

Braddon Mary Elizabeth

Mount Royal: A Novel.

Volume 3 of 3



Mary Braddon
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**Braddon M. E.
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CHAPTER I

**"WITH SUCH REMORSELESS
SPEED STILL COME NEW WOES."**

The next morning was damp, and grey, and mild, no autumn wind stirring the long sweeping branches of the cedars on the lawn, the dead leaves falling silently, the world all sad and solemn, clad in universal greyness. Christabel was up early, with her boy, in the nursery – watching him as he splashed about his bath, and emerged rosy and joyous, like an infant river-god sporting among the rushes; early at family prayers in the dining room, a ceremony at which Mr. Tregonell rarely assisted, and to which Dopsy and Mopsy came flushed and breathless with hurry, anxious to pay all due respect to a hostess whom they hoped to visit again, but inwardly revolting against the unreasonableness of eight-o'clock prayers.

Angus, who was generally about the gardens before eight, did not appear at all this morning. The other men were habitually late – breakfasting together in a free-and-easy manner when the ladies had left the dining-room – so Christabel, Miss Bridgeman, and the Miss Vandeleurs sat down to breakfast alone, Dopsy giving little furtive glances at the door every now and then, expectant of Mr. Hamleigh's entrance.

That expectancy became too painful for the damsel's patience, by-and-by, as the meal advanced.

"I wonder what has become of Mr. Hamleigh," she said. "This is the first time he has been late at breakfast."

"Perhaps he is seeing to the packing of his portmanteau," said Miss Bridgeman. "Some valets are bad packers, and want superintendence."

"Packing!" cried Dopsy, aghast. "Packing! What for?"

"He is going to London this afternoon. Didn't you know?"

Dopsy grew pale as ashes. The shock was evidently terrible, and even Jessie pitied her.

"Poor silly Dop," she thought. "Could she actually suppose that she stood the faintest chance of bringing down her bird?"

"Going away? For good?" murmured Miss Vandeleur faintly – all the flavour gone out of the dried salmon, the Cornish butter, the sweet home-baked bread.

"I hope so. He is going to the South of France for the winter. Of course, you know that he is consumptive, and has not many years to live," answered Miss Bridgeman.

"Poor fellow!" sighed Dopsy, with tears glittering upon her lowered eyelids.

She had begun the chase moved chiefly by sordid instincts; her tenderest emotions had been hacked and vulgarized by long experience in flirtation – but at this moment she believed that never in her life had she loved before, and that never in her life could she love again.

"And if he dies unmarried what will become of his property?" inquired Mopsy, whose feelings were not engaged.

"I haven't the faintest idea," answered Miss Bridgeman. "He has no near relations. I hope he will leave his money to some charitable institution."

"What time does he go?" faltered Dopsy, swallowing her tears.

"Mr. Hamleigh left an hour ago, Madam," said the butler, who had been carving at the side-board during this conversation. "He has gone shooting. The dog-cart is to pick him up at the gate leading to St. Nectan's Kieve at eleven o'clock."

"Gone shooting on his last morning at Mount Royal!" exclaimed Jessie. "That's a new development of Mr. Hamleigh's character. I never knew he had a passion for sport."

"I believe there is a note for you, ma'am," said the butler to his mistress.

He went out into the hall, and returned in a minute or two carrying a letter upon his official salver, and handing it with official solemnity to Mrs. Tregonell.

The letter-was brief and commonplace enough —

"Dear Mrs. Tregonell, —

"After all I am deprived of the opportunity of wishing you good-by this morning, by the temptation of two or three hours' woodcock shooting about St. Nectan's Kieve. I shall drive straight from there to Launceston in Mr. Tregonell's dog-cart, for the use of which I beg to thank him in advance. I have already thanked you and Miss Bridgeman for your goodness to me during my late visit to Mount Royal, and can only say that my gratitude lies much deeper, and means a great deal more, than such expressions of thankfulness are generally intended to convey.

"Ever sincerely yours,

"Angus Hamleigh."

"Then this was what Leonard and he were settling last night," thought Christabel. "Your master went out with Mr. Hamleigh, I suppose," she said to the servant.

"No, ma'am, my master is in his study. I took him his breakfast an hour ago. He is writing letters, I believe."

"And the other two gentlemen?"

"Started for Bodmin in the wagonette at six o'clock this morning."

"They are going to see that unhappy man hanged," said Miss Bridgeman. "Congenial occupation. Mr. Montagu told me all about it at dinner yesterday, and asked me if I wasn't sorry that my sex prevented my joining the party. 'It would be a new sensation,' he said, 'and to a woman of your intelligence that must be an immense attraction.' I told him I had no hankering after

new sensations of that kind."

"And he is really gone – without saying good-by to any of us," said Dopsy, still harping on the departed guest.

"Yes, he is really gone," echoed Jessie, with a sigh.

Christabel had been silent and absent-minded throughout the meal. Her mind was troubled – she scarcely knew why; disturbed by the memory of her husband's manner as he parted with Angus in the corridor; disturbed by the strangeness of this lonely expedition after woodcock, in a man who had always shown himself indifferent to sport. As usual with her when she was out of spirits, she went straight to the nursery for comfort, and tried to forget everything in life except that Heaven had given her a son whom she adored.

Her boy upon this particular morning was a little more fascinating and a shade more exacting than usual; the rain, soft and gentle as it was – rather an all-pervading moisture than a positive rainfall – forbade any open-air exercise for this tenderly reared young person – so he had to be amused indoors. He was just of an age to be played with, and to understand certain games which called upon the exercise of a dawning imagination; so it was his mother's delight to ramble with him in an imaginary wood, and to fly from imaginary wolves, lurking in dark caverns, represented by the obscure regions underneath a table-cover – or to repose with him on imaginary mountain-tops on the sofa – or be engulfed with him in sofa pillows, which stood for whelming waves. Then there were pictures to be looked at, and

little Leo had to be lovingly instructed in the art of turning over a leaf without tearing it from end to end – and the necessity for restraining an inclination to thrust all his fingers into his mouth between whiles, and sprawl them admiringly on the page afterwards.

Time so beguiled, even on the dullest morning, and with a lurking, indefinite sense of trouble in her mind all the while, went rapidly with Christabel. She looked up with surprise when the stable clock struck eleven.

"So late? Do you know if the dog-cart has started yet, Carson?"

"Yes, ma'am, I heard it drive out of the yard half an hour ago," answered the nurse, looking up from her needlework.

"Well, I must go. Good-by, Baby. I think, if you are very good, you might have your dinner with mamma. Din-din – with – mum – mum – mum" – a kiss between every nonsense syllable. "You can bring him down, nurse. I shall have only the ladies with me at luncheon." There were still further leave-takings, and then Christabel went downstairs. On her way past her husband's study she saw the door standing ajar.

"Are you there, Leonard, and alone?"

"Yes."

She went in. He was sitting at his desk – his cheque-book open, tradesmen's accounts spread out before him – all the signs and tokens of business-like occupation. It was not often that Mr. Tregonell spent a morning in his study. When he did, it meant

a general settlement of accounts, and usually resulted in a surly frame of mind, which lasted, more or less, for the rest of the day.

"Did you know that Mr. Hamleigh had gone woodcock shooting?"

"Naturally, since it was I who suggested that he should have a shy at the birds before he left," answered Leonard, without looking up.

He was filling in a cheque, with his head bent over the table.

"How strange for him to go alone, in his weak health, and with a fatiguing journey before him."

"What's the fatigue of lolling in a railway carriage? Confound it, you've made me spoil the cheque!" muttered Leonard, tearing the oblong slip of coloured paper across and across, impatiently.

"How your hand shakes! Have you been writing all the morning?"

"Yes – all the morning," absently, turning over the leaves of his cheque-book.

"But you have been out – your boots are all over mud."

"Yes, I meant to have an hour or so at the birds. I got as far as Willapark, and then remembered that Clayton wanted the money for the tradesmen to-day. One must stick to one's pay-day, don't you know, when one has made a rule."

"Of course. Oh, there are the new Quarterlies!" said Christabel, seeing a package on the table. "Do you mind my opening them here?"

"No; as long as you hold your tongue, and don't disturb me

when I'm at figures."

This was not a very gracious permission to remain, but Christabel seated herself quietly by the fire, and began to explore the two treasuries of wisdom which the day's post had brought. Leonard's study looked into the stable-yard, a spacious quadrangle, with long ranges of doors and windows, saddle rooms, harness rooms, loose boxes, coachmen's and groom's quarters – a little colony complete in itself. From his open window the Squire could give his orders, interrogate his coachman as to his consumption of forage, have an ailing horse paraded before him, bully an underling, and bestow praise or blame all round, as it suited his humour. Here, too, were the kennels of the dogs, whose company Mr. Tregonell liked a little better than that of his fellow-men.

Leonard sat with his head bent over the table, writing, Christabel in her chair by the fire turning the leaves of her book in the rapture of a first skimming. They sat thus for about an hour, and then both looked up with a startled air, at the sound of wheels.

It was the dog-cart that was being driven into the yard, Mr. Hamleigh's servant sitting behind, walled in by a portmanteau and a Gladstone bag. Leonard opened the window, and looked out.

"What's up?" he asked "Has your master changed his mind?" The valet alighted, and came across the yard to the window. "We haven't seen Mr. Hamleigh, Sir. There must have been

some mistake, I think. We waited at the gate for nearly an hour, and then Baker said we'd better come back, as we must have missed Mr. Hamleigh, somehow, and he might be here waiting for us to take him to Launceston."

"Baker's a fool. How could you miss him if he went to the Kieve? There's only one way out of that place – or only one way that Mr. Hamleigh could find. Did you inquire if he went to the Kieve?"

"Yes, Sir. Baker went into the farmhouse, and they told him that a gentleman had come with his gun and a dog, and had asked for the key, and had gone to the Kieve alone. They were not certain as to whether he'd come back or not, but he hadn't taken the key back to the house. He might have put it into his pocket, and forgotten all about it, don't you see, Sir, after he'd let himself out of the gate. That's what Baker said; and he might have come back here."

"Perhaps he has come back," answered Leonard, carelessly. "You'd better inquire."

"I don't think he can have returned," said Christabel, standing near the window, very pale.

"How do you know?" asked Leonard, savagely. "You've been sitting here for the last hour poring over that book."

"I think I should have heard – I think I should have known," faltered Christabel, with her heart beating strangely.

There was a mystery in the return of the carriage which seemed like the beginning of woe and horror – like the ripening

of that strange vague sense of trouble which had oppressed her for the last few hours.

"You would have heard – you would have known," echoed her husband, with brutal mockery – "by instinct, by second sight, by animal magnetism, I suppose. You are just the sort of woman to believe in that kind of rot."

The valet had gone across the yard on his way round to the offices of the house. Christabel made no reply to her husband's sneering speech, but went straight to the hall, and rang for the butler.

"Have you – has any one seen Mr. Hamleigh come back to the house?" she asked.

"No, ma'am."

"Inquire, if you please, of every one. Make quite sure that he has not returned, and then let three or four men, with Nicholls at their head, go down to St. Nectan's Kieve and look for him. I'm afraid there has been an accident."

"I hope not, ma'am," answered the butler, who had known Christabel from her babyhood, who had looked on, a pleased spectator, at Mr. Hamleigh's wooing, and whose heart was melted with tenderest compassion to-day at the sight of her pallid face, and eyes made large with terror. "It's a dangerous kind of place for a stranger to go clambering about with a gun, but not for one that knows every stone of it, as Mr. Hamleigh do."

"Send, and at once, please. I do not think Mr. Hamleigh, having arranged for the dog-cart to meet him, would forget his

appointment."

"There's no knowing, ma'am. Some gentlemen are so wrapt up in their sport."

Christabel sat down in the hall, and waited while Daniel, the butler, made his inquiries. No one had seen Mr. Hamleigh come in, and everybody was ready to aver on oath if necessary that he had not returned. So Nicholls, the chief coachman, a man of gumption and of much renown in the household, as a person whose natural sharpness had been improved by the large responsibilities involved in a well-filled stable, was brought to receive his orders from Mrs. Tregonell. Daniel admired the calm gravity with which she gave the man his instructions, despite her colourless cheek and the look of pain in every feature of her face.

"You will take two or three of the stablemen with you, and go as fast as you can to the Kieve. You had better go in the light cart, and it would be as well to take a mattress, and some pillows. If – if there should have been an accident those might be useful. Mr. Hamleigh left the house early this morning with his gun to go to the Kieve, and he was to have met the dog-cart at eleven. Baker waited at the gate till twelve – but perhaps you have heard."

"Yes, ma'am, Baker told me. It's strange – but Mr. Hamleigh may have overlooked the time if he had good sport. Do you know which of the dogs he took with him?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because I rather thought it was Sambo. Sambo was always a favourite of Mr. Hamleigh's, though he's getting rather too old

for his work now. If it was Sambo the dog must have run away and left him, for he was back about the yard before ten o'clock. He'd been hurt somehow, for there was blood upon one of his feet. Master had the red setter with him this morning, when he went for his stroll, but I believe it must have been Sambo that Mr. Hamleigh took. There was only one of the lads about the yard when he left, for it was breakfast time, and the little guffin didn't notice."

"But if all the other dogs are in their kennels – "

"They aren't, ma'am, don't you see. The two gentlemen took a couple of 'em to Bodmin in the break – and I don't know which. Sambo may have been with them – and may have got tired of it and come home. He's not a dog to appreciate that kind of thing."

"Go at once, if you please, Nicholls. You know what to do."

"Yes, ma'am."

Nicholls went his way, and the gong began to sound for luncheon. Mr. Tregonell, who rarely honoured the family with his presence at the mid-day meal, came out of his den to-day in answer to the summons, and found his wife in the hall.

"I suppose you are coming in to luncheon," he said to her, in an angry aside. "You need not look so scared. Your old lover is safe enough, I daresay."

"I am not coming to luncheon," she answered, looking at him with pale contempt. "If you are not a little more careful of your words I may never break bread with you again."

The gong went on with its discordant clamour, and Jessie

Bridgeman came out of the drawing-room with the younger Miss Vandeleur. Poor Dopsy was shut in her own room, with a headache. She had been indulging herself with the feminine luxury of a good cry. Disappointment, wounded vanity, humiliation, and a very real *penchant* for the man who had despised her attractions were the mingled elements in her cup of woe.

The nurse came down the broad oak staircase, baby Leonard toddling by her side, and making two laborious jumps at each shallow step – one on – one off. Christabel met him, picked him up in her arms, and carried him back to the nursery, where she ordered his dinner to be brought. He was a little inclined to resist this change of plan at the first, but was soon kissed into pleasantness, and then the nurse was despatched to the servants' hall, and Christabel had her boy to herself, and ministered to him and amused him for the space of an hour despite an aching heart. Then, when the nurse came back, Mrs. Tregonell went to her own room, and sat at the window watching the avenue by which the men must drive back to the house.

They did not come back till just when the gloom of the sunless day was deepening into starless night. Christabel ran down to the lobby that opened into the stable yard, and stood in the doorway waiting for Nicholls to come to her; but if he saw her, he pretended not to see her, and went straight to the house by another way, and asked to speak to Mr. Tregonell.

Christabel saw him hurry across the yard to that other door,

and knew that her fears were realized. Evil of some kind had befallen. She went straight to her husband's study, certain that she would meet Nicholls there.

Leonard was standing by the fireplace, listening, while Nicholls stood a little way from the door, relating the result of his search, in a low agitated voice.

"Was he quite dead when you found him?" asked Leonard, when the man paused in his narration.

Christabel stood just within the doorway, half hidden in the obscurity of the room, where there was no light but that of the low fire. The door had been left ajar by Nicholls, and neither he nor his master was aware of her presence.

"Yes, Sir. Dr. Blake said he must have been dead some hours."

"Had the gun burst?"

"No, Sir. It must have gone off somehow. Perhaps the trigger caught in the hand-rail when he was crossing the wooden bridge – and yet that seemed hardly possible – for he was lying on the big stone at the other side of the bridge, with his face downwards close to the water."

"A horrible accident," said Leonard. "There'll be an inquest, of course. Will Blake give the coroner notice – or must I?"

"Dr. Blake said he'd see to that, Sir."

"And he is lying at the farm –"

"Yes, Sir. We thought it was best to take the body there – rather than to bring it home. It would have been such a shock for my mistress – and the other ladies. Dr. Blake said the inquest

would be held at the inn at Trevena."

"Well," said Leonard, with a shrug and a sigh, "it's an awful business, that's all that can be said about it. Lucky he has no wife or children – no near relations to feel the blow. All we can do is to show our respect for him, now he is gone. The body had better be brought home here, after the inquest. It will look more respectful for him to be buried from this house. Mrs. Tregonell's mind can be prepared by that time."

"It is prepared already," said a low voice out of the shadow. "I have heard all."

"Very sad, isn't it?" replied Leonard; "one of those unlucky accidents which occur every shooting season. He was always a little awkward with a gun – never handled one like a thoroughbred sportsman."

"Why did he go out shooting on the last morning of his visit?" asked Christabel. "It was you who urged him to do it – you who planned the whole thing."

"I! What nonsense you are talking. I told him there were plenty of birds about the Kieve – just as I told the other fellows. That will do, Nicholls. You did all that could be done. Go and get your dinner, but first send a mounted groom to Trevena to ask Blake to come over here."

Nicholls bowed and retired, shutting the door behind him.

"He is dead, then," said Christabel, coming over to the hearth where her husband was standing. "He has been killed."

"He has had the bad luck to kill himself, as many a better

sportsman than he has done before now," answered Leonard, roughly.

"If I could be sure of that, Leonard, if I could be sure that his death was the work of accident – I should hardly grieve for him – knowing that he was reconciled to the idea of death – and that if God had spared him this sudden end, the close of his life must have been full of pain and weariness."

Tears were streaming down her cheeks – tears which she made no effort to restrain – such tears as friendship and affection give to the dead – tears that had no taint of guilt. But Leonard's jealous soul was stung to fury by those innocent tears.

"Why do you stand there snivelling about him," he exclaimed; "do you want to remind me how fond you were of him – and how little you ever cared for me. Do you suppose I am stone blind – do you suppose I don't know you to the core of your heart?"

"If you know my heart you must know that it is as guiltless of sin against you, and as true to my duty as a wife, as you, my husband, can desire. But you must know that, or you would not have brought Angus Hamleigh to this house."

"Perhaps I wanted to try you – to watch you and him together – to see if the old fire was quite burnt out."

"You could not be so base – so contemptible."

"There is no knowing what a man may be when he is used as I have been by you – looked down upon from the height of a superior intellect, a loftier nature – told to keep his distance, as a piece of vulgar clay – hardly fit to exist beside that fine porcelain

vase, his wife. Do you think it was a pleasant spectacle for me to see you and Angus Hamleigh sympathizing and twaddling about Browning's last poem – or sighing over a sonata of Beethoven's – I who was outside all that kind of thing? – a boor – a dolt – to whom your fine sentiments and your flummery were an unknown language. But I was only putting a case, just now. I liked Hamleigh well enough – in his way – and I asked him here because I thought it was giving a chance to the Vandeleur girls. That was my motive – and my only motive."

"And he came – and he is dead," answered Christabel, in icy tones. "He went to that lonely place this morning – at your instigation – and he met his death there – no one knows how – no one ever will know."

"At my instigation? – confound it, Christabel – you have no right to say such things. I told him it was a good place for woodcock – and it pleased his fancy to try his luck there before he left. Lonely place, be hanged. It is a place to which every tourist goes – it is as well known as the road to this house."

"Yet he was lying there for hours and no one knew. If Nicholls had not gone he might be lying there still. He may have lain there wounded – his life-blood ebbing away – dying by inches – without help – without a creature to succour or comfort him. It was a cruel place – a place where no help could come."

"Fortune of war," answered Leonard, with a careless shrug. "A sportsman must die where his shot finds him. There's many a day I might have fallen in the Rockies, and lain there for the lynxes

and the polecats to pick my bones; and I have walked shoulder to shoulder with death on mountain passes, when every step on the crumbling track might send me sliding down to the bottomless pit below. As for poor Hamleigh; well, as you say yourself, he was a doomed man – a little sooner or later could not make much difference."

"Perhaps not," said Christabel, gloomily, going slowly to the door; "but I want to know how he died."

"Let us hope the coroner's inquest will make your mind easy on that point," retorted her husband as she left the room.

CHAPTER II

"YOURS ON MONDAY, GOD'S TO-DAY."

The warning gong sounded at half-past seven as usual, and at eight the butler announced dinner. Captain Vandeleur and Mr. Montagu had returned from Bodmin, and they were grouped in front of the fire talking in undertones with Mr. Tregonell, while Christabel and the younger Miss Vandeleur sat on a sofa, silent, after a few murmured expressions of grief on the part of the latter lady.

"It is like a dream," sighed Mopsy, this being the one remark which a young person of her calibre inevitably makes upon such an occasion. "It is like a dreadful dream – playing billiards last night, and now – dead! It is too awful."

"Yes, it is awful; Death is always awful," answered Christabel, mechanically.

She had told herself that it was her duty to appear at the dinner-table – to fulfil all her responsibilities as wife and hostess – not to give any one the right to say that she was bemoaning him who had once been her lover; and she was here to do her duty. She wanted all the inhabitants of her little world to see that she mourned for him only as a friend grieves for the loss of a friend – soberly, with pious submission to the Divine Will that had taken

him away. For two hours she had remained on her knees beside her bed, drowned in tears, numbed by despair, feeling as if life could not go on without him, as if this heavily-beating heart of hers must be slowly throbbing to extinction: and then the light of reason had begun to glimmer through the thick gloom of grief, and her lips had moved in prayer, and, as if in answer to her prayers, came the image of her child, to comfort and sustain her.

"Let me not dishonour my darling," she prayed. "Let me remember that I am a mother as well as a wife. If I owe my husband very little, I owe my son everything."

Inspired by that sweet thought of her boy, unwilling, for his sake, to give occasion for even the feeblest scandal, she had washed the tears from her pale cheeks, and put on a dinner gown, and had gone down to the drawing-room just ten minutes before the announcement of dinner.

She remembered how David, when his beloved was dead, had risen and washed and gone back to the business of life. "What use are my tears to him, now he is gone?" she said to herself, as she went downstairs.

Miss Bridgeman was not in the drawing-room; but Mopsy was there, dressed in black, and looking very miserable.

"I could not get poor Dop to come down," she said, apologetically. "She has been lying on her bed crying ever since she heard the dreadful news. She is so sensitive, poor girl; and she liked him so much; and he had been so attentive to her. I hope you'll excuse her?"

"Please don't apologize. I can quite imagine that this shock has been dreadful for her – for every one in the house. Perhaps you would rather dine upstairs, so as to be with your sister?"

"No!" answered Mopsy, taking Christabel's hand, with a touch of real feeling. "I had rather be with you. You must feel his loss more than we can – you had known him so much longer."

"Yes, it is just five years since he came to Mount Royal. Five years is not much in the lives of some people; but it seems the greater part of my life."

"We will go away to-morrow," said Mopsy. "I am sure you will be glad to get rid of us: it will be a relief, I mean. Perhaps at some future time you will let us come again for a little while. We have been so intensely happy here."

"Then I shall be happy for you to come again – next summer, if we are here," answered Christabel, kindly, moved by Mopsy's *naïveté*: "one can never tell. Next year seems so far off in the hour of trouble."

Dinner was announced, and they all went in, and made believe to dine, in a gloomy silence, broken now and then by dismal attempts at general conversation on the part of the men. Once Mopsy took heart of grace and addressed her brother:

"Did you like the hanging, Jack?" she asked, as if it were a play.

"No, it was hideous, detestable. I will never put myself in the way of being so tortured again. The guillotine is swifter and more merciful. I saw a man blown from a gun in India – there were

bits of him on my boots when I got home – but it was not so bad as the hanging to-day: the limp, helpless, figure, swaying and trembling in the hangman's grip while they put the noose on, the cap dragged roughly over the ghastly face, the monotonous croak of the parson reading on like a machine, while the poor wretch was being made ready for his doom. It was all horrible to the last degree. Why can't we poison our criminals: let them die comfortably, as Socrates died, of a dose of some strong narcotic. The parson might have some chance – sitting by the dying man's bed, in the quiet of his cell."

"It would be much nicer," said Mopsy.

"Where's Miss Bridgeman?" Leonard asked suddenly, looking round the table, as if only that moment perceiving her absence.

"She is not in her room, Sir. Mary thinks she has gone out," answered the butler.

"Gone out – after dark. What can have been her motive for going out at such an hour?" asked Leonard of his wife, angrily.

"I have no idea. She may have been sent for by some sick person. You know how good she is."

"I know what a humbug she is," retorted Leonard. "Daniel, go and find out if any messenger came for Miss Bridgeman – or if she left any message for your mistress."

Daniel went out, and came back again in five minutes. No one had seen any messenger – no one had seen Miss Bridgeman go out.

"That's always the case here when I want to ascertain a fact,"

growled Leonard: "no one sees or knows anything. There are twice too many servants for one to be decently served. Well, it doesn't matter much. Miss Bridgeman is old enough to take care of herself – and if she walks off a cliff – it will be her loss and nobody else's."

"I don't think you ought to speak like that of a person whom your mother loved – and who is my most intimate friend," said Christabel, with grave reproach.

Leonard had drunk a good deal at dinner; and indeed there had been an inclination on the part of all three men to drown their gloomy ideas in wine, while even Mopsy, who generally took her fair share of champagne, allowed the butler to fill her glass rather oftener than usual – sighing as she sipped the sparkling bright-coloured wine, and remembering, even in the midst of her regret for the newly dead, that she would very soon have returned to a domicile where Moët was not the daily beverage, nay, where, at times, the very beer-barrel ran dry.

After dinner Christabel went to the nursery. It flashed upon her with acutest pain as she entered the room, that when last she had been there she had not known of Angus Hamleigh's death. He had been lying yonder by the waterfall, dead, and she had not known. And now the fact of his death was an old thing – part of the history of her life.

The time when he was alive and with her, full of bright thoughts and poetic fancies, seemed ever so long ago. Yet it was only yesterday – yesterday, and gone from her life as utterly as

if it were an episode in the records of dead and gone ages – as old as the story of Tristan and Iseult. She sat with her boy till he fell asleep, and sat beside him as he slept, in the dim light of the night-lamp, thinking of him who lay dead in the lonely farmhouse among those green hills they two had loved so well – hushed by the voice of the distant sea, sounding far inland in the silence of night.

She remembered how he had talked last night of the undiscovered country, and how, as he talked, with flushed cheeks, and too brilliant eyes, she had seen the stamp of death on his face. They had talked of "The Gates Ajar," a book which they had read together in the days gone by, and which Christabel had often returned to since that time – a book in which the secrets of the future are touched lightly by a daring but a delicate hand – a book which accepts every promise of the Gospel in its most literal sense, and overflows with an exultant belief in just such a Heaven as poor humanity wants. In this author's creed transition from death to life is instant – death is the Lucina of life. There is no long lethargy of the grave, there is no time of darkness. Straight from the bed of death the spirit rushes to the arms of the beloved ones who have gone before. Death, so glorified, becomes only the reunion of love.

He had talked of Socrates, and the faithful few who waited at the prison doors in the early morning, when the sacred ship had returned, and the end was near; and of that farewell discourse in the upper chamber of the house at Jerusalem which seems dimly

foreshadowed by the philosopher's converse with his disciples – at Athens, the struggle towards light – at Jerusalem the light itself in fullest glory.

Christabel felt herself bound by no social duty to return to the drawing-room, more especially as Miss Vandeleur had gone upstairs to sit with the afflicted Dopsy – who was bewailing the dead very sincerely in her own fashion, with little bursts of hysterical tears and fragmentary remarks.

"I know he didn't care a straw for me" – she gasped, dabbing her temples with a handkerchief soaked in eau-de-Cologne – "yet it seemed sometimes almost as if he did: he was so attentive – but then he had such lovely manners – no doubt he was just as attentive to all girls. Oh, Mop, if he had cared for me, and if I had married him – what a paradise this earth would have been. Mr. Tregonell told me that he had quite four thousand a year."

And thus – and thus, with numerous variations on the same theme – poor Dopsy mourned for the dead man; while the low murmur of the distant sea, beating for ever and for ever against the horned cliffs, and dashing silvery white about the base of that Mechard Rock which looks like a couchant lion keeping guard over the shore, sounded like a funeral chorus in the pauses of her talk.

It was half-past ten when Christabel left her boy's bedside, and, on her way to her own room, suddenly remembered Jessie's unexplained absence.

She knocked at Miss Bridgeman's door twice, but there was

no answer, and then she opened the door and looked in, expecting to find the room empty.

Jessie was sitting in front of the fire in her hat and jacket, staring at the burning coals. There was no light in the room, except the glow and flame of the fire, but even in that cheerful light Jessie looked deadly pale. "Jessie," exclaimed Christabel, going up to her and putting a gentle hand upon her shoulder, for she took no notice of the opening of the door, "where in heaven's name have you been?"

"Where should I have been? Surely you can guess! I have been to see him."

"To the farm – alone – at night?"

"Alone – at night – yes! I would have walked through storm and fire – I would have walked through – " she set her lips like iron, and muttered through her clenched teeth, "Hell."

"Jessie, Jessie, how foolish! What good could it do?"

"None to him, I know, but perhaps a little to me. I think if I had stayed here I should have gone stark, staring mad. I felt my brain reeling as I sat and thought of him in the twilight, and then it seemed to me as if the only comfort possible was in looking at his dead face – holding his dead hand – and I have done it, and am comforted – a little," she said, with a laugh, which ended in a convulsive sob.

"My good warm-hearted Jessie!" murmured Christabel, bending over her lovingly, tears raining down her cheeks; "I know you always liked him."

"Always liked him!" echoed the other, staring at the fire, in blank tearless grief; "liked him? yes, always."

"But you must not take his death so despairingly, dear. You know that, under the fairest circumstances, he had not very long to live. We both knew that."

"Yes! we knew it. I knew – thought that I had realized the fact – told myself every day that in a few months he would be hidden from us under ground – gone to a life where we cannot follow him even with our thoughts, though we pretend to be so sure about it, as those women do in 'The Gates Ajar.' I told myself this every day. And yet, now that he is snatched away suddenly – cruelly – mysteriously – it is as hard to bear as if I had believed that he would live a hundred years. I am not like you, a piece of statuesque perfection. I cannot say 'Thy will be done,' when my dearest – the only man I ever loved upon this wide earth is snatched from me. Does that shock your chilly propriety, you who only half loved him, and who broke his heart at another woman's bidding? Yes! I loved him from the first – loved him all the while he was your lover, and found it enough for happiness to be in his company – to see and hear him, and answer every thought of his with sympathetic thoughts of mine – understanding him quicker and better than you could, bright as you are – happy to go about with you two – to be the shadow in the sunshine of your glad young lives, just as a dog who loved him would have been happy following at his heels. Yes, Belle, I loved him – I think almost from the hour he came here, in the

sweet autumn twilight, when I saw that poetic face, half in fire-glow and half in darkness – loved him always, always, always, and admired him as the most perfect among men!"

"Jessie, my dearest, my bravest! And you were so true and loyal. You never by word or look betrayed – "

"What do you think of me?" cried Jessie, indignantly. "Do you suppose that I would not rather have cut out my tongue – thrown myself off the nearest cliff – than give him one lightest occasion to suspect what a paltry-souled creature I was – so weak that I could not cure myself of loving another woman's lover. While he lived I hated myself for my folly; now he is dead, I glory in the thought of how I loved him – how I gave him the most precious treasures of my soul – my reverence – my regard – my tears and hopes and prayers. Those are the only gold and frankincense and myrrh which the poor of this earth can offer, and I gave them freely to my divinity!"

Christabel laid her hand upon the passionate lips; and, kneeling by her friend's side, comforted her with gentle caresses.

"Do you suppose I am not sorry for him, Jessie?" she said reproachfully, after a long pause.

"Yes, no doubt you are, in your way; but it is such an icy way."

"Would you have me go raving about the house – I, Leonard's wife, Leo's mother? I try to resign myself to God's will: but I shall remember him till the end of my days, with unspeakable sorrow. He was like sunshine in my life; so that life without him seemed all one dull gray, till the baby came, and brought me back to the

sunlight, and gave me new duties, new cares!"

"Yes! you can find comfort in a baby's arms – that is a blessing. My comfort was to see my beloved in his bloody shroud – shot through the heart – shot through the heart! Well, the inquest will find out something to-morrow, I hope; but I want you to go with me to-morrow morning, as soon as it is light, to the Kieve."

"What for?"

"To see the spot where he died."

"What will be the good, Jessie? I know the place too well; it has been in my mind all this evening."

"There will be some good, perhaps. At any rate, I want you to go with me; and if there ever was any reality in your love, if you are not merely a beautiful piece of mechanism, with a heart that beats by clockwork, you will go."

"If you wish it I will go."

"As soon as it is light – say at seven o'clock."

"I will not go till after breakfast. I want the business of the house to go on just as calmly as if this calamity had never happened. I don't want any one to be able to say, 'Mrs. Tregonell is in despair at the loss of her old lover.'"

"In fact you want people to suppose that you never cared for him!"

"They cannot suppose that, when I was once so proud of my love. All I want is that no one should think I loved him too well after I was a wife and mother. I will give no occasion for scandal."

"Didn't I say that you were a handsome automaton?"

"I do not want any one to say hard things of me when I am dead – hard things that my son may hear."

"When you are dead! You talk as if you thought you were to die soon. You are of the stuff that wears to threescore-and-ten, and even beyond the Psalmist's limit. There is no friction for natures of your calibre. When Werther had shot himself, Charlotte went on cutting bread and butter, don't you know? It was her nature to be proper, and good, and useful, and never to give offence – her nature to cut bread and butter," concluded Jessie, laughing bitterly.

Christabel stayed with her for an hour, talking to her, consoling her, speaking hopefully of that unknown world, so fondly longed for, so piously believed in by the woman who had learnt her creed at Mrs. Tregonell's knees. Many tears were shed by Christabel during that hour of mournful talk; but not one by Jessie Bridgeman. Hers was a dry-eyed grief.

"After breakfast then we will walk to the Kieve," said Jessie, as Christabel left her. "Would it be too much to ask you to make it as early as you can?"

"I will go the moment I am free. Good-night, dear."

CHAPTER III

DUEL OR MURDER?

All the household appeared at breakfast next morning; even poor Dopsy, who felt that she could not nurse her grief in solitude any longer. "It's behaving too much as if you were his widow," Mopsy had told her, somewhat harshly; and then there was the task of packing, since they were to leave Mount Royal at eleven, in order to be at Launceston in time for the one o'clock train. This morning's breakfast was less silent than the dinner of yesterday. Everybody felt as if Mr. Hamleigh had been dead at least a week.

Captain Vandeleur and Mr. Montagu discussed the sad event openly, as if the time for reticence were past; speculated and argued as to how the accident could have happened; talked learnedly about guns; wondered whether the country surgeon was equal to the difficulties of the case.

"I can't understand," said Mr. Montagu, "if he was found lying in the hollow by the waterfall, how his gun came to go off. If he had been going through a hedge, or among the brushwood on the slope of the hill, it would be easy enough to see how the thing might have happened; but as it is, I'm all in the dark."

"You had better go and watch the inquest, and make yourself useful to the coroner," sneered Leonard, who had been drinking his coffee in moody silence until now. "You seem to think

yourself so uncommonly clever and far seeing."

"Well, I flatter myself I know as much about sport as most men; and I've handled a gun before to-day, and know that the worst gun that was ever made won't go off and shoot a fellow through the heart without provocation of some kind."

"Who said he was shot through the heart?"

"Somebody did – one of your people, I think."

Mrs. Tregonell sat at the other end of the table, half hidden by the large old-fashioned silver urn, and next her sat Jessie Bridgeman, a spare small figure in a close-fitting black gown, a pale drawn face with a look of burnt-out fires – pale as the crater when the volcanic forces have exhausted themselves. At a look from Christabel she rose, and they two left the room together. Five minutes later they had left the house, and were walking towards the cliff, by following which they could reach the Kieve without going down into Boscastle. It was a wild walk for a windy autumn day; but these two loved its wildness – had walked here in many a happy hour, with souls full of careless glee. Now they walked silently, swiftly, looking neither to the sea nor the land, though both were at their loveliest in the shifting lights and shadows of an exquisite October morning – sunshine enough to make one believe it was summer – breezes enough to blow about the fleecy clouds in the blue clear sky, to ripple the soft dun-coloured heather on the hillocky common, and to give life and variety to the sea.

It was a long walk; but the length of the way seemed of little

account to these two. Christabel had only the sense of a dreary monotony of grief. Time and space had lost their meaning. This dull aching sorrow was to last for ever – till the grave – broken only by brief intervals of gladness and forgetfulness with her boy.

To-day she could hardly keep this one source of consolation in her mind. All her thoughts were centred upon him who lay yonder dead.

"Jessie," she said, suddenly laying her hand on her companion's wrist, as they crossed the common above the slate-quarry, seaward of Trevalga village, with its little old church and low square tower. "Jessie, I am not going to see him."

"What weak stuff you are made of," muttered Jessie, contemptuously, turning to look into the white frightened face. "No, you are not going to look upon the dead. You would be afraid, and it might cause scandal. No, you are only going to see the place where he died; and then perhaps you, or I, will see a little further into the darkness that hides his fate. You heard how those men were puzzling their dull brains about it at breakfast. Even they can see that there is a mystery."

"What do you mean?"

"Only as much as I say. I know nothing – yet."

"But you suspect – ?"

"Yes. My mind is full of suspicion; but it is all guess-work – no shred of evidence to go upon."

They came out of a meadow into the high road presently – the pleasant rustic road which so many happy holiday-making people

tread in the sweet summer time – the way to that wild spot where England's first hero was born; the Englishman's Troy, cradle of that fair tradition out of which grew the Englishman's Iliad.

Beside the gate through which they came lay that mighty slab of spar which has been christened King Arthur's Quoit, but which the Rector of Trevalga declared to be the covering stone of a Cromlech. Christabel remembered how facetious they had all been about Arthur and his game of quoits, five years ago, in the bright autumn weather, when the leaves were blown about so lightly in the warm west wind. And now the leaves fell with a mournful heaviness, and every falling leaf seemed an emblem of death.

They went to the door of the farmhouse to get the key of the gate which leads to the Kieve. Christabel stood in the little quadrangular garden, looking up at the house, while Jessie rang and asked for what she wanted.

"Did no one except Mr. Hamleigh go to the Kieve yesterday until the men went to look for him?" she asked of the young woman who brought her the key.

"No one else, Miss. No one but him had the key. They found it in the pocket of his shooting jacket when he was brought here."

Involuntarily, Jessie put the key to her lips. His hand was almost the last that had touched it.

Just as they were leaving the garden, where the last of the yellow dahlias were fading, Christabel took Jessie by the arm, and stopped her.

"In which room is he lying?" she asked. "Can we see the window from here?"

"Yes, it is that one."

Jessie pointed to a low, latticed window in the old gray house – a casement round which myrtle and honeysuckle clung lovingly. The lattice stood open. The soft sweet air was blowing into the room, just faintly stirring the white dimity curtain. And *he* was lying there in that last ineffable repose.

They went up the steep lane, between tall tangled hedges, where the ragged robin still showed his pinky blossoms, and many a pale yellow hawksweed enlivened the faded foliage, while the ferns upon the banks, wet from yesterday's rain, still grew rankly green.

On the crest of the hill the breeze grew keener, and the dead leaves were being ripped from the hedgerows, and whirled down into the hollow, where the autumn wind seemed to follow Christabel and Jessie as they descended, with a long plaintive minor cry, like the lament at an Irish funeral. All was dark and desolate in the green valley, as Jessie unlocked the gate, and they went slowly down the steep slippery path, among moss-grown rock and drooping fern – down and down, by sharply winding ways, so narrow that they could only go one by one, till they came within the sound of the rushing water, and then down into the narrow cleft, where the waterfall tumbles into a broad shallow bed, and dribbles away among green slimy rocks.

Here there is a tiny bridge – a mere plank – that spans the

water, with a hand-rail on one side. They crossed this, and stood on the broad flat stone on the other side. This is the very heart of St. Nectan's mystery. Here, high in air, the water pierces the rock, and falls, a slender silvery column, into the rocky bed below.

"Look!" said Jessie Bridgeman, pointing down at the stone.

There were marks of blood upon it – the traces of stains which had been roughly wiped away by the men who found the body.

"This is where he stood," said Jessie, looking round, and then she ran suddenly across to the narrow path on the other side. "And some one else stood here – here – just at the end of the bridge. There are marks of other feet here."

"Those of the men who came to look for him," said Christabel.

"Yes; that makes it difficult to tell. There are the traces of many feet. Yet I know," she muttered, with clenched teeth, "that some one stood here – just here – and shot him. They were standing face to face. See!" – she stepped the bridge with light swift feet – "so! at ten paces. Don't you see?"

Christabel looked at her with a white scared face, remembering her husband's strange manner the night before last, and those parting words at Mr. Hamleigh's bedroom door. "You understand my plan?" "Perfectly." "It saves all trouble, don't you see." Those few words had impressed themselves upon her memory – insignificant as they were – because of something in the tone in which they were spoken – something in the manner of the two men.

"You mean," she said slowly, with her hand clenching the rail

of the bridge, seeking unconsciously for support; "you mean that Angus and my husband met here by appointment, and fought a duel?"

"That is my reading of the mystery."

"Here in this lonely place – without witnesses – my husband murdered him!"

"They would not count it murder. Fate might have been the other way. Your husband might have been killed."

"No!" cried Christabel, passionately; "Angus would not have killed him. That would have been too deep a dishonour!"

She stood silent for a few moments, white as death, looking round her with wide, despairing eyes.

"He has been murdered!" she said, in hoarse, faint tones. "That suspicion has been in my mind – dark – shapeless – horrible – from the first. He has been murdered! And I am to spend the rest of my life with his murderer!" Then, with a sudden hysterical cry, she turned angrily upon Jessie.

"How dare you tell lies about my husband?" she exclaimed. "Don't you know that nobody came here yesterday except Angus; no one else had the key. The girl at the farm told us so."

"The key!" echoed Jessie, contemptuously. "Do you think a gate, breast high, would keep out an athlete like your husband? Besides, there is another way of getting here, without going near the gate, where he might be seen, perhaps, by some farm labourer in the field. The men were ploughing there yesterday, and heard a shot. They told me that last night at the farm. Wait! wait!" cried

Jessie, excitedly.

She rushed away, light as a lapwing, flying across the narrow bridge – bounding from stone to stone – vanishing amidst dark autumn foliage. Christabel heard her steps dying away in the distance. Then there was an interval, of some minutes, during which Christabel, hardly caring to wonder what had become of her companion, stood clinging to the hand-rail, and staring down at stones and shingle, feathery ferns, soddened logs, the water rippling and lapping round all things, crystal clear.

Then, startled by a voice above her head, she looked up, and saw Jessie's light figure just as she dropped herself over the sharp arch of rock, and scrambled through the cleft, hanging on by her hands, finding a foothold in the most perilous places – in danger of instant death.

"My God!" murmured Christabel, with clasped hands, not daring to cry aloud lest she should increase Jessie's peril. "She will be killed."

With a nervous grip, and a muscular strength which no one could have supposed possible in so slender a frame, Jessie Bridgeman made good her descent, and stood on the shelf of slippery rock, below the waterfall, unhurt save for a good many scratches and cuts upon the hands that had clung so fiercely to root and bramble, crag and boulder.

"What I could do your husband could do," she said. "He did it often when he was a boy – you must remember his boasting of it. He did it yesterday. Look at this."

"This" was a ragged narrow shred of heather cloth, with a brick-dust red tinge in its dark warp, which Leonard had much affected this year – "Mr. Tregonell's colour, is it not?" asked Jessie.

"Yes – it is like his coat."

"Like? It is a part of his coat. I found it hanging on a bramble, at the top of the cleft. Try if you can find the coat when you get home, and see if it is not torn. But most likely he will have hidden the clothes he wore yesterday. Murderers generally do."

"How dare you call him a murderer?" said Christabel, trembling, and cold to the heart. It seemed to her as if the mild autumnal air – here in this sheltered nook which was always warmer than the rest of the world – had suddenly become an icy blast that blew straight from far away arctic seas. "How dare you call my husband a murderer?"

"Oh, I forgot. It was a duel, I suppose: a fair fight, planned so skilfully that the result should seem like an accident, and the survivor should run no risk. Still, to my mind, it was murder all the same – for I know who provoked the quarrel – yes – and you know – you, who are his wife – and who, for respectability's sake, will try to shield him – you know – for you must have seen hatred and murder in his face that night when he came into the drawing-room – and asked Mr. Hamleigh for a few words in private. It was then he planned this work," pointing to the broad level stone against which the clear water was rippling with such a pretty playful sound, while those two women stood looking at

each other with pale intent faces, fixed eyes, and tremulous lips; "and Angus Hamleigh, who valued his brief remnant of earthly life so lightly, consented – reluctantly perhaps – but too proud to refuse. And he fired in the air – yes, I know he would not have injured your husband by so much as a hair of his head – I know him well enough to be sure of that. He came here like the victim to the altar. Leonard Tregonell must have known that. And I say that though he, with his Mexican freebooter's morality, may have called it a fair fight, it was murder, deliberate, diabolical murder."

"If this is true," said Christabel in a low voice, "I will have no mercy upon him."

"Oh, yes, you will. You will sacrifice feeling to propriety, you will put a good face upon things, for the sake of your son. You were born and swaddled in the purple of respectability. You will not stir a finger to avenge the dead."

"I will have no mercy upon him," repeated Christabel, with a strange look in her eyes.

CHAPTER IV

"DUST TO DUST."

The inquest at the Wharncliffe Arms was conducted in a thoroughly respectable, unsuspecting manner. No searching questions were asked, no inferences drawn. To the farmers and tradespeople who constituted that rustic jury, the case seemed too simple to need any severe interrogation. A gentleman staying in a country house goes out shooting, and is so unlucky as to shoot himself instead of the birds whereof he went in search. He is found with an empty bag, and a charge of swan-shot through his heart.

"Hard lines," as Jack Vandeleur observed, *sotto voce*, to a neighbouring squire, while the inquest was pursuing its sleepy course, "and about the queerest fluke I ever saw on any table."

"Was it a fluke?" muttered little Montagu, lifting himself on tiptoe to watch the proceedings. He and his companions were standing among a little crowd at the door of the justice-room. "It looks to me uncommonly as if Mr. Hamleigh had shot himself. We all know he was deadly sweet on Mrs. T., although both of them behaved beautifully."

"Men have died – and worms have eaten them – but not for love," quoted Captain Vandeleur, who had a hearsay knowledge of Shakspeare, though he had never read a Shakspearian play in

his life. "If Hamleigh was so dead tired of life that he wanted to kill himself he could have done it comfortably in his own room."

"He might wish to avoid the imputation of suicide."

"Pshaw, how can any man care what comes afterwards? Bury me where four roads meet, with a stake through my body, or in Westminster Abbey under a marble monument, and the result is just the same to me."

"That's because you are an out-and-out Bohemian. But Hamleigh was a dandy in all things. He would be nice about the details of his death."

Mr. Hamleigh's valet was now being questioned as to his master's conduct and manner on the morning he left Mount Royal. The man replied that his master's manner had been exactly the same as usual. He was always very quiet – said no more than was necessary to be said. He was a kind master but never familiar. "He never made a companion of me," said the man, "though I'd been with him at home and abroad twelve years; but a better master never lived. He was always an early riser – there was nothing out of the way in his getting up at six, and going out at seven. There was only one thing at all out of the common, and that was his attending to his gun himself, instead of telling me to get it ready for him."

"Had he many guns with him?"

"Only two. The one he took was an old gun – a favourite."

"Do you know why he took swan-shot to shoot woodcocks?"

"No – unless he made a mistake in the charge. He took the

cartridges out of the case himself, and put them into his pocket. He was an experienced sportsman, though he was never as fond of sport as the generality of gentlemen."

"Do you know if he had been troubled in mind of late?"

"No; I don't think he had any trouble on his mind. He was in very bad health, and knew that he had not long to live; but he seemed quite happy and contented. Indeed, judging by what I saw of him, I should say that he was in a more easy, contented frame of mind during the last few months than he had ever been for the last four years."

This closed the examination. There had been very few witnesses called – only the medical man, the men who had found the body, the girl at the farm, who declared that she had given the key to Mr. Hamleigh a little before eight that morning, that no one else had asked for the key till the men came from Mount Royal – that, to her knowledge, no one but the men at work on the farm had gone up the lane that morning. A couple of farm labourers gave the same testimony – they had been at work in the topmost field all the morning, and no one had gone to the Kieve that way except the gentleman that was killed. They had heard a shot – or two shots – they were not certain which, fired between eight and nine. They were not very clear as to the hour, and they could not say for certain whether they heard one or two shots; but they knew that the report was a very loud one – unusually loud for a sportsman's shot.

Mr. Tregonell, although he was in the room ready to answer

any questions, was not interrogated. The jury went in a wagonette to see the body, which was still lying at the farm, and returned after a brief inspection of that peaceful clay – the countenance wearing that beautiful calm which is said to be characteristic of death from a gun-shot wound – to give their verdict.

"Death by misadventure."

The body was carried to Mount Royal after dark, and three days later there was a stately funeral, to which first cousins and second cousins of the dead came as from the four corners of the earth; for Angus Hamleigh, dying a bachelor, and leaving a handsome estate behind him, was a person to be treated with all those last honours which affectionate kindred can offer to poor humanity.

He was buried in the little churchyard in the hollow, where Christabel and he had heard the robin singing and the dull thud of the earth thrown out of an open grave in the calm autumn sunlight. Now in the autumn his own grave was dug in the same peaceful spot – in accordance with a note which his valet, who knew his habits, found in a diary.

"Oct. 11. – If I should die in Cornwall – and there are times when I feel as if death were nearer than my doctor told me at our last interview – I should like to be buried in Minster Churchyard. I have outlived all family associations, and I should like to lie in a spot which is dear to me for its own sake."

A will had been found in Mr. Hamleigh's despatch box, which receptacle was opened by his lawyer, who came from London on

purpose to take charge of any papers which his client might have in his possession at the time of his death. The bulk of his papers were no doubt in his chambers in the Albany; chambers which he had taken on coming of age; and which he had occupied at intervals ever since.

Mr. Tregonell showed himself keenly anxious that everything should be done in a strictly legal manner, and it was by his own hand that the lawyer was informed of his client's death, and invited to Mount Royal. Mr. Bryanstone, the solicitor, a thorough man of the world, and an altogether agreeable person, appeared at the Manor House two days before the funeral, and, being empowered by Mr. Tregonell to act as he pleased, sent telegrams far and wide to the dead man's kindred, who came trooping like carrion crows to the funeral feast.

Angus Hamleigh was buried in the afternoon; a mild, peaceful afternoon at the end of October, with a yellow light in the western sky, which deepened and brightened as the funeral train wound across the valley, climbed the steep street of Boscastle, and then wound slowly downwards into the green heart of the hill, to the little rustic burial place. That orb of molten gold was sinking behind the edge of the moor just when the Vicar read the last words of the funeral service. Golden and crimson gleams touched the landscape here and there, golden lights still lingered on the sea, as the mourners, so thoroughly formal and conventional for the most part – Jack Vandeleur and little Monty amidst the train with carefully-composed features – went back to their carriages.

And then the shades of evening came slowly down, and spread a dark pall over hill-side, and hedgerow, and churchyard, where there was no sound but the monotonous fall of the earth, which the gravedigger was shovelling into that new grave.

There had been no women at the funeral. Those two who, each after her own peculiar fashion, had loved the dead man, were shut in their own rooms, thinking of him, picturing, with too vivid imagery, the lowering of the coffin in the new-made grave – hearing the solemn monotony of the clergyman's voice, sounding clear in the clear air – the first shovelful of earth falling on the coffin-lid – dust to dust; dust to dust.

Lamps were lighted in the drawing-room, where the will was to be read. A large wood fire burned brightly – pleasant after the lowered atmosphere of evening. Wines and other refreshments stood on a table near the hearth; another table stood ready for the lawyer. So far as there could be, or ought to be, comfort and cheeriness on so sad an occasion, comfort and cheeriness were here. The cousins – first and second – warmed themselves before the fire, and discoursed in low murmurs of the time and the trouble it had cost them to reach this out of the way hole, and discussed the means of getting away from it. Mr. Tregonell stood on one side of the hearth, leaning his broad back heavily against the sculptured chimney piece, and listening moodily to Captain Vandeleur's muttered discourse. He had insisted upon keeping his henchman with him during this gloomy period; sending an old servant as far as Plymouth to see the Miss Vandeleurs into the

London train, rather than part with his familiar friend. Even Mr. Montagu, who had delicately hinted at departure, was roughly bidden to remain.

"I shall be going away myself in a week or so," said Mr. Tregonell. "I don't mean to spend the winter at this fag-end of creation. It will be time enough for you to go when I go."

The friends, enjoying free quarters which were excellent in their way, and having no better berths in view, freely forgave the bluntness of the invitation, and stayed. But they commented between themselves in the seclusion of the smoking room upon the Squire's disinclination to be left without cheerful company.

"He's infernally nervous, that's what it all means," said little Monty, who had all that cock-sparrowish pluck which small men are wont to possess – the calm security of insignificance. "You wouldn't suppose a great burly fellow like Tregonell, who has travelled all over the world, would be scared by a death in his house, would you?"

"Death is awful, let it come when it will," answered Jack Vandaleur, dubiously. "I've seen plenty of hard-hitting in the hill-country, but I'd go a long way to avoid seeing a strange dog die, let alone a dog I was fond of."

"Tregonell couldn't have been very fond of Hamleigh, that's certain," said Monty.

"They seemed good friends."

"Seemed; yes. But do you suppose Tregonell ever forgot that Mr. Hamleigh and his wife had once been engaged to be

married? It isn't in human nature to forget that kind of thing. And he made believe that he asked Hamleigh here to give one of your sisters a chance of getting a rich husband," said Monty, rolling up a cigarette, as he sat adroitly balanced on the arm of a large chair, and shaking his head gently, with lowered eyelids, and a cynical smile curling his thin lips. "That was a little *too* thin. He asked Hamleigh here because he was savagely jealous, and suspected his motive for turning up in this part of the country, and wanted to see how he and Mrs. Tregonell would carry on."

"Whatever he wanted, I'm sure he saw no harm in either of them," said Captain Vandeleur. "I'm as quick as any man at twigging that kind of thing, and I'll swear that it was all fair and above board with those two; they behaved beautifully."

"So they did, poor things," answered Monty, in his little purring way. "And yet Tregonell wasn't happy."

"He'd have been better pleased if Hamleigh had proposed to my sister, as he ought to have done," said Vandeleur, trying to look indignant at the memory of Dopsy's wrongs.

"Now drop that, old Van," said Monty, laughing softly and pleasantly, as he lit his cigarette, and began to smoke, dreamily, daintily, like a man for whom smoking is a fine art. "Sink your sister. As I said before, that's too thin. Dopsy is a dear little girl – one of the five or six and twenty nice girls whom I passionately adore; but she was never anywhere within range of Hamleigh. First and foremost she isn't his style, and secondly he has never got over the loss of Mrs. Tregonell. He behaved beautifully while

he was here; but he was just as much in love with her as he was four years ago, when I used to meet them at dances – a regular pair of Arcadian lovers; Daphne and Chloe, and that kind of thing. She only wanted a crook to make the picture perfect."

And now Mr. Bryanstone had hummed and hawed a little, and had put on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, and cousins near and distant ceased their conversational undertones, and seated themselves conveniently to listen.

The will was brief. "To Percy Ritherdon, Commander in Her Majesty's Navy, my first cousin and old schoolfellow, in memory of his dear mother's kindness to one who had no mother, I bequeath ten thousand pounds, and my sapphire ring, which has been an heirloom, and which I hope he will leave to any son of his whom he may call after me.

"To my servant, John Danby, five hundred pounds in consols.

"To my housekeeper in the Albany, two hundred and fifty.

"To James Bryanstone, my very kind friend and solicitor of Lincoln's Inn, my collection of gold and silver snuff-boxes, and Roman intaglios.

"All the rest of my estate, real and personal, to be vested in trustees, of whom the above-mentioned James Bryanstone shall be one, and the Rev. John Carlyon, of Trevena, Cornwall, the other, for the sole use and benefit of Leonard George Tregonell, now an infant, who shall, with his father and mother's consent, assume the name of Hamleigh after that of Tregonell upon coming of age, and I hope that his father and mother will accept

this legacy for their son in the spirit of pure friendship for them, and attachment to the boy by which it is dictated, and that they will suffer their son so to perpetuate the name of one who will die childless."

There was an awful silence – perfect collapse on the part of the cousins, the one kinsman selected for benefaction being now with his ship in the Mediterranean.

And then Leonard Tregonell rose from his seat by the fire, and came close up to the table at which Mr. Bryanstone was sitting.

"Am I at liberty to reject that legacy on my son's part?" he asked.

"Certainly not. The money is left in trust. Your son can do what he likes when he comes of age. But why should you wish to decline such a legacy – left in such friendly terms? Mr. Hamleigh was your friend."

"He was my mother's friend – for me only a recent acquaintance. It seems to me that there is a sort of indirect insult in such a bequest, as if I were unable to provide for my boy – as if I were likely to run through everything, and make him a pauper before he comes of age."

"Believe me there is no such implication," said the lawyer, smiling blandly at the look of trouble and anger in the other man's face. "Did you never hear before of money being left to a man who already has plenty? That is the general bent of all legacies. In this world it is the poor who are sent empty away," murmured Mr. Bryanstone, with a sly glance under his spectacles

at the seven blank faces of the seven cousins. "I consider that Mr. Hamleigh – who was my very dear friend – has paid you the highest compliment in his power, and that you have every reason to honour his memory."

"And legally I have no power to refuse his property?"

"Certainly not. The estate is not left to you – you have no power to touch a sixpence of it."

"And the will is dated?"

"Just three weeks ago."

"Within the first week of this visit here. He must have taken an inordinate fancy to my boy."

Mr. Bryanstone smiled to himself softly with lowered eyelids, as he folded up the will – a holograph will upon a single sheet of Bath post – witnessed by two of the Mount Royal servants. The family solicitor knew all about Angus Hamleigh's engagement to Miss Courtenay – had even received instructions for drawing the marriage settlement – but he was too much a man of the world to refer to that fact.

"Was not Mr. Hamleigh's father engaged to your mother?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then don't you think that respect for your mother may have had some influence with Mr. Hamleigh when he made your son his heir?"

"I am not going to speculate about his motives. I only wish he had left his money to an asylum for idiots – or to his cousins"

– with a glance at the somewhat vacuous countenances of the dead man's kindred, "or that I were at liberty to decline his gift – which I should do, flatly."

"This sounds as if you were prejudiced against my lamented friend. I thought you liked him."

"So I did," stammered Leonard, "but not well enough to give him the right to patronise me with his d – d legacy."

"Mr. Tregonell," said the lawyer, frowning, "I have to remind you that my late client has left you, individually, nothing – and I must add, that your language and manner are most unbefitting this melancholy occasion."

Leonard grumbled an inaudible reply, and walked back to the fireplace. The whole of this conversation had been carried on in undertones – so that the cousins who had gathered in a group upon the hearthrug, and who were for the most part absorbed in pensive reflections upon the futility of earthly hopes, heard very little of it. They belonged to that species of well-dressed nonentities, more or less impecunious, which sometimes constitute the outer fringe upon a good old family. To each of them it seemed a hard thing that Angus Hamleigh had not remembered him individually, choosing him out of the ruck of cousinship as a meet object for bounty.

"He ought to have left me an odd thousand," murmured a beardless subaltern; "he knew how badly I wanted it, for I borrowed a pony of him the last time he asked me to breakfast; and a man of good family must be very hard up when he comes

to borrowing ponies."

"I dare say you would have not demurred to making it a monkey, if Mr. Hamleigh had proposed it," said his interlocutor.

"Of course not: and if he had been generous he would have given me something handsome, instead of being so confoundedly literal as to write his cheque for exactly the amount I asked for. A man of his means and age ought to have had more feeling for a young fellow in his first season. And now I am out of pocket for my expenses to this infernal hole."

Thus, and with other wailings of an approximate character, did Angus Hamleigh's kindred make their lamentation: and then they all began to arrange among themselves for getting away as early as possible next morning – and for travelling together, with a distant idea of a little "Nap" to beguile the weariness of the way between Plymouth and Paddington. There was room enough for them all at Mount Royal, and Mr. Tregonell was not a man to permit any guests, howsoever assembled, to leave his house for the shelter of an inn; so the cousins stayed, dined heavily, smoked as furiously as those furnace chimneys which are supposed not to smoke, all the evening, and thought they were passing virtuous for refraining from the relaxation of pool, or shell-out – opining that the click of the balls might have an unholy sound so soon after a funeral. Debarred from this amusement, they discussed the career and character of the dead man, and were all agreed, in the friendliest spirit, that there had been very little in him, and that he had made a poor thing of his life, and obtained a most

inadequate amount of pleasure out of his money.

Mount Royal was clear of them all by eleven o'clock next morning. Mr. Montagu went away with them, and only Captain Vandeleur remained to bear Leonard company in a house which now seemed given over to gloom. Christabel kept her room, with Jessie Bridgeman in constant attendance upon her. She had not seen her husband since her return from the Kieve, and Jessie had told him in a few resolute words that it would not be well for them to meet.

"She is very ill," said Jessie, standing on the threshold of the room, while Leonard remained in the corridor outside. "Dr. Hayle has seen her, and he says she must have perfect quiet – no one is to worry her – no one is to talk to her – the shock she has suffered in this dreadful business has shattered her nerves."

"Why can't you say in plain words that she is grieving for the only man she ever loved," asked Leonard.

"I am not going to say that which is not true; and which you, better than any one else, know is not true. It is not Angus Hamleigh's death, but the manner of his death, which she feels. Take that to your heart, Mr. Tregonell."

"You are a viper!" said Leonard, "and you always were a viper. Tell my wife – when she is well enough to hear reason – that I am not going to be sat upon by her, or her toady; and that as she is going to spend her winter dissolved in tears for Mr. Hamleigh's death, I shall spend mine in South America, with Jack Vandeleur."

Three days later his arrangements were all made for leaving Cornwall. Captain Vandeleur was very glad to go with him, upon what he, Jack, pleasantly called "reciprocal terms," Mr. Tregonell paying all expenses as a set-off against his friend's cheerful society. There was no false pride about Poker Vandeleur; no narrow-minded dislike to being paid for. He was so thoroughly assured as to the perfect equitableness of the transaction.

On the morning he left Mount Royal, Mr. Tregonell went into the nursery to bid his son good-bye. He contrived, by some mild artifice, to send the nurse on an errand; and while she was away, strained the child to his breast, and hugged and kissed him with a rough fervour which he had never before shown. The boy quavered a little, and his lip drooped under that rough caress – and then the clear blue eyes looked up and saw that this vehemence meant love, and the chubby arms clung closely round the father's neck.

"Poor little beggar!" muttered Leonard, his eyes clouded with tears. "I wonder whether I shall ever see him again. He might die – or I – there is no telling. Hard lines to leave him for six months on end – but" – with a suppressed shudder – "I should go mad if I stayed here."

The nurse came back, and Leonard put the child on his rocking-horse, which he had left reluctantly at the father's entrance, and left the nursery without another word. In the corridor he lingered for some minutes – now staring absently at

the family portraits – now looking at the door of his wife's room. He had been occupying a bachelor room at the other end of the house since her illness.

Should he force an entrance to that closed chamber – defy Jessie Bridgeman, and take leave of his wife? – the wife whom, after the bent of his own nature, he had passionately loved. What could he say to her? Very little, in his present mood. What would she say to him? There was the rub. From that pale face – from those uplifted eyes – almost as innocent as the eyes that had looked at him just now – he shrank in absolute fear.

At the last moment, after he had put on his overcoat, and when the dog-cart stood waiting for him at the door, he sat down and scribbled a few hasty lines of farewell.

"I am told you are too ill to see me, but cannot go without one word of good-bye. If I thought you cared a rap for me, I should stay; but I believe you have set yourself against me because of this man's death, and that you will get well all the sooner for my being far away. Perhaps six months hence, when I come back again – if I don't get killed out yonder, which is always on the cards – you may have learnt to feel more kindly towards me. God knows I have loved you as well as ever man loved woman – too well for my own happiness. Good-bye. Take care of the boy; and don't let that little viper, Jessie Bridgeman, poison your mind against me."

"Leonard! are you coming to-day or to-morrow?" cried Jack Vandeleur's stentorian voice from the hall. "We shall lose the train at Launceston, if you don't look sharp."

Thus summoned, Leonard thrust his letter into an envelope, directed it to his wife, and gave it to Daniel, who was hovering about to do due honour to his master's departure – the master for whose infantine sports he had made his middle-aged back as the back of a horse, and perambulated the passages on all-fours, twenty years ago – the master who seemed but too likely to bring his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, judging by the pace at which he now appeared to be travelling along the road to ruin.

CHAPTER V

"PAIN FOR THY GIRDLE, AND SORROW UPON THY HEAD."

Now came a period of gloom and solitude at Mount Royal. Mrs. Tregonell lived secluded in her own rooms, rarely leaving them save to visit her boy in his nursery, or to go for long lonely rambles with Miss Bridgeman. The lower part of the house was given over to silence and emptiness. It was winter, and the roads were not inviting for visitors; so, after a few calls had been made by neighbours who lived within ten miles or so, and those callers had been politely informed by Daniel that his mistress was confined to her room by a severe cough, and was not well enough to see any one, no more carriages drove up the long avenue, and the lodge-keeper's place became a sinecure, save for opening the gate in the morning, and shutting it at dusk.

Mrs. Tregonell neither rode nor drove, and the horses were only taken out of their stables to be exercised by grooms and underlings. The servants fell into the way of living their own lives, almost as if they had been on board wages in the absence of the family. The good old doctor, who had attended Christabel in all her childish illnesses, came twice a week, and stayed an hour or so in the morning-room upstairs, closeted with his patient and her companion, and then looked at little Leo in his nursery,

that young creature growing and thriving exceedingly amidst the gloom and silence of the house, and awakening the echoes occasionally with bursts of baby mirth.

None of the servants knew exactly what was amiss with Mrs. Tregonell. Jessie guarded and fenced her in with such jealous care, hardly letting any other member of the household spend five minutes in her company. They only knew that she was very white, very sad-looking; that it was with the utmost difficulty she was persuaded to take sufficient nourishment to sustain life; and that her only recreation consisted in those long walks with Jessie – walks which they took in all weathers, and sometimes at the strangest hours. The people about Boscastle grew accustomed to the sight of those two solitary women, clad in dark cloth ulsters, with close-fitting felt hats, that defied wind and weather, armed with sturdy umbrellas, tramping over fields and commons, by hilly paths, through the winding valley where the stream ran loud and deep after the autumn rains, on the cliffs above the wild grey sea – always avoiding as much as possible all beaten tracks, and the haunts of mankind. Those who did meet the two reported that there was something strange in the looks and ways of both. They did not talk to each other as most ladies talked, to beguile the way: they marched on in silence – the younger, fairer face pale as death and inexpressibly sad, and with a look as of one who walks in her sleep, with wide-open, unseeing eyes.

"She looks just like a person who might walk over the cliff, if there was no one by to take care of her," said Mrs. Penny,

the butcher's wife, who had met them one day on her way home from Camelford Market; "but Miss Bridgeman, she do take such care, and she do watch every step of young Mrs. Tregonell's" – Christabel was always spoken of as young Mrs. Tregonell by those people who had known her aunt. "I'm afraid the poor dear lady has gone a little wrong in her head since Mr. Hamleigh shot himself; and there are some as do think he shot himself for her sake, never having got over her marrying our Squire."

On many a winter evening, when the sea ran high and wild at the foot of the rocky promontory, and overhead a wilder sky seemed like another tempestuous sea inverted, those two women paced the grass-grown hill at Tintagel, above the nameless graves, among the ruins of prehistorical splendour.

They were not always silent, as they walked slowly to and fro among the rank grass, or stood looking at those wild waves which came rolling in like solid walls of shining black water, to burst into ruin with a thunderous roar against the everlasting rocks. They talked long and earnestly in this solitude, and in other solitary spots along that wild and varied coast; but none but themselves ever knew what they talked about, or what was the delight and relief which they found in the dark grandeur of that winter sky and sea. And so the months crept by, in a dreary monotony, and it was spring once more; all the orchards full of bloom – those lovely little orchards of Alpine Boscastle, here nestling in the deep gorge, there hanging on the edge of the hill. The gardens were golden with daffodils, tulips, narcissus, jonquil

– that rich variety of yellow blossoms which come in early spring, like a floral sunrise – and the waves ran gently into the narrow inlet between the tall cliffs. But those two lonely women were no longer seen roaming over the hills, or sitting down to rest in some sheltered corner of Pentargon Bay. They had gone to Switzerland, taking the nurse and baby with them, and were not expected to return to Mount Royal till the autumn.

Mr. Tregonell's South American wanderings had lasted longer than he had originally contemplated. His latest letters – brief scrawls, written at rough resting-places – announced a considerable extension of his travels. He and his friend were following in the footsteps of Mr. Whympier, on the Equatorial Andes, the backbone of South America. Dopsy and Mopsy were moping in the dusty South Belgravian lodging-house, nursing their invalid father, squabbling with their landlady, cutting, contriving, straining every nerve to make sixpences go as far as shillings, and only getting outside glimpses of the world of pleasure and gaiety, art and fashion, in their weary trappings up and down the dusty pathways of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens.

They had written three or four times to Mrs. Tregonell, letters running over with affection, fondly hoping for an invitation to Mount Royal; but the answers had been in Jessie Bridgeman's hand, and the last had come from Zurich, which seemed altogether hopeless. They had sent Christmas cards and New Year's cards, and had made every effort, compatible with their

limited means, to maintain the links of friendship.

"I wish we could afford to send her a New Year's gift, or a toy for that baby," said Mopsy, who was not fond of infants. "But what could we send her that she would care for, when she has everything in this world that is worth having. And we could not get a toy, which that pampered child would think worth looking at, under a sovereign," concluded Mop, with a profound sigh.

And so the year wore on, dry, and dreary, and dusty for the two girls, whose only friends were the chosen few whom their brother made known to them – friends who naturally dropped out of their horizon in Captain Vandeleur's absence.

"What a miserable summer it has been," said Dopsy, yawning and stretching in her tawdry morning gown – one of last year's high-art tea gowns – and surveying with despondent eye the barren breakfast-table, where two London eggs, and the remains of yesterday's loaf, flanked by a nearly empty marmalade pot, comprised all the temptations of the flesh. "What a wretched summer – hot, and sultry, and thundery, and dusty – the cholera raging in Chelsea, and measles only divided from us by Lambeth Bridge! And we have not been to a single theatre."

"Or tasted a single French dinner."

"Or been given a single pair of gloves."

"Hark!" cried Mopsy, "it's the postman," and she rushed into the passage, too eager to await the maid-of-all-work's slipshod foot.

"What's the good of exciting oneself?" murmured Dopsy, with

another stretch of long thin arms above a towzled head. "Of course it's only a bill, or a lawyer's letter for pa."

Happily it was neither of these unpleasantnesses which the morning messenger had brought, but a large vellum envelope, with the address, Mount Royal, in old English letters above the small neat seal: and the hand which had directed the envelope was Christabel Tregonell's.

"At last she has condescended to write to me with her own hand," said Dopsy, to whom, as Miss Vandeleur, the letter was addressed. "But I dare say it's only a humbugging note. I know she didn't really like us: we are not her style."

"How should we be?" exclaimed Mopsy, whom the languid influences of a sultry August had made ill-humoured and cynical. "*She* was not brought up in the gutter."

"Mopsy," cried her sister, with a gasp of surprise and delight, "it's an invitation!"

"What?"

"Listen —

"Dear Miss Vandeleur, —

"We have just received a telegram from Buenos Ayres. Mr. Tregonell and Captain Vandeleur leave that port for Plymouth this afternoon, and will come straight from Plymouth here. I think you would both wish to meet your brother on his arrival; and I know Mr. Tregonell is likely to want to keep him here for some time. Will you, therefore, come to us early next week, so as to be here to welcome

the travellers?

"Very sincerely yours,

"Christabel Tregonell."

"This is too delicious," exclaimed Dopsy. "But however are we to find the money for the journey? And our clothes – what a lot we shall have to do to our clothes. If we only had credit at a good draper's."

"Suppose we were to try our landlady's plan, for once in a way," suggested Mopsy, faintly, "and get a few things from that man near Drury Lane who takes weekly instalments."

"What, the Tallyman?" screamed Dopsy. "No, I would rather be dressed like a South Sea Islander. It's not only the utter lowness of the thing; but the man's goods are never like anybody else's. The colours and materials seem invented on purpose for him."

"That might pass for high art."

"Well, they're ugly enough even for that; but it's not the right kind of ugliness."

"After all," answered Mopsy, "we have no more chance of paying weekly than we have of paying monthly or quarterly. Nothing under three years' credit would be any use to *us*. Something might happen – Fortune's wheel might turn in three years."

"Whenever it does turn it will be the wrong way, and we shall be under it," said Dopsy, still given over to gloom.

It was very delightful to be invited to a fine old country house;

but it was bitter to know that one must go there but half provided with those things which civilization have made a necessity.

"How happy those South Sea Islanders must be," sighed Mopsy, pensively meditating upon the difference between wearing nothing, and having nothing to wear.

CHAPTER VI

"I WILL HAVE NO MERCY ON HIM."

The Buenos Ayres steamer was within sight of land – English land. Those shining lights yonder were the twin lanterns of the Lizard. Leonard and his friend paced the bridge smoking their cigars, and looking towards that double star which shone out as one light in the distance; and thinking that they were going back to civilization – conventional habits – a world which must seem cramped and narrow – not much better than the squirrel's cage seems to the squirrel – after the vast width and margin of that wilder, freer world they had just left – where men and women were not much more civilized than the unbroken horses that were brought out struggling, and roped in among a team of older stagers, to be dragged along anyhow for the first mile or so, rebellious, and wondering, and to fall in with the necessities of the case somehow before the stage was done.

There was no thrill of patriotic rapture in the breast of either traveller as he watched yonder well-known light brightening on the dark horizon. Leonard had left his country too often to feel any deep emotion at returning to it. He had none of those strong feelings which mark a man as the son of the soil, and make it seem to him that he belongs to one spot of earth, and can

neither live nor die happily anywhere else. The entire globe was his country, a world created for him to roam about in, climbing all its hills, shooting in all its forests, fishing in all its rivers, exhausting all the sport and amusement that was to be had out of it – and with no anchor to chain him down to any given spot. Yet, though he had none of the deep feeling of the exile returning to the country of his birth, he was not without emotion as he saw the Lizard light broadening and yellowing under the pale beams of a young moon. He was thinking of his wife – the wife whose face he had not seen since that gloomy morning at Mount Royal, when she sat pale and calm in her place at the head of his table – maintaining her dignity as the mistress of his house, albeit he knew her heart was breaking. From the hour of her return from the Kieve, they had been parted. She had kept her room, guarded by Jessie; and he had been told, significantly, that it was not well they should meet.

How would she receive him now? What were her thoughts and feelings about that dead man? The man whom she had loved and he had hated: not only because his wife loved him – though that reason was strong enough for hatred – but because the man was in every attribute so much his own superior. Never had Leonard Tregonell felt such keen anxiety as he felt now, when he speculated upon his wife's greeting – when he tried to imagine how they two would feel and act standing face to face after nearly a year of severance.

The correspondence between them had been of the slightest.

For the first six months his only home-letters had been from Miss Bridgeman – curt, business-like communications – telling him of his boy's health and general progress, and of any details about the estate which it was his place to be told. Of Christabel she wrote as briefly as possible. "Mrs. Tregonell is a little better." "Mrs. Tregonell is gradually regaining strength." "The doctor considers Mrs. Tregonell much improved," and so on.

Later there had been letters from Christabel – letters written in Switzerland – in which the writer confined herself almost entirely to news of the boy's growth and improvement, and to the particulars of their movements from one place to another – letters which gave not the faintest indication of the writer's frame of mind: as devoid of sentiment as an official communication from one legation to another.

He was going back to Mount Royal therefore in profound ignorance of his wife's feelings – whether he would be received with smiles or frowns, with tears or sullen gloom. Albeit not of a sensitive nature, this uncertainty made him uncomfortable, and he looked at yonder faint grey shore – the peaks and pinnacles of that wild western coast – without any of those blissful emotions which the returning wanderer always experiences – in poetry.

Plymouth, however, where they went ashore next morning, seemed a very enjoyable place after the cities of South America. It was not so picturesque a town, nor had it that rowdy air and dissipated flavour which Mr. Tregonell appreciated in the cities of the South; but it had a teeming life and perpetual movement,

which were unknown on the shores of the Pacific; the press and hurry of many industries – the steady fervour of a town where wealth is made by honest labour – the intensity of a place which is in somewise the cradle of naval warfare. Mr. Tregonell breakfasted and lunched at the Duke of Cornwall, strolled on the Hoe, played two or three games on the first English billiard-table he had seen for a year, and found a novel delight in winners and losers.

An afternoon train took the travellers on to Launceston, where the Mount Royal wagonette, and a cart for the luggage, were waiting for them at the station.

"Everything right at the Mount?" asked Leonard, as Nicholls touched his hat.

"Yes, Sir."

He asked for no details, but took the reins from Nicholls without another word. Captain Vandeleur jumped up by his side, Nicholls got in at the back, with a lot of the smaller luggage – gun-cases, dressing-bags, despatch-boxes – and away they went up the castle hill, and then sharp round to the right, and off at a dashing pace along the road to the moor. It was a two hours' drive even for the best goers; but Mr. Tregonell spoke hardly a dozen times during the journey, smoking all the way, and with his eyes always on his horses.

At last they wound up the hill to Mount Royal, and passed the lodge, and saw all the lights of the old wide-spreading Tudor front shining upon them through the thickening grey of early evening.

"A good old place, isn't it?" said Leonard, just a little moved at sight of the house in which he had been born. "A man might come home to a worse shelter."

"This man might come home to lodgings in Chelsea," said Jack Vandeleur, touching himself lightly on the breast, with a grim laugh. "It's a glorious old place, and you needn't apologize for being proud of it. And now we've come back, I hope you are going to be jolly, for you've been uncommonly glum while we've been away. The house looks cheerful, doesn't it? I should think it must be full of company."

"Not likely," answered Leonard. "Christabel never cared about having people. We should have lived like hermits if she had had her way."

"Then if the house isn't full of people, all I can say is there's a good deal of candlelight going to waste," said Captain Vandeleur.

They were driving up to the porch by this time; the door stood wide open; servants were on the watch for them. The hall was all aglow with light and fire; people were moving about near the hearth. It was a relief to Leonard to see this life and brightness. He had feared to find a dark and silent house – a melancholy welcome – all things still in mourning for the untimely dead.

A ripple of laughter floated from the hall as Leonard drew up his horses, and two tall slim figures with fluffy heads, short-waisted gowns, and big sashes, came skipping down the broad shallow steps.

"My sisters, by Jove," cried Jack, delighted. "How awfully

jolly of Mrs. Tregonell to invite them."

Leonard's only salutation to the damsels was a friendly nod. He brushed by them as they grouped themselves about their brother – like a new edition of Laocoon without the snakes, or the three Graces without the grace – and hurried into the hall, eager to be face to face with his wife. She came forward to meet him, looking her loveliest, dressed as he had never seen her dressed before, with a style, a *chic*, and a daring more appropriate to the Théâtre Français than to a Cornish squire's house. She who, even in the height of the London season, had been simplicity itself, recalling to those who most admired her, the picture of that chaste and unworldly maiden who dwelt beside the Dove, now wore an elaborate costume of brown velvet and satin, in which a Louis Quinze velvet coat, with large cut-steel buttons and Mechlin *jabot*, was the most striking feature. Her fair, soft hair was now fluffy, and stood up in an infinity of frizzy curls from the broad white forehead. Diamond solitaires flashed in her ears, her hands glittered with the rainbow light of old family rings, which in days gone by she had been wont to leave in the repose of an iron safe. The whole woman was changed. She came to meet her husband with a Society smile; shook hands with him as if he had been a commonplace visitor – he was too startled to note the death-like coldness of that slender hand – and welcomed him with a conventional inquiry about his passage from Buenos Ayres.

He stood transfixed – overwhelmed by surprise. The room was

full of people. There was Mrs. Fairfax Torrington, liveliest and most essentially modern of well-preserved widows, always *dans le mouvement*, as she said of herself; and there, lolling against the high oak chimney-piece, with an air of fatuous delight in his own attractiveness, was that Baron de Cazalet – pseudo artist, poet, and *littérateur*, who, five seasons ago, had been an object of undisguised detestation with Christabel. He, too, was essentially in the movement – æsthetic, cynical, agnostic, thought-reading, spiritualistic – always blowing the last fashionable bubble, and making his bubbles bigger and brighter than other people's – a man who prided himself upon his "intensity" in every pursuit – from love-making to gourmandize. There, again, marked out from the rest by a thoroughly prosaic air, which, in these days of artistic sensationalism is in itself a distinction – pale, placid, taking his ease in a low basket chair, with his languid hand on Randie's black muzzle – sat Mr. FitzJesse, the journalist, proprietor and editor of *The Sling*, a fashionable weekly – the man who was always smiting the Goliaths of pretence and dishonesty with a pen that was sharper than any stone that ever David slung against the foe. He was such an amiable-looking man – had such a power of obliterating every token of intellectual force and fire from the calm surface of his countenance, that people, seeing him for the first time, were apt to stare at him in blank wonder at his innocent aspect. Was this the wielder of that scathing pen – was this the man who wrote not with ink but with aqua fortis? Even his placid matter-of-fact speech was, at

first, a little disappointing. It was only by gentlest degrees that the iron hand of satire made itself felt under the velvet glove of conventional good manners. Leonard had met Mr. FitzJesse in London, at the clubs and elsewhere, and had felt that vague awe which the provincial feels for the embodied spirit of metropolitan intellect in the shape of a famous journalist. It was needful to be civil to such men, in order to be let down gently in their papers. One never knew when some rash unpremeditated act might furnish matter for a paragraph which would mean social annihilation.

There were other guests grouped about the fireplace – little Monty, the useful and good-humoured country-house hack; Colonel Blathwayt, of the Kildare Cavalry, a noted amateur actor, reciter, waltzer, spirit-rapper, invaluable in a house full of people – a tall, slim-waisted man, who rode nine stone, and at forty contrived to look seven-and-twenty; the Rev. St. Bernard Faddie, an Anglican curate, who carried Ritualism to the extremest limit consistent with the retention of his stipend as a minister of the Church of England, and who was always at loggerheads with some of his parishioners. There were Mr. and Mrs. St. Aubyn and their two daughters – county people, with loud voices, horsey, and doggy, and horticultural – always talking garden, when they were not talking stable or kennel. These were neighbours for whom Christabel had cared very little in the past. Leonard was considerably astonished at finding them domiciled at Mount Royal.

"And you had a nice passage," said his wife, smiling at her lord. "Will you have some tea?"

It seemed a curious kind of welcome to a husband after a year's absence; but Leonard answered feebly that he would take a cup of tea. One of the numerous tea-tables had been established in a corner near the fire, and Miss Bridgeman, in neat grey silk and linen collar, as of old, was officiating, with Mr. Faddie in attendance, to distribute the cups.

"No tea, thanks," said Jack Vandeleur, coming in with his sisters still entwined about him, still faintly suggestive of that poor man and the sea-serpents. "Would it be too dreadful if I were to suggest S. & B.?"

Jessie Bridgeman touched a spring bell on the tea-table, and gave the required order. There was a joviality, a *laissez-aller* in the air of the place, with which soda and brandy seemed quite in harmony. Everything in the house seemed changed to Leonard's eye; and yet the furniture, the armour, the family portraits, brown and indistinguishable in this doubtful light, were all the same. There were no flowers about in tubs or on tables. That subtle grace – as of a thoughtful woman's hand ruling and arranging everything, artistic even where seeming most careless – was missing. Papers, books were thrown anyhow upon the tables; whips, carriage-rugs, wraps, hats, encumbered the chairs near the door. Half-a-dozen dogs – pointers, setters, collie – sprawled or prowled about the room. In nowise did his house now resemble the orderly mansion which his mother had ruled so

long, and which his wife had maintained upon exactly the same lines after her aunt's death. He had grumbled at what he called a silly observance of his mother's fads. The air of the house was now much more in accordance with his own view of life, and yet the change angered as much as it perplexed him.

"Where's the boy?" he asked, exploring the hall and its occupants, with a blank stare.

"In his nursery. Where should he be?" exclaimed Christabel, lightly.

"I thought he would have been with you. I thought he might have been here to bid me welcome home."

He had made a picture in his mind, almost involuntarily, of the mother and child – she, calm and lovely as one of Murillo's Madonnas, with the little one on her knee. There was no vein of poetry in his nature, yet unconsciously the memory of such pictures had associated itself with his wife's image. And instead of that holy embodiment of maternal love, there flashed and sparkled before him this brilliant woman, with fair fluffy hair, and Louis Quinze coat, all a glitter with cut-steel.

"Home!" echoed Christabel, mockingly; "how sentimental you have grown. I've no doubt the boy will be charmed to see you, especially if you have brought him some South American toys; but I thought it would bore you to see him before you had dined. He shall be on view in the drawing-room before dinner, if you would really like to see him so soon."

"Don't trouble," said Leonard, curtly; "I can find my way to

the nursery."

He went upstairs without another word, leaving his friend Jack seated in the midst of the cheerful circle, drinking soda water and brandy, and talking of their adventures upon the backbone of South America.

"Delicious country!" said de Cazalet, who talked remarkably good English, with just the faintest Hibernian accent. "I have ridden over every inch of it. Ah, Mrs. Tregonell, that is the soil for poetry and adventure; a land of extinct volcanoes. If Byron had known the shores of the Amazon, he would have struck a deeper note of passion than any that was ever inspired by the Dardanelles or the Bosphorus. Sad that so grand a spirit should have pined in the prison-house of a worn-out world."

"I have always understood that Byron got some rather strong poetry out of Switzerland and Italy," murmured Mr. FitzJesse, meekly.

"Weak and thin to what he might have written had he known the Pampas," said the Baron.

"You have done the Pampas?" said Mr. FitzJesse.

"I have lived amongst wild horses, and wilder humanity, for months at a stretch."

"And you have published a volume of – verses?"

"Another of my youthful follies. But I do not place myself upon a level with Byron."

"I should if I were you," said Mr. FitzJesse. "It would be an original idea – and in an age marked by a total exhaustion of

brain-power, an original idea is a pearl of price."

"What kind of dogs did you see in your travels?" asked Emily St. Aubyn, a well-grown upstanding young woman, in a severe tailor-gown of undyed homespun.

"Two or three very fine breeds of mongrels."

"I adore mongrels!" exclaimed Mopsy. "I think that kind of dog which belongs to no particular breed, which has been ill-used by London boys, and which follows one to one's doorstep, is the most faithful and intelligent of the whole canine race. Huxley may exalt Blenheim spaniels as the nearest thing to human nature; but my dog Tim, which is something between a lurcher, a collie, and a bull, is ever so much better than human nature."

"The Blenheim is greedy, luxurious, and lazy, and generally dies in middle life from the consequences of over-feeding," drawled Mr. FitzJesse. "I don't think Huxley is very far out."

"I would back a Cornish sheep-dog against any animal in creation," said Christabel, patting Randie, who was standing amiably on end, with his fore-paws on the cushioned elbow of her chair. "Do you know that these dogs smile when they are pleased, and cry when they are grieved – and they will mourn for a master with a fidelity unknown in humanity."

"Which as a rule does not mourn," said FitzJesse. "It only goes into mourning."

And so the talk went on, always running upon trivialities – glancing from theme to theme – a mere battledore and

shuttlecock conversation – making a mock of most things and most people. Christabel joined in it all; and some of the bitterest speech that was spoken in that hour before the sounding of the seven o'clock gong, fell from her perfect lips.

"Did you ever see such a change in any one as in Mrs. Tregonell?" asked Dopsy of Mopsy, as they elbowed each other before the looking-glass, the first armed with a powder puff, the second with a little box containing the implements required for the production of piquant eyebrows.

"A wonderful improvement," answered Mopsy. "She's ever so much easier to get on with. I didn't think it was in her to be so thoroughly *chic*."

"Do you know, I really liked her better last year, when she was frumpy and dowdy," faltered Dopsy. "I wasn't able to get on with her, but I couldn't help looking up to her, and feeling that, after all, she was the right kind of woman. And now – "

"And now she condescends to be human – to be one of us – and the consequence is that her house is three times as nice as it was last year," said Mopsy, turning the corner of an eyebrow with a bold but careful hand, and sending a sharp elbow into Dopsy's face during the operation.

"I wish you'd be a little more careful," ejaculated Dopsy.

"I wish you'd contrive not to want the glass exactly when I do," retorted Mopsy.

"How do you like the French Baron?" asked Dopsy, when a brief silence had restored her equanimity.

"French, indeed! He is no more French than I am. Mr. FitzJesse told me that he was born and brought up in Jersey – that his father was an Irish Major on half-pay, and his mother a circus rider."

"But how does he come by his title – if it is a real title?"

"FitzJesse says the title is right enough. One of his father's ancestors came to the South of Ireland after the revocation of something – a treaty at Nancy – I think he said. He belonged to an old Huguenot family – those people who were massacred in the opera, don't you know – and the title had been allowed to go dead – till this man married a tremendously rich Sheffield cutler's daughter, and bought the old estate in Provence, and got himself enrolled in the French peerage. Romantic, isn't it?"

"Very. What became of the Sheffield cutler's daughter?"

"She drank herself to death two years after her marriage. FitzJesse says they both lived upon brandy, but she hadn't been educated up to it, and it killed her."

"A curious kind of man for Mrs. Tregonell to invite here. Not quite good style."

"Perhaps not – but he's very amusing."

Leonard spent half an hour with his son. The child had escaped from babyhood in the year that had gone. He was now a bright sentient creature, eager to express his thoughts – to gather knowledge – an active, vivacious being, full of health and energy. Whatever duties Christabel had neglected during her husband's absence, the boy had, at least, suffered no neglect. Never had

childhood developed under happier conditions. The father could find no fault in the nursery, though there was a vague feeling in his mind that everything was wrong at Mount Royal.

"Why the deuce did she fill the house with people while I was away," he muttered to himself, in the solitude of his dressing-room, where his clothes had been put ready for him, and candles lighted by his Swiss valet. The dressing-room was at that end of the corridor most remote from Christabel's apartments. It communicated with the room Leonard had slept in during his boyhood – and that opened again into his gun-room.

The fact that these rooms had been prepared for him told him plainly enough that he and his wife were henceforth to lead divided lives. The event of last October, his year of absence, had built up a wall between them which he, for the time being at least, felt himself powerless to knock down.

"Can she suspect – can she know" – he asked himself, pausing in his dressing to stand staring at the fire, with moody brow and troubled eyes. "No, that's hardly possible. And yet her whole manner is changed. She holds me at a distance. Every look, every tone just now was a defiance. Of course I know that she loved that man – loved him first – last – always; never caring a straw for me. She was too careful of herself – had been brought up too well to go wrong, like other women – but she loved him. I would never have brought him inside these doors if I had not known that she could take care of herself. I tested and tried her to the uttermost – and – well – I took my change out of him."

Mr. Tregonell dressed himself a little more carefully than he was wont to dress – thinking for the most part that anything which suited him was good enough for his friends – and went down to the drawing-room, feeling like a visitor in a strange house, half inclined to wonder how he would be received by his wife and his wife's guests. He who had always ruled supreme in that house, choosing his visitors for his own pleasure – subjugating all tastes and habits of other people to his own convenience, now felt as if he were only there on sufferance.

It was early when he entered the drawing-room, and the Baron de Cazalet was the only occupant of that apartment. He was standing in a lounging attitude, with his back against the mantelpiece, and his handsome person set off by evening dress. That regulation costume does not afford much scope to the latent love of finery which still lurks in the civilized man, as if to prove his near relationship to the bead and feather-wearing savage – but de Cazalet had made himself as gorgeous as he could with jewelled studs, embroidered shirt, satin under-waistcoat, amber silk stockings, and Queen Ann shoes. He was assuredly handsome – but he had just that style of beauty which to the fastidious mind is more revolting than positive ugliness. Dark-brown eyes, strongly arched eyebrows, an aquiline nose, a sensual mouth, a heavy jaw, a faultless complexion of the French plum-box order, large regular teeth of glittering whiteness, a small delicately trained moustache with waxed ends, and hair of oily sheen, odorous of *pommade divine*, made up the catalogue of his

charms. Leonard stood looking at him doubtfully, as if he were a hitherto unknown animal.

"Where did my wife pick him up, and why?" he asked himself. "I should have thought he was just the kind of man she would detest."

"How glad you must be to get back to your Lares and Penates," said the Baron, smiling blandly.

"I'm uncommonly glad to get back to my horses and dogs," answered Leonard, flinging himself into a large armchair by the fire, and taking up a newspaper. "Have you been long in the West?"

"About a fortnight, but I have been only three days at Mount Royal. I had the honour to renew my acquaintance with Mrs. Tregonell last August at Zermatt, and she was good enough to say that if I ever found myself in this part of the country she would be pleased to receive me in her house. I needn't tell you that with such a temptation in view I was very glad to bend my steps westward. I spent ten days on board a friend's yacht, between Dartmouth and the Lizard, landed at Penzance last Tuesday, and posted here, where I received a more than hospitable welcome."

"You are a great traveller, I understand?"

"I doubt if I have done as much as you have in that way. I have seldom travelled for the sake of travelling. I have lived in the tents of the Arabs. I have bivouacked on the Pampas – and enjoyed life in all the cities of the South, from Valparaiso to Carthagen; but I can boast no mountaineering exploits or scientific discoveries

– and I never read a paper at the Geographical."

"You look a little too fond of yourself for mountaineering," said Leonard, smiling grimly at the Baron's portly figure, and all-pervading sleekness.

"Well – yes – I like a wild life – but I have no relish for absolute hardship – the thermometer below zero, a doubtful supply of provisions, pemmican, roasted skunk for supper, without any currant jelly – no, I love mine ease at mine Inn."

He threw out his fine expanse of padded chest and shoulders, and surveyed the spacious lamp-lit room with an approving smile. This no doubt was the kind of Inn at which he loved to take his ease – a house full of silly women, ready to be subjugated by his florid good looks and shallow accomplishments.

The ladies now came straggling in – first Emily St. Aubyn, and then Dopsy, whose attempts at conversation were coldly received by the county maiden. Dopsy's and Mopsy's home-made gowns, cheap laces and frillings, and easy flippancy were not agreeable to the St. Aubyn sisters. It was not that the St. Aubyn manners, which always savoured of the stable and farmyard, were more refined or elegant; but the St. Aubyns arrogated to themselves the right to be vulgar, and resented free-and-easy manners in two young persons who were obviously poor and obviously obscure as to their surroundings. If their gowns had been made by a West End tailor, and they had been able to boast of intimate acquaintance with a duchess and two or three countesses, their flippancy might have been tolerable, nay, even

amusing, to the two Miss St. Aubyns; but girls who went nowhere and knew nobody, had no right to attempt smartness of speech, and deserved to be sat upon.

To Dopsy succeeded Mopsy, then some men, then Mrs. St. Aubyn and her younger daughter Clara, then Mrs. Tregonell, in a red gown draped with old Spanish lace, and with diamond stars in her hair, a style curiously different from those quiet dinner dresses she had been wont to wear a year ago. Leonard looked at her in blank amazement – just as he had looked at their first meeting. She, who had been like the violet sheltering itself among its leaves, now obviously dressed for effect, and as obviously courted admiration.

The dinner was cheerful to riotousness. Everybody had something to say; anecdotes were told, and laughter was frequent and loud. The St. Aubyn girls, who had deliberately snubbed the sisters Vandeleur, were not above conversing with the brother, and, finding him a kindred spirit in horseyness and doggyness, took him at once into their confidence, and were on the friendliest terms before dinner was finished. De Czalet sat next his hostess, and talked exclusively to her. Mr. FitzJesse had Miss Bridgeman on his left hand, and conversed with her in gentle murmurs, save when in his quiet voice, and with his seeming-innocent smile, he told some irresistibly funny story – some touch of character seen with a philosophic eye – for the general joy of the whole table. Very different was the banquet of to-day from that quiet dinner on the first night of Mr. Hamleigh's visit to

Mount Royal, that dinner at which Leonard watched his wife so intensely, eager to discover to what degree she was affected by the presence of her first lover. He watched her to-night, at the head of her brilliantly lighted dinner-table – no longer the old subdued light of low shaded lamps, but the radiance of innumerable candles in lofty silver candelabra, shining over a striking decoration of vivid crimson asters and spreading palm-leaves – he watched her helplessly, hopelessly, knowing that he and she were ever so much farther apart than they had been in the days before he brought Angus Hamleigh to Mount Royal, those miserable discontented days when he had fretted himself into a fever of jealousy and vague suspicion, and had thought to find a cure by bringing the man he feared and hated into his home, so that he might know for certain how deep the wrong was which this man's very existence seemed to inflict upon him. To bring those two who had loved and parted face to face, to watch and listen, to fathom the thoughts of each – that had been the process natural and congenial to his jealous temper; but the result had been an uncomfortable one. And now he saw his wife, whose heart he had tried to break – hating her because he had failed to make her love him – just as remote and unapproachable as of old.

"What a fool I was to marry her," he thought, after replying somewhat at random to Mrs. St. Aubyn's last remark upon the superiority of Dorkings to Spaniards from a culinary point of view. "It was my determination to have my own way that wrecked me. I couldn't submit to be conquered by a girl – to have the wife

I had set my heart upon when I was a boy, stolen from me by the first effeminate fopling my silly mother invited to Mount Royal. I had never imagined myself with any other woman for my wife – never really cared for any other woman."

This was the bent of Mr. Tregonell's reflections as he sat in his place at that animated assembly, adding nothing to its mirth, or even to its noise; albeit in the past his voice had ever been loudest, his laugh most resonant. He felt more at his ease after dinner, when the women had left – the brilliant de Cazalet slipping away soon after them, although not until he had finished his host's La Rose – and when Mr. St. Aubyn expanded himself in county talk, enlightening the wanderer as to the progress of events during his absence – while Mr. FitzJesse sat blandly puffing his cigarette, a silent observer of the speech and gestures of the county magnate, speculating, from a scientific point of view, as to how much of this talk were purely automatic – an inane drivel which would go on just the same if half the Squire's brain had been scooped out. Jack Vandeleur smoked and drank brandy and water, while little Monty discoursed to him, in confidential tones, upon the racing year which was now expiring at Newmarket – the men who had made pots of money, and the men who had been beggared for life. There seemed to be no medium between those extremes.

When the host rose, Captain Vandeleur was for an immediate adjournment to billiards, but to his surprise, Leonard walked off to the drawing-room.

"Aren't you coming?" asked Jack, dejectedly.

"Not to-night. I have been too long away from feminine society not to appreciate the novelty of an evening with ladies. You and Monty can have the table to yourselves, unless Mr. FitzJesse – "

"I never play," replied the gentle journalist; "but I rather like sitting in a billiard-room and listening to the conversation of the players. It is always so full of ideas."

Captain Vandeleur and Mr. Montagu went their way, and the other men repaired to the drawing-room, whence came the sound of the piano, and the music of a rich baritone, trolling out a popular air from the most fashionable opera-bouffe – that one piece which all Paris was bent upon hearing at the same moment, whereby seats in the little boulevard theatre were selling at a ridiculous premium.

De Cazalet was singing to Mrs. Tregonell's accompaniment – a *patois* song, with a refrain which would have been distinctly indecent, if the tails of all the words had not been clipped off, so as to reduce the language to mild idiocy.

"The kind of song one could fancy being fashionable in the decline of the Roman Empire," said FitzJesse, "when Apuleius was writing his 'Golden Ass,' don't you know."

After the song came a duet from "Traviata," in which Christabel sang with a dramatic power which Leonard never remembered to have heard from her before. The two voices harmonized admirably, and there were warm expressions of delight from the listeners.

"Very accomplished man, de Cazalet," said Colonel Blathwayt; "uncommonly useful in a country house – sings, and plays, and recites, and acts – rather puffy and short-winded in his elocution – if he were a horse one would call him a roarer – but always ready to amuse. Quite an acquisition."

"Who is he?" asked Leonard, looking glum. "My wife picked him up in Switzerland, I hear – that is to say, he seems to have made himself agreeable – or useful – to Mrs. Tregonell and Miss Bridgeman; and, in a moment of ill-advised hospitality, my wife asked him here. Is he received anywhere? Does anybody know anything about him?"

"He is received in a few houses – rich houses where the hostess goes in for amateur acting and *tableaux vivants*, don't you know; and people know a good deal about him – nothing actually to his detriment. The man was a full-blown adventurer when he had the good luck to get hold of a rich wife. He pays his way now, I believe; but the air of the adventurer hangs round him still. A man of Irish parentage – brought up in Jersey. What can you expect of him?"

"Does he drink?"

"Like a fish – but his capacity to drink is only to be estimated by cubic space – the amount he can hold. His brain and constitution have been educated up to alcohol. Nothing can touch him further."

"Colonel Blathwayt, we want you to give us the 'Wonderful One-Horse Shay,' and after that, the Baron is going to recite

'James Lee's Wife,' said Mrs. Tregonell, while her guests ranged themselves into an irregular semicircle, and the useful Miss Bridgeman placed a *prie-dieu* chair in a commanding position for the reciter to lean upon gracefully, or hug convulsively in the more energetic passages of his recitation.

"Everybody seems to have gone mad," thought Mr. Tregonell, as he seated himself and surveyed the assembly, all intent and expectant.

His wife sat near the piano with de Cazalet bending over her, talking in just that slightly lowered voice which gives an idea of confidential relations, yet may mean no more than a vain man's desire to appear the accepted worshipper of a beautiful woman. Never had Leonard seen Angus Hamleigh's manner so distinctively attentive as was the air of this Hibernian adventurer.

"Just the last man whose attentions I should have supposed she would tolerate," thought Leonard; "but any garbage is food for a woman's vanity."

The "Wonderful One-Horse Shay" was received with laughter and delight. Dopsy and Mopsy were in raptures. "How could a horrid American have written anything so clever? But then it was Colonel Blathwayt's inimitable elocution which gave a charm to the whole thing. The poem was poor enough, no doubt, if one read it to oneself. Colonel Blathwayt was adorably funny."

"It's a tremendous joke, as you do it," said Mopsy, twirling her sunflower fan – a great yellow flower, like the sign of the Sun Inn, on a black satin ground. "How delightful to be so gifted."

"Now for 'James Lee's Wife,'" said the Colonel, who accepted the damsel's compliments for what they were worth. "You'll have to be very attentive if you want to find out what the poem means; for the Baron's delivery is a trifle spasmodic."

And now de Cazalet stepped forward with a vellum-bound volume in his hand, dashed back his long sleek hair with a large white hand, glanced at the page, coughed faintly, and then began in thick, hurried accents, which kept getting thicker and more hurried as the poem advanced. It was given, not in lines, but in spasms, panted out, till at the close the Baron sank exhausted, breathless, like the hunted deer when the hounds close round him.

"Beautiful! exquisite! too pathetic!" exclaimed a chorus of feminine voices.

"I only wish the Browning Society could hear that: they would be delighted," said Mr. Faddie, who piqued himself upon being in the literary world.

"It makes Browning so much easier to understand," remarked Mr. FitzJesse, with his habitual placidity.

"Brings the whole thing home to you – makes it ever so much more real, don't you know," said Mrs. Torrington.

"Poor James Lee!" sighed Mopsy.

"Poor Mrs. Lee!" ejaculated Dopsy.

"Did he die?" asked Miss St. Aubyn.

"Did she run away from him?" inquired her sister, the railroad pace at which the Baron fired off the verses having left all

those among his hearers who did not know the text in a state of agreeable uncertainty.

So the night wore on, with more songs and duets from opera and opera-bouffe. No more of Beethoven's grand bursts of melody – now touched with the solemnity of religious feeling – now melting in human pathos – now light and airy, changeful and capricious as the skylark's song – a very fountain of joyous fancies. Mr. Tregonell had never appreciated Beethoven, being, indeed, as unmusical a soul as God ever created; but he thought it a more respectable thing that his wife should sit at her piano playing an order of music which only the privileged few could understand, than that she should delight the common herd by singing which savoured of music-hall and burlesque.

"Is she not absolutely delicious?" said Mrs. Torrington, beating time with her fan. "How proud I should be of myself if I could sing like that. How proud you must be of your wife – such verve – such *élan* – so thoroughly in the spirit of the thing. That is the only kind of singing anybody really cares for now. One goes to the opera to hear them scream through 'Lohengrin' – or 'Tannhäuser' – and then one goes into society and talks about Wagner – but it is music like this one enjoys."

"Yes, it's rather jolly," said Leonard, staring moodily at his wife, in the act of singing a refrain, of Bé-bé-bé, which was supposed to represent the bleating of an innocent lamb.

"And the Baron's voice goes so admirably with Mrs. Tregonell's."

"Yes, his voice goes – admirably," said Leonard, sorely tempted to blaspheme.

"Weren't you charmed to find us all so gay and bright here – nothing to suggest the sad break-up you had last year. I felt so intensely sorry for you all – yet I was selfish enough to be glad I had left before it happened. Did they – don't think me morbid for asking – did they bring him home here?"

"Yes, they brought him home."

"And in which room did they put him? One always wants to know these things, though it can do one no good."

"In the Blue Room."

"The second from the end of the corridor, next but one to mine; that's rather awfully near. Do you believe in spiritual influences? Have you ever had a revelation? Good gracious! is it really so late? Everybody seems to be going."

"Let me get your candle," said Leonard, eagerly, making a dash for the hall. And so ended his first evening at home with that imbecile refrain – Bé-bé-bé, repeating itself in his ears.

CHAPTER VII

"GAI DONC; LA VOYAGEUSE, AU COUP DU PÈLERIN!"

When Mr. Tregonell came to the breakfast room next morning he found everybody alert with the stir and expectation of an agreeable day. The Trevena harriers were to meet for the first time this season, and everybody was full of that event. Christabel, Mrs. Torrington, and the St. Aubyn girls were breakfasting in their habits and hats: whips and gloves were lying about on chairs and side-tables – everybody was talking, and everybody seemed in a hurry. De Cazalet looked gorgeous in olive corduroy and Newmarket boots. Mr. St. Aubyn looked business-like in a well-worn red coat and mahogany tops, while the other men inclined to dark shooting jackets, buckskins, and Napoleons. Mr. FitzJesse, in a morning suit that savoured of the study rather than the hunting field, contemplated these Nimrods with an amused smile; but the Reverend St. Bernard beheld them not without pangs of envy. He, too, had been in Arcadia; he, too, had followed the hounds in his green Oxford days, before he joined that band of young Anglicans who he doubted not would by-and-by be as widely renowned as the heroes of the Tractarian movement.

"You are going to the meet?" inquired Leonard, as his wife

handed him his coffee.

"Do you think I would take the trouble to put on my habit in order to ride from here to Trevena?" exclaimed Christabel. "I am going with the rest of them, of course. Emily St. Aubyn will show me the way."

"But you have never hunted."

"Because your dear mother was too nervous to allow me. But I have ridden over every inch of the ground. I know my horse, and my horse knows me. You needn't be afraid."

"Mrs. Tregonell is one of the finest horsewomen I ever saw," said de Cazalet. "It is a delight to ride by her side. Are not you coming with us?" he asked.

"Yes, I'll ride after you," said Leonard. "I forgot all about the harriers. Nobody told me they were to begin work this morning."

The horses were brought round to the porch, the ladies put on their gloves, and adjusted themselves in those skimpy lop-sided petticoats which have replaced the flowing drapery of the dark ages when a horsewoman's legs and boots were in somewise a mystery to the outside world.

Leonard went out to look at the horses. A strange horse would have interested him even on his death bed, while one ray of consciousness yet remained to recognize the degrees of equine strength and quality. He overhauled the mare which Major Bree had chosen for Christabel a month ago – a magnificent three-quarter bred hunter, full of power.

"Do you think she can carry me?" asked Christabel.

"She could carry a house. Yes; you ought to be safe upon her. Is that big black brute the Baron's horse?"

"Yes."

"I thought so – a coarse clumsy beast, all show," muttered Leonard; "like master, like man."

He turned away to examine Colonel Blathwayt's hunter, a good looking chestnut, and in that moment the Baron had taken up his ground by Christabel's mare, and was ready to lift her into the saddle. She went up as lightly as a shuttlecock from a battledore, scarcely touching the corduroy shoulder – but Leonard felt angry with the Baron for usurping a function which should have been left for the husband.

"Is Betsy Baker in condition?" he asked the head groom, as the party rode away, de Cazalet on Mrs. Tregonell's right hand.

"Splendid, sir. She only wants work."

"Get her ready as quick as you can. I'll take it out of her."

Mr. Tregonell kept his word. Wherever de Cazalet and Christabel rode that day, Christabel's husband went with them. The Baron was a bold, bad rider – reckless of himself, brutal to his horse. Christabel rode superbly, and was superbly mounted. Those hills which seemed murderous to the stranger, were as nothing to her, who had galloped up and down them on her Shetland pony, and had seldom ridden over better ground from the time when Major Bree first took her out with a leading rein. The day was long, and there was plenty of fast going – but these three were always in the front. Yet even the husband's immediate

neighbourhood in no wise lessened the Baron's marked attention to the wife, and Leonard rode homeward at dusk sorely troubled in spirit. What did it mean? Could it be that she, whose conduct last year had seemed without reproach; who had borne herself with matronly dignity; with virginal purity towards the lover of her girlhood – the refined and accomplished Angus Hamleigh – could it be that she had allowed herself to be involved in a flirtation with such a tinsel dandy as this de Cazalet?

"It would be sheer lunacy," he said to himself. "Perhaps she is carrying on like this to annoy me – punishing me for – "

He rode home a little way behind those other two, full of vexation and bewilderment. Nothing had happened of which he could reasonably complain. He could scarcely kick this man out of his house because he inclined his head at a certain angle – because he dropped his voice to a lower key when he spoke to Christabel. Yet his very attitude in the saddle as he rode on ahead – his hand on his horse's flank, his figure turned towards Christabel – was a provocation.

Opera bouffe duets – recitations – acted charades —*bouts rimés*– all the catalogue of grown-up playfulness – began again after dinner; but this evening Leonard did not stay in the drawing-room. He felt that he could not trust himself. His disgust must needs explode into some rudeness of speech, if he remained to witness these vagaries.

"I like the society of barmaids, and I can tolerate the company of ladies," he said to his bosom friend, Jack; "but a mixture of

the two is unendurable: so we'll have a good smoke and half-crown pool, shilling lives."

This was as much as to say, that Leonard and his other friends were about to render their half-crowns and shillings as tribute to Captain Vandeleur's superior play; that gentleman having made pool his profession since he left the army.

They played till midnight, in an atmosphere which grew thick with tobacco smoke before the night was done. They played till Jack Vandeleur's pockets were full of loose silver, and till the other men had come to the conclusion that pool was a slow game, with an element of childishness in it, at the best – no real skill, only a mere mechanical knack, acquired by incessant practice in fusty public rooms, reeking with alcohol.

"Show me a man who plays like that, and I'll show you a scamp," muttered little Monty in a friendly aside to Leonard, as Jack Vandeleur swept up the last pool.

"I know he's a scamp," answered Leonard, "but he's a pleasant scamp, and a capital fellow to travel with – never ill – never out of temper – always ready for the day's work, whatever it is, and always able to make the best of things. Why don't you marry one of his sisters? – they're both jolly good fellows."

"No coin," said Monty, shaking his neat little flaxen head. "I can just contrive to keep myself – 'still to be neat, still to be drest.' What in mercy's name should I do with a wife who would want food and gowns, and stalls at the theatres? I have been thinking that if those St. Aubyn girls have money – on the nail, you know,

not in the form of expectations from that painfully healthy father – I might think seriously of one of them. They are horridly rustic – smell of clover and beans, and would be likely to disgrace one in London society – but they are not hideous."

"I don't think there's much ready money in that quarter, Monty," answered Leonard. "St. Aubyn has a good deal of land."

"Land," screamed Monty. "I wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs! The workhouses of the next century will be peopled by the offspring of the landed gentry. I shudder when I think of the country squire and his prospects."

"Hard lines," said Jack, who had made that remark two or three times before in the course of the evening.

They were sitting round the fire by this time – smoking and drinking mulled Burgundy, and the conversation had become general.

This night was as many other nights. Sometimes Mr. Tregonell tried to live through the evening in the drawing-room – enduring the society games – the Boulevard music – the recitations and tableaux and general frivolity – but he found these amusements hang upon his spirits like a nightmare. He watched his wife, but could discover nothing actually reprehensible in her conduct – nothing upon which he could take his stand as an outraged husband, and say "This shall not be." If the Baron's devotion to her was marked enough for every one to see, and if her acceptance of his attentions was gracious in the extreme, his devotion and her graciousness were no more than he had seen

everywhere accepted as the small change of society, meaning nothing, tending towards nothing but gradual satiety; except in those few exceptional cases which ended in open scandal and took society by surprise. That which impressed Leonard was the utter change in his wife's character. It seemed as if her very nature were altered. Womanly tenderness, a gentle and subdued manner, had given place to a hard brilliancy. It was as if he had lost a pearl, and found a diamond in its place – one all softness and purity, the other all sparkle and light.

He was too proud to sue to her for any renewal of old confidences – to claim from her any of the duties of a wife. If she could live and be happy without him – and he knew but too surely that his presence, his affection, had never contributed to her happiness – he would let her see that he could live without her – that he was content to accept the position she had chosen – union which was no union – marriage that had ceased to be marriage – a chain drawn out to its furthest length, yet held so lightly that neither need feel the bondage.

Everybody at Mount Royal was loud in praise of Christabel. She was so brilliant, so versatile, she made her house so utterly charming. This was the verdict of her new friends – but her old friends were less enthusiastic. Major Bree came to the Manor House very seldom now, and frankly owned himself a fish out of water in Mrs. Tregonell's new circle.

"Everybody is so laboriously lively," he said; "there is an air of forced hilarity. I sigh for the house as it was in your mother's

time, Leonard. 'A haunt of ancient peace.'"

"There's not much peace about it now, by Jove," said Leonard. "Why did you put it into my wife's head to ride to hounds?"

"I had nothing to do with it. She asked me to choose her a hunter, and I chose her something good and safe, that's all. But I don't think you ought to object to her hunting, Leonard, or to her doing anything else that may help to keep her in good spirits. She was in a very bad way all the winter."

"Do you mean that she was seriously ill? Their letters to me were so d – d short. I hardly know anything that went on while I was away."

"Yes. She was very ill – given over to melancholy. It was only natural that she should be affected by Angus Hamleigh's death, when you remember what they had been to each other before you came home. A woman may break an engagement of that kind, and may be very happy in her union with another man, but she can't forget her first lover, if it were only because he *is* the first. It was an unlucky thing your bringing him to Mount Royal. One of your impulsive follies."

"Yes, one of my follies. So you say that Christabel was out of health and spirits all the winter."

"Yes, she would see no one – not even me – or the Rector. No one but the doctor ever crossed the threshold. But surely Miss Bridgeman has told you all about it. Miss Bridgeman was devoted to her."

"Miss Bridgeman is as close as the grave; and I am not going

to demean myself by questioning her."

"Well, there is no need to be unhappy about the past. Christabel is herself again, thank God – brighter, prettier than ever. That Swiss tour with Miss Bridgeman and the boy did her worlds of good. I thought you made a mistake in leaving her at Mount Royal after that melancholy event. You should have taken her with you."

"Perhaps I ought to have done so," assented Leonard, thinking bitterly how very improbable it was that she would have consented to go with him.

He tried to make the best of his position, painful as it was. He blustered and hectorated as of old – gave his days to field sports – his evenings for the most part to billiards and tobacco. He drank more than he had been accustomed to drink, sat up late of nights. His nerves were not benefited by these latter habits.

"Your hand is as shaky as an old woman's," exclaimed Jack, upon his opponent missing an easy cannon. "Why, you might have done that with a boot-jack. If you're not careful you'll be in for an attack of del. trem., and that will chew you up in a very short time. A man of your stamina is the worst kind of subject for nervous diseases. We shall have you catching flies, and seeing imaginary snow-storms before long."

Leonard received this friendly warning with a scornful laugh.

"De Cazalet drinks more brandy in a day than I do in a week," he said.

"Ah, but look at his advantages – brought up in Jersey, where

cognac is duty-free. None of us have had his fine training. Wonderful constitution he must have – hand as steady as a rock. You saw him this morning knock off a particular acorn from the oak in the stable yard with a bullet."

"Yes, the fellow can shoot; he's less of an impostor than I expected."

"Wonderful eye and hand. He must have spent years of his life in a shooting gallery. You're a dooced good shot, Tregonell; but, compared with him, you're not in it."

"That's very likely, though I have had to live by my gun in the Rockies. FitzJesse told me that in South America de Cazalet was known as a professed duellist."

"And you have only shot four-footed beasts – never gone for a fellow creature," answered Jack lightly.

CHAPTER VIII

"TIME TURNS THE OLD DAYS TO DERISION."

If Leonard Tregonell was troubled and perplexed by the change in his wife's character, there was one other person at Mount Royal, Christabel's nearest and dearest friend, to whom that change was even a greater mystification. Jessie Bridgeman, who had been with her in the dark hours of her grief – who had seen her sunk in the apathy of despair – who had comforted and watched her, and sympathized and wept with her, looked on now in blank wonderment at a phase of character which was altogether enigmatical. She had been with Mrs. Tregonell at Zermatt, when de Cazalet had obtruded himself on their notice by his officious attentions during a pilgrimage to the Riffel, and she had been bewildered at Christabel's civility to a man of such obvious bad style. He had stayed at the same hotel with them for three or four days, and had given them as much of his society as he could without being absolutely intrusive, taking advantage of having met Christabel five seasons ago, at two or three *quasi* literary assemblies; and at parting Christabel had invited him to Mount Royal. "Mr. Tregonell will be at home in the autumn," she said, "and if you should find yourself in Cornwall" – he had talked of exploring the West of England – "I know he would be

glad to see you at Mount Royal."

When Jessie hinted at the unwisdom of an invitation to a man of whom they knew so little, Christabel answered carelessly that "Leonard liked to have his house full of lively people, and would no doubt be pleased with the Baron de Cazalet."

"You used to leave him to choose his own visitors."

"I know; but I mean to take a more active part in the arrangement of things in future. I am tired of being a cipher."

"Did you hear those people talking of the Baron at *table d'hôte* yesterday?"

"I heard a little – I was not particularly attentive."

"Then perhaps you did not hear that he is a thorough Bohemian – that he led a very wild life in South America, and was a notorious duellist."

"What can that matter to us, even if it is true?"

It seemed to Jessie that Christabel's whole nature underwent a change, and that the transformation dated from her acquaintance with this man. They were at the end of their tour at the time of this meeting, and they came straight through to Paris, where Mrs. Tregonell abandoned herself to frivolity – going to all the theatres – buying all the newest and lightest music, spending long mornings with milliners and dressmakers – squandering money upon fine clothes, which a year ago she would have scorned to wear. Hitherto her taste had tended to simplicity of attire – not without richness – for she was too much of an artist not to value the artistic effects of costly fabrics, the beauty of warm

colouring. But she now pursued that Will o' the Wisp fashion from Worth to Pingat, and bought any number of gowns, some of which, to Miss Bridgeman's severe taste, seemed simply odious.

"Do you intend spending next season in May Fair, and do you expect to be asked to a good many fancy balls?" asked Jessie, as Mrs. Tregonell's maid exhibited the gowns in the spacious bedroom at the Bristol.

"Nonsense, Jessie. These are all dinner gowns. The infinite variety of modern fashion is its chief merit. The style of to-day embraces three centuries of the past, from Catherine de Médicis to Madame Récamier."

At one of the Boulevard theatres Mrs. Tregonell and Miss Bridgeman met Mr. FitzJesse, who was also returning from a summer holiday. He was Angus Hamleigh's friend, and had known Christabel during the happy days of her first London season. It seemed hardly strange that she should be glad to meet him, and that she should ask him to Mount Royal.

"And now I must have some women to meet these men," she said, when she and Jessie were at home again, and the travelled infant had gone back to his nursery, and had inquired why the hills he saw from his windows were no longer white, and why the sea was so much bigger than the lakes he had seen lately. "I mean to make the house as pleasant as possible for Leonard when he comes home."

She and Jessie were alone in the oak panelled parlour – the room with the alcove overlooking the hills and the sea. They

were seated at a little table in this recess – Christabel's desk open before her – Jessie knitting.

"How gaily you speak. Have you – "

She was going to say, "Have you forgiven him for what was done at St. Nectan's Kieve?" but she checked herself when the words were on her lips. What if Leonard's crime was not forgiven, but forgotten? In that long dreary winter they had never spoken of the manner of Angus Hamleigh's death. Christabel's despair had been silent. Jessie had comforted her with vague words which never touched upon the cruel details of her grief. How if the mind had been affected by that long interval of sorrow, and the memory of Leonard's deed blotted out? Christabel's new delight in frivolous things – her sudden fancy for filling her house with lively people – might be the awakening of new life and vigour in a mind that had trembled on the confines of madness. Was it for her to recall bitter facts – to reopen the fountain of tears? She gave one little sigh for the untimely dead – and then addressed herself to the duty of pleasing Christabel, just as in days gone by her every effort had been devoted to making the elder Mrs. Tregonell happy.

"I suppose you had better ask Mrs. Fairfax Torrington," she suggested.

"Yes, Leonard and she are great chums. We must have Mrs. Torrington. And there are the St. Aubyns, nice lively girls and an inoffensive father and mother. I believe Leonard rather likes them. And then it will be a charity to have Dopsy and Mopsy."

"I thought you detested them."

"No, poor foolish things – I was once sorry for Dopsy." The tears rushed to her eyes. She rose suddenly from her chair, and went to the window.

"Then she has not forgotten," thought Jessie.

So it was that the autumn party was planned. Mr. Faddie was doing duty at the little church in the glen, and thus happened to be in the way of an invitation. Mr. Montagu was asked as a person of general usefulness. The St. Aubyn party brought horses, and men and maids, and contributed much to the liveliness of the establishment, so far as noise means gaiety. They were all assembled when Baron de Cazalet telegraphed from a yacht off the Lizard to ask if he might come, and, receiving a favourable reply, landed at Penzance, and posted over with his valet; his horse and gun cases were brought from London by another servant.

Leonard had been home nearly a fortnight, and had begun to accept this new mode of life without further wonder, and to fall into his old ways, and find some degree of pleasure in his old occupations – hunting, shooting.

The Vandeleur girls were draining the cup of pleasure to the dregs. Dopsy forgot her failure and grief of last year. One cannot waste all one's life in mourning for a lover who was never in love with one.

"I wore bugles for him all last winter, and if I had been able to buy a new black gown I would have kept in mourning for six

mouths," she told her sister apologetically, as if ashamed of her good spirits, "but I can't help enjoying myself in such a house as this. Is not Mrs. Tregonell changed for the better?"

"Everything's changed for the better," assented Mopsy. "If we had only horses and could hunt, like those stuck up St. Aubyn girls, life would be perfect."

"They ride well, I suppose," said Dopsy, "but they are dreadfully *arriérées*. They haven't an æsthetic idea. When I told them we had thoughts of belonging to the Browning Society, that eldest one asked me if it was like the Birkbeck, and if we should be able to buy a house rent-free by monthly instalments. And the youngest said that sunflowers were only fit for cottage gardens."

"And the narrow-minded mother declared she could see no beauty in single dahlias," added Dopsy, with ineffable disgust.

The day was hopelessly wet, and the visitors at Mount Royal were spending the morning in that somewhat straggling manner common to people who are in somebody else's house – impressed with a feeling that it is useless to settle oneself even to the interesting labour of art needlework when one is not by one's own fireside. The sportsmen were all out; but de Cazalet, the Rev. St. Bernard, and Mr. FitzJesse preferred the shelter of a well-warmed Jacobean mansion to the wild sweep of the wind across the moor, or the dash of the billows.

"I have had plenty of wild life on the shores of the Pacific," said de Cazalet, luxuriating in a large sage green plush arm chair, one of the anachronisms of the grave old library. "At home I

revel in civilization – I cannot have too much of warmth and comfort – velvety nests like this to lounge in, downy cushions to lean against, hot-house flowers, and French cookery. Delicious to hear the rain beating against the glass, and the wind howling in the chimney. Put another log on, Faddie, like the best of fellows."

The Reverend St. Bernard, not much appreciating this familiarity, daintily picked a log from the big brazen basket and dropped it in a gingerly manner upon the hearth, carefully dusting his fingers afterwards with a cambric handkerchief which sent forth odours of Maréchale.

Mr. FitzJesse was sitting at a distant table, with a large despatch box and a pile of open letters before him, writing at railway speed, in order to be in time for the one o'clock post.

"He is making up his paper," said de Cazalet, lazily contemplating the worker's bowed shoulders. "I wonder if he is saying anything about us."

"I am happy to say that he does not often discuss church matters," said Mr. Faddie. "He shows his good sense by a careful avoidance of opinion upon our difficulties and our differences."

"Perhaps he doesn't think them worth discussing – of no more consequence than the shades of difference between tweedledum and tweedledee," yawned de Cazalet, whereupon Mr. Faddie gave him a look of contemptuous anger, and left the room.

Mr. FitzJesse went away soon afterwards with his batch of letters for the post-bag in the hall, and the Baron was left alone, in listless contemplation of the fire. He had been in the drawing-

room, but had found that apartment uninteresting by reason of Mrs. Tregonell's absence. He did not care to sit and watch the two Miss St. Aubyns playing chess – nor to hear Mrs. Fairfax Torrington dribbling out stray paragraphs from the "society journals" for the benefit of nobody in particular – nor to listen to Mrs. St. Aubyn's disquisitions upon the merits of Alderney cows, with which Jessie Bridgeman made believe to be interested, while deep in the intricacies of a crewel-work daffodil. For him the spacious pink and white panelled room without one particular person was more desolate than the wild expanse of the Pampas, with its low undulations, growing rougher towards the base of the mountains. He had come to the library – an apartment chiefly used by the men – to bask in the light of the fire, and to brood upon agreeable thoughts. The meditations of a man who has a very high opinion of his own merits are generally pleasant, and just now Oliver de Cazalet's ideas about himself were unusually exalted, for had he not obviously made the conquest of one of the most charming women he had ever met.

"A pity she has a husband," he thought. "It would have suited me remarkably well to drop into such a luxurious nest as this. The boy is not three years old – by the time he came of age – well – I should have lived my life, I suppose, and could afford to subside into comfortable obscurity," sighed de Cazalet, conscious of his forty years. "The husband looks uncommonly tough; but even Hercules was mortal. One never knows how or when a man of that stamp may go off the hooks."

These pleasing reflections were disturbed by the entrance of Mopsy, who, after prowling all over the house in quest of masculine society, came yawning into the library in search of anything readable in the way of a newspaper – a readable paper with Mopsy meaning theatres, fashions, or scandal.

She gave a little start at sight of de Cazalet, whose stalwart form and florid good looks were by no means obnoxious to her taste. If he had not been so evidently devoted to Mrs. Tregonell, Mopsy would have perchance essayed his subjugation; but, remembering Dopsy's bitter experience of last year, the sadder and wiser Miss Vandeleur had made up her mind not to "go for" any marriageable man in too distinct a manner. She would play that fluking game which she most affected at billiards – sending her ball spinning all over the table with the hope that some successful result must come of a vigorous stroke.

She fluttered about the room, then stopped in a Fra Angelico pose over a table strewn with papers.

"Baron, have you seen the *Queen*?" she asked presently.

"Often. I had the honour of making my bow to her last April. She is one of the dearest women I know, and she was good enough to feel interested in my somewhat romantic career."

"How nice! But I mean the *Queen* newspaper. I am dying to know if it really *is* coming in. Now it has been seen in Paris, I'm afraid it's inevitable."

"May I ask what *it* is?"

"Perhaps I oughtn't to mention it – crinoline. There is a talk

about something called a crinolette."

"And Crinolette, I suppose, is own sister to Crinoline?"

"I'm afraid so – don't you hate them? I do; I love the early Italian style – clinging cashmeres, soft flowing draperies."

"And accentuated angles – well, yes. If one has to ride in a hansom or a single brougham with a woman the hoop and powder style is rather a burthen. But women are such lovely beings – they are adorable in any costume. Madame Tallien with bare feet, and no petticoats to speak of – Pompadour in patches and wide-spreading brocade – Margaret of Orleans in a peaked head dress and puffed sleeves – Mary Stuart in a black velvet coif, and a ruff – each and all adorable – on a pretty woman."

"On a pretty woman – yes. The pretty women set the fashions and the ugly women have to wear them – that's the difficulty."

"Ah, me," sighed the Baron, "did any one ever see an ugly woman? There are so many degrees of beauty that it takes a long time to get from Venus to her opposite. A smile – a sparkle – a kindly look – a fresh complexion – a neat bonnet – vivacious conversation – such trifles will pass for beauty with a man who worships the sex. For him every flower in the garden of womanhood, from the imperial rose to the lowly buttercup, has its own peculiar charm."

"And yet I should have thought you were awfully fastidious," said Mopsy, trifling with the newspapers, "and that nothing short of absolute perfection would please you."

"Absolute perfection is generally a bore. I have met famous

beauties who had no more attraction than if they had been famous statues."

"Yes; I know there is a cold kind of beauty – but there are women who are as fascinating as they are lovely. Our hostess, for instance – don't you think her utterly sweet?"

"She is very lovely. Do come and sit by the fire. It is such a creepy morning. I'll hunt for any newspapers you like presently; but in the meanwhile let us chat. I was getting horribly tired of my own thoughts when you came in."

Mopsy simpered, and sat down in the easy chair opposite the Baron's. She began to think that this delightful person admired her more than she had hitherto supposed. His desire for her company looked promising. What if, after all, she, who had striven so much less eagerly than poor Dopsy strove last year, should be on the high road to a conquest. Here was the handsomest man she had ever met, a man with title and money, courting her society in a house full of people.

"Yes, she is altogether charming," said the Baron lazily, as if he were talking merely for the sake of conversation. "Very sweet, as you say, but not quite my style – there is a something – an intangible something wanting. She has *chic*– she has *savoir-faire*; but she has not – no, she has not that electrical wit which – which I have admired in others less conventionally beautiful."

The Baron's half-veiled smile, a smile glancing from under lowered eyelids, hinted that this vital spark which was wanting in Christabel might be found in Mopsy.

The damsel blushed, and looked down, conscious of eyelashes artistically treated.

"I don't think Mrs. Tregonell has been quite happy in her married life," said Mopsy. "My brother and Mr. Tregonell are very old friends, don't you know; like brothers, in fact; and Mr. Tregonell tells Jack everything. I know his cousin didn't want to marry him – she was engaged to somebody else, don't you know, and that engagement was broken off, but he had set his heart upon marrying her – and his mother had set her heart upon the match – and between them they talked her into it. She never really wanted to marry him – Leonard has owned that to Jack in his savage moods. But I ought not to run on so – I am doing very wrong" – said Mopsy, hastily.

"You may say anything you please to me. I am like the grave. I never give up a secret," said the Baron, who had settled himself comfortably in his chair, assured that Mopsy, once set going, would tell him all she could tell.

"No, I don't believe – from what Jack says he says in his tempers – I don't believe she ever liked him," pursued Mopsy. "And she was desperately in love with the other one. But she gave him up at her aunt's instigation, because of some early intrigue of his – which was absurd, as she would have known, poor thing, if she had not been brought up in this out-of-the-way corner of the world."

"The other one. Who was the other one?" asked the Baron.

"The man who was shot at St. Nectan's Kieve last year. You

must have heard the story."

"Yes; Mr. St. Aubyn told me about it. And this Mr. Hamleigh had been engaged to Mrs. Tregonell? Odd that he should be staying in this house!"

"Wasn't it? One of those odd things that Leonard Tregonell is fond of doing. He was always eccentric."

"And during this visit was there anything – the best of women are mortal – was there anything in the way of a flirtation going on between Mrs. Tregonell and her former sweetheart?"

"Not a shadow of impropriety," answered Mopsy heartily. "She behaved perfectly. I knew the story from my brother, and couldn't help watching them – there was nothing underhand – not the faintest indication of a secret understanding between them."

"And Mr. Tregonell was not jealous?"

"I cannot say; but I am sure he had no cause."

"I suppose Mrs. Tregonell was deeply affected by Mr. Hamleigh's death?"

"I hardly know. She seemed wonderfully calm; but as we left almost immediately after the accident I had not much opportunity of judging."

"A sad business. A lovely woman married to a man she does not care for – and really if I were not a visitor under his roof I should be tempted to say that in my opinion no woman in her senses could care for Mr. Tregonell. But I suppose after all practical considerations had something to do with the match. Tregonell is lord of half-a-dozen manors – and the lady hadn't a

sixpence. Was that it?"

"Not at all. Mrs. Tregonell has money in her own right. She was the only child of an Indian judge, and her mother was co-heiress with the late Mrs. Tregonell, who was a Miss Champernowne – I believe she has at least fifteen hundred a year, upon which a single woman might live very comfortably, don't you know," concluded Miss Vandeleur with a grand air.

"No doubt," said the Baron. "And the fortune was settled on herself, I conclude?"

"Every shilling. Mr. Tregonell's mother insisted upon that. No doubt she felt it her duty to protect her niece's interest. Mr. Tregonell has complained to Jack of his wife being so independent. It lessens his hold upon her, don't you see."

"Naturally. She is not under any obligation to him for her milliner's bills."

"No. And her bills must be awfully heavy this year. I never saw such a change in any one. Last autumn she dressed so simply. A tailor-gown in the morning – black velvet or satin in the evening. And now there is no end to the variety of her gowns. It makes one feel awfully shabby."

"Such artistic toilets as yours can never be shabby," said the Baron. "In looking at a picture by Greuze one does not think how much a yard the pale indefinite drapery cost, one only sees the grace and beauty of the draping."

"True; taste will go a long way," assented Mopsy, who had been trying for the last ten years to make taste – that is to say a

careful study of the west-end shop-windows – do duty for cash.

"Then you find Mrs. Tregonell changed since your last visit?" inquired de Cazalet, bent upon learning all he could.

"Remarkably. She is so much livelier – she seems so much more anxious to please. It is a change altogether for the better. She seems gayer – brighter – happier."

"Yes," thought the Baron, "she is in love. Only one magician works such wonders, and he is the oldest of the gods – the motive power of the universe."

The gong sounded, and they went off to lunch. At the foot of the stairs they met Christabel bringing down her boy. She was not so devoted to him as she had been last year, but there were occasions – like this wet morning, for instance – when she gave herself up to his society.

"Leo is going to eat his dinner with us," she said, smiling at the Baron, "if you will not think him a nuisance."

"On the contrary, I shall be charmed to improve his acquaintance. I hope he will let me sit next him."

"Thant," lisped Leo decisively. "Don't like oo."

"Oh, Leo, how rude."

"Don't reprove him," said the Baron. "It is a comfort to be reminded that for the first three or four years of our lives we all tell the truth. But I mean you to like me, Leo, all the same."

"I hate 'oo," said Leo, frankly – he always expressed himself in strong Saxon English – "but 'oo love my mamma."

This, in a shrill childish treble, was awkward for the rest of

the party. Mrs. Fairfax Torrington gave an arch glance at Mr. FitzJesse. Dopsy reddened, and exploded in a little spluttering laugh behind her napkin. Christabel looked divinely unconscious, smiling down at her boy, whose chair had been placed at the corner of the table close to his mother.

"It is a poet's privilege to worship the beautiful, Leo," said the Baron, with a self-satisfied smirk. "The old troubadour's right of allegiance to the loveliest – as old as chivalry."

"And as disreputable," said FitzJesse. "If I had been one of the knights of old, and had found a troubadour sneaking about my premises, that troubadour's head should have been through his guitar before he knew where he was – or he should have discovered that my idea of a common chord was a halter. But in our present age of ultra-refinement the social troubadour is a gentleman, and the worship of beauty one of the higher forms of culture."

The Baron looked at the journalist suspiciously. Bold as he was of speech and bearing, he never ventured to cross swords with Mr. FitzJesse. He was too much afraid of seeing an article upon his Jersey antecedents or his married life in leaded type in the *Sling*.

Happily, Mr. Tregonell was not at luncheon upon this particular occasion. He had gone out shooting with Jack Vandeleur and little Monty. It was supposed to be a great year for woodcock, and the Squire and his friends had been after the birds in every direction, except St. Nectan's Kieve. He had refused to

go there, although it was a tradition that the place was a favourite resort of the birds.

"Why don't you shoot, Mrs. Tregonell?" asked Mrs. Torrington; "it is just the one thing that makes life worth living in a country like this, where there is no great scope for hunting."

"I should like roaming about the hills, but I could never bring myself to hit a bird," answered Christabel. "I am too fond of the feathered race. I don't know why or what it is, but there is something in a bird which appeals intensely to one's pity. I have been more sorry than I can say for a dying sparrow; and I can never teach myself to remember that birds are such wretchedly cruel and unprincipled creatures in their dealings with one another that they really deserve very little compassion from man."

"Except that man has the responsibility of knowing better," said Mr. FitzJesse. "That infernal cruelty of the animal creation is one of the problems that must perplex the gentle optimist who sums up his religion in a phrase of Pope's, and avows that whatever is, is right. Who, looking at the meek meditative countenance of a Jersey cow, those large stag-like eyes – Juno's eyes – would believe that Mrs. Cow is capable of trampling a sick sister to death – nay, would look upon the operation as a matter of course – a thing to be done for the good of society."

"Is there not a little moral trampling done by stag-eyed creatures of a higher grade?" asked Mrs. Torrington. "Let a woman once fall down in the mud, and there are plenty of

her own sex ready to grind her into the mire. Cows have a coarser, more practical way of treating their fallen sisters, but the principle is the same, don't you know."

"I have always found man the more malignant animal," said FitzJesse. "At her worst a woman generally has a motive for the evil she does – some wrong to avenge – some petty slight to retaliate. A man stabs for the mere pleasure of stabbing. With him slander is one of the fine arts. Depend upon it your Crabtree is a more malevolent creature than Mrs. Candour – and the Candours would not kill reputations if the Crabtrees did not admire and applaud the slaughter. For my own part I believe that if there were no men in the world, women would be almost kind to each other."

The Baron did not enter into this discussion. He had no taste for any subject out of his own line, which was art and beauty. With character or morals he had nothing to do. He did not even pretend to listen to the discourse of the others, but amused himself with petting Leo, who sturdily repulsed his endearments. When he spoke it was to reply to Christabel's last remark.

"If you are fonder of roaming on the hills than of shooting, Mrs. Tregonell, why should we not organize a rambling party? It is not too late for a picnic. Let us hold ourselves ready for the first bright day – perhaps, after this deluge, we shall have fine weather to-morrow – and organize a pilgrimage to Tintagel, with all the freedom of pedestrians, who can choose their own company, and are not obliged to sit opposite the person they least care about in

the imprisonment of a barouche or a wagonette. Walking picnics are the only picnics worth having. You are a good walker, I know, Mrs. Tregonell; and you, Mrs. Torrington, you can walk I have no doubt."

The widow smiled and nodded. "Oh, yes, I am good for half-a-dozen miles, or so," she said, wondering whether she possessed a pair of boots in which she could walk, most of her boots being made rather with a view to exhibition on a fender-stool or on the step of a carriage than to locomotion. "But I think as I am not quite so young as I was twenty years ago, I had better follow you in the pony-carriage."

"Pony-carriage, me no pony-carriages," exclaimed de Cazalet. "Ours is to be a walking picnic and nothing else. If you like to meet us as we come home you can do so – but none but pedestrians shall drink our champagne or eat our salad – that salad which I shall have the honour to make for you with my own hands, Mrs. Tregonell."

Jessie Bridgeman looked at Christabel to see if any painful memory – any thought of that other picnic at Tintagel when Angus Hamleigh was still a stranger, and the world seemed made for gladness and laughter, would disturb her smiling serenity. But there was no trace of mournful recollection in that bright beaming face which was turned in all graciousness towards the Baron, who sat caressing Leo's curls, while the boy wriggled his plump shoulders half out of his black velvet frock in palpable disgust at the caress.

"Oh! it will be too lovely – too utterly outfish," exclaimed Dopsy, who had lately acquired this last flower of speech – a word which might be made to mean almost anything, from the motive power which impels a billiard cue to the money that pays the player's losses at pool – a word which is a substantive or adjective according to the speaker's pleasure.

"I suppose we shall be allowed to join you," said Mopsy, "we are splendid walkers."

"Of course – entry open to all weights and ages, with Mrs. Tregonell's permission."

"Let it be your picnic, Baron, since it is your idea," said Christabel; "my housekeeper shall take your orders about the luncheon, and we will all consider ourselves your guests."

"I shall expire if I am left out in the cold," said Mrs. Torrington. "You really must allow age the privilege of a pony-carriage. That delightful cob of Mrs. Tregonell's understands me perfectly."

"Well, on second thoughts, you shall have the carriage," said de Cazalet, graciously. "The provisions can't walk. It shall be your privilege to bring them. We will have no servants. Mr. Faddie, Mr. FitzJesse, and I will do all the fetching and carrying, cork-drawing and salad-making."

CHAPTER IX

"THOU SHOULDST COME LIKE A FURY CROWNED WITH SNAKES."

When the shooting party came home to afternoon tea, Dopsy and Mopsy were both full of the picnic. The sun was sinking in lurid splendour; there was every chance of a fine day to-morrow. De Cazalet had interviewed the housekeeper, and ordered luncheon. Mopsy went about among the men like a recruiting sergeant, telling them of the picnic, and begging them to join in that festivity.

"It will be wretched for Dopsy and I" – her grammar was weak, and she had a fixed idea that "I" was a genteeler pronoun than "me," – "if you don't all come," she said to Colonel Blathwayt. "Of course the Baron will devote himself exclusively to Mrs. Tregonell. FitzJesse will go in the pony-trap with Mrs. Torrington, and they'll have vivisected everybody they know before they get there. And I can't get on a little bit with Mr. Faddie, though he is awfully nice. I feel that if I were to let him talk to me an hour at a stretch I should be obliged to go and join some Protestant sisterhood and wear thick boots and too fearful bonnets for the rest of my days."

"And what would society do without Mopsy Vandeleur?" asked the Colonel, smiling at her. "I should enjoy a ramble with

you above all things, but a picnic is such a confoundedly infantine business. I always feel a hundred years old when I attempt to be gay and frisky before dusk – feel as if I had been dead and come back to life again, as some of the savage tribes believe. However, if it will really please you, I'll give up the birds to-morrow, and join your sports."

"How sweet of you," exclaimed Mopsy, with a thrilling look from under her painted lashes. "The whole thing would be ghastly without you."

"What's the row?" asked Leonard, turning his head upon the cushion of the easy chair in which he lolled at full length, to look up at the speakers as they stood a little way behind him.

The master of Mount Royal was sitting by one fireplace, with a table and tea-tray all to himself; while Mrs. Tregonell and her circle were grouped about the hearth at the opposite end of the hall. Jack Vandeleur and little Monty stood in front of the fire near their host, faithful adherents to the friend who fed them; but all the rest of the party clustered round Christabel.

Mopsy told Mr. Tregonell all about the intended picnic.

"It is to be the Baron's affair," she said, gaily. "He organized it, and he is to play the host. There are to be no carriages – except the pony-trap for Mrs. Torrington, who pinches her feet and her waist to a degree that makes locomotion impossible. We are all to walk except her. And I believe we are to have tea at the farm by St. Piran's well – a simple farmhouse tea in some dear old whitewashed room with a huge fireplace, hams and onions and

things hanging from the rafters. Isn't it a lovely idea?"

"Very," grumbled Leonard; "but I should say you could have your tea a great deal more comfortably here, without being under an obligation to the farm people."

"Oh, but we have our tea here every afternoon," said Mopsy. "Think of the novelty of the thing."

"No doubt. And this picnic is the Baron's idea?"

"His and Mrs. Tregonell's, they planned it all between them. And they are going to get up private theatricals for your birthday."

"How kind," growled Leonard, scowling at his teacup.

"Isn't it sweet of them? They are going to play 'Delicate Ground.' He is to be Citizen Sangfroid and she Pauline – the husband and wife who quarrel and pretend to separate and are desperately fond of each other all the time, don't you know? It's a powder piece."

"A what?"

"A play in which the people wear powdered wigs and patches, and all that kind of thing. How dense you are."

"I was born so, I believe. And in this powder piece Mrs. Tregonell and Baron de Cazalet are to be husband and wife, and quarrel and make friends again – eh?"

"Yes. The reconciliation is awfully fetching. But you are not jealous, are you?"

"Jealous? Not the least bit."

"That's so nice of you; and you will come to our picnic, to-

morrow?"

"I think not."

"Why not?"

"Because the woodcock season is a short one, and I want to make the best use of my time."

"What a barbarian, to prefer any sport to our society," exclaimed Mopsy coquettishly. "For my part, I hate the very name of woodcock."

"Why?" asked Leonard, looking at her keenly, with his dark, bright eyes; eyes which had that hard, glassy brightness that has always a cruel look.

"Because it reminds me of that dreadful day last year when poor Mr. Hamleigh was killed. If he had not gone out woodcock shooting he would not have been killed."

"No; a man's death generally hinges upon something," answered Leonard, with a chilling sneer; "no effect without a cause. But I don't think you need waste your lamentations upon Mr. Hamleigh; he did not treat your sister particularly well."

Mopsy sighed, and was thoughtful for a moment or two. Captain Vandeleur and Mr. Montagu had strolled off to change their clothes. The master of the house and Miss Vandeleur were alone at their end of the old hall. Ripples of silvery laughter, and the sound of mirthful voices came from the group about the other fireplace, where the blaze of piled-up logs went roaring up the wide windy chimney, making the most magical changeful light in which beauty or its opposite can be seen.

"No, he hardly acted fairly to poor Dopsy: he led her on, don't you know, and we both thought he meant to propose. It would have been such a splendid match for her – and I could have stayed with them sometimes."

"Of course you could. Sometimes in your case would have meant all the year round."

"And he was so fascinating, so handsome, ill as he looked, poor darling," sighed Mopsy. "I know Dop hadn't one mercenary feeling about him. It was a genuine case of spoons – she would have died for him."

"If he had wished it; but men have not yet gone in for collecting corpses," sneered Leonard. "However poor the specimen of your sex may be, they prefer the living subject – even the surgeons are all coming round to that."

"Don't be nasty," protested Mopsy. "I only meant to say that Dopsy really adored Angus Hamleigh for his own sake. I know how kindly you felt upon the subject – and that you wanted it to be a match."

"Yes, I did my best," answered Leonard. "I brought him here, and gave you both your chance."

"And Jack said that you spoke very sharply to Mr. Hamleigh that last night."

"Yes, I gave him a piece of my mind. I told him that he had no right to come into my house and play fast and loose with my friend's sister."

"How did he take it?"

"Pretty quietly."

"You did not quarrel with him?"

"No, it could hardly be called a quarrel. We were both too reasonable – understood each other too thoroughly," answered Leonard, as he got up and went off to his dressing-room, leaving Mopsy sorely perplexed by an indescribable something in his tone and manner. Surely there must be some fatal meaning in that dark evil smile, which changed to so black a frown, and that deep sigh which seemed wrung from the very heart of the man: a man whom Mopsy had hitherto believed to be somewhat poorly furnished with that organ, taken in its poetical significance as a thing that throbs with love and pity.

Alone in his dressing-room the lord of the Manor sat down in front of the fire with his boots on the hob, to muse upon the incongruity of his present position in his own house. A year ago he had ruled supreme, sovereign master of the domestic circle, obeyed and ministered to in all humility by a lovely and pure-minded wife. Now he was a cipher in his own house, the husband of a woman who was almost as strange to him as if he had seen her face for the first time on his return from South America. This beautiful brilliant creature, who held him at arm's length, defied him openly with looks and tones in which his guilty soul recognized a terrible meaning – looks and tones which he dare not challenge – this woman who lived only for pleasure, fine dress, frivolity, who had given his house the free-and-easy air of a mess-room, or a club – could this be indeed the woman he had

loved in her girlhood, the fair and simple-minded wife whom his mother had trained for him, teaching her all good things, withholding all knowledge of evil.

"I'm not going to stand it much longer," he said to himself, with an oath, as he kicked the logs about upon his fire, and then got up to dress for the feast at which he always felt himself just the one guest who was not wanted.

He had been at home three weeks – it seemed an age – an age of disillusion and discontent – and he had not yet sought any explanation with Christabel. Not yet had he dared to claim his right to be obeyed as a husband, to be treated as a friend and adviser. With a strange reluctance he put off the explanation from day to day, and in the meanwhile the aspect of life at Mount Royal was growing daily less agreeable to him. Could it be that this wife of his, whose purity and faith he had tried by the hardest test – the test of daily companionship with her first and only lover – was inclined to waver now – to play him false for so shallow a coxcomb, so tawdry a fine gentleman as Oliver de Cazalet. Not once, but many times within the past week he had asked himself that question. Could it be? He had heard strange stories – had known of queer cases of the falling away of good women from the path of virtue. He had heard of sober matrons – mothers of fair children, wives of many years – the Cornelias of their circle, staking home, husband, children, honour, good name, and troops of friends against the wild delirium of some new-born fancy, sudden, demoniac as the dance of death. The

women who go wrong are not always the most likely women. It is not the trampled slave, the neglected and forlorn wife of a bad husband – but the pearl and treasure of a happy circle who takes the fatal plunge into the mire. The forlorn slave-wife stays in the dreary home and nurses her children, battles with her husband's creditors, consoles herself with church going and many prayers, fondly hoping for a future day in which Tom will find out that she is fairer and dearer than any of his false goddesses, and come home repentant to the domestic hearth: while the good husband's idol, sated with legitimate worship, gives herself up all at once to the intoxication of unholy incense, and topples off her shrine. Leonard Tregonell knew that the world was full of such psychological mysteries; and yet he could hardly bring himself to believe that Christabel was of the stuff that makes false wives, or that she could be won by such a third-rate Don Juan as the Baron de Cazalet.

The dinner was a little noisier and gayer than usual to-night. Every one talked, laughed, told anecdotes, let off puns, more or less atrocious – except the host, who sat in his place an image of gloom. Happily Mrs. St. Aubyn was one of those stout, healthy, contented people who enjoy their dinner, and only talk about as much as is required for the assistance of digestion. She told prosy stories about her pigs and poultry – which were altogether superior, intellectually and physically, to other people's pigs and poultry – and only paused once or twice to exclaim, "You are looking awfully tired, Mr. Tregonell. You must have overdone it

to-day. Don't you take curaçoa? I always do after ice pudding. It's so comforting. Do you know at the last dinner I was at before I came here the curaçoa was ginger brandy. Wasn't that horrid? People ought not to do such things."

Leonard suggested in a bored voice that this might have been the butler's mistake.

"I don't think so. I believe it was actual meanness – but I shall never take liqueur at *that* house again," said Mrs. St. Aubyn, in an injured tone.

"Are you going to this picnic to-morrow?"

"I think not. I'm afraid the walk would be too much for me – and I am not fond enough of Mrs. Torrington to enjoy two hours' *tête-à-tête* in a pony-carriage. My girls will go, of course. And I suppose you will be there," added Mrs. St. Aubyn, with intention.

"No, Vandeleur, Monty, and I are going shooting."

"Well, if I were in your shoes and had such a pretty wife I should not leave her to go picnicking about the world with such an attractive man as the Baron."

Leonard gave an uneasy little laugh, meant to convey the idea of supreme security.

"I'm not jealous of de Cazalet," he said. "Surely you don't call him an attractive man."

"Dangerously attractive," replied Mrs. St. Aubyn, gazing at the distant Baron, whose florid good looks were asserting themselves at the further end of the table, on Christabel's left hand – she had Mr. St. Aubyn's grey, contented face, glistening with dinner, on

her right. "He is just the kind of man I should have fallen in love with when I was your wife's age."

"Really," exclaimed Leonard, incredulously. "But I suppose after you married St. Aubyn, you left off falling in love."

"Of course. I did not put myself in the way of temptation. I should never have encouraged such a man – handsome, accomplished, unscrupulous – as Baron de Cazalet."

"I don't think his good looks or his unscrupulousness will make any difference to my wife," said Leonard. "She knows how to take care of herself."

"No doubt. But that does not release you from the duty of taking care. You had better go to the picnic."

"My dear Mrs. St. Aubyn, if I were to go now, after what you have just said to me, you might suppose I was jealous of de Cazalet; and that is just the one supposition I could not stand," answered Leonard. "It would take a dozen such fascinating men to shake my confidence in my wife: she is not an acquaintance of yesterday, remember: I have known her all my life."

Mrs. St. Aubyn sighed and shook her head. She was one of those stupid well-meaning women whose mission in life is to make other people uncomfortable – with the best intentions. She kept a steady look-out for the approaching misfortunes of her friends. She was the first to tell an anxious mother that her youngest boy was sickening for scarlet fever, or that her eldest girl looked consumptive. She prophesied rheumatics and bronchitis to incautious people who went out in wet weather – she held it as

a fixed belief that all her friends' houses were damp. It was in vain that vexed householders protested against such a suspicion, and held forth upon the superiority of their drainage, the felt under their tiles, their air bricks, and ventilators. "My dear, your house is damp," she would reply conclusively. "What it would be if you had *not* taken those precautions I shudder to imagine – but I only know that I get the shivers every time I sit in your drawing-room."

To-night she was somewhat offended with Mr. Tregonell that he refused to take alarm at her friendly warning. She had made up her mind that it was her duty to speak. She had told the girls so in the course of their afternoon constitutional, a private family walk.

"If things get any worse I shall take you away," she said, as they trudged along the lane in their waterproofs, caring very little for a soft drizzling rain, which was supposed to be good for their complexions.

"Don't, mother," said Emily. "Clara and I are having such a jolly time. Mrs. Tregonell is straight enough, I'm sure. She does flirt outrageously with the Baron, I admit; but an open flirtation of that kind seldom means mischief; and Mr. Tregonell is such a heavy clod-hopping fellow: his wife may be forgiven for flirting a little."

"Mrs. Tregonell flirts more than a little," replied Mrs. St. Aubyn. "All I can say is, I don't like it, and I don't think it's a proper spectacle for girls."

"Then you'd better send us back to the nursery, mother, or

shut us up in a convent," retorted the younger of the damsels. "If you don't want us to see young married women flirt, you must keep us very close indeed."

"If you feel uneasy about your Cochin Chinas, mother, you can go home, and leave us to follow with the pater," said Emily. "I've set my heart upon stopping till after Mr. Tregonell's birthday, the 14th of November, for the theatricals will be fine fun. They talk of "High Life below Stairs" for us girls, after "Delicate Ground;" and I think we shall be able to persuade Mrs. Tregonell to wind up with a dance. What is the use of people having fine rooms if they don't know how to use them?"

"Mrs. Tregonell seems ready for anything," sighed the matron. "I never saw such a change in any one. Do you remember how quiet she was the summer before last, when we were here for a few days?"

CHAPTER X

"HIS LADY SMILES; DELIGHT IS IN HER FACE."

That benevolent advice of Mrs. St. Aubyn's was not without its influence upon Leonard, lightly as he seemed to put aside the insinuation of evil. The matron's speech helped to strengthen his own doubts and fears. Other eyes than his had noted Christabel's manner of receiving the Baron's attentions – other people had been impressed by the change in her. The thing was not an evil of his own imagining. She was making herself the talk of his friends and acquaintance. There was scandal – foul suspicion in the very atmosphere she breathed. That mutual understanding, that face to face arraignment, which he felt must come sooner or later, could not be staved off much longer. The wife who defied him thus openly, making light of him under his own roof, must be brought to book.

"To-morrow she and I must come to terms," Leonard said to himself.

No one had much leisure for thought that evening. The drawing-room was a scene of babble and laughter, music, flirtation, frivolity, everybody seeming to be blest with that happy-go-lucky temperament which can extract mirth from the merest trifles. Jessie Bridgeman and Mr. Tregonell were the

only lookers-on – the only two people who in Jack Vandeleur's favourite phrase were not "in it." Every one else was full of the private theatricals. The idea had only been mooted after luncheon, and now it seemed as if life could hardly have been bearable yesterday without this thrilling prospect. Colonel Blathwayt, who had been out shooting all the afternoon, entered vigorously into the discussion. He was an experienced amateur actor, had helped to swell the funds of half the charitable institutions of London and the provinces; so he at once assumed the function of stage manager.

"De Cazalet can act," he said. "I have seen him at South Kensington; but I don't think he knows the ropes as well as I do. You must let me manage the whole business for you; write to the London people for stage and scenery, lamps, costumes, wigs. And of course you will want me for Alphonse."

Little Monty had been suggested for Alphonse. He was fair-haired and effeminate, and had just that small namby-pamby air which would suit Pauline's faint-hearted lover; but nobody dared to say anything about him when Colonel Blathwayt made this generous offer.

"Will you really play Alphonse?" exclaimed Christabel, looking up from a volume of engravings, illustrating the costumes of the Directory and Empire, over which the young ladies of the party, notably Dopsy and Mopsy, had been giggling and ejaculating. "We should not have ventured to offer you a secondary part."

"You'll find it won't be a secondary character as I shall play it," answered the Colonel, calmly. "Alphonse will go better than any part in the piece. And now as to the costumes. Do you want to be picturesque, or do you want to be correct?"

"Picturesque by all means," cried Mopsy. "Dear Mrs. Tregonell would look too lovely in powder and patches."

"Like Boucher's Pompadour," said the Colonel. "Do you know I think, now fancy balls are the rage, the Louis Quinze costume is rather played out. Every ponderous matron fancies herself in powder and brocade. The powder is hired for the evening, and the brocade is easily convertible into a dinner gown," added the Colonel, who spent the greater part of his life among women, and prided himself upon knowing their ways. "For my part, I should like to see Mrs. Tregonell dressed like Madame Tallien."

"Undressed like Madame Tallien, you mean," said Captain Vandeleur: and thereupon followed a lively discussion as to the costume of the close of the last century as compared with the costume of to-day, which ended in somebody's assertion that the last years of a century are apt to expire in social and political convulsions, and that there was every promise of revolution as a wind-up for the present age.

"My idea of the close of the nineteenth century is that it will be a period of dire poverty," said the proprietor of the *Sling*; "an age of pauperism already heralded by the sale of noble old mansions, the breaking-up of great estates, the destruction of famous collections, galleries, libraries, the pious hoards of generations

of connoisseurs and bookworms, scattered to the four winds by a stroke of the auctioneer's hammer. The landed interest and the commercial classes are going down the hill together. Suez has ruined our shipping interests; an unreciprocated free trade is ruining our commerce. Coffee, tea, cotton – our markets are narrowing for all. After a period of lavish expenditure, reckless extravagance, or at any rate the affectation of reckless extravagance, there will come an era of dearth. Those are wisest who will foresee and anticipate the change, simplify their habits, reduce their luxuries, put on a Quakerish sobriety in dress and entertainments, which, if carried out nicely, may pass for high art – train themselves to a kind of holy poverty outside the cloister – and thus break their fall. Depend upon it, there will be a fall, for every one of those men and women who at this present day are living up to their incomes."

"The voice is the voice of FitzJesse, but the words are the words of Cassandra," said Colonel Blathwayt. "For my part, I am like the Greeks, and never listen to such gloomy vaticinations. I daresay the deluge *will* come – a deluge now and again is inevitable; but I think the dry land will last our time. And in the meanwhile was there ever a pleasanter world than that we live in – an entirely rebuilt and revived London – clubs, theatres, restaurants, without number – gaiety and brightness everywhere? If our amusements are frivolous, at least they are hearty. If our friendships are transient, they are very pleasant while they last. We know people to-day, and cut them to-morrow; that is one

of the first conditions of good society. The people who are cut understand the force of circumstances, and are just as ready to take up the running a year or two hence, when we can afford to know them."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," quoted little Monty, in a meek voice.

"Our women are getting every day more like the women of the Directory, and the Consulate," continued the Colonel. "We have come to short petticoats and gold anklets. All in good time we shall come to bare feet. We have abolished sleeves, and we have brought bodices to a *reductio ad absurdum*; but, although prudes and puritans may disapprove our present form, I must say that women were never so intelligent or so delightful. We have come back to the days of the *salon* and the *petit souper*. Our daughters are sirens and our wives are wits."

"Charming for Colonel Blathwayt, whose only experience is of other people's wives and daughters," said little Monty. "But I don't feel sure that the owners are quite so happy."

"When a man marries a pretty woman, he puts himself beyond the pale," said Mr. FitzJesse; "nobody sympathizes with him. I daresay there was not a member of the Grecian League who did not long to kick Menelaus."

"There should be stringent laws for the repression of nice girls' fathers," said little Monty. "Could there not be some kind of institution like the Irish Land Court, to force parents to cash up, and hand over daughter and dowry to any spirited young man

who made a bid? Here am I, a conspicuous martyr to parental despotism. I might have married half a dozen heiresses, but for the intervention of stony-hearted fathers. I have gone for them at all ages, from pinafores to false fronts; but I have never been so lucky as to rise an orphan."

"Poor little Monty! But what a happy escape for the lady."

"Ah, I should have been very kind to her, even if her youth and beauty dated before the Reform Bill," said Mr. Montagu. "I should not have gone into society with her – one must draw the line somewhere. But I should have been forbearing."

"Dear Mrs. Tregonell," said Mopsy, gushingly, "have you made up your mind what to wear?"

Christabel had been turning the leaves of a folio abstractedly for the last ten minutes.

"To wear? Oh, for the play! Well, I suppose I must be as true to the period as I can, without imitating Madame Tallien. Baron, you draw beautifully. Will you make a sketch for my costume? I know a little woman in George Street, Hanover Square, who will carry out your idea charmingly."

"I should have thought that you could have imagined a short-waisted gown and a pair of long mittens without the help of an artist," said Jessie, with some acidity. She had been sitting close to the lamp, poring over a piece of point-lace work, a quiet and observant listener. It was a fixed idea among the servants at Mount Royal that Miss Bridgeman's eyes were constructed on the same principle as those of a horse, and that she could see

behind her. "There is nothing so very elaborate in the dress of that period, is there?"

"I will try to realize the poetry of the costume."

"Oh, but the poetry means the bare feet and ankles, doesn't it?" asked Miss Bridgeman. "When you talk about poetry in costume, you generally mean something that sets a whole roomful of people staring and tittering."

"My Pauline will look a sylph!" said the Baron, with a languishing glance at his hostess.

And thus, in the pursuit of the infinitely little, the evening wore away. Songs and laughter, music of the lightest and most evanescent character, games which touched the confines of idiocy, and set Leonard wondering whether the evening amusements of Colney Hatch and Hanwell could possibly savour of wilder lunacy than these sports which his wife and her circle cultivated in the grave old reception-room, where a council of Cavaliers, with George Trevelyan of Nettlecombe, Royalist Colonel, at their head, had met and sworn fealty to Charles Stuart's cause, at hazard of fortune and life.

Leonard stood with his back to the wide old fireplace, watching these revellers, and speculating, in a troubled spirit, as to how much of this juvenile friskiness was real; contemplating, with a cynical spirit, that nice sense of class distinction which enabled the two St. Aubyn girls to keep Mopsy and Dopsy at an impassable distance, even while engaged with them in these familiar sports. Vain that in the Post Office game,

Mopsy as Montreal exchanged places with Emily St. Aubyn as Newmarket. Montreal and Newmarket themselves are not farther apart geographically than the two damsels were morally as they skipped into each other's chairs. Vain that in the Spelling game, the South Belgravians caught up the landowner's daughters with a surpassing sharpness and sometimes turned the laugh against those tender scions of the landed aristocracy. The very attitude of Clara St. Aubyn's chin – the way she talked apart with Mrs. Tregonell, seemingly unconscious of the Vandeleur presence, marked her inward sense of the gulf between them.

It was midnight before any one thought of going to bed, yet there was unwonted animation at nine o'clock next morning in the dining-room, where every one was talking of the day's expedition: always excepting the master of the house, who sat at one end of the table, with Termagant, his favourite Irish setter, crouched at his feet, and his game-bag lying on a chair near at hand.

"Are you really going to desert us?" asked Mopsy, with her sweetest smile.

"I am not going to desert you, for I never had the faintest intention of joining you," answered Leonard bluntly; "whether my wife and her friends made idiots of themselves by playing nursery games in her drawing-room, or by skipping about a windy height on the edge of the sea, is their own affair. I can take my pleasure elsewhere."

"Yes; but you take your pleasure very sadly, as somebody

said of English people generally," urged Mopsy, whose only knowledge of polite literature was derived from the classical quotations and allusions in the *Daily Telegraph*; "you will be all alone, for Jack and little Monty have promised to come with us."

"I gave them perfect freedom of choice. They may like that kind of thing. I don't."

Against so firm a resolve argument would have been vain. Mopsy gave a little sigh, and went on with her breakfast. She was really sorry for Leonard, who had been a kind and useful friend to Jack for the last six years – who had been indeed the backbone of Jack's resources, without which that gentleman's pecuniary position would have collapsed into hopeless limpness. She was quite sharp-sighted enough to see that the present aspect of affairs was obnoxious to Mr. Tregonell – that he was savagely jealous, yet dared not remonstrate with his wife.

"I should have thought he was just the last man to put up with anything of that kind," she said to Dopsy, in their bedchamber confidences; "I mean her carrying on with the Baron."

"You needn't explain yourself," retorted Dopsy, "it's visible to the naked eye. If you or I were to carry on like that in another woman's house we should get turned out; but Mrs. Tregonell is in her own house, and so long as her husband doesn't see fit to complain – "

"But when will he see fit? He stands by and watches his wife's open flirtation with the Baron, and lets her go on from bad to worse. He must see that her very nature is changed since last

year, and yet he makes no attempt to alter her conduct. He is an absolute worm."

"Even the worm will turn at last. You may depend he will," said Dopsy sententiously.

This was last night's conversation, and now in the bright fresh October morning, with a delicious coolness in the clear air, a balmy warmth in the sunshine, Dopsy and Mopsy were smiling at their hostess, for whose kindness they could not help feeling deeply grateful, "whatever they might think of her conduct. They recognized a divided duty – loyalty to Leonard as their brother's patron, and the friend who had first introduced them to this land of Beulah – gratitude to Mrs. Tregonell, without whose good graces they could not long have made their abode here.

"You are not going with us?" asked Christabel, carelessly scanning Leonard's shooting gear, as she rose from the table and drew on her long *mousquetaire* gloves.

"No – I'm going to shoot."

"Shall you go to the Kieve? That's a good place for woodcock, don't you know?" Jessie Bridgeman stared aghast at the speaker. "If you go that way in the afternoon you may fall in with us: we are to drink tea at the farm."

"Perhaps I may go that way."

"And now, if every one is ready, we had better start," said Christabel, looking round at her party.

She wore a tight-fitting jacket, dark olive velvet, and a cloth skirt, both heavily trimmed with sable, a beaver hat, with an

ostrich feather, which made a sweeping curve round the brim, and caressed the coil of golden-brown hair at the back of the small head. The costume, which was faintly suggestive of a hunting party at Fontainebleau or St. Germain, became the tall finely moulded figure to admiration. Nobody could doubt for an instant that Mrs. Tregonell was dressed for effect, and was determined to get full value out of her beauty. The neat tailor gown and simple little cloth toque of the past, had given way to a costly and elaborate costume, in which every detail marked the careful study of the coquette who lives only to be admired. Dopsy and Mopsy felt a natural pang of envy as they scrutinized the quality of the cloth and calculated the cost of the fur; but they consoled themselves with the conviction that there was a bewitching Kate Greenaway quaintness in their own flimsy garments which made up for the poverty of the stuff, and the doubtful finish of home dressmaking. A bunch of crimson poppies on Mopsy's shoulder, a cornflower in Dopsy's hat, made vivid gleams of colour upon their brown merino frocks, while the freshness of their saffron-tinted Toby frills was undeniable. Sleeves short and tight, and ten-buttoned Swedish gloves, made up a toilet which Dopsy and Mopsy had believed to be æsthetically perfect, until they compared it with Christabel's rich and picturesque attire. The St. Aubyn girls were not less conscious of the superiority of Mrs. Tregonell's appearance, but they were resigned to the inevitable. How could a meagre quarterly allowance, doled out by an unwilling father, stand

against a wife's unlimited power of running up bills. And here was a woman who had a fortune of her own to squander as she pleased, without anybody's leave or license. Secure in the severity of slate-coloured serges made by a West-End tailor, with hats to match, and the best boots and gloves that money could buy, the St. Aubyn girls affected to despise Christabel's olive velvet and sable tails.

"It's the worst possible form to dress like that for a country ramble," murmured Emily to Clara.

"Of course. But the country's about the only place where she could venture to wear such clothes," replied Clara: "she'd be laughed at in London."

"Well, I don't know: there were some rather loud get-ups in the Park last season," said Emily. "It's really absurd the way married women out-dress girls."

Once clear of the avenue Mrs. Tregonell and her guests arranged themselves upon the Darwinian principle of natural selection.

That brilliant bird the Baron, whose velvet coat and knickerbockers were the astonishment of Boscastle, instinctively drew near to Christabel, whose velvet and sable, plumed hat, and point-lace necktie pointed her out as his proper mate – Little Monty, Bohemian and *décousu*, attached himself as naturally to one of the Vandeleur birds, shunning the iron-grey respectability of the St. Aubyn breed.

Mrs. St. Aubyn, who had made up her mind at the last to join

the party, fastened herself upon St. Bernard Faddie, in the fond hope that he would be able to talk of parish matters, and advise her about her duties as Lady Bountiful; while he, on his part, only cared for rubric and ritual, and looked upon parish visitation as an inferior branch of duty, to be performed by newly-fledged curates. Mr. FitzJesse took up with Dopsy, who amused him as a marked specimen of nineteenth-century girlhood – a rare and wonderful bird of its kind, like a heavily wattled barb pigeon, not beautiful, but infinitely curious. The two St. Aubyn girls, in a paucity of the male sex, had to put up with the escort of Captain Vandeleur, to whom they were extremely civil, although they studiously ignored his sisters. And so, by lane and field-path, by hill and vale, they went up to the broad, open heights above the sea – a sea that was very fair to look upon on this sunshiny autumn day, luminous with those translucent hues of amethyst and emerald, sapphire and garnet, which make the ever changeful glory of that Cornish strand.

Miss Bridgeman walked half the way with the St. Aubyn girls and Captain Vandeleur. The St. Aubyns had always been civil to her, not without a certain tone of patronage which would have wounded a more self-conscious person, but which Jessie endured with perfect good temper.

"What does it matter if they have the air of bending down from a higher social level every time they talk to me," she said to Major Bree, lightly, when he made some rude remark about these young ladies. "If it pleases them to fancy themselves on a pinnacle, the

fancy is a harmless one, and can't hurt me. I shouldn't care to occupy that kind of imaginary height myself. There must be a disagreeable sense of chilliness and remoteness; and then there is always the fear of a sudden drop; like that fall through infinite space which startles one sometimes on the edge of sleep."

Armed with that calm philosophy which takes all small things lightly, Jessie was quite content that the Miss St. Aubyns should converse with her as if she were a creature of an inferior race – born with lesser hopes and narrower needs than theirs, and with no rights worth mention. She was content that they should be sometimes familiar and sometimes distant – that they should talk to her freely when there was no one else with whom they could talk – and that they should ignore her presence when the room was full.

To-day, Emily St. Aubyn was complaisant even to friendliness. Her sister had completely appropriated Captain Vandeleur, so Emily gave herself up to feminine gossip. There were some subjects which she really wanted to discuss with Miss Bridgeman, and this seemed a golden opportunity.

"Are we really going to have tea at the farmhouse near St. Nectan's Kieve?" she asked.

"Didn't you hear Mrs. Tregonell say so?" inquired Jessie, dryly.

"I did; but I could not help wondering a little. Was it not at the Kieve that poor Mr. Hamleigh was killed?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think it just a little heartless of Mrs. Tregonell to choose that spot for a pleasure party?"

"The farmhouse is not the Kieve: they are at least a mile apart."

"That's a mere quibble, Miss Bridgeman: the association is just the same, and she ought to feel it."

"Mrs. Tregonell is my very dear friend," answered Jessie. "She and her aunt are the only friends I have made in this world. You can't suppose that I shall find fault with her conduct?"

"No, I suppose not. You would stand by her through thick and thin?"

"Through thick and thin."

"Even at the sacrifice of principle?"

"I should consider gratitude and friendship the governing principles of my life where she is concerned."

"If she were to go ever so wrong, you would still stand by her?"

"Stand by her, and cleave to her – walk by her side till death, wherever the path might lead. I should not encourage her in wrong-doing. I should lift up my voice when there was need: but I should never forsake her."

"That is your idea of friendship?"

"Unquestionably. To my mind, friendship which implies anything less than that is meaningless. However, there is no need for heroics: Mrs. Tregonell is not going to put me to the test."

"I hope not. She is very sweet. I should be deeply pained if she were to go wrong. But do you know that my mother does not

at all like her manner with the Baron. My sister and I are much more liberal-minded, don't you know; and we can understand that all she says and does is mere frivolity – high spirits which must find some outlet. But what surprises me is that she should be so gay and light-hearted after the dreadful events of her life. If such things had happened to me, I should inevitably have gone over to Rome, and buried myself in the severest conventual order that I could find."

"Yes, there have been sad events in her life: but I think she chose the wiser course in doing her duty by the aunt who brought her up, than in self-immolation of that kind," answered Jessie, with her thin lips drawn to the firmest line they were capable of assuming.

"But think what she must have suffered last year when that poor man was killed. I remember meeting him at dinner when they were first engaged. Such an interesting face – the countenance of a poet. I could fancy Shelley or Keats exactly like him."

"We have their portraits," said Jessie, intolerant of gush. "There is no scope for fancy."

"But I think he really was a little like Keats – consumptive looking, too, which carried out the idea. How utterly dreadful it must have been for Mrs. Tregonell when he met his death, so suddenly, so awfully, while he was a guest under her roof. How did she bear it?"

"Very quietly. She had borne the pain of breaking her

engagement for a principle, a mistaken one, as I think. His death could hardly have given her worse pain."

"But it was such an awful death."

"Awful in its suddenness, that is all – not more awful than the death of any one of our English soldiers who fell in Zululand the other day. After all, the mode and manner of death is only a detail, and, so long as the physical pain is not severe, an insignificant detail. The one stupendous fact for the survivor remains always the same. We had a friend and he is gone – for ever, for all we know."

There was the faint sound of a sob in her voice as she finished speaking.

"Well, all I can say is that if I were Mrs. Tregonell, I could never have been happy again," persisted Miss St. Aubyn.

They came to Trevena soon after this, and went down the hill to the base of that lofty crag on which King Arthur's Castle stood. They found Mrs. Fairfax and the pony-carriage in the Valley. The provisions had all been carried up the ascent. Everything was ready for luncheon.

A quarter of a hour later they were all seated on the long grass and the crumbling stones, on which Christabel and her lover had sat so often in that happy season of her life when love was a new thought, and faith in the beloved one as boundless as that far-reaching ocean, on which they gazed in dreamy content. Now, instead of low talk about Arthur and Guinevere, Tristan and Iseult, and all the legends of the dim poetic past, there were loud

voices and laughter, execrable puns, much conversation of the order generally known as chaff, a great deal of mild personality of that kind which, in the age of Miss Burney and Miss Austin, was described as quizzing and roasting, and an all-pervading flavour of lunacy. The Baron de Cazalet tried to take advantage of the position, and to rise to poetry; but he was laughed down by the majority, especially by Mr. FitzJesse, who hadn't a good word for Arthur and his Court.

"Marc was a coward, and Tristan was a traitor and a knave," he said. "While as for Iseult, the less said of her the better. The legends of Arthur's birth are cleverly contrived to rehabilitate his mother's character, but the lady's reputation still is open to doubt. Jack the Giant Killer and Tom Thumb are quite the most respectable heroes connected with this western world. You have no occasion to be proud of the associations of the soil, Mrs. Tregonell."

"But I am proud of my country, and of its legends," answered Christabel.

"And you believe in Tristan and Iseult, and the constancy which was personified by a bramble, as in the famous ballad of Lord Lovel."

"The constancy which proved itself by marrying somebody else, and remaining true to the old love all the same," said Mrs. Fairfax Torrington, in her society voice, trained to detonate sharp sentences across the subdued buzz of a dinner-table.

"Poor Tristan," sighed Dopsy.

"Poor Iseult," murmured Mopsy.

They had never heard of either personage until this morning.

"Nothing in the life of either became them so well as the leaving it," said Mr. FitzJesse. "The crowning touch of poetry in Iseult's death redeems her errors. You remember how she was led half senseless to Tristan's death-chamber —*lors l'embrasse de ses bras, tant comme elle peut, et gette ung souspir, et se pasme sur le corps, et le cueur lui part, et l'âme s'en va.*"

"If every woman who loses her lover could die like that," said Jessie, with a curious glance at Christabel, who sat listening smilingly to the conversation, with the Baron prostrate at her feet.

"Instead of making good her loss at the earliest opportunity, what a dreary place this world would be," murmured little Monty. "I think somebody in the poetic line has observed that nothing in Nature is constant, so it would be hard lines upon women if they were to be fettered for life by some early attachment that came to a bad end."

"Look at Juliet's constancy," said Miss St. Aubyn.

"Juliet was never put to the test," answered FitzJesse. "The whole course of her love affair was something less than a week. If that potion of hers had failed, and she had awakened safe and sound in her own bedchamber next morning, who knows that she would not have submitted to the force of circumstances, married County Paris, and lived happily with him ever after. There is only one perfect example of constancy in the whole realm of poetry, and that is the love of Paolo and Francesca, the love which even

the pains of hell could not dissever."

"They weren't married, don't you know," lisped Monty. "They hadn't had the opportunity of getting tired of each other. And then, in the underworld, a lady would be glad to take up with somebody she had known on earth: just as in Australia one is delighted to fall in with a fellow one wouldn't care twopence for in Bond Street."

"I believe you are right," said Mr. FitzJesse, "and that constancy is only another name for convenience. Married people are constant to each other, as a rule, because there is such an infernal row when they fall out."

Lightly flew the moments in the balmy air, freshened by the salt sea, warmed by the glory of a meridian sun – lightly and happily for that wise majority of the revellers, whose philosophy is to get the most out of to-day's fair summer-time, and to leave future winters and possible calamities to Jove's discretion. Jessie watched the girl who had grown up by her side, whose every thought she had once known, and wondered if this beautiful artificial impersonation of society tones and society graces could be verily the same flesh and blood. What had made this wondrous transformation? Had Christabel's very soul undergone a change during that dismal period of apathy last winter? She had awakened from that catalepsy of despair a new woman – eager for frivolous pleasures – courting admiration – studious of effect: the very opposite of that high-souled and pure-minded girl whom Jessie had known and loved.

"It is the most awful moral wreck that was ever seen," thought Jessie; "but if my love can save her from deeper degradation she shall be saved."

Could she care for that showy impostor posed at her feet, gazing up at her with passionate eyes – hanging on her accents – openly worshipping her? She seemed to accept his idolatry, to sanction his insolence; and all her friends looked on, half scornful, half amused.

"What can Tregonell be thinking about not to be here to-day?" said Jack Vandeleur, close to Jessie's elbow.

"Why should he be here?" she asked.

"Because he's wanted. He's neglecting that silly woman shamefully."

"It is only his way," answered Jessie, scornfully. "Last year he invited Mr. Hamleigh to Mount Royal, who had been engaged to his wife a few years before. He is not given to jealousy."

"Evidently not," said Captain Vandeleur, waxing thoughtful, as he lighted a cigarette, and strolled slowly off to stare at the sea, the rocky pinnacles, and yonder cormorant skimming away from a sharp point, to dip and vanish in the green water.

The pilgrimage from Trevena to Trevithy farm was somewhat less straggling than the long walk by the cliffs. The way was along a high road, which necessitated less meandering, but the party still divided itself into twos and threes, and Christabel still allowed de Cazalet the privilege of a *tête-à-tête*. She was a better walker than any of her friends, and the Baron was a practised

pedestrian; so those two kept well ahead, leaving the rest of the party to follow as they pleased.

"I wonder they are not tired of each other by this time," said Mopsy, whose Wurtemberg heels were beginning to tell upon her temper. "It has been such a long day – and such a long walk. What can the Baron find to talk about all this time?"

"Himself," answered FitzJesse, "an inexhaustible subject. Men can always talk. Listening is the art in which they fail. Are you a good listener, Miss Vandeleur?"

"I'm afraid not. If any one is prosy I begin to think of my frocks."

"Very bad. As a young woman, with the conquest of society before you, I most earnestly recommend you to cultivate the listener's art. Talk just enough to develop your companion's powers. If he has a hobby, let him ride it. Be interested, be sympathetic. Do not always agree, but differ only to be convinced, argue only to be converted. Never answer at random, or stifle a yawn. Be a perfect listener, and society is open to you. People will talk of you as the most intelligent girl they know."

Mopsy smiled a sickly smile. The agony of those ready-made boots, just a quarter of a size too small, though they had seemed so comfortable in the shoemaker's shop, was increasing momentarily. Here was a hill like the side of a house to be descended. Poor Mopsy felt as if she were balancing herself on the points of her toes. She leant feebly on her umbrella, while the editor of the *Sling* trudged sturdily by her side admiring the

landscape – stopping half-way down the hill to point out the grander features of the scene with his bamboo. Stopping was ever so much worse than going on. It was as if the fires consuming the martyr at the stake had suddenly gone out, and left him with an acuter consciousness of his pain.

"Too, too lovely," murmured Mopsy, heartily wishing herself in the King's Road, Chelsea, within hail of an omnibus.

She hobbled on somehow, pretending to listen to Mr. FitzJesse's conversation, but feeling that she was momentarily demonstrating her incompetence as a listener, till they came to the farm, where she was just able to totter into the sitting-room, and sink into the nearest chair.

"I'm afraid you're tired," said the journalist, a sturdy block of a man, who hardly knew the meaning of fatigue.

"I am just a little tired," she faltered hypocritically, "but it has been a lovely walk."

They were the last to arrive. The tea things were ready upon a table covered with snowy damask – a substantial tea, including home-made loaves, saffron-coloured cakes, jam, marmalade, and cream. But there was no one in the room except Mrs. Fairfax Torrington, who had enthroned herself in the most comfortable chair, by the side of the cheerful fire.

"All the rest of our people have gone straggling off to look at things," she said, "some to the Kieve – and as that is a mile off we shall have ever so long to wait for our tea."

"Do you think we need wait very long?" asked Mopsy, whose

head was aching from the effects of mid-day champagne; "would it be so very bad if we were to ask for a cup of tea."

"I am positively longing for tea," said Mrs. Torrington to FitzJesse, ignoring Mopsy.

"Then I'll ask the farm people to brew a special pot for you two," answered the journalist, ringing the bell. "Here comes Mr. Tregonell, game-bag, dogs, and all. This is more friendly than I expected."

Leonard strolled across the little quadrangular garden, and came in at the low door, as Mr. FitzJesse spoke.

"I thought I should find some of you here," he said; "where are the others?"

"Gone to the Kieve, most of them," answered Mrs. Torrington briskly. Her freshness contrasted cruelly with Mopsy's limp and exhausted condition. "At least I know your wife and de Cazalet were bent on going there. She had promised to show the waterfall. We were just debating whether we ought to wait tea for them."

"I wouldn't, if I were you," said Leonard. "No doubt they'll take their time."

He flung down his game-bag, took up his hat, whistled to his dogs, and went towards the door.

"Won't you stop and have some tea – just to keep us in countenance?" asked Mrs. Torrington.

"No, thanks. I'd rather have it later. I'll go and meet the others."

"If he ever intended to look after her it was certainly time he should begin," said the widow, when the door was shut upon her host. "Please ring again, Mr. FitzJesse. How slow these farm people are! Do they suppose we have come here to stare at cups and saucers?"

CHAPTER XI

"LOVE BORE SUCH BITTER AND SUCH DEADLY FRUIT."

Leonard Tregonell went slowly up the steep narrow lane with his dogs at his heels. It was a year since he had been this way. Good as the cover round about the waterfall was said to be for woodcock, he had carefully avoided the spot this season, and his friends had been constrained to defer to his superior wisdom as a son of the soil. He had gone farther afield for his sport, and, as there had been no lack of birds, his guests had no reason for complaint. Yet Jack Vandeleur had said more than once, "I wonder you don't try the Kieve. We shot a lot of birds there last year."

Now for the first time since that departed autumn he went up the hill to one of the happy hunting-grounds of his boyhood. The place where he had fished, and shot, and trapped birds, and hunted water-rats, and climbed and torn his clothes in the careless schoolboy days, when his conception of a perfectly blissful existence came as near as possible to the life of a North American Indian. He had always detested polite society and book-learning; but he had been shrewd enough and quick enough at learning the arts he loved: – gunnery – angling – veterinary surgery.

He met a group of people near the top of the hill – all the party except Christabel and the Baron. One glance showed him that these two were missing from the cluster of men and women crowding through the gate that opened into the lane.

"The waterfall is quite a shabby affair," said Miss St. Aubyn, "there has been so little rain lately, I felt ashamed to show Mr. Faddie such a poor little dribble."

"We are all going back to tea," explained her mother. "I don't know what has become of Mrs. Tregonell and the Baron, but I suppose they are loitering about somewhere. Perhaps you'll tell them we have all gone on to the farm."

"Yes, I'll send them after you. I told my wife I'd meet her at the Kieve, if I could."

He passed them and ran across the ploughed field, while the others went down the hill, talking and laughing. He heard the sound of their voices and that light laughter dying away on the still air as the distance widened between him and them; and he wondered if they were talking of his wife, and of his seeming indifference to her folly. The crisis had come. He had watched her in blank amazement, hardly able to believe his own senses, to realize the possibility of guilt on the part of one whose very perfection had galled him; and now he told himself there was no doubt of her folly, no doubt that this tinselly pretender had fascinated her, and that she was on the verge of destruction. No woman could outrage propriety as she had been doing of late, and yet escape danger. The business must be stopped somehow,

even if he were forced to kick the Baron out of doors, in order to make an end of the entanglement. And then, what if she were to lift up her voice, and accuse him – if she were to turn that knowledge which he suspected her of possessing, against him? What then? He must face the situation, and pay the penalty of what he had done. That was all.

"It can't much matter what becomes of me," he said to himself. "I have never had an hour's real happiness since I married her. She warned me that it would be so – warned me against my own jealous temper – but I wouldn't listen to her. I had my own way."

Could she care for that man? Could she? In spite of the coarseness of his own nature, there was in Leonard's mind a deep-rooted conviction of his wife's purity, which was stronger even than the evidence of actual facts. Even now, although the time had come when he must act, he had a strange confused feeling, like a man whose brain is under the influence of some narcotic, which makes him see things that are not. He felt as in some hideous dream – long-involved – a maze of delusion and bedevilment, from which there was no escape.

He went down into the hollow. The high wooden gate stood wide open – evidence that there was some one lingering below. The leaves were still on the trees, the broad feathery ferns were still green. There was a low yellow light gleaming behind the ridge of rock and the steep earthy slope above. The rush of the water sounded loud and clear in the silence.

Leonard crept cautiously down the winding moss-grown track, holding his dogs behind him in a leash, and constraining those well-mannered brutes to perfect quiet. He looked down into the deep hollow, through which the water runs, and over which there is that narrow foot bridge, whence the waterfall is seen in all its beauty – an arc of silvery light cleaving the dark rock above, and flashing down to the dark rock below.

Christabel was standing on the bridge, with de Cazalet at her side. They were not looking up at the waterfall. Their faces were turned the other way, to the rocky river bed, fringed with fern and wild rank growth of briar and weed. The Baron was talking earnestly, his head bent over Christabel, till it seemed to those furious eyes staring between the leafage, as if his lips must be touching her face. His hand clasped hers. That was plain enough.

Just then the spaniel stirred, and rustled the dank dead leaves – Christabel started, and looked up towards the trees that screened her husband's figure. A guilty start, a guilty look, Leonard thought. But those eyes of hers could not pierce the leafy screen, and they drooped again, looking downward at the water beneath her feet. She stood in a listening attitude, as if her whole being hung upon de Cazalet's words.

What was he pleading so intensely? What was that honeyed speech, to which the false wife listened, unresistingly, motionless as the bird spell-bound by the snake. So might Eve have listened to the first tempter. In just such an attitude, with just such an expression, every muscle relaxed, the head gently drooping,

the eyelids lowered, a tender smile curving the lips – the first tempted wife might have hearkened to the silver-sweet tones of her seducer.

"Devil!" muttered Leonard between his clenched teeth.

Even in the agony of his rage – rage at finding that this open folly, which he had pretended not to see, had been but the light and airy prelude to the dark theme of secret guilt – that wrong which he felt most deeply was his wife's falsehood to herself – her wilful debasement of her own noble character. He had known her, and believed in her as perfect and pure among women, and now he saw her deliberately renouncing all claim to man's respect, lowering herself to the level of the women who can be tempted. He had believed her invulnerable. It was as if Diana herself had gone astray – as if the very ideal and archetype of purity among women had become perverted.

He stood, breathless almost, holding back his dogs, gazing, listening with as much intensity as if only the senses of hearing and sight lived in him – and all the rest were extinct. He saw the Baron draw nearer and nearer as he urged his prayer – who could doubt the nature of that prayer – until the two figures were posed in one perfect harmonious whole, and then his arm stole gently round the slender waist.

Christabel sprang away from him with a coy laugh.

"Not now," she said, in a clear voice, so distinct as to reach that listener's ears. "I can answer nothing now. To-morrow."

"But, my soul, why delay?"

"To-morrow," she repeated; and then she cried suddenly, "hark! there is some one close by. Did you not hear?"

There had been no sound but the waterfall – not even the faintest rustle of a leaf. The two dogs crouched submissively at their master's feet, while that master himself stood motionless as a stone figure.

"I must go," cried Christabel. "Think how long we have stayed behind the others. We shall set people wondering."

She sprang lightly from the bridge to the bank, and came quickly up the rocky path, a narrow winding track, which closely skirted the spot where Leonard stood concealed by the broad leaves of a chestnut. She might almost have heard his hurried breathing, she might almost have seen the lurid eyes of his dogs, gleaming athwart the rank undergrowth; but she stepped lightly past, and vanished from the watcher's sight.

De Cazalet followed.

"Christabel, stop," he exclaimed; "I must have your answer now. My fate hangs upon your words. You cannot mean to throw me over. I have planned everything. In three days we shall be at Pesth – secure from all pursuit."

He was following in Christabel's track, but he was not swift enough to overtake her, being at some disadvantage upon that slippery way, where the moss-grown slabs of rock offered a very insecure footing. As he spoke the last words, Christabel's figure disappeared among the trees upon the higher ground above him, and a broad herculean hand shot out of the leafy background,

and pinioned him.

"Scoundrel – profligate – impostor!" hissed a voice in his ear, and Leonard Tregonell stood before him – white, panting, with flecks of foam upon his livid lips. "Devil! you have corrupted and seduced the purest woman that ever lived. You shall answer to me – her husband – for your infamy."

"Oh! is that your tune?" exclaimed the Baron, wrenching his arm from that iron grip. They were both powerful men – fairly matched in physical force, cool, hardened by rough living. "Is that your game? I thought you didn't mind."

"You dastardly villain, what did you take me for?"

"A common product of nineteenth-century civilization," answered the other, coolly. "One of those liberal-minded husbands who allow their wives as wide a license as they claim for themselves."

"Liar," cried Leonard, rushing at him with his clenched fist raised to strike.

The Baron caught him by the wrist – held him with fingers of iron.

"Take care," he said. "Two can play at that game. If it comes to knocking a man's front teeth down his throat I may as well tell you that I have given the 'Frisco dentists a good bit of work in my time. You forget that there's no experience of a rough-and-ready life that you have had which I have not gone through twice over. If I had you in Colorado we'd soon wipe off this little score with a brace of revolvers."

"Let Cornwall be Colorado for the nonce. We could meet here as easily as we could meet in any quiet nook across the Channel, or in the wilds of America. No time like the present – no spot better than this."

"If we had only the barkers," said de Cazalet, "but unluckily we haven't."

"I'll meet you here to-morrow at daybreak – say, sharp seven. We can arrange about the pistols to-night. Vandeleur will come with me – he'd run any risk to serve me – and I daresay you could get little Monty to do as much for you. He's a good plucked one."

"Do you mean it?"

"Unquestionably."

"Very well. Tell Vaudeleur what you mean, and let him settle the details. In the meantime we can take things quietly before the ladies. There is no need to scare any of them."

"I am not going to scare them. Down, Termagant," said Leonard to the Irish setter, as the low light branches of a neighbouring tree were suddenly stirred, and a few withered leaves drifted down from the rugged bank above the spot where the two men were standing.

"Well, I suppose you're a pretty good shot," said the Baron coolly, taking out his cigar-case, "so there'll be no disparity. By-the-by there was a man killed here last year, I heard – a former rival of yours."

"Yes, there was a man killed here," answered Leonard, walking slowly on.

"Perhaps you killed him?"

"I did," answered Leonard, turning upon him suddenly. "I killed him: as I hope to kill you: as I would kill any man who tried to come between me and the woman I loved. He was a gentleman, and I am sorry for him. He fired in the air, and made me feel like a murderer. He knew how to make that last score. I have never had a peaceful moment since I saw him fall, face downward, on that broad slab of rock on the other side of the bridge. You see I am not afraid of you, or I shouldn't tell you this."

"I suspected as much from the time I heard the story," said de Cazalet. "I rarely believe in those convenient accidents which so often dispose of inconvenient people. But don't you think it might be better for you if we were to choose a different spot for to-morrow's meeting? Two of your rivals settled in the same gully might look suspicious – for I dare say you intend to kill me."

"I shall try," answered Leonard.

"Then suppose we were to meet on those sands – Trebarwith Sands, I think you call the place. Not much fear of interruption there, I should think, at seven o'clock in the morning."

"You can settle that and everything else with Vandeleur," said Leonard, striding off with his dogs, and leaving the Baron to follow at his leisure.

De Cazalet walked slowly back to the farm, meditating deeply.

"It's devilish unlucky that this should have happened," he said to himself. "An hour ago everything was going on velvet. We might have got quietly away to-morrow – for I know she

meant to go, cleverly as she fenced with me just now – and left my gentleman to his legal remedy, which would have secured the lady and her fortune to me, as soon as the Divorce Court business was over. He would have followed us with the idea of fighting, no doubt, but I should have known how to give him the slip. And then we should have started in life with a clean slate. Now there must be no end of a row. If I kill him it will be difficult to get away – and if I bolt, how am I to be sure of the lady? Will she come to my lure when I call her? Will she go away with me, to-morrow? Yes, that will be my only chance. I must get her to promise to meet me at Bodmin Road Station in time for the Plymouth train – there's one starts at eleven. I can drive from Trebarwith to Bodmin with a good horse, take her straight through to London, and from London by the first available express to Edinburgh. She shall know nothing of what has happened till we are in Scotland, and then I can tell her that she is a free woman, and my wife by the Scottish law, – a bond which she can make as secure as she likes by legal and religious ceremonies."

The Baron had enough insight into the feminine character to know that a woman who has leisure for deliberation upon the verge of ruin is not very likely to make the fatal plunge. The boldly, deliberately bad are the rare exceptions among womankind. The women who err are for the most part hustled and hurried into wrong-doing – hemmed round and beset by conflicting interests – bewildered and confused by false

reasoning – whirled in the Maelstrom of passion, helpless as the hunted hare.

The Baron had pleaded his cause eloquently, as he thought – had won Christabel almost to consent to elope with him – but not quite. She had seemed so near yielding, yet had not yielded. She had asked for time – time to reflect upon the fatal step – and reflection was just that one privilege which must not be allowed to her. Strange, he thought, that not once had she spoken of her son, the wrong she must inflict upon him, her agony at having to part with him. Beautiful, fascinating although he deemed her – proud as he felt at having subjugated so lovely a victim, it seemed to de Cazalet that there was something hard and desperate about her – as of a woman who went wrong deliberately and of set purpose. Yet on the brink of ruin she drew back, and was not to be moved by any special pleading of his to consent to an immediate elopement. Vainly had he argued that the time had come – that people were beginning to look askance – that her husband's suspicions might be aroused at any moment. She had been rock in her resistance of these arguments. But her consent to an early flight must now be extorted from her. Delay or hesitation now might be fatal. If he killed his man – and he had little doubt in his own mind that he should kill him – it was essential that his flight should be instant. The days were past when juries were disposed to look leniently upon gentlemanly homicide. If he were caught red-handed, the penalty of his crime would be no light one.

"I was a fool to consent to such a wild plan," he told himself. "I ought to have insisted upon meeting him on the other side of the Channel. But to draw back now might look bad, and would lessen my chance with her. No; there is no alternative course. I must dispose of him, and get her away, without the loss of an hour."

The whole business had to be thought out carefully. His intent was deadly, and he planned this duel with as much wicked deliberation as if he had been planning a murder. He had lived among men who held all human life, except their own, lightly, and to whom duelling and assassination were among the possibilities of every-day existence. He thought how if he and the three other men could reach that lonely bend of the coast unobserved, they might leave the man who should fall lying on the sand, with never an indication to point how he fell.

De Cazalet felt that in Vandeleur there was a man to be trusted. He would not betray, even though his friend were left there, dead upon the low level sand-waste, for the tide to roll over him and hide him, and wrap the secret of his doom in eternal silence. There was something of the freebooter in Jack Vandeleur – an honour-among-thieves kind of spirit – which the soul of that other freebooter recognized and understood.

"We don't want little Montagu," thought de Cazalet. "One man will be second enough to see fair-play. The fuss and formality of the thing can be dispensed with. That little beggar's ideas are too insular – he might round upon me."

So meditating upon the details of to-morrow, the Baron went

down the hill to the farm, where he found the Mount Royal party just setting out on their homeward journey under the shades of evening, stars shining faintly in the blue infinite above them. Leonard was not among his wife's guests – nor had he been seen by any of them since they met him at the field-gate, an hour ago.

"He has made tracks for home, no doubt," said Jack Vandeleur.

They went across the fields, and by the common beyond Trevalga – walking briskly, talking merrily, in the cool evening air; all except Mopsy, from whose high-heeled boots there was no surcease of pain. Alas! those Wurtemberg heels, and the boots just half a size too small for the wearer, for how many a bitter hour of woman's life have they to answer!

De Cazalet tried in vain during that homeward walk to get confidential speech with Christabel – he was eager to urge his new plan – the departure from Bodmin Road Station – but she was always surrounded. He fancied even that she made it her business to avoid him.

"Coquette," he muttered to himself savagely. "They are all alike. I thought she was a little better than the rest; but they are all ground in the same mill."

He could scarcely get a glimpse of her face in the twilight. She was always a little way ahead, or a little way behind him – now with Jessie Bridgeman, now with Emily St. Aubyn – skimming over the rough heathy ground, flitting from group to group. When they entered the house she disappeared almost instantly, leaving

her guests lingering in the hall, too tired to repair at once to their own rooms, content to loiter in the glow and warmth of the wood fires. It was seven o'clock. They had been out nearly nine hours.

"What a dreadfully long day it has been!" exclaimed Emily St. Aubyn, with a stifled yawn.

"Isn't that the usual remark after a pleasure party?" demanded Mr. FitzJesse. "I have found the unfailing result of any elaborate arrangement for human felicity to be an abnormal lengthening of the hours; just as every strenuous endeavour to accomplish some good work for one's fellow-men infallibly provokes the enmity of the class to be benefited."

"Oh, it has all been awfully enjoyable, don't you know," said Miss St. Aubyn; "and it was very sweet of Mrs. Tregonell to give us such a delightful day; but I can't help feeling as if we had been out a week. And now we have to dress for dinner, which is rather a trial."

"Why not sit down as you are? Let us have a tailor-gown and shooting-jacket dinner, as a variety upon a calico ball," suggested little Monty.

"Impossible! We should feel dirty and horrid," said Miss St. Aubyn. "The freshness and purity of the dinner-table would make us ashamed of our grubbiness. Besides, however could we face the servants? No, the effort must be made. Come, mother, you really look as if you wanted to be carried upstairs."

"By voluntary contributions," murmured FitzJesse, aside to Miss Bridgeman. "Briareus himself could not do it single-

handed, as one of our vivacious Home Rulers might say."

The Baron de Cazalet did not appear in the drawing-room an hour later when the house-party assembled for dinner. He sent his hostess a little note apologizing for his absence, on the ground of important business letters, which must be answered that night; though why a man should sit down at eight o'clock in the evening to write letters for a post which would not leave Boscastle till the following afternoon, was rather difficult for any one to understand.

"All humbug about those letters, you may depend," said little Monty, who looked as fresh as a daisy in his smooth expanse of shirt-front, with a single diamond stud in the middle of it, like a lighthouse in a calm sea. "The Baron was fairly done – athlete as he pretends to be – hadn't a leg to stand upon – came in limping. I wouldn't mind giving long odds that he won't show till to-morrow afternoon. It's a case of gruel and bandages for the next twenty-four hours."

Leonard came into the drawing-room just in time to give his arm to Mrs. St. Aubyn. He made himself more agreeable than usual at dinner, as it seemed to that worthy matron – talked more – laughed louder – and certainly drank more than his wont. The dinner was remarkably lively, in spite of the Baron's absence; indeed, the conversation took a new and livelier turn upon that account, for everybody had something more or less amusing to say about the absent one, stimulated and egged on with quiet malice by Mr. FitzJesse. Anecdotes were told of his

self-assurance, his vanity, his pretentiousness. His pedigree was discussed, and settled for – his antecedents – his married life, were all submitted to the process of conversational vivisection.

"Rather rough on Mrs. Tregonell, isn't it?" murmured little Monty to the fair Dopsy.

"Do you think she really cares?" Dopsy asked, incredulously.

"Don't you?"

"Not a straw. She could not care for such a man as that, after being engaged to Mr. Hamleigh."

"Hamleigh was better form, I admit – and I used to think Mrs. T. as straight as an arrow. But I confess I've been staggered lately."

"Did you see what a calm queenly look she had all the time people were laughing at de Cazalet?" asked Dopsy. "A woman who cared one little bit for a man could not have taken it so quietly."

"You think she must have flamed out – said something in defence of her admirer. You forget your Tennyson, and how Guinevere 'marred her friend's point with pale tranquillity.' Women are so deuced deep."

"Dear Tennyson," murmured Dopsy, whose knowledge of the Laureate's works had not gone very far beyond "The May Queen," and "The Charge of the Six Hundred."

It was growing late in the evening when de Cazalet showed himself. The drawing-room party had been in very fair spirits without him, but it was a smaller and a quieter party than usual;

for Leonard had taken Captain Vandeleur off to his own den after dinner, and Mr. Montagu had offered to play a fifty game, left-handed, against the combined strength of Dopsy and Mopsy. Christabel had been at the piano almost all the evening, playing with a breadth and grandeur which seemed to rise above her usual style. The ladies made a circle in front of the fire, with Mr. Faddie and Mr. FitzJesse, talking and laughing in a subdued tone, while those grand harmonies of Beethoven's rose and fell upon their half indifferent, half admiring ears.

Christabel played the closing chords of the Funeral March of a Hero as de Cazalet entered the room. He went straight to the piano, and seated himself in the empty chair by her side. She glided into the melancholy arpeggios of the Moonlight Sonata, without looking up from the keys. They were a long way from the group at the fire – all the length of the room lay in deep shadow between the lamps on the mantelpiece and neighbouring tables, and the candles upon the piano. Pianissimo music seemed to invite conversation.

"You have written your letters?" she asked lightly.

"My letters were a fiction – I did not want to sit face to face with your husband at dinner, after our conversation this afternoon at the waterfall; you can understand that, can't you Christabel. Don't – don't do that."

"What?" she asked, still looking down at the keys.

"Don't shudder when I call you by your Christian name – as you did just now. Christabel, I want your answer to my question

of to-day. I told you then that the crisis of our fate had come. I tell you so again to-night – more earnestly, if it is possible to be more in earnest than I was to-day. I am obliged to speak to you here – almost within earshot of those people – because time is short, and I must take the first chance that offers. It has been my accursed luck never to be with you alone – I think this afternoon was the first time that you and I have been together alone since I came here. You don't know how hard it has been for me to keep every word and look within check – always to remember that we were before an audience."

"Yes, there has been a good deal of acting," she answered quietly.

"But there must be no more acting – no more falsehood. We have both made up our minds, have we not, my beloved? I think you love me – yes, Christabel, I feel secure of your love. You did not deny it to-day, when I asked that thrilling question – those hidden eyes, the conscious droop of that proud head, were more eloquent than words. And for my love, Christabel – no words can speak that. It shall be told by-and-by in language that all the world can understand – told by my deeds. The time has come for decision; I have had news to-day that renders instant action necessary. If you and I do not leave Cornwall together to-morrow, we may be parted for ever. Have you made up your mind?"

"Hardly," she answered, her fingers still slowly moving over the keys in those plaintive arpeggios.

"What is your difficulty, dearest? Do you fear to face the future with me?"

"I have not thought of the future."

"Is it the idea of leaving your child that distresses you?"

"I have not thought of him."

"Then it is my truth – my devotion which you doubt?"

"Give me a little more time for thought," she said, still playing the same *sotto voce* accompaniment to their speech.

"I dare not; everything must be planned to-night. I must leave this house early to-morrow morning. There are imperative reasons which oblige me to do so. You must meet me at Bodmin Road Station at eleven – you must, Christabel, if our lives are to be free and happy and spent together. Vacillation on your part will ruin all my plans. Trust yourself to me, dearest – trust my power to secure a bright and happy future. If you do not want to be parted from your boy, take him with you. He shall be my son. I will hold him for you against all the world."

"You must leave this house early to-morrow morning," she said, looking up at him for the first time. "Why?"

"For a reason which I cannot tell you. It is a business in which some one else is involved, and I am not free to disclose it yet. You shall know all later."

"You will tell me, when we meet at Bodmin Road."

"Yes. Ah, then you have made up your mind – you will be there. My best and dearest, Heaven bless you for that sweet consent."

"Had we not better leave Heaven out of the question?" she said with a mocking smile; and then slowly, gravely, deliberately, she said, "Yes, I will meet you at eleven o'clock to-morrow, at Bodmin Road Station – and you will tell me all that has happened."

"What secret can I withhold from you, love – my second self – the fairer half of my soul?"

Urgently as he had pleaded his cause, certain as he had been of ultimate success, he was almost overcome by her yielding. It seemed as if a fortress which a moment before had stood up between him and the sky – massive – invincible – the very type of the impregnable and everlasting, had suddenly crumbled into ruin at his feet. His belief in woman's pride and purity had never been very strong: yet he had believed that here and there, in this sinful world, invincible purity was to be found. But now he could never believe in any woman again. He had believed in this one to the last, although he had set himself to win her. Even when he had been breathing the poison of his florid eloquence into her ear – even when she had smiled at him, a willing listener – there had been something in her look, some sublime inexpressible air of stainless womanhood which had made an impassable distance between them. And now she had consented to run away with him: she had sunk in one moment to the level of all disloyal wives. His breast thrilled with pride and triumph at the thought of his conquest: and yet there was a touch of shame, shame that she could so fall.

Emily St. Aubyn came over to the piano, and made an end of all confidential talk.

"Now you are both here, do give us that delicious little duet of Lecocq's," she said: "we want something cheerful before we disperse. Good gracious Mrs. Tregonell, how bad you look," cried the young lady, suddenly, "as white as a ghost."

"I am tired to death," answered Christabel, "I could not sing a note for the world."

"Really, then we mustn't worry you. Thanks so much for that lovely Beethoven music – the 'Andante' – or the 'Pastorale' – or the 'Pathétique,' was it not? So sweet."

"Good-night," said Christabel. "You won't think me rude if I am the first to go?"

"Not at all. We are all going. Pack up your wools, mother. I know you have only been pretending to knit. We are all half asleep. I believe we have hardly strength to crawl upstairs."

Candles were lighted, and Mrs. Tregonell and her guests dispersed, the party from the billiard-room meeting them in the hall.

These lighter-minded people, the drama of whose existence was just now in the comedy stage, went noisily up to their rooms; but the Baron, who was usually among the most loquacious, retired almost in silence. Nor did Christabel do more than bid her guests a brief good-night. Neither Leonard nor his friend Jack Vandeleur had shown themselves since dinner. Whether they were still in the Squire's den, or whether they had retired to

their own rooms no one knew.

The Baron's servant was waiting to attend his master. He was a man who had been with de Cazalet in California, Mexico, and South America – who had lived with him in his bachelorhood and in his married life – knew all the details of his domestic career, had been faithful to him in wealth and in poverty, knew all that there was to be known about him – the best and the worst – and had made up his mind to hold by an employment which had been adventurous, profitable, and tolerably easy, not entirely free from danger, or from the prospect of adversity – yet always hopeful. So thorough a scamp as the Baron must always find some chance open to him – thus, at least, argued Henri le Mescam, his unscrupulous ally. The man was quick, clever – able to turn his hand to anything – valet, groom, cook, courier – as necessity demanded.

"Is Salathiel pretty fresh?" asked the Baron.

"Fit as a fiddle: he hasn't been out since you hunted him four days ago."

"That's lucky. He will be able to go the pace to-morrow morning. Have him harnessed to that American buggy of Mr. Tregonell's at six o'clock."

"I suppose you know that it's hardly light at six."

"There will be quite enough light for me. Pack my smallest portmanteau with linen for a week, and a second suit – no dress-clothes – and have the trap ready in the stable-yard when the clock strikes six. I have to catch a train at Launceston at 7.45.

You will follow in the afternoon with the luggage."

"To your London rooms, Sir?"

"Yes. If you don't find me there you will wait for further instructions. You may have to join me on the other side of the channel."

"I hope so, Sir."

"Sick of England already?"

"Never cared much for it, Sir. I began to think I should die of the dulness of this place."

"Rather more luxurious than our old quarters at St. Heliers ten years ago, when you were marker at Jewson's, while I was teaching drawing and French at the fashionable academies of the island."

"That was bad, Sir; but luxury isn't everything in life. A man's mind goes to rust in a place of this kind."

"Well, there will not be much rust for you in future, I believe. How would you like it if I were to take you back to the shores of the Pacific?"

"That's just what I should like, Sir. You were a king there, and I was your prime minister."

"And I may be a king again – perhaps this time with a queen – a proud and beautiful queen."

Le Mescam smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"The queenly element was not quite wanting in the past, Sir," he said.

"Pshaw, Henri, the ephemeral fancy of the hour. Such chance

entanglements as those do not rule a man's life."

"Perhaps not, Sir; but I know one of those chance entanglements made Lima unpleasantly warm for us; and if, after you winged Don Silvio, there hadn't been a pair of good horses waiting for us, you might never have seen the outside of Peru."

"And if a duel was dangerous in Lima, it would be ten times more dangerous in Cornwall, would it not, Henri?"

"Of course it would, Sir. But you are not thinking of anything like a duel here – you can't be so mad as to think of it."

"Certainly not. And now you can pack that small portmanteau, while I take a stretch. I sha'n't take off my clothes: a man who has to be up before six should never trifle with his feelings by making believe to go to bed."

CHAPTER XII

"SHE STOOD UP IN BITTER CASE, WITH A PALE YET STEADY FACE."

The silence of night and slumber came down upon the world, shadow and darkness were folded round and about it. The ticking of the old eight-day clock in the hall, of the bracket clock in the corridor, and of half a dozen other time-pieces, conscientiously performing in empty rooms, took that solemn and sepulchral sound which all clocks, down to the humblest Dutchman, assume after midnight. Sleep, peace, and silence seemed to brood over all human and brute life at Mount Royal. Yet there were some who had no thought of sleep that night.

In Mr. Tregonell's dressing-room there was the light of lamp and fire, deep into the small hours. The master of the house lolled, half-dressed, in an armchair by the hearth; while his friend, Captain Vandeleur, in smoking-jacket and slippers, lounged with his back to the chimney-piece, and a cigarette between his lips. A whisky bottle and a couple of siphons stood on a tray on the Squire's writing-table, an open pistol-case near at hand.

"You'd better lie down for a few hours," said Captain

Vandeleur. "I'll call you at half-past five."

"I'd rather sit here. I may get a nap by-and-by perhaps. You can go to bed if you are tired: I sha'n't oversleep myself."

"I wish you'd give up this business, Tregonell," said his friend, with unaccustomed seriousness. "This man is a dead shot. We heard of him in Bolivia, don't you remember? A man who has spent half his life in shooting-galleries, and who has lived where life counts for very little. Why should you stake your life against his? It isn't even betting: you're good enough at big game, but you've had very little pistol practice. Even if you were to kill him, which isn't on the cards, you'd be tried for murder; and where's the advantage of that?"

"I'll risk it," answered Leonard, doggedly, "I saw him with my wife's hand clasped in his – saw him with his lips close to her face – close enough for kisses – heard her promise him an answer – to-morrow. By Heaven there shall be no such to-morrow for him and for me. For one of us there shall be an end of all things."

"I don't believe Mrs. Tregonell is capable" – began Jack, thoughtfully mumbling his cigarette.

"You've said that once before, and you needn't say it again. Capable! Why, man alive, I *saw* them together. Nothing less than the evidence of my own eyes would have convinced me. I have been slow enough to believe. There is not a man or woman in this house, yourself included, who has not, in his secret soul, despised me for my slowness. And yet, now, because there is a question of a pistol-shot or two you fence round, and try to persuade me

that my wife's good name is immaculate, that all which you have seen and wondered at for the last three weeks means nothing."

"Those open flirtations seldom do mean anything," said Jack, persuasively.

A man may belong to the hawk tribe and yet not be without certain latent instincts of compassion and good feeling.

"Perhaps not – but secret meetings do: what I saw at the Kieve to-day was conclusive. Besides, the affair is all settled – you and de Cazalet have arranged it between you. He is willing that there should be no witness but you. The whole business will rest a secret between us three; and if we get quietly down to the sands before any one is astir to see us no one else need ever know what happened there."

"If there is bloodshed the thing must be known."

"It will seem like accident?"

"True," answered Vandeleur, looking at him searchingly; "like that accident last year at the Kieve – poor Hamleigh's death. Isn't to-morrow the anniversary, by-the-by?"

"Yes – the date has come round again."

"Dates have an awkward knack of doing that. There is a cursed mechanical regularity in life which makes a man wish himself in some savage island where there is no such thing as an almanack," said Vandeleur, taking out another cigarette. "If I had been Crusoe, I should never have stuck up that post. I should have been too glad to get rid of quarter-day."

In Christabel's room at the other end of the long corridor

there was only the dim light of the night-lamp, nor was there any sound, save the ticking of the clock and the crackling of the cinders in the dying fire. Yet here there was no more sleep nor peace than in the chamber of the man who was to wager his life against the life of his fellow-man in the pure light of the dawning day. Christabel stood at her window, dressed just as she had left the drawing-room, looking out at the sky and the sea, and thinking of him who, at this hour last year, was still a part of her life – perchance a watcher then as she was watching now, gazing with vaguely questioning eyes into the illimitable panorama of the heavens, worlds beyond worlds, suns and planetary systems, scattered like grains of sand over the awful desert of infinite space, innumerable, immeasurable, the infinitesimals of the astronomer, the despair of faith. Yes, a year ago and he was beneath that roof, her friend, her counsellor, if need were; for she had never trusted him so completely, never so understood and realized all the nobler qualities of his nature, as in those last days, after she had set an eternal barrier between herself and him.

She stood at the open lattice, the cold night air blowing upon her fever-heated face; her whole being absorbed not in deliberate thought, but in a kind of waking trance. Strange pictures came out of the darkness, and spread themselves before her eyes. She saw her first lover lying on the broad flat rock at St. Nectan's Kieve, face downward, shot through the heart, the water stained with the life-blood slowly oozing from his breast. And then,

when that picture faded into the blackness of night, she saw her husband and Oliver de Cazalet standing opposite to each other on the broad level sands at Trebarwith, the long waves rising up behind them like a low wall of translucent green, crested with silvery whiteness. So they would stand face to face a few hours hence. From her lurking-place behind the trees and brushwood at the entrance to the Kieve she had heard the appointment made – and she knew that at seven o'clock those two were to meet, with deadliest intent. She had so planned it – a life for a life.

She had no shadow of doubt as to which of those two would fall. Three months ago on the Riffel she had seen the Baron's skill as a marksman tested – she had seen him the wonder of the crowd at those rustic sports – seen him perform feats which only a man who has reduced pistol-shooting to a science would attempt. Against this man Leonard Tregonell – good all-round sportsman as he was – could have very little chance. Leonard had always been satisfied with that moderate skilfulness which comes easily and unconsciously. He had never given time and labour to any of the arts he pursued – content to be able to hold his own among parasites and flatterers.

"A life for a life," repeated Christabel, her lips moving dumbly, her heart throbbing heavily, as if it were beating out those awful words. "A life for a life – the old law – the law of justice – God's own sentence against murder. The law could not touch this murderer – but there was one way by which that cruel deed might be punished, and I found it."

The slow silent hours wore on. Christabel left the window, shivering with cold, though cheeks, brow, and lips were burning. She walked up and down the room for a long while, till the very atmosphere of the room, nay, of the house itself, seemed unendurable. She felt as if she were being suffocated, and this sense of oppression became so strong that she was sorely tempted to shriek aloud, to call upon some one for rescue from that stifling vault. The feeling grew to such intensity that she flung on her hat and cloak, and went quickly downstairs to a lobby-door that opened into the garden, a little door which she had unbolted many a night after the servants had locked up the house, in order to steal out in the moonlight and among the dewy flowers, and across the dewy turf to those shrubby walks which had such a mysterious look – half in light and half in shadow.

She closed the door behind her, and stood with the night wind blowing round her, looking up at the sky; clouds were drifting across the starry dome, and the moon, like a storm-beaten boat, seemed to be hurrying through them. The cold wind revived her, and she began to breathe more freely.

"I think I was going mad just now," she said to herself.

And then she thought she would go out upon the hills, and down to the churchyard in the valley. On this night, of all nights, she would visit Angus Hamleigh's grave. It was long since she had seen the spot where he lay – since her return from Switzerland she had not once entered a church. Jessie had remonstrated with her gravely and urgently – but without eliciting any explanation

of this falling off in one who had been hitherto so steadfastly devout.

"I don't feel inclined to go to church, Jessie," she said, coolly; "there is no use in discussing my feelings. I don't feel fit for church; and I am not going in order to gratify your idea of what is conventional and correct."

"I am not thinking of this in its conventional aspect – I have always made light of conventionalities – but things must be in a bad way with you, Christabel, when you do not feel fit for church."

"Things are in a bad way with me," answered Christabel, with a dogged moodiness which was insurmountable. "I never said they were good."

This surrender of old pious habits had given Jessie more uneasiness than any other fact in Christabel's life. Her flirtation with the Baron must needs be meaningless frivolity, Jessie had thought; since it seemed hardly within the limits of possibility that a refined and pure-minded woman could have any real *penchant* for that showy adventurer; but this persistent avoidance of church meant mischief.

And now, in the deep dead-of-night silence, Christabel went on her lonely pilgrimage to her first lover's grave. Oh, happy summer day when, sitting by her side outside the Maidenhead coach, all her own through life, as it seemed, he told her how, if she had the ordering of his grave, she was to bury him in that romantic churchyard, hidden in a cleft of the hill. She had

not forgotten this even amidst the horror of his fate, and had told the vicar that Mr. Hamleigh's grave must be at Minster and no otherwhere. Then had come his relations, suggesting burial-places with family associations – vaults, mausoleums, the pomp and circumstance of sepulture. But Christabel had been firm; and while the others hesitated a paper was found in the dead man's desk requesting that he might be buried at Minster.

How lonely the world seemed in this solemn pause between night and morning. Never before had Christabel been out alone at such an hour. She had travelled in the dead of the night, and had seen the vague dim night-world from the window of a railway carriage – but never until now had she walked across these solitary hills after midnight. It seemed as if for the first time in her life she were alone with the stars.

How difficult it was in her present state of mind to realize that those lights, tremulous in the deep blue vault, were worlds, and combinations of worlds – almost all of them immeasurably greater than this earth on which she trod. To her they seemed living watchers of the night – solemn, mysterious beings, looking down at her with all-understanding eyes. She had an awful feeling of their companionship as she looked up at them – a mystic sense that all her thoughts – the worst and best of them – were being read by that galaxy of eyes.

Strangely beautiful did the hills and the sky – the indefinite shapes of the trees against the edge of the horizon, the mysterious expanse of the dark sea – seem to her in the night silence. She

had no fear of any human presence, but there was an awful feeling in being, as it were, for the first time in her life alone with the immensities. Those hills and gorges, so familiar in all phases of daylight, from sunrise to after set of sun, assumed Titanic proportions in this depth of night, and were as strange to her as if she had never trodden this path before. What was the wind saying, as it came moaning and sobbing along the deep gorge through which the river ran? – what did the wind say as she crossed the narrow bridge which trembled under her light footfall? Surely there was some human meaning in that long minor wail, which burst suddenly into a wild unearthly shriek, and then died away in a low sobbing tone, as of sorrow and pain that grew dumb from sheer exhaustion, and not because there was any remission of pain or sorrow.

With that unearthly sound still following her, she went up the winding hill-side path, and then slowly descended to the darkness of the churchyard – so sunk and sheltered that it seemed like going down into a vault.

Just then the moon leapt from behind an inky cloud, and, in that ghostly light, Christabel saw the pale grey granite cross which had been erected in memory of Angus Hamleigh. It stood up in the midst of nameless mounds, and humble slate tablets, pale and glittering – an unmistakable sign of the spot where her first lover lay. Once only before to-night had she seen that monument. Absorbed in the pursuit of a Pagan scheme of vengeance she had not dared to come within the precincts of the

church, where she had knelt and prayed through all the sinless years of her girlhood. To-night some wild impulse had brought her here – to-night, when that crime which she called retribution was on the point of achievement.

She went with stumbling footsteps through the long grass, across the low mounds, till she came to that beneath which Angus Hamleigh lay. She fell like a lifeless thing at the foot of the cross. Some loving hand had covered the mound of earth with primroses and violets, and there were low clambering roses all round the grave. The scent of sweetbriar was mixed with the smell of earth and grass. Some one had cared for that grave, although she, who so loved the dead, had never tended it.

"Oh, my love! my love!" she sobbed, with her face upon the grass and the primrose leaves, and her arms clasping the granite; "my murdered love – my first, last, only lover – before to-morrow's sun is down your death will be revenged, and my life will be over! I have lived only for that – only for that, Angus, my love, my love!" She kissed the cold wet grass more passionately than she had ever kissed the dead face mouldering underneath it. Only to the dead – to the utterly lost and gone – is given this supreme passion – love sublimated to despair. From the living there is always something kept back – something saved and garnered for an after-gift – some reserve in the mind or the heart of the giver; but to the dead love gives all – with a wild self-abandonment which knows not restraint or measure. The wife who, while this man yet lived, had been so rigorously true to

honour and duty, now poured into the deaf dead ears a reckless avowal of love – love that had never faltered, never changed – love that had renounced the lover, and had yet gone on loving to the end.

The wind came moaning out of the valley again with that sharp human cry, as of lamentation for the dead.

"Angus!" murmured Christabel, piteously, "Angus, can you hear me? – do you know? Oh, my God! is there memory or understanding in the world where he has gone, or is it all a dead blank? Help me, my God! I have lost all the old sweet illusions of faith – I have left off praying, hoping, believing – I have only thought of my dead – thought of death and of him till all the living world grew unreal to me – and God and Heaven were only like old half-forgotten dreams. Angus!"

For a long time she lay motionless, her cold hands clasping the cold stone, her lips pressed upon the soft dewy turf, her face buried in primrose leaves – then slowly, and with an effort, she raised herself upon her knees, and knelt with her arms encircling the cross – that sacred emblem which had once meant so much for her: but which, since that long blank interval last winter, seemed to have lost all meaning. One great overwhelming grief had made her a Pagan – thirsting for revenge – vindictive – crafty – stealthy as an American Indian on the trail of his deadly foe – subtle as Greek or Oriental to plan and to achieve a horrible retribution.

She looked at the inscription on the cross, legible in the

moonlight, deeply cut in large Gothic letters upon the grey stone, filled in with dark crimson.

"Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord."

Who had put that inscription upon the cross? It was not there when the monument was first put up. Christabel remembered going with Jessie to see the grave in that dim half-blank time before she went to Switzerland. Then there was nothing but a name and a date. And now, in awful distinctness, there appeared those terrible words – God's own promise of retribution – the claim of the Almighty to be the sole avenger of human wrongs.

And she, reared by a religious woman, brought up in the love and fear of God, had ignored that sublime and awful attribute of the Supreme. She had not been content to leave her lover's death to the Great Avenger. She had brooded on his dark fate, until out of the gloom of despair there had arisen the image of a crafty and bloody retribution. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." So runs the dreadful sentence of an older law. The newer, lovelier law, which began in the after-glow of Philosophy, the dawn of Christianity, bids man leave revenge to God. And she, who had once called herself a Christian, had planned and plotted, making herself the secret avenger of a criminal who had escaped the grip of the law.

"Must he lie in his grave, unavenged, until the Day of Judgment?" she asked herself. "God's vengeance is slow."

An hour later, and Christabel, pale and exhausted, her garments heavy with dew, was kneeling by her boy's bed in the

faint light of the night-lamp; kneeling by him as she had knelt a year ago, but never since her return from Switzerland – praying as she had not prayed since Angus Hamleigh's death. After those long, passionate prayers, she rose and looked at the slumberer's face – her husband's face in little – but oh! how pure and fresh and radiant. God keep him from boyhood's sins of self-love and self-indulgence – from manhood's evil passions, hatred and jealousy. All her life to come seemed too little to be devoted to watching and guarding this beloved from the encircling snares and dangers of life. Pure and innocent now, in this fair dawn of infancy, he nestled in her arms – he clung to her and believed in her. What business had she with any other fears, desires, or hopes – God having given her the sacred duties of maternity – the master-passion of motherly love?

"I have been mad!" she said to herself; "I have been living in a ghastly dream: but God has awakened me – God's word has cured me."

God's word had come to her at the crisis of her life. A month ago, while her scheme of vengeance seemed still far from fulfilment, that awful sentence would hardly have struck so deeply. It was on the very verge of the abyss that those familiar words caught her; just when the natural faltering of her womanhood, upon the eve of a terrible crime, made her most sensitive to a sublime impression.

The first faint streak of day glimmered in the east, a pale cold light, livid and ghostly upon the edge of the sea yonder, white

and wan upon the eastward points of rock and headland, when Jessie Bridgeman was startled from her light slumbers by a voice at her bedside. She was always an early riser, and it cost her no effect to sit up in bed, with her eyes wide open, and all her senses on the alert.

"Christabel, what is the matter? Is Leo ill?"

"No, Leo is well enough. Get up and dress yourself quickly, Jessie. I want you to come with me – on a strange errand; but it is something that must be done, and at once."

"Christabel, you are mad."

"No. I have been mad. I think you must know it – this is the awakening. Come, Jessie."

Jessie had sprung out of bed, and put on slippers and dressing-gown, without taking her eyes off Christabel. Presently she felt her cloak and gown.

"Why, you are wet through. Where have you been?"

"To Angus Hamleigh's grave. Who put that inscription on the cross?"

"I did. Nobody seemed to care about his grave – no one attended to it. I got to think the grave my own property, and that I might do as I liked with it."

"But those awful words! What made you put them there?"

"I wanted the man who killed him to be reminded that there is an Avenger."

"Wash your face and put on your clothes as fast as you can. Every moment is of consequence," said Christabel.

She would explain nothing. Jessie urged her to take off her wet cloak, to go and change her gown and shoes; but she refused with angry impatience.

"There will be time enough for that afterwards," she said; "what I have to do will not take long, but it must be done at once. Pray be quick."

Jessie struggled through her hurried toilet, and followed Christabel along the corridor, without question or exclamation. They went to the door of Baron de Cazalet's room. A light shone under the bottom of the door, and there was the sound of some one stirring within. Christabel knocked, and the door was opened almost instantly by the Baron himself.

"Is it the trap?" he asked. "It's an hour too soon."

"No, it is I, Monsieur de Cazalet. May I come in for a few minutes? I have something to tell you."

"Christabel – my – " He stopped in the midst of that eager exclamation, at sight of the other figure in the background.

He was dressed for the day – carefully dressed, like a man who in a crisis of his life wishes to appear at no disadvantage. His pistol-case stood ready on the table. A pair of candles, burnt low in the sockets of the old silver candlesticks, and a heap of charred and torn paper in the fender showed that the Baron had been getting rid of superfluous documents. Christabel went into the room, followed by Jessie, the Baron staring at them both, in blank amazement. He drew an armchair near the expiring fire, and Christabel sank into it, exhausted and half fainting.

"What does it all mean?" asked de Cazalet, looking at Jessie, "and why are you here with her?"

"Why is she here?" asked Jessie. "There can be no reason except – "

She touched her forehead lightly with the tips of her fingers.

Christabel saw the action.

"No, I am not mad, now," she said, "I believe I have been mad, but that is all over. Monsieur de Cazalet, you and my husband are to fight a duel this morning, on Trebarwith sands."

"My dear Mrs. Tregonell, what a strange notion!"

"Don't take the trouble to deny anything. I overheard your conversation yesterday afternoon. I know everything."

"Would it not have been better to keep the knowledge to yourself, and to remember your promise to me, last night?"

"Yes, I remember that promise. I said I would meet you at Bodmin Road, after you had shot my husband."

"There was not a word about shooting your husband."

"No; but the fact was in our minds, all the same – in yours as well as in mine. Only there was one difference between us. You thought that when you had killed Leonard I would run away with you. That was to be your recompense for murder. I meant that you should kill him, but that you should never see my face again. You would have served my purpose – you would have been the instrument of my revenge!"

"Christabel!"

"Do not call me by that name – I am nothing to you – I never

could, under any possible phase of circumstances, be any nearer to you than I am at this moment. From first to last I have been acting a part. When I saw you at that shooting match, on the Riffel, I said to myself 'Here is a man, who in any encounter with my husband, must be fatal.' My husband killed the only man I ever loved, in a duel, without witnesses – a duel forced upon him by insane and causeless jealousy. Whether that meeting was fair or unfair in its actual details, I cannot tell; but at the best it was more like a murder than a duel. When, through Miss Bridgeman's acuteness, I came to understand what that meeting had been, I made up my mind to avenge Mr. Hamleigh's death. For a long time my brain was under a cloud – I could think of nothing, plan nothing. Then came clearer thoughts, and then I met you; and the scheme of my revenge flashed upon me like a suggestion direct from Satan. I knew my husband's jealous temper, and how easy it would be to fire a train *there*, and I made my plans with that view. You lent yourself very easily to my scheme."

"Lent myself!" cried the Baron, indignantly; and then with a savage oath he said: "I loved you, Mrs. Tregonell, and you made me believe that you loved me."

"I let you make fine speeches, and I pretended to be pleased at them," answered Christabel, with supreme scorn. "I think that was all."

"No, madam, it was not all. You fooled me to the top of my bent. What, those lovely looks, those lowered accents – all meant nothing? It was all a delusion – an acted lie? You never cared

for me?"

"No," answered Christabel. "My heart was buried with the dead. I never loved but one man, and he was murdered, as I believed – and I made up my mind to avenge his murder. 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' That sentence was in my mind always, when I thought of Leonard Tregonell. I meant you to be the executioner. And now – now – God knows how the light has come – but the God I worshipped when I was a happy sinless girl, has called me out of the deep pit of sin – called me to remorse and atonement. You must not fight this duel. You must save me from this horrible crime that I planned – save me and yourself from blood-guiltiness. You must not meet Leonard at Trebarwith."

"And stamp myself as a cur, to oblige you: after having lent myself so simply to your scheme of vengeance, lend myself as complacently to your repentance. No, Mrs. Tregonell, that is too much to ask. I will be your bravo, if you like, since I took the part unconsciously – but I will not brand myself with the charge of cowardice – even for you."

"You fought a duel in South America, and killed your adversary. Mr. FitzJesse told me so. Everybody knows that you are a dead shot. Who can call you a coward for refusing to shoot the man whose roof has sheltered you – who never injured you – against whom you can have no ill-will."

"Don't be too sure of that. He is your husband. When I came to Mount Royal, I came resolved to win you."

"Only because I had deceived you. The woman you admired was a living lie. Oh, if you could have looked into my heart only yesterday, you must have shrunk from me with loathing. When I led you on to play the seducer's part, I was plotting murder – murder which I called justice. I knew that Leonard was listening – I had so planned that he should follow us to the Kieve. I heard his stealthy footsteps, and the rustle of the boughs – you were too much engrossed to listen; but all my senses were strained, and I knew the very moment of his coming."

"It was a pity you did not let your drama come to its natural dénouement," sneered de Cazalet, furious with the first woman who had ever completely fooled him. "When your husband was dead – for there is not much doubt as to my killing him – you and I could have come to an understanding. You must have had some gratitude. However, I am not bloodthirsty, and since Mrs. Tregonell has cheated me out of my devotion, fooled me with day-dreams of an impossible future, I don't see that I should gain much by shooting Mr. Tregonell."

"No, there would be no good to you in that profitless bloodshed. It is I who have wronged you – I who wilfully deceived you – degrading myself in order to lure my husband into a fatal quarrel – tempting you to kill him. Forgive me, if you can – and forget this wild wicked dream. Conscience and reason came back to me beside that quiet grave to-night. What good could it do him who lies there that blood should be spilt for his sake? Monsieur de Cazalet, if you will give up all idea of this

duel I will be grateful to you for the rest of my life."

"You have treated me very cruelly," said the Baron, taking both her hands, and looking into her eyes, half in despairing love, half in bitterest anger; "you have fooled me as never man was fooled before, I think – tricked me – and trifled with me – and I owe you very little allegiance. If you and I were in South America I would show you very little mercy. No, my sweet one, I would make you play out the game – you should finish the drama you began – finish it in my fashion. But in this world of yours, hemmed round with conventionalities, I am obliged to let you off easily. As for your husband – well, I have exposed my life too often to the aim of a six-shooter to be called coward if I let this one opportunity slip. He is nothing to me – or I to him – since you are nothing to me. He may go – and I may go. I will leave a line to tell him that we have both been the dupes of a pretty little acted charade, devised by his wife and her friends – and instead of going to meet him at Trebarwith, I'll drive straight to Launceston, and catch the early train. Will that satisfy you, Mrs. Tregonell?"

"I thank you with all my heart and soul – you have saved me from myself."

"You are a much better man than I thought you, Baron," said Jessie, speaking for the first time.

She had stood by, a quiet spectator of the scene, listening intently, ready at any moment to come to Christabel's rescue, if need were – understanding, for the first time, the moving springs

of conduct which had been so long a mystery to her.

"Thank you, Miss Bridgeman. I suppose you were in the plot – looked on and laughed in your sleeve, as you saw how a man of the world may be fooled by sweet words and lovely looks."

"I knew nothing. I thought Mrs. Tregonell was possessed by the devil. If she had let you go on – if you had shot her husband – I should not have been sorry for him – for I know he killed a much better man than himself, and I am hard enough to hug the stern old law – a life for a life. But I should have been sorry for her. She is not made for such revenges."

"And now you will be reconciled with your husband, I suppose, Mrs. Tregonell. You two will agree to forget the past, and to live happily ever afterwards?" sneered de Cazalet, looking up from the letter which he was writing.

"No! there can be no forgetfulness for either of us. I have to do my duty to my son. I have to win God's pardon for the guilty thoughts and plans which have filled my mind so long. But I owe no duty to Mr. Tregonell. He has forfeited every claim. May I see your letter when it is finished?"

De Cazalet handed it to her without a word – a brief epistle, written in the airiest tone, ascribing all that had happened at the Kieve to a sportive plot of Mrs. Tregonell's, and taking a polite leave of the master of the house.

"When he reads that, I shall be half-way to Launceston," he said, as Christabel gave him back the letter.

"I am deeply grateful to you, and now good-bye," she said,

gravely, offering him her hand. He pressed the cold slim hand in his, and gently raised it to his lips.

"You have used me very badly, but I shall love and honour you to the end of my days," he said, as Christabel left him.

Jessie was following, but de Cazalet stopped her on the threshold. "Come," he said, "you must give me the clue to this mystery. Surely you were in it – you, who know her so well, must have known something of this?"

"I knew knowing. I watched her with fear and wonder. After – after Mr. Hamleigh's death – she was very ill – mentally ill; she sank into a kind of apathy – not madness – but terribly near the confines of madness. Then, suddenly, her spirits seemed to revive – she became eager for movement, amusement – an utterly different creature from her former self. She and I, who had been like sisters, seemed ever so far apart. I could not understand this new phase of her character. For a whole year she has been unlike herself – a terrible year. Thank God this morning I have seen the old Christabel again."

Half an hour afterwards the Baron's dog-cart drove out of the yard, and half an hour after his departure the Baron's letter was delivered to Leonard Tregonell, who muttered an oath as he finished reading it, and then handed it to his faithful Jack.

"What do you say to that?" he asked.

"By Jove, I knew Mrs. T – was straight," answered the Captain, in his unsophisticated phraseology. "But it was a shabby trick to play you all the same. I daresay Mop and Dop were in it."

Those girls are always ready for larks."

Leonard muttered something the reverse of polite about Dop and Mop, and went straight to the stable-yard, where he cancelled his order for the trap which was to have conveyed him to Trebarwith sands, and where he heard of the Baron's departure for Launceston.

Mystified and angry, he went straight upstairs to his wife's room. All barriers were broken down now. All reticence was at an end. Plainest words, straightest measures, befitted the present state of things.

Christabel was on her knees in a recess near her bed – a recess which held a little table, with her devotional books and a prie-dieu chair. A beautiful head of the Salvator Mundi, painted on china at Munich, gave beauty and sanctity to this little oratory. She was kneeling on the prie-dieu, her arms folded on the purple velvet cushion, her head leaning forward on the folded arms, in an attitude of prostration and self-abandonment, her hair falling loosely over her white dressing gown. She rose at Leonard's entrance, and confronted him, a ghostlike figure, deadly pale.

"Your lover has given me the slip," he said, roughly; "why didn't you go with him? You mean to go, I have no doubt. You have both made your plans to that end – but you want to sneak away – to get clear of this country, perhaps, before people have found out what you are. Women of your stamp don't mind what scandal they create, but they like to be out of the row."

"You are mistaken," his wife answered, coldly, unmoved by

his anger, as she had ever been untouched by his love. "The man who left here this morning was never my lover – never could have been, had he and I lived under the same roof for years. But I intended him for the avenger of that one man whom I did love, with all my heart and soul – the man you killed."

"What do you mean?" faltered Leonard, with a dull grey shade creeping over his face.

It had been in his mind for a long time that his secret was suspected by his wife – but this straight, sudden avowal of the fact was not the less a shock to him.

"You know what I mean. Did you not know when you came back to this house that I had fathomed your mystery – that I knew whose hand killed Angus Hamleigh. You did know it, Leonard: you must have known: for you knew that I was not a woman to fling a wife's duty to the winds, without some all-sufficient reason. You knew what kind of wife I had been for four dull, peaceful years – how honestly I had endeavoured to perform the duty which I took upon myself in loving gratitude to your dear mother. Did you believe that I could change all at once – become a heartless, empty-headed lover of pleasure – hold you, my husband, at arm's length – outrage propriety – defy opinion – without a motive so powerful, a purpose so deadly and so dear, that self-abasement, loss of good name, counted for nothing with me."

"You are a fool," said Leonard, doggedly. "No one at the inquest so much as hinted at foul play. Why should *you* suspect

any one?"

"For more than one good reason. First, your manner on the night before Angus Hamleigh's death – the words you and he spoke to each other at the door of his room. I asked you then if there were any quarrel between you, and you said no: but even then I did not believe you."

"There was not much love between us. You did not expect that, did you?" asked her husband savagely.

"You invited him to your house; you treated him as your friend. You had no cause to distrust him or me. You must have known that."

"I knew that you loved him."

"I had been your faithful and obedient wife."

"Faithful and obedient; yes – a man might buy faith and obedience in any market. I knew that other man was master of your heart. Great Heaven, can I forget how I saw you that night, hanging upon his words, all your soul in your eyes."

"We were talking of life and death. It was not his words that thrilled me; but the deep thoughts they stirred within me – thoughts of the great mystery – the life beyond the veil. Do you know what it is to speculate upon the life beyond this life, when you are talking to a man who bears the stamp of death upon his brow, who is as surely devoted to the grave as Socrates was when he talked to his friends in the prison. But why do I talk to you of these things? You cannot understand – "

"No! I am outside the pale, am I not?" sneered Leonard;

"made of a different clay from that sickly sentimental worshipper of yours, who turned to you when he had worn himself out in the worship of ballet-girls. I was not half fine enough for you, could not talk of Shakespeare and the musical glasses. Was it a pleasant sensation for me, do you think, to see you two sentimentalizing and poetizing, day after day – Beethoven here and Byron there, and all the train of maudlin modern versifiers who have made it their chief business to sap the foundations of domestic life."

"Why did you bring him into your house?"

"Why? Can't you guess? Because I wanted to know the utmost and the worst; to watch you two together; to see what venom was left in the old poison; to make sure, if I could, that you were staunch; to put you to the test."

"God knows I never faltered, throughout that ordeal," said Christabel, solemnly. "And yet you murdered him. You ask me how I know of that murder. Shall I tell you? You were at the Kieve that day; you did not go by the beaten track where the ploughmen must have seen you. No! you crept in by stealth the other way – clambered over the rocks – ah! you start. You wonder how I know that. You tore your coat in the scramble across the arch, and a fragment of the cloth was caught upon a bramble. I have that scrap of cloth, and I have the shooting-jacket from which it was torn, under lock and key in yonder wardrobe. Now, will you deny that you were at the Kieve that day?"

"No. I was there. Hamleigh met me there by appointment. You were right in your suspicion that night. We did quarrel – not about

you – but about his treatment of that Vandeleur girl. I thought he had led her on – flirted with her – fooled her – "

"You thought," ejaculated Christabel, with ineffable scorn.

"Well, I told him so, at any rate; told him that he would not have dared to treat any woman so scurvily, with her brother and her brother's friend standing by, if the good old wholesome code of honour had not gone out of fashion. I told him that forty years ago, in the duelling age, men had been shot for a smaller offence against good feeling; and then he rounded on me, and asked me if I wanted to shoot him; if I was trying to provoke a quarrel; and then – I hardly know how the thing came about – it was agreed that we should meet at the Kieve at nine o'clock next morning, both equipped as if for woodcock shooting – game-bag, dogs, and all, our guns loaded with swan-shot, and that we should settle our differences face to face, in that quiet hollow, without witnesses. If either of us dropped, the thing would seem an accident, and would entail no evil consequences upon the survivor. If one of us were only wounded, why – "

"But you did not mean that," interrupted Christabel, with flashing eyes, "you meant your shot to be fatal."

"It was fatal," muttered Leonard. "Never mind what I meant. God knows how I felt when it was over, and that man was lying dead on the other side of the bridge. I had seen many a noble beast, with something almost human in the look of him, go down before my gun; but I had never shot a man before. Who could have thought there would have been so much difference?"

Christabel clasped her hands over her face, and drew back with an involuntary recoil, as if all the horror of that dreadful scene were being at this moment enacted before her eyes. Never had the thought of Angus Hamleigh's fate been out of her mind in all the year that was ended to-day – this day – the anniversary of his death. The image of that deed had been ever before her mental vision, beckoning her and guiding her along the pathway of revenge – a lurid light.

"You murdered him," she said, in low, steadfast tones. "You brought him to this house with evil intent – yes, with your mind full of hatred and malice towards him. You acted the traitor's base, hypocritical part, smiling at him and pretending friendship, while in your soul you meant murder. And then, under this pitiful mockery of a duel – a duel with a man who had never injured you, who had no resentment against you – a duel upon the shallowest, most preposterous pretence – you kill your friend and your guest – you kill him in a lonely place, with none of the safeguards of ordinary duelling; and you have not the manhood to stand up before your fellow-men, and say, 'I did it.'"

"Shall I go and tell them now?" asked Leonard, his white lips tremulous with impotent rage. "They would hang me, most likely. Perhaps that is what you want."

"No, I never wanted that," answered Christabel. "For our boy's sake, for the honour of your dead mother's name, I would have saved you from a shameful death. But I wanted your life – a life for a life. That is why I tried to provoke your jealousy – why I

planned that scene with the Baron yesterday. I knew that in a duel between you and him the chances were all in his favour. I had seen and heard of his skill. You fell easily into the trap I laid for you. I was behind the bushes when you challenged de Cazalet."

"It was a plot then. You had been plotting my death all that time. Your songs and dances, and games and folly, all meant the same thing."

"Yes, I plotted your death as you did Angus Hamleigh's," answered Christabel, slowly, deliberately, with steady eyes fixed on her husband's face; "only I relented at the eleventh hour. You did not."

Leonard stared at her in dumb amazement. This new aspect of his wife's character paralyzed his thinking powers, which had never been vigorous. He felt as if, in the midst of a smooth summer sea, he had found himself suddenly face to face with that huge wave known on this wild northern coast, which, generated by some mysterious power in the wide Atlantic, rolls on its deadly course in overwhelming might; engulfing many a craft which but a minute before was riding gaily on a summer sea.

"Yes, you have cause to look at me with horror in your eyes," said Christabel. "I have steeped my soul in sin; I have plotted your death. In the purpose and pursuit of my life I have been a murderer. It is God's mercy that held me back from that black gulf. What gain would your death have been to your victim? Would he have slept more peacefully in his grave, or have awakened happier on the Judgment Day? If he had consciousness

and knowledge in that dim mysterious world, he would have been sorry for the ruin of my soul – sorry for Satan's power over the woman he once loved. Last night, kneeling on his grave, these thoughts came into my mind for the first time. I think it was the fact of being near him – almost as if there was some sympathy between the living and the dead. Leonard, I know how wicked I have been. God pity and pardon me, and make me a worthy mother for my boy. For you and me there can be nothing but lifelong parting."

"Well, yes, I suppose there would not be much chance of comfort or union for us, after what has happened," said Leonard, moodily; "ours is hardly a case in which to kiss again with tears, as your song says. I must be content to go my way, and let you go yours. It is a pity we ever married; but that was my fault, I suppose. Have you any particular views as to your future? I shall not molest you; but I should be glad to know that the lady who bears my name is leading a reputable life."

"I shall live with my son – for my son. You need have no fear that I shall make myself a conspicuous person in the world. I have done with life, except for him. I care very little where I live: if you want Mount Royal for yourself, I can have the old house at Penlee made comfortable for Jessie Bridgeman and me. I daresay I can be as happy at Penlee as here."

"I don't want this house. I detest it. Do you suppose I am going to waste my life in England – or in Europe? Jack and I can start on our travels again. The world is wide enough; there are two

continents on which I have never set foot. I shall start for Calcutta to-morrow, if I can, and explore the whole of India before I turn my face westwards again. I think we understand each other fully, now. Stay, there is one thing: I am to see my son when, and as often as I please, I suppose."

"I will not interfere with your rights as a father."

"I am glad of that. And now I suppose there is no more to be said. I leave your life, my honour, in your own keeping. Good-bye."

"God be with you," she answered solemnly, giving that parting salutation its fullest meaning.

And so, without touch of lip or hand, they parted for a lifetime.

CHAPTER XIII

WE HAVE DONE WITH TEARS AND TREASONS

"I wonder if there is any ancient crime in the Tregonell family that makes the twenty-fifth of October a fatal date," Mopsy speculated, with a lachrymose air, on the afternoon which followed the Baron's hasty departure. "This very day last year Mr. Hamleigh shot himself, and spoiled all our pleasure; and to-day, the Baron de Cazalet rushes away as if the house was infected, Mrs. Tregonell keeps her own room with a nervous headache, and Mr. Tregonell is going to carry off Jack to be broiled alive in some sandy waste among prowling tigers, or to catch his death of cold upon more of those horrid mountains. One might just as well have no brother."

"If he ever sent us anything from abroad we shouldn't feel his loss so keenly," said Dopsy, in a plaintive voice, "but he doesn't. If he were to traverse the whole of Africa we shouldn't be the richer by a single ostrich feather – and those undyed natural ostriches are such good style. South America teems with gold and jewels; Peru is a proverb; but what are *we* the better off?"

"It is rather bad form for the master of a house to start on his travels before his guests have cleared out," remarked Mopsy.

"And an uncommonly broad hint for the guests to hasten the

clearing-out process," retorted Dopsy. "I thought we were good here for another month – till Christmas perhaps. Christmas at an old Cornish manor-house would have been too lovely – like one of the shilling annuals."

"A great deal nicer," said Mopsy, "for you never met with a country-house in a Christmas book that was not peopled with ghosts and all kind of ghastliness."

Luncheon was lively enough, albeit de Cazalet was gone, and Mrs. Tregonell was absent, and Mr. Tregonell painfully silent. The chorus of the passionless, the people for whom life means only dressing and sleeping and four meals a day, found plenty to talk about.

Jack Vandeleur was in high spirits. He rejoiced heartily at the turn which affairs had taken that morning, having from the first moment looked upon the projected meeting on Trebarwith sands as likely to be fatal to his friend, and full of peril for all concerned in the business.

He was too thorough a free-lance, prided himself too much on his personal courage and his recklessness of consequences, to offer strenuous opposition to any scheme of the kind; but he had not faced the situation without being fully aware of its danger, and he was very glad the thing had blown over without bloodshed or law-breaking. He was glad also on Mrs. Tregonell's account, very glad to know that this one woman in whose purity and honesty of purpose he had believed, had not proved herself a simulacrum, a mere phantasmagoric image of goodness and

virtue. Still more did he exult at the idea of re-visiting the happy hunting-grounds of his youth, that ancient romantic world in which the youngest and most blameless years of his life had been spent. Pleasant to go back under such easy circumstances, with Leonard's purse to draw upon, to be the rich man's guide, philosopher, and friend, in a country which he knew thoroughly.

"Pray what is the cause of this abrupt departure of de Cazalet, and this sudden freak of our host's?" inquired Mrs. Torrington of her next neighbour, Mr. FitzJesse, who was calmly discussing a cutlet *à la Maintenon*, unmoved by the shrill chatter of the adjacent Dopsy. "I hope it is nothing wrong with the drains."

"No, I am told the drainage is simply perfect."

"People always declare as much, till typhoid fever breaks out; and then it is discovered that there is an abandoned cesspool in direct communication with one of the spare bedrooms, or a forgotten drainpipe under the drawing-room floor. I never believe people when they tell me their houses are wholesome. If I smell an unpleasant smell I go," said Mrs. Torrington.

"There is often wisdom in flight," replied the journalist; "but I do not think this is a case of bad drainage."

"No more do I," returned Mrs. Torrington, dropping her voice and becoming confidential; "of course we both perfectly understand what it all means. There has been a row between Mr. and Mrs. Tregonell, and de Cazalet has got his *cong * from the husband."

"I should have introduced him to the outside of my house three

weeks ago, had I been the Squire," said FitzJesse. "But I believe the flirtation was harmless enough, and I have a shrewd idea it was what the thieves call a 'put up' thing – done on purpose to provoke the husband."

"Why should she want to provoke him?"

"Ah, why? That is the mystery. You know her better than I do, and must be better able to understand her motives."

"But I don't understand her in the least," protested Mrs. Torrington. "She is quite a different person this year from the woman I knew last year. I thought her the most devoted wife and mother. The house was not half so nice to stay at; but it was ever so much more respectable. I had arranged with my next people – Lodway Court, near Bristol – to be with them at the end of the week; but I suppose the best thing we can all do is to go at once. There is an air of general break-up in Mr. Tregonell's hasty arrangements for an Indian tour."

"Rather like the supper-party in Macbeth, is it not?" said FitzJesse, "except that her ladyship is not to the fore."

"I call it altogether uncomfortable," exclaimed Mrs. Torrington, pettishly. "How do I know that the Lodway Court people will be able to receive me. I may be obliged to go to an hotel."

"Heaven avert such a catastrophe."

"It would be very inconvenient – with a maid, and no end of luggage. One is not prepared for that kind of thing when one starts on a round of visits."

For Dopsy and Mopsy there was no such agreeable prospect as a change of scene from one "well-found" country-house to another. To be tumbled out of this lap of luxury meant a fall into the dreariness of South Belgravia and the King's Road – long, monotonous, arid streets, with all the dust that had been ground under the feet of happy people in the London season blown about in dense clouds, for the discomfiture of the outcasts who must stay in town when the season is over; sparse dinners, coals measured by the scuttle, smoky fires, worn carpets, flat beer, and the whole gamut of existence equally flat, stale, and unprofitable.

Dopsy and Mopsy listened with doleful countenances to Jack's talk about the big things he and his friend were going to do in Bengal, the tigers, the wild pigs, and wild peacocks they were going to slay. Why had not Destiny made them young men, that they too might prey upon their species, and enjoy life at somebody else's expense?

"I'll tell you what," said their brother, in the most cheerful manner. "Of course you won't be staying here after I leave. Mrs. Tregonell will want to be alone when her husband goes. You had better go with the Squire and me as far as Southampton. He'll frank you. We can all stop at the 'Duke of Cornwall' to-morrow night, and start for Southampton by an early train next morning. You can lunch with us at the 'Dolphin,' see us off by steamer, and go on to London afterwards."

"That will be a ray of jollity to gild the last hour of our

happiness," said Mopsy. "Oh, how I loathe the idea of going back to those lodgings – and pa!"

"The governor is a trial, I must admit," said Jack. "But you see the European idea is that an ancient parent can't hang on hand too long. There's no wheeling him down to the Ganges, and leaving him to settle his account with the birds and the fishes; and even in India that kind of thing is getting out of date."

"I wouldn't so much mind him," said Dopsy, plaintively, "if his habits were more human; but there are so many traits in his character – especially his winter cough – which remind one of the lower animals."

"Poor old Pater," sighed Jack, with a touch of feeling. *He* was not often at home. "Would you believe it, that he was once almost a gentleman? Yes, I remember, an early period in my life when I was not ashamed to own him. But when a fellow has been travelling steadily down hill for fifteen years, his ultimate level must be uncommonly low."

"True," sighed Mopsy, "*we* have always tried to rise superior to our surroundings; but it has been a terrible struggle."

"There have been summer evenings, when that wretched slavey has been out with her young man, that I have been sorely tempted to fetch the beer with my own hands – there is a jug and bottle entrance at the place where we deal – but I have suffered agonies of thirst rather than so lower myself," said Dopsy, with the complacency of conscious heroism.

"Right you are," said Jack, who would sooner have fetched

beer in the very eye of society than gone without it; "one must draw the line somewhere."

"And to go from a paradise like this to such a den as that," exclaimed Dopsy, still harping on the unloveliness of the Pimlico lodging.

"Cheer up, old girl. I daresay Mrs. T. will ask you again. She's very good-natured."

"She has behaved like an angel to us," answered Dopsy, "but I can't make her out. There's a mystery somewhere."

"There's always a skeleton in the cupboard. Don't you try to haul old Bony out," said the philosophical Captain.

This was after luncheon, when Jack and his sisters had the billiard-room to themselves. Mr. Tregonell was in his study, making things straight with his bailiff, coachman, butler, in his usual business-like and decisive manner. Mr. FitzJesse was packing his portmanteau, meaning to sleep that night at Penzance. He was quite shrewd enough to be conscious of the tempest in the air, and was not disposed to inflict himself upon his friends in the hour of trouble, or to be bored by having to sympathize with them in their affliction.

He had studied Mrs. Tregonell closely, and he had made up his mind that conduct which was out of harmony with her character must needs be inspired by some powerful motive. He had heard the account of her first engagement – knew all about little Fishky – and he had been told the particulars of her first lover's death. It was not difficult for so astute an observer of human nature to

make out the rest of the story.

Little Monty had been invited to go as far as Southampton with the travellers. The St. Aubyns declared that home-duties had long been demanding their attention, and that they must positively leave next day.

Mr. Faddie accepted an invitation to accompany them, and spend a week at their fine old place on the other side of the county – thus, without any trouble on Christabel's part, her house was cleared for her. When she came down to luncheon next day, two or three hours after the departure of Leonard and his party, who were to spend that night at Plymouth, with some idea of an evening at the theatre on the part of Mop and Dop, she had only the St. Aubyns and Mr. Faddie to entertain. Even they were on the wing, as the carriage which was to convey them to Bodmin Road Station was ordered for three o'clock in the afternoon.

Christabel's pale calm face showed no sign of the mental strain of the last twenty-four hours. There was such a relief in having done with the false life which she had been leading in the past month; such an infinite comfort in being able to fall back into her old self; such an unspeakable relief, too, in the sense of having saved herself on the very brink of the black gulf of sin, that it was almost as if peace and gladness had returned to her soul. Once again she had sought for comfort at the one Divine source of consolation; once more she had dared to pray; and this tardy resumption of the old sweet habit of girlhood seemed like a return to some dear home from which she had been long

banished. Even those who knew so little of her real character were able to see the change in her countenance.

"What a lovely expression Mrs. Tregonell has to-day!" murmured Mr. Faddie to his neighbour, Mrs. St. Aubyn, tenderly replenishing her hock glass, as a polite preliminary to filling his own. "So soft; so Madonna-like!"

"I suppose she is rather sorry for having driven away her husband," said Mrs. St. Aubyn, severely. "That has sobered her."

"There are depths in the human soul which only the confessor can sound," answered Mr. Faddie, who would not be betrayed into saying anything uncivil about his hostess. "Would that she might be led to pour her griefs into an ear attuned to every note in the diapason of sorrow."

"I don't approve of confession, and I never shall bring myself to like it," said Mrs. St. Aubyn, sturdily. "It is un-English!"

"But your Rubric, dear lady. Surely you stand by your Rubric?"

"If you mean the small print paragraphs in my prayer book, I never read 'em," answered the Squire's wife, bluntly. "I hope I know my way through the Church Service without any help of that kind."

Mr. Faddie sighed at this Bœotian ignorance, and went on with his luncheon. It might be long before he partook of so gracious a meal. A woman whose Church views were so barbarous as those of Mrs. St. Aubyn, might keep a table of primitive coarseness. A Squire Westernish kind of fare might await him in the St. Aubyn

mansion.

An hour later, he pressed Christabel's hand tenderly as he bade her good-bye. "A thousand thanks for your sweet hospitality," he murmured, gently. "This visit has been most precious to me. It has been a privilege to be brought nearer the lives of those blessed martyrs, Saint Sergius and Saint Bacchus; to renew my acquaintance with dear Saint Mertheriana, whose life I only dimly remembered; to kneel at the rustic shrines of Saint Ulette and Saint Piran. It has been a period of mental growth, the memory of which I shall ever value."

And then, with a grave uplifting of two fingers, and a blessing on the house, Mr. Faddie went off to his place beside Clara St. Aubyn, on the back seat of the landau which was to convey the departing guests to the Bodmin Road Station, a two-hours' drive through the brisk autumn air.

And thus, like the shadowy figures in a dissolving view, Christabel's guests melted away, and she and Jessie Bridgeman stood alone in the grand old hall which had been of late so perverted from its old sober air and quiet domestic uses. Her first act as the carriage drove away was to fling one of the casements wide open.

"Open the other windows, Jessie," she said impetuously; "all of them."

"Do you know that the wind is in the east?"

"I know that it is pure and sweet, the breath of Heaven blowing over hill and sea, and that it is sweeping away the

tainted atmosphere of the last month, the poison of scandal, and slang, and cigarettes, and billiard-marker talk, and all that is most unlovely in life. Oh, Jessie, thank God you and I are alone together, and the play is played out."

"Did you see your husband to-day before he left?"

"No. Why should we meet any more? What can we two have to say to each other?"

"Then he left his home without a word from you," said Jessie, with a shade of wonder.

"His home," repeated Christabel; "the home in which his poor mother thought it would be my lot to make his life good and happy. If she could know – but no – thank God the dead are at peace. No, Jessie, he did not go without one word from me. I wrote a few lines of farewell. I told him I had prayed to my God for power to pity and forgive him, and that pity and pardon had come to me. I implored him to make his future life one long atonement for that fatal act last year. I who had sinned so deeply had no right to take a high tone. I spoke to him as a sinner to a sinner."

"I hope he does repent – that he will atone," said Miss Bridgeman, gloomily. "His life is in his own keeping. Thank God that you and I are rid of him, and can live the rest of our days in peace."

Very quietly flows the stream of life at Mount Royal now that these feverish scenes have passed into the shadow of the days that are no more. Christabel devotes herself to the rearing of

her boy, lives for him, thinks for him, finds joy in his boyish pleasures, grieves for his boyish griefs, teaches him, walks with him, rides with him, watches and nurses him in every childish illness, and wonders that her life is so full of peace and sunshine. The memory of a sorrowful past can never cease to be a part of her life. All those scenes she loves best in this world, the familiar places amidst which her quiet days are spent, are haunted by one mournful shadow; but she loves the hills and the sea-shore only the dearer for that spiritual presence, which follows her in the noontide and the gloaming, for ever reminding her, amidst the simple joys of the life she knows, of that unknown life where the veil shall be lifted, and the lost shall be found.

Major Bree is her devoted friend and adviser, idolizes the boy, and just manages to prevent his manliness deteriorating under the pressure of womanly indulgence and womanly fears. Jessie has refused that faithful admirer a second time, but Christabel has an idea that he means to tempt his fate again, and in the end must prevail, by sheer force of goodness and fidelity.

Kneeling by Angus Hamleigh's grave, little Leo hears from his mother's lips how the dead man loved him, and bequeathed his fortune to him. The mother endeavours to explain in simplest, clearest words how the wealth so entrusted to him should be a sacred charge, never to be turned to evil uses or squandered in self-indulgence.

"You will try to do good when you are a man, won't you, Leo?" she asks, smiling down at the bright young face, which shines like

a sunbeam in its childish gladness.

"Yes," he answers confidently. "I'll give Uncle Jakes tobacco."

This is his widest idea of benevolence at the present stage of his developement.

THE END