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LANCASTER'S CHOICE

Alex. McVeigh Miller
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Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller

Lancaster's Choice

CHAPTER I

Old Lady Lancaster had twenty thousand pounds a year of her own. She had brought that much dower when she came to her husband, the late Lord Lancaster, and now, when he was dead, and she a childless widow, she was like the Martha of Holy Writ—she was troubled over many things.

The possession of great wealth usually entails trouble, it is said, and Lady Lancaster's case was no exception to the rule. The greatest anxiety she had was that she could not decide what she would do with her fortune when she died. She was eighty years old, and although she did not want to die, she knew that she would have to do so some day, and she wanted to make her will before that grewsome event.

The title and estates of Lancaster had descended to the late lord's nephew, young Clive Lancaster. It was but a barren honor, after all, for there was no money to support the dignity of the position. The deceased incumbent had been a spendthrift, and so had his father before him. They had dissipated all the property that was not strictly entailed with the title, and the present heir had little to live on except his pay as a captain in the army,

where he still remained after his accession to the title, while at his express wish and desire Lady Lancaster still reigned lady paramount at his ancestral home, and kept up its wonted dignity and state. She said she should leave all her money to Captain Lancaster if he married to please her. If not—and she shook her gray head ominously, not to say viciously, at this point, and remained silent.

Lancaster Park was one of the loveliest places in Devonshire, as Devonshire is one of the loveliest counties in England. It seemed almost a pity that the young lord could not afford to marry and bring home a beautiful bride to grace his stately home. No one doubted but that when the time came he would espouse the bride his aunt selected for him. It would be folly, it would be madness, if he refused. No one supposed that the handsome young soldier could be capable of such rashness. He did not dream of anything but obedience himself. He only hoped that it would be a very pretty girl whom his aunt chose for him, and also that the matrimonial hour was yet in the dim distance. He was only five-and-twenty, and he did not care to surrender his bachelor freedom yet. He was amazed and confounded, therefore, when in a year after his uncle's death Lady Lancaster sent him one of her characteristic letters—short and to the point:

"My dear Clive"—she wrote—"try and get leave to come down to Lancaster Park for a month or so this fall. I have invited a lot of people for that time, among them the girl I have chosen for you. Do not fail me. Delays are dangerous."

It was rather a command than a request, and the last words sounded like a threat. The young lord-captain was taken by storm. His heart sunk to the bottom of his tall cavalry boots. He did not want to be married off-hand like that. He secretly rebelled against a forced surrender of his soldierly freedom, even though he gained twenty thousand pounds a year in exchange for it. He took counsel with his chum, young Harry De Vere, who was a soldier, too.

"I'm ower young to marry yet," he said. "How shall I outwit the old lady's designs upon me?"

"Come over to America with me," said Lieutenant De Vere. "I have leave of absence for six months. You can get it, too, by the asking. I am going over to the States to spend my holiday. I should be delighted to have you for a companion."

The idea took hold of Captain Lancaster's imagination immediately.

"I will go with you," he said. "I have always intended to make the tour of the United States, and if I do not go before I am married, it is not likely I shall do so afterward. I will write to my aunt to postpone her matrimonial designs a little while longer."

He wrote to Lady Lancaster that he was very sorry indeed to disappoint her, but that he had made a most positive engagement to go over to the States next month with his friend Harry De Vere, and now the young fellow would not let him off, but as soon as they returned he should be at her ladyship's command, etc., etc.

Lady Lancaster was profoundly annoyed and chagrined at her

nephew's letter. She did not want to postpone the consummation of her favorite scheme. But she wisely concluded to bear with the inevitable this time. She wrote to the truant lord that she would excuse him this once, but that he must be ready to fall in with her plans next time, or it might be worse for him. Her fortune was not likely to go a-begging for an owner.

CHAPTER II

Captain Lancaster got leave and went off in triumph with Lieutenant De Vere to the United States. When he had put the ocean between himself and his match-making relative, he breathed more freely.

"I can count on one year more of single blessedness now, I hope," he said. "I do not suppose my aunt will try to have me married off by a cablegram or a telephone while I am absent."

De Vere laughed at his friend's self-congratulations.

"I never saw any one so unwilling to accept a fortune before," he said.

"It is not the fortune I object to—it is the incumbrance I must take with it," replied Captain Lancaster.

"Should a wife be regarded as an incumbrance?" inquired the other, with a smile.

"That would depend upon whether she were one's own choice or somebody else's. I can not imagine old Lady Lancaster selecting an ideal wife for me."

"All the same you will accept the one she provides for you. It would be madness indeed to refuse," said his friend.

"Well, well, we will not discuss it. May the evil day be yet far off," responded Lancaster, fervently.

Woe unto him if her ladyship, far away under English skies, could have heard his regrets, or have known that he had taken

his trip solely to stave off the evil day of his marriage, as he so considered it. She was vexed over it. While she deemed it an accident, she would have been furiously angry could she have known it to have been design. At home she was eating her heart out with impatience and vexation, and eagerly counting the weeks and months as they rolled away, thinking that each one brought her nearer to his return and to the accomplishment of her cherished scheme.

The months glided by, and at length the winter was past and spring was at hand. It was April—that tender, timid month, with its violets and daisies. Lady Lancaster's heart beat more lightly. She had had a recent letter from the traveler. He wrote that he would be at home by the first of June. She began to lay her plans accordingly. She would have a merry party at the Park to welcome him home, and he should make up his mind then. There was no time for delay.

She sent for the housekeeper to come to her immediately. She wanted to make all her arrangements at once, and she could do nothing without consulting Mrs. West, the model housekeeper who had ruled at Lancaster Park for sixteen years. My lady grew impatient while she sat in her great velvet arm-chair and waited for the woman's coming. Her small black eyes snapped crossly, she wriggled her lean, bent body in its stiff brocade, and the bony little hands, with the great jeweled rings hanging loosely upon them, grasped the jeweled serpent-head that topped her walking-cane with nervous energy as she gasped out, angrily: "Why don't

the woman come? How dare she keep me waiting?"

The door opened softly and Mrs. West entered just in time to catch the impatient exclamation—a very lady-like person indeed, in noiseless black silk, and a neat lace cap that surrounded a face only half as old as that of the lady of Lancaster Park.

"I am very sorry that I kept you waiting, my lady," she said, quietly.

Then Lady Lancaster looked up and saw an open letter in the housekeeper's hand, and the signs of inward disturbance on her usually unruffled countenance.

"You know that I hate to be kept waiting, West," she said, "and you are usually very prompt. But I see that something has happened this time, so I am ready to excuse your tardiness. What is it?"

"You are right, Lady Lancaster. Something *has* happened," said Mrs. West. She sunk down quietly, as she spoke, into the chair that her mistress indicated by a nod of her grim, unlovely head. "I have had a letter with bad news in. I shall be obliged to quit your service."

"Quit my service!" echoed Lady Lancaster, wildly. Her voice rose almost to a shriek, it was so full of dismay and anger.

"That was what I said, my lady," reiterated the housekeeper, deprecatingly.

Lady Lancaster regarded her in incredulous dismay a moment, then she burst out, sharply:

"But I say you shall do no such thing; I can not spare you, I

can not get on without you at all—that is, not without six months' warning to supply your place."

"A month is the usual time, Lady Lancaster," said the housekeeper, mildly; and then, as the old lady regarded her in speechless dismay, she added, quickly: "But I am sorry that I can not even give you a month's warning to supply my place, for I am obliged to leave you right away. I have a long journey to take. I must cross the ocean."

"Cross the ocean! Now, did I ever! Are you crazy, West?" demanded the old lady, wrathfully.

"I knew you would think so," said Mrs. West. "But if you will be kind enough to let me explain the circumstances, you mightn't think so hardly of me, Lady Lancaster."

"No circumstances could excuse your going off in this way," flashed Lady Lancaster. "There is Lord Lancaster coming home by the first of June, and of course I must invite a party to meet him; and there are the rooms, and—and—everything to be seen to. No one knows my ways and my wishes like you who have been at Lancaster Park so many years. Now, what am I to do?"

She lifted her wrinkled hands helplessly.

"There will have to be a new housekeeper found, of course," hazarded Mrs. West, timidly.

"Oh, yes; an ignorant creature who knows nothing, and who will have everything wrong, of course, just when I want all to be at its best," groaned the wizened old aristocrat. "I call this downright ungrateful in you, West, this going off just as we had

got used to each other's ways."

Mrs. West suppressed a struggling smile around the corners of her lips, and, rising up, stood respectfully before her hard mistress.

"My lady, I'm sorry you think so hard of me. Indeed, I would not leave you but for good cause," she said. "I had hoped and expected to spend all my days at Lancaster Park, but my duty calls me elsewhere. I assure you it is as hard for me as for you. Think how hard it is for me, a poor lone woman, to have to cross the ocean—at my time of life, too! And then to have to take a child to raise and spend all my earnings on—a child that's no kin to me, either, you understand, my lady!"

CHAPTER III

Lady Lancaster settled her gold-bowed spectacles on her long Roman nose, and fixed a keen, penetrating stare on the troubled face of her housekeeper.

"Whose child is it, and what is it all about, anyhow?" she sputtered, vaguely.

"It's my brother-in-law's child, and he's dead away off in New York somewhere, and the child's left to me—his penniless, friendless orphan child, left to me by the dead; and how could I refuse the charge, my lady?" inquired Mrs. West, reproachfully. "I should think the dead would come from his grave, away off yonder in America, to haunt me if I didn't do his bidding," cried she, glancing behind her with something like a shudder of superstitious fear.

"I didn't know you were simpleton enough to believe in ghosts, West," sniffed my lady, contemptuously. "And I didn't know you ever had a brother-in-law, either. Where has he been all these years?"

"If you will read this letter, Lady Lancaster, you will find out in fewer words than I can tell you," said Mrs. West, respectfully presenting her letter, which all this time she had been holding open in her hand.

My lady took the black-edged sheet into the grasp of her thin, bony hand, and ran her keen eyes down the written page.

"Dear Sister-in-Law"—it ran—"I know you've wondered many a time since I caught the gold fever and ran away to California, twenty years ago, what's become of the willful lad that you and John couldn't manage; although you tried so hard and so faithfully. I always meant to write to you some day, but I put it off from time to time in my hard, busy life, until now it's almost too late, and I seem to be writing to you from the borders of that other world where I've somehow heard my brother John went before me, and where I'm hastening now. For I'm dying, sister-in-law, and I'm quite sure that I shall be dead before this comes to your hand. Well, I've had ups and downs in this life, sister Lucy—good luck and ill luck—and now I'm dying I have one great care upon my mind. I'm leaving my little girl, my pretty Leonora—named so for her mother, who died when her baby was born—all alone in the cold, hard world. She is friendless, for we've led such a roving life once she was born that we have made no friends to aid us now in our extremity. Dear sister-in-law, you were always a good woman. You tried to do your duty by the wayward orphan boy who has so poorly repaid your care. Will you be kinder still? Will you come to America and take my child for your own? Will you give her a mother's love and care? Remember, she is friendless and forsaken in the world, without a living relative. What would become of her if you refused my dying prayer? I inclose a card with our New York address upon it. She will wait there after I am dead until you come for her. I feel sure that you will come; you will not disregard my dying wish and request. Forgive me all my ingratitude and

thoughtlessness, sister Lucy, and be a mother to my darling little Leo when I am no more.

"Your dying brother,

"Richard West."

The letter rustled in Lady Lancaster's nervous grasp. She looked up thoughtfully at the patient, waiting woman.

"I could not refuse such a prayer as that, could I, my lady?" she asked, wistfully. "You see, he was my husband's only brother—poor, handsome, willful Dick. His parents were both dead, and he had only me and John, my husband. He was restless and ambitious. He ran away and left a letter that he should go to California and seek his fortune. From that day to this, never a word has been heard of Dick. And now he's dead—not so old, either; only in the prime of life—and he's left me his little girl. She will be a trouble, I know. I must give up my quiet, peaceful home here and make a new home for the child somewhere. But I can not refuse. I dare not, for John's and Dick's sake. I must go to America and get the child. I can not do less than he asked me. He was always restless, poor Dick. He could not stay in his grave if I refused his dying prayer."

CHAPTER IV

Lady Lancaster, filled with chagrin and despair, sat gazing on the floor in silence. The thought of losing this trusty, capable woman, who had belonged to the staff of Lancaster Park so long, was most annoying to her. It had come upon her with all the suddenness of a calamity. She viewed it as nothing less.

She was an old woman, and she disliked exceedingly to have new faces around her. Under Mrs. West's efficient *régime* the affairs of the house had gone on with the precision and regularity of clock-work. It would take a new woman years to attain to her proficiency. She had grown to regard the good housekeeper almost as her own property—a piece of her personal goods and chattels. She could not help being angry at the thought of losing her.

"It is too bad," she blurted out, indignantly. "Why do folks go and die like that, and leave their wretched brats on other people's hands."

A faint color crept into Mrs. West's comely face at the scornful words.

"My lady, it's the will of God," she said, in her quiet, deprecating way.

"I don't believe God has anything to do with it," cried the old lady, violently. "If He did, He would prevent poor folks from marrying, in the first place."

And then as she saw how patiently the woman endured these taunts, she had the grace to be ashamed of herself.

"Well, there, there; I dare say you don't care to hear your folks spoken of in that way," she said, in a milder tone. "But then Richard West was no kin to you, anyway—only your husband's brother!"

Mrs. West could not forbear a pertinent little retort.

"And Captain Lancaster is only your husband's nephew, my lady, yet you take a great interest in him," she said.

Lady Lancaster gave her a keen little glance. "Humph! West has some spirit in her," she said to herself; then, aloud, she replied:

"I can assure you the only interest I take in him is because he is my Lord Lancaster; and as he holds the title my late husband held, I should like for him to have money enough to support it properly. But if he does not marry to please me, you shall see how little I care for the young popinjay."

Mrs. West made no reply, and her mistress continued, after a moment's thought:

"Must you really take the child, do you think, West?"

"I couldn't think of refusing poor Dick's dying request," was the answer.

"Shall you make your home in America?" continued the lady.

"Oh, no, no; I should come back to dear old England. I couldn't consent to pass my last days in a strange country."

Lady Lancaster was silent a moment. Her eyes were very

thoughtful; her thin lips worked nervously. Mrs. West waited patiently, her plump hands folded together over the letter that had brought her such strange, unwelcome news. "Where are you going to live when the child comes?" Lady Lancaster snapped, almost rudely.

"I don't know yet, my lady. I have made no plans. I only received my letter a little while ago."

"You don't want *my* advice, I presume?"—more snappishly than ever.

"I should be very glad of it," Mrs. West replied, respectfully.

"Why didn't you ask it, then?"

"I didn't dare."

"Didn't dare, eh? Am I an ogress? Should I have eaten you if you had asked my advice?" demanded the irascible old lady, shortly.

"Oh, no, Lady Lancaster; but I shouldn't have presumed to trouble you so far," Mrs. West replied, in her quiet way that was so strange a contrast to the other's irritability.

"Very well. I've presumed to lay a plan for you," replied the grim old lady.

"A plan for me!" Mrs. West echoed, vaguely.

"Yes. You shall not go away from Lancaster Park. You shall have the child here."

"Here!" cried the housekeeper, doubtful if she were in her proper senses.

"Why, do you echo my words so stupidly, West?"

"I beg your pardon. I was doubtful if I understood your words rightly. I thought you disliked children," Mrs. West answered, confusedly.

"I did, and *do*," tartly. "But, for all that, I had sooner have Dick West's child here than for you to leave me. You could keep her in your own rooms, couldn't you? I needn't be bothered with her society?"

"Certainly," faltered Mrs. West, in a tremor of joy. She was very glad that she was not to leave Lancaster Park, where she had dwelt in peace and comfort for sixteen years—ever since her faithful, hard-working John had died and left her a lone widow with only fifteen pounds between her and the world. She had thought herself a very fortunate woman when she secured this place, and her heart bounded with joy at the thought that she was to stay on in peace, in spite of the incumbrance of her brother-in-law's orphan child.

"Oh, Lady Lancaster, I don't know how to thank you!" she cried. "I shall be very glad not to go away from the Park. I will keep Leonora very close, indeed I will, if you allow me to bring her here."

"Well, she shall be brought here. Of course I rely on you to keep her out of my way. I dislike the ways of children," said the hard old lady, who had never had any children herself, and who was an old maid at heart. "That is all I ask of you. Don't have her around under my feet, and I shall never remember that she is here."

"Thanks, my lady. And when am I to go and fetch my niece?" inquired the housekeeper, timidly.

"You're not to fetch her at all. I thought I had told you that already," tartly.

Mrs. West's eyes grew large and round with dismay.

"Indeed, I thought you said I should have her here," she exclaimed.

"So I did; I said she should be brought here, but I didn't say you should go to New York and fetch her home!"

"But Dick wished me to go," perplexedly; "and how is she to come if I do not go?"

"She may come with Lord Lancaster the first of June. I dare say he can go and get her all right."

"But it seems as if I ought to go myself. Besides, Lord Lancaster mightn't like it, indeed," whimpered poor Mrs. West.

"Fiddlesticks! I do not care whether he likes it or not," declared the octogenarian, snapping her fingers. "He shall do as I bid him. Aren't you willing to trust the brat with him?"

"Oh, yes, my lady," declared the housekeeper, with a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER V

"I'll be shot!" ejaculated Captain Lancaster, in a voice of the liveliest exasperation.

"Oh, no; what have you done?" exclaimed his chum, lifting his handsome head from his lounge amid a cloud of curling, blue cigar-smoke.

"Nothing; I never did anything in my life," in an injured tone, "and I am fain to ask why I am so bitterly persecuted."

"Persecuted?" inquired De Vere, languidly.

"Oh, yes, you can afford to be cool. You are the legal heir to ten thousand a year. You are not at the beck and call of a relative who gives you the most troublesome commissions to execute without so much as saying 'by your leave,'" growled Lancaster.

The young lieutenant laughed lazily.

"You have had a letter from my lady?" he said.

"Yes. Look here, De Vere, I wonder if she thinks I belong to her wholly? Must one be a white slave for the sake of coming into twenty thousand a year?"

"It is worth lots of toadying," declared De Vere, emphatically.

"I used to like Aunt Lydia—rather—before my uncle died," said Lancaster, reflectively. "She was always tart and waspish. I didn't care for it when I didn't have to bear the brunt of it. She rather amused me then, but now I get out of patience with her whims and exactions."

"What is it she wants now?" asked Harry De Vere, lazily.

"It is something I have to carry home to her from New York. By Jove! I have a great mind to refuse. Anything in reason I would willingly undertake; but, ah, really, this is too bad!" groaned the victim, dropping his head back among the cushions of his chair.

It was a handsome head, crowned with short, crisp masses of fair hair, and he was a blue-eyed young giant with the perfect features of an Antinous, and a smile that dazzled one when it played around the full red lips half veiled by the drooping ends of the long, fair mustache. He had an indolent air that was not unbecoming to him, but rather taking than otherwise. He did not look like a man who would overexert himself for anything, and yet the air might have been cultivated and not natural.

"I did not know that there was anything on this side of the 'herring-pond' her ladyship would deign to accept," said De Vere.

"There isn't. She has a horror of everything American."

"Then why—what?" inquired the other, perplexedly, and Captain Lancaster's moody brow cleared a moment, and he laughed merrily at his friend's amazed air.

"Give it up, Harry. You couldn't guess in a month," he said.

"I give it up," resignedly.

"It's a female," said Lancaster, lifting his head to note the effect on his inferior officer.

It was startling. The hands that were clasped behind the lieutenant's head relaxed suddenly, and he sat bolt upright on his

sofa, his brown eyes distended to their greatest size, his whole air indicative of the greatest astonishment.

"By George! You don't say so?" he ejaculated.

Lancaster relaxed from his perturbation to laugh at his startled hearer. "It's astonishing what an effect the mere mention of the female sex has upon you, De Vere," he observed.

"Well, you did take my breath away. I confess myself astonished. Who is the female, Lancaster? Not," catching his breath excitedly, "the chosen fair?—the fatal she who is to out-captain the captain himself, and lead him captive to the hymeneal altar?"

"Pshaw!" disgustedly, "how you run on! Of course it is nothing of the sort. Could one come out of New York that would please my august aunt?"

"Can any good come out of Nazareth?" quoted the lieutenant, lightly. "But I say, Lancaster, you have excited my curiosity to the highest pitch. Who is the female? Am I to be associated with you in the care of her?"

"I will hand over to you the whole charge, if you wish," said the captain, with the same disgusted air.

"*Cela dépend.* Is she young and fair? I have found New York girls rather fascinating, usually," said De Vere, recalling sundry flirtations by the light of a chandelier, with nobody very near.

"Young? yes—very young, I should say," growled the captain, sardonically. "But not to keep you any longer in suspense, listen to this portion of my dear aunt's epistle:

"There is a small commission I wish you to execute for me, Clive. My housekeeper's brother has died in New York and left her a little girl to take care of. I can not spare Mrs. West long enough for her to go after the child; and, in fact, I don't think it would be safe for her to go, anyhow. She is so simple, poor woman, she would be quite lost in the wilderness of New York, and might be devoured by the bulls and bears that I hear infest the place. So I want you to bring the child to England with you. I dare say she will not be much trouble. I inclose a card with her name and New York address. You are to go there and get little Leo and bring her to her aunt. Now, do not upon any account forget the child, Clive, for West would be ready to die of chagrin if you did not bring the little brat to her the first of June."

He paused and looked at his friend in comical anger.

"Did you ever hear of anything so deucedly cool in your life?" he said.

"No, I never did. It is most outrageous. What shall you do?"

"Advise me, please. Shall I rebel against my tormentor's mandate and refuse point-blank?"

"No, never. Rather meet the peril boldly and vanquish it. Walk boldly up to the cannon's mouth. In other words, accept the small commission."

"Small commission, indeed!" groaned the wretched victim. "What shall I do with a child—a girl-child, too—perhaps a baby?"

"That would be the best of all. You need have no trouble

then. Only provide a nurse, a sucking-bottle, and some cans of condensed milk, put them aboard with the baby, and all your trouble is over," suggested the lieutenant.

"Is it so easy as that? Well, perhaps it is a baby. She calls it a girl, a little child. Yes, I have no doubt it is a baby. Well, when we leave Boston we will go over to New York and see about the nurse and the bottles," sighed Lancaster.

CHAPTER VI

Captain Lancaster and his friend, having brought letters of introduction from England, were having rather a nice time in the cultured and æsthetic circles of Boston. They had made the grand tour of the States, lingering at the last in the beautiful city where they had made some very pleasant acquaintances, and where, as eligibles of the first water, they were fêted and courted in the most flattering manner by the fashionable people of the place. It is true that Lieutenant De Vere sometimes declared that he found New York more charming, but still he lingered, loath to go, and it was two weeks after the reception of Lady Lancaster's letter before they turned their faces toward the city that held the child that was to go to England with them—the baby, as they had quite decided in their own minds it must be.

There are a few people who, when they have a disagreeable task to perform, go bravely forward and get it over. There are a great many more who shirk such things and put them off till the last moment. Captain Lancaster belonged to the latter class. He was intensely afraid of disagreeables. He revolted exceedingly from the idea of "that squalling baby" he had to carry to England. He thought that Mrs. West should come after it herself. Yet Captain Lancaster was not a bad and selfish man, as one might have supposed from his reluctance to do this kindness. The whole gist of the matter lay in the fact that his aunt had so cavalierly

ordered him to do it. He chafed beneath the plainly visible fact that she meant to lead him by the nose as long as she lived, in virtue of the money she was going to leave him when she died.

So our hero mentally kicked against taking home the orphan child, and all unconsciously to himself directed a part of his vexation at his aunt against the little one. The mention of it was exceedingly distasteful to him, and when Lieutenant De Vere once or twice represented to him that he "ought to go and see about Leonora West before the last day," he invariably replied: "My dear friend, it is one of my rules never to do anything to-day that I can put off until to-morrow."

So it was actually the day before they sailed when Lancaster hunted up the address and went to look after his charge, his "small commission," as Lady Lancaster had blandly termed it. He went alone, for when De Vere offered to accompany him he shook his head and replied, decidedly, "No, I will not trouble you, for I can get over disagreeable things best alone."

So he went alone, and the address took him to a quiet, genteel boarding-house, in a quiet but highly respectable street. He rang the bell impatiently, and a smart female servant opened the door, smiling and bridling at the sight of the big, handsome young aristocrat.

"I have called to see about little Miss West. Is she here?" he inquired.

"Oh, Lor', yes sir!" she replied. "Please to walk into the parlor, and I'll take your card."

He handed her the small bit of pasteboard with his military title, "Captain Lancaster," simply engraved upon it, and said, abruptly:

"Send Miss West's nurse to me as soon as possible, please. I am in a hurry. We must sail for England to-morrow."

She gazed at him a little stupidly. "The nurse!" she echoed.

"Yes, the baby's nurse. Of course I must see her and make arrangements for our voyage," he replied; and the girl hastily retreated, and he caught the echo of a suppressed titter outside the door.

"American rudeness and freedom," he said to himself, disgustedly, as he walked up and down the limits of the pretty little parlor with its Brussels carpet, lace curtains, and open piano. "What did she see to giggle at, I wonder?"

And he glanced carelessly at his own elegant reflection in the long, swinging mirror, and felt complacently that there was nothing mirth-provoking there. From the top of his fair, handsome head to the toe of his shining boot all was elegant and irreproachable.

"Now, how long is that nurse going to make me wait? I hope, upon my soul, she won't bring that horrid young one in to display its perfections. I can well dispense with the pleasure," he said to himself, grimly, and he then turned hurriedly around at a sudden sound.

The door had opened softly, and a young girl, clad in deep, lusterless mourning apparel, had entered the parlor.

CHAPTER VII

Captain Lancaster was taken at a disadvantage. He was not at all a vain man. He did not half know how fine looking he was, and his hasty perusal of the mirror was directed rather to his dress than his face. But as he turned about hastily and met the half smile on the lips of the new-comer, he realized instantly that his attitude had favored strongly of masculine vanity, and a not unbecoming flush mounted to his good-looking, straight-featured face. He had a sneaking sense of shame in being caught posing, as it were, before the mirror by this extremely pretty girl.

She was more than pretty, this girl—she was rarely beautiful. She was of medium height and size, and her figure was symmetry itself, all its delicious curves and slender outlines defined at their best by the close-fitting black jersey waist she wore buttoned up to the graceful white throat that had a trick of holding itself high, as if innocently proud of the fair face that shone above it—the face that Captain Lancaster gazed at in wonder for a moment, and then in the most lively and decided disapprobation.

For she was much too pretty to be a nurse, he said to himself—too pretty and too young. She had an air of refinement quite above her position. She had an arch, pretty face, with beautiful blue-gray eyes that were almost black when the full white lids and dark lashes drooped over them. The dazzling fairness of her complexion was heightened by the unrelieved blackness of her

dress, and her pouting lips by contrast looked like rosebuds. Two long, thick braids of lovely chestnut-brown hair hung down her back, and some soft, fluffy rings of the same color waved over the low, broad forehead with its slender, dark brows. She was not only beautiful, she looked bright and intelligent, and the half smile that parted her red lips now made her wonderfully lovely.

But pretty as she was, she was aware that Captain Lancaster was regarding her with knit brows and a general air of entire disapprobation. Perhaps it was a novel experience. It seemed to amuse her. The dimples deepened around the sweet, arch mouth. She looked down at the card in her hand, and began to read it aloud in a soft, hesitating, inquiring voice: "Cap-tain Lancaster?"

"Yes," he replied, and was on the point of making his most elegant bow when he suddenly remembered that it was not at all necessary to be so ceremonious with the nurse of his housekeeper's niece. So he straightened himself up again and said, almost tartly:

"You are the baby's nurse, I presume?"

The long fringe of the girl's lashes lifted a moment, and she flashed a dazzling glance into his face.

"The—baby?" she inquired.

"Yes—the little Miss West—the child that is to get to England under my care. Aren't you her nurse?"

The young lady had put a very small, white hand up to her face and coughed very hard for a moment. She looked at him the

next moment, very red in the face from the exertion.

"I—ah, yes, certainly; I'm the nurse," she replied, demurely.

And then ensued a moment's silence, broken at last by the girl, who said, quietly and politely:

"Won't you be seated, Captain Lancaster?"

He dropped mechanically into a chair near him, but the pretty nurse-maid remained standing meekly in the center of the room, her small hands folded before her, a demure look on her fair face.

The caller cleared his throat and began, rather nervously:

"It isn't possible that you expected to go to England as that child's nurse?" he said.

"I had hoped to do so," answered the girl, with a sudden air of chagrin.

"But—ah—really, you know, you're too young, aren't you?" stammered Lancaster, feeling abashed, he knew not why, but maintaining a grave, judicial air.

"Too young? I should hope not. I was eighteen last week," lifting the small head with an air of great dignity.

He could hardly repress a smile, but he put his long, white hand hastily across his lips to hide it from those bright, keen eyes.

"And do you think you can really take good care of Miss West?" he said. "Remember, it is a long trip across the ocean."

She flashed him one of her swift, bright glances.

"Indeed?" she said. "But that does not matter at all, sir. I consider myself quite competent to take care of Miss West anywhere."

"Does she mean to be impertinent?" he thought; but a glance at the demure, downcast face reassured him. It was only the high self-confidence of ignorant, innocent youth.

"You must excuse me; I don't know how they do such things on this side of the water," he said, feeling mean within himself, yet not at all understanding why it was so. "But, you see, it is all different in England. There one chooses a woman of age and experience for a nurse. Now, I remember my own nurse was at least fifty years old."

"In-deed?" replied the girl, dropping him a demure little courtesy that somehow again filled him with an uneasy sense that, under all her pretty humility, she meant to be impertinent. His face felt hot and burning. He did not know how to pursue the conversation.

Seeing that he made her no answer, she looked up with a pretty, appealing air. "Do I understand that you object to taking me to England? that my youth counts against me?" she inquired.

"Oh, no, no; not at all, if you are sure you can take good care of the baby," he replied, hastily. "You see, the whole thing is a great bore and nuisance to me. I object most decidedly to being encumbered with that child, but, most unfortunately for me, I can't get out of it. So, if you can really be of any use, pray go along with it to England—Oh!"

The sudden exclamation was wrung from him by a glance at her face. The pretty actress had dropped her mask at hearing those swift, vehement words of his. A hot color glowed in her

face, two pearly tears started under her dark lashes. She put out her white hands before her as if to ward off a blow.

"Oh, Captain Lancaster, say no more!" she cried. "There has been some wretched mistake somewhere, and I have only been laughing at you these five minutes. I am nobody's nurse at all. There isn't any child nor any baby. It is a grown-up young lady. I am Leonora West."

Tableau!

CHAPTER VIII

"If only the earth would open and swallow me up!" sighed Lancaster to himself, miserably. It is not pleasant to be made fun of, and the most of people are too thin-skinned to relish a joke directed against themselves. Lancaster did not. His ridiculous mistake flashed over him instantly at the deprecatory words of the girl, and he scarcely knew whom to be most angry with—himself or Leonora West.

He stole a furtive glance at her, wishing in his heart that he could subdue the crimson flush that glowed on his face. He was glad that she was not looking at him. She had sunk into a chair and buried her face in her hands. Evidently she was not enjoying her saucy triumph much. Those last impatient words of his had cleverly turned the tables.

He glanced at the drooping figure in the arm-chair, and it flashed over him that De Vere would never be done laughing if he knew that he, Lord Lancaster, a cavalry officer, and a "swell party" altogether, had been made a target for the amusement of this lowly born girl. How dared she do it? and could he keep De Vere from finding out? he asked himself in the same breath.

And just then Leonora West lifted her wet eyes to his face, and said, with a sob in her throat:

"I am glad now that I didn't tell you the truth at first. If I had, I mightn't have found out, perhaps, that you thought me a bore

and a nuisance, and that you didn't want me to go to Europe with you."

Captain Lancaster winced. All she had said was quite true, yet he had not cared to have her know it. It is but seldom one cares to have people know one's real opinion of them.

"And—and"—she went on, resentfully, "you may be quite, quite sure, after this, that I will not go with you. You will have no trouble with me. My aunt might have come after me herself, I think. I was afraid, when I got her letter saying that you would come for me, that something would go wrong. Now I know it. To think that you should call me a baby!"

While she poured forth her grievances dolorously, Lancaster had been collecting his wool-gathering wits. What upon earth was he to do if she really refused to go with him? He pictured to himself old Lady Lancaster's fury. It was quite likely that, after such a contretemps, she would cut him off with a shilling.

"It will never do for her to stay in this mood. She shall go to England, *nolens volens*," he resolved.

"Richard" began to be "himself again." The ludicrous side of the case dawned upon him.

"I have made a tremendous *faux pas*, certainly, and now I must get out of it the best way I can," he thought, grimly.

Leonora's sharp little tongue had grown still now, and her face was again hidden in her hands. He went up to her and touched her black sleeve lightly.

"Oh, come now," he said; "if you go on like this I shall think

I made a very apposite mistake. Who but a baby would make such a declaration as yours in the face of the circumstances? Of course you are going to Europe with me!"

"I am not," she cried, with a mutinous pout of the rich red lips.

"Yes, you are," he replied, coolly. "You have no business to get angry with me because I made a slight mistake about your age. And after all, I remember now that it was really De Vere's mistake, and not mine."

"Who is De Vere?" inquired Leonora, curiously, as she glanced up at him through her wet lashes, and showing the rims of her eyes very pink indeed from the resentful tears she had shed.

"De Vere is my friend and traveling-companion," he replied.

"And does he, too, consider me a bore and a nuisance?"

"Well," confidingly, "to tell you the truth, we both did—that is, you know, while we were laboring under the very natural mistake that you were a very small baby instead of—a grown-up one. But all that is altered now, of course, since I have met you, Miss West. We shall be only too happy to have you for our *compagnon du voyage*."

He was speaking to her quite as if she were his equal, and not the lowly born niece of the housekeeper at his ancestral home. It was impossible to keep that fact in his head. She was so fair, so refined, so well-bred, in spite of the little flashes of spirit indicative of a spoiled child.

She did not answer, and he continued, pleasantly:

"I am very sorry for the mistake on my part that caused you

so much annoyance. I desire to offer you every possible apology for it."

She looked up at him quickly. "Oh, I wasn't mad because you thought Leonora West was a baby," she said.

"Then why—because I thought you were a nurse?"

"Not that either. I was only amused at those mistakes of yours."

She paused a moment, then added, with a rising flush:

"It was for those other words you said."

"I do not blame you at all. I was a regular brute," said Lancaster, penitently. "Do say that you forgive me, I never should have said it if only I had known."

"Known what?" she inquired.

"That you were the baby I had to carry to England. I should have been only too happy to be of service to you. De Vere will be distracted with envy at my privilege. There, I have said several pretty things to you. Will you not forgive me now?"

"Yes, I will forgive you, but you do not deserve it," answered Leonora. "It was not kind to talk about me so, even if I had been an unconscious baby."

"It was not," he admitted. "But think a moment, Miss West. I am a bachelor, and I know nothing at all of babies. I have forgotten all the experiences of my own babyhood. I was wretched at the idea of having to convey one of those troublesome little problems across the ocean. I would as soon have been presented with a white elephant. I should have known

quite as much of one as the other. Can you find it in your heart to chide me for my reluctance?"

Leonora reflected, with her pretty brows drawn together.

"Well, perhaps you are right," she acknowledged, after a moment. "They are troublesome—babies, I mean—I think you called them problems. You were right there, too, for one does not know what to make of them, nor what they will do next, nor what they will become in the future."

"Then you can not blame me, can not be angry with me. And you will be ready to go with me to-morrow?"

"No, I think not. I am afraid, after all you have said, Captain Lancaster, that you really are vexed in your mind at the thought of taking me. I do not believe I ought to take advantage of your pretended readiness," she replied, sensitively, and with that perfect frankness that seemed to be one of her characteristics.

"And you refuse to go with me?" He gazed at her despairingly.

"I would rather not," decidedly.

He looked at the pretty face in some alarm. It had a very resolute air. Would she really carry out her threat of staying behind? He did not know much about American girls, but he had heard that they managed their own affairs rather more than their English sisters. This one looked exceedingly like the heroine of that familiar ballad:

"When she will, she will, depend on't,
And when she won't, she won't,

And there's an end on't."

She glanced up and saw him pulling at the ends of his mustache with an injured air, and a dark frown on his brow.

"Why do you look so mad? I should think you would be glad I'm not going."

"I am vexed. I wasn't aware that I looked mad. In England we put mad people into insane asylums," he replied, rather stiffly.

"Thank you. I understand. Old England is giving Young America a rhetorical hint. Why do you look so vexed, then, Captain Lancaster?"

"Because there will be no end of a row in Lancaster Park when I go there, because you have not come with me."

"Will there, really?"

"Yes; and my aunt, Lady Lancaster, who has promised to give me all her money when she dies, will cut me off with a shilling because I have disobeyed her orders and disappointed Mrs. West."

The blue-gray eyes opened to their widest extent.

"No!" she said.

"Yes, indeed," he replied.

"Then she must be a very hard woman," said Miss West, in a decided tone.

"She is," he replied, laconically.

"You are certain that she would not give you the money?" anxiously.

"Quite certain," he answered.

"And—have you none of your own?"

"Only my pay in the army," he admitted, laughing within himself at her naïve curiosity.

"Is that much?" she went on, gravely.

"Enough to keep me in boots and hats," he answered, with an owl-like gravity.

"And this Lady Lancaster—your aunt—does she give you the rest?" persevered Leonora.

He did not want to be rude, but he burst out laughing. She looked up into the bright blue eyes and reddened warmly.

"I dare say you think me curious and ill-bred," she said.

"Oh, no, no, not at all. I am intensely flattered by the interest you take in my affairs."

"It is only because I do not want to be the means of your losing that money, if you want it. Do you?"

"Indeed I do. Anybody would be glad to have twenty thousand a year," he replied.

"So much as that? Then, of course, I must not be the cause of your losing it," said Leonora, gravely.

"Then you will go with me?" he cried, with quite a load lifted from his mind by her unexpected concession.

"Ye-es. I suppose I shall have to go," she answered.

"A thousand thanks. I thought you would relent," he said. "And will you be ready to sail with me to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes, quite ready. My trunks have been packed several

weeks, and I have been only waiting for you to come," she answered, promptly.

And then she slipped her small hand into the folds of her dress and drew out a netted silk purse, through whose meshes he caught the glitter of gold pieces. She counted out a number of shining coins into his hand with quite a business-like air.

"That is the price of my ticket. Will you please buy it for me? I will have my luggage sent down all right," she said.

He took the money mechanically and rose, thinking this a dismissal. Then something that had been on his mind all the time rose to his lips.

"I want to ask a great favor of you, Miss West."

She looked at him with a slight air of wonder, and answered: "Yes."

"You will meet with my friend, Lieutenant De Vere, on board the steamer. He is a very nice youth indeed. He will be good friends with you directly."

"In-deed?" said Leonora, in a slow, inquiring voice that implied a distinct doubt on the subject.

"Yes, indeed. You need not look so incredulous. You will be sure to like him. The ladies all adore him."

She looked up at him with the dimples coming into roguish play around her mouth.

"And you wish to warn me not to fall a victim to his manifold perfections?" she said.

"Oh, dear, no, not at all. I never thought of such a thing. You

see, Miss West, my friend intensely enjoys a joke."

"Yes?" she gazed at him with an air of thorough mystification.

"He intensely enjoys a joke," repeated Lancaster. "I want you to promise me now, upon your honor, that you will not tell him how unmercifully you quizzed me awhile ago. He would never have done chaffing me if he knew, and he would tell the whole regiment once we landed in England."

"Would they tease you much?" inquired Leonora, highly interested.

"Unbearably," he replied.

"They shall not know, then," she answered, promptly. "I will not tell your friend about it."

"Nor any one?" he entreated.

"Certainly not," she answered, soothingly, and involuntarily he caught her hand and pressed it a moment in his own, not displeased to see that she blushed as she drew it hastily away.

He went away, and when he looked at his watch outside the door he was honestly surprised.

"Two hours! I really do not know how the time went," he said to himself.

When he went back to his hotel he found De Vere in a state of surprise, too.

"You have been gone almost three hours," he said. "Did you find the baby?"

"Yes, I found it," he replied, carelessly.

"Was it well? Shall we have the pleasure of its company to-

morrow?" pursued the lieutenant.

"Yes, it was well, but it is a spoiled child. I am afraid we shall find it a source of trouble to us," replied Captain Lancaster, smiling to himself at the surprise and delight in store for De Vere to-morrow, when he should find that it was a beautiful young girl instead of a cross baby who was to be their *compagnon du voyage* to England.

CHAPTER IX

Lancaster electrified his friend next morning by informing him that he must get their traps aboard the steamer himself, as he would not have time to attend to his own affairs, having some commissions to execute for Miss West.

"The nursing-bottles and the cans of condensed milk, you know," he said, with a mischievous laugh, and De Vere stared.

"I should think the nurse would attend to that," he said.

"Nurses are forgetful, and I wish everything to be all right, you know," replied his friend; "so I shall see to everything myself."

"Well, you will have plenty of time to do so. We do not sail until four o'clock."

"Well, I shall have plenty to do in the meantime, so you need not wait for me, Harry. You may just go aboard at any time you like. I shall take a carriage and call for the baby on my way down."

"You are getting very kind all at once," De Vere said, carelessly.

"Yes, I mean to be. Having undertaken it, I mean to see the poor little thing safely through."

"Well, I wish you success," De Vere replied, as he lighted a fresh cigar and turned away.

The tickets and state-rooms had already been secured, and Lancaster hurried down-town, intent on securing all the comforts possible for his fair charge, who had suddenly grown very

interesting in his eyes. He bought a steamer-chair, some warm rugs, and a gayly colored Oriental wrap that was both pretty and comfortable. Then he provided himself with some nice novels and poems and books of travel. When he had provided everything he could think of that was conducive to a lady's comfort, he repaired to a florist's and selected an elegant and costly bouquet.

"I have noticed that ladies always like a bunch of flowers when they are traveling," he said to himself. "But what will De Vere say to such reckless extravagance on my part?"

He smiled to himself, thinking how the young lieutenant would chaff.

"Anyway, I shall have got the start of him," he thought. "He will be on the *qui vive* for a flirtation with Leonora West."

Then he looked at his watch and found that he had consumed so much time in making his purchases that he only had time to take a carriage and call for his charge. Having sent all his purchases to the steamer, and being encumbered with nothing but the flowers, he made all haste to execute his last and pleasantest task—accompanying Miss West to the steamer on which they were to embark.

"Drive fast," he said to the man on the box; and when they paused before the genteel boarding-house where he had made Miss West's acquaintance the day before, he jumped out with alacrity and ran up the steps.

The door was opened by the simpering maid of the day before

who had giggled at his ridiculous mistake. He could not help coloring at the remembrance as he met her recognizing smiles, a little tintured with surprise.

He assumed an air of coldness and hauteur, thinking to freeze her into propriety.

"I have called for Miss West to take her to the steamer. Will you please see if she is ready?"

"Oh, Lor', sir!" tittered the maid.

"I have called for Miss West," he repeated, more sternly. "Can you inform me if she is ready?"

The maid bridled resentfully at his impatient air.

"Why, lawk a mercy, she was ready ages ago, mister!" she said, tartly.

"Then ask her to come out, if you please. We have barely half an hour to go on board," he said, glancing hurriedly at his watch.

"I can't ask her. She is not here," was the answer.

"Not here? then where—" he began, but the pert maid interrupted him:

"Lor', sir, Miss West went down to the steamer two hours ago."

An audible titter accompanied the information.

Lancaster bounded down the steps without a word, sprung into his carriage, and slammed the door with a vim.

"Drive down to the steamer just as fast as you can, coachman!" he hallooed, sharply.

CHAPTER X

De Vere stared in wonder when his friend scrambled up the plank alone with his beautiful bouquet. He was not a minute too soon, for in an instant the gang-plank was hauled in, and they were outward bound on the dark-blue sea.

"Halloo!" shouted the lieutenant, sauntering up; "where's the precious babe?"

His air of unfeigned surprise was most exasperating to Lancaster in his disappointed mood. He was about to exclaim, "Hang the babe!" but recollected himself just in time to glance around at the passengers on deck. No, she was not there, the pretty American maid who was so gracefully independent. "Gone to her state-room, probably," he thought, with profound chagrin, and leaning over the railing, pitched his fragrant exotics impulsively into the sea.

"So much for my foolish gallantry to Mrs. West's niece," he said to himself, hotly.

Raising his eyes then, he met De Vere's stare of wonder.

"Have you gone clean daft, my dear captain?" inquired he.

"I don't know why you should think so," said Lancaster, nettled.

"From your looks, man. You come flying up the gang-way, breathless, and when I ask you a question you stare around distractedly, and run to the railing to pitch over one of the

sweetest bouquets I ever laid eyes on. Now, what am I to think of you, really?"

He laughed, and Lancaster, trampling his vexation under-foot, laughed too. He was vexed with himself that he had let Leonora West put him out so.

"I beg your pardon for my rudeness," he said. "I will explain. You see, I was so busy all day that I only had time at the last to jump into a carriage and call for Miss West. Then I was detained by an impertinent servant who, after ten minutes of stupid jargon, told me that my charge had gone down to the steamer two hours before. So then we had not a minute to spare, and of course I was flurried when I came aboard."

"But the bouquet?" suggested De Vere, curiously.

"Oh, I bought that for my charge," replied Lancaster, airily.

"Rank extravagance! And didn't you know more about the tastes of babies than that, my dear fellow? A rattle would have been a more appropriate and pleasing selection. You know what the poet says:

"Pleased with a rattle,
Tickled with a straw."

"Yes, I remembered that just as I came aboard, and I was so vexed at my foolish bouquet that I tossed it overboard," Lancaster replied, with the utmost coolness.

He sat down, lighted a weed, and leaning over the rail, watched

the deep, white furrows cut in the heaving sea by the bounding ship. His thoughts reverted provokingly to Leonora West.

"What is she doing? Will she come on deck this evening? Did she think I would not call for her, or did she come down first with malice prepense?" he asked himself, one question after another revolving busily through his brain.

Lieutenant De Vere's gay voice jarred suddenly on his musings:

"Tell you what, old fellow, you missed something by not coming aboard with me. I formed a charming acquaintance this afternoon."

"Eh, what?"—the captain roused himself with a start.

"I formed a charming acquaintance on board ship this afternoon. Prettiest girl in America—England, either, I should say."

A swift suspicion darted into Lancaster's mind.

"Ah, indeed?" he said. "What is the divinity's name?"

"I have not found out yet," confessed the lieutenant.

"Ah! then your boasted acquaintance did not progress very far," chaffingly.

"No; but I rely on time to develop it. We shall be on board steamer ten days together. I shall certainly find out my fair unknown in all that time," confidently.

Lancaster frowned slightly with that lurking suspicion yet in his mind.

"Oh, you needn't look so indifferent!" cried De Vere.

"You would have lost your head over her, too, old man. Such a face, such a voice, such an enchanting glance from the sweetest eyes ever seen!"

"And such a goddess deigned to speak to you?" sarcastically.

"Yes. Shall I tell you all about it? I'm dying to talk to some one about her!"

"Don't die, then. I would rather be bored with your story than have to carry your corpse home to the regiment."

"It was this way, then: I was *ennuyé* at the hotel, so I came on board early with my traps—as early as one o'clock. It was about two, I think, when she came—lady and gentleman with her."

"Oh!"

"Yes, and shawls—bags, books, bouquets—the three B's—*ad infinitum*. She had a dark veil over her face. Her friends bade her good-bye—lady kissed her with enthusiasm—then they gave her the shawls and three B's they had helped carry, and went away."

"Who went away?"

"The lady and gentleman went away. If you had been listening half-way to my story, Lancaster, you would have understood what I said."

"Don't be offended. I am giving you my strictest attention. Go on, please."

"She gathered all her things in her arms—she should have had a maid, really—and began to trip across the deck. Then the wind—bless its viewless fingers whirled off her veil and tossed it in the air."

"Fortunate!" muttered Lancaster.

"Yes, wasn't it?" cried De Vere, in a lively tone. "So I gave chase to the bit of gossamer and captured it just as it was sailing skyward. I carried it back to her, and lo! a face—well, wait until you see her, that's all."

"Is that the end of the story?" queried Lancaster, disappointed.

"Not yet. Well, it was the sweetest face in the world. A real pink and white; eyes that were gray, but looked black because the lashes were so long and shady. Pouting lips, waving bangs, just the loveliest shade of chestnut. Imagine what I felt when this lovely girl thanked me in a voice as sweet as a sugar-plum, and gave me her things to hold while she tied on her veil again."

"I hope you did not let her see how moonstruck you were on the instant."

"I don't know. I'm afraid she did," dubiously. "You see, I was so taken by surprise I had not my wits about me. I talked to her quite idiotically—told her I would not have restored the veil had I known she would hide that face with it again."

"And she?" asked Lancaster, with a restless movement.

"Oh, she colored and looked quite vexed a moment. Then she asked me, quite coolly, if my keeper was on board."

There was a minute's silence. Lancaster's broad shoulders shook with suppressed laughter.

"So I begged a thousand pardons," De Vere continued, after a minute's thoughtful rumination, "and I found her a seat and brought the chamber-maid to take her things and show her her

state-room; so she could not choose but forgive me, and I talked to her a minute."

"And told her all about yourself in a breath," laughed the captain.

"No; I would have done it, but she did not stop long enough to hear me. I asked her if she was going to cross the 'big pond' all alone by herself, as Pat would say, and she laughed very much and said no; she was to have two chaperons. Then she asked me was I going, too. I said yes, and was fumbling for my card-case when the chamber-maid whisked her away from me. But to-morrow I shall—Oh, oh! Lancaster," in a suppressed tone of ecstasy, "there she is now!"

Lancaster dropped his cigar into the heaving waves and turned his head. He saw a lissom, graceful figure coming unsteadily across the heaving deck—Leonora West!

Leonora West, even more fair and bonny looking than yesterday, in a jersey waist and a black-kilted skirt just short enough to show the arched instep of an exquisite foot in a dainty buttoned boot. She carried her veil on her arm now, and wore a big black hat on her head, under which all her wealth of curling chestnut hair waved loosely to her perfect waist. The fair "innocent-arch" face looked as fresh as a rose and beamed with gentleness and good nature.

Captain Lancaster rose up deliberately, and disregarding his friend's amazement, went forward to meet her.

"Miss West, the deck is rather unsteady. Will you honor me

by taking my arm?" he said, bowing before her with elaborate politeness.

CHAPTER XI

Lieutenant De Vere gazed in the most unfeigned astonishment, not to say dismay, at the strange and unexpected sight of Captain Lancaster coolly leading the unknown beauty across the unsteady deck. As he said of himself when relating it afterward, he might have been "knocked down with a feather."

And when he saw that they were coming straight toward him, and that Lancaster had quite an air of proprietorship, and that the girl was looking up with an arch smile at him, he was more astonished than ever, he was almost stupefied with amazement. Did Lancaster know her, really? And why had he kept it to himself, selfish fellow?

And then he was overpoweringly conscious that they had come up to him. He struggled to his feet and came near falling back over the railing into the ocean, out of sheer wrath, for just then Captain Lancaster said, with just a touch of raillery in his tone:

"Miss West, permit me to present my friend, Lieutenant De Vere."

"Lancaster knew her all the while, and he has been chaffing me all this time," flashed angrily through De Vere's mind but he suppressed his rising chagrin and said, with his most elaborate bow:

"I am most happy to know your name, Miss West. I have been longing to know it ever since I met you this afternoon."

"What audacity!" thought Lancaster to himself, with a frown that only grew darker as the girl replied, gayly:

"And I am very glad to know that you are Captain Lancaster's friend. You will help to amuse me on the way over."

She sat down between them, Lancaster on one hand, De Vere on the other. The lieutenant looked across the bright, sparkling young face at his friend.

"Do you mean to tell me that this is *the* baby?" pointedly.

"Yes."

"But, how—" pausing helplessly.

Lancaster laughed, and Leonora joined her musical treble to his.

"You see, De Vere, there was a mistake all around," he said. "I found out yesterday that the baby existed only in our imaginations."

"You might have told me," De Vere muttered, reproachfully.

"I was reserving a pleasant surprise for you to-day," Lancaster rejoined.

Leonora turned her bright eyes up to his face.

"When did you come aboard?" she inquired, naïvely.

"At the last moment," he replied, rather coldly.

"You were detained?"

"Yes," dryly.

A sudden light broke over De Vere's mind. He laughed provokingly.

"Miss West, would you like to know what detained him?" he

inquired.

"Yes," she replied.

"He went up to Blank Street, to fetch you," laughing.

"No?"

"Yes, indeed. Ask him, if you doubt me."

She looked around at Lancaster. There was a flush on his face, a frown between his eyebrows.

"You did not, really, did you?" she asked, naïvely.

"I did," curtly.

"Don't tease him about it. He was furiously angry because you ran away and came by yourself," said De Vere. He was beginning to turn the tables on Lancaster now, and he enjoyed it immensely.

"But I did not come by myself. My friends where I boarded—Mrs. Norton and her husband—came with me. I did not know Captain Lancaster was coming for me. If I had known I should have waited," apologetically.

"You do not know what you missed by not waiting," said De Vere. "When Lancaster came aboard he had a great big hot-house bouquet."

"And I do so love flowers," said Leonora, looking round expectantly at the captain.

"Ah, you needn't look round at him now. It is too late," said De Vere, wickedly. "When he came scrambling up the gang-plank, at the last moment, and didn't see you anywhere on deck, he was so overcome by his disappointment, to use the mildest phrase, that he threw the beautiful bouquet out into the sea."

"Ah! you did not, really, did you, Captain Lancaster?" exclaimed Leonora, regretfully.

"Yes; the flowers were beginning to droop," he replied, fibbing unblushingly; and then he arose and walked away from them, too much exasperated at De Vere's chaff to endure his proximity a minute longer.

He crossed over to the other side of the deck and stood there with his face turned from them, gazing out at the beautiful, foam-capped billows of old ocean with the golden track of the sunset shining far across the waves. There came to him suddenly the remembrance that he was homeward bound.

He was homeward bound. In a few days, or weeks at most, he should be at home; he should be at Lancaster Park; he should meet the girl his vixenish aunt had chosen for his future bride. He wondered vaguely what she would be like—pretty, he hoped; as pretty as—yes, as pretty as—Leonora West.

Her clear, sweet voice floated across the deck, the words plainly audible.

"You are both soldiers. How pleasant! I do so adore soldiers."

"You make me very happy, Miss West," cried De Vere, sentimentally, with his hand upon his heart.

"But not," continued Leonora, with a careless glance at him, "not in their ordinary clothes, you understand, Lieutenant De Vere. It is the uniform that delights me. I think it is just too lovely for anything."

De Vere, crushed to the earth for a moment, hastily rallied

himself.

"I would give the half of my kingdom," he said, "if only I had gone traveling in my red coat."

"I wish you had," she replied. "But some day—after we get to England, I mean—you will let me see you in it, won't you?"

"Every day, if you like. I shall only be too happy," vivaciously.

"I'll be shot if you shall have an invitation to Lancaster Park, you popinjay!" Lancaster muttered to himself, in unreasonable irritation.

He moved away a little further from them, out of earshot of their talk, but he could not as easily divert his thoughts from them.

"How silly people can be upon occasion!" he thought. "How dare he get up a flirtation with Mrs. West's niece? She is wholly out of his sphere. Once she gets to England, I dare swear he will never be permitted to lay eyes on her again. He shall not make a fool of the child. She is but a child, and ignorant of those laws of caste that will trammel Mrs. West's niece in England. I will speak to him."

CHAPTER XII

That night when the girl had gone to her state-room, and the two men were alone on deck smoking their cigars in the soft spring moonlight, Lancaster said, rather diffidently:

"Oh, I say, De Vere, weren't you going the pace rather strong this evening?"

"Eh?" said the lieutenant.

"I say you oughtn't to try to flirt with little Leonora West. You were saying no end of soft things to her this evening. It isn't right. She's in my care, and I can't see her harmed without a word."

"Harmed? Why, what the deuce are you hinting at, Lancaster?" his friend demanded, hotly.

"Nothing to make you fly into a temper, Harry," Lancaster answered, gravely. "Nothing but what is done every day by idle, rich men—winning an innocent, fresh young heart in a careless flirtation, and then leaving it to break."

De Vere dropped his fine Havana into the waves and looked around.

"Look here, Lancaster," he said, "tell me one thing. Do you want Miss West for yourself?"

"I don't understand you," haughtily, with a hot flush mounting to his brow.

"I mean you are warning me off because you're in love with the little thing yourself? Do you want to win her—to make her

my lady?"

"What then?" inquired Lancaster, moodily.

"Why, then, I only want an equal chance with you, that's all—a fair field and no favor."

They gazed at each other in silence a moment. Lancaster said then, with something like surprise:

"Are you in earnest?"

"Never more so in my life."

"Have you remembered that your family will consider it a *mésalliance*?"

"I am independent of my family. I have ten thousand a year of my own, and am the heir to a baronetcy."

"But you are rash, De Vere. You never saw Leonora West until to-day. What do you know of her?"

"I know that she is the fairest, most fascinating creature I ever met, and that she has carried my heart by storm. I know that if she is to be won by mortal man, that man shall be Harry De Vere!" cried the young soldier, enthusiastically.

There was silence again. The great ship rose and fell with the heaving of the waves, and it seemed to Lancaster that its labored efforts were like the throbbing of a heart in pain. What was the matter with him? He shook off angrily the trance that held him.

"Since you mean so well, I wish you success," he said.

"Thanks, old fellow. I thought at first—" said De Vere, then paused.

"Thought—what?" impatiently.

"That you were—jealous, that you wanted her for yourself."

"Pshaw! My future is already cut and dried," bitterly.

"A promising one, too: twenty thousand a year, a wife already picked out for you—high-born and beautiful, of course. Even Lady Lancaster couldn't have the impertinence to select any other for Lord Lancaster."

"Oh, by the bye," Lancaster said, with sudden eagerness.

"Well?"

"Do me this favor: don't rehearse any of my family history to Miss West—the barren title, the picked-out bride, and—the rest of it."

"Certainly not. But of course she will know once she gets to England."

"At least she need not know sooner," Lancaster replied.

"No," assented De Vere; and then he asked thoughtfully. "Is it true that her aunt is the housekeeper at Lancaster Park?"

"That is what my aunt says in her letter."

"And yet she—my little beauty—does not look lowly born."

"No; her mother was an American, you know. They—the Americans—all claim to be nobly born, I believe. They recognize no such caste distinctions as we do. Miss West bears a patent of nobility in her face," said Lancaster, kindly.

"Does she not, the little darling? What a sweet good nature beams in her little face. And, after all, it is our own poet laureate who says:

"Howe'er it be, it seems to me,
'Tis only noble to be good:
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

"Yet I think you will find it hard to bring the rest of the De Veres to subscribe to Tennyson's verse," Lancaster said, anxiously.

"They will e'en have to. I shall please myself, if I can—mark that, lad. So you needn't scold any more, old fellow, for I am in dead earnest to make Leonora Mrs. H. De Vere," laughed the young soldier.

"You are the arbiter of your own destiny. Envidable fellow!" grumbled Lancaster.

"I never knew what a lucky fellow I was until now," agreed De Vere. "It was fortunate for me that I had a bachelor uncle in trade, and he left me his fortune when he died. I can snap my fingers at my family if they cut up about my choice."

"Yes," Lancaster said, dryly.

"Ah, you are just thinking to yourself what a dude I am!" exclaimed De Vere, suddenly. "Here I am talking so confidentially about my choice, when I do not even know if she will look at me. What do you think about it, eh? Do I stand any chance with her?"

"If she were a society girl, I should say that you stood no chance of being refused. No girl who had been properly educated by Madame Fashion would say no to ten thousand a year and a

title in prospective," Lancaster replied, with conviction.

"You are putting my personal attractions quite out of the question," said De Vere, chagrined.

"Because they are quite secondary to your more solid recommendations," sarcastically.

"And, after all, you have not said what you think about my chances with Miss West."

"I do not know what to say, because I do not at all understand her. Yet if she is poor, as of course she must be, and being lowly born, as we know, she could not do better than take you, if she is worldly wise."

"You talk about my worldly advantages very cynically, Lancaster. Do you not think that I might be loved for myself?" inquired De Vere, pulling at his dark mustache vexedly, and wondering if he (Lancaster) believed himself to be the only handsome man in the world.

"Why, yes, of course. You're not bad looking. You have the smallest foot in the regiment, they say, and the whitest hand, and your mustache is superb," Lancaster replied, laughing, for from his superb size and manly beauty he rather despised small dandies; and De Vere, feeling snubbed, he scarcely knew why, retired within himself after the dignified reply:

"I humbly thank you, Captain Lancaster; but I was not fishing for such weak compliments."

CHAPTER XIII

Miss West accepted the steamer-chair, the rugs, the wraps, and the books with unfeigned pleasure, and buried herself in the volumes with a pertinacity that was discouraging to her ardent wooer. She wearied of the blue sky and the blue ocean, the everlasting roll of the ship, the faces of her fellow-voyagers, of everything, as she averred, but the books. They had a fair and prosperous journey, and every sunny day Leonora might be seen on deck, but whether walking or sitting, she had always a book in her hand in whose pages she persistently buried herself at the approach of any one with whom she was disinclined to talk. In this discouraging state of things De Vere's wooing sped but slowly, and Lancaster's acquaintanceship progressed no further than a ceremonious "Good-morning," "Good-evening," "Can I be of any service to you?" and similar stilted salutations, to all of which Leonora replied with a quietness and constraint that put a check on further conversation. No one could complain that she gave any trouble; she was quiet, courteous, and gentle, and there were two pairs of eyes that followed the demure, black-robed figure everywhere upon the deck, and the owners of the eyes wished, perhaps, that she would call on them for more attention, more services, so oblivious did she seem of the fact that they waited assiduously upon her lightest command.

"She is not a little flirt, as I thought at first, seeing her with

De Vere," the captain said to himself. "She is a clever little girl who is better pleased with the thoughts of clever writers than the society of two great, trifling fellows such as De Vere and myself. I applaud her taste."

All the same, he would have been pleased if the pretty face had lighted sometimes at his coming, if she had seemed to care for talking to him, if she had even asked him any questions about where she was going. But she did not manifest any curiosity on the subject. She was a constrained, chilly little companion always to him. It chagrined him to see that she was more at her ease with De Vere than with him. Once or twice she unbent from her lofty height with the lieutenant, smiled, chatted, even sang to him by moonlight, one night, in a voice as sweet as her face. But she was very shy, very quiet with the man whose business it was to convey her to England. She tried faithfully to be as little of "a bore and nuisance" as possible.

It did not matter; indeed, it was much better so, he told himself, and yet he chafed sometimes under her peculiar manner. He did not like to be treated wholly with indifference, did not like to be entirely ignored, as if she had forgotten him completely.

So one day when De Vere lolled in his state-room, he went and stood behind her chair where she sat reading. It was one of the poets of his own land whose book she held in her hand, and the fact emboldened him to say:

"You like English authors, Miss West. Do you think you shall like England?"

She lifted the blue-gray eyes calmly to his face.

"No," she replied, concisely.

He flushed a little. It was his own native land. He did not like to hear her say she should not like it.

"That is a pity, since you are going to make your home there," he said.

"I am not at all sure of that," she answered, putting her white forefinger between the pages of her book, and turning squarely round to look at him as he talked. "Perhaps if I can not bring myself to like England, I may persuade my aunt to come to America with me."

"Lady Lancaster would die of chagrin if you did," he replied, hastily.

He saw a blush color the smooth cheek, and wished that he had thought before he spoke.

"She is poor and proud. She does not like to be reminded that her aunt is a servant at Lancaster Park," he said, pityingly, to himself.

And he recalled De Vere's intentions with a sensation of generous pleasure. Leonora, with her fair face and her cultured mind, would be lifted by her marriage into the sphere where she rightly belonged. Then she would like England better.

"I have been reading your poet laureate," she said. "I was much struck by these lines:

'Howe'er it be, it seems to me,

'Tis only noble to be good:
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood.'

I should not have thought an English poet would write that," she went on. "I thought England was too entirely governed by the laws of caste for one of her people to give free utterance to such a dangerous sentiment."

"You must not judge us too hardly," he said, hastily.

Ignoring his feeble protest, she continued: "My papa was English, but he was not of what you call gentle birth, Captain Lancaster. He was the son of a most unlucky tradesman who died and left him nothing but his blessing. So papa ran away to America at barely twenty-one. He went to California to seek his fortune, and he had some good luck and some bad. When he had been there a year he found a gold nugget that was quite a fortune to him. So he married then, and when I was born my pretty young mamma died. After that he lived only for me. We had many ups and downs—all miners have—sometimes we were quite rich, sometimes very poor. But I have been what you call well educated. I know Latin and French and German, and I have studied music. In America, I can move in quite good society, but in your country—" she paused and fixed her clear, grave eyes on his face.

"Well?" he said.

"In England," she said, "I shall, doubtless, be relegated to the

same position in society as my aunt, the housekeeper at Lancaster Park. Is it not so?"

He was obliged to confess that it was true.

"Then is it likely I shall love England?" she said. "No; I am quite too American for that. Oh, I dare say you are disgusted at me, Captain Lancaster. You are proud of your descent from a long line of proud ancestry." She looked down at her book and read on, aloud:

"I know you're proud to bear your name,
Your pride is yet no mate for mine,
Too proud to care from whence I came."

He knew the verse by heart. Some impulse stronger than his will or reason prompted him to repeat the last two lines, meaningly, gazing straight into the sparkling, dark-gray eyes with his proud, blue ones:

"A simple maiden in her flower
Is worth a hundred coats of arms."

The gray eyes, brave as they were, could not bear the meaning gaze of the blue ones. They wavered and fell. The long lashes drooped against the cheeks that flushed rosy red. She shut up the book with an impatient sigh, and said, with an effort at self-possession:

"You shall see that I will bring my aunt home to America with

me, Captain Lancaster."

"Perhaps so; and yet I think she loves England—as much, I dare say, as you do America."

"I hope not, for what should we do in that case? I have only her, she has only me, and why should we live apart?"

"Do you mean to tell me that you have left behind you no relatives?" he said.

"I told you I had no one but Aunt West," she said, almost curtly.

"And she can scarcely be called your relative. I believe she was only your father's sister-in-law," he said.

"That is true," she replied.

"Then why go to her at all, since the kinship is but in name, and you would be happier in America?" he asked, with something of curiosity.

"Papa wished it," she replied, simply.

Then there was a brief silence. Leonora's lashes drooped, with the dew of unshed tears on them. The young face looked very sad in the soft evening light.

"She is almost alone in the world—poor child!" he thought.

"I want to ask you something," he said, impulsively.

"Yes," she said, listlessly.

"Was it because of those things we talked of just now—those aristocratic prejudices—that you have so severely ignored De Vere and me?"

"Not exactly," she replied, hesitatingly.

"Then, why?" he asked, gravely.

She looked up into the handsome blue eyes. They were regarding her very kindly. Something like a sob swelled her throat, but she said, as calmly as she could:

"I'll tell you the reason, Captain Lancaster. Do you remember the day we sailed, and what you and Lieutenant De Vere talked of that night over your cigars?"

"I remember," he replied, with an embarrassment it was impossible to hide.

The clear eyes looked up straight into his face.

"Well, then," she said, "I heard every word you said to each other there in the moonlight."

CHAPTER XIV

For the second time since he had met Leonora West, Captain Lancaster devoutly wished that the earth would open and hide him from the sight of those gray-blue eyes.

"I heard every word," she repeated, and his memory flew back anxiously to that night.

"Oh, impossible!" he cried. "You had retired. We were alone." The fair cheek flushed warmly.

"I shall have to confess," she said. "But you must not judge me too hardly, Captain Lancaster."

He looked at her expectantly.

"I will tell you the truth," she said. "I went early to my state-room, because I was tired of Lieutenant De Vere. I wanted to be alone. But it was so warm and close in my room, I could not breathe freely. So I threw a dark shawl over me and went out on deck again. There was no one there. I slipped around in the shadow of the wheel-house and sat down."

"And then we came—De Vere and I," said Lancaster.

"Yes," she replied. "I was frightened at first, and shrank closer into the darkness. I did not want to be found out. I thought you would smoke your cigars and go away in a little while."

There was a minute's silence.

"I wish I had been a thousand miles away!" the captain thought, ruefully, to himself.

"So then you commenced to talk about me," continued Leonora. "I ought not to have listened, I know, but I could not make up my mind to interrupt you; it would have been so embarrassing, you know. So I kept still, hoping you would stop every minute, and thus I heard all."

"You heard nothing but kindness—you must grant that, at least," he said.

The red lips curled at the corners, whether with anger or feeling he could not tell.

"You were very condescending," she said, in a quiet, very demure little voice.

"Now, you wrong us—you do, indeed, Miss West," he cried, hotly. "We said the kindest things of you. You must own that Lieutenant De Vere paid you the highest compliment man can pay to woman."

A beautiful blush rose into the fair face, and her eyes drooped a moment.

"While we are upon the subject," he continued, hastily, "let me speak a word for my friend, Miss West. He is quite in earnest in his love for you, and you would do well to listen to his suit. He is in every way an unexceptionable suitor. There is everything in favor of him, personally, and he is of good birth, is the heir to a title, and last, but not least, has ten thousand a year of his own."

"Enough to buy him a more fitting bride than Mrs. West's niece," she said, with some bitterness, but more mirth, in her voice.

"Who could be more fitting than the one he has chosen?" asked Lancaster.

"It would be a *mésalliance*," she said, with her eyes full on his face as she quoted his words.

"In the world's eyes—yes," he answered, quietly. "But if you love him and he loves you, you need not care for the world," he said; and he felt the whole force of the words as he spoke them. He said to himself that any man who could afford to snap his fingers at fortune and marry Leonora West would be blessed.

She listened to his words calmly, and with an air of thoughtfulness, as if she were weighing them in her mind.

"And so," she said, when he had ceased speaking, "you advise me, Captain Lancaster, to follow up the good impression I have made on your friend, and to—to fall into his arms as soon as he asks me?"

He gave a gasp as if she had thrown cold water over him.

"Pray do not understand me as advising anything!" he cried, hastily. "I merely showed you the advantages of such a marriage; but, of course, I have no personal interest in the matter. I am no match-maker."

"No, of course not," curtly; then, with a sudden total change of the subject, she said: "Aren't we very near the end of our trip, Captain Lancaster?"

"You are tired?" he asked.

"Yes. It grows monotonous after the first day or two out," she replied.

"You might have had a better time if you had let De Vere and me amuse you," he said.

"Oh, I have been amused," she replied, frankly; and he wondered within himself what had amused her, but did not ask. She had a trick of saying things that chagrined him, because he did not understand them, and had a lingering suspicion that she was laughing at him.

"We shall see the end of our journey to-morrow, if we have good luck," he said, and she uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"So soon? Ah, how glad I am! I wonder," reflectively, "what my aunt will think about me."

"She will be astonished, for one thing," he replied.

"Why?"

"Because I think she is expecting a child. She will be surprised to see a young lady."

"Poor papa!" a sigh; "he always called me his little girl. That is how the mistake has been made. Ah, Captain Lancaster, I can not tell you how much I miss my father!"

There was a tremor in the young voice. His heart thrilled with pity for her loneliness.

"I hope your aunt will be so kind to you that she will make up to you for his loss," he said.

"Tell me something about her," said Leonora.

"I am afraid I can not tell you much," he answered, with some embarrassment. "She is a good woman. I have heard Lady Lancaster say that much."

"Of course, you can not be expected to know much about a mere housekeeper," with a distinct inflection of bitterness in her voice. "Well, then, tell me about Lady Lancaster. Who is she?"

"She is the mistress of Lancaster Park."

"Is she nice?"

"She is old and ugly and cross and very rich. Is all that nice, as you define it?"

"No; only the last. It is nice to be rich, of course. That goes without saying. Well, then, is there a master?"

"A master?" vaguely.

"Of Lancaster Park, I mean."

"Oh, yes."

"And is he old and ugly and cross and rich?" pursued Miss West, curiously.

"He is all but the last," declared Lancaster, unblushingly. "He is as poor as Job's turkey. That is not nice, is it?"

"I know some people who are poor, but very, very nice," said the girl, with a decided air.

"I am glad to hear you say so. I am very poor myself. I have been thinking that the reason you have snubbed me so unmercifully of late is because I so foolishly gave myself away when I first met you."

"Gave yourself away?" uncomprehendingly.

"I mean I told you I was poor. I beg your pardon for the slang phrase I used just now. One falls unconsciously into such habits in the army. But tell me, did you?"

"Did I do what?"

"Did you snub me because I am poor?"

"I have not snubbed you at all," indignantly.

"You have ignored me. That is even worse," he said.

"Indeed I have not ignored you at all," she protested.

"Well, then, you forgot me. That is the unkindest cut of all.

I could bear to be snubbed, but I hate to be totally annihilated," said he, with a grieved air.

She pursed her pretty lips and remained silent.

"Now you want me to go away, I see," he remarked. "This is the first time you have let me talk to you since we came aboard, and already you are weary."

"Yes, I am already weary," she echoed.

She put her little hand over her lips and yawned daintily but deliberately.

Burning with chagrin, he lifted his hat to her and walked away.

"I can never speak to her but she makes me repent," he said to himself, and went and leaned moodily against the side, while he continued to himself: "What a little thorn she is, and how sharply she can wound."

Leonora watched the retreating figure a moment, then leisurely opened her book again and settled herself to read. But she was not very deeply interested, it seemed, for now and then she glanced up under her long lashes at the tall, moveless figure of the soldier. At length she put down the book and went across to him.

Gazing intently out to sea, he started when a hand soft and white as a snow-flake fluttered down upon his coat-sleeve. He glanced quickly around.

"Miss West!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

She glanced up deprecatingly into his face.

"I—I was rude to you just now," she stammered. "I beg your pardon for it. I—I really don't know why I was so. I don't dislike you, indeed, and I think you are very nice. I have enjoyed the chair and the books, and I have been sorry ever since that day when I came down to the steamer and did not wait for you. But—somehow—it was very hard to tell you so."

She had spoken every word with a delightful shyness, and after a pause, she went on, with a catch in her breath:

"As for your being poor, I never thought of that—never. I think poor men are the nicest—always. They are handsomer than the rich ones. I—"

She caught her breath with a gasp. He had turned around quickly and caught her hand.

"Miss West—" he was beginning to say, when a sudden step sounded beside them.

Lieutenant De Vere had come up to them. There was a sudden glitter in his brown eyes—a jealous gleam.

"I beg your pardon. Are you and Miss West rehearsing for private theatricals?" he asked, with a slight sarcastic inflection.

Lancaster looked intensely annoyed; Leonora only laughed.

"Yes," she said. "Do you not think that I should make a good

actress, Lieutenant De Vere?"

"Yes," he replied, "and Lancaster would make a good actor. 'One man in his time plays many parts.'"

Lancaster looked at him with a lightning gleam in his blue eyes. There was a superb scorn in them.

"Thank you," he replied. "And to carry out your idea, I will now make my exit."

He bowed royally and walked away. De Vere laughed uneasily; Leonora had coolly gone back to her book. His eyes flashed.

"If anyone had told me this, I should not have believed it," he muttered. "Ah! it was well to lecture me and get the game into his own hands. Beggar! what could he give her, even if she bestowed her matchless self upon him—what but a barren honor, an empty title? Ah, well! false friend, I know all now," he hissed angrily to himself.

CHAPTER XV

Leonora, apparently absorbed in her book, watched her exasperated admirer curiously under her long, shady lashes. She divined intuitively that he was bitterly jealous of his handsome friend.

"Have I stirred up strife between them?" she asked herself, uneasily. "That will never do. I must carry the olive branch to the distrustful friend."

She glanced around, and seeing that Lancaster was not in sight, called gently:

"Lieutenant De Vere!"

He hurried toward her, and stood in grim silence awaiting her pleasure.

"I—want to speak to you," she said.

There was a vacant chair near at hand. He brought it and sat down by her side.

"I am at your service, Miss West," he said, stiffly.

He thought he had never seen anything half so enchanting as the face she raised to his. The big black hat was a most becoming foil to her fresh young beauty. There was a smile on the rosy lips—half arch, half wistful. The full light of the sunny day shone on her, but her beauty was so flawless that the severe test only enhanced its perfection. His heart gave a fierce throb, half pain, half pleasure.

"You are vexed with me?" said Leonora, in a soft, inquiring voice.

"Oh, no, no," he replied, quickly.

"No?" she said. "But, then, you certainly are vexed with some one. If it is not with me, then it must be with Captain Lancaster."

To this proposition, that was made with an air of conviction, he remained gravely silent.

"Silence gives consent," said the girl, after waiting vainly for him to speak, and then he bowed coldly.

"Then it is he," she said. "Ah, dear me! what has Captain Lancaster done?"

"That is between him and me," said the soldier, with a sulky air.

The red lips dimpled. Leonora rather enjoyed the situation.

"You will not tell me?" she said.

"I beg your pardon—no," he answered, resolutely.

"Then I will tell you," she said: "you think he has treated you unfairly, that he has taken advantage of you."

De Vere stared.

"How can you possibly know, Miss West?" he asked, pulling sulkily at the ends of his dark mustache.

"I am very good at guessing," demurely.

"You did not guess this. He told you, I presume," bitterly.

"He—if you mean Captain Lancaster—told me nothing. I was telling him something. Why should you be vexed at him because I went and stood there and talked to him?" indignantly.

"I was not," rather feebly.

"Do you really deny it?" she asked him, incredulously.

"Well, since you put it so seriously, yes, I was vexed about it; but I don't understand how you could know it," he answered, flushing a dark red.

"I will tell you how I know," she said, coloring crimson also. "I heard all that you and Captain Lancaster said about me that first night we came aboard."

"Oh, by Jove! you didn't, though?" he exclaimed, radiant, and trying to meet the glance of the beautiful eyes.

But with her shy avowal she had let the white lids drop bashfully over them.

De Vere was not one bit disconcerted by what she had told him. He knew that all she had heard that night had been to his advantage.

"And so all this while you knew that I thought—" he began, boldly.

"That you thought me rather pretty—yes," she replied, modestly. "I knew also that I was a *mésalliance* for you, and that Captain Lancaster's future was 'cut and dried,'" bitterly.

He gazed at her in wonder.

"And you have kept it to yourself all this while, Miss West?"

"Yes, because I was ashamed to confess the truth. I did not want to be thought an eavesdropper, for I did not really wish to hear. It was an accident, but it has weighed on my mind ever since, and at last I made up my mind to 'fess, as the children say."

He gazed at her with ever-increasing admiration.

"So," she went on, slowly, "this evening I told Captain Lancaster all about it."

She blushed at the remembrance of some other things she had told him—things she had not meant to tell, but which had slipped out, as it were, in her compunction at her rudeness to him.

"And—that was all? Was he not making love to you, really?" cried the lieutenant, still uneasy at the remembrance of that impulsive hand-clasp that had so amazed him.

She flashed her great eyes at him in superb anger.

"Love to me—he would not dare!" breathlessly. "I'm nothing to him, nothing to you—never shall be! Please remember that! Once I reach my aunt, neither of you need ever expect to see me again. I—I—" a strangling sob; she broke down and wept out her anger in a perfumed square of black-bordered cambric.

"Oh, pray, don't cry!" cried he, in distress. "I did not mean to make you angry, Miss West;" and then Leonora hastily dried her eyes and looked up at him.

"I'm not angry—really," she said. "Only—only, I want you to understand that you need not be angry with Captain Lancaster on my account. There's no use in your liking me and having a quarrel over me—no use at all."

"No one has quarreled," he answered, in a tone of chagrin and bitter disappointment.

"Not yet, of course," she replied shaking her head gravely. "But you know you spoke to him very aggravatingly just now."

"I merely used a quotation from Shakespeare," he retorted.

The bright eyes looked him through and through with their clear gaze.

"Yes, but there was a double meaning in it. I am sure he understood all that you meant to convey. I should think that when you meet him again he will knock you down for it."

"You are charmingly frank, but you are right. I do not doubt but that he will—if he can," he replied, bitterly.

Leonora measured the medium-sized figure critically with her eyes.

"I should think there could be no doubt on the subject," she observed. "He is twice as big as you are."

"Why do women all admire big, awkward giants?" asked he, warmly.

"We do not," sharply.

"Oh, Miss West, there's no use denying it. There are a dozen men in the Guards better looking than Lancaster, yet not one so much run after by the women; all because he is a brawny-fisted Hercules," crossly.

"Captain Lancaster is your friend, isn't he?" with a curling lip.

"He was before I saw you. He is not my friend if he is my rival," said De Vere, with frankness equal to her own.

The round cheeks grew crimson again.

"Put me out of the question. I am nothing to either of you—never can be," she said. "You have been friends, haven't you?"

"Yes," curtly.

"For a long time?" persisted she.

"Ever since I went into the Guards—that is five years ago," he replied. "The fellows used to call us Damon and Pythias."

"Then don't—don't let me make a quarrel between you!" exclaimed Leonora, pleadingly.

"It is already made, isn't it?" with a half regret in his voice.

"No; only begun—and you mustn't let it go any further."

"No? But what is a fellow to do, I should like to know?"

"You must go and apologize to your friend for your hasty, ill-timed words," she said.

"I'll be hanged if I show the white feather like that!" he cried, violently.

"There is no white feather at all. You made a mistake and spoke unjust words to your friend. Now, when you discover your error, you should be man enough to retract your remarks," she answered, indignantly.

"I can't see why you take up for Lancaster so vehemently," he commented, straying from the main point.

"I'm not taking up for him," warmly. "I only don't want you to make a fool of yourself about *me*!"

"Ah!"—shortly.

"Yes, that is what I mean, exactly; I don't want my aunt to think I've set you two at odds. She will be prejudiced against me in the beginning. Come, now," dropping her vexed tone and falling into a coaxing one, "go and make it up with your injured Pythias."

He regarded her in silence a moment.

"Should you like me any better if I did?" he inquired, after this thoughtful pause.

"Of course I should," she answered, in an animated tone.

"And it would really please you for me to tell Lancaster I was mistaken and am sorry?"

"Yes, I should like that, certainly."

He tried to look into the sparkling eyes, but they had wandered away from him. She was watching the flight of a sea-bird whose glancing wings were almost lost in the illimitable blue of the sky.

"If I do this thing it will be wholly for your sake," he said, meaningly.

"For my sake, then," she answered, carelessly; and then he rose and left her.

Lancaster had been in his state-room reading two hours, perhaps, when De Vere knocked at his door. He tossed back his fair hair carelessly, and without rising from his reclining posture, bade the applicant come in.

"Ah, it is you, De Vere?" he said, icily.

"Yes, it is I, Lancaster. What have you been doing? Writing a challenge to me?" laughing. "Well, you may burn it now; I have come to retract my words."

"To retract?" the frown on Lancaster's moody brow began to clear away.

"Yes, I was mistaken, I thought you were my rival in secret, but Miss West has explained all to me. I spoke unjustly. Can you accord me your pardon? I'm downright sorry, old fellow—

no mistake."

Lancaster gave him his hand.

"Think before you speak next time," he said, dryly.

"I will. But I was terribly cut up at first, seeing you and her together—like that. How sweet she is! She did not want us to quarrel over her. She confessed everything. It was comical, her hearing everything that night—was it not? But there was no harm done."

"No," Lancaster said, constrainedly.

"I'm glad we are friends again; but I was so stiff I could never have owned myself in the wrong, only that I promised to do it for her sake," added De Vere; and then he went away, and left his friend to resume the interrupted perusal of his novel.

But Lancaster tossed the folio angrily down upon the floor.

"For her sake," he replied. "She is a little coquette, after all, and I thought for an hour that—Pshaw, I am a fool! So she has fooled him to the top of his bent, too! Why did I speak to her at all? Little nettle! I might have known how she would sting! Well, well, I wish the 'small commission' were duly handed over to the housekeeper at Lancaster Park. A good riddance, I should say! So she thought that poor men were the nicest and handsomest, always? Faugh! Lucky for me that De Vere came upon the scene just then! In another minute I should have told her that I thought just the same about poor girls! So she confessed all to De Vere, and bade him apologize for her sake. Ah, ah, little flirt!" he repeated, bitterly.

CHAPTER XVI

Things went on smoothly as usual at Lancaster Park after Mrs. West had given her consent to my lady's clever plan. They put Richard West's child out of their heads for awhile and began their preparations for the guests who were expected to arrive the last of May, to welcome the returning master of Lancaster Park. Mrs. West found time in the hubbub to fit up a tidy little room next her own for the little American niece who was coming to her from so far away. Then she, too, dismissed the matter from her mind, save now and then when in solitary moments she would wonder to herself what Dick West's child would be like, and if she would be old enough to put to school.

"It is lucky that I have a good store of savings," thought the lonely woman to herself. "I will find a good boarding-school for little Leonora, if she is old enough to go, and the child shall be educated for a teacher, that she may have the means of supporting herself genteelly when she grows up. It will take a good deal of money, but I will not begrudge it to poor Dick's child. He was a good-hearted, sunny-tempered lad. I only hope his child may be like him."

So she went on thinking of the child as of a very small girl indeed. Her brother-in-law's letter, with its hurried mention of "my little girl," "my little Leo," had entirely misled her. The poor dying man had had no intention of deceiving his sister-in-law.

To him his darling daughter, although grown to woman's stature, was always "my little girl," and it never occurred to him, when on his dying bed he penned that hurried letter, to explain to Mrs. West that his orphan child was a beautiful young girl of eighteen, already fairly educated, and with a spirit quite brave enough to face the world alone, if need be.

So she went on thinking of Leonora West as a little girl who would be a great deal of trouble to her, and on whom she would have to spend the savings of long years; and, although she felt that she had a formidable task before her in the rearing of this orphan girl, she did not shrink from the undertaking, but made up her mind to go forward bravely in the fulfillment of the precious charge left to her by the dead.

So the day drew near for Leonora's arrival, and the great house was now filled with guests—twenty in all—whom Lady Lancaster had bidden to the feast, prepared in honor of her nephew, the Lord of Lancaster.

So the day was come at last, and Lady Lancaster in the drawing-room awaited her nephew, while the housekeeper in the kitchen awaited her niece.

It was one of the most beautiful of June days. The air was sweet and warm, the sky was clear and blue, all nature seemed to smile on the home-coming of the master.

Mrs. West, having given her orders in the kitchen, repaired to her own special sitting-room, a small apartment on the second floor, with a sunny window looking out upon the rear grounds

of the house. She had put a bouquet of roses in a vase on the mantel, and some small pots of simple, sweet-smelling flowers on the window-sill, to brighten up the place for the child's eyes.

"It will look so cheerful. Children always love flowers," she said.

She pulled forward a pretty little child's rocking-chair that she had brought down from the immense garret. She arranged a pretty little red-and-white tidy over the back.

"In a little while they will be here, for John went to meet them with the carriage a good while ago," she said to herself. "Dear me, how nervous I am getting over that child's coming."

And she settled her lace cap again and looked into the small mirror against the wall, wondering how Dick's child would like her aunt's looks.

"Dear me, Mrs. West, I did not think you were so vain," said a laughing masculine voice.

She turned around quickly.

"Oh, my lord, so you're come home again!" she cried; "and as full of your mischief as ever. Welcome, welcome!"

"Yes, I am home again, Mrs. West, and here is what I have brought you," he said, stepping back that she might see the girl who had followed him into the room—the graceful figure in deep black, that came up to her with both hands outstretched, and said, demurely:

"How do you do, Aunt West?"

For a minute Mrs. West did not touch the pretty white hands

held out to her, she was so amazed and surprised. She managed to stammer out faintly:

"Are you Leonora West? I—I was expecting to see a very young child."

The bright face dimpled charmingly.

"That was a mistake," she said. "I hope you will not be vexed because I am so large!"

CHAPTER XVII

"But," said Mrs. West, in perplexity, "the letter said a little girl."

"Yes, I know," said Leonora. "Poor papa always called me his little girl, and if he had lived until I was an old woman it would have been the same. And he forgot that you could not possibly know how old I was. I'm sorry you are disappointed, Aunt West, but I am eighteen years old. You see, papa was married one year after he went to America—and—"

Just here Captain Lancaster interposed:

"Aren't you going to kiss your niece, Mrs. West?"

"Oh, dear me, yes; I was so surprised, I quite forgot!" cried the good woman. She went up to Leonora, put her arms around the graceful figure, and kissed the round cheek.

"Welcome to England, my dear child," she said. "I shall love you dearly, I am sure. Sit down, do, in this chair, while I take your things."

And in her flurry she pushed forward the small rocking-chair with elaborate courtesy, whereat Leonora laughed good-naturedly.

"Either the chair is too small, or I am too big," she said; "I am afraid to trust myself upon it." She went and sat down on a pretty old-fashioned sofa. Then she glanced around and saw that Captain Lancaster had gone.

"Are you disappointed because I am not a little girl, Aunt West?" she inquired, as she removed her hat and smoothed her rough tresses with her small, white hands.

"I—I don't know—yet," said the good woman; "I am so flustered by the surprise, and—and—I wonder what Lady Lancaster will say?"

"What has Lady Lancaster to do with me?" demanded Miss West, in her pretty, abrupt way, fixing her large eyes wonderingly on her aunt's face.

"Oh, nothing!" answered Mrs. West, rather vaguely.

"I should think not, indeed," said Leonora, in a very decided tone.

"Are you tired, my dear? Should you like to go to your room and rest?" inquired the housekeeper, changing the subject.

"No, I am not tired, thank you, aunt; but I will go to my room if you please," Leonora answered. There was a little disappointment in her tone. The young face looked sober.

"This way, then, my dear," said Mrs. West. She led the girl through her own neat bedroom, into a prettier one, small, but furnished with a white bed, a blue carpet, and some blue chairs—these latter also the spoils of the garret, but looking very well after the furbishing Mrs. West had given them.

Leonora cast a rapid, comprehensive glance around her, then went over to the ewer and bathed her face and hands.

"I hope your room suits you, Leonora," said Mrs. West, lingering, and half-abashed. Something about the fair, self-

possessed girl seemed to vaguely suggest better things. Beside her grace and beauty the room looked poor and mean.

"Oh, yes, thank you, aunt," Leonora returned, quietly. She had taken her combs and brushes out of her dressing-bag now, and Mrs. West saw that they were an expensive set, pearl and silver-backed, as elegant as Lady Lancaster's own.

"My dear, could your papa afford handsome things like these?" she said.

Leonora flushed rose red.

"Not always," she said. "But he was very extravagant whenever he had money. He made a great pet of me, and sometimes—when he had good luck—he bought the loveliest things for me. Perhaps, if he had taken more care of his money, you need not have been burdened with the care of his orphan daughter now."

There was a dejected tone in her voice that went straight to the housekeeper's womanly heart.

"Oh, you poor fatherless child!" she cried. "Do you think I could mind dividing my savings with Dick West's child? He was a bonny lad, was Dick! I always loved him, although he was no real kin to me, and only my husband's brother."

Leonora's eyes shone very bright now through the tears that filled them.

"Oh, Aunt West, you will love me too a little, then—for poor papa's sake!" she cried, and Mrs. West answered, with sudden warmth and tenderness:

"Indeed I will, dear. You shall be like my own daughter to me."

A moment later she added, ruefully:

"I'm sorry I could not have a nicer room for you, Leonora. But, you see, I thought this would do very well for a child."

"Oh, indeed, it does not matter in the least. I shall not stay in it much. I shall be out-of-doors nearly all the time."

CHAPTER XVIII

Leonora spoke in such a composed, matter-of-fact tone that she was surprised at its effect upon her aunt.

The good lady uttered an exclamation almost amounting to terror, and stood regarding her niece with such a rueful and amazed face that the girl burst into a peal of sweet, high-pitched laughter.

"Oh, my dear aunt," she cried, as she vigorously brushed out her thick plaits of hair into loose, shining ripples over her shoulders, "what have I said to shock you so?"

"I'm not shocked, my dear," said the good soul, recovering herself, with a gasp. "What put such an idea in your head? But what did you say, child," anxiously, "about being out all day?"

"I said it didn't matter about the room, as I didn't expect to stay in it much. I love fresh air, Aunt West, and I shall be outdoors nearly all the time."

"I'm afraid that won't do here, my love," suggested the housekeeper, timidly.

"Why not?" said Leonora, amazed; then she colored, and said, demurely: "Oh, yes, I understand now. You can not spare me. I shall have to help work for my living."

"No, you shall not," indignantly; "I did not mean that at all. I should be mean if I thought of such a thing. But there's Lady Lancaster. She wouldn't like it."

A pretty little frown came between Leonora's straight, dark brows.

"Wouldn't you like me to go out-doors? Is that what you mean?" she asked, and when Mrs. West answered "Yes," she said, angrily and decidedly:

"Lady Lancaster has nothing to do with my movements, and I don't suppose she will grudge me a breath of God's free air and sunshine even if I walk in her grounds to obtain them."

"But I promised her—" said Mrs. West, then paused bashfully.

"I hope you didn't promise her to bury me alive in this musty little chamber, at all events," said the girl, with an irreverent glance around her.

"Yes, I did. At least I promised to keep you out of her sight. She does not like children."

"I'm not a child," said Leonora, looking her tallest.

"Yes. I forgot that. I will ask her if her objections extend to a young lady," Mrs. West said, with a hesitating air. She was a little afraid of a contretemps of some kind. The girl's great eyes were flashing, her pretty red lips curling disdainfully.

"Aunt West, are you going to stay on at Lancaster Park, and am I to stay here with you?" she asked, slowly.

"That was my expectation, dear," the housekeeper answered, mildly.

"And—am I here on Lady Lancaster's sufferance? Am I—hired to her?"

"Why, no, of course not, Leonora, child. She has nothing at

all to do with you. My lady was very kind. She did not send me away because I was about to adopt a daughter. She permitted me to have you here, and she made but one condition."

"And that?"

"That I was to keep you limited to my rooms—to keep you out of her sight. She did not want to be pestered by a child."

"Ah!" Leonora drew a long breath, as with her white fingers she patted the soft rings of hair down upon her white forehead.

"Yes, you can not blame her, surely, dear. You see, my lady is an old woman. She is eighty years old, and she has never had any children. So of course she would not like to be bothered with other people's. She is very ill-natured, and very peculiar, but perhaps when she finds out you are a young lady she will not care if you go out into the grounds some."

"And to the house, Aunt West—am not I to go over that? Papa has told me so much about these grand old English homes. I should like to go over one so much," said the girl.

"I will take you over the house myself, some day. You shall see it, never fear, child, but not for some time yet. You see, the place is full of grand company now."

"Lady Lancaster's company?" asked Leonora.

"Why, yes, of course," said Mrs. West. "She has twenty guests—fine, fashionable people from London, and they are all very gay indeed. You shall see them all at dinner this evening. I will find you a peep-hole. It will be a fine sight for you."

"I dare say," said Leonora, speaking rather indistinctly,

because she had two pins in her mouth and was fastening a clean linen collar around her neck.

"How coolly she takes things! I suppose that is the American way," thought Mrs. West. "But then of course she can have no idea what a brave sight it is to see the English nobility dining at a great country-house. She will be quite dazzled by the black coats and shining jewels and beautiful dresses. I don't suppose they have anything like it in her country," mused the good woman, whose ideas of America were so vague that she did not suppose it had advanced very far from the condition in which Columbus discovered it.

"I should not think," said her niece, breaking in upon these silent cogitations, "that Lady Lancaster, being so old—'one foot in the grave and the other on the brink,' as they say—would care about all that gay company around her. Does she lead such a life always?"

"Oh, no. It is only now and then she is so dissipated. But she must keep up the dignity of the Hall, you know, for the sake of Lord Lancaster. All this present gayety is in honor of his return."

"Has Lord Lancaster been abroad, then?" Leonora asked, carelessly.

"Why, my love, what a strange question!" said her aunt, staring.

"What is there strange about it, Aunt West?" asked the girl.

"Why, that you should ask me if Lord Lancaster has been abroad—as if any one should know better than yourself."

"I, Aunt West? Why, what should I know of Lady Lancaster's husband?" exclaimed Leonora, wondering if her aunt's brain were not just a little turned.

"Why, my dear girl, who said anything about her husband? She's a dowager. The old Lord Lancaster has been dead these two years. Of course I meant the young heir."

"The old lady's son?" asked Leonora, irreverently.

"Her nephew, my dear. You know I told you just now that she never had a child."

"Oh, yes, I was very careless to forget that. I beg your pardon. So then it is her nephew who has been abroad?"

"Yes, or rather her husband's nephew," replied Mrs. West.

"Where has he been, aunt?" continued the girl, carelessly.

Mrs. West looked as if she thought Leonora had parted with her senses, if ever she had possessed any.

"Why, he has been to America, of course. Didn't he fetch you to England, Leonora? And hasn't he but just gone out of the room? Are you making fun of your old auntie, dear?"

Leonora stood still, looking at her relative with a pale, startled face.

"Why, that was Captain Lancaster," she said, faintly after a minute.

"Of course," answered Mrs. West. "He's an officer in the army, but he is Lord Lancaster, of Lancaster Park, too. Dear me, dear me, didn't you really know that much, Leonora?"

"N-no; I didn't. I thought he was nothing but a soldier. He—"

he told me that he was as poor as—as a church-mouse!" faltered Leonora, as red as a rose, and with a lump in her throat. She was just on the point of breaking down and crying with vexation. How had he dared chaff her so?

"Well, so he is poor—not as poor as a church-mouse, of course, for he has Lancaster Park and five thousand acres of woodland; but then he has no money—it was all squandered by the dead-and-gone lords of Lancaster. So Captain Clive Lancaster never left the army when he came into the title. He could not support it properly, and so my lady lives on here, and some day, if he marries to please her, she will give him all her money," said Mrs. West, volubly.

Leonora went over to the window, and stood looking out at the fair, peaceful English landscape in silence. Her readiness of speech seemed to have deserted her. The pretty face was pale with surprise.

"You must be tired, dear. Do lie down and rest yourself," said Mrs. West. "I must leave you now for a little while. Oh, I had almost forgotten—your luggage, Leonora—did you bring any?"

"Yes, there were several trunks," Leonora answered, without turning her head.

"I will have them brought in," said Mrs. West. Then she bustled away and left the girl alone.

She was not tired, probably, for she did not lie down. She only pulled a chair to the window and sat down. Then she clasped her small hands together on the window-sill, rested her round,

dimpled chin upon them, and gazed at the sky with a thoughtful, far-off look in her eyes.

Meanwhile Mrs. West's mind teemed with uneasy thoughts.

"She's rather strange, I'm afraid," the good woman said to herself. "I think, perhaps, poor Dick has humored her some—she will not bear restraint well—I can see that! And what will Lady Lancaster say to a grown-up girl instead of a little one, as we expected? I'm afraid I see rocks ahead. And yet how pretty and bright she is—too pretty to belong to the housekeeper's room, I'm afraid. Lady Lancaster will be vexed at her, if ever she sees her. She is too independent in her ways to suit my lady. They must not be allowed to meet as long as I can help it," sighing.

CHAPTER XIX

Lady Lancaster was pleased to be very gracious indeed to her returned nephew.

"Ah, you are as big and handsome as ever, Clive!" she said, "and well, of course. I believe you never were sick in your life?"

"Hardly ever," he replied, with a laugh, adding, with veiled anxiety: "I hear that you have killed the fatted calf in my honor, Aunt Lydia. Whom have you staying with you?"

"A few nice people from London, Clive—twenty in all, I think. There are old Lord and Lady Brierly, and their son and daughter, Sir Charles Winton, Colonel Livingston, Mark Dean and his pretty sister, the Earl of Eastwood and his beautiful daughter, Lady Adela, the Cliffords, and some other people. You will meet them all at dinner. I think you know them all?"

"Yes, I suppose so," he answered, rather absently.

"To-night there will be a little informal dance—the young folks were so eager for it, you know. And, Clive, that young friend of yours, Lieutenant De Vere—I hope you brought him down with you?"

"I did not," he replied.

"I am sorry; but I shall send him a note to-morrow. Did you have a fair trip over, Clive?"

"Very fair," he replied, in a peculiar tone.

"I am glad to hear that. Oh, by the way, Clive, did you bring

that child to the housekeeper?"

"Yes," he replied, and a slight smile twitched the corners of the mustached lips.

"I hope she wasn't troublesome," said the haughty old lady, carelessly.

"She was troublesome—I suppose all of the female sex are," he answered, lightly.

"Well, it couldn't be helped, or I would not have bothered you. I had to send for the young one, or West would have gone off herself to fetch her. I'm glad you brought her. The trouble is all over now, so I suppose you don't care."

"Oh, no!" said Captain Lancaster, with rather grim pleasantry. And then she touched him on the arm and said, significantly: "There's some one here I want very much for you to meet, Clive."

"Ah, is there?" he said, shrinking a little from the look and the tone. "I thought you wanted me to meet them all."

"I do; but there is one in particular. It is a lady, Clive," she said, giving him a significant smile that he thought hideous.

He tried gently to wrench himself away from her.

"Well, I must go and take my siesta and dress before I meet them," he said.

"Wait a minute, Clive. I must speak to you," she said, in a tone that savored of authority.

"Will not some other time do as well?" he inquired, glancing rather ungallantly at his watch.

"No time like the present," she answered, resolutely. "You are trying to put me off again, Clive; but beware how you trifle with me, my Lord Lancaster, or I shall know how to punish you," she said, shaking her skinny, diamond-ringed finger at him.

His handsome face flushed haughtily.

"Go on, madame," he said, with a slight, mocking bow. "I am the slave of your pleasure."

She regarded the handsome, insubordinate face in dead silence a minute.

"You already anticipate what I would say," she said. "Why is the idea so distasteful to you, Clive? Any young man in your position might be transported with joy at the thought of inheriting my fortune."

He bowed silently.

"You know," she went on, coolly, "you can never come home to live on your ancestral acres unless you marry money or inherit it."

"Thanks to the folly of my predecessors," he said, bitterly.

"Never mind your predecessors, Clive. There is a woman here whom I want you to marry. Win her and make her mistress of Lancaster Park, and my fortune is yours."

"Am I to have her for the asking?" he inquired, with a delicate sarcasm.

"It is very likely you may," she answered. "Handsome faces like yours make fools of most women."

"And who is the lady it is to charm in this case?" he inquired,

with bitter brevity.

"It is the Lady Adela Eastwood," she replied, concisely.

He gave a low whistle of incredulity.

"The Lady Adela Eastwood—the daughter of a hundred earls!" he cried. "Your ambition soars high, Aunt Lydia."

"Not too high," she replied, shaking her old head proudly, until the great red jewels in her ears flashed like drops of blood.

CHAPTER XX

"Not too high," repeated Lady Lancaster, sagely. "The lords of Lancaster have married earls' daughters before to-day."

"Yes, in their palmy days," said Clive Lancaster; "but not now, when their patrimony is wasted, their lands encumbered with taxes, and their last descendant earning a paltry living in her majesty's service."

"Lady Adela is as poor as you are," said the withered old woman, significantly.

"No?"

"Yes."

"But I thought that the Earl of Eastwood was very rich."

"He was once; but he and his spendthrift sons have made ducks and drakes of the money at the gaming-table. Lady Adela will have no portion at all. She will be compelled to marry a fortune."

"So you have placed yours at her disposal?" he said, with hardly repressed scorn.

"Yes," coolly, "if she takes my nephew with it. But, seriously, Clive, it is the best match for you both. You will have money; she has beauty and exalted station. Married to each other, you two will be a power in the social world; apart, neither of you will count for much. You will have rank, but that will be a mere incumbrance to you without the ability to sustain its dignity

properly."

"If you only knew how little I care for social power," he said. "The life of a soldier suits me. I have no great ambition for wealth and power."

"You are no true Lancaster if you are willing to let the old name and the old place run down!" she broke out, indignantly. "Ah, I wish that I might have borne a son to my husband! Then this degenerate scion of a noble race need never have been roused from his *dolce far niente* to sustain its ancient glory."

His lip curled in cold disdain of her wild ranting.

"At least the old name will never be dishonored by me," he said. "I have led a life that no one can cry shame upon. My record is pure."

Glancing at his flushed face and proud eyes, she saw that she had gone too far. She did not want to rouse that defiant mood inherent in all the Lancasters. She was afraid of it.

"I was hasty," she said. "Forgive me, Clive. But I am so anxious to have you fall in with my plans. I have no kin of my own, and I am anxious to leave my money to you, the heir of my late husband's title. If you fall in with my views I shall give you from the day of your marriage ten thousand a year, and after my death the whole income shall be yours. If you cross me, if you decline to marry as I wish you to do, I shall hunt up other Lancasters—there are distant connections in London, I think—and I shall leave everything to them instead of to you."

Her black eyes glittered with menace, and there was an evil,

triumphant smile on her thin, cruel lips. She knew the extent of her power, and was bent on using it to the full.

"Money is a good thing to have, Aunt Lydia. I should like to have yours when you are done with it, I don't deny that," he said. "There may be some things better than money, if," slowly, "one could have them, but—"

"Better than money?" she interrupted, angry and sarcastic, and frightened all at once, for fear that he was about to refuse her. "Pray tell me what those desirable things may be."

"You did not hear me out," he answered, calmly. "I was about to say there might be, but I was not sure. We will not discuss that unknown quantity."

"I think not," she answered, dryly. "It might be more pertinent to discuss Lady Adela now. What do you say, Clive? Shall you pay your court to her?"

A deep red flushed all over his fair, handsome face.

"She might decline the honor," he said.

"Pshaw! she might be a fool, but she isn't," said my lady, sharply. "She will not decline. She has an inkling of what I mean to do. I have talked with the earl. He thinks it would be a pleasant and pertinent arrangement for the house of Lancaster. You know you have to think of your heirs, Clive, and to do the best you can for their future."

"Yes," he said, sarcastically.

"Well, now I have told you all my hopes and plans, Clive, I want to know what you are going to do. There is no use beating

about the bush," said my lady, sharply.

"I am going to make Lady Adela's acquaintance before I make up my mind," he answered, undauntedly.

"You will fall in love with her. She is a great beauty," my lady said, confidently, as he bowed himself out.

CHAPTER XXI

That evening when "sober-suited twilight" had begun to fall over all things, when the stars began to sparkle in the sky, when the air began to be heavy with odors of rose and mignonette and jasmine and the odorous, heavy-scented honeysuckle, Mrs. West came into the sitting-room, where Leonora was leaning from the window, drinking in the peaceful sweetness of the summer eve.

"Are you lonely here in the dark, my dear? I will bring a lamp," she said.

"Not yet, please, Aunt West," said the girl. "I love this twilight dimness. I love to sit in the darkness and think."

"About your poor papa, dear?" asked the good woman. "Tell me about him, Leonora. What did he die of?"

"It was a fever, Aunt West. Some day I will tell you all about him, but not just yet, please. I—can not bear it yet. It has been so little a while since I lost him—barely two months!" said Leonora, with the sound of tears in her voice.

"Well, well, dear, I did not think. You shall tell me when you please. But that was not what I came for. You know I promised you a peep at the fine folks when they dined. Well, it is time now. In a minute they will assemble. Come with me; I have found a snug place for you."

Leonora rose and followed her aunt. They went along some dark corridors, hand in hand, silently, and then Mrs. West put

a key softly into a lock and turned it. A door opened. A close, musty scent of dust and disuse breathed in their faces. Mrs. West drew Leonora in and shut the door.

"Do not be afraid of the dark, dear," she whispered. "It is only a disused china-closet opening on the dining-hall. There is a broken panel. This way, Leonora. Now, look."

There was a broken panel, indeed, that made an aperture as wide as your hand. Through it there streamed a bar of light, making visible the cobwebbed corners of the narrow pantry, with piles of cracked and old-fashioned china arranged upon the shelves, where the dust of years lay thick and dark and musty. Leonora laughed a little at the novelty of her position.

"Auntie, I feel like a naughty little girl who has hid in the closet to steal preserves," she whispered.

Mrs. West laughed softly too.

"You will have something nicer than preserves," she whispered, reassuringly, as if Leonora had indeed been a little girl. "Now, dear, look, look!"

Leonora looked out through the narrow aperture, half dazzled by the radiant light for a moment, and saw a magnificent dining-hall, long and lofty, with carved oak paneling, and a tiled fire-place, a tapestried wall, and some glorious paintings by the old masters, all lighted by a magnificent chandelier of wax-lights, whose soft, luminous blaze lighted up a table glittering with gold and silver plate, costly crystal, and magnificent flowers. As she gazed upon the brilliant scene there was a rustle, a murmur, the

echo of aristocratic laughter, and a gay party entered the room.

Mrs. West, leaning over her niece's shoulder, whispered, softly:

"There is my lady—in front, on that tall gentleman's arm, dear."

Leonora saw a little, wizened figure in a glistening brocade, with rubies pendent from the thin ears, a lace cap on the thin white hair, a locket of diamonds and rubies on the breast, and glittering bracelets that mocked the yellow, bony wrists they encircled, and the sour, wrinkled face, rendered even more ugly and aged by the attempts that had been made to render it youthful.

"That hideous old lady in paint and powder—do you say that she is Lady Lancaster?" Leonora asked; and when Mrs. West answered "Yes," she said, irreverently:

"She looks like a witch, auntie, dear. I shall be expecting every minute to see her gold-headed stick turned into a broom, and herself flying away on it 'into the sky, to sweep the cobwebs from on high.'"

"Oh, fy, my dear!" cried the housekeeper, disappointed that Leonora had not been more impressed with the splendor of the scene and Lady Lancaster's dignity. "But, look at Lord Lancaster—is he not grand in his black suit?"

"Where?" asked Leonora, carelessly, as if she were not gazing at that moment on the tall, superb figure, looking courtly in its elegant evening-dress. He was walking by the side of a lady

whose white-gloved hand rested lightly on his arm. Leonora looked admiringly at the dark, brilliant face and stately figure of this woman, who, clothed in ruby silk and rich black lace, looked queenly as she sunk into her chair behind a beautiful épergne of fragrant flowers.

"Oh, I see him now!" she said, after a minute. "He is with that lady in ruby silk. Aunt West, who is she?"

"The Earl of Eastwood's daughter, Lady Adela. She is a great beauty and a very grand lady."

"She is very handsome, certainly," Leonora said. Her gaze lingered on the dark, brilliant face behind the flowers. The dark eyes and red lips made a pretty picture. She wondered if Captain Lancaster thought so.

"Yes, she is very handsome, and she will be the next mistress of Lancaster Park," Mrs. West said.

"She is engaged to Captain—to Lord Lancaster, then?" said Leonora. She looked at the earl's daughter with a new interest.

"No, but every one knows what is in Lady Lancaster's mind," said Mrs. West, significantly.

"It is dreadfully close here in this closet. One can scarcely breathe," said Leonora. "Oh! Lady Lancaster, you said. What has she to do with Lord Lancaster and the earl's daughter? It seems to me she is a very meddling old lady."

"She wants her nephew to marry Lady Adela. Every one knows it. She invited her here just to throw them together and make the match."

"But perhaps he will not marry her just to please his aunt!" spiritedly.

"He will be apt to do just what my lady tells him," said Mrs. West. "If he does not, she will leave her money away from him. He can not afford that."

"And will he really sell himself for money?" Leonora spoke in a stage whisper.

"Hush, my dear; not quite so loud. As to selling himself, I don't know that you could call it that exactly. Many people here marry for wealth and position. Yet, why shouldn't these two young people fall in love with each other? Lady Adela has everything in the world that is desirable, except money, and so has he. Their fortune is made if they marry each other."

"Happy pair!" said Leonora, in a sarcastic voice, in the darkness. "Isn't it just stifling in this hole, Aunt West? Let us go."

They went back quietly to the little sitting-room again.

"Well, how did you enjoy it, Leonora?" asked her aunt.

"Oh! very much," said the girl.

"I'm glad. Somehow, I thought you didn't," vaguely. "They are going to dance this evening. I can manage for you to see it, if you like to do so. Should you, Leonora?"

"Oh! very much," said the girl again.

CHAPTER XXII

It was a beautiful night, bright with moonlight and starlight, and sweet with balmy air and the breath of fragrant flowers. Leonora sat at the window and silently drank in the sweet influences of the balmy night. She would have liked to go out, but she did not suggest it, for fear of shocking her aunt.

"Are there any old ruins about here, Aunt West, and any pretty scenery?" she inquired, presently.

"Oh, yes; there are the old Abbey ruins, about two miles from here. They are very pretty and picturesque. Artists go there to sketch, and picnic parties to frolic. Devonshire is a very pretty place, anyhow. A great many people come here to make pictures."

"So I have heard," said Leonora. "May I go there some day—to the Abbey, I mean—and make a picture, Aunt West?"

"You, child? Can you sketch?"

"A little," demurely. "Indeed I have some talent for it. I have drawn some little things good enough to sell."

"Can you, really?" cried the housekeeper, in surprise.

"Yes, indeed," said Leonora, smiling. "To-morrow I will unpack my trunks and show you some pictures I did last year—some in California, some in New York State, some in Virginia, and some in West Virginia."

"All those places?" said Mrs. West. "Why, my dear, you must

have traveled a great deal."

"I have," Leonora answered, carelessly.

"But could poor Dick—could your papa afford it?" inquired Mrs. West, bewildered.

"Sometimes—whenever he found a large gold nugget—he could," said Leonora. "We always had a little trip somewhere then. Papa was very fond of traveling."

"It must have cost a great deal of money, and—weren't you afraid, my dear? I have heard—at least I have read—that there are many Indians in Virginia."

"Oh, my dear aunt!" cried Leonora, amazed at such lamentable ignorance; then, in a moment, she added, kindly: "That was a great many years ago, aunt—when Christopher Columbus discovered America. There are not any Indians there now."

"Oh!" said Mrs. West, relieved, and with a sudden overwhelming feeling of dense ignorance, which Leonora saw so plainly that she turned the conversation kindly back to its first channel.

"But you haven't told me yet, aunt, if I may go and sketch the Abbey ruins. I suppose they are out of Lady Lancaster's jurisdiction," disdainfully.

"They are not, child, for they belong to Lord Lancaster; but I don't think there can be any objection. She never goes there herself," said Mrs. West.

"Then I shall go there some day and get a picture. Perhaps

it may be good enough to sell. I'm going to try to help support myself, Aunt West."

"You need not, my dear, for I have savings enough for us both, and you are welcome to your share," said the good soul, kindly.

"I shall not touch a penny. I shall sell pictures enough to buy my dresses," said Leonora, with a confident air.

"They will have to be very good ones, dear," dubiously.

"I shall try to make them so," laughing.

At that moment a burst of music swelled upon the air—one of Strauss's most intoxicating waltzes. Leonora's heart thrilled to the sound.

"How delicious!" she cried.

"It is the band. The dance has begun," cried Mrs. West. "Come, Leonora, you shall have a peep at it."

"Not from the shelter of another hot china-closet, I hope," said the girl, laughing. "I am afraid of the cobwebs and the spiders."

"We will find a better place this time. Put something over your head, Leonora; we shall have to go out-doors, and the dew is heavy."

Leonora wound a dark veil turban fashion about her head.

"Now?" she said.

"Yes, that will do; come on," Mrs. West replied.

They went on a little balcony shrouded in vines, from which they could peep unobserved through an undraped window into the brightly lighted ball-room.

"Perhaps this will not do any better than the china-closet, after

all," said Mrs. West, dubiously. "These vines are so thick, there may be bugs and spiders in them, too."

Leonora, shuddering, exclaimed, "Ugh! I can feel them creeping now!" and then declared that she would stay ten minutes, anyhow.

"Isn't it a pretty sight? Did you ever see anything so pretty, my love?" exclaimed Mrs. West, proudly.

CHAPTER XXIII

It was a pretty scene. The long ball-room was draped in roseate colors and decorated with flowers. The walls were exquisitely painted in appropriate figures, and the waxed oaken floor shone so bright that it reflected the flying figures of the men and women who whirled around it in the sensuous measures of the gay waltz.

"Did you ever see anything so pretty?" repeated Mrs. West, with a certain pride in this grand old family whom she served; and her niece answered, unperturbably:

"Yes."

"You have? Where?" whispered the good soul, incredulously.

"In New York," replied the girl. "I was at a ball there last winter. It was very grand—much grander than this."

Nevertheless, she continued to gaze with a great deal of interest at the animated scene. There were more than a dozen couples upon the floor, the beautiful, richly dressed women and black-coated men showing to their greatest advantage in the gay dance. Leonora saw Lord Lancaster's tall, splendid figure among them. He had Lady Adela Eastwood for a partner. His arm was clasped lightly about her tall, slender form; her dark, brilliant face drooped toward his shoulder with rather a languishing air.

"Lady Adela is Lord Lancaster's partner," whispered the housekeeper. "Aren't they a well-matched pair? He is so fair, she

is so dark, they go well together."

"Very well," said Leonora. She watched the two figures admiringly, and thought how exquisitely the light of the lamps shone down on Lady Adela's ruby silk and her flashing diamonds. The black hair bound into a braided coronet on the top of the graceful head contrasted well with the fair locks that crowned Lord Lancaster's brow.

"Yes, they go well together," she said to herself. "Will expediency and inclination go hand in hand? Will he marry her?"

"Lady Adela has superb diamonds," said the housekeeper, in her shrill whisper.

"Yes, they are very nice," said Leonora. "But I have—a friend who has much finer ones. Her father gave them to her for a birthday present. They cost fifty thousand dollars."

"What an odd girl! She is not one bit astonished at the splendor of anything she sees. She has seen a great deal of the world, really, and America must be a much finer place than I ever thought it," mused Mrs. West to herself.

"There, the waltz is over, Aunt West," whispered the girl, clinging to her arm. "Hadn't we better go now? Some one may come out here."

"Yes, if you have seen enough—have you?" Mrs. West replied, and Leonora answered:

"Yes, quite enough, thank you. I do not like to look at such gayety, and my dear papa so lately dead. Oh, Aunt West, please let us walk out in the air awhile. It is so warm here, and these

vines are full of spiders and cobwebs, just like that china-closet."

When Leonora West said "please" in that coaxing tone there were not many people who could resist her. Mrs. West did not. She said to herself that it would be no harm to walk about the grounds a bit with her niece. She could not refuse her a breath of fresh air, certainly.

She saw Lady Lancaster sitting in a chair in the ball-room, and she did not think it likely that she would stir from her seat for at least an hour.

"So I'll run the risk," said the kind-hearted woman. "Come along, Leonora."

They went down into the beautiful grounds, along the moonlighted paths, past gleaming groups of statuary, ghost-like in the weird light, past beds of rarest flowers, past thickets of roses, walls of honeysuckles, with the white radiance of the moon shining over everything.

"How sweet this is!" the girl whispered. "When we were crossing the ocean, I grew so tired of the water and the sky; I longed for the green grass and the flowers. How soft and fragrant the air is, and how beautiful the moonlight! I think I could stay out here all night."

"You would catch your death of cold," Mrs. West said, aghast. "The dews are very heavy."

"Oh, of course, I don't mean to; but it is so romantic. It is like an Eastern night, so soft and balmy, and—oh, oh! Aunt West, is that the nightingale—the English nightingale papa used to love

so dearly?"

She clapped her little hands. It was the nightingale, indeed, hid in some flowery covert, all alone,

"Pouring his full heart,
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

"Yes, it is the nightingale," said Mrs. West, delighted that Leonora had found something at last in England to grow enthusiastic over. "There are so many of them here, and it is down by the Magic Mirror you hear that one singing. It is their favorite resort."

"The Magic Mirror?" echoed Leonora.

"Yes. It is a pretty pond of water a little further on, all fringed with willows and roses. It is as smooth and clear as a mirror, and there is an old tradition that the youth or maiden gazing into the Magic Mirror by moon light, in the month of June, may see there reflected the face of his or her life companion."

"Oh, Aunt West, let us go there!" cried the girl, eagerly.

"What! you don't believe in that silly tradition?" laughed the good woman.

"No, no, but to hear the nightingales," cried Leonora. "Is it far, auntie?"

"No; only a short distance further on, at a little bend where two paths meet. But we have come so far already—"

"And you are tired," said the girl, with generous compunction.

"I ought to have remembered that." She pushed Mrs. West gently into a low rustic seat by the path, and said, kindly: "Sit here and rest while I go find it myself. The nightingale's voice shall guide me."

"You will not be long?" said Mrs. West, hesitatingly.

"No, no. May I go, Aunt West? Will you wait for me here?" pleadingly.

"Yes," answered the kind, indulgent soul; and Leonora set off at a quick pace, following the sound of the nightingale's voice, and repeating under her breath those exquisite lines to the nightingale written by Sir Walter Scott.

"Beautiful nightingale, who shall portray
All the varying turns of thy flowing lay?
And where is the lyre whose chords shall reply
To the notes of thy changeful melody?
We may linger, indeed, and listen to thee,
But the linkéd chain of thy harmony
Is not for mortal hands to unbind,
Nor the clew of thy mazy music to find.
Thy home is the wood on the echoing hill,
Or the verdant banks of the forest rill;
And soft as the south wind the branches among,
Thy plaintive lament goes floating along."

She went on swiftly through the beautiful night, guided by the nightingale's voice, and with a fast-beating heart; for, with all a

young girl's folly, she meant to look into the Magic Mirror to see, perchance, the face of her future lord and master.

Louder and nearer grew the notes of the nightingale, as Leonora hastened on. She thought she had never heard anything so sweet. At first it had only been one bird, but now several had joined their notes together in a medley of intoxicating music that swelled deliciously upon the fragrant air of the night. She walked lightly, almost holding her breath as she came upon the scene, for fear of frightening them away.

She passed from the shadow of the grand oaks that had overhung her path, out into an open space, and the Magic Mirror burst upon her sight—a little limpid lake fringed with willows and sweet-brier and water-lilies, and so clear that the full, white radiance of the moon and stars was mirrored on its tranquil breast, while, hid in the thicket of rose and willow, the night birds were pouring out their hearts in song.

"Oh, how sweet!" cried the girl. She clasped her hands in an ecstasy. Her heart was touched by the peaceful beauty and enchanting repose of the scene. Scarce a ripple stirred the bosom of the quiet lake, and the water-lilies, drooping to look at their fair reflections, were scarcely ruffled by the soft, light breeze that played around the enchanting spot.

Leonora moved softly forward to the verge of the Magic Mirror, and bending forward, with a slightly quickened heart-beat, gazed down into its crystal-clear depths. She saw her own face gazing back at her with all its fresh young beauty, its eager

eyes and parted lips, the dark veil twisted carelessly about her head, and the loose tresses of her hair flowing beneath it. She saw all this clearly as in a mirror, and for a moment she remained intently gazing at it, wondering if the old legend were indeed true, and if the face of her future husband would indeed rise from those mysterious depths by the side of her own.

So absorbed was she in contemplation that she did not detect the faint scent of cigar smoke that suddenly filled the air; she did not hear the approaching step that was muffled also, not to frighten the birds away. She remained gazing intently into the water, half bent forward, her hand grasping the slender branch of a willow, until suddenly, in the mystic pool, a face looked over her shoulder—the face of her fate.

CHAPTER XXIV

Something like a startled cry burst from Leonora's lips as she thus beheld that face beside her own—that fair, strong, handsome face that was as familiar as her own—the face of Clive, Lord Lancaster.

She believed for a moment that his face had indeed arisen from the depths of the enchanted pool, and after that one startled cry she was silent, watching it with dilated eyes and bated breath, expecting every moment to see it fade into the nothingness from which it had sprung.

But, instead of fading, it grew clearer to her sight; it changed its expression. At first it had a half-mischievous smile upon the lips and in the eyes; this changed to gravity, tenderness, and passion. It was the face of a lover on which Leonora now gazed with rapt interest, unconscious that—

"His eyes looked love
To eyes that spake again."

It was a moment of silent happiness.

The light wind stirred the lily-buds on the bosom of the lake that held those two fair faces mirrored in its breast; the nightingale's song pierced their hearts with exquisite pleasure that bordered on pain.

Leonora, wandering for one moment in the Land of Enchantment, was recalled to the present and to the actual by the man's folly.

He should have stolen away as he had come, in silence, leaving her alone with her beautiful, strange illusion, to bear its fruit in due season; but—

"Men's hearts crave tangible, close tenderness,
Love's presence, warm and near."

He yielded to a tender impulse without trying to resist it. He was close beside her; his cheek was near her own; his eyes looked into her eyes as they gazed up from the water, and those soft orbs had a look in them that made him dizzy with delight. He slid his arms around the graceful bending form and whispered in her ear:

"Leonora, is it fate?"

Alas!

"A touch, a kiss! the charm was snapt!"

Like one startled from a dream, she looked up and saw him holding her in that strong clasp, gazing into her face with a passion that frightened her. She tore herself from his arms.

"How dared you? oh, how dared you?" she cried out, indignantly.

Her angry words, her scornful glance, chilled the fire that burned within him. He realized his folly. Why had he touched

her, frightened her, and so broken the spell of enchantment that held her? She would never forgive him, perhaps, for his temerity.

"Did you think, because you were my Lord Lancaster, forsooth, and I only the housekeeper's niece, that you could insult me thus?"

Her voice broke cold and sharp on the stillness. The nightingales had all flown away at the first sound of her angry tones.

"Insult you?" cried the culprit, agitatedly; he was too much shocked at the result of his hasty act to speak calmer. "Believe me, Miss West, I meant no insult. I did not think that you would take it so."

His words were unfortunate. They irritated Leonora even more.

"You did not think so?" she cried, gazing reproachfully at him. "And, pray, sir, what cause had I given you to—to think that your caresses could be agreeable to me?"

He stood gazing at her in silence.

If he told her the real truth—told her that the face in the Magic Mirror had fooled him with its soft eyes and tender lips, and led him on to the commission of that impulsive act—she would be more angry than ever. She would deny that her own looks had tempted him, made a fool of him. He would not stoop to exculpate himself from the anger of one so manifestly unjust.

All the Lancaster pride flushed into his face as he stood looking down at her from his haughty height, his arms folded

over his broad breast.

"What cause had I given you," she repeated, stamping her little foot angrily on the earth, "to think that your caresses were agreeable to me?"

"She is a little shrew!" he said to himself, with sudden anger. "I will never give another thought to her."

With that thought he answered, coldly:

"If you were like other women, Miss West, I might exculpate myself in your eyes. But as it is, I can only say that I meant no harm, and I humbly crave your pardon."

"Like other women!" she flashed, haughtily. "What do you mean, Lord Lancaster? Does the misfortune of my poverty and lowly birth place me beyond the pale of your respectful consideration? Perhaps, were I Lady Adela Eastwood it would be different."

"What the deuce does she know about the earl's daughter?" he asked himself, in extreme astonishment; but he answered, eagerly:

"Yes, indeed, it would be different, Miss West. I should not look into the Magic Mirror over Lady Adela's shoulder, certainly; nor would I put my arm around her waist, but—"

He could not say another word, for she interrupted him, glowing with angry beauty.

"So you acknowledge the truth to my very face. For shame, Lord Lancaster! You throw discredit upon your name of gentleman; you make me hate and despise you for those words!"

No; I will never forgive you as long as I live!" sobbed Leonora, bursting into angry tears; and then she fled away from him in the moonlight, leaving him standing like one dazed by the side of the Magic Mirror.

But it was only for a moment that he remained thus motionless.

He thought apprehensively.

"It was most unwise in Mrs. West to allow her niece to go roaming about alone at this hour. Even upon my grounds she may lose her way, or meet with some unpleasant adventure. I will follow her at a safe distance, and see that she gets back safely to the Hall."

He set out hurriedly, and, turning the bend in the road, almost ran over two figures standing motionless under the tall trees that bordered the lane—Mrs. West, with Leonora sobbing in her arms.

The good woman, looking up, uttered a cry of relief.

"Oh, Lord Lancaster! I am so glad to see you," she exclaimed. "I am so frightened. Something must have happened to Leonora. You see how she's crying. Well, she came out for a breath of fresh air, and then she wanted to hear the nightingales at the Magic Mirror, and so I sat down and waited for her; but she stayed so long, I went to look for her; and there she came flying into my arms, and crying like some hurt thing. Did you see anything or any person, my lord?" anxiously.

He was intensely annoyed. The sight of Leonora sobbing

grievously in the woman's arms bitterly irritated him.

Why would she misjudge him so persistently? why misunderstand him always?

He looked at the graceful black figure with its head bowed on Mrs. West's plump shoulder, and said, curtly:

"Miss West is unnecessarily alarmed. She has seen no one or nothing but myself. It was the sight of me that alarmed her."

"Oh, hush! I did not mean to tell her!" cried Leonora through her sobs.

There was a note of warning in her voice; but in his vexation he did not heed it.

Mrs. West was looking at him anxiously.

"Of course, she would not have been frightened at the sight of you, my lord!" she exclaimed.

"I—was not frightened at anything—I was only angry," Leonora said, lifting her head at this moment, and hushing her low sobs into silence. "He had no right, Aunt West," she added, incoherently.

"No right!" echoed the good woman, looking from one to the other in amazement. "Why, what has he done, my dear?"

"Nothing; only looked over my shoulder into the water—and—and frightened me. Please don't think me silly, Aunt West. I think I'm nervous to-night. Let us go," said the girl, without looking at the tall, handsome form standing so near her.

"Let me come to-morrow and explain," he said, humbly, coming nearer to her; but she turned her face resolutely from

him.

"No," she said, icily; "it is quite unnecessary. Come, Aunt West."

She dragged the good woman away, and left him standing there in the moonlight, with a settled shadow upon his face.

"What a contretemps!" he said to himself, gloomily. "Ah! how little I thought, when I came out to-night to smoke that solitary cigar, that I should meet with such an adventure! How angry she was! Every time we meet we drift further away from each other!"

He went back to Lady Adela and his guests after awhile. The earl's daughter chided him because he had left them for that odious cigar.

"It was most ungallant!" she declared.

"You are mistaken. I went to consult that oracle, the Magic Mirror," he replied.

Lady Adela had heard the old legend. She smiled and bridled.

"Did you see your fate?" she asked him; and he answered, in a strange tone:

"I saw the woman I love in the Magic Mirror."

The earl's beautiful daughter was a little puzzled by his reply. She wondered if hers was the face he had seen in the water, but she dared not put the thought into words.

CHAPTER XXV

Several days passed away very quietly after Leonora's first day and night at Lancaster Park. The girl stayed in the small rooms to which she was restricted quite as closely as the housekeeper could have desired. She did not even offer to go out, seeming to have tacitly resigned herself to the situation.

She unpacked one of her trunks and showed Mrs. West the sketches she had promised to show her; she took out all her pretty, simple black dresses, and hung them on their pegs in the little dressing-closet her aunt assigned her.

When she had nothing else to do she read or embroidered. Her aunt noted with pleasure that she was seldom idle.

She did not know of the long hours Leonora spent, when alone, curled up in a big easy-chair, with her milk-white hands folded in her lap, her eyes half shut, with the dark lashes drooping against the pink cheeks, and a thoughtful, puzzled expression on the fair face.

If she had seen her, Mrs. West would have wondered much what her niece was thinking about.

In the meantime, the gay life of the great folks at Lancaster went on from day to day.

Leonora saw no more of it, steadily declining the well-meant offers of her aunt to provide her with surreptitious peeps at it.

"I do not care about it," Leonora would say, with an eloquent

glance at her black dress. "Gayety only jars upon me, auntie, dear. I should like to go out in the fresh air a little; but if I can not do that, I have no desire for the rest."

But Mrs. West, however willing she was, did not dare advise her niece to go out into the grounds where the guests might be encountered at any time, or even old Lady Lancaster herself.

She knew that Leonora's pretty face, once seen by the guests, would excite remark. It had already won the admiration of the house-maids.

These latter persons, having caught occasional glimpses of Leonora in their errands to the housekeeper's room, were disposed to be very sociable with the fair American girl; but Mrs. West put an end to their well-meant cordialities by saying, gently:

"My niece would rather not be disturbed; she is in great trouble; she has recently lost her father."

After that the maids did not court Leonora's society any more. They accepted her aunt's excuse good-naturedly and sympathetically, and contented themselves by talking about her among themselves, and praising her beauty, which they declared to each other was even greater than that of the young ladies who were sojourning at Lancaster—greater even than that of Lady Adela Eastwood, who, it was confidently whispered, was to be the next mistress of Lancaster Park.

Mrs. West grew downright sorry for her pretty prisoner, whose pink cheeks were fading in the close, dark rooms where she was kept. She said to herself that this would not do. She must not

have poor Dick's orphan child pining for liberty and light and the blessed sunshine that was free to all.

"I will not do it; no, not if I have to leave Lady Lancaster's service and make a home for the girl elsewhere," she said to herself.

So one day she came into the little room where Leonora, sitting at the window, gazed wistfully out at the green grass and the blue sky, with an unconscious pathos on the sweet, girlish face.

"My dear, you are tired of this stuffy little chamber, I know," she said.

"Not very," said the girl, a little drearily. "I suppose I ought to be grateful to you for giving me such a home."

"Grateful to me for hiding you away in these little musty rooms, as if you hadn't the sweetest face the sun ever shone on!" cried the good woman, self-reproachfully. "Not a bit of it, my dear. I'm ashamed of myself for treating you so. It mustn't go on so, or your health will suffer, and so I shall tell Lady Lancaster; and if she won't allow you the liberty of the grounds, I will go away from here and make us a snug little home somewhere else, where we may come and go as we please; so there!" said the good woman, with sudden independence.

Leonora rose impulsively and went and kissed the homely face of her friend.

"Aunt West, would you really do that much for me?" she exclaimed, delightedly.

"Yes, I would," Mrs. West answered, firmly. "Poor Dick left you to me to take care of, and I'm bound to do the best I can for your happiness."

"Ah!" said Leonora, checking an impatient sigh.

"And I've come to tell you," Mrs. West continued, "that if you'd like to go and sketch the Abbey ruins, you may go this morning, Leonora."

"If I'd like!" cried the girl. "Oh, Aunt West! it's just what I was wishing for. I shall be so happy!"

"Yes; you shall go, dear, and stay all day, if you like. I'll put you up a nice cold lunch in a little basket, and I'll hire the lodge-keeper's boy to show you the way. I'll give him a shilling to go, and he will stay all day to keep you from getting frightened."

"I shall not be frightened," said Leonora, radiant.

"I don't know; it's still and lonesome-like there, and the bats and screech-owls might startle you. And there's an old dismantled chapel, too—"

"Oh, how lovely! I shall sketch that, too!" Leonora exclaimed, clapping her hands like a gleeful child.

"And a little old grave-yard," pursued Mrs. West. "Some of the old Lancasters are buried there. You might be afraid of their ghosts."

"I am not afraid of the Lancasters, dead or living," the girl answered, saucily, her spirits rising at the prospect before her.

She set forth happily under the convoy of little Johnnie Dale, the lodge-keeper's lad, a loquacious urchin who plied her with

small-talk while he walked by her side with the lunch-basket Mrs. West had prepared with as dainty care as if for Lady Lancaster herself.

She did not check the boy's happy volubility, although she did not heed it very much, either, as they hurried through the grand old park, where the brown-eyed deer browsed on the velvety green grass, and the great oak-trees cast shadows, perhaps a century old, across their path.

When they had shut the park gates behind them, and struck into the green country lanes, bordered with honeysuckle and lilac, Leonora drew breath with a sigh of delight.

"How sweet it all is! My father's country, too," she said. "Ah! he was right to love these grand old English homes, although he was but lowly born. What a grand old park, what sweet, green lanes, what a sweet and peaceful landscape! It is no wonder that the English love England!"

She remembered how her father, now dead and buried under the beautiful American skies, had loved England, and always intended to return to it some day with his daughter, that she might behold his native land.

She remembered how often he had quoted Mrs. Hemans' lines:

"The stately homes of England,
How beautiful they stand!
Amidst their tall ancestral trees
O'er all the pleasant land!

The deer across their greensward bound
Through shade and sunny gleam,
And the swan glides past them with the sound
Of some rejoicing stream."

"He loved the homes of England, although his fate was not cast with them," she said to herself. "Poor papa! I must try to love England for his sake; it was always dear to him, although he was fond of his kind adopted home, too!"

When they reached the ruins, she studied them carefully on every side to secure a picturesque view. She found that to get the best possible one she would have to sit down among the graves close to the little dismantled chapel.

"You bain't going to sit down amang them theer dead folk, missus?" inquired Johnnie, round-eyed, and on the alert for ghosts.

"Yes, I am. Are you afraid to stay, Johnnie?" she asked, laughing.

"Ya'as, I be," he replied, promptly.

"Very well; you may go off to a distance and play," said Leonora. "Don't let any one come this way to disturb me. And if you get hungry, you may have a sandwich out of my basket."

"I'm hungry now," he answered, greedily.

"Already, you little pig!" she cried. "Very well; take your sandwich now, then, and be off out of my way. I'm going to make a picture."

She sat down on the broken head-stone of an old grave, took

out her materials, and while she trimmed her pencils, glanced down and read the name on the tomb beneath her.

It was Clive, Lord Lancaster.

Something like a shudder passed over her as this dead Lancaster, gone from the ways of men more than a century ago, recalled to her the living one.

"What do all the paltry aims and ambitions of our life matter, after all?" the girl asked herself, soberly. "The grave awaits us all at last!

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour;
The path of glory leads but to the grave."

Sitting there among the lonely green graves and broken, discolored monuments, with the ivy creeping over their dim inscriptions, Leonora, a little lonely black figure, began her sketch.

She worked industriously and skillfully, and nothing disturbed her for several hours.

Johnnie had availed himself of the opportunity to make an excursion into the woods on his own account, and she was quite alone; but nothing alarmed her, and she worked on fearlessly amid the fragrant stillness of the lovely June day, whose calmness was broken by nothing louder than the hum of the bees among the flowers, or the joyous carol of the sky-lark as it soared from

earth to heaven, losing itself, as it were, in the illimitable blue of the sky.

The midday sun climbed high and higher into the sky, and Leonora, pausing over her nearly completed sketch, pushed back her wide hat from her flushed face, and stopped to rest, glancing around at the quiet graves that encompassed her.

"What a still and peaceful company we are!" she said, aloud, quaintly, never thinking how strange it looked to see her sitting there—the only living thing among the silent tombs.

Then all at once, as if the tenants of the grave had come to life, Leonora heard a soft babel of voices and laughter.

With a start she turned her head.

A party of gay young ladies and gentlemen were strolling toward her across the level greensward. Foremost among them was Lord Lancaster, walking beside the earl's daughter.

It was too late for retreat.

Every eye turned on the graceful figure sitting there so quietly among the graves of the dead and gone Lancasters.

As they passed the low stone wall that divided them, Lancaster lifted his hat and bowed low and profoundly.

Then they were gone, but an eager hum of masculine voices was borne back to her ears on the light breeze:

"By Jove! what a beauty!"

"Heavens! was that a ghost?"

"What a lovely being! Who is she, Lancaster?" She heard his deep, musical voice answer carelessly:

"It is Miss West—a young lady who is staying in the neighborhood for the sketching, I believe."

They went on toward the ruins.

Leonora, with a deeper color in her fair face, bent over her sketch and rapidly put some finishing touches to it.

"Now I wonder where little Johnnie can be?" she thought.

She glanced up and saw Captain Lancaster coming back to her.

CHAPTER XXVI

He came on quickly toward the figure sitting among the graves, with the small head poised defiantly, although Leonora was thinking to herself:

"He is coming to scold me, perhaps, for trespassing on his property."

He came up to her and stood bareheaded before her with the sunlight falling on his fair head—tall, stalwart, handsome—a living Lancaster among those dead and gone ones; one who did no discredit to the name.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," he said; "but—you are sketching the ruins?"

"Yes."

"Will you let me see your work?"

She held it out to him in silence.

He scrutinized it in mingled wonder and delight.

"How perfect! how spirited! how beautiful!" he cried. "You must have real talent!"

"Thank you!" she answered, with a slight inclination of her head.

He stood watching the half-averted face a moment in silence. It had a slightly bored air, as if she wished he had not come, or that he would, at least, soon go.

"You are very brave, Miss West, sitting here all alone among

these graves," he said, after that momentary pause.

"Did you leave your friends to come back and tell me that?" inquired she, with delicate sarcasm.

"No-o," slowly; "I came back to ask a favor, Miss West."

"Indeed?" incredulously.

"Yes; and it is this: I should like to have that sketch. My friend, Lady Adela, is in raptures over that pile of old ruins. She would like to have a picture of it."

He was watching her closely. He was rewarded for his intent scrutiny by seeing an angry crimson flush the round cheek.

"You would like this for her?" said Leonora, with ominous calmness.

"Yes; will you part with it?—for money, if you will. It is singularly perfect, and should be worth something considerable."

"You are very kind," said Leonora.

She had pulled a flower from a grave, and was tearing its petals apart with fierce cruelty between her white fingers.

"No; I am only just," he said; then, with a smile. "Ah! Miss West, do not be so cruel to that poor flower. I have a shuddering conviction that it is, metaphorically, myself you are deliberately annihilating."

She glanced up to him rather curiously from beneath her shady lashes.

"I—did not really think what I was doing," she said. "Why should you think I would treat you that way?"

"Because I have been so unfortunate as to incur your dislike,"

he answered.

She did not utter the denial he half hoped she would, but she threw her mutilated flower from her with a quickly suppressed sigh.

"Well, am I to have the sketch?" he inquired, after waiting vainly for an answer.

"No."

"You refuse?" he asked, chagrined.

"Yes. I drew the picture for myself, not for Lady Adela," she replied, spiritedly.

"She will be disappointed at my failure to secure it for her," said he.

"That does not matter to me," Leonora returned, coldly. "Why does she not make a picture for herself?"

"She does not sketch."

"Ah! is it beneath her dignity?" asked the girl.

"No, but beyond her power," he returned.

"Really?" asked the girl.

"Yes," he replied; "she assures me that she has no talent at all in that way. You who are so clever, Miss West, might afford to pity her."

"I do, but not because she can not draw," said Leonora.

"Why, then?"

"Because, for all her high birth and proud position, she will have to sell herself for money."

The shot told. She saw his cheek grow red.

"Mrs. West has been telling her these things. I wish to Heaven she had held her tongue!" he thought, bitterly. But aloud he said, lightly: "Perhaps you may find it expedient to do the same thing, Miss West."

"To do what?" she inquired.

"To marry for money," he replied.

"And you think it would be expedient?" she inquired, drawing her delicate black brows together in a vexed little frown.

"Yes, for you," he replied. "You are too beautiful and gifted, Miss West, to be contented in your present humble condition. You should marry wealth and position. Both would become you rarely."

"Thank you, my lord," she said, bowing, with a pretty gesture of mock humility.

"That reminds me to tell you that De Vere will be here tomorrow," he said, suddenly.

"What has that to do with our subject?" she inquired, shortly.

"Everything. De Vere is in love with you, and he is rich and well born. You can be Mrs. De Vere any time you wish."

"Did your friend employ you to tell me this?" asked Leonora, pale with passion.

"No; but he would have no objection to my doing so. He will tell you so himself when he comes."

"And you advise me to marry him?" she asked, gazing into his face with her soft, steady glance.

His own eyes fell beneath it.

"I should not presume to advise you; yet it would be a good thing for you, I know. De Vere adores you. He would be your slave, and you would be like a little queen in the position to which his wealth would raise you."

"You make a great deal of wealth," she said, gravely, and waiting curiously for his reply.

"It is a great power in the world," he replied.

"Is it?" she asked. "Ah! Lord Lancaster, 'almost thou persuadest me' to sink to Lady Adela's level and sell myself for gold."

"You seem to have imbibed a strange contempt for Lady Adela," he said.

"I have. Where is her womanliness, her self-respect, that she can lend herself to that wicked old woman's ambitious schemes for buying a coroneted head with her twenty thousand a year? She is the daughter of a hundred earls, and yet she can give herself to you merely for the money's sake. Pah!"

"Need it be merely for the money's sake?" he asked. "Am I repulsive to look upon, Miss West? Is it quite impossible that a woman, Lady Adela or another, should give me her heart with her hand?"

Something like wounded pride quivered in his voice, and he looked at her reproachfully.

"Would it be impossible for me to be loved for myself alone?" he went on, slowly. "Might not some good, true, sweet woman love me for my own self—even as I am?"

She looked up at the handsome face, the large, graceful form, and silently recalled the words Lieutenant De Vere had spoken to her on the steamer's deck that day:

"He is more run after by the women than any man in the regiment."

"He knows his power," she thought; and from sheer contrariness made no answer to his appeal. "He shall not know what I think about it," she said to herself.

CHAPTER XXVII

The handsome young lord stood looking at the fair face and mute red lips with a half chagrined air for a moment; then he said, hastily:

"Good-day, Miss West. I see how disagreeable my presence is, so I will leave you to your meditations among the tombs. I hope none of those old fellows will come out of their graves to haunt you for your scorn of their descendant.

"I hope not, indeed!" said Leonora, and then she laughed.

He turned back at the sound of that laugh.

Perhaps she was relenting.

She had risen, indeed, and was holding out to him the sketch he coveted.

"Take it," she said. "I was in a bad temper just now. Lady Adela may have it."

"Will you, indeed, be so kind?" he exclaimed, radiant with pleasure. "But, indeed, you must not give your whole morning's work for nothing. Let me—"

He put his hand into his pocket and brought out a shining gold piece.

"Thank you, my lord," said Leonora, demurely, as she received the money into her palm. "I shall be able to buy myself a new dress with this."

"You are not angry?" he said, struck by an inexplicable

something in her tone.

"Oh, no; I am very glad to be so well paid for my work," she answered, with the same demure air; and then she said, suddenly: "Good-morning," and walked away from him.

He followed her.

"Are you going home alone, Miss West?"

"No; I have a small escort hereabouts, if he has not eaten my lunch and run away," she replied, carelessly.

"Johnnie Dale? No, he has not run away. You will find him in the lane, where I saw him as we came through. Shall I find him for you?"

"No, thank you. Doubtless Lady Adela is impatient at your long stay," she said, walking coolly away from him.

"The deuce! I expect she is. I had quite forgotten the daughter of a hundred earls," he said to himself, ruefully. "I forget everything with Leonora West. She would not answer my question, yet I would give the world to know what she really thinks. If I had not promised De Vere a fair field, I would try to find out what she thought before the sun sets. How brusque she is! Ah!"

The last exclamation was wrung from him by seeing Leonora lift her hand as she walked across the field.

Something bright and shining flashed in the air a moment, then fell into the grass.

"She has thrown my gold piece away like so much dross! What does she mean?" he asked himself.

But the question was one not easily answered, so he returned to his friends, who were chattering like so many magpies among the ruins.

"We thought you had gone back home, you were so long away," said Lady Adela, looking rather cross.

"Now I shall have to invent some fiction to account for my long absence," he thought, pulling vexedly at his long mustache. "Deuce take the women! They pull one this way and that way, until one is out of patience!"

And while he was hastily concocting an excuse, Leonora was walking rapidly through the lanes and fields with little Johnnie, on her way back to the Hall.

"I'm glad you came back so soon," Mrs. West said; "for some of the young people have gone over to the ruins, I hear, and I was afraid they would see you."

"They did see me; but I came away soon after," the girl answered, carelessly.

"They are going to have a picnic at the ruins to-morrow, it seems," pursued her aunt. "Lady Lancaster and all of them are going. So the house will be empty, and I can take you all over it to-morrow, if you like."

"Thank you; I shall like it very much," said Leonora, rather apathetically.

"And your picture of the ruins—did you get it, my dear?" pursued Mrs. West, suddenly remembering the sketch.

"Oh, yes; I finished it."

"Aren't you going to let me see it?"

"I'm sorry, aunt, but I sold it as soon as I finished it. I'll go back some day and make another for you."

"You sold it! To whom, my dear?" exclaimed the good soul, surprised.

"Why, to Lord Lancaster," Leonora answered, indifferently.

But Mrs. West was delighted. She thought that her niece must be very accomplished, indeed, if she could make a picture that Lord Lancaster would be willing to buy.

"He was very kind, especially after the way she behaved the other night. It was quite silly. I did not think Leonora would be so easily frightened. It is a wonder that Lord Lancaster was not offended," she thought.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The next day dawned as fair and lovely as any picnic-party could desire. The party from Lancaster set out as early as twelve o'clock, and left the coast clear for Leonora's explorations of the great house.

Mrs. West, with her basket full of keys upon her arm, undertook the office of guide. We do not propose to accompany them, you and I, reader. Descriptions of rooms are wearisome alike to reader and writer. Most people skip over these prolix inventories of furniture and bric-a-brac, and hasten on to more interesting matters. We will too, reader.

Mrs. West had "reckoned without her host" when she supposed that the house was empty, and that the lady of Lancaster Park as well as the rest of the guests had gone to the Abbey ruins on fun and frolic intent. It was quite true that she had intended doing so, but there is a quaint old adage to the effect that "man proposes, but God disposes."

That prosaic affliction, rheumatism, which is no respecter of persons, and to which old age is peculiarly liable, laid its grim hand upon the great lady that morning, and reminded her of a fact that she was sometimes prone to forget, in the arrogance of her greatness and worldly prosperity—namely that, in spite of her wealth and power, she was but mortal, after all, and that although she could order other things, she had no control over her own

frail body and soul.

So, groaning under the hand of her relentless enemy, Lady Lancaster was fain to relinquish her design of superintending the loves of her nephew and the earl's daughter for that day at least. She made arrangements for the party to proceed without her, and surrendered herself to the good offices of her maid for the day.

And a doleful day Mlle. Elise had of it, too, for her lady's temper, never sweet, was sharp as vinegar under the stress of her affliction. In vain did Elise apply the hot fomentations and the vaunted liniments, in vain darken the room, and with kindest ministrations endeavor to woo quiet and repose to the couch of the afflicted one. Lady Lancaster being full of selfishness and venom always, vented it with even more than usual rigor upon the head of her unoffending handmaid, and keeping up a series of groans, hysterics, and revilings, made hideous the gloom of her curtained chamber.

So, groaning and lamenting and scolding, Lady Lancaster passed the hours of her penance, and toward high noon the devoted maid had the satisfaction of hearing her acknowledge that she felt a little better, and that if the sharp twinges of pain did not come back into her shoulder, she might perhaps fall into a little doze.

"Thank God," said Elise, devoutly, to herself, and she smoothed and patted the lace-fringed pillows, and sat down to watch her mistress's slumbers, feeling intensely relieved, and praying within herself that the shrewish dowager might not open

her keen black eyes again for at least twenty-four hours.

"For I do not believe that her shoulder can hurt any worse than mine, with the rubbing I have given her," said the French woman, ruefully, to herself; and she was afraid to breathe lest those wrinkled lids should open again, and the querulous voice demand some further service from her weary and impatient handmaiden.

"And if the pay wasn't so good, I would not stay in her service another day," said the woman to herself. "She grows harder and more vixenish every day of her life. As old as she is, she does not seem to be making any preparations for dying. I dare say she expects to live forever. Ugh! how yellow, and wrinkled, and ugly she is, with the paint and powder off, and her wig of gray curls in the box; I should want to die if I were as ugly and witchy-looking as she is."

And the maid settled her coquettish little cap a little more rakishly upon her befrizzled hair, and made a grimace expressive of intense satisfaction with her own young and pretty face. For Elise, in common with many of her sex, believed that beauty was a great power in the world, and had vague dreams of making capital out of hers as soon as she had saved up a little pile of money, enough to start a thread and needle and ribbon shop for herself in London, where she expected to captivate some handsome and flourishing young tradesman with her pretty face and gay attire.

But while Elise, gazing into the long mirror opposite, indulged in these Alnaschar visions of the future, the beady black orbs of

her mistress had flared wide open again, and she exclaimed, in such sharp, sudden accents that the maid gave a start of terror:

"Elise, who is that playing upon the drawing-room piano?"

"Oh, my lady, I thought you were asleep!" cried poor Elise, ruefully.

"So I should have been if some fool had not commenced to play on the grand piano in the drawing-room. Who is it, I say?" demanded Lady Lancaster, irascibly.

"Oh, my lady, you must be mistaken!" Elise began to say; but then she stopped in confusion. Some one *was* playing the piano, and the strong, full, melodious notes, struck by a practiced hand, echoed melodiously through the house.

"I'm not deaf, Mam'selle Elise," said her mistress, scornfully. "Some one is playing the piano. Hark, it is the grand march from 'Norma!' I thought all of the people had gone to the picnic."

"So they have, my lady—every soul of them."

"Then who is that playing in the drawing-room?—tell me that!" snapped the peevish old lady.

"Indeed I don't know, Lady Lancaster," answered the maid, truthfully.

"Then make it your business to find out—go and see," was the peremptory command; and Elise without any more ado obeyed it.

"I did not know that there was a woman in the house who could wake the soul in the piano like that," said Lady Lancaster to herself, when the girl was gone. "What a touch! What grand

notes! Who is it that has been hiding her talents in a napkin? Not Lady Adela! She is fast enough to show all the accomplishments she possesses. So are all the other women, for that matter. Modesty is not one of their failings."

And she waited most impatiently for Elise to return. She was both curious and angry. She was angry because her nap had been brought to an untimely end, and she was curious to know who had done it.

It seemed to her that the maid stayed a long time. The march from "Norma" was finished, and the unknown musician had struck into another piece—a melancholy fugue—before the girl came flying back with upraised hands and dilated eyes, exclaiming:

"Oh, my lady, I never was so astonished in all my life!"

CHAPTER XXIX

"You fool!" cried Lady Lancaster, in a rage. "Who cares whether you are astonished or not? Why don't you tell me what I sent you to find out?"

"What a spiteful old cat!" Elise said to herself, indignantly; but she answered, meekly enough:

"So I am going to tell you, my lady, directly. It's that girl from America—the housekeeper's niece."

Lady Lancaster bounded erect in her bed and regarded the maid for a moment in unfeigned dismay. She had utterly forgotten the existence of Mrs. West's niece, and it took several minutes of bewildered thought to recall her to her mind. When her memory had fully come back, she gasped out feebly:

"Do you say that that child—West's niece—is down in the drawing-room playing on the piano?"

"Yes, my lady, that was what I said," said Elise, who was almost as much astonished as her mistress.

"The impertinent little monkey! Wherever did she learn to play like that? Did you tell her to go away, Elise?" angrily.

"No, my lady. I only went and peeped in at the door. When I saw who it was, I came quietly away."

"Help me out of bed, Elise," cried her mistress, imperiously.

"Oh, my lady, and bring back all the pain in your shoulder again!" Elise cried, aghast.

"Do as I bid you, girl," sharply.

The maid took the thin, bony little figure into her strong young arms, and lifted it out upon the floor.

"Now bring my dressing-gown, my slippers, and my wig. Put them on me—quickly," commanded my lady.

Elise knew that there was no use in expostulating. She quietly did as she was told. She powdered the yellow face, adjusted the curly wig and youthful cap, put on the velvet slippers and the gorgeous brocaded dressing-gown that made Lady Lancaster look like the Queen of Sheba in all her glory.

"Now give me your arm," she said, turning toward the door.

"But, my lady, where are you going?" cried Elise.

"To the drawing-room," curtly.

"You'll catch your death of cold," whimpered the maid.

"What is that to you?" flashed the dowager, sharply. "Come along."

And clinging to the arm of Elise, and groaning at every step with the reawakened pain in her shoulder, Lady Lancaster took up her march to the drawing-room, her flowered gown trailing majestically behind her, going forth as one goes to conquer, for she was intent on the instant and utter annihilation, metaphorically speaking, of the daring plebeian child who had so coolly transgressed her commands.

Leonora had never got beyond the picture-gallery and the drawing-room. The great, black, ebony piano had fascinated her. She could not tear herself away.

"Oh, Aunt West, my fingers ache to touch the keys!"

"Can you play, dear?" asked her aunt, with one of her kind, indulgent smiles.

"Only let me show you," said the girl. "There is no one to hear, is there, aunt?"

"No, there is no one," said Mrs. West, reflectively. "The maids are all in the other wing. This part of the house is empty. I dare say it will be no harm for you to amuse yourself a little while."

She threw back the magnificent embroidered cover, and raised the lid herself. Leonora's eyes beamed under their long lashes at sight of the gleaming pearl keys.

"Oh!" she said, under her breath, and sat down. She ran her fingers lightly along the keys. A shower of melody seemed to fall from them. The silver-sweet notes fell soft and swift as rain-drops from the flying fingers, and full of subtle harmony and delicious sound. She played on and on, and when the exquisite aria came to a close Mrs. West gazed at her in amazement.

"Oh, my dear, what music!" she cried. "I do not believe that any of the ladies who come here can play as well as that."

"Can not Lady Adela?"

"No, I am sure she can not," Mrs. West answered, decidedly. "But shall we go now?"

"Presently, Aunt West. I may stay just a little longer, may I not?"

"If you like to stay alone. I have just thought of some duties I have to perform. I will go back and leave you here. If I come

in half an hour, will you be ready?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, aunt," she answered, and ran her fingers lovingly over the keys, little thinking that the strong, full, joyous notes were awakening Nemesis from her nap upstairs.

CHAPTER XXX

While Lady Lancaster was finishing her toilet upstairs, Leonora finished her fugue in the drawing-room. Then she played a little *morceau* from Bach. Then she began to sing. The dowager, coming along the corridor outside with stealthy, cat-like steps, was amazed to catch the passionate words of a little gem from "Iolanthe," sung in a voice as sweet and clear and well trained as many a professional could boast.

"An opera song! Upon my word! What sort of a girl is it, anyhow?" ejaculated the dowager, in astonishment; and in spite of her haste and anger, she could not help pausing to hear the words of the tender love song:

"None shall part us from each other,
All in all to each are we;
All in all to one another,
I to thee, and thou to me!
Thou the tree, and I the flower—
Thou the idol, I the throng—
Thou the day, and I the hour—
Thou the singer, I the song!
Thou the stream, and I the willow—
Thou the sculptor, I the clay—
Thou the ocean, I the billow—
Thou the sunrise, I the day!"

"Upon my word, that must be a remarkable child," Lady Lancaster said to herself; and, like Elise, she peeped around the door to get a secret view of the daring transgressor.

After she had looked she stepped back a pace in amazement. She was more astonished than she had ever been in her life.

The child she had come to see was nowhere. She had come down the stairs with a distinct intention of "boxing the little brat's ears for her temerity." She stared in amazement at what she saw.

And yet it was not a wonderful sight, but only a very pleasing one—unless my lady had been hard to please—only a graceful, girlish figure in deep black, with a line of white at the slender throat, where the narrow linen collar was fastened with a neat bar of jet—only a fair young face, with its profile turned toward the door, and two small white hands guiltless of rings or other adorning, save their own dimpled beauty, straying over the keys with a loving touch, as if all her soul was in her song.

Lady Lancaster caught her breath with a gasp as if someone had thrown cold water over her. She turned to the maid; exclaiming, in a shrill whisper:

"Elise, that is not West's American niece. You are trying to deceive me!"

"No, my lady, I am not. It is Miss West. Is she not a pretty girl?"

"But I thought," said my lady, ignoring the question, "that West's niece was a child. I am sure she told me so."

"I do not know what she told you; but this is certainly Leonora West," reiterated the maid; and then her mistress stepped over the threshold into the room, the long train of her stiff brocade rustling behind her as she walked with an air of withering majesty upon her wrinkled face.

Leonora, hearing the ominous sound, glanced around with a startled air, her hands fell from the keys, and she sprung to her feet, and stood waiting the lady's approach—not humbly, not nervously, but with that calm dignity and self-possession that seemed characteristic of her, and that seemed to belong peculiarly to her as fragrance belongs to a flower.

Lady Lancaster was not propitiated by that peculiar air. To her angry eyes it savored of defiance.

She walked on across the thick, soft pile of the velvet carpet until she was directly in front of the waiting girl, and then Leonora lifted her eyes with an air of gentle curiosity, and dropped her a graceful courtesy.

"Impertinent! I have a great mind to slap her, anyhow!" the old lady said, irately, to herself; but she kept down her spleen with a great effort of will, and said, with ironical politeness:

"You are Leonora West, the housekeeper's niece, I presume?"

"Yes, madame, that is my name," Leonora answered, with another graceful bow. "And you are—Mrs. Lancaster!"

"Lady Lancaster, if you please," flashed the dowager, haughtily.

"Ah?" smoothly. "Lady Lancaster, I beg your pardon. You see

we have no titles in America. A plain Mrs. is a title of honor in itself, and when one comes to England one is apt to forget the requirements of rank."

A graceful, simple explanation enough; but Elise, who kept close beside her mistress, saw a roguish gleam in the blue-gray eyes shaded by the drooping black lashes.

"She is laughing in her sleeve at my lady," thought the astute maid; but she did not resent the girlish impertinence in her mind. Lady Lancaster snubbed her handmaid so often that Elise rather enjoyed seeing her snubbed in her turn.

Lady Lancaster dimly felt something in the suave, silver-sweet tones that vaguely angered her.

"You are very excusable, Miss West," she said, tartly and insultingly. "One has to pardon much to American impudence and ignorance."

Leonora looked at her with the full gaze of her clear orbs.

"I hardly think I understand you, Lady Lancaster," said she, calmly.

"I fail to make my meaning clear, do I?" cried the dowager, furious. "Tell me this, then. How dared you come into my drawing-room and play on the piano?"

"Your drawing-room?" the girl lifted her eyes in gentle, courteous inquiry.

"Lord Lancaster's, then; and just as good as mine, since he is too poor to live at home. But that is no concern of yours. I repeat—how dared you play on the piano?"

Leonora looked very innocent and wondering and candid.

"I assure you I have not injured the piano one bit," she said. "It is a very nice one; but I understand how to use it, and my touch is very soft."

"Who cares about your touch? I was not talking about that. No one cares for that," contemptuously. "I referred to your impertinence in coming out of your proper place in the housekeeper's rooms and entering this drawing-room."

"Oh!" intelligently.

"Well, what do you mean by 'oh'?" inquired the angry dowager.

"I mean that there was no harm done by my entrance here. I have not hurt anything. I was very curious to know what great people's houses looked like, so I persuaded my aunt to let me come and see; but I really can not understand what terrible offense I have committed against your ladyship," said Leonora, with her gentle, candid air.

"You are poor and lowly born, and your place is in the rooms of the servants, and—and—I thought you were a child," sputtered Lady Lancaster, unable to fence with the polished tools of her fair opponent, and continuing, incoherently: "What did you mean, anyway, by—by—"

"By being a tall, grown-up girl instead of a child?" interposed Leonora, allowing a soft little smile to flicker over her rosy lips. "Oh, Lady Lancaster, pray be reasonable! Could I help it, really? Can one turn back the hands of Time? If that were

possible, surely *you* would have availed yourself long ago of that wondrous art;" and with a graceful little bow, Leonora walked deliberately out of the room, having fired this Parthian shot of delicate feminine spite into the camp of the astounded enemy.

Lady Lancaster was purple with rage and dismay. She had sallied upon the field ready to drive the intruder from her grounds, and she, Lady Lancaster, the great rich lady, had been vanquished by the sharp little tongue of a low-born girl who had so innocent and candid an air that she did not at this moment quite realize that the girl herself knew the enormity of the offense she had committed.

Elise, full of silent, demure laughter, waited for her mistress to speak.

It was several minutes before she rallied from her fit of rage enough to speak clearly. When she did, she said, sharply:

"Put me into a chair, Elise, and bring Mrs. West to me."

"Hadn't I better take you back to your room first? Perhaps some one may come in here. And you have pushed your wig awry, and the powder is all off your face, my lady," said Elise, demurely; and her mistress groaned:

"Take me back to my room, then, and tell West to come at once—at once, do you hear?"

And when she had regained the privacy of her own room she sunk down exhausted upon her bed to await the housekeeper's arrival.

Leonora had already gone to Mrs. West's room and related

her adventure.

"And oh! Aunt West, she was so proud and scornful and overbearing that I was vexed at her; and I'm afraid that I was just a little bit saucy to her. What will she do, do you think? Will she send me away from Lancaster Park?"

"She will have to send me too if she does!" cried Mrs. West.

"Oh, Aunt West, would you really go? Would you give up the home of sixteen years for my sake?" cried the girl.

"Yes, dear, I would go. You have no one but me, and I mean to do the best I can for your happiness. If Lady Lancaster is unreasonable about this matter, I shall leave her," said Mrs. West, decidedly.

"But, oh, aunt, you will be sorry that I came to you—sorry that poor papa left me on your hands," anxiously.

"I shall regret nothing, dear, if I can only do my duty by you," was the reassuring reply that brought a look of relief into Leonora's beautiful face.

Then Elise came with Lady Lancaster's message. She looked curiously at the calm, unruffled face of Leonora.

"Oh, Miss West, you have seriously offended my mistress!" she exclaimed.

"Have I?" Leonora answered, demurely; and Elise knew by the gleam under the girl's long lashes that she did not care. She delivered her message and departed.

"I do not know what to make of that Miss West; but she is decidedly too proud and too pretty for her position," Elise said to

herself, when she was going slowly back upstairs to her mistress. "I'm afraid she will cause Mrs. West to lose her place."

Mrs. West went upstairs to the great lady, and Leonora waited in the little sitting-room for her return, which occurred in about fifteen minutes. The housekeeper was somewhat red in the face, and her lips were curved rather sternly.

"Well, aunt, have you promised to send me away?" the young girl asked, demurely.

"She would have liked to have me do so," said Mrs. West, indignantly. "She was very arrogant and presuming. She seems to be quite angry because poor Dick's daughter is as pretty and accomplished as the young ladies in a higher rank of life."

Leonora smiled, and her aunt continued:

"I gave warning that I would leave her in a month. If it were not for Lord Lancaster, I would go to-day; but he has always been so kind that I shall stay a few weeks longer for his sake. Can you endure it that much longer, my child?"

"Oh, yes," said Leonora, "I will try to be very good that long. And, Aunt West, when we leave here we are going back to New York. You need not shake your head so solemnly. I am a willful child, and I mean to have my own way."

CHAPTER XXXI

Lord Lancaster received a message from his aunt that evening. She wished to see him privately for ten minutes.

"I hope she isn't going to tease me about Lady Adela again," he said to himself, and he looked rather sullen when he went to her. He was exceedingly impatient of the rule she tried to exercise over him.

"Clive, why didn't you tell me about that girl?" she began, dashing into the subject without preamble.

He was honestly bewildered by the suddenness of the inquiry. He did not think of connecting Leonora West with it.

"I do not know what you are talking about, Aunt Lydia," he answered.

She gave him a keen glance to see if he was trying to deceive her; but his fair, handsome face expressed only the most honest surprise. "I mean that West girl—the housekeeper's niece," she said. "Why didn't you tell me about her when you came home?"

He reflected a moment, and then answered:

"I did, Aunt Lydia. You asked me if I had brought Leonora West to the housekeeper, and I told you that I had done so. Then you asked me if she were troublesome, and I told you that she was. Do you not remember?"

"Yes; but you should have told me more about her. It is very strange that you kept it all to yourself," she said, regarding him

suspiciously, and nowise pleased when she saw the deep flush that reddened his face.

"What was it you wished me to tell you?" he inquired, coldly.

"Why, that she was grown up instead of a child, as I thought, and—and—that she was pretty—rather—and accomplished beyond her station," wrathfully said Lady Lancaster.

"I supposed you would find that out for yourself in due time," he replied with a half smile that nettled her, for she was decidedly uneasy over the discovery she had made. She was by no means blind to the distracting beauty of Leonora, and it had not taken her five minutes to find out that her mind was cultured and her accomplishments of a high order. When she reflected that her nephew had crossed the ocean in this dangerous society, she was frightened for her plans concerning him. What if they should "gang alee?"

"Did you have any selfish motives in keeping the fact to yourself so long?" she inquired, sneeringly.

"I do not understand you," he replied, coldly.

"You do not? Yet you must have known that I would be surprised. You knew I expected a child. You must have supposed that I would not care to have such a girl—an adventuress, perhaps—or, may be, a low concert or saloon singer—who can tell?—here at Lancaster Park."

The angry flash of his eyes did not escape her keen gaze. She had spoken with a deliberate purpose.

"Lady Lancaster, I do not think any one but yourself would

dare say such things of Miss West," he said, hotly.

"Dare? Why not? What do you know to the contrary?" sneered the evil old woman.

"I know Miss West herself; no one who knows her would believe her to be an adventuress. She is a pure, simple, and true-hearted maiden," he answered, steadily.

"Ah! so you are interested in her? I thought as much," declared Lady Lancaster, violently. "This, then, is the secret of your indifference to Lady Adela. You have conceived a preference for this low-born, impertinent girl. But beware, sir, how you trifle with me. Remember my conditions."

Flushing to the roots of his hair, Lancaster neither affirmed nor denied her accusations. He sat gazing at her in proud silence.

"Answer me one thing," she stormed. "Do you intend to marry Lady Adela?"

"I have not made up my mind yet," he answered, coldly.

"Do you ever expect to do so?" she sneered. "You have been acquainted with Lady Adela long enough, I think, to tell whether you are pleased with her or not."

"It is scarcely a week," he said.

"Do you want more time?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"How much?" she inquired.

"The utmost limit your liberality will allow me."

Lady Lancaster reflected for a moment, with her head on one side, like some brooding bird of evil omen.

"Very well," she said. "You shall not say I was impatient with you. Lady Adela will stay with us a month yet. You shall have the whole of that time to make up your mind, and then you must give me your answer. I can not believe that you are fool enough to let it be an unfavorable one."

"Thank you," he replied, with a bow.

"You need not thank me for nothing," sharply. "Of course I know you will have more sense than to refuse twenty thousand a year, unless," sneering, "you mean to become a suitor for the hand of that West creature."

Stung to retaliation, he answered:

"Miss West can boast a suitor more eligible than myself in point of that 'filthy lucre' you hold so dear."

She started, and gave him a keen glance.

"Whom?"

"Lieutenant De Vere."

"No!" she cried.

"Yes," he answered. "Why should you look so surprised? He was our *compagnon du voyage*. He admired Miss West very much, and he confided to me his intention of winning her, if possible, for his wife."

"His family will not allow him to throw himself away on that girl," she cried.

"He is quite independent of his family, and he will not be slow to avail himself of the advantage."

"Happy mortal! You would like to exchange places with him,

no doubt?" she sneered.

"I could wish, certainly, that I were as fortunate as my friend," he replied.

She glared at him a moment, and then asked, curiously:

"Is the girl in love with De Vere? Pshaw! what would love have to do with it? I mean, will she accept her wealthy suitor?"

"She will if she is worldly wise," slowly. "But I can not tell. I do not know Miss West well enough to decide what she would do in a given case."

"Of course she will accept him. She is sharp enough, and such a girl as she is—poor and lowly born—would not be slow to jump at such a chance," said the dowager, coarsely. "If I had known that Lieutenant De Vere was so silly, I should not have invited him here. I would have had nothing to do with him. But he will be here to-night."

"He is here now. He went to his dressing-room an hour ago," Lancaster said, coolly. "I think he will express a desire for a private interview with you this evening. It is rather embarrassing to him to have to ask your permission to woo his lady-love in the housekeeper's rooms, yet such is his avowed intention. If I—" he paused and bit his lip to keep back the impatient avowal.

"If you—what? Go on, my lord—let me hear what wonderful thought was prefaced by that 'if.'"

"Only this—if I were master in my own house instead of a guest, it should be otherwise. My friend should not be insulted."

"You would bring that creature into the drawing-room to

receive his addresses?" she hissed.

"Yes," he replied.

"Then you will not do so while I am the mistress of Lancaster. If he chooses to have such low tastes, it is not for me to indulge him in them. If he must woo the housekeeper's niece, he may woo her in her proper place," cried Lady Lancaster, indignant at his defense of his friend's misplaced admiration, and secretly jealous of the beautiful girl's influence.

What if Lancaster, too, had been bewitched by that fair, piquant face and luring smile?

A sudden thought came to her.

After all, perhaps, it were best for her plans that De Vere should have his way. Who could tell what folly might get into Lancaster's head?

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Perhaps I was hasty," she said. "But I had a shock to-day when I first saw the girl, and—she was very impertinent to me. Is it your wish, Clive, that I should put no obstacle in the way of Lieutenant De Vere's designs?"

He bowed silently. A swift, sharp, cruel pang of jealousy tore through his heart as he did so. "To see her another's—Oh, God! it would be harder than death!" he said to himself, and yet there was no hope for him. Why should he stand in another's light?

Her keen eyes detected the shadow on his face, and she interpreted it aright. She was frightened at the danger that had been so near her, unknown and unsuspected all this while.

"I must remove the temptation from him as soon as I can," she thought, anxiously.

CHAPTER XXXII

"Lord Lancaster, I want to ask you something," said Lady Adela Eastwood.

It was in the evening after the gentlemen had come in from their walnuts and wine. Lord Lancaster had retired rather sulkily to a corner, and the earl's daughter had followed him and sat down near him.

She looked very handsome in her dinner-dress of rose-pink satin draped with creamy lace. Her brilliant black eyes searched his face eagerly, as she said:

"Lady Lancaster has been telling us the strangest story before the gentlemen came in. I am going to ask you if it is true."

He tried to rouse himself to interest in her theme.

"Yes," he said, "I know that Lady Lancaster can be very interesting," sarcastically. "What is it all about, Lady Adela?"

She lowered her voice, and glanced across the room where Lieutenant De Vere sat with rather a bored look on his face, trying to become interested in the lively chatter of the pretty Miss Dean.

"It is about that handsome Lieutenant De Vere," she said; "Lady Lancaster has been telling us that he is infatuated with a ridiculous creature—a servant, I think she said, or something like that. And he is going to propose to her, and it will most likely be a match. Now, you are his friend, Lord Lancaster. Please tell

me if it is really so?"

"No, it is not," he replied, pulling savagely at the innocent ends of his long mustache.

"Then it is not true? Lady Lancaster was only telling it to tease Emma Dean, I fancy. Emma has been setting her cap at the lieutenant, you know. She will be very glad to hear it was all a joke."

"But it was not a joke, really," he said, embarrassed. "You know what Tennyson says about a 'lie that is half a truth,' Lady Adela. Well, that is how the case stands. Lady Lancaster has simply misrepresented the facts. There was a grain of truth in her bushel of falsehood."

"Oh, dear!" cried Lady Adela, in dismay. She nestled a little nearer him on the fauteuil where they were sitting. "Do tell me the right of it, Lord Lancaster; I am all curiosity."

"Then I will tell you the right of it, if you care to hear," he replied; and there was so stern a look on his face that the earl's daughter was frightened. She wondered if he was angry with her.

"I hope you are not offended with me for repeating what Lady Lancaster said," she observed sweetly, giving him a demure look out of her large black eyes.

He looked at her gravely a minute without replying. She was very handsome, certainly—a brilliant brunette, very vivacious when it pleased her to be so, and again with a languor and indolence amounting to laziness. She had been in society several seasons, and owned to twenty-three years old. She was beautiful,

graceful, and dignified, and Lancaster felt that she would make a fitting mistress for Lancaster Park; but his pulse did not beat any faster at her bright glance, nor at her sweet, half-confidential tones.

But he looked back at her reassuringly as he replied:

"I am sorry I looked so black as to inspire you with such an idea, Lady Adela. Of course I am not offended with you. You are not answerable for Lady Lancaster's peccadilloes. I think, however, that she might have shown more respect to Lieutenant De Vere than to indulge herself in such gossip, more than half of it being false."

"Oh, then he isn't going to commit such a folly after all?" she exclaimed, relieved that it was not so, for her patrician pride had been somewhat hurt at the idea of one of her own order descending to a plebeian.

"You jump so quickly from one conclusion to another, Lady Adela, that you will not give me time to explain," he said, smiling.

"Oh!" she cried, abashed. "Then I shall not say another word, only listen to your story."

"There is no story—only an explanation," he said. "I should not speak of it, only I think De Vere would thank me for setting him right. Yes, he is in love, Lady Adela, but not with a servant girl, as my aunt insinuated. The young lady who has won his heart is a fair, refined young girl, cultured and accomplished, and of respectable although not noble birth. She is an American girl who came over with De Vere and myself from New York to her aunt,

who is the housekeeper here. That is the long and the short of the servant-girl story."

"You know her?" cried Lady Adela, amazed. "Oh, how I would like to see this fascinating girl, admired both by Lieutenant De Vere and Lord Lancaster!"

"You have seen her," he replied, with that quick flush that showed so clearly through his fine skin.

"Where?" she cried, amazed.

"You remember the young lady we saw sketching among the ruins yesterday?"

"Yes," she replied.

"It was Miss West—De Vere's inamorata," he answered.

Lady Adela did not speak for a moment. She was surprised into silence. When she recovered her speech, she said, faintly:

"You said she was staying in the neighborhood for the sketching."

"That was a small fib, Lady Adela, for which I humbly crave your pardon. The truth is that Miss West's father, lately dead, has left his daughter to Mrs. West's care. She is staying at Lancaster because she has no other home."

"Ah! Then she is the housekeeper's niece. I presume that is the reason Lady Lancaster called her a servant," said the earl's daughter, in a tone that quite excused the dowager.

He gave her a quick look which, not being an adept in reading expressions, Lady Adela did not understand.

"No, she is not Mrs. West's niece. Her father's brother was

Mrs. West's husband. There is all the relationship there is," he said, almost curtly.

Lady Adela gave him a glance that was rather haughty, yet half jealous.

"I can see that Lieutenant De Vere has a zealous champion in you," she said, with a tincture of bitterness in her voice.

"I do not think he needs or desires a champion," he answered.

"No? And why not?" she asked. "Surely he must be aware that he will be censured by many for his course in marrying below his own station in life. He will need some one to make excuses for him."

"His wife, if he wins her, will be an all-sufficient excuse for him," Lancaster said, calmly.

"Why?" she asked, rather piqued at his words.

"Because Miss West is quite fascinating enough to make any man excusable for his folly, if folly it be," he replied.

"You are very complimentary to her," Lady Adela said, with her head held high. "I can not see how she could be so fascinating. I did not think she was so very pretty, really. She had quite common brown hair, and gray eyes, I think, and one of those baby faces that some people admire, but which I never did."

"It is not at all a baby face," he said. "She has a great deal of character and decision in it, I think."

"Indeed? But, of course, you have had a better chance of studying her face than I have, and may be a better judge. I think you are more than half-way in love with the housekeeper's niece

yourself," Lady Adela exclaimed, flashing a reproachful glance upon him, for, being well aware of Lady Lancaster's scheme, she felt that he belonged to her.

"De Vere would not like that much," he said, carelessly, without betraying his inward vexation.

She fanned herself rapidly with her pink satin fan for a moment, then said, with a keen glance at him:

"Lady Lancaster has formed a fine plan for showing him his folly and breaking off the affair."

"Really?" he inquired, sarcastically.

"Yes; she is quite sure that if he could once see this girl in the company of real ladies, he would see the difference and become disenchanted."

"Yes?"

"It seems as if the girl can play quite well," said Lady Adela, going on in her low, confidential tones. "And the ladies are all curious to see her. So Lady Lancaster is going to have her in to play for us, just for a pretext, you know; and then Lieutenant De Vere can not help seeing the difference between her and the women of his own set. Perhaps it will cure him of his fancy."

"Perhaps," said Lancaster, dryly; but his heart began to beat. Would Lady Lancaster really bring Leonora into the drawing-room? Something assured him that if she did it would only be to humiliate and snub her. He read this intuitively in Lady Adela's supercilious expression. His heart swelled with hot resentment. He rose hurriedly.

"She shall not send for her," he said; but the earl's daughter answered, with ill-concealed malice:

"She has already done so."

"Then she shall not come. I will myself forbid it," he exclaimed; but even as the words left his lips, he paused and stood for a moment speechless. The drawing-room door had opened just then, and Leonora West stood just inside of it, hesitating on the threshold.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"Oh, Lord Lancaster, you are too late! She is come now!" cried Lady Adela, for her glance, too, had fallen on the graceful, hesitating figure. She saw with inexpressible chagrin that Leonora was in simple but faultless costume. Her dress, of some soft, shining, thin, black material, was of stylish and fashionable make, and her white shoulders and arms gleamed marble-white through the thin folds. She had arranged all her rich tresses of chestnut hair in loose puffs and waves on the top of her head, and fastened a single spray of starry white jasmine flowers at the side. Some of the same sweet, fragrant blossoms fastened the full ruff of white crêpe lisse at the round, white throat, and constituted her only adorning. Her white arms and dimpled wrist, left bare by the elbow-sleeves of her dress, were more beautiful in their shapely grace than Lady Adela's ten-button gloves and diamond bracelets.

"She has had the impertinence to get herself up in full evening dress, the minx!" the earl's daughter muttered, almost audibly; and then she uttered a suppressed exclamation of annoyance, for Lord Lancaster had started for her side, and was making his way rapidly across the room to the door.

"He has left me for her!" was her jealous, angry thought, and a sudden hatred for Leonora entered her heart.

Meanwhile, Lord Lancaster had reached the spot where the

girl was standing, with a slightly heightened color on her face, but with that quiet air of self-possession she habitually wore. She was not at all overwhelmed by the honor Lady Lancaster had thrust upon her, but she was a little indignant at the dowager, who purposely left her standing there alone, taking care that De Vere did not see her and go to her rescue.

But she forgot her nephew sitting in full view across the room, or she thought that he would not forsake the side of Lady Adela. What was her amazement when she saw him standing by the girl's side, saw the fair face lifted to his with a grateful smile!

"Lady Lancaster has commanded your humble servant to appear before your highness and execute divers pieces of music," she was saying, mischievously, when the dowager pounced down upon them like a hawk, and, with an angry aside to her nephew, bore Leonora off to the piano.

The next minute De Vere came forward gladly. By this time every one was looking, yet he was in nowise intimidated.

"Oh, Miss West, how glad I am to meet you, and looking as charming as ever, too!" in an audible aside, while his face beamed with delight. Leonora drew her hand rather hastily away.

"I am not here on equal terms, please remember that," she said, turning around and sitting down on the piano-stool. "It is my lady's orders that I shall amuse the company."

"Then I shall turn your music—may I?" he entreated.

She gave a careless assent, and looked at the great pile of music.

"Perhaps you will select something to play," she said; and seeing, without turning her head, that Lancaster had gone back to his seat by the earl's daughter.

"He is afraid she will be jealous of me," the girl said to herself, with the least little curl of her red lip.

"Can you play this?" De Vere inquired, placing a simple little song before her.

"Yes; but I do not want a song, please. Give me something by Mozart or Rossini—something brilliant. I am on exhibition, you see," saucily.

"Can you really play Mozart?" he whispered to her as he searched for the music.

"Oh, yes; and Beethoven, too. I am fond of music, so I have studied it a great deal. I can play almost anything," she said, carelessly, as she took the piece he handed her—an exceedingly brilliant and difficult piece by Mozart, and ran her quick eyes over it.

She placed the music before her, and struck the first notes. The hum of voices in the room grew instantly still. No one spoke while that grand torrent of music rose and fell on the charmed air, as those slim white fingers of Leonora swept the echoing keys. They forgot the performer for a little, even as she forgot them. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkled. While she played she remembered nothing but the harmonies that were shed from her subtle finger-touches. The art of the grand composer charmed her, and when she paused at last, it was with a low sigh of blended

pain and pleasure.

"Brava!" said De Vere, bending over her, and she smiled.

"Have I done well? It is because I have a passion for music, and have given my soul to it."

CHAPTER XXXIV

It was quite likely that De Vere would see the difference between his lowly born love and the real ladies in the room, as Lady Adela had said, but that he would be disenchanted was quite another matter. There certainly appeared to be no chance of it now. He was charmed with the splendid musical talent she had evinced. He felt a glow of pride in her as if she belonged to him already.

"You have done splendidly," he whispered, as he hung delightedly over her. "There is not a lady in the room who can do half so well."

"Thank you," she replied, demurely. "But you had better give me another piece. I am here to play, not to talk."

He longed to say, "Give me the right to place you on an equality with these women as my wife," but he was afraid to venture yet. Something in her cold, careless manner forbade the thought. He said to himself that he must wait until he knew her longer and had wooed her more. She was not to be lightly won, this beautiful gifted girl. She was proud and sensitive. He would have to bide his time.

So with a smothered sigh he placed before her several pieces, and while she played he stood silently by her side, turning the leaves of her music, and gazing into the beautiful, soulful face, proud and glad in the privilege he enjoyed of being so near her.

When she had played several instrumental pieces brilliantly, he placed another song before her.

"Let me hear if you can sing as well as you can play," he pleaded.

She glanced at the song. It was Longfellow's "Bridge."

"Yes, I will sing it," she said; and again there fell a hush of silence as the sweet and well-trained voice filled the room with its melody. De Vere was fain to acknowledge that she sung as well as she played.

When she had sung the last line she looked up into his face.

"Will you play or sing something now while I rest?" she asked.

"I never knew how unfortunate I was before in having no talent for music," he said, ruefully. "I should like to oblige you so much, but I have no more voice than a raven, Miss West. I will call Lancaster. He can sing like a seraph."

"Oh, pray don't!" she cried; but he had already turned around.

"Lancaster," he called, "won't you come and sing something while Miss West has a breathing-spell?"

He came forward at once. He thought it would be very pleasant to displace De Vere for a moment, to stand by her side and watch her exquisite face and the glancing white hands as they moved over the shining pearl keys.

"Pray do not rise," he said, bending over her, hurriedly; "I will sing, but I shall want you to play my accompaniment."

She bowed silently, and he selected a piece of music and placed it before her. It was that beautiful song, "My Queen."

"He is going to sing to Lady Adela," the girl said to herself, a little disdainfully, but her touch was firm and unfaltering as she struck the chords while Lord Lancaster sung:

"Where and how shall I earliest meet her?
What are the words she first will say?
By what name shall I learn to greet her?
I know not now, but 'twill come some day.

With the self-same sunlight shining upon her,
Streaming down on her ringlets' sheen,
She is standing somewhere, she I would honor,
She that I wait for, my Queen, my Queen!

I will not dream of her tall and stately,
She that I love may be fairy light;
I will not say she should walk sedately,
Whatever she does it will surely be right.
And she may be humble or proud, my lady,
Or that sweet calm that is just between;
But whenever she comes she will find me ready
To do her homage, my Queen, my Queen!

But she must be courteous, she must be holy,
Pure in her spirit, that maiden I love—
Whether her birth be noble or lowly,
I care no more than the angels above.
And I'll give my heart to my lady's keeping,
And ever her strength on mine shall lean;

And the stars shall fall, and the angels be weeping,
Ere I cease to love her, my Queen, my Queen!"

De Vere did not like his friend's selection much. He regretted that he had asked him to sing.

"It sounds like he was singing to her," he said, discontentedly to himself as he watched the couple at the piano. "What does the fellow mean, and what will Lady Adela think?" he wondered; and glancing toward her he saw that she was looking very cross over the top of her fan. Truth to tell, she was very much in doubt whether to appropriate the song to herself.

When the song was ended De Vere, who had lingered jealously near the piano, went up to Leonora's side.

"I thought you were going to rest while some one else sung," he said, reproachfully.

She glanced up with a smile at Lord Lancaster.

"So I was," she replied, lightly, "but Captain Lancaster wished me to play while he sung for Lady Adela. So of course I could not refuse."

Lancaster gazed into her face with amazement. Was she indeed so blind, or did she purposely slight the tribute he had paid to her, and which he had believed she could not fail to understand? Angered and chagrined, he bowed his thanks coldly, and retired from the piano, leaving a fair field for his rival.

He went out through the open window and wandered into the grounds, driven from her presence by the pain of her coldness,

her studied indifference. There was a gulf between them that grew wider and wider at every effort he made to bridge it.

"Heaven help me! I am a fool to waste my heart on one who laughs at my love," he said to himself. "I will tear her from my heart. I will never show her again the tenderness of a heart she chooses to trample. She will choose De Vere. That is wise. He is rich, I have nothing but Lancaster. Yet, if she would love me, I could bear poverty without a sigh, deeming myself rich in her affection."

His aimless walk led him to the Magic Mirror, where he had come upon her so suddenly and with such irrepressible joy that night. If only she had listened to him then, she would have known the whole story of that passionate love wherewith he loved her—she did not even care to hear, he said to himself with bitter pain and humiliation as he gazed into the clear pool from which her face had shone on him that night, and fooled him with the love he thought he saw on the lips and in the eyes.

He had always been gay and light-hearted until now, but an hour of profound bitterness came to him to-night alone in the odorous moonlit stillness. The words of Leonora's song seemed to echo in his brain:

"For my heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care,
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear."

"I wish that I could go back to my regiment to-morrow," he thought. "Why should I linger on here, and how will it all end, I wonder? Will De Vere marry Leonora? shall I marry Lady Adela? What will fate do with the tangled thread of our lives, I wonder?"

He went back to the house, and he found that Leonora was gone, and that De Vere had gone over to the fauteuil, and was talking to the earl's daughter. Several of the men had formed a coterie around Lady Lancaster, and were good-naturedly upbraiding her because she had declined to present them to the beautiful musician.

"I could not do it, really," said the dowager. "She is not in our set at all. She is a mere nobody, the dependent niece of my housekeeper."

"Well, but Lancaster and De Vere were quite hand-in-glove with her," objected one.

"A mere accidental acquaintance. She came over from America with them," said the dowager, carelessly.

In fact, she was inwardly raging with vexation. Her clever plan for annihilating Leonora had failed. The girl had appeared to much more advantage than she had expected—had created a sensation, in fact. The men were all in raptures, the women were all angry and jealous, and Leonora's modest withdrawal from the scene as soon as she arose from the piano was felt by all as a relief.

Lieutenant De Vere had gone with her as far as the door. He

had held her hand a minute in saying good-night.

"May I come into Mrs. West's room and see you to-morrow?" he asked, with an entreating glance into the bright eyes, and he saw a gleam of mischief shining in them.

"Will Lady Lancaster permit you to do so?" she inquired, demurely.

"Yes," he replied, "I have told her quite frankly the reason why I came to Lancaster Park, and she had nothing to say against it. If you will let me see you to-morrow, I will tell you what I told her," he continued, with his heart beating fast as he gazed at her fresh young beauty.

She was very thoughtful for an instant. She seemed to be making up her mind.

"You must not say no," he said, hastily. "I assure you that Lady Lancaster will have no objection to my doing so, if your aunt will permit me. May I come?"

Leonora raised her eyes gravely to his face.

"Yes, you may come," she answered, and then turned quickly away.

CHAPTER XXXV

The impulses of men in love are as various as their natures. Where one will linger around the fatal charmer and hug his pain, another will fly from

"The cruel madness of love,
The honey of poison-flowers, and all the measureless ill."

Lancaster, being wise, chose the latter part. He had an innate conviction that Leonora would accept Lieutenant De Vere. He did not feel strong enough to witness his friend's happiness just yet. He felt that if he remained he might betray his passion and be laughed at for his pains. He sought safety from himself in ignominious flight.

What was Lady Lancaster's dismay next morning, when she arose to her late breakfast, to find a note awaiting her from that troublesome nephew. She was in a great rage when she read it. She pushed back her dainty, untasted repast, which had been served in the privacy of her own room, and rang her bell violently.

"Present my compliments to Lieutenant De Vere, and ask him to come to me for ten minutes," she said, sharply, to the servant who answered the summons.

He came immediately, full of wonder at this abrupt summons, and found her pacing up and down the floor in a great rage which

she did not take any pains to conceal.

"Did you know of any reason Lord Lancaster could have for going up to London this morning?" she asked him, after they had gone through the preliminaries of a hasty good-morning.

"No," he replied, gazing at her in surprise.

"Well, he has gone—did you know that?" she demanded.

"Yes, I heard from his groom that he went at daylight this morning," he replied.

"Here is a note he left for me," she said, angrily. "He says he has been suddenly called away by urgent business—may be detained a week or more, and wishes me to present excuses and regrets to you and the rest of the company."

"I am very sorry he had to go," said the lieutenant.

"But do you believe that he really has business?" she inquired, peevishly.

"Of course he had—or why should he have gone?" inquired the handsome young fellow, staring at her in amazement.

"I don't know—but I have my suspicions. I half believe that he has run away from me and Lady Adela. If I were quite sure of it, I'd have my revenge," she muttered, irascibly.

"What an old shrew! I don't blame Lancaster for running away. I'm quite sure I should do so, too, if she bullied me as she does Lancaster," said the young fellow to himself, but aloud, he said, with an air of surprise:

"My dear Lady Lancaster, I am sure you wrong my friend. Why should he run away from you, his kind friend, and from the

beautiful Lady Adela?"

"Ah, why? I have my suspicions, Lieutenant De Vere, but I shall not impart them to any one—at least not yet. But he has behaved very badly, going off like this. I do not know how to make excuses for him, least of all to Lady Adela. She was jealous last night. I could see that. What will she say now? Clive has been playing fast and loose with me ever since last fall. It can not go on forever. I shall make him understand that."

"Do not be too hard upon him. Give him time, Lady Lancaster. He will not brook harshness, he will break a tight rein and escape from it. You should know that much of all men's natures," said De Vere, pleading for his friend.

"I have not been hard upon him. I have been most patient; but his behavior is inexplicable," cried she. "I have offered a wife and a fortune to him—a beautiful, high-bred, high-born wife, and a splendid fortune—yet he is indifferent to both. All Lady Adela's beauty makes no impression on him. He is barely civil to her. What is the matter with him, Lieutenant De Vere? Is he going to be fool enough to fly in the face of his own good fortune?"

"I hope not," said Lieutenant De Vere, but he looked very anxious. He remembered that "whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad."

Lancaster was mad—mad with love for the beautiful, penniless American girl, Leonora West. De Vere had suspected it all along, he was sure of it now. That song last night had opened his eyes. A pang of bitter, futile jealousy shot through his heart.

He believed that his friend was an unacknowledged rival. A vague terror of the end rushed over him. Who would win, Lancaster or himself?

Lady Lancaster came nearer to him—she looked anxiously at him with her small, bead-like black eyes.

"You and Clive are intimate," she said; "you ought to know a great deal about him. Tell me what it is that makes him so blind to his own interests? Is there any one in the way? Is there any woman in the case?"

"I am not in Lancaster's confidence, believe me, Lady Lancaster," he replied. "If there be any woman in the case, he has never told me so. Perhaps you are making a mountain out of a little mole-hill."

She studied him attentively.

"You are his friend. I shall find out nothing from you. I can see that," she said.

"You will never learn anything from me derogatory to his interests—be sure of that," he replied, loyal to his friend in spite of his reawakened jealousy.

"And your own wooing—how does that prosper?" she inquired, with something like a sneer, abruptly changing the subject.

He flushed indignantly.

"You are pleased to jest on delicate subjects, Lady Lancaster," he said, stiffly.

"I beg your pardon," she answered, quickly, "I did not know

you were so sensitive, but I assure you that I take a great interest in your love affair."

"Thank you. I understand the origin of your great interest," he answered with a slight smile; and she winced perceptibly. She did not want him to know whither her suspicions tended.

"I dare say you think me a very meddling old woman," she said, abruptly; "but you have my best wishes for a successful suit. Miss West is beautiful and accomplished, and with your wealth you can have no difficulty in lifting her to your level."

"She is the most beautiful of women," he answered, forgetting his momentary ill-humor in the pleasure she awoke in him by her artful praise of Leonora.

"And you will lose no time in making her your own? Delays are dangerous," she said, with a subtle meaning in her tone that made his heart beat.

"I know that. But I am a coward; I am almost afraid to ask her for the boon I crave most upon earth," he said, giving her in those few words a glimpse into his full heart.

"Pshaw! you are a coward," said my lady, laughing. "Where is the woman who is going to refuse you with your face and your fortune? You are a prize in the matrimonial market."

"But I want to be accepted for myself, and not for my fortune, Lady Lancaster," he answered, proudly, and yet not without a sense of satisfaction over these worldly advantages of his. It was very pleasant to be his own master, to be able to do as he pleased, to ask no one's leave to marry whom he wished.

Lady Lancaster laughed a very disagreeable laugh.

"As I am such an old woman, you will forgive me for telling you not to be a fool, Lieutenant De Vere," she said. "There are very few men who are married for themselves alone in these days, and, let me add, there are very few who deserve it. The average woman looks out for money and position now. Be sensible, and thank your lucky stars that when you go to court Miss West you can carry a fortune in your hand, as well as a heart."

"What a very disagreeable old woman!" he said to himself, reddening with vexation. "She is full of spleen and venom. I must go out or I shall be tempted to say something sharp to her."

He went, and as he was leaving, she fired a last shot at him:

"Take my advice, and don't delay the proposal, young man. Don't let excessive modesty deter you. Remember that faint heart never won fair lady."

CHAPTER XXXVI

Sitting in the quiet little room of Mrs. West that morning, with the golden sunlight of June shining in through the screen of flowers at the window, the pretty American girl listened to the story of the *grande passion* told in as eloquent phrases as the young soldier could command—a story as old as the world, but ever sweet and new.

Leonora listened with dewy eyes and flushing cheeks. She knew the value of all that he was offering to her—knew that he was wealthy, that he was heir to a title, that he had a warm, true, manly heart, and that in his affection for her he was running counter to the wishes and desires of all his friends. It was but natural that she should feel proud of his homage. She wished that she might have loved him in return. A sense of shame and embarrassment stole over her at the thought that while he offered her so much she could give him nothing save the calm regard of a friend.

She drew away the hand of which he had possessed himself, and the rich roses mantled her cheeks as she said, gently and sadly:

"I thank you very much for the honor you have done me, and I wish that I could love you, but—"

"But what? Oh, Leonora, you are not going to be cruel to me—you are not going to refuse me?" he cried, anxiously, and he

looked so handsome and so ardent that her heart ached for him, and she wished again that she might have loved him, and said yes instead of no to his manly proposal.

"I am very sorry," she said, and the pretty face looked so shy and troubled, that he longed to gather her in his arms and kiss the sweet lips into smiles again. "I am very sorry, and I don't mean to be cruel, Lieutenant De Vere—but I must refuse, because I do not love you."

"Let me teach you," he cried, ardently. "I know I have been too premature. I have asked you to love me too soon; but I have been so afraid of a rival, my darling."

Leonora smiled pensively and bitterly.

"A rival," she said, with a quickly suppressed sigh. "Ah, you need not have feared that! No one would sacrifice anything for my sake but you."

He thought he understood the allusion, and his heart sunk. He gently touched the small hand that lay on her black dress.

"Do not judge any one hardly, Miss West," he said. "There are many who would love you and make sacrifices for you if they had the chance. And you know I should not have to make any sacrifice at all. I am rich in my own right. I could lift you at once from the level you now occupy to one more worthy of you—one you would adorn, and where your beauty and accomplishments would be rated at their full value. Oh, Leonora! do not say no just yet. Let me woo you a little longer—a month, a year. In time you might learn to love me. Let me still hope on. I love you so

dearly I can not give you up yet!"

She blushed deeply, and the long lashes drooped over her cheeks, but she answered, firmly:

"It would be very cruel for me to let you keep on hoping like that, Lieutenant De Vere. I could never be yours if you waited months and years. I will tell you the truth. There is"—a gasp—"some one—some one else that I love."

A moment's dead silence. The girl drops her shamed face in her hands. Presently he says huskily, yet with manly courage:

"It is some fortunate suitor you have left in America. Let me congratulate you, Miss West."

But she answers, in a sad, shamed voice:

"No, you need not congratulate me. I am not any happier than you are. He—he does not love me."

"Does not love you? Then he must be a stock or a stone," De Vere says, indignantly.

"He is neither," says Leonora, with the pretty pensive smile she has worn throughout their interview. "But let us speak no more of it. I should not have confessed to you only to show you how futile it would be for you to go on loving me. I thought it but justice to you. It may make it easier for you to forget me."

"I shall never do that," he answers, with conviction.

"You think so now, but time will console you," smiling. "I shall be gone out of your life forever in a few weeks."

"Gone?" he echoes, blankly.

"Yes; I am going away in three weeks' time. Aunt West goes

with me to America."

He starts.

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, we are going to seek a home in my own land. Bid me *bon voyage*, Lieutenant De Vere. You are the only friend I have made in England, that is, if I may call you my friend," wistfully.

He gulps down a great sigh of disappointment, regret, and pain, and holds out his hand.

"Yes, I am your friend, if I can not be your lover," he said, manfully.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Something like a week later Lieutenant De Vere, strolling down a street in London, comes suddenly face to face with Clive, Lord Lancaster.

"What! not gone home yet?" says the former, in surprise, and Lancaster flushes guiltily.

"No; but when did you come to London?" he inquires.

"Several days ago," De Vere replies, carelessly, and scanning his friend curiously. Lancaster does not bear the scrutiny well. He is wan and haggard looking. There is no color in his usually florid face, and his eyes are heavy and restless.

"You have not finished your visit so soon, I trust," he observes, eyeing his friend in turn with a close scrutiny. De Vere has a worn air, too, as if dull and *ennuyé*.

"Yes, I have finished my visit; I did not care to remain after my host took such a cavalier flight."

"Ah, indeed!" sarcastically. "But I did not know that I was the object of your visit."

"You were not, particularly; but I came away because I had no longer any excuse for staying."

The tone was so peculiar that Lancaster looked at him more closely. He caught De Vere by the arm a little nervously.

"De Vere, you don't mean to tell me that *she* has refused you?"

"*She* is so indefinite. Whom do you mean?" airily.

"I thought there was but one *she* in the case. Miss West, of course."

"Oh!"

"Has she refused you, I say, De Vere?" imploringly.

"Yes."

"Really?" with something like incredulous joy in his voice, though he tries hard to keep it out of it. He has been so jealously sure all the while that Leonora would accept "the goods the gods provided," that he can scarcely take in the truth now.

"Yes, Miss West has refused me, really. You seem glad of my ill-luck, Lancaster," in a tone of subdued bitterness.

Lancaster is suddenly shocked at himself.

"Oh, no, no! I beg your pardon a hundred times I did not mean it at all. I am sorry for you, old fellow, but I can not understand it, really."

"Perhaps you are dull of comprehension. Take a cigar to brighten up your understanding."

They light their cigars and walk on together, and then De Vere continues:

"What is it about the affair that you can not understand?"

"That she should refuse you. I thought she would be sure to accept."

"Ah!" said Lieutenant De Vere, dryly, and then he took several moody puffs at his cigar.

"Yes, I honestly thought so. Did she give you any reason for refusing you?"

"Two reasons," De Vere replied, laconically.

"One ought to have been enough," said his friend.

"Yes, it ought to have been, I know," said De Vere, reddening warmly. "But, you see, I did not want to take no for an answer, so when she said she couldn't marry me because she didn't love me I wanted her to take time. You see, I thought she might learn to love me. So, then, to escape my importunities, she had to put in another reason."

"And that?" asked Lancaster.

"I am not sure that I ought to tell. I think she told it me as a secret," he answered, thoughtfully.

And then when he saw Lancaster's grave, disappointed face, he said, suddenly:

"Tell me your secret, Lancaster, and I will tell you hers. Why did you run away from Lancaster Park?"

"Because I was a coward, De Vere—that is all," bitterly.

"But why? Were you afraid that your aunt would marry you off willy-nilly to the earl's daughter?"

"Not exactly, although there was some danger of it," said Lancaster, smiling.

"There was some other reason, then? Come, old fellow, are you ashamed to confess the truth?"

"I should have been a week ago, I think I might own it now with the bribe you offered in view."

"What was it, then?" curiously.

"This: I was madly in love with Leonora West, and too selfish,

or too jealous, or too great a coward, to stay and witness your happiness as her accepted lover."

"Hum! All the happiness you would have witnessed wouldn't have hurt you," ruefully. "And so you ran away like a coward! What have you been doing all this while, truant?"

"All sorts of foolish things, I'm afraid. For one thing, I've been trying to exchange out of my own regiment into one ordered to India."

Lieutenant De Vere was betrayed into a whistle of profound surprise:

"Whew!"

"Yes," admitted the big, handsome fellow, shamefacedly.

"But do you mean to tell me that you were going to throw over the whole thing, Lady Lancaster, Lady Adela, and all—just because you were disappointed in love?" queried De Vere, in wonder.

"Yes, I believe I was—though I didn't think much about it. You see, I was just running away headlong from my own misery."

"I did not really believe you were so romantic," said De Vere, after a long pause.

"You mean so foolish," said his friend, eyeing him closely.

"Well, perhaps so," admitted the lieutenant.

"A man must be far gone, indeed, to throw away twenty thousand a year and an earl's daughter for the *beaux yeux* of a pretty little penniless girl. Such luck is not met with every day."

"Leonora is worth it all," said Lancaster, warmly.

"Yes, if one could win her; but then you were throwing all away, without anything in return. You should have remembered that you would lose all and gain nothing. What says the poet:

"What care I how fair she be,
If she be not fair for me?"

Lancaster said nothing, only sighed furiously.

"Look here, old fellow," said his friend. "Tell me the truth. If you could get Leonora, would you really throw over all the rest for her? Would you do the 'all for love, and the world well lost' business?"

An eloquent look from Lancaster's dark-blue eyes was his only answer.

"You would. Then you are far gone indeed. I do not think I ought to countenance you in such egregious folly. I think you will be cured of your madness when I tell you her second reason for not loving me."

Lancaster looked at him imploringly.

"Say what you are going to say, De Vere," he said, almost roughly, in the misery that filled his voice; "but, for God's sake, don't chaff! Think what I've endured already. I love Leonora to madness. If you think there's any hope for me, say so at once and put me out of misery."

"Lancaster, I'm sorry for you, upon my soul, but I don't think there's any chance for you at all. Miss West told me quite frankly

that she was in love with another man."

Lancaster gives a great start. He says, hurriedly:

"Who is the happy man?"

"She would not tell, but of course it can not be you, because she says it is quite a hopeless passion. He does not love her; she admitted that with the reddest blushes."

"No, of course, it can not be me, for I am quite sure she knows my heart. I have shown her my love unwittingly more than once, and been laughed at for my pains," Lancaster admits, with bitter chagrin and despair struggling in his voice.

"Poor little girl! It is strange that she should love in vain. It is a cold-hearted man indeed that could be insensible to so much beauty and sweetness," De Vere muses aloud. "I think it is some one she has left in New York, for she and Miss West are going to sail for America next week, to make their home there."

"Then that ends all," Lancaster says, moodily.

"Yes," De Vere answers, rather gravely. "And there will be one page folded down forever in both our lives, eh, old fellow? We are in the same boat, you see. But take my advice, Lancaster, don't let this episode spoil your prospects. Throw up the India scheme, and go home and marry the earl's daughter."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Lady Lancaster was surprised and angry and frightened all in one when she heard that Leonora West had refused Lieutenant De Vere. She made him own the truth when he came to make his hasty adieus, and she roundly abused the "pert minx," as she called her, for her "impertinence and presumption."

"Whom does she think she will get? Does she think she will capture an earl or a duke?" she sneered, and De Vere answered, coldly:

"I do not believe that she has any matrimonial designs on any one, Lady Lancaster. She returns to America in a very few days."

Lady Lancaster was so surprised that she gave vent to her relief in a hasty exclamation:

"Thank Heaven! And I devoutly wish that she had remained there."

"There are more persons than one who will agree with your ladyship there," he said, betrayed into a laugh at her naïveté.

"Whom?" she exclaimed, with a start.

"Myself for one," he answered. "I am not at liberty to implicate any one else."

She gave him a savage glance.

"Do you mean my nephew?" she inquired.

"I said I was not at liberty to name any one else," he replied.

Then he went away, and Lady Lancaster straightway confided

the fact of his rejection to all the ladies in the house. They all agreed with her that Leonora West was an impertinent minx to have refused such a splendid offer, but that it was a narrow escape for Lieutenant De Vere and that he had need to be very thankful over it.

In the meantime, Lady Lancaster's guests grew very curious over her nephew's absence. The earl and his daughter talked of going away. They felt secretly aggrieved and resentful over Lord Lancaster's continued absence. It was a palpable slight to them. They did not believe the story of important business in London.

What business could he have?

Lady Lancaster wrote her nephew a sharp, imperative letter of recall. She was on thorns lest her long-cherished scheme should fail. She intimated quite plainly that her patience was exhausted, and that if he did not come to terms soon she would never forgive him, and worse still, she would cut him out of her will.

Lancaster threw that letter angrily into the fire, and swore to himself that he would not go near Lancaster. He would go off to India, and she might buy another husband for her favorite with the money she prized so much. He would have none of it.

In short, our hero was in a most sullen and intractable mood. His heart was sorely wounded, for he had loved Leonora with all the strength and passion of a noble nature. His sorrow for a time completely mastered him. He said to himself that he could not bear to go back now. He must wait a little longer.

Then came De Vere with his strange story. Now indeed all

was ended, thought the hopeless lover. She was going away, and he would never even see her again, this bright-eyed, soft-voiced girl who had stolen into his heart almost unawares, who had been so cruel to him, who had so lightly scorned him, and yet whom he loved with all the strong passion of his young manhood.

Once or twice De Vere reiterated his advice that he should go home and marry Lady Adela, but Lancaster only laughed miserably in his face.

"What, with my heart and soul full of another woman?" he said, bitterly. "No, I can not do that much injustice to beautiful Lady Adela. I respect her too much."

Go where he would, do what he might, the face he loved was ever before his fancy. As the time drew near for her departure to America a strange longing took possession of him. He yearned to see the living face of the girl once more, before the wild waves of the blue Atlantic divided them forever as widely as if she were in her grave and he in his. He had no longer any bitterness or anger toward her in his heart since he had learned of that sweet sorrow hidden in her young breast—a sorrow akin to his own.

"I should like to see the man who was so cold and hard that he could not love her," he said to himself. "He must be a stock or a stone indeed. Poor little Leonora! I will go down to Lancaster and bid her good-bye and god-speed on her homeward way. There can be no harm in that. I must see her once more, or I shall go mad with longing for her sweet, fair face and her soft voice."

So in the first heat of sweltering July he went down to

Lancaster Park, intent on sating his restless pain with one last look at the beloved face.

CHAPTER XXXIX

He thought himself very fortunate that when he crossed the grounds of Lancaster and entered the house, no one saw him. It was just what he wished.

He went straight to the housekeeper's room, and he found Mrs. West sitting alone in the little sitting-room, going over her account-book with a pen and ink. She rose in some perturbation at the unexpected sight of the master of Lancaster Park.

"I did not know you were in the house, my lord," she said.

"I have just entered it," he replied. "Do not let me disturb you, Mrs. West. I came to see your niece."

"Leonora?" she said, with some surprise. "Oh, dear! I am very sorry, but she is not here;" and she wondered at the sudden paleness that overspread his face.

"Not here?" he stammered. "Is she gone, then? I thought—I understood that you would go with her to America."

"Oh, yes, so I shall," she answered; "but she is not gone there yet. I did not mean that. She will be here this evening."

"Where is she now?" he asked, eagerly, and Mrs. West replied:

"She has gone over to the Abbey ruins to make a sketch this morning."

"Thank you," he said, and hurried out of the room with such precipitancy that the good soul stared after him in amazement and consternation.

"Dear me! what has that poor child done now?" she thought, nervously. "It is a pity she ever came to Lancaster Park. She has but a sorry time of it here. I almost wish she had accepted Lieutenant De Vere. It would have been such a grand match for her, and she is too bright and pretty to remain in my station of life. I wonder what Lord Lancaster can want with her. Is he going to scold her for anything she has done?"

But while she propounded these uneasy questions to herself, our hero was striding across the park and lanes and fields toward the Abbey ruins, every other thought swallowed up in the intense longing to see Leonora again. His heart beat heavily as he came in sight of her, at last, sitting among the green graves, as he had seen her before, but not sketching busily now, for her drawing materials lay beside her on the grass, and her head was bowed on her arm, her face hidden from sight on her black sleeve.

"Poor child!" he thought, compassionately, "she has a sorrow to grieve over as well as I;" and he stepped softly, almost fearing to intrude upon the sacredness of her grief, yet loath to turn back again, for something drew him irresistibly to her side.

The soft echo of his footstep in the grass startled her. She looked up quickly with a low cry. He saw tears upon her face, and her rosy lips were quivering like a child's.

"Leonora!" he cried, and knelt down impulsively by her side.

She was so taken by surprise for a moment that she forgot to draw away the hands he caught daringly in his. She looked up at him, and said, with a catch in her breath:

"I thought you were in London."

"So I was until to-day; but I came down to bid you good-bye," he answered, feasting his hungry sight unrestrainedly on the pale beauty of her lifted face.

"Then you knew that I was going away?" she asked.

"Yes; I saw De Vere in town. He told me," he answered; and a pretty blush crept into her cheeks, and her lashes fell. "And so," he went on, half smiling, "you refused my friend, in spite of all my advice to the contrary?"

She pulled her hands suddenly away.

"Yes, I refused him. Was it worth my while," with a stinging scorn her voice, "to sell my body and soul for paltry gold?"

"No; you were right not to give the hand while your heart was another's," he said, bending down to look into her face that suddenly grew burning crimson as she cried out, sharply:

"Why do you say that? How dare you? Has Lieutenant De Vere told you—"

"Yes, he has told me that you would not marry him because you loved another. He is a thrice better man whoever he may be, Leonora. How much I envy him I need not say," he said, earnestly, carried away by the passion that filled him.

She looked at him with her gray-blue eyes full of wonder.

"You! Lady Adela's intended husband!" she said, bitterly.

"I am not her intended husband," he answered. "Do you think I am less noble than you, Leonora? that I could wrong any one by giving my hand without my heart? No, I do not love Lady Adela,

and I can never be her husband. Do you know what I was doing up in London, child?"

"How should I know?" she answered.

"Well, I was trying to exchange into a regiment that is *en route* for India. I am going to throw over the twenty thousand a year and run away from England and my pain."

"You are?" she said, drawing a long breath and gazing at him with dilated, wondering eyes. "But why, Lord Lancaster?"

"Can you ask me why?" he asked, bitterly.

"Yes, because I can not understand at all why you are going to India. What pain is it you are running away from?"

He started and looked at her keenly. Was it possible that she did not guess? Had she misunderstood him all along? His heart beat with a sudden hope.

"I am fleeing from that misery that the poet has put into immortal doggerel," he said. "Have you never heard of it, Leonora? That pain which is

"Of all pains the greatest pain,
To love and not be loved again?"

She looked at him with a new, strange light in her soft eyes that made his heart beat tumultuously.

"Yes, I have heard of it," she said; "but I did not know that you were a victim to its pangs. Who is it that you love, Lord Lancaster?"

"Is it possible you do not know?" he asked; and then he saw that her eyes were shining with hope, and her whole graceful form trembling.

He took the small hands again into his, and she did not offer to take them away.

"I will make a compact with you, Leonora," he said. "If I will tell you whom I love, will you then tell me to whom you have given your heart?"

"Yes, I will tell you," she replied, with a soft, sweet laugh.

"Listen, then," he said. "I have been in love with you, Leonora, ever since that first day I saw you in New York."

"And I with you," she answered, glowing with happy blushes.

"My darling!" he cried, and caught her in his arms and pressed her to his beating heart. "Then why have you been so cruel to me all the time?"

"Because I thought you were going to marry Lady Adela, and I was so jealous and unhappy that I misunderstood you all the while," Leonora confessed, with shy frankness.

CHAPTER XL

"Lady Lancaster will be very angry with us, will she not?" asked Leonora, lifting her head from his breast, where it had been resting a few silent, happy moments.

"I have no doubt she will," he replied, with supreme indifference to his aunt's wrath.

"She will not give you any of her money, I suppose?" pursued the girl.

"No, not a penny, I am sure. But we can do without it, can we not, love?" he asked, fondly.

"But will you never regret that you chose me instead of Lady Adela and your aunt's fortune? Can you bear poverty for my sake?"

"I shall never regret anything, and for the rest I shall never know that I am poor. Having you, my darling, I shall always deem myself rich," he answered, fondly caressing her.

"And you will never be ashamed of me?" anxiously.

"Never, my darling."

"Nor of poor Aunt West, who is only the housekeeper at Lancaster Park?"

Then indeed he winced, but only for a moment, and he answered bravely:

"She belongs to you, Leonora, and she is, besides, a good and worthy woman. I shall not be ashamed of her, but she must

not serve at the Park any more; she shall be raised to a position befitting the aunt of the future Lady Lancaster."

"She will leave the Park to-morrow. We are going to London for a week, then we sail for New York," said Leonora.

"Is my bride going to leave me so soon?" he whispered, fondly.

"Yes; but she will come back when you come to New York for her," answered Leonora, with a blush and a smile.

"That will be in a very short while, then. But why go at all, darling? Couldn't we be married right away?"

"Without my trousseau? No, sir, thank you. Besides, my aunt and I have some business to attend to in New York, and I want her to see my native land and appreciate it."

"When may I come after you, then, my darling? In September?"

"Oh, dear, no!"

"October?"

"No, indeed—that is, I will ask Aunt West," demurely.

"I shall not wait a day longer than October, miss. Do you hear that?" he says, laughing, but in earnest, for he says to himself, thoughtfully, "The darling has no one but Mrs. West to take care of her, and the sooner she is married and settled, the better for her."

"You begin to play the tyrant soon," laughs the happy betrothed.

"In revenge for the way you have treated me all this while," he replies.

And then he adds, with a sterner light in his handsome blue eyes:

"I am going to take you home now, Leonora, and present you to Lady Lancaster as my promised wife. Are you willing, my darling?"

"I have no objection," she answered, for Leonora, being but human, thought she would rather enjoy this triumph over her enemy.

So they went back to the house, and Lancaster led his love to the library, where one of the servants had told him Lady Lancaster was sitting with Mrs. West, going over the housekeeping books of the latter.

They opened the door and entered. My lady stared at the pair in horror for a moment, then she rose majestically to her feet and struck her gold-headed cane upon the floor with a resounding thump.

"So you are come home at last!" she cried. "But what does this mean? Why have you brought this impertinent minx into my presence?"

"Perhaps you will speak more respectfully of Miss West when I tell you that she is my promised wife, and the future Lady of Lancaster," her nephew answered sternly.

"The Lady of Lancaster! What! do you mean that you have sacrificed all your future prospects for this low-born and penniless girl?" cried my lady, growing purple in the face and actually foaming at the lips with fury.

"I have sacrificed nothing, and I have secured my future happiness by my betrothal," Lord Lancaster answered, proudly.

The old lady stared at him speechless with rage for a few seconds, then she struck her cane violently upon the floor again, and burst out with concentrated wrath:

"Then hear me, you blind, besotted fool! You think you have played me a fine trick, but I'll have my revenge, be sure of that! Not a dollar of my money shall ever go to you! I will leave it all to the next of kin. And you, Clive Lancaster, may go on earning your beggarly pittance in the army, and your wife may take in soldiers' washing, and your children starve or beg, but I will never throw you a crust to keep you from starving, nor a rag to keep you from freezing!"

An indignant retort rose to the young man's lips, but before he could speak Leonora's sweet, clear voice rang out upon the silence:

"I hope, Lady Lancaster, that neither myself, my husband, nor my children may be reduced to the dire necessity you anticipate. I shall persuade Captain Lancaster to leave the army and live at Lancaster Park. He can well afford to do so without your money, for I am as rich as you are."

"Oh, Leonora!" cried her aunt, dismayed.

"Yes, dear aunt," cried the girl, dauntlessly, "I am not the poor, dependent girl you and every one else thought me. My father made his fortune in California. He was very wealthy, and he left me his whole fortune, with the exception of a legacy to yourself

that will keep you in luxury all your life."

"But why did you let us think that you were poor, my dear?" exclaimed the good soul.

Leonora laughed gayly, in spite of her enemy's angry, wondering face.

"I did not exactly let you," she said. "You see, you all took it for granted, and I did not contradict it, for," with a shy glance into her lover's face, "I wanted to see if any one would love me for myself alone, and I am richly rewarded; for

"He does not love me for my birth,
Nor for my lands so broad and fair;
He loves me for my own true worth,
And that is well—"

Lady Lancaster could have killed her for her brilliant triumph, but she was powerless to do anything but carry out her angry threats, so she retired from the scene and went to her dower house, where she actually adopted a scion of the house of Lancaster and made him the heir to her wealth; but this lad was too young to marry the earl's daughter, so the dowager never had that honor in the family.

But her spleen and venom passed harmlessly and unheeded over the heads of Lord Lancaster and his fair Leonora, for, in the far-famed language of the story-book, "they were married, and live happily ever afterward."

THE END