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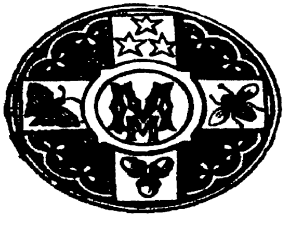

# PATTY

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID

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expression on her face did not change; she could not solve the perplexity that was troubling her.

"I can't go on like this," she said at last, slowly, as if her words kept pace with her thoughts; "it's no better than being in prison. When father asked me to go to service, I said I wouldn't, because I thought home would be freest; but no master nor mistress could tie me as tight as father do. Just as if I can't speak to a man without harm coming of it. Harm! Weren't men and women made on purpose for each other, I wonder? If father only knew my notions, he'd trust me fast enough." Here she remembered her own existence, and smoothed the chestnut hair into still more glossy waves; a smile of consciousness curved her lips out of the bondage in which they had been kept.

"I wonder what father'd say if I told him I mean to marry a gentleman; maybe, though, he'd be worse than ever. He'd fancy I'd be throwing myself into mischief more than he does now. Bless him!" she gave her head a little toss; "does he think I'm like Jane at the Rectory, or Clara at the butcher's? So I was before I went to Guildford and saw a few people; I was just as much of a fool. Well, he'll find out the difference. Clara! why, if I was as free as Clara is, and had her fine clothes and her opportunities, would I let such fellows as she does take walks with me? Not I. There's not one young man in all Ashton I'd let kiss my little finger."

Patty seated herself in the chair and thought again.

It was all very well to keep firm to this secret resolution of becoming "a lady;" but Patty had begun to snub every love-sick village swain who sought her favour, and life was growing too dull to bear. Her father's cottage stood by itself at the end of the lane, a good mile out of the village. Across the common in front there was a high-road, but this was too far off to give much chance for picking up acquaintance thereon.

I go to service, he says he must have half my wages. I hate such near ways. I'll go away——"

She stopped to think again, and an angry flush rose suddenly in each cheek, and made her eyes look dry and feverish.

"I won't go to the Rectory—I've made up my mind on that. Fancy being maid to that Nuna Beaufort! I'm just as good as she is, and I'm ever so much prettier; all the difference between us is in speaking French and playing the piano, and anybody could learn them things as tried. I'm sure I could, for Miss Coppock says I'm clever, and she's clever if you like, Miss Coppock is; she can speak French and do all as Miss Nuna can, unless it's the drawing and painting, and those don't count in making a lady, I know." A light came into her face. "I might serve in a shop; or why shouldn't I help in the bar at the Bladebone?" She paused; there was an attraction in this last idea, it promised variety and freedom as well, but she shook her head.

"No; that Dame Fagg's a tyrant, and I expect she'd be jealous of that fool of a husband. All the women are jealous of me." She laughed at this, and the frowning, angry look left her, but it came back again after a while. "I can't see my way clear except for one thing; I won't be maid at the Rectory, and I'll tell Father so. I hate Nuna Beaufort; she's a poor pale-faced, half-asleep thing. If I was to live in the same house as her, I should be tempted to do her a mischief; it's like what that old Gubbins said at Miss Coppock's—she said if two women disliked one another they was best to keep apart, else if they came together in life they was sure to do one another a mischief. I wonder," she spoke slowly, "if that's true."

## CHAPTER II.

### IN THE LANE

CARVING'S WOOD LANE was in full beauty; summer and autumn had not yet decided which should hold empire there—so the light that came streaming down through the leaves was green-hued, till it reached the lofty sand-banks on each side the way, and then autumn seemed to hold her own again, and the twisted grotesque roots stood out golden where the sun reached them. Tree roots, which might be likened to the limbs of slumbering giants all too lightly covered, for the flimsy soil in which they spread was for ever filtering away, unable to hide their stalwart contortions. Higher up among the branches the two seasons fought hand-to-hand for mastery, the shadows were so purely exquisitely green, the lights so brightly golden; but if autumn were gaining the victory, she was as yet ripe, not mellow, with the beauty one may sometimes find in middle age—bloom still on the cheek, light still in the liquid eyes, scarlet still on the lips, only the firmness and velvet texture of youth departed.

There was not much leafage on the high banks; long trailing honeysuckles flung themselves over the giant limbs, and tufts of oak fern, with spots of golden powder like tiny coins as the light fell on them, niched in some snug hollow in the spreading roots; but it was scarcely a scene in which the eye could grasp petty details. The lane mounted slowly, deeply shadowed by the crossing branches, and as it gained higher ground the flood of chequered green and gold

# PATTY.

## CHAPTER I.

### AT THE COTTAGE.

THE sun had been shining all day out of a blue sky—blue and clear enough to make the eyes ache with its uniformity of tint—the cabbages in front of Roger Westropp's cottage looked dry and withered.

It was a long narrow cottage, and the sun had heated it through and through; it glared with whiteness, and, with its door set wide open, looked as if it gaped and wanted a nap.

Either the heat or the contents of the letter spread out on his knee had ruffled Roger Westropp's patience. There was a touch of anger in his voice as he called out "Patty!"

The sound clashed suddenly on the burning stillness and seemed to evoke life from it. From the back of the cottage came the lowing of a cow, and the gnats blowing their shrill trumpets swayed in a grey cloud round Roger's head.

"I've made up my mind, so she may as well know." He folded the letter carefully on his knee, and put it in his pocket; the action calmed his irritation. He rose up and went to the foot of the staircase. "Patty!" he called again, but in a quieter voice.

He had stooped while he read the letter; you were

now. I'm not likely to run after men of any sort, much less horse-dealers. I'm rather more particular than that, I hope."

She threw back her head, and the colour flew over her face.

Roger looked earnestly at her; there was pride in his look, but mistrust along with it.

"You're right, lass, so far," he said; "they be a set of knaves and spendthrifts be horse-dealers; but as I've known 'em, Patty—men be much alike—I don't trust one among 'em all."

"You don't trust ne'er a one, let alone men, Father."

Roger winced, and then he frowned at her.

"What do you mean by that?" he said harshly.

"I mean you don't trust women any more than men; you don't trust me. You had that news early this morning—you know you had. Why couldn't you have told me before? You know why. You know you didn't want to give me the chance of going to the village and getting some one to come down and cheer me up a bit while you was away. It's a shame, Father, that it is, a crying shame. All the months I've been back from Miss Coppock's, and I've never so much as asked a friend of my own to take a bit or sup in the place."

She did not sob or cry; she looked at him with full dilated eyes and quivering nostrils, while she panted for breath to go on.

But Roger had heard as much as he meant to hear at present. He got up slowly and looked at her—looked at her so calmly, so quietly, that Patty's flashing eyes fell beneath his.

"What did you come home for, then?" he said at last. "You wurn't content at Miss Coppock's, you fretted for your freedom; you said you was sick and tired of needlework and such like. I didn't want you; maybe you makes the place smarter, but I was doin' well enough alone."

His words stung her, but she kept down her anger.

"I'm a poor working-man," he said; "'tis hard enough to get vittals for you and me, without feeding gowks of girls as should stay at home and mind their work, for it's Jane at the Rectory you're meaning, Patty."

"I don't mean anyone, but I hate stingy ways." She spoke more quietly, and she raised her eyes to her father's face to see how much she dared to say. His lips looked thinner than ever, but there was no other sign of anger in the long narrow face. "Father, people tell me you're not poor; why need we live as we do?" She gave an impatient look at her often-washed gown.

Roger's face worked.

"Don't be a fool;" he put one hand so firmly on her plump shoulder that she could not move. "I tell you I *am* poor. I mayn't choose to spend all I've got, but that's not your business, girl; you'll benefit by my thrift some day. Where'd be the use of dressing you up now in smart clothes and leaving you to starve in rags when I'm gone?"

"You needn't trouble about me when you're gone," Patty spoke loftily; "I shall never want."

Roger looked at her curiously.

"You'll never keep yourself by your two hands, I know that fast enough; you'll do as little as you can help, my girl, for yourself or anyone else; you'll not make a shillin' go as far as another would, it bean't in ye; but that's not what I called you down for, neither. Now look here, Patty, you keep at home. I won't have Jane nor nobody here;" he raised his hand and let it fall on her shoulder again; "I won't have you seen at the Bladebone, neither; so now you knows my mind, lass."

He walked across the room with long heavy steps, and then upstairs. Patty stood quite still, only pinching her gown between thumb and finger. He came down again with the few necessaries he meant to take with him tied in a handkerchief, but she never stirred.

"Good-bye, lass;" he nodded, and his face softened as he passed her. "If I'm not back Saturday, you

can go to church Sunday; but maybe I'll be back sooner."

"Good-bye," said Patty, sulkily, over her shoulder; but he did not stop as he passed, and she made no advance to a more demonstrative leave-taking.

As Patty stood there she looked more and more like her father. Her full red lips were pressed against each other till they must surely have hurt themselves; her white round chin squared itself, and the even eyebrows drew together and made a ridge in the delicate flesh above.

Patty was not, as folks say, in a passion; she had stamped her foot just now, but her displeasure was far too weighty to be thrown off in the mere froth of temper; her grievance was an old one. She stood just where her father had left her, thinking. Five years' service in the workroom of Miss Coppock, the milliner, had taught her that no other female quality or faculty has so much value as beauty; but self-conscious as she was, she was too deeply absorbed now to remember herself, or to be aware of the picture she made standing beside her father's empty chair, framed in by the porch outside the open door.

The flush on her lovely skin had faded into its usual perfect pink, a pink melting softly into the pure flesh-colour beyond, for Patty's skin was fair, not white; white is a lifeless expression, and will not render the glow of her complexion. It may have seemed white near her lips from the intensity of their scarlet; and again on the forehead and temples and behind the delicate ears from the same effect of contrast with the massive, almost sculpturesque waves of bright chestnut hair; but it was more like the outer petals of a blush-rose bud, or the edges of a rose-lined sea-shell: the plump shapely hand that clasped the arm-chair so firmly was pink, though a lighter pink than usual just now on account of the heat, and so was the dimpled wrist above.

She stood, scarcely moving for some time, but the

seemed only the outer court of a still more gloomy descent beyond.

At least the artist thought so, who stood now a little on one side of the chequered pavement, himself a picturesque object enough with the tools of his art strapped about him.

"By Jove!" and he stood still whistling a soft subdued air, breathing out the rapture which a sight of beauty was sure to kindle in his glowing imagination.

His eye travelled on, passing from the jewelled greenery through the sombre shadow to the foot of the descent, and his whistling ended. The trees ceased, then the lane broadened, and just where the light came pouring in from the open ground beyond, a figure sat on an old tree-stump. Paul Whitmore quickened his pace, and passed out of the sunshine again into the gloom.

He shivered slightly, the coolness was almost cold after the stifling journey from London; and besides this physical sensation, there was almost awe in the solemn breadth of shadow.

When Paul was a boy he had written verses, and it came to him now that he was realizing the thing he had pictured and rhymed about in his visions of life, the path of shadowed doubt and grief, the light and joy beyond; and with the sentiment of an artistic nature—a nature joyous in practice and pensive in theory—he became half irritable as the foreboding grew that he was all unconsciously tracing the outline of his own future in this walk through the lonely lane.

He could make out the sitting figure distinctly now; it was a woman, and she seemed young.

"And she should be lovely with that graceful bending figure," the artist thought; "but I don't know: women with good shape and abundant hair are often harsh or coarse in feature and complexion, and a woman with a bad skin is objectionable. If my theory just now has anything in it, this bending creature's life

is cast in sunny places." He stood still, and though in shadow himself, he shaded his eyes with one hand as he gazed at her.

"She is charming!" he exclaimed, "at least her position is; now if she'll only keep so a minute."

He leaned back against the bank, high enough to yield support, though on the opposite side it had followed the downward bend of the road, and gave room only for smaller tree roots in its diminished height.

As Paul sketched he saw that his sitter was reading, and upon this he grew more enterprising, and included in the picture growing rapidly under his long slender hand a portion of the deeply shadowed road.

"She's an excellent model; I don't believe she'll move this hour."

The words were hardly said when the sitter raised her head, and nodded to some one beyond the angle of the lane. The shadow cast by her hat was gone, and Paul Whitmore could see her face.

"Charming! only wants colour to be lovely. But she's too pale. I expect she is better still nearer; those delicate faces always lose by distance. I wonder if this is the girl Pritchard talks of; if so, that young farmer Bright is a lucky fellow. Does she like him, I wonder? She looks too refined for a clodhopper."

He stopped abruptly; he had been so absorbed in looking that he had not noticed the approach of the person to whom the girl had nodded; the branches of the last tree on his side drooped low and had intercepted his view. Paul Whitmore forgot his sitter and his theories in an instant—a real picture was before him; another girl framed in, now that she stood in front of them, by the drooping green boughs. She had a pink cotton gown on with a little frill round her white firm throat; there was no hat to shade her face, no cloak to hide her shape. She was not tall enough perhaps, but her limbs were so rounded, so well put together, that it was difficult to criticise her.

Paul Whitmore did not attempt it, at the sight of

her deep blue eyes with their heavy sculpturesque white lids; his soul had fairly melted in the sort of ecstasy beauty creates in its worshippers. If he had not met those eyes fixed on his own with such speaking admiration, Paul might have seen that the well-cut mouth was too full, and that the lowermost of those scarlet lips drooped somewhat heavily; he might have seen that the nose was thick and inexpressive, and that the magnificent wealth of hair that glowed a wavy golden brown in the sun's rays was not fine in texture, and that it grew too low on the girl's forehead; but he did not criticise.

He saw before him the most glowing piece of female beauty that had ever met his eyes, and he stood gazing at it.

He roused from the exquisite delight of this long gaze, and looked to the other side of the lane. His sitter had risen to her feet; Paul Whitmore glanced across from one girl to the other, and he hesitated. The new-comer was certainly the prettiest; her skin might not be as purely transparent as that of his sitter, but it was such true flesh tint, and the soft colour stole into it so bewitchingly. The one face was exquisitely peach-like and tempting; it was that of a sweet, innocent, confiding child—whereas the other had a certain depth of expression which might betoken spirituality, but which also suggested a character not so easily read as that of the lovely village maiden who stood blushing like a sea-shell under the artist's ardent eyes.

There was little difference, except the hat, in the dress of the two girls, and yet Paul Whitmore had recognized instinctively that the one was a lady, the other a village girl; and in his heart he preferred the last-comer.

"Poor little thing! she doesn't like to be stared at. How prettily she blushes! But my young lady looks severe; I believe she has a mind to give me in charge for sketching her." This was how he read the two faces.

"Patty," came in a very gentle voice from the young lady. But Patty had no intention of moving.

"Yes, Miss Beaufort;" she looked slightly over her shoulder, and then turned again towards the artist to watch the progress of his sketch.

Paul glanced mischievously across the road. Just beyond the tree-stump on which Miss Beaufort had been sitting came a gate, with a glimpse of open country behind it.

"She is affronted—I knew she would be. Well, I may have been sketching what these provincials call 'the view,' for anything my young lady knows to the contrary, so she need not look so stately and proper."

Inside Nuna Beaufort's mind he would have seen that what he was construing into *hauteur* and propriety was a nervous sense of discomfort, and the sight might have made him better proof against Patty's charms; but then men—artists especially—are so very human in such a case. Patty's eyes had told him that he was a being to be worshipped, and, moreover, they kept on telling him so, and each time they glanced shyly up through their black lashes, Paul thought them more and more lovely; whereas Nuna, after the first brief surprised look, had kept her eyes steadily averted, just as if he were unworthy of notice.

He was not especially vain; he knew he had a remarkable face, and he also knew that most women liked to look at him, except when his great dark eyes fixed themselves as they had fixed on the pretty village girl.

Miss Beaufort had something to say, and she did not care to be listened to by a stranger. She crossed the road, and came up to Patty.

"Patty, my father has a message to give you for your father; you had better come up to the Parsonage."

Patty curtsied. She looked very demure and meek, but the colour on her cheek grew deeper; it was too bad to have to make a curtsey to Miss Beaufort.

"Yes, ma'am; I'll not forget."

Nuna waited a moment to see if Patty would not follow her, and then she passed up the deeply-shadowed hill, her grey dress marking her slow progress.

Patty did not choose to follow Miss Beaufort; but she remembered propriety now, and she too began to move slowly towards the angle of the lane.

Paul let her go a little way, and then he called after her:

"Can you tell me if I am near a place called Ashton?"

Patty turned, and then she fingered her gown in such pretty modest confusion that Paul thought her more charming than ever.

"You've passed Ashton, sir—if you came down the lane, that's to say."

There was a little breadth of accent in her speech, but there was no marked provincial dialect—nothing that grated on his fastidious ears.

"What is she?" Paul thought.

"Passed it, have I? Then it is beyond the other end of the lane, is it? Is that young lady going to Ashton?"

Patty glanced quickly at him, but he did not even turn to look after the young lady as he asked about her.

"Yes, sir"—her eyes fell again beneath Mr. Whitmore's—"Miss Nuna is going to Ashton Rectory."

"I thought you called her Miss Beaufort?"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Beaufort is our Rector."

The words dropped out as evenly as if they had been clipped; they were so very simple and childlike, that Paul looked at the girl involuntarily to make sure she was not acting.

No; her eyes drooped again timidly, and he fancied the flush deepened on her cheeks.

"I was making a sketch of Miss Beaufort when you came up; would you like to look at it?"

He wanted to make her come nearer. She stood there like a bird on the wing; she might fly off in another moment, and leave no trace. Patty came up shyly. Her lustrous eyes kindled as she looked, and the scarlet lips parted, and showed glistening even teeth, firmly closed.

"How pretty! it's just like Miss Nuna; but there's no face, sir." There was a question in her eyes.

"Well, no." Paul felt guilty in having admired Miss Beaufort at all when he looked at Patty. "I fancy Miss Beaufort's face is her least beauty."

"Some people think her very pretty," and Patty tossed her head. She did not want this gentleman to admire Miss Beaufort, and yet she was not sure how far good manners would permit her to depreciate her.

"Do they?" He looked full into Patty's eyes, and down went the long curved lashes. "I don't admire their taste, then. I want you to tell me something; how is it you manage to keep free from tan and freckles?"

"I wear a sun-bonnet," said Patty, simply.

"She is absurdly innocent," said Paul; "she has no idea what a lovely little creature she is!" Then he went on: "A sun-bonnet! oh, you mean one of those great curious things which perch upon the top of the head. If you had your sun-bonnet now, I could put you in my sketch. I'm afraid it would trouble you too much to get it."

"Oh no, sir"—Patty blushed more bewitchingly still —"Father's cottage is only just round that corner; I'll run and fetch it."

"I'll go with you," and he walked on by her side. "I wonder," he thought, "what Stephen Pritchard would say if he saw me now? Think of his not knowing about such a creature as this is! Perhaps he does, sly rascal, and that was why he talked of Miss Beaufort, to put me off the scent. I know he said his cousin, Will Bright, was making up to the Rector's daughter."

They had just reached the angle of the lane at the foot of the hill, when they came face to face with a gentleman. He looked like a fretful invalid, and he also looked like a clergyman. Patty started away from the artist's side as she saw him.

The clergyman stopped; he looked grave, and there was a rebuking tone in his voice as he spoke to Patty.

"Good day, Martha. I have just been round to look for your father; he's not come back."

"He'll not be back yet, sir, for a day or so."

The clergyman glanced at Paul; he wanted him to move on, but Mr. Whitmore had no mind to be parted from his companion.

"Oh, indeed!" Mr. Beaufort's light blue eyes moved restlessly, and his pale lips twitched with impatience. "Well, then, whenever he does come home send him up to the Rectory at once; I have some very special family news to communicate to him, and the sooner he knows it the better."

"From Australia, sir?" Patty looked up eagerly.

"Yes, and no; but don't ask questions, child. Send your father up as soon as he comes home, and don't go about in this heat bareheaded; you'll get a sunstroke if you do."

Paul had moved away a little, while they talked; but he came up now and raised his hat to the clergyman.

Mr. Beaufort returned the greeting stiffly. This person looked like an artist, and he did not approve of artists; they were always democrats, and they wore such long beards, and had such untidy habits, and they took no interest in politics or agriculture—the only two subjects which, in Mr. Beaufort's opinion, were worthy the attention of a reasonable man; and besides these, he had conceived another objection against Paul Whitmore. He took a good look at him. Yes, he certainly must be an artist. An amateur sketcher would have had more spick and span accompaniments, and would not have carried them with the same careless ease; but, added to this, there was an air of refinement and good breeding about the stranger which made him a most unsuitable companion for Patty Westropp.

"I beg your pardon," said Paul, "but I fancy you are the Rector of Ashton, and if so, perhaps you will be kind enough to direct me. I want to find a place called Gray's Farm. I suppose it is somewhere hereabouts?"

Mr. Beaufort liked to be waited on and cared for, but he dearly loved to impart knowledge; he had been a schoolmaster once, and the habit lingered.

His face softened in expression.

"Gray's Farm; to be sure—a very nice place indeed, but it is three miles off at least; you will have to go quite to the further side of the common yonder."

"Without an atom of shade!" exclaimed Paul; "and I was led to believe I had got to the end of my journey when I reached Ashton."

"May I ask whether you are acquainted with my friend Mr. Bright, the owner of Gray's Farm?"

"I have a letter of introduction to him from a cousin of his. I meant to call on him, but I don't feel inclined to undertake such a walk in this heat."

"Decidedly not; you could not think of such a thing. Your best plan is this: go back to the village; there's a most comfortable little inn there—the Bladebone. You'll find cleanliness and fair cookery—very fair cookery indeed—and very civil people. My friend Mr. Bright is almost sure to drive in to-morrow or next day, and he'll take you back with him to Gray's. I really think this is your best plan."

"Thank you," said Paul politely — to himself, "Why doesn't the old fellow ask me to the Rectory? He need not fancy I'm going to make love to his daughter."

"I'm going up the lane," said Mr. Beaufort, "I can show you the inn."

"Thank you, but I have to finish a sketch I've been working at; and I need not tell you that in another half-hour the sun's position will have changed, and with it my light and shade. I'm very much obliged to you, though," and he raised his hat again.

If Paul Whitmore had seen the glance of unfeigned admiration Patty darted at him, he might have doubted her extreme simplicity. Patty had managed the Rector herself, but she knew that he was not easy to manage. The artist's frank, careless ease won her even more than his good looks had done.

## CHAPTER III.

THE RECTOR'S STUDY.

"I SEE," said the Rector to himself, as he went slowly up through the gloomy shadow, "I wronged that young fellow; Martha's is certainly a very remarkable face, and he is going to sketch it; I think he is too much of a gentleman to find pleasure in talking to a village girl; and yet I don't know really," and Mr. Beaufort's face lengthened as he climbed the hill, and his breath grew short.

He paused when he reached the chequered level at top, and took breath before he began the descent.

"It shows me how careful one ought to be. There was something strangely fascinating about that young fellow; I had it almost on my tongue to ask him to the Rectory; but of course, if he can make a companion of Martha Westropp, he is not a fit associate for Nuna, and really Nuna has such curious ideas about associates, she cares so little for birth or position, that one can't be too particular—impossible."

He walked down-hill, and as he went he reflected that after all it was a good thing that Nuna was not fastidious; this carelessness of hers would make the darling scheme of his life—a marriage between his daughter and Will Bright, the wealthy owner of Gray's Farm—not only possible, but probable.

"Mary would never have listened to such a thing, I know; but then Mary did not always know what was best for her young sister, and the Gray's people have some old blood, and I don't see who else is likely to take a fancy to Nuna, and I'm sure I can't

provide for her. Mary was a good creature, but prejudiced, poor dear girl."

This was the way in which Mr. Beaufort spoke of the daughter who had devoted her whole life to his service. He had lost his wife early, and Mary had striven hard to supply her mother's place, till just a few months ago; then death had come and released her from her life of incessant, unselfish toil.

When you reach the end of Carving's Wood Lane, if you look well about you, you will see on your right hand, at some little distance on the further side of the way, bits of scarlet roof peeping among the trees that skirt the road; beyond is a pond, with children maybe playing near it, and other indications that a village is nestling somewhere thereabouts.

But the village is completely backed by Lord Storton's woods; and the road by which Paul Whitmore had come from the railway runs alongside these woods, so that when he reached the cross-roads, seeing the delicious cool shelter of the lane opposite him, it is not surprising that he plunged into it at once, without so much as looking to the right or left. If he had only looked one way he might not have guessed at the village, it lay so completely sheltered; the brown cottages with their red roofs and chimneys peeped out among the leaves like robins from a tree nest.

But on the left from the lane, the point to which the Rector turned must have attracted Paul's notice had he looked towards it. Thirty yards this way the road turned abruptly and split into three; a white hand-post on a triangular bit of grass informed passengers that from that point they could get to Ashton, to Guildford, and to Weston. On the right, facing the road to Weston, which ran nearly parallel with Carving's Wood Lane, and sheltered by an abrupt turn made by the London road, was another announcement on a signboard, and behind it a small inn.

Generally there was plenty of life to be seen here,

from the grinning ostler to Mr. Dennis Fagg himself, the landlord of the "Bladebone." But on this hot afternoon everything had gone to sleep except the gnats, and these sent forth such a joyous trumpeting at the approach of a fresh victim, that Mr. Beaufort's evenly pink face grew red, and he pushed his hand irritably through his fair curling hair as the little torments buzzed about it.

The "Bladebone" looked comfortable and fresh. The original house had been red brick, and the entrance-door of this stood open on the top of a couple of cracked stone steps; to the red brick portion a piece had been added on in lath and plaster—a long room with a bow-window facing the road and a bedroom window above, with snowy knitted curtains on brass rods. The sign-board might have been fresher. A dingy board displayed the Bladebone in such a weather-stained indistinct condition that it might have been any other bone; in this respect it matched with the horse-trough and mounting stones, which were cracked and broken, and covered with the green and grey livery old outdoor servants are wont to wear. Beyond the house came some large drooping ash-trees, their graceful branches bending thirstily over the dark cool pond below them till its furthermost end was almost hidden—a quaint mystery which every now and then one of the brown ducks floating along so lazily, with orange feet drifting behind it, was venturesome enough to explore.

That pond, and the exquisite contrast it made in its sombre darkness against the glittering green above, would have rewarded Paul Whitmore if he had chosen the dusty high-road instead of the shady lane: it may be that if he had chosen it, the web of his after-life might have been a less tangled one.

Mr. Beaufort had no eyes for the beauties of nature to-day; he wanted to get away from the gnats.

"Are they all asleep? Dennis! I say, Dennis, where are you?"

A newspaper fluttered at the open bow-window, and

then the Rector perceived two arms in shirt-sleeves stretched widely apart, as if some one were rousing from a nap, and yawned all ways at once.

But as he saw this, Mrs. Fagg the landlady appeared on the doorstep.

A neat-looking woman who had once been fresh and pretty, but her fair skin had lost its roses, and her blue eyes had sunk back in her head; still there was an exquisite cleanliness in her appearance, a deft quickness in all she did and all she said, which impressed you with the notion that Mrs. Fagg was a fit hostess for the village inn.

"Good afternoon, sir," she spoke in a thin birdlike voice, but every word as distinct as a postman's knock. "Do you want Dennis particular, sir, or can't I do? He's more asleep than awake now, and it'll take a week of Sundays to get him clear-headed."

"The heat, eh?" said the Rector, smiling.

"Oh yes, the heat, sir." Mrs. Fagg stuck her head on one side, and flapped two fingers impatiently against her waistband, in a half-defiant fashion.

"Well, the heat is exhausting," said Mr. Beaufort. "I have been all round by Carving's Wood Lane, and I really dread the effect of such an effort."

"Come in and take a glass of lemonade, sir, do."

Mr. Beaufort raised his hand in deprecation. "Lemonade, Mrs. Fagg! let me beg of you not to recommend such a drink on a day like this; it would be most injurious, but you would not understand me if I explained its dangerous qualities," he said, with a melancholy shake of the head. "No; but, Mrs. Fagg, if Dennis goes to Guildford to-morrow, and chances to meet with Roger, tell him to say that I have news for him—very important news, too."

"Yes, sir; and perhaps you'll be so good, sir, as to ask Miss Nuna if she'll not forget to send my Bobby home; his tea's ready, and waitin'."

"Bobby!" Mr. Beaufort started, and turned a shade paler; "do you mean that Miss Nuna has taken Bobby

to the Rectory? Good day, Mrs. Fagg. Oh dear me!" These last words were said out of the landlady's hearing; the Rector had forgotten the heat and his effort, forgotten even himself, in dread of the mischief which might be happening at the Rectory while he hurried along the dusty road beyond the inn.

He had not far to go. A field, bordered by a wall of ragstone, came beyond the ash-trees, and after this a high yew hedge on a lower wall, then a tall iron gate set seemingly in the hedge itself, which formed a smooth round arch atop of it.

Mr. Beaufort hurried through this gate up a long shaded drive, in which the house stood sideways, and, passing several pleasant-looking windows all sheltered by a thatched verandah, he almost ran in at an open glass door in the centre of the long low house.

He checked his rapid pace in the hall, and put his hat down. It was a pretty quaint place, like a summer parlour, with its matted floor and nosegays and round table in the centre strewn with books and papers; a child's hat lay on these, and the Rector frowned as he saw it.

"Just like her,"—he spoke so fretfully that one longed to shake him,—"no more thought, no more consideration for others than that china jar," and he wrung his white useless-looking hands.

He went on into a sort of inner entrance, and opened a door on the left.

The picture that presented itself was disturbing, not to say irritating. All Mr. Beaufort's books and papers lay scattered on the floor, and among these lay his reading-lamp; the inkstand had been overturned, and a black stream trickled slowly from the edge of the study table on to the carpet below; while the perpetrator of the mischief, a red-haired boy of four years old, marched triumphantly up and down the table itself, singing the British Grenadiers, the green shade of the reading-lamp on his head, and the hearth-broom resting in military fashion on his shoulder.

And in the midst of this disarray, to all seeming unconscious of it, Nuna sat on the floor, one hand clasping her forehead and the other holding an old book of prints.

She looked very charming; but Mr. Beaufort saw no beauty in her attitude. Poor man, he had only eyes for the "Douglas larder" on the floor. All he saw in Nuna was that her hair was untidy and her dress crumpled, and he could not command his anger.

"Nuna, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—you really ought. Bobby ought to be whipped; but he is less to blame than you are. How could you? I never saw such a thing! Take him away, take him away directly and never let me see him here again; do you hear?—never, never again."

Nuna had risen up, but she stood paralysed. She really was very sorry and very much ashamed, and she longed to say so; but her father's words pelted like hail, they came so fast and hard, and there were plainly more to follow; there seemed only one answer to make. She turned to Bobby—he stood sucking his thumb in sullen terror; she lifted him from the table and left the room hand in hand with the chubby offender.

"Come along, Bobby, do come along; here's your hat. O Bobby, Bobby, hush! Can't you keep your crying in, dear, till we've got to the gate?—do, there's a darling; the Rector is angry when boys cry."

Outside the study door Bobby's terror had vented itself in the sort of unearthly howl which only boys are capable of, and which probably compensates to their freeborn minds the degrading subjection in which they are held by weaker vessels.

"I doesn't tare," he sobbed; "he's angedy now; he's as naughty as me, he is; he's in a paccon, and mother say it's naughty to det in paccons."

He left off howling, but his scarlet cheeks and panting chest warned Nuna that another outburst was coming. She gave up all attempt at soothing, and catching him

up in her arms she ran with him as fast as she could to the end of the drive.

There she set him down.

"O Bobby," she said sorrowfully, "how could you be so cruel? You have kicked me so hard, and my head aches with the noise you made."

"Do it?" He gave a wondering stare, and left off sobbing at once with a little compunctious sigh.

"I didn't want to hurt oo," he said, "acos I yoves oo."

Nuna stooped down and gave him such a kiss that his cheek tingled.

"Ah, Bobby, we have both been naughty; I ought not to have taken you into the study, and you ought not to have been so mischievous."

Bobby's round blue eyes opened widely at this, and Nuna remembered she was talking above his comprehension.

"Good-bye, dear," she said; "run home to mother as fast as you can."

She stood looking through the gate, but she did not see anything out of those large liquid eyes of hers. Will Bright, the young master of Gray's Farm, said that Nuna Beaufort's eyes could flash scornfully, and that they were magnificent when they did; but just now they were full of pensive sorrow—her whole attitude was listless and unhappy.

"I don't want to live my life over again," she thought; "oh no, it would be too wearying to have all Elizabeth's scoldings and worries about nothing. And yet there is a comfort in being like Bobby; he has his cry, and then he grows good, and no one thinks of bringing up his faults against him afterwards. If my father would once forget my carelessness, perhaps I could turn over a new leaf and begin again; and yet I don't know why there should be so much fuss about mere carelessness. Suppose I were cross, surely that would be worse." She stood trying to think how it had happened. "It was all the fault of that likeness. I know we have it in Lodge's portraits, or somewhere,

if I could only find it; and I dare not ask where it is. Oh, I wish I could remember whose portrait it is! I would keep it for my own, and then I could always see it."

Nuna blushed, and looked charmingly ashamed of herself. She had made her father angry, and got into this horrible dilemma, because she had been so eager to find a portrait like the stranger in Carving's Wood Lane, that she had forgotten all the proprieties of life.

Of course Bobby ought not to have gone into the study; she knew that, and she had left him outside in the entrance-hall while she hurried on to find the book she wanted. She meant to take it back to her little companion; but once at the book-shelves, she became uncertain and puzzled, and finally pulled down two or three volumes, and grew far too absorbed in her search, and in a certain dreamy reverie concerning the unknown stranger, to pay any heed to the child's entrance, or his efforts at providing his own entertainment.

Poor Nuna! when Mr. Beaufort said that Mary had not always known what was best for her young sister, he was nearer the truth than he knew; and yet he spoke in blind ignorance of Nuna's real nature. He thought that his child ought to do her duty towards him, simply because it was her duty; and all unconsciously he made the duty vexatiously hard, and never attempted to lighten it by an extra caress, by any sign of the natural love he must have felt for his youngest child. There are people in this world whose affections must be taken on trust; they are so absorbed on self, or so desperately hard to draw out, that a more impressionable sensitive nature recoils from the effort heart-sick, and resigns itself to the belief that it is unloved. And in this way Mr. Beaufort was right about Mary's judgment.

If Nuna had always grown up with her father, there might have been less reserve between them; but at fifteen she was so dreamy, so thoughtless and irregular

in all her ways, that Mary grew disheartened and wearied between the worries entailed by the daily habits of father and sister. Mr. Beaufort was neat and precise, but he wanted as much waiting on as a fanciful woman. It seemed to Mary that the best hope for Nuna lay in placing her away from home with some regular, precise person, with whom she could be well and carefully educated. Doubtless Nuna would have done better at school, but Mr. Beaufort's aristocratic mind revolted against the contamination of mixed society for his daughters. His views of life were apt to be taken through a pair of special spectacles, and he was never quite convinced of the sanity or good repute of any one who did not use these glasses too.

So Nuna had been sent up to London to live in Bloomsbury with a distant cousin of Mr. Beaufort, a Miss Matthews, who till this arrangement lived with her mother in a country town on the scanty income of a captain's widow.

Miss Matthews was now an orphan. She was not clever, but she had a keenness of shallow perception, and she was a disciplinarian in all the small ways of life; she was also quite capable of superintending the work Nuna would have to prepare for her various teachers.

"Nuna has plenty of ability," thought the careful, anxious sister; "she will not be idle if she is well taught, and Elizabeth's constant oversight will be so much better for her than mine."

The tender soul shrank from the constant blame she had to administer. Mary was far too humble-minded to see that her gentle patience, her cheerful labour for all, might have provoked imitation. She was more bent on sowing fresh seed than of educing original qualities by special cultivation, and the result in Nuna's case was to all human sight a failure.

Nuna left Bloomsbury certainly more dreamy and unlike other people than she went there, and with a now failing developed and ripened into habit—an intense

dislike of Elizabeth Matthews, and to the petty rules and regulations she associated with her remembrance.

When she came home, she found Mary in failing health, and again her sister's unselfish tenderness injured Nuna. Mary knew that she was in a rapid consumption, and she begged so hard that Nuna might be spared the slightest risk of infection, that Mr. Beaufort consented to admit the services of a professional nurse.

The end came very soon, and it still seemed a dream to Nuna that this darling sister, the only creature who had loved her, or cared for her love in return, was gone to her rest, as her gentle mother had gone before her.

"They were both so good," said Nuna, her thoughts travelling on as she stood at the gate; "how much more comfortable either of them would have made my father than I do. I wonder why the best people always die and the worst ones are always left?" She checked the next idea that came. She wished for a more peaceful life in the hazy, indefinite way that was natural to her, but she could not bring herself to wish to change places with Mary. With all her dreamy ways, Nuna was full of warm, glowing life; she felt that if she only knew where it lay there was happiness that might be hers somewhere—a life quite different to this that she was leading—a life with more of sorrow in it perhaps, but with passages of rapturous joy between.

"That was just one of the things which showed me I could never get on with Elizabeth; she always would say that an even, calm, untroubled life, free from passions either way, is so preferable to my up-and-down dreams." Here came a sudden start, and a vision of the study. "Oh, I quite forgot! Oh, the ink! the ink!" She darted back to the house at full speed, not to the front entrance, but plunging into a narrow path cut in the shrubbery, she found her way to the kitchen.

"Jane, Jane, take a flannel, will you, and a pail of hot water and soap, and whatever else is good for ink; some has been upset in the study."

Jane, the red-faced country girl who acted as

housemaid, giggled; even the civil, respectful cook smiled.

"It's all right, miss, don't you trouble," she said; "Jane and me have wiped all up, and set everything straight, and master's writing away quite comfortable."

It was a relief to hear this, and yet Nuna felt uneasy; she would have liked to help in repairing some of the damage she had caused.

She went on to the study and knocked at the door, her heart beating loudly with fright.

There was no answer, and she knocked again.

"Who's there? Don't come in, I'm busy," in a very worried voice.

"Yes," Mr. Beaufort sat listening to his daughter's retreating footsteps; "I've no doubt Nuna is sorry, and all that, but it's too late; I really can't overlook such carelessness. I really could not go through another scene with her. And if she had come in and had seen this letter we should have had an argument, and I have had quite as much disturbance as I can bear in one day—quite." He finished his letter, sealed it, and then took it himself to the "Bladebone."

He did not choose that Nuna should discover he had been writing to Elizabeth Matthews.

"She will be sure to come," he said. "She has few invitations, poor thing! and her example, even for a few weeks, will be of immense use to Nuna—immense. Yes, I am sure the step is a judicious one."

## CHAPTER IV.

### ONLY A PENCIL SCRIBBLE.

AND while Nuna was incurring reproof and punishment (for the visit of his cousin was a bitterer infliction than Mr. Beaufort knew) because she so longed to find

Paul Whitmore's likeness, what had Paul been saying to Patty Westropp?

Very little indeed. At the angle of the lane where Mr. Beaufort left them the girl hurried on, and before Paul could overtake her she ran away through a little white gate that seemed to lead nowhere, it was so blocked with lofty scarlet bean vines. However, these bespoke the unseen presence of a cottage; and moving on a few steps, Paul came in view of the low white-washed dwelling, with its cabbage garden.

The garden showed signs of thrifty cultivation. The cabbage-stumps were left to sprout, and rows of vegetables and plots of herbs were so close together that there was little space for flowers. A porch was outside the door; within it on each side a crazy-looking bench. The whole erection was so weather-stained and worm-eaten that the over-wreathing honeysuckle seemed rather to support it in its embrace than to be clinging to the porch itself.

Paul had just turned a fresh page of his book to sketch the porch, when Patty appeared at the open door behind it, blushing under her white sun-bonnet.

She made such a picture there among the pink and white flowers that the artist in Paul got the better of the mere human being. "Will you stand there a minute, please? Yes, like that; thank you."

He had put in as much as he wanted of her in five minutes, and then threw his head first over one shoulder, then over the other, to look at his handiwork; Patty stood still, blushing and smiling, far happier than she would have been at the finest compliment in mere words from the stranger gentleman.

Her portrait painted by a real London artist!—for she felt sure he came from London.

"I wonder what Miss Coppock will say? She never had a painted portrait done of her, nothing but a brown photograph."

She stood as he had told her, looking at the honeysuckle, her cheeks matching its loveliness; she could

not see that Paul had only used his pencil, and that he was actually closing his sketch-book.

"I have finished, thank you," said Mr. Whitmore, gently.

"Finished!" Patty bit her lips hard to keep the tears out of her eyes. "Finished!" She knew nothing about sketching, but she felt sure that no one could make a proper painted portrait of her in that minute—a painted portrait like Miss Nuna's up at the Rectory when she was a little girl, or those grander ones at the Park, which Patty had seen long ago, when as a child she had been taken up to the housekeeper's room to be shown to the grand lady who kept Lord Storton's keys. The little puss had been expecting that a full-length picture would grow by magic out from Paul's fingers, and she felt as if she had fallen into a trap.

Seeing that she made no movement towards him, Paul jumped over the low fence, and crossed the bit of garden between it and the porch.

Something in her face struck him; she looked disappointed, he thought.

"Would you like to see the sketch, Patty?—Patty's your name, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," and again the words dropped out like round sugar-plums. Paul felt provoked at her apparent stolidity.

Patty's eyes fastened eagerly on the page he held to her; her breath came short, and her colour deepened to crimson as she looked.

Why, this was worse than she expected. Painting! it was just a sort of pencil scribble that any one could have done as well. Miss Nuna had drawn Bobby Fagg ten times better. It was all porch and flowers, with a few scratches behind that might be meant for any one.

Paul was watching her face, and he could not mistake the vexation there.

"What's the matter?" he said smiling. "Isn't it like?"

But Patty was resolved not to tell; she nearly choked

in the effort to keep back her tears, but she kept them back.

"I was thinking how pleased Father would be to see it, sir. He was going to take the old wood down to light fires with, but I asked him to leave it for the suckle to rest on."

"Take it down! why, the cottage would be hideous without it—it's the making of the place."

"Yes, sir."

But the enchantment was broken for Paul. Patty no longer sent up those sweet shy glances through her black eyelashes; she seemed really afraid of him now.

"Do you always live here?" he asked. He was trying to make an excuse for seeing her again, and he wanted another glance from those exquisite blue eyes.

"I do now, sir; I keep house for Father."

"And your father goes out to work, I suppose."

Patty looked up quickly, and Paul's eyes soothed her wounded vanity. It was plain he thought her beautiful, though he had not painted her.

"Yes, sir; Father gardens and does for the cows and horses at the Rectory."

"I see; and do you go to the Rectory, or what do you do?"

"I stay within and mind the house," said Patty, demurely.

She was still framed in by the porch, her dimpled pink fingers playing with the strings of her sun-bonnet, and Paul stood close to her, looking at her. He did not want her to talk now; every instant he was growing more dangerously infatuated with the strange power her beauty had on him—and Patty liked to be looked at.

There came a sound of lowing from the back of the cottage, and she started.

It was long past milking-time, she knew that, and Peggy the cow would be cross, and maybe knock both her and the milk-pail over; but Peggy must wait, Patty was not going to demean herself by milking before

this gentleman: he would think her no better than a common farm servant.

Again came the same lowing sound, and fear of Peggy's temper conquered Patty's love of being admired.

"I must go, sir, please."

Paul roused himself; he had forgotten time and everything else.

"I should like to paint you really; if I come this way to-morrow, I shall find you here, shall I?" he said so winningly, that Patty forgave him the pencil-scribble at once.

"Yes, sir," and this time she looked at him and smiled while she spoke, looked as if she really wanted to see him again. The smile drove him almost distracted.

"Good-bye," he said, reluctantly. "Won't you shake hands, Patty?" he held out his slender brown hand.

Patty blushed with triumph. She put her rosy, plump fingers into his, and looked up in his face once more.

This time her eyes did not droop again directly; they took a proud, admiring glance at him.

Just then Peggy lowed angrily, and Patty drew her hand from the warm clasp.

Paul turned hastily away, and did not look back till he reached the little gate.

There he drew a deep breath.

"What am I about?" he thought. "I'm a fool: I laughed at Pritchard when he said he had better come down and take care of me among the country girls. Nonsense, I'll go and find the inn."

## CHAPTER V.

### AT THE "BLADEBONE."

MR. FAGG was still nursing his newspaper, but his wife soon caught the sound of an arrival.

She came to the open door and curtsied to Mr. Whitmore.

Paul took a liking to her at once, but Mrs. Fagg's neat instincts shrank from the sight of his baggage.

"I want some dinner and a bedroom," he said. "The rest of my luggage is at the station; I suppose you have some one you can send out for it?"

The landlady was pleased with his gentle manner, but this request was unusual and irregular.

"There's a fly at the station, sir, and strange gentlefolks always takes it and brings their traps along. I'm sure I don't know who it is, then, I can send," she went on sharply; "Mr. Fagg's asleep, and tired besides, and folks is most all out harvesting. Roger now, if he'd been at home, he'd go for you."

"Who's Roger?" A dim remembrance of the name made Paul inquisitive.

"He's the Rector's man, sir; but after-hours, no matter how hard he's been working, Roger 'ud walk his legs off to earn a shilling. But come in, sir, please; I oughtn't to keep you standing. This way, sir."

She led the way into a small room behind her own parlour, a room like that of any other village inn, except, perhaps, that the muslin curtains looked fresher, the horsehair sofa brighter, and that, instead of the usual, tawdry paper flowers in the grate, it was entirely hidden by glistening white deal shavings, from the centre

of which rose a plume of shield fern, with a spike or two of late foxglove here and there.

Only an artist knows how irritation of any kind is allayed by an object of beauty, no matter what. Paul had not felt peaceful or contented when he reached the "Bladebone," and now something, perhaps the exquisite grace of the foxgloves, soothed him at once. He walked on to the window at the end of the room, and looked into the garden, and he breathed freely with a sense of keen enjoyment.

A London gardener—the possessor of any conventional garden with close-shaven lawn, rolled gravel-walks, and box-edged flower borders—would, I suppose, have shuddered at the irregular mingling of flowers and fruit, and herbs and cabbages, displayed in the garden of the "Bladebone." It was not very wide; the wall that fenced it on one side was gemmed with ruby morellas, some of them so purple that they looked ready to drop into the mouth of any one who might go near enough. It was difficult to guess how far the garden reached: golden brown wreaths of pears and red and russet-cheeked apples so overshadowed it that the eye was baffled as to its extent; and the gay plots of cloves and marigolds and snowy rocket were backed by dwarf hedges, in which large lusty apples lay basking as if the sunshine were made specially to burnish their jolly brown faces; lavender bushes, like middle-aged women with scanty hair all sticking up on end, were frequent; and so were courtly hollyhocks, suggestive of powder and propriety, and others with stocks, quaint old-fashioned darlings which we can never improve on, though we may add to their number.

Just below the window grew a huge patch of mignonette, and Paul leaned out to enjoy the fragrance.

"Will you like to see the bedroom, sir?" said Mrs. Fagg; and when she had shown him into it she left him, promising him his dinner in a quarter of an hour.

The bedroom was so exquisitely clean and fresh,

with its snowy dimity and neat furnishings, that when Paul had washed away the dust and heat of his journey, he felt quite at home.

"I believe I'll stay here," he said as he went downstairs again; "this Bright may be a disagreeable, ignorant fellow, for anything I know. I would not have accepted the introduction, only I thought he lived in the village, and I could see what he was like without going expressly to see him. I hate forcing myself on any one's hospitality; and this place seems full of charming bits—and Gray's Farm may be ugly. And then there's that sweet Patty." He paused a few minutes. "I want my dinner, I expect," he said lightly, "or such absurd fancies would not come into my head. What harm can there be either to the girl or me if I study that lovely face of hers for a few days? Quite a bit of study, and a very rare bit too in point of colour; she would soon make her fortune as a model."

He went to his sitting-room window and looked out. Mr. Fagg was coming across the garden. He was a short stout man, and walked with his legs wide apart; his head was narrow at top, with a massive jowl and throat, so that Mr. Fagg bore in some respects a likeness to the letter A, especially when he walked. His neighbours said he was like a flat fish, but that was probably because of his small dull eyes, and wide thin-lipped mouth. He looked up at the window and touched his hat.

"Good afternoon, sir." Mr. Fagg's voice still sounded sleepy. "Do you know these parts, sir?"

"No, I'm a stranger here."

Paul Whitmore had the reserve one often finds in an artist—in any mind, in fact, to which concentration of thought has become the necessity it must become to him who creates, and in whom it is often, though not always, a pre-existent faculty. With Paul this reserve was far more apparent towards men than towards women, perhaps because he was more used to the society of the first, and so was more constantly on guard with them; and also, it may be, that the ardent enthusiasm

which lay hidden under the somewhat cold manner he had among his equals was so apt to kindle at sight of a beautiful face, that the excitement produced rendered him for the time more what he really could be when moved than that which he really was in daily life. And abrupt and haughty as he could and would be under the slightest attempt at patronage from even the most beautiful woman, there was the spirit of true chivalry hidden somewhere in Paul's heart; the spirit—which either the railway system or the self-assertion of women has done so much to root out of being—of true reverence for a woman, young or old, simply because she is a creature made not only to be useful to man, but also to be protected by him.

Paul's father had died when he was sixteen, and his mother had not lingered long after her husband. Dearly as she had loved her boy, he had not had the full association with her, the full monopoly of her time, that is sometimes the portion of sons less dearly loved; for Mrs. Whitmore had been a writer, and it was from her that Paul inherited that power of concentration without which imagination may indeed work, but can never work effectively. So the mother and son had gone on living in the same house, each, although the other knew it not, pining for a more united life, till death had come with awful suddenness one day, and had taken the weary woman to rest.

Not so suddenly that she could not speak a few last words to Paul. Paul kneeling horror-struck beside her, unable to realize the truth of that which was going on before him—to him it was all a mocking drama; even he seemed to act that which he did and spoke.

"Paul," she said, gently, "I have worked only for you. I meant to have tried for more leisure, to be more to you as a companion than I have been. I have loved you, darling, God knows how much, but I see now that was not enough. I might perhaps have been more to you than mere money ever can be. Don't marry a dreamy wife, Paul; you will not be happy with her."

He could not speak, but he covered her hands with passionate kisses.

We never perhaps become aware of a definite want in our natures except by the loss of that which has suffered by it, and therefore Paul Whitmore had always considered his mother's words as the pure fruit of her unselfish devotion to him, and of her self-blaming nature. He worshipped his mother as men do who have a strong power of tenderness, and now that he had lost her it seemed to him that he had only half loved her as she deserved to have been loved, he had shown her so little outward affection. It is possible too that he had been more conscious of his mother's silent sympathy than she knew of, for since her death he had been possessed by a kind of restlessness.

He rarely made acquaintances; it may have been that, as it was no effort to him to create a favourable impression, he took no pains to effect it; the reputation he had, both among fellow-artists and others, was, "a very jolly fellow, if he would only let you know him."

It seemed to Paul, as Mr. Fagg's small inexpressive eyes fixed themselves on his face, that this clodhopper was inquisitive, and he was determined to give him as little satisfaction as possible.

"Do you know whether any one can fetch my portmanteau from the station?" he said.

"If to-morrow 'ud do, sir, I'd go myself."

Fagg had a slow, ponderous utterance; his mind had become overgrown by matter, and so had a weary journey before it could find an outlet.

"To-morrow won't do. You don't mean to tell me there is not a single industrious fellow in the village besides this Roger your wife talks about."

"Well, sir, you see, Roger—well," Fagg stopped to scratch his head, "he's a wonner, he is. Now, sir, that chap passes for being poor, and it's my belief that he hoards and saves every farthing instead of keeping things about him comfortable, and letting that pretty lass of his see a little life."

Paul's reserve melted on the instant.

"Has he a family, then?" He had no intention of owning his acquaintance with Patty.

"Well, sir, hardly what you'll call a family. His wife died years ago, and left him with this one girl, and he's brought her up hisself; and I must say," Fagg looked behind him cautiously, and then lowered his voice, "and I'm sure if you come across Patty you'll bear me out in saying, she's as pretty a face as ever you looked on."

"Dinner if you please, sir." Mrs. Fagg's voice sounded very sharp at Paul's elbow, and then she placed a chair for him at the table, and took her place behind it.

Paul had forgotten his hunger, he wanted to hear the rest of Patty's history without the necessity of asking questions; but he knew by a sort of instinct that Fagg was not likely to talk about a pretty girl in the hearing of his wife. He seated himself at the table in silence; he did not even compliment Mrs. Fagg on the excellent cooking of the mutton-chops she took the cover from.

There came a sound of voices in the passage, and Mrs. Fagg went out of the room.

"If you please, sir," she said, when she came in again, "Mr. Fagg is going to the station himself with a letter for the Rector—there is a later post goes out from the station, you see, sir; so if you'll be so good as to say what your luggage is, Dennis 'ull bring it along; and if you please, sir, the Rector would like a word with you himself." Then, in a lower voice, "That was the Rector just now, and I said you was at dinner, sir, and that you will step round to the Rectory after. I was afraid your chops 'ud have been quite spoiled by such time as the Rector had done with you, if you'd have seen him now."

Paul looked up half annoyed at being managed for; but there was something thoroughly feminine in Mrs. Fagg's face, though it was an intelligent one—something, too, so well featured and pleasant that he was mollified.

"He's a sort of invalid, you see, sir, the Rector, and he do get just a trifle prosy and slow in his talk. Poor gentleman, he's sadly put about to-day on account of Roger being away; such a thing hasn't happened for years, and wouldn't now, only the old man thought it might be to his advantage. It's his late wife's mother, you see, sir, is dying, and she sent for Roger, so the Rector tells me."

"Yes," said Paul; then to himself, "Confound the woman! why can't she talk about Patty?"

He felt very stupid, he supposed it was the heat; but try as he would, he could not hit on any way of approaching the desired subject indirectly. He waited till Mrs. Fagg's reticence had quite exhausted his slender patience, and then he said, just what he might have said ten minutes sooner:

"Your husband says this Roger has a pretty daughter."

Mrs. Fagg was changing his plate as he spoke. She never allowed the maid to wait on young gentlemen, "for fear of larks," she said, but the plate nearly fell from her dexterous hand. She tossed her head, and then shook it. Dennis was foolish sometimes, but she never could have thought of such folly as this; to go making a gentleman—a young one like this, too—curious to see Patty Westropp! "Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Well, sir, I believe my husband do think her pretty; she's too high-coloured for my taste. You should have seen Miss Mary—Miss Beaufort, sir; *she* was pretty, if you like—face and figure and conduct all to match."

"Where's she gone to?" said Paul, carelessly.

"She's in heaven, sir," Mrs. Fagg said softly. "Do you like your cheese decayed or sound, sir? we have both."

"Neither, thank you—I've done. Where shall I find the Rectory?" said Paul; he was rather shocked by Mrs. Fagg's abrupt transition.

She went to the door and showed him the way; but he had no intention of going there at once. He saun-

tered into the inn garden, and smoked his pipe among the apple hedges.

He did not want to go to the Rectory. Something about Mr. Beaufort, even in that short interview, had smacked of conventionality, and in the country Paul liked to be free from all restrictions.

"If I go to the Rectory I shall have to behave myself, and perhaps have to talk to that piece of pale propriety who ran away from me in the lane this morning. How much more really innocent the other little girl was—so truly simple!"

And with this thought in his head Paul Whitmore went at last to the Rectory to make the acquaintance of Nuna Beaufort.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AT GRAY'S FARM.

MRS. BRIGHT, as she sits facing her tea-urn, is a comfortable representative of the Englishwoman of middle age, not too plump for a certain amount of good looks. She has a fresh bright complexion, and a sweet and kind expression; there are few lines on her smooth forehead, thought being one of the things which Mrs. Bright considers specially intended for mankind—women being made to look nice, be useful, and do as they are bid, especially by their lords and masters; from which considerations the reader will perceive, if he be discerning, that Mrs. Bright is a woman of a thoroughly conservative kind, with no dangerous modern dogmas about her.

At this moment her pleasant face has somewhat the aspect of a surprised full moon; the eyebrows have so raised themselves that her forehead is far from smooth as she listens to her son's news.

"Good gracious, Will! you don't mean that Stephen Pritchard has been random enough to send a stranger

down upon us without warning? Why"—here the beaming face turns almost the colour of a red peony—"dear me, dear me! and I've just picked my best lace cap to pieces for wash, and I have not got a new shape yet to make it up on again. Stephen really might have a little thought—so clever as he is too!"

Mr. William Bright has risen from breakfast before his mother comes to the end of her sentence; he stoops over his leather bag, fastening a strap tightly round it, and his face is flushed by the effort as he looks up again.

Will is a fine young fellow, tall and square and deep-chested, with honest clear grey eyes, and the fair hair that goes so well along with them. It is far easier to describe the master of Gray's Farm than to describe Mr. Paul Whitmore; and as one man had much to do in making and marring the happiness of the other's life, it may be well here to speak of them together; and as a true description must always partake of the nature of the person described, that of Paul can only be fitful and uncertain. The charm of his face lay in expression, and this varied as a landscape varies under passing clouds across April sunshine. Words cannot paint Paul's smile; it came like a sudden summer, but when it faded you felt you had a new revelation of the dark-eyed man you had been thinking proud and cold.

Will Bright is a man to be looked at at any time you please; his face bespeaks him at once—no need to wait for the clue given by a smile or a frown. As he stands smiling at his mother's discomfiture, he is as fine a specimen of manhood as you can see anywhere; an impersonation of handsome health and strength, of that fair square Saxon type which is often united to two specially English mental qualities—dogged resolution in practical duties, and a narrow judgment on folks who have less perpendicular principles.

Will is more awkward than shy; he is thoroughly self-reliant. His mother has worshipped him from his cradle with the sort of teasing fondness some mothers,

and some sisters too, indulge in, and though Will is a good son he sets little store by his mother's judgment.

"Stephen only thinks of the people in his books, mother; you see he knows nothing about dress, and I don't think your cap matters."

"Dear me, Will, not matter how I look! I thought you liked your mother to look nice."

"She always looks nice." Will stoops and kisses her, much as he would have pacified a child. "But Stephen should have written beforehand. From what Mr. Beaufort said last night, this Mr. Whitmore was coming over to us without any notice at all, just when the Rector met him. Mr. Beaufort says he seems a pleasant fellow; he sent him to the 'Bladebone,' but I was in a hurry to get home, so I didn't go in there. I asked the Rector to say I was going from home for a day or two, and I would call and drive Mr. Whitmore out here on Monday. Mr. Beaufort seemed to think he should ask him to the Rectory to-morrow."

"Ask him to the Rectory!" Mrs. Bright's happy face fills with sudden trouble; "and he an artist! Oh, my dear Will, I'd rather have had him here fifty times —indeed, indeed I would. So fond of sketching as Nuna is too; and who is to say they may not go out sketching together and get flirting over the paints? O Will, I can't tell you how anxious you've made me!"

"Anxious! what d'ye mean, mother?" Will speaks as surlily as a man is apt to speak when he fully realizes a danger presented to him by another—danger which, because the suggester of it is a woman, he loftily resolves to ignore.

"Will, dear, please don't be tiresome. I don't know, but I don't fancy you are quite so sure of Nuna Beaufort as to give every young fellow a chance of pleasing her—and you say this Mr. Whitmore is pleasant."

"Oh, bother chances!" says Will, all the sunshine hidden by the cloud that shadows his grey eyes. "I know one thing well enough, Nuna will choose only to please herself, and I can't keep her from seeing a

dozen strangers a week if she has the chance, so why on earth should I try?" he ends defiantly, and takes up his bag.

Mrs. Bright looks up proudly at her tall, handsome son.

"Well, dear," she says, with that wonderful humility mothers display far more liberally to their sons than to their husbands, "of course we all know she is not likely to see any one like you. But I say, Will dear, just tell me before you go whether I should have the best curtains up in the blue bedroom—those with the daisy fringe, you know—or the plain ones."

"Both if you like, only don't bother me;" and Will kisses his mother and goes off with his bag through the pleasant stone hall-entrance, then down a narrow red-tiled path to the little gate set in a holly hedge, outside of which his dogcart stands waiting.

A tall lazy-looking fellow, with a constant grin that shows teeth as white and as strong as a young wolf's, stands at the horse's head. He touches his ragged straw hat.

"Is everything in, Larry?"

"That it is, yer honour, and I'm thinkin' it's meself wouldn't mind the laste in life if ye'd put me up along wid the victuals."

He grins wider than ever; but Mrs. Bright has reached the gate, and she shakes her head reprovingly.

"O Larry, if you spent less on eating and drinking, your wife and children would be more comfortable."

"Is it Aileen then, and the childre? It's not desaving ye I am, but they takes a dale more comfort in their bellies than in jist outside show; they'd sooner feed barefoot than starve in shoes and stockings, be jakers they 'ood! But it's thanking yer honours all the same I am for the boots for the boy." His voice has fallen into a whine, but here the droll look comes back. "Bedad, he kicked his sisters all round wid 'em, he did."

"Then you should have flogged him," says Mrs. Bright, seriously.

"Bedad," says Larry, "and that's what I've no heart for. But," he winks, "the boy's not set eyes on 'em again; he can't kick so hard widout 'em, yer ladyship sees."

"Good-bye, mother," and Will drives off, Larry running on before to open the gate of the yard into which the garden opens. Larry wants to get out of Mrs. Bright's way; he has no mind to be questioned about the boots, which have been already bartered away for drink and tobacco.

"I wonder why Will keeps Irishmen on the farm," his mother thinks as she leaves the gate, "they are so full of excuses and so false. I don't trust one among them, man or woman either. I believe they'll do anything to gain their own ends, and keep up a fair seeming all the while."

The stone entrance-hall had in former generations been the chief living room of the old rambling farmhouse. The sunken stone floor went up and down, and the huge oak table stood all unlevel; the empty open fire-place would have seated a dozen people, and the tall andirons held themselves up stiffly, guardians of the deserted spot. A row of pleasant diamond-paned lattices on each side of the door gave light to the ancient place—a place literally of passage. Mrs. Bright used it only for drying lavender and rosemary on the deep window-sills, and Will used it as a kind of business room.

Mrs. Bright stood a minute and looked round her. "Will must marry Nuna of course; he won't be happy without her. I don't think she'll alter the old place; she will let everything be just as it is; she'll let the house fall down about her ears before she knows there's aught amiss. Well, well, Will has got wits enough for man and wife too, only it seems hard for a man to have to think of everything." She looked pensive, and then the usual cheerfulness returned to her good-humoured face. "I suppose it's all use," she said; "we must all of us have something to put up with. I don't know I'm sure what I had,"—here the tears came,

and she wiped them away,—"unless it was my poor dear going hunting and then breaking his neck; but then that's not a thing that could well happen twice, and I had begged him to be careful, and his last words to me were, 'Nancy, my dear, I will.'"

This remembrance was always too much for the affectionate widow, and she sat down on one of the tall oak stools and cried.

After a bit she took her face out of her handkerchief, wiped her eyes in a determined final way, felt in her wide deep pocket for her keys, and took her way to the oak staircase.

"There were just one or two things certainly that I had to put up with in my poor dear, but they don't seem much now," she said, as she mounted the dark slippery stairs. "He would smoke in the parlour, and he would drink beer with his breakfast, and I'm thankful that in those two things my boy don't take after his father. Will never forgets he is a gentleman. I shall put on the best bed with the daisy fringe, and the best toilet curtains too. I must show this Mr. Whitmore that my son is something more than a mere farmer; but I do wish I knew what shaped caps are worn in London. Will never thinks about fashion when he goes to town; never can tell me anything of that kind."

Mrs. Bright had a way of prattling on without taking much heed to what she said. She had got so used to being laughed at and not listened to, that she would have been puzzled now if she had known how some of her careless words were pricking at her son's heart, as he drove his spirited black horse over to Guildford.

"What am I about?" Will asked himself. "My mother is right; Nuna is just the girl to be much more taken with any one coming in, in this sudden unexpected way, than with the regular matter-of-fact courtship I pay her." Here he lashed out at the black horse. The horse having a full consciousness that it was doing its duty, gave a violent plunge and bolted,

and Will had a narrow escape of being pitched on his head. It was fortunate for him that the road was level and free from awkward stones, and after a bit he managed to soothe the irritated creature. They went on evenly as before, and Will's mind travelled again to Nuna, and to the chance of her love for the stranger.

"Does she know I love her?" He went slowly back in thought to the early days when Mary Beaufort had been often glad to trust her fragile little sister to Mrs. Bright's motherly care. What golden days those had been, when Nuna had been given to his sole guardianship! Spring days, when they had gone to the woods to find blue-bells and starry anemones; summer days, when he, a great sturdy fellow of twelve, had carried dinner for both to the old chalk-pit at the farthest end of the farm, and then afterwards had crowned Nuna with wreaths of dog-roses; autumn days, with the crimson glories of blackberrying, or more adventurous nutting; and then, when Nuna grew stronger and was permitted to spend winter days at the farm —the dear delights of sliding on the large pond in Four-acre Meadow. What days these had been! Will was not twenty-five, and yet it seemed to him that life did not hold in the present these bits of sunshine crystallized for ever in his memory. And such recollections evoked the vivid triumphant consciousness that if Nuna lived to be an old woman, no one could ever have the power of serving her that he himself had possessed. Why, the pretty weak little girl could scarcely run the first time he saw her; he smiled as he remembered teaching her to run races down the Creek field, and then how he had caught her up in his arms and lifted her over the deep ditch at the bottom of the hill. And in those summer days, more than once she had tired out, and had thanked him so gratefully when he carried her in his strong arms.

Will sighed. His love for Nuna then had been protecting and brotherly—the pitying love strength has for weakness. How little he had prized those days, so precious now as memories! Will sighed again. What

would he give for the privilege of carrying Nuna across the creek now—the privilege of feeling her arms round his neck, and hearing the sweet "Thank you" from the rosy mouth that once on a time had offered a kiss with the words.

Memory went on again to the time when these visits grew rarer, and when, on his return from school, these tendernesses subsided into ordinary boy and girl acquaintance.

"But I never had ordinary feelings for Nuna," he said to himself impetuously. "Why, when I taught her to ride, it was the lifting her up and down I cared for more than the riding. Why didn't I make her love me then? Before she went to London I could say anything I liked to Nuna."

Will had never forgotten that leavetaking. How, in the midst of the exquisite June day, a sudden winter had come on his spirits, and going home in the long light evening, it had seemed to him that the season was in error, and that the trees should have been brown and leafless. He learned on that day a truth which had since been developing and making itself felt more and more urgently, that he could never love any one as well as he loved Nuna Beaufort, and that, if she would not love him in return, he would be content to live alone for her sweet sake. He had told himself over and over again that she should love him, and she must; there was nothing else for her to do. But six months ago Nuna had come back a tall graceful woman, whose sweet shyness subdued him far more than even the changeable fitful frankness of her girlhood, and a new sort of barrier seemed to have grown up between them. Then had come Mary Beaufort's death, and Will told himself that he must wait till Nuna's deep sorrow for her sister softened, and then she would be his wife. He would claim the fulfilment of a promise made in one of their childish rambles.

"I will be your wife, Will, dear," the little maiden had said, "and you'll always take care of me, won't you?"

He knew the idea was foolish, but it haunted him. As he drove along to-day it pressed on him that he was letting the year slip by without having made one effort to win Nuna's love.

"I have been away in London, and then there came hay-making and harvesting; what chance have I had?"

A deep flush rose on his broad open forehead. He had seen Nuna every Sunday, and he might have seen her oftener; why had he been so backward a wooer?

The reins slackened, and the black horse, feeling that his master was lost in reverie, took himself along the road at a more leisurely pace than the swinging trot he had been keeping up.

A woman would have got to the root of the matter in no time; but Will being a man, and being gifted only with the large lordly faculties of mankind, could not understand the reason of his delay, simply because that very British part of his nature—his own self-reliance—put a bandage on his eyes. It was not likely that he would own to himself—he, the firm, determined, cool-headed Will Bright, to whom men older than himself appealed in matters of difficult judgment—how could he own to himself that he was afraid of the girl he had known and petted ever since she was three years old? And yet if he had led a less active outside life—had he been more of a student—Will might have learned out of books that much of his love was founded on the sort of reverent awe which now tied his tongue. Even as a child Nuna had talked to him, not learnedly, for Nuna had little enough of learning till she went to London, but in a way quite as much beyond Will's comprehension as learning itself, about pictures in the clouds, in the fire; she would even weave stories out of a hedge-bank, which made Will marvel. He could not define his feelings; but he had long been aware of the presence of something in Nuna beyond his power either to grasp or to sympathise with; and the very self-reliance which he never shrank from manifesting among his fellows

made him prefer to love that to which he felt himself inferior. Tangible superiority he would have shrunk from, but he did not recognize this in the Beauforts. Mr. Beaufort was proud that his wife had been an earl's daughter, but his poverty kept him aloof from his aristocratic connections; and as to blood, Will Bright was not of yeoman descent: some of the oldest families in the county were kin on his father's side.

In his matter-of-fact way he would perhaps have said that his wealth and the comforts with which he could surround a portionless wife were equivalents to the bluest blood in England. His mother's words had aroused him to the fact of his delay, and Will was impatient to atone for it.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A TALK.

On the morning on which the master of Gray's Farm took his way to Guildford, Paul Whitmore had risen much earlier than he ever did in London, and had in consequence gained considerably in the opinion of Mrs. Fagg.

So far as feeling went, possibly she might have preferred to have got his breakfast later. It was a busy morning at the "Bladebone;" a noisy party of horse-dealers had come in over-night from Weston fair, and they were assembled in the large room clamouring for breakfast when Paul asked for his. But Mrs. Fagg was one of those women to whom an emergency is as a whetstone to a knife; it neither flurried her nor made her impatient, just a flush on the pale cheek, a fire in the sunken eyes, and a compression of the firm mouth told an observer that the woman was overtaxed, and might somewhat stir his indignation against her small-eyed lord and master smoking his pipe in the garden,

while he counted his plums and apricots ripening on the wall.

How many eggs and rashers of ham were cooked and carried in to the consumers thereof on that hot summer morning it would be hard to say. The horse-dealers disdained all cold meats; and Mrs. Fagg being too solicitous for the credit of the "Bladebone" to permit her maid a share in the cooking, Paul found her still bending over the fire when he went to look for her after breakfast.

"I shall come in to dinner some time, Mrs. Fagg," he said, "and I shall want to keep my room on certainly till Monday, perhaps longer. Dear me! is not that very hot work?"

He looked admiringly round the kitchen: the white wood of the long dresser, the bright oak table up in one corner, the shining array of pots and pans glowing in the fire heat, and sending out a warm greeting to the sunshine which streamed in through the window, Mrs. Fagg placing the last golden egg on the dish of crimson rashers, all struck his fancy as new and unusual.

Mrs. Fagg set a cover on the dish and gave it to the maid before she answered.

"Now mind what you're about, Sarah; if you overset an egg, there's no pickin' it up, mind you that. Well, sir, it is hot, but I don't look to find cooking cool; perhaps you never saw an inn kitchen before, sir?"

Something in the landlady's manner told Paul that Mrs. Fagg deemed his presence in her kitchen superfluous.

"Oh, yes," he said; "I've not seen many English kitchens, but abroad I'm sure to find them out. You should see the wonderful brass pans and kettles they have there; they are quite a study. Well, I must say good morning."

"Quite a study!" Mrs. Fagg threw back her cap-strings contemptuously. "That's so like a man; they always judge of things by the outside; they set no

vally on the trouble that things cost folks to keep bright. Just like Dennis; he'll go about, I haven't a doubt of it, this morning, making a boast all over Ashton of the breakfasts the 'Bladebone' has served up, and he'll give no more a thought to my trouble than I give to them egg-shells;" and she flung a handful of them on the fire.

Paul was glad to get away from the heat, glad to find himself again in Carving's Wood Lane, under the overarching trees. These were the causes of gladness he owned to; he was half ashamed of the eagerness which drew him on to Patty's cottage.

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder," is a sort of maxim we grow up to have faith in, as we put faith in "A stitch in time saves nine," and other wise adages, with a secret belief that if they came freshly to us, and so presented tempting food for investigation, we might discover that they are not so flawless as they seem. One point, however, in respect of this first maxim is certain: if a man's fancy be strongly and suddenly impressed over-night, the impression grows almost as Jack's bean-stalk did—grows in a semi-conscious way through his dreams, till when he awakes next morning it has shaped itself into an intense desire to realize the half-tasted delight which caused it.

It had been so with Paul Whitmore. Those few brief moments with Patty had been exquisite to him; his ardent love of beauty had found full scope for worship in her loveliness, and the simple, sweet shyness with which it seemed to him she shrank from his admiration had made him long to conquer it—to tame this lovely rustic into a liking for him. If you had told Paul Whitmore that there was any danger of his really loving Patty, he would have scoffed; and yet his thoughts had been so full of her over-night at the Rectory that he had scarcely noticed Nuna Beaufort. The Rector had explained to him that he had seen his friend Mr. Bright, who would be absent till Monday; and Paul had accepted an invitation to dine with

Mr. Beaufort on Sunday, much against his will, and only because he could not plead any good reason for refusing.

"I would much rather get a stroll with Patty," he said to himself, "than have to play fine gentleman to a proper young lady like Miss Beaufort. When one goes in the country, one doesn't care to wear harness. I like freedom in every way."

He was in hopes of meeting Patty somewhere in the lane; but even when he reached her cottage gate there was no trace of her.

Paul hesitated as to what he should do. There might be some one besides Patty in the cottage, and it might vex the young girl if he ventured in without her asking.

He stood leaning on the gate whistling—whistling a tender, appealing strain he had heard in Italy; he whistled it without being conscious of its appropriateness to his feelings. He had learned it from a young vetturino in a moonlight drive one soft spring evening; and memory, linking the tender emotions the sweet mournful air had evoked to his present state, tuned his lips to produce it at Patty's gate.

But there was no answering sign; all was quiet. After a bit Paul seated himself on the gate and looked across the open country. In front of the cottage the ground sloped downwards in broken masses of yellow gravel, fringed with long fine grass, and then sunk into a bulrush-shaded pond crowded up with bog-plants; beyond this it spread out into a wide, far-stretching common, purple and green and brown in the bright morning sunshine, only here and there flecked with golden gorse blossoms.

Unless as a study of colour, there was not much in the prospect for an artist's contemplation, except that an artist finds food for study in all nature; but the common was so specially flat, and the horizon beyond so specially level, that a windmill with outspread sails was quite a boon in this unbroken monotony.

Presently Paul looked towards the angle of the lane, and his heart gave a great leap; there was Patty.

He was beside her in a minute. He had resolved to repress his admiration, to be quite indifferent; but he had counted on meeting Patty in a natural way in her garden or at her cottage-door. Instead, he was so taken at unawares, so eagerly delighted, that he had got both Patty's hands in his before he knew what he was doing, and was gazing down into her face, his feelings speaking ardently in his dark eyes.

No, his fancy had not deceived him; she was lovely —far lovelier than she had looked yesterday. She stood with downcast eyes, a delicious blush rising softly in each cheek; and it seemed to Paul that her hands trembled while they lay passively in his warm clasp.

All Paul's speech had flown; he only wanted to look at Patty. He feared to break the exquisite raptures the sight of her face inspired, by any word. He would have stood there much longer if Patty herself had not roused him.

The white lids were gently raised, and then the sweet blue eyes looked up from under their black lashes. Patty drew her hands away gently.

Then Paul found his tongue.

"Where have you been? I was afraid I should not see you. I have been waiting for you ever so long."

"I'm very sorry," said Patty; "I went to the post, sir."

"Do you write letters?" he said, with a keen pang of jealous vexation.

Patty stooped a little; she tried to tread a stone into its place in the loose gravel.

"Sometimes, sir."

"Don't call me sir—pray don't. Tell me who you write to, Patty?"

Patty looked at him; she saw that he was frowning, and a half smile curved her full red lips.

"I wrote this letter to a friend of mine—Miss Coppock," she said.

"A friend of yours! Where does she live?" Paul said the words absently.

"In Guildford. I used to live with her before father sent for me home." Patty sighed.

This was the first clue she had given him, and Paul caught at it eagerly. He longed to make her talk about herself, as he had longed just now to stand still gazing down into her face.

He saw this morning that she was less rustic than he had thought. She had been used to something better than a mere country life; others had doubtless admired her as much as he did; and yet if she were aware of her beauty she could not be so simple.

"Which do you like best, Guildford, or the cottage here?"

"I don't know quite," and Patty blushed.

"But your father is kind to you, isn't he? You are happy with him, aren't you?"

Patty tossed her head like a young pony.

"Father's kind; but you see I've been brought up different to his ways, and I find them too strict."

"Ah!" said Paul, and Mr. Fagg's words came back.

Poor little Patty! she was then one of the victims he had fancied only existing in books; shut up in this lonely cottage with a miserly father, who probably made her work cruelly hard so as to get the most he could out of her; and yet her hands showed small signs of work.

"Father says," Patty went on, timidly glancing up every now and then to make sure her listener did not think her over-bold, "I ought to earn wages; he wants me to take service at the Rectory."

"Take service!" Paul's brain spun round. It was fortunate for Patty that she stood there close to him in all her beauty as she said this, or he might have been cured of his growing passion. "Service!" a vision of Patty with cap and apron cleaning the grate in the Rectory drawing-room, of Patty thus garbed receiving her orders from the silent, unapproachable Miss Beaufort, almost made him gasp for breath.

"You must not dream of such a thing," he said warmly. "What can your father be thinking about? He must know that you would be exposed to all kinds of annoyance, even if you were in any way fit for such a thing. You must laugh at him, and tell him you mean to marry and have a house of your own to take care of."

Paul did not know how eagerly he looked at her as he spoke. He said to himself, "Of course she'll marry, only I hope it will be something better than a mere bumpkin." A quick flush on Patty's face, and a sudden light in her eyes as she looked full at him, told him he had in some way offended her.

"What is the matter? don't you mean to marry?" he said.

"No;" Patty looked sulky.

"And won't you tell me why?" said Paul. He felt so guilty at having made this poor child unhappy, he longed to take her in his arms and comfort her.

"I don't know." Patty hung her head, and her lip quivered. Paul's curiosity grew intense.

"Ah, you can't marry the man you love, and so you won't have anyone else," he said, laughingly. "That's father's doing, is it?" and while he laughed he felt as jealous as Blue Beard.

Patty looked up, her eyes round with surprise.

"Whatever does he know about me?" she thought. "I don't love anybody," she said slowly; "and I won't marry only to please father."

There was a little pause. Paul had awakened to the consciousness that he was talking in a very unusual way to this country girl, and Patty was waiting to see the effect of her words.

Patty had learned much from her friend in Guildford, and one lesson that she had especially retained was, never to lessen the effect of her beauty by too many words. "Middle-aged women and plain women must talk, my dear," said Miss Coppock; "but till a man tires of a pretty face, let him look at it—that's

all he wants; and yours is no common pretty face, Patty Westropp."

"Well then," Paul spoke slowly, "I don't see why you should not stay at home, and keep house for your father; he must have some one."

But Patty was not appeased, though she tried to hide her vexation, and the flutter she was in made this difficult; her only help lay in clinging to Miss Coppock's wisdom. "Patience says real ladies never look cross," she thought; "they only smile all the harder to hide what they feel," and she forced a smile. Patty was not as simple as Paul took her to be, but she had never talked quite alone to a gentleman before, and it was very difficult to know how to behave. Patty's rule was that no man was a gentleman who earned his living, but it was impossible to deny this gentleman's claim to the title, even if he did paint pictures.

"I don't like rough work," she said, plaintively; "it spoils my hands."

Paul glanced at the ill-used hands; they were plump and well-shaped, with little rose-tinted dimples where knuckle-bones show later. The fingers, too, so far as he could judge, looked round and shapely; but Patty had taken good care to crumple up her finger points as she spoke, so that he did not see much more than two small pink fists.

"But you would have hard work to do in—in service, would you not?"

"Not if I was lady's-maid. But I shouldn't like service at all," said Patty angrily.

"Not even at the Rectory!" She looked so pretty, and in her pettish mood she had so forgotten her shyness that he teased her on purpose to prolong it.

"No, that I wouldn't. I wouldn't be Miss Nuna's maid not for better wages than she could ever give."

The words jarred, but she was growing more charming every minute, he thought.

"I should have thought Miss Beaufort a kind, quiet sort of young lady."

"I don't know anything about that," said Patty, and she fixed her eyes doggedly on the cottage, "and I don't care to know. I don't believe anybody does know her. She hasn't a bit of style or manner about her; why, the maids at the Rectory don't mind her no more than they'd mind me."

"Well, we won't talk about her." Paul was sorry he had teased when he saw tears of vexation in the angry girl's eyes. "I'll tell you what I want, Patty; I want you to sit to me—I mean I want to take your likeness. You'll let me paint it, won't you?"

Patty felt horribly ashamed. Whatever had she been about, letting the gentleman hear her find fault with Miss Nuna, and getting in a passion, and all because she was jealous that he had only made a pencil scribble of herself, while Miss Nuna was sketched distinctly as she sat on the tree-stump. And, meantime, he had been meaning this—this great wonderful triumph, he was going to make a painted picture of her. Oh, how she wished she had known before she sent off that letter to Miss Coppock.

She looked up at Paul so sweetly, so gratefully, that he could hardly help kissing her.

"Yes, if you like, sir."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PATTY'S SUNDAY.

"JANE!" the Rector called through his bedroom door to the maid who had just brought his shaving water, "if any letters come for me this morning, bring them up to me here."

"Yes," he went on to himself, "there is sure to be a letter from Elizabeth, and unless she fixes a definite time for coming I shall not tell Nuna I have invited

her. Why should there be any discussion about it? Surely I can judge better than Nuna can."

Having said this in the captious manner which some men mistake for firmness, Mr. Beaufort sat down before his looking-glass and shaved.

Another tap at the door, and when he opened it he found two letters—one from Miss Matthews, the other for Roger Westropp, under cover to the Rector of Ashton.

Miss Matthews would be delighted to come; but was her dear cousin quite sure that darling Nuna wished for her? "You must remember that she is mistress of your household now, and I cannot go to you unless I am sure of her welcome."

Mr. Beaufort looked fretful as he read, and then folded up the letter and put it in his pocket.

"Women have no consideration, not even Elizabeth. Why give me the trouble of writing twice? However, I'll soon let her know who is master at the Rectory."

The feeling that he was plotting against her made his manner to Nuna much more fatherly than usual. She was in one of her excited, sprightly moods. Mr. Whitmore had promised to come in after church and spend the rest of the day with them, and Nuna had never in her life seen anyone like Mr. Whitmore.

He had scarcely spoken to her, but then Nuna did not thirst for admiration. The only man she knew intimately, Will Bright, always showed her that he was thinking of her, and she would have liked him better if he had occasionally treated her to a little neglect. Nuna had never loved anyone yet, but she had shaped out in her dreams a creature she idolized—a creature too high and noble for poor, weak human nature to attain to, but still a creature in whom Nuna believed as implicitly as she believed in heaven. She had given this dream-love a likeness, the portrait of which Paul had reminded her, and this had attached a strange significance to her casual glance at him when they met in the lane. And on that Friday evening

when she came into the drawing-room and found Mr. Whitmore chatting with her father, his voice and manner had no strangeness for her; they seemed the realization of that which she had so often pictured.

All day Saturday she had been in what the cook irreverently termed "one of Miss Nuna's moons." She could not have told what she was thinking of, unless it was Mr. Whitmore.

This morning she had waked with the glad anticipation of coming joy. She tried hard to collect her thoughts in church, and luckily for her she did not see Paul; he sat some way behind her, far more intent on looking at Patty than at his Prayer-book.

"I tell you what it is, Dennis,"—Mrs. Fagg always took her husband's arm, and leaned on it too as they walked home from church,—"girls such as Patty Westropp don't ought to go to church—that they oughtn't; they're a snare to young men's eyes."

"Well, my dear, but Patty can't help being so very pretty;" and then Mr. Fagg looked half-sheepish.

"Now don't be a fool, Dennis, if you can help it, putting me out on a Sunday of all days in the week. If you'd got sense in your eyes instead of folly, you'd have seen something in Patty's face this morning besides the good looks you're so in love with."

"In love! that's a good one!" Dennis sniggered till his wife's fingers itched to box his ears; but she was not the woman to lower a man in the opinion of his neighbours, so she only held her parasol very stiffly, and leaned extra heavily on the delinquent's arm. "Why, Kitty, you know I never was in love, but once, and that's been ever since—eh, old woman?"

"Dennis, don't be a simpleton!" But she was clearly appeased. "What I mean is," she lowered her voice, for they were still in the stream of folks that had come out of church with them, "there's something up between Patty and our lodger. Now don't contradict me, Dennis, there is. He's a man, so he'd look at her, of course; I don't mean that only. Men are

like flies at treacle, if there's any pink-and-white doll to be looked at. But I never saw Patty look as she looked at our lodger this morning. It's high time Roger came home to see after that girl."

Patty lingered in church. She had felt proud and happy that Mr. Whitmore did not sit on the Rectory bench, and she had likewise been aware that during the service his looks had been constantly travelling towards her; but the service was over now, and yet he made no movement to leave his seat. Patty waited till almost every one had gone out, and then she had to follow the rest. She stood waiting among the daisy-covered graves, as if she were reading the epitaphs on some of the quaint headstones. "Why don't he come, I wonder? He don't know Miss Beaufort. Why need he wait till she comes out? I know that's what he's waiting for." She stamped her foot angrily, heedless that she stamped it on an old blackened stone, blistered with orange-coloured spots.

She looked towards the porch again.

Miss Nuna was coming out, and Mr. Whitmore was following her; and, yes, they were shaking hands. Patty stood as still as one of the old headstones, and she felt mad with jealous vexation when she saw Miss Nuna taking the path that led through the churchyard to the Rectory gate, and Mr. Whitmore walking side by side with her, seemingly without invitation.

He never so much as looked round at Patty.

"It's too bad—a deal too bad; and to see him yesterday while he was painting my picture, he looked as if he never could care for anybody but me." Poor Patty sobbed freely as soon as she was safe out of the throng of neighbours and in the lane, and the large hot tears blistered her fresh white ribbons. "I did not want him to speak to me before people, but he needn't go off with her. And is he going to be just the same to Miss Nuna as he was to me yesterday? Oh, I do hate her, I do!" said Patty, vehemently; "and she's not pretty. I don't care what folks say,

I can't see no prettiness; she's as pale and as thin as a lily, no shape nor colour in her."

Poor Patty! her pretty white eyelids were red and swelled by the time she reached the cottage. She felt miserably ill-used. Her life had not pleased her, it had been so dull and hard to her ease-loving, pleasure-seeking nature; but till now she had endured it for the sake of what was to come by and by; she had looked forward. Miss Coppock had predicted that her face would make her fortune some day, and Patty had firmly determined to be a lady, however long she might have to wait for promotion. Her notions of benefits to be gained by this exaltation were perhaps not very refined, but they bore a strong family resemblance to those of many of her more cultivated sisters.

She should never walk; she should have a carriage to take her wherever she chose to go. Then she would live in London itself, and buy as many bonnets and gowns and gloves as ever she liked—much grander bonnets than Miss Coppock had ever had in her show-room; and she would wear plenty of real jewels. However lofty her dreams would sometimes be, this last vision always floated on the summit of the pyramid.

One evening at Miss Coppock's a county grandee drove into town on her way to some large party on the other side of it. The lady's head-dress had got displaced, and Patty was sent for to help Miss Coppock in arranging it. The lady blazed with diamonds, and the girl saw how they renovated the faded beauty in her face. This same face in the morning Patty had thought sallow and plain, but now the lustre of the jewels lent a sparkle to it, and made it attractive. The lesson was not forgotten. From that evening Patty's resolve took increased strength. If she were beautiful in her simple cotton dress, what would she be in velvet and diamonds? Castle-building and planning had soothed her toil when she came to live at Ashton; bright dreams of the future gave a relish to

the homely fare which her father said was good enough for such as them. But the last two days had taught Patty a new kind of happiness. At first when Paul noticed her, and she thought he would take her likeness, her heart throbbed with joy. If he painted her picture, others might see it; rich and grand people perhaps would inquire about the original; but yesterday as Paul talked to her while he painted, and as she felt his eyes fixed in their ardent gaze, a more idle, more exquisite sensation than castle-building had come to Patty; dress and bonnets, jewellery even, faded in the pride of being admired by him. Her cheeks glowed, her lips trembled, and when at last Paul left off painting and said he must go back to the inn, she could scarcely keep from tears.

He disappeared at last round the angle of the lane, and all the sunshine went out of her afternoon. She would have liked to have gone on always in such new delicious enjoyment, and to her surprise she found that hours had slipped away unheeded. It was very weary to think that he would not come again till Monday, and then her father might be at home.

"But father can't find fault with him for taking my likeness; no one can say a word against his coming here to do that. And yet I don't want father to know, and I couldn't have Mr. Whitmore see father;" and then she began to count the hours which must pass before she saw Paul again.

Patty's nature was worldly; and no one had ever tried to teach her that she must not live entirely for herself. But as she came home from church on this Sunday, with all the heart she had she loved Paul Whitmore better than she had ever loved anything or anybody, and she longed to have him beside her, chiefly because she did love him.

She threw the nicely-trimmed bonnet on her bed when she reached home, forgetful of the tender care she usually bestowed on it. She sat down before her tiny looking-glass. Her hair was ruffled, her eyes

looked red and fretful, her face was tear-stained, her mouth even drooped in limp misery.

"If I looked like that in church," she sobbed, "no wonder he went home with her. Oh! why can't I have a grey silk gown and a black lace shawl as well as her? We'd see who'd do the most credit to their clothes then! But I didn't think it of him; just because he was walking and talking with that miss, I didn't think he'd be too proud to speak to me. But it's not pride, it's meanness. He was ashamed to speak to me just because of her. Ah! and he'll forget all about me! He'll get fond of her to-day, and then to-morrow she'll plan to have him there again, and I was getting quite fond of him. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do? Like will take to like; I'm prettiest, but then she's a lady."

But this last thought had consolation in it. Patty drew her hands from her face and set about smoothing her rich hair into its usual wavy gloss. Mr. Whitmore had seen Miss Nuna in the lane, and he had not seemed much impressed by her; he had been much more taken with herself, and they had been together then. By the time Patty had washed away her tears, and settled her collar and brooch to her satisfaction, she decided that after all he could not help it, and it was just possible that he had avoided her on purpose, so as not to draw notice on her.

"It would never have done for him to speak before that sharp-eyed, bitter-tongued landlady," she said. "But I will have it out with him all the same when he comes; I'm not going to be made much of one day and snubbed the next without good reason."

She could pacify her anxiety, but she could not quiet impatience. She could not feel at ease; she was restless and feverish; the day seemed so hot and so long there was no bearing its shining dulness. Patty would not give herself even the variety of afternoon church. She could make excuses for Mr. Whitmore here, away from him, but she knew that if he walked

past her again beside Miss Nuna she should probably do something foolish.

And so that Sunday went on, the most sorrowful that Patty had ever known, and yet the first in which she had found such happiness—for it was such happiness to think over yesterday. Would he come to morrow?

Something whispered to her that he would; and so, now thinking over what would happen in his next visit, now of what had already happened, Patty sat, her head resting on her hand, while the light faded out of the glowing sunset.

It was happiness to have her thoughts so filled that the petty vexations of her daily life had lost power to annoy her. When Roger was at home she hated the darkness he insisted on, candles being, he urged, too dear to waste on crochet and finery; but even if the light had been dimmer than it was, Patty would have preferred to be alone with her thoughts in the darkness.

## CHAPTER IX.

### AT THE RECTORY.

PAUL had not seen Patty as he passed her half hidden behind a gravestone; and even if he had, it is possible that he would not have noticed her. He wanted to see a good deal more of "the pretty little thing," and he certainly did not mean to make her a subject for village gossip.

He had eyes to discover that Miss Beaufort was far prettier than he had thought her on Friday. He was not influenced, as Patty had feared, by Nuna's superiority of dress. Her eyes chiefly had attracted him: as she sat opposite at dinner he found himself looking at them, wondering at their depth and variety of expression. Nuna was timid, and rather more silent than

usual; but when Mr. Beaufort began to question his visitor about Italy, she listened with such enthusiastic interest that Paul warmed towards her. Mr. Beaufort left them together before afternoon service, and then, little by little, Paul drew Nuna on from Italy to talk of pictures and of Art, and learned that she herself had an earnest love of painting, and gave up all the time she could find to its exercise.

Still Patty need not have feared, though she would have seen that the deep glow on Nuna's transparent skin was very beautifying, and that her eyes looked into Paul's with a wealth of expression of which she was utterly unconscious. But Nuna was quite aware that Mr. Whitmore took a very ordinary interest in her, and that probably he would not have talked to her at all if she had not cared so much for the things he cared for; and if Nuna had been a little older she might have feared that in this very sympathy of tastes lay a repulsion to love—that, as a rule, the very last thing a man values in a woman is sympathy with his actual pursuit. She may sympathize with himself, and to a certain extent in his tastes, always provided that she does not grow learned in them, and so lose the sweet docile ignorance which he takes such pleasure in informing and correcting.

In one way her cousin Elizabeth had been a true friend to Nuna; she had so magnified her failings, and depreciated her gifts, that the girl had a very mean opinion of her own attractions; and it never once occurred to her that Paul could admire her. Truly she was too deeply absorbed in him to remember her own identity.

They had tea in the garden; Nuna sat under a grand old plane-tree, the light flecking her hair here and there with gold, as it crept down through the broad leafy canopy.

The cups and saucers were rarities, old Vienna porcelain. Mr. Beaufort had whispered to Nuna to produce them, after the dinner talk had shown him that his

guest would appreciate them; but when Paul admired them, you would have thought, from the Rector's manner, that he was used to drink tea out of these treasures every Sunday. If Paul could have kept his thoughts from straying to the cottage, the evening would have delighted him. Mr. Beaufort was a good listener so long as he was well amused, and the glow in Nuna's eyes led the artist on from one description to another, till he was surprised at his own eloquence.

He looked at Nuna; she was bending forward to take a teacup from her father, and a remembrance struck him.

He drew out his sketch-book, and showed her the little drawing he had made in Carving's Wood Lane.

"You were just like it a minute ago," he said.

Mr. Beaufort looked at it attentively, and then a sudden remembrance came to him also.

"Had you been sketching again when I met you?" He looked hard at Paul. "Sketching Martha Westropp?"

Paul did not flinch under the Rector's scrutiny; he grew a shade paler. He was very angry, he could not have said why; but it seemed to him that Nuna need not be made acquainted with his intimacy with Patty.

"I sketched the little cottage there," he said, carelessly. He turned over the leaves, and showed the porch to Mr. Beaufort.

Nuna worshipped beauty. "Patty deserves to be put in more distinctly; she would make a beautiful picture, I think."

There was a little silence, and then Paul felt that he must say something.

"Yes, she is a very pretty girl. I expect some artist or other has painted her before now."

"She is what I could fancy a Perdita might be," Nuna went on, growing excited with her own enthusiasm. "She is too short for a Dorothea, or else she

has just that fair, fresh, healthy beauty, and yet her skin is more delicate and velvet-like than any I ever saw. I wish I could dress Patty like a lady for once, and see how lovely she would look."

"And most likely you would be disappointed." Her father spoke sharply, and Nuna drew into her shell in a fright. What had she done? "Peasant beauty," continued the Rector, oracularly, "owes much to its surroundings: in the garb of a higher class, its uncouth ways and awkwardness show out as they never would have shown in cotton gowns."

Paul longed to give the Rector a good shaking. He rose up to say good-bye presently, and he held Nuna's hand in a long, warm clasp. He could have thanked her with all his heart for her generous praise of Patty's beauty.

Even while he hurried down Carving's Wood Lane, impatient to see the face that so enthralled him, his mind went back to Nuna; and he felt that if he were free, there would be interest in getting her to lay aside her reserve, in developing the enthusiastic nature which had hinted its presence to-day, as the glowing cracks in the black ridge betray a volcano. But this was purely a mental idea. The day's separation had so fostered his passion for Patty, that it had been hard for him to return to the Rectory after afternoon service; only a slight fear of arousing the Rector's suspicions had induced him to do it.

After morning church, he had gravely asked himself what he was doing, and how he meant this idyl to end? But then came the meeting with Nuna, and there had been no further opportunity for self-communing.

Now, as he hurried along in his mad impatience—an impatience quickened by Nuna's praise—a sense of wrong-doing hung over him, but did not check his progress. As he drew nearer and nearer the cottage, thought grew confused; a tumultuous, throbbing joy left no room for aught beside its own presence.

## CHAPTER X.

### AN INTERRUPTION.

PAUL went in behind the scarlet-runner vines; he wanted to take Patty by surprise, so he stepped over the gate that its click might not give her warning.

Light had faded suddenly out of the sky, and by the time he reached the porch the green of the honeysuckle had darkened so that the blossoms showed ghostwise on the dusky leaves.

The stillness was deathlike, except for the weird, mysterious murmur by which Nature indicates her function of perpetual growth. As he listened, there came a shriller sound than these indistinct pulse-beats—a cricket chirping out in the silent house.

The charm was broken. He had stood in the porch, spelled by the murmuring stillness; he tapped at the door, and smiled.

"I am faint-hearted to need encouragement from a cricket."

The door opened, and there was Patty.

"I'll come out," she said, "it is so dark in here."

There was no surprise in her voice. It seemed to Paul that she had felt his presence before she saw him. Patty would have liked to ask him indoors, only then he would have seen how poor her home was.

She was so very glad that she could not find anything to say. But Paul's first words reminded her of her grievance against him.

"I thought I should see you at church again?" he said.

Patty had meant to speak calmly, and like a lady, as she phrased it, but her indignation mastered her. He wanted her to go to church, did he, that he might look at her, and then walk home with Miss Nuna, without so much as turning his head?

"You wouldn't have seen me if I'd gone," she said.

Paul started, the words were so harshly spoken. Patty had turned her head away, but he felt that she was looking vexed.

There was no possible way of guessing at Paul's moods; he was, as Mrs. Fagg would have said, "so touch-and-go." The very cause of offence of one day might on the next be specially pleasing to his fastidious notions; and now, although at the sight of Patty his whole being seemed to go out to her, and though he could hardly restrain the avowal of his passion, these few words, hardly and flippantly spoken, threw him back on himself—almost broke through the charm that had held his senses in thrall.

He stood cold and unmoved. And Patty turned round her head and saw him so standing; and as she really did love him, nature prompted her to do the only thing which could have moved him: she began to cry.

The little quivering sob thrilled through his heart, and in a minute his arms were round her, and she was drawn close to him.

"You sweet little darling, what is it?" he whispered. "You know I couldn't vex you, Patty."

Patty made no effort to free herself. "I thought you'd forgotten me," she sobbed.

The light was very indistinct, but Paul did not want much light to make him see her face. He put one hand under the soft round chin, and raised it.

"You would not have liked me to speak to you before all those people?"

"No," said Patty. She was so happy she would have said anything she thought he wished her to say.

"Of course I knew I should see you here this evening; isn't it much better, eh?"

He bent down and looked into her eyes—looked until his soul seemed to go out at his lips. Somehow they met Patty's.

Even while that first thrilling kiss lingered, a slight

but distinct sound made them start asunder—the click of the gate latch.

"It's father," Patty whispered; and then her keen wits helped her lover. "He can't see us because of the bean-vines; go away over the front palings—go, quick!"

Paul would have stood his ground, but there was such terror in her voice that he feared to expose her to her father's anger.

He stepped over the palings; and then he stood waiting till he heard footsteps going towards the cottage.

There was a murmur of voices, but no sounds of anger. He waited yet for some time, but there was no sign of life. He heard the front door shut, and some creaking bolts drawn across it, and then he turned slowly towards the lane again, with no very kind thoughts of the intruder.

Patty inwardly blessed her father's thrifty ways. He could not see her blushes in the darkness; and the very fact of finding her thus, and not, as he expected, burning a candle through the whole evening, put Roger in good humour with her, and made him unsuspicious.

"Well, lass, I'm come home later than I thought, but I'd have been later yet if Mr. Bright hadn't given me a lift; an' I've brought you news you'll like to hear."

"Oh, what's that?" Patty's heart fluttered violently; she longed to run upstairs and realize some of the delight of the last few minutes; it was dreadful to be forced away from the thought of it, to anything so dull as her father's talk.

"Well," Roger spoke almost jocularly, "I'm not going to say all on a sudden; I'll make ye guess, lass; there's a visitor coming to see ye."

At any other time Patty must have guessed his meaning, but now she could not even take in his words.

"A visitor? Do you want supper, father?"

"I'll have a crust," he said; and in the faint glimmer he found his chair and sat down in it, while Patty disappeared into the washhouse.

A little chill fell on her father. We are apt to proportion our notions by the mood in which we view things. If Roger's journey had proved unsuccessful, and if on his return he had found Patty writing a letter by the light of a half-burnt candle, he would have been as cold as usual, and would not have expected any warmth from his child; but he was in singularly bright spirits. Grandmother Wood had died easily, and had left her savings to "her daughter's husband, Roger Westropp, for the use of his only child Martha." This was better than he expected; he should have no trouble now in keeping the money from being spent in ribbons and rubbish. It had been a triumph, too, to rescue the money from his brother-in-law Peter. Grandmother Wood had only left her son ten pounds; he had displeased her by an imprudent early marriage, but at her death she had forgiven and blessed both him and his wife.

"How that fellow took on for the loss of his mother!" said Roger to himself. "He couldn't have done more if she'd left to him instead of to me. And how that wife of his did try to comfort him!"

A sort of smothered sigh escaped him.

"She means well, does Patty," he said to himself.

Patty came back with a thin candle in a flat tin candlestick, and then she set a loaf, a fragment of cheese, and a knife on the table.

Roger drew his chair up and ate in silence.

"I may as well have a drink," he said; "I'm thirsty." She fetched him some water, and then she tried to think of something to say.

"How's Grandmother?"

Roger took a draught out of the brown pitcher and set it down on the table.

"She's dead! And, Patty, she's left all she'd got to leave in trust to me against you're old enough to want it: it beant much, lass, but it 'ull be useful one day."

Patty's eyes brightened for an instant; then a look of

disappointment came into her eyes. She made no answer.

Something in her silent manner struck her father as new and unusual.

He lifted the candle suddenly to his daughter's face, and gave her a keen, searching glance.

Patty did not wince; she had recovered her self-possession, and the very manifestation of her father's suspicion put her on guard to baffle it.

"What makes ye so quiet, lass? Why don't ye guess who your visitor 'll be?"

"Is it some one at Guildford?" And then she went on quickly, roused suddenly out of her deadness to outside things by an eager hope: "Is it Miss Patience herself?"

Roger nodded.

"I don't see as it can be any other, unless ye've friends in Guildford as I knows naught on. I saw Miss Patience in the street yesterday, and she said she was coming over to Ashton Rectory, to-morrow or next day, to wait on Miss Nuna Beaufort, and she 'ud be glad if you'd go up and see her there."

"You ought to have asked her here." Patty spoke crossly; a vision of Nuna waited on obsequiously by Miss Coppock, with the curtseying manner the milliner observed towards her customers, was disturbing. "Miss Patience can come over all the way from Guildford to wait on that Miss Nuna, and yet she won't take the trouble so much as to walk the length of Carving's Wood Lane to see an old friend like me."

But Patty was too practical to nourish such resentment.

"Miss Nuna pays for her going," she thought, and her forehead grew smooth. Just then it seemed to her that anything might be expected so long as the pay was in proportion to the service rendered; never in her life before had she felt such a craving for money

Roger paused before he answered; his words were always weighed before he spoke them.

"I did ask the lady to come and see you, and I'll tell you why I did, Patty. You can tell Miss Patience of your grandmother's bounty if you will, but I won't have Jane at the Rectory, nor Clara Briton either, chattering about my affairs; d'ye hear, lass?"

He spoke sharply, but Patty's spirits had come back.

"Never you fear, father. Oh, I am so pleased Miss Patience is coming: to-morrow or next day? I hope to-morrow."

Roger's suspicion was lulled.

"She'd got dull like with being alone," he said; "if she'd found amusement here, she wouldn't be in such a taking at seeing that stuck-up dressmaker." Then a thought struck him, and he went on aloud:

"Miss Coppock 'll be down here somewhere about three o'clock. You can give her a cup o' tea, Patty, but I'll have no waste in providing cakes and pastry; don't you fancy I'll make the smallest change in my ways because of this bit of money comin' in. It's put by against a rainy day."

"Suppose the rainy day never comes," Patty laughed. She was too happy in the prospect before her to be vexed again. Her secret had been delicious enough in itself only, but to think of pouring out to Miss Coppock the story of the last three days! Oh, it was too delightful! Why, if Father had not come when he did, there was no knowing what Mr. Whitmore might have said.

Her father was tired, and scarcely answered her last words. Patty went upstairs to her little bare room, and listened impatiently to his slow, firm tread. It seemed to her he was longer than usual shutting and bolting the door.

"As if any one would rob a poor cottage like this," she said. "Why, I'm the only thing worth stealing in it."

She looked wonderfully pretty as she sat on the edge

of her bed, loosening her luxuriant hair till it reached the counterpane, and longing for silence in the cottage.

It came at last, and then Patty could give herself up freely to her reveries without fear of interruption.

While she sat waiting, a cloud had come across the sunshine of her future.

Were artists gentlemen? To Patty the word gentleman did not represent a state of mind, or manners, or breeding; it simply meant style of living—a large luxurious house, a carriage, plenty of servants, and, above all, an unlimited command of money; these things, so the novels she had devoured at Miss Coppock's assured her, were to be found by poor country girls, provided they had wit and beauty, and it was for these things she had resolved to marry a gentleman.

"Such things make any one a lady," said Patty. It don't matter about the schooling or the breeding either —I'm sure it don't—half so much as the clothes and the carriage. A poor lady, if she's a lady to the backbone, 'ull get snubbed and sent to the wall if she's no money to cut a dash with."

And yet wasn't Mr. Whitmore enough in himself without anything besides?

And that first kiss came back; it seemed to be really pressing itself on Patty's lips again. She hid away her glowing face in her hands, hugging the memory of it.

And he might be rich after all, who could tell? Perhaps he only painted pictures for amusement; he had spoken of himself as an artist, but that might not mean anything; he might be a real independent gentleman.

She went to bed at last, comforted in this new perplexity by the anticipation of Miss Coppock's counsel.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PLEADING.

MR. BRIGHT'S impatience had become unbearable during his two days' absence from home; and on Monday morning he drove towards Ashton in a state of mind hard to describe, it was so full of contradiction.

He was curious to see his cousin's friend, and he must of course seek him out; but Will felt unwilling to make Mr. Whitmore's acquaintance.

He longed to see Nuna; but in spite of his impatience he could not decide whether he should at once pour out his love to her, or wait until this dangerous rival was safely off the ground.

Will knew that he was inferior to Nuna; but he felt such reliance on the strength of his love, that it seemed to him she must in the end yield to its influence.

"Nuna will love with all her heart," he thought. "I shall never forget her when her sister died; why, she has not got back her spirits since."

There was a short way to Ashton across the common in front of Roger Westropp's cottage, and on through Carving's Wood Lane, but it was a way not often taken, because of the sharp pitch in the lane above.

The shortest way suited best with Will's mood; and he drove across the common and into the road which led across it from the lane.

He thought he saw figures in front of Roger Westropp's cottage; but the black horse knew his road, and went at such a pace that in a moment the scene was clear to Will.

Patty Westropp stood just within the cottage-porch, and bending over her, with his arm clasped round her, was a gentleman, a stranger to Will, and yet, he felt certain, the very person he had come in search of.

Men who are their own masters early are apt to be either very rigid or very lax in their notions of propriety. Will had prided himself on the example he set to his tenants and farm-labourers. He would as soon have thought of joking with Patty as with one of his mother's maid-servants. This sight was too much for him; he sat stupified, and before he had recovered from the shock of his surprise, the black horse had carried him on past the angle of the lane to the chequered rise above.

"How utterly disgraceful!" he exclaimed. "A steady, respectable girl; a pet of Nuna's too."

And then he remembered that this daring transgressor of rural proprieties had doubtless spent yesterday at the Rectory; had talked to Nuna herself. There was profanation in the thought!

He drove rapidly on. The lane had never seemed so long before. He drew up at last at "The Bladebone."

"I may be mistaken after all," he thought; "there may be another stranger in Ashton. I may find Mr. Whitmore waiting for me here."

Dennis and his wife appeared at the door together.

Will had a high opinion of the landlady; and she approved of him in some ways, though, as Dennis said, "If an angel was to come into Ashton, wings and all, Kitty would be safe to find goose-feathers in 'em."

And on one or two occasions Mrs. Fagg had pronounced Mr. Bright "a pragmatical prig, only fit to live in a teacup."

Will nodded to the pair as they greeted his approach

"Is Mr. Whitmore in?"

Dennis opened his eyes and mouth; but his wife answered before he could get a word out:

"That's our lodger"—this to Dennis in a quick aside; then louder, "Mr. Whitmore's out, sir—been out some hours."

"Ah! I wonder if I met him; a tall, dark man, in a grey suit, with a felt hat of the same colour?"

Mrs. Fagg nodded.

"That's him, sir; he's a gentleman you couldn't easy mistake. Why, I believe he's taller than you, sir; looks so perhaps, because he's not so wide-chested. Will you leave any message, sir?"

Will hesitated. After all, what business was it of his? The man might not be a gentleman spite of his looks, and Patty might be the sort of girl likely to attract him.

"I'll leave the trap here, Dennis, and go on to the Rectory; perhaps Mr. Whitmore will be in by the time I come back."

A sense of relief had come with his last reflections. He went on fast to the Rectory. A servant was coming downstairs.

"The Rector's engaged, sir, in his study; will you walk this way?" She threw open the dining-room door, and there sat Nuna drawing.

Will saw that she blushed, and that there was an unusual flutter about her as he came in; both these signs gave him hope.

"I'm sorry you can't see Papa," she said; "I'm afraid he will be busy all the morning. Some business of old Roger's is worrying him to-day."

Will did not answer; he was thinking how to begin on his own business. If Nuna had continued to blush it would have been easy, but she was unconscious and natural again.

"When is Mrs. Bright coming to see me, Will? I want her for a whole long day. You must tell her my Spanish hens thrive famously, and I have two of the dearest little kittens."

"I thought you disliked cats?"

"Ah, but not kittens, they are such graceful little pets; and, Will, I don't believe there ever were such pretty ones as these. Your friend, yesterday, was delighted with them."

It seemed to Will that Nuna was blushing again. He thought of the scene in the cottage-porch, and a sudden

most unwarrantable fit of wrath took possession of him.

"My friend?" He reddened, but Nuna was not looking at him. "I suppose you mean Mr. Whitmore; he's no friend of mine; he's a stranger sent down here by my cousin Stephen. It was very kind of your father to invite him, but I wish Stephen would not put me in such a position."

Nuna did look at him now, and she laughed at the vexation on his honest face. No use for Will Bright to try concealment, his feelings were as legible as if he had printed them.

"What do you mean, Will? Why, Papa said this morning he quite envied you the privilege of Mr. Whitmore's society. You can't think how delightful he is."

"Delightful is he?" Will spoke very much like an angry schoolboy. "Pray what is there so delightful in him? I don't think him particularly handsome, I can tell you."

"Handsome! you silly old Will; why, he's much better than handsome, he's distinguished-looking; and besides, he looks like a genius."

If he had been less angry, Will might have noticed that Nuna had gone back to the old terms of their friendship. She spoke far more intimately than she ever had done since Mary's death.

"Genius! what's that? Something that's as poor as a rat, and not quite respectable; that's my experience of a genius, Nuna. In London Stephen is thought a genius among his own set. Genius! If you had wanted to set me quite against this Mr. Whitmore, you could not have chosen a better word."

Nuna drew her chair up to the table, took her crayon, and went on with her drawing.

"Poor Will! how boorish he is! how different to Mr. Whitmore!" But though she thought Mr. Bright rude, she was too easy-tempered to be vexed. "How can he know better poor fellow?" she thought. "I believe he's always about his farm talking to his men;

association must tell upon all of us." A sentiment sadly at variance with the democratic notions with which Miss Beaufort occasionally shocked her father's prejudices.

She looked so pretty, bending gracefully over her drawing, with a bright earnestness in her eyes. Will could have gone down on his knees and worshipped her. He was heartily ashamed of himself already; and yet, as his mind was only half relieved of its burden, he could not feel at ease.

He drew his chair nearer.

"Don't be angry with me; you know what a rough fellow I am, you do, don't you, Nuna?"

He bent his head forward till it nearly touched hers.

Nuna was so used to blame, that it seemed too much for any one to ask pardon of her. Will's humility touched her warm, sensitive nature, and brought tears to her eyes.

She put her hand frankly into his huge grasp, and smiled—it seemed to Will with such heavenly sweetness, that if he had not just offended he must have taken her to his heart at once, she looked such a darling.

"Ah, Will! But indeed I'm sure you will like Mr. Whitmore; he has been in Italy, and in so many other countries, and he has read and observed so much, it makes one feel horribly ignorant to listen to him."

"Really! I don't find any pleasure in being made to feel horribly ignorant."

Nuna looked up thoughtfully. Hitherto with Will she had been conscious of his goodness and his kind friendliness. Her father called him clever, and she had taken him on trust. Nuna thought men must be more clever than women, unless they were like Dennis Fagg, and even he was a great politician; but something in Will's last sentence put her wandering thoughts into a more concrete form than usual.

"Don't you really?" she said at last. "But then, unless one feels one's ignorance, one would rest content in it. Don't you think when one sees a remarkable person, such a person as—as Mr. Whitmore for instance,

it acts like a spur, and rouses one for weeks afterwards? Why, I have worked just double to-day at my drawing. He knows the original of this old cast, and his talk about it has thrown such an interest into the subject."

Will sat gnashing his teeth in silent anger.

"Nothing but 'he,' and 'his,'" he said to himself, but he sat dumb.

Nuna went on with her drawing.

"I'm afraid I could never agree with you about him," Will said at last; he tried to speak calmly: "what you say would give me the idea of a highly-refined man, and Mr. Whitmore is not that by any means."

A flush came in Nuna's face, not at his manner this time, but at his words. "How can you say that? Just now you told me you knew nothing about Mr. Whitmore."

Will hesitated. He could not tell Nuna what he had seen, and yet he must warn her against her exaggerated notions.

"I have not spoken to Mr. Whitmore, but from what I know about him I'm quite sure, Nuna, he is not a fit companion for you."

Nuna's eyes sparkled; she flushed crimson, and sat very upright.

"I don't understand you. Papa is the best judge of that, I think. I will go and find out how soon he will be at liberty to see you."

It was so new to see Nuna downright angry, that her lover sat confounded; he did not know what to do or say. But by the time she reached the door, passion had overcome fear, and he was beside her, grasping her arm.

"Nuna, darling, don't go away, don't be angry, there's a sweet darling. I've been vexing you with a heap of folly and nonsense all this time, just because I couldn't get the words out I came to say. I'm a great blundering idiot; but you'll forgive me, darling, won't you? Don't be angry with me, you sweet, gentle girl. Say you're not angry, Nuna."

He put his strong arm round her as he ended, and drew her close to him.

Nuna freed herself as soon as she could; then she drew a deep breath.

"O Will, how could you? You frightened me."

It was a very unsatisfactory speech, but there was no rejection in it; and when once Will had put his hand to anything, he was not likely to turn back.

"I beg your pardon; I'm so rough, such a vehement fellow; you knew that, darling, in the old days; but you'll forgive me, won't you?" He took her hand, but she tried to pull it away. "Why, Nuna, you're not really angry?"

The door opened, and Jane appeared.

"The dressmaker, if you please, Miss. She's in the spare room."

Nuna was hurrying after Jane, but Will stepped before her; then he shut the door and set his back against it.

"Wait just a minute, won't you? You shan't go like this," he said, passionately. "I love you, Nuna! I have loved you all my life; give me a little hope, Nuna! I know I've blundered this morning, but—" he stopped and looked at her pale, wondering face. "Nuna, darling, look at me out of your dear eyes just one minute. Try and see if you can't feel what I'm feeling; I'm almost mad now." His voice got hoarse and choked as he went on. "I'll be worse if you tell me there's no chance. For God's sake don't tell me so; tell me to wait. I'll wait any time you like. Stop, Nuna," for she again shook her head sadly, "think how I've been hoping on for years; think how long I've loved you! Tell me, was there a chance for me before this cursed meddling Londoner came?" He spoke sternly, and anger flashed in Nuna's eyes. "There, I've ruined myself now, I see. O Nuna, Nuna! will you go away like this from me, when I love you as I do?"

The anger in her face softened.

"I don't know what to say to you. O Will, why

have you done this? Why don't you go on being friends, as we used to be? You have made it all so uncomfortable."

Will stood looking at her.

"We can never again be as we used to be," he said at last, sadly. "You don't know what love means, Nuna; you don't understand your own feelings yet; if they are free, you must in the end feel some love for me." She looked impatiently at the door. The unquiet tumult he had raised deadened her pity for him. "Yes, you shall go," he said, bitterly; "I see I only torment and vex you; you can't bear the sight of me."

He had his hand on the door ready to open it; but Nuna melted. There was nothing hard in her at this epoch of her life. She held out her hand to Will.

"Do let us be friends," she said gently; "I believe I have not behaved as you had a right to expect. I mean," she spoke quickly, to check the hope she saw rising in his face, "I ought to have thanked you for what you told me; and indeed I am grateful to you, and I'm sorry too. You do forgive me, don't you?" She held out her hand.

Will clasped it close, and then kissed it so passionately that Nuna drew it away, frightened out of all her sympathy by the vehement behaviour of her lover.

She ran upstairs, and hurried along the gallery to her own room; but when she reached it, she remembered Miss Coppock.

"I suppose I must not keep her waiting," she said dolefully. She did so long to be alone. She was afraid of herself, and of this new trouble that was tugging at her heart as if it never meant to let rest come there again.

"If I had stayed with Will, would he have persuaded me to say I loved him?" she stood thinking. "Oh, no, that masterful way of Will's is just what gives me courage. I don't think I would be driven to do anything, even if I liked it, and——" She broke off here, and again remembered Miss Coppock.

## CHAPTER XII.

### FROM THE GRAVE.

THE first thought that came to Patty when she waked was that she had forgotten the Rector's message.

Roger looked confounded when he heard it.

"It's always so," he said to himself; "so sure as a bone falls to one's share, so sure some hungry dog snaps it up and runs off with it. Now here'll be my brother Watty turning up again, a beggar, or worse, and I'll be called on to set him straight. I won't," he said, doggedly; "let him stay in Australia and do the best he can. Grandmother Wood left the money to the child, not to me. I disapproved of that, but now I see a use in it; it's not mine to spend."

Roger knew there was no use in presenting himself in the Rector's study before nine o'clock. Patty was milking the cow, so her father was alone; it was fretful work with him; it did seem hard that after so much toiling and moiling, and never taking so much as a day's pleasure out of his earnings, he should be called on to part with them for one who had never toiled, except to please himself.

His younger brother Walter had been a wild, careless youth, left dependent on Roger; and folks had said that if Walter Westropp had met with less harsh and niggardly treatment in boyhood he might not have been thrown among the associates who led him astray. Walter got into mischief, and to save exposure, Roger paid his brother's passage out to Australia; once since, at the urgent entreaty of his wife, he had sent a few pounds to the young prodigal when Watty had represented himself as sorely in need of help. This was all that had passed between the brothers, but till she died Mrs. Westropp kept up a correspondence with her

young brother-in-law, and Patty had cherished visions of the return of this long lost uncle with a nugget of Australian gold. Roger knew better than that, or thought he did. Watty was a scamp and a disgrace, and would never be anything else—this was Roger's version of his family history.

Patty told her father how the Rector had answered her question as to whether the news came from Australia, and it seemed to Roger conclusive that the tidings did concern Watty, but that he was in England.

He pushed his breakfast away; anxiety was the only food he could digest this morning. Till it was time to begin work at the Rectory, Roger worked in his own garden, but this morning he sat indoors thinking. He struck his hand hard on the table as he rose up from it.

"Watty shall go to the Union. Patty's idle enough as it is; she'd be ruined with the pattern of a loafing vagabond like he about the place."

But anxious as he was, having once gone to the Rectory kitchen and reported himself returned, he stuck doggedly to his work, and went on mowing the lawn, without any further attempt to seek an interview with his master.

The summons to the study came at last. When Roger opened the door he found the Rector looking much puzzled and perplexed; Mr. Beaufort had passed his delicate hand through his hair till it stood nearly on end, and the corners of his mouth were drawn down in a way ludicrous to behold; and yet Roger, who was a close observer, saw that his master's perturbation was not trouble, but mere flutter—there was decided gratification in it.

"Good morning, Roger," said the Rector, in the old schoolmaster style. "I have a very important communication to make to you, and that is why I sent for you; in fact, Roger, you had better sit down while I read you this letter. Or stay, had I better read it?

Shall I try and explain it instead, though I don't quite understand it myself? You see, it's entirely business."

"Read it, sir, if ye please, if ye leave the choice to me." Roger looked suspicious; he felt sure he should understand the letter, he thought himself quite a match for the Rector in a matter of business.

But as Mr. Beaufort read, the old man found it no easy matter to follow him. The letter was from a lawyer in Sydney, and there was much technical language in it. Three facts, however, stood out clearly. Watty was dead; Watty had died rich; and Watty had made Martha Westropp his heiress.

Mr. Beaufort read the letter through in his most magisterial manner, even to the signature, and then glanced at Roger with eager curiosity.

But Roger looked as unmoved as the bookcase behind him.

"I must congratulate you—at least, no, I believe I should condole with you on the loss of your brother in the first place," here the Rector hesitated. "There is a letter from him too; it is addressed to the lawyer, but it is plainly meant for you."

No muscle of Roger's face stirred, but he stretched his hand out suddenly for the letter.

"I'll give it you," Mr. Beaufort said; "but I want first to ask how this is to be communicated to Patty?"

"She need know nothing, sir, till she come of age." Roger spoke sharply.

Mr. Beaufort waved his white hand. "Stop a minute; you cannot keep it from her. The tidings are not sent to you, Roger, at all; they are sent to me in trust for Patty. I communicate them to you first, because I think a parent should always be taken into confidence first about anything affecting the happiness of his child; but so far as I can make out, Patty will have something like £50,000." Roger started, and his lower jaw drooped. "Now you are too sensible not to see that such a property as this

must alter her whole manner of life; and the first thing to be thought of is to give her a good education, and such a bringing up as may enable her to fill the new place in life which she is called to occupy; she is quite young enough to avail herself of these benefits, and quite old enough to understand that she is called to new duties."

The firm-set face twitched restlessly. Roger had not gathered in anything like this from the letter he had heard read.

"Fifty thousand pounds did ye say, sir? Watty must ha' hoarded rarely!" His face twitched rapidly; he felt more sympathy for his brother than he had ever felt before.

"Yes, that is about the amount of the property. You see I have several letters here, which you can look through at your leisure, and these will put you in possession of the way in which the money is at present invested; but I don't think your brother hoarded." Mr. Beaufort could not keep back a smile. "You told me, if you remember, that he went to some gold-diggings and was thoroughly unsuccessful; it appears that a more successful finder than himself took a fancy to your brother, and after this they went about the country together. This man bought a small property, fell ill soon after and died, leaving the ground to his companion, and in this very ground the gold was afterwards discovered which founded Watty's fortunes."

"And do you mean to say, sir," Roger's eyes gleamed with repressed excitement, "that my brother Watty dug £50,000 in gold out o' the inside o' the earth?"

Roger's bony hand clenched nervously; he longed for a spade in it, and to be at that moment treasure-seeking on his own account.

"I don't mean that altogether, though I can well believe such things have happened; but Watty seems to have been a prudent, practical man; he turned this discovery to good account, and then placed the money

he so gained in the hands of one of the first merchants in Sydney, and the result proves you see, Roger, that money makes money more by using than by hoarding it."

"Do you mean to tell me that Watty didn't know how to spend his riches when he got 'em?" said Roger, roughly.

"He seems to have gone on living quietly on a small farm, and he died unmarried some few months ago."

"He was ready enough to tell of his mischances," said Roger, bitterly; "he couldn't let us know of his well-doing."

"Well, that is past and gone. Now perhaps you would like to read his letter; and I think, if you agree to it, that we will go down to the cottage, and we can tell Patty the news between us."

Roger made no answer; he saw that the Rector would tell the girl with his consent or without it, but he was thoroughly unconvinced.

Education! Why, that meant a boarding-school; and that would spend ever so much of the money to begin with, and would also teach Patty ways and means of spending more of it.

To Roger, money was a precious thing in itself. He shut his eyes to the future; it seemed to him that Patty did well enough in her cotton gowns. She could read and write; what more learning did she want? A vision of investing some of the money in the purchase of live stock, so that he might give up service and reap his own reward from the experience he had acquired, came into his mind; but if Patty were to be made a fine lady, he should have the waste and expense of keeping a dairy-woman, and all sorts of other expenses would come. But these were scarcely thoughts, rather an indistinct haze, which occupied him till the Rector went out of the study to prepare for his walk.

Mr. Beaufort had placed Watty's letter on the

table beside Roger, but his eagerness to read it had subsided. A superstitious dread crept over the hard man as he looked at this message from the grave.

A thought like this came to help him: "I always did my dooty by Watty. Maybe, if I'd been more yielding, he'd ha' been softer still than what he was; maybe it was my keeping him strict as gave him the backbone to do so much."

But against this reasoning two faces rose in mute appeal. Watty's face, with bright eyes and curly hair, and the face of his own wife—the quiet, subdued woman she had died, not the merry-hearted, prattling maiden he had wooed and married. The quiet force of Roger's strong reserved nature had moulded his wife into shape much sooner than seemed likely to be the case with her daughter.

"Martha always said there were good in the lad, so she were right after all," he said in a softened voice.

It was easier to take up the letter now. He opened it, and flattened it on the table with his hand. The beginning was brief and formal, chiefly relating to business matters, but at the end was this paragraph:—

"My brother Roger will likely ask why I leave the money to his child Martha instead of him? You can tell him this at the time you tell him the news: first and foremost, because she's the child of Martha, who never gave me an unkind word; and next, because she's *his* daughter, and I won't, if I can help it, give him the chance of turning her to the bad as he turned me. Tell him, that if I'd felt I had a friend to go to instead of a hard judge, I would never have gone astray, never have done what has made me always ashamed to hold up my head among other men. I don't harbour malice against Roger, you may say that much, but I do feel glad and happy that I've taken it out of his power to make that girl's life wretched by his miserly harshness. May the money do her more good than it's

done me, but I'm not sure;—perhaps I'd have been wiser if I'd builded a church or a hospital."

"Miserly harshness!" Had not Patty said almost the same words? Roger's face worked convulsively; but Mr. Beaufort opened the door, and in an instant he looked as usual.

He got up and followed the Rector. His face looked greyer, older, and there was a strange contraction in his eyes. He folded the letter and put it in its cover, then went forward and opened the gate for Mr. Beaufort.

"Here's the letter, sir," he said.

"You have more right to it than I." The Rector spoke kindly, but he did not look at Roger. He understood the man's proud nature too well to hint his motive; but it seemed to him that some day or other, if not to-day, the truth so plainly stated might make itself heard, and work on the hard sordid heart as his own preaching had failed to work.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

PATTY listened in perfect silence while the Rector announced his golden tidings, and then she glanced up like a shy kitten, at her father and at Mr. Beaufort.

The Rector got up and held out his hand to her. "I congratulate you sincerely, Martha; and if I or Miss Beaufort can be of any service to you in the way of advice as to your future proceedings, as I believe we can be, we shall be glad to help you."

"Thank you, sir;" Patty curtsied at the end of this speech, but the mention of Nuna had quieted the flutter of her excitement.

"You must have good teaching, and so on, you know. Come up to the Rectory when you have had time to think it over, and ask for Miss Nuna; she can tell you a good deal about suitable teachers, masters, and so forth. Now I dare say you and Roger would like to talk it over alone."

And the Rector went away. He had not been so happy for a long while. Doubtless he enjoyed the part assigned to himself in the little drama; but allowing thus much for human infirmity, there was genuine kindness in his heart, in spite of the overlay of self. Selfishness had never made him stingy. It might have been better for Nuna's future if her father had been less open-handed; but Roger's parsimony had always pained his master, and more than once he had dreaded its effect on Patty since her return from Guildford.

"Next to some one leaving a fortune to Nuna, it does me good to think of that poor little girl being released from her hard, dull life. And yet, unless she falls into very good hands, this change of estate may prove a trial; in fact, it is an awful temptation. Yes, we must look very closely after Patty."

But he had no time to pursue this thought. Will Bright was driving up-hill as fast as the black horse would take him; he drew up when he saw Mr. Beaufort.

"Where is your friend, Will? I thought you were to take him out to Gray's with you."

"My friend," Will's emphasis on the word was not friendly, "prefers 'The Bladebone' to Gray's Farm. Ashton is plainly too attractive for him just at present."

The Rector was so full of Patty's fortune, that he failed to notice the irony in Will's voice.

"I'm sorry," he said; "you and Mrs. Bright would have found him a pleasant inmate, I fancy. But, Will, I want to talk to you about that bit of waste land below my first meadow. Cannot you come back and have luncheon? Nuna will be glad to see you."

"Thank you; no." Will Bright gathered up the

reins in his hand ready for a start. "I have seen Nuna this morning."

The tone woke up Mr. Beaufort; he looked at the young man. "What's the matter, Will? I'm sure there's something amiss."

"I've been a fool, that's all," the young fellow said. He turned his head away; he longed to drive on, but the Rector was standing too close.

The gladness that had been making sunshine in Mr. Beaufort's heart clouded over with foreboding.

"Have you and Nuna quarrelled?" he said in a fretful voice.

Will turned round and faced him. "Quarrelled is not the word, and no one is to blame but me. I was hasty, and you can guess what I mean," he said impatiently. "You advised me not to be in a hurry yourself."

"Ah." The Rector drew back out of the way; it seemed to him there was nothing to be said.

"Poor Will!" Mr. Beaufort watched the young farmer driving rapidly away. "I'm afraid he's a blundering fellow, after all. Can't he see that Nuna is only a child, without a notion of love in her head? And I'll venture to say he asked her to be his wife without any preface or courtesy. That roughness comes of the mixture of blood; those Brights have intermarried with yeoman families more than once. Will wants breeding, fine fellow as he is. And yet I really don't see how Nuna could do better than marry Will. I suppose I must say something to her. Dear me, it is very awkward—very awkward and troublesome. I feel quite worried. I made up my mind yesterday not to find fault any more till Elizabeth comes. Well, why can't Elizabeth settle this?"

He had reached the Rectory gate; some one was coming down the gravelled drive as he went in.

"Good morning, Miss Coppock." Mr. Beaufort raised his hat with ceremonious politeness, and the dressmaker returned his greeting reverently.

"What a very remarkable face that woman has!" he thought to himself as he passed on. "I can't fancy she has always been a dressmaker."

Miss Coppock was tall and slender; her grey hair looked almost white against her black bonnet. If her features had been less sharp, and her complexion less sallow, she might have been handsome; there was depth of colour yet in her sunken dark eyes; but the regular aquiline profile was painfully hard in outline, and the jawbone too prominent and marked, now that roundness had left the face. Still there was a purpose in her expression, wholly alien from the study of how best to foster the frivolous vanity of womankind.

"Mary never liked that woman," mused the Rector; "but then dear Mary had a few prejudices. I am not sure that she really liked Elizabeth, though she agreed to trust Nuna with her. Dear me!" he gave a sudden start; "why, Elizabeth will be here to-morrow, and I have not told Nuna she's coming." He hurried indoors.

Miss Beaufort was not in any of the downstairs rooms, so he sent Jane to look for her.

Even if he had not met Will, the Rector must have seen that something unusual had happened, Nuna looked so shy and conscious.

Mr. Beaufort had a way of keeping to his resolutions so long as there was no means of acting on them. He forgot them now.

"I have just met Will, and I find you have been quarrelling." Nuna grew red.

"I am very sorry, but I don't want Will to come here again for a long time."

Her father stroked her hair with unusual graciousness. Fathers seem often to take a secret pleasure in the rejection of their daughters' suitors.

"Nonsense," he laughed; "I expect Will blundered, and you are too young to know your own mind, child. Oh, by the bye, Nuna, Elizabeth Matthews has written to say that she can come and stay with us; she is

coming to-morrow, so will you have a room got ready?"

Downright alarm sprang into Nuna's eyes.

"To-morrow! O father, are you sure? Is there no way of preventing it?"

But her father's graciousness had fled.

"Don't be such a child; why should you object to seeing your cousin? I'm sure," he went on in an injured voice, "we want some one here to keep things straight, and I should have thought you would have been thankful for such an accomplished, ladylike companion. Pray don't let me hear another word of objection."

To ensure safety he went away, and shut himself in his study.

Nuna walked up and down as if she felt caged.

"Oh dear, oh dear, what will become of me? My father finds fault: but then I deserve it, and it does me good; but when Elizabeth scolds, I try to be as tiresome as I can. I feel downright wicked. I would not be good if I could, if she were likely to know it; it would be better to go to Gray's with Will —fifty times better than to live here with Elizabeth."

Meantime at the cottage Patty spoke her mind boldly.

"Now, father, I want to hear more about all this. Mr. Beaufort seems to have got a half way of telling things; in the first place he never said how it was poor uncle came to think about me at all."

"That can't signify nothing." Roger spoke roughly, and then he softened. "You'll learn all about it, lass, I don't doubt, when you're up at the Rectory along of Miss Nuna."

It was pleasant for the father to think of Miss Nuna looking on Patty as an equal, but the dread of all that book-learning might teach lay heavy on his miserly nature.

"I'm not going up to the Rectory, father."

He turned and looked at her. Patty was standing

against the wall, paler than usual, with her lips firmly closed. Roger rarely saw his own face, but he had a secret consciousness at that moment that the girl resembled him.

"What d'ye mean, lass?"

Roger would have scorned the accusation if it had been brought against him, but he felt already a secret reverence for Patty, or rather for Watty's wealth in her person.

"I'm not going up to the Rectory; I'm not going to be patronized any longer. I can get much better advice than that poor dawdle of a Miss Nuna can give me. I mean to be another sort of lady altogether to what she is, father. Don't you trouble yourself about me."

Her father looked at her curiously. She had begun to walk up and down the tiled floor, with her head thrown back, and with long, almost stately steps: he thought she was certainly a well-looking lass. But even her newly-acquired importance could not make him pass over her slighting mention of Miss Beaufort.

"If you grow to be as good and kind-spoken a young lady as her, you may be thankful. Don't make me ashamed of you, Patty; don't let the Ashton folk say as Watty's gold has turned your head and made a fool of you all in a minute. Who d'ye mean can give you better advice than what she can?"

"Why, Miss Coppock, to be sure. Haven't I told you that she's as well taught, and all the rest, as Miss there. *She* wasn't brought up to the dressmaking; she had maids of her own from the first."

Roger shook his head.

"My lass, you've not lived long enough yet to learn the difference betwixt real gentlefolks and make-believes; and I tell you," he struck the table with his fist, "you won't find a truer lady than Miss Nuna anywhere. Why, child, Miss Coppock can only teach you back-stairs ways; she knows more about the maids than she do about the mistresses."

"She's got twice the manners Miss Nuna have," said Patty, sulkily.

"Manners!" Roger looked at her slowly; he tried to keep down his strong contempt, but it rose in spite of him. "Pretty manners! fallals and a smile that seems as if it was always lying on top of her face ready for use, and a way of marching along the street like a peacock. Them's the manners Miss Coppock have to teach. Look you here, Patty, you could paint out the old mildew on the scullery wall if you laid the paint on thick enough—on'y for a while, mind you, it's there all the same, it 'ud come through. Any woman that's 'cute enough can ape a few airs and graces. If you don't know a true lady when you see one, Patty, it's like you'll be takin' up with the wrong sort o' patterns. Don't let's have no more nonsense, there's a good lass."

Roger had been moved by Watty's letter, and now he was moved out of his slow cautious speech. His rugged worldly nature had been shocked to its foundation—shocked, no more—and he was anxious to escape from the subject altogether; it had unhinged him from his usual track of life. He went out into the garden and began to dig potatoes.

Patty stood quietly in the low, meanly furnished room. She pinched her arm at last, and then her lips parted in a smile.

"I suppose it's true," she said. "Good gracious! it's like a fairy story; it's more like dreams I've had;" and then she put her hands before her eyes, for the room was going round and round, while dresses, and jewels, and carriages, and luxurious drawing-rooms filled with light and glitter, enveloped her in a chaos of brilliant confusion.

It seemed as if her usual collected self was deserting Patty Westropp, and that a double transformation was effected. She was not only rich, but she felt fevered, impatient, excitable, as if she could not wait even hours for the leap into this new glorious life

which was so surely hers. For the first time a more kindly feeling showed itself towards Nuna.

"Poor thing! she'll live and die in this dull place, I suppose, unless she marries that young Bright. Well, she's got manners enough for Gray's Farm, any way."

And then Patty's thoughts came back to herself.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MISS COPPOCK'S COUNSEL.

ROGER'S digging was interrupted by the arrival of Miss Coppock.

"Good morning, Mr. Westropp;" the milliner gave him one of the ready-made smiles. "Shall I find Martha within?"

Roger answered by digging his spade into the ground: leaving it there, he came forward, and placed himself in the path of his visitor.

"Good morning, ma'am; come this way a bit, will you?" and he walked on till Miss Coppock was fairly hidden again among the scarlet-runner vines.

"Now, ma'am, I've a word to say, and when you've heard what it is you'll excuse my being short of manners. Patty have got great news for you; she's rich now; she've had sums of money left her. Now, Miss Coppock, I know you're a clever woman, for I hear you manage your own business right well by your own self. Martha 'll want to consult you; women must talk to one another, I suppose, but I want to have my say first. Money's a fine thing; but it ain't like the leaves, it don't grow again when it's spent. My lass is a good girl now, but she's just one that a very little wrong advice would send to the bad altogether. Hold her in, ma'am, hold her in, if ye'd do a friend's part;

she's too full of speerit; she wants the curb just now. That's all, ma'am." He stood aside to let her pass.

While he spoke, Roger had become sensible of a change in the milliner's face; the artificial smile faded, and a look of eager interest took its place; and this expression suited her features so much better than the former one that it was natural to suppose it the more rightfully her own.

She held out her hand to Roger.

"I'm very glad to hear your good news; you may trust me, Mr. Westropp." She went on fast to the cottage.

Roger looked after her.

"Maybe Patty's right," he said; "I've a notion there's more in yon woman than ribbons and such; she forgot all her smiles and mincings at hearing of Patty's luck."

Patty heard her friend's footsteps, and met her in the porch. She was going to shake hands as usual, but Miss Coppock bent forward and clasped her warmly to her.

"I congratulate you, my dear child, with all my heart. I cannot express to you how truly rejoiced I am." She kissed Patty affectionately before she released her.

Patty had a half-comic look on her face; with all her reverence in words for Miss Coppock she had always felt sure of pleasing her, and was perhaps more saucy to her than to any one.

"I'm somebody now, arn't I? I'm as worth coming all the way from Guildford to see as Miss Beaufort herself."

"You mustn't say that," said the dressmaker, in her most professional tone; "I came to see you before I even heard the news."

"Then you didn't hear it at the Rectory?"

"Oh dear no! your father told me as I came in."

"And he told you to give me good advice, and above all, not to be extravagant; I know, I know. Now, Miss Patience, there's no use in looking innocent, I

know the ways of him. Suppose we go up in my bedroom and have a good talk all to ourselves, if you don't mind." She led the way without waiting for her visitor's answer.

Patty was too excited to realize the change in her own manner, but Miss Coppock felt it keenly. She knew well that only a week ago the girl would have thought a visit from her a rare and prized condescension, and here she was leading the way upstairs and treating her as her inferior already.

Patience Coppock had been battling with life for many a long year, and looking onward she saw no rest from her incessant warfare and toil; for of all the toilsome lives allotted to women, surely a dressmaker's is as trying as can be found. There is no repose for the ingenious brain. The mysteries of one set of fashions are no sooner conquered than fresh ones present themselves, and these must be studied, to please the whims and caprices of those chief tyrants of their sex, vain women. The inventors of the fashions themselves doubtless find pleasure in their art as they create, but the hapless crew doomed to copy, and yet to adapt their copy to the capricious taste of each employer, are as much to be pitied as negro slaves are.

Miss Coppock had known a higher kind of life, though still a toilsome one, and once she had had visions of a bright future. Now, following Patty up the uneven staircase, these visions came back with bitter vividness; and she almost hated the blooming girl who was going to take a place so much above any that she could hope for.

Patty closed the door, and then she turned round on her friend without even asking her to sit down.

"Father wants me to take advice with Miss Beaufort." She kept her eyes on her friend's face, and she saw the cloud there. "Now I just don't mean to—I don't like her, and more than that, I'd rather have your advice than anyone's else. I don't know all about it yet, but I expect I shall be much, much better off than the

Rector. I want to tell you the first plan that come in my head when I thought about it."

"I suppose you know you must have an education?" Miss Coppock spoke gravely and simply.

"Oh yes, I must have learning, but that comes after; it'll take us days and days to plan everything. The first thing to be done is to go away from this quietly without saying where we're going, so as no one can make us out to be the same again."

"But you will be traced somehow."

"I don't see it," said Patty, decisively; and Miss Coppock found herself swayed by the command in the girl's manner. "We'll have to change our names; but I know that can be done without trouble. I learned that only yesterday."

The colour flew up to Patty's temples, and flushed face and throat painfully. Till now she had completely forgotten Paul Whitmore.

As we grow older, and autumn comes to our hopes, we find it easier to yield them up, and build new plans on their ruins; and as Patience Coppock stood there listening to Patty, and contrasted the green fresh certainty of the girl's life with the withered brownness of her own, a notion grew in her brain—grew quickly as a fungus grows. She would never see the future that had once seemed so certain. She must give up all hope of an independent life, but she might realize an easy, luxurious future of rest instead of toil by this golden lot that had fallen to Patty. To do this she foresaw she must submit herself to her former apprentice; and in spite of her curtsies and her smiles there was a stubborn independence in the dressmaker—the independence that had been to her as a life-belt, when the waters of despair had once all but closed over her head. But the more worldly spirit conquered; it whispered, "You may make yourself so useful that you will be invaluable;" and hand in hand with this came a more evil suggestion: "Knowledge is power," she thought, "and I must know all Patty's secrets if I am to get a hold of her."

The girl's sudden emotion gives her resolve a power of action; the ill-written note she has received is fresh in the dressmaker's memory.

"How about your friend from London, Patty? What does he say to all this?" If Miss Coppock hopes to take Patty by surprise she is mistaken. The deep blue eyes are raised unshrinkingly to her face.

"I don't understand you; I said a gentleman had sketched my likeness, and I expected he would take my picture. I never said he was a friend as I could talk my affairs to."

Patty speaks pettishly, for she feels her blushes rising, and she is angry at not being able to control them as she can control her words.

Miss Coppock laughs.

"Come, come, Patty, there's no use in half-confidences. Why did you write to me at all, if when I come to answer your letter you begin by denying? You'll make me think that it was all a fancy of yours, and that you've seen no more of this gentleman."

Miss Coppock has gone back to the old tone of superiority; but she feels that Patty is slipping away every moment further and further out of the slight subservience she has exacted; if she does not place herself on a firm footing to-day, her position will be most insecure. Her words break through Patty's reserve.

"You'll think very wrong, then; he comes and sees me every day." And then the girl wishes her words unspoken.

"Is he going to marry you, Patty?" There is a keen, pitiless query in the dark eyes bent fully on Patty's working face. Miss Patience has had plenty of apprentices, pretty girls many of them, and she has had to sift the facts of more than one sad story before now.

"I suppose that rests with me." Patty tosses her head. "You needn't look so hard, Miss Coppock. He all but asked me to be his wife this morning, and he's

coming again to-morrow—this evening, maybe, if father goes out."

"Patty"—there is such a stern warning in her friend's voice that the girl starts—"if he only comes to see you when your father's away, he doesn't mean to marry you; he's only trifling, and amusing himself—perhaps worse."

"For shame, Miss Coppock! He has as much respect for me as if I was a lady born; and don't you suppose he'll want to marry me fast enough when he knows I am as good as a lady?"

Patience Coppock looks keenly at the flushed face.

"You are not a lady yet;" she speaks quickly, but in a firm, decided tone that convinces Patty against her will; "you want education and breeding. You have no manners whatever; your mind and your body must both be trained before you can even pass as a lady."

Patty pouts unbelievingly. She has never seen any one nearly as pretty as she is; it is all very well for a long, skinny, gaunt woman to talk to her in this way, but it is not true.

"Ah well, he's quite satisfied with me as I am."

Her vanity helps her love. If she is good enough for Mr. Whitmore, why need she bother herself with all the drudgery of learning?

"What is this gentleman? What does he do—anything?" Miss Coppock feels on vantage-ground now that Patty has gone back to her own condition.

"Mr. Whitmore told me this morning,"—here Patty's cheeks flame up again at the remembrance of that interview,—"he was an artist; he paints pictures." She looks quickly at the dressmaker, and she sees Miss Patience's lip curling. "He may have property besides for what I know, but I don't think he's rich."

"Ah!" says Miss Coppock.

"What do you mean?" says Patty, angrily. "There's no use in sighing and groaning; it's much the best to speak your mind."

Miss Coppock shakes her head.

"No, no, Patty; I know human beings better than you do, and I've learned that the only use of giving your opinion to a girl who has made up her mind as you have, is to cause disagreement, and I don't want to quarrel with you."

"You can't quarrel with me unless I'm willing."

Patty has recovered her good temper. "And I have not *quite* made up my mind; I want you to tell me plainly what you think."

"About Mr. Whitmore?"

Patty nods.

Miss Coppock hesitates to say what is in her mind; it is a risk, but then the prize to be gained is worth a risk, and certainly she will only be fulfilling her pledge to Roger Westropp, in preventing his daughter from throwing herself away on a poor artist.

"If I'm really to say what I think, I don't trust this Mr. Whitmore. He admires you—you have just the face an artist would admire—and he is studying you; and I've no doubt he finds it very pleasant to visit you and flirt with you. But now listen, Patty: artists are always poor, always extravagant. I haven't the least doubt that Mr. Whitmore has heard of your good fortune by this time. You'll be the talk of Ashton for some weeks to come; and perhaps your money will make him ask you to be his wife. Of course, if you choose to accept his offer and marry him, you will in one way please yourself; but what follows? You say Mr. Whitmore is satisfied with you as you are; then I'm sure you'll rest content too, for a time; you'll hand him over your fortune and he'll spend it for you. It sounds immense to you, Patty, but he'll not find it so. So far so well; but when the money's all spent—mind you, Patty, an artist never lays by against a rainy day—what happens? There you are in a poor struggling home, with perhaps a family. Why, you're better off here, Patty, with only your father to work for. Are you sure you love Mr. Whitmore well enough to run this risk?"

Patty stands thinking; her bright flush has faded.

"The same thing might happen if I married any one," she says slowly.

"And it will happen, my dear, if you marry any one who has only his wits to live on; don't you see that he will be glad to let them rest, and live on your money instead of working?"

"Well, and why not? there's enough."

Miss Coppock looks contemptuous, and Patty feels at a disadvantage. Miss Patience is more wonderful than she had thought her if she can venture to sneer at fifty thousand pounds.

"No, child, there is not enough for wealth; there is just enough to make you see what can be done with money, and to make you long and pine for more." Her thin lips press together eagerly. "But, Patty, you have as good a prospect of real wealth as any one I ever heard of. Set to work at once and make a lady of yourself; I can help you. In a few months, if you try with all your might, you will be quite changed; then, when you are no longer afraid of showing yourself among people anywhere, with your face and the means you have of making a good show you must marry some one who has money—who you like, in fact, but you must not marry a poor man, Patty. You want to get into good society, I suppose?"

"I want to know grand people, and go among fine company," says Patty, sulkily: it seems to her that ambition is not so pleasant after all, if she has to pay a price for its gratification.

"Exactly; well then, my dear,"—Miss Coppock is at her blandest,—"well then, you must do as society does. Well-bred people don't make love-matches, Patty; follies of that kind go on in villages and among the lower classes. You mustn't believe all the nonsense you read in story-books, child; that's just made up to amuse, and it amuses people all the more because it's such a contrast to what really happens. Do you know, Patty, I thought you were far less simple?"

## CHAPTER XV.

### PAUL TRIES TO MAKE UP HIS MIND.

On the morning of the same day when Will had declared his love, and Patty had found herself an heiress, Paul Whitmore had left Roger Westropp's cottage sorely against his will. But Patty had insisted on his going away. Her father might come in any time from the Rectory, and she did not want to run the risk she had run on the previous evening.

Paul had gone down ostensibly to paint her portrait, but he had not even taken a brush from his case this morning. His infatuation had got to its height; and when he left the cottage, it seemed to him that he could not live out the hours till next morning. When he reached the end of Carving's Wood Lane, he avoided "The Bladebone," and crossing into the road leading to the station he found a green lane on the left, one of those grassy sequestered rides which seem made for either solitude or love.

He strolled on, his head bent, his hat slouched over his eyes, at first in a frenzy of impatience, and then, as his senses cleared, with a determined purpose to make Patty his at any sacrifice.

Sacrifice! What nonsense! By the time Patty had been his wife a year, no one would guess her origin. There was nothing unrefined or vulgar about her; she was as simple as a wild-flower. And then he looked at the hedge-bank and thought how far more exquisite were those graceful trailing blackberry wreaths than any mere garden climbing plant.

"She is just like a briar-rose. She has nothing to unlearn; so intelligent too, she would adapt herself to any station."

He lay down at the foot of a tree and gave himself up to the thought of Patty.

After a while he rose up, went back to "The Bladebone," and had his dinner.

If he had been less absorbed, he must have noticed a change in the conduct of his landlady. She sent the maid in to wait on him, and when he came into the garden to smoke she kept studiously out of sight.

Mrs. Fagg had remarked that each time her lodger went out, he went in the direction of Carving's Wood Lane; and this morning Bobby, the luckless cause of so much woe to Nuna Beaufort, had been down to the common to play among the gorse, and had seen the "parlour tustomer," as he called him, talking to Patty in front of Roger's cottage. Mrs. Fagg was a woman of severe virtue, and she did not know how to act. There was no use in speaking to Dennis; he would only make her angry by some nonsense about Patty's prettiness.

"I've almost a mind to speak to the Rector," she said.

But though she had a way of speaking her mind boldly and plainly, Mrs. Fagg was not a mischief-maker, and she shrank from denouncing Patty to Mr. Beaufort.

"She'll come to no good," she said. "She's Watty's own niece, though folks do say Watty would never ha' been so bad if he'd not been drove to it; but Patty's her own driver—good-for-nothing little hussey!"

Meantime Paul was struggling with his scruples. A vision of his mother had come back to him. Was she praying for her son at that moment? He felt, with a sudden keen conviction, that Patty was not the wife she would have wished him to choose.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, put it in its case, and walked moodily up and down the long narrow

garden. A jackdaw, a pet of Bobby Fagg's, kept on popping in and out from among the espaliers with his head all awry, winking one eye, as if Mr. Whitmore's meditations were the most delicious joke in the world.

"I believe mothers never do like their sons' wives," he said at last; "and my darling mother warned me not to marry a gifted woman like herself. I could never find one like her," he said reverently. In that brief moment Patty's image faded.

He thought of what his friends would say.

"Stephen will laugh, no doubt; but then Stephen and I hold different creeds about women. Poor fellow, he lost his mother before he knew what her society was worth, and I'm afraid he doesn't allow women any souls. I'd not tell him a word about Patty if I were to find him in the parlour when I go back there; we should quarrel if I did. He would jeer at the idea of marriage at all in such a case, just as if one woman is not as much a human being as another, and entitled to the same amount of respect, though she may claim it differently."

He felt quieter, more virtuous altogether, after he had finished his walk up and down the garden. He began to think he would leave Ashton at once, go back to London, and think the matter over calmly at a safe distance from the cottage.

"I used to laugh at Rinaldo for being glamoured by Armida, but I'm worse; when I look back a week and see how quickly this has all come about, I believe I ought to be a little less rash."

And in pursuance of this newly-found wisdom Mr. Whitmore determined not to yield to the longing he felt to go down to the cottage again that evening.

"If I am in earnest," he said, "I ought to be very careful not to expose her to her father's suspicions; if not, I am only tormenting myself."

He went through the village, and finding a little sunburnt group playing at "clocks," he sat down and sketched it.

"What a jolly time these youngsters have of it," he thought, and he looked at the red-cheeked, white-headed toddlers with almost envy. The "clocks" of that part of the road were exhausted. The group broke up into twos and threes, hunting eagerly for fresh prey, and one little frail girl scrambled to the top of a long heap of stones ready for road-mending. There was a shrill outcry. "Tell'ee there bean't none there, Lottie," shouts a sturdy brother, who has sat down tired at the foot of the heap to stare at the gentleman. But Lottie's perseverance is rewarded. She has ducked down to search the bank behind the heap, and now she stands upright in triumph on the stones with a dandelion stalk quite six inches long in her hand. Poor little Lottie! Just as the rest come flocking like a troop of chickens when their mother's cluck announces treasure-trove, the little ankle twists, and down she slips, bruising herself severely as she falls.

There was one universal shriek; but when Paul managed to extricate the fallen child from the group that clustered about her like a mass of twining, crawling caterpillars, he found she was insensible.

"Where does she live?" he said to the boy who had been staring at him, the biggest of the chubby, sobbing pinafores around him.

"Her be my sister Lottie, her be;" both brown fists went to his eyes and seemed to be pounding them into his head. "O-o-oh, mother'll whip I, 'cos Lottie be hurt. Oh!"

"Come along like a man, you selfish young brute." Paul was really alarmed for the little lifeless form in his arms. "Run on in front and show me where you live. Go quick, I say, and I'll give you sixpence."

The sobs stopped at once, and the boy trotted on fast, his red legs bulging over the top of his sturdy boots without any visible line of stocking between. He led the way in an opposite direction to the village. Paul had begun to wonder where he was going, when

they came to a sudden turn in the road. A huge elm-tree projected its branches from one side of the way to the other, and behind the screen made by these was a tiny cottage, with a garden all round it, and a mossy thatched roof.

The boy unlatched the gate, and then he slunk behind Mr. Whitmore.

At the sound a young woman came out of the cottage; her face was blooming, her dress tidy and clean, but vixen was stamped in her small light grey eyes and varying complexion.

As she looked at Paul and made out first the lifeless child in his arms, and then the boy shrinking out of sight, she grew white for just an instant, and then the blood flew back to her face and throat in stripes.

"You little villain!" She shook her fist, and darting swiftly past Mr. Whitmore, she caught the boy by the hair and shook him violently. "You've been—and killed your sister,—have you,—you good-for-nothing,—naughty,—wicked limb?"

She emphasized each epithet with a blow. She saw that the gentleman was trying to stop her; but she knew he was powerless with Lottie in his arms, and she gave vent to her passion like a fury.

"Be quiet!" Paul thundered; "this child will die if you don't see to her."

She had got rid of the froth of her rage by this time; she let go Bobby's hair and came and looked at the little girl.

"I'll carry her in," said Mr. Whitmore firmly, "if you'll show me where to lay her down."

The woman scowled, but she obeyed. There was one room opening into the garden, and from this a very rude staircase led into a bedroom above.

There was no closeness of atmosphere, though the room was very small, and had two beds in it; and as Paul laid his little burden down, he noticed how clean were the patchwork curtains and counterpane.

The movement roused the child, and she opened her eyes.

Paul told the mother how the accident had happened.

"And mind you don't scold either of them," he said; "it was purely an accident. You should rather thank God she is not killed. Now, will you raise your little girl, and we will see if there are any broken bones?"

The child moaned with pain when her mother touched her right arm, but it was only from the suffering of the bruised and broken skin; she stood firmly when raised, and her joints seemed to move freely.

Paul gave the woman some silver, and asked her if he could do anything for her in the village.

She thanked him with rather less of a scowl, but she evidently thought herself ill-used by the child's fall.

"No, sir, I don't want nothing, thank you. I'll have my hands full enough with this mischief without a pack o' gossips coming to see how 'tis with Lottie. If you meet e'er a one a-coming, maybe you'll be so good as turn 'em back again. Say thank you, you naughty child, do, to the gentleman as have carried you all the way home."

Lottie was lying on the bed again, her blue eyes fixed on Paul; but at this she grew red and shy, and then pouted up her little mouth to be kissed.

"Well I'm sure, what next?" said the mother, sharply; but Paul bent down and kissed the little maid.

"I'll come and see you to-morrow, shall I, Lottie?"

Lottie smiled; and after giving his advice in a learned fashion to the woman on the treatment of bruises, Paul went away.

The little incident had done him good, and he went to bed resolved to go down Carving's Wood Lane next morning and say good-bye to Patty before his departure for London.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### MRS. FAGG HINTS.

MR. BEAUFORT calculated to a nicety the time at which Miss Matthews must arrive, and then he resolved to go and visit one or two sick people in Ashton.

"Nuna is too amiable to receive her cousin unkindly," he said to himself, "and will be far more gracious if left to herself."

Like many others of his irresolute brethren, Mr. Beaufort disliked seeing facts as they exist; he preferred to theorize. If a thing ought to be done, then every human being might be expected to do it. In precisely the same manner he would not grapple with the fact that an unmethodical mind cannot find order and memory and perseverance by one single effort of the will, and that if habit has to be grafted into a new species, it does not bear speedy fruit.

What ought to be done could be done; and then his judgment took a startling leap to the next conclusion, it must be done.

He could not stand over Nuna all day long to remind her of her omissions, but he could find some one else to act the part of overseer.

And yet a certain discomfort, evoked by Nuna's sad face at breakfast-time, troubled him, and supplied a cogent, though perhaps not an acknowledged, reason for his anxiety to visit the sick this morning.

But his last visit to a poor cripple with only a hard-featured daughter-in-law to take occasional care of him, seemed rather to heighten Mr. Beaufort's discomfort; the poor man was so patient, and the Rector's questions

had elicited more than one trait of unselfish endurance and resignation.

"Still it is very tiresome of Nuna not to have my slippers ready for me when I come in, and to let Jane disturb my papers; and she might dust the book-case oftener, and then the dust would not stifle me as it does now; and then the china figures, they are scarcely ever touched, if she only did a little every day, instead of leaving it all for a week or a fortnight; but everything is sure to go right now Elizabeth is coming, and that is such a comfort."

Still he felt fidgety and uneasy. Mr. Beaufort liked to have his own way, but the naturally soft nature of the man shrank from making his child unhappy.

"It is all nonsense," he said at last. "She ought to like Elizabeth, and so she must. Pooh! I declare I won't go into any more of these stifling little cottages for some time to come. Why won't they open their windows? I believe I am quite nervous from the confined air. The next time Jenkins comes over from Brockham, he may as well go a round among them."

Jenkins was Mr. Beaufort's curate. He lived in the parish which the Rector held conjointly with Ashton, and though he was hard-worked, it is only fair to say that he got a larger stipend than so poor a living might have been expected to furnish. The thought of his curate suggested that it would be well to call at "The Bladebone," and ascertain if Mr. Fagg was likely to be sending over to Brockham, for "The Bladebone" was a house of delivery for parcels, &c., for more inlying villages, and Dennis did a sort of irregular carrier's business for the said parcels and the delivery of the ale for which the inn was noted.

"I don't really see," said the Rector, "why Jenkins should not come over and take duty for me next Sunday afternoon. I have been overworking lately, or I should not feel so nervous. The Brockham people don't often have to go without two services."

When he reached "The Bladebone" Dennis was absent.

Mrs. Fagg appeared as usual on the door-step.

"Will you please walk in, sir?"

"Is your lodger in?" said Mr. Beaufort. "We have seen nothing of him since Sunday."

"Please to walk in, sir."

Mr. Beaufort walked in, but the room into which the landlady ushered him was empty.

"Then you'll tell Mr. Whitmore I'm here."

"I can't do that, sir,"—Mrs. Fagg looked grim,—"he's not in yet; but if you'll please to wait, he surely must be in soon. I should say his stomach 'ud bring him; he was out by eight, and he scarce touched a morsel of breakfast."

"He goes out sketching, I suppose. Yes, I'll wait; I should like to see what he is making of our neighbourhood. I fancy Mr. Whitmore is a very clever artist, Mrs. Fagg." The Rector liked a chat with the landlady, though he sometimes winced under her remarks.

"Is he, sir?" She paused, and then she said sharply, "But I don't think he'll show you his sketch, sir, for all that."

Mr. Beaufort stared. "He keeps his drawings out of sight, does he? Well, I rather like that; modesty is not a frequent fault of the rising generation."

"I should think not, sir, indeed. So far as gals go, there's as much brass in 'em now as in any of them folk as lies on the chancel pavement; but it wasn't for his modesty that I said the gentleman wouldn't care to show his drawing, though in another way perhaps it was."

Mrs. Fagg's sentences poured themselves out at a draught, but when she had delivered them, she stood stockstill, and always listened patiently to her interlocutor.

"Dear me! what is she driving at?" Then aloud, "I don't follow you; do you mean that it is from me especially Mr. Whitmore would hide his sketches?" Mrs. Fagg shook her head; "or what do you mean?"

The question was put impatiently; he thought Mrs Fagg ought not to speak to her pastor in riddles.

"Well then, sir, suppose instead of waiting here till the gentleman comes in to eat that blessed duck —which 'ull be more fit for a pig's food than a Christian's if it's to be kept much longer—you just walk down Carving's Wood Lane; I've a notion you'll be nearer the mark than you would be by waiting here another hour."

But Mr. Beaufort was slow of perception.

"Oh! he sketches in that direction, does he? Very well, I want a little walk. Good day, Mrs. Fagg."

The landlady stood looking after him with a very satirical smile.

"I'm too hard on Dennis oft," she said, "when I call him thickhead. There's Mr. Beaufort, crammed full of Latin and Greek, and the wisdom that's said to go along with 'em, and yet his brains is in such a fog they can't see a torch when it's shown 'em. There's somethin' about men's understandins which minds me of the Flemish mare up at the Park; it takes such a deal to set 'em goin'."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### UNEXPECTED.

In spite of her good fortune, Patty's heart was as heavy on this morning as Nuna's was. When one sees how differently individuals are affected by troubles, one is apt to long for the power of distributing them differently; that is to say, if one believes trouble to be a real evil. Nuna was tormented at the prospect of passing a few weeks with a person with whom she could not sympathise—a prospect which, in the same position, would not in any way have troubled Patty Westropp. She would have smiled at Miss Matthews's interference and small annoyances, and she would have taken her usual way just as if no such person existed. On the other

hand, no one could have laid on Nuna the trouble that gloomed this morning in Patty's beautiful blue eyes, and compressed her pouting lips, simply because the trouble sprang from Patty's own nature, and could never have existed in such a heart as Nuna's.

Through the long wakeful night Miss Coppock's counsel had been a constant subject of thought in Patty's busy brain; sometimes love had conquered, and she had resolved to run the threatened risk and to marry Paul if he asked her to be his wife, but the dressmaker's artful suggestion robbed this anticipation of all sweetness and joy.

"He will only ask me because of my money," she thought; and then she turned to seek a cooler place on the pillow for her burning head. "My luck's known all over Ashton by now. I wonder if he is poor and extravagant: Miss Patience says he is. I won't have ducks and drakes made of my money."

Each time Love was repulsed with a colder, more determined answer, and at last she fell asleep worn out and miserable.

She waked later than usual; the sun had for some time bathed her little mean room in golden light, the whitewashed walls glowed in it. Patty thought the glow was in keeping with the splendour of the new life that opened before her.

She gazed earnestly in her little mirror, resting her face between her two pink palms. She looked pale and heavy-eyed, but still she felt that she was beautiful.

"And what shall I be when I come to be well-dressed, with a lot of soft white lace to set off my complexion, and diamond earrings to make my eyes brighter than they are of themselves, and a lovely necklace on? Why, I might marry a lord, a duke even; why should I throw myself away in such a hurry?"—she drew her long wavy hair through her fingers—"now, too, when I've got no advantage from it all. As Miss Coppock says, think what I may be in a year. Why, she said if I got in good company I

might be in the papers as lovely, and distinguished, and all sorts of names women get sometimes; and if I go marrying a nobody now, I shall be lost to everybody, just one man's wife all my life."

"One man's wife!" A soft blush came with the thought. Was there another man like him to be found? For a while the image of Paul again conquered, and the girl went on dressing herself, a smile of happy love dimpling her lips and brightening her eyes as if no worldly thought could ever reign there.

Her morning duties were strangely distasteful to Patty; she always shrank from spoiling her hands, but milking Peggy seemed this morning a positive and intolerable hardship. Presently she came round to the front of the cottage to gather beans from the scarlet-runner vines; it was hot work, spite of its being still early. The beans most fit for cooking hung high up out of reach, unless she stood on tiptoe. Patty paused at last with aching wrists and panting breath beneath the bean-vines trained on arches over the path; a smile came across her vexed face.

"If he could see me now, what a fuss he'd be in over the picture I make gathering beans. One wouldn't want for admiration certainly if one married him; but then he'd get used to me, and I to him, and then there'd be an end of that. When I think about what I might have if I only have patience—I don't only mean money, I mean change, and lots of people in love with me all at once—somehow a husband don't seem to count against all that."

A tramp, a wretched-looking Irishwoman, passed up from the common to the lane, followed by three squalid children, and carrying one in her arms.

"How dreadful!" thought Patty. She shrank out of sight lest the woman should see her and turn aside to beg. "How dreadful it must be to be plagued with a lot of bothering children! When there's plenty of nurses and nurseries where they can be kept out of the way, they're perhaps not so much bother. I couldn't

be an old maid, though," and then Patty laughed. She was in shade now, and felt less cross; but it was so impossible to think of herself as old that she must have laughed anywhere.

She went slowly into the house, with her apron full of beans, and while she filled a basin of water to cut them into she went on thinking—thinking of Paul, and then of her promise to Miss Coppock; finally a new thought shaped itself distinctly. She must marry, there was no doubt of that; no single woman, she thought, could ever be so much thought of as one with a husband. But the husband himself no longer held the place Patty's judgment had given him before she heard the Rector's tidings.

"After all," she said, pensively, "one can't have one's cake and eat it, and it seems as if there was less risk in choosing all sorts of good things, so many that one couldn't never tire of 'em, than to go and give all up at once for just a husband; and who's to say we mightn't quarrel, and end by hating one another after all?"

Still she looked troubled and uneasy; and when she had shred up her beans she saw they were too few.

"What a plague!"

Paul Whitmore was in the porch when she reached it, and her face clouded.

"Why, what has happened?—you're in trouble, Patty. What is it, my darling?"

But she shrank away from his circling arm, and the gloom on her face deepened.

"Best get it over at once," she thought.

"Why, Patty! What's the matter?" Paul laid his hands on her shoulders and looked down into her frowning face. "Trying to show itself off in a new character, is it, the pretty pet?" He kissed her repeatedly before she could struggle from the strong clasp his hands held her shoulders in; but she did free herself at last, with such vehement energy, that Paul stood still, looking utterly surprised. "Come,

come, Patty, what is it? What have I done to vex you?"

He was very nearly angry. He had forgotten all his sage resolutions of last night, and had hurried down the lane full of passionate, intense longing to hold Patty to his heart, and to see her love shining out in her sweet bright eyes. And then he smiled at himself; after all she was only a woman, and women must be capricious and wayward.

"You vex me by doing that," said Patty slowly; "and—and it's better for me you shouldn't come here again, Mr. Whitmore."

Her heart rebelled against every word as she said it, and yet she knew that unless she drove Paul away she must yield to him.

"Not come here again! Why not? Patty, do you think I'm not in earnest when I say I love you? Who's been putting nonsense into your head?"

A deep flush rose on Patty's cheeks, but she kept her eyes resolutely away from Paul.

"It's not nonsense, and no one put it in my head. I suppose people may change their minds of theirselves." She tossed her head; she tried hard to remember that Paul must know all about her good fortune, and that it was because he did know it that he had come to the cottage early this morning to make her promise to be his wife; but it was very hard to believe all this while she listened to the deep-drawn breathing that told how her words had moved her lover.

"My darling!" Paul spoke very gently, for it seemed to him he had not acted quite fairly towards this simple girl. "Perhaps you have a right to be vexed with me, my own sweet Patty. I ought sooner to have asked you to be my wife, but I loved you so well that I never thought you would doubt me. You forgive me now, my own darling?"

He tried to take her hand to draw her to him, but she pushed his hand away.

"Don't touch me, sir!" she said, angrily. "You've no right to stay here when I keep on saying I don't want you, it's too bad; and you wouldn't dare if father was at home. I don't want to marry you or see you ever again."

She made a movement to retreat into the cottage; but Paul caught her hands suddenly in his, and drew her out into the porch before she could escape him.

Involuntarily she raised her eyes, and then she looked away in fear. There was a tempest in Paul's face; his dark eyes flashed, and his lips trembled with passion.

"Patty! You don't say this of yourself; some one has been poisoning your mind against me; you could not have changed without some cause. O Patty! Patty! have you loved me at all? Did you love me yesterday when you looked so full of love, or have you been deceiving me all through? Look at me—once, only once—and say, if you can, 'Paul, I don't love you.' You can't say it, darling, I know you can't; you are only trying me. For God's sake end the joke, it's too cruel." He spoke hoarsely; he felt that his words made no way. "Patty, tell me at once that you do love me still."

Patty was sulky; she rebelled against this masterful wooing.

"I can't, and I won't; and, Mr. Whitmore, I don't think it's like a gentleman to hold me by force to listen to what I don't care for."

There was no mistaking now the stubborn resolution of her words.

Paul let go her hands, and then he fell back against the old porch as if some one had sent him reeling there under a heavy blow.

He felt struck, withered; all light had gone out of his life—all the easy dilettante spirit in which he had stood there sketching so few days ago. He had been free then; his heart had not been scorched by the passionate love which almost maddened him as his eyes rested on Patty.

Patty stood there pale and grave, but she showed no other traces of emotion. A casual observer, ignorant of all that had come and gone between those two, would have said the man looked stern and the girl weary.

He tired of the silence first. It seemed to him that her words had been a dream, something unreal, that his strong will must and should conquer.

"Think again, my darling," he said earnestly; "you were willing enough to listen to me yesterday: am I changed from what I was then? O Patty! Patty! you are trying me. My sweet, sweet girl, you do not understand how I love you, how happy I will try to make your life, how I will study every wish; you are not in earnest in this horrible, sudden coldness." And then, catching at this stray hope, he grasped her hands in his own and tried to draw her to him.

But she shrank away, and he let go her hands in proud anger.

"False, cold-hearted girl! which is the truth—the Patty you seemed yesterday, when I might hold you in my arms and kiss you, or this Patty? I still believe some one has been slandering me; if they have, if they have said I do not mean fairly by you, I offer you this proof,—come with me now this instant to your father, and hear me ask him to give you to me as my wife."

Patty shook her head, but she would not look at Paul.

"It's no use," she said, fretfully; "I liked you yesterday, but I've changed my mind. I don't ever want to see you again."

"Changed! Say the truth,—say you never felt any real love for me. If you had felt even a fraction of the love I feel, you could not harden yourself against me. Do you see what you have done? Listen to me, I tell you." Patty had turned half away, shrugging one shoulder up like a sulky child. "I never loved any woman really till I saw you, Patty; and this first fresh love you fostered till it has grown into madness, and

now, when I cannot live without you, you calmly say you have changed your mind—you want to be rid of the sight of me. Are all women like you, I wonder?—fair sepulchres of lies!"

"I won't stay here to be called a liar," Patty sobbed, and moved away. Face to face with her lover, it was so hard to play the part she had set herself; she felt angry with Paul for the pain he made her suffer.

Paul's heart smote against his pride. "Forgive me;" he took firm hold of her arm, and drew his hand along it till he had secured her hand once more in his; "you know I could not willingly vex you, but you have driven me out of myself—I feel almost mad. Turn your dear face round, Patty, look into my eyes once as you used to look, and tell me, if you can, that you do not love me. Look at me, darling; let me look into your sweet eyes, your heart will soften. I believe in you still against yourself."

These last words gave Patty warning—gave back her strength; she had betrayed herself then, while she thought she was so guarded. No, she would not look at him. She would not, could not trust herself to meet Paul's eyes; spite of Miss Coppock and all the prospects she had placed before her, Patty trembled before the power of Love, trembled in every fibre of her body.

Unless she meant to yield, she must run away; and if she attempted to do this, she feared Paul would once more clasp her in his arms, and she dared not risk that a second time.

Selfish as she was, the trial was very bitter; it was so hard to give him up. She did not want to marry him, but his love had been the first dear delight of her life, and Patty would have liked to gather up every pleasure she met with, and carry it along with her.

She looked towards the common. Oh! if even she could see a cart driving across it—anything that would break up the solitude; for she knew that Mr. Whitmore could not expect her to brave scandal for his sake.

She looked right and left, but there was no one in sight.

Paul still held her hand, he kept his eyes fixed on her face, and hope grew as he saw the increasing agitation there. He kept back any act or word. It seemed to him, in that moment of passionate, intense hope, that Patty's own feelings would plead best for him.

If he could only have seen into her heart, if he could have known that she dreaded herself more than him, that she was almost stifled by her fear of yielding, he would have made another passionate appeal, and he might have yet conquered.

That brief waiting was decisive. Patty lifted her head, and looked once more towards the lane. Sister Anne on the top of Blue Beard's tower did not gaze with more heartfelt expectation. A sound had reached her ears, a sound faint at first, but coming more and more distinctly, the sound of a stick striking against the pebbles in the road.

She was not deceived. As she looked she saw Mr. Beaufort turning the corner of the lane.

"Ah, there's the Rector! Oh, please let me go! I told you I wanted to go. Oh, quick, quick, go away —we shall be seen!"

But Paul would not loose her hand. He would not yield up his newly kindled hope for all the rectors in England.

"I will let you go, darling, if you tell me the truth. You must look at me too, Patty, or I can't believe. Do you love me?"

Patty raised her eyes to his. She hesitated a moment.

"No—no, indeed; I don't want to see you again."

The words were like a blow—Paul loosed her hand, and she was gone before he knew what had happened.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### PATTY'S REASON.

PAUL stood leaning against the porch. What did he care for Mr. Beaufort? Just then he would like to have proclaimed Patty false to all the world.

The Rector felt extremely uncomfortable. He knew that Mr. Whitmore had seen him; he could not retreat, but he scarcely knew how to act.

"How very awkward. Dear, dear me! Why, he was holding that girl's hand just now. I'm afraid there has been something more than portrait-painting here. It is my duty to say something. How very troublesome."

"Good morning," said Paul, as he came up. "You'll only find Patty in," he added, "her father is not here."

Mr. Beaufort was completely taken aback by such coolness, but still it seemed as if he must say something.

"Are you painting Martha Westropp?" he said, gravely.

"No; I've been talking to her."

The Rector coughed and looked away; those fiery dark eyes were sending most challenging looks at him.

Paul still stood quietly leaning against the porch, and whistled.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. —— Whitmore; will you favour me with five minutes' talk outside the gate?"

Indignation at what seemed to him defiant insolence had given the Rector courage.

Paul bowed and followed him beyond the gate to the corner of the lane.

"Excuse what I am going to say, Mr. Whitmore. You know I must look after my own people, and though no doubt it is very amusing to you to talk to a simple

village girl, you must remember that you are perhaps doing her a great harm." Here the Rector suddenly remembered Patty's improved fortunes, and he felt as if he were telling a falsehood, and moreover that the case was entirely altered. But then—for the meaning of Mrs. Fagg's hints was clear now—this acquaintance must have been going on some days, and, moreover, it was scarcely probable that Mr. Whitmore knew of Patty's changed estate.

"I suppose it is nothing but mere idle folly," he said to himself, irritably, "but it is most reprehensible, and I've no doubt this young man is in the habit of such intimacies. I dislike them altogether."

"I shall not have a chance of doing her any more harm." Paul's laugh puzzled the Rector, it sounded so bitter. "I am leaving Ashton to-day. I meant to call at the Rectory, but if you will permit me I will say good-bye to you here, and thank you for your kind hospitality. Good-bye."

"What a very extraordinary person!" and it seemed to the Rector, as Paul Whitmore passed on rapidly up the lane, that he himself had decidedly got the worst of the encounter. The stately dignity of the artist's parting words had fairly taken the Rector's breath away.

Paul literally strode on as if he were treading out the fire of his passion on the loose sandy soil; his firm steps sent it flying as he hurried along. He meant to go back to the inn, pay his reckoning, and then leave the village without delay. He would not stay one unnecessary minute in Ashton.

At the end of the lane, playing there, in the act of climbing up the steep bank by the help of one of the gnarled roots, was the boy whose sister Paul had helped last night.

"Please, sir, is you coming to see Lottie?" the boy said.

Paul had a tender place in his heart for children, and he remembered his promise to the little pale Lottie as she lay on the bed.

He turned to the right instead of to the left, and passed quickly through the village on his way to the cottage. It seemed as if he could not give thought a moment—he could only move.

He lifted the gate latch, but no one came out, and then he rapped on the half-open door within.

"Come in," said in a quiet voice.

Paul went in, and started back in surprise. The mother was not there, but Nuna Beaufort was sitting in a low chair with Lottie on her lap.

The warm blood came rushing to her face, and then she smiled and held out her hand.

"I believe you must be the 'good gentleman' Lottie is talking about. Her mother sent down to the Rectory for something for bruises, so I came to see what was the matter. Poor old Lottie, she had a sad tumble, hadn't she?"

She bent over the child and kissed her, glad to hide her own blushes.

"I'm glad of the chance of saying good-bye to you," said Paul, which was not true. Just then he hated every one, women above all.

"Are you going away?" said Nuna. "You will see my father, I hope, before you go. I am sorry he has been so taken up with this business of Patty Westropp's. I know he meant to have called on you."

Mr. Whitmore's words seemed to Nuna to take away the last little bit of sunshine left in her life.

But he was thinking only of Patty. What was this business? In it might be the secret of her caprice.

"I met Mr. Beaufort just now. Is Patty Westropp in trouble, then?"

"Well, no, hardly trouble." Nuna smiled, and Paul felt as if he would like to shake the words out of her. "And yet I believe her change of fortune may cause her more trouble than she would have found in poverty. She has had money left her—quite a large fortune, I believe—so I shall have my wish after all, and see how pretty Patty looks dressed like a lady."

"A fortune left Patty!"

Nuna looked up quickly at the changed tone. Mr. Whitmore had turned pale to whiteness.

"Yes; I believe it is no secret. My father told me yesterday that the property left was worth more than fifty thousand pounds. Will it not be a great change for Patty?"

Paul murmured an indistinct answer, then he shook hands mechanically with Nuna, and went out of the cottage as fast as he could.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A FLITTING.

THREE days after Mr. Whitmore's sudden departure Roger gave up service at the Rectory. Mr. Beaufort had been able to find a likely substitute.

When the Rector asked if Patty had begun to make any plans for the future, Roger answered sullenly that he believed there was something afoot, but he gave no hint that they were likely to quit the cottage.

"I shall go down to-morrow and see Patty again." Mr. Beaufort stood watching Roger as he passed slowly out through the iron gate. "She must not be left to fight her own battle with Roger; I'm afraid he's a thorough miser."

The troubled look had not left Roger's face when he reached his cottage door.

He looked round the poor bare room with a restless, yearning glance, until his eyes settled on the two brass candlesticks.

"Patty!" There was no answer, and he went to the bottom of the little staircase. "Patty, I say!"

"I'm busy; you must wait, father."

The cloud on Roger's face deepened.

"It's working already," he muttered; "she were always stiff-necked, and now there'll be no turnin' her no way." He went back into the little room, took down the two candlesticks and set them on the table; there came a half-sneer at himself while he did it. "God knows I ain't one for fancies and extravagance, but she chose these herself and bought 'em, and I don't mean to part from 'em. I don't reckon they'd fetch above a trifle."

There was a cupboard in the wall near the fireplace, and from this he took an old newspaper and tore it in two.

Patty came in before he had finished; she had her hat and cloak on, and there was an unusual excitement in her deep blue eyes.

"Going to light candles, father? Well, I never! Why, we shall be off before 'tis quite dark, and there was only two candles left, and they're packed up."

Roger lifted up his head, and looked at his daughter from under his grey bushy brows.

"Let me be, lass, will ye? unless ye lend a hand in parcelling up these to go along of us."

"You can't take the candlesticks, father, they're not ours any longer; I saw they was marked down in the valuing book, when Mr. Brown showed it me."

The shaggy brows knit closely, but an angry light gleamed through them.

"You saw your dead mother's goods marked down for sale and you let 'em stand in the book, did ye? I'd not have believed it of you, Patty, if any one but yourself had sworn to it."

Patty stared in utter wonder. It was not easy to surprise her; her quickness had hitherto got the start of the wits of those among whom she lived; but a sentiment in her father was as unexpected as a gift.

"I never give a thought to their being mother's; I mind now you told me so, but Mr. Brown said he was to reckon up everything in the place. Why"—she smiled till it seemed as if there must be more

worthy spectators than those four dull walls and the tall, stern, grey man beside the table to gaze on such exquisite sweetness—"I thought he was going to enter my bonnet-box and all. But look here, father, let me do 'em up for you, and you can make it right with Miss Patience to-night; she'll tell Mr. Brown."

Her father pushed the plump pink hands away.

"Go and see after the baggage; I'd liefer see to these myself. Will ye be done by the time I bring the cart round?"

Patty nodded and tripped away; she almost danced. It had not seemed possible to believe in her new life while the old husk of former scenes and habits was unchanged; and moreover that parting interview with Mr. Whitmore had been a sore trial.

"There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," she had said to herself, and Miss Coppock had come over again, and had praised her warmly for her wisdom; but it was hard to lose a real lover so soon. Patty's feelings as well as her vanity had told her Paul's love was real. Still one event had succeeded another so rapidly in this short time that she had had no leisure for regret, and in the excitement of to-night this trouble had faded out of sight. Patty felt that she was taking her first steps in life, and her excitement was heightened by the mystery which Miss Coppock had prescribed.

"Go away in the evening, my dear," Patience had said, "without any fuss or leave-takings, and then you can't be worried with questions you don't mean to answer."

All the information vouchsafed to Mr. Brown, the broker from Guildford, had been that Roger Westropp wanted to sell his old furniture, and would like to know how much he ought to have for it.

Patty ran upstairs for the last time, gave one comprehensive look round the bare room, and then came down with the only valuable she possessed.

It was one of those circular wooden boxes, with oil-

cloth top and a strap, a present from Miss Coppock when Patty gave up her service.

"I dare say now," the girl thought, "before a month's over I shall laugh at myself for troubling about such poor fineries and trinkets. I might have given them to Jane for a keepsake; but I don't mean to give anything up till I've got its value in exchange." She went to the door and called to Roger. "I'm ready now, father; we'd best be moving."

She had assumed an independence which grew daily. Roger, as yet, had not found words to resent it openly, but he was more silent and sullen than ever.

Even now, as he harnessed the horse, his heart was full of foreboding. Was he doing wisely or well in quitting this quiet roof, where he had been safe if not satisfied, to travel out into the world with a girl of whom he seemed to know as little as of some stranger? And the puzzle of the matter to Roger was that he was doing all this against his will, at the bidding of a woman and a girl. Miss Coppock and Patty, even while they seemed to consult him, had, he felt, settled all as they wished. His brains were too deep in calculating how to expend the least possible portion of Patty's fortune, to see that this fortune was, after all, the magnet that was drawing him from his quiet home. Patty had told him that she meant to go to school abroad—it would be cheaper all ways; but she should get a few months of London teaching first. He wished now he had stood firm. Why could he not have placed her at once in safe-keeping, and have stayed behind in the cottage? But Patty had become to Roger an embodiment of her money, and this was only a momentary thought. He must not leave Patty; he must watch over her personally if he would secure Watty's pounds from being squandered or stolen.

Everything was in the cart at last, and they drove away in the dim light. The cow had been sold to the butcher, and even this had been managed so as to give no rise to suspicion; there never had been cat or dog

in the cheerless home. They drove away in silence, only the crickets chirped louder in the stillness, as if glad to be rid of their fellow-inhabitants.

Roger looked more than once over his shoulder till the cottage became lost in indistinctness. But Patty's eyes were fixed steadfastly forward; she was longing to meet the future she felt so sure of—the future she had already pictured without one cloud to dim its brightness.

They were to sleep at Miss Coppock's, and then to start early, before the town was awake, for London. Miss Coppock had lodged once in the Old Kent Road, and she thought it would be a quiet out-of-the-way place for the Westropps; a place where Patty might effect the transformation she wished in her outward appearance without observation, and where Roger could live as quietly and cheaply as he chose. When Patty had equipped herself in a suitable fashion—and she was to take to town with her a costume devised by Miss Patience's own fingers—she was to betake herself to a teacher likewise recommended by this indefatigable friend.

All this had been settled beforehand; but when Patty arrived at Miss Coppock's she was at once conducted with much formality to her own room, and there her friend recapitulated the whole programme.

"You don't seem satisfied, dear," she said; for the rich red lips pouted in a drooping fashion.

"Well, no, I'm not. Why can't I, when I'm dressed like a young lady, go to a regular first-rate school, the very best there is to be had for money, instead of sneaking off to an out-of-the-way place like this Kent Road."

Miss Coppock smiled coaxingly.

"Well, you know, dear, it all depends on yourself how long you stay with Miss Finch; and besides, she does not live there, only near it. But she can teach you all sorts of things—how to move, and how to curtsey, and how to come into a room. And, my dear

Patty, though of course when you get to school you'll be prettier than any one else there, and be thought more of no doubt, still these outside affairs are most important; and if you have not the same kind of manner in all these little things as the rest of the pupils, depend upon it they'll suspect, and once they suspect they'll give you no peace till they've found you out."

Patty smiled, and tossed her head.

"I don't think people will get anything out of me I don't choose to tell 'em."

"There, Patty, there it is; that's exactly what Miss Finch will do for you. Before you've been with her a fortnight you'll never think of saying ''em,' or tossing your head so pertly."

Patty coloured up.

"Don't you be afraid, Miss Patience. I mean to spend a little time in a French school, and then in a German one; I've learned about them in novels. It won't matter whether I get to talk foreign languages or not, so long as I can say I've been there, and the travelling will teach me more than a school will."

"Ah well, my dear, you'll see." Patience Coppock was thinking that Patty had grown scrupulous since she left her service; in those days she had not always confined herself to assertions founded on fact. "I hope you'll sleep well," she said. "You have quite settled then about your new name."

"Yes, quite; do try and forget I ever was called Patty: I'm Elinor Martha Latimer."

And that night among her fevered dreams the girl seemed to hear Paul Whitmore, calling "Patty, Patty, do you love me?" and the sound grew sweeter as she listened.

## CHAPTER XX.

### AT THE STUDIO.

A MAN sat reading by lamplight in a large, dim, old-fashioned room in St. John Street—reading intently loose sheets of manuscript. His face was closely bent over the pages; both elbows were planted on the table, and the hands belonging to the elbows had buried themselves in the mane of hair that almost reached the reader's shoulders.

Not being able to see his face, the eye turned to take a survey of the room, so far as the dim light revealed it.

It was square and well-proportioned, a wide bay window faced the door, and on the right from the window there was a high quaint fire-place, with carved mantelshelf and piers in red marble; facing the fire-place was a rambling, well-filled bookcase. The ceiling was ornamented, like the mantelshelf, with scrolls and flowers; the high wainscot, beneath the pale green walls, was richly carved, as were also the panels of the doors and shutters.

Mr. Stephen Pritchard had lit his reading lamp, but he had not thought it necessary to shut out the twilight. He sat with his back to it at a library table of carved oak. Another table stood between the door and the fire-place, and on this was a small easel and a collection of "properties" in the way of colour-tubes, brushes, &c., which spoke of another branch of Art than that practised by Mr. Pritchard. Looking round the room in the dim light, there were easels in different parts of it, with pictures on them in various stages, and the walls showed plaster casts in abundance on shelves and brackets. Against the wainscot were portfolios reaching nearly the length of the room, some orderly and

neatly tied, but the greater number over-filled and bulging. A huge square artist's "throne" stood in the middle of the room, and on this was a carved oak chair, with crimson velvet back and cushion. In the dark far-away corners more than one lay figure showed phantom-like and ghastly.

Mr. Pritchard got up abruptly and began to walk, or rather roll, up and down the room, with both hands in his pockets.

His face was not pleasant to look at; it was sleepy and sensual. Just now, with all his sandy-coloured hair standing up on end, and his lower lip drooping heavily, he looked like a despairing satyr.

"Confound it! it won't do. If I sit up all night, I must work it out better."

The door opened, and in came Paul Whitmore. He put his hat down on the table and seated himself as if he were at home.

He looked thinner and older than he did at Ashton, graver too, but he smiled at Pritchard's appearance.

"I say, old fellow, you're just in condition for Absalom; no, you're not young or handsome enough. By Jove! I tell you what you'd do for exactly—the Apostate in the Pilgrim's Progress, dragged along, as you may remember, by his hair. Oh dear, I'm dead beat this evening."

"I should very much like to know what you are dead beat about. Bodily fatigue is all nonsense; take a nap if you're tired, and get over it. You painters don't know what real labour is." Mr. Pritchard took out his pipe and began to fill it.

"Why," Paul laughed, in a good-humoured teasing way, "do you suppose we never tire our brains over our work?"

"Brains! I should like to see you put a strain on yours, my good fellow. As to a painter working his brains, it's a mere fiction. You're observing, I'll own, and you reflect on what you see, and digest, and modify, and reconstruct, and all the rest of the pro-

thought, scorning himself for dwelling on the memory of her loveliness, and yet when he came home his first task was to put her face on canvas—"Perdita" he called the picture; but no one who had seen Patty Westropp could fail to recognize her portrait.

Nearly three months since he left Ashton, and the wound still smarted. He told himself that he detested the mean mercenary girl who had so deceived him, but yet every now and then a keen wild desire to go down and see her took possession of him; if he had not had pressing work in the shape of commissions to execute, he must have gone.

"I say, Paul, you are right; I am used up"—Mr. Pritchard took his pipe out of his mouth; he gathered up his manuscript and locked it in his desk—"I shall go down to my cousin Will's to-morrow. Will you come?"

Paul Whitmore started; his thoughts just then were at the cottage near Carving's Wood Lane. He had almost said Yes, but he resisted the temptation. If he did go to Ashton he certainly did not want to go in company with his friend, and, above all, he did not mean to go and stay at Gray's Farm. There was some satisfaction in knowing that Stephen would hear all the news that was to be learned in Ashton, and that he would be back again soon to retail it.

"No, thank you; if I tell you the truth, I don't think your cousin would care particularly to see me; I can't say I made a favourable impression."

"Perhaps old Will was afraid you might make a too favourable impression at the Rectory. It is four years now since I was down; but if that youngest Beaufort has grown up according to promise, she ought to be charming."

"Yes, she is rather nice-looking." Paul spoke abruptly, almost savagely; he hated to be reminded of Nuna, and the pain her words had given him. He went on busily with a charcoal drawing, in which moon and clouds and a stormy sea were the actors.

"Nice-looking!" Mr. Pritchard had been smoking again, and now he took his pipe out of his mouth. "I feel certain she snubbed you, Paul. Nice-looking! I never saw such eyes as she had. I shall soon find out by what she says what she thinks of you, my fine fellow."

"Miss Beaufort has certainly forgotten my existence," said Paul, carelessly, and no more was said about Ashton.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AT ASHTON.

MR. PRITCHARD went down to Gray's Farm, but two rainy days proved a great trial for his patience. He was too much of an invalid to adopt Will's costume and go tramping about all day, sometimes knee-deep in mud and slush, and he found the quiet but incessant stream of his aunt's confidence worse than the London fog he had left in St. John Street. It stupified him, and he went back to town bearing an invitation for himself and his friend to spend the week after Christmas at the farm.

Mrs. Bright had given this invitation impulsively, and had suffered much inward misgiving in confessing her indiscretion to Will.

He was more angry than she expected—so angry that she began to fumble for her pocket-handkerchief. "I surely am your mother, Will," she said.

"And you have every right to invite your friends and mine too, but this Mr. Whitmore is no friend of ours. Why, you have never seen him."

There was a blustering sound in her son's voice, and his face was very red indeed.

"Oh dear me!"—Mrs. Bright laughed nervously,—"how jealous men are! But don't be afraid, dear, you may make your mind quite easy about Nuna; your

cousin says Mr. Whitmore don't admire her at all—thinks nothing of her."

"How dare he speak a word against her!" thundered Will. He got up and shook himself as if, like the children, he felt "the black dog on his back," and for once his mother was glad when he went away.

"I'm afraid he and Nuna don't get on," she said. "Poor dear Will!"

In reality Mr. Bright's courtship had been at a standstill, although he had no intention of giving up his hopes. He stayed away some weeks from the Rectory to give Nuna time to come round, and when he at last went there, he put such a strong constraint on his looks and his manner that Nuna was relieved. She felt persuaded that her old friend had given up his love, and that they should gradually subside into their former relations.

It was a help to Will's self-control that he never found Nuna alone. Miss Matthews was always with her; and Miss Matthews had good reasons of her own for encouraging the young man's visits, and made herself specially agreeable to him. She had the faculty of pretty talk—talk which compelled an answer that the tongue could frame without troubling the brains to aid it; talk with nothing in it to remember, and yet which soothed Will's anxiety.

And Miss Matthews helped him in yet another way. Nuna was so weary of her cousin's prattle, of these long days of forced companionship, without one grain of sympathy in it, that she began to look for Will's visits as a relief from the monotony. Nuna was utterly weary of Miss Matthews.

Her chief comfort lay in the fact that Elizabeth had a long-standing engagement to spend Christmas with an old aunt who was likely to remember her in her will, and Nuna knew well that this attraction would prove irresistible. She was unobservant, but she was gifted with the mental sensitiveness of a blind person; her instincts helped her; she might seem blind, but these,

like the long antennæ of some insects, were truer sentinels than mere eyes would have been. And yet, truly as these instincts served her, Nuna was strangely blind to the empire which her cousin was quietly and surely establishing over Mr. Beaufort. She was so troubled by the orderly restraints which had come over her erratic habits, and by Elizabeth's constant presence, that she grew more and more self-absorbed. Mr. Beaufort sometimes shared their walks, and then he and Elizabeth talked, and Nuna found herself free to wander on before them. Once or twice she had wondered at the interest with which her father and her cousin listened to each other, but she had soon forgotten anything but the subject of her own meditation —her future life. The subject of most young women's reveries, although it may differ in matter, yet is almost always a forecasting of the future.

A common-place girl thinks, and perhaps plans the best way of getting a husband; a lofty-minded damsel how she may lay out the coming years for the benefit of others; and between these two are an infinity of rainbow tints. Nuna was free from the grovelling thoughts, and also from the more transcendental ideas. She must be intensely happy, and she must be loved. She mused on the future, and that which it might hold for her. It was to her a far off, strange country, yet one which she must surely visit; and burning through these misty indefinite visions with a steady clear light was the ardent longing for sympathy—the sympathy of a heart that could understand her own—strong helpful sympathy on which she could lean, for love and guidance too, for Nuna lacked self-reliance. She would have been startled if she had known how the memory of Paul Whitmore mingled with her visions till it was becoming an integral part of them. She had striven hard at first to forget him. Without a distinct consciousness she felt that the thought of this stranger troubled her peace; but all unknowingly, the strong loving guide who was to pilot her through rocks and shoals in the future

look to the fires, and when you knew, too, that my throat was uncomfortable last night. My study fire is out, quite out; there's not a spark."

Nuna looked disturbed.

"I'll go and light it," she said.

"You light it! You could not light a fire, Nuna, or do anything else that is useful and domestic. Tell Jane to do it. I must go and put my great-coat on again, I suppose; it really is too trying."

"Oh, how horribly stupid of the fire!" groaned Nuna, while her father went to fetch his coat. "I quite forgot; and now I shall be lectured for the rest of the day—just as if I could be expected to think of everything while I was doing those fidgety flowers."

Mr. Beaufort came back, and sat down shivering. He felt very irritable; he had walked himself into a glow, and now, instead of reaping any advantage therefrom, he knew he should get a chill by sitting down in a cold room. He need not have sat down; he might have walked in the garden till the fire was lighted, but he wished to punish Nuna, by making a martyr of himself. He felt thoroughly vexed, for the second time this morning. Just before he reached the Rectory he had met Will Bright.

"I don't know what to do," said Will; "my cousin Stephen is coming down to-day, instead of waiting till the end of the week, and it will scarcely do to leave him the first evening."

The Rector did not like the little he had seen of Mr. Pritchard, but he never failed in hospitality.

"Bring him, of course; we have not seen him for years, and he has become a great man in the way of fame since we saw him."

"Thank you; I know he was very sorry to miss seeing you when he came down in November. But he is not coming down alone; that artist friend of his is coming too, not to us,—he prefers 'The Bladebone,' it seems."

"Dear me!" said the Rector; and he looked vexed.

"Well, yes." Will felt awkward. "Mr. Whitmore likes to be free in the country, at least so Stephen says; and if he gets out he doesn't care to feel bound to come in for early dinner; and you know I never alter my hour for any one."

The Rector had stood musing, utterly deaf to Will's personal information. "I had better go back to 'The Bladebone,' I suppose, and leave a message for this Mr. Whitmore. Good day, Will."

It is possible that if things had come about naturally, and the Rector had met Mr. Whitmore unexpectedly in the village, the sight of the artist might have rekindled the old attraction he had felt towards him; but Will's disparaging manner recalled his own last interview with Paul, and the very undesirable position in which he found him with regard to Patty Westropp.

"I don't think he is the sort of person a clergyman ought to receive at his house," thought Mr. Beaufort; "but still he paid no attention to Nuna. I don't fancy he is a man who cares to talk to what he would call conventional young ladies; and I so dislike to be inhospitable."

The Rector went to "The Bladebone," and left an invitation with Dennis for Mr. Whitmore to dine at the Rectory at six o'clock; and then he walked rapidly home to tell cook of the two additional guests, and found the fireplace in the study black, and the room as chill as a well, and when he reached the dining-room there was no fire there either. He sat shivering while Nuna went off to find Jane.

"Nuna's carelessness is not to be endured. I really don't know what to do; I don't, indeed. I cannot see what is to become of her, married or single; she has no thought for any one but herself and what she happens to be doing at the time." He looked at the graceful pyramid on the table. "Those flowers; yes, they are beautiful, but they would have answered every purpose if they had been put up in an ordinary fashion. Elizabeth would have arranged them in one quarter

Mrs. Bright kissed Nuna, then held her hand a minute, and then kissed her again.

"How nice you do look, dear; just like a picture in a keepsake I've got at home, though to be sure that lady looks silly, spite of the black lace and all, and nobody could ever say you looked silly, Nuna, could they? But you know what I mean; it's the look and the lace and flowers, and all that sort of thing, in the keepsake. It's a very pretty story you know, dear, but a sad ending; she thinks,—the lady, you know—her name is Dolores—well, Dolores thinks her husband don't love her, and so she takes poison."

"Then I'm afraid Dolores was decidedly silly," said Pritchard.

"Do you?" Nuna's eyes looked direct into Mr. Pritchard's; his talk was new, and it amused her, and amusement was to Nuna that which sunshine is to a flower. "I don't mean," she smiled, "to champion suicide, but I always think women who take poison must be mad, and surely such a cause as that would make any woman mad."

Pritchard felt as if he could hardly contradict her, she looked so wonderfully pretty; he noted the depth of feeling that glowed up into her eyes, and he quite envied his cousin Will.

"By Jove! how that girl will love when she does love."

"I'm afraid I must still call a woman silly who goes mad on such a subject," he said, smiling. "What do you say, Mrs. Bright?"

"O Stephen, you know I never argue with you, and I believe you said the story was badly written. I suppose that was because of its old-fashionedness. I'm sure I can't see what the writing of a story can have to do with the excitement of it; it seems to me that's all one cares for. I always skip everything but the exciting parts; you see I can't think and be interested all at once, and when people are married against their wills—at least when they marry the wrong person

through a mistake, or because their father can't pay his bills—I never think of anything but getting on fast, I always feel so excited to know what will happen when the right lover turns up afterwards."

Mr. Pritchard had been nervously pulling his beard in his intense desire to speak.

"The right lover! My dear aunt, I'm alarmed. What is to become of the morals of the rising generation if a sober-minded, strait-laced matron like you patronizes these toadstools of literature? Why, why—" Mr. Pritchard's contradiction made him quite indifferent on which side he argued, so long as he was in opposition to every one else—"don't you know that they are a pack of lies—monstrous humbug from beginning to end? People never act in real life as these mawkish little girls do. No, I beg their pardon, girls in novels are not mawkish now-a-days; they are nasty little materialists. Such love as they feel would never break their hearts or drive them mad in real life. I'm free to admit," he looked eloquently at Nuna, who had sat down beside Mrs. Bright, "that there may be women capable of one only *grande passion*, or two perhaps—women who love with a vengeance. But these women have noble, steadfast souls; they would not sit and snivel out their existence on themselves."

"Well, but then," said Mr. Beaufort, who had got attracted to the discussion, "your negative itself brings you round to agreement; if there be only few of these higher women, the others constitute the mass, and are justly represented."

The discussion was beyond Mrs. Bright. She drew Nuna into a conversation on the subject of Larry's iniquities.

"I had not finished," said Pritchard. "These sighing, brainless creatures are incapable, morally and physically, of genuine love; depend upon it, there's not one among 'em all that would not be consoled by some kind of material panacea. I don't mean to libel them when I say they are far more likely to take to brandy than to poisoning themselves."

"No," said Nuna, "I don't read deep books."

"Why not?"

"They make my head ache, and I don't like them."

"Ah!" Mrs. Jenkins sighed, "all the result of early training. My Mary, you know, is only fifteen, and she turns with disgust from a shallow book. She and I have just begun to study Hegel."

"Won't she grow very learned?" said Nuna, mischievously.

"Ah, my dear Miss Beaufort, that is such a mistake; women can't learn too much. And then, too, you must bear in mind that Mary's sphere of thought is large—very large! She never fritters thought away on small things," and Mrs. Jenkins leaned her sharp cheek-bone on her hand and looked up to the ceiling in silence.

The gentlemen came in before Mrs. Jenkins emerged from her reverie, and then she fastened at once on Pritchard, who wanted to talk to Nuna, and cursed the learned lady in his heart.

"To my certain knowledge," whispered Mrs. Bright, "that girl Mary can't sew a seam, and I should say, to judge by the look of it, she brushes her hair once a week; and if anything should happen to that turnip-faced husband, what's to become of the child? Her learning won't find her in bread and butter and shoe-leather."

The evening was soon over. Nuna sang, and Mr. Whitmore was charmed with her rich full voice, and placed himself so that no one else could stand beside her.

"What right had I to do it?" he said, as he walked back to "The Bladebone;" "she is that fellow Bright's property, not mine, but she is too good for him. She'll wear her heart out tied to such a prosy, commonplace lout. What eyes she has! and what a figure! I wish I could make out whether she likes that cousin of Stephen's."

And then he remembered the expression of her eyes when he had looked down into them as they parted in the verandah, and he felt that if Nuna married Mr. Bright, it would be a most thorough mistake.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### IN HASTE.

"You're not often wrong, Kitty," said Mr. Fagg, "but you see you made a clear mistake when you said Patty Westropp had gone away after that there artist gentleman."

Mrs. Fagg was usually a recollected person. If her words sometimes stung, it was because she meant them to do so; but when you are toasting bacon before a fire that will not burn clear, it is vexing to be told of your mistakes. Mrs. Fagg therefore answered in a pet:

"Drat Patty Westropp! And how do you know she didn't go after him, and he wouldn't have nothing to do with her, having seen enough of her and her ways? Or again, how do you know he's not married to her? I suppose, Dennis, you have heard of such a thing in your life as men who find pleasure in gadding out without their wives? Hand me that dish, will you? there'll be some sense in doing that."

Dennis did as he was bid. He never quarrelled with his wife; he knew very well that sharp speeches from Kitty—and these were rarely directed against himself—were sure to be followed by some extra piece of wifely duty and affection, often by the concocting of a more tempting dinner than might otherwise have fallen to his lot. Mrs. Fagg had early learned to sacrifice to her husband's idols—ease and appetite.

She had not tasted any breakfast yet, though Dennis had had his long ago; but still it did not occur to Mr. Fagg that he might carry in his customer's breakfast, and spare the pale, tired, uncomplaining woman.

Instead of this, he went and smoked his pipe at the open door till Paul came out of the parlour. Mr.

Whitmore had promised to ride over to Gray's Farm that morning; the Rector had offered to lend him a horse. He just nodded to Dennis, and went on to the Rectory.

"Too early to call on a lady, I suppose." He wanted to see Nuna Beaufort again alone, out of Will's presence; he felt a singular curiosity to know whether she really loved the young farmer, or whether she was only going to marry him because she cared for no one else.

"It won't be a safe marriage if that's the case," he said. "She may not have loved yet, but a woman can't have that power of expression in her eyes and not have the power of loving along with it. It's impossible she can love that carcase of a farmer, poor little thing."

The Rectory gate opened when he tried it, and he went in. The entrance hall was empty, but the Christmas decorations were still there; and as Paul admired them, and felt sure they were Nuna's doing, he again thought she would be thrown away on Will Bright.

He looked about for a servant to announce him, but no one was in sight. In truth, cook and Jane were both far too deeply engaged in the china closet to heed even the bell; for if the best china had been left for Miss Nuna's putting away, cook knew very well what that would come to. But there was no bell to be seen, and Paul looked out of the window across the lawn.

Just there, under those grand leafless plane-trees, they had sat and drunk tea out of the Vienna tea-cups; and then, as if it were held up to him in a picture, the whole scene came distinctly back to Paul, and he seemed to hear Nuna's enthusiastic praise of Patty's beauty. A hot flush rose in his face; thought went on, spite of his repugnance, and recalled other words that had been spoken by Patty,—slighting, contemptuous words, of the girl who had been so generous towards herself.

He remembered that even then, mad as he was, Patty's dislike to Nuna had pained him; but he felt rather than knew how much Patty's contempt had influenced his own indifference to Miss Beaufort.

Patty! The thought of her opened the door to the memory he had been battling with for weeks. Pritchard had told him of the nine days' wonder of Ashton in the total disappearance of the Westropps, father and daughter, but Paul had listened in silence. He knew his friend's power of tormenting far too well to run the risk of betraying himself. He tried to think of Patty calmly; to see her as he might have seen her if his eyes had not been blinded by passion—and his reason decided against her. She had treated him shamefully.

She had deliberately rejected him because she felt able to push her own way in the world; he had told himself this over and over again, but to-day the conviction was stronger than ever.

"She never loved me," he said to himself; "she was heartless from the beginning, or this money would not have changed her. Real love in a woman is not conquered so quickly. Her love, if it had been genuine, would have made her understand me; she would have dreaded lest her fortune should set me against her, for I spoke openly to her of my dislike to money as mere wealth."

And then he thought again of Nuna Beaufort, and confessed that she was worth a hundred Pattys. But the confession was too calm and reasonable, there was no ardour in it; a dread lurked behind—a dread which he turned from resolutely—would not Patty in living presence, Patty once more sweet and loving, be as dangerous to his peace as ever? The only safety lay in throwing aside her memory.

"I wonder why I came down here? And yet I don't know, nothing obliterates an outline so completely as painting it out, and when I go back to the studio I shall perhaps carry the memory of these changeful dark eyes with me."

He heard some one coming, and he hoped it was Nuna. She came slowly into the hall, her head bent, her hat in her hand, her whole attitude full of dejection.

Paul stood a minute yet in the recess of the window admiring her graceful shape; her soft grey gown fell in broad folds, and her rich hair coiled round her well-set head in thick glossy braids. She moved on towards the outer door.

"I beg your pardon," said Paul, coming forward; "I know I ought not to call so early, but Mr. Beaufort kindly offered to lend me his horse. Can I see him, do you think?"

"Yes—no." Nuna's voice sounded thick, and she was so confused that she stammered. She was really in the midst of a hearty fit of crying, only Paul did not detect it at first. "Will you mind waiting a little?" she said more steadily. "Will you come in and sit down? Papa is writing, and I know he must not be disturbed."

She turned away abruptly and opened the drawing-room door, but Paul had had time to see that she was in trouble. Till now Nuna had been to him more like a picture than a woman; but that wonderful tenderness for weak oppressed creatures, which seems the most godlike attribute of mankind, in a moment bridged over the distance there had been between them; the utter dejection of the girl's aspect gave the human link that had been wanting to her. Mr. Whitmore felt on a sudden wiser, older, moved out of his usual outside calm, to protect and comfort this grief-stricken maiden.

"Will you sit down here, please? Papa won't be long, I know; but he can't see you just now."

There came a little sob into her voice, and she moved hastily towards the door.

Paul could not let her go. Had that old curmudgeon of a father been making her cry? "I wish you would let me look at the song you sang last night," he said.

She went back to the other end of the room, and began to turn over her music; her hands felt hot and

cold at once, she did not know what she was doing. Ever since they parted in the verandah she had only thought of Paul—thought of him all through her long wakeful night, till she had felt as if she could never meet him again for fear of betraying her delight in his presence. And then when morning broke, with its cold uncontrovertible reality, to tell her that one or two sweet visions that had come in short snatches of repose from the long open-eyed night, were as false as mirage, Nuna rose up from her bed in actual terror of herself and her own overpowering feelings.

"It is not love," she said; "I could not be so unwomanly as to love a man who has not sought me, and Mr. Whitmore has only shown me common courtesy. It is because I live so shut up; I see so few people, that every fresh face sends me off my balance with excitement; in a day or two, when he has gone away from Ashton, I shall be all right again."

Gone away from Ashton! Nuna felt as if she were going mad this morning. How was she to live on this same quiet, unchanging existence now; and as if to stamp on her heart the conviction of her own self-deceit came the thought of Mr. Pritchard. He was a stranger, and yet he had not occupied the merest fragment of her thoughts. She scarcely remembered a word he had said, and all through the night she had been repeating every look and tone and gesture of Mr. Whitmore's.

She had come down to breakfast pale and unhappy, and her father had announced to her his settled intention of asking Elizabeth Matthews to live with them. Nuna was already so unstrung that she had felt no ready power of self-control; she burst into an indignant remonstrance, and went out of the room in a tempest of almost despairing sorrow. She knew, just when she met Paul, that the Rector had gone into his study to write the dreaded letter of invitation. For the moment her sorrow had helped her against her self-consciousness. Now, as she stood looking for the song, Paul came

towards her, and held the portfolio open. Nuna's cheeks grew hotter and hotter as she bent down over the music; her fingers felt glued to the paper, and kept on turning over leaves at random. She could not master her terror — a terror she could not have explained, and yet in which there mingled an intense, almost a delirious joy. The song had been an old one; Nuna had sung it sorely against her will at the urgent request of Mrs. Bright; it was the ordinary hackneyed plaint of a forsaken maiden bewailing her fate in extra touching words. She found the song at last, and held it towards Paul.

But he had forgotten all about it. He had been watching the rising glow in Nuna's face, and the traces of deep sorrow, and every moment he had felt himself drawn more and more irresistibly to try and win the confidence of this half-shy, half-frank creature so utterly unlike any girl he had seen before.

He took the music, and put it back among the rest.

"I am afraid you are in trouble—can't I help you in some way?"

He felt how eccentric he was; but Paul was not accustomed to resist impulse, and an attraction that was quite beyond him hurried him on now completely out of himself and of all reticence.

The touch of sympathy in his voice thrilled through Nuna. Involuntarily her eyes raised themselves to his, and sank at once beneath the glowing gaze she met. She felt as if she must run away from him.

"You can't help me. I'll see if papa is ready." She tried to make her words as cold and as steady as she could; she walked across the room, her fingers were on the handle of the door, another moment, and she would have escaped.

How do such things happen? No one knows; no one can ever detail the sensations of the most eventful moments of life. No one sees the wind rise, or the lightning part the dark cloud overhead. We see the tree lying prostrate, the building tottering

from roof to basement, or it may be riven asunder, and we feel with a sort of awful conviction that no mere human agency can ever revoke that which has come to pass, and efface the stamp of disaster.

In the present case the seen effect was this: Paul had reached Nuna's side, had taken her hand very gently and tenderly in his own.

"Won't you tell me?" he said; "I am sure I could help you."

He had taken her hand gently, but he held it firmly. For an instant she tried to escape, and then she yielded, not only because she felt no power against his strong grasp, but because her spirit yielded too in glad submission.

"You will tell me, won't you?" He bent his head, and the words seemed to steal into her very soul. "If you knew how I long to comfort you, you would, I'm sure."

It seemed to Nuna as if her grief were too childish; there was so much of reverence in her love for Paul, it was impossible to trouble him with the story of her dislike to Elizabeth.

"You'll think me silly;" she blushed, and Paul could scarcely keep from drawing her close into his arms. But he was not in the same wild impatient state into which Patty Westropp had thrown him. He saw that if he were gentle with Nuna, she would tell him her trouble in her own way; but he saw too that her shyness was real, and that she was as likely to run away as to stay with him.

"I could never think you silly," he said warmly. He felt the little hand trying to free itself, and he let it go.

"It seems like blaming my father," she said simply; "but I don't mean that; only he is asking a cousin to come and live with us, a person I dislike, and it makes me so unhappy." She paused. Paul stood listening; he felt warm delight at winning this child-like confidence. "I do so long to know if I am right or wrong;" and in her impulsive, unthinking way she clasped her hands

over her eyes. "I longed so to live alone with my father, and now he will be shut away from me more than ever, and he will end by not loving me at all."

If she had not hidden her eyes, she would not have said this; but the unseen spiritual influence was drawing her to Paul with irresistible strength.

"That is impossible," he said warmly. He had bent down over her while she hid her eyes; she felt this, and drew herself away. The slight movement quickened his growing love; he longed to take her hands away, to make the dark eyes look lovingly into his; but still he waited. A sudden remembrance of Will Bright came between him and Nuna, and he resolved to know the truth.

"It may be," he said, "that Mr. Beaufort knows you will leave him, before long, and he wishes to make provision before such an event takes place?"

Nuna could not mistake the questioning tone in which he spoke. She looked up for the first time, and he read in her frank, direct glance her guess at his meaning.

"I'm not likely to leave my father," she said. She blushed very much. That one glance at Paul had reminded her that she was opening her whole heart to a stranger. But her words were like joy-bells to Paul; he loved her for her frank directness. It seemed to him that she had understood that he meant Will Bright.

"But you would leave him for some one who loved you—some one you loved too—you would, would you not?"

Before he could get possession of her hand again Nuna had taken fright, and started away from him.

Spite of her love, it was too new, too sudden. She could not believe he loved her. What had she done to give Mr. Whitmore cause to speak in this way to her?

Flight seemed her only safety; and yet when she reached the door she gave one look, she could not help it, to show him she was not angry.

The look was enough; it was all Paul could do to keep from following her and forcing her to speak the confession her eyes had made.

He loved her better for not yielding too easily. Had he seen the Rector he would at once have asked permission to woo his daughter; but Mr. Beaufort's letter proved lengthy, and Jane came at last to say "the horse was brought round, and would Mr. Whitmore excuse seeing master."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MRS. BRIGHT CONFIDES.

MR. BEAUFORT'S old horse knew the short way to Gray's Farm, and he trotted briskly through Carving's Wood Lane—but not fast enough to satisfy Paul. The oft-trodden way brought back most disturbing memories; and when he reached the angle leading to the cottage, he fairly dashed over the common to get free from them. His passion for Patty seemed to him to-day a mad infatuation; and yet if this change of fortune had not happened, he would most likely now be married to her—an ignorant country girl. And what had he done this morning? Flung himself, in the same headlong, impulsive way, into a fresh attachment.

"And how is it to end? Am I going to make Nuna my wife—my wife?" he said the last words slowly, with a sort of hesitating pleasure. There was nothing to shrink from in Nuna Beaufort, and yet it seemed strange to Paul that at the very threshold of his love, when he might have been expected to forget all prudence or doubt in the first flush of joy, it seemed strange he should ask himself deliberately why he had been so hasty.

"It would have been wiser to wait. I might have seen more of her. How do I know that I can make her happy?"

But he forced himself to think of her and her sweet blushing confusion, and before he reached Gray's Farm his mind was once more at ease. He felt that he was beloved, not as he meant Nuna to love him, but still enough to make him sure that he would suffice for Nuna's happiness; Paul had studied women enough to learn that a woman's love brings its own happiness along with it, if she only gets some love in return for the lavish wealth of her own. He felt that to such a nature as that which revealed itself in Nuna's deep passionate eyes the bliss of loving was greater even than that of being loved again.

"And what does one want in a wife but love?" he said to himself. "And she has so much besides. She is far too good for a harum-scarum fellow like me. I don't believe her father will let me have her."

He was hailed from the other side of the hedge that bordered the stony lane, and presently Will and his cousin appeared through a gate leading into the field they had been walking in.

"Very glad to see you," said Will, heartily. Paul shook hands, but he felt guilty; he resolved that no amount of pressing should prevail on him to become an inmate of Gray's Farm, for he felt positive Mr. Bright was in love with Nuna.

"Here, Larry!" shouted Will; and the Irishman came up grinning from ear to ear, and led Mr. Beaufort's horse away to the stables.

Mrs. Bright was in a flutter of delight, and Mr. Whitmore so increased her excitement by praising everything, from the scarlet bunches of pyrocanthus berries on each side of the entrance door to the old-fashioned dogs in the fireplace, that she nearly danced with pleasure along the passage leading to the drawing-room.

But here Paul's praises came to an end. There was a stuffy formal atmosphere about this, the grand room of the house; and moreover all the little attempts at taste—and there were too many of these—were either

stiff, or what Mrs. Fagg would have called "messy." The chimney-piece of Mrs. Bright's drawing-room was decidedly "messy." There was an old-fashioned clock in china of the Louis Quinze period; and with this went harmoniously a Chelsea Venus on one side and a Dresden Neptune on the other. But then Mrs. Bright could not leave well alone. Stephen Pritchard had presented his aunt with a pair of white China candlesticks in the style of the clock, but between these and the figures were gourds set on end; and again, between the figures and the clock, small coloured wax-images, with tremulous heads; and as if they were not obtrusive enough by themselves, the good woman had crammed into the hand of each a sheaf of dried grass, to give, as she expressed it, "a grace" to the arrangement. The whole was backed by hand-screens painted by Mrs. Bright herself in youthful days; tulips on white velvet with a border and a stick in blackened gilding. The same vague idea pervaded the room. There was neither uniformity nor contrast, nor any repose for the eye in the amount of petty trifles scattered about.

The room worried Paul. He was glad when Will got a business summons to the Hall, and Mrs. Bright proposed they should go into the parlour and see if dinner were ready.

"I never wait for Will," she said. "We live like clocks here, Mr. Whitmore, every day exactly alike."

"Don't you get tired?" said Paul.

"Dear, dear, how like you are to Nuna Beaufort; that's exactly what she said yesterday when I was telling her about Will's punctual ways. Something in the paints is it, do you think, that makes people irregular? You know Nuna is quite an artist, Mr. Whitmore. And yet Stephen is just the same about dulness, and his is all pen and ink work. I suppose you are all alike, and I can't tell what it is that does it?"

It was always impossible to the blithe chatterpie of

a woman to keep her uppermost thoughts from getting into words, and yet she felt sure Will would be vexed that she talked about Nuna to Mr. Whitmore.

Mr. Pritchard roused himself from the brown study into which his aunt's talk was apt to send him, "I say, Paul, what do you think of our Ashton beauty? I can tell you, you must mind what you say about her here."

Paul looked at Pritchard, and then at Mrs. Bright; it seemed to him that his last night's admiration had not been remarked. They both appeared to be standing up in defence of Nuna.

"I think she is charming," he said, warmly. "I wonder she has not been taken away from Ashton before this."

He wanted to be fair and above-board with Mr. Bright. Nuna's words had told him that he was not winning her away from a favoured lover, but Paul's independence chafed at anything like concealment.

Mrs. Bright bridled, smiled at Mr. Pritchard, and gave a sort of half cough.

"Then you did not tell your friend anything, Stephen?"

"I don't think there's anything to tell; and if there is, I'm not sure that Will cares for it to be talked over publicly." Mr. Pritchard spoke roughly, walked to the window and whistled. It had come into his head last night as they drove home from the Rectory, that if he could bring himself to commit such a folly as marriage —Mr. Pritchard had taken more wine than usual, and it was broad moonlight, both which circumstances may account for his entertaining even in a temporary fashion such a conventional idea as marriage—well then, if he could do this, Nuna Beaufort was just the girl he should like for a wife.

"She has plenty of feeling and fire, and no forms and ceremonies;" for a keen observer like Pritchard had noted at once the little irregularities of manner, the impulsive words which, spite of her gentle courtesy

made Nuna wholly unlike a proper "drawing-room young lady."

Finding herself left thus alone with Paul, the temptation to confide was too strong for Mrs. Bright. Something in the strongly-marked face, in those dark eyes, almost stern when they were not smiling, inspired her, as Paul's face usually inspired women, with a sense of trust. He looked too noble, too grand, to take advantage of her confidence.

"Perhaps Stephen is right, Mr. Whitmore," she said in a half-whisper; "my son is extremely particular; but then you are so intimate with his cousin, living together and all, you know it does make such a difference."

"You must excuse me," said Paul, "I cannot imagine that I have the slightest right to Mr. Bright's confidence."

"Oh, of course not, I did not mean that; but everybody in Ashton knows Will means to marry Nuna. The Rector and I settled it months ago."

A flush came into Paul's face. He wished to speak openly to Mr. Beaufort before any one else—before Pritchard even knew of his love and his hopes; but still it seemed as if he must protest against Mrs. Bright's certainty.

"I am not surprised at your son's attachment, but I should not have thought Miss Beaufort was likely to marry him."

"Good gracious me! why not? Why, Stephen—no, nothing." Mrs. Bright heard her son's heavy step outside, and she stopped. "I wish dinner would come; you must be quite starved, Mr. Whitmore."

But Paul assured her he could not stay to dinner. He felt as if he could not remain another minute in the house. The idea of Nuna disposed of in this summary fashion made him furious. Mrs. Bright begged and entreated, and got Will to aid her in pressing hospitality on the visitor. Paul was resolute, and finally escaped with the penance of a glass of cherry brandy, and a hunch of seed-cake nearly as big as his

head, Mrs. Bright keeping up meanwhile a history of the cherry-tree, and of the best way of preventing the fruit from shrivelling in the brandy.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### ROGER WESTROPP AT HOME IN LONDON.

"I WANT you, please, to drive me to Number Four, Bellamount Terrace, Old Kent Road."

Miss Coppock spoke to the cab-driver with her usual obsequious politeness, and then she threw herself back in the cab.

She felt relieved and curious too—relieved from the daily wear of anxiety, and yet curious as to the result of her journey. But when she found herself drawn up to the edge of the pavement, opposite some broken railings, she pulled out of her pocket a crumpled piece of paper. Yes, there was no mistake, the dirty, smoke-begrimed house before her, without a curtain to any of its misty windows, and scarcely any paint to speak of on its crooked door, was the place of her destination. The house door had evidently gone down in life, on one side at any rate, and its dirt was rendered even more conspicuous by a spasmodic dauby attempt to brighten the handle and bell knob.—These in their unusual brazen glory likened the door somewhat to a factory girl with her gilt earrings and grimy fingers. The whilome turf at the foot of the steps was grassless, as if it had gone bald with age; the railings which fenced in this dreary habitation from the road were broken and very rusty, and the gate having lost its fastening, and moreover one of its hinges, was kept on duty by a huge wooden bar. The cabman was now struggling to unfasten this after an ineffectual search for the outside bell.

Miss Coppock's heart sank. She knew that she

should not find Patty in Bellamount Terrace; but being a woman, she had given rein too liberally to fancy, and it had never occurred to her that Roger would remain the same niggardly Roger as ever in his thorough change of circumstances.

"It need not surely be all so dirty," she said, sighing with disgust, as she gathered up her fresh crisp skirts and stepped along to the house.

The door stood partly open, and she felt sure from that circumstance that Roger was hidden behind it. She tried to smooth her face into its usual practised smile, bade the cabman set her boxes at the foot of the steps, and dismissed him. Patience was not specially a neat or orderly woman; nature seems to have "otherwise provided" in the composition of dressmakers; but for the moment, as the cab drove away, she longed to call it back, and yield up all the golden hopes she had built on Patty's friendship, for the sake of escaping the squalor before her.

The door opened slowly, grating as it did so on something on the bare boards within, and then, as she expected, she perceived Roger himself. He looked taller and more careworn than when she last saw him; he held out his hand to greet her in what he meant to be a cordial fashion. His eyes smiled, but his lips could not relax their grimness. Roger had a respect for Miss Coppock rather than a liking; but the sight of a face that took him back to former times was pleasant, for he missed his old life—the life which had grown to be as much a part of him as his skin or his hair: and yet while he awkwardly shook Miss Patience's well-gloved hand in his lank, large-jointed fingers, a dim vision of extra loaves, the necessity for butcher's meat, milk, butter, and other luxuries almost unknown in Bellamount Terrace, kept his lips firmly pressed together to repress a groan.

"Glad to see ye, ma'am; walk in, will ye, an' I'll have those boxes in directly."

Patience passed in as she was bid at a door on the

right of the narrow, stuffy passage. She had just come from the fresh pure air of the country, and she felt sick and faint at the close odour of stale tobacco, and the memories of what had once doubtless been savoury fumes, that hung about the little dirty room. It was carpeted with dark green drugget, with irregular yellow spots, and across the hearth, by way of rug, stretched a breadth of the same pattern, with raw unhemmed ends. There was no relief for the eye on the walls covered with what had been flaunting flower-bunched paper, faded and bulging out here and there. The only thing on which the eye could rest with pleasure stood on the mantelshelf, between the two old candlesticks, in front of the blackened and clouded looking-glass,—a coloured photograph of Patty. As Patience bent down to look at it, it seemed to her that sunshine came into the poor dingy room at once.

"Dear me, how beautiful!" said the dressmaker. "I had forgotten half her prettiness."

"You'll perhaps not want your boxes upstairs?" Roger's voice came in a sort of beseeching, half-ashamed way, from the parlour door. "That is, I don't know how soon you think of joining my daughter, ma'am."

If she had found Roger in a different house, Miss Coppock would have resented this speech; she had resolved to submit herself to Patty, but she saw no need to cringe to the father, on whom Patty was in no way dependent. She had meant to use this lodging as long as it suited her to stay in London; but now that she saw it, one night in such a place would be as much as she could bring herself to endure, and she did not care to incur unnecessary expense, so she answered graciously:

"Oh no, thank you, Mr. Westropp; I hope to start for Paris to-morrow evening, as soon as ever I have executed dear Patty's commissions."

Roger went to the top of the kitchen stairs, but he had to go down half of them before he could summon the deaf old woman he had engaged in honour of Miss Coppock, to escort that lady to her bedroom. Patience

followed the ragged creature upstairs, but her feelings were not soothed by this attendance. The deaf, haggard-throated old woman, who looked like a mummy from a rag-shop, had brought water with her to fill the jug, and spying some dirt on the inside of the basin she deliberately spat on it, and then rubbed it with her smeared apron, as the quickest way of removing it.

"Dinner be ready in five minutes," said the hag, with a sniff; and she went tumbling down the stairs.

It was not appetizing to look forward to dinner cooked by such hands; but after all, it was only a trial of some hours, and Miss Coppock had known a few ups and downs in her former life.

The tablecloth was fairly clean, a circumstance easily accounted for by the fact that Roger was in the habit of using a newspaper in lieu of such a luxury; and the dinner, half a shoulder of mutton baked, smelt savoury.

By the time the meal was over Miss Patience felt at home with Roger.

"And how do you amuse yourself, Mr. Westropp, if I may ask?—at least I suppose I am to say Mr. Latimer, such being the wish of dear Patty." These last words were spoken with the suavity of the Guildford show-room, and Roger winced and sneered at the same time.

He was a keen observer. As long as he looked at Miss Coppock, and saw only her remarkable face and quiet movements, he was impressed by her superiority; but Roger had been used to real gentlefolks, and the assumption in Patience's tone unmasked her at once. His sour rugged nature had one virtue, he abhorred shams; and without knowing why, he felt ill at ease with his daughter's friend.

"I don't hold with changing of our name, ma'am; it ain't my way of doing business. There's only one thing as I can see for it; Patty says—and she's cute at judging folks—she says she is less likely to be cheated and put upon if folks don't know about her than if

they does. That may hold good for her, but I can't see it for myself."

"She's quite right; if she hadn't changed her name your story would have got wind, and she would have been a regular prey to all sorts of people."

In her heart Patience knew that the mystery she had herself enjoined, was necessary to the hold she meant to keep over Patty, and she spoke eagerly and naturally.

Roger looked keenly at her with those deep-set light blue eyes of his, and he felt baffled.

"She's like two women in one," he said; "she can speak out open and hearty, and then, without a word of warning, she minces and ambles like a pony going through its paces for a circus rider. I'm blessed if she don't floor me."

Roger scarcely knew how nearly he had hit the mark; he did not guess at all that the poor deceitful woman was more natural with him than she had been since she was a child.

She questioned him again as to how he passed his time, and he told her.

"I know a trifle about money matters, ma'am, but not enough; bless ye, not half enough to guide such a sight of money as Watty's. I go to an old friend every day, and I'm learnin' to be a good man of business."

Miss Coppock stared.

"Dear me!" she said. "I should have thought now you'd have preferred leisure after being busy all your life."

Roger gave her another searching glance.

"You're a deal too sensible to think that, ma'am, if you give it a second thought. Them as has had to earn their daily bread is just the folk which finds daily leisure a burden. I spoke to you of a friend just now; I'll name no names, and then no one can be hurt. Him and me was lads at the same school, Miss Coppock. I stayed down in the parish, he went up to town, and I heard no more on him; but he was nearly the first man I met when I comed up to London. He's

got a fine thriving business here all his own, and yet he works as hard at it as he did when he began life as a porter. If our money's managed his way, it 'ull double and treble itself."

Roger had drunk a little ale in honour of Miss Coppock, and this, with the long silence he had been living in since Patty's departure, had helped his tongue to an unusual flow of speech; but he checked himself, and glanced over his shoulder hastily. It was a great risk to speak of the money at all.

Miss Coppock looked and wondered; and twenty-four hours after, when she found herself at last on her way to Patty, she wondered still.

"Whatever will the girl do with that old father?" she thought. "She may dress him up in gentleman's clothes, but when he begins to talk, he must be found out."

If Miss Coppock had passed her life in London, she would have known better; she would have learned that, with some people, far worse ignorance than Roger's can be gilded so as to pass current.

She was a good sailor, and the journey was a real enjoyment; it took her back years of life. She was sorry when it ended, sorry when she reached Paris, and when the cab which conveyed her from the railway stopped at a white-fronted, green-blinded house in a quiet street; a French maid opened the door, and showed the way obsequiously to the visitor of "Mees Latimer." Here for the present we must leave her.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### MRS. FAGG'S OPINIONS.

PAUL did not go back to Ashton till late in the afternoon. He had a good notion of locality, and so after refreshing himself and his horse at a wretched little inn, where the bread was mouldy and the ale sour, he

managed to see a good deal of country before he at last found himself at the farther end of Ashton from "The Bladebone."

He had studied to avoid Carving's Wood Lane. It was very foolish, for Patty was nothing to him now, only a humiliating memory; but his mind was at peace about Nuna, and he did not want to risk the chance of the strange disturbance he had experienced that morning as he rode through the lane.

"After all, I'm no wiser than other fools," he thought; "does not all history, whether of life or fiction, tell the same tale? Love never was, never can be, a comfortable or easy sensation; it must always be full of doubt and worry."

Yes, Paul Whitmore, doubt whether we are loved, fear that we are unworthy of the love we hope for—doubt, it may even be when we love really and fondly as to whether our feelings are true or only self-deceit; for this doubt will come from the most real part of love, its humility, its unbelief in its own power of loving: but not a doubt which brings the shadow, however faint, of another between ourselves and the woman we love; not a doubt as to the prudence and wisdom with which we have acted. No, Paul, these are not the torments of true ardent love, of the blind passion which yet never strays aside from the direct line of its flight.

He felt impatient to see Nuna again—not the feverish intoxication of impatience which had doubled each minute that kept him away from Patty; there was more method and reason in his present mood, and yet he was impatient. He wanted to make matters straight, to be quite sure of Nuna, and to speak to Mr. Beaufort.

"I suppose I ought to have talked to the old gentleman before I said anything positive to Nuna, but then I never do as I ought; besides, I can keep a wife, so there's nothing to be said against my making it out with her first."

Mrs. Fagg had softened towards her lodger when she

found that the Rector had taken him into such favour as to lend him his horse; a favour which he owed far more to Mr. Bright's asking than his own, for Paul was bad at asking favours. Mrs. Fagg brought in Mr. Whitmore's dinner, and waited upon him herself. But he was very silent; he had no questions to ask till she gave him one piece of information, and that startled him into talk.

"The Rector and Miss Nuna are going away to-morrow, sir; but you knew that, perhaps?"

"No; where are they going to?" Paul looked, as he felt, thoroughly vexed. Nuna had said nothing to him of this; he hated matters to go against his wishes, and he had planned out to-morrow after a fashion of his own.

"To Beanlands, sir; they always go there once a year, but only for a couple of days or so; it's Lord Lorton's place, Miss Nuna's grandpapa. Her mamma was Lady Mary Wynne, as you may have heard, sir."

No, he had not heard. This was worse and worse; he grew savage. He, with his democratic notions, and his horror of "uppish" people, merely because they were "uppish"—for in his heart Paul valued breeding highly—that he should have given his love to the granddaughter of a lord! It was impossible that Mr. Beaufort could listen to his suit.

"Do you know when they are to return?"

"Well, sir, we are to send a fly up to the station the second day after to-morrow. I believe they are coming then."

Paul gave a sort of grunt, but his landlady approved his dissatisfaction: it showed that he valued the Rector's company. She went into the kitchen to tell Dennis, and found that worthy gravely instructing Bobby in the art of smoking his pipe.

"Mercy me, Dennis, how can you? The child 'ull be no better than a gun-barrel or an engine-funnel, all his dear little insides choked up with that filthy smoke. Bobby, did you never hear what happened to the little boy as smoked a pipe against his mother's wishes?"

Bobby's blue eyes looked like small cheese plates, he opened them so.

"The pipe stuck,"—Mrs. Fagg spoke with awful solemnity,—"stuck all day, and all night too, in the very self-same corner of that little boy's mouth, and he couldn't get it out, and by next morning it wasn't the little boy, Bobby, as was fat and rosy and round, it was the pipe that had sucked the little boy into itself; there wasn't nothing to be seen of him but the soles of his boots."

Bobby's lower lip had dropped with the progress of the story, and at this tragical point he burst into such a prolonged howl that his mother caught him up in her arms, and tried to comfort him with kisses.

"There, there, Bobby, don't be such a silly, don't; run and ask Sally if there's not a bit of ginger-cake in the tin."

Bobby went off with alacrity, though he still sobbed at the dreadful doom of the smoking boy; but Dennis felt himself aggrieved.

"I call that folly now, Kitty; you know such a thing couldn't have happened, then why tell the little chap it could? It's like them foolish fairy stories Miss Nuna gived to Bob, making bears and such talk. Why the next thing 'ud have been, if I hadn't burnt the book, we should have had Bob a flingin' himself between the two next dogs he sees fightin', a-talkin' to 'em as if they was Christians."

"Bless you, Bob's not such a fool. But look you here, Dennis, I've a better opinion of our lodger than I had, and I don't object to his being here since he's took up with the Rectory. Mr. Beaufort may be a fidget, and fanciful, but he's a real gentleman, and no one can get anything but good from his company. Mr. Whitmore was quite put out when he heard they were gone."

"Did you hear Miss Matthews were comin' back?" Dennis, had a look of owlish wisdom in his flat, complacent face.

"No, and I do hope she'll stay away; Miss Nuna's looked herself again ever since Miss Matthews went."

"Well," Dennis spoke slowly, "she's coming, as sure as a gun. When I took the horse round just now, cook told me so herself." Mrs. Fagg could not restrain a slight elevation of the eyebrows at her husband's appetite for gossip. "Cook says Miss have been fretting about it, but master's more comfortable with Miss Matthews than without her."

"In-deed!" Mrs. Fagg laid a prodigious stress on the first syllable, and then she stopped, her breath coming in a series of short pants, as if indignation were too much for her. "Now I tell you what, Dennis; you know as well as most, that I don't give myself to talking of my neighbours, but if that Miss Matthews comes back to the Rectory, she don't leave it till she's married the Rector,—that's what *she'll* do."

Mrs. Fagg moved her head with a sort of sagacious wave, as if she wished to indicate that Miss Matthews' designs had been made known to her by special revelation.

Dennis had gone on smoking quietly; he took the pipe from his mouth, puffed out a long cloud of smoke, and then gave a little laugh behind his hand.

"Well, Kitty, and why not? The Rector's not much older than me, come."

Mrs. Fagg made an effort to suppress her feelings, but there was a strong flavour of contempt in the look she gave her husband.

"Dennis, I'm ashamed of you, an' I'm not thinking of the Rector; if he chooses to make an old fool of himself, he'll only follow suit with most men as has been more lucky than usual in their wives an' has lost 'em. Bless 'em, poor simpletons, they can't let well alone; just as if it 'ud be common justice for one man to have such luck twice over."

"Well, then," Dennis felt rather nervous; he laid down the law to his wife, and would not have acknowledged her superior wits even to himself, but

he had a secret awe of them, an awe which made him always endeavour to elicit her opinion before he delivered his own—"then if you're not thinking of the Rector, Kitty, who is it you are thinking of? Miss Matthews? I rather thought myself the change would have suited her."

"Miss Matthews!" Mrs. Fagg's voice had got into an unusually shrill key. "She, indeed! Why, she's the very last person to be thought of at all; a poor sort of nobody, worming and twisting herself in like a cork-screw, till she's got such a firm hold of the Rector that it's my belief she'll do as she likes with him. Talk of foxes! mark my words, if ever there was a white fox standing upon two legs in a lavender gown, it's Miss Matthews!"

"Come, come, Kitty, I'm sure she spoke you very pleasant that day she comed here."

"Did she, now? There's iron that'll look black when it's at red heat yet, and there's folks as can make believe looks which is a lie as to what's inside 'em. Miss Matthews 'ud smile through anything if she thought it 'ud serve her purpose. She's one you can't take on her own showing, Dennis, she wants a diction-ary to make her out, and I rather take it Miss Nuna's sad face is her diction-ary."

"Prejudice, prejudice, my dear!" said Dennis. He never gave in openly; that would have undermined the dignity on which he prided himself. "You see," he emphasized each word with his forefinger, "you women must always have an object to sharpen your wits on; it's the same with you all; it used to be poor little Patty, and now it's going to be Miss Matthews. Well, *she's* no beauty;" and Dennis went on smoking.

Mrs. Fagg had been right on one point; Miss Matthews was so eager to obey the Rector's summons, that she arrived at Ashton next day, very soon after Mr. Beaufort and Nuna had departed.

She did not seem disappointed at finding the house empty; on the contrary, she told cook that she con-

sidered it very desirable she should be there to receive Miss Nuna on her return.

Cook felt restive; but there was something so collected and self-possessed about her master's cousin, that the old servant was powerless to resist the mandates issued from time to time, as Miss Matthews set vigorously to work to tidy up the house.

The change she effected was wonderful. The study was cleared of all superfluous litter, the books were taken down and dusted, and the shelves given up to Jane to be thoroughly cleansed; stray volumes lying about in heaps, taken down for reference from time to time, and left just where they had been used, were carefully replaced in the sets to which they belonged; manuscript of all kinds was carefully collected and tied in bundles, for Miss Matthews did not exercise the delightful right of private judgment in the way of destruction assumed by some female tidiers, although, perhaps, she had a great contempt for "useless scribble."

The room looked much larger, much lighter too, by the time she had finished her labours. There was an exasperating primness about it; the table was cleared of all but the inkstand, and every chair stood back against the wall. In Nuna's bedroom Miss Matthews was less merciful; everything that "harboured" dust was odious in her sight, and long-treasured birds' nests and trophies of bulrushes and grass blossoms, and other remembrances which Nuna loved to bring from her favourite haunts, were unsparingly condemned. Miss Matthews would have liked to fling some of the dirty old casts away, and to burn many of the drawings too, simply because they "harboured" dust, but Jane's look of surprise, and her indignant "Why, Miss Nuna did all them herself," restrained Miss Matthews for the present. Elizabeth abhorred the word Art and its accessories; it was useless, and it always brought litter of some kind, and litter was her *bête noire*. In one of Dickens' Christmas stories, there is a captain whose

impressionable substance over which the waters of forgetfulness, the tide of change, could flow, effacing these agonies of first love—so effacing them as to leave a smooth surface again, a surface that might seem to the unpractised eye fresh and untried. There may be, doubtless,—judging by what one sees in life,—there are different kinds of love; but such women as Nuna, women in whom love is innate rather than inspired, only love once, and then their whole being yields itself up for ever, is fused for ever into the nature which has subjugated theirs. Nuna's love might be better likened to one of the inscriptions on Eastern rocks; Paul's image lay graven indelibly on her heart, no human power could ever erase it.

Her father noticed her silence, but he fancied she was timid. Her grandfather had the gout, and was fractious—so fractious that Nuna earnestly hoped her father would never suffer from the disease, in spite of Lord Lorton's assurance that gout was quite a thing to have. She must have betrayed her democratic tendencies at some of these stereotyped remarks, for his lordship told her father that Nuna was a very pretty, graceful creature, but that she "wanted ballast." Mr. Beaufort communicated this remark when they were at last on their way back to Ashton.

"What does he mean by ballast?" said Nuna, laughing.

"Well, my dear"—Mr. Beaufort looked slightly perplexed—"I expect your grandfather means deportment—a more staid presence than you have. He likes women to keep to their proper sphere; they should move well and have pretty feminine accomplishments, they have no need to think deeply; I saw him shake his head this morning when he found you reading Carlyle. He thinks that women should be stately and dignified, but he dislikes new notions. He says women should persevere in the beaten track—he never wishes to see any change in them."

Nuna had not listened. They were in the fly now;

in another half-hour they would be home again. Through the morning she had felt as if she could not wait for the time of starting; she must see Paul, and it was possible he might leave Ashton before they reached it. But now she had changed again; every minute was lessening the distance between them, and the dread that had so tormented her, the dread of seeming to claim Paul's love against his will, came back to Nuna, and made her sicken with fear of seeing him.

Her father leaned forward when they came to a turn in the road, and waved his hand. Nuna looked. There was Paul, and at the sight of him, of the joy that shone out in his face, Nuna's heart gave a wild leap, and then she sank back in the carriage. Rest had come at last. She was tired, yet so ineffably happy. In the transient calm that descended on her poor struggling soul, she realized all that she had been suffering, the exhaustion of her sleepless nights and troubled days.

A few minutes more and she should be safe in the quiet of her own bedroom, the only confidant she had now, the storehouse of much unwitnessed emotion. Lately, indeed, during her cousin's visit, this room might have been called, in Persian fashion, the Place of Tears.

"At last!" she said, when the fly stopped at the Rectory gate. If Nuna had been less absorbed, the shock would have come less suddenly, but it was terrible; there stood Elizabeth smiling a sweet welcome to them both, as if they were visitors, and she herself the mistress of the parsonage. Nuna felt stunned, she submitted passively to her cousin's kiss, and went on silently into the house.

"There is a nice fire in the study, dear," said Miss Matthews, with a chirrup in her voice that was hateful to Nuna. "Won't you come in and warm yourself, dear?"

Nuna was hurrying to the staircase, but an exclamation from her father stopped her. She paused, and looked into the study.

The Rector was standing before the fire with both Elizabeth's hands in his.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said, warmly; "the room has not looked so home-like since I lost Mary."

Nuna had heard enough; she glided away, and when she reached her bedroom the changes there passed without notice. Storm had risen in her sorrowful soul —storm which threatened to wreck all the peace she had left. She shut the door, locked it, and then stood leaning against it; she had no power to move in that moment of passionate anger—anger in which she felt capable of leaving her father and her home for ever, a father who was so cruelly unnatural as to prefer a stranger to his own child. But the fierce swelling tempest burst into a shower of tears, great scalding drops, and the slender frame shook like a lily in summer rain.

You are perhaps thinking that Nuna weeps for her own shortcomings, and that these are tears of anguish that her forgetful, uncareful nature has made her neglectful of her father's comfort; but Mary's mistake told here against her young sister. Nuna's moral nature had not progressed with her mental powers during the years she had passed with Miss Matthews, and, except for her father's erudite but not very spiritual sermons, she had had no special outward help against herself since Mary died; and as, moreover, an indulged dislike generally brings its own sting with it, it is certain that Nuna's feelings towards her father and her cousin were at this moment most unreasonably bitter.

She was like a traveller jogging along through a dull, uninteresting journey; there is nothing to please him, but also there is nothing to cause him serious vexation. Suddenly he takes a wrong turning, he has a slight consciousness of his error, he almost wishes to retrace his steps, but he persists in going on till, losing his track altogether, he plunges into the dangers of which he had been warned before he set out.

Instead of the rest she had hoped for, here was the

beginning of daily vexation. She had no thought of coping with it; she only writhed at the prospect before her. All light had gone from her life. What had been her troubles heretofore compared to this? To see the only creature she hated set in the place of her dead sister. Even to herself she could not frame the further evil she dreaded. Filial reverence had not quite left her, and it would have seemed an insult to her father to fancy even that he could think of Elizabeth except as a cousin.

Her eyes travelled mechanically round the room, and recognized the changes effected during her absence; but these did not awaken fresh anger; Nuna's mind had no pettiness in it.

"She shall not have power to vex me," she murmured. It was sad to hear how bitterly she spoke, and to see the scorn that curved the delicate lips. "She is too contemptible to quarrel with." Nuna stopped; her eyes had lighted on something that aroused a fresh train of thought. A small table that she had left littered with painting materials had been cleared, its encumbrances lay in neat precision on a shelf above, and on the table, in a pretty terra-cotta flower-pot, was a club-moss, the plant, Nuna's instinct told her, that Will had promised her. Will and his love, and herself as mistress of Gray's Farm, flitted like a vision across Nuna's thoughts; and with this came the feeling of refuge from Elizabeth; scarcely for an instant, and then she had almost flung the poor club-moss out of window, so intense was the disgust that succeeded.

She sank down into a chair, wearier than ever, so lonely, with such an ache at her heart, that even her tears flowed no longer, from the dull weight there. Gradually there came to her timidly, as if it feared to mingle with the strife that had been raging in her breast, the memory of Paul's look of love.

"He loves me; yes, he loves me. Oh, if he leaves me, I must die!"

And as imagination, always with Nuna so much

harder at work than was needful, conjured up the picture of her life alone, without the love she craved, the heart-ache culminated in a deep shuddering sob, then another, and tears came at last; no longer the proud scalding drops which had only stimulated her resentment, but softening, tender tears.

Nuna's brow was smooth, and she could look cheerful when she at last went downstairs.

Several letters lay on the tea-table, one of them in an unknown handwriting. Nuna opened this first, and then smiled at the result of her curiosity.

"I thought I had a new correspondent," she said, "and it is only a circular to say that Miss Coppock has retired from business, and that some one from Weybridge solicits the continuation of my distinguished patronage. I wonder Miss Coppock did not tell me she was going away."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### PATTY THE HEIRESS.

Miss Coppock found herself ushered into a bare but exquisitely clean room; the floor, the walls, the furniture—that is, the chairs and a table, there was nothing else—were all oak or oak colour, a quiet neutral tint that would have relieved pictures or flowers or any object of art, but which had a too sober shade by itself.

Miss Coppock had scarcely time to take in the general effect when the door opened, and there was Patty—Patty, so radiant in her glowing beauty that you felt at once the room had wanted her to frame with its quiet contrast; Patty dressed to perfection, both as to style and fashion, and yet with that sought simplicity of which so few English women understand the secret.

She put her arms round Patience, and kissed her on both cheeks.

"So glad to see you; so kind of you to come on so quickly."

Involuntarily Patience drew back; she looked at Patty, and their eyes met. In those deep blue lustrous eyes Miss Coppock read that her empire had departed; there was no effort even in the graciousness which pervaded the girl's manner; there was no effusion, but there was perfect repose. In that instant Patience saw that Patty had far more self-control than she could herself ever attain to, and she felt bitterly that if she meant to benefit by her apprentice's rise in life, it could be only by subservience to her wishes. She did not realize what had caused the change, she only felt it.

Poor Patience! this her last hope of ruling was over. If she meant to live in luxurious idleness, she must go back to her life of dependence. "So soon too," she said; "only a few months, and the girl moves about as quietly as a born lady could. I didn't think she was half so clever." Still Patience was a woman, and she would not give in without one effort for rule.

In her letters Miss Coppock had proposed to take a lodging where Patty could receive her professors; but Patty had left the proposal unanswered.

"When are you to leave Madame Mineur's?" she said gravely.

"Not just yet, I think." Patty's tone was so calm and she smiled so bewitchingly that Miss Coppock felt helpless. "You had better get yourself a lodging at once, Patience. Madame Mineur has been inquiring for some suitable apartment for you. You must have a pretty room, you know, for I mean to spend my Sundays with you."

This was an opening. "It would be far better if you came at once and lived altogether with me." Patience spoke awkwardly and stiffly; she wanted to gain her point, and yet she was afraid of offending Patty.

She looked up quickly; she expected to see Patty toss her head and pout. Instead, the lovely lips curved into a smile,—a smile that broadened, at the growing discomfiture in her friend's face, into a little musical laugh.

"Do you think so? I'm sorry to disappoint you, Patience, but at present I intend to stay here. I am very comfortable, and I am making friends. You and I shall see plenty of each other by and by, you know, when I take you to live with me." She paused, and looked at the dressmaker. Try as she would to check it, the blood rushed to Patience's face, but she managed to keep silence, and Patty went on, in the same smiling, deliberate way: "I think, you know, we had better begin as we mean to go on; it is quite necessary to me to make friends of all kinds; you are my friend already, so it is waste of time to shut myself up with you."

Miss Coppock could not bear it—vanity conquered policy.

"But I could teach you so many things, Patty, and I can speak French, you know, so you would not be losing that advantage."

Patty had rehearsed this scene beforehand, while she was expecting Miss Coppock's arrival, but she had not counted on so much resistance. The worst part of such a rehearsal as Patty's was that she had not considered all the provocations which might assail her self-possession, and the old spirit in the girl could not resist so good a chance of taking down her friend's conceit. For the moment she forgot her calm inflexibility: she burst out into hearty laughter.

"Yes, I listened to your French just now; I heard you speak to Victorine as you came in. I know I can't speak easily yet; but I'm really afraid I shouldn't mend my French by shutting myself up with you." She laughed again, and looked as if she expected Miss Coppock to join her. The mortified face before her might have moved pity, but Patty had made the most

of her heiress-ship at the school, and she was accustomed to universal worship from Madame Mineur and her satellites. Miss Coppock looked shabby and dowdy, and seemed to have grown horribly presuming. No, there was no pity for her in Patty's heart. She meant to be kind and useful to Patience, but she was determined to teach her at once her true position.

"I don't want any more help than I have in the way of speaking French," she said more gravely; she was a little surprised at her own laughter; "one of the teachers here, Madame de Mirancourt, devotes herself entirely to me out of class hours. Her father was a marquis or a duke, I really forget which"—Patty spoke loftily—"and she has been in regular grand society; she tells me all sorts of useful things, and she is forming me, she says. I pay her extra, of course; poor thing, she's very glad to make a little money. And then among the girls I have friends too. The other parlour boarders are very different to me, you know; they are only a pair of old maids. I like the school-girls better: there's a Miss Jane Deverell, whose mother is Lady Jane; and there's Elinor Dryden, whose uncle is quite a grand person; and they are both so fond of me. They will be quite sorry when I leave them."

"I dare say." Patience thought she had detected a weak spot in this boastfulness about grand people, and she made another effort. She *must* get Patty all to herself, or some of these new friends would rob her of her prize; besides, she had been Patty's absolute mistress once; she knew all the girl's secrets; surely if she tried hard enough she might re-establish her power. "But then you see, Patty, these are ladies with an assured position; just now you said yourself it was necessary for you to make friends and to be formed. Now, dear,"—Miss Coppock's voice grew coaxing,—"if we took a nice suite of rooms you might invite your friends, and they would bring others, and you would soon get a little society round you, and I could be useful to you in so many ways, Patty dear."

A faint sneer curved the full red lips.

"All in good time, Patience; we have both of us something to learn first. I wish you to take French lessons, and also to learn to dress better." She kept her eyes away from Patience's face; she wanted to say all she had to say without being turned aside by pity, or by the ridicule she felt for her friend's want of tact. "I must let you see Madame de Mirancourt; she is only a poor teacher, certainly, but she always looks so nice, and she knows her place perfectly. She never volunteers an opinion unasked, and that is so nice, you know. Poor thing, she wants to get the chance you have of being my companion; but you see she is deformed, one shoulder is much higher than the other, and this has stopped her growth; she is short and insignificant; and you know, Patience"—Patty spoke quite cordially again—"you are really a striking-looking woman, and will be quite stylish when you dress better. Of course I am willing to pay all expenses. Now I'll ring and send for the address of the lodgings."

She turned away to ring the bell, and in that moment Patience's pride or else her good angel pleaded hard; told her it would be better to toil more incessantly than ever, than make herself the slave of this girl.

But even while Miss Coppock stood writhing with mortification and trying to frame a speech which should assert her independence without giving mortal offence, Patty turned round. Her lovely blue eyes were full of liquid sweetness; she was like a beautiful sunbeam. In the pause, she had asked herself why she had sent for this overbearing, dull woman, so different from her gay, mocking Madame de Mirancourt, a woman she was already obliged to teach behaviour to, and the answer had come.

Patience was as clever and as useful in her way as the Frenchwoman, far more presentable, and without any dangerous power of repartee in case of a quarrel. Patience was also industrious and self-denying, and

De Mirancourt was greedy after presents; and, above all, Patience held the secret of Patty's former condition.

It seemed to the beautiful, flattered girl, whose vanity had been lavishly fed by all around her, that hardly any one would believe the story of Patty Westropp, even if Miss Patience told it; but there was the doubt, and also there was her father with his rough country manner to give weight to such an assertion. She must not quarrel with Patience; she must have a useful friend and ally, and Patience would do for the post.

"Then I will for the future consider you my companion," she said, in the petting, caressing manner she had used at first. "Your lodging bills, living, and all that, of course I shall settle; and for the present, for your own personal expenses, I thought of two hundred francs a month."

Victorine came in to answer the bell. Madame Mineur had sent the address for Miss Latimer, and Patience found herself driving away in the cab again before she could get resolution to refuse Patty's offer.

And after all, why should she refuse it? at any rate for the present.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### NUNA AND HER LOVERS.

It sounds very simple to repeat a well-known fact, and yet in that part of the human drama called love, unless we keep to fact, it is much easier to be unreal than it is to be probable. The truth in question is, that however well a man may love a woman, he is always aroused to a more precipitate course of action with regard to her by the existence of a rival, whether this rival be merely the creation of his own brain or a real cause of anxiety.

The dinner-party at the Rectory had so rekindled Will's longing to make Nuna his wife, that if he had been free from the necessity of entertaining Stephen

Pritchard, he must have gone down to Ashton next day, and learnt his fate. And when his mother repeated Paul's words, he would have gone off to the Rectory and have left his cousin to amuse himself, only that the good lady informed him the Beauforts were by that time on their way to Beanlands, and would not return for two days or more.

How Will fumed and raved at his men during that interval, and contradicted his mother, and behaved himself altogether in a most refractory manner to all who came within the circle of his life, is not to be here chronicled; only towards Stephen Pritchard did he maintain an outward show of decorum. Will, as has been said, had been at Harrow, and there had imbibed rather than grasped a certain fragmentary and misty notion of classics and mathematics, and it may be that during this process the amount of reverence due to talent may have in some inexplicable manner grown into his brain; Stephen made no display of his cleverness, but he could show the proof of it in type and cheques, and this last proof is, to such a mind as Will's, irrefutable: genius in rags to such a mind is a myth and a humbug, but genius, directly it gets its name before the public—in fact, has a name and produces gold—is genius, and is to be respected accordingly; and as most people are of Will Bright's way of thinking, there is no use in preaching against it, only that genius, being a Divine gift, must be the same everywhere—living in comfort or dying in debt—adaptability being the one quality that changes its position.

In Stephen Pritchard were united the rare accidents of power and adaptability; no wonder he imposed reverence on Mr. Bright.

"I tell you what, Stephen," Will said on the morning of the third day, "I'm going down to Ashton on business; shall you object to look up your friend at The Bladebone for an hour or so?"

"Not at all. I rather think, Will, between ourselves, that we shall find Whitmore gone back to London; he

can't amuse himself, you know, as I can. He must be amused. I can't conceive what he does in Ashton: why, there's not even a shop."

"All the shops he wants, I fancy," said Will, savagely. "Dennis Fagg gets capital cigars, and the ale at 'The Bladebone' has a reputation; come, Steeve, I'm not going to have our village run down."

The dog-cart was brought round, and after some "chaff" fully returned between Mr. Pritchard and Larry, the cousins betook themselves to Ashton. Mr. Bright put up at "The Bladebone," and then, leaving Stephen to find out his friend, he went off alone to the Rectory.

It was the morning after the Rector's return from Beanlands, and he had gone to visit the poor cripple who had been ill when he left home. Nuna too had gone out to see little Lottie, a fast friend of hers since her accident.

Mr. Bright therefore found Miss Matthews alone.

"I wonder why Nuna dislikes her," Will thought; "she looks very ladylike, and her hands are so white. I should have fancied her quite a gentle, elegant creature." The word elegant, according to Mr. Bright, covered a multitude of sins, only he was not choice in applying it.

"I hope dear Nuna will be in soon; it was so extremely kind in you to send her that curiously beautiful plant. I'm sure she values it extremely; she has it upstairs in her own room."

A warm glow of pleasure rose in Will's face; his fear had been that Nuna might reject the gift; he could not help building on this foundation, but he waited for Miss Matthews to speak again.

"Why don't you come and see us often?" she said. "If I were not afraid of vexing you, I would tell you what I used to think last autumn."

She laughed in such a conscious way, that Will began to hate her: she had made him nervous and uncomfortable.

"What did you think?"

"Oh, nothing to vex you; only I fancy, had I been

a certain young lady, I might have felt myself a little neglected, especially when I gave no discouragement."

Will's heart beat with the wild tumult in which we are plunged by an unlooked-for discovery.

"Please to speak plain, Miss Matthews; you saw a good deal of Nuna then. Do you mean, that she said she took any pleasure or interest in seeing me?"

In his excitement he got up and stood before her.

Miss Matthews laughed, but she looked admiringly at his handsome, honest, troubled face.

"What noble creatures you men are in your humility," she said; "so blind to your own merits, setting aside all other advantages."

Much as she wanted to hasten on a marriage between her listener and Nuna, she could not resist the side hint that these other advantages might have weight in her young cousin's eyes.

"You have not answered my question." Will spoke in a downright, determined way; he was not going to let Miss Matthews make a fool of him, though he was excited.

"Well"—Miss Matthews smiled placidly down on her hands; she had not the smallest sympathy with Will's passion, she only wanted to be sure of it—"I have, of course, nothing definite to tell you; you do not expect me to repeat Nuna's secrets, do you?" Here she looked up in what she meant to be an arch, playful manner, and met such a fierce frown in the blue eyes gazing down on her, that her words came considerably faster. "I can only tell you that she always looked pleased when you came, and more than once I heard her say, 'What a time it is since Will has been here!'"

Both Will's large, shapely hands had got entangled in his tawny beard. "Are you sure of this?" he said, damaging the beard in his agitation.

"Yes, quite sure;" and then Miss Matthews's proprieties were really quite disturbed; this simple Cymon pulled his hands out of the tangle he had been making, and nearly smashed her delicate fingers in his firm clasp.

"Thank you, thank you," he said; "I can't tell you how happy you have made me."

Miss Matthews was so startled that she thought he had better be left to cool, there was no knowing how far his gratitude might carry him.

"I will go and see if Nuna has come in; she only went down the village," she said, and she got up from her chair.

Will snatched up his hat.

"I'll go and meet her, don't you trouble;" and then he thanked Miss Matthews again, and went away.

"Dear me, what a very vehement person," said the spinster; "my wrist is red still, and my knuckles quite ache. But he is quite the sort of person for Nuna."

Fate, or rather the Fates, all three sisters, must have been hard at work that morning, trying to complicate the tangle of Nuna and her lovers. The Fates thus arranged that, as Mr. Bright came in sight of the cross roads beyond Lottie's cottage, he saw Nuna coming out of the cottage, and he also saw, walking leisurely along one of the cross roads, with his eyes bent on the ground, Mr. Paul Whitmore.

Will came to a sudden halt. Nuna did not see him yet, but she was coming towards him with graceful, springing steps, each one of which took her farther from the artist, and it was possible that Mr. Whitmore might pursue his way along the cross road, unconscious of her presence. Will fancied Nuna must have seen his rival, and it cheered him that she was hurrying away from Paul.

She saw Will, and her pace slackened.

He was beside her in a moment, and then turned and walked with her towards the village.

"I hope you enjoyed your visit to Beanlands," he said.

Nuna did not know how she answered. She had seen Paul, and she had also seen that he was unconscious of her presence. Following her impulse of sudden shyness, she hastened away from all appearance of seeking him

pletely he had let himself be carried out of the calm deliberate part he had resolved on.

They had reached the village, but Will did not care now who heard him; he forgot all his customary reticence. He did not care for the blacksmith who stood at the door of his smithy, with bright eyes and brawny arms, gazing on the young pair; nor yet for Mrs. Tomkins, the laundress, peeping through the gaps in her garden hedge as she hung the clothes up to dry. Will did not care if the whole world knew that he loved Nuna. He was not ashamed of it. But Nuna shrank from these busy eyes. It seemed as if the careful, decorous man and the dreamy, unobservant girl had changed places. Nuna's nature was thoroughly roused; this must be ended once and for ever. It was sheer cruelty to give Will the slightest hope that she could return his love.

"I want you to listen to me," she said, so earnestly that he was taken by surprise. "Don't talk any more here. Come down Carving's Wood Lane; we shall be quieter."

His heart sank in his breast like a stone. He knew her so well that this told him all was over. But still he clung to hope. There was silence between them till they were under the leafless far-stretching oak branches, out of sight of the high road.

Then Nuna spoke fast and earnestly.

"Will, you are making a mistake. You have cared about me as a sister till you think you love me. But indeed I could never make you happy." Will stopped, and took both her hands to make her stop too. "Hush, Will, dear Will: I listened to you so long, won't you listen? do let me tell you all I want. I can never love you more than I do now, and next to papa I do love you, Will. Why don't you be content, and let us be dear friends always?"

Will's heart leapt up again.

"I never said I wanted much love, at least at first; if you love me next your father, I am willing and thank-

ful to begin on that. Oh, Nuna, if you could see how I love you, how I long for the least love from you!—darling, you must take pity on me; you must be my wife."

The last word changed her feelings. As he said it, she drew her hands away.

"You are unreasonable, Will: you have known me so long that you ought to believe me. Do you think that if there was the least hope of my changing I would not give it you? Do you think I am ungrateful for your love? No, indeed, Will; but it would be so false to give you any hope. I never, never can love you in the way you want to be loved." She tried so much to speak convincingly that her words sounded cold.

The eager light faded from Will's blue eyes. He stood there, pale, and yet with a hunger in his face that made Nuna shrink away from him.

He saw that she so shrank.

"O God, it is too hard!" he said hoarsely. "What have I done to deserve this from you, Nuna, of all women? I who would be your slave. I am despicable then; there is something in me you loathe—impossible for you to love?" He shook with the violence of his passion.

Nuna stood looking at him with a scared white face, struck dumb by his agitation. The poor child had never seen a man so deeply moved—she was utterly terrified. She despise Will! how could he think it? Surely he might hope to win the love of some one very superior to herself; she must show him this. And then the girl's pure, generous heart came to help her; she would trust Will—it would wound him less to know that she had no love left to give, than to feel himself unworthy of being loved at all. The effort was painful, but just then pain was a relief to Nuna; it brought her into sympathy with poor Will.

"Will,"—she spoke very humbly,—"you wrong us both by saying this; how could I despise you? I said just now that next to my father I loved you. In all these years have I ever deceived you? I will give you

a proof of love. I will tell you what even my father does not know;—I—I have no better love left to give you." The blood rushed to her face as she spoke.

Will had stood quite still; he knew every word that was coming; he seemed to have heard all this before in some far-off time: even after Nuna ceased speaking he stood silent, his eyes fixed sternly on her, as if he were waiting to hear a yet fuller revelation.

He had no gratitude in that moment for her frankness; his only defined sensation was a longing to meet Paul Whitmore, and try, man to man, which had the best claim to win Nuna's love.

And Nuna was too much moved out of herself to sooth him as a wilier, colder woman would have known how to sooth.

"Don't be hard to me, Will; let us part friends,"—she put out her hand, and looked imploringly at him,—"you have been such a good friend to me."

But Will would not take her hand in his.

"Friends! I hate friendship. Do you remember what is said about asking for bread, and giving a man a stone?—that's what you have done, Nuna. I asked you for your love, and you won't give it; but I'll not have your friendship; you'll offer me next the pity of that confounded artist who has stolen your love away from me. You needn't look frightened, Nuna, I'm not going to tell your secret: though, if you take my advice, you will not keep it secret, you'll have it all out as soon as you can." Such a look of distress came in her face, that he softened—"Good-bye, Nuna; I know I am not good enough for you, but no more is he: no one ever could be worth your love." He stopped and looked tenderly at the blushing face, blushing with the bitter humiliation of her confession: "Nuna," he said gently, "you may live to wish you had married the man who loved you, instead of the man you love yourself."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### PAUL'S CONFESSION.

Mrs. Fagg rarely stirred abroad unless it was to go to church. The most cogent reason for a habit being seldom that which is acknowledged, it is possible that Mrs. Fagg's pretext of only having one bonnet at a time was not the true cause of her stay-at-home habits. A Sunday bonnet, in the opinion of the mistress of The Bladebone, was an article to be kept specially for going to church in, not to be in any way used on week-days. Perhaps Mrs. Fagg thought that secular sights and sounds had some mysterious power of lingering in the bows and quillings, and of whispering distractions amid her devotions. The bonnet was duly replaced in its tissue-paper wrappings on her second return from church, and stayed there till the next Sunday.

Still Mrs. Fagg loved air, and therefore, when she was not wanted in the kitchen or to superintend the servant's housework, she was fond of standing at the entrance of The Bladebone, usually with a duster to hem, as she took her accustomed airing. When the Rector came back from visiting the poor cripple, Mrs. Fagg stood leaning against the door hemming a red pocket-handkerchief with white spots for the use of her darling Bobby. The needle flew in and out as deftly as if Mrs. Fagg had never anything else to do but needlework. Mrs. Fagg had a way of doing her best at everything.

"Good morning, Mrs. Fagg," said the Rector; "so I find you have your artist lodger again."

"Yes, sir, we have." Mrs. Fagg spoke dryly. Since her conversation about Mr. Whitmore with the Rector, more than one circumstance had combined to prove that her lodger's acquaintance with Patty had gone to

what Mrs. Fagg considered "lengths." "Yes, sir, but I don't somehow think he'll be long with us; he don't sketch or do nothing as he did last time, he seems altogether duller like."

"Ah, he had better go over to Gray's. I fancy Ashton must be dull for a single man."

Mrs. Fagg put her head a little on one side, and looked sharply at her pastor.

"Well, about dulness, you see, sir, that depends on what folks find amusement in. You see, sir, there's no amusement *now* in going down Carving's Wood Lane."

The Rector shook his head.

"Ah, Mrs. Fagg, you were always hard on poor Patty. I am afraid she had not many friends."

"And no wonder, sir!" The matron spoke indignantly. She had finished hemming the red handkerchief, and she folded it up in exquisite squareness, giving it an admonitory pat at each fresh folding. "There are them that'll take away a neighbour's character while they go on praising all the time; that's like stroking a cat while you make off with her kittens. That's not my way, sir, and I should not trouble to move my tongue against Patty Westropp only for something I was told yesterday."

"Well, but, Mrs. Fagg, don't you know we must never believe half we are told in the way of scandal? Why, suppose any one were to come and tell me Dennis was lazy, you wouldn't like me to believe it, would you?"

The Rector smiled, with an attempt at mischief in his quiet blue eyes.

"You couldn't believe it, sir; you'd know better." Mrs. Fagg paused, and thought a minute before she went on. "No one could call a man lazy who works as hard at reading as Dennis do; why, it's my belief he gets through every column of the news, down to the coal advertisements and all, in one day, and to hear him talk Parliament speeches is most improving to them as can understand. A lazy man don't do that, sir;

he does nothing at all. No, everyone's got his own line as plain marked out as the stripe on a donkey's back, and the folks as don't get on in life is them as takes to the wrong line perversely; and it's my belief that girl Patty never took to the right from the beginning; she can't go straight now, sir, it ain't in reason to expect it. Do you know where she is, sir, and what she's doing with her fortune?"

"No, I wish I did. I am very much interested in Patty's future." Mr. Beaufort was surprised at the landlady's excitement. Mrs. Fagg was known to have prickles on her tongue for those who deserved them; but she was not a gossip, and it was most unusual, and it seemed to the Rector most uncalled for that she should persist in this attack on a motherless girl. "Oh, women, women, you are all alike," he thought; "if one among you happens to be prettier than the rest."—"I wish," he said, "I could find out what has become of that girl and her father."

"Well, sir, it was that made me speak. I thought you was trying to find out. I was told that you had thought of inviting Patty to stay at the Rectory, and be a friend like for Miss Nuna. No, sir, you needn't be afraid I believed it, I knew better; but I heard yesterday that Patty said to a person in Ashton before she went away, that she shouldn't have anything to say to Miss Beaufort after a bit; she meant to be a quite better sort of lady than Miss Nuna; and this did put my back up, it did. When I heard, sir, as I did, that you'd been over to Guildford making inquiries, I was determined to tell you about it. To think of the notice Miss Nuna showed that there girl! Why, she used to speak to Patty Westropp more than anyone else in the village. It's downright shameful! And that's not all, sir. You weren't pleased last autumn with what I said, I knew! I saw plain enough you thought me as spiteful as a toad."

"Really, Mrs. Fagg, I am not aware——" Mr. Beaufort shrank from this personal attack.

"No, sir, no doubt you were not aware—you'll excuse me saying it—no one ever is aware of half their feelings while they last, and very often never, if something unlooked-for turns up at the time and wipes 'em out; but that girl Patty, at that very time I was talking to you, either then or the day before, or most like both, was letting herself be regularly courted by this artist lodger of ours"—Mr. Beaufort gave a sudden nervous look of inquiry to the upper window—"oh, it's all right, Mr. Whitmore's out walking, sir; and besides, I don't blame him half nor a quarter what I blame the girl; if Mr. Bright chose to speak, he knows all about it, for he was just at the corner of the lane when the person as told me was on the common."

Mr. Beaufort felt annoyed and irritable; his own encounter with Paul seemed to take a deeper shade under this new tale, and it was specially vexing that Will, of all people in the world, should be cognizant of Mr. Whitmore's conduct with Patty Westropp.

"Well, I must bid you good morning," he said. "You know young men will admire a pretty face; we can only say it is perhaps a good thing that no worse happened. Take my advice, and never believe half you hear, Mrs. Fagg; no, nor a quarter; and, above all, don't repeat it."

He had relieved some of his vexation by giving this pastoral advice, but he could not shake it all off. He had been very severe on misdemeanours of this kind among his flock, and it was mortifying to have given public countenance to a stranger while he was actually carrying on this sort of acquaintance with Patty. Mr. Beaufort chose to reprove Mrs. Fagg, but he believed Paul's conduct to have been much worse than it really had been. He called to mind now his first meeting with the artist—even then he was walking with Patty; he remembered how coldly the young man had accepted his invitation to spend that first Sunday at the parsonage, and last of all his final interview with Paul outside Roger's cottage.

He could not understand how, in the face of all this, he had asked the artist again to his house—above all to meet Will Bright.

Mr. Beaufort had been struck with the visible coolness between the two young men, but Mrs. Fagg's words seemed to explain it.

"I must say Will might have told me; so strict as he is, he must have known that a man who sets public opinion at defiance in such a way as this is not the sort of person to be countenanced by a clergyman."

It was a relief to be able to blame some one besides himself, but Mr. Beaufort was still in a very perplexed state when he reached home.

It has been said that the Fates had been working at cross purposes this morning. Paul Whitmore had hurried past Nuna to put into effect a resolution—a resolution which had been quickened to immediate action by the sight of the Rector's daughter walking with Will Bright. Paul did not doubt Nuna; he had read her love for him in that brief glance yesterday; but she must be wholly his, and he could not endure that Will should even approach her. He meant to have seen Nuna once more alone before he spoke to her father, but this meeting changed his plans, and he hurried on fast to seek Mr. Beaufort.

The Rector was not in. "He can't be long now, sir," said Jane; "Master never do take long walks."

"I want to see him on business, so I can wait, I suppose."

"Will you please walk this way, sir?"

He followed into the Rector's study. There was not much in it likely to attract Paul Whitmore—shelves of dully-bound volumes of English divinity, other shelves full of Latin and Greek and even Hebrew volumes, for Mr. Beaufort was a scholar; treatises on cows and pigs and horses, and oil-cake and farming; county maps and histories, and peerages, and books on jurisprudence, on the laws of franchise, and, scattered among these, books of ready-made quotations and

Paul smiled; he did not think this quiet, gentle-spoken man would have flown off in such a womanish temper.

"Unwarrantable perhaps, but not unheard of. You were young yourself once; can't you make some excuse for my over-haste?"

"I am afraid, sir, you have appealed to a most ineffectual sympathy. I can safely say that nothing could have tempted me to offend so grievously against the usages of life."

He was too angry to ask how Nuna had received Mr. Whitmore's admiration; he wanted to dismiss the subject finally, without any more detail, and he went on just as if he were driving a ploughshare over every thought and feeling that might be held in opposition to his.

"I must beg to hear no more about this, and I think you will see that it is impossible I can continue to receive your visits at my house."

While the Rector spoke Paul had felt his own superiority to the man who was thus ignoring all right and justice in his treatment of him. There was a slight flush on his dark face, but his words came with the calm weight that compels deference.

"I think I must ask you to hear rather more, or at least to give me some reason for your decision. Is your daughter to have no voice in the matter?"

"We will keep my daughter out of the question altogether, if you please." Mr. Beaufort's face flushed. "She is much too young to decide for herself, and too well brought up, I hope, to think of adopting such a course. If I had no other reason, it would be sufficient that I know far too little of you to entertain such a proposal."

"That is a reason which can be soon got over. I will stay at Ashton as long as you please; and if you will allow me to explain my position and means of living, I have every hope that you will be satisfied.

Paul spoke temperately still, but the flush in his face had deepened.

His manner restrained the Rector, but Mr. Beaufort felt it was useless to temporize, worse than useless for this wild young fellow to think he could have Nuna for the asking. He waved his hand.

"We need not discuss your position at all. If you had followed me, Mr. Whitmore, you would have noticed that I said if I had no other reason: unfortunately this is not the case; I have another objection, but it would be much pleasanter for us both if you would let the matter end here."

Paul bent his dark eyes searchingly on the fretful, anxious face before him.

"You don't understand me," he said, bluntly; "I love your daughter with all my heart, and you have said nothing yet to prove that I am not fit to win her love. I don't say I am worthy of her; no man ever yet was worthy of a pure, good woman's love; but unless you make me believe that it is impossible for me to win your daughter, I tell you, with all due regard for you as her father, but still I tell you frankly, I don't mean to give her up."

Paul spoke impetuously, and Mr. Beaufort waved both his white hands as if he would soothe away the outburst.

"I consider the reason I have already given, the slightness of our acquaintance, a very sufficient one; but it may perhaps settle the matter more completely if I add, as a clergyman, that you are not quite the person I should choose for my daughter's husband."

"You have implied that before,"—Paul was pale enough now, and he spoke haughtily; "but I have a right to ask you to say plainly what you mean."

"You may have a right, but I question your wisdom in asserting it; there are things best left unexplained, still——"

Paul looked impatient, and the Rector went on faster.

"I can tell you if you wish. When you were here before I objected to your acquaintance with a young woman in a different class of life from your own."

"Really."

"Will you allow me to finish? I am aware that young men see no harm in such intimacies; they only consider their own amusement; but I believe incalculable mischief is done in this way. Such notice turns a girl's head with vanity, unfits her for association with her equals, and, I fear, where time and opportunity prolong the acquaintance, still worse harm ensues. I dare say you are surprised, but you asked me to give you a reason; and I tell you plainly that I think that if this girl Patty had still been in Ashton, it is quite possible you would have renewed this very objectionable intimacy."

At first Paul's haughty annoyance had nearly hurried him away without offering any explanation, but the Rector's earnestness prevailed.

"I should have done nothing of the kind. You have spoken out to me, Mr. Beaufort, and I will be quite frank with you. I had a foolish infatuation for Patty, I greatly admired her; but there was nothing criminal in my feelings for her." He spoke very frankly and simply.

"I dare say not." The Rector almost wrung his hands in his desire to be rid of the subject, it jarred his refinement so painfully. "I have no doubt there was no harm in your intention, but the fact remains."

"Your knowledge of it; but that is founded on a mistake. You shall know the whole truth. I was so madly in love with Patty that I asked her to be my wife, and she refused me."

Mr. Beaufort literally staggered back against the writing-table. Nothing perhaps masters us so completely as the recognition of some quality in another of which we feel ourselves incapable. It was marvellous to hear Mr. Whitmore say that he meant to make Patty his wife, but it was literally astounding to hear him confess that he had been rejected by this village girl.

For a few moments this grand frankness overwhelmed the Rector with astonished admiration, and

then a very different feeling brought him back to self-complacency. How dared this man even look at Nuna with the notion of making her a successor to Patty Westropp?

He grew very red in the face indeed, with virtuous indignation.

"You have said quite enough, more than enough, to justify me in forbidding any attachment between you and my daughter. I could not receive a man as a son-in-law who could dream of marrying such a person as Patty Westropp. Really, Mr. Whitmore, for both our sakes, I must ask you to end this interview."

He was amazed to see Paul smile.

"I am going away," he said, "but I am not going to give up the hope of your daughter's love, Mr. Beaufort. I shall write to her: I consider myself justified in writing to explain my conduct in leaving Ashton so abruptly. I go away now in deference to your wishes, but I shall come down here again soon, and if I then have reason to think I have any hope of success, I shall ask you to reconsider your determination."

He would shake hands, ignoring altogether the Rector's stiff bow of dismissal, and then he went away.

"Really,"—the Rector threw himself back in his easy chair in a state of nervous agitation,—"that is the most extraordinary person I ever met with in all my life."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### NUNA'S LETTER.

Miss Matthews felt unusually excited when Mr. Bright left her. Something in Will's manner warned her that he had a special purpose in going to look for Nuna. It seemed to Elizabeth that the marriage was certain, and then her calm, practical mind began to calculate

how soon the affair could be settled. For the question of marriage presented itself to Miss Matthews in what Nuna would have called upside-down fashion. Ways and means, all the machinery of arrangement and possibility and prudence, had first to be taken into account, and then sentiment between two people, or that which Miss Matthews called love, might come in when all the rest was settled. It seemed to her that in this affair of Will Bright there had been a super-abundance of sentiment already; the attachment had gone on quite long enough.

She watched eagerly for Nuna's return, but Nuna came in so quietly, that Miss Matthews missed her.

At dinner-time Nuna was too pre-occupied to notice anything, but Miss Matthews saw that the Rector was suffering from unusual disquiet. These symptoms in father and daughter indicated some confidence from which she was excluded.

There was no active spirit of intrigue in Elizabeth's nature; she would have considered it ill-bred to indulge such a spirit, but she meant to be all in all to Mr. Beaufort, and to be this she must know all his secrets.

And yet she could not question him; delicacy and refinement alike kept her from asking the cause of his fretful looks and captious silence. She passed an anxious evening, and her placid face still looked perplexed when she came in to breakfast next morning. She had been in the garden gathering flowers for the Rector's writing-table, and Nuna and her father had had time to open their letters before she came in.

Miss Matthews looked from one to the other, and she saw that something unusual was happening. Nuna's face had flushed, and she was putting her letter away seemingly to avoid observation. Her father held an open letter in his hand, but he was not looking at it. He was frowning most severely, for him—frowning at Nuna.

While Miss Matthews sat studying the two faces, Nuna looked up suddenly and met her father's eyes

Her blush deepened, but it seemed to Elizabeth that the girl looked happy, spite of her evident confusion.

Whatever did it all mean? She watched and waited, but neither father nor daughter gave her the least clue to their secret. The doubt of the previous day had now become a certainty to Miss Matthews; she was sure that some secret existed of which she was ignorant.

The Rector was summoned to his study on parish business, and Nuna disappeared suddenly. Elizabeth's curiosity grew.

Later on in the morning she arrived, as she thought, at the gist of the whole matter. She saw Mr. Bright ride by the parsonage without turning his head.

"She refused him yesterday, then!" and for a moment surprise quite mastered Miss Matthews; and then she reflected. "Nuna never had any common sense, and therefore she is not likely to understand her own feelings or what is best for her." Miss Matthews felt that she must speak to Mr. Beaufort: Nuna must end by marrying Mr. Bright.

Coming in from the garden she met the Rector, so evidently vexed that she ventured to express her sympathy.

"I'm afraid you are worried,"—she spoke in the purring, child-like way that goes straight to the confidence of some men,—"and worry is not good for you, is it? I wish I could be of any use to you; but I am afraid women can only soothe; they have not brains enough to be of real assistance to wise men like you."

Elizabeth looked positively sweet.

"I don't know; I don't know, I'm sure; perhaps not, and yet this is a woman's matter. My nerves have gone through an amount of exhaustion within the last four-and-twenty hours which it will take weeks to counteract the effect of. No one who has not studied the subject as I have done can conceive how great is the waste of physical energy and health caused by the slightest irritation to the nerves. People are called

touchy and ill-tempered and various other things, and all the time, if the state of their nerves had been duly regarded by those among whom they live, the result might have been a most unbroken placidity. Come into my study, will you, a moment, and I will just tell you how I am situated."

Elizabeth's heart went a little quicker; he had begun to lean on her already, then; and when Mr. Beaufort placed a chair for her beside his writing-table, she felt herself mistress at the Rectory.

"Perhaps I ought to say that I believe I know how Nuna has behaved to Mr. Bright," she said, sympathisingly.

"To Will—what do you mean?" and the frown bent on her was so very decided that she told him her guess about Nuna's refusal. The Rector thought a few minutes.

"You may be mistaken: I am inclined to think you are. I do not think Nuna has had any talk of this kind lately with Will. Will Bright is exactly the man Nuna ought to marry, I should like it above all things—and I shall tell her so; he is very kind and excellent, but he is thoroughly practical and free from extravagant, high-flown notions—no romance about Will. No, I was not thinking about him; it is quite another person altogether—a stranger—an artist, who really has scarcely seen Nuna, and yet he has proposed for her. I told him I could not entertain his proposal for a moment, but he won't listen to me. I meant to take no notice to Nuna, but I feel sure he has written to her; that letter she got this morning was from him—I'm sure of it—and I must forbid the thing altogether."

Miss Matthews' light, colourless hair stood almost on end, and her eyes and lips rose in simultaneous protest.

"An artist! But, dear Mr. Beaufort, how did Nuna make the acquaintance of such a person?"

"There's nothing unusual in that,"—Miss Matthews' horrified tone annoyed him—"he is a gentleman, and a

very remarkable person altogether, but still not suited to Nuna. I am not puzzled about him, he went back to London yesterday; it is Nuna who perplexes me: I don't know how to deal with her. My own idea is that these subjects are best left alone; opposition is sure to make girls contradictory and love-sick; and yet I must stop this writing. I really don't know what to do," he said, plaintively; and then his vexation got vent at last. "Can't you suggest something? You ought to know how to deal with Nuna, Elizabeth," he said, irritably, "she was with you long enough."

Miss Matthews thought so too. She did not trouble herself about the fact that she never had been able to win her young cousin's confidence and affection; Miss Matthews never doubted her own judgment, she considered that she had judged Nuna thoroughly, and that the girl's only safety lay in a prudent, well-considered marriage. It seemed, therefore, to her, that now the matter was put in her hands, Nuna's future must be safe.

"I think I should say as little as possible,"—she thought awhile before she spoke,—"and then I should take an early opportunity of telling Nuna your wish that she should marry Mr. Bright. She is flighty, but I really think she is dutiful; and besides, if she has seen this—this gentleman so seldom, she can hardly care much for him, I think."

"Well, no—no, perhaps not." The Rector felt himself soothed, and yet, when he thought of Paul Whitmore, not at all satisfied; it was so very tiresome to be compelled to go through an explanation with Nuna.

Mr. Beaufort would have been less perplexed if he could have lifted the roof from his daughter's bedroom that morning, but he would have been more angry. Nuna was kneeling beside her dressing-table; Paul's letter lay there, and she had kissed almost every word of it.

For every word was precious. Paul's love was no longer a doubtful imagination; he confessed it briefly and simply. He did not ask for hers in return, but

he said he could not leave Ashton without explaining the full meaning of some words he had spoken at their last meeting. He told her he hoped to win her love, and to soften her father's opposition, and meantime he asked Nuna not to judge him too severely for anything she might hear alleged against him. "There is truth in that which will be told you," he wrote: "I only ask you to let me tell my own story, if you are willing to hear it, before you pronounce me quite undeserving of your love."

Nuna feasted on these words, read them over and over again, and then closed her eyes, so as to enjoy the fresh delight when she opened them of seeing that it was not all a dream.

"He loves me!" she murmured softly, and the rich bloom of love rose on her cheek and ripened in her eyes; "he loves me!" and the tide of passion, all stronger from the repression she had maintained with such failing strength, throbbed in her pulses. There never can be any human sensation to equal this—a timid heart assured of the love it craves. Nuna stayed there, all unconscious of time or of present life.

A tap at the door startled her out of her dream of joy.

"May I come in?" in Elizabeth's voice, and Nuna congratulated herself that the door was fastened. She folded up her precious letter with reverent care and hid it away in her pocket—hid it with something else she carried there, a little pencil sketch of a head made on that first day after meeting Paul in Carving's Wood Lane.

"Mr. Beaufort wants you in the study, dear." Elizabeth spoke affectionately. She had tried to be kind to Nuna in this visit, but dislike to Miss Matthews was too strongly planted in the girl's nature to allow the trial fair play.

"She is only trying to make me civil, and then she will be as pragmatical as ever. I don't like her, and I can't be a hypocrite," Nuna thought.

Her lips quivered a moment at the message, and then she went down stairs.

"I suppose I must tell everything. Well, it will be a good thing over," she said to herself; "but I only hope papa won't make me angry."

Her father was bending over his desk; he did not raise his head as she came in.

"Sit down," he said; and then, after a little, "you had a letter this morning, Nuna?"

He waited, but Nuna did not answer. Her father longed to ask for the letter, and yet he could not make up his mind to do this.

"I believe I know the contents of your letter, and I am very sorry that it was written. I—I have sent for you now to tell you that you need not answer it."

Nuna had shrunk from the idea of writing to Paul, but contradiction rose in protest against her father's prohibition.

"And," Mr. Beaufort went on, for he scarcely expected she would speak, "in the event of your receiving another letter of this kind—scarcely probable, perhaps, but still a thing which may happen—it will be better to give it to me unopened, and I will send it back to the writer."

He looked up at Nuna, and he was very much surprised indeed.

Fathers go on living with daughters, mothers sometimes do the same, thoroughly unconscious of the inner life, the real drama of existence which is being played out in the hearts of the seemingly gentle unobservant creatures: and it often happens, where parents are devoid of keen insight, that this goes on to the end. In Nuna's case the sudden prohibition, like the touch of the angel's spear, brought passion into visible action, and the father shrank into himself with a feeling of helpless trouble at the girl's flashing eyes and panting, ardent words.

"No! I can't do that. I will not answer this letter, I am not sure he wishes it; but if he writes again I

must read his letter. I will not do anything without your knowledge, father, but I cannot wrong him."

Mr. Beaufort passed his hand over his forehead—once, twice—and then shook his head feebly. He was utterly bewildered; he saw the fact that Nuna loved Mr. Whitmore, but he refused to accept it. Instead, his brain went off into a bewildering puzzle of how this had come to pass, and as to the causes which ought to have prevented it from happening.

"Him! he!" catching fretfully at the superficies of Nuna's indiscretion; "really Nuna, you are talking in a most extraordinary way of a person who is almost a stranger. What can this Mr. Whitmore or his letter be to you? What ought they to be?"

"I don't know what they ought to be——" Here she stopped; she had been brave up to the point of confession, but the burning glow that seemed to scorch her eyes with its heat confused speech, and made it impossible; she stood mute, but her twining fingers and quivering face spoke eloquently.

A harder, firmer man would have been more cruel, would have forced her to speak out, but her father's fretfulness helped Nuna. He went on pettishly.

"Then am I to understand that you care about this person, or fancy you do, for you cannot really know what you think about the matter? Oh, Nuna, I'm ashamed of you. I cannot tell you how I feel, that a daughter of mine should behave so like a silly schoolgirl, and about such a person too; oh dear, dear me!"

This last exclamation was caused by the fresh dilemma in which he found himself. He had not intended to say one word to Nuna about Paul's love for Patty, but then he had expected to find Nuna passive; instead of this there was such a thorough attitude of revolt about her, that, however painful it might be to his sense of refinement, it was necessary at once to explain Mr. Whitmore's real character to his daughter. In his heart the Rector believed that Paul's offer to make Patty his wife had

been elicited by the girl's virtuous behaviour, rather than from scruples on the part of the artist for a more unlawful course; the idea of Nuna's love for such a person became more and more repugnant.

"Father,"—Nuna spoke as she felt, in a highly wrought intense way, which to her father was only confirmation of her unreal state,—"don't speak against Mr. Whitmore, please; I could not bear it, I know I could not. I have told you that I will not write or do anything against your wishes, but I cannot leave off loving him."

It had been very hard to say out in those naked words, with no one by to turn to for refuge, no one in whose bosom she could hide her eyes from the shame she felt. It was a wrenching of Nuna's whole nature to speak out her love openly, for one too who, as her heart whispered all the while, had not spoken out his love to her; who was, as her father said, a stranger so far as outward seeming counted.

Both Mr. Beaufort's hands fastened on the arms of his chair. Nuna rose up in all the strange wild beauty which agitation creates. Till now her emotion had always been restrained in the presence of others. Her bosom heaved, her whole form seemed to dilate; the delicate expressive nostrils, those tell-tales of passion, quivered, and the large lustrous eyes swam with changeful feelings. She kept her slender fingers locked together as if they helped her to restrain her words.

"You do not know what you are talking about; you do not indeed, Nuna. You say I must not find fault with Mr. Whitmore; don't talk nonsense, child, I tell you I must."

The frankness of this last sentence was startling from Mr. Beaufort, but he was fairly off his balance, and all the niceties and small proprieties of life had kicked the beam along with him. "You fancy yourself in love with this person because you think him quite different to that which he really is; he's a wild, good-

for-nothing fellow." He raised one hand at Nuna's indignant attempt to stop him. "Hush, Nuna, you must listen; if you had been reasonable and well-behaved, as I hoped you would be, you would have spared me and yourself too a great deal of annoyance. What can a girl like you know about a man's conduct? I desire you to stay and listen to this,"—Nuna was moving away,—"Mr. Whitmore paid far more court to Patty Westropp than he has paid to you when he was here in August."

"He is an artist, he admired her beauty; how could he help it?" The girl spoke proudly, but a spasm of jealousy tortured her.

"Nuna, I did not think you so vain, so self-willed; you will not let me spare you. Mr. Whitmore did much more than admire Patty, he loved her so madly—I quote his own words—that he asked her to be his wife."

All the glow faded out of her face, all the light left her eyes, yet she clung desperately to her faith in the man she loved, and strove to force her trembling lips into a smile of unbelief.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" Her voice had a defiant tone in it.

"All, Nuna!"—he spoke more earnestly—"surely I have said enough to show you, if you will only calm yourself, that this Mr. Whitmore is not really serious in seeking your affection. He is a man, Nuna, who loves, or fancies that he loves, every fresh face that falls in his way, and the wife of such a man must be miserable. This is a habit seldom cured by marriage. You do not love Mr. Whitmore, Nuna, you are in love with your own fancy, and a very short acquaintance would convince you of your mistake. You are convinced already—I hope so, at least."

Her face had drooped, but she raised it and looked fully at her father. "*You* are mistaken, father. I love Mr. Whitmore, and if I never see him again I shall never love anyone else; there is no use in trying to

prejudice me against him: I shall not change. May I go now?"

Mr. Beaufort saw that the very result he had foreseen and dreaded had come to pass: opposition to her wishes had driven Nuna into obstinacy. He was wise enough to see too that any further remonstrances would be useless.

"Yes, you can go, certainly: I think you must feel Nuna that you have grieved and disappointed me."

But Nuna scarcely heard him; she only wanted to be alone.

Alone, as she was before she got that summons to her father's study? ah, no, that brief hour of pure unalloyed trust and joy might well be precious now, might well stand out white for ever in memory. She was alone again now, for what? Not to yield herself up to rosy dreams of Paul and his love, but to battle with a sombre torturing jealousy: it was so very hard to feel that she had given up all her heart, all her love, while he had only the dregs of his love to bestow on her. There was no use in struggling, no use in trying to cast out the demon of jealousy before it meant to go; she stood outwardly still, so pale and chill-looking that one might have thought her void of feeling, while within, the tender, loving soul was tossed on the waves of a fierce tempest. She had anchored herself, as she fondly thought, so surely—for Paul's truth, Paul's nobleness, had been to Nuna impregnable—and she had been cast adrift. But hope, that divine comforter, came at last to rescue her from drifting to despair.

"Is he to have loved no one but me, then? I have been no more than a hypocrite when I said I was not worthy of his love; if I had been true, I could not have been so vain as to hope to have it all from the beginning. Was he to keep his heart shut to all others till he met with such an insignificant creature as I am." She hid her face in shame of her own vanity. Presently she lifted up her head; her forehead had cleared, and there was a sweet trustful look in her eyes.

"He is true! He may have loved that girl—I can't bear to think so; but I have no right to be angry. He loves me now, I am sure he loves me, and I will not believe he means to deceive me. Does he not ask me not to judge him? Why should I? Why should I wrong him and my own love for him by the smallest doubt? Oh, Paul," she broke down in sudden tears, "I shall never see you again perhaps, but I will always love you!"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### MISS LATIMER.

It is August again, golden August, with its flaming sunshine and rich ripe full ears of corn, so full and heavy this year that they are longing for the sickle, longing to lie down and rest, instead of standing up like never-changed sentinels burning each day into a redder gold; while the sun, not content with his work on the corn itself, blazes yet more fiercely in the faces of the scarlet poppies and golden-bosomed marguerites below, till they send up glowing reflections on the fainting ears. And in Belgium the poor ears get rarely a green glimpse overhead, they see only an intense blue, with scarce a hand's-breadth of fleecy white to soften its hard uniform tint; the only trees are poplars—poplars, those emblems of self-righteousness resolved to point heavenwards without holding out so much as one pendant bough to help their neighbours on the way thither.

It was a specially hot, dry autumn, and the rank and fashion of Brussels had betaken themselves to Ostend and Blankenbourg to bathe.

Miss Latimer had lately arrived at Brussels; she had quitted Madame Mineur's establishment some weeks ago, and had resolved on making a travelling tour with her companion before she settled herself down to study again.

"I'm not sure that I want any more teaching," Patty thought. "My French is as good as most people's. I can practise music, and unless people are first-rate, De Mirancourt says, no one plays in society now-a-days. I can pay artists to do that kind of thing when I give receptions. I believe, if I read and get myself well up in all that goes on, I am quite educated enough for any one. There's no use in asking Patience's opinion. She is so ignorant, and so conceited of the little she knows."

Patty looked with a slight sneer at her companion. Patience had fallen asleep on the little red velvet sofa opposite to that on which Patty lay. The room was very hot and quiet, overlooking the quaint courtyard of a small hotel in Brussels. Patience had begged hard to avoid the more frequented inns, quiet and mystery being, according to Miss Coppock, the fit setting to enhance the effect of Patty's beauty.

Patty looked very beautiful just now. The large open sleeves of her muslin dress had fallen back, and showed the creamy white arm pillowing her head; one cheek rested on the rose dimpled wrist, and the dull red velvet of the couch seemed to be there on purpose to throw all into higher relief. There was a striking, an almost awful contrast between the occupants of the two sofas. They might have served as models for joy and disappointment. Patty with her softly rounded limbs reclined in graceful ease, her exquisite rose-tinted skin, her ripe and smiling scarlet lips and deep-coloured soft eyes, her youth crowned by rich wavy luxuriant tresses, and Patience stretched out stiffly, the long bony feet showing below the flounce of her over-juvenile muslin dress; Patience with hollow cheeks and sunken eyes—eyes veiled now by dark brown lids; Patience with the thin lips of her firm mouth tightly compressed, and her sallow deeply-lined forehead bordered by thin scant hair, broadly streaked with grey. Can there ever have been beauty in this faded rigid face, beauty that a man had desired to call his own? and

if beauty has been there, will Patty's face ever fade to this likeness when the glow and freshness of youth have gone. Time will show. A face is rarely a picture only to be injured and altered by outward influences or mischances. It is rather a sun-picture: the process is gradual instead of instantaneous, though the effect is the same; joy and sorrow, hope and fear, truth and falsehood, nobility and pettiness, earnestness and lukewarmness, self-denial and self-indulgence, meanness and generosity, print themselves at last legibly, ineffaceably, marring or enhancing the flesh-and-blood beauty which is to them a mere canvas on which to exhibit themselves. And the skilled eye would now, in travelling from grey Patience to rosy Patty, have recognized a kindred expression, full-blown and yet hiding itself in the one, developing more boldly in the other—an expression of falsehood.

Patience was tired out. Miss Latimer had visited the Musée and some other picture-galleries; had also inspected St. Gudule, and had finally enjoyed herself to her heart's content in one of the best jewellers' shops in the Rue Montagne de la Cour. Patty had not been extravagant—she was never lavish—but she had tried on about fifty bracelets, and had delighted in the effect produced on her lovely arms by their magnificence: finally she had contented herself with a set of coral ornaments.

Miss Coppock entreated that she would buy something more showy, but Patty said it would be mere extravagance.

"I don't want anything to set me off in the way we live now, Patience. I can see no use in buying ornaments just to let them lie by and get old-fashioned. The first thing a man will do when he falls in love with me will be to smother me with presents. How can you know anything about such things? De Mirancourt told me everything. She had lovers of her own. *She* was beautiful when she was young."

Patty spoke contemptuously. Poor tired Patience had

offended her. She had forgotten her submission for once, and had given her opinion in a tone of equality at the jeweller's.

Miss Coppock's eyes flashed for a moment, and then her love of comfort prevailed; instead of answering she lay down on the velvet sofa, and soon fell asleep.

But before she slept she had asked herself how it was that Patty held such sway over her; how it had happened that the plan for governing the heiress so carefully matured at Guildford had proved so utterly a failure in Paris.

"I am nothing better than a paid companion, except that I call her Patty when we are alone, and I am not sure that she likes that; at any rate, at Guildford, if I was worried about money, I was free."

It was all very well to make this reflection and to fall asleep on it, but if Patience had been quite herself instead of being, as she was, irritated by the little flying darts which Patty used so skilfully, she would have known she was talking nonsense. Miss Coppock had begun her millinery business in debt, and debt had, according to its usual custom, thickened on her path, till her life had grown into one long series of prevarication and excuse. Patty's offer of taking her as companion had been accepted gladly, not only for the life of ease and luxury it promised, but for escape from the daily harass and worry which were wearing her to a skeleton; it is possible that but for all these years of debt Patience might have been better able to cope with her patroness, but the fiery independence which had once flamed in those dark sunken eyes had been quenched by the daily wearing pressure of owing money she could not pay.

"Poor creature, how tired she is!" Patty was smiling most bewitchingly; some pleasant thought was passing across her mind, though, to do Patty justice, she was rarely cross.

She liked to have her own way, and she usually got it; it was impossible to refuse anything to her smiles,

and it was nearly as impossible to resist the occasional plain speeches made by Miss Latimer to those on whom she considered smiles wasted.

"I wish she would wake," said Patty, meditatively; "it is very unhealthy to sleep so soundly in the middle of the day, and Patience does look so plain while she is asleep. Ugh!" The beauty shuddered and looked lovingly at the soft white flesh on which her cheek rested. "How dreadful it must be to have a skin of that colour; she's nothing but skin and bone, poor creature; her eyes are the only good point about her, and when she's asleep one don't see them: but then, she hasn't got a hump, like De Mirancourt. What a shapeless heap of cunning wickedness that dear old Frenchwoman is. Never mind, she's done more for me than all the teaching and study in the world. She's taught me to value myself properly, and how to make other people do it too. If I hadn't known her and liked her, if I'd been such a goose as to take up the prejudices those silly English girls had against her, I should have known nothing of real life. I should have plodded on into a mere commonplace young lady;" and then Patty closed her eyes, and a smile of intense enjoyment curved her full lips. The novelty had not quite worn off; it was still delicious to realize that which she had been, and then to spring to the delightful certainty that no one, however prejudiced, could deny her right to be called a "young lady."

"Such prejudices too! just because she never went to Mass, as if it could matter: going to our Church may do some people good, but I can't believe any one was ever the better for all that Romish rubbish. I rather respect De Mirancourt for being too strong-minded to give in to it. Patience! oh, Patience, do wake up."

Miss Coppock started up at the sudden call, and Patty lay laughing; her disordered hair and staring alarmed eyes gave Patience a very weird aspect.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you," said Patty, sweetly.

"I haven't been asleep, so there was nothing to disturb." Miss Coppock spoke with the determined certainty with which a person who has just been snoring the house down assures you he is broad awake, and has heard every word you have been saying.

"Oh, I'm so glad;" Patty smiled in such an exquisite way that Patience felt sure some more than usual service was about to be required of her. "I suppose you don't know, do you, where they keep the visitor's book?"

"I can go and see," and Miss Coppock got up from the sofa.

"No,"—Patty laughed still, but she spoke decidedly, —"not as you are, Patience, you would frighten the crows; your hair, now I think of it, is just like a crow's nest. Suppose you ring the bell and tell the waiter to bring the book here."

To us who have not seen them together during all these months it seems surprising that the heiress had so easily learned to command her former mistress; but Patty had one natural gift which does not always belong to cleverness: she was not only quick in reading human nature, but she had that strange power, more subtle than mere tact, of adopting at once the means best adapted to subdue or fascinate it.

She had no depth of insight; she could never have sounded Nuna Beaufort's heart, though she would easily have detected the sensitive, ill-assured nature that lay on its surface. Patty had not the gift of true sympathy, and sympathy alone can give thorough insight. She had no idea of the passion that lay hidden in Miss Coppock, though she comprehended perfectly the vanity and weakness which marred all that had once been true in the woman's nature, and this reading had taught her that the obsequious submission with which the milliner had treated her customers would be paid to herself if she took the lofty and commanding manner which some of those ladies had shown to Patience.

Even with De Mirancourt, who worshipped her for her beauty and her liberal gifts, Patty knew that she

would never have held the same position if the wily Frenchwoman had ever suspected her origin. At Madame Mineur's she had represented herself as a young lady brought up in a lonely part of England, with few advantages of education; and the superficial polish she had gained from Miss Coppock's friend in London had enabled her to perform this character successfully, though her extreme beauty and charm did as much for her as anything else. It seemed to Patty that as she could not maintain this fiction literally with Miss Coppock, the next best thing was to act up to it; and from the day on which she left Madame Mineur's and took up her abode in the suite of rooms Patience had engaged for her, the ex-dressmaker had been aware that without a decided quarrel, which would possibly involve dismissal, there was no hope of changing the relations in which Patty's manner had placed them.

Miss Latimer's first act had been a prelude significative of the key-note she meant to strike.

She seated herself at once in the pretty little Parisian salon, and took off her bonnet.

"Miss Coppock," she said, with a grave, sweet smile, "take my bonnet if you please; I will follow you to my room presently," and then Miss Latimer turned to the maid, who stood staring in open-mouthed admiration of her new mistress, and spoke to her in fluent French—French which poor Patience, in spite of her efforts, was as incapable of rivalling as she was blind to the grammatical blunders which the glibness of Patty's utterance disguised. So that now this order to ring the bell sounded as a matter of course to Patience.

The waiter came, a bullet-headed, pink-cheeked Fleming, who took a great interest in these "dames voyageuses," as he called them.

"Ah," up went his shoulders and his hands, "it is a pity, but there is an English monsieur who has just demanded the book."

He looked at Patty, but she did not condescend to

answer; De Mirancourt had told her nothing was so important as reserve and dignity with inferiors.

"Tell him to bring it as soon as he can, and come here, Patience;" then she whispered, "Will you find out if the gentleman who has just asked for the book is the new arrival this morning?"

Miss Latimer walked away to the window, and looked down into the courtyard while the conversation went on between the companion and the waiter.

"I believe I ought to have sent them on to the landing. Well, there's one comfort, when I'm really launched I shan't be likely to come to a quiet place like this inn, so if I do make mistakes here they are not likely to injure me afterwards."

The quaint courtyard, with its stone figures and jars filled with scarlet creeping blossoms, made a quiet scene of repose—of picturesque, richly coloured, still life; for the old walls around it were genial in their show of vines: purple and golden grapes hung in ripe luxuriance everywhere, and below, climbing up as if to reach them, were wreaths of flaming nasturtium flowers, with broad cool green leaves. But there was no leisure in the heiress's mind at present for the exquisite contrasts presented by grey stone and scarlet blossoms, or by tender green leaves and luxurious purple grapes; Patty's brain was filled with exquisite costumes, the best choice she could make among the lace she had that morning inspected, and also with surmises as to the position of the gentleman who had been so evidently struck by her beauty.

Going out early on their way to the Musée—it was so near that they had decided to walk, though Patty never walked if she could help it—they had met a gentleman coming into the hotel. He had just got out of a travelling carriage loaded with baggage; evidently he was a person of consideration.

He gave Patty a long look of admiration, a look which seemed to her involuntary; she thought he was too complete a gentleman to have stared in that way

at a lady unless he had been bewildered by her beauty. She could not have told what he was like; she only felt sure that he was greatly taken with her. So little had she noticed him, that when they came back from their expedition, and she saw a well-dressed man with a fair beard watching her as she got out of her carriage, she would not have recognized or remarked him—for Patty was accustomed to be stared at—but for the same intense gaze.

Then she saw that he was a moderately well-looking man, of middle height and age, with small light eyes, and a superfluity of fair hair and beard, a man among men rather like what a Pomeranian is among dogs—he looked silky and well-cared for.

Miss Latimer had meant to question Patience about the new-comer; but Patience had been so tiresome as to fall asleep after her baffled attack on the subject of ornaments.

"Well," as soon as the waiter had closed the door, "what did the fellow say?"

"He says the gentleman who has got the book is a gentleman who arrived from Paris this morning. The man began to laugh when I asked. He said the gentleman saw us come in just now, and asked who we were."

"Asked who you were, did he? Dear me!" Patty smiled. "I hope the waiter will bring the book."

"I'm going to write to my father," she said after a pause. "When you go down to put the letter in the box, Patience, you can remind the man, if he forgets."

Patience had gathered up the bonnets, parasols, &c., and was leaving the room with them, but she turned round as Patty spoke.

"I fancied your father had agreed to your change of name, and yet I noticed you directed his last letter Roger Westropp, Esq."

A slight flush rose on Patty's cheek, and the watchful eyes—eyes which were daily growing more eager for any, the slightest clue to a permanent hold over the heiress—noted it in silence,

"No; my father has no wish to change his manner of life, or his name either; my whole life has changed, therefore it is far better to give the new life a new name."

Something unusual, artificial in the tone of voice, awakened Patience to suspicion.

"I can't fancy how you'll manage when you go back to England. Surely you won't live in that dirty house?"

Patty stood for a moment arguing with herself.

"If she stays with me, she must know," she said, "and I had better tell her than let her find it out." She paused a moment longer. Should she dismiss Miss Coppock before she returned to London, find her some suitable situation, and cut the tie between them? Patience never knew how nearly that moment's hesitation had altered the future course of her life. "No," argued Patty, "I have made good my position with her; I have no need to be on my guard, as I must be with a stranger, lest some little mistake should undo all I have done for myself. Patience thinks me a wonder, and that doubles my power over her. She is too ignorant herself to know that I don't know how to do everything yet, as I will know before I have done." The soft sweet face looked almost stern in its determination. "Besides, Patience by herself, beyond my control, might chatter; nobody would believe her—perhaps, but I like to be quite safe." She went on aloud:

"I don't mean to live with my father when I go back to London; and as we are not to have the same name, although of course it will make no real difference between us, still I shan't call him father. We have nothing to hide or be ashamed of, you know we haven't;" she looked inflexibly into Miss Coppock's eyes, and they fell beneath hers. "I've changed my name, and paid for it, just because I wanted to avoid annoyance and extortion from people who knew me beforehand; but if I were to call him father, and yet have a different name, people would begin to suspect

there was something to be found out. I am Miss Latimer, and Roger Westropp is my foster-father; for I suppose you know I contribute to his support. I don't know whether he receives it or lets it accumulate, but a certain income is settled on him for the rest of his life."

She spoke calmly and distinctly, and Patience looked aghast at this new proof of Patty's cleverness. For the moment the gravity of Miss Latimer's manner gave reality to her assertions, but not for long. Patience was too clever at subterfuge herself not to see the advantage that might accrue to her from the falsehood that Patty had chosen to act.

"And suppose any one finds out?" she said slyly.

Patty raised those deep blue eyes softly to her companion's face and gave her a long look.

"Do you know, Patience, you sometimes make me think you are afraid of being found out yourself, the idea seems so uppermost in your head. Can't you see there's nothing to find out in my case? I've never done anything I'm ashamed of. I've been placed by circumstances in a different position to the one I was born in; I've worked hard enough, goodness knows, and I've fitted myself for my present advantages; it would be ungrateful and ridiculous to grovel back to my former state. I'm not ashamed of it—dear me! no; but I've left it. I'm not Patty Westropp;" she gave a slight shiver at the name. "Other people—people with prejudices, you know—might be ashamed of it; why should I distress and annoy my friends by forcing my own past history on their notice? De Mirancourt told me once, and I agree with her, that there's nothing so vulgar as the way some people have of thrusting their family and their affairs on the notice of others." She changed her tone, and looked in a half-playful way at Patience. "I don't know what De Mirancourt would say though if she heard me holding forth in this way; she'd say it was vulgar to preach, I know. But, Patience, I should have thought you agreed with

her in some things, you are so very close about your early life."

The sunken eyes fell again, and an angry flush spread over Miss Coppock's sullen face; but she was spared the pain of answering.

The waiter came in with a newspaper in his hand, which had come by the mid-day post, he said, and he had the visitors' book under his arm.

Patty seated herself, eager to examine this, and tossed the paper over to her friend.

"It seems about three months old; it has been sent on from Paris," she said, carelessly.

Before she had found the place she wanted, Miss Coppock startled her.

"Here's news for you, Patty! What do you think has happened?"

For an instant Patty grew white. She did care for her father, far more than her manner to him would have vouched for, and she thought some harm had happened to him.

"Isn't it father's writing outside?" she said.

"Oh yes, it's his writing, but it's nothing about Mr. Westropp; it's a marriage—it's got a cross against it. Here it is: 'At the Parish Church of Ashton, Paul Whitmore, Esq., to Nuna Cecil Beaufort.'"

There was a little malice in the sparkle of Miss Coppock's eyes, but Patty gave no outward sign of mortification.

"Oh! they are married, are they?" she said; and her plump white finger went steadily down the list of names in the visitors' book.

"'Maurice Downes, Esq.,'" she read, "'Hatchhurst Hall, Warwickshire, Bruce Castle in the Highlands, Park-lane, London.' Ah, I thought he looked like a gentleman."

"Who?" Patty looked up quickly. Miss Coppock's voice sounded hoarse, as if she were ill; she looked ill enough certainly—ashy pale, and almost rigid. "Who?" she repeated.

"That gentleman we saw this morning—but what ever is the matter?"

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### PATTY'S FRIGHT.

DAYS and weeks went on, and still Miss Latimer stayed in Brussels.

Mr. Downes stayed there too. He had managed to be one of the party when Patty went to Waterloo—she was too economical to take a carriage to herself,—and during the journey he succeeded in pleasing Miss Latimer, and in rousing her out of her usual languid indifference towards fellow-travellers. Miss Coppock contributed to this result; she sat in a corner of the carriage with her veil down, and kept perfect silence.

"Whatever made you so quiet, Patience? I can't think what possessed you! I declare if it hadn't been for Mr. Downes my tongue must have rusted before we got to the end of the journey."

Patty was looking at herself in the glass while she spoke, smiling in beautiful triumph at the remembrance of her fellow-traveller's irrepressible admiration. She took no heed of the despair in Miss Coppock's haggard face.

"I had a headache," Patience murmured. But Patty went on talking.

"I rather like him, do you know, though he is so English. Before we had been talking half an hour he gave me to understand he was rich, and that he had fine estates, and all that sort of thing. I don't believe travellers usually put more than one address in the book; some don't put any; it shows how purse-proud he is. I believe men think far more of money than women do after all. He says he wonders how we can exist in these small, confined rooms, Patience; so I asked him how he happened to be at such an insignificant place himself. You should have seen what a

puffet he was in; he got quite red. He said he came here simply for quiet. He says at the great hotels the English of his class are marked men; they can't get any privacy. Do you know, Patience, I feel sure and certain Mr. Downes's father was the first of his family; De Mirancourt always said only mushrooms are full of their own importance. Never mind, he'll be the more easy to manage. If I find that he really is as rich as he makes out, I rather think I shall give him the opportunity he asks for."

"What's that?" In a sharp utterance, more like a cry than a question.

"Oh, Patience, how you startled me; you've turned me pale with fright. Did you really think Mr. Downes had made me an offer at once? No, he knows better, he's a gentleman, though he is so fussy; he only asked me to let him join us next time we went on an expedition."

"And what did you say?" Patience tried to speak quietly, but she could not hide the effort this cost her.

"Mercy me, *you* are fussy now; I said of course I must consult my friend, and I wasn't sure if we should go on any more expeditions. Now you know why he was so extremely devoted in handing you from the carriage; he sees how dependent I am on you." Patty threw herself into a chair and laughed heartily.

"I don't think it will be proper to allow him to go about with you, Patty. This party was exceptional; it was made up too by the hotel-keeper to fill his carriage, not by you. I thought you said you meant to be so very select and particular."

"Of course, so I am when there's a reason for it; but just now I needn't be half as straitlaced as if I were living at home in Paris or London. If I'm to make acquaintance with Mr. Downes, I must see him sometimes—besides, of course, I've not decided; I shall take a few days and think the matter over."

Patience made no answer, and Patty went on.

"Mr. Downes seems a very suitable person—come now,

Patience, you know he is well off, and he does not belong to titled people: if he did, he wouldn't think so much about mere money. I should like a title of course"—Patty put her head on one side and looked pensive, almost more lovely than when she smiled—"but then I want a husband who's rich enough of himself: I should only get hold of a poor spendthrift lord perhaps. Why," she said with a blush, "you ought to be content, Patience, I'm sure you've said enough to me about marrying a poor man." The blush changed into a frown; she remembered that Paul Whitmore was Nuna's husband now.

"I advised you not to marry that young artist who had nothing to offer you but himself; but indeed, Patty, you shouldn't do anything hasty, you might perhaps do much better than this Mr. Downes."

Miss Coppock turned away as she spoke; something told her she would never influence Patty by contradiction.

Next morning at breakfast an exquisite bouquet came for Patty, and to Patience's surprise Miss Latimer insisted on taking a walk instead of a drive.

Days passed on, the ladies and Mr. Downes met frequently, and Miss Coppock's opposition grew. She did not mean Patty to marry just yet; she was determined she should not marry Mr. Downes. Patience could maintain a dogged, sullen resistance to the acquaintance, but she had no power to cope openly with Patty; she grew more and more silent and determined: if she could have managed it, she would have carried Miss Latimer away by force.

"We are to visit the old town, to-day," said Patty, one morning. "Mr. Downes will meet us at the Grande Place. Now, Patience, do try and be a little more cheerful—I can't fancy what makes you so dull and quiet."

"I'm tired of Brussels." Patience spoke wearily, and Patty smiled.

"Ah, well, we shan't stay here much longer." "You old goose," she added to herself, "don't you suppose I

know what's the matter with you, and don't you suppose he'll follow us wherever we go now?"

When they came home from visiting the old town, Miss Coppock felt strangely tired. She lay down on a sofa, and stayed there till Patty was obliged to rouse her.

"Come, you must rouse up," she said: "I forgot to tell you Mr. Downes is coming to coffee this evening. Do you know he has never seen me without my bonnet? and I promised he should come—Why, Miss Coppock, Patience, what's the matter?"

At her first words Patience had sat up listening, but at the end she fell back heavily, white and faint.

Patty rang for the femme de chambre. Miss Latimer had never had an illness in her life, and she was incredulous about the sufferings of others; but when the good-natured Rosalie found she could not rouse Miss Coppock to consciousness, she ran away and fetched her mistress, and Augustine the cook; and when all their united efforts failed to restore the sick lady to her usual state, they went in a body to Miss Latimer. Patty had been pacing up and down the salon, in much vexation and disturbance of mind, while the trio laboured in Patience's bedroom, and she grew alarmed when she was told she had better send for a doctor.

The doctor came—an Englishman; he looked hard at Patty.

"I think I saw you in the old town this morning, madam."

"Yes, we were there." Patty spoke haughtily; she thought this man was neglecting his business.

"I had nearly warned you," the doctor said, gravely, "and then I thought a sudden panic might be as harmful to you as the actual risk you ran. The street you were in is full of small-pox cases, and I feel almost sure your friend has taken it."

Patty gave an exclamation of terror, but the doctor signed to her imperatively to control herself.

"I am not sure—I may not be quite sure for two

days yet, perhaps longer, but the coincidence is remarkable with some symptoms I have witnessed. Keep yourself quiet," he said, severely. Patty was wringing her hands in a fresh access of despair. "Even if your friend has the disease, she may have it slightly, and you have been wise in sending for me at once."

"But I shall take it, I know I shall!" Patty almost shrieked; and she put her hands up to her lovely face as if to shield it from disfigurement.

The doctor's lip curled; he looked at Patty more attentively.

"You cannot stay here," he said; "if you like, I will take a lodging and procure a sœur to nurse your friend; you will accompany her, I suppose?"

"Me! Oh no, I could not; I know nothing about nursing; I should only be in the way. I will pay you whatever you like for your care, if you will only take her away at once." She put up both hands beseechingly.

"What a lovely creature!" the doctor said to himself; "it would be dreadful if such a face were spoiled; and yet——"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### MARRIED.

NUNA sat in the old studio expecting her husband. Her needlework had been thrown aside, and then a book which she had taken up by way of passing the time. The words grew to be mere arrangements of senseless letters. Her mind was so full of Paul that she could not take in any outside thought. One day before their marriage he had told her that he was sadly unpunctual, and she had laughed, and had answered she loved him all the better: punctual men were formal, like Will Bright. She thought of this at the end of her two hours' expectation.

"Ah! but then I had not realized how dreadful it is

to be away from him; it seems as if the room grows darker when he leaves it. I wonder if the time is as long to him when we are apart."

She gave a slight sigh. There was sorrow on her face, but it had not been brought there only by Paul's absence. She had heard news since he went away—news which she expected, and yet which had troubled her. Her father's marriage with Elizabeth Matthews had taken place two days ago.

Miss Matthews had tried quietly, but steadily, to induce Nuna to listen to Will Bright; but Nuna had proved obstinate, and, to Elizabeth's surprise, Mr. Bright seemed cured of his passion. But if Mr. Beaufort and his daughter took a walk together Elizabeth found her own influence over the Rector weakened, and Miss Matthews's quiet, tortoise-like mind began to perceive that, if she meant to be mistress at the Rectory, she must call in some aid to get rid of Nuna.

She watched her more closely, and she felt sure that the girl was unhappy. Mr. Beaufort one day commented on his daughter's looks to his cousin.

"I believe she really does care about that good-for-nothing young artist," he said, gloomily.

Miss Matthews acted on this hint. If Nuna would not marry Will, she had better marry Mr. Whitmore. She approached the subject very carefully, but at last she asked Nuna why she had not answered Mr. Whitmore's letter.

"Because I said I would not;" but the tone was sad, not angry, and Miss Matthews hoped on. It would have been against her principles to suggest directly a clandestine correspondence; but her own feelings and wishes were waging war against her principles in a very dangerous manner.

By one of the strange accidents that so often happen in life, and which, if they were duly chronicled, would be far more marvellous than any creation of human fancy, Miss Matthews, coming home from an afternoon's shopping in Guildford, saw Mr. Whitmore on the plat-

form of Ashton station; and as she proceeded to the Rectory in a fly, she saw him walking along the road to the village.

Was he going to see Nuna? At least she could make sure that Nuna should see him. It has been said that Miss Matthews was not naturally intriguing, neither was she quick-witted, so that the part she played this evening came to her piecemeal, instead of as the plan a bolder, shrewder woman would have had time to construct, as she drove homewards. She met Nuna at the garden gate, and the first step seemed to come of itself.

"Did you expect Mr. Whitmore, Nuna? He came down by the same train that I did."

Nuna stood looking at her. Hope and fear grew too strong for the reserve she had maintained towards her cousin.

"If Mr. Whitmore calls here, do you know whether he is to be admitted, Elizabeth? Am I to be allowed to see him?" It was the first time she had owned, openly, that her cousin was deeper in Mr. Beaufort's confidence than she herself was, and she felt a rebellious bitterness to both her father and his adviser.

"No, I believe not; he is not to see you any more;" and then Miss Matthews stopped to consider how she could contrive that the lovers should meet. "If you go up the station road you might meet him." She might have spared this suggestion. Nuna had already turned to the gate; if she hesitated now, she gave up her last hope of seeing Paul. Her duty to her father was nothing to her love; and she walked on fast to the turn in the road.

Elizabeth's dull brain cleared as she looked after her.

"Dear me, she is gone to meet him;" and then a half-smile came on her pale lips at the probable result of the meeting. "I ought to tell Mr. Beaufort, at any rate;" and she went to his study and told him.

Now, as Nuna sat waiting for her husband in the old quaint room in St. John Street, it seemed to her that one event had followed so fast on another since

that meeting with Paul, that she was only waking up to reality; that which had been happening had been a hurried dream—scarcely a happy one. Mingled with the intense joy of Paul's love came the remembrance of her father's anger when he met her and her lover, or rather when he and Will Bright had come upon them suddenly in Carving's Wood Lane.

Paul had persuaded her to go there with him so as to get out of the high road, and time had gone by till evening came, and still she had stood listening to him.

After that evening all had been storm and strife for a while.

Her father and Elizabeth had said she must marry Paul; Mr. Bright was not the only person who had seen her with him in this strange clandestine manner. And so with little of previous courtship, with a haste which had a certain chill of foreboding in it, Nuna found herself standing beside Paul at the altar, saying the words that made her his for ever. Outwardly, Elizabeth had been kind: this had been easy when the Rector yielded so pliantly to her will, but still Nuna cherished anger against her cousin; she had been too simple and too pre-occupied to suspect the motive that had made Elizabeth befriend Paul's love, and so urge on the marriage, but something told her that it was not any sincere desire for her happiness. She felt bitterly, too, that Miss Matthews had destroyed all confidence between herself and her father. And now only a fortnight ago Mr. Beaufort had written to her announcing his intended marriage with Miss Matthews, and had asked her to be present at it; then Nuna's eyes had opened, and she had burst into a passion of indignant tears.

Paul tried to soothe her and to induce her to go down to Ashton. He had promised to go out sketching for a day or two, so he could not accompany her. But Nuna would not go alone, and her husband let her decide for herself. He was too careless to trouble himself much about Mr. Beaufort's marriage; he knew that her father had never been specially kind to Nuna, so perhaps

it was not surprising that she should refuse to go; and then he became absorbed in arranging his little excursion and thought no more about his wife's trouble.

Nuna was very angry still. It was an anger unlikely to die out soon, it had such a root of bitterness. If she had then gone down to that root, and tried to draw up some of its clinging fibres, or at least have washed them free of bitterness with penitent tears, it might have been well for her; unowned, thrust out of sight, was the consciousness that if she had not neglected her father by her self-indulgent, dreamy ways, he would not have needed Elizabeth, and also that she had, by her own undutiful refusal to be present at his marriage, closed the door on her father's love.

"It is an insult to my own dear mother's memory," and Nuna hardened herself, as she thought virtuously, against any relenting.

It was a new sensation; her conscience protested, but she would not listen; and so she took the first step in that process which has done so much to mar domestic peace—she wilfully hardened her own heart.

Eight o'clock, and Paul had promised to return at five, and he had been gone three days. Oh, how could he manage to be happy away from her!

A clatter of wheels, then a ringing and a buzz of voices.

Nuna seemed to make one bound to the head of the staircase, the lower rooms were tenanted by strangers, and she was timid about going down into the hall; but in a minute Paul came rushing upstairs, his hair all ruffled over his eyes, but not enough to hide the gladness in them.

"My own pet!" and he nearly lifted Nuna off the ground.

Oh, it was worth all the long solitary time she had been enduring to feel that she had him once more all to herself, with no one to come between them—surely this was perfect happiness! Even while the thought lingered, she felt herself suddenly released, and Paul drew a step or two away.

"O Stephen, I forgot you, I declare. Nuna! here's Stephen Pritchard, come home at last."

Nuna wished Mr. Pritchard had stayed in Italy, or anywhere away from St. John Street. How mistaken she had been, to fancy she liked this talking, self-asserting man, who positively contradicted Paul.

She felt cross with him and with herself for being affected by his presence. Paul looked at her; he was struck by her unusual silence, and Mr. Pritchard saw the look, and smiled.

"The honeymoon is over," he said to himself; "I expect Paul wishes he had not been in such a hurry."

"What made you so late?" Nuna roused herself to speak.

"That's right, Mrs. Whitmore, call him to account."

Paul appeared to be very busy with his gaselier. "Am I late?" he said.

Nuna felt in a moment that he was vexed.

If they had been alone, she would have put her arms round his neck and have kissed him, but she could not do this before Stephen; she looked up quickly, there was a satirical smile on Mr. Pritchard's face.

"He will think Paul and I are not happy together," she thought, in a nervous, vexed way.

"No, indeed, I am not calling Paul to account, only I was afraid some accident had happened to the train."

"And suppose I hadn't come home at all?" said Paul, laughing.

Nuna laughed too, she had not the slightest fear that her husband was in earnest.

"Oh, I knew better than that, I knew you would keep your promise."

Paul turned round and looked at her; something in his face troubled Nuna.

"Well," he said, gravely, "it was a very near shave—if we had lost this train, we should have stayed all night."

"Then I should have sat up till you came in!"

Paul did not answer; he thought Nuna silly to prolong this talk before Stephen Pritchard.

Nuna felt uncomfortable; she got up and began to clear the table of her work and books, to get out of the range of Mr. Pritchard's watchfulness.

Paul was a genius, but he could be silly sometimes. His artist friends had laughed at his anxiety to get home, and had said he was afraid of a lecture, and he had told himself that nothing he could do or say would ever seem wrong or vexatious to his sweet, loving wife. It was specially vexatious that she should have called him to account before such a watchful scoffer as Stephen Pritchard.

One of his abstracted fits mastered him, and but for Mr. Pritchard, the supper would have been very silent.

"I have heard from Ashton," said Nuna at last.

"From your father?"

"Oh no, only the announcement of the marriage in the paper."

"Well, it is a good thing over." Paul spoke carelessly; he was thinking of something else, and Nuna felt wounded.

It is very strange that men and women—at any rate till bitter experience has forced them to open their eyes—rarely use the sense of their own peculiarities of disposition in interpreting their neighbours. Some of us are ready enough to decide that because we should not act in such and such a manner, therefore our fellows are incorrect for so acting; but dreamy, unobservant people, like Nuna, are somewhat blind to outward characteristics, and are apt to rouse from their reveries into a timid, frightened belief that the gravity of their companion is caused by displeasure or indifference, instead of its being more frequently the result of a pre-occupation resembling their own.

Nuna tried to talk to Mr. Pritchard, but the fear of having displeased Paul weighed down her spirits.

Her husband noticed her silence. She was tired, he thought.

"Don't you sit up, Nuna," and he rose and lit her candle. "Stephen and I shall be late, I dare say."

There was no help for it; she had to say good night, without even a word alone to her husband.

"I shall not go to bed," she said decidedly, as soon as she had closed the double doors that shut off her room from the studio; "that hateful man can't stay here all night."

And at the same moment Pritchard was saying to Paul, "I say, old fellow, don't let Mrs. Whitmore sit up; I'm not going to bed this hour or more: come across to my rooms, they are quite close, you know, we shall be snugger there."

Paul hesitated, but he was not going to be laughed at by Pritchard.

"I'll follow you in a minute," he said, and as soon as Mr. Pritchard had departed he went to find Nuna.

"I say, darling, go to bed, and go to sleep as fast as you can; I'm going to smoke a pipe with Stephen, and he may keep me talking."

When she saw her husband, Nuna had only thought of asking him not to be angry with her; but this announcement, added to his frank, cheerful manner, changed her in an instant; the only excuse to be made for her is that she had been overwrought by the separation from Paul and sorrow at her father's marriage.

"Oh, Paul," she said, reproachfully, "going away again! and I have not had you a minute to myself."

She had thrown her arms round him while she spoke, but he drew back. Men like Paul are not to be scolded into tenderness. Nuna looked up, and saw the same expression that had troubled her on his first arrival.

"I thought you were different to other women, Nuna—nobler and free from pettiness—but you are all alike; you all make this mistake of supposing that men like to be managed. There, don't be silly." He leant down and kissed the face she had hidden in her hands. "I'm only joking; there never was such a little darling, was there? Good night!" He took her into his arms and whispered tender, loving nonsense. "Get to sleep as fast as you can," he said, and he left the

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### PATIENCE'S STORY.

"GONE away!" and then Patience Coppock murmured to herself, "gone away without caring what became of me, whether I lived or died."

"Yes, Mademoiselle," was the calm answer; and Patience shrank from the quiet, observant eyes fixed on her altered face, and passed on up the stairs.

"Mademoiselle will find a letter from Madame on the table in the salon, and if she requires any attendance Mademoiselle will be kind enough to tell me now."

This being a discreet hint that Mademoiselle Louise intended to take the rest of the evening for her own amusement, Patience said sullenly she would have coffee and something to eat with it, and then she went into the salon.

Louise had opened the door for Miss Coppock to pass in. She stood on the landing with a marked expression of dislike on her placid face—placid all but the eyes, and these at times suggested that the placidity was a mask, and that Mademoiselle Louise had some qualities in common with a cat.

"It is inconceivable," she said to herself, "that a beautiful young lady like Madame should carry about with her anything so ugly—so unattractive—Miss Coppock is like a shadow. She was always ugly, but she is horrible with those holes in her face. Ah, Madame was in the right to depart before her arrival. Ma foi, I wish she had died, it is embarrassing to serve such a person. She is not much more than a servant, and yet it is necessary to serve her—cela m'embête!" Having softened her feelings by expressing them, Louise went to the kitchen to see after coffee.

Patience looked round the charming little room. Traces of Patty's presence lingered there still. A

dainty parasol lay on one of the couches, and exquisite flowers, faded now, had been placed in the different vases.

Patience had travelled a long way. She was sick for want of food, faint too from weariness, for, in her anxiety to rejoin Patty, she had undertaken the journey from Brussels to Paris before her strength was sufficiently restored; but before she thought of resting herself her eyes roamed hungrily about the room for Patty's letter. There were so many little tables, and these were so covered with the exquisite little treasures Patty had lately collected, that Miss Coppock did not at once see the letter. She found it at last under a china dog, and she snatched at it so eagerly that the dog fell and was broken to fragments.

But Patience took no heed of the dog. She tore open the scented envelope, heedless of the gold and silver crest it bore, and if she had heeded this it would not have prepared her for the news inside. Miss Coppock knew that Patty had talked of setting up a crest and a motto of her own. Poor Patience! she had looked red enough on her arrival, with that redness which small-pox leaves as the brand of its recent presence; but as she stood beside the little table she grew almost purple while she read:—

"Dear Miss Coppock,—You will see by my leaving this letter for you that I have thought of you in your absence. By the time you get it, I hope you will be quite well again, and that you have escaped being marked or disfigured. I hope the doctor and the nurse did their duty by you; they ought to have, for I paid them well. I wonder what you will think of my news? Perhaps I ought to say I am sure you will be glad to learn that I am really settled for life. I married our friend Mr. Downes two hours ago at the Embassy. In fact, I write this while I am changing my dress, before we start on our marriage tour. No use in telling you where we are going—and besides, the route is not made

out. Madame de Mirancourt says if I do not leave off writing there will not be time to put on my bonnet properly. It was very naughty of you to fall ill and miss my wedding—my dress is charming, white satin and point d'Alençon—however, De Mirancourt has done her best to supply your place, poor old thing. She came to Brussels at once when I telegraphed for her. It was very awkward being left in that sudden way without a chaperon. I suppose you will remain in Paris until I write again? I shall probably require you to go on to London before we return. You will hear from me in a fortnight. Enclosed you will find a cheque for your expenses.

"I am, dear Miss Coppock,
Your sincere friend,
"ELEANORA MARTHA DOWNES."

Have you sometimes watched fireworks till the grand *finale* comes, and then tried to see at one glance the vivid tongues of many-coloured flames that dart skywards out of a glowing mass below? You cannot distinguish one from another; in the endeavour to see each distinctly, they become blended and confused. Anger, mortification, fear, sorrow, and worse feelings than those, lightened out successively on the dull, red face, till it grew hideous with the storm, yet the feelings were so blended that it was difficult to mark them all. Patience threw down the letter and trampled it into the velvet carpet; she clenched her poor worn hands in impotent fury, and then she looked fiercely round the room with those sunken eyes, from which all beauty of colour and light had departed, as if she hoped to find something which might help her to revenge herself.

Miss Coppock felt that she had been treated with the most selfish unkindness; but that was nothing compared to the baulking of her carefully laid plans, of her resolution that Patty should not marry till she had got firmer hold of her, and still more her fixed determina-

tion that, come what might, Patty should not marry Mr. Downes.

"It is shameful of her. I knew she was selfish, but then it seemed natural her head should turn a bit, but I didn't think she was sly—I couldn't have thought it of her. If it had been anything but small-pox, I could think she made me ill on purpose to get me out of the way. Why is she to have everything and me nothing?"

She sank down in one of the luxurious chairs panting with exhaustion. Poor, worn creature! contrasting her lot with Patty's, it seemed a hard one; and yet at the outset Patience Coppock had started along the road of life with fairer prospects than any that seemed likely to open to Patty Westropp. Patience had been very handsome, though she had lacked the natural grace, the charm that doubled Patty's loveliness; but Patience had not been born to hard work, she had been a wealthy farmer's daughter with servants of her own, a horse at her disposal, and bonnets and gowns at will. At seventeen these fair prospects had been overcast: her father sank all his savings in a mine on the estate of his landlord; the mine went to ruin, proprietor and tenant along with it, and at seventeen Patience found herself alone in the world, without anything that she could call her own except her wearing apparel and a trifle of pocket-money. At this time of her life she was honest and independent, and she felt crushed with shame at learning the amount of her father's debts. His sudden death brought the knowledge without any warning.

"I will pay them off," the girl said to herself, with the daring hardihood of ignorance; she had not yet learned how hard an oyster the world proves to the unknown and the friendless.

Her first experience was brief and bitter, and, like many another first experience, it dyed the years that followed with one ineffaceable hue.

A rich lady in the neighbourhood, the wife of th owner of a large estate called Hatchhurst, wanted some one rather better than a nursemaid to teach her children

to read; they were babies still in the nursery. Spite of her resolve to clear her father's name, the girl's pride rose: she would not accept the offered post unless she had a room allotted to herself; she refused to associate with the nurses. The lady demurred, and finally yielded, in her heart thinking all the better of Miss Clayton for her request, a request which possibly produced the girl's ruin.

Patience went to Hatchhurst, and for a few weeks all went well with her; her little charges were fairly tractable, and she did not see much of them; their mother wished them to have some hours of play in the nursery.

"This will give you plenty of spare time, Miss Clayton," the condescending lady added; "time which you may devote to your own improvement."

When Patience was alone again, she looked at her handsome face in the glass, and told herself she needed no improvement.

Her employers went away on a round of country visits; they were to return in three weeks to meet the heir of the property, the eldest son by a former marriage; he would be independent of his father when he came of age, his mother's large property coming direct to him.

He was just twenty, and was supposed to be spending the long vacation in Italy and Switzerland with a Cambridge tutor.

Two days after his parents had set out on their visiting tour he returned home alone. There were no old servants at Hatchhurst. Its new mistress was an imperious dame, very jealous of anything that recalled her predecessor. Her first act had been the dismissal of the household, most of whom had known the young squire as a child. He did not care for his little brothers; he found no well remembered face to welcome him, but he soon discovered that his step-mother had provided him with pleasant pastime in her nursery governess.

He met Patience in the garden at first by chance, then, after a day or so, by appointment. At home Patience had been allowed to associate freely with the young men who came to see her father. Her mother had died years ago. She had been unused to restraint, and when the young master of Hatchhurst asked permission to come and hear her sing in her little schoolroom she admitted him gladly. Then came for Patience two short weeks of glowing happiness — happiness in which no dream of the future seemed too unreal, too bright, for fulfilment. She loved for the first time, and she was beloved. The love was not equal. Patience had a heart, and she loved with all the strength of womanhood. In return, she got that sort of boyish worship which goes by the name of calf-love, and which is as easily extinguished as any other newly-kindled fire. The young lovers were very happy and very innocent —neither of them looked forward—neither of them guessed that they were suspected and watched.

It had oozed out through Mrs. Robins, the abigail, before she went away with her mistress, that Miss Clayton had insisted on having a separate sitting-room and a separate table from the nurses. Thenceforth her doom was sealed; she was an upstart, sure to go wrong. Mrs. Caxton, the head nurse, and her two handmaids, only waited their mistress's return to report Miss Clayton's "disgraceful goings on with the young master."

One evening the lovers were seated as usual in the schoolroom, the young man's arm was round Patience's slender waist, and she had hidden her blushing face on his shoulder while he repeated over and over again that, if she would only keep true to him, he would marry her as soon as he was of age.

"Only a year, my darling, no one can part us then; I——"

Patience never heard the end; the door was flung open, and she saw a confused crowd of angry and malicious faces.

She had an uncertain remembrance of being taken

to her bedroom by Mrs. Caxton, and of seeing her clothes and possessions packed; but she did not completely recover her senses till she found herself driving leisurely along the road in the grand carriage which had just brought home the mistress of Hatchhurst. Then Miss Clayton realized that she had been turned out of the house in disgrace.

"I am lost, ruined! oh, what will become of me?" But as she drove on this panic of shame lessened; resentment came instead; she had been cruelly, unjustly treated.

"I have done nothing wrong, nothing to justify this; I gave my love in return for his; there is no harm in that. Ah, I have only got to trust Maurice; he will take care of me."

But meantime she would not be carried away tamely, and she put her head out of the window and asked the coachman where he was taking her.

He named a town a few miles off, but he spoke so familiarly that Patience shrank back into the carriage in a fresh paroxysm of shame.

The coachman set her down at a quiet little inn; he went into the entrance-way with her and gave the landlady a note, and then he drove away.

"You'll have a letter to-morrow, Miss," he said, before he went.

The letter came; it was written as to a stranger. It commented severely on the deceitful and disgraceful conduct of Miss Clayton, who had, the writer said, utterly destroyed her own reputation; but it was added, that regard for a friendless orphan induced Mrs. Downes to try and save Miss Clayton from going further astray: enclosed was a note of introduction to a reformatory for young women in the town to which Patience had been taken; enclosed also was the amount due to her for salary.

Patience tore the letter into fragments. She waited on in hopes of seeing her lover, but time passed and he did not come.

She left the inn, and got herself a cheap lodging in another part of the town. A milliner's apprentice

lodged in the same house, and through this girl Patience found employment. At the milliner's she worked at, she heard her own story spoken of—she had taken the precaution to change her name; she heard, too, that her lover had gone abroad again. One day the mistress of Hatchhurst came to her employer's, and before Patience had time to escape from the room she was seen and recognized.

The lady was too valuable a customer to offend, and Patience was again dismissed without a character.

She was discouraged, almost brokenhearted, but still faith in her lover's constancy and her own independence supported her.

She went to London, and after some struggles which brought her face to face with want, she again got employment at a milliner's.

"I have learned the trade," she said, "and it is more amusing than teaching; and besides, one can get work without a character at this time of year."

But there were among Patience's fellow-workers girls who had lost their reputation in a less innocent way than she had, and she found herself led into society full of danger to a young, handsome girl.

One day she was summoned to attend one of the principals of the establishment in which she worked; she was to carry a dress which had to be fitted.

Just before they reached the house a gentleman and lady on horseback passed: the lady was young and beautiful, and seemed to be listening attentively to the gentleman riding beside her. Patience looked at the speaker's face and recognized it at once. It was her lover; and his eyes had never looked into hers as lovingly as they now strove to look into those of his companion.

The girl's spirit, chilled almost to death for an instant, rose to defend him. "He thinks I have forgotten him," she said, "and men must amuse themselves."

The couple dismounted at the door-steps of the very

mansion to which she was going, and as she and her employer waited while they passed in, Patience's heart winced at the tender care her lover showed towards his fair companion.

She was left in the hall while a servant ushered her employer upstairs and took the box she had carried.

It seemed to Patience that this was the crisis of all her long-cherished hopes; if she missed this chance of a recognition, she and her lover might never meet again. She had written several letters to him at Hatchhurst, but she felt sure they had not reached his hands; if she let him drift away from her into this great wilderness of London, she gave him up of her own free will. She sat still, calm outwardly, but so inwardly agitated that her heart-beats almost choked her. Some one was coming down the great staircase into the inner hall in which she sat, but there were tall footmen close by; she could not speak to Maurice before them, and a hot flush spread over her forehead; she could not be seen by him, sitting there like a servant.

In a moment she had glided into the outer hall, a carriage was waiting, and the house-door stood open; she passed out.

When Patience found herself alone that night in her miserable little lodging, she had that kind of tempest in her soul which seldom subsides without causing shipwreck in such a one as the poor vain milliner's girl.

She had had one moment of exquisite joy when she found herself in the street beside her lover; Maurice recognized her, and tried to avoid her, and when he found this impossible, he told her he thought she was ill-judged in seeking to renew acquaintance with him. He spoke kindly and gently; he told her he bitterly regretted his own folly, and also the hasty and unfeeling treatment she had experienced from Mrs. Downes. Patience listened first in stupefied surprise; then in a sort of sullen despair; then, when she thought he was leaving her, desperation forced her into one last effort to regain his love.

"Oh, Maurice," she cried out passionately, "if you don't love me, I shall die! Why did you make me love you?"

Maurice grew white with vexation: Patience's words could almost have been heard on the opposite pavement, and he saw that people were coming towards them.

He pulled out a card-case and held out his card to her.

"If I can be of any assistance to you," he said in a hurried, vexed tone, "you can write to that address; but I must refuse to see you again."

Patience found herself standing alone with the card in her hand.

"Here, young woman," said one of the tall footmen, from the top of the steps; "your mistress is asking what's become of you."

"Write to him! ask him for assistance!" The unhappy girl felt as if no depth of misery could wring such a meanness from her. All this went through her brain when she stood alone in her miserable little room.

In the midst of her frenzy of passion and despair came a tap at the door. One of her companions had come to visit her; she had brought tickets for the theatre. She was the worst among Patience's fellow-workers, and the girl had always refused to go about with her; but to-night she welcomed any escape from herself. She went, and let her companion take her where she pleased.

Then came those months in Patience's life of which she had ever since been trying to hide the traces—a brief epoch of sin and luxury. When this came to an end, she found herself placed in a milliner's shop at Guildford as Miss Coppock, from London.

She had never been taught thrift, and the chequered life she had led since her father's death had not been likely to foster any regularity of mind or thought. And thus her life had grown into one continual stream of

embarrassment and subterfuge, backed by the gloomy, haunting mists of the past. Patience felt no power now to live down evil repute. Her independence had left her when she yielded up her innocence. The aim of her life was to hide away that which she had been, and to keep up the fiction of her new name. When she thought of Maurice, it was with bitter anger; his desertion had thrown her into the frenzy which had led to her ruin. And yet, when at last she saw him again —her Maurice—changed into a calm, self-possessed man of middle age, Patience's heart grew strangely soft, and she felt as if she could lay down her life to serve him.

For, face to face with Maurice Downes, her shame seemed overwhelming; and by that extraordinary process of reasoning, or morbidity, which only exists in unselfish women, Patience shifted the blame of her fall wholly to herself. It seemed to her that her lover had not been as actually faithless as she had—he was still unmarried. He did not recognize her, but his presence crushed her with shame, and she longed to escape from the avenging memories it roused to torture her.

And now, in this letter of Patty's, had come the climax of her misery. The man she still loved, with a strong undying love, had joined his life to Patty's—to a girl who, as Patience knew too well, had no love for him; who merely looked on him as something annexed to herself, a something necessary to the part she meant to play in the world, but a something for which Mr. Downes, personally, was not more desirable than any other landholder of equal position.

The poor wretched sinner crouched lower and lower on the sofa, and again the heartbroken cry sounded—"O God! is she to have everything—everything?"

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### CLOUDS.

MEANTIME life in the old studio at St. John Street was not gliding on as smoothly as life is always supposed to glide at the end of three-volume novels, when a loving hero and heroine are made one.

Doctors, and those who are freely admitted into domestic life, tell us that the first year of marriage is usually the most troubled. This may depend on the amount of intimacy which has previously existed between the newly-married pair, and also on the power possessed by the wife, not only of conforming herself to her husband's wishes, but of so projecting herself into his character that she knows, as if by instinct, how best to please him.

In some women, love will do this; in others, where love is quieter, less intense, it may be the result of extreme unselfishness.

It was especially sad for such a nature as Nuna's that her marriage had been so hurried.

Paul was not a man to be read by ordinary rules; and, spite of her love, Nuna's timidity and want of observation came in the way of the thorough confidence which a less shrinking woman would have attained to.

When Paul went off into long hours of reverie, Nuna tried at first to rouse him, and then, getting short, indifferent answers, she grew to fancy she had vexed him. Sometimes she took courage and asked him what she had done, and then he answered playfully, and sunshine came again. With him, sitting near him, even through long hours of silence, she was happy, happy as a loving woman can be; but in his frequent absences she tormented herself. He went away to work, she knew that; but she was jealous of work, of anything that took him away.

Did Paul love her? Was she enough for his happiness?

"Ah, if I were, he would be content to stay at home with me instead of going off alone with that hateful Mr. Pritchard."

And at this period of his life, if Paul had been questioned, he would have said that it was only from habit that he spent so much time away from home—habit, and a certain undefined dread that haunts some men lest they should yield up liberty of action. He might, at the expense of some trouble, have done this work, the copy of a picture Pritchard had brought from Italy, at home; it was by his wish that they lived at the studio in St. John Street. Mr. Beaufort had said that it would be better for Nuna to have a small house near at hand, and thus be altogether freed from studio life and society; but when Paul told Nuna this would involve separation except at meal-times, she was eager to live entirely in the quaint old house.

"I don't want a drawing-room, or any conventional arrangement," she had said; "I only want to be always with you and to see you paint."

It was winter-time again. Nuna had stayed indoors all day shivering, instead of bracing her nerves and her limbs by taking a walk. She was shy of going out alone. Paul often took her out "between the lights," but to-day, directly after dinner, he had disappeared, and had not said where he was going.

Nuna wrote occasionally to her father, but she never mentioned Elizabeth's name in her letters, so it was no wonder that Mr. Beaufort's answers grew short and cold, and only came at long intervals.

"If one could begin everything all over again," thought Nuna—"I wish I had not been cross and stiff about the marriage. Now I suppose Elizabeth will never forgive me, and I can't begin all at once to be different. With Paul too, if we had just one little quarrel—only one—and never any more after, it would be much better than all these private miseries of

mine; we should get everything clear and straight for ever."

Doubtful Nuna; if Strife gets let into Eden, there is no saying that he will ever entirely quit it.

Paul came in presently. Coming in out of the brightly lit hall the room looked cheerless, and darker than it really was.

"Sitting in darkness, eh?—and, darling, scarcely any fire—you careless monkey!"

Paul spoke good-humouredly, and returned her kisses as he spoke; but he felt that this was not quite the reception he ought to have had on a cold winter's night after a hard day's work. He made no complaint, but instead of petting Nuna as much as she expected him to pet her, he stirred the fire vigorously, lit the gas, and then turned to go into his dressing-room to get his slippers.

But Nuna was awake now and thoroughly penitent.

"Oh, stay, please, don't go yourself, darling—oh, anybody but me would have got them ready."

But Paul put her back in her chair with a strong hand, and fetched the slippers himself.

When he came back Nuna was crying.

"Ah, Paul," she sobbed, "what a horrid, uncomfortable wife I am; how sorry you must be you ever married me!" And then she hid her face on his shoulder.

"I don't know that you ought to be blamed," said Paul. "You might have thought I should go out again to Pritchard's and smoke as usual, but I shan't be doing that for some time to come. In fact, I believe you'll have such a benefit of me, pet, that you'll wish Stephen back again—he is going to Spain."

Nuna threw her arms round her husband and kissed him till he was fairly startled at her vehemence.

"Oh, I am so glad," she murmured; "oh, so glad he's going."

"Poor Stephen! Why, Nuna, I had no idea you were such a little hater."

"I shouldn't hate him if he were anybody else's friend." She felt ashamed of her words.

"Then you only hate him because he loves me; eh, Nuna; is that it?"

"No, no; I am not so wicked. I suppose I can't bear you to love anybody but me."

Paul kept silence, he was thinking; but as Nuna nestled closer to him she felt his chest heave as if the thoughts were raising some amount of tumult.

"Turn your face to the fire," he said presently.

"No, the light does not reach your eyes; kneel down, facing me—so:" he looked searchingly into her deep, loving eyes. "Do you know what I am looking for, darling?"

"No;" her voice trembled with a vague fear.

"I was looking to see if I could find any jealousy in your eyes, Nuna. I always say you are unlike other women; you have no petty, carping fancies; but you mustn't let jealousy get into a corner of that tender heart of yours, or you will make us both miserable."

She took his hand between hers, kissed it, and then laid her face on it.

"But, Paul, can one be jealous without knowing it? If I were jealous in that way, you would not despise me for it, would you?"

"I don't know," Paul spoke gravely. "I have always shrunk from jealousy; my mother said no true woman could be jealous." Nuna shivered. "Come, little woman"—Paul smiled at her—"I want a song."

"Yes, in a minute, darling; only I must ask one more question." This was the talk she wanted, and she was hungry to go on with it; she could not bear to leave off, just when a few moments more would lay all her haunting ghosts.

"Not half a syllable;" he broke away from her and went up to the piano, which stood now opposite the window, between the dressing-room door and that leading to the staircase. "I've been working hard all day, and I'm too tired to argue, I want nothing but rest. I've no doubt you'll sing me to sleep."

She went at once and sang him one song after another. She had a sweet, rich voice, and it had been carefully trained—trained to that exquisite simplicity which marks out the true musician from the pretender, if, indeed, simplicity is not always the badge of true merit.

While Nuna was singing the servant came in with a note.

Paul took it, but he did not open it; he was listening to Nuna. She was singing the same ballad which had so charmed him the night he dined at the parsonage, the night which had revealed Nuna to him in a new character. Then there had been an intensity of feeling which had thrilled through him while he listened, but now it seemed to him there was a passionate significance in the mournful words as she breathed them.

"Come here, darling."

He took her in his arms and thanked her fondly for the pleasure she had given him. Nuna was too happy to speak, too happy for anything that might disturb this delight. She had Paul all to herself again, to worship and make an idol of to her heart's content.

It seemed to her as if the evening had flown when she found how late it was.

As soon as she left the room Paul sat down to write letters, and in clearing the table to make room for this he came upon the note he had thrown aside and forgotten.

He opened it, read it, and then flung it into the grate, after noting down the address.

It was merely a commission to paint a portrait—a lady's portrait, Mrs. Downes of Park Lane.

"Downes—never heard of her. There was a Lady Downes, I remember—never mind, she is some swell or other, no doubt."

He went on with his work; the only comment he made on the note was:

"I hope it is an old woman; they sit the best; the young ones haven't a notion of keeping still."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE PORTRAIT.

PAUL was ushered into a room on the ground-floor of the house in Park Lane.

A gentleman sat near the fire at a small table covered with newspapers and reviews, but the room itself attracted Mr. Whitmore's notice before he so much as glanced towards its occupant.

It was large enough for a library, but there was a lack of books and bookshelves; there were cabinets filled with old china and other quaint rarities, a few good oil pictures on the walls, but the decoration of the room itself was more attractive than its contents: the walls were divided into large square panels, the dull red ground of these relieved at wide intervals by gold stars, the panel mouldings of satin-wood and ebony; the wainscoting was of pure ebony, and the mouldings at top and bottom of satin-wood. The ceiling was covered with arabesques in blue and red, relieved by gold bosses.

It was too full of colour and splendour to be quite in good taste. But Paul had not time to take in the details of this magnificence; he merely guessed that the proprietor of such a mansion must be very wealthy, and that he was probably fond of art.

There was a complacent, well-kept air about Mr. Downes, which gave the notion of acquired wealth; his clothes, his very hair and whiskers, had the look of being newly put on.

"Good morning, Mr. Whitmore"—he bowed, but not as to an equal; "you painted a portrait for my cousin, Mrs. Winchester, which I am much pleased with; Mrs. Winchester recommended you to me, in fact. You are a portrait painter, I conclude?"

"No," (a smile began to curve Paul's mouth,) "I am

not a portrait painter; I painted Mrs. Winchester to please a friend of mine."

Mr. Downes looked slightly discomposed.

"Ah! indeed. But you will have no objection to paint Mrs. Downes, I suppose?"

"I object to paint a mere portrait, but I shall be glad to make a picture of Mrs. Downes so long as I do it my own way."

"Dear me, what a very foolish person—he does not know how to get on in his profession at all." Aloud Mr. Downes said: "Just as you please; I leave you to settle that part of the business with Mrs. Downes; I fancy no one can help making a picture of her."

Mr. Downes went to the bell and rang it.

"She's a beauty, I suppose," Paul thought; "or her husband thinks she is."

"When will it suit you to have the first sitting, Mr. Whitmore? Mrs. Downes will prefer being painted at home."

"Yes," said Paul, "that will suit me best." Since his marriage he had avoided receiving sitters at the studio in St. John Street. "This day week about this time—I could not begin sooner."

Mr. Downes sent up a message to his wife, and while he waited for the answer he graciously condescended to show Paul his pictures.

Here he admitted equality; and Paul's manner softened as he grew interested, for some of the pictures were remarkable; but still his first impression of Mr. Downes remained, and when he went away that gentleman repeated to himself—

"Very foolish, conceited person that. I shall not tell Elinor how abrupt he is, or she may change her mind about the portrait. She was unwilling enough at first to let him do it, but I must have it: I never saw a picture that I liked so much as that likeness of Henrietta. He's clever; but what high-flown nonsense these artists talk! They should be thankful to get a commission, instead of laying down the law how it shall

be executed. Lucky for Mr. Whitmore that I saw his likeness of Henrietta before I saw him."

Mr. Downes was very much in love with his wife, and he considered the artist a fortunate fellow indeed who was honoured by a commission to paint her loveliness.

He went up to her sitting-room to ask her if she were quite sure that the day he had fixed suited her. But when he opened the outer door there was a sound of angry voices; he drew back and shut it again.

"Poor dear Elinor, I never heard her speak so loud before. I feel sure that Miss Coppock is tiresome; really Elinor's championship of that woman is most surprising; I can't bear the sight of her, she is so ugly. I believe all ugly females should be destroyed when children: we might copy the Greeks in this respect with advantage."

When Mr. Downes reached his writing-room again, he looked round it with complacency.

"Ah! I saw that fellow's eyes taking in the decoration. Yes; I don't fancy many rooms in London will beat this style of thing as a whole. I wish I had shown him the other rooms—and yet I don't know; those sort of people live in such a small circle, and have such restricted notions, that he might think I was proud of my house. Well, considering what a sum it has cost to ornament it in this way, I suppose a mere vulgar, moneyed man would be proud."

Mr. Downes went back to his newspaper with the comfortable reflection that, at any rate, his hands had never been soiled by making money.

His wife's words, if he had heard them, would have troubled him more than their loudness of tone did.

"I thought it was quite understood, Patience, that you are to forget all I do not wish remembered. Mr. Whitmore will paint my portrait quite as well as any other artist, I suppose; and if my husband chooses him, I really cannot refuse to employ him."

Mrs. Downes, as she spoke, stood looking at herself in a tall narrow mirror between the windows of her

room. It was difficult to feel angry before such a lovely picture; her long trailing black velvet robe gave her height, and suited perfectly with the calm dignity with which she reproved Miss Coppock; the only betrayal of anger had been in the raised tone of voice.

Miss Coppock was seated by the fireside, warming her feet; she had regained her old paleness, but all evenness of skin had left her face, and her eyes had lost their fire; her dress was ill chosen—a ruby silk with elaborate trimmings and frillings; its want of repose added to her gaunt, haggard appearance.

At Mrs. Downes's last words a slight flush came into Patience's face.

"Oh, Patty, how can you! Why ar'n't you honest? You know you want Mr. Whitmore to see your grandeur."

"Miss Coppock,"—Mrs. Downes turned her head, so as to get a distinct view of her face in a new position,—"I wish you would try to remember my name; pet names are well enough for children, but I have left off being a child."

"You never were a child:"—this was muttered between Patience's set teeth; she made a struggling effort to compose herself before she answered.

"I don't often advise you now; I'm willing to admit you are capable of guiding yourself;" a sudden parting of Patty's lovely lips gave a hint that she too had been mastering some impatience; "but at your age, you can't know men as well as I do, and I'm sure it's neither fair to your husband nor to Miss Beaufort—I mean Mr. Whitmore's wife—for you to give him these sittings."

"You said something of this kind once before, Miss Coppock, and I told you then that you mistook your office. One would think"—Patty broke out into a laugh, which brought back all the old winning look into her face—"you'd been born in Spain, where, I believe, women always have a female gaoler; but as I'm not likely to forget my position or what I owe to it, you needn't play duenna, or whatever it is, here. Now

don't be cross; if you didn't run away so pertinaciously as you do from Mr. Downes, I should say you were in love with him; you are always taking his part."

It was happy for Patience that Patty's mind was bent on deciding which was the best side of her own face; and she did not look round at her companion. The blood rushed up to Miss Coppock's forehead, the dull eyes lightened for a moment with an expression that was very like hatred for the bright, beautiful creature sunning herself in the glow of her own reflected loveliness, actually feasting on the picture made by her flower-like skin, and blue eyes and fair gleaming hair. A casual looker-on might have thought Mrs. Downes had a dangerous companion, and that in all probability this ugly, ill-tempered woman would work her a mischief: but if the looker-on had waited, this idea would have fled. Every movement of Mrs. Downes was soft and easy, in keeping with the exquisite repose of her beauty, but there was nothing undecided about her. She walked across the room to the sofa with a firm step, and seated herself in an attitude full of grace and yet full of self-possession. But with Patience the spasm of jealous fury faded into a sad, downcast look, and a quivering of the pale lips that told of indecision, even in her dislike. She muttered something about orders to give, and went out of the room.

Patty's face clouded over at once. "One always has to pay a price for rising in life, I suppose, and so I have to swallow that woman's insolence. How dare she venture to say such a thing! If I hadn't been quite sure before, I'm determined to see Paul Whitmore now, and let him paint my likeness." She sat thinking; the cloud faded, and a thoughtful look came into her deep blue eyes—a look Patty never wore for the observation of others, and yet one which since her marriage had been her habitual expression when alone; it was so different to her playful, childlike sweetness that it would have puzzled Mr. Downes; it seemed to make her a full-grown woman at once.

"What did I marry for?" she said at last; "certainly not for the mere sake of Maurice,"—a fretful droop here of the full scarlet under-lip. "I mean to fulfil all that my position requires, of course; in De Mirancourt's last letter she says, 'Be sure to keep well with your husband, it makes a woman so looked up to;' but I might as well have done without education or refinement, if I am to keep to the commonplace 'all for love' idea: nobody does, I'm sure; it's a mere sham only found in books: if I'd believed in it, of course I'd have waited, and then what would have happened? First, as an unmarried woman not knowing anybody, I shouldn't have got into society at all, or at least only on the footing of an adventuress, and then directly my money got known about, I should have been a prey to all kinds of imposition. No, a husband is a shield and an introduction, and those are just the two things I want; and Maurice is very indulgent, and has a good deal of savoir faire. Of course I must have admirers,—I could not escape them if I tried," she smiled; "and why not Paul among the others? I owe him something for having forgotten me so soon—that is, if he did forget me. I can't believe he really fell in love with that pale-faced, half-asleep girl; it was pique, I know it was; he married her just to put me out of his head, poor fellow! by this time he is less romantic and unlike other people, and he'll be able quite to understand that he can admire me, though he is married, without any harm done. I suppose he reads French novels as other men do. Poor Patience, I ought to make some excuse for her; it's her vulgar bringing-up that gives her these notions—as if any possible harm could come to me from the admiration of any man, married or single. De Mirancourt always said—and she knew everything—that it is horribly underbred to fancy impropriety where none exists. I can't live without admirers, unless I shut myself up for the whole of the season. What does a woman dress for? why does she show herself in public, unless

she means to be looked at? But I'm as silly as poor Patience herself, to trouble my head with her vulgar notions."

Patty's thoughts went off to plan, first, the dress in which she should receive Paul, and then how she should dispose of Miss Coppock, so that she might not be present during the first interview with him.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE FIRST SITTING.

THERE are, and always will be, plenty of people who do not believe in presentiments of either coming joy or evil; but Nuna was not one of these sceptics; and after she had kissed Paul and watched him from the window till he was out of sight, she felt oppressed to sadness with a vague sense of trouble. Paul was never very communicative, and he had taken an instinctive dislike to Mr. Downes, and, man-like, he kept his dislike to himself: he purposely avoided any mention of his visit to Park Lane. So when he left Nuna on the morning he had fixed for the first sitting, he only said, "I have one or two places to go to to-day—don't wait dinner, Nuna."

There was nothing in this to depress her; she was accustomed to see him go away for hours. Mr. Pritchard had not come back, but Paul had plenty of artist friends, and he often painted away from home. There had been a group of horses in his last picture, and these he had been obliged to study from at their stables; but that was for his Academy picture, and Nuna knew it had been sent in.

She tried to occupy herself in painting: she had made great progress lately, but she could not concentrate her mind on her work this morning. She was following Paul in spirit, and the load at her heart grew heavier every hour.

When Paul reached Mr. Downes's, he was struck with the evident care that had been taken in receiving him. The room into which he was shown was in the same style as the writing-room, but the colouring was more subdued; it was chiefly white and gold, with an occasional admixture of scarlet. The curtains were in scarlet velvet, and Paul noted approvingly that the shutters of one window had been closed so as to avoid any crossing of light. He also saw that the canvas he had ordered to be sent was carefully placed on an easel, and that a chair had been raised so as to imitate the arrangement in his own studio.

"Ah, Mrs. Downes knows something, she has been painted before; well, so much the better: she will know how to sit."

A closed photograph case lay on one of the small tables, and Paul stretched out his hand for it lazily, as he sat leaning back in one of the easy chairs. Patty had placed it there herself. She wanted Paul to be prepared to see her; but she had counted on quicker movements on his part. Before he had got the case open she came into the room.

Paul rose, and then stood still; he did not bow or speak, but his blood rushed up in tumult to his face; he was stunned by this unexpected meeting.

His eyes were fixed on Patty. She, too, stood motionless: she had not been able quite to plan her part, but she took it at once from Paul. Her eyes drooped; her whole attitude became dejected, and at last she looked up with a timid, imploring sweetness.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Whitmore; won't you shake hands?"

The words came so tenderly, so softly, that Paul's anger seemed to be slipping away. He tried hard to keep it; he saw that she was more beautiful than ever, and he frowned.

"I ought to have been told," he said.

"I was afraid." Patty spoke sorrowfully—except for the changed accent, she might have been Patty Westropp.

There was the drooping head, the child-like voice, and the little hands were pressed plaintively together. "I thought if you knew it was me, you wouldn't have come." She looked with such a helpless pleading in her sweet blue eyes, that Paul felt their old power coming over him. He still fought against it, and answered almost audibly,

"No, I don't think I should."

"And then," she went on in the same soft imploring tone, "I could not be sure you would recognize me. I thought you might have forgotten all about me; I am so altered, am I not—so aged?"

She looked up at this and spoke impressively, as if to remind him of her changed position. Paul bowed, with a sort of scorn in his deference.

"Aged," he laughed. "You are altered; but you could scarcely think I could forget you."

He went up to the easel, and looked at the canvas.

"Is my dress the sort of thing you like?" said Mrs. Downes.

But Paul did not even look round at her: he stood thinking.

"Your dress is of little consequence to-day, so far as its colour is concerned," he said at last, "but I don't think I will paint you."

The colour sprang to Patty's face. "Oh, please do;" she spoke imploringly, without any of her newly gained repose of manner; "it is my husband's wish that you should paint me; what will he think?"

She looked so humble, so sweet, so utterly unlike the false Patty he had so long pictured, that Paul's impulses made him yield while he thought he was yielding to Mrs. Downes's arguments.

It was an entirely false position, but he must make the best of it; after all, it was perhaps better to show Patty how indifferent he felt.

"Very well." He stooped over the table on which he had placed his materials, and selected a piece of charcoal; he thought he was really quite indifferent.

"Ah but, Mr. Whitmore,"—Patty had gone back to her old playful manner,—"why need you be so dreadfully industrious? Don't be in such a hurry to begin; we haven't had a bit of talk; I haven't even asked after Mrs. Whitmore."

Mrs. Downes felt horribly piqued. She fancied her beauty would assert its old magic over Paul, and instead of any devotion, he was treating her like a culprit. He did not seem at all impressed by the state of life in which he found her.

"I must make him feel it," she said to herself; "I won't submit to insolence, even from him."

"How is Mrs. Whitmore?" she said, politely.

Paul was conscious of a change in her manner; he was sorry he had betrayed his own vexation: he smiled, and tried to speak in a more natural voice.

"Thank you, she is quite well; but you must excuse me if I ask you to sit. I have no time to lose—you forget that *I* am only a rising artist, and have still to work hard for my living." He emphasized the word "I," and then felt himself silly.

Patty was relieved; Paul did still care for her; he must, or he would be more at ease, more indifferent. She answered, as simply as if she had not felt the sting under his words—

"Are you really? I'm so sorry: I never thought of you as being obliged to work hard; I looked upon you as a gentleman who followed art more as an amusement than anything else; but indeed I'll be careful not to waste your time now."

Almost without any help from Paul she placed herself so that it seemed impossible to improve on her attitude. It did not occur to the artist that this happy easy grace was the result of study, and that Mrs. Downes had spent hours in deciding how she would be painted—he only saw a fresh beauty in it: he despised Patty from the bottom of his heart, but he thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The past year and

a half had matured and perfected her loveliness: she had gained so much, too, in expression; she had, as a Frenchwoman would say, so much more physiognomy, and yet she had not surrendered one physical charm. Even in the arrangement of her rich chestnut hair, the natural irregular wave which had given so much wild grace to it in former times was preserved. Patty rather bent fashion to serve her beauty than yielded herself up to its trammels. Her dress this morning suited her exactly: it was a striped blue and white silk; she had felt sure it would not paint well, but she preferred to give Mr. Whitmore the opportunity of advising and directing her taste. Miss Coppock was possibly right when she said she had had a larger experience in dealing with men than Mrs. Downes had; but experience can never match the instinctive quickness and artistic power of such a nature as Patty's. She read Paul's mood truly, and she saw that for the present at least he must be left to himself.

So the sitting progressed silently enough: "A little more to the right—thank you," from the artist; and sometimes, "Do I keep still enough—are you sure I do?" from the sitter, and then his thanks.

Every now and then Mrs. Downes stole a glance at Paul. How rapt he was in his work: he frowned slightly, but more as if he were concentrating straying thoughts than as if he were angry.

"Is he happy, I wonder? Why did he marry—how could he marry without money?" Patty gave a little shudder as she summoned up the picture of a poor artist's home. Poverty among people of the class from which she herself sprang did not seem a hardship to Mrs. Downes. She told herself that the shrinking she had felt from poor, mean ways was a sure proof she had always been intended for a higher position. "I know I was a lady born," was an axiom she loved to repeat. Poor people, as poor people, ought to be content with their lot, she thought, but poverty to a man like Paul Whitmore must be dreadful—so lowering

and debasing; for, to Patty, the possession of wealth was in itself a sort of brevet rank, and those who had not got it were only pretenders when they aspired to equality with rich people. There was quite a criminal presumption in such refinement and uppishness as she remembered at Ashton Rectory, considering that Mr. Beaufort could not even afford a carriage or a saddle-horse for his daughter.

Her feelings against Nuna took their old bitterness as she looked at Paul. In the excitement of her own hurried marriage—hurried because she feared her father might gain knowledge of her proceedings — in her triumphant exultation at the state and splendour to which she saw her husband was habituated, and also in her satisfaction at the easy sway she held over him, Mrs. Downes had forgiven the Rector's daughter for marrying Paul Whitmore. There was a tender corner in her heart where she pleased herself with thinking he still dwelt, but she had not counted on seeing him again, and when she thought of him it was with a sort of regretful pity for the mistake he had made in marrying Nuna Beaufort. But the sight of her old lover had stirred Patty strangely, stirred her memory to that parting in the cottage porch, stirred the atmosphere of worldliness that was around her: glancing at him as she sat there alone in his presence, feeling that presence nearer from the almost oppressive silence—a throb rose in Patty's bosom—a throb of wild, sudden anguish. She stifled the sigh in which it showed itself, and in a moment she looked as calm and sweet as the face rapidly taking shape on the canvas.

But this stifling brought pain with it, and Patty had no notion of bearing her own quota of pain: if she suffered, some one else must bear the penalty, and at that moment she hated Nuna with an intensity that De Mirancourt would have stigmatized as low-bred. It seemed to Patty, in the sudden passion of her soul, that Nuna had taken Paul and his love from her. "I had him first! What right had she to come between us?"

She gave another quick, sidelong glance, her eyes glowing with the mingled passions she could not keep out of them. Till now she had seen Paul's face in profile, his eyes bent on his work; but this time their gaze met fully.

Paul looked away as suddenly and sharply as if he had seen something loathsome.

There was a tap at the door. "May I come in?"—but Mr. Downes did not attempt to enter until his wife's soft voice answered.

Then he came in, and wished Mr. Whitmore good morning in an unctuous, benevolent voice—a voice that seemed to say, "My good fellow, I'm so sorry that you have to earn your own bread, that I must show you my compassion somehow."

He placed himself directly between the artist and Patty, and peered at the canvas through his eyeglass.

"Capital! really, do you know, you've quite caught that pose of the head which is peculiar to my wife. Upon my word I think, if you go on as you have begun, that you'll make something of this picture, Mr. Whitmore."

"I hope so."

Patty saw the curl on Paul's lip, and she writhed in silence. How insignificant her husband was in her eyes! For the first time since her rise in life Mrs. Downes realized that there are things unpurchaseable by money.

"I should have preferred the full face being represented." Mr. Downes was still scrutinizing the sketch through his eyeglass, his under-lip pursed up, and his head on one side. "I suppose it's easy enough to alter, Mr. Whitmore; what do you think, Elinor, eh?"

Paul glanced up suddenly at the unusual name: a dim glimmering came to him that Mr. Downes was ignorant of his wife's early history.

"Mr. Whitmore must know best," Patty said, much more to Paul than to her husband.

"Well, I don't know. We should always try to have the best even of a good thing. I'm sure Mr. Whitmore will agree with me in thinking that I must know the best view of your face, and every turn and variety of your expression, better than he can on such very recent acquaintance. I don't mean to say it makes as much difference in your case as it would in that of others." Mr. Downes's smile made the words a compliment.

Patty was thankful that she might cast down her eyes and blush at praise before a stranger. She could not help blushing; she felt very disconcerted: her husband's words had told to Paul all that she least wanted him to know—that she had been false and deceitful, and had concealed her early history; and that moreover, if Paul chose to speak, he might ruin her for ever with her purse-proud, punctilious husband.

She was too much confused to listen to Mr. Downes's next words, but she saw that Paul was gathering his materials together. She longed to escape, but she dared not just then leave Mr. Whitmore alone with her husband. It was an unspeakable relief when Paul went away.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

"IT IS WELL TO BE OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE BEFORE YOU ARE ON WITH THE NEW."

PAUL had hardly thought at all while he remained in Patty's morning-room.

At any time the very violence of his impulses made concentrated thought a slow process; feeling had to be given time to subside before judgment could begin to act. When he saw Patty he felt the need of immediate self-control, and he sought it by throwing himself into his work with a strength and abstraction that might have been impossible to an inferior man. But Paul

was a true Artist. He had chosen to follow Art, not only because he loved it and as a means of livelihood, but because it was embodied in him, it was his mode of speech for the gift he found within him; he worshipped Art as an abstract reality, and now in this moment of need his devotion stood him in good stead; he found himself armed against Patty and her attempts at reconciliation.

But outside the house, fairly on the way to his own home, the charm was over.

A feeling of strong indignation against Patty, against her husband, and against himself for having submitted to such a false position, flamed up.

"I am a fool, a weak irresolute fool! Just because I had the canvas there and everything ready, to let myself be led on to do that which I believe to be absolutely wrong. I'll throw the thing up; by what that simpleton said he knows nothing of his wife's beginnings, and of course she expects me to connive at her deceit." He gave a shudder here. "What a false creature she has been all through;" and then his thoughts went over the past. A deep sigh came, a sigh of relief, of thankfulness; he had been contrasting Nuna and Mrs. Downes; and Patty's conduct grew blacker in his eyes.

"Well, she has got her punishment in a man like that; one would not wish her worse off: it's easy to see that he is a slave to conventionalities and forms of all sorts. Her life must be a perpetual subterfuge: if he ever does find her out, I don't envy her. I should not like to be the woman dependent on Mr. Downes's clemency. Poor little Patty: what a fate!" Under this new light Paul Whitmore's heart softened; he had been very hard on her after all; it was not fair to judge her by Nuna's standard. Patty's trial had been so exceptional that it could hardly be judged by ordinary rules; it was plain she did not love her husband, but under her peculiar circumstances an early marriage must have been a necessity.

"She could not possibly have stayed with that miserly old father. Poor girl! with another man she might have had a chance."

Paul did not tell himself that Patty still loved him; he would not allow himself to dwell for an instant on the look which he had surprised in her eyes; but a strong feeling rose in his heart and quieted away his anger, a feeling of pity for the beautiful wife of "that fool," as he termed Mr. Downes, and a resolution that he would not paint her portrait.

"And I will say nothing to Nuna about the matter; she behaved nobly when I told her of my folly with Patty; but women are all alike on one point, they are never quite easy about a man's previous love unless she is older and uglier: and it is not from jealousy either—rather in such a nature as Nuna's it would be from her humble notion of herself; she would feel completely inferior to Patty now. No, I shall say nothing about it. I shall write and get out of the whole affair, and there's an end of it. We are not likely to meet these Downeses; Nuna dislikes grand parties as much as I do, and the Downeses only visit swells, of course."

A load rolled off Paul's heart at this resolution, and yet it was the first time since their marriage that he had resolved to keep anything from Nuna,—her frankness had so far won him from his habitual reserve.

In his impulse to prove Nuna's superiority to Patty —it may be as a shield against the remembrance of that passionate glance, a shield which, if his love for his wife had been full and perfect, he never would have needed—Paul quite forgot that he had told Nuna not to expect him till evening.

He went on fast to St. John Street, impatient to be with his wife, and to show her that he truly valued her love and her truth; it seemed to him they had never shone out so brightly as they did in contrast with Patty's deceit. "Sweet, truthful little darling!" he said to himself.

He went softly upstairs that he might enjoy her eager look of delight at his unexpected appearance.

A sound of scrubbing made him pause. He opened the door.

He looked down on a face upturned to him—a face with a strong resemblance to a King Charles' spaniel; large dark eyes, a pug nose, and a bunch of black curls on each side of the face: here the canine likeness ended, except that, as the body belonging to the face was on all-fours, the attitude might be called in keeping. A black gown was tucked tightly round this anomalous being, most of it hidden by a canvas apron tied behind: beside her stood a steaming pail, and she held up a scrubbing-brush at Paul as if she thought he looked in want of it.

"What's the meaning of all this?" Paul spoke dreamily: he was not quite sure he was in his own studio. The room was bare—cleared for action, except that in one corner was a barricade, a heterogeneous piled-up heap, of precious articles.

At this sight Paul gasped.

"By whose orders are you doing this?" He spoke angrily: he thought the owner of the house had been interfering and making suggestions to Nuna and her maids.

The black eyes sparkled and the curls waggled, while their owner got up nimbly and began to wipe her hands and arms on her apron.

"Missis's, sir, if you please." The woman drew in her pinched lips in such a spasmodic attempt at a smile that Paul thought she was laughing at him while she curtsied.

"Who do you mean by Missis?" He spoke very imperiously.

"Lord bless us, sir, why *your* Missis, to be sure, and a sweet young lady she his: she said as you wouldn't be coming anear the place till tea-time, and I was to clean up as much as I could so long as I got done by six." The charwoman felt herself the aggrieved person.

"And did you move all those things yourself?" Paul said ruefully: he had just caught sight of a pile of heavy books on the face of a half-completed picture.

"Missis did some, sir, and I helped. You see, sir," she added confidentially, looking up in Paul's face as if she had earned his everlasting gratitude, "the place was in that awful muck and litter as it warn't fit for pigs, let alone Christians. As to them there plaster casts, it took me a good hour or more to get the rough dirt off, though I did use the brush. That there's all I've broke, sir;" she pointed to the chimney-piece—"I don't fancy it's of much account: it's only a nose, sir, hoff o' that little brown image; I put it safe on the mantel."

Paul could not speak: he walked up to the "little brown image," an exquisite statuette in terra-cotta he had brought from Italy. The nose was gone, the face scratched, and every fold of drapery, every wave of hair, encrusted with soap, which clung to the surface tenaciously, and entirely filled up all the delicate modelling.

"I'm sorry you've come in so soon, sir;"—Black-eyes looked sharply at her scrubbing-brush: she wanted to get on with her work;—"you see, you'd have knowed nothin' about it if you'd stayed hout, and what the heye don't see, sir, as you know, the 'art never feels, though that's not allus true, 'cos one don't see when one's master goes to the public, but one feels it all a same."

"And a loving husband who comes home to his wife gets this kind of reception," said Paul to himself; "why, it's death and destruction to everything in the shape of art. What awful recklessness! How could Nuna do it!" He felt almost beside himself with anger. He had come home, longing for the domestic joy which he believed was unknown in the splendid mansion of Mr. Downes—for a quiet afternoon's work, with Nuna beside him reading to him or sympathising in the progress of his picture; and instead, he had found his studio in disorder and steaming with soap-

suds; so wet that it would be scarcely habitable by evening, and he could hardly calculate how much mischief done besides.

"Such petty, womanish fussiness." He fumed up and down the room; he had too much reticence to let the charwoman hear his angry words. "What can it matter about the corners of a room? I'm sure the table and all the centre was clean: it's so beggarly and wretched to have this kind of thing going on. I never saw it in my mother's house; I don't believe the rooms were ever cleaned in such a way, and yet she was particular enough."

His thoughts went back to the exquisite room he had just left—a room where nothing looked formal or precise, and yet where all was spotless and well-placed.

"It will take me a month to sort everything I want out of that Douglas larder:" he went up to the window and looked out.

Black-eyes felt relieved when he turned his back; it was the next best thing to going away.

"Oh my!" She went down on her knees, and began to scrub again vigorously. "Ain't he got a temper, and no mistake! My! and they ain't been married but a few months or so. There's no pleasin' men, that's the long and short on it; they can't abide sluts, none of 'em can't, and it seems to me this here one ain't fond o' cleanliness neither. I'm sure if some o' them part-folers in the corners hadn't been brushed and rubbed, they'd have walked by theirselves, they was that standin' in dust. Poor young lady! she's got a horkard temper to deal with: now I suppose he'll take hisself off in a huff to the public—gentlefolks calls 'em clubs, I believe, but I take it it's the same meanin' in the hend, to the wives as is left at home by theirselves."

Paul stood thinking a few minutes, and then he rang the bell.

Even the usually trim, prim parlour-maid seemed to be participating in the general disarray. She looked soiled and untidy.

She stood at the door, but Paul frowned, and beckoned her across the wet floor.

"Where's your mistress?"

"Mistress said, sir, I was to tell you, if you came in, sir, that she got a note this morning, asking her to take luncheon with a lady from Ashton, at the Langham Hotel, sir. Mistress said she felt sure you wouldn't come in till late, but I was to say so if you did."

"Did you hear the lady's name?" said Paul.

"Mrs. Bright, I think, sir." The girl had never heard Mr. Whitmore speak so harshly. She looked at the door.

"Can't you make that woman leave off this miserable slopping?" he said, "and can't you and Anne set to work to make the room straight at once? I won't have that woman touch even a portfolio."

"Yes, sir," said the girl demurely, but inwardly she laughed.

It was so likely she and Anne would put the carpet on the wet floor, and work themselves like horses in moving those great lumbering things, when Missis was going to pay the woman on purpose that they mightn't have to do rough work; the parlour maid said this to herself, with the usual contempt inherent in the servant mind for the domestic interference of masters, while she held the door open for Mr. Whitmore to pass out, with more than ever of "prunes and prism" in the set of her demure mouth.

Paul fulfilled the charwoman's prediction, by dining at his club, and then he went off to the rooms of two young artists at the other end of London, where he got laughed at for his quiet, domestic ways, till he began to think himself a pattern husband.

He was not in a hurry to go home; the remembrance of the studio came to him with a shudder, and he shrank too from seeing Nuna. He felt afraid of his own temper.

"I wish that old chattering Mrs. Bright had stayed at home; she is sure to say or do something foolish."

Paul was vexed that Nuna should have gone off in

this sudden way without consulting him. It did not occur to him that his unpunctual habits had made his wife secure of his absence, and delighted to shorten one of her long, solitary days, by a chat with her old friend.

## CHAPTER XL.

### IN WHICH PAUL "TREATS" RESOLUTION.

It was growing dark when Paul once more set out on his way home.

When he came into the hall, the gas was not lighted; it seemed to him he heard Nuna's voice on the staircase, and a sudden gladness came back to him: he ran upstairs; a tall man coming down nearly knocked him over.

It was Will Bright. The two men begged pardon, and then recognized each other in the dim light.

"I've brought Nuna home," said Will; "she stopped talking with my mother in hopes you would come and fetch her; we should have been so glad to see you."

"Thank you:" Paul spoke stiffly: then he added, "Won't you come up and have some supper?"

"No, thank you," and the two men shook hands and parted.

"Poor darling," Will sighed to himself, "is this the way that fellow neglects her? I'd like to give him a good thrashing."

"Great stupid lout," said Paul as he went upstairs, all the glad light gone from his eyes. "How could Nuna bring the fellow here? She knows I can't bear him."

Nuna ran to him as soon as he opened the door.

She was radiant: she had had a delightful day; the Brights had been so kind; they had taken her to see exhibitions and for a drive in the park; she had so enjoyed herself. Paul listened; he was pleased she

had been happy, but his discomfiture had not passed away; and in the midst of her animated flow of talk Nuna checked herself.

"Doesn't Paul like me to enjoy myself without him? Yes, it was selfish of me;" and a double flow of tenderness came to her voice.

"What have you been doing all day, darling? I was half in hopes you would get home before I did, and come to fetch me. You would have come if you had known in time, wouldn't you?"

"No; I did come home, Nuna. I came home to dinner. To tell you the truth, I was so savage at the mess I found the room in, and at the damage and mischief done, that I was in no hurry to come home again."

He spoke gravely, and as he thought very leniently, considering all he had suffered, and the terrible mistake his wife had made in setting such an outrageous proceeding on foot without duly consulting him; and if Nuna had been sitting indoors moping after her usual fashion, she would have taken his reproof to heart, and expressed due contrition; but the open-air drive, the sight of her friends and their kindness, had brought back her old girlish spirits.

She laughed heartily in Paul's face, and then nestled close up to him.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, darling; but, you dear old fidget, why didn't you stay away, and then you never would have known anything? I meant to tell you, of course, but I wanted to surprise you:" she blushed at Paul's look of annoyance. "And I am very, very sorry I was not in when you came, but stay at home to-morrow instead, darling, won't you? and we'll be so happy. It feels all so clean and comfortable; now do sit down and listen; I have so much to tell you still."

Paul sat and listened, while Nuna rattled on full of the sparkle of happy feelings; but he was silent; he was still profoundly vexed, and yet too proud to show his vexation.

"There is nothing like association," he said to him-

self. "A few hours with these commonplace people, and Nuna is quite changed; I could not have believed she would laugh at me when she must have seen I was vexed; she has no sympathy. I won't damp her spirits now, but I'll take care that this sort of upset is not repeated; if it is, I paint away from home."

"Poor old Will," said Nuna. "I wish you would call on him, darling, and be a little kind to him."

"I don't mind calling," Paul smiled, "but I don't think I can be very pleasant society for him, and to tell you the truth I think he's a lout."

Nuna blushed: she thought Paul the least bit ungenerous. "Poor Will, you are hard on him; he asked very kindly after you;" and then she left off talking about the Brights.

She was so thoroughly gay and happy that the evening passed over without any further cloud. Paul wisely kept his eyes off his treasures: but as soon as he was left alone he took a lamp and gave a rapid glance at the new arrangements.

So far as he could see, everything was much as usual, but when he remembered the clay statuette he felt as angry as ever.

"It was unjustifiable. So much mischief might have been done. I wish those confounded Brights had stayed at home. That's the worst of country acquaintance: they come upon you when you wish for them least. Nuna will want to spend every day with that silly old chatterbox."

Next morning was full of sunshine, and Paul even was forced to admit that the studio was all the pleasanter from the absence of dust: he was mollified, too, by finding that his wife had carefully stowed away his chief rarities in her own little room —a tiny retreat hardly bigger than a large closet, a striking contrast to Patty's luxurious sitting-room.

It seemed to Paul this morning that he had been unreal and exaggerated in his ideas of Mrs. Downes

and himself. There could be no greater harm in his going to Park Lane to paint her portrait, than in the pleasure Nuna showed in talking of Will Bright.

"From what Mr. Beaufort said to me, that fellow will go on loving Nuna in his calf-like way to his dying day, and yet she evidently considers herself free to talk to him and walk with him. The truth is I am too strait-laced in my notions: I did not know I was such a prig. Why should I lose the money I mean to make that fellow Downes pay for his wife's portrait, just for a squeamish scruple? I'm sure she can't care a rap for me, and I can answer for myself. When the picture's done I shall go my way, and Patty will go hers, and I can't see that we shall be the worse for having met again."

He tore up the note he had written at the club to Mr. Downes, and resolved that he would keep the appointment he had made with Patty.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### PATTY'S ADVISERS.

WHEN Paul Whitmore went away, Mrs. Downes wished her husband would go downstairs with him. She wanted to get rid of Mr. Downes; she cared little that he should be courteous to the artist. The short interview between the two men had shown her there could be no friendship between them.

"So much the better—it makes me all the safer."

Patty had studied her husband's character; his was just one of the natures she had power to read thoroughly, and she had realized painfully during the last half-hour that all his idolatry, all her beauty, would fail to keep her on the throne she now filled in Mr. Downes's mind, if he ever came to know about her origin.

"He's not up enough yet among great people himself to be liberal about such a misfortune," Patty sighed, "and he's right. If one wants to climb, one must do it boldly; there's no use in stopping to see who one kicks down as stepping-stones, and people can't climb high who have any drag to pull them down. Paul will never speak about Ashton to my husband, I know he won't; and I don't mean ever to see his wife, and I don't fancy," she smiled, "that Mrs. Whitmore will hear a single word about me or my portrait."

While Patty stood thinking, Mr. Downes had been bending over the canvas. He looked at his wife—

"That is a clever young fellow, Elinor; but he has a very objectionable manner: he wants deference—I think you must keep up your dignity a little more, darling. Mr. Whitmore scarcely seems to feel that it is a privilege to paint such a face as yours. I came up to tell you that Henrietta has come to luncheon: the truth is, I asked her yesterday. I—I am very anxious you should see a good deal of Henrietta, darling; she knows everybody, and there is a certain style about her, and—and—" Here Mr. Downes floundered; a rising flush on the lovely pink cheeks warned him that he was getting into trouble.

But Patty's natural coolness saved him from the petulant answer a more sensitive, more loving wife would possibly have been betrayed into making. She looked at her husband and smiled.

"Mrs. Winchester is your cousin, Maurice. I hope she will always find a pleasure in coming to see me. Shall we go down to her?"

Mr. Downes pulled out his long whiskers; he had expected a different answer, and, not being a quick-witted man, he was disconcerted. He could not find fault with his wife's words, and yet they did not satisfy him. Since their arrival in Park Lane he had become aware of an increasing sense of disappointment. His wife was charming,—he had never seen any one so beautiful,—she had far less of girlish ignorance than

might have been expected from her age and secluded education, and yet he was not satisfied. He did not know what he wanted. He thought that he wished the playful archness which gave Mrs. Downes her most bewitching expression, should be used for him as well as against him—for his wife was never so gay and charming as when she made him give up his most determined resolutions; but he was not even sure about this.

"She is thoroughly sweet-tempered," he said, as he followed her downstairs: "most women dislike their husband's relations;" and then he sighed—he was actually silly enough to think that, perhaps, if Elinor were not quite so easy-tempered, she might be more loving.

Mrs. Winchester rustled all over as she rose and shook hands with her cousin's wife.

Mrs. Winchester was a finely-formed woman, with a face that had once possessed the beauty of a fresh complexion, and large bright unmeaning blue eyes, but to freshness had succeeded the peculiar coarseness which told of open-air driving in all weathers, and habits of luxury. Mrs. Winchester looked now like a Juno rather the worse for wear; and, conscious of her losses, she strove to hide them by an elaborate costume and a judicious use of powder and pale blue ribbon.

Mr. Downes kept silent; he left his wife and her visitor to entertain each other, but the talk soon flagged. Mrs. Winchester occupied herself in criticising the trimming on Patty's dress, and in taking stock of the rings she wore; her eyes travelled carefully from the bow of the tiny shoe to the waves of bright sunny hair; not in rapid glances, but in a practical, methodical fashion. Mrs. Winchester was taking notes, and meant to remember them.

Mr. Downes grew impatient of the silence. "Elinor has just given her first sitting to your artist, Henrietta."

"Your artist!" The cousins were looking at each other; neither of them saw the lightning in Patty's dark blue eyes. Anger is so terrible in blue eyes.

There is a steely brightness in it which brown eyes have no power to render: in the last there is the glow of passion; in the other, the glare of stern displeasure. But Patty's feelings had not reached such a pitch as sternness.

"Good gracious," she thought, "if those two are going to discuss Paul, I'd better stop my ears. De Mirancourt said, 'When you are bored, think of something pleasant.'"

Mrs. Downes forced her attention away, though she longed to listen; and reminded herself that in a fortnight she was to be presented at Court, and that she should certainly make Mrs. Winchester look very passée as they drove along side by side. But Patty was only a woman, though she was so clever; and she could not help, after a minute, gathering up the crumbs of talk between the faded Juno and her husband.

"But still, Maurice, you must acknowledge he is a remarkable person—not much appreciation for style, and that kind of thing, you know; but he quite amuses me: these fresh unconventional people are so original and amusing. I expect your wife, now, would quite take his fancy."

His cousin left off speaking, but Mr. Downes stood listening; he wished to give her opportunity to explain her last remark; then seeing the lady sink back gracefully into her chair, he turned his head stiffly towards her—slowly as well as stiffly, as if he were striving not to impair the upright set of his collar.

"I suppose you mean in common with the effect produced on every one else; otherwise I am at a loss to conceive how my wife should have any special charm for this Mr. Whitmore."

It was just at this point that Patty roused, or rather that her interest forced her to listen.

What had gone before to cause her husband's words? She met his eyes—conscious that her own were full of eager terror, and that she was blushing.

Mr. Downes was delighted. He thought his wife had

been annoyed by Mrs. Winchester's remark, and to see her thus appealing to his protection against his cousin's sneer gave him an exquisite sense of pride and power.

At that moment he would have done anything she asked.

"How silly Maurice looks when he smiles in that way," Patty said to herself, quite restored and composed now that she felt safe again.

"You dear Maurice," Mrs. Winchester smiled, in a large, encouraging manner—she was not quite so rich as Mr. Downes, and it was delightful to have a chance of patronising him,—"don't you see what I mean? Artists always admire natural beauty far more than that which is trained and conventional. Don't look ashamed, my dear Elinor; you will lose your freshness quite soon enough." Mrs. Winchester's silk flounces rustled again in a little chorus of applause.

Patty gave her a sweet, innocent glance.

"Oh, dear, I hope not! I want to keep fresh and natural for a long, long time; it must be so dreadful to look faded, and to have to think of what is becoming and all that;" then with her child-like laugh, "it would soon make me quite vain, I'm afraid."

Mr. Downes was startled; it was impossible that his wife could be acting, she spoke so simply, and yet when he saw the discomfiture in his cousin's face, he wished Elinor had said something less personal.

"She couldn't mean it, of course, it was a chance shot," and then he laughed to himself, "Poor Henrietta! I am afraid it came rather near the mark."

"When you come down to see us at Brookton, my dear, you will be quite in your element," said Mrs. Winchester; "you may be as wild as you like at Brookton,—milk the cows, you know, or anything that takes your fancy. Ah, Maurice, when will you settle down at Hatchhurst, and be the model landlord Charles is, with his cottages and his prize pigs?"

Mr. Downes had grown angry at his cousin's spite; he waited to swallow his indignation before he spoke, and his wife answered—