty?”

“Oh yes, Jane, yes.”

“And a very beautiful young gentleman has been saying nice things to you? and maybe telling you that there is no sweeter face than yours in all the world?”

“Oh no, Jane! Jane, I must say good-bye! Give my love to the girls—take great care of father—expect me back in a fortnight: good-bye—good-bye!”



CHAPTER IX.

WHAT ABOUT LOUIS?



HALFORD was a very different place from St. Bevis—it was much smaller and not nearly so grand. It was a homely, pleasant brown house, surrounded by splendid trees, enclosed in a charming garden. Its owners were rich people, but Chalford was only their summer residence, and when there they liked to throw off restraint, and to be as homelike and homely as possible.

Mr. and Mrs. Morris were a middle-aged pair, with several grown-up children, both young men and girls. It was the fashion of the family, had been the fashion for several years, to meet at Chalford, whatever happened. Circum-

stances sometimes prevented all the boys and all the girls congregating round the Christmas hearth in the town-house, but nothing had ever prevented the family from meeting at Chalford in the summer and autumn of the year. The boys brought their friends, the girls theirs; cousins of even remote degree were invited. The cheerful, sunshiny house was always full as full could be. Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Forrester were either third or fourth cousins, but Mrs. Morris would have considered it a serious indignity if her dear cousin Fanny did not spend at least a month of the year with her. She and Patty received on this occasion a very warm greeting, and Patty was instantly surrounded by half a dozen young people, who carried her off to play tennis.

"I hope you don't play too scientifically," said Bell, a bright little girl of seventeen. "I like amateur players much the best."

"You won't say that before Louis," remarked her brother, with a laugh. "You remember

what he said last year about amateurs at play or anything else."

"What a worry you are, Rupert!" said Bell. "And when he does come he's not going to be so masterful as when he was here last time, I can tell you! Oh, Miss Beaufort, I beg your pardon—you look very pale—are you too tired to play?"

"No," said Patty, "I am very fond of tennis;" but as she played there was a confused buzzing in her ears. What did Miss Morris mean by Louis—how stupid of her to mind! Doubtless there were twenty men of that name—why should her thoughts instantly fly away in so provoking, so wrong a fashion to St. Bevis and Louis Stanhope?

"I am very sorry indeed," said gentle little Bell, when the game was over, and the two girls walked away together. "I don't know what you will think of us, and I really felt afraid to tell you at first."

"No one ever yet was afraid of me," said

Patty; "no one. If you only heard how my people scold me at home!"

"Scold you? Ah, no; I expect they love you! I don't think I am afraid of you, and so I shall tell you straight away. Only first let me say how sorry I am; and mother is dreadfully put out. We are afraid you won't be very comfortable, and that we are not treating you with respect."

"I am wonderfully curious," said Patty; "do tell me what it is; do you want me to catch the next train back to town?"

"No, no, no—that would be terrible; but we want you to share my room for a couple of nights, the house is so full. The fact is, we had a letter this morning; we could not put him off; he is a great friend—one of our greatest; but the Martins go on Saturday, and then you shall have a dear little room all to yourself; and my room is very snug, and has a beautiful view, and my maid shall help you. Oh, do say you don't

mind, and that you don't think we are wanting in respect to you!"

"My dear Miss Morris! I shall like to share your room; you don't know me, really, or you would not speak like that. It is very, very good of you to care to have me."

"Oh, now, I knew you were sweet! You must not call me Miss Morris; I am Bell to every one. Here is mother coming to meet us. Let me take you to her.—Mother, Miss Beaufort is so delighted about the room; she says she quite likes to share it with me."

"Patty likes to share it with you," corrected the girl, a little timidly.

"Oh, yes, we are Patty and Bell to each other already. I told Patty, mother, that she should have the little room under the eaves when the Martins go."

"Yes, of course, my dear.—Miss Beaufort, I have been put out about it. It's just that boy Louis—he will make his appearance at the most inconvenient moments. Now, my dear girls,

go both of you and get ready for dinner. Rupert has taken the dog-cart to meet Louis, and they may be back at any moment. Go and dress, both of you, you idle young things! you know, Bell, your father can't bear to be kept waiting a moment for his dinner."

"We'll gather some rosebuds for our hair," said Bell. "Here, Patty, quick! round by this corner. I'll have *gloire de Dijon*, for I am going to wear my blue Liberty silk. What colour will your dress be?"

"White," said Patty, drooping her head a little.

"Oh, sweet! you shall have these crimson rosebuds, just a bunch in your dusky hair, and another in your belt. Come, come, we have not a moment to lose."

Laughing gaily—for such light-heartedness as Bell's was infectious—the two girls presently found themselves in the brightest, cosiest attic bedroom imaginable, with dear little dormer windows which commanded an extensive view.

"If you please, miss——" a prim-looking face was pushed round the door.

"Yes, yes ; what is it, Dawson ?"

"If you please, Miss Bell, can you do without me this evening? Miss Annette and Miss Maggie have not come to their rooms yet, and I shall have to spend every moment to get them ready in time."

Bell was standing by her open wardrobe ; she turned round and looked interrogatively at Patty.

"Can you lace up a dress at the back ?"

"Oh, yes—at least, I've often done so," said Patty.

"Then it is all right—we shan't want you, Dawson. There, you may go.—Now, Patty, we must just fly—I hear the dog-cart coming back ; we must be in the drawing-room in a quarter of an hour. Father is the dearest old man, but he just will not stand being kept waiting for his dinner. Now, then, here you are—let me unpack your things ; is this your dinner

dress? Nun's veiling—very nice. I like nun's veiling; I often wear it."

"No, no, not that—this," said Patty, her cheeks suddenly growing crimson, and she pulled the worked India muslin into view. She had managed to make it up in spare moments. It was reserved for best, very best occasions; but an impulse which she could not quite control, which she vaguely understood, made her select the dress for this evening.

"Oh, that is perfectly lovely!" exclaimed little Bell; "how sweet you will look! Let me help you with your hair—there, that crisp kind of hair is so easily arranged. Mine is fair, and horribly thick; I can't possibly unplait it—I really can't. There, there's a love! put that *gloire de Dijon* just below my ear. Now how do I look? As to you, you are beautiful!"

"No, Bell, you must not tell me what is not true," said Patty in a grave voice, while a troubled look filled her brown eyes.

"Well, at least you are a darling, and you must

allow me to keep my private opinion. Now stick these roses into your belt, and these in your hair. Have you your handkerchief and gloves? We don't wear gloves after dinner here—we are *very* homely people. Now, Patty, give me your hand. We shall be first in the drawing-room, after all."

The girls tripped downstairs, Bell suddenly raising her head, and calling out to a tall figure who was seen flying along the corridor.

"Rupert, Rupert! has Louis come?"

"Yes, he's in his room—don't wait dinner for us; tell them so—we'll appear in the middle."

The tall figure vanished, and Patty and Bell descended to the drawing-room.

"Bell," said Patty, turning her crimson cheeks towards her young companion, "do tell me, do, whom do you call Louis?—I mean that *I—I* know some one of the name."

"Oh, do you? I think it's such a pretty name, and our Louis is a dear old fellow. Don't we quiz him, though! You know, Patty, he is

so lazy, and he puts on such airs, and we always try to take rises out of him. You must help us, Patty—you are just the sort of girl he would admire. Oh, there is the dinner-gong—we are only just in time, after all.”

The party, a large one, filed into the dining-room. Patty found herself removed by the length of half a table from Bell, but she also noticed that there was a vacant place by her side.

Presently some one dropped into it.

“How do you do, Miss Beaufort? Did I not tell you that it was only *au revoir*?”

“Mr. Stanhope!” exclaimed Patty. Try as she would, she could not keep the gladness out of her eyes, nor a little ring of joy from her voice.

“I am very glad to see you again,” he said; “the fact was, I could not keep away. Was not this cleverly managed, that I should sit near you at dinner? That was Rupert’s doing: Now tell me, Miss Beaufort, what *will* Mrs. Forrester say?”

“ Oh, I don’t know, Mr. Stanhope—I feel quite confused at this.”

“ So does Mrs. Forrester, I am sure ; I have not ventured to meet her eye yet. Suppose you and she go back to St. Bevis to-morrow ; I am not there, and I *am* here, and here I intend to remain. You are looking remarkably well, Miss Beaufort--and what a pretty *new* dress ! ”





CHAPTER X.

SEE THE CONQUERING HERO



It was impossible to be formal at the Morris'es'; the most starched and stiff and severe people—those who considered etiquette to comprise the very essence of life—unbent here. The atmosphere was so genial, so happy, so bright, so good. All the thoughts floating about were such kind thoughts—all the interest and sympathies were so genial and hearty. Mrs. Forrester, a good-natured, although worldly woman, was also easily impressed by her surroundings. At St. Bevis the tone was essentially of the earth, earthy. At St. Bevis money and a good position assumed enormous, gigantic propor-

tions, but here at Chalford nothing seemed of any account at all except love and cheerfulness and happiness. So although Mrs. Forrester began by feeling extremely angry with Stanhope for, as she expressed it, stealing a march on her, she could not help, long before the evening was over, becoming infected by the general light-heartedness. At St. Bevis, Stanhope's attentions to Patty had been sufficiently remarkable to cause jealous girls and angry mothers to regard her with dislike and suspicion, but at Chalford it seemed quite the thing that all the boys and girls should laugh and be cheerful together—that they should stray away after dinner in the soft gloaming under the trees, and should come back presently one couple at a time without any one making the least remark. Mrs. Forrester resolved to say nothing to Patty that night; on the contrary, she was a little kinder than usual to the young girl, and when she bade her good-night con-

gratulated her on her pretty dress and pleasing appearance.

“ You looked very nice this evening, my dear ; yes, that soft simple kind of dress suits a face and figure like yours, particularly when the face is as brightly coloured as it was this evening. Now run to bed, child ; I am glad to find you have quite got over your fatigue.”

The next day and the next were delightful. Patty and Bell became excellent friends, and where Patty and Bell were found Stanhope generally contrived to be.

“ He is greatly improved,” whispered Bell to her companion ; “ he is not half so lazy as he used to be, nor so masterful, and his eyes look wide awake and energetic. I think you do him good, Patty ; he evidently likes you very much.”

Patty, in these two or three golden days, almost forgot her home worries ; she almost forgot that she was a very poor girl, who knew the worth of a shilling better than any other

young person at Chalford, who understood perfectly what quarter-day meant, and who had often tried to imagine to herself how the house would get on when the water-supply was cut off. She almost forgot these things, and only when she laid her head on her pillow at night had time to remember her greatest anxiety of all—whether her father's poem—his great, great work—would turn out a success or not.

On the fourth day of her visit the whole party at Chalford went on a picnic to some neighbouring ruins—that is, the whole party with one exception. Just at the last moment Mrs. Forrester sent for Patty to her room.

“My dear, I have done such a tiresome thing! I have sprained my ankle; not much—nothing to be anxious about; but it will be impossible for me to walk about all day. I should be in every one's way, and no end of a nuisance. Now, Patty, I don't wish any one to know of this; if they hear of it before you have started, some one of these dear, good-natured Morris

will be offering to stay at home with me ; now, that I should not allow on any account ; afterwards, when they miss me, you are to explain. Now run off and enjoy yourself, my dear. You look well ! ”

Patty kissed Mrs. Forrester, who surveyed her from head to foot with a slightly pathetic, slightly critical glance ; then she ran off to join her companions. The day was perfect—the spirits of all the gay party were exuberant with mirth and light-heartedness. They examined the ruins, as in duty bound ; made great fun over the dinner, and afterwards, as is the invariable custom at picnics, strolled off in couples to admire the scenery.

“ We are to meet two miles up the glen for tea,” called out Rupert Morris, as Stanhope, by Patty’s side, was disappearing up a glade.

“ All right, old fellow ; I know the spot, by the haunted oak tree,” called out Stanhope. “ And now, Miss Beaufort,” he continued, turning his bright face to hers “ I am going to

show you some scenery of which England may be justly proud. Oh, yes, nothing in the Highlands can go beyond it. Different! yes, I admit it is different, but so homelike, so rural, so comforting. I only want to see grand nature when I am very happy."

"You look very happy now," said Patty, her voice faltering.

"Yes, I am happy, but I have not reached the summit of bliss. Here, sit down. We shall come to our view by-and-by. How is your father's poem getting on?"

Patty sighed.

"I saw him for a moment last week," she said. "He spoke enthusiastically about the poem, but he did not look well. Oh, I know it is selfish of me to be away here enjoying myself. I ought to be with him."

"Why? Did he tell you he missed you?"

Patty laughed.

"On the contrary, he admitted he did *not*

miss me," she replied; "but that has nothing to say to it. I ought to be with him."

"Why?"

"To see to things."

"Oh, to see to things! You are the universal benefactor—the little housekeeper at every one's beck and call. The position is wearing—it is very good for you to be out of it."

"Do you think so? I must go back to it, you know. When my father has finished the poem, my real anxiety will begin."

"How?"

"Oh, I only quote from former experiences. He has written other poems, although nothing half so fine as this. He will be exhausted from the effort and strain of writing, and he will be also feverishly anxious about the fate of the poem. He will take it to some large firm of publishers, and he will call there every day to inquire about it. If he is not in the shop or counting-house, inquiring about the fate of the

poem, he will be pacing up and down outside. He will think of nothing else ; he will scarcely eat, and he will scarcely sleep, until the fate of the poem is known. The *other* poems were declined, and father always came home broken down, looking ten years older. If this—this, which he considers his best—is not accepted, it may kill him.”

“ Oh, don’t, Miss Beaufort ! nothing so tragical can happen. If your father has genius, it must find a market. Don’t look so sorrowful about it. Why, there are absolutely tears in your eyes.”

“ I have had so much experience,” said Patty sadly. “ I think all his poems lovely. I don’t think publishers know geniuses—I don’t really. I think they must be very bad judges of good work, or they would not refuse father’s.”

“ Miss Beaufort ! Patty—oh, I know it is very wrong of me to call you Patty !—Miss Beaufort, might I ask you a question ? ”



'Shall we go up and admire that view?'—*Page 113.*

"Yes, of course."

"But a very rude, personal question."

"Oh, I don't think you would be rude."

"Yes, my question is rude; but I must ask it. Yes, I must ask it; I must know. Tell me—I have guessed it once or twice, but I should like to hear it from your own lips—are you very poor?"

Patty started, a burning flood of colour rushed over her face. She rose hastily to her feet.

"Shall we go up and admire that view?" she said. "Yes, Mr. Stanhope, I am a very poor girl—a girl with scarcely any dresses, and scarcely any friends. I've been rather out of my sphere lately—I had almost forgotten I was poor. You did right to remind me. Now, shall we look at the view?"

"Good gracious, I have offended you, Miss Beaufort! How little you know me, or my heart, or my feelings! Why, I meant—but no matter; you have misunderstood me. Do

you suppose I think *worse* of a girl for being poor? 'One so plucky as you—so brave, so gentle? Do you think I left St. Bevis because I despised you for being poor? Do you think—good gracious, how little you know me! I can't bear empty-headed rich girls; I can't bear girls who wear different dresses every day; I can't bear—Miss Beaufort, you need not look at me like that."

"You have always been most kind to me," said Patty. "I am not offended, indeed. It is true that I am a poor girl; it is also true that there are some delightful rich girls—Bell, for instance, and my cousin Elizabeth. Now, shall we go up and see the view?"

Something in Patty's last words seemed suddenly to quiet Stanhope. Until she said "my cousin Elizabeth," his face had been flushed and eager, now it perceptibly paled, and even his manner to Patty became a shade colder and more reserved.

"Take my hand, Miss Beaufort; this part of

the path is very steep. Ah, now we are at the very top ; and now, behold my view !”

It spread before them an exquisite panorama, a far-reaching picture of peace and rural beauty and plenty ; the silver threads of more than one winding river ran through rich pasturage, or under softly shaded trees ; the cattle browsed happily in the fields ; here and there were studded snug farmsteads, and picturesque red-tiled dwellings ; a blue haze lay over the scene ; the wind scarcely stirred, there was not a cloud in the sky. Finally, both in the near landscape and the far was added to the natural beauty the rich glow and colouring of autumn, in russet brown, and masses of golden yellow, verging to crimson.

“ Yes,” said Patty, “ this scene fills me with peace ; I——” Her eyes filled with tears ; she looked away, pretending to be absorbed with what she saw around her. When her eyes were quite dry she turned to her companion.

"Shall we join the others now?" she said gently.

They went down the hill without a word. Stanhope scarcely knew himself why he felt melancholy, but Patty's thoughts had gone home to her father.

When the merry picnic party returned to Chalford that evening, Mrs. Forrester came to meet them, holding an open letter in her hand.

"Good news, my dears!" she said eagerly. "Good, delightful news—dear Elizabeth joins us to-morrow."

"Betty!" exclaimed Patty. "Have you had a letter from her? Does she say much? May I see?"

"I will show you the letter when you come to bid me good-night, dear. She arrives by the twelve o'clock train to-morrow, and so, and so—she will release you, poor little prisoner!"

Patty did not know why a cruel stab seemed to go right through her heart.

“Yes,” she said quietly.

“ ‘Yes’—what is that?” suddenly exclaimed Bell, springing to Patty’s side. “*You* going, Patty? Indeed, you shall not! I know better than to allow such a thing. I could not live without you just at present. Oh! Elizabeth Cunningham is all very well, and we’re all very fond of her. She’s our cousin, and—and—there are other things. But Elizabeth is not you, Patty; and there is plenty of room for you both. You shall go on sharing my attic with me, and Elizabeth shall have the room under the eaves. Louis— I say, Louis! come here. Are we going to allow Patty to go because Elizabeth Cunningham is coming?”

“No, certainly not,” said Stanhope. His face grew a sudden dusky-red. His eyes were fixed on Patty, as if he saw no one in the world but her. “Stay, Miss Beaufort, stay!” he murmured.

“Patty!” suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Forrester’s voice, which sounded thin and strained,

“we will talk the matter quietly over in my room to-night, dear, and you will let this kind little Bell know your decision in the morning. Now, had you not better go to your room and get ready for supper.”





CHAPTER XI.

MRS. FORRESTER'S STORY

“YES, dear, sit down by my side on this low chair; I am so glad you have had this pleasant time; it has done you good. You look very well, Patty—quite a different girl from the one who came to me a few weeks ago. Elizabeth will thank you for taking such good care of her aunt. I have enjoyed your society, dear; I am the better for it.”

“Have you a time-table, Mrs. Forrester?” said Patty suddenly, in abrupt voice. She could not make out why her nerves were so irritated, nor why Mrs. Forrester’s smooth, liquid tones jarred on her. “Oh, you are very kind,” she

continued, blushing vividly ; “but, please, have you a time-table? I mean I want to know about the trains for to-morrow.”

“I need not look, dear ; I know about the trains. There is one in the morning at eleven, an express, which will get you into town in an hour and a half. There is another very good train at three. You had better wait for that, Patty. You will see Elizabeth and get your lunch comfortably over.”

“Thanks,” said Patty ; “I may go by the earlier train. I will let you know in the morning.”

“Yes, dear, yes ; now sit down quietly by me, and let us have our little talk. My dear Patty, I know how fond you are of Elizabeth, and she has often told me that you are her favourite cousin. It is a great treat to me to have the dear girl coming to stay with me for a time. And in her coming now—for I have mentioned to her the names of *all* our guests at Chalford—I may as well frankly own that I have a double cause for congratulation.”

"Indeed!" said Patty. "I don't think I quite understand."

"No, dear; and perhaps I ought to explain matters a little to you. I have long wished to tell you a certain little story."

"Is it about Betty? Had she not better tell me her own stories?" answered the girl, suddenly rising to her feet.

"It is no breach of confidence, my dear. You may sit down—you need not excite yourself. The story is about Betty, as you call her, and—and—a friend of yours. I think I may safely say that Louis Stanhope is your friend, Patty. He has evidently taken a great fancy to you."

Once again Patty rose quickly to her feet.

"I think perhaps—I really think perhaps I had better not hear," she said. Her cheeks were white, her lips quivered. "I—I am going away to-morrow, and Betty and Mr. Stanhope can—can meet. I mean, I won't interfere. I need not hear the story, need I, Mrs. Forrester?"

"My dear Patience, your manner, your agitation astonish me. My dear, I think you are a nice, sweet, modest girl—I *have* thought so; but now—how am I to interpret your too visible agitation, Patience? Sit down, Miss Beaufort. I am sure you are only a little over-tired, but all the same I think it right—I insist—upon telling you my story."

Patty's white face had turned crimson. Mrs. Forrester's cruel words had acted as a cold douche; they had braced up her nerves to bear anything for the time being.

"Tell me anything you like," she said icily; "you have quite misunderstood me."

"Of course I have, dear; I knew it. You are, as I remarked, over-tired—that accounts for everything. Well, my little tale is soon done. It is about Elizabeth—and, yes—I may as well add—Louis. Has Louis, my dear Patty—has he ever spoken to you about his mother?"

"He told me once that he had a mother,"



" ' Tell me anything you like,' she said icily."—Page 122.

said Patty; "that he loved her very much. I was telling him about my father—that was what made him speak of his mother—he did not say much about her."

"No; she is a proud woman, is Lady Stanhope. She—she—Elizabeth went to stay with her two years ago, and she took a fancy to her. Louis is not, for his position, well off; of course all these things go by comparison, but even at his mother's death he will not have five thousand a year, and that is a small sum to keep up a family estate upon. Louis inherits his property through his mother; his father was a very distinguished military man, and was knighted in consequence. Well, this is very far apart from my tale. Louis is his mother's only son, and she is a widow; in such a position, he ought to do much for her, and it is absolutely—*absolutely* necessary that he should marry to please her."

"Yes," said Patty; "yes."

"Two years ago Lady Stanhope fell in love

with your cousin Elizabeth, and thought she would make a good wife for her son. She was greatly struck with her beauty and amiability, but was also glad to find—and in this particular she also felt as a wise mother should—that Elizabeth had a fortune—nothing large, of course, but still sufficient to make it prudent for Louis to marry her. The young people met, and—and—well, I cannot exactly tell you what occurred, but my impression is that there is a kind of tacit engagement between them. Remember, I don't know this, but it is my strong impression. Elizabeth is a very whimsical girl, and takes a long time to make up her mind, but there is not the least doubt that Louis was violently in love with her two years ago; even now I never mention her name without his showing emotion. There is no doubt whatever as to his feelings, and as to hers, I expect I can guess pretty accurately the state of Elizabeth's heart. The meeting which will now take place between the two will, I have

not the slightest doubt, bring about the public recognition of the engagement which has so long been existing between this young pair. You will be glad to hear of dear Elizabeth's happiness, will you not, Patty? and I will promise you, dear, to write myself to you when I have anything to communicate. What a lovely bride your Betty will make!"

"Yes," said Patty. Then she added, with an effort: "If this is true—and I suppose it is—we shall miss her very much at home."

"I have no doubt of that, my dear. Her money must be of great consequence to you; but, in any case, I fear that the present arrangement could not go on. It is necessary that Elizabeth should see the world; so beautiful and young and wealthy a girl cannot be hidden away in an out-of-the-way corner."

"No," said Patty, wearily. She rose again to her feet. "I will go now," she said. "I have heard the story. Thank you for telling it to me."

"Not at all, my dear. You really do look very white and tired, Patty. There, good-night, child; good-night."

When Miss Beaufort reached the room which she shared with Bell Morris, she found that young lady up, and eager to converse with her.

"Well, Patty, love, you are going to stay, are you not?"

"No, Bell, no," said Patty, putting her hands before her eyes in a dazed kind of way. "I am going away by an early train to-morrow; Mrs. Forrester wishes it."

"Mrs. Forrester?" said Bell, reddening; "what has she to say to our asking a guest to stay on in our own house? What can you mean, Patty? If you like it you shall stay, poor darling—there, mother shall ask you herself in the morning."

"I was wrong to speak about Mrs. Forrester," said Patty, tears springing to her eyes; "I was really very wrong. I must go in any case, Bell;

I have reasons! It would be impossible for me to stay from home any longer; and now, oh, Bell, my head does ache so dreadfully! May I lie down and not talk any more until the morning?"

"Poor Patty!" said tender-hearted little Bell, and then she bustled about her friend, helping her to get into bed, so that the blessed moment when the candles were put out, and Patty found herself in the friendly darkness of the night, came sooner than she had dared to hope.

It was some time before either girl slept. Poor Patty lay motionless on her couch, thinking hard and burning and dreadful thoughts; but fearful of moving, almost afraid to breathe, lest Bell should find out she could not sleep. What did it all mean, why was her heart so torn! Why did she suddenly feel as if she almost hated Elizabeth? Why did even the most distant thought of Stanhope cause her to writhe with almost uncontrollable agony! Oh, when would the morning come, how soon would

she be at home? What a cruel, dreadful world it was, after all! And what a terrible woman Mrs. Forrester had suddenly proved herself!

"Oh, how could she speak so bitterly to me?" moaned the girl, "as if I loved him, as if I had given my heart to him without being asked."

More and more fiercely throbbed poor Patty's head; she thought the night would never go. In the dreadful enforced stillness which she was obliged to keep she almost wondered if she could retain her senses. When, oh when, would the morning come?

But relief arrives, even to the most desolate, and before the daybreak the young girl had forgotten all her troubles in peaceful, childlike slumber.

Then, just when Patty was in her soundest sleep, the other young occupant of the bedroom rose softly, and, scarcely daring to glance at her companion, dressed herself, and left the room.

"For I know," said Bell—"I know," she added, stamping her little foot, and speaking at last aloud in the passage, a little way from their room—"I am certain Mrs. Forrester has said something dreadful to Patty. Her face was completely changed when she came into our room after talking to her last night. Any one can see how fond Louis is of Patty, and I am sure that nasty Mrs. Forrester does not like it. Darling Patty! She looked quite broken-hearted when she came to bed, and she says she will not stay, and she will go back to London by the very first train. Oh dear! oh dear! I have scarcely been able to sleep all night thinking of it, and I know Patty did not sleep until a couple of hours ago, although she lay as still as a mouse. Well, at any rate, I'll do one thing. I'll go and wait in the passage outside Louis's room. I heard him and Rupert making an arrangement to go out fishing early this morning, and if he did that, he might not return until after Patty had gone. That would never do.

I will prevent it. Oh, Mrs. Forrester, I do not like you at all!"

The little maiden, looking as childish and pretty as a girl of seventeen could look, went and curled herself up on the broad ledge of a certain window, which lit the passage leading towards Stanhope's bedroom. There she sat, tapping her fingers against the pane, and looking out at the autumn landscape. It was scarcely daylight yet, but Bell knew that her brother and his friend would go off to fish at an early hour.

As she waited, she could not help feeling impatient. She did hope that lazy, tiresome Louis would not stay much longer in bed; for suppose Patty awoke and missed her—oh, then, ~~what~~ could she do?

The daylight broadened and deepened, and still there was no sign of movement in the quiet house. Bell was just meditating a raid on Rupert, to let him know how late it was, when a lazy step in Louis's bedroom was distinctly

heard, and a few moments afterwards the young man came out.

"My dear Bell! what are you doing here?" he asked in amazement.

"Waiting for you, Louis," answered Bell. "Louis, I wanted to say—I mean, I thought you ought to know—I thought you would be glad to know—I mean—I mean——" Here Bell coloured crimson, and quite stammered.

Her tall cousin looked down at her with some amusement and a little impatience.

"My dear child, what is it? Do say out what you want to say. Rupert must be waiting for me, and it is late as it is."

"It's about Patty," said Bell. "She's going—she won't stay—she can't stay. It's Mrs. Forrester's fault!"

Here two blue eyes full of tears were raised to Stanhope's face.

"Come along, Louis. I'm perfectly sick of waiting!" called Rupert, from the storey below.

Stanhope's face had undergone a curious change.

"Look here, Bell, I'll be back in a minute," he said; then he ran downstairs and said a word or two to his cousin.

"I've changed my mind, Rupert—I won't fish this morning; or perhaps I may find it possible to join you in an hour by the bank under the western willows. Go on, old chap; don't let me spoil sport. I—I'm a little out of sorts this morning."

"Then why," began Rupert—"why in the world did you get up?" but he spoke to empty air, for Stanhope had once more bounded up the stairs, and was standing even now by Bell's side.

"Now, Amabel, you must tell me all this story. I thought it was arranged that Miss Beaufort was to stay. I certainly quite understood it so last night, and why should Mrs. Forrester—— What—what do you mean, Bell?"

“I don’t quite know what I mean myself,” said Bell, “except that I love Patty, and that she looks dreadfully unhappy. She looks as if her heart were broken, and I know she has been awake all night. But she will go—she will go early to-day, Louis. I thought you would like to know.”

“So I do like to know. I am very much obliged to you, Bell. Now you can go back to bed, you poor child.”





CHAPTER XII.

CROSS PURPOSES

PATTY awoke from her restful slumber with a start and a little feeling of wonder. It was late; she had a kind of intuition that it was late; but she felt lazy and comfortable, and looked sleepily round the pretty room, feeling disinclined to get up and wondering why she was lazy, and why the sap and spring of her youth did not send her bounding as usual out of bed. Bell was neatly dressed, some fresh roses in her belt, and her bright hair parted on her brow; she was standing by the open lattice window, as if waiting for something. When she heard Patty stir she came up to her at once, and kissed her affectionately.

"You have overslept yourself, you naughty!" she said, "and I have brought up your breakfast; see, here it is on this tray, as hot and cosy as possible. You shall sit up in bed and eat it, and I will stay and chatter to you."

"Oh, I'm so ashamed of being late!" said Patty.

All her memories had come back to her now; she remembered last night, the blow she had received, the tears she had shed, the agonies she had endured. She knew that she must leave by an early train to-day.

"Bell," she said, "I am sorry you did not wake me; I must get up at once and pack, for I am going, dear."

"If you must go, you need not pack," said Bell; "Dawson will do that. Sit up and eat your breakfast, and don't let us think of disagreeables. I've brought you some peaches; I went out to gather them myself, so I know they are just perfect."

"Yes—thank you, dear Bell. Bell, I must leave by the eleven-o'clock train."

"But why by that train, Patty? Elizabeth Cunningham will be here at 1.30. You will like to meet her; you were always fond of her, you know."

"Yes, I was fond of Betty," said Patty, in a dreary tone; "but I think I will go by the eleven train, dear. Betty lives with us, and I can see her at any time, you know."

"If you must go," said Bell, in an eager tone—"if you must go, darling, darling Patty, shall we manage it in this way? Wilson shall take your luggage in the cart—it shall be all packed and ready in good time, and you and I will walk across the fields to meet the train. No one with us, only Cecil; it will do Cecil good to have the run."

Cecil was the youngest of the family, a spoilt little boy of ten. Patty wondered why it was necessary for him to accompany them, but she felt too tired and sad to trouble herself much

"We can have such a lovely walk across the fields," pleaded Bell. "You won't want the tiresome, stupid carriage to take you to the station, Patty."

"No, dear, no; I would much rather walk with you. Only let us be in time."

"Trust me to see to that!" said Bell with energy, as she ran out of the room.

"Bell is wonderfully cheerful," thought poor Patty: "as if she were rather glad I was leaving her. Oh, dear! I know every word Mrs. Forrester said is true. I have myself noticed a change on his face when he spoke about Elizabeth. Dear, beautiful Betty! who can wonder? She will make a splendid wife for him, and it is nice to think her money will be useful to him. Oh, of course, I must not be selfish, I must not show any one I care. No, no, no, I don't care. Of course I don't care—only somehow, somehow, there is a dreadful ache in my heart."

Down went the poor little brown head on the small hands. and during Bell's absence Patty

was forced to give herself the luxury of a good cry.

She forced her spirits, however, to rally before the final leave-taking came, and it was a rosy-faced, bright little girl who ran into Mrs. Forrester's room at ten o'clock that morning to say good-bye.

"Why, Patty dear, how well and happy you look! Ah! I knew the little prisoner was glad to be set free! But why are you going so soon, my dear? Your train does not leave until eleven."

"No, but Bell and I are going to walk through the fields to the station, and we must give ourselves plenty of time. Good-bye, Mrs. Forrester—give my love to Elizabeth."

"Good-bye, my child. Yes, I will give your cousin your affectionate love. I trust, dear Patty, you will soon be congratulating Elizabeth. Ah! how happy this match will make us all! Good-bye, my child; kiss me."

Patty bent for an instant, pressed one light,

icy little kiss on the lady's brow, then smiling gaily, she left her.

The rest of the farewells were soon said, and no one observed that Patty looked round wistfully for some one who was not present.

The two girls, accompanied by Cecil, started on their walk across the fields, and Bell, linking her arm in that of her companion, looked into her face, and said very innocently :

"But you have never said good-bye to Louis !"

Patty coloured painfully.

"I—I—it does not matter. Please say good-bye to him for me, Bell."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Bell. "There is Louis fishing under that willow tree; you can say good-bye to him yourself. Ah, he sees us; he is coming to meet us. All right. I'll leave you two to say your adieus in private. Come along, Cecil—race me to the next wicket-gate."

Patty's crimson face had turned white; a cold

sensation seemed almost to paralyse her ; then, with a violent effort, she recovered herself, and by the time Stanhope had reached her, she was coming to meet him with a tolerably natural smile.

“ Miss Beaufort, were you really going back to London without saying a word to me ? ”

“ I want to catch the eleven train,” said Patty ; “ you were not in the drawing-room when I went to bid the others good-bye.”

“ Am I ever in the drawing-room at ten in the morning ? But why are you going away at all—was it not arranged last night that you were to stay ? ”

“ There was no special arrangement made,” said Patty, in a steady voice—“ I would rather go—I am going. Good-bye, Mr. Stanhope ; if you will allow me, I will run after Bell—I’m afraid I may miss my train.”

“ Your train won’t go for three-quarters of an hour, and you can reach the station from here, walking at a snail’s pace, in five minutes. Come down and ’sit under the willow tree, and see me fish.”

"Oh, no—no, thank you."

"Not no, but yes—come."

"I cannot, indeed—I must join Bell. Good-bye."

"Bell is out of sight. Patty, what is the matter with you?"

"Please don't call me Patty. I must—must go. Good-bye."

"Not if I say you must *not* go—not, at least, until you have heard me out. Oh, my poor little girl! oh, my darling! There, there, Patty, you were going to cry; do come and sit under the willow—I can read your poor little forlorn face like a book."

"No, Mr. Stanhope, you cannot. I am going back to my father; I am not forlorn, and you have no right—it is cruel of you to speak to me as you have just done."

"Patty! Cruel! Oh, Patty, you know you do love me!"

"No, I don't! How can you? Let me go."

Patty spoke with vehemence; her eyes were ~~flashing~~ with angry tears; for the first time

Stanhope's almost too confident manner changed—his expression altered—he looked at the defiant and unreasoning girl in astonishment.

"I thought," he began—"I thought—oh, Patty, do come and sit under the willow tree. Why do you look at me so angrily? Why do you pretend to misunderstand both our hearts? You must—you must know that we love one another. Even outsiders have seen it—even Bell. Patty, have you not taken one look into your own heart? Don't you know that I am not indifferent to you."

Patty was trembling more and more. Some words of Mrs. Forrester's kept ringing in her ears :

"He is a flirt ; your feelings are unmistakable."

Yes, yes, any one could see that she had fallen in love with him. Even he saw it, and he was sorry for her. She felt choking with rage and self-abasement.

"I cannot," she said ; "you are mistaken ; I cannot. I—I told you I did not care."

Then suddenly a desperate idea came into her

head. She would sting him. She would show him that she knew something of his base conduct.

"You know that you have no right to say such words to me. It is unjust to another!"

"To another! To another! What do you mean, Patty?"

"I know what I mean, and so do you; Mrs. Forrester has told me. She is coming: she will make you a good wife. I—I—— Oh, Mr. Morris, is that you? I am going; will you say good-bye to me?"

Lazy, good-humoured Rupert Morris could not help staring at the excited little figure who now rushed up to him and held out an eager hand. He had never before thought Miss Beaufort a very pretty girl; now he suddenly discovered that she was lovely.

"Walk up with me to the station," said Patty; "Bell has run away. Will you come, too, Mr. Stanhope?"

But Stanhope had vanished. They saw his tall figure disappearing behind the willow trees.



CHAPTER XIII.

AT LAST

“**M**E certainly is very much changed, Patty. Yes, on the whole, I am glad you have come home ; Constance and I are dull companions for him ; we are neither intellectual enough nor silly enough for his taste.”

“ Oh, Ethel, what do you mean ? ”

“ Now, my dear Patty, you need not put on that injured air. You are the silly little girl who always suits our dear father to perfection ; as to the intellectual people, he may now and then meet them at the British Museum, but they don’t come here.”

Ethel was standing in the dull little drawing-

room in Beatrice Gardens, and Patty, kneeling on the fender stool, was looking into her face. On this occasion the drawing-room was not flooded with sunshine; a steady rain was pouring outside, and the autumn day was already fading.

Constance, leaning back in an easy-chair, was trying to catch the last rays of light to devour a novel, and Ethel was grumbling out the woes of the last six weeks into Patty's attentive ears.

"Yes, Patty," she said, in conclusion, "that is exactly how things are. We are shorter than ever of money, shorter than we *ever* were, and father has turned very queer. He is so morose, and sometimes looks so excited and unhappy, that Constance and I don't dare speak to him. It's all very fine for you, Patty. You have been having a gay, delightful time, of course, but we have had our worries, I can tell you."

"You have not told her the worst yet, Ethel," said Constance, suddenly flinging down the book that she was reading.— "The most perplexing

and the deepest worry of all is the one about Elizabeth, you know."

"Betty?" exclaimed Patty. Her heart sank; she got up, and, scarcely knowing what she was doing, set a light to the fire which had been laid in the grate.

"Oh, what an extravagant little thing you are!" said Constance, coming up and spreading out her hands to the grateful blaze. "There, it is a comfort to have you back, Patty-pan! you know how to make things nice for us all. Yes, I thought you had heard it—Elizabeth is going."

"Mrs. Forrester hinted it to me," said Patty; "but I did not know that Elizabeth herself wished to go—I mean, I thought Betty liked being with us."

"Oh, yes, so did we—she always pretended to; but, after all, why should she—a rich girl like her? Anyhow, these are the facts. She comes of age this month; is quite her own mistress, and leaves at Christmas—no reason given."

"And so vanishes her two hundred pounds a year!" said Ethel. "Heigh-ho! we starved before; now we can't live at all—that is a self-evident fact."

"Don't, Ethel," said Patty. Her head was throbbing wildly. Just now coming from all the luxury, and wealth, and freedom from money cares, she could scarcely realise the great pressure of poverty. Two things alone absorbed her bewildered brain; first, that she was certain she knew why Elizabeth was leaving; second, what ailed her father? The fear caused by her sister's words was almost the sharpest fear of all just now. She sprang suddenly to her feet.

"I have not seen father yet," she said. "Is he often out all day long like this?"

"Oh, yes," said Ethel. Then she yawned carelessly. "At least," she added, "I don't know. He's scarcely ever in in the evening, is he Con?"

"No," said Constance. "Ethel, do you know where the second volume of my novel is?"

"I'll run down to father's study and make it a little comfortable for him," said Patty.

She left the room, neither of her sisters hindering her, and running downstairs entered the tiny study. It was dark enough here, so dark that Patty instantly lit the lamp; and then poking all the rubbish out of the grate, she went into the kitchen for coal and wood, and in a few minutes had a bright fire blazing merrily. There are pieces of work which only loving hands can attempt, and one of these is the setting in order of such a study as Mr. Beaufort's. Patty, however, had deft little fingers—they knew how to tidy without disarranging, and how to bring a certain amount of order out of the most hopeless chaos. When the room was dusted, the worn armchair turned in front of the fire, the lamp burning clearly, the fire sparkling merrily, Patty ran into the kitchen.

"Jane," she said, "have you got a chop in the house?"

"A chop, my dear? where would I have a chop?"

"Eggs, then, Jane—some fresh eggs—which you can poach, and serve up hot on anchovy toast."

"Well, well, love, there are two or three which we are keeping for breakfast."

"Never mind about breakfast. As soon as ever my father comes, get them ready as nicely and as quickly as you can, and bring them into the study with some hot, strong coffee."

"I'm dead beat, darling, for the ladies upstairs never give me no help at all, but I'd do more than that for you. Oh, how pale you look, Miss Patty!"

"But I am really very well, Jane; I've had a splendid holiday. Now I am going into the study to wait for father."

Jane began bustling about in the kitchen, and Patty went back to the little room she had made bright and cheery. She sat down in her father's armchair, crossed her hands on her lap, and gazed into the glowing fire.

This time last night she was coming home

from that delightful picnic, and the sun was disappearing in golden splendour behind the hills. This time last night it seemed all summer and sunshine and hope. This time to-night it was autumn, and the dreariness and despair of late autumn had entered her heart.

"I did the right thing to-day," she murmured to herself—"I did the right thing, though it almost killed me. He only said those words to me out of pity—his heart is with Elizabeth; yes, yes, of course it is with Elizabeth, and she will make a good wife for him, and her money will be useful to him. Yes, I am glad I had courage to keep him true to her. Very soon he will forget about me—he will forget that he very nearly asked a penniless little girl to be his wife, and that she was very nearly weak enough to say 'Yes.' Ah, but he won't ever know that—I had to be rude, to make it quite safe for him and Elizabeth; that was what hurt me most. Well, now it is all over, and I must forget about it as fast as ever I can. Oh, I have enough to

think about now that I have come home, and there are worries enough. Dear father—I cannot help being very anxious about him!”

Just then steps were heard, pausing at the hall-door—a latchkey was put into the lock, and a moment or two later Mr. Beaufort entered the study.

Patty was accustomed to a look of gloom on her father's face. That look of gloom, accompanied by an expression of abstraction—a far-away, dreamy, rapt gaze—was how she best knew his face. To-night she started, clasped her hands, and sprang from her seat. Her father's countenance was simply transfigured. So completely altered was it, that in an instant his daughter forgot her own cares, her own little story, her own young life. Every faculty in her was absorbed in wondering, in conjecturing what had happened. Mr. Beaufort, for the first time in Patty's memory, looked a jubilant, a radiant, a happy man.

"Oh, father!" said Patty—"father dear, I have come home! How are you?"

"How am I, child?—does it matter in the least how I am, or how any one is—the poem will live!"

"Oh, father dearest!—oh, father!"

"Read this, Patty—my head is a little dazed; of course there was no fear—there could not have been—but I own I have been anxious. Read this, read it aloud to me, child."

With trembling fingers, Mr. Beaufort fumbled in his coat-pockets. Presently he pulled out a letter which bore the impress of a great firm of publishers.

"Read it aloud, child—I own that I feel a bit dazed—it's the lifting of a load of anxiety. Read me what they say, Patty. I am glad you are home; you always sympathised."

The letter was short. Patty read the following words aloud :—

"SIR,—We have considered your poem—'London of the Present'—very carefully, and

are so far impressed by it as to be willing to open negotiations with regard to its publication. We need scarcely tell you that poems are a drug in the market, but we admit that your work shows considerable power. Can you make an appointment to see us at an early opportunity? We will suit our convenience to yours.

“Yours faithfully,

“SHARP AND JONES.”

“There, Patty, it is settled at last,” said Mr. Beaufort.

“Oh, father dear, I hope so!”

“Why do you say you hope so?—the thing is done—Sharp and Jones are men of sense. Oh, I am tired, Patty; we won’t discuss the poem any more—the load is off my mind, and I can rest. I am glad of a fire, and my own study looks cosy.—Well, little girl, and so you have come back to your old father!”

“Give me a kiss, father dear.”

“There is a load off my mind, Patty—I feel quite young and hearty again. We shall have

money, too, and I shall be famous.—Ah, Jane, you are bringing me some supper; that is right. You may leave it there, Jane—thank you, I feel quite hungry. Patty, I have been long waiting for this day—you know, child—you can testify I have waited patiently.”

Tears sprang to Patty's eyes.

“You have,” she said, “you have;” and stooping down, she kissed her father's thin hand reverently.





CHAPTER XIV.

WE HAVE NOT MET FOR A YEAR



LIZABETH CUNNINGHAM was a special favourite at Chalford ; she was a great contrast to Patty, being large and fair and important-looking ; she had a bright face and merry blue eyes. So merry and genial was her glance that no one felt in the least afraid of her, but at the same time so dignified was her carriage and bearing that no one could have dreamed of taking a liberty with her.

This girl, the happy possessor of a thousand a year in her own right, had of course no lack of lovers ; wherever she went she was fêted and made much of—anxious fathers and mothers

being always civil to Elizabeth, and penniless sons instantly worshipping her.

"I don't want to marry," the young girl said — "and, what is more, I will not marry any one until I can give him my heart as well as my purse."

As yet the right person had not arrived to claim Elizabeth's heart; unless some slight shyness, a vague embarrassment, which might be discerned in her manner when talking to Stanhope, could be construed into signs.

Mrs. Forrester welcomed her niece warmly.

"It was so sweet of you to return, love; you know, you naughty girl, that you promised only to be away a month, and it is quite six weeks since you left England."

"Well, I'm back again at last, Aunt Fanny," answered Elizabeth, in a careless tone. "And I did not leave you in bad hands; you had Patty."

"Oh, yes, dear little thing! she is a nice child, Betty. I took quite a fancy to her."

“You took a fancy to Patty! I should rather think so! She is the sweetest creature——Where is she? I am longing to see her.”

“Oh, my dear, she is a sad home-bird. As soon as ever she heard that her duties had terminated, she hurried off home. She seems devoted to her father—quite a little home girl.”

“Poor Uncle Egbert! Yes, he is very fond of Patty, and she of him; but I should have thought she would have waited just to see me,” added Elizabeth. “I am disappointed. I was anxious to have a chat with her.”

“Well, my dear, I did my best to induce her to remain, and so, I know, did all the Morrises, but she would not even put off her return until the afternoon. She was a nice child, but I expect she felt her poverty. I can’t say that I think you treated her very well in the matter of dress, Betty; the poor little thing often put in quite a shabby appearance.”

“Oh!” said Elizabeth, colouring high. “I gave her——”

Here she ~~drew herself~~ up abruptly. "I ~~thought~~ I gave her plenty," she added. "I am very sorry, *very* sorry. Dear, dear little Patty!"

"Well, never mind her now, love; she has gone, and she enjoyed herself very much. I mentioned to you, did I not, in my letter, that Louis Stanhope was here?"

"Oh, yes. I have not seen him yet."

"He is sure to be somewhere near; he has been expecting you, looking for you, I know."

"Very likely," said Elizabeth, in a careless tone. She got up and tapped her fingers impatiently on the pane of glass. Mrs. Forrester guessed rather than saw that a dreamy look filled her dark blue eyes.

"I will go downstairs and have a chat with the others, Aunt Fanny," she said, looking round and giving her aunt a smiling nod. "I am disappointed to have missed little Pat, particularly as I have to change all my plans by the winter."

She left the room and ran downstairs, to be

greeted eagerly and affectionately by the elder Morris girls.

"Now, Betty, you are just in time for tennis. —Bell, run and ask Louis to join us—tell him that Betty has come."

"Louis is not at home," said Bell; "he told Rupert he would not be back till dinner-time."

"What? Impossible! Did he know Betty would be here?"

"He *did* know it," replied Bell, steadily; "still, he has gone for a walk."

"And a walk will do him good," said Elizabeth. "Now, girls, let us come out and enjoy our game without him."

The afternoon passed away gaily; Miss Cunningham was all life and vivacity. Hers was a stronger and more vigorous nature than Patty's, and she bore all the young people along on the joyous current of her own high spirits.

Just before the second gong sounded for dinner Louis strolled languidly up; he wore his

most bored and his laziest air, and Bell could not help saying to herself :

“Oh, what a worry he will be now that Patty has gone ; she was the only one that managed to make him quite pleasant and charming.”

Bell had a very troublesome trick of sometimes saying her sentences half aloud, and Elizabeth, who was standing near, heard at least part of her muttered words.

Not a muscle of her smiling face changed however. With a gracious and dignified movement she advanced a step or two, and held out her hand with a cordial smile to Stanhope.

“Wonder of wonders, we have not met for a whole year !” she exclaimed lightly ; “and yet when you heard I had come you took the opportunity of running away.”

“Not at all,” he answered. “I happened to have a splitting headache, and could talk to no one. You look well, Miss Cunningham.”

“So I am, only disappointed.”



'Stanhope returned with it, and presented it to Miss Cunningham

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“ Ah, that is scarcely flattering to us who have counted so on your visit.”

“ Nevertheless I adhere to my words—I am disappointed. I had hoped to find my cousin Patty Beaufort here.”

“ Miss Beaufort returned to London this morning.—Bell, has not the first gong for dinner sounded ?” Stanhope turned on his heel, sauntered across the grounds without waiting for Bell’s answer, and cutting a lovely bud from a late *gloire de Dijon*, returned with it, and presented it to Miss Cunningham.

She accepted it with a careless and smiling word of thanks, but, as the whole party moved towards the house, took the opportunity of dropping the bud in such a manner that Stanhope could not fail to see it. That he did observe the significant little action she was sure, for glancing back for a second she saw him trample the innocent and lovely flower under his foot.

“ Bell,” said Betty, later that evening, “ I

want to talk to you ; will you come into the inner drawing-room with me ? ”

“ Of course I will, Elizabeth—I shall be only too glad. But I am the youngest, and they will all want you.”

“ Never mind ; I want the youngest at present. Now let us settle ourselves cosily in this nook where no one can disturb us. Bell, I want you to tell me all that you can about my dear little cousin, Patty Beaufort.”

“ I love her very much,” said Bell, her eyes widening and darkening. “ We are great friends—I miss her dreadfully.”

“ Bell, you will tell me the truth—why did she go away so suddenly ? ”

Bell looked nervously round the room.

“ Well, Betty,” she began, “ I don’t know—I don’t know anything ; Patty said that she must go home, and that she must catch the eleven o’clock train from here to-day. She would not give any special reason—she was determined to go, and she went.”

"Even though *I* was coming here in the middle of the day? Did she not often tell you that she loved me?"

"Yes, many, many times; she loved you dearly."

"Thank you, Bell; you have told me what you *know* about Patty, now tell me what you *think*."

"Oh, that is a very different matter," answered Bell, blushing, and once more looking round her.

"But you must tell it to me, good little cousin; it is important that I should know; if I do not know, I may unintentionally wrong some one whom I love very much."

"Oh, Betty! would you really, really be good to Patty whatever happened?"

"What can you think of me, child? I have known this little friend of yours for years—I would not wrong her for the world. Now out with your thoughts, maiden fair; I am sure they are as wise as thoughts can be."

“ You must not laugh at me, Elizabeth—I have not much experience, only I do think ——”

“ Yes, yes, how modest the child is! What do you think, little one ? ”

“ I do think—I am sure that Patty was very anxious to stay when she came home from the picnic last night. She and Louis had been together as usual, and Louis wanted her to stay, and so did I, and she certainly looked as if she wished to.”

“ Well, Bell, go on ; this is most entertaining. So Louis wanted her to stay ? It sounds quite a romance, my dear. When did our charming little Patty make up her mind to disappoint Louis ? ”

“ Oh, Betty ! you are speaking quite sarcastically. Patty went to bid Mrs. Forrester good-night, and when she came back she was changed. She looked quite old, and then she said she must go. I *think*,” said Bell, “ I *think* I know what it means.”

"Oh, now, this is charming—thrilling—you must tell me, Amabel."

"I don't know that I ought, Elizabeth; they are only my thoughts, after all."

"Your thoughts, child—how do you know that others don't share them? Tell me this minute what you think about Patty, Bell."

"Indeed, Elizabeth, I think I had better not."

"You think you had better not. Very well, then, I will tell you. I know your thoughts, wise little Bell—I know what you think."

"Oh, Betty! that is impossible—you cannot."

"I will say them aloud to you, may I?"

"Betty, you frighten me."

"Do I? I am sorry. These are your thoughts, most wise Bell. You know that Louis is fond of Patty, and that Patty is fond of Louis; you know that Patty would have wished to stay, and intended to stay, until Aunt Fanny (I know her way!) interfered—she frightened

the poor little bird, and sent it fluttering away to its own nest. Those are your thoughts, are they not, Bell dear ? ”

“ Oh, Elizabeth, how wonderful you are ! How could you guess ? ”

“ How could I guess ? The moment I saw Louis I knew everything. But just for my own satisfaction, tell me that I am right, Bell.”

“ You are perfectly right, Betty—oh, are you cold, Elizabeth dear ? How you shiver ! Yes, any one could see that Louis was fond of Patty—he was always with her, and we thought she liked him—that is, *I* did, for I don’t believe the others noticed anything. Betty, I don’t mind confessing something to you ; I was so anxious to help her, and so unhappy about her, and I got up early this morning, and I told Louis she was going. Louis and I made a little plot then, that he was to meet us as we walked to the railway station. He did, and I ran away to leave them together. I did so hope he would propose, and that Patty would come back again

to the house with me, or at any rate go to London quite radiant with happiness. But I think, instead of proposing to her, they must have quarrelled, for Patty did look so pale and wretched when I met her at the railway station. Rupert brought her up instead of Louis, and she could tell me nothing about Louis except that he had gone back to his fishing. Then this evening did you not notice how dismal Louis looked? Oh, I am certain they have had a great quarrel."

"We must put it right," said Elizabeth, rising with alacrity. "You were a good girl to confide in me, Bell. You may be quite certain I shall respect your confidence."





CHAPTER XV.

TO THE RESCUE

THE next morning early a bright gleam of sunshine awoke Elizabeth Cunningham from her slumbers. The dismal evening, wet in Surrey as in London, had vanished, and the autumn morning was as fresh and beautiful as morning could be. Elizabeth sprang lightly out of bed.

“What a good thing I found out just in time!” she said to herself. “Oh, Aunt Fanny, you are a wicked woman. Don’t I know your aim and your longing? Don’t *I* know why you sent for me in those emphasised letters? Can I not read your hints, can I not fathom your innuendoes? However, if you are wicked, you

are also transparent—any girl who was not an absolute fool could see through you. Poor little Patty—poor little Patty! I might have broken her heart, and also, alas! alas! I might have broken my own. Just fancy Elizabeth Cunningham going about the world with a broken heart. Smiling, gay, brilliant, rich Elizabeth—no one would guess she had such a dismal appendage belonging to her! No, no, I have been saved in time—just pulled up short at the critical moment—and now my duty lies very plain; I must do what I can for little Patty.”

So Elizabeth dressed with vigour, singing gaily as she pursued her toilet, for she was a thoroughly healthy-minded happy girl, and if she had been wounded she would make no sign of defeat even to herself. At breakfast-time no one looked more smiling or brilliant; and the whole party congratulated her on her good looks.

Mrs. Forrester did not often appear at the breakfast-table, but on this occasion she came

down, and took a place reserved for her near gentle Mrs. Morris. Stanhope was the last to put in an appearance—he still looked gloomy and bored, and as he dropped into his seat, said abruptly:

“By the way, I am sorry, but I must leave to-day. I have had a letter from my mother; she is all alone, and wishes me to go to her.”

This announcement was received with a chorus of disappointed ejaculations. In the midst of the din of voices Mrs. Forrester was seen to bend forward and whisper something to Mrs. Morris.

“Yes, yes,” exclaimed the good lady eagerly, “certainly, most certainly—what an excellent idea, Fanny. Thank you for reminding me of it. My dear Louis, your mother must come here; oh, yes, I insist—we all insist—she must come here, and then, of course, you will stay, and every one will be pleased and satisfied. I will write to Lady Stanhope at once, by this very post. Our largest spare room is vacant; we

can make her thoroughly comfortable, and it will be delightful to renew our acquaintance with her."

"You also must write to your mother, Louis," said Mrs. Forrester, in her thin, clear voice; "and when writing, you might mention that her favourite, Elizabeth, is here."

Louis coloured slightly. Elizabeth had not failed to observe that when his mother's name was mentioned, a flush of vexation rose to his cheek.

"You are very kind," he said. "Yes, it would be very nice for my mother to come here. It—it——"

"Oh, it would be charming," said Emily, one of the older girls. "I am so anxious, so inordinately curious to find out if Lady Stanhope in the least resembles you, Louis. She must come—she must—and we will all promise to make her happy."

"Still, I fear I shall have to go to-day," continued Louis; "my mother, of course, must

please herself—I mean, I daresay she will be delighted, but I——”

“My dear fellow,” said Rupert, raising his voice for the first time, “have you forgotten our engagements with the Le Bretons for Saturday?”

Louis laughed.

“I confess I have,” he said.

“And tennis at the Marshes’ to-morrow afternoon,” said Maude.

“You must make my excuses,” said Louis, with his most bored expression. “I fear, I greatly fear, that even though the Le Bretons want to fish, and the Marshes to play tennis in my company, yet I must absent myself.”

“Even though your mother is coming?” said Mrs. Forrester; “even though your mother, whom you said you were going to stay with, is coming? Louis! oh, Louis! what paltry excuse can you offer for running away? If you go—you must own the truth—you leave us because we are so intolerably dull that

you simply cannot remain with us any longer."

"You are unfair," said poor Stanhope, colouring again. Suddenly raising his eyes he encountered those of Elizabeth.

"I wish you would stay," she said then, in her usual, quiet, richly-toned voice.

"If you wish it," he answered, in a startled and astonished manner.

Then he abruptly rose from his seat.

"I am vanquished, ladies and gentlemen," he said, with a laughing bow and a peculiar glance at Elizabeth. "I did not know that my society was of consequence to any one ; but if you want me, Mrs. Morris, I am at your service for the next few days." Then he strolled out of the room, having forgotten a packet of letters which lay unopened near his plate.

"What a witch you are, Betty," began one of the girls ; but here Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Forrester, who had exchanged glances, interposed.

"Breakfast has lasted quite long enough,"

said the gentle hostess. "Girls, you lazy things, run away to your different duties."

"Elizabeth, can you spare your aunt half an hour of your society?" inquired Mrs. Forrester.

"Certainly, auntie," replied Betty, in her brightest voice. "I will just run into the drawing-room to find my knitting. I left it there last night."

She escaped from the room before any one could question her further, and not only reached the inner drawing-room, but saw Louis standing in the verandah pretending to admire the view. Quick as thought she had joined him.

"Mr. Stanhope, I want to speak to you. Can you give me an opportunity?"

He looked at her again in utter bewilderment.

"I want to explain why I asked you to stay—please don't misunderstand. Can I talk with you anywhere without being disturbed?"

Her face wore so honest, and kindly, and

sweet a look that the young man was slightly appeased—his embarrassment ceased, his brow grew clear.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “I—they talk of making up a riding-party for this afternoon. I did not mean to join it. Now I will go—will you?”

“Yes.”

She smiled and vanished, returning to Mrs. Forrester's side, before that good lady had time to remark her somewhat lengthened absence.

Mrs. Forrester was beaming with good-humour and happiness. All things were, *must* be, going well. Elizabeth could not mean to refuse Stanhope when she pointedly asked him to stay. Stanhope must intend to propose for Elizabeth when he allowed her voice to influence his decision. What a good thing that she had got that little Patty away in time—what a blessing that matters were in such a position that she could influence them before irrevocable harm was done! So, brimming over

with good spirits, she chatted and laughed with Elizabeth, taking care not to mention Stanhope's name, for on this subject her mind was now absolutely at rest. She said a good deal about Patty, however, praising her much, and trying to get Elizabeth to believe that she was sincerely attached to her.

On the subject of Patty, Miss Cunningham was strangely silent, but this very fact only added to Mrs. Forrester's happiness, for it occurred to her that little rumours of Stanhope's attentions to Miss Beaufort might have reached her niece's ear, and she might be jealous in consequence.

The riding-party turned out a success, and Miss Cunningham and Mr. Stanhope were quite undisturbed in the *tête-à-tête* which they evidently sought.

"Now," said Betty, drawing in her horse's rein, "we surely need not gallop up this hill. Let us crawl—let us go at a snail's pace. Mr. Stanhope, I want so much to talk to you."

"And I am pleased to talk to you," said Stanhope. "You know, a man never can talk to a girl without people making themselves disagreeable, and—and—— Of course, you must have some reason for wishing to see me alone."

"I told you my reason. I wished to explain why I asked you to stay."

"Ah, that surprised me. I mean, I could not account for that, and your throwing away the rosebud last night."

Elizabeth coloured crimson.

"Never mind the rosebud," she said; "that episode is past. I want you to stay because I think there is a misunderstanding somewhere. People are often made miserable for life because of misunderstandings, just because those who know about them won't have courage to speak up. My position is a difficult one, but I thought, I hoped that you would quickly comprehend me, and spare me the pain of speaking more clearly."

Elizabeth's words were faltering—her checks

were deeply flushed—Stanhope gazed at her in returning astonishment, and it is certainly true that at this moment he failed to understand.

“I wish I could take a hint,” he said; “there evidently is a game of cross purposes going on in my immediate circle, and I am the unlucky victim. A lady has accused me of something of which I am absolutely innocent, of conduct which from the bottom of my heart I abhor; then you come and intentionally slight a small attention, and, when I feel that the best chance for me is to go away and be out of it all, you ask me to stay, in so marked a manner that I had to flatter myself that it was a personal wish on your part.”

“You are right,” said Elizabeth boldly, and as her companion’s embarrassment grew her own lessened; “I have asked you to stay for the sake of Patty Beaufort.”

“Pardon me,” said Stanhope hotly, “why should Miss Beaufort’s name be dragged into this?”

“Because without her we have nothing to talk about—because she is my dear little cousin, whom I tenderly love.”

“Forgive me,” said Stanhope, with a sudden change of tone; “I always knew you were kind and noble—there is—there must be a misunderstanding; I am bewildered.”

“Poor fellow!” said Miss Cunningham. Then she paused.

“The fact is,” she said, “you are giving me a very difficult task; you force me to speak more explicitly than I thought I should have to. I have gathered from one or two little speeches made, from one or two hints dropped (you know, girls’ perceptions are wonderfully keen, Mr. Stanhope), that you and my cousin Patty were good friends.”

“It was a natural conclusion to come to,” retorted Stanhope, with some bitterness. “Well, cannot a man and a girl be on terms of good-fellowship without all the world commenting thereon?”

"I am going to be very bold—I conjectured that you were more than friends."

"Oh! your perceptions are very keen."

"I have known Patty for years," continued Betty, in a quiet voice—"I have watched her in her home—I have seen her enduring little crosses and vanquishing little cares. I have seen her the sunbeam in a gloomy dwelling—I have seen her the right hand and the stay of her old father. I know Patty well; I know that the man who wins her heart will have secured a priceless treasure; I know——"

"Why do you tell me all this, Miss Cunningham?" interrupted Stanhope. His voice was husky—the hard expression had vanished from his face.

"Why do I tell you this? Because I know what my aunt, Mrs. Forrester, is; she *is* my aunt, but this is not a moment to mince matters; she would sow discord between you; she would oppose this marriage, if in her power she would prevent it."

"You certainly have plenty of courage, Miss

Cunningham ; you speak about my marrying a girl, and about somebody preventing my marriage. Do you suppose for an instant that I cannot make a free choice—that I am to be opposed by a woman, by a woman not my mother, not even a near relation ? Surely I may, and will, woo the girl I love, without asking any one's approval or consent. Now I will reward you for your candour ; I will believe in your kind intentions, and place implicit faith in your friendship for Miss Beaufort. I did not play that young lady false—I did not flirt with her ; there has been no misunderstanding between us. Yesterday morning I asked her to be my wife."

"You did?" said Betty—"you did? Well?"

"And she refused me."

"Patty Beaufort refused you?"

Elizabeth was conscious of a queer sensation. Surprise, pain, envy for a moment filled her heart. Would *she* have refused? But the gift had been offered to one who valued it not.

"She did refuse me," said Stanhope, "and she said some queer words,—something about

‘another’; she seemed to think, or her words implied, that in presuming to love her I had been guilty of a great injustice to another. What is the matter, Miss Cunningham? You look pale; are you ill?”

No,” said Elizabeth, rousing herself with a great effort. “I knew there was mischief at work; I felt there was a misunderstanding; I must see Patty.”

“Not on this subject, please—I would rather not. I know, Miss Cunningham, you mean kindly; I am ashamed of myself for even pretending to misunderstand you. I cannot say for a moment that I have not suffered—that I do not suffer by Miss Beaufort’s refusal; but no one can interfere between us; I understood her words to be final—I won’t have her worried. Will you promise that you will not speak of me to Miss Beaufort?”

“It would be difficult for me to promise not to speak of you to her; the very fact of my not doing so would awaken her suspicion. I can promise, however, not to allude to this.”

"Thank you ; that is all that I require. Is not the view fine from here ?"

The rest of the ride was taken up with commonplace. The *tête-à-tête* between Stanhope and Miss Cunningham was interrupted, and the whole party arrived at home in time for dinner in apparently the best of spirits.

When they entered the house Bell ran to meet them, holding a telegram in her hand.

"It is for you, Elizabeth," she said ; "it came more than an hour ago."

Elizabeth tore open the little yellow envelope carelessly. Telegrams are common nowadays, and people receive them without any starts of dismay.

"This is probably from my dressmaker in Paris," said the young lady ; but the next moment the cry which arose to her lips brought the whole party clustering round her.

"From Patty," she cried. "My uncle is ill ; he has had a paralytic stroke. Patty wants me. I must go to her at once."



CHAPTER XVI.

A COMFORTER

WHEN, late that evening, Elizabeth Cunningham arrived at Beatrice Gardens, she found the whole house in that state of disorder and breathless suspense which is generally the result when serious illness occurs in a poor family where there is no definite head.

Patty was nowhere to be seen, and Jane, with very red eyes, ushered Elizabeth into the drawing-room, where a smoking paraffin-lamp did little to disperse the gloom.

Constance was lying on the sofa, and sprang up to meet her cousin with an exclamation of astonishment.

"I never thought you'd come, Betty. That silly child Patience would telegraph; but I told her it was useless. Why should you come to a house of mourning and misery like this?"

"Constance, how unkind of you! I hurried off the first thing. Now tell me all about Uncle Egbert: is he better? I could get nothing out of Jane."

"Oh, he won't be better for days, if ever. The doctor says we must not expect any change for some time. Of course Ethel and I could see that it was coming on. Any one with half an eye must have known he was in for an illness. I expect it was partly your fault, Betty; he did not say anything, but I am sure he was vexed at your leaving us. Ah, here comes Ethel; you see, Betty has turned up, Ethel."

"I am glad to see you, Elizabeth," said Ethel, kissing her cousin with some affection. "Father is no better. Patty is still with him—she has scarcely left his side all day."

"Except when she went out for more than two hours in the middle of the day," interposed Constance.

"Oh yes, I forgot that; I wonder she could go out. You know, Elizabeth, Patty has always made such a fuss over dear old father. She seems very low this evening; she is crying nearly all the time."

"I will sit up with my uncle to-night," said Betty, taking off her hat and jacket. "Patty must have some rest, poor little dear! How did Uncle Egbert first get ill, Constance? Do tell me everything."

"Oh, my dear, how can I? Patty said he seemed so bright and well last night, but this morning he did not get up, and when Patty went to his room to take him his breakfast he could not speak to her, and his face was greatly altered. Then we sent for Dr. Phillips, and he said he had had a stroke."

"I will go up to Patty now," said Elizabeth.
"No, I don't want anything to eat—don't keep

me, girls, and don't fret about me. I have come to be useful, and mean to do my share in watching and nursing. Now do go to bed, you two tired-looking, poor things, and if I possibly can I will make Patty follow your example. As for me, I am as fresh as possible, and as strong as a horse."

"You really are a comfort, Betty; I didn't know it was in you," said Constance, going over and kissing her cousin with some warmth. "I don't know why a rich girl like you should put yourself out. However, as you will; we are very grateful—are we not, Ethel?"

"Yes," said Ethel, "I always knew that Betty had a kind heart."

When Elizabeth left the room she made her way down to the kitchen.

The Beauforts' house had been her headquarters for the greater part of three years, but never before had she visited the kitchen, and when Jane saw her enter she gave a violent start, and hastily began to sweep away the

contents of a very frugal little meal into the nearest cupboard.

“Dear, dearie me! you took the heart out of me, Miss Cunningham. Is it a jug of hot water you want, Miss?”

“Not at all, Jane. I am anxious to have a little chat with you. May I sit by the fire for a few minutes?”

“With pleasure, I’m sure, Miss; and so you don’t find the air of the kitchen too close? It’s awful wearing to the complexion. See how dead-white I’ve grown from it.”

“Poor Jane! You want some fresh breezes to blow upon you. Now, see here, Jane: I hope you are attending to all the necessary nourishment for Mr. Beaufort. I don’t know much about sick people, but I’ve always heard they wanted very tempting things—soups, broths, and fruit, you know.”

“Oh, don’t I just, Miss! Well, we’ll do our best, Miss Patty and me. You wants your room made up, I suppose, Miss Cunningham?”

"I will do what is necessary to it myself presently. Jane, is Mr. Beaufort's illness likely to be a long one?"

"How can I tell you, my dear young lady? It will be according to the will of God."

"Oh, yes. Dear Uncle Egbert! I fear he is very ill. Jane, see here, I want to manage the housekeeping with your help for the next fortnight."

"How so, Miss Cunningham? Oh, my word! but I've no time for fads at the present moment."

"No, no, Jane, not any fads, but just the necessary things—all the necessary things 'got in in plenty, without worrying Patty about the money."

"Just so, Miss; but they must be paid for in the long run; and Miss Patty, whatever Miss Patty do have the management of, she puts down ready money for—she always do, Miss Cunningham. And I don't mind telling you, Miss, that my young ladies would rather die than let you hear that money ain't too plentiful in the family."

"Oh, Jane, as if I did not know that! Here, I will have my way in this matter. Here is a five-pound note; buy everything that is wanted; spend it freely—get in chickens, and beef, and soups, and fruit, and ice, and fish. Let the young ladies have plenty to eat, and get everything that Mr. Beaufort wants, and when the money is out come to me for more. Now, Jane, this is a secret between us two, and if you reveal it I'll never forgive you—never!"

Some tears had sprung to Elizabeth's eyes, and poor tired old Jane also felt her vision dim.

"There, Jane, not another word!" said the girl, running out of the kitchen.

Jane passed her hand across her dim eyes.

"She's a blessed young lady, and I didn't know it was in her," she muttered. "Oh, *she* don't know, and may she never know the real worth of a five-pound note. Why, Miss Patty and me we hadn't a shilling between us—and Miss Patty wondering, with the tears raining down her cheeks, what we could sell, and the



“ ‘Poor little thing !’ said Elizabeth, bending over her. ’—Page 191

doctor's orders that Mr. Beaufort was to have nourishment every half-hour. Oh, dear, dear, dear! this will put things right fine. Catch me telling—no fear!”

Jane put on her bonnet and cloak and went out, for the provision shops were not yet shut, and she had many things to purchase.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth, going softly to her own room, changed her boots, and put on a dress which she knew would not rustle; then quite quietly she opened the door of the sick-room and went in.

Elizabeth knew little or nothing of illness, but some people are born nurses, and she felt neither awkward nor out of place. Mr. Beaufort was lying with his eyes shut—if he were conscious, he made no sign, and Patty, lying back in the armchair by his side, was fast asleep.

She looked deadly pale in her sleep, and the traces of tears were still visible on her pretty cheeks.

“Poor little thing!” said Elizabeth, bending

over her, and speaking with great tenderness. Then she sighed deeply and murmured half to herself, "Never mind, Patty; you shall have a happy life yet, for some one loves you well."

Perhaps Patty heard the gentle little murmur, for she opened her eyes, and started up with a glad exclamation.

"Oh, Betty! Oh, you have come! How glad, how very glad I am!"

"And you are to go to bed, dear; I will sit up with Uncle Egbert to-night. I have arranged it all, Patty."

"No, no," said Patty; "no, I cannot leave father; don't ask me, Betty dear."

"Very well, I will not force you. You shall come over and lie on this sofa, and tell me what to do. Can he hear us when we speak, Patty?"

"The doctor says not; he is rather more unconscious than he was this morning."

"Then he is not so well?"

I fancy he is not so well, but Dr. Phillips

said we must look for no change for the better for several days."

"Come over to the sofa, Patty; lie down, and I will cover you up. Now I will kneel by your side, and you shall talk to me. Tell me everything about him—what made him ill?"

"He must have been over-excited, Elizabeth; the doctor said he was working at high pressure, and taking no nourishment. He had written a poem, the greatest he had ever composed—he had finished it. When I came home he brought good news—or at least he thought it was good news—oh, father, father!"

"Why do you cry, Patty darling? Patty, put your head on my shoulder; now tell the trouble to your own Betty, who loves you."

"You are very good to me, Betty. Oh, it is bitter—it will kill him. If he gets better, this will kill him. Sometimes I almost wish he would never get better, and then he would go away to the other world with some happy thoughts. He would fancy, he would believe

that his last great work was not absolutely a failure."

"Tell me about it, Patty."

"Oh, Elizabeth, you are rich. You cannot understand the sorrows of poor people like us."

"So you say, dear—perhaps you do me an injustice. Tell me the story, anyhow."

"Father had finished the poem. It was called 'London of the Present'—it was very powerful—he threw his whole heart into it, he lived in it—it was part of his very self. I cannot tell you what he felt about the poem, Betty, but if you had heard him speak of it, and seen the light in his eyes, you would have known what genius meant. Father had written a great many other poems, but none were quite like this to him—he staked everything upon it. I came home yesterday, and the girls gave me a bad account of him. He was neither eating nor sleeping, and he looked strange. I went down to his study, and made everything comfortable, and then he came in. Elizabeth, I should not

have known my own father—he was changed—he was transfigured—he brought a letter from some publishers, and he thought they meant to publish the poem. He made me read the letter aloud to him, and I felt so happy, and as to father, he seemed lifted quite out of himself. He went on telling me how he had waited for this, and how after all he had not lived in vain. I never saw any one so thankful, nor so humble, for you know he is a real genius, Betty, not a make-believe, and he seemed overpowered, and almost humiliated by his success.

“ He did not come down this morning, and I went to his room, and I found him—I found him as you see him now. He could not speak even then, but there was a troubled look on his face, and I suddenly guessed what he must want, and I bent down over him and whispered, ‘ Father dear, I am going to Messrs. Sharp and Jones ; I will arrange about the poem.’ His face got quite peaceful then, and he squeezed my hand, but he could not speak. He is much

more unconscious now ; he does not recognise me when I say anything to him—perhaps that is best.”

“Go on, Patty ; you went to Messrs. Sharp and Jones ? Tell me what they said.”

“Oh, Betty, Betty dear, I went to them——”

“Yes—yes ? ”

“Oh, this would have broken father’s heart. They dared not bring out the poem at their own expense ; they would pay half, if father would pay the other half. They dared not risk more, they said, for though the poem was fine, there was no market for poetry. I almost cried when I was with them, Betty ; I almost went on my knees, but they—why should they care ? I told them how ill father was, and one of them seemed sorry. They said they would give us a week to consider ; then I went away.”





CHAPTER XVII.

SATISFACTORY TERMS

MESSRS. SHARP AND JONES had large offices in the Strand ; they always brought out the best books, and they were looked up to and esteemed by all lovers of literature. Aspiring authors said to themselves, " If only I could get my work published by Messrs. Sharp and Jones I should be sure to succeed ! " Their name alone was almost sufficient to float a book : they were known only to bring out the very best, the cream of literature.

Poor little Patty, however, in her despair, knew nothing of the fact that for Messrs. Sharp and Jones to contemplate publishing a work on

any terms was in itself a high recommendation, was in itself a guarantee that the manuscript offered to them was the reverse of worthless. All that Patty knew was that certain terms were proposed which neither she nor her father could by any possibility meet. Therefore the great poem must remain unpublished and unknown; therefore her father must either live with a broken heart, or die with his genius unrecognised. Patty very nearly made up her sorrowful little mind that it would be best for him to die, but somebody else with energy and resolution thought differently.

Elizabeth sat up with the sick man that night, but being a thoroughly strong and healthy girl she felt very little the worse when the morning came. She had made some plans during the silent hours of the night, and when daylight arrived she proceeded to carry them into execution.

First of all, she had a long interview with Jane in the kitchen, then she waylaid the doctor

on his return from the sick-room, and then she sought Patty out.

"Patty dear, I have just had an interview with Dr. Phillips. He says Uncle Egbert is in no immediate danger; also that in all probability there will be no change for some days. That being the case, I am going to send in a nurse."

"Nonsense, Betty! You cannot, you must not! You know—why should I speak of it?—but you know that we cannot afford to pay for a nurse."

"She will be my nurse, Patty; she comes here by my arrangement. Patty dear, why should I not have a little to say to making Uncle Egbert better?"

"I don't think we want a nurse," said Patty, her cheeks growing red; "if father—*when* father gets better, I would rather feel I had taken care of him all by myself."

Elizabeth looked hard at her little cousin. There were some new obstinate lines about Patty's mouth—lines brought there by pain.

"It will not do to deceive that child," said Elizabeth; "I must be quite frank with her. However painful it is to break the ice, the ice must be broken. Patty dear," said Betty, "you know perfectly that illness is an expensive thing."

"Oh don't!" said Patty, shrugging her shoulders and turning her head away.

"You know perfectly," continued Elizabeth, "that doctors must be paid, and medicines freely ordered, and suitable nourishment got. Have you money for all this?"

"Don't!" said Patty again, in a stifled voice.

"Have you, Patty? For if you have not, you must go in debt; and when Uncle Egbert is well, how is he to meet the debt? Or you must do without the medicines, and the doctor's visits, and the suitable nourishment, and then Uncle Egbert will die."

Patty's hands were clasped over her eyes, her tears were streaming fast.

"Whereas, Patty," continued Elizabeth, pre-

tending not to see the tears, "if I, Uncle Egbert's own niece, step into the breach, and supply the doctor and the medicines and the food, no one is any the worse, no debts are incurred, and Uncle Egbert has a chance of getting well again. Nothing stands in the way of this arrangement but the pride of one little cousin, who I thought loved me too well to feel any pride where I was concerned."

"I do love you, Elizabeth," said poor Patty ; then with a great effort she forced back her tears. "You can do as you wish," she added. "It is hateful, hateful, taking the money, but I do it for father's sake." Then she added, with a sudden crimson blush, "Perhaps I ought to tell you, Betty, I did something absolutely wicked at the beginning of the summer—I spent half the money you gave me to make myself smart for my visit, on the house."

"Oh, you poor little thing! Patty, you have not been half frank enough with me. And so you went away without half the nice things you

ought to have had! I don't believe, however, you looked shabby—I can't quite say how it is, but although you are so pale and unhappy looking just now, you have really improved in appearance since I last saw you; you are a prettier Patty than ever. Patty, I hope you were happy when you were away?"

"Oh, yes; oh, more than happy! Betty, don't ask me about my visit."

"No, dear, I will not. Patty, you won some hearts. The Morris girls cannot talk about you highly enough, and Louis Stanhope and I had a long talk about you yesterday."

"See here, Elizabeth," said Patty, "you can give us the money, if you like, and you can send in a nurse if you think she is wanting, but I must not stay any longer out of father's room, for, whatever the doctor says, he *may* want me at any moment."

Patty rushed away, scarcely allowing Elizabeth to catch a glimpse of her disturbed face.

"She will marry him, and it is terrible to

have to take the money from her," moaned the poor child, as she went softly into the sick-room.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth, in good spirits—for there is nothing so stimulating to the spirits as helping others—put on her hat and jacket and went out. She hailed the first passing hansom, and drove straight to those august publishers Messrs. Sharp and Jones. Here she was received by a clerk, and asked to remain for some time in a waiting-room. She sent in her name, which nobody seemed at all impressed by, and by the time she was feeling a little cross and a little impatient, received a summons to see Mr. Jones, the junior partner.

"I have come about a manuscript sent to you by my uncle, Mr. Beaufort," said the young lady, colouring high, and abruptly announcing her business. "I think his daughter called about it yesterday. I am not at all literary, and I don't know anything about publications, but I want to say a few words about this special manuscript."

"Oh, ah, yes," said Mr. Jones; "I think my partner Mr. Sharp saw the young lady in question. She was a good deal troubled with regard to our terms. We like the poem, and think it above the average—decidedly above the average—but we do not see our way to risking a larger sum than we have named. Poetry, however good, is, I regret to say, a drug in the market. Miss—Miss——"

"Cunningham," interposed Elizabeth.

"Miss Cunningham, I am sorry for the young lady and her father, who I regret to hear has been taken seriously ill, but I fear we cannot improve our offer, therefore there is no use in troubling you to discuss the matter further."

"I have come," said Elizabeth, speaking slowly, although her voice trembled a little, "I have come to tell you that I wish to have the poem published. I wish to have it made into a very nice book, and printed on the best paper, and largely advertised; and I am prepared to take all the risk—all. I am well off; I am

Mr. Beaufort's niece, and I wish that book to be published—are you willing to undertake it for me ? ”

“ Certainly, Miss Cunningham—most certainly ; perhaps it is only right to tell you that to bring the book out well, and to advertise it freely, in addition to the commission we must charge, will cost a considerable sum of money. This money you may never see again, although the poem is good, striking, above the average.”

“ I will risk that,” said Elizabeth. “ I am very much obliged to you. I have just one more request to make—please keep my name a secret in this matter. I have a particular reason for wishing this. Please also write to Miss Beaufort ; write to her in any terms you like, only give her to understand that you now see your way to bringing out the poem without putting Mr. Beaufort to any expense whatever ; that the question of profit will be an after consideration.”

Mr. Jones smiled, shook his head a little, but finally agreed to write such a letter as Elizabeth required.

“That is one thing off my mind,” said the young lady, as she tripped joyfully downstairs ; “I really feel now that Uncle Egbert will get better ; but how am I to put things right for poor Patty ?”





CHAPTER XVIII.

A MEETING IN ST. JAMES'S PARK

ELIZABETH occupied her thoughts very much over this latter subject. How *was* she to put things right for her pretty little cousin? Patty did not look quite as usual. Her manner to Elizabeth had altered—it was not only intensely affectionate, but also a trifle defiant; now and then Elizabeth thought she detected a rebellious hurt, gleam in Patty's brown eyes.

In old times Patty had never been defiant with her favourite cousin; she had been all that was soft and pretty, yielding as a rule to the superior rich cousin's opinion.

Betty wondered over the change.

"I can understand her sorrowing over her father; I can understand her even refusing Louis Stanhope; but I cannot understand her turning away from me as she is now doing. One would suppose I had done her some injury," thought the girl.

Then it suddenly flashed across Elizabeth that perhaps Mrs. Forrester had really made Patty believe that she, Elizabeth Cunningham, cared for Stanhope. Stanhope had told her that Patty had refused him with queer words. Dear, dear! how terrible it all was! what a mischievous woman her Aunt Fanny was turning out! The young girl quickened her steps as she thought this, and the colour mantled high in her cheeks. She had walked from Charing Cross, and now found herself in St. James's Park. Autumn was making sad havoc of the London trees—dreary, unmistakably late autumn, forerunner of winter, was at hand. Elizabeth felt her spirits sinking, and a cold despairing sensation came over her bright

mature for a moment. She was rich, she was handsome, and doubtless by many people she was beloved ; and yet just now she felt lonely—intensely so.

Footsteps overtook her in the Park, a voice called her name, and looking up she saw Stanhope standing by her side.

“What witchery has brought you here ?” she said, flushing and then paling at the sight of him.

“I was standing on the steps of my club, and saw you go by. I had the impertinence to follow you. Do you mind ?”

“Not at all ; I am glad to see you. Have you just come up from Chalford ?”

“Yes—that is, I have been in town for a few hours. My mother comes to Paddington this afternoon, and I am going to meet her.”

“Oh, don’t forget to give her my love. I shall be really sorry to miss her.”

“Then you don’t return to Chalford this evening ? They all hoped you would.”

"I? Certainly not. My cousins are in great trouble; Uncle Egbert is seriously ill."

"Oh, I wanted to ask you about that. Is it really very serious?"

"I fear it is; he is unconscious just now. Patty never leaves him."

Stanhope quickened his steps a very little.

"It is like her. She will wear herself out," he muttered.

"Oh, no, she won't; she loves her father. It would be agony to be parted from him. Besides, I'm getting in a nurse. I will see that she does not overstrain her strength."

"That is very good of you." Stanhope absolutely favoured Miss Cunningham with a short, quick glance full of gratitude.

"Of course I will take care of her," she said, brightening. "You must give a message from me to my aunt, Mr. Stanhope. Tell her that Uncle Egbert's state is so precarious that I do not know when I can get back to her, and she had better make her plans without relying on me."

Stanhope promised to give this message. Still, however, he kept by Elizabeth's side.

"I am going home by the Underground Railway," she said; "perhaps we had better say good-bye here."

"Yes, yes; just one minute," he said. "Is—do you mind telling me?—is Mr. Beaufort's great poem finished? Miss Patty set her heart so on the poem; she often spoke of it to me."

Elizabeth's face grew full of brightness.

"I have good news about the poem," she said; "it is finished, and its publication arranged for with some publishers."

"Indeed; with whom?"

"Messrs. Sharp and Jones."

Stanhope, who had dabbled slightly in literature himself, knew what the name of this firm was worth.

"I am delighted!" he said. "If such a first-class firm bring out the poem, it is certain to succeed."

"I believe it is certain; they speak very highly of it."

"I am truly glad. You might tell Miss Patty how pleased I am. Now I shall speak of it everywhere. I promise you it shall be the book of the coming season."

Elizabeth smiled, shook hands with Stanhope, and hastened home.

Mr. Beaufort was just the same, but Constance had come home ill, and required some attention. She had discovered that her cousin Elizabeth could adopt quite a new *rôle*, and instead of being the petted young lady boarder to whom every one must bow down, and before whose desires all other caprices must yield, might herself turn into a very comfortable and soothing Lady Bountiful.

Constance felt a certain degree of pleasure when Elizabeth bathed her forehead, with eau de Cologne, and forced her to eat some delicious hothouse grapes.

"I do hope, Betty, when you marry and have a house of your own, you'll ask me to come and stay with you," she said impulsively. "The

fact is, I do pine for a luxurious life, and even to have it for a month would be a treat."

"But I'm not going to marry, Con."

"Oh, nonsense! Every one says you are. They say that's why you're leaving us."

"It is untrue. Aunt Fanny has almost forced me to promise that I will go abroad with her next winter. She says it is an old promise, and I must redeem it. I don't want to. Frankly, I would rather stay here with all of you."

"That is good of you, Betty; you always were a nice creature, and not a bit spoiled by your wealth. And so you really are not going to be married?"

"No; you ought never to listen to idle rumours."

"But there is no smoke without a little fire. Rumour not only gave the report, but even mentioned the name of the lucky man. Mr. Stan—Stan——"

Elizabeth put her hand with unnecessary violence over Constance's mouth.

"Don't say it, Con, don't say it!" she implored.

"Well, I won't if you don't want me to; you need not be so rough—you have quite brought my headache back again. I heard it when I was out this morning, and thought it quite an interesting little bit of gossip, and I ran home to tell Patty, for the most interesting part is that she has been staying in the same house with this Mr. Stanhope."

"Oh, Constance, you have not been so terribly indiscreet as to tell Patty such an idle bit of gossip?"

"Yes, I have told her; she took it quite coolly, and as if she knew all about it. What a pity it is not true! Stanhope is a nice name, and I was picturing to myself your wedding-dress and trousseau, and then your house, and all the etceteras. I thought, perhaps, too, you would ask us to be your bridesmaids. You know we are quite your nearest girl relations, and people often have uneven numbers now as

bridesmaids. Ethel and I would have made a couple, and Patty would have done very well by herself. Patty looks very nice when she is dressed."

"Nice—nice! I think Patty perfectly lovely. There, I must go up-stairs now, Constance. Take plenty of grapes, and lie quiet, and let me hear nothing more of my coming wedding, for I have no intention whatever of being a bride."





CHAPTER XIX.

MOTHER AND SON



LADY STANHOPE was looked upon with much awe and respect by the greater number of her friends. She was a stately dame, and at first sight was supposed to have a very cold and ungracious manner. This wore off on nearer acquaintance, and those who knew her well, loved her. Thus her few friends were real friends, but they were not many, because in the first place she was extremely fastidious and difficult to please, and in the second her own great reserve, and almost shyness of manner, chilled those whom she would have liked to know more of.

Louis dearly loved his mother ; he of course

long ago had got beneath the coldness, and found the warm heart which glowed under so freezing an exterior. When alone with him she was all that was delightful, but he owned to a little uneasiness as he introduced her for the first time to the Morris family.

"Now, mother, just remember that forms and ceremonies are things unknown in Chalford; don't expect too much from my gay little cousins, and don't—don't—frighten them, mother."

"My dear Louis!" Lady Stanhope swept her mantle about her, and stepped out of the railway carriage.

A bevy of Morrises had come to meet them, happy, laughing, merry lads and lasses. No grand dame could sober their inexhaustible high spirits nor long check their flow of words. Two or three of them conveyed Lady Stanhope to the carriage where Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Forrester awaited her. Her reception pleased her, the perfect homeliness of her sur-

roundings melted her reserve, and she showed at her best.

Mrs. Forrester's face looked excited and eager—she thought a great deal of Lady Stanhope's arrival ; she was nervously anxious and fearful about Elizabeth. Had Elizabeth returned—was she coming back ? The moment they reached the house she went to Louis and asked the question.

“ Have you heard or seen anything of Elizabeth ? She has not written—your mother is here, and she has not come ; it is more than provoking.”

“ What is more than provoking ? ” asked the young man, with an imperturbable face.

“ Elizabeth not having returned. It is a slight to your mother.”

“ I don't think so at all. I happened to meet Miss Cunningham in St. James's Park, and she told me to give you a message. She cannot possibly leave Beatrice Gardens just now—her uncle is alarmingly ill. She asks you to make your plans without her.”

"Oh, the dear impulsive creature!" said Mrs. Forrester, her brow clearing when she heard Stanhope had met Elizabeth. "Well, well, well, I must say something pretty to Lady Stanhope."

She bustled off, and Louis, with a slightly sarcastic smile, turned down a passage which led to the garden.

All was gaiety, and laughter, and pleasure at Chalford, but Stanhope's heart was heavy within him. Patty had managed to wound him deeply, and Elizabeth's revelations had only served to bewilder him.

"I was a fool to suppose that that pretty, sweet little girl would learn to care for me so easily," he said to himself. "And yet, and yet I can never know a moment's happiness till I have won her."

He walked on, shunning his cousins and their guests, and gave himself up to melancholy musing.

"I am glad at least that the manuscript is accepted," he murmured. "Poor little Patty!

what store she did set by it! She will be pleased, and we'll all do our utmost to make it a big success. How she does love that old father of hers! What a jolly thing it would be if she loved me only half as well! Now, what am I thinking of? I must—I must—I will win her. I wonder if the mater would help me? I have a strong suspicion that that gentle little Patty would exactly suit my gracious and beautiful mother. Well, well, I'll just sound her on the subject."

Meanwhile, as Lady Stanhope drank her tea in one of the drawing-rooms, she was being gently purred over, in a way she detested, by Mrs. Forrester.

"I am terribly vexed about Elizabeth not being here," she began; "the dear girl was so delighted at the thought of meeting you, Lady Stanhope. I know, all things considered, that nothing but the strongest sense of duty would keep my niece from Chalford now you have arrived."

"It would be very extraordinary if Miss Cunningham did leave her uncle now he is so dangerously ill," replied Lady Stanhope, in her most freezing voice.

"Yes—oh—do you think so? I thought you cared for Elizabeth."

"So I do; I have a sincere regard for Miss Cunningham; but I should have very little opinion of any girl who put pleasure before a manifest duty of this sort. Besides, I am quite sure she could not be happy here while those who have been so very kind to her are in trouble."

"Kind to her? Do you mean those poor Beauforts?"

"Yes, I mean the Beauforts. My son has been telling me something about them, and I am much interested. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go to my room to rest a little bit before dinner."

Mrs. Forrester was nonplussed. She had a kind of vague idea that Lady Stanhope could

see through her, and rather despised her, but the thought only came to her vaguely, for she was in no sense a sensitive person.

Meantime the evening passed, and the idea of consulting his mother grew and grew on Stanhope. Although no one would have said it to look at them—for they both possessed a rather distant and repellent manner—these two were in many respects an ideal mother and son.

That evening, when Lady Stanhope was resting in her boudoir, there came a slight, imperative tap at her door.

“Come in,” she said; and her son’s handsome face and figure appeared.

“Are you too tired to speak to me, mater?” he asked, as he came up to her chair.

“Too tired? I am delighted, my son. Why, my boy, it is months since we met! Sit down by the fire. These autumn evenings are growing quite cold, and a fire is agreeable.”

“I am glad you made up your mind to come

to Chalford, mother; I have always wanted you to know the Morrises."

"Yes, my dear, yes; and they seem nice, agreeable people—unaffected, friendly. The girls are fresh and comely, but not beautiful. Rupert seems a good sort of fellow; you might ask him for the late shooting, Louis. By the way, I don't care for that other lady, Mrs.—Mrs. Forrester."

"Oh, my dear mother, no more do I. Indeed, to be frank with you, I detest her."

"But you seem very intimate with her, Louis. I even fancied I heard her calling you by your Christian name."

"Well, you see, she is a cousin of Mrs. Morris's, and every one here gets into a cousinly frame of mind somehow or other. I do know her rather well; she is Miss Cunningham's aunt, you know."

"Ah, yes; but how different from Elizabeth! By the way, Louis, I am really sorry that nice, fresh, handsome girl is not here. I took a

great fancy to her ; I looked forward to meeting her ; I enjoyed her visit to me greatly last year—in short, I may as well own that I should not have come to Chalford if I had not felt sure of meeting her again.”

“ Yes, mother ; but that is scarcely flattering to me.”

Here Louis paused, and his face reddened a little.

Lady Stanhope darted a quick glance in his direction ; then she took up some knitting and pretended to occupy herself with it.

“ You could have come to me, Louis,” she said. “ But—but—is there anything the matter, my son ? You don’t look quite so bright as you used to. Is there anything wrong ? Tell me, my boy ; remember I am your mother.”

“ I do remember it,” said Stanhope. “ The fact is, I am in trouble, and have come to consult you about it.”

When her son said, “ I have come to consult you about it,” a gratified and soothed expression

spread over Lady Stanhope's face, making her look for the moment almost beautiful.

"You always told me all your troubles when you were a little fellow," she said, stretching out her hand to him. "I was ready to listen and sympathise then; I am the same mother now."

"I know it," said Stanhope, deeply touched; and he raised his mother's hand to his lips.

"Tell me what worries you, my boy," said Lady Stanhope.

"An ordinary story, mother, only it happens to be intensely painful to the sufferer—in short, he feels inclined not to submit; I have fallen in love with a girl—I want her to be my wife."

Lady Stanhope's face grew perceptibly paler.

"I might have guessed it," she murmured under her breath.

Aloud she said :

"Well, Louis, who is the young lady? May I try to guess her name?"

"You could not—you don't know her. She has refused me."

"What! Elizabeth Cunningham has refused you?"

"Mother, dear, you do know Miss Cunningham."

Here Louis rose to his feet.

"On all hands," he said, "from every quarter I hear hints with regard to Miss Cunningham and myself. Mrs. Forrester whispers it in every word she speaks; my cousins look meaningly at me whenever her name is mentioned. Rupert quizzes me about her; even the men at my club dare to insinuate that there is something between us; and now you, mother, even you! Good gracious, I don't care for Elizabeth Cunningham!"

"My dear Louis, she is a nice girl, a good girl—in every way suited to be your wife. If her name has been spoken of so much in connection with yours, it is your duty as a gentleman to propose for her."

Stanhope looked aghast.

"You can't mean what you say, mother," he said. "Elizabeth and I understand each other perfectly—we are the best of friends, but no more. It is another girl whom I love—another girl has refused me. I've spoken to Elizabeth about her. Elizabeth knows the whole story."

"That alters the case then, Louis. Sit down, my son, and let us discuss this matter quietly. What is the young lady's name?"

"Miss Beaufort—Patty Beaufort."

"Oh, the daughter of the man who is so ill? They are very poor people, are they not?"

"Yes, they are undoubtedly poor."

"This girl, then, whom you want to marry, has nothing?"

"Nothing! Why, my dear mother, she seems to me to possess more of all those qualities which can make a man happy than any other girl I ever met."

Lady Stanhope smiled a little sarcastically.

"That goes without saying, my son; the

fact, however, remains that Miss Beaufort has no money. I thought it was always 'agreed between us that you should try to find a wife with a modest fortune of her own."

Stanhope felt angry.

"I might have said something unreasonable of the sort," he said. "If so, I must now retract my words. Miss Beaufort has no money, and she is the only girl in the world whom I will marry. Good-night, mother; I am sorry I have worried you—good-night; sleep well!"

"My dear Louis, what do you think of your own mother? You are determined not to marry money? Well, my dear, I am sorry—Elizabeth Cunningham would have suited me, and her money would have been remarkably good for the estate. However, I am not the person to cry over spilt milk. Tell me all about this young lady who has dared to say 'No' to my son's offer."

"There, you are my own dear mother

again! Patty is—oh, mother, if you could see her!”

Here followed a long rhapsody, to which Lady Stanhope listened with marvellous patience. Afterwards the two had a conversation which lasted far into the night.





CHAPTER XX.

A CHANGED VERDICT

MR. BEAUFORT, to all appearance, was in an absolutely stationary state. Day after day brought no change for the better; also, the doctors said, no change for the worse. Elizabeth had her own way—she got in a trained nurse; and she saw that the household purse was kept sufficiently full to enable Jane to get what necessities were required for the family, and what luxuries were essential for the invalid.

In his present state of torpor, however, Mr. Beaufort needed nothing except constant watching. This watching the hired nurse undertook by night, and Patty by day.

In the daytime no one could induce Patty to absent herself long from her father's room. "He cannot speak, but he knows I am here—I am certain he knows I am here," she said once or twice; and certainly the sick man lay quieter, with less of that painful, interminable movement of his hands over the bed-clothes, when Patty was present.

"I will not leave him," she said; and finally she was allowed to have her own way, and even to sleep on a sofa in his room at night.

One day the post brought two letters—one for Miss Beaufort, the other for Miss Cunningham. Elizabeth, who had quite established herself as the temporary head of the house, received the two, and carried them unopened into the room where Patty kept watch by her father.

Elizabeth had seen the magical name of Sharp and Jones on the back of the envelope, and she was curious to observe what effect

their communication would have on her little cousin.

Mr. Beaufort had now been over a week in his present state of stupor, and those who were with him had grown so accustomed to his noticing nothing, to his marble, impassive, apparently unseeing face, that things were said aloud in his presence under the supposition that he neither heard nor heeded.

Patty received her letter with a little cry.

"This is from those dreadful publishers," she said. "It is to ask me for stamps to return father's poem."

"Hush!" said Elizabeth, for she thought she detected the ghost of a movement from the bed. Then a sudden idea flashed like lightning through her brain—it brought a vivid colour to her cheeks and a light to her eyes; she would try it—she would dare the doctors. Leaving Patty standing by the fire, she went over to a little table which stood close to her

uncle's bedside, and pretended to busy herself arranging the flowers.

"Read the letter aloud, Patty," she said; "I am so anxious about Uncle Egbert's poem, and I want to hear what those dreadful publishers have decided."

"They have decided already, you know," said Patty, lowering her voice. "This is only about stamps, I am sure."

Then she opened the envelope, glanced hastily at the contents of the letter, and uttering another cry, loud and joyful, ran over to Elizabeth, and thrust the open sheet of letter-paper into her hands.

"Read it to me, Betty, my eyes are dazzled; it—it isn't what I thought."

Elizabeth took the letter, and read its contents in a quiet, clear voice :

"DEAR MADAM,—Since our last interview with you we have been enabled to alter our

decision with regard to your father's poem, 'London of to-day.' We now offer to bring out the poem without putting you or your family to any expense in the matter, only asking you to leave the question of profits for future consideration. By this we wish you to understand that we do not purchase the copyright, which still remains Mr. Beaufort's property. As for many reasons we are anxious that this striking poem should make one of the features of the coming book-season, we are having the MS. put at once into type. You will receive proofs in a day or two, which kindly correct, and return in every instance, if possible, by following post.

Yours faithfully,

"SHARP, JONES AND CO."

There was a silence when the letter was finished. Betty looked up. Why did not her impulsive, excitable little cousin exclaim? But no; Patty was doing something else—she had

her arms round that still figure lying on the bed, her cheek was pressed to his cheek, her dark curly hair touched his thin grey locks.

"Father, father darling, beloved! you have succeeded—you are the best, the first of men," she kept murmuring into his ear; and, wonder of wonders! he responded. His eyes looked with recognition into hers, his lips moved—spasmodically, but still they moved.

"Thank God, child!" he said: "now I can sleep."

He closed his eyes again, and sank no longer into torpor, but into a quite child-like, gentle slumber.

In the excitement consequent on the receipt of this wonderful letter, and in the still greater excitement which the unexpected change for the better in Mr. Beaufort had caused, Elizabeth forgot that she also had received a letter. She found it in her pocket that evening, and opened it just before she went to bed. Its contents were as follows:

“CHALFORD, *October 5th.*

“MY DEAR ELIZABETH,—I must call you so, for we have always been good friends—I am anxious to see you, and wonder if it would greatly inconvenience you if I called some morning at Beatrice Gardens. I was much disappointed to find you were not at Chalford before me, but the Morris girls have given me a full account of your present occupation, and, my dear, you couldn't do otherwise.

“Elizabeth, my dear, I am anxious to see you, and as you cannot possibly come to me, will you spare me half an hour at Beatrice Gardens?

“If I do not hear to the contrary, I will be with you on Thursday at twelve o'clock.

Yours affectionately,

“LAURA STANHOPE.”

Elizabeth could not help feeling queer when she read this note. “Has Louis told her? Does she want to see me in order to see

Patty?" she said to herself; "and I have not yet had an opportunity—no, not the ghost of an opportunity—of telling her I am not engaged to her Louis. *Her* Louis! Good heavens! the idea!—the bare idea—of anybody supposing that I could engage myself to another girl's Louis! Well, Lady Stanhope, you must come, and I know you are far too much of a lady to make anything uncomfortable for me, or to think the worse of dear little Patty because she lives in a shabby house."

The improvement in Mr. Beaufort was quite marked the next morning. The doctor said that the pressure was being gradually lifted from his brain, and there was now every probability that he would quite get over his present attack.

"Keep up his spirits, give him plenty of hope, and no shocks, Miss Patty," he said to that young lady.

Shortly after the doctor had left Elizabeth came into Mr. Beaufort's room to pay her usual

morning visit. While there she said, in a careless tone, to Patty :

“ By the way, Lady Stanhope—Louis’s mother—is coming from Chalford to see me at twelve o’clock.”

Patty turned very white, and clasped her hands.

“ Oh, Betty, Louis’s—I mean Mr. Stanhope’s—mother ! Oh, Betty, the drawing-room is so shabby ! ”

Betty nodded her head brightly.

“ We’ll hide the shabbiness with flowers,” she said. “ I am going out this moment for the very purpose.”

Patty’s cheeks had now grown as red as they were pale.

“ It doesn’t so greatly matter, after all,” she said. “ Lady Stanhope comes to see you, Elizabeth, and this is not your house.”

Elizabeth went up to her cousin and kissed her.

“ Patty, you are a little goose,” she said. “ Lady Stanhope certainly comes to see me, but I suspect—I strongly suspect—oh, no. I’m

not going to say. Patty dear, Lady Stanhope has no special reason for coming to see me—nothing beyond that of an old friend. Patty, will you oblige me by doing something?"

"What is that, Betty?"

"Put on that soft grey tweed dress, with a little crimson knot at your throat. There, that is all. Good child! Stay with your father until I call you."

Elizabeth hurried out of the room without once again glancing at her cousin, put on her own hat and jacket, and ran downstairs.

"Jane," she said to the old servant, "a friend of mine is coming at twelve o'clock. I may induce her to stay to lunch."

"To lunch, Miss Cunningham! Oh, no, miss; really—I'm always plain-spoken—it can't be done."

"But if I give you leave to buy anything you fancy, Jane, couldn't you manage it just to oblige me?"

"It isn't the eatables, miss—money will buy

them ready cooked from the shop ; but it's the waiting, and the table-linen, and the dinner-service, which is that cracked and patched up with odds and ends as you wouldn't put down before any lady as knows any better."

Elizabeth stood in a deliberating attitude.

" I'm afraid Lady Stanhope does know what a very nice lunch means," she said.

" Lady Stanhope ! A title ! My word, then, that quite puts an end to it. I'm sorry to disoblige you, miss ; but the odds and ends of crockery are such as no grand lady could do anything but turn up her nose at."

" Well, well, Jane, I am sorry, particularly as I know I am convinced ; but this I tell you in the utmost confidence—that she takes a great interest in Miss Patty."

" My word ! in Miss Patty ? Is she one of the grand ladies whom Miss Patty met when she was away, Miss Cunningham ?"

" No ; but she met Lady Stanhope's son, which is more to the purpose."

“Miss Cunningham! you don’t say so!”

“He is extremely well off.”

“I suppose so, miss, seeing that he has a mother with a handle to her name.”

“That does not always follow, Jane. However, it is true enough in this case. I am given to understand that he—the son, I mean—thinks there never was so sweet a girl as my cousin Patty.”

“Oh, bless her heart! she’s an angel out and out!”

“It seems a great pity we could not ask Lady Stanhope to lunch, Jane. I know Patty will be very shy about meeting her, and if we had lunch she would come down naturally, and it would be all right.”

“Dear me, miss! of course Lady Stanhope must be asked to lunch. I ain’t the one to throw obstacles in the way.”

“I thought you said the dinner-service——”

“Oh, we can find odds and ends to make the luncheon-table look nice.”

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"I thought you said the dinner-service——"

"Oh, we can find odds and ends to make the luncheon-table look nice."

“And the table-linen——”

“There’s a beautiful old cloth belonging to Miss Patty’s mother, as white as the driven snow it is, and as fine as silk, that shall go down.”

“But about the attendance, Jane?”

“Couldn’t you wait on yourselves, if I put everything as proper as should be on the table?”

Elizabeth said afterwards that she felt it difficult at that moment to refrain from embracing honest, hard-working Jane. As it was, however, she gave the old servant’s hand a hearty squeeze, and hurried out to purchase fruit and flowers.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD

“**Y**ES, my dear ; I will own that it was a disappointment to me not to find you at Chalford. I expected—oh, yes, I expected you to be there, but it could not really be helped. And so Mr. Beaufort is getting better ?”

“ Yes,” said Elizabeth ; “ will you sit by the fire, Lady Stanhope ? There was a great change for the better yesterday. My uncle had just received some good news—rather unlooked-for good news. Patty, she is impulsive—she spoke of it before him ; it had an extraordinary effect—it broke the torpor. Patty is so pleased.”

"Is Miss Patty your uncle's only daughter?"

"Oh no, there are two other girls, Ethel and Constance."

"They must also have been delighted."

"They were delighted, but Patty loves her father best "

"Is Miss Patty with him now?"

"Yes—nothing will induce her to give up her charge. We have a nurse, but Patty makes her post an easy one."

Lady Stanhope fidgeted with her mantle.

"I," she said, after a pause—"I should like to see the little Miss Beaufort who cares so much for her father."

Here her eyes fell, and she avoided Elizabeth's face.

"I may as well own," she proceeded, as Miss Cunningham did not reply; "I may as well own that I have come here with the express desire of making Miss Beaufort's acquaintance."

"I know that, dear Lady Stanhope; it can be easily managed. Will you stay to lunch?"

"My dear, I should take up too much of your time."

"Not at all. I am not such an overpoweringly busy person—the heavy work of this house rests on Patty's shoulders, not on mine."

"What a wonderful little paragon Patty! Elizabeth! why, when, and how did Louis fall in love with her?"

Elizabeth's fair, handsome face became flushed.

"Your son ought to answer that question best himself," she said. "If I might venture to respond to it, I would say he fell in love with her because he could not help it, and the first moment he saw her."

"Is she, then, so fascinating?"

"To those who do not know her, she may not be at all fascinating; those who do, generally manage to love her very much."

"You are a good friend, Elizabeth. I will stay to lunch, and make Miss Patty's acquaintance. Now draw your chair to the fire, my dear. I want to consult you about another aspect of this affair."

"What is that?"

"Why did Miss Beaufort refuse my boy?"

"Ah! I cannot quite fathom her reasons. I believe one thing, however, emphatically—and I have ventured to hint a word to your son—she did not refuse him because she was indifferent to him."

"Then, my dear Elizabeth, what was her reason? Surely, surely, she was satisfied with having secured one of the truest of hearts; and also, my dear, Miss Beaufort is poor. Louis, from a worldly point of view, would be considered in point of position—in every way—an excellent match for her."

"Those considerations would not weigh with Patty. She is absolutely unworldly; she would fail to understand any one who told her that

she had made a good match because she had married a rich man, or a man who is thought well of by society. A good match, in her acceptation of the word, would mean a man who loved her very much, and to whom she had given her whole heart in return. If such a man took her to live in an attic with him, she would still consider she had done excellently for herself."

"Perhaps so, Elizabeth. I admire a girl for being simple-minded; but, I must confess, I like a tinge of common-sense to accompany it. Love in an attic would not last long. Well, my dear, you have not answered my question—why did Miss Beaufort refuse Louis?"

"I do not know the reason, but I can guess it."

"Oh, you can guess it! Then I have not come here in vain to-day. Sit close to me, Elizabeth. Let us have a long, comfortable, confidential chat. Elizabeth, you will not be offended if I am very, very frank with you?"

"I have no doubt you will be very frank; I

hope you will also be merciful, and not hurt my feelings."

"My dear child, this has nothing to say to you personally. Ah, Betty, I've always liked you very much—I have had dreams about you."

"Don't tell me your dreams, Lady Stanhope," interrupted Elizabeth, almost haughtily, a great flush of colour coming into her face. Then she paled down, and said in a gentle voice : "Forgive me ; I have been worried lately. People have been planning out my life for me to an alarming extent. I am tired of it. This conversation is to be about Patty, is it not ?"

"Yes, yes—and I was going to be frank ; my dear, when Louis told me he had fallen in love, irrevocably in love, with your little penniless cousin, I had to go through a struggle. My son knew, for we had often talked it over, and although he was not to seek for an heiress, yet a girl with some money would be in all respects suitable for his wife. I did not want to welcome

this girl as my daughter, first, because she was penniless; second, because I wanted—well, I won't go into that. I told Louis, I told him frankly, that I could not approve of Miss Beaufort."

"He soon talked you round, of course."

"Why 'of course,' Elizabeth? Am I a person so easily influenced?"

"By the world at large, no; by your son, yes; he is as the apple of your eye."

Lady Stanhope smiled.

"You are right, Betty," she said. "You read me well; yes, the boy did talk me over."

"That is right! I am so glad. May I kiss you for being such a true, dear mother?"

"My dear child! To confide in you absolutely, Elizabeth, I would rather the estate were sold over our heads than that Louis should have a shadow on his heart."

"Oh, I knew that perfectly."

"You did? You are a naughty, bewitching

maid. Now, my dear, how are we to get that little Patty to change her mind?"

"I think we can manage it, Lady Stanhope. She thinks you have come to see me solely, but you will meet her at lunch, and then I don't think I need tell you what to do. Your own heart will tell you how to win Patty over. When you look at her you will remember two things: first, that Louis loves her; second, although she will not own it to herself, that he is the first and best in all the world to her."

"Yes, my dear; and then?"

"I must have a talk with Patty; there are one or two clouds which I can clear away. Oh, I am quite certain that everything will come right in the end, and Louis will value his wife all the more if she is a little hard to win."

Lady Stanhope was about to reply, when there came a sudden interruption. Quick, light steps were heard hurrying down the stairs, the drawing-room door was burst impetuously open, and a little figure with a flushed face,



“‘ Bstty, Betty ! they ve come ! ’ — *Page 251*

eyes sparkling through tears, and lips quivering, rushed in.

Not the Patty whom poor Elizabeth pictured—not Patty in her soft grey dress with her hair in order, and her features composed, but an untidy girl in a print dress which she had outgrown, her dark hair pushed back anyhow, her words coming out rapidly.

“Betty, Betty! they’ve come! Here they are! Look at them! Oh, I have been crying over them; read them, read them—do look at them, Betty dear.”

“What, the first proofs of the poem?” said Elizabeth. “Patty dear, this is Lady Stanhope; I told you she might call this morning.”

“How do you do?” said Patty, just glancing at the tall, stately lady, and then bending her head to devour the closely printed pages.

Elizabeth sighed.

“It is absolutely true,” she said to herself,

“that at this moment that child has even forgotten Louis; she thinks of no one, and of nothing but her father’s great poem.”

“Oh, Betty, how splendidly it reads in print! but I have been afraid to show it to father; and yet he ought to see it. I mean he ought to have it read to him. I cannot, my voice shakes so; would you, could you, dear Elizabeth? The proofs must go back by the next post; would you read the poem to father at once?”

“But, Patty, Lady Stanhope is here!”

“You won’t mind, will you?” said Patty, turning round eagerly to the lady. “This is so very, very important—the most important thing in all the world to us just now. You don’t know the story of that poem. If you did, if you even knew half its story, you would never expect any girl to stand on ceremony with you at such a moment.”

Patty’s eyes were full of tears—she was hold-

ing out her hands, which Lady Stanhope now took within her own.

“You are right, my dear little girl!” she said gently. “Go away, both of you; I will rest here quite contentedly till lunch is ready.”





CHAPTER XXII.

A PROOF READY

BUT Mr. Beaufort was not strong enough to listen to his own poem—a word or two was sufficient to tire him; he could talk a very little to-day, but he could follow no consecutive line of thought.

“I cannot listen,” he whispered to Patty; “I—it upsets me—take it away. I know it will appear; I rest in the thought, but I cannot listen now.”

Patty looked in consternation at her cousin.

“Uncle Egbert must not be worried,” said Elizabeth with decision. “Patty, lunch is ready. Uncle Egbert, we will leave you for a

little in Mrs. Stephens' care—trust to everything being done right about the poem.”

She took Patty's hand and led her out of the room.

“I don't understand you, Betty,” said the young girl, with almost irritation. “If father is not able to correct the proofs the poem cannot be published, and then—and then—Betty, I just have longed for it so—I have so longed to show the world what my father really is, to show them that he is not a failure, but a great, great success—that I can scarcely bear this fresh delay and disappointment. Betty, don't be angry with me.”

“I am not angry, dear ; you are unreasonable because you are a little over-excited. How can you expect Uncle Egbert to be fit to attend to any mental efforts to-day ? It was folly of me even to begin to read the poem aloud to him. Come downstairs, Patty—try not to look so hopelessly doleful ; and oh, my dear, could you not change your dress before lunch ?”

"Oh, Elizabeth, let me be! Lady Stanhope is nothing to me—she is not, really. I am so anxious about the poem."

"Well, dear, come down to lunch as you are; don't let us keep Louis's mother waiting any longer. Patty, you are really shamefully untidy."

"Perhaps I am—I forgot about Louis; I mean, I forgot that Lady Stanhope had anything to say to Louis—to—to Mr. Stanhope. Betty, you must be a very happy girl!"

She raised her head, gave her cousin a swift, eager kiss, and ran into her own room.

So it happened that Lady Stanhope did see the soft grey dress, and a very pretty and presentable Patty, after all.

"We are in perplexity," said Elizabeth, as she gracefully presided at her uncle's table. "Patty and I are quite in trouble, for Uncle Egbert, although a great deal better, is still too ill to correct the proof-sheets of his poem."

"And the publishers are waiting for it," said

Patty. "I had a letter from them—Messrs. Sharp and Jones: such *very* good publishers!—and they want the proofs always to be sent back by the next post. What shall we do?"

"Has your father made a careful copy?" asked Lady Stanhope of the girl; "for if he has, and the alterations required are not many, I see a way of getting you out of your difficulty. My son is a very fair amateur poet, and has even published verses: suppose you entrust your proof-sheets to his supervision?"

"What a delightful thought!" said Elizabeth.

"It would give Mr. Stanhope a great deal of trouble," said Patty, some quick blushes rising to her cheeks.

"Not at all, my dear. Louis is an idle man at present, and will be grateful for the occupation. Shall we settle it so, then? and shall he call at Beatrice Gardens every morning to find out if there are any proofs waiting for him?"

"That must be as Elizabeth likes," said Patty.

"Nay, Patty," retorted Elizabeth gravely, "this arrangement has nothing whatever to say to me. I think it rests with you to accept Lady Stanhope's offer, for your father's sake."

"Then I will do so," said Patty, raising her clear brown eyes to the lady's face. "My father will be greatly obliged to Mr. Stanhope."

"Then that is settled," said Lady Stanhope, giving the girl back a puzzled, curious glance. "My dear, I am so pleased to have conferred on you even a small favour. Now, will you do something for me in return?"

"I will gladly, Lady Stanhope."

"I have ordered a carriage to call for me at two o'clock; will you come for a drive with me? I have heard a good deal about you from my son, and I should like to know you better. Will you come for a drive, and let us become acquainted with each other?"

"Not me. You must mean Elizabeth."

“ No ; I mean Miss Patty Beaufort.”

Patty went for her drive, and came back again looking quiet and thoughtful. She avoided Elizabeth, taking care never to be in the room alone with her. She would not talk about Lady Stanhope, nor make any allusions to her drive, but, taking refuge in her father's sick-room, devoted herself to the perusal over and over again of the cherished proof-sheets.

Her sisters could not make her out. Knowing nothing of Louis or Lady Stanhope, except by the most distant repute, they could get no key to the mystery of this changed and altered Patty.

Her father was getting better ; the great poem was about to be published ; for some inexplicable reason, the hard pressure of poverty seemed lifted from the household, and yet Patty was grave and silent. Her face grew paler instead of brighter, her eyes had a wistful glance : she looked like a girl who was struggling very hard with herself.

"I can't understand her," said Ethel one day to Elizabeth. "I was awfully frightened for her when father was so ill, for Patty has always, as you know, just worshipped him; but now the doctors say he will certainly get well, and with care may remain well for years; the poem is also coming out, and—and—the old Patty would have been treading on air—her cheeks would have been like roses. The rest of us old sobersides would have found her too much for us—her gaiety would have been simply overpowering, whereas now—— What does it all mean, Elizabeth?"

"Patty has had a shock," said Elizabeth gently. "She kept up when there was excitement and danger; this is the reaction. She will be better presently."

"Well, it's very odd," said Ethel. "She was always a silly little thing, not good for a great deal—not capable of earning her living, I mean, or anything of that sort, but very bright and useful in a house, and so companionable. And

now, I do assure you, when that handsome Mr. Stanhope calls, as he does every day, to look over father's proofs, nothing will induce her to go into the room where he is working. Of course, Constance and I cannot leave our work to attend to him, and it is positively rude of Patty to let him sit in the drawing-room by himself, and send him messages by Jane."

Elizabeth sighed slightly.

"Things will come right in time," she said. "Patty wants time, and no one to notice her. Now, Ethel, will you come out with me? it is your birthday, and I want to buy you a present."

During these days Mr. Beaufort made rapid progress towards recovery; in a week he was able to talk about his poem to Patty, and to express the strongest interest in its appearance.

One day he asked her a direct question.

"The proofs come in every day, don't they, Patty?"

"Yes, father—at least, nearly every day."

“ And that young man—what is his name?—he corrects them carefully, I hope ? ”

“ I—I suppose so, father.”

“ Speak up, child ; I don’t quite hear you. He has undertaken an important task. What did you say his name was, Patty ? ”

“ Stanhope, father—Louis Stanhope.”

“ Oh, I hope he will be careful with regard to the punctuation of the opening paragraph of Book V. Is he downstairs now, Patty ? I am much better to-day. I—I—might see him for a moment on that point.”

Patty’s face grew very pale.

“ I believe Mr. Stanhope is downstairs,” she said ; “ I heard Jane letting him in half an hour ago. Are you sure you are fit to see him, father ? ”

“ Yes, yes, child ! don’t oppose me ; the punctuation of Book V. is most important ; it commences, you remember, with Cyndric’s great speech when he addresses his political supporters. False punctuation there might spoil the sense.

Let me see this young Stanhope ; bring him up to me without delay."

" I will ring for Jane, and tell her to ask him to come up," said Patty, rising and going to the bell. " While he is with you I can run away and change my dress, can I not, father ? "

" What do you mean, Patty ? You know my articulation is not very clear yet, and Stanhope, being a stranger, may not understand me. Of course you must stay, child—certainly you must stay."

" Then I will run downstairs and fetch Mr. Stanhope myself," said Patty.

She ran out of the room, a wild look, half of delight, half of fear, growing and deepening on her face.

" There, I am not to blame—Elizabeth is out—I have kept out of his way," she murmured ; " this I cannot, cannot help ! "

She rushed downstairs, pushing back her tumbled, untidy hair, and ran into the room

where Stanhope, looking as sombre and bored as man could look, was wearily revising Mr. Beaufort's proofs.

"How do you do?" said Patty, her face all glowing like the heart of a rose. "Father wants you; he will see you now—at once. Let me take you to his room."

Stanhope rose and held out his hand; the reflection of Patty's brightness stole into his face. He squeezed her hand, looked into her eyes, and followed her upstairs as if he were treading on air.

Mr. Beaufort had an earnest discussion with this valuable proof-reader, and Patty, standing by, had to act interpreter. Almost every line of the great poem seemed stamped into her brain. It was above her, doubtless; but she understood it by the intuition of her great love.

Mr. Beaufort was soothed and elated by two such enthusiastic critics. The moments became half-hours; the half-hours lengthened out into one, two, three—no one was tired: all were



'Mr Beaufort was soothed and elated by two such enthusiastic critics.'

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interested ; when suddenly the room-door was opened, and Elizabeth came in.

Stanhope was seated in a chair by the sick man's side ; Patty, standing near him, was eagerly commenting and explaining. Stanhope had raised his head to look at her, and was challenging her merry face and quick repartee, when he suddenly saw a change. The little, rosy, glowing face grew white.

"Betty !" said Patty ; and she sprang away from Stanhope, and took Elizabeth's hands in hers, as if she were praying her to forgive her. Then she looked into her cousin's eyes in astonishment.

"Patty, dear," said Elizabeth, stooping down and whispering in the young girl's ear, "I am so happy—so happy to see you thus."



CHAPTER XXIII.

A LORDLY MESSAGE



WHEN Stanhope left Mr. Beaufort's room, Elizabeth followed him downstairs.

"I hope you are satisfied now," she said.

"What about?"

"That Patty loves you. Why don't you speak to her? She is shy and frightened and miserable, but she loves you with all her heart. I have seen her day after day up in my uncle's room: taking care of him, loving him, and tending him, but looking all the time like a ghost: no light in her eyes, no spirit in her voice. I came in just now, and found that you made a third to the little party; and, behold!

Patty was like a rose—all glowing and joyous and lovely. You made the change; how can you doubt that she loves you?”

Stanhope was looking thin and worried. His duties at Beatrice Gardens—which he had undertaken willingly enough, and inspired with much hope—had proved irksome in the extreme. No Patty made her appearance; no word, no message, did she vouchsafe to him. He was close to her, and yet far away from her. He loved her devotedly—the hours spent at Beatrice Gardens became in consequence torture to him.

“I won’t stand it much longer,” he had said that morning to his mother. “You and Elizabeth believe that Patty cares for me, but no girl who had a spark of regard for a fellow would treat him as she treats me. She avoids me in the most marked manner. There can be only one construction for her conduct.”

So Louis had said, and he had resolved that not even for Mr. Beaufort’s interests, not even for the sake of the great poem, would he take

that daily pilgrimage any longer to Bayswater when suddenly, lo and behold! for him the sun came out, figuratively, and the blushing, dimpled, charming Patty of old once more put in a shy appearance.

"You are always preaching hope to me, Elizabeth," he said now; "you have always been more than good, still—still—how am I to take all the comfort of your words in the face of facts?"

"See Patty, and ask her once again if she loves you."

"How am I to accomplish the great feat of seeing her? My lucky chance of to-day may not repeat itself."

"It will, if you are courageous enough to do the right thing."

Stanhope's face flushed.

"I am not wanting in courage," he said. "What is the right thing?"

"Send her a message by me. Tell her your desire to see her at once."

"I—how can I? That is scarcely the message from a man to a girl who professes not to care for him."

Elizabeth felt inclined to stamp her foot.

"Never mind her professions. Will you trust me enough to send the message?"

"Oh, I don't know. Yes, yes—anything to get out of a state of suspense."

"That is right. I am waiting for your commands."

"My commands! What do you mean?"

"Your message to Patty."

"Oh, you know what to say."

"I know what I should say; but these would not be your words. This is an important message, and it must proceed from your lips. I will take care to repeat it verbally, as you have delivered it to me, adding not a word, omitting not a word. Now, are you ready?"

"You puzzle me, Elizabeth: you puzzle me, and yet you fill me with hope. I don't know why I feel quite elated just now—something as I did

when she, little darling! was standing by my side upstairs. I feel quite cheerful; my fears have vanished. I am courageous; I even have a faint sensation of victory."

"Then send a victorious message, great conqueror; I am waiting for your words."

"Say—oh, Miss Cunningham, how difficult it is—say, 'I, Louis, want you, Patty. Come at once.'"

Elizabeth smiled—she instantly left the room.

She ran upstairs, and went straight to her uncle's bedroom.

"Uncle Egbert," she said, "can you manage without Patty for half an hour?"

A slightly annoyed expression came over the sick man's face. Patty saw it, and frowned at her cousin.

"I am reading to father," she said; "we are both interested. Will it do after lunch, Betty?"

"No, it will not," said Elizabeth, in her most peremptory tones; "what I want you for is important, and pressing. Uncle Egbert, can

you manage with Mrs. Stephens for a few moments? I will return to you myself as soon as possible."

"Go, child," said the sick man; "come back soon; I presume it is a new dress," he added, with a smile; "a new dress or some feminine folly of that kind; go, Patty, go—your old father can well understand that a demand of that nature must be pressing."

Patty felt very angry. When the two girls reached the landing, she turned almost fiercely upon her cousin—

"This is really unreasonable of you, Betty—when I am engaged with father; when I am reading to him nothing can be of importance to me in comparison."

"Don't be a little goose!" said Elizabeth, taking Patty's two hands and drawing her into her bedroom. "Here, make yourself presentable; let me brush that untidy cloud of hair. I presume, Patty, that you will not disregard a message sent to you by your lord and master."

Patty stared.

"My lord and master!" she repeated. "Do you mean father?"

"No, I do not, you silly, silly child—I mean the man who loves you, and who is breaking his heart for you, and whom you love, and are breaking your heart to be with. There! as if I did not guess—as if I did not know everything for weeks past. Go down to Louis at once, Patty—he has sent for you—he is waiting in the drawing-room for you. These were his words—this was his exact message—‘I, Louis, want you, Patty; come to me, at once.’”

"Louis said that?" said Patty. "Louis said that—to *me*—of me?"

Here she covered her burning face with her two hands. Elizabeth put her arms round her.

"He did, darling, and he was peremptory enough; I should advise you not to keep him waiting—he is naturally a masterful man; by-and-by, Patty, you won't have a scrap of will of your own."

"Then he's not," said Patty—"he's not *your* Louis after all?"

"*Mine!* good gracious child! he never was, and never wished to be! Put that idea out of your head once and for ever. From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot he is all yours. How long are you going to keep his lordly personage waiting? Must I repeat his message again—'I, Louis——'"

But Patty was gone.





CHAPTER XXIV.

SUNSHINE

WHEN the news of Patty's engagement became known, no one was more emphatic in her sentiments of approval than that honest and hard-working individual, Jane.

"I always did know that Miss Patty was the flower of the family," said Jane; "and for sure and certain I guessed there'd be a prince coming along. Life always goes by contraries; and she, poor darling, who have had, you may say, from her birth to look twice at every sixpence, to twist it and turn it and see if it would do the work of sevenpence, why, now she'll have

pounds and pounds more than she knows what to do with. It's a blessed relief, and I'm more pleased than I can say."

Patty, who, although dearly loved, had always occupied, to a certain extent, the position of Cinderella in the household, was now lifted on all hands out of this somewhat servile position, and petted and made much of. Constance and Ethel regarded their little sister with some awe, some wonder, and perhaps a tiny, tiny share of envy. Betty was openly in raptures, Mr. Beaufort in a dreamy way thoroughly well pleased, while as to Patty herself, although she was as modest and charming and bright as ever, she was secretly, in her heart of hearts, the most elated of all.

"There must really be something very nice about me, or *he* would not love me," she whispered to herself many times a day. "I cannot make out what he can see in me, but I must believe that there is something delightful, for he has told me so often. Oh, what a happy

happy girl I am! I have secured the love of the most splendid man in all the world!"

Stanhope, an excellent fellow, but perhaps not altogether a hero, was much elated by Patty's adoration.

"What an opinion she has of me!" he said to himself. "Well, there is nothing for me but to try to live up to it."

Mrs. Forrester took an early opportunity of calling at Beatrice Gardens to congratulate Patty.

"My dear child," she said, as she kissed the youngest Miss Beaufort, and folded her in her embrace, "how obliged, how greatly obliged you must be to me!"

"Why so?" asked Patty, raising her honest brown eyes, and gazing full at her visitor.

"Oh, now, my dear, you know perfectly, perfectly, that *I* made the match! Ah, Patty, you shy little thing! do you remember that evening in Scotland when Louis covered your poor little shabby nun's-veiling dress with that

wild clematis? Ah, my dear, I knew then how things would be—I knew then that my pretty little Patty had won the heart of that dear, good, captivating fellow.”

“Did you really?” said Patty, in her quiet voice. “I always hoped, I always greatly hoped you did not know.”

“My dear child, what do you mean?”

“I always tried to excuse you in that way, Mrs. Forrester, when you were so very, very unkind to me. I always whispered to myself: ‘She cannot possibly guess that there is any likelihood of our loving each other.’”

Patty’s words were so simple and earnest that Mrs. Forrester for once in her life found herself blushing; and some further words which she intended to use with regard to an invitation for herself to Silverdale, Stanhope’s beautiful place, died away unspoken on her lips. When any one read her through and through as thoroughly as Patty Beaufort had done, she felt that the less she had to say to that person in the

future, the better. Accordingly she shortened her visit, and beyond sending Patty a trifling wedding present, took no further notice of her.

It was decided that Patty's wedding-day was to arrive just a week before Christmas.

"There is one thing that troubles me," said the young girl to her favourite cousin, Betty. "What will father do when I am gone? He is much better, and the poem is really out, and selling well, is it not, Betty?"

"Yes, dear, the reviews have been excellent, and Messrs. Sharp and Jones give most satisfactory reports of the sales."

"Yes—well, you see, although father is perfectly happy and thankful, and nearly as well as ever, yet I am sure he will feel a little blank when I am not with him. Louis says he must come to Silverdale, and Lady Stanhope is very sweet about wishing him to come too; still, still, that won't be like having me living quite quietly with him here."

"Which you can do no longer, Patty; that

part of your life is quite ended—your first duty now is to your husband.”

“To Louis? Of course, I know that.”

“Look at me, darling. Are you really troubled about Uncle Egbert?”

“I am afraid I am, Betty; sometimes I wake at night and think of him, and although I am so very, very happy, I cry when I picture how very lonely he will be.”

“Now, Patty, look at me; in the first place, even if Uncle Egbert did remain on here, and things were as they have always been in Beatrice Gardens, I don’t believe he would be anything like as lonely as you imagine. He loves you, dear—he loves you, I know, better than any one; but his nature is naturally abstracted, and he would soon bury himself again in books and papers. The success he has now undoubtedly won will give a zest and pleasure to his life, and in all probability any future poems which he may write he will have little difficulty in securing a market for.”

“But,” said Patty, “but——”

“I know, Patty ; I am coming to that part. The doctor does not wish him to use his brain much for at least a year. Now, this is my idea. You know that I have just come of age, and I am rich ; for a girl who has no particular claims and no particular expenses, I am very rich. I do not want to stay in Beatrice Gardens, nor do I want to live with my aunt, Mrs. Forrester. If I ever made any plans to this effect, I have told her they must come to an end. Now, this is what I want to do ; I want to shut up this house, and I want Uncle Egbert and Constance and Ethel to come abroad with me for a year. Poor Con and Ethel ! they do want a holiday and a little bit of pleasure sadly.”

“Oh, Betty, I really never knew any one like you !” said Patty ; “I do think you into the world to make every one you across happy. I think you are *too* good ; oh, darling ! you are almost an angel !”

“Not a bit of it, darling ; just a girl with

plenty of faults and weaknesses, but with a trust which I do long to use worthily."

Elizabeth's lovely eyes were full of tears, and Patty, flinging her arms round her neck, cried a little too, for joy.

In this way everything came right for the Beauforts, and on a certain frosty morning in December a very pretty little bride stood, by Louis Stanhope's side, and was made his for better, for worse—a quiet-looking little bride, but with such radiant eyes, and so sweet a smile of gentle happiness, that she took the hearts of all beholders by storm.

"Now, Patty," said her husband, as they drove away that afternoon together, "I should like to know what you meant by refusing me that day when you were leaving Chalford."

"Yes, you know—you must know—I know it—you cared for Elizabeth, and that she cared for you."

"Mrs. Forrester put that into your head?"

"She did. Don't let us think of that now."

“I want to ask you another question. Why did you condemn me to solitary state in that dismal drawing-room at Beatrice Gardens, when I was longing for your——”

“‘Louis—Louis—because I loved you so much!’”

“A queer way of showing it. Do you know, Patty, that I don’t believe we should ever have been husband and wife but for Elizabeth? I will own that I was almost in despair; in short, I should never have won you to my side but for her.”

“Louis,” said Patty, “I want to say one thing. I am your wife now, and I am, oh! the happiest and the proudest girl in all the world; but I do think there is one girl too good even for you, and her name is Elizabeth.”

