HARRY JOSCELYN.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF

"The Chronicles of Carlingford,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HARRY JOSCELYN.

XIV., XV., XVI.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER TEN YEARS.

TEN years is a large slice out of a life; but it slips by, not leaving much trace in a rural country where everything goes quietly, and where Christmas follows after Christmas with scarcely any sign by which one can be identified from another on looking back. We will not say that nothing had happened in the White House to mark the ten years from the time when young Harry Joscelyn disappeared from the Fell country, and it became evident that no one there was likely to hear anything of him more. Various things had happened: one, for instance, was that Joan had married Philip Selby, and was now the mistress of Heatonshaw, and could not easily remember, so strange is the effect of such a change, how she had contented herself in her previous life, or what had been the habits and customs of Joan Joscelyn. More had happened to her in this than in any other ten years of her life; but yet they had glided over very calmly, day following day with such a gentle monotony that it was hard for her to decide how many of them there were, or which was which. She had no child to measure the years by, which was a misfortune, but one which she bore with submission: reflecting to herself that if children are a comfort they are often also a great handful, and that when they are troublesome there is nothing else so troublesome in all the world. Philip Selby himself was less philosophical, and would have ventured gladly upon the risk for the sake of the blessing; but it was not so to be. And thus they had little evidence before them of how the years stole away. But all that he had augured, and Joan had agreed to, about the house, had come true. There were the best of beasts in the byres, and heavy crops on the arable land, and a phaeton in the coach-house, and horses in the stables such as no man needed to be ashamed of. And with all this, there was a very comfortable couple inside. Joan, on her marriage, had been half ashamed of the fine room, which was called—not according to her old-fashioned formula, the parlour, but—the drawing-room, to

which her husband had brought her home, and which had been furnished by one of the best shops in Carlisle, with furniture such as was approved by the taste of the time. There was a white paper on the walls, and a great deal of gilding, and sofas and tables with legs that were crooked and curly. But by the end of ten years much that was somewhat showy once had toned down. The furniture had got more shapely and a little human; the place had worn into the fashion of the people that inhabited it. In summer it was a perfect bower of lilies and roses, the great white shafts of the one rising above the broad branches, heavy with flowers, of the other (for in those days there were no standards), and the whole air sweet with the mingled perfume. Liddy Joscelyn, Mrs. Selby's little sister, thought there was no flower-garden in the world like it; but then she had not been away from home since she was twelve, and had not seen much, and there was nothing like it about the White House.

That, place, too, had changed in these years. Ralph Joscelyn was the one upon whom the change had told most. It was not that he was much altered in personal appearance, nor yet that he had entirely mended and corrected his ways. Perhaps indeed the alteration visible in him was more due to the fact that there was nobody about the place who crossed him, no one who opposed any strenuous opposition to his will, or dissented from his opinions, than any real alteration. But it was a quieter life which the homestead led, subject to much fewer storms than of old; and Mrs. Joscelyn lived a far less anxious life. The loss of her youngest boy so long ago—though it might not be really the loss of him, since who could tell what day he might re-appear again?—was not a thing, as everyone said, that she could be expected to get over. But the ten years had calmed her, and, what was more, Liddy had calmed her. Lydia had been sent for to her school when her mother was in the depths of this trouble, and she had never been suffered to go back again, her presence being the only consolation which the gentle and unhappy woman was the better for. And after ten years of Liddy's constant company, Mrs. Joscelyn was a very different woman. Joan, who had been so sympathetic with her mother through that last family trouble, without understanding her in the others, understood still less the effect

produced by her little sister, who smoothed down everything without any apparent trouble, more by understanding it, so far as appeared, than from anything she did. When Joan's reign terminated, Lydia became the dominant spirit in the house. She was so at fourteen; how much more at twenty! It was not a good thing for the butter and the cheese. The dairy produce of the White House fell off wonderfully. It was no longer half the quantity, and still less was it equal in quality, to the butter of Joan's time. Old Simon never ceased shaking his head over it till his dying day, and went out of human consciousness moaning to himself that "A' things was altered, and no t' half o' t' money coming in." It was he that had always been the salesman, and he felt it deeply. For half of the time or so Joan had done her utmost, driving over in the morning and spending hours endeavouring to indoctrinate her sister with the mysteries of that art; but Liddy only laughed, and kept her pretty white hands by her side, and declared herself incapable. "I don't know what to do with these things," she would say, gazing at the bowls of milk, without the least sense of shame, with even a smile on her face; and to Joan's consternation her father, coming in when this was said, and himself standing in the doorway, swaying his big figure to and fro, said, "Let her alone, let her alone, Joan. You did it, but she is another kind from you."

"That she is," said Joan. "She's not the profitable kind either, if she let's the dairy take care of itself."

But to this Joscelyn paid no attention; and Mrs. Selby was led to her chaise stupefied, not knowing whether she was asleep or awake, so bewildered was she. The dairy went off, it was no longer celebrated as of yore. The cows decreased in number, for what was the use of keeping them when they brought in so little profit? And by degrees the house changed altogether. Lydia, slim and straight, with her white hands, and feet that scarcely sounded upon the old passage, gradually modified everything. When she was seen in a new riding-habit, and a hat with a feather, going out to ride with her father, the old servants could scarcely contain themselves; and the timid mother, coming out to see her, smoothed the horse's sleek coat with a frightened hand, and did not know how to look at the

girl, or her father, who was as proud of Lydia as Mrs. Joscelyn herself could be.

And then the old piano, which nobody had touched for years —for Joan, who had ended her education at fifteen, had never learned any more music than was contained in a first book of exercises—was sent off to an attic, and a new piano was bought for Lydia. Where it came from no one could quite understand, for it was impossible to believe that Joscelyn had drawn his purse-strings to such an extent; but all the same it arrived, and Lydia, sometimes going into Wyburgh, sometimes having her professor out to the White House, had lessons, and practised diligently, and by-and-bye became in her way a musician, astonishing all the neighbourhood with her powers. A young lady who rode about the country on a handsome horse, and who played the piano, was something altogether new in the place. She might have been much more profoundly instructed without producing half so great an impression. The house altogether rose in the social scale. People came to call who had never been seen near the White House before; and they found the mistress of the house, who had always been genteel, a gentle woman, ladylike and subdued, and her daughter one of the prettiest girls in the county, with a sort of elegance about her which was the inheritance she had received from her mother, strengthened and consolidated by the superior strength which she got from the other side of the house. When Joscelyn himself appeared, which was rarely, his fine form and strength, and the refinement imparted by a crown of white hair, raised him, too, to a sort of pinnacle. People began to say that they found they had done him injustice, and that after all the present representative of the Joscelyns was not unworthy his race. The process was slow, but it was very complete. When Will and Tom appeared with their wives, it was unaccountable how “put out” and “set down” they felt, as if they were going to their landlord’s, where everything was finer than the surroundings they were accustomed to, and not to their father’s, upon whose shabby furniture Mrs. Will and Mrs. Tom had looked with contempt. Even Joan looked round her with a curiosity which was mingled with grievance, scarcely able to restrain the thought that what was good enough for *her*, might certainly have been

good enough for Liddy. Liddy it was clear did not think so. And how that little thing knew, or where she had got her instinctive acquaintance with polite ways, Mrs. Selby, who was on the whole proud of Liddy, could not tell; but so it was. The house brightened up generally; here a new carpet, and there a new curtain, made a change in its dingy aspect. The old furniture was made the most of, and old china, and all the stores of a long established house brought out to embellish the parlours; the very hall and passages were brushed up, the table, and the service at the table, so improved, that Joan too thought she must be dining with some of the great county people, whom the Joscelyns had always thought themselves equal to, but who had not acknowledged the Joscelyns.

"The thing that surprises me is where she learned it all," Mrs. Selby said; "a bit of a thing that has seen no more than the rest of us; but she has a deal of you in her, mother, far more than any of the rest."

"Ah, my dear," said Mrs. Joscelyn, shaking her head, "I never had the courage to settle things my own way. It was not that I didn't know: I knew very well how things ought to be done." This little gentle assertion of her gentility Mrs. Joscelyn felt was her due in the new development of affairs. It was not all the discovery of Liddy. She had known well enough all the time. Circumstances had been too much for her; but the refinements of society were her natural atmosphere. Joan looked at her mother with mingled respect and amusement, proud that she was such a lady, yet feeling the joke of her superiority.

"Yes, mother," she said, "I mind how you and Phil talked the first time he came to the White House. It was as good as a play to hear you. He never let on it was me he wanted, but to have a talk with you, such a superior woman. I did not understand a word you were saying, and I took pains to let him see that the dairy and the stables were what I was most acquainted with; but that didn't make any difference, you see."

"You were never one to make the most of yourself, Joan," said the mother, mildly. "I always knew there was a great deal more in you than you would ever show," at which Joan laughed; but she was not displeased. And she was proud of her

young sister when Liddy came riding over on the last perfection from her father's stable, looking like a young princess. She was the nearest thing to a child of her own that Joan was ever likely to have, and she forgave her possession of a great many indulgences which no one had thought of conceding to Joan. When it appeared, however, that Lydia had a groom behind her, Mrs. Selby's soul was stirred within her.

"Now, Liddy," she said, "I can stand a deal, but you'll ruin father if you go on like this. A groom behind you! what will you want next? Father's just infatuated, that is all I can say."

"It's only a livery coat," said Liddy, "that's all. It doesn't cost very much. I'll pay it off my own allowance, and father will never be the worse——"

Here she was interrupted by a shriek from her elder sister. "Your allowance? What next?" she said. "I never had a penny to myself when I was at home, and hard ado to get a bill paid. If it had not been for the butter money, I should never have had a gown to my back."

"But that would not do for me," said Lydia, with a toss of her head; and, indeed, to see her here with her airy figure, and her close-fitting habit, and the beautiful bay arching his fine neck in the background, and to suggest any connection with the butter money was a thing which only an elder sister without sentiment or sense of appropriateness could have done. The Duke's daughter did not look more unlike any such homely particulars; indeed, the Duke's daughter was not fit, as Joan said, proudly, to herself, to "hold the candle" to little Liddy Joscelyn.

"I don't know what's coming of it," Mrs. Selby said to her husband; "but, Phil, you and me will stand by that child, and see her out of it—will you, goodman?"

"That I will, my dear," Philip Selby said; "but Joscelyn has been doing not badly, and I dare say he can afford to let the little one have her fling. He has none to think of now but Liddy—and there's Uncle Henry's money."

This allusion always made Joan ready to cry, though she was not given to tears. "I would rather burn off my fingers than touch Uncle Henry's money," she said. "It will never be

me that will put my hand to it, and give my consent that yon poor lad is not coming home——”

“We must be reasonable, my dear,” Philip Selby said, mildly, “and the others will not be so patient. There is one thing you shall do if you like, Joan, and that is give your share to Liddy. It would never be any pleasure to you.”

Joan looked at her husband with a startled air. She was more matter of fact than he was, and the idea of giving over actual money to which she had a right, to anyone, was a thing which gave her somewhat of a shock. In their ordinary affairs she had to keep rather a tight hand upon her Phil, who was too easy about his money generally; but this was a complicated case, and puzzled her much.

“Give Liddy my share? You say true it would be little, little pleasure to me; but money is money, and there are some to come after us. It’s fine to be generous, but we must think upon justice. What’s Liddy’s is Liddy’s, and what’s mine is mine.”

It was from no want of kindness that Joan spoke: but she could not help it. It was as natural to close her hand over money, even when she hated it, as it was for others to throw it away.

“You will think better of it,” her husband said.

“Oh! it’s very likely I will think better of it. A woman cannot live with a prodigal like you without getting into ill ways. But I was always brought up to stick to my money; and I’ve you to look after as well. If you had not me to watch over you, you would give away the coat off your back.”

“For all that I’ve always had plenty,” said Selby, “and now more than plenty—with a good wife to take care of it and me.”

“You may say a wife to take care of you,” said Joan, “and how you ever kept a penny in your purse before you got her, is what I cannot tell; though, after all, when a man spends nothing upon himself, it’s easy keeping him going. But I’m one that sticks to my money. Give what you please else, but keep a grip upon your money, that’s always been my way.” Then she added, after a pause: “There will never be any question about that; when he knows it’s all left to him, it stands to reason that he will come back. Joscelyns have more regard to their own interest. They are not easy-going like you.”

“I wish I could think so,” Mr. Selby said.

And so the conversation ended. Uncle Henry had died not very long before, leaving behind him only an old will in which everything was left to Harry. The executors, who were both influential persons in Wyburgh, had advertised for him, or for news of him, but none had come; and the family generally had accepted this as a proof that Harry was dead—the family, all but the mother and Joan, who were both strenuous that nothing should be done, and no division made. Mrs. Joscelyn would have been overruled before now, but Joan was a stronger opponent, and she had the backing of her husband, of whom her brothers stood in a little awe; so that the division and distribution of Uncle Henry’s funds had been postponed. But this delay could not last: the elder brothers, who were men with families and in want of money, were certain to push for a settlement. They had no doubt, and not very much feeling, about the younger one who was lost. It had been entirely his own doing. He was a fool to have gone away like that, and compromised himself, and thrown away all his chances; but whatever happened to him in consequence was his own fault. If he had died, or if he was living in some obscure corner far away, were not they equally innocent? They had tried all they could to find him—the trustees were trying now. Old Pilgrim was advertising far and wide. If Harry were dead, or if he were so far away as to be out of reach of this call, it was not their fault; and they wanted no more than their share—but that share, there was no doubt, would be very convenient. Will’s sons were growing up, and Tom was taking in more land to his farm. To each of these, as to most people, a little money would have been of the greatest use. And it was all very well for Joan to talk who had neither chick nor child, and was in such easy circumstances; it was well for her to talk whose husband supplied her with everything, and who had no need of money; but they were men and knew better. They knew that men are not such fools as to stay away from their home as Harry had done. Nobody did such a thing, especially when advertisements were in the papers about them, and “something to their advantage” promised.

“Something to your advantage means money,” said Will. “ ’Twouldn’t be long I’d skulk away at the end of the world if

you were to give me the chance."

"He's never skulking away at the end of the world," said Tom. "If he went off at all, he went to California or thereabouts; and he'd have come home at the first scent of money. Bless you, we know our own breed;" and in this the other brother concurred. But the trustees held fast. They would not consent to any distribution of the money till Harry, if Harry still existed, had every chance of hearing of it. Privately Mr. Pilgrim had no objection to advance to Tom the money he wanted for that addition to his farm. There was solid security, and a feasible reason for borrowing. "There's but too much reason to think that your poor brother will never turn up again," the executor allowed; "but we must not go too fast." Alas! such is the weakness of human nature that the other Joscelyns ere long were not sure that they wished their poor brother to turn up again. The money would be so convenient! When is there a time that money is not convenient? And it could do him no good, poor fellow, if he was in his grave—which at the same time would be his own fault.

Very different, however, from the conclusions of Will and Joan were those which were held at the White House on this subject. Mrs. Joscelyn had never consented to that view. "He may have been led away," she said; "but do you think my boy would die and me not know? Oh, Liddy, my darling, many a time when you see me in low spirits, and ask me why, and I say it's nothing, that is what it is. It is borne in upon me that something is the matter with one of the boys. I've different feelings for each of them. People may laugh that don't understand, but you'll not laugh, my Liddy dear. I never said it to one of the others, but I may say it to you. If it's Ben, or if it's Huntley, I have a kind of a feeling—and as sure as letters come it's found to be true. There is always a something. Now it stands to reason that Harry should be the same, but as he never writes we never can tell. Sometimes I've been quite light-hearted for nothing at all, and I've said to myself, 'That's Harry: something good's happening to him.' Do you think it is natural that if he had *died*—oh, the Lord preserve him!—his mother would not know?"

“It would not be natural at all,” said Lydia, confidently; “he would come and stand by your bedside; I don’t feel the least doubt of that. But there is one thing I should like, mamma; I should like to go abroad. I feel sure that I should find him. I think that I should find him somewhere not very far away—or else in America: I have quite made up my mind to that.”

“You would scarcely know your brother if you saw him,” said Mrs. Joscelyn, shaking her head; “You were so little, my pet; and poor Harry must be changed in ten years.”

“Oh, I should know him,” cried Lydia. She held her pretty head high. She was very sure of most things. “After you are grown up you don’t change so much. He might not know me, but I should know him wherever I saw him. Ah, how delightful it would be to bring him back to you!” said Lydia, throwing her arms round her mother. The words and the arms were alike sweet. Nobody had given Mrs. Joscelyn this food for her heart in the old days.

“My darling!” she said; “but I see no chance for you to go abroad, far less—far less——”

“There is no telling what may happen,” said Liddy, “everybody, you know, goes abroad now.”

But Mrs. Joscelyn shook her head. She saw the practical difficulties here.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW COUSIN.

LYDIA had indeed as little prospect of going abroad as any girl could have. Her own kindred dreamt of no such indulgences, and she had no friends likely to suggest them. In these days people stayed still where their home was, and did not think of the continued changes and absences which make up our modern life—though the spirit of travel was beginning to be in the air, and younger spirits, even in the Fell-country, began to form dreams on the subject. Perhaps there never was a time when the idea of travelling was not attractive to the young, and when Italy was not a name to conjure withal. Lydia Joscelyn had read everything that fell into her hands all her life, even the Book of Beauty, which her brother-in-law, Philip Selby, presented to her with an inscription on the flyleaf, at Christmas. Half the stories, and half, almost all, the poetry there, bore reference to "the sunny South." She was resolute to go "abroad" some time or other; to live among the dark-eyed Antonios and lovely Rosalbas of romance. And there, she had made up her mind, she would find Harry, and bring him back to her mother. It was her dream. Whenever she had nothing else to do she thought of it, and represented to herself how she should find him, how he would try to conceal himself from her, and by what wonderful ruses and clever expedients she would discover his secret and prove him to be her brother. It is not to be supposed that there did not mingle in Lydia's dreams, visions of some other figure still more attractive than that of her brother, who having been five-and-twenty when he disappeared, ten years ago, was according to her calculation "quite old" by this time. It is not quite certain that she did not expect him to be grey-haired, and a little decrepit; but there would be some friend, some protector, some handsome young count, or even prince, who would have afforded the stranger hospitality, and in whom Liddy felt the possible hero of her life to be embodied. He was quite vague, except a pair of beautiful eyes; there was nothing at all about him else that she

was certain of; but those eyes looked out of the mists upon her, with every kind of tender and delightful look. He would help her, could any one doubt, to bring Harry home? and afterwards —perhaps—would ask for his reward. Such was the natural sequence of events. To do Lydia justice, however, this visionary prince was a secondary personage, only indulged in as a dream by way of recreation, after she had, in her thoughts, tracked Harry down, and got him at her mercy.

She had not much society or recreation at the White House. There were times, indeed, when, if it had been possible for a girl to have done so, Lydia would have had no objection to try, as Harry had done, what the society of the "Red Lion" could do for her; but to do her justice one trial would have been enough. She did what was quite as good, and more innocent; she ran off sometimes into the kitchen of the White House, and talked with the servants, and heard a hundred stories both of the past and present, and learned the countryside, so that she knew who everybody was, and their mothers, and their wives, and all that had happened to them. It was there, rather than from her mother and her sister, that she heard about Harry. The old cook remembered everything about him, from the time when he had cut his teeth. She had a recollection of that night when he had gone away, and still excused herself for not having gone to the rescue. "T' master was all about t' house, travelling up and down in his stocking-feet—was it my part to oop and open the door?" Thus her apologies accused her according to the proverb. The other women were younger, but they too had something to tell. And then Liddy would go back to the quietude of the parlour, where her mother was sitting in the same attitude, reading the same book. The parlour looked cheerful enough, but there was never any change in it, not half so much as in the kitchen, where some one was always moving about, and there was a perpetual flow of talk. Liddy never spent an evening away from home, except two or three times a year to her sister's, when there was "a party" prepared weeks in advance, and talked of for months after; or at Dr. Selby's in the village, where now and then there were entertainments of a homelier kind.

Young Selby, who had been Harry's friend and a frequenter of the "Red Lion," though he had not yet sown all his wild

oats, was a person of some importance in the village society. He was his father's assistant, and although it was said that he was far more interested in the fees than in the Doctor's patients, yet the fact that he was almost the only unmarried man in the neighbourhood gave him a certain importance. He was continually meeting Liddy when she went out to ride, and he looked very well on horseback, and gave her a great deal of good advice about the management of her horse. Perhaps but for that young Count in her dream, she would have got to understand what young Selby meant, though she scoffed at the adjective, and declared that he was not young, but as old as his father. He was the most entertaining person in the neighbourhood all the same, and the hero of Joan's parties when they came round, one in summer, one about Christmas. These entertainments were pretty much alike, whatever was the time of year. Garden parties were not known in those days. In summer the windows were open, in winter the shutters shut over them and the curtains drawn. In other ways they were very much alike. There was a great round game carried on at the round table in the centre of the room. The tea had been served in the dining-room, so it did not interfere with the evening's arrangements. Mr. Pilgrim's family from Wyburgh were among the guests, and all the clergymen round, and any other notability who was not too great for the occasion. Few of the guests indeed could be called county people; but there were a good many who visited with the county people, and is not that very nearly the same? Joan, though she was homely enough, held her head somewhat high at her own table. The Selbys were but of moderate pretensions, but she never forgot that she was a Joscelyn. And she kept Liddy by her, not allowing any indiscriminate flirtations, and distinctly discouraging young Selby, who was her cousin by marriage, but had never won her heart. Mrs. Joscelyn never came to her daughter's parties, though she was pleased to hear all about them; and it was only on condition that Liddy was to keep by her sister's side that she was permitted to go, "You needn't fear, mother, that she'll meet with anyone she oughtn't to meet with at my house," Joan said, and she took care of her accordingly. It troubled her mind on the occasion to which we are about to refer, that a young man had come with Mrs.

Pilgrim's party, about whom she knew nothing. He was nice-looking, but she had not even caught his name. She could not help thinking it a little wrong of Mrs. Pilgrim to bring a stranger to such an assembly. If he had been in love with one of her girls, Joan allowed that would have made a difference; but there was not the least appearance that he was in love with one of the Pilgrim girls. They were very assiduous in their attention to him, pointing out everybody and making conversation for the young man, who, without being rude or disagreeable, held himself just a little aloof from the company in general, as if he had come there solely because he was brought, and had no special interest in the proceedings. His head, for he was tall, appearing steadily over Mrs. Pilgrim's, at last began to irritate Mrs. Selby, who felt herself to be in every way a greater personage. She called her husband to her again and again to point out to him this wholly ineffective member of the party.

"What is he wanting here?" she said.

"My dear, what they all want—to enjoy himself," Philip Selby replied.

"Enjoy himself—do you call that enjoyment? He looks as if he had swallowed a poker; and is never trusted for a moment out of the charge of two or three Pilgrims. I don't think I'll ask these people again."

"They are very good sort of people, Joan; and considering the position in which they stood to your uncle Henry——"

"I'm very tired of Uncle Henry, Phil; besides, the girls didn't stand in any position—and I never authorised them to bring a strange young man."

"He will be after Amy or Tiny—or——"

"He's after none of them. Can't you see that with half an eye? It's my belief he's spying out for our Liddy. And what will mother say to me if I let her make acquaintance with a stranger? I said, 'You needn't fear, mother; she'll meet nobody you don't want her to meet at my house.' "

"Well, well," said Philip Selby, soothingly; "there's half the room between them; and nobody can say, my dear, that it's your fault."

“But that’s just what mother will do,” said Joan, with a puckered brow, as if her mother had been the most alarming critic in existence. She laughed at herself afterwards, and went to the table to superintend the round game, in which Liddy was deeply involved, seated by young Selby’s side. There was a strong sense of responsibility on Joan’s mind, or rather, she was a little cross. Her cakes had not come quite so well out of the oven as she intended, and Mrs. Doctor Selby had suggested a fault in the flavour of the tea. She went up to the players in a stormy state of mind. “Come, come,” she said, “you’re not sitting right. Liddy, you come over here and help little Ellen; all you strong ones are together. Raaf,” this was to young Selby, “stay where you are. I’ll put Miss Armstrong, she’s not playing at all, next to you.”

At this young Selby made a grimace, but Liddy tripped out of her place with all the alacrity possible, leaving her seat and devoting herself to little Ellen. She even gave her sister a smiling look of gratitude. “Thank you,” she said, in an undertone, “but it was rude, Joan.”

“Now you are a deal better arranged, and the game will go faster; there will be no cheating,” Joan said. She did not care a bit for being called rude. Raaf Selby should know that he was not good enough for a Joscelyn whatever his cousin might be. “One’s enough,” she said to herself. Besides, she wanted for Liddy something that should be out of the common altogether. She herself had done very well in marriage. She had got an excellent man, with enough to be comfortable upon. But she did not feel that she would be satisfied with only so much for her little sister. Not that Raaf Selby at his best could hold a candle to Phil. He was not much except when he was on a horse; then she was obliged to allow he looked pretty well. But a man can’t always be on a horse’s back, and anywhere else he was not worth looking twice at; very different from Phil. Even Phil, however, much as she respected her husband, was not the kind of person she wanted for Liddy. A fairy prince, if any such fantastic being had ever existed in Joan’s steady imagination, was the sort of person who ought to be Lydia’s fate; a fine young fellow (young to start with), and handsome, and well off, and with an air above the rest of the world. Unawares, as her eyes went round her guests, they fell once

more upon the tall young stranger behind Mrs. Pilgrim's chair. Was that the kind of man? Well, if he had not been an intruder, a stranger, a hanger-on of the Pilgrims' (though certainly not in love with either of the girls), that was the kind of person. She drew near Mrs. Pilgrim as this unsolicited thought arose in her mind. She was annoyed with herself to think that a person whom she did not know, and who had no right to be here, should thus have taken her eye.

"You are doing nothing, Amy," she said to the eldest Miss Pilgrim; "I'm sure they want you in the game yonder—or you might give us some music. You and your sister might play a duet. I like to see everybody employed."

"That is what I always say. You don't let the grass grow beneath your feet, Mrs. Selby, neither in work nor in pleasure. I was just saying to——" here she made signs with her thumb, pointing to the stranger, who was inspecting the party from his eminence, and talking languidly to one of the girls. "He was introduced to you," she added, in a whisper, "when he came in?"

"I should think," said Joan, "that nobody would bring a strange man into my house without introducing him to me. But your friend is doing nothing either," she said, with compunction, and a relenting of hospitality. "He has just got into a corner; and the evening's lost when you once do that."

"Oh, Mrs. Selby, he doesn't know anybody. We promised we would take care of him if he came with us," Amy Pilgrim said; and the object of Joan's mingled interest and indignation laughed a little, and said that he hoped Mrs. Selby would not trouble herself, that he was very well there.

Then Joan sought her husband again. "Look at them," she said, "all sitting in a corner with this strange man, as if they were above the rest of us: as if it was my lady Countess and her party from the Castle looking at the poor people's amusements. I will never ask these Pilgrims again."

"My dear, my dear," said Philip Selby, "they are very good sort of people; and if they have a strange man with them that knows nobody, in civility what can they do?"

"Then in civility it's your part to make him know somebody. Are you not the master of the house? Phil, you are lazy; you

are not doing your duty," Joan said, giving him a little push towards the corner in which the Pilgrims were enthroned. "If there is one thing I cannot put up with it is a knot of people in a company making their observations." She was quite excited by the Pilgrims and their guest—"for he is their guest, and not mine, though it's in my house," Joan said to herself. But alas for her consistency! Next time that she disengaged herself from the lesser crowd round the card-table, Joan saw a sight which displeased and satisfied her at the same time. The group of the Pilgrims had broken up; that is to say, "the strange man" had been led or had strayed away, and Amy and Tiny, having no longer anyone to take care of, and describe the company to, had sought refuge at the card-table, and were much merrier, if not so fine, as in their former position. That was all very well; but, on the other hand, there was Lydia, seated demurely in a chair apart, with Raaf Selby standing on one side of her like a thunder-cloud, and on the other, talking and making himself very agreeable, the Pilgrims' "strange young man."

"Raaf," said Joan, promptly, "you're as bad as Phil; you're taking no trouble. How is the game to go on without you to look after it, when it's well known that you are far the best player here?"

"I have been playing all the evening. I think I may be permitted a little rest," Raaf said, with a gloomy countenance. He was older and shorter than the strange young man, and not so tall, and there was a something about this personage which was above the level of young Selby. He could not tell what it was. He himself had more ornaments, he had a finer head of hair, and more shirt-front, but yet there was something. Lydia was replying very gravely to what the stranger said to her, but she gave him her whole attention, and the other girls had given evidence that they saw something in this new comer which was not in their familiar hero. He felt crestfallen, and he felt angry. He was not in a humour to be ordered about by Joan.

"Then sing us one of your songs," Mrs. Selby said. "Things are going a bit slow; I don't know what is the matter: or perhaps it's only me that's the matter. But I think things are going a bit slow."

“That’s my opinion, too,” Raaf said; “but I don’t think it’s my fault.”

Upon which Lydia suddenly struck in, “Never mind how they are going, Joan, Joan! Let the people alone; they will amuse themselves. Mr. Brotherton has never been among the Fells before, and he wants to learn about us and all our ways. We are the natives—a kind of savages, but friendly; and talking a kind of dialect that can be understood with a little trouble. Come, Joan, and listen. It is nice to hear so much good of ourselves.”

This she said a little vindictively, with a glance at her new companion which brought the colour to his face. He had opened the conversation unguardedly, as fine people are often in the habit of doing with each other, by talking about the natives and the barbarous people. It was a compliment, if Lydia had known, to the superior air of her dress, and her appearance generally; how it is that one individual looks *comme il faut*, and another does not, is the most difficult of questions. Lydia in fact was no way superior to the rest: but the stranger thought she was a young person of the world, somebody who was in society, storm-stayed like himself.

“Do not take me at such a disadvantage,” he said; “if I spoke nonsense, it was because I did not know any better. I have got a relation somewhere among these good natives. You cannot think I do anything but respect them when that is the case.”

“Do you always respect your relations?” Lydia asked. She was perfectly disposed to flirt, and had an instinctive knowledge how to do it, though she had so little practice—no practice, it may be said; for young Selby was not light enough in hand to give her any experience, and he was almost the only individual with whom it would have been possible to flirt.

“If you are looking for friends,” said Joan, with immediate interest, “we have been here in this country since before the memory of man, and, if anybody can help you, we should be able to do it. Who is it you want?” She took a vacant chair and sat down by her sister—partly to guard Lydia, partly because she was full of curiosity about the strange young man—and partly, also, because Joan was a great genealogist, and knew

everybody's descent and how their grandfathers had married—when they had any grandfathers, it must be said.

"They are people of my own name," said the stranger, "or, I should rather say—it is a distant cousin of my own name, who married somewhere hereabouts heaven knows how many years ago. My father recollects her well enough. She was a pretty girl in his day, and he told me to look her up; but as he had forgotten her present name (if she is still living), and she was married some forty years ago or more, I doubt if I am very likely to succeed."

"Your—own name?" said Joan, with a little confusion. In her own house, and in the capacity of hostess to the stranger, she felt that it was rude not to know his name. She gave a glance of appeal at Liddy, who was mischievous, and in no humour to throw any light on the subject.

"Joan will tell you," the girl said. "She knows everyone, and whom they married, and all their aunts and uncles. You have only to ask my sister."

More and mere confused grew Joan. She looked at Liddy with reproachful eyes; she even addressed a plaintive glance to Raaf, who did not understand her embarrassment, and for the moment was too angry to have helped if he had. "Of your—own name?" she said, faltering.

"Yes; forty years ago, or so, she was Lydia Brotherton."

"Why, it's mother!" said Joan, her countenance beaming. There was a victory over everybody, Pilgrims and all; while the young man, starting, turned round with amazed pleasure, and looked, not at Joan, who spoke, however, but at Lydia, who listened, looking up at him, as much astonished as he.

"Mother!" Lydia said, and her fair countenance brightened into smiles from which all the mischievous meaning had gone.

"Well, that's as easy a find as I ever heard of," cried Joan, "and how lucky you should have come here! Mother *will* be pleased! She has not seen any of her relations for years. She was an only child, so she had never any near friends. How pleased she will be, to be sure! The best thing you can do is to stay here all night, and ride over with Liddy to-morrow: she is going home to-morrow. Bless me, I think I'll go too, just to see mother so pleased!"

“It is a delightful discovery,” said young Brotherton. “How fortunate that I mentioned it now; my father charged me to find out—but I confess I had forgotten till this moment. How lucky I thought of it! I am afraid I must go home to-night with these good people who have been so kind to me; but I will come back in the morning. It is delightful to fall among kindred,” the young man said, looking at Lydia, whose face reflected all manner of pleasant sensations, surprises, a delightful sense of novelty and exhilaration. She had but few relatives, and a new cousin was delightful—especially a cousin so completely creditable, a gentleman, one about whom there could not be two opinions. The Pilgrims, who had been so proud of this “strange young man,” had altogether disappeared now, and Raaf was left entirely out of the little group of three, all so pleased with themselves and each other. Joan forgot even those duties which usually she performed with such devotion, leaving the round game and its players to themselves, and no longer thinking either of the duet of the Pilgrim girls, or Raaf’s song.

“I took the greatest notice of you from the moment you came in,” she said. “I cannot tell you how it was. It’s not that there is any family likeness, for I can’t see any. Liddy favours mother, and there’s not a feature alike in her and you; but all the same I took notice of you from the first. I didn’t catch your name, or it might have made me think—but there was something. I was more vexed than pleased with those Pilgrims; but all the same, when I caught sight of you——”

“It was kindred at first sight,” said the young man.

“That’s a new way of putting it,” said Joan, laughing; and it glanced through her mind that she had already thought, if he had not been with the Pilgrims, that this might be the right sort of man; and now it was clear that he did not belong to the Pilgrims. She gave a rapid glance from him to Lydia, and back again. As yet she had not the least idea who he was. She had never seen any of the Brotherton connections, and knew nothing about them. Mrs. Joscelyn had often told her children that she had no relations nearer than cousins, and with them even she had kept up no acquaintance. Her children were entirely in the dark about the family. They knew that there was

a Sir John who gave dignity to it; but that was all. Joan was very straightforward, but she did not like to plunge at once into details, and ask him who he was. But when she had talked a great deal to the new relative, and arranged the expedition to the White House to-morrow, she went back to Mrs. Pilgrim, who sat somewhat deserted in her corner, a little humiliated by the desertion of her "gentleman," with the most cheerful cordiality. "I did not catch the gentleman's name," she said, "when you brought him in; but what a good thing you brought him! He's a cousin of ours, and came here looking for mother; for her own friends live far away, and we've long lost sight of them. Of course," said Joan, with a little artifice, "he had no notion whose house he was coming to. There's always a great confusion in a family about your married name."

"Came here—looking for——? I thought he came looking for a place for the shooting," Mrs. Pilgrim said, confounded. She could scarcely allow herself to believe it. It had been a distinction to bring a new "gentleman," a person of such distinguished appearance, in her train; and to have him taken from her bodily, nay, carried off soul and body, so to speak, not indeed to her enemy's side, but at all events into another family, was hard to bear.

CHAPTER III.

CONFIDENCES.

THEY were still at breakfast at Heatonshaw next morning when the new cousin came to the door. He was on a good horse, which was a thing they all remarked at once, being learned in such matters—and looked handsomer in daylight than he had done at night. The household had been late on the previous evening—a party being a matter of such rare occurrence that it was considered only right to make the best of it, both in kitchen and parlour, and to bustle half the night "putting away." The whole company had dispersed at a little after eleven; but next morning there was as much license as if it had been the morning after a ball. And the household felt equally dissipated; everything is comparative; eleven o'clock at night was in Heatonshaw as bad as three or four in the morning at another place. So they were still around the breakfast table when young Brotherton rode up.

"That's not Pilgrim's horse," Mr. Selby said. "It must be out of his own stables; and he did not get that for nothing." Even Liddy got up from where she was sitting, a little out of the way, to peep at the new arrival. He came in a few minutes after whip in hand.

"You are not so early, Mrs. Selby, as I feared. I made a very early start lest you should be gone before I could get here."

"We are not so early as all that," said Joan, "and we're not used to have our home disturbed, and the house turned upside-down, as it was last night. I'm one that thinks it a duty, where people have a nice house and plenty to do with, to have your friends from time to time. But it's a great trouble both before and after. Not a servant in this house was in their bed till long past twelve o'clock at night; and, poor things, we could not be exacting this morning," Joan added, apologetically. "Liddy, if Mr. Brotherton will not take anything, we will, maybe, better get ready to go."

"Do not hurry for me," the young man said. He was quite at his ease talking to Philip Selby, whom it pleased his wife to see putting on mildly the air of a man of the world when any invasion came from that big place into the Fell-country. When they had gone to "put on their things," young Brotherton made himself very agreeable to the master of the house. He spoke of my "cousins" as if he had known them all his life: though all the time there was a look of semi-amusement on his face. He had stumbled into a new life without knowing anything about it. The servants up till after twelve, which was spoken of with bated breath as a wonderful interruption of rule; the master and mistress, who "were not exacting" after that tremendous vigil; the freshness and sweetness of the rural place, all produced a great effect upon him. He thought it a kind of Arcadia, an Arcadia dashed with reminiscences of hot supper, and some vagaries of homely fashion which struck Brotherton as more amusing than all the similar vagaries which he had come across before. When the ladies came down again, Joan attired in a bonnet which was more striking in its colours and composition than was common, ready to drive her phaeton to the White House, and Lydia in her riding habit, his pleasure in the sunshiny expedition he was about to make was as great as his amusement in finding himself a member of the primitive society, almost of the family, which was so simple and so kind. He watched the packing of the phaeton with laughing eyes. Lydia's box, containing her evening dress no doubt, was carefully fastened on behind, and in front, in the vacant seat, was a basket, in which there were a number of delicacies from the feast, which Mrs. Selby thought "Mother might like: or if she doesn't care for them herself, it will always be a pleasure to give them away," said Joan; "though you must not think, Mr. Brotherton, that I am forgetting our own poor folk. A little bit that is out of the way, that comes from the party—everybody likes that." He helped to lift the basket into the phaeton almost with reverence. The feast of last night became beautiful to him in this light. How many had he seen, much more delicate and costly, of which the fragments went to the dogs, nobody dreaming of the "poor folk!" Mr. Selby put Liddy upon her horse while the young stranger was helping with the basket, and this he felt to be a sacrifice on his part, in

consonance with the kind and homely charity that breathed about the place. Then Philip Selby promised to walk over to join his wife in the afternoon, and the party went off, Mrs. Selby in advance, talking cheerily to her horse, bidding him to get on, and not bother her with a whip. Liddy and the young man set out soberly together. They did not say much for the first mile or two. Now that they were alone together they were a little abashed by each other. He thought her the prettiest girl he had ever seen—which was by no means the case, for Liddy, though very pretty, was not a wonder of loveliness; and she thought him, with more reason, the finest gentleman that had ever came across her path. She asked herself how it was that he was so different from Raaf Selby? but could not make any reply. He was like nobody she had ever seen. "This is what a gentleman is, a real gentleman, the kind that goes to Court and sees the Queen; the kind that is in Parliament and rules the country; the kind that everybody tries to be like, and that Raaf Selby would fain be taken for—he!" Liddy said to herself; and she was abashed, and did not talk much to her companion. Indeed it was not till they were near the White House that she ventured to ask a question which had been long on her lips.

"Are you a member of Parliament, Mr. Brotherton?"

"Oh, no," he said, laughing; "it is my father you are thinking of. I have never attained that dignity. I ought to have told you more about myself before I asked admittance; but Mrs. Selby was so kind. I am a briefless barrister, if you know what that is."

"A lawyer with nothing to do," said Liddy; "one reads about them in books."

Young Brotherton laughed. "It is as good a definition as another," he said; "but sometimes it means only some one who has pretended to study for a profession which is all a pretence together, and never comes to anything. That is my case: and I have been wandering over all the world."

"In Italy?" asked Lydia, with eager eyes.

"Oh, yes. You are fond of Italy? I daresay we shall find we have sympathies on that point. My mother is a great devotee; she would live there all the year round if we would let her. I wonder which is your favourite spot."

“Oh!” cried Lydia, with all her heart in her voice, “I have no favourite spot; I only know it by name. Italy is where everything happens—all the stories are there: and besides,” she added, “I have a private reason too.”

He looked at her with some curiosity, and a great deal of interest. What could the private reason of a young girl be? “You have, perhaps,” he said, “friends there?”

Lydia shook her head. “If you are our cousin, Mr. Brotherton, and going to know all about us—”

“*If* I am your cousin! Do you think I am making a false claim, Miss Joscelyn?” he said.

“—then you will soon know about Harry,” said Lydia, going on in the same breath. “I have a brother who went away a great many years ago. We don’t know where he is, or anything about him; but I am sure if I could go abroad I should find him—that is why I am always so anxious to talk to anyone who has been there.”

“Where?” he said.

“Abroad.” Lydia said the word with all simplicity. “Abroad” meant everything to her. It meant the place in which Harry was, and where she should certainly find him if she got there. When she said “Italy” she meant much the same thing. Not Italy, of which she knew little, except by the stories in the “Book of Beauty;” but a vague and beautiful place in which everything that was wonderful happened, and in which it would be natural that this should happen too.

But Brotherton, whose knowledge was more precise, was puzzled. He did not know whether to follow out this line of conversation, which promised to become intimate, or to go back to subjects personal to himself. He had no right to inquire into the story of the family prodigal, he thought; but still, as the door had been opened to him, how was he to turn from it? “I have gone abroad since ever I can remember,” he said; “my mother, as I tell you, is never so happy in England as out of it. She is rather an invalid, and she cannot bear the cold. When I was a boy I scarcely knew where my home was.”

“Are there many of you?” asked Liddy, full of interest. She did not understand a small family, and a vision came on her of sisters, girls like herself, companions such as she had never

had; but this new idea was alarming as well as delightful, and she could not help fearing that young ladies who were equal to her new friend would think themselves above her; therefore it was almost a relief, though at the same time a disappointment, when he laughed and said, "I am all the daughters of my father's house, and all the brothers too,"—words which she thought she had heard somewhere else, but was not clear about. And then they went on again quite silently for a time, the wide valley all about them, the air breathing in their faces, the great world all to themselves. Joan, driving in her steady way, was round the next corner, well ahead, and there was nothing but these two figures stalking on in the sunshine, with their shadows behind them. Liddy felt that she did not care to talk. The sensation was sweet, and tranquil, and friendly, and furnished all that was required, without any talking at all. It is impossible to describe what an interruption it was, a kind of outrage upon the quiet, when, as they went round that next corner, skirting the hedgerows, they were suddenly met face to face by young Selby, on his big brown horse. Even Lydia, not too favourably disposed towards him, had been obliged to admit on former occasions that Raaf Selby looked well on his big horse. But to-day he positively offended her by his appearance. There is no class of men in the world so delightful, so helpful, so kind, so modest about their own merits, and of so much service to all the rest of the world, as doctors; but yet there is a compound of rudeness, jauntiness, pretension, and vulgarity to be found now and then in a country practitioner, which can nowhere else be paralleled. Raaf Selby was not always like this, nor was it at all the impression which he made upon the general mind, or even upon Liddy's, who, in other times, had considered him, as all the country did, "quite a gentleman." But when he met them now he had a red face (which was not his fault) and the air of having been up all night (which, if it had been true, would have been a virtue in him), and looked altogether like a rural dandy trying to be something which he was not.

"Hullo, Miss Liddy," he said, "I suppose you kept it up to all the hours last night after the rest of us were gone?"

"I don't know what there was to keep up," Liddy said, with an indignant blush; upon which young Selby laughed loudly.

"Ah, I daresay; but *I* know," he said, with an open look at Brotherton, a look full of insolence and jealousy—and he gave a great laugh. "I was out of it last night; but I haven't always been out of it," he said.

Lydia was a girl not at all disposed in her own person to submit to any impertinence, but she got alarmed when she saw the gathering clouds on her companion's face. "I think you are alluding to something I don't understand," she said, firmly, "but I need not ask what it is, to detain you. We have got to keep up with Joan. Did you see Joan? She has got the lead of us, and we are bound to make up to her now."

"Yes, I saw she had got judiciously out of hearing," said young Selby, with another laugh. "That's the first duty of a chaperon."

In this he meant no particular offence, but spoke with the rough bantering which was not disliked by ordinary country girls, just sharpened with jealousy and envy, and the sting of seeing how thoroughly harmonious and sympathetic Liddy and her new companion looked. As for Brotherton he kept apart as far as he could. Good manners in another generation would have suggested a use of his whip. Good manners now restrained him from taking any notice, though his blood boiled.

"I don't know about a chaperon's duties," Liddy said; "I think we must go on. Good morning, Mr. Selby," and they went on, leaving him in the middle of the road, staring. He could not help looking after them, though he did not like the sight. Two handsome young people, in complete accord and harmony, moving along together as if to music, with no noise nor boisterous gaiety, as would have been the case had Selby himself ridden home with Liddy after the party, but in perfect friendliness and union, as he thought.

"Good morning," he called after them, "and my congratulations to Joan upon her success last night."

He was so bitter that he could not forbear from sending this last shaft after them. Who was this fellow, that he should come in and spoil other people's chances? Selby recalled furiously to his recollection, incidents of a similar kind that he had known. A swell comes down, he pokes himself between a foolish lass and some honest man that likes her; and when he has turned

her head he rides away! The country gallant was aware that he had acted this fine part himself in a lower class, when he had merely laughed at the lass's credulity and the fury of the clown who was her true lover, but whom she could not endure after being courted by a gentleman; but he did not laugh when the case was his own. This swell, of course, would go away; but Liddy's head would be turned; and she was a girl who would have a good bit of money, besides being the prettiest girl in the county. Joscelyn had been making money of late, everybody said, and there was her Uncle Henry's money, which must be divided sooner or later; and all this to be put out of an honest suitor's reach by a young fellow who would not even take it himself, but only spoil the lass for a better man. This was what was rankling in Selby's heart as he rode away.

"Is Mr. Selby a relation of yours?" Brotherton asked.

"Only of Joan's—my sister's—husband. It is not bragging," said Lydia, with a little blush, yet a slight elevation of her head as well, "but we are very different from the Selbys, Mr. Brotherton. Many people thought Joan made a very poor marriage. I don't think so, for she is fond of Philip, and he is so good; but the Joscelyns are the oldest family—I don't speak out of vanity—the oldest family in the county. We used to be great people," said Liddy, laughing, but very serious all the same, "in the old days."

"I always knew," said Brotherton, "that it was an old name."

"Oh, there are all sorts of people who have old names; but we are the real people; if you stay long we will show you the old tower. There have been Joscelyns in it ever since there was any history at all."

She gave her head a slight fling backwards, and laughed again, half at herself—but yet Lydia meant every word she said. Young Brotherton, for his part, had been brought up in more enlightened circles, and would have thought of himself that he failed in that "sense of humour" which is the modern preservation from all absurdities, had he spoken of his family in this way. He held his tongue on the subject, and thought that he esteemed one name as much as another, and was no respector of persons; and he laughed in his heart at Lydia's brag, and admired, with an indulgent sense of superiority, to

see how this sentiment of family pride kindled her eyes and elevated her head. But all the same he was impressed by it. It produced its effect upon him, as it does upon every Englishman. He liked the boast, of which he did not fail to see the ludicrous side, and which his more cultivated taste would have entirely prevented him from putting forth in his own person—but in Liddy he liked it, and laughed, yet was more pleased with her and his connection with her. She carried it in her face, he thought, and in every movement of her untutored, yet graceful, carriage. It did not occur to him to think that homely Joan, soberly speeding along the road in her phaeton, had all the same advantages of blood.

Mrs. Joscelyn came out to meet them at the door. She liked to see her Liddy get down beaming, from her horse—the horse as handsome as herself, which Mrs. Joscelyn began for the first time to see the beauty of, now that her child was the rider. She did not know who the young man was, and she did not much care. Her mind had not been awakened to the matrimonial question, though, to tell the truth, no wild beast, no lion with a devouring maw, would have wakened so much alarm in Mrs. Joscelyn as the appearance of a lover for Liddy. That would have inferred the saddest fate for herself, the destruction of her present sweet life, and all the late happiness which had come to her in compensation for her troubles; but fortunately such an idea did not enter into her mind. It was a pleasant arrival. Joan, always active and bright, lifting down with her own hands her big basket, stood in the hall watching too the arrival of the young people, yet calling out to the groom some prudent suggestions about her own horse, which was being led away to the stables. She was as well informed about all the necessities of the stable as any of them, and took the deepest interest in the welfare of the animals, and she stepped forward to pat the fine neck of Liddy's steed as her mother got the young rider in her arms.

"Did you ever see a prettier creature?" she said to Brotherton, "and I would not say but there were two of them. But mother's just a fool about Liddy. She thinks there's nothing like her on the face of the earth. Mother, here's a relation come to see you," she added, turning round.

Mrs. Joscelyn gave a little cry. Brotherton was standing against the light, so that his features were not at first decipherable. She made a quick step forward, throwing out her hands, then grew suddenly pale.

"I don't know what I was thinking of," she said, faintly. "I am sure I beg your friend's pardon, Joan, and yours too."

"I see what you're thinking of, mother—but there's nothing in it," Joan said. "This is young Mr. Brotherton, who's come to the Fells asking for a cousin of his name that married here long ago. If it's not you, I don't know who it can be—and I've brought him to see you. It would be his father you knew, for he's but a young lad himself, as you can see."

"He's kindly welcome," Mrs. Joscelyn said, and he was brought into the parlour, and a great deal of family explanation was gone through. Mrs. Joscelyn had her pride of birth, as well as her daughter, and it had always been a secret pleasure to her to think that there was a Sir John in her family, who might turn up some time or other and balance the faded Joscelyn pretensions with a far more tangible living dignity. For her own part, she did not know anything about Sir John; but it gratified her mightily to think that he had remembered he had a cousin married in the Fell-country. "There could not be any —stranger that it would give me more pleasure to see," she said.

Young Brotherton, for his part, was delighted with his old cousin. It was from her, he perceived with pleasure, that Liddy had taken her willowy grace, and the refined and delicate features which bore little resemblance to those of Mrs. Selby. He was in a humour to be pleased with everything he saw. When the master of the house appeared, he thought him the model of an old North-country squire, rough, perhaps, but manly and full of character, as suited that strong-minded country. The plainness of manners and living, the woman-servant, not very adroit, that served the dinner—which was plainly dinner, and not luncheon—the atmosphere of farm and stables outside of the house, instead of park and pleasure-grounds, all struck him in the most favourable light. Liddy had thrown glamour in the young man's eyes; he saw them all through her. These, the unusual features in her surroundings,

appeared to him in the form of characteristic traits and country peculiarities, not as symptoms of a level of society lower than his own. It was all piquant, novel, delightful, and when he was asked to stay, a grace which Joscelyn put forth to the wonder and admiration of all the household, he accepted the invitation with eagerness. Mrs. Selby, for one, could not get over her astonishment.

"Nay, when father's asked him there's not a word to say," she cried. "Father! I would as soon have believed that you and me, Phil, would have been asked to take tea with the Queen."

CHAPTER IV.

BEGINNING.

BROTHERTON stayed a week at the White House—to the great mortification of the Pilgrims at Wyburgh, whose guest he had been. Nobody likes to have their visitors interfered with, or that a new acquaintance, whom they have themselves introduced and brought out, so to speak, in society, should desert them for a new circle. The girls and the mother were alike indignant, and the incident even had the effect of quickening the action of the father, and making him more impatient of the delays in respect to old Mr. Joscelyn's estate. But this had little effect upon the household at the White House, which for the moment was more happy and peaceful than perhaps it had ever been before. It was the beginning of one of those new chapters in life which revive the interest of the old story. Poor Mrs. Joscelyn had lived through many such, but they had been in most cases not of the pleasant, but painful kind. Her blood had been quickened in her veins, her heart driven into wild beating, as one crisis after another occurred in the family life. But now everything was changed. Lydia had become to her another self. She was not sure whether it was not herself again, glorified, elevated, made beautiful by present youth and infinite hope, which was always about her—moving with her step for step, talking, even thinking with her: the same thoughts rising to their lips. Between two sisters such a dual life is sweet; but to a mother it is a recompense for all the pangs of life, which are seldom few or small. She was not sure that it was not herself who spoke, and thought, and smiled in Lydia; but only a self far more firm, erect, and self-supporting than she had ever been. Lydia was not afraid of anything, and of Ralph Joscelyn least of all. This of itself made the strangest difference. It gave a flavour and fragrance to their mingled life. The mother felt herself more brave and more strong in her child; and now romance was arriving to her late in the same way. Ralph Joscelyn's wooing had been a rough one. During its course the pretty, drooping Lydia of those days had been

charmed by its very abruptness, and considered the peremptory passion a double compliment to herself, and to the power of love in subduing the strong. She had liked all the silly similes, the lion enchained, the giant deprived of his strength, and had believed in her foolish heart that her half-savage hero would be always in her toils—however rough to others, yet to herself the gentlest of the gentle. From this foolish dream there had been a summary awakening; and all her long life since had been calculated to convince the romantic woman that romance existed only in her dreams. But now another kind of awakening was coming to her. Youth had come back with its visions, and Arcadia, and love. The young man who was her own kith and kin (which of itself was sweet) was also, as becomes a young man, something of her own kind. He was full of poetry, and sympathy, and enthusiasm: it was not after her old-fashioned mode, but yet it was not the common strain of prose to which she had been accustomed. To see his eyes turn to her Lydia was to Mrs. Joscelyn like the revival of all her own maiden fancies; and the affectionate worship which he gave to herself completed the charm. Perhaps she was happier than Lydia in those early days of wooing. She saw the dawn of admiration and enthusiasm in his eyes, when Lydia herself thought of him only as a sort of advanced playfellow, a something new in his youth and pleasantness. Mrs. Joscelyn saw it all from the beginning; she felt from the beginning that it was written in heaven. It was half like a story which she was reading in snatches, or chapters, a single page at a time, always longing to go on with it, to see what the next step was to be, to anticipate the end.

As for Lydia herself, after the little excitement of the arrival, and the pleasure of bringing this new cousin to her mother—the most delightful present that could be thought—of she subsided sedately into her usual life, and treated him as a new companion, not doubting his interest in her simple occupations. His servant came over from Wyburgh with his baggage, which was a shock to the primitive household; but as the man was rather in charge of the horse than of his master, and that is a point on which princes and grooms may fraternise, the alarm was soon over. Brotherton wanted, it appeared, to find a shooting box, a little place in which he

could establish himself for the autumn. He explained that he was not rich enough to aspire to a Scotch moor, and modestly permitted it to be understood that the Duke's youngest son was his intimate friend, and that it was chiefly to be near him, and share his shootings, that he had chosen this part of the world. With the hospitality of primitive regions, Ralph Joscelyn would have taken him in permanently, and allowed him to be an inmate of the White House; but his wife retained enough of her old breeding to see that this expedient was undesirable, even though her heart stirred faintly with a hope that in that case the Duchess might have called, which is the chief sign of belonging to the aristocracy in these countries. The Duchess had never given her this sign of recognition, which had been a life-long smart to the poor lady. What did she care about such distinctions now? but yet for the sake of Liddy, she said to herself. To have her Lydia asked to a ball at the Castle would indeed be something to reward her for living, to make her feel that now she could die in peace. Mrs. Joscelyn did not say anything about this hope—for the disappointment, if nothing came of it, would have been very severe she felt, too great a trial to expose her child to: but she cherished it in her heart of hearts. And in the meantime they made every effort they could to find for this new relation the lodging he wanted. It was Lydia at last who suggested the old Birrenshead, the house which had been Uncle Harry's, but which had not been inhabited by anybody but Isaac Oliver in the memory of man.

"It is a very tumble-down old place," she said, deprecating, "but it is only two miles from here."

"Oh, if it is only two miles from here—!" cried the young man, eagerly. This was one of those elliptical forms of speech which he had begun to employ unawares, and which only Mrs. Joscelyn understood. She smiled within herself, but she said nothing; and it was agreed that he should walk there next day and see what accommodation the place possessed. The name of it threw a little tremor over Mrs. Joscelyn, although she had smiled. And next morning, when with great simplicity, and without any thought of harm, Lydia set out with the stranger to show him the way, she told him the circumstances in which the family stood, as she had before revealed to him the fact of her brother's disappearance. It did not occur either to Lydia or to

her mother that there was anything wrong, anything out of the common, in showing young Brotherton the way to Birrenshead. It seemed indeed of all things the simplest and most natural. She walked by his side as seriously as if the young man had been her own grandfather, with all the dignity of a princess in her own country. Nor did anyone in the village think it strange. They saw her pass, and wondered who it was who accompanied her over the bridge; but that was all.

"This is part of the property," she said gravely, "which was left to my poor brother whom I told you of. That is what made my mother look so serious. She does not like to hear about Uncle Henry's property. If we do not hear something of Harry soon, it will have to be divided, they say."

"And that is a grief to her?" Brotherton said, sympathetically.

"Oh, Mr. Brotherton, think! to be the heir of your own child—do you wonder that she cannot bear it? They say we should all have our share, father and mother too. *He* does not say much, but he thinks more than he says, and I am sure he would rather die than touch it. But my brothers," said Lydia, with a sigh, "my other brothers, don't think so. They want us to yield and consent that Harry is dead. But that is what I will never do."

Brotherton looked at her animated face with admiring interest. "You must have been very fond of this brother," he said.

"I scarcely remember him; but I am sure I should find him," cried Lydia. "You will say that is nonsense; but then I have been my mother's only companion all these years, and she will never be happy till she has seen Harry again. She has not had a very happy life; perhaps she has not always understood—and then no one has understood *her*. I must, I must get her some happiness before she dies!"

There was a glow of tender enthusiasm about the girl which touched her companion deeply. "I think," he said, "she is happy in you. It would be strange if she were not," he added, half under his breath.

This brought a wave of colour over Lydia's face. "She is a little more happy in me; but she will not be really happy till

she sees Harry."

"And if——"

"Don't say so, Mr. Brotherton, please! Don't think so even. Do you imagine if he had been —— that mother would not know? If I could only go abroad I know I should find him. Here is old Isaac Oliver, old Uncle Henry's man. He will let you see the place; and if he is cross you will not mind? He has been here so long that he thinks it is his own."

They were walking along the edge of a field of corn, on a little footpath so narrow that here and there they had to walk singly. The wind, which swept the tall rustling crop in waves like breath coming and going, blew the pale yellow heads against them as they went along in pleasant contact with this wealth and freshness of nature. The corn was still pale in tint, ripening slowly under the northern sun, with a glimmer of red poppies under the surface like the woven under-ground of some rich Indian stuff. As Lydia spoke, an old man became visible between the corn and the hedgerow, pushing his stooping shoulders along before him with a sidelong movement like a crab. His head was bent to one side, his footsteps shuffling. Ten years had told upon Isaac. He did not take off his hat when he saw Liddy approaching, such a ceremonial being scarcely necessary to the familiar intercourse of the country, but he nodded amiably, and made signs of welcome with his hand. As, however, the path widened a little just at that moment, and young Brotherton, making a quicker step, appeared suddenly at Lydia's side, Isaac, who had not seen him before, was greatly startled. He stopped short in his crab-like course to stare at the new comer. He fell back a step or two and screwed his stooping head aloft in a sidelong attitude. Then he gave vent to a shrill, prolonged "E-eh!" which penetrated the air like a skewer. "So he's coomed back," the old man said.

"Who has come back?" said Lydia, startled and eager.

"Lord, Master, give us a grip o' your hand. You're no Master Harry now, you're master's sel'. T' ould Master left it all to ye, as I said he would if you'd let him be; but you never would listen, nor think on——" When he had got so far, old Isaac paused. His head had sunk a little from its first energy of

motion, but he kept one eye screwed up and shining, and his mouth twisted upward at one corner. Here, however, he paused, and a cloud came over his face. “Miss Liddy,” he said, reproachfully, “you might have tellt me it wasn’t him.”

“Who did you think it was, Isaac? It is Mr. Brotherton, a ——distant cousin. Did you think——? Oh, tell me, is he like, is he like——?”

The old man recovered himself gradually. He gave a grin which seemed to twist upwards from his mouth to his little twinkling eyes.

“Not a feature in his face,” he said, with a growl of angry laughter, “not a bit, no more nor I’m like. I’m just an old fool. I take anyone for him. Ne’er a soul comes down t’ Fells but I say, it’s him, as if he was coming from t’ skies. A fine joke that; and him t’ prodigal son, a good joke; to look for him from t’ skies! He should come from t’ other place, Miss Liddy, up from t’ ground.”

“But he was no prodigal,” said Liddy, indignantly. “He did not go away for any harm, Isaac, you know that!”

“I know a’ about it, a’ about it,” said the old man. “Step forward, Sir, into the light. If you keep there dangling behind her—Lord! but I’ll think it’s you after a’.”

“You must be like Harry,” cried Lydia, turning round quickly upon her companion. “When she saw you first, my mother started too.”

“He’s about the same age,” said old Isaac, “and tallness—no more, not a hair. Don’t you speak to me, Miss Liddy. If I dunnot know him, who does? I brought him up, though you wouldn’t think it. I put him on a pony the first time. I gied him most of his lessons, out of t’ school. But this isn’t him,” the old man said indignantly, “it’s not him, I tell ye. Don’t you think to impose on me.”

“Isaac,” said Lydia, “will you let Mr. Brotherton see the house? He wants to live here for a little. Mother thinks you might put in a little furniture, and make him comfortable.”

“Com—fortable!” said the old man, prolonging the word with a half-laughing, half-angry cry; “and it was your mother said it? If he likes t’ bide with the bats and the rats, he may be

com—fortable. There's been nobody else there as long's I mind. Do you mean," he added, suddenly screwing up his eye into a little spark of red fire, "that she's consented, and Miss Joan, and you? I'll not b'lieve it; and who," he asked fiercely, "is to get this share?"

"You must not speak so to me. We have not consented, and I never will consent. But this gentleman does not understand what we are talking about," said Lydia; "take him into the house and show him what rooms there are, and I will go and see your wife."

"Oh, ay," said Isaac, "speak to t' missis, you'll find her in a fine way. If she hadna gotten t' meekest man, next to Job, that was ever in this ill world—a pictur and a pattern. But you'll see for yourself, Miss Liddy; you can drop a word about t' gentleman to soothen her down. Come this way round, come this way round, it's the best way."

Old Isaac had turned in front of them, and was creeping along by the side of the path scarcely so high as the corn, his battered old hat about the same height as the yellow ears. When the cornfield ended they came out abruptly upon a grey old house, surrounded by a small rough square of grass, in which were some fine trees. The house looked as if it had been forgotten there, like an old plough. It had a square, respectable portico, with a pediment above it, and rows of windows chiefly broken, the lower ones closed with shutters which were falling to pieces. A huge elm-tree stood up at one corner, throwing its shadow over half the house; behind it were traces of the trees of an orchard; but the fields all round had encroached on the place, potatoes were growing within a stone's throw of the great door, and everything bearing witness of its deposition and reduction from a human centre of life to a mere wreck and encumbrance on the earth.

"Ay, ay," said old Isaac, shaking his head, "they'd just like to pull it down and no leave one stone on another, like Jerusalem in t' Bible; but the walls is good, and the woodwork's good, and it would last his time and mine—and far more if Mr. Harry would come home, as he ought."

"Then you think he'll come home," said young Brotherton, not knowing what to say.

“Wha said he wasna coming home, why should he no come home?” said Isaac, screwing up his eye once more into a red spark of angry light. “Them that say so know nothing about it, I can tell you that, Master. Them that are of that opinion have nothing to found it on. Who understands Master Harry like me, unless, maybe, it was his mother? Well, his mother and me, we’re both expecting him. That should be an answer, except to them that arguys just for the sake of arguyment,” the old man said, fiercely. “Will you come in and see the house?”

To Brotherton it had begun to seem, by this time, as if the house and all about it, the very skies overhead, had darkened. He did not quite know at first what was the cause. It was some cloud that had come over the sun; or was there some obscurity about the house, some shadow of fate, which darkened the skies at midday? It seemed to him suddenly that nothing could be more dreary than the aspect of the place altogether, though before Lydia disappeared round the broken bit of garden-wall, it had seemed so inviting and desirable. But he did not ask himself if Lydia’s disappearance had anything to do with this sudden change: all he said to himself was, “it is only two miles from the White House,” and, strengthened by this reminder, he went on with courage into the dark portal. It was, as Liddy had said, a very tumble-down house. There was a dirty and ragged carpet on the floor, sometimes moving in waves when the windows were opened; a table stood in the centre of the largest sitting-room, and the chairs were put round, as if some sober party had just risen from them. This was on the first floor, in the drawing-room of the house; behind it were some bed-rooms scarcely more inviting; the dust rose in clouds when the air was admitted, the furniture seemed dropping to pieces. Brotherton stood at the door of one room after another, with a blank stare at them. They had but one quality; they were within two miles of the White House.

“And do you think they will suit you?” Lydia asked, coming back to him when his inspection was over.

She had not been in dusty places like those which he had just left, but came round the corner of the garden wall, looking so fresh and bright, that somehow that cloud over the sun disappeared in a moment, and the whole landscape brightened,

and the dust went out of his throat. He had been feeling half choked, but he felt so no more. He had thought that they would not do at all; but now a sort of heavenly suitability seemed to come to them all at once, and it appeared to him in a moment that, if he could have the choice of all sorts of lodgings, these dreary rooms were those which would suit him best.

"They will do beautifully," he said, with much cheerfulness. "So far as I can see they are the very thing I want; and then so near the White House! What is two miles? I shall be able to walk over constantly—if you will let me," he added, in a softer tone.

"Of course we will let you," said Lydia, sedately. "We shall miss you so much that we shall be very happy to have you whenever you like. But were they not in very bad order? the furniture dreadful? and everything dropping to pieces?"

"I did not see it," said young Brotherton, stoutly. "They were, I daresay, a little dusty; when a place has been uninhabited for a long time—I suppose nobody has lived there lately?"

"Nobody has lived there since I can remember—oh, and not for a long time before. Even Uncle Henry never lived there. I think I must have been silly to bring you, for it can't be fit to live in now I think of it; and while matters are undecided about poor Harry they will not do anything. Oh, I am afraid mother and I were hasty in thinking it would do."

"On the contrary," said young Brotherton, feeling in the enthusiasm of the moment as if it had been a palace which he had just quitted, "it is everything I require. Perhaps," he added, modestly, as if by an afterthought, "they would not mind—sweeping it out."

"I spoke to Jane, that is Isaac's wife. Isaac is a very funny old man, but he is frightened for his wife. She keeps him right. And she will scrub it, and sweep it, and dust it, and make it as clean as a new pin. Oh, you may be quite sure of that. And then, at first, you can take your meals with us, the White House is so near—only two miles, what is that?"

"Nothing," said Brotherton, with enthusiasm. Then he added, "I must not tire you out. I shall do very well. I can get everything I want here."

"Oh, no; until you get used to Jane, and accustomed to the cooking, and all that—I know these things are of consequence to gentlemen," Lydia said, with a soft smile of feminine superiority, "you must come and take your meals at the White House. But Jane Oliver is quite a good cook," she added, encouragingly. Brotherton's heart had sunk within him at the mention of Jane's cookery. The cookery could not but be a terrible necessity in such a place. But he scorned to show any such weakness.

"I am sure she is," he said, cheerfully. "I feel certain that I shall be in the best of quarters. Is there a ghost?"

"A ghost! why should there be a ghost?" cried Lydia, in surprise. Then she added, with a little dignity, "There was never anybody injured or betrayed in a house that belonged to the Joscelyns. So there can't be any ghosts."

"You reprove me justly," he said, feeling his little joke very small indeed in the presence of Lydia's youthful dignity. "It was a vulgar, slangy sort of suggestion. I see the folly of it now."

"No folly," said Lydia, from her pedestal; "you did not know."

And then they went on together, once more very sedately, as if they had been a sober, middle-aged couple, the corn rustling and nodding towards them, the soft wind sweeping over it, bowing its yellow plumes in soft successions of movement, the whole air full of a happy rustle and sweep of sound, the sound of the atmosphere, the subdued hum of summer happiness common to all the world. He made up his mind that the landscape, all full of young trees and northern colours, and the moment, in which there was no positive bliss indeed, but only a dreary, dusty lodging, and the prospect of being cared for by a ploughman's wife—were perfect, and that life could not hold anything sweeter. Lydia went on talking of the chance that perhaps Mr. Pilgrim, the executor, would "do something" when he heard of a tenant, until it gradually began to appear to the young man as if she were talking of improving heaven. What could be equal in all the world to a place which was within reach of the White House? "But if your brother were to

come home suddenly," he said, "what would become of me? Should I be turned out?"

"Harry!" cried Lydia, with glistening eyes; and then she said, turning to him (he was behind her for the moment, the path was so narrow), "Harry! Oh, how kind you are! To speak like that is to give one courage; for you really, really think, Mr. Brotherton, don't you, now you have heard all about him, that he must come home?"

CHAPTER V.

THE DUCHESS.

WHEN it was known that the old house at Birrenshead had been taken by a gentleman for shooting quarters, the astonishment of the neighbourhood was great. The house was known to be in a most dilapidated condition, and the rooms had not been occupied in the memory of man. The village took the most anxious interest in the rash gentleman, and inquired, with much solicitude, "what motive" he could have for burying himself in such a place? Was it for the sake of Lydia Joscelyn? But then he had been much nearer Lydia Joscelyn at the White House, where the family no doubt would gladly have kept him had he wished it; or was it on the other hand to get away from Lydia, who had been devoting herself too unreasonably to him? Both these opinions had their supporters; but as it was impossible to prove either, the question remained a burning question for half of the time that young Brotherton lived at Birrenshead, where he soon became well-known. He was quite a gentleman, there could be no doubt of that. He had a couple of horses and a man, and money did not seem to be wanting with him. The neighbours soon found out all that was to be found, which was not saying much —that he was Sir John Brotherton's son, and a great friend of Lord Eldred, the second son at the Castle; and that he was actually, on his own showing, second cousin to Mrs. Joscelyn. Had she said it the neighbourhood might have doubted; but he said it himself; and he was constantly at the White House. Scarcely a day elapsed that he was not there on one pretence or another, and sometimes Lord Eldred would go with him, having his dinner there, the gossips said, and sometimes tea, and conducting himself as if the Joscelyns were his equals. This opened a new and exciting question, which was discussed warmly by the different sides, each maintaining its own view. What would the Duchess do? She had excluded the Joscelyns from the list of county gentry when they were first married, asking, with a contempt for blood, which was most

unbecoming in the local head of society (and the Joscelyns *had* blood—it was the one thing that could not be denied to them), "Why should I call upon people who have nothing to recommend them but that their grandfathers were gentlemen?" This leaving out of the family altogether had been very marked; when you consider that the Selbys, who were nobodies, had cards from the Duchess because the old Doctor was their father! Mrs. Joscelyn had not said anything about it, but she had felt the sting all her life. And she was not less interested than the rest of the world in the question—What would the Duchess now do? This problem was not solved for several weeks; but at last, just before the great ball which absorbed the whole county in consideration of what to wear, and how to appear to the best advantage, the village was convulsed by the appearance of the ducal liveries. It was an October day, with frost in the air, so clear that you could see to any distance, from one end of the dale to the other. The Selbys, called to their windows by the roll of wheels and the jingle of the horses' feet and furniture, and the flood of blue and yellow in the air, rushed to the vicarage to rouse their friends to the seriousness of the crisis. "The Duchess is going to call," they cried, rushing in open-mouthed. "The Duchess *has* called," cried the others, who were all grouped round a telescope which they had brought to bear on the door of the White House. There the carriage was undoubtedly standing, delayed an unreasonable time at the door—which both the families felt, whatever reason they might have, showed bad taste on the part of the Joscelyns. Then the footman, a splendid apparition all plush and powder, was seen to make his way a second time up the narrow path, between the two grass plots, bordered all round with chrysanthemums. The watchers had a moral certainty that Mrs. Joscelyn was not out. Had she denied herself to the Duchess? A thrill of sensation passed through the minds of the observers—of mingled stupefaction and excitement. To say "not at home" was a moral offence upon which people were hard in that primitive community; but to have the courage to say it, was something which overawed them. And to the Duchess! Imagination could scarcely go further.

When Mrs. Joscelyn perceived, with a sudden rush of blood from her heart to her head, that the honour she had been looking for all her life had actually happened to her, she rose up precipitately and fled, throwing a shawl over her head. This was partly fright, and partly resentment, and partly it was a wise impulse. The family parlour and Betty in her white apron to open the door, were not accessories which would impress the Duchess, and Mrs. Joscelyn had not much confidence in the refinement of her own appearance. She was not so bold a sinner, however, as to sit still and instruct her innocent maid to say, "Not at home," a task to which Betty, knowing it was not true, would not have been equal. So she went out, meeting Betty trembling with excitement, tying on her clean apron as she came. "It's the Duchess, missis!" Betty said, overwhelmed. "You will say, Not at home," said Mrs. Joscelyn breathless. "I am going out, you see." "Going out! Missis! and the Duchess at the door." Betty thought it was incredible. Mrs. Joscelyn, however, deaf to remonstrance, though herself trembling with excitement, ran out upon the Fell side, and enjoyed the spectacle. She was an Englishwoman, and it is not to be supposed that the sight of the blue and yellow liveries, and the carriage with a Duchess in it, did not touch the highest feelings in her nature; and to have spoken to that Duchess, to have realised the full glory of the event, would have been sweet—but it would have been alarming too, and discretion is the better part of valour. She stood upon the rising ground with her heart beating, and gazed at the wonderful sight, visions rising before her of the ball, and the invitation for Lydia which would be sure to follow, and the ball dress, and all the excitement of so great an occasion. She breathed more freely when the great lady drove away, and she was delivered from the fear of being sent for, and compelled to come back by some dreadful mistake on Betty's part. But Betty too had risen to the occasion. She had said trembling, but resolute, "Not at home, Sir," to the fine footman—arguing with herself that it was quite true that Missis wasn't at home, for hadn't she seen her, with her own eyes, go out? Betty went out too to ease her Mistress's mind, when the incident was over, carrying the cards in her apron. She did not like to touch them with her hands, though she had scrubbed those hands crimson only a

few minutes before. “T’ gentleman said as Her Grace was sorry,” said Betty, her eyes almost out of her head with staring. “T’ gentleman” was the biggest part of the event to her; she had never in her life seen anything so grand so near. Her ruddy cheeks were crimson, and her liberal bosom palpitated. And Mrs. Joscelyn could not herself restrain a tremor when she took these sacred bits of pasteboard in her hand.

The excitement about the ball, however, was not all pleasurable. The invitation came a few days after, and at first Lydia, who had a great spirit, altogether refused to avail herself of it. She was in the parlour with her mother, arranging bunches of the ruddy leaves and rowan berries which made the country gay, in the big old-fashioned china vases which stood on the mantel-piece, and which were worth their weight in silver, though nobody was aware of it. Lionel Brotherton had come in on his way back from a short day’s shooting. He had brought some game, which lay in a shallow basket on the table, the mingled colours of the plumage harmonizing well with the warm autumnal tints of leaves and fruit. The whole culminated in the girl’s glowing and animated countenance as she stood by the table, twisting her garlands of leaves and throwing them about with a freshness of gesture and energy which only a touch of indignation could have given. She had put a cluster of the red berries into her hair, with a few long serrated leaves, marked with brilliant red upon the green; and thus crowned was like an autumnal nymph, not mature enough for a Ceres, but yet warm with the northern glow of colour and life. “Why should I go?” she was saying. “What is it to me, mother? If the Duchess chooses to fling an invitation at us after all these years, are you and I to seize upon it as if we cared? I don’t care. I don’t want it. I should not like to go—Of course I may be forced,” cried Lydia. “I may have to do it, for all the several reasons which people always bring up; but listen, mother, this is the truth, I should not like to go.”

“My dearest,” said her mother, joining her hands in that instinctive movement of entreaty which was her natural attitude. Nobody could admire Liddy as her mother did, not even the young man who sat a little apart gazing at her, and thinking all kinds of foolish thoughts. Mrs. Joscelyn saw in her the perfection of herself, the accomplished ideal to which she

had been striving all her life. She herself would never have had the strength of mind to look so, and speak so—but Liddy had; and even while she remonstrated and entreated, she approved. “My pet, that is just your fancy. Why shouldn’t you like it? You have never been at a ball.”

“That is just the reason,” cried Lydia; “when I do go I want to enjoy it. I want to be as good as anybody there. I want people to think as much of me as anyone, and ask me to dance, and think my dress pretty, and like me altogether. I won’t go anywhere unless I can be sure of that.”

“And so you will, my darling,” Mrs. Joscelyn said. Brotherton did not venture to speak, but he put a great deal into his eyes. Lydia indeed did not look at him, and so could not perceive this, but perhaps she had some notion of it all the same. Her colour increased the least in the world, taking a glow from the red leaves in her hands and the red berries in her hair.

“No, mother, I know how it will be. We shall come in at the end with the Selbys, and the Armstrongs and the Pilgrims, and —oh, a great many more. There will not be any want of companions in distress. We will all keep together at one end of the room, and our hearts will all beat if anybody comes near us. If it is an officer from Carlisle, or if it is Mr. Brotherton, or still more if it should happen to be Lord Eldred. Oh my!” cried Lydia with momentary mimicry, clasping her hands, “We shall look at him as if we could eat him, and almost hold out our hands like the children at school, and cry, me, me! If you think that is nice for nice girls to have to do, mother, I don’t,” said Lydia with a sudden vivid flush. “So I don’t want to go.”

“But that is impossible,” Brotherton cried.

“No, not at all impossible; it is just what happens, when people ask you because they cannot help it; of course they don’t take any trouble about you; and of course the gentlemen prefer to dance with girls they know, and who belong to their own class, instead of seeking out poor little Miss Selbys and Miss Armstrongs, and Miss Jos—No,” said Liddy vehemently, “a Miss Joscelyn has never been in it, and, mother, if you please, never will be. I don’t say,” she added, calming down,

“that it is anyone’s fault. I feel quite sure for one that you would ask me to dance, Mr. Brotherton.”

“Do you really—think so? The time has come,” said the young man, hurried and nervous, but with a laugh of excitement, “to set one matter to rights. Mr. Brotherton will certainly not ask you to dance, Miss Joscelyn. I have a right to be Cousin Lionel, and I will be so. I am not to be defrauded of my birthright any longer. You talk of the Duchess, but you are far more haughty than the Duchess. Take the beam out of your own eye, Cousin Lydia, and then you will see more clearly to take the mote out of the Duchess’s. Mrs. Joscelyn, am I not right?”

Mrs. Joscelyn looked at them both with a pleasure that almost went the length of tears. In the sudden union which her glance from one to another made between them, the young man and the young woman blushed—blushed for nothing at all, for sympathy, for fellow-feeling, and a little for pleasure. “Yes, yes, my dear,” Mrs. Joscelyn said, “yes, yes, I think he is right; and your cousin—your cousin would make a difference. And then, my darling, if you do not go, people will never know that you were invited, Liddy; and that means—”

“That we are not county people; and we are not county people. We need not keep up any pretences before—before Cousin Lionel,” said Lydia with a blush and a smile, and a curtsey to the young man, who looked on with a sense of enchantment. “Uncle Henry was one of them; but not we. We are Joscelyns, however,” she cried, tossing her head upwards with a proud movement, “and if blood means anything, that means something better than her Grace.”

“But why do you say *if* blood means anything, Liddy?” said her mother, “of course it means everything, my love.”

Then Lydia looked straight at the two people before her; both so admiring, the one more foolish than the other—and the meaning changed in her face. She sighed; her pretty head, crowned with the glowing red berries and brilliant leaves, drooped a little. “Because I don’t believe it does,” she said.

Then there was an outcry, “Oh, Liddy, Liddy!” of horror and alarm from her mother, who had borne everything else, poor soul, but who could not bear any attack upon her last

stronghold, her pride of family. It had always been a comfort to her in all her troubles, and specially in those social ones which her greater neighbours had made her suffer—that, to everybody who knew, the Joscelyns were far superior even to her Grace, who had been nobody. To hear her favourite child express this scepticism was terrible. Even Brotherton sustained a slight shock of disappointment. He would have preferred on the whole that Lydia should have felt a romantic certainty of the claims of "blood;" but since it was not so, he made a virtue out of her incredulity, and looked at her with a smile and little nod of sympathy. Lydia, however, was wise enough to make no answer to her mother's exclamation of horror.

"If I went," she said with great decision, "you would have to go too; I will not go with anybody but you."

"Me, Liddy?" Mrs. Joscelyn cried in alarm.

"And my father. I will go with you both, or not at all," Lydia gave out as her final deliverance; and then she went out of the room, carrying the remains of her autumnal wreaths, and paying no attention to the pathos of her mother's protestations. Mrs. Joscelyn could do nothing but turn to her young kinsman, and appeal to his impartial judgment.

"What should I do among all those fine people? I have not been out in the evening nor worn a low dress (in those days 'low dresses' were exacted even from old ladies by the stern fiat of fashion) since that child was born. You must speak to her, you must speak to her, Mr. Brotherton—I mean Lionel. Oh, yes, I want her to go; but me! and Ralph. Ralph has never gone among them, I think he has done himself injustice; but it is too late to change now. You must tell her it would never do."

"But you would not like her to go with the Selbys or the Pilgrims—people not fit to be in the same room with her. *I* should not like that," young Brotherton said. And Mrs. Joscelyn's pale countenance coloured with pleasure to think that her child should be so determined, and her young cousin so approving. This sudden appreciation of herself was late, but yet it was pleasant, though also embarrassing. And after this there were continual remonstrances and arguments, Liddy holding to her point, her mother fighting desperately against it. As for Ralph Joscelyn, he separated himself at once from the

feminine part of his household. “Go to what tomfoolery you like,” he said, with his usual courtesy, “but don’t ask me; I’ve nought to do with such nonsense.” Mrs. Joscelyn was then driven to the end of her forces. She was disturbed too about Lydia’s ball-dress, which Joan would fain have gone to Carlisle for and been “done with,” in her energetic way; but the mother had no confidence in Joan’s taste. And for her part, though Joan had behaved generously it cannot be denied that she felt her exclusion from the splendour which ought to have belonged to her as the eldest Miss Joscelyn, but which her husband’s position excluded her from. The other Selbys even, who went on sufferance as the Doctor’s family, made it more hard for Joan.

“My husband is a deal better a man than Raaf Selby will ever be,” she said with some indignation to Brotherton, who heard the complaints on all sides, “and nobody that knows them would ever hesitate between them. But Heatonshaw is only a little place, and we’ve nothing at all to do with the great folks at the Castle. Of course it is me Liddy ought to go with; and it is a joke to think that Raaf Selby’s family should all be going, and not me. But I will never forgive mother if she sends Liddy with them, and does not go herself to take care of the child. Mother’s a strange woman. She was never happy till the Duchess called, and now she has got her desire she’ll not hear any more of it. I like consistency. Now I don’t care a snap of my fingers for the Duchess; but if she invited me,” said Joan, magnanimously, “I’d go.” Here she paused, but a minute or two after resumed with great gravity. “A woman takes her husband’s rank, whatever that may be. I am not ashamed of my husband because he does not take her Grace’s eye.” And here Joan laughed again, but with an uneasy laughter. She was sore on the subject, and perhaps if she had been entrusted with the buying of the dress the result might have been disastrous. Mrs. Joscelyn would not trust Joan, but in her own timid person hesitated and doubted what to do, when Brotherton, the confidant of all their troubles, came to her aid. He proposed that his mother, who was in town (much the best place for everything of the kind; the place where fashion reigned, and ball-dresses were much more plentiful than blackberries), should get the dress.

“Which will be of no use,” said Lydia, sternly, “without a dress for my mother too.” At this Mrs. Joscelyn was ready to cry, not knowing what else to do. Her hands stole towards each other with the nervous gesture of old, when Brotherton again whispered in her ear a message of hope.

“My mother is coming—leave it to me,” he said. She had almost thrown her arms round his neck in her intense relief and thankfulness.

And this was how it was that Lydia Joscelyn made such a sensation at the ball. Had she gone with the Selbys, all would have happened precisely as she predicted. She would have stood among them, in a white gown bought at Carlisle, at the bottom of the room, surrounded by a little crowd of other obscure young ladies, left out in the cold, tremulously eager to secure partners, and taken notice of by nobody. There she would have stayed, pretending to be amused, till old Mrs. Selby gave the signal, and gathered her little flock around her, tired with standing, sick with waiting, cross, and humiliated and mortified, consoled only by the thought that the ball at the Castle would be a thing to talk of long after people had forgotten to ask, “Did you dance much?” But for Lydia was reserved a more splendid fate. She had a dress which everybody at the White House thought would have been fit for a princess, and she went with Lady Brotherton, with whom she stayed at the Wyburgh Hotel afterwards, and whose presence introduced her into the selectest circle, and the company of all the first people. Lady Althea went so far as to admire her dress, and Lord Eldred danced with her so often that his mother was alarmed, but yet could not do anything but smile upon the stranger whom Lady Brotherton patronised and introduced as “my young cousin.” Lady Brotherton was a fanciful and romantic woman, and she seized at once upon the idea that Lydia was the object of a romantic attachment on the part of Lord Eldred. Perhaps had she known that her own son was in any danger from the same quarter, it might have checked her enthusiasm. But Lionel did not feel bound in honour to give her any information on that point. She was seized with an enthusiastic friendship for Liddy before they had been half an hour together, and as she was a graceful, sentimental woman, with very tender and engaging manners,

Lydia was not wanting in her response. Then Sir John, who was much older than his wife, added his contribution to the rising warmth of the relationship by vowing continually that this was the Cousin Lydia of his youth over again. The fact was that he had seen his cousin Lydia only once or twice in her youth, but he was old enough to have forgotten that, and nobody knew it was a mistake. So all things concurred in the growth of this sudden devotion, and before Lydia returned to her mother she was invited to accompany the Brothertons abroad, and had become, so to speak, one of the family.

"I will come and see your mother," Lady Brotherton said, "and I will take no denial;" while Sir John patted her on the shoulder, and told her with his toothless jaws, that she was "sh'image of" her mother. Lydia came home with her head turned, but faithful, among all these new crotchets of other people's, to her own.

"You are not to say no, mother dear; but I know you will never do that. You are to put up with the loneliness, and manage without me the best you can; for I am going to find Harry," Lydia cried. This new piece of excitement obliterated the ball, which was quite an inferior event. Mrs. Joscelyn cried, and clung to her child in a kind of despair, yet hope.

"Oh, my darling, what shall I do without you? and how are you to find him?" she said; then wept and wrung her hands. "And how am I to make sure that your new friends will be kind to you? Oh, yes, they are kind now; but it is different now and when you have nobody else; and what, oh what, if you were unhappy, my pet, when you were away."

"Well," said Lydia, who was a young person of much strength of mind, "even in that case there could be nothing desperate about it, for I should come back. They could not lock me up in my room and feed me on bread and water. If I was not happy I should come home."

"But oh, my pet, think," cried Mrs. Joscelyn, with a fresh outbreak, "if you should be left like that to travel alone."

"And why not?" said Liddy. "Nobody would meddle with me if I behaved myself; and I hope I should always behave myself. But they will not be unkind to me. Do you think there is anything unkind about—Cousin Lionel." She pronounced

his name always with a little hesitation, which, to the foolish young man himself, made it very sweet.

“No, no, Liddy; but then he is only a man—only a young man, and admires you. His mother will not be like that. A lady is different; a lady is not carried away.”

“A lady is—much more easily satisfied,” said Liddy. “She took to me in a moment, mother. They said they never saw her take so quickly to anyone; and Sir John says I am like you.”

“Like me! I don’t think he ever saw me.”

“Never mind, never mind, mother; they are not a den of robbers. They cannot do me any harm. And I shall find Harry,” Lydia said.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OPINION OF THE FAMILY.

THE Joscelyns were much excited and disturbed by all this "to do" about Liddy, which the sisters-in-law thought intolerable, and which, as has been already related, moved even Joan to some sensation of displeasure, notwithstanding the gratified sense of family pride which she experienced as a Joscelyn in the recognition of her family, which, though late, was satisfactory. But Mrs. Will and Mrs. Tom had no such feeling. To them the sense of being left out was not less but rather more disagreeable because a little chit like Liddy had been made much of and received as the representative of her race. Neither of these ladies could bear to hear of it, and Will and Tom showed their feelings in indignant ridicule, scorning the thought that a little lass should be put in the foreground, and their own substantial claims as the heirs of the Joscelyn name disregarded. For what is a girl in a family? nothing; a mere accident; perhaps useful in a way as extending the connection, but directly of no sort of benefit at all. When they heard, however, that Lydia was going "abroad" their indignation burst all bounds. Where was the money to come from? The sons and the sons' wives were as angry as if it came out of their own pockets. Mrs. Will even cried, and enumerated a whole list of things which were wanted to make her house comfortable. "I never have even a trip to the seaside," she said, "and as for a piano where I'm to get one I can't tell, and the children all growing up; and there isn't a sideboard in the house, not like I was used to, and the poorest stock of linen! while your sister is gallivanting all over the world." Mrs. Tom suggested that nothing but a surreptitious slice out of Uncle Henry's property—which it was a sin and a shame to keep hanging on because of a runaway, who must be dead years ago or he would have come back on the hands of his family, no doubt about that—could have induced Ralph Joscelyn to consent to such a mad piece of expenditure. "That Pilgrim just plays into their hands," she said; "your mother's silly enough

for anything, when it's for Liddy, but your father'd never have done it without something to go upon." The brothers were so moved by these arguments, and by their own sense of injustice, that they made a joint raid upon the paternal house to see what remonstrance would do. "I'll tell you what it is, father, it's time that money was divided," said Will; "it would come in uncommon handy, I can tell you, in my house, with all my children growing up." Tom had no children, but he was not less forcible in his representations. "We're a laughing-stock to all the county," he said, "hanging on waiting for Harry turning up. If Harry had been going to turn up he'd have done it long ago. There never was a good-for-nothing in a family but he came back." Now the day of this visit was a day which Joan had chosen to come to the White House to hear "all about it," and these words were spoken at the family table just after the early dinner, for which an additional chicken had been killed on account of the guests.

"Good for nothing!" said Joan, indignantly, "that's what our Harry never was. You may say what you like of yourselves, but of him I'll never stand such lying. He was as honourable a lad as ever stepped. He never asked a penny from one of you, nor from father either—that he got. So far from taking anything of yours with him, he left his own behind him. Poor lad! there's his very clothes in his drawers. It must have cost him a mint of money to get more to put in their place. I've often thought of that. If it's just to put mother out, which is all you'll do, you may as well try some other subject than Harry. Mother, don't you take on. He's no more dead than I am. He'll come home some fine day to take up his property—if you don't let them put you into your grave first."

Mrs. Joscelyn's hands had crept together in a nervous clasp. She looked pitifully from one to another. "Boys," she said, in her soft voice, to the threatening men who looked older and infinitely harder than she, "I hope you'll have a little patience. If I had the money, oh! how gladly I would give it you! It is hard, too, when you have need of it. I say nothing against that."

"Need of it! I should think we had need of it," said Will. "As for giving it if you had it, that's easy speaking; and there

are plenty that promise what they haven't, and think no more of it when they have. What's this we hear of Liddy going abroad? I should say that would cost a pretty penny. My wife and me, we can't take our family so much as for a fortnight to the sea-side."

"And what business is it of your wife's and yours where Liddy goes?" said Joan, instantly throwing her shield over her own side. "You'll not get Liddy's money, you may be sure of that, to take you to the sea-side."

"Oh, children!" cried Mrs. Joscelyn, clasping her hands.

"Well, I must say it's more reasonable that a family of children should have a change, than that a bit of a lass like Liddy should go picking up foreign manners and ruining her character—not that I am speaking for myself——" Tom interposed. But he was interrupted by a cry from Joan, repeating his last words, "ruining her character!" and by an exclamation of pain from her mother. "Well," cried Tom, "I say again, ruining her character. Is there any decent man about here that would have anything to do with a Frenchified wife? —not to say that a woman's morals are always undermined in those foreign places. And Liddy's flyaway enough, already ——"

Here Joscelyn commanded silence by striking his fist upon the table with a blow that made the glasses ring. "Hold your dashed tongues," he said. "What have you got to do with it, you lads? You've got what belongs to you, and you can go to Jericho and be blanked to you. If there's any man has a right to interfere in my house, I'd like just to see his dashed face. Hold your tongues, the whole blanked lot of you. Them that's in my house will do as I please, and them that has houses of their own had better go where they came from; and, Liddy, don't you say a word, my lass. I'll look after you," he said, laying a large hand upon her shoulder, as he thrust his chair away from the table with an impulse which displaced the table too, and jarred and shook everything upon it. When Joscelyn "spoke up," there was nobody in his family that ventured to withstand him. The sons rose, too, somewhat abashed, and strode forth after him to view the stables, which was the recognised thing to do after the meal, which thus came to an abrupt conclusion.

They shook their heads over father's weakness, and declared to each other that "they (meaning the women) had got him under their thumb"—though "who would have thought it of father!" "It's what every man comes to when he begins to break up," Tom said.

When they were gone Mrs. Joscelyn cried, but the two sisters were indignant. "Now, mother, don't be a silly," Joan said. "They are just as worldly and as hard as they always were. But what can you expect when you think of the two women these poor lads married? It is a wonder they are no worse."

"Oh!" sighed poor Mrs. Joscelyn, "when I think the bonnie boys they were!" for she was a woman upon whom experience had little power, and who never could learn.

As for Lydia it struck her against her will with a strong sense of the ridiculous to hear her middle-aged brothers, in whose favour she had scarcely even a natural prejudice, spoken of as "bonnie boys." It was all she could do out of respect for her mother not to laugh. And she was more angry than she was amused. "What harm does it do to Will and Tom," she said, "that I should be going abroad?"

"They are just furious that Liddy has been asked to the Castle," said Joan. "Oh, I know them down to the bottom of their hearts; but I'll tell you what, mother, if it's a question of making a lady of Liddy, and sending her out in a way to do us credit, you mind there's nothing to be spared upon her, for Phil and me, we'll do our share."

This was all Mrs. Will and Mrs. Tom (for the other women of the family scouted the idea that the brothers were anything but puppets in the hands of these ladies), made by their motion. They threw Joan vehemently upon the other side, blew away the little vapour of envy and uncharitableness which made the elder sister grudge for a moment the younger's elevation, and bound Joan in enthusiastic partizanship to all her little sister's wishes. "She shall do us credit," Joan said, "if I don't have a gown to my back for years to come. She shall want for nothing if I have to give up my party next Christmas. She shall find out who it is that stands by her, and them that think of her in the family."

“I never had any doubt about that,” said Lydia, throwing her arms round her sister, “and, Joan, I’ll bring you the best of presents, I’ll bring you Harry back.”

At this Joan shook her head and wiped a tear out of the corner of her eye. “It’s a blessing,” she said, “you little thing, that Phil’s just as silly about you as me; but to find Harry, poor Harry, will take a cleverer than you.”

“Joan, do not you say that. I have it borne in upon me here,” said Mrs. Joscelyn, laying her thin hands upon her bosom, “that before I die I will see my boy back.”

“And it is I that will find him,” Liddy cried, throwing back her head with a proud movement of self-confidence; for the moment, being foolish women, they all believed in this inspiration. “And why not,” said sensible Joan, “it may be the Lord that has put it into her head. And all these fine folks, the Duchess and my lady and the rest of them, may just have been instruments.”

This suggestion filled them all with momentary awe. To see such noble means bringing about a triumphant end, and to be able to trace so easily the workings of Providence, is always the highest of pleasures to the simple-minded. To bring Harry back to his own, and comfort the heart of his mother before she died, was this not an object worthy the employment of Duchesses? Meanwhile Tom and Will went home discomfited, and told their wives how father had “shut them up.” “These women have got him under their thumb,” was what they all said.

Then there came another agitating crisis; Sir John and Lady Brotherton offered a visit to their cousin to arrange the details of their journey, and this made such an overturn in the White House as had not been known in the memory of man. To the wonder of everybody, Joscelyn made no objection to it. A shade of complacency even stole over his face as he gave his consent. “My lady—will maybe take a fancy to me, as some one else has ta’en a fancy to thee,” he said, pulling Lydia’s ear with unprecedented playfulness. Certainly the women had got him under their thumb at last. Joan and her husband came over with a great sense of importance to help to prepare for this great ceremonial, he enacting butler and she housekeeper to

the admiration of all concerned. Philip Selby knew about wine, nobody could gainsay that; while his wife prepared enough of what were then called “made dishes,” and pastry and cakes, to have lasted a month instead of a day. Then the amiable pair drove home at a great rate, to dress themselves in their best and present themselves solemnly as guests to meet the strangers. Lionel Brotherton was in all these secrets; Joan and he indeed exchanged a smile of intelligence when after working together all day they met and shook hands in the evening; but he kept inviolate the confidence bestowed upon him, and never betrayed even to his mother the tremendous pains that had been taken to prepare for her, and receive her fitly. When he went up to her room after the dinner was over, to bid her good night, Lady Brotherton could not speak enough in praise of their new cousin. “You did well to say it was an idyllic life,” she cried. “You did not say a word too much, Lionel; what freshness, what simplicity, what a breath of the moor; and all so nice, such pretty curtains (Lionel himself had helped to fasten them up that morning), such nice old furniture! I thought pretty Liddy was quite an exceptional moor-blossom, but I quite understand her now. Her mother is a most refined woman. I should like to model those hands of hers; they are full of expression. And that handsome whitehaired father like a tower, quite the ideal representative of a very old impoverished family, little education, and not much to say, but with long descent in every feature!” It was all Lionel could do to keep his countenance.

“I am so glad you like them, mother; I don’t know when I have been so glad; and you can’t think how kind they have been to me.”

“I love them for it,” said Lady Brotherton, “not that I am surprised—for they like you, Lionel, one can see that, and nothing could be more delightful to your mother. Tell me, dear, does poor Lord Eldred come often, or is he forbidden to come? I want to know how far it has gone.”

“How far what has gone?” said Lionel aghast.

“Is it possible you have not noticed? I am sure he made no secret of it, poor fellow; the Duchess saw it well enough. Why, that Lord Eldred is over head and ears, or if there is any

stronger expression—deep, deep in the depths of love; and I am mistaken if she does not know as well as I—"

"In love—with—? not Lydia? Lydia!" Lionel cried, as if this were the most astonishing thing in the world.

Lady Brotherton's back was turned; she did not see his lamentable countenance. She laughed with a tinkling silvery laugh for which she was famous, but which her son at that moment felt to be the harshest and least melodious of sounds. "Who else?" she said; "there is no one but Lydia here capable of being fallen in love with. Not that nice Mrs. Selby, you may be sure, which would not be proper, and is impossible—no, Liddy—I like the name of Liddy. It is quite rural and moorland, like all the rest. Well, don't you think she knows it too?"

"I shouldn't say so," Lionel answered with the greatest gravity. He tried very hard not to be so deadly serious; but he could not smile.

"Well, we shall see, we shall see," said Lady Brotherton gaily, "of course I shall not interfere. I dare say the Duchess blesses me for taking her out of the way. But if the lover has the courage to follow, nobody need expect me to put obstacles in the course of true love. It shall run smooth for me. Going, Lionel? God bless you, dear; the Fells have agreed with you, you are as brown and strong as you can look, and I must go and see your den to-morrow. Good night, good night, my own boy."

Lionel went away in a frame of mind very different from that with which he had followed his mother upstairs. He looked into the parlour with a countenance so solemn that the little party assembled there, and congratulating themselves on everything having gone off so well, were entirely chilled. Mrs. Joscelyn, reposing in her chair with her hands clasped, was smiling with relief and pleasure, while Joan described all the pangs with which she had looked forward to the arrival of my Lady. "I thought she would be so stiff and so grand," said Joan, "Lord, I don't know what I didn't think; but she's as nice a woman as mother or myself, and takes nothing upon her. As long as I live I'll never be afraid of a fine lady again." Here Lionel's solemn voice was heard at the door.

“I have come to say good night,” he said; “no, thank you, I will not sit down. I have a long walk before me; not anything, thank you. My mother is very comfortable, and much obliged to you, Mrs. Joscelyn. I beg I may not trouble anyone to open the door.”

“What is the matter with him with all his ‘thank yous,’ and his ‘not troubling any ones,’ ” cried Joan when he went away without a smile. It was generally Lydia who let him out, which perhaps Mrs. Joscelyn should not have permitted. But to-night Lydia was checked by his cold looks, and held back shyly, and it was Philip Selby who opened the door. This was a slight matter; but it seemed to prove to Lionel everything his mother had said. He felt rather glad to have left a chill behind him, as he had evidently done; and he was very much tempted to steal to the window and peep in at them, and enjoy the wonder with which no doubt they would ask each other “What is the matter?” It was well he did not do so, for he would have seen the company in the parlour laughing—all but Lydia, who was wondering by herself in a corner, what was the matter?—at a witticism of Joan’s, who had made a solemn face in imitation of poor Lionel the moment his back was turned. Lionel was fortunately not aware of this; but felt that he had produced a sensation, and was not sorry; and so went away gloomily, not to say misanthropically, down into the village and across the bridge and along the river’s side to Birrenshead. On the way he met with old Isaac, who had once more been beguiled into the “Red Lion,” and was now making his way home with much stumbling.

“It was you as kept me, Master,” the old man said, “you know ’twas you as kept me. I’d never have stayed out so long if it hadn’t been for you. If you would mention it to t’missis I would take it kind, for women is very onreasonable.”

“T’auld sinner,” cried a voice in the dark, “to larn t’young gentleman a pack o’ lies. D’ye think I dunuo know where you’ve been just to hear your voice?”

“My good woman,” said Lionel, “don’t be hard upon poor Isaac.”

He was still so terribly serious, and spoke in tones so hollow and tragical, that Jane Oliver was alarmed. She darted forward

in the dark and caught hold of his arm.

"Oh! my bonnie young gentleman," she cried, "tell me! Something's happened to my silly auld man?"

At this hint Isaac began to moan, and grasped at Lionel's other arm, leaning heavily upon it.

"It's nothing, Missis, nothing; that is, not much, nothing to frighten you. T' young Master's been that kind, he's given me his arm to lean upon all along t' water-side," Isaac said, with a limp which would have been much too demonstrative had it been addressed to the eye; but in the dark it answered well enough. For once the Missis fell into the trap, and Lionel, dragged round by his pretended patient to the back door, with blessings called down upon his head by the deceived woman, went through the little fiction with the gravest countenance, and without the least inclination even to smile. It was not till he had left Isaac with his foot elevated on a chair, elaborating the story of a supposed sprain, and had groped his way round to the other entrance, and climbed the dilapidated stairs to the musty old sitting-room, in which his solitary lamp was flaring, that he burst into a short laugh, as he threw himself into a chair. If it was Isaac's little comedy that called forth this sudden outburst, it was only as the climax of a hundred other comedies which were not mirthful. His disappointment, and the confusion of all his thoughts, which his mother's revelation had brought about, made him, as was natural, misanthropical and bitter. He laughed at the tragical folly and falsehood of everything, himself included; from the Joscelyns making all sorts of efforts to appear better, more refined and comfortable, than they were, by way of pleasing, *i.e.*, deceiving, Lady Brotherton—and Lady Brotherton accepting everything, adding her own fanciful interpretation, not only deceived, but deceiving herself—down to old Isaac, who had so often tried in vain to dupe his wife, and his wife, who was now duped so easily, not by Isaac, but, save the mark! by himself, Lionel, without intention or purpose. "And I, who am the biggest fool of all!" the poor youth said to himself. What had he been doing all these weeks? making a fool's paradise out of this squalid ruin, and princes and princesses out of the Joscelyns, half farmers, half horse-coupers as they were—all because he had

believed in the sweet looks of a girl who the whole time had been aiming these sweet looks over his head at a better match, and a greater personage than himself. What an idiot he had been! the scales seemed to fall from his eyes. He saw everything round him, he thought, in its true colour. What would his mother think if she came and saw the wretched place in which he had been living? She would ask, like the village folk, what could his motive be? His motive, what was it? Even now, mortified and discouraged as he was, he sat upright in his chair with a thrill of alarm, when he imagined a research into his motives. Lady Brotherton might stop the expedition altogether if she found them out. Lydia's perfidy was terrible, but it would be more terrible still to leave her behind, perhaps to lose sight of her, to miss the opportunity to which he had been looking forward with so much delight. When he came to think of it, his mother had not said Lydia was in love with Lord Eldred, but only that Lord Eldred was in love with Lydia—which was so different. At this Lionel roused himself, and the sight of his portmanteaux packed and ready to be shut up, roused him still more. After all it was to-morrow they were to start, and he, and not Lord Eldred, was to be for the present Lydia's daily companion. There would be time to do many things before that hero could arrive, even if, as Lady Brotherton suggested, he should join them afterwards. To-morrow, nay, to-day, for it was already past midnight, was all his own, with nobody to interfere.

And next day, with some suppressed tears and fictitious smiles, and a general excitement of the whole neighbourhood, as if the village itself had been going abroad, the party went away. The vicarage people and all the Selbys came out to their doors to see them pass. Raaf Selby on horseback stood like a statue at the end of the bridge, and took off his hat and gave Lydia a look half-tragical and altogether melodramatic. Joan drove her mother in the phaeton steadily, but with a very grave countenance, though now and then bursting into momentary jokes and laughter, to the station to see them off, her husband riding very slowly by their side. Joan laughed by times, but that did not change the seriousness of her face; and Mrs Joscelyn sat with her veil down, a large Spanish veil covered by great spots of black flowers, behind which nobody could

see what she was doing. Lydia herself broke down, and cried freely, though her mother could not cry. “I’ll bring home Harry,” the girl cried, with a passionate promise, out of one window of the railway carriage. Lionel was at another, keeping in the background, eager to be off, and shorten the moment of farewells, when his attention was distracted from the pathetic group by the sudden swaying upwards of old Isaac’s shock head. “I thought you’d like to know, Sir,” old Isaac said, “as my missis and me’s the best of friends. And it’s all owing to you, as had the judgment never to say a word. Good-bye and good luck to you, Master; don’t forget old Isaac Oliver as will do you a good turn and welcome whenever he has the chance. Lord! but we took t’ Missis in, that time,” Isaac said, with a grin that reached from ear to ear. And that was the last the travellers saw of the village folk.

CHAPTER VII.

LYDIA'S TRAVELS.

THE quiet that fell over the White House, not to speak of other houses, when Liddy was thus carried off into the wider world, was something which might be felt, like the darkness in the vision. Mrs. Joscelyn subsided into a kind of half-life. She had been living in her child, and when her child was withdrawn, her existence ebbed away from her. She began to wring her hands again, especially when in the wild winter weather the posts were delayed. All that could be done for her was done by the Selbys, who humoured her and petted her, everybody said, like a child. Joan drove over in her phaeton as often sometimes as thrice in a week, and Philip, who was "an understanding man" his wife allowed, did what was still better. He subscribed for her to the circulating library, and kept the poor lady supplied, in defiance of all prejudices, even those of his wife, with a boundless supply of novels. Joan was somewhat indignant and much scandalised by this, asking him if he thought mother was a baby, and if it was his opinion that an old person should waste her time over such nonsense? "If it was a good book indeed," Joan said. But Philip verified his title to be called "understanding." He helped her through the dull days as nobody else could. She read and read till she got a little confused among the heroes and heroines, all of whom she wove together by an imaginary thread of connection with Liddy, comparing their fictitious graces, their adventures, their history with those of her child, and following her imaginary Liddy through many a chapter. Lydia's letters when they came were like another warmer, fuller romance, the most enticing of all.

And then Ralph Joscelyn himself suddenly developed a new character. He was miserable when his daughter was fairly gone, though he had never betrayed any unwillingness to let her go. He read every word of her long letters with a patience which had never been equalled in his life. He gave up the dashes and blanks of which his conversation was once full, and

would come in the cold afternoons and sit with his wife, often fatiguing her greatly, and keeping her back from the end of an exciting story, but always meaning the best, and filling her soul with gratitude, even when she felt most bored. And by and bye he would put on his spectacles, and surreptitiously turn over a novel too, when the day was wet, or on a long evening. Thus the sight might be seen of these two in their old parlour, one at each side of the fire, rather dull but friendly, like people who had grown old together, and in whom a moderate modest affection had outlived all quarrels and years. He was a little shamefaced when he was found thus in his wife's company, but by degrees that wore off too.

Meanwhile, Lydia went far afield, leaving dulness and darkness and cloud behind her; finding winter turned into summer, and her life into sunshine. It would be impossible to use words too strong to express the change that had come upon her. From the north country of England to the south of France was not a more complete difference than from the grey and limited life of the yeoman household to the brightness and variety and grace of existence among people accustomed all their lives to wealth and refinement and luxury. The way in which they travelled, the attendants always round them, the ease with which they took all their gratifications, surprised by nothing that was pleasant, taking luxuries, which were princely to Liddy, as a matter of course, had an extraordinary effect upon her—the effect of a forced and miraculous education, in which every half hour told like a year. For a short time she was much subdued, almost stupefied, indeed, by the revolution in everything round her, and was so very quiet that Lady Brotherton almost came the length, notwithstanding her animated countenance, and the favourable first impression she had made, of thinking her dull. In fact, she was only in a state of intense receptiveness, taking in everything, opening her mind and spirits to all the new influences, which confused and dazzled her. But after thus lying dormant for a time, Lydia suddenly awoke into new life, and bloomed like a flower. She awoke to a great many things which were completely new and strange; to beauty and wealth, to art, which was entirely unknown, and a revelation to her; and to Nature of a lavish and splendid kind, almost as entirely unknown.

There were other revelations, too, upon which, at this moment, it is unnecessary to dwell. It was more than enough that little Lydia, out of what was not much more than a northern farmer's house, should have found herself in society, in that wandering society of the English abroad where the finest specimens are to be found afloat among the coarsest, and in which all the elements of life are represented; hearing names familiarly pronounced every day which she had hitherto read with reverence in books, talking to personages whose distant doings she had but heard of with awe and wonder, and living in palaces, which she heard found fault with as poverty-stricken and uncomfortable, she who had known nothing better than the drawing-room at Heatonshaw. The party went from France to Italy; to Florence and Rome, and still further south, Naples and all its dependencies. So dazzled and transported was she with all the new things she saw and heard that for the first month or two Lydia forgot all about her quest. When she bethought herself of it, a question arose which was far more troublesome here than it had been at home. What was she to do? To examine anxiously every new face she saw, to look out in the streets and in every company she entered for somebody like Harry, seemed a far less hopeful enterprise in Italy than it had been in England. She did not remember Harry's face, which was disabling to begin with, and then why should he be in Italy? she asked herself. Poor people (unless they were artists) did not seem to come to Italy, but only people with plenty of money and leisure, who came to enjoy themselves. She was so bewildered by this altogether new idea that she did not know what to do, nor did Lionel, "Cousin Lionel," to whom she began to refer everything (as indeed his mother did), suggest anything that could help her. They looked over all the visitors' books together, and lists of the English inhabitants in every new place they came to, with their young heads together, and much secret enjoyment of the business; but neither did this stand her in much stead. In Rome, where they spent Christmas, they were joined, as Lady Brotherton's prophetic soul had divined, by Lord Eldred; but when they left he did not follow, and Liddy's course, which was not that of true love but wandering fancy, required no trouble to keep it smooth. But, by others besides Lord Eldred, Lydia was "very

much admired," as people say. She might have got "a very good match" out of her wanderings; but walked through all these possibilities unwitting, not having even her little head turned, which Lady Brotherton expected. The elder lady, however, was delighted with the little sensation she made. She liked the little flutter of moths about this gentle taper. She liked to have half-a-dozen young men standing ready to do every necessary civility, to procure everything that was wanted. Lydia saved her a great deal, she said, in commissionaires; and old Sir John laughed his chuckling old laugh, and said she was just like her mother; his Cousin Lydia had always a train after her. Liddy wondered sometimes whether it was a former Cousin Lydia, a century old or so, whom the old man meant. But they were very kind to her. They became fond of her as the time went on. She lived an enchanted life among them, with "Cousin Lionel" always at her side, seeing everything, doing everything, along with her; and she could not have believed that it would prove so easy to forget Harry and all about him. Sometimes she awoke to this thought with such a sense of guilt as depressed her for days; but in the meantime life was flowing on in content, brightness, and variety, full of a hundred occupations. There was not a moment vacant. Sometimes it would glance across her that the day must come when she must leave it all and return to the White House. Alas, poor mother! vegetating there, keeping herself alive by means of her novels, and chiefly the unfinished romance of Lydia, most delightful of all. What would she have felt had she known the cold chill which came over Lydia as she realised that the day must come when she would be once more at home; and how wretched, how angry Lydia was with herself, how she despised her own frivolous being when she felt this chill invading her! Generally however she put the thought away, and was content to live, and no more. To live, how sweet it was! "Good was it in that time to be alive, and to be young was very heaven." At last Lydia came, as the time of return approached, to throw away every consideration, and exist only in the moment, with a kind of desperation of happiness. "I shall never have it over again," she said to herself, and shut her eyes and went on, forgetting home and forgetting Harry, refusing to think of anything but

the sweet hours that were going over her; “I shall have had my day.”

Thus time came to have a prodigious sweep and fling as the long delicious holiday approached its end. The hours and days rushed on like the waters of a river hurrying to the falls, every minute increasing the velocity; already the skies were getting bright (as if they had ever been anything but bright!) with spring; the flowers were bursting forth everywhere; the warmth becoming excessive; the English tourists beginning to return home in clouds. And the Brothertons spoke quite calmly of going back to England. To them it meant a natural succession, no more; they would return home to other delights. When autumn came back they would set out again, and go over the same enchanted lands; but for Lydia all would be over. She tried to enter into their plans, however, quite steadily, concealing the vertigo that seized her, and her wild sense of the hurrying rush of those last days. When it was suggested that they should rest a few days at Pisa, Sir John having a cold, and from thence go on to Leghorn, and take the steamer, Lydia felt like a criminal who has got a reprieve; but oh, how guilty, how more than ever deserving of any sentence that could be passed upon her!

By this time there had come a strange uneasiness into her intercourse with “Cousin Lionel.” Liddy had always been more reserved with him than with anyone else, she could not tell why. Since the first frankness of the days when she went with him to Birrenshead there had been a great seriousness in all their relations. This was partly his doing, and partly hers. Lord Eldred’s appearance had checked him when he had been getting rid of the impression which his mother’s opinion on the subject of Lord Eldred had produced on him. And Lydia’s seriousness had subdued the young man. She had consulted him indeed, referred to him constantly, took his advice, kept up an invariable tacit appeal to him in all her concerns, which she was scarcely herself aware of, but which went to the very bottom of his heart; but she was always serious. Her gayer flights were with the moths, as Lady Brotherton called them, the commissionaires, the young men who fluttered about the two ladies, and whom Lydia, caring nothing about them, treated with every kind of gay malice, and a hundred caprices;

but she was never capricious with cousin Lionel. They treated each other with a sort of stately dignity, reserved on one side, reverential on the other, to the amusement, but great gratification of Lady Brotherton.

"Thank heaven there is no fear of these two falling in love with each other," she said, "which is an embarrassment one is scarcely ever safe from." As for Sir John, he chuckled and declared that his son was an old woman. "Talk'sh like two ambassadorsh," said the old man. Never was anything more satisfactory; for to have a course of true love so near to her, notwithstanding her sentimental sympathy with the thing in the abstract, would not have suited Lady Brotherton at all. But on the day of Sir John's cold at Pisa, something occurred which, if she had not been so busy administering gruel, she might not have found so satisfactory. The two young people being thus left alone went out together, and walked very soberly, as was their wont, about the Cathedral and the Baptistery, gazing at everything as it was their duty to do. They stood and looked up at the delicate fretted galleries of the leaning tower, and the blue sky above which filled up every opening. They had been very silent, and silence is dangerous. At last Lionel said hastily:

"I don't know why this should make me think of the old Joscelyn tower you showed me; there is not much likeness certainly between this and a Border tower."

"The sky was just as blue," said Lydia, "in all the crevices; though they say that in England we never see the sky."

"You remember it too?"

"Yes," she said with a faint little tremor in her voice.

"And soon you will be there again," he said (as if it were not brutal to remind her of it!), "but I—— where shall I be?" He threw so much pathos into his tone that Lydia, feeling herself on the brink of darkness and desolation, could not quite restrain a little outburst of impatience. He to talk like that, who would have nothing to give up, whose life would always be as beautiful as it was now!

"Where should you be—but where you please!" she said, with a sharp tone of irritation in her voice.

“Where I please?——do you think?—but I must not ask you that,” Lionel said, drawing a long breath. And then he added as if he were breathless and hurried, though in reality there was nothing to hurry him, “Lydia—I want to speak to you before—before——”

“I don’t know what you mean; you can talk to me whenever you please,” cried Lydia, with the daring of anger. She was angry with him, she could scarcely tell why.

He was silent for a minute, looking at her with a curious expression which she did not understand. What did it mean? No doubt Lionel thought that Lydia knew exactly all that was overflowing in him; the eagerness in his eyes, the hesitation in his mind. He thought she looked him through and through, and she thought he looked her through and through. The young man felt as if it could scarcely be necessary for him to say what was in his heart; she must have seen it in every look for months; and she, on her side, felt that her secret, which he was so likely to have divined, must be kept from him at all hazards. Thus they stood for a moment as in a duel, the man sealing his lips by force, considering, with a generosity that cost him much, that to speak now would make the position intolerable for her, and that any formal declaration of his sentiments (which she must know so well before he uttered them!) must be reserved for the very end of the family intercourse in which they had been living; while the woman, who had been far too much interested on her own account ever to discover his meaning fully, doubted still, and guarding herself against a mistake of vanity, had to guard her own secret, which she would not have him divine. They looked at each other thus for a breathless moment; then he spoke.

“I can talk to you whenever I please? but not now; before—if ever—we part.”

What did that mean? “Before—if ever.” Her heart beat so loudly that she seemed unable to do anything but keep it down, and yet she asked herself wistfully what was the meaning of it. She was tantalized and aggravated beyond words. “That will soon be,” she said with a little mocking laugh, and turning, walked away towards the river. He followed her quite silent and cast down, for he thought this laugh meant the very worst.

And when they got back to the inn Lydia disappeared, and save in his mother's presence saw him no more that day. Lady Brotherton saw no difference for her part. She tried to throw them together benevolently. "You must try and make the best of it," she said. "I must go back to your father, Lionel. Take Lydia somewhere, show her the town. You are cousins, you need not stand upon ceremony, you don't want a chaperon."

"I am so sorry, Lady Brotherton," said Liddy with an innocent air, "but I must go and write letters. We have been moving about so much lately. I have not written half so often as usual to my mother. I thought I'd take this afternoon for it."

"That is a pity," said Lady Brotherton, "I am sure she will excuse you, my dear; you will be with her so soon! and Lionel will be quite lonely; you might give him this afternoon. Your mother will have you in a week, you know."

Poor wicked Liddy! what a pang it gave her! and a still greater pang to think that it should be a pang. She looked at Lady Brotherton with sorrowful, half reproachful eyes, into which, much against her will, the tears came—but fortunately kept suspended there, making her eyes big and liquid, not falling. "I know," she said, trying hard to suppress a sigh; "but I must write all the same."

"Don't think of me," said Lionel. "I shall play a game at billiards—or something." Lady Brotherton paused to launch a *mot* at the absurdity of coming to Italy to play billiards before she went to Sir John, and in that interval Lydia disappeared, and except at dinner, when his mother was present, the two did not meet again that day.

Sir John was a little better next morning, and declared himself able to go the little way there was to Leghorn, where he would rest another night before taking the steamer. "And there'sh old Bonamy," he said, "old friend'sh, never forshake old friend'sh. Bonamy, Vicesh-Conshull, famous old fellow." He was delighted at the idea, though Lady Brotherton shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, yes, he is very nice," she said, "not old, quite a handsome man; but all these Consular people, they are—you know what they are—However Mr. Bonamy is quite superior. Another night in Italy, Liddy, though it is only a

mercantile place and not interesting. Let us hope there will be a moon."

But Lydia did not wish for a moon. She had got into a state of feverish indifference. It was so nearly over now, that she wished it over altogether. What was the good of a few more hours? She would have run away, had she been able, to get out of it all, to forget Italy if that were possible, and all these five months of happiness. She felt angry with Sir John and his friend, and the place they were going to, and everything about it. A moon? what did she want with a moon? she would have liked to pluck it out of that blue, blue intolerable sky that never changed. It was all Liddy could do to keep herself from making a cross reply.

They got to Leghorn early that Sir John might not be exposed to the heat of the day; and the aspect of that place did not tend to soften Lydia's feelings; a town with shipping and docks and counting-houses; she declared to herself that it was like any town in England, not like Italy at all. Sir John, who was fond of novelty, had his card sent at once to the Vice-Consul, with a request that Mr. Bonamy would go and see an old friend who was not well enough to visit him; and the old man grew quite brisk on the strength of something new, and sat up in a chair and declared himself quite well. He looked so comfortable that Lady Brotherton was very sorry that she had settled to stay another evening. "When we have quite made up our minds to it, it seems a pity," she said, "to lose a day." How tranquilly she spoke! while the two young people listening to her, and too languid or too nervous to take any part in the discussion, felt a secret fury burn within them. "Lose a day!" Neither of them knew whether it was a loss or a gain, an incalculable treasure of possibilities, or a miserable hour the more of suspense and unhappiness. Perhaps they were both most disposed to look upon it in the latter light; and yet they were both angry with Lady Brotherton for talking of losing a day. There is no consistency in youth, nor was there any reason for the nervous excitement which possessed them both. They sat down to luncheon together, both of them devouring their hearts, and quite indisposed for other fare.

“Mr. Bonamy knows our English ways. I should not be surprised,” said Lady Brotherton, “if he came to lunch.”

“Yes, yes, knowshur English ways, English himself,” said Sir John, “knowsh what’sh what. Shure to come in to lunch.”

And then they sat down at table. Lady Brotherton ate her bit of chicken with all that unearthly, immeasurable calm which distinguishes elder people, taking everything quite coolly, though with a flaming volcano on each side of her; would she eat her chicken all the same, they wondered, if they too were to explode and be carried off into the elements? Notwithstanding their mutual opposition, they could not help giving each other a glance of sympathy as they watched her, wondering how she could do it. Lionel felt that he never could again believe in those sensations which his mother had often described to him, which affected her when he was in any trouble. Sympathy! She could not take things so quietly if she was a woman of any sympathy at all.

The meal was half over. Lydia had scattered salad over her plate to look as if she had eaten what was set before her, and Lionel, on his side, had practised some other artifice. Thank heaven the moment was almost over when they must sit there together exposed to observation. When the door opened, Lionel rose to his feet to receive his father’s old friend. But what did Lydia care for Sir John’s old friend? it was an excuse to push her chair away from the table. It was Sir John’s English servant who introduced the stranger; an Italian might have made a mistake about the name, but about this there was no mistake. Thomas came in before the visitor with all the imperturbability of a British flunkey.

“Mr. Isaac Oliver,” he said.

Then Lydia too rose to her feet wondering, with a little cry of surprise. She did not know what she thought, whether it was a messenger from home with evil tidings, or merely a fantastic coincidence. Lionel was greatly astonished too. He made a step forward to meet the new-comer—and there was something in the aspect of the new-comer which puzzled him still more, he could not tell why. Where had he seen him before? He was certain he had seen him before.

“Mr.—Isaac—Oliver?” he said.

He perceived, without being aware of it till after, that at his surprised tone the stranger turned a suspicious look upon him, and glanced round upon the party with the manner of a man who was not entirely at his ease.

“Yes, that is what I am called,” he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

ISAAC OLIVER.

AND after all, what is there in a name? That was not an original observation in Romeo's case, much less in that of an English resident in Italy far on in the nineteenth century. The person who thus presented himself in Sir John Brotherton's rooms was tall and strong, and fair, with the amplitude of chest and breadth of back which show a man to have attained the very fullness of manhood, or perhaps a little more. His hair was light brown and curly, with life and vigour in every crisp twist of it, and in the short beard then unusual with Englishmen, and considered "foreign" by the inexperienced. Except this beard, and something in his dress which betrayed a continental tailor, he was altogether English in his appearance, and in his voice there was something that betrayed the North-country, or so at least two of the company, startled by his name, supposed. Lydia who felt ashamed of herself for her little cry of wonder, sat down in a corner behind backs, and felt the better for the curious stir of surprise and expectation which seemed to blow on her like a breath of fresh air: while Lionel bestirred himself to welcome the stranger, who explained that he came on the part of Mr. Bonamy, then occupied in public affairs, who hoped to pay his respects to Sir John later. "I ought to introduce myself as his son-in-law," Mr. Oliver said.

"Oh, you are Rita's husband," said Lady Brotherton, "little Rita! forgive me, I used to know her when she was a child. I have not realised the idea of Rita married."

"Then you must prepare yourself for a shock," he said pleasantly. "For Rita has been married more than eight years."

"And there are children—of course?"

"Four," he said, with a smile of affectionate pride, "but my wife still looks like a little girl. You will not find so much difference in her appearance as there ought to be. I think Mr. Bonamy prefers to ignore the babies—and it's not difficult to

do so when you look at her. My father-in-law hoped you would come and dine with us to-night."

"Sir John is—rather an invalid——"

"Not a bit—not a bit!" cried the old man, speaking for himself. "Yesh, yesh, letsh dine with Bonamy. Bonamy knowsh what'sh what."

"And we are a large party," said Lady Brotherton deprecating.

Here Lydia came behind her chair. "You must not think of me, dear Lady Brotherton." "I have—my letters to write."

"Still letters to write, Liddy? My dear, you must have set up a most alarming correspondence. My young friend, Miss Joscelyn, Mr. Oliver."

The stranger made a slight movement in his chair, with a hurried breath, and a sudden startled widening of his eyes. It was a thing which he had often said to himself might happen any day, but years of serenity had almost driven it from his remembrance. As it was, the start was but momentary, and perhaps among men might have passed unnoticed. But Lady Brotherton caught it with her keen observation; and Lydia, herself, so excited and curious, saw it with additional excitement, but without any surprise.

"I hope," he said with a hesitation which did not sound unfriendly. "I hope we may see—Miss Joscelyn, too."

"I shall certainly bring her if you think you can really have us. How kind to think of it!" Lady Brotherton said. "But the Bonamys were always kind. I remember your wife's mother, Mr. Oliver. She was the prettiest creature——"

"I flatter myself you will think the same of her daughter," he said, with a smile ("But if he thinks so much of his wife what business had he to stare so much at Liddy?" Lady Brotherton said after. "Liddy is a very pretty girl, and of course with young men one knows what one must expect—but a man with a family of children! I don't think I quite like it."). He spoke to the elder lady, but his eyes were on the younger—not so much admiringly as curiously, anxiously. Was it? could it be? A sort of brotherly impulse came over him. "I think I must have met —some of Miss Joscelyn's family—from the Fell-country?—

from the North of England?" he said, a rush of colour coming to his face.

"Oh!" cried Lydia, paling as he reddened, "none of my family were ever abroad except one. Oh, I wonder if you can have met my brother. I am looking for him. I came to look for him. Harry Joscelyn? We have people of your name," she added hastily, "in our village too."

"I come from—Lancashire," he said, with a sort of hurried abandonment of the subject. Lionel Brotherton had begun to stare at him too. He felt himself in an atmosphere charged with electricity of some sort, and thought with alarm, that some one or other of this dangerous party might put a moral pistol to his head and accuse him at any moment of his false name. He returned to the subject of his wife and family, which was safer in every way. "You know that Mr. Bonamy will not let his daughter go to England," he said, "because it was fatal to her mother. It is her great grievance; by dint of being debarred from it there is nothing she wants so much to do."

"And you—have you nothing to say? Is she so delicate?" Lady Brotherton asked.

"Not delicate at all, thank heaven! I have a great deal to say; but I agree. I came under a solemn promise before I was allowed to marry her, and then I have no wish to take her to England—England—" he said, with a little sternness, "has no particular attraction to me. All the happiness of my life is here."

"But that is a hard thing to say of your home, Mr. Oliver."

"My home—is here," he said. What did that girl mean by watching him so? He felt that he was talking vindictively at her, though all that he desired was to ignore her, and escape the scrutiny of her eyes, which made him angry and alarmed, both together. All this time Sir John had been breaking in at intervals, expressing with a great many sibillations his pleasure in the prospect of dining with "Old Bonamy."

"Old Bonamysh sh'a very old friend; alwaysh liked him, and hish father before him," the old man cried. "N'ash for bein' able to dine out, never wash better, never wash better." This came in at intervals as a kind of chorus, while Lady Brotherton kept up the central strain of friendly commonplace,

as unconscious of Lydia's eager eyes over her shoulder, as of the vague, alarmed curiosity and anxiety that had roused the girl out of herself.

"It was startling to hear his name," said Lionel, when after awhile, as quickly as politeness permitted, the visitor took his leave.

"What was there peculiar about his name? Oliver! it is not a bad name," Lady Brotherton said.

"It is not the Oliver, but the Isaac Oliver. Lydia was startled too. It is a name we know very well in the Fell-country," Lionel said. He was able to treat the subject more lightly than Liddy, on whom, in her excitement, this new and sudden fire had caught at once. He told his mother all about Isaac Oliver, with details that quite satisfied her as to the origin of the stranger's startled looks and apparent excitement when he heard Liddy's name.

"That's it, you may be sure," she said; "he is ashamed of his people. He is a son or a nephew or something of your old man, and he doesn't want it to be known; very natural. He must have kept it a secret from Mr. Bonamy—who never would have let Rita marry him if he had known. Well, I am almost glad it is that, and nothing worse. I thought you had made an impression upon him, Liddy, my dear. I thought his eyes would have leapt out of his head when he saw you. Of course, I saw in a moment there was something; but this explains it. Dear, dear, what a sad thing for the Bonamys if it ever comes to be known! You must take the greatest care, both of you, not to betray him. Now, remember—not a word," Lady Brotherton said, making as though she would have put her soft, plump, white hand first on one mouth and then on another. Nevertheless, when Mr. Bonamy himself came in later, she could not help telling him that "my young people" knew, they supposed, some of Mr. Oliver's friends. But Lady Brotherton was very sorry when she saw with how much interest a statement which she thought too vague to do any harm was received.

"My dear lady," the Vice-Consul cried, "they know more than I do if they know his friends. He is the best fellow in the world and the best son, and the most excellent husband that

ever was; but I fear the world in general would think me very imprudent. I know nothing about his family, except that he quarrelled with them, and made a vow never to return till he had made his fortune. Well, I don't know where he will do that —not in the service of H.B.M. He has settled down here with me, and we are all very comfortable, and it was no small comfort to me to find an English husband for Rita who would not insist upon taking her to England. It was all settled," said Mr. Bonamy, "when I was so ill. I believed I was going to die, and so did everybody else; and to provide for my Rita was all I thought of. Well, I have nothing to regret. He makes her an excellent husband, and she is as happy as the day is long; and I don't know what I should do without him. Still I allow it was rash, for I know nothing about his friends."

"When a man has proved himself to be all that," said Lady Brotherton, in alarm, "it does not matter much about his family."

"Well, no—perhaps not," said the Vice-Consul, doubtfully. "But I have always taken it for granted they were people of some importance," he added, elevating his head. "He speaks like a man with good blood in his veins; he has all the prejudices of a man of some family. I don't think I can be mistaken in that; but I have never had the least clue to who they were. I should be quite glad to hear something about them from your young people."

"Unfortunately," cried Lady Brotherton, "they are both out; and then it was a mere conjecture, you know. Excuse me a moment, and I will ask the servant if he knows whether my son or Miss Joscelyn have come in——" And she hurried to the door to tell Thomas, who was waiting in the passage, to tell Miss Joscelyn and Mr. Brotherton, if they should make their appearance, that she was very much engaged, and begged they would *not* come in. "Remember, *not* come in," she whispered, earnestly. Alarm had seized upon her. She had laughed at Lionel's description of old Isaac Oliver—but, good heavens! to be the means of introducing such a very undesirable relation to the knowledge of the Bonamys! She was almost too much frightened to be able to face the Vice-Consul again; but it had to be done. She found him pondering when she went back. Sir

John was lying down to rest, so that they were alone; and poor Lady Brotherton's punishment for her indiscretion was not yet over.

"Did you say Miss Joscelyn?" he asked, "then I am sure it must be the same, for my son-in-law has Joscelyn in his name. He does not use it in an ordinary way, but on grand occasions; indeed I did not know it till I saw his signature at his marriage, and he has never liked to be questioned about it. Perhaps he may turn out to be a relation, a connection of your young friend."

"Oh, I don't think that is at all likely," cried Lady Brotherton hastily, "her mother is a cousin of Sir John's—" then she faltered and coloured, seeing the inference to be drawn from her words. "I do not mean that Mr. Oliver's family is not—everything that is desirable," she said.

The Vice-Consul looked up for a moment startled; but then he bethought himself of Lady Brotherton's "way." Her way he said to himself was well known. She was fond of connecting things that had no connection, and scorning those that had. So he answered without offence, "I did not suppose for a moment that you meant anything of the kind, Lady Brotherton; you will like him when you know him. He is as good a fellow as ever stepped; not very much educated—but so few of your young English squireocracy are."

"Do you think so, Mr. Bonamy?" her mind glanced straight of course to Lionel, and she felt a little offence as well as a disdainful pity for so foolish an opinion, and the grounds upon which it must have been formed.

"Yes, I think so; they come here knowing no language but their own, without a notion what they have come for, or what they want, trying to get up cricket matches and yawning in the face of all that makes Italy desirable. If they want cricket they should stay in England, where they would get it at its best. Yes, it must be allowed we see a great many ignorant young fellows —who are thorough gentlemen all the same——"

"I am glad you allow that," said Lady Brotherton, a little piqued. She was rather fond herself of finding fault with her country folks, but she did not like it in other people; and the Vice-Consul went away with his mind in a considerable

ferment, wondering if now he was about to penetrate the mystery of his son-in-law's antecedents. The idea that he knew nothing about them had given him a prick now and then through all these years; but Harry had never betrayed himself. He had not done so, for the good reason that all his young life had disappeared from him like a mist, and that honestly he never thought of it, or felt tempted to make any reference to it. His marriage had taken place while the Vice-Consul was still in a weak state of health, for the results of his illness had lasted long, though the seizure itself was over: and in all those happy quiet years Harry's heart had been so full and his mind had been so occupied that he had scarcely thought of the possibility of being called upon some day to roll away the stone from the grave of the past. And a sort of honourable hesitation had moved the Vice-Consul; he had accepted the stranger as he was; ought he to enter into discussion of his rights and wrongs now, and perhaps be compelled to condemn him, though he was so good? Now, however there seemed a prospect of a clearing up. "I should like to know who he is; before I die, I should like to know the rights of it," Mr. Bonamy said to himself.

"I was so glad you were not here, my dear," Lady Brotherton said to Lydia. "It appears that this Mr. Oliver has said nothing to the Bonamys about his family. He has allowed it to be supposed that they were people of importance. How they could be so foolish as to let Rita marry him without knowing all about him I can't imagine; but that is just what has been done. Now, my love, I want to warn you; be on your guard. Be on your guard, Lionel. It was very wrong of the young man to do it, but it's no business of ours; and they're married now, and can't be separated, you know; and Mr. Bonamy has not a word but praise to say of him. Be on your guard; I have no right to speak; I as nearly as possible let it out myself. I said my young people thought they knew Mr. Oliver's family; but afterwards I assured him that this was mere conjecture, and that I didn't think there was anything in it. So, my dears, both of you be on your guard."

"I shall not betray him, mother; but all the same it is a shabby business. The fellow must be a cad to do it," Lionel said.

Lydia looked up at him with hot, sudden displeasure, she could not tell why. What had she to do with Isaac Oliver? But she was excited by the appearance of this stranger who bore such a familiar name, and she felt angry that he should be called a "cad." She was in so strange a condition, so feverish, and restless, and impatient, that to be angry for some real cause was a luxury to her. She did not, for her part, give any pledge or make any reply, but seated herself in the carriage with a forlorn and partly fictitious feeling that this man, whom she had never (she thought) seen before, and knew nothing about, would be more near to her, if he were one of the Olivers, than these people with whom she had been so familiar, who had been her friends, and more than her friends, but who were about to drop her (she said to herself) next week, as if she had never belonged to them at all. They were all reminding her of this parting, keeping it before her, she thought, even old Sir John—without any sympathy for her, or regret to leave her, or perception of what the parting would be to her. Anybody from her own country, within her own circle of being, would be more to her, she said within herself, would understand her better, would feel more for her, than the friends who had been so kind, but who did not care.

But the visit of the travelling party was contemplated with very much stronger feelings by the one of all concerned, who alone knew all about it, and understood the full importance of the meeting. Harry had been unable to keep himself from one startled look when he heard his sister's name. "Liddy" first, which of itself roused him a little—he had not heard the north-country sound of that familiar name since he left the north country—and then Joscelyn. Who could she be? Could there be any Liddy Joscelyn but one? It was his mother's name, and his little sister's, whom he remembered with that tender partiality with which elder brothers and sisters think of the little one who is the pet of the family. Liddy had not been old enough to have come to the bar of fraternal judgment when he had left the White House. She was still a child, and he had been fond of her. They had all been fond of her. She had been the pet, sacred from the animadversion even of Tom and Will, who, being married, and separated from their home, were in some measure freed from the family prejudices. But Harry was

not freed. He had been angry with all his belongings for all these years, but as soon as he heard her name his heart grew soft to little Liddy. Liddy Joscelyn! He went away from the inn full of excitement, saying over and over to himself those familiar, soft-sounding syllables, Liddy Joscelyn, Liddy Joscelyn. Could it really be that this pretty young woman, who had looked at him over Lady Brotherton's shoulder, with such earnest eyes, was his little sister? For a long time he could think of nothing else but this, and took a long walk in an entirely different direction from the office to familiarize himself with the idea, and to get his excitement calmed down.

But the more he thought, the less he could manage to get his excitement calmed down. It might be supposed that he would have thought first of all of the danger of being discovered, and the likelihood that something might arise which would betray him to his sister. But this was only his second impulse. The first was instinctive, a sudden surging up of family affection, a leap of his heart into old prejudices and tendernesses; and it was only when he had exhausted this that he thought of the risk that he would inevitably run when Liddy found herself brought into contact with a man bearing so marked a name as that of Isaac Oliver. He laughed within himself, half bitterly, half with a sort of amusement at the sudden image which her little cry of surprise and startled look brought before him as well as before herself—Old Isaac Oliver! He remembered every line of him, all in a moment, his stooping, his shuffling, his desire to give good advice, his fear of his Missis, and almost laughed out at the strange connection he had himself formed between this grey old figure and himself. Why had he been so absurd as to choose such a marked name? But the idea that anybody could suppose him, Harry Joscelyn, to have anything to do with that old peasant, amused him more than all the rest. He could scarcely keep himself from shouts of laughter. He! The notion was too incongruous to be considered with gravity. It was an offence to him at the same time, but most of all it was ludicrous. And these people were coming to his house to-night, to dine at his table, to ask him questions, to make their remarks, to speak of old Isaac, and, perhaps, put it into the heads of his wife and her father that this was the kind of relation whom he had left behind him in England. The

Bonamys had received him so generously, accepted his own explanations so easily, given him the best evidence of their perfect confidence and trust, and, if now they heard this fine story of the old north-country clown, what would they think of him? The more Harry thought of it the more he was confused and bewildered. Liddy had looked at him with a very penetrating, anxious look over Lady Brotherton's shoulder. What was she so curious about? How could she know? And his wife and she would meet, would talk together, would perhaps come to confidences. He was not able to face the position. He was older and more experienced in many ways, but he was not experienced in such complications of circumstances. His head turned round and round. What was he to do?

The only thing he did was a curious token of the utter helplessness he felt. When he got to the office he called Paolo, who was still a faithful prop of the Consulate, and asked him to dinner to meet some English friends. He waited even till Paolo made his elaborate evening toilette, and walked home with him arm in arm, clinging to him as a sort of protection. There could not be a more clear confession of the state of impotence in which he felt himself. It was like one of his early difficulties long ago, in which Paolo was his only friend.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BRITISH CONSULATE.

THE Vice-Consul's family still lived in the same house, with more frequent use than before of the succursale of the Villa, where the children spent so much of their time. Naturally, however, it was a changed house, brighter and happier in one sense, in another—perhaps not all that it had been. Perhaps Mr. Bonamy had found a more delicate and complete happiness in it when he and his little daughter lived there alone, in perfect companionship, he sharing every thought with his child, and finding an entire and sweet compensation for all the troubles of his life in that perfect union and sympathy. It was true that, as he was aware now, he had known very little of Rita all that happy time: but while it lasted he did not know this, and thought that he had everything. It is the lot of fathers and mothers. When this last exquisite dream of his life failed him, and his Rita went over to that amiable, well-disposed, and kind young enemy, who had conquered and supplanted her father, Mr. Bonamy had, it is needless to say, a certain struggle with himself. But the circumstances helped him to a large degree. He was ill, expecting to die, and glad to think that whatever happened to him he had secured a companion, a support for her. When, however, death dropped into the background, and he had to begin again, and to reconcile himself to a third person in his house, at his table, and in all the most intimate relations of his life, the Vice-Consul had found it hard; and very hard it was to see his Rita turn to this other man as a flower turns to the sun, with all the clinging and dependence she had once shown to her father, and with a constant reference to and consultation of his wishes. It was quite right that it should be so, oh, perfectly right! and she was happy, as happy as a young woman could be—but it jarred upon the man who was left out in the cold, and who had to share, nay to give up the best of, this love which had been the recompense of his life, to a stranger. It is the lot of the fathers and mothers; when they make any

difficulty about consenting to it, we call them hard names; but yet once in a way it may be allowed, that it is a bitter thing to do. Mr. Bonamy on the whole had done it with a very good grace. He was, more or less, grateful to the interloper that his house was not left to him desolate: and he swallowed Harry with as few grimaces as possible, making in private those which he could not altogether suppress. On the whole no man could have occupied so invidious a position more genially, more inofficiously than Harry did. He was grateful and attached to his father-in-law, and he had a profound respect for him and his judgment, to which unfortunately Mr. Bonamy did not make much response. The Vice-Consul indeed had that half-painful, half-amused sense of being a better man than his son-in-law, which at once increases the pang of such a rivalry and makes it ludicrous. "Having known me to decline on a range of lower feelings, and a narrower heart than mine." When a father utters in the depths of his own heart such a sentiment as this, it may be somewhat bitterly, but it must be with a sense that it is utterly ludicrous. Mr. Bonamy felt all through like the disappointed lover in the poem "Thou shalt lower to his level day by day;" for indeed Rita herself, when she became Mrs. Harry, soon came to have far less interest in matters above Harry's level, than she had felt when it was her father's level by which her eager young being was founded. Then she had been his leader sometimes, his little oracle, with a fineness of perception that filled him with wonder and admiration; now she avoided those fine questions and speculations in which her husband did not share. He was faultless, Mr. Bonamy was just enough to allow; he was not exacting, he would still look on with honest admiring looks when they went beyond his knowledge, and smile and listen to discussions in which he could not take any share. But what Harry did not feel for himself, Rita felt for him. She would not go beyond him. She limited her own impulsive eager steps, which had been so ready for every path of fancy in order to keep upon the beaten ground by his side. Perhaps it gave her a little prick of pain too to leave her father alone, to curb all her natural impulses, to keep to that steady solid pace which suited Harry; and she did it knowing that her father felt it was a decline. But nevertheless her delicate instinctive unspoken

loyalty to her husband carried her through. She was "falsely true" as much as Lancelot though in so different a way, belying herself, for Harry's sake, who did not want such a sacrifice; but Rita felt it to be his due. There, as in all cases where there is a divided duty, the happiness which they possessed was purchased by a little inevitable pain, it was no longer unalloyed. The interloper, the breaker up of that previous blessedness, was the one who felt least drawback in it. For one thing he was naturally very modest and humble about himself, and it did not at all hurt him to acknowledge himself less clever than his wife and father-in-law. He would not have objected had they gone on talking over his head. His taste was less fine, and his perceptions much less acute than Rita's. And he got the advantage of that *finesse* of thought and feeling, that delicacy which was so much greater than anything he was capable of, really without knowing it, or being at all aware of the sacrifice she made.

Then the children, though they were a new bond, and a great pleasure to Mr. Bonamy (being good and healthy and smiling children, making the best of themselves, and looking merry and pretty, as children ought to do), gave a little wound also to his fantastical delicacy (for it was of course fantastical) about his daughter, whom he did not like to think of as involved in all the functions of motherhood. But the Vice-Consul, though perhaps not a very wise man by the head, was wise by the heart, and he would not do or say anything to throw the least cloud upon his child's happiness; he accepted everything, allowing to himself that he was fantastical; and their home was pointed out to everybody as the emblem of a united house, full of love and mutual consideration, and the closest affection—which it was, though not the same home as of old.

On this particular day Rita was somewhat excited by the prospect of a visit from the Brothertons. Lady Brotherton had been one of the objects of her girlish devotion—that devotion which so often flows forth to an older woman before it turns to a lover. She had admired the beautiful lady as only a girl can admire, and had copied her in many a little matter, and still believed in her with all the delightful prejudice which clings to the friends of our youth. She was eager to show everything—her husband, her babies, her own maturity of life—to her old

authority, and see how they looked through Lady Brotherton's eyes. When she saw her husband before dinner she was full of this pleasant excitement.

"What a pity, what a pity that Ralph and Vanna are at the Villa" (Harry in his perversity had given his father's name to his eldest boy, though he was of opinion that he hated his father), Rita cried, "I should have liked her to see them; but there is always Madge and baby. I wonder if she will think Madge like you, Harry. I wonder if she will think baby a beauty. English children are so big and red in the face; she may think ours pale; though I am sure they are quite strong. I wonder how she will think papa is looking. I wonder if she will approve of——"

"Me?" said Harry, with a somewhat uneasy smile; "she will think me not half good enough for you, and there I agree with her, so we shan't quarrel on that subject. But listen, dear, there is some one with her, whom I want you to be a little on your guard with; a—a girl—a Miss Joscelyn——"

Rita looked up suddenly, with a keen light in her dark eyes. She had Italian blood in her, to which jealousy was quite possible. She looked up startled, ready to take fire; but Harry went on tying his neck-tie, not so much as conscious, in his honest simplicity, that such a sentiment as jealousy could enter into the possibilities.

"I have a kind of idea," he said, "that she must belong to people—I used to know. I may be mistaken, but still I have a notion she does. So don't say anything, darling; don't let her enter upon the subject."

"What subject?" said Rita, breathless. "Do you mean that you knew the—lady—in those old times that I know nothing about?"

"I can't tell," said Harry; "if I knew her, it was as a child. But, Rita, you are always generous; you never have bothered me with questions. Don't say anything to her, or to any of them, if they should question you—about me."

"About you!" Rita's mind was partially relieved, but it was not in human nature to receive, without some retort, this curious commission. "What can I say about you? I know nothing," she said, with a little bitterness. Then, as he turned

and looked at her with unfeigned astonishment, “Oh, no, no, I do not mean that! I know everything, dear Harry, I know you; but nothing before you came here.”

“That is true,” he said, thoughtfully. “I wonder if I ever shall be able to tell you—all about it?” The sight of Liddy and the sound of her name had worked upon him more than he had thought anything could.

“Do! do!” cried Rita, all eagerness, clasping his arm with both her hands.

He had never said so much to her before, and she, in fastidious delicacy, had not asked. He laughed now, but still with anxiety in his face.

“At present I must get ready for dinner,” he said.

“Ah! it is always like this,” cried Rita; “when you are in a humour to tell me, something happens, dinner, or something equally unimportant!” which was more like one of her early girlish outbursts than the matronly composure by which she liked to think herself distinguished now.

But at this moment her maid came to tell her that the carriage of the English Signori, who were coming to dinner, had just driven into the courtyard, and Rita had to give her skirts a last settling, and to hurry to the drawing-room. And Harry had failed in his tie; he had to take a new one, feeling his hands tremble a little. His mind was in a great ferment. Some months before he had seen the advertisement for Harry Joscelyn, or a certificate of his death, in the *Times*, where he was described as “supposed to have emigrated,” and this of itself had roused no small commotion in him. He was to hear of “something to his advantage.” Harry could not tell what that might be, and if for a moment now and then the temptation came over him to answer the appeal and understand the cause of it, it yielded immediately, not only to the old resentment, but to the new sense of alarm and apprehension with which the idea of breaking up his present life, and disclosing to those who knew him under one name another identity, filled his spirit. It appeared to him that, if he gave up his present standing ground by revealing another, his whole life, so happy, so sweet, so full of natural duty, work, and recompense, would break up and disappear from him. As Isaac Oliver he was at

the head of the Consular business, known and named in all its affairs. As Isaac Oliver he was the husband of his wife. All the town knew him under that name, his children bore it. It had become almost dear to him, the name which he had picked up in bitter ridicule, and adopted with a perverse laugh, as he might have stuck a feather in his hat. The sound was familiar now to his ears, he liked it. It was Rita's name. She called him Harry, as the name of his childhood, which he preferred, and he had been led to admit that the "Harry Joscelyn Isaac Oliver," with which, for precaution sake, he had signed the register on his marriage, was his full baptismal name. He signed it now H. J. Isaac Oliver, and she was Mrs. Isaac Oliver. He liked it, and had a certain pride in it, as a name that was honest and without stain, and which should never suffer in his hands; and if he cut himself off from it, what would become of him? his identity would be gone. But the appearance of Liddy had made a very great impression on him. When she rose up suddenly, with a little start and cry, at the sound of his name, he had seen in a moment, in imagination, the real Isaac Oliver, shuffling like a crab along the North-country road, and a sense of the incongruity had struck him painfully, bringing a sensation of sudden shame and discomfiture; but in general he was not ashamed of the name to which he had grown familiar, and he felt as if, resuming the other, his pleasant life would all break up and disappear, and he would become another man.

Rita met the strangers with less composure than she would have done but for that two minutes' talk. Even when she threw herself into Lady Brotherton's arms, in the fervour of feeling which her Italian blood made a little more apparent than it would have been had she been all English, she cast an eye upon Lady Brotherton's companion. Lydia was not looking her best in the confused and painful fever of suspense and expectancy which was upon her; but she looked younger than her real age, and almost childlike in her slightness and slimness beside the matronly form of Lady Brotherton. Even Rita, though still light and small, was rounder and fuller than of old, but Liddy looked eighteen though she was twenty-two, and there could be no doubt that if Harry had seen her before it must have been as a child. This somewhat composed the

fanciful bosom of Harry's wife. Liddy when she had made her curtsey to Mrs. Oliver, sat down behind backs, with a timidity which had come suddenly back to her, isolating herself as far as might be, especially from Lionel, whom she had avoided ever since their recent conversation. Harry had not yet come into the room, and she felt herself altogether in a strange place. Perhaps it was this that brought Paolo to her side; the little Italian thought her probably, a neglected *demoiselle de compagnie* whom nobody particularly cared to notice, and this was enough to bring him instantly to the rescue. "Miss Joscelyn is a stranger in Italy?" he said with an engaging and conciliatory smile. He spoke a great deal better English than when Harry had made acquaintance with him, and dressed with less *abandon* and devotion to the beautiful; but he was still a "funny little man," in the eyes of the English girl; his kindness however could not be mistaken.

"Scarcely," she said, "I have been in Italy all the winter; and now we are going home."

"Ah, you are going 'ome, that always pleases; but I hope Mees Jos—lyn will retain a little memory that is pleasant of Italy too."

"Oh, I have liked it so much," said Liddy. She was disturbed at this moment by Harry's entrance; and it occurred to her now for the first time as it had done to Lionel when he first saw him, that she had seen somebody very like him—who was it that was so like him? She paused in what she was saying to interpose this wondering question in her own mind.

"That is Mr. Oliver," said Paolo, "you have seen him before? He is what we call *beluomo*, fine man, very fine man; he is my great friend; I was the first to meet him when he stepped upon this shore; we have been friends of the heart always since that day."

Lydia cast an involuntary look from the little man in front of her, in his elaborate dress, to the big person of the Englishman. She could not help thinking they would make a strange pair. And Paolo, with the quickness of lightning, divined her meaning.

"You think he is so tall, and I—little? Nevare mind," said the good little fellow, "we are of the same tallness in the heart.

Nay, even me, I am a little the tallest there," he added, laughing, "for I have nobody, and the good Oliver, he has his wife and little children, and many to love. He is my devotion," added the Italian, warmly. "I have never had a friend before him. I am English too—though perhaps Mees Jos-lyn would not know it."

"Are you indeed? I beg your pardon," said Lydia, "I thought you were an Italian. Mr. Oliver is very English. Do you know where—he comes from? and is it long since he came here?"

"That no one can tell you so well as I," said Paolo, delighted with the subject. "It was in—Ah, how well I remembare! I was upon the quay to watch for the great *vapore*—the steamboat I should say—and ecco! in one of those little boats that brought the travellers, this tall, big, beautiful young man. I step forward. I offer my help, for he could not speak a word, not one word. But no! he had a distrust of the foreigner. Mees Jos-lyn has perhaps remarked? It is the great fault of the English; they have always a distrust of the foreigners. He would not listen, nor permit himself to be assisted; but caught up his portmanteau and walked along. Wonderful! I stood and looked. Che bell'uomo! they all cried. I, I did not take any time to think—I am English, but I am Italian as well; from that moment I loved him, though he had a distrust of me. When I entered *table-d'hôte* at the hotel where I always dined, there was he again; and then we became friends. We have quarrelled, oh yes, we have quarrelled—a hundred thousand times," cried Paolo, "but we are always friends again. Mees Jos-lyn will pardon that I tell such a long tale. It is ten years."

"What are you saying to Miss Joscelyn, Paul-o, about ten years?"

"I am telling, amico, how we became friends," said Paolo, stretching himself to his full height by Harry's side, raising himself on tip-toe. The other looked down on him with a kindness that was not without a touch of contempt. Harry was very faithful to Paolo, and proud of him in his way; but the almost feminine demonstrative affection of the little Italian was always a thing of which he was half ashamed.

"Is it ten years?" he said. "But you might find some better subject to entertain Miss Joscelyn about."

“I asked him,” said Lydia. She looked at this stranger with very anxious, suspicious eyes. He was a stranger of course. She had seen him for the first time to-day. Still his name was one she knew; his face was one she knew; his very voice sounded familiar. A curious confusion and suspicion came over her. Strangely enough it never once occurred to her to think of her brother.

“Let me take you to dinner,” he said.

Could anything be more commonplace? The Vice-Consul went before them with Lady Brotherton, Sir John hobbled after them with Rita. On either side there were a few words being said. Lady Brotherton on the one hand pouring praises of Rita’s developed beauty into her father’s pleased ears, while old Sir John spluttered forth his remarks on the other. “Fathers’sh an evergreen, my dear. Look’sh ashyoung ash’ever he did. Bloomin’, bloomin’, like yourshelf.” Between these two, feeling a little tremor in the arm she touched lightly with her hand. Lydia walked with her silent companion. He did not say a word, and neither did she. But her heart began to beat: there seemed something strange and exciting in the air. She felt suspicious of him as if he had been a criminal; why did he not speak? It was scarcely any better at dinner. There was a great deal of talk at table, and much liveliness, but in this he took little share. When Lydia looked away to the other end of the table, or talked to anyone else, she invariably found his eye upon her when she returned to herself; but he said nothing except in answer to what was said to him; either he was a very stupid man, or—something else. She became so impatient at last that she turned to him boldly, provoked by his silence.

“Mr. Oliver,” she said, “I know some one of your name in the North-country.”

He seemed to perceive with an effort that she was actually addressing himself; but turned to her quickly, as if prepared for the attack.

“My name is not a very uncommon name,” he said.

“Oliver is not; but Isaac Oliver is surely very uncommon—it made me stare when I heard it. I thought you must be a messenger from home.” Lydia felt herself grow important in

her excitement. “Our Isaac Oliver is a very well-known person. Cousin Lionel, you know him too!”

It was a most unjustifiable attack; and to compromise Lionel too! Lady Brotherton stopped short in the midst of something she was saying, in her dismay at this contradiction of all her instructions, and this called the attention of the whole table to what Lydia was saying. There was a general pause in which every word was distinctly audible.

“Everybody knows him,” said Liddy, “in our countryside.”

And then they all looked at Harry, upon whose countenance there came a slight shade of colour.

“Is it so?” he said; “but he is no relation of mine.”

“How can you tell,” the audacious girl went on, “when you do not even know what countryside I mean?”

“Harry,” said Rita, leaning across the table, “what is Miss Joscelyn saying to you? You have forgotten your favourite dish, which was made expressly for you. Look, there is Antonio waiting, and cannot make you understand.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Harry, with a hurried glance round him; and then Antonio, though he did not know a word of English, understood like a true Italian that he was wanted to relieve an embarrassment, and gallantly stepped into the breach with his dish. Lydia, arrested in the midst of her assault, felt herself driven back upon herself, and confused as if she had received a soft, unexpected blow.

“Harry,” she said, in a low tone, “Harry—I thought your name was Isaac Oliver. I beg your pardon, I fear I have been making a mistake.”

The talk had recommenced again; nobody was paying any attention, and Harry’s head was bent over his plate; but suddenly he raised it for a single instant, and gave her a look. What did that look mean? Lydia was stunned by it as by a sudden electric shock. She had been confused before, but not half so confused as now. The look was tender, affectionate even, half-appealing, as if, she thought, there was some secret understanding between them—something which they knew, and which nobody else knew. She stared at him in return, arrested in all the movements of her own mind, her lips

dropping apart in her wonder, her eyes opening wide. He was not angry nor surprised at her boldness, nor at her attempt to force upon him an undesirable relation, but looked at her with an almost affectionateness, an understanding which she could not understand. Lydia was altogether confused; she did not say another word. Sitting by this stranger's side, she relapsed into silence like his own. Who was he? What did he mean? How had he got the command of her? She was giddy with the confusion in her mind, and what it all meant she could not tell.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER DINNER.

BUT Lydia was far, very far from being out of the embarrassment which she had brought upon herself. When the ladies went back to the drawing-room, which they did after the English fashion, Rita took no more notice of her than civility required, though she could not help owning to herself that there could be no reason for displeasure with her husband, or the least sense of jealousy on Lydia's account; Rita however could not help showing her adoption of Harry's quarrel by the chilliest civility to the girl against whom he had bidden her to be on her guard. She would not, as some suspicious women might have done, seize the opportunity to find out something concerning that part of his life which was unknown to her. She was too proudly honourable to do this; and she could not help feeling a certain enmity towards the girl who might betray him, even to herself. No, she would not hear a word Miss Joscelyn might have to say. She lingered by her a moment coldly, and asked if she would like to look at some books of engravings (it was before the time of photographs), placing them before her on a little table; and then she sat down on a sofa in a distant corner of the room with Lady Brotherton, and talked and talked. When the gentlemen came in, Lydia was visible in her white dress, all lighted up by the condensed light under the shade of a large lamp, sitting quite alone, while the voices of the two others seemed to bring her solitude into more full relief. Quite alone—nobody taking any notice. There was room round her for all the party, and it would have been natural that they should have collected about her, the only girl among them, so pretty as she was, and neglected by the other women. But the younger men were balked by the Vice-Consul, who stepped forward briskly, and at once put himself into a chair beside her. He talked to her, as he had a gift of talking, with delightful sympathy and kindness. He asked her about her travels, how far she had gone, and entered into all the little adventures of which she told him, telling her stories of the

days when he too had travelled, and giving her all manner of anecdotes. The Vice-Consul was still a handsome man, as majestic and gracious as ever; and he had a way, as everybody acknowledged, of talking to young people. He charmed Lydia altogether. She thought she had never met with anyone so delightful; and then he led the conversation quite imperceptibly to England, and her part of the country, and her family and herself.

"England is a closed country to me," he said. "To be sure I might go now that my daughter is married, and I am no longer indispensable to her. But I forget that. When Rita was younger, before she married, I was all she had, as she is still all I have in the world. I hope your parents are both living, Miss Joscelyn, and happy in their child? Ah, that is well. Rita has never been in England, and must never be."

"Must never be?" Lydia looked across the room to the sofa on which Mrs. Oliver was still sitting, with mingled wonder and pity. And yet, she reflected, she herself was not so very glad to get back to England. That was a fate which, under certain circumstances, might be bearable enough.

"No; I dare not risk her among the fogs and damps. She is—well, perhaps, I ought not to say she is delicate, not now: but she was so during all her earlier life. You see, I forget that she is not still my little girl, but has now little girls of her own. That makes a difference. No, she was never to go to England, that I vowed almost as soon as she was born. The cold and the damp were fatal to her mother, and Rita is so like her; I dare not risk my daughter there."

"But," said Lydia, "it is not always cold and damp. It is very lovely here, but people are prejudiced, and talk nonsense about England. If it is so long since you were there, you have, perhaps, forgotten. We have something else besides rain and fog."

"Yes, yes; I know there is an occasional fine day. You come from the south of England probably, Miss Joscelyn, where some sort of fine weather is to be found?"

"No, indeed, I come from the north—quite the north, close to Scotland; and we have often beautiful weather," said Lydia, with a glow of patriotism; "a different blue from this, and a

great deal more cloud; but then that is what makes it so beautiful, flying over the hills, clearing off in a moment, then dropping again like a white veil, and the sun bursting out all in a moment like a surprise. When one comes to think of it the variety is the charm. Here you have the same thing all day long, and every day; but with us the skies are never the same for an hour; and as for cold, I never feel any cold; one takes a brisk walk, and that is all that is wanted."

"I see you enter into the spirit of the country. The north? That is where my son-in-law comes from." The Vice-Consul always said to himself that he put in his tone a note of interrogation to this question; but Lydia took it for a statement, and received it without hesitation.

"Yes, I suppose so," she said.

"I think I heard you say that you knew—relations of his? Are they neighbours of yours? I am interested in everything about Harry."

"That puzzles me," she said, "to hear you call him Harry. I thought he was Isaac Oliver. I know some one of that name."

"A neighbour? It is, as you say, an uncommon name. I might have thought of that. Yes, quite an uncommon name. And your Mr. Oliver, Miss Joscelyn, was——?"

"Oh," cried Lydia, forgetting all previous cautions, with a laugh at the unnecessary title, "he was not *Mr.* Oliver at all. He was a man whom—he was a man—he was a——"

Here she stopped all at once, bethinking herself of Lady Brotherton's injunction, and of the possible effect upon the young man who had looked at her with such a strange, curious look, of this revelation. She stopped all at once, and looked at her questioner with sudden alarm. "I have not the least reason to think that he is a relation of Mr. Oliver's," she said. "It was only an idea on my part. It was because of the name. When I heard the name I thought it must be some one sent to bring me home."

"It *is* a curious name. We have got used to it: we have forgotten that. The man then is—not a gentleman? I think I may guess as much. He is a—what? A farmer—a yeoman? The yeomen in the north country, I have always heard, are a very fine, independent class of men."

“Oh, it is not a farmer, or a—— Indeed, indeed, it was the silliest mistake on my part. Besides, it is not really the same name, even if that were anything, for you call him Harry; so he cannot be Isaac Oliver, after all.”

“You must not think me too pressing, Miss Joscelyn. I have a particular reason for wishing to know. We have never known much about his family; and I think I am sure that it must be the same family, for the name of Joscelyn is—— What is it, what is it, Harry? Am I wanted? This is the way we are worked, we poor servants of the public. H.B.M., God bless her! is a hard taskmistress: but this conversation is too interesting to be abandoned. Keep my seat for me here, Paolo. I put great confidence in you till I come back.”

Paolo, who had been hovering about with many longing looks, took the seat with enthusiasm.

“I take it,” he said, “with all my heart; but to give it up, even to the Signor Consul himself, that is what I shall not do if I can help it. Mees Joscelyn has known Mr. Bonamy before? He is charming. He will not only talk, but make talk. He has great education and feeling; and in art, he knows himself much better than most of the English—not to speak with unkindness of the English, who have much fine qualities: and also I am English myself.”

“But one would not think so,” said Lydia, “to hear you talk.” She was of opinion on the whole that this was rather a compliment than otherwise, for “foreigners” in her opinion were more “interesting” than commonplace Englishmen. But Paolo was in despair.

“You think me—? Ah, it is cruel! and if Mees Joscelyn say so,” said little Paolo, “it must be true. No, I am not like my friend for example; but Englishmen are not all one like another. There is variety, as you have said so beautifully, like a poem, about the weather. Ah, the English weather! I should like that.”

“I don’t think you would altogether,” said Lydia with a quiet smile. She had no attention to bestow on Paolo. But she did what impulsive people are so apt to do with strangers, insignificant but sympathetic, often to the great damage of the victim. She leant forward a little and took him into her

confidence. “You are a great friend of Mr. Oliver?” she said, “you told me so; then please don’t go away when Mr. Bonamy comes back, for he is asking me questions, and I would rather not answer. It might do Mr. Oliver harm.”

“I will not go—for the King himself—if you thus tell me to remain,” cried Paolo, enchanted. But he was confounded too; he did not understand. The first and most natural idea seemed to be that Lydia and Harry were old friends or lovers, with a secret between them; or else this was a mere pretence to secure the pleasure of his, Paolo’s, society, instead of that of Mr. Bonamy. English young ladies, who were so free in their manners, so emancipated, did very strange things. Paolo smiled upon Lydia with his most captivating smile. “I could stay here for evare,” he said.

Lydia gave him a look of amused surprise, but she did not mind the little man at all, nor did it for a moment occur to her that he might interpret her sudden confidential impulse according to any theory of nationalities.

“It is very hard,” she said, leaning back in her chair with a little sigh of relief, “when anyone looks you in the face, and keeps on asking questions, not to tell everything that you know.”

“You think so,” said Paolo. “Ah! Mees Joscelyn, it is that you are so true, what you call straightforwards in England; here one would take a pleasure in doing otherwise. In Italy, when it is imagined that you desire to know more than is necessary, that pleases to us to confuse you. Not to me,” he said, bethinking himself, and beating his breast lightly to indicate himself as an exception, “not to me, for I am also English: but to noi altri Italiani:” this little confusion of a double identity as English, yet one of *noi altri*, pleased Paolo; he laughed at his own cleverness with the frankest self-appreciation. “It pleases,” he said, “to put a too much inquirer wrong.”

“But when he looks you in the face,” said Lydia, amused and relieved, “how can you say anything but what it really is? There is a—person in England whom I know. He is not a gentleman, but he has the same name as Mr. Oliver. Mr.

Oliver's name is Isaac, is it not? but then they call him something else, and I don't know what to think."

"My amico, Oliver, pleases to Miss Joscelyn?" Paolo said.

"Pleases to——? I feel a great interest in him," said Lydia. "He startled me so much with the sound of his name; and then he is like somebody I know. I cannot remember who it is—but there is some one; and then Mr. Bonamy asks me so many questions—I feel an interest. I do not think it very wise, if you have poor relations, to be ashamed of them—do you? And yet one does not like to betray another if there is any reason—" Lydia became so fragmentary in her utterances, that Paolo could not follow the broken thread of her thoughts.

"Ny-ce?" he said. "But my friend Oliver is very ny-ce—there is not a thought in him that is not ny-ce. I know," said Paolo, with an ingratiating smile, "that word so well."

"How nice of you to answer for him so!" cried Lydia, turning upon him with a sudden radiance of smiles. "It is delightful to meet with such a true friend."

Paolo's very soul expanded with pleasure. He put his hand upon his shirtfront, and bowed over the little table, laden with the picture-books. He did not deprecate as an Englishman would have done, or disclaim any merit in this; but took the full credit of it with a pleasant consciousness of deserving it. He thought, however, that there had been enough of Oliver, and determined to push his own successful fortunes without further delay. "Miss Joscelyn, I hope, will stay long, a little while, two, tree weeks at Livorno? No! Oh! that is bad news, very bad news," said Paolo, his face growing longer and longer as she shook her head.

"Only till to-morrow—to-morrow evening we are to go by the steamboat;" and Lydia, reverting to her own thoughts, recorded this statement with a sigh.

"You are sorry to leave the beautiful Italy. Ah! and Italy too will be desolated when so many charming Inglesi, so many beautiful ladies leave her shore—to-morrow! That is bad news, very bad news," Paolo said.

"I am afraid Italy will not care very much," said Lydia, with a little laugh. "The English come and go every year; but I don't think I shall ever come back. For me it is once in my

life," she said, this time with a sigh; and the sigh was a sad one, for there came once more over her mind, which had been temporarily distracted by a new subject, all the heavy and troubled thoughts which had made her so restless and wretched for a few days past.

"No, no," cried Paolo. "No, no—ah! pardon, it must not be one time in the Signorina's life. She must return—she must return! There are impressions, made in a moment—which will nevare, nevare be effaced——"

Paolo was carried out of himself; he leaned across the table, almost kneeling at Liddy's feet, and with the most passionate expression in his large liquid Italian eyes. Lydia on her side looked at the little man with the sublimest composure. She elevated her eyebrows the least in the world in mild surprise, and a passing wonder crossed her mind, immediately checked by the reflection that these were "Italian ways." But Paolo's rapt looks attracted the attention of others, if not of her to whom they were addressed. Two champions stepped forth immediately to the rescue. On one side Harry, hasty and disposed to be a little peremptory with his friend, and on the other Lionel, anxious and alarmed, thinking of course that any rival might come in at the last moment and "cut him out."

"Paolo," said Harry, "I wish you'd look after that gymnastic man for the children—the man you told me about. Ralph is coming back to-morrow; he wants exercise when he's in town."

"Ralph?" said Lydia, looking up, and once more meeting a look which bewildered her. Harry's brow was a little clouded, but his eyes had the same tender appeal in them, the same solicitude, as if he wanted her to understand him. What did he want her to understand? and here was another familiar name.

"Yes," he said, but a little uneasily; "it is an English name. We are divided a little in our family. The next is Giovanna, after an aunt—of my wife's."

"But that has an English form, too," said Lionel. "Joan."

A spark seemed to flash out of the eyes of this strange Mr. Oliver. He meant something. What did he mean? Lydia seemed to herself to be groping after him as if he had led her into a dark passage with a doubtful outlet, yet one that showed

faintly far off. Isaac or not, he must be somebody who knew about him, who was conscious of some connection. And to see him standing there before her, the idea that he belonged to old Isaac Oliver seemed too absurd to be entertained. How foolish she had been to say anything about it; how unkind and impertinent to try to vex him by producing that ghost of an old country servant! But then how was it that this stranger knew she was speaking of an old peasant, a man of a different species? He knew all about him, she was convinced. Old Isaac meant to him what it meant to her. Here again Liddy got entirely confused in the darkness, and groped and felt that she must be on the edge of finding out all about it, but for the moment knew nothing, and had not even begun to suspect any new turn which the confusion might yet take.

"Names seem very much the same in all languages," said Harry; "the contractions are different. In England we take the first half of the name, in Italy the last. My wife's name is Rita; one little girl is Madge; but they are the same name—Margaret. And you've only to stick on a vowel, and an English name becomes prime Italian. There's yours, for instance, Paolo; in English you would be Paul."

"That is true," said Paolo, dissembling, with a broad smile of affection, the sensations produced by the slap upon his shoulders which Harry was in the habit of administering, and which he was too polite, too devoted, to complain of. Paolo had a keen pang of disappointment too to have been thus interrupted while he felt he was making such progress with the beautiful young Englishwoman; but he was too sweet-tempered to resent it. He winced under the blow, but he smiled all the same. "That is true," he said; "but, amico mio, if you could but learn what it is to pronounce two vowels in the Italian! Mees Joscelyn must know that my friend Oliver, he is in Italia for ten years, and still he cannot do justice to two vowels. Will the Signorina make me the pleasure to pronounce my name?—Paolo. Pao-lo, broad, like this—ow. He will never catch it, he is so true an Englishman; but Mees Joscelyn will say it—ah, perfectly!" cried Paolo, clapping his hands together, and once more throwing himself into that adoring attitude; "thanks a thousand times; that is to make music of my poor little name."

At this both the Englishmen made a step forward, and stood tall and frowning like sentinels on either side of her, glooming down upon the little Italian, thrown forward almost upon his knees, with his clasped hands half way over the table, and rapture in his big, beautiful eyes. The scene roused Lydia in spite of herself. She was only a girl after all, and this conflict of emotion around her, the demonstrative adoration on one side, the furious defence on the other, which was quite as great a compliment, amused her, and gave her a little thrill of pleasure. Both Harry and Lionel, however, were much disgusted to perceive that, instead of being indignant and offended by Paolo's demonstration, she was at the least amused, and perhaps pleased. This made them more angry than ever.

"The vowel may add softness," said Lionel, in a tone of irritation; "but I don't think that is any advantage, at least in a man's name. In that a little abruptness, a bold conclusion, is desirable, not a liquid *a* or *o*."

"You want English for that," said Harry; "these foreign beggars (I beg your pardon, Paolo) are all for airs and graces. I suppose I can't get my mouth about them; though to tell the truth I don't see any difference between my pronunciation and Miss Joscelyn's."

"It is true," said Paolo, "there is a sound in both your voices —what you call it—a tone. You have in brief, by the way, the same voice—that is strange. Mr. Brotherton, he is in a different key; but you, that is a great compliment for you, amico, you are in the same note with Mees Joscelyn. She will speak perfectly, perfectly! the Italian, and you no. Oh, you no! nevare," said Paolo with a laugh, clapping his hands; "but nevertheless it is true you are in the same tone."

"That is strange," Harry said. Once more he looked at her so affectionately, with a kind look of pleasure in his eyes, that Lydia was more and more bewildered. "It is a great compliment to me, as Paolo says."

"My mother seems to want you, Lydia," said Lionel, very coldly. He did not like it at all. It seemed to him that Oliver, who was a married man, was forgetting himself altogether, though he was an Englishman, and ought to have known

better; and was paying court undisguisedly to Lydia as well as this little hop-o'-my-thumb of an Italian who was languishing at her feet, just like a foreigner, showing off those sentiments which an Englishman has the delicacy to conceal. And Lydia was pleased! Was it possible? Such a thoroughly nice girl, so modest and delightful in all her ways, never putting herself forward, always with the pretty reserve in her frankness which is the very bloom of maidenhood. To think that she should be pleased! Lionel felt that he could not understand it. This, no doubt, was the sort of thing which made cynics declare women to be incomprehensible creatures. A really nice girl, everything about her good and pure, and yet this kind of thing actually pleased her! Lionel's indignation, and disgust, and disappointment were extreme, but he tried to restrain himself. "My mother is looking for you," he said. "And I suppose she wants to go. You must not forget my father has been ill, and that we have a long journey before us." He hoped the fellow would understand this; that she was going away to-morrow, and that he had no further chance of philandering in this barefaced way; and he hoped Liddy understood that he thought her forgetful and inconsiderate, and showing no feeling for poor old Sir John, not to speak of Sir John's son. But his ill-temper did not have so great an effect as it might have had in other circumstances. She was looking up at Oliver, wondering, with her pretty eyebrows slightly raised and a softened, gentle, almost child-like look, interrogating the eyes of that fellow, who was a married man! Lionel thought it absolutely immoral. He was disgusted and bewildered, and did not know what to think. He made another step nearer and offered her his arm. "My mother," he repeated, with some sharpness, "is moving to go away."

Lydia made no resistance. She took his arm quite submissively, and held out her other hand. "Good night," she said to Harry. "I suppose we must be of the same country, as we have the same voice."

"Yes," he said, holding her hand a moment, "we are of the same country, and I know what you think; but it is not that."

"It is not *that*? What is it?" Lydia said, with a startled look, as if she saw light somewhere; but then Rita came forward

with Lady Brotherton and took leave coldly of Miss Joscelyn, and there was nothing for it but to go away.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COUNSELS OF THE NIGHT.

"LIDDY, Liddy, my dear! you should not have said anything about that old man. How is it possible that he could be a relation of Mr. Bonamy's son-in-law? It is odd, of course, about the name; still, you know, there might be another Lydia Joscelyn in the world who was no relation of yours. There are Joscelyns down in the South. I thought when Sir John first remembered about your mother that it was one of them she had married; and there might just as well as not be a Lydia among them. Lydia is not a common name, no more common than Isaac—but there might be a Lydia among them, who, of course, would not be related to you."

"I don't think now that he is related to Mr. Oliver," Lydia said.

"I wonder," said Lionel, "what reason you have for that? It seems much more likely to me than before. I don't think the fellow is a gentleman. Oh, he looks well enough, there is nothing amiss about his appearance; still there are some things I have remarked."

"If Lionel thinks so," said Lady Brotherton, "my dear, in these matters, I always take the opinion of a man, just as about women I would take a lady's opinion before all the men in the world. Oh, yes, it is very pretty to talk of jealousy, and all that; but you may be sure we all know our own kind the best. If Lionel thinks so, I would take his opinion before my own."

At this Lionel had compunctions, and drew back a little.

"Perhaps I went too far," he said. "I was out of temper. Still there are some things a man would not do, if——" but though he felt that he had been rash, he did not complete his sentence. The carriage stopped, indeed, at that moment at the inn door, and there was no time for him to say anything more; and Lydia took no further part in the discussion.

She bade her friends good night in the hall of the inn and ran upstairs to her room. She was rather glad to have disagreed

with Lionel and set her own opinion before his, and she felt angry with him, indignant, and almost wounded, that he should have given such an opinion. She felt it almost to be something against herself. She hurried up to her own room, to finish her packing, she said. She had taken out her white dress to wear that evening, and had now to put it back, to resume her travelling-garments. It was their last night in Italy; next evening they would be at sea, seeing the sun set in the Mediterranean. It was a warm night, and her mind was far too restless and busy for sleep. When she had put away her dress, and arranged all her possessions in order, she went to the open window and sat down there, looking out at the moon. The room was high up near the skies, and she had all the firmament to herself, nothing to disturb its calm except the old belfry of a convent with its little tinkling bell, which was always in movement all day long, but which seemed to have gone to bed along with the peaceful sisters and their pupils. This little belfry stood out against the deep blue of the sky, which lined out every little curve and corner, but all was quiet in and about it, its shrill tongue still till morning. All was quiet; the room looked out to the back of the house, and not an echo of the street reached Lydia in her retirement. She felt, half with the giddiness of her excited condition, half with the expectation of to-morrow, as if she were sailing upon a sea of space, floating between the earth and sky; and as she sat there so still, her candles burning in the background unnoticed, sedately awaiting her leisure, and the soft night blowing in upon her with a breath of the sea in it, a perfect crowd and storm of thoughts burst on Lydia in the quiet. She thought, you would suppose, of what she had been doing to-night, of the curious questions about Isaac Oliver, and the examination to which the Vice-Consul had subjected her, and all the novelty of this story into which she had been thrust head and shoulders without any will of her own; but, to tell the truth, Lydia thought nothing about this at all, at first. She thought of to-morrow, of the tide of movement which would sweep her away, of leaning over the bulwark and seeing the long trail of the water gliding under the ship, and of what might be said to her there. Sir John would be safely installed in the deck-cabin, which had always to be secured for him, and Lady Brotherton would stretch

herself out on a sofa and close her eyes, in preparation for being ill. And then: what would be said? She wove a great many imaginary conversations that came to nothing. Why should they come to anything? He would tell her—what he was going to do in town; that he hoped she would enjoy going home; something commonplace, ordinary—or else he would say foolish things about the months they had been together, and pretend to regret them. Why should he regret them? Lydia imagined herself saying much that would not be true, that she was impatient to get back, that the quiet of the Fells would be delightful after so much wandering; and much besides which would pique him and wound him, and perhaps goad him to say other unpleasant things in return.

And then all at once, without any doing of hers, her thoughts gave a leap back to to-night, and there began to float and move before her all the new faces never seen before, never, probably, to be seen again, which for an hour or two had filled her with such strange, strong interest. From the moment Mr. Isaac Oliver had been announced, startling her out of herself, until now, when still discussing him, she had left the rest of the party in the hall, the encounter had agitated and disturbed her. "We are of the same country, and I know what you think—but it is not that." What did he mean?—it is not that! and why did a stranger whom she had never seen before look at her so, and understand her so strangely? Her heart began to beat loudly once more when she thought of her impertinent production of old Isaac, when seated beside her silent host at the table, taunting him with the old man; and he understood her—that was the strange thing. If he did not really belong to old Isaac Oliver, how was it that he understood her? When he looked at her with that curious appeal, as if saying "Do not vex me—do not trouble me," there would have been no meaning in it if he had not known what she meant; and how could he know if it was not true? Lydia felt herself caught as in a net of confusing questions and thoughts. Another man would have been surprised; he would have asked "Who is this namesake of mine? Tell me about him." But this man did not ask a question; he *knew*. She felt that from the first moment she had perceived this involuntarily, and that her little pricks of questions could not have had any point if he had not known

old Isaac, and if she had not felt that he knew him. Mr. Bonamy, for instance, did not know at all, and asked natural questions—who the gentleman was? the gentleman! if he was a neighbour, a farmer, a yeoman?—none of which things Mr. Oliver so much as suggested. Then who was this that knew Isaac Oliver, that knew her own name she began to remember, starting when he heard it first, as she had started when she heard his?

By this time Lydia began to get hot after the puzzle which unfolded itself slowly before her. Why did the Vice-Consul ask her so many questions? and he had begun to say something about "the name of Joscelyn." What about the name of Joscelyn? Then a crowd of bewildering recollections, like motes in the sunbeam, like the whirling flakes of a snowstorm, began to circle and dance and palpitate around her. "We are of the same country, and I know what you think—but it is not that." What was it, then? What was it? He a relative of Isaac Oliver! no, no!—it was impossible; but he knew Isaac Oliver; he knew his name and herself; he knew what she meant when she spoke; and when she tried to humble him with her impertinence, he was not angry, but sorry. She seemed to see now his kind, half-reproachful, half-appealing eyes, the look which bewildered and arrested her, she could not tell why. Quicker and quicker went the course of Lydia's thoughts. He had a child who was called Ralph, and another Joan—no, not Joan, but Giovanna; but there had come a gleam out of his eyes when Lionel had suggested Joan. Who was he, who could he be to use these names, to look like that, like somebody she had seen, to understand all she meant, yet not to be angry? And their voices that were of the same tone! She could see this herself, or rather she could hear it herself—that their voices sounded alike, with a suspicion of a North-Country accent. Good heavens! where was this flood of suggestion, of recollection, carrying her? She jumped up from her seat in the confusion and hurry of her thoughts, and began to pace about the room, her hands clasped together like her mother's. Then she stopped in the centre of the room, and in the silence, in the middle of the night, threw up her arms above her head with a wild gesture, and gave a sudden cry. "Harry!" she almost screamed to herself in the stillness. Everybody was asleep

around her, the stars winking in the sky as if about to shut up their wakeful eyes, the blue behind the belfry beginning to glow with a pale radiation into the air of the coming dawn—and as if they had given each other a signal, all the clocks of the silent town began chiming and striking, some of them prolonging the lengthened measure of the Italian time into the soft tuning of the night. Lydia standing in the middle of the room in wild excitement, her hair streaming about her, her arms thrown up, her mouth open, looked like a prophetess in a trance, seeing the invisible, almost shrieking her revelation into the heart of the silence. Harry! Harry! She could not keep it to herself; she could not help but scream it out into the night, to make sure that she was not dreaming or raving—but was a sane creature, who had made a discovery which seemed to set her whole being on fire.

It was a long time before she could calm herself down. If there had been anybody to tell it to, that would have been something; but, as she had no way of getting rid of her excitement, it blazed up in her higher and higher. She did not know what to do to calm herself down. She walked about for nearly an hour, now and then going to the window, leaning half out, exposing herself to the fresh air and coolness, eagerly looking for the first early riser, the first window opening, and watching the little belfry grow black against the lightening sky, then flash and blaze to the first touch of the sun. Sleep! she could have sooner done anything else in the world—stretched out her arms like wings and flown, leaped down from the window, called out to all the city, that was what she wanted to do—"Harry, Harry!" She seemed to have but one idea left in the world.

After a while, however, in the desperation of being unable to communicate her discovery, or do anything to bring herself more clearly face to face with so wonderful a revelation, Lydia sat down to trace it again step by step, then lay down on her bed, going over and over the familiar ground. She fell asleep just as the sunshine began to stream into her room, and slept soundly for an hour or two in the depths of her exhaustion; but when she woke it was still early, and a long day before her. Naturally the first thing she did was to survey again the entire circumstances, going over them one by one. She had not much

experience, and in her whole life no such lawless incident as a *nuit blanche*, a night spent without taking off her clothes had ever occurred to Liddy before. She felt almost guilty as she found herself lying there, her long hair streaming about her, in her dressing-gown, as she had been when she first sat down at her window to think. Sometimes the morning light dissipates the wisest calculations and conclusions of the night, and turns its theories and revelations into folly; but as she started up hastily, and began to put her facts together again, no such awakening occurred. They seemed more conclusive, more certain, in the sober light of the morning, than they did in the feverish wakefulness of the long, silent night. She pieced them all together hurriedly, in a tremble of excitement. He had been there ten years, and it was ten years since Harry disappeared. He had said nothing about his family, he had even married without any explanation on that point. He had started at the sound of her name; he had understood all she said. He had called his child Ralph—*Ralph!* after his father, with a prejudice that was North-country all over; and his name was Harry, so called by his wife, though he had himself announced as Isaac Oliver. Lydia thought she could understand exactly what had made him take Isaac Oliver's name—a moment of despite and despair, yet humour—a putting down of himself from the pinnacle of the Joscelyns to the humility of the lowliest servant, an expedient which would direct the thoughts of anyone who might seek him into another direction. She sprang up, and was fully dressed and ready to begin the extraordinary piece of work she had in hand, before anyone else of the party had stirred. But what was she to do? Was she to go to him straight, without any further inquiry, without a pause, and say, Are you my brother Harry? or, You are my brother Harry! If by any chance he was not so, after all, he would think her mad. What was she to do? She sat down again at the window where she had sat for half the night. The sunshine was pouring in, growing every moment more brilliant, not like the temperate British sunshine which it is a pleasure in the early morning to bathe and bask in, but already blazing, slaying in its Italian force and fervour. She had to close the *persiani*, which she had herself thrown open in her restlessness on the previous night. When all the people of the

hotel were in motion, and life fully astir, she went downstairs; but there was nothing to be done there, save to sit down once more and think it all over again. She had not been there long, however, when Lionel came into the room in search of a book; he had been restless too; but he started violently when he caught sight of her buried in a great chair, with her hands clasped in her lap. For the first moment he thought that she must have been there all night.

"Lydia!" he cried, in great alarm, "what is the matter?" Then he added, hastily, "My nerves are entirely wrong, I think. You startled me so, as if you had been all night in that chair."

"Not in this chair," said Liddy, willing, however, to have some credit of her sleepless night, "but almost the same. Cousin Lionel, I want advice very much. I am very lonely and very inexperienced to do anything so important by myself."

He came quickly and drew a chair close to her. She was excited physically by her vigil, and the tears were very near her eyes, which were brimming full when Lionel, much concerned and very tender and sympathetic, looked her in the face. He put out his hand to take hers with anxious solicitude; and Lydia did not resist. Her heart was so full, and she was so overburdened with this new thing, that the mere touch of a sympathetic hand was a consolation to her. The tears dropped out of her eyes like two drops of rain upon her dress, and then she looked at him and said, "I have found Harry," with the tremor of a sob in her voice.

"You have found——!" he was so startled that he did not know what to say in reply.

"Cousin Lionel," cried Lydia, "answer me this—how did he know what I meant when I spoke of Isaac Oliver? He knew very well, he never asked a question; and why did he start when he heard my name? I saw it myself. He arrived here ten years ago, without knowing anybody, he has never told them about his family, he called himself *that*, don't you see, in a kind of disdain at himself and everything. Then he married and promised never to take his wife to England. He did not want ever to go to England, why was that? And he called his son Ralph, fancy, *Ralph*! why was that? And though he is called Isaac Oliver to the world, he could not bear that at home, and

they call him Harry, his true name. Oh, Lionel, do you not see it all? It is perfectly clear, as clear as noon-day. And now tell me what am I to do?"

"But——" Lionel said, who had not followed, entirely without preparation as he was, her breathless argument. "What do you mean? tell me what you mean? I am utterly bewildered. Are you speaking of Oliver—*Oliver*? I don't understand what you mean."

Lydia made a gesture of impatience.

"Oh, everybody is so slow, so slow!" she cried, "except him. He understood at once. Don't you see he must have known it all beforehand, everything that could be said? He never asked, 'Who is Isaac Oliver?' he said in a moment, directly, 'He is no relation of mine.' How could he know if he had not known?" cried Liddy, too eager to be lucid. "Mr. Bonamy asked me, 'Who are you talking of? a neighbour, a farmer, a yeoman, who is it?' but *he* never asked a question. He said directly, 'He is no relation of mine;' and when we were coming away he said to me, 'I know what you think, but it is not that.' Now how could he know what I thought if he had not known?"

"By Jove!" said Lionel. He was very much startled, so that some exclamation was necessary. "That is very acute," he said; "I see what you mean. It is very acute, and this is very strange. Perhaps—there may be something in it. But you know," he added, "it is far too pat, too complete, to be a real discovery. People do not find long lost brothers like this."

"Oh, do not talk—in that common way," cried Lydia; "as if strange things did not happen as much as they ever did! Why should it be too complete? The more you think of everything, the more you will feel sure. Don't you see just why he chose that name to disguise himself with? I do. And all those little bits of kindness—to call his boy Ralph, like a forgiveness to my father, who was so hard upon him. He has not a Liddy," she cried, with a little regret. "Ah, I see how that was too! mother, dear mother, he had nothing to forgive her. Lionel! Lionel!" she cried, grasping him by the arm in her excitement, "tell me what I must do?"

"You see meaning in everything," he said, "more than there is, more than there can be, Lydia. All that about his child's

name is just your own delicate feeling—though after all, when one comes to think of it, Ralph! it is an odd name for a little Italian boy."

"And the girl is Giovanna; you said yourself it was the same name as Joan."

"Did I? I am sure I did not mean anything," said Lionel, with a short laugh, and then he cried, "By Jove!" again. "I really do think there is something in it. He gave a look, I remember now, as if he did understand, as if he thought I meant something. It looks very odd, Lydia; and I had a strong impression he was like some one that I had seen him before."

"He is like—all of us," said Lydia, with a little breathless gasp, "not one nor another, but all. But tell me, tell me what to do! We have only to-day, a few hours, nothing more!"

"As for that," said Lionel, "of course, if this turns out so important, my mother must simply arrange to stay till we see the end of it. She will not mind, she will like to jump into the middle of a romance; and my father will easily be persuaded to stay, there will be no difficulty about that."

And then there was a long debate and consultation between them; a debate—for Lionel, not understanding that even when a human creature is a woman she likes to do her work with her own hands, was for proceeding to the Vice-Consul himself, and going through all the pros and cons, and bringing the result to her, to save her fatigue, and to keep her from all disagreeable contact with the world; whereas Lydia's most prevailing desire was to follow out the clue at which she had caught, and to track her prey into his last refuge, and to unveil the impostor. She did not use these words, but this was the course upon which she was intent. She was not afraid of contact with the world, or of what anybody might say. The discussion rose somewhat hotly between them as the servants came and went, laying the table, bringing in the English urn and teapot, which all the Inglesi preferred. They were still sitting close together, talking warmly, interrupting each other, Lydia's face glowing with the excitement of the situation, when Lady Brotherton appeared. She was startled by the sight, but for the moment she did not ask any questions, being much pre-occupied by Sir John's breakfast, that the tea should be

strong enough without being too strong, that the cream should not be “turned,” and that the fish should be done to his mind. She did not take much notice of them, and the meeting between them broke up, each retiring upon his and her own side of the question. Lydia was too much excited to talk, or to think, of ordinary things. She sat at the table as upon thorns, and the moment the meal was over, got up with some excuse and hastened away. Lionel followed her a few minutes after. He lingered in the hall, hoping he might be in time, at least, to go with her, wherever she might choose to go. But as she did not come, after half-an-hour’s waiting Lionel resolved to act upon his own theory, and accordingly set out on his volunteer mission, hoping that she might have thought better of it, and was staying with dignity in her room, however anxious she might be, waiting till he, her representative, should bring her news. It was a pretty division of labour, and one that fell in with all Lionel’s views.

CHAPTER XII.

ACTING FOR HERSELF.

BUT it is not to be supposed that Lydia, her whole being ablaze with excitement and eagerness, was likely to assent to this masculine view of what was best for her. Before Lionel had got downstairs into the hall, where he waited so long to intercept any rash enterprise she might be bound on, she had stolen out, tremulous yet brave, and was speeding along the morning streets, where the passers-by, who gazed at her with that frank admiration which Italians feel, without any impertinence of meaning, to be the due of every pretty woman —excused, yet wondered at her solitary progress, on the score that everything was to be pardoned to an Englishwoman. Lydia herself was confused by the looks she met on every side, but her mind was so entirely preoccupied that they made less impression upon her than they would have done had it been at freedom, and it did not occur to her that she was being guilty of any breach of decorum. What troubled her more was that she was uncertain of the way, having paid but little attention to it last night, and she was shy of asking which turning to take. But by right of the inspiration that was in her, and of that good fortune which attends daring, she at last found herself in a street which she recognised, and saw with a beating heart the well-known shield over the doorway. It was not to the official entrance she was bound. She saw with a smile, even in the midst of all the ferment of her agitation, the little Italian, her admirer of the previous night, in light clothes and a cigar, making his way towards it; and, lingering a moment till he disappeared within the doorway, she hurried after him till she got safely within the shelter of the courtyard and to the door of the Vice-Consul's house.

The Vice-Consul that morning had been early astir. He had been painfully affected by the half-revelation of last night. All these years, since the beginning of their intercourse when he had framed his theory about Harry's parentage so easily, and satisfied himself so entirely that he must be right, nothing had

occurred to put this theory to the test. The marriage had taken place while he was still ill, and in a state of some danger, and perhaps at the bottom of his heart he was glad and relieved to be in a condition which made all inquiries impossible, and which forced him to throw himself upon Harry's honour. He had never had any occasion to be shaken in his faith as to that honour personally, and use and wont had made everything natural. For years he had not thought on the question. Nothing had occurred to bring it up. The serene domestic life had flowed along, and notwithstanding the drawbacks on Mr. Bonamy's part which have been already noted, they had been happy together. He was aware that, though he might sometimes grudge Harry the position he had acquired in Rita's affection, yet that he himself would have been the first to miss him had any accident taken Harry away. But at the first whisper of a real discovery of his son-in-law's antecedents, Mr. Bonamy was roused out of the quiescence of years. The very suggestion of some one bearing Harry's name roused him, and something about Harry, an awakened attention in his eyes, a strain of watchfulness quite unusual with his simple, easy-going nature had aided the impression. He had already heard something from Miss Joscelyn, and was on his way to learn more when Harry had interrupted the conversation, calling him away for a matter of business to which strictly speaking it was necessary that he should give his attention, but which in other circumstances his son-in-law, he felt sure, would have managed himself rather than disturb him among his guests. And what he had heard had roused him still more. It was evident that the person, whoever he was, who bore the same name was not a relation to be proud of, and the Vice-Consul too was impressed by the fact, dimly apparent, that Harry had shown no surprise and asked no questions when this namesake was spoken of. There had been that look in his eyes, *eveillé*, on the watch, on his guard; but no curiosity—and he had not said a word about it when the guests were gone. Neither had Rita said anything about it, which would have seemed so natural. She had not asked who Miss Joscelyn was speaking of, or what she was speaking of; but had maintained a complete silence on the subject. All this awakened the Vice-Consul's anxious curiosity. He was on the watch at breakfast

next morning, hoping that something might be said, that Harry might laugh at the suggestion made to him, or take some notice of it. But nothing occurred to throw the least light upon the subject. Harry was still watchful, still on his guard, but chiefly occupied with little Madge and the baby, whom he brought in to breakfast seated high upon his shoulder, and who occupied him completely in a way which filled the elder man, though he had usually all the indulgence of a grandfather for his descendants, with impatience. He was glad to get away from this scene, rising somewhat abruptly, and going out without any explanation. Had Lydia come the direct way she would have met Mr. Bonamy and saved him a great deal of annoyance and trouble. But, as she took two or three wrong turnings, the Vice-Consul reached the inn and was shown up to the sitting-room to wait for Lady Brotherton about the same time that Lydia reached his house; and Lionel, by no means so sure what to do as either of these straightforward and one-idead persons, had gone to the English bankers, the best-informed persons he could think of, to see what information about Mr. Isaac Oliver he could pick up there.

Lady Brotherton was still busy about Sir John's breakfast, endeavouring to beguile him to the simple luxury of an egg instead of the something much less safe on which he had set his fancy. "You must not forget that we start to-night; that we have a sea voyage before us," she was saying. "Morsh-a reason for deshunt breakfast now," said the invalid, and chuckled and laughed at his own cleverness. His wife was not at all disposed to go downstairs and hear what Mr. Bonamy might have to say. "Let'sh have old Bonamy up here—show him up here," Sir John said; but that was so much worse that Lady Brotherton left him to his ortolan, and went off to answer her untimely visitor. She thought it was no doubt a mere visit of goodwill, to inquire "if he could be of any use." "As if we wanted anybody to be of use! As if we were not experienced enough to know what we want, and how to get it," she said to herself, as she went to the unwelcome guest. Her mind was a little perturbed besides; the servant had declared that he could not find either Mr. Brotherton or Miss Joscelyn. They had both gone out. Where had they gone, had they gone together? she asked, but nobody could tell. Now Lady Brotherton had bidden

them to go out together, had said they were cousins, and had no need of a chaperon, but she did not like this adoption of her advice so suddenly. The last morning, just when Sir John wanted special managing, that he might commit no imprudence before the evening, and when they might have known Mr. Bonamy would be sure to call!

But when Lady Brotherton heard that it was not civility, nor for her sake at all, but a visit full of self-interest upon his own business, this interruption in the midst of all her cares threw her out of temper.

"No, indeed, I cannot tell you much," she said; "I heard them talking of it, but I did not pay much attention. The man is an old servant, I believe, belonging to Miss Joscelyn's family, a sort of old factotum at a farm. My son lodged in some rooms in the old Manor-house (I think), and this old Isaac and his wife 'did for him,' as people say. Yes, I am sure that was the story. They all know this old man, quite respectable, I feel sure, a sort of good class of family retainer; servants of this kind still flourish, you know, in some out of the way places. Mr. Bonamy, I am afraid you are ill."

"No, no," he said, waving his hand, "nothing, it's nothing, a kind of faintness I have sometimes since my illness, which goes off directly. I see—I see—an old servant. Well, of course, it was a very odd coincidence, very odd. But I thought at first the young lady supposed—that this old man of hers was somehow connected with my son-in-law. Thank you! thank you! I see how absurd I was."

"Oh, I don't think Lydia could be so ridiculous as to think that," said Lady Brotherton, "only my son and she were both struck by the name; it is such an uncommon name. At least, the two together were struck by it; they both cried out, 'Isaac Oliver!' My son is rather fond of telling absurd stories about this poor old man. He is a kind of a wit in his way, it seems, but a little of that goes a long way in the country. I don't think I have seen much humour in what they tell of him—"

"A thing that is quite commonplace often seems original from the lips of a clown," said the Vice-Consul, with solemnity. "Perhaps you have heard something about the family, or children, or other relatives of this—old man?" Mr.

Bonamy felt disposed to call him a confounded old man, but, after all, it was not the old man's fault.

"Nothing at all, nothing whatever, I assure you. You must not think, Mr. Bonamy, for a moment—it was only *pour rire*; they never supposed, I am sure you will believe me when I say it, of connecting old Isaac with—any gentleman; it was a mere joke. They thought the coincidence so amusing, and Lydia, I suppose, as girls do, thought it was fun to tease Mr. Oliver a little; that was all. I have never heard a word more about it. It was only at the moment. I hope you will forgive my silly youngsters. They are both out. I cannot think where they are gone, or they would make their apologies themselves."

"No apologies are necessary," the Vice-Consul said. He was very grave, his countenance had changed even since he came in, much more since yesterday, when his handsome head had been full of serene content. There was a deeply marked wrinkle in his forehead, and the lines at the corners of his mouth drooped heavily. He seemed to have aged half-a-dozen years. "There is no harm done; and where there is no offence there need be no excuse." He said this with a sort of formality, such as he was in the habit of employing to troublesome British subjects, who got into many scrapes and gave much occupation to the representative of their country in pulling them out. It was a style that told (for the moment) upon such persons, and it came to his hand readily on an emergency. "I am glad to hear there is so little in it," he added, rising. "Unfortunately my son-in-law is estranged from his family, and we know but little about them; so that I thought it just possible this might be some one—in whose well-being he was interested. It is I who should apologise for troubling you. I hope Sir John is none the worse for last night?"

"He is not at all strong," said Lady Brotherton. "It begins to be anxious work when we have long journeys to take. But he bears them better than anyone would think," she added. "Oh, no, he is none the worse; I left him making a very good breakfast. He would have liked to see you, but I could not think to trouble you coming into a sick-room."

"No trouble at all," Mr. Bonamy said, but he did not make any motion to go, neither did she wish him to do so, and they

parted with mutual politenesses and professions of regret to have given each other trouble, and repeated protestations that it was no trouble at all. But when the Vice-Consul got out of doors, he went along slowly with a dejected tread, his head drooping, his eyes dim, and little in him of the dignified tranquillity becoming the representative of H.B.M. He was wounded in his pride, in his self-confidence, in the serenity of his judgment, in the force of his instincts. He was not going to give up Harry; Harry was Harry, whatever happened. But to think, after all, that he was *not a gentleman*, that the family which Mr. Bonamy had taken for granted was a family of laborious peasants, not of gentlefolks, that his relations were such as would not help him, but burden him in every particular of life—in short, that he himself had been entirely mistaken, and that he had given his daughter to a nobody, went to his very heart. He had the generosity to reflect that Harry had said little, that it was he who had jumped at conclusions and given him credit for connections which he had never directly claimed. It was he, rather than Harry, who was the fallen personage, fallen from all certainty, from all faith in the future, in himself. He would say nothing about it, he thought, to anyone. Why disturb poor Rita, who need never know that her husband's father, or uncle, or near relation was a farm-servant? Why even bring poor Harry to book, and force him to confess, and convict him, if not of falsehood, yet of sanctioning a false impression? Mr. Bonamy with true magnanimity decided that he would not humiliate, as he might do, even the chief culprit, if culprit he could be said to be. It was no use to make all suffer. He thought it best on the whole to make an effort to keep the trouble to himself.

Meanwhile Lydia had knocked with some timidity and trembling at the door of the Vice-Consul's house. She asked for Mrs. Oliver with a hesitation that was very unusual to her. Now that the moment had come her heart beat so loudly, her breath came so quick, that she did not feel able to face it. She was led soberly up to the large, cool, shadowed drawing-room, in which with so much agitation she had spent the previous night. There was no trace of agitation or disturbance of any kind about the tranquil place, all closed up and semidark, according to the Italian wont, against the fierceness of the sun.

The old graceful furniture, the dim pictures on the walls, the signs of long established living everywhere, made it almost impossible to think of any change or revolution that could happen in such a settled place. Lydia sat down in a corner, feeling herself more than an intruder—a traitor and introducer of strife and trouble into the stillness. She had asked instinctively for the wife, lest after all she might be making a mistake; and only after she had done so, had it occurred to her that to have her husband thus discovered and identified, though he had done no wrong, might not be an agreeable incident in Rita's life. This, however, was but a momentary thought. To feel that she was herself within a few minutes of the truth was an excitement which occupied all her being. Her mind had room for little more.

Rita was busy with her housekeeping, arranging the affairs of the day. Her husband was in the office at his work; her father gone out, no doubt about business; her little children enjoying the morning air in the garden. All had begun pleasantly as usual in the well-ordered, calmly constituted life. She had been a little disturbed, a very little, last night by her visitors, with the slightest possible jealousy in her mind of the new-comer, who seemed to have some sort of connection with her husband's early life, that portion of it with which she was completely unacquainted. It was a mere superficial sentiment, not strong enough to be called jealousy, yet veering that way; for she did not like to think that anybody anywhere could know more about her Harry than his wife, a feeling which even in its most unreasonable phases is not uncommon among wives—or husbands either, for that matter. But *that* Miss Joscelyn was going away, was gone away so far as the Vice-Consul's household was concerned, and Rita thought no more of her—She was interrupted in the very midst of her discussion of the *spese*, and examination of the contents of the cook's basket, which old Benedetta was helping to turn over, and making sharp remarks upon, to the damage of the cook's temper, as so much dearer and not nearly so good as in her time—by a message that a lady wanted to see her. She was predisposed to be annoyed by it. "A lady! how often must I tell you to bring me the name! It can be nobody for me; it must be some one for your master," she said. The man was very

humble and apologetic; he represented that the English names were very hard to pronounce; that it was the young lady who had been there last evening—the young lady who resembled the bambino so much. “Resembled the bambino? What bambino?” cried Rita. And then old Benedetta burst in and explained that all the servants had remarked it—that the English young lady was the very image of nostro bambino, our own blessed baby whom everybody admired.

“Resemblances are very strange,” Benedetta said; “they will come without rhyme or reason—for of course our darling can have nothing to do with a stranger—a young Signorina Inglese whom no one ever saw before.”

“I wonder you can allow yourself to talk such nonsense, Benedetta. There is not the slightest resemblance,” Rita said. The other servants bowed and deprecated, and agreed that the Signora must know best; but Benedetta stood like a rock, and completely ruffled the impatient, fanciful temper of her mistress. Rita delayed consequently as long as she could find something to occupy her in her kitchen, wilfully keeping her untimely visitor waiting. “What can she want with me? She had better ask for Harry if she has anything to say. Like my baby indeed! I wonder what next?” Rita said to herself. But at last, when there was no further excuse, she mounted reluctantly the stairs, and walked slowly towards the drawing-room, Lydia within counting her deliberate steps with a beating heart that went a great deal faster. It was a duel that was about to take place between the two.

“Good morning,” Rita said, coldly; “Italian servants never can manage English names. I was told it was a young lady, and that is vague. Pray sit down. I hope there is nothing amiss with Lady Brotherton or Sir John.”

“I come—entirely on business of my own,” said Lydia, with a little timidity. She was taller and altogether a more imposing person by nature than this small, little, half Italian matron; but Rita had always a certain grandeur about her, and she was the invaded châtelaine, the defender of her house against an intruder. Lydia felt almost afraid of her, and a little compunctious too.

“My husband would probably be of more use than I can be. But pray sit down, and if there is anything I can do——” Rita said, with a majestic wave of her hand towards a chair.

But Lydia did not sit down. Her hands sought each other in that same clasp of agitation which was habitual to her mother. “I must beg you to pardon me. It is about your husband that I want to ask.”

“My husband!” Rita said, and no more.

They stood and looked at each other for a moment, Lydia, appealing, agitated, as if (she felt) there was something wrong in her interest in Harry, the little wife towering over her in offended dignity, something like a Queen Eleanor, though without any cause.

“I want you to tell me if you know anything of his family, or where he came from; and when he came here? and if he has ever spoken to you of any of——, and why he has never taken any notice? It must seem very strange to you,” Lydia sat pausing, trying a smile of anxious deprecation, “that I should ask such questions as these.”

“It is very strange indeed. I cannot understand them, or what right you can have to put them. A stranger must have a very good reason indeed for interfering at all between a man and his wife.”

“I do not want to interfere,” cried Lydia; “oh, believe me, it is not that! I want only to know; and it may be very important for you and the family, as well as for us. I am only surmising, groping; and I am not—very old,” the girl said, with that instinctive appeal to personal feeling with which women invariably back up all arguments, “nor experienced. I don’t know how to go about it. But it is of so much importance, if I only could tell you right, to my mother, and all of us, and may be to you too.”

“Your mother, and all of you! What do you mean? What have you to do with my husband?” Rita cried.

The wonder, and even the indignation, were natural enough. To be confronted all at once by a stranger demanding news of your husband, declaring that what she wishes to find out will be very important to her mother—what could be more bewildering, more irritating to a woman? Her nostrils began to

expand, and her eyes to flash. “There is evidently some mystery here which I am unable to fathom,” she said.

“It is a very innocent mystery,” said Lydia; “there is nothing in it that will do him any harm, or you. If you will not tell me, will you take him a message from me? It must be cleared up one way or another, for we are going away to-day.”

“Mr. Oliver is in the office,” said Rita coldly, walking to the bell. “He can be sent for at once.”

“Will you wait a little, please?” Lydia said, faintly; “though I feel so sure, yet I may be wrong. Will you take a message for me? It will be better if you will do it than seeing him myself.”

“I would rather not be mixed up with any mystery.” Rita had her hand on the bell. She was drawn up to twice her usual height, her small foot planted firmly on the ground, her head thrown back, her whole person instinct with resistance, defiance, and indignation. And Lydia before her, flushed and excited, was not at all unlike a suppliant handmaiden, whom the wife had a right to reject and cast forth out of her house.

“Oh, do not be so hard upon me,” she cried. “Listen to what I want you to say to him. Would I send any message that could hurt him by his wife?”

“Hurt—him—” Rita began to be confused, and took her hand from the bell. “But it might hurt me.”

“It will not hurt you. Don’t delay, don’t delay!” cried Lydia; “if you knew what a thing it is to wait. And think how my poor mother has been waiting all these ten years—and I said when I left her that I should find him. Mrs. —— no, no, I cannot call you by that name—it is unworthy! Mrs. Harry—will you go and say this to him from me? Listen, listen; you must not make any mistake. Uncle Henry is dead. He has left all his money to his nephew who went away. If he does not come home it will be divided, and wrong will be done. Will you say that to your husband for me?”

“Uncle Henry—and his money—and his nephew. What is the meaning of all this? What do we know about all this—and who are you?” It was Rita now who was losing command of herself.

"If *he* understands," said Lydia, dropping down in a chair in the mingled exhaustion and relief of having at last had her say, "I will tell you who I am. You don't know the meaning, but I am sure he will know. Oh, Mrs. Harry, it is so simple a test! Will you not try it? If he does not understand no harm will be done, and you can judge of it for yourself. If he knows what it means you will soon know all about me."

She began to cry, with little tremulous laughs between, in her agitation. She was entirely overcome by the excitement of the crisis—so near finding out, so sure, and yet still a little cloud of suspense and uncertainty between. Rita stood and looked at her—her rival was it? who was it?—with a tremor of wonder and rising excitement, and even a sympathy which nature exacted, which she was most unwilling to bestow. Then reluctantly she went out of the room, slowly and carefully closing the door behind her, and walking along the corridor as if counting every step she took. It was the last struggle of her instinctive opposition with awakened interest, excitement, curiosity, and alarm. She ran along the passage to the office as soon as she was out of hearing of the other. In a moment more she would know.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT.

MR. BONAMY felt weary of his morning's expedition. It was not that there was really anything to tire him in it; but he was dejected, disappointed, mortified. He did not feel able to go into the office as usual, to meet Harry as usual, to do and say the usual things. He thought he would go into the house instead, and rest a little, and see Rita and the children, and try to console himself with the reflection that this painful discovery only made them all belong to himself the more. It was a poor consolation, and yet in a way it was sure. He felt them more his now that he was certain no other family could claim them. Poor girl! poor babies! some time they might be glad to take the name of Bonamy instead of that wretched one that was their own. He did not intend to say a word to Rita on the subject, but he did what it was the habit of this imprudent man to do, he thrust himself into temptation. He went, all emotional and disturbed as he was, into the dwelling-house, into the room where his daughter would most likely be found, and where she was certain to inquire into the cause of his depression. In half an hour, in the ordinary state of affairs, he would have been at Rita's mercy, and notwithstanding all his fine resolutions would have betrayed everything to her. He went in, however, determined not to say a word, only to show his child who was injured, though she did not know it, that her father's tenderness would never fail her. He was so foolish that he went into a jeweller's on his way, and bought a little ornament for her. And he meant to say something very kind of Harry too, though it was by Harry that his humiliation had come. A peasant, a servant! and his poor child who might have been a princess! but he would make it up to her, and she should never know.

In this mood Mr. Bonamy went into the dim and cool drawing-room, out of the heat and glare of the streets. He saw some one seated near the window, but he could not for the first moment make out who it was. He was greatly disappointed,

however, to have the privacy of his first interview with his daughter interfered with, and though he was too polite to show his annoyance, yet it was with no friendly feelings towards the intruder that he made his way among the furniture to the spot where she sat. He had looked for a moment of *attendrissement*, of something like the old unbroken union between the father and child. Your husband is a disappointment, but your father will never forsake you; he did not mean to say this, would not have said it for the world; but he intended that it should be understood, and there was no doubt a melancholy enjoyment in the anticipation. Whoever this stranger might be he wished her at Jericho; nevertheless courtesy goes before all, and he went up to her, with the full intention of being friendly if he knew her, and at all events civil, as became a man in all circumstances towards a lady in his daughter's drawing-room. Lydia looked up as he approached. She saw him well enough, her eyes being accustomed to the darkness. She was white as a ghost, and trembling, expecting, though there was not yet time, the return of Rita with an answer to her message—perhaps, if she was right, of Harry himself, and his recognition, and the clearing up of the whole matter. But when she saw only Mr. Bonamy, her heart seemed to stand still. She threw up her arms with a pained and wondering cry.

"Oh, is it only *you*? Oh, am I wrong, am I wrong, after all?"

The Vice-Consul was as much surprised as she was to find her there; and he was piqued, as an oldish (not very old) man, who knows himself to be a handsome man, notwithstanding his years, would naturally be by such an address; but he pulled himself together, and laughed, and bowed.

"It's only I, as you say, Miss Joscelyn. I am very sorry to disappoint you. I daresay some one more interesting will soon be here."

Lydia was so over-excited, so exhausted with the agitations of the night and the excitements of the morning, that she burst out crying while he was speaking. The Vice-Consul was confounded; but he was never more in his element than when administering consolation. He took her gently by the hand, and put her back into the seat from which she had risen. "My dear young lady," he said, soothingly, "I am grieved to see you

distressed. What is the matter? In what are you wrong?" Then he began to understand dimly that Lydia's distress must be somehow connected with his own. He grew very grave, though he still held her hand with fatherly kindness. "If you have come to tell Rita anything unpleasant about her husband," he said, "I am very, very sorry you should have thought it right to do so, Miss Joscelyn. I have heard it all from Lady Brotherton. I don't deny that it has wounded me; but, after all, my daughter did not marry her husband for his relations, but for himself. He is the just the same in himself as he has been these nine, ten years. To tell me would have been right enough, but why vex Rita? She need never know anything about it. Neither, so far as I am concerned, is there any need to reproach Harry with it. I do not even intend to let him know that I am acquainted with the condition of his family. Let me persuade you, Miss Joscelyn—you ought to be of gentle mind, so young, and pretty, and gentle-looking as you are—to pretend this is only a common call, and not to say anything to Rita, or to him either, poor fellow. Rita is a girl of a high spirit; she might not forgive her husband. Come, come, let me take you back to Lady Brotherton; and forget that you have ever seen young Oliver, or his wife, or myself, or any one here."

"Mr. Bonamy, you are very, very kind. We don't say much in the north country, but I think I love you," Lydia said.

A smile came over his face; even in such circumstances the Vice-Consul could not help being pleased. "This is very sweet and very pleasant, and I have no doubt the feeling would soon be mutual—if you will do what I ask you, what I beg of you. Let these young people alone. Why should you interfere with them? I hope the Olivers are decent people, at least, if nothing more."

"The Olivers," cried Lydia, hotly, "are poor folk; they are nobody; they have nothing to do with it. I will never more submit to call Harry by that name. I couldn't do it even at first, though I couldn't tell why."

"Now what does this mean?" said Mr. Bonamy, quickly. "What does this mean? Is there some further story to be told? God bless my soul! what is it, young lady? You are not the sort of person to interfere and make mischief. If there was anything

disagreeable to be told, why not send for her father and tell it to me?"

"There is no reason why it should be disagreeable. I may be wrong—I may still be wrong," cried Lydia. "Oh, don't speak for a moment that we may hear her step coming back! If he comes with her, then I shall know I am right. A few minutes will make me—I sent Mrs. Harry with a message to him. I thought he would like best, if it was true, to tell her himself. Oh, listen, listen! is there nobody coming? This was the message I sent: 'Uncle Henry is dead, and he has left his property, and it will all be divided and lost to you if you do not come back.' Did you hear anything? If he understands that, don't you see?—you can judge for yourself—I shall be right; and mother, dear mother!" cried Lydia, with an outburst of tears.

Mr. Bonamy stood by her confounded. "Uncle Henry is dead, and has left his property? What else could Uncle Henry do? he could not take it with him if he is dead. If he understands that! Well, I do not understand it, that is one thing certain."

"Oh, open one of those dreadful windows; that there may be a little light—a little light!" Lydia cried.

The Vice-Consul obeyed quite humbly; he had lost his standing-ground altogether, even the painful bit of soil he had got under his feet this morning. He seemed swimming in a sea of bewildered conjecture. He opened the *persiani*, throwing a broad bar of sunshine across the dark room: and then there ensued another pause. They waited in complete silence, he confounded, shuffling about, taking up things and putting them down, to the exasperation of Lydia's nerves, who sat bolt upright and pale as her dress, with her eyes fixed upon the door.

No ordinary measure of time could be sufficient to calculate what this was; it was hours; it was weeks; it was minutes. Lydia had time to go over everything in her thoughts; to glance at the aspect of affairs at home; the consternation of Will and Tom; the happiness of her mother; the mingled wonder and delight of Joan. She had time to go through half-a-dozen scenes with Lionel; to speculate how her father would take it:

to realise even old Isaac Oliver's gape of astonishment when he heard that Harry had taken his name of all names in the world—before at last there came a sound, unfamiliar to her, but which Mr. Bonamy knew, the little click of the swing door at the end of the passage which communicated with the office. Then came the sound of steps. Lydia rose up to her feet to meet the decision whatever it was. She trembled so that she could scarcely stand, and seeing this the Vice-Consul, though not yet in charity with her, went to her side in his kindness, and drew her arm within his. "Lean upon me, my poor child," he said. They stood on one side of the broad band of light which divided the room, and which, though it showed to them the other two who came in, also arm-in-arm, concealed them from the new-comers. Rita, tearful and excited but not melancholy, was clinging to her husband's arm. He with an eager, pre-occupied face pressed forward across the light. "Confound that sunshine! who opened the window?" were the first words he said, then strode along across it, paying but little regard to Rita, whom he dragged after him. When he got face to face with Lydia he paused.

"Was it you that sent me that message?" he said. "Is it true?"

Lydia's emotion fled in a moment at this matter-of-fact address. She drew her arm out of Mr. Bonamy's, trembling no longer.

"It is true," she said; "they have advertised and done everything to find you."

"I know—I know. I saw that; but they never said why. And they would like to take it from me! Will and Tom—and their father."

"For shame!" she said; "not father. He is the one that stands out—with mother, and Joan, and me."

He had been quite steady and business-like, almost stern, up to this moment; now he suddenly fell a-laughing in the strangest way.

"What a united family!" he said, "Mother—and Joan—and you. Who are you? Little Liddy, the little girl at school, that poor mother always thought—but, poor soul! she thought that of me too."

Lydia's excitement was almost uncontrollable; but she was a North-country girl, and she kept herself down a moment longer.

"Joan always says still," she said, "that there was a great deal of mother in you."

And then he burst forth into a half shriek of laughter and sobs.

"Look here, I can't stand it any longer," he cried. "Mother—is living then, and all right?" He seized her by the shoulders, looked her in the face, kissed her almost roughly, brushing his beard along her smooth cheek. "I knew you the first moment," he said, "you little thing! I knew you the first moment. You were always a clever baby from your cradle. I have often thought the last baby was like you. You were the sharpest little thing! Of course I knew nobody else could be Liddy Joscelyn. And you thought I belonged to old Isaac, eh? that is the best joke I ever heard. Old Isaac—is the old fellow living? And father—stood out for me? Well he ought to, for it is along of him——" Here Harry stopped a minute, put Lydia away, and looked round him upon the two silent spectators who regarded this scene with an astonishment beyond words. He made a pause, pulling himself up all at once. "Poor old father," he said, "after all he's done more for me than anyone (I called the boy after him, you can tell him). It is along of him—that I found the best friend and the dearest wife that ever was."

And Harry gathered his Rita—who had been standing by with a countenance swept by all manner of emotions: now angry, now melting, wondering, bewildered, indignant, always chill with that sense of being left out, which is the most terrible of sensations to such as she—into his arms and kissed her, and put his hand over her forehead as if clearing some veil away. "You are not Mrs. Oliver any longer," he cried; "that's a good thing over. You're Rita Joscelyn, and the best and the sweetest that ever did honour to the name. Isn't she a little beauty, Liddy? What will mother say to her, and to the children?" Here poor Harry, overmastered by excitement and pleasure, fairly burst out crying, and kissed his wife over and over, sobbing, and bedewed her hair with his tears.

“You might let her speak to me, Harry,” said Lydia, crying a little in sympathy, but brightening and beaming too.

“This is all very astonishing,” said Mr. Bonamy. “You have talked a great deal in an unknown tongue, and kissing is all very well, Harry; but you owe a fuller explanation to me.”

Then Lydia stepped forth. “We are the Joscelyns of Joscelyn Tower—the real old Joscelyns whom everybody knows in the Fell country,” she said. “We are not quite so rich as we once were (but father has been doing so well lately,” she added, in a parenthesis to Harry) “and we live in the White House. *He* ran away ten years ago, and never has written, never has sent a word (oh, shame, Harry! and poor mother breaking her heart) all this time. But when I left home in November,” Liddy said, holding her head high, “to come abroad, I told them I should find him, I should bring Harry home; nobody believed me of course, but I have done it; and now, Mr. Bonamy, you know why I said I loved you. We are relations,” she said, holding out her hand; “we all belong to the same family now.”

The Vice-Consul was greatly touched; and he was deeply relieved at the same time in his own mind (though, if truth were told, a little, just a little, disappointed too). He took the hand she offered to him very gallantly, with his old-fashioned, paternal grace. “Then, my dear, I may as well follow Harry’s good example,” he said, stooping over her to kiss her forehead. “I am very glad to receive you into my family.” Yet he would have liked to have had his daughter all to himself. The Isaac Oliver business, which had seemed such a terrible downfall an hour ago, looked a little, just a little, to be regretted now. It was an unworthy thought, and Mr. Bonamy felt that it was so. He in his turn held out his hand to his son-in-law. “When you are at leisure,” he said, plaintively, “perhaps you will shake hands with me in your new capacity. Harry Joscelyn—is that your name now? Well, it is preferable to that of Isaac Oliver one must allow.”

As for Rita she was crying a little on her husband’s shoulder. “I don’t think so,” she said. “I like all things as they were. I shall never know who people are speaking to when they say Mrs. Joscelyn; and how are we to explain to——. We are not going to tell everybody all the story, I hope.”

This was a little perversity not to be got over all at once. She had not said anything to Lydia; she could scarcely forgive Lydia for being her Harry's sister, for finding him out, for resembling the baby: she saw that herself now, but was angry with Benedetta for having discovered it, and with Lydia for having in that disagreeable way announced a private claim upon her (Rita's) family. No doubt Ralph would be like her too, for he and the baby had always been said to resemble each other. Poor little Ralfino—Rita, who up to this moment had called him Raaf in defiance of all Italianisms, instantly conferred upon him the softening vowel and diminutive: Ralfo, Ralfino he should be henceforward, she decided in a moment; and she took no notice of Lydia. Papa, she said to herself, was doing all that was necessary in that way.

Thus the scene of the discovery, the restoration of Harry to his family, and his inheritance to its right owner, which according to all dramatic precedent ought to have been ecstatic, was not at all so, and ended in embarrassment and mutual annoyance. The results would be very advantageous in every way to the hero himself and his wife and children, and would not be advantageous, but the reverse to Liddy, who was at once so much the poorer by Harry's discovery. But it was she who gained, not she who lost, who took the revelation unpleasantly. "You will have to go—to England I suppose," she said, looking askance at the new-found sister, and clasping the arm of her husband; and there was a grudge in her tone.

"Yes, my darling; I must go and see my mother."

"That is your first duty," said Mr. Bonamy, almost severely; the severity was intended for his perverse child, but she took no notice of it. "Of course you must go to your mother. If I had known, my boy, that there was a mother in the case——"

"Oh! for heaven's sake, papa, don't upbraid him now! it is bad enough without that. When must you go? and why, now that I am strong as a little horse, why shouldn't I go with you?" cried Rita, clasping his arm with both hers.

"I don't know any reason, dear, except——" Harry turned appealing eyes upon Mr. Bonamy, who had stiffened into a man of stone.

“Except—your solemn promise,” said the father; “but that was thought very binding in my day.”

“In that case there is nothing more to be said, Sir,” said Harry, not without a shade of incipient offence; and then he turned to his wife. “It will only be for a very short time, my darling. I shall not be away from you, you may be sure, a moment longer than I can help.”

Oh, sublime selfishness of marriage! which looks like the most generous and perfect of sentiments to the two concerned; the bystanders scarcely saw it in the same light. The father, realizing that his child had to be consoled for being left a week or two to his sole company and tenderness; the sister, who had taken so much trouble to reinstate her brother in his fortune and family, finding out that he was to give to that family not a moment longer than he could help—looked at each other with a mutual understanding, which found vent on Lydia’s side in an uncontrollable laugh of mingled humour and disgust. “Mother would be pleased to hear you say so, Harry,” she cried, “after ten years. I think you might give her a day or two of your free will beyond that.”

Rita was very quick-witted, and she saw and was ashamed. She detached herself from her husband and drew near to his sister. “I daresay you don’t like me, d’avance, because I have the first right to him,” she said.

“I have never seen him since I was a child,” said Liddy, with dignity. “It cannot be supposed that it makes much difference to me. I was very anxious to find him for mother’s sake, and to let him have his property, because it was justice, but otherwise why should I fight with any one about him? he is a stranger to me.”

“Don’t say so, Liddy,” her brother cried.

“I must say so when I am asked such questions. Mrs. Harry does not seem to understand,” Liddy said.

There is nothing perfect in this world. How different, how very different, she had expected it all to be! She had expected perhaps that Harry himself would be a little gratified, that he would be touched by the faith in him of his little sister and her determination to find him. Lydia had herself forgotten that this determination had fallen much into the background in her

recent wanderings. She thought her mind had always been full of it, and that this was the recompense of her devotion. She was hurt and wounded. Though she was Harry's sister, and though she had brought him a fortune in her hand, she was still a stranger in Harry's house, and his wife defied her. She could have cried this time in sheer mortification and injured feeling. "I will let them know that you are here," she said with as much stateliness as she could muster. "I have done all that I suppose is in my power. I will not intrude upon anyone." What a dreadful thing it is to be a woman and have that weakness of crying when you are hurt! Liddy kept her tears in her eyes only by main force, and could not altogether succeed in subduing the tremor in her voice.

At this moment, however, the door opened, and the servant appeared, introducing Lionel, who stared when he saw the party thus assembled. Lionel was not in the best of tempers. He had been making inquiries as best he could, and he had found all Lydia's guesses confirmed. But he had gone back to find that she had stolen a march upon him, and he was exceedingly cross, so cross that he was sometimes very angry with, and at other times very sorry for, himself. When he had made his bow to Rita, and stared with a gloomy countenance at her husband, he turned to Lydia with suppressed passion. "My mother has sent me for you," he said. "She wishes you to remember that everything must be ready early to be sent down to the steamboat. Time and tide will wait for no man, you know." This was said with a little smile, as if he were beginning to perceive, and wanted at least to hide from the others, the vexation in his tone.

This made a diversion, and as the whole story had to be told him, the members of this strange family group were drawn nearer to each other in spite of themselves. Under cover of the little commotion of talk which got up, all of them sometimes speaking together, Rita, who began with her quick intelligence to realize the position, and to see her own ungraciousness, took the opportunity to draw a little nearer to Lydia. She kissed her when she went away. "I—I hope you will forgive me if I was bewildered," she said: and Lydia forgave. But she was not the less stately when she left the party, feeling, with a little bitterness, that without her they would talk the matter over

more at their ease. Lionel was stately, too. He made them his congratulations with the utmost gravity, as if pleasure were out of the question, and he took the earliest opportunity to remind Lydia a second time that his mother was waiting, and that the things must be sent to the boat. They went out of the house together in a sort of armed pacification, a truce hastily patched up, stalking side by side, not looking at each other. Going out into the street was a sort of solemnity to them, like steering out into the sea on a voyage in which they did not know what might happen. Anything might happen in it. They might quarrel for ever and ever, they might part not to see each other again. They might do anything—except walk quietly from the British Consulate to the Leone, where Lady Brotherton was waiting, fretting over Miss Joscelyn's box, which was not locked, and of which no one could find the key.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE STREET.

OUT in the street, out upon the world, out upon a perfectly lonely sea, where they saw nobody and thought of nobody, but those two worlds of themselves, he and she, moving alone together, with a little space of clear daylight between them, the two parallel lines which can never come together so long as measurements last—For a time they moved on with no communication at all, each feeling very solitary, and unspeakably dignified and superior to all trivial thoughts and words. What could they have to say? What does he care? Lydia said to herself; what does anyone care but me? She had done her work, but she had not got much satisfaction out of it. It had estranged her friends from her, and everybody. Her mother would be pleased, that was always a little consolation to think of. Dear mother! and what if she were disappointed too? You never can tell how little satisfaction there is in a new thing till it has happened, she said to herself. In her preoccupation she stumbled over a crossing, over the rough pavement, and then her companion spoke.

"Take care; these little streets are so many traps. Will you take my arm till we get into the smoother way?"

"Thank you," said Lydia, "it is not at all necessary. I did not notice where I was going."

"You prefer not to be helped in anything," her adversary said.

"Indeed, no; if anybody will help me, I am always very thankful," Lydia replied.

And then he turned his eyes upon her. "I think you are mistaken in yourself," he said, quickly, "we often are. You think women should be independent and manage their own affairs."

Lydia raised her eyebrows a little.

"I was not thinking about women, or what they should do. I think everyone, woman or not, likes best to look after their

own affairs themselves."

"Do you think so? I have always been brought up to believe that it was a man's part to take the rough work, and that a woman did well to accept his help."

"Cousin Lionel," said Lydia, "if you are angry because I went off to Mr. Bonamy's myself, instead of leaving you to work things your own way, you are surely very unreasonable. I was sure of it; there was not any reason to doubt; and why should I bother you about what I could do so easily? It was my business; you could not be supposed to—take—much interest."

"Trouble me!" he cried, "take much interest! Do you think there is anything you care for that I don't take an interest in? What is the chief thing I have thought of ever since I knew you? You speak so much at your ease; I wish you would tell me that."

"I hope it is nothing to be angry with me about," said Lydia, with meekness, "but how can I know?"

"No, I suppose you don't know," he said, with almost a scornful tone, "you have only seen me every day these five months, and talked to me, and pretended to take some interest in me, as you say; and now you turn upon me and ask me how can you know? How can you help knowing? is what I should say."

"Cousin Lionel, I don't know why you should be angry. If I had waited for you this morning I should have lost my chance. There was so little time to do anything; and time runs away so fast when it is the last day."

"Do you think I am talking only of this morning? What is this morning? It is all the time I complain of. It has just been the same all the time."

And now it was Lydia's turn to look round, this time in unfeigned surprise; but her glance at him, perhaps, gave her more information than his words: at least, there was a subtle tone of hypocrisy in the meekness with which she asked.

"Have I displeased you all the time?" with a little tragic accent of remonstrance. "I am so sorry," she said.

“Sorry! and displeased! it is not words like those that will do any good,” Lionel cried.

Liddy looked at him again piteously, but perhaps in the puckers round her eyes, and the droop of her mouth, there was a dimple or two which the faintest touch could have turned into smiles. She shook her head.

“You are hard upon me, Cousin Lionel; you are angry about this morning, and then you tell me it is not this morning; but all the time; and when I say I am sorry (what else can I say? for I am very sorry, and so mistaken! I thought we were such friends!) you say, words like these will not do any good. What am I to say? It is a discovery I never expected to make, that I had been—disagreeable all the time.”

“I think you want to drive me out of my senses!” he cried.

Which, indeed, was very foolish; she had all the reason and force of the argument on her side, and he, having at some point in the altercation taken a wrong turning, got only further and further astray at every step he made.

Lydia by this time had recovered all her usual composure. When one party to a controversy gets hot and weak, the other becomes calm. She felt herself to have the best of it, and it was a pleasure to her, after her recent discomfiture, to have the upper hand, and find herself in the exciting position, not altogether un-enjoyable, of skilfully fencing and keeping off an agitated man’s self-disclosure. It agitated herself a little, but the circumstances strengthened her. Besides, whatever was going to be said, this was not the moment to say it, in the streets, with the Leone almost within sight. His self-betrayal gave her force to stand against him.

“Here we are,” she said, softly, “almost at home—if you can call the hotel home. Whatever I have done amiss, I hope you will pardon me. We shall be such a short time together now. Oh——!” for some one, darting forward, caught her with the very tears in her eye, the quaver in the tone. “Mr.—Paul; Signor——”

“Not me,” said Paolo, shaking his head; “I am born in Livorno, but except that I am an Englishman; Mees Joscelyn will not find it is necessary to say Signor to me. I have had a commission—from the bureau. I am in this direction, and I

wait to pay my—homage—to lay once more my respects—from the heart, from the heart!" said little Paolo, laying his hand upon that organ, "at these ladies' feet, and to ask if I can be of service. The Signor Consul has authorized me. I am known, well known, on the board of the *vapore*. I could arrange the baggage, select the cabins, what Mees Joscelyn will."

Lionel repeated instinctively his movement of last night; he came a step nearer, as if to keep the anxious Italian off.

"We are much obliged to you, but our own servant has looked after all that," he said.

Paolo's eyes flashed a little. The Englishman was rude; but in Paolo's experience Englishmen were very often rude, and he was not surprised. Englishwomen, that was a different matter. He gave his shoulders a little shrug, and turned to Lydia once more.

"A servant—that is one thing," he said, with a wave of his hand, "there are many, and the travellers many. One pays not too much attention to servants; but me, I think I can command ——" Paolo said this with an ineffable look of modest importance; and he added in a lower tone: "To make it more easy for these ladies to go away—that is not what I should wish to do; but one must forget one's self, and there may come another time—perhaps?"

"Yes," said Lydia, smiling. She was so glad to come to an end of the *tête-à-tête*, which was becoming so embarrassing, that she smiled with double sweetness upon Paolo. "Indeed I shall have more to do with Leghorn than I ever supposed. Mr. Oliver—who is your friend——"

"My friend—of my heart," said Paolo, laying his hand once more on his much-decorated bosom. He had dressed himself in all his finest chains and buttons, and a beautiful waistcoat, that Lydia might see him at his best.

"Ah!—he is my brother," Lydia said. She had begun to shake off the jarred and painful feelings that had spoiled her morning's work. Daylight and ordinary life, and a new excitement between her and that, began to restore the perspective; and as she made this announcement the first really wholesome natural sense of pleasure came over her. It was

Lionel who was out of perspective now, too close to her, overshadowing heaven and earth. But the other event began to appear in its natural size and aspect. Paolo's state of wonder was unfeigned. The Italian was quick enough to observe the undercurrents around him on ordinary occasions; but Lydia had made too great and immediate an impression upon him to leave his eyes free for anything else.

"Your brother!" he cried.

"Tell me how he arrived here, as you told me last night; but I did not know all the meaning of it then," said Lydia. "Tell me again how he came, and carried his own box."

She was more than half in earnest, wanting to hear about Harry, and yet it was half a pretence; she could not help but be conscious of the figure at her elbow stalking along in silent disgust, ready to abandon her for ever, and all the plans connected with her; ready to seize the little Italian by his coatcollar and whirl him away into the sea or air, yet jealous of losing a word of what was said. Lionel walked along the street like an embodied thunder-cloud, and they were already at the door of the Leone, which thank heaven, he thought, would at least put an end to this. It did not do so, however, for Lydia in her perversity insisted upon carrying Paolo with her to Lady Brotherton, interrupting him in the midst of the narrative she had asked for, but which in her gradually increasing excitement about her other companion she could not listen to. She broke into it just as Paolo, with the water in his eyes, was recounting how he had thrown himself on Harry's bosom and sworn eternal friendship. "Siamo amici, I said to him," said Paolo. "What is mine is thine. I will be your caution; I will respond for you; I will present you——" "Come upstairs, Mr. Paul," said Lydia, restless, "Lady Brotherton will be glad to have you to help us." He stopped short, thus interrupted in the midst of his narrative, and it hurt poor Paolo. But next moment he smiled with his usual sweet temper, and followed her. Lionel could not help feeling that in the same circumstances he could have almost killed her—which, indeed, was the state of his mind now. And then there followed such an afternoon of trouble and excitement as drove Lionel nearly out of his senses. Lady Brotherton had to be told the strange story, and

then Sir John, who could not understand it at all; and afterwards, in the midst of all the preparations for the start, "all Leghorn," the indignant young man said to himself, poured down upon them. All Leghorn meant Harry and his family, and Mr. Bonamy, who came one after another in different degrees of excitement. Rita arrived first with her two youngest children and their nurse, to show to her new sister-in-law, and to make amends for her previous want of graciousness. "I could not understand it—how could I understand it?" she said, and she was magnanimous enough to point out the resemblance of the bambino to his aunt. Then came Harry to say that he had made hasty preparations to go home with his sister, and would join them that evening at the steamboat. And finally the Vice-Consul's exertions brought some sort of enlightenment to Sir John, whose first idea was that Mr. Bonamy's son-in-law wanted to marry little Liddy, though he had already a wife of his own. All these perpetual visitors kept the party in a whirl of commotion, and Lionel, at last driven to the end of his patience, sallied forth and walked about till the moment of departure came, all but cursing Harry, and vowing to himself that he would take no further trouble, but let Lydia depart as she came. Why should he take any trouble? His mother would not like it. They (his parents) would wish him, if he married, to marry somebody with money, somebody with position, somebody—— Ah! Here he took himself by the shoulders, so to speak, and shook himself fiercely, and called himself, "you fool!" as if there was any question of marrying anybody! as if she would have him! Was she not pouring contempt upon him? putting even that little hop-o'-my thumb before him, preferring a little Italian beggar, hung all over with jewellery! These were poor Lionel's reflections as he wandered about the streets. And that other fellow, the brother, if he was her brother, was going with them; would talk to her, who could doubt it, the whole time, and never give a man a chance——! Lionel would have liked, without much hyperbole, to smother them all, or pitch them into the sea.

At last the moment of departure came. Rita, with a flush of excitement about her, her cheeks hot, her eyes shining, and without a tear, came to the steamboat with her husband to see him away. He whispered again in her ear that he would not

stay a moment longer than he could help; that he would count the days he was away from her; that she must not worry about him, must not feel lonely.

"Lonely!" she cried, in a tone which wounded poor Harry deeply. "Oh no, I shall not be lonely. I mean to amuse myself very much. I shall go everywhere. I shall not miss you at all. Ser Paolo will take care of me."

"You will have your father to take care of you, my darling," Harry said, very gravely, with a little surprise; and then he added, with a laugh, "he will be glad to be rid of me for once, to have you all to himself. But Paul-o, all the same, will stand by you, I know," he said, turning round to his friend lest his susceptible feelings should be wounded; "it is not that I doubt Paul-o—who will do everything."

"Yes, everything," Paolo said, with a fervent grip of his friend's hand.

And Rita laughed. Why should she laugh? She did not shed a tear to part with him. Harry looked over the bulwark of the ship and watched his little wife standing in the boat which had brought them on board as long as he could make her out. The boatmen lay on their oars, and Rita stood up, waving her handkerchief, with Paolo by her side. These two figures, and after them all the features of the well-known scene, and then the very place itself, which was his home, which contained all his independent life, dropped away into the mists, into the distance. He had said to himself many a day that he would never go back; yet he was going back, severing himself, as he had done before, from everything he knew or cared for. And Rita had not seemed to care! He was not sentimental, but he turned away when there was no longer anything to be seen of Leghorn, with a little shiver, and a pang at his heart.

CHAPTER XV.

AT SEA.

IT was a beautiful night, the stars shining like diamonds, like ethereal lamps in the sky, clear and crisp, with a twinkle and movement in them as of something living; the sea all in a ripple, in absolute peacefulness yet endless life, sweeping like a smooth, green, transparent flood of liquid metal under the bow, seething in white curd and spray behind, marking a long, moving line of white across its surface as the great boat rustled and fretted on. The air was so sweet, the sea so calm, that everybody stayed late on deck, except Lady Brotherton, who had placed herself at once on her sofa with her eyes closed, not to see the motion, of which, even when there was no motion at all, she was afraid. But Sir John sat on deck till it was late, enjoying the voyage greatly, and, in the absence of his wife, keeping his son near him, and addressing to him all his thousand questions. " 'Shay, Lionel, what'sh that Consul fellow doing with Liddy, 'shgot a wife of hish own." "You forget," Lionel said, "that he's her brother, Sir—Harry Joscelyn. Mr. Bonamy told you all about it to-day." "Yesh, yesh, old Bonamy, easy-going old duffer. 'Shish own daughter—should take more care of her. You look after little Liddy; shgot wife of his own." Lionel looked at the pair walking up and down with feelings it would be difficult to describe. It was easy to say, take care of little Liddy. Liddy was hanging on her brother's arm, quite independent of him. They two were now the two who belonged to each other now. When they parted in England it was her brother who would take Lydia home. She had no need of Lionel to talk to, to make a companion of; Harry was much better—a novelty, and all women like novelty—and then he was her brother; what could be more natural and right? Lionel took to theorizing about women, as men naturally do when ill-used by them. This was the kind of thing to be expected from these unaccountable creatures, whom, of course, no man could understand—though every man is surrounded by them all his life; triumphant folly of sex which

transcends all experience! He railed at women in his heart, because Lydia was occupied, and had no attention to give him. He heard her laugh, and the soft current of her voice running on continually, with a kind of maddening contempt. She leant on her brother's arm, which she never did on his—Lionel's. It made his heart sick to see her thus enjoying herself, enjoying the balmy night. There was nothing so bad that he did not think it as the hours of the delightful twilight, the soft, early night, flew by. Perhaps it was not her fault: were not all women the same? treacherous, fickle, blown about by every wind—off with the old whenever there was something new to take to; mysterious, worthless, untrustworthy creatures, who, however sweet they might be one day, were never to be relied upon for the next; who would part from you with the tenderest of farewells and meet you next time as if you were the merest acquaintance! Lionel felt that he hated the whole sex as he stood by his father's side watching these two about the decks. When they passed she would nod at him, or give him one of her easy smiles, not in the least ignoring his position, recognizing it, and coolly suffering it so to be. At last he had to withdraw, helping Thomas to move his father into the cabin reserved for him, and consequently losing sight of them for a moment. When he returned he could not see them, and the rage in him burned fiercer than ever. Then, on the bridge, high up against the sky, he discerned something like Harry's figure, with a red tip of a cigar appearing above the collar of his warm coat. Harry had become chilly after ten years of Italian life. Lionel laughed at this effeminacy. He liked to feel that his own coat was thin, yet quite enough for his muscular Anglicism. No doubt she had gone in, retired for the night, and *all that* was out of the question. He did not specify to himself what *all that* was. He had not the heart even for a cigar. If he smoked he would come across that fellow, and be compelled to talk to him. After all, it was a great mistake to dis-inter relations whom you know nothing about. One might be nice—though even of that he felt far from certain—but the rest were almost sure to be bores, like this fellow. Indeed, the brothers were all bores, and without any breeding. It was a mistake to have taken any trouble about them, or ever to have sought them out at all. "Confound them!" he said to himself, facing the breeze,

diving his hands deep down to the bottom of his pockets, and angrily gazing into the night.

"Confound whom, Cousin Lionel?" said a voice by his side.

Lionel started violently, then turned round. "Oh! are you there? I did not know where you were. I thought you had gone to bed."

"Must one go to bed? They say we get to Genoa quite early; and it is such a lovely, lovely night."

"Do you think so?" he said, softened; "so do I. If you will stay with me, I don't think you need go to bed; but if you are going off again with that fellow—I mean, of course, with your brother——"

"It is quite delightful," said Lydia, with energy, "to have a brother—you know, a real brother—a little like one's self: not elderly, and worldly, and Westmoreland, like Will and Tom."

"I thought you were so fond of Westmoreland," said Lionel.

"Ah! so I am; but not that kind. Now Harry is—you can't think what Harry is——"

"I know what you want me to think him—the most disgusting interloper, the worst nuisance in the world. It is quite unaccountable of him to go and leave you alone here. Doesn't he know how a lady should be taken care of? In a common steamboat when there are all sorts of people——"

"I never knew you were so ill-natured before," said Lydia in a plaintive tone. "Poor Harry! he took me to the cabin-door; he thinks I am there now. I came up afterwards—well—because it is hot there, because it is such a lovely night, because the sea is so beautiful—look at that light on it—and, then, because I thought you would perhaps think it civil to come and say good night."

"Ah, Liddy!" he cried, seizing her hand and drawing it through his arm, "come and walk about a little. I thought I was never to have a chance of saying a word to you to-night. I have been swearing at everything and everybody."

"I thought so," said Liddy, with a little laugh, "from the expression of your face."

"And you laughed—at my torture——"

“Would you have had me cry? What could I do? I could not take you from Sir John; and then you never looked as if you wanted to have anything to say to us. Well,” said Lydia, stopping short, “now all the purposes of civility are fulfilled, and we can say good night.”

But they had not said good night full two hours after, when the short voyage was almost over, and the lights of Genoa stretching round the whole breadth of the lovely bay in an ineffectual struggle with the dawn, began to rise upon their dazzled eyes. Then after a little struggle Lydia made her escape. “What will Lady Brotherton think? It must be three o’clock in the morning, and how can I face her? She will see it in my eyes, and she will not like it. Oh! why didn’t we think of that sooner? They will not like it, neither she nor Sir John; for I am nobody, Lionel.”

“Nobody? you are Liddy—that is enough; and then you forget,” he said, with a slight sense of humour, “you are a Joscelyn.”

“Yes, that is true,” said Lydia, very gravely, “I am a Joscelyn; but we are not at all what we used to be. Being Joscelyns,” she added, mournfully, “we are rough country people.”

“You a rough country people! You are Liddy,” he said.

“Oh, what is the good of saying that over and over again! Liddy! what is Liddy? an ugly old-fashioned name. We should have thought of that sooner. They will not have me,” she said.

“No, I hope not. It is I that must have you,” said Lionel, and he took no notice of the fact that it was morning; but, to be sure, there was nobody except the sailors about. He walked with her to the door of the cabin as the deceived Harry had done. How much had passed since then! Liddy thought with shame and self-reproach, as she stole into the darkened shelter where a peevish little lamp was still burning, that it would never have happened had she not given him that opportunity. She *had* given him the opportunity. She ought to have stayed in the cabin and prevented all that followed. It was her fault; but perhaps, though she felt guilty, she did not feel so penitent as she might have done. Lady Brotherton by dint of shutting her eyes had gone peacefully to sleep, which was a thing she

professed never to do on board ship. Lydia retired to rest; she stole out of her gown as quiet as a mouse, and compunctious and guilty, but very happy, crept into her berth. The steamer was coming to anchor with great jars and creakings, and heavy footsteps overhead; and by and by Lydia's drowsy eyes, so full of happiness and freshness, yet soft weariness and dreaminess, closed in spite of her. She did not suppose that she could have slept on such a night.

But next day was much more difficult to get through. The honest girl did not feel that she could look Lady Brotherton in the face. As long as they were apart, the position, though painful, was possible; but, when they were together, Lydia was so changed from her usual aspect that Lady Brotherton could not avoid noticing the alteration. "Liddy, my child, something is the matter. Are you ill?" she said.

"No, Lady Brotherton."

"Nervous then—this new brother does not quite fit in with your ideas? You ought to have calculated upon that, Lydia. People cannot be separated for ten years, and fall into one another's ways again in a moment; though I think he is very nice and very gentlemanly myself."

"It is not that, Lady Brotherton."

"What is it then, my dear? You are not a bit like yourself. You are sorry, a little, to part with us? So am I, my sweet—dreadfully sorry; but it must only be for a little while. And, then, you know you are going home."

"Oh! Lady Brotherton, my heart is breaking! It is not even that. It is that I have got a secret, and you will not be pleased."

They were sheltering in Sir John's deck cabin from the heat of the sun, the steamboat ploughing peacefully on its further way to Marseilles, the journey approaching its last stage, and the time of separation drawing near. Lydia's eyes were full of tears; she covered her face with her hand; the other was clasped in that of the kind friend whom she felt she had betrayed.

"A secret—how can you have a secret? You have never been away from my side. I suppose it must be something about love, Liddy—that is the only secret at your age. And why

should I not be pleased—unless you have made an unworthy choice?"

"Oh, no, not that—too good—too good."

"Lionel, go away; we don't want you just now. Liddy has something to tell me."

"It is better that I should tell you for her, mother. She will not let the secret be kept a day. I wanted to put off till—we parted: in case you should be, as she thinks, displeased: though I can't believe you will be displeased."

"Lionel!" Of course, from the time he had begun to speak Lady Brotherton had perceived but too well what the secret was. She loosed her hold of Lydia's hand, which lay white and passive in her lap after she had withdrawn hers, with a kind of appeal in it. Lady Brotherton's colour went and came. Hard words came to her lips; but she looked at her son's face and paused. "I am displeased, more than displeased; and your father will never consent to it," she said.

Lydia did not say a word, but she sighed and took her hand away, to clasp it with the other in that pathetic gesture, "the trick of grief," which she had learned from her mother. As for Lionel, an only son and spoilt child, he took matters with a high hand.

"My father will consent gladly enough if you consent, mother," he said; "and what did you expect? You have thrown us together constantly for five months. You must think me a wretched creature if you thought I could not manage to persuade her to like me—a little, with all the opportunities we have had."

"It is not that," said Lady Brotherton, with simplicity, falling into the snare, "any girl might like you; of course there is nothing wonderful in that."

"And, you see," he said, "unfortunately I loved her—before we ever started at all."

"Before! and why didn't you warn me? and I who have been saying you were so safe, and never thought of each other. Liddy! Liddy! you have deceived me! You would never look at him, never amuse yourself as you did with the others, you

were always so serious! And pray was it going on all the time, and was that only dust thrown in my eyes?"

"I have never deceived anyone," Liddy said, with a proud elevation of her head. She could not say, even in her own defence, what the cause of her serious treatment of her lover was.

"And how was it settled at last?" Lady Brotherton said. "Since we started? She has never been away from me night or day."

This produced a slight flicker of suppressed laughter even in Lydia's depressed bosom.

"She did not leave the deck till we were in harbour this morning; I kept her by force," Lionel said.

"Well, that is the most wonderful of all," cried the not hard-hearted mother; "did you get into your berth by the port-hole? for I declare I never closed my eyes all night, you know I never do—and I never once missed you. I believe you have dreamed it all," Lady Brotherton said.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT HOME.

THE rest of the journey was hurried and feverish. Lady Brotherton was not hard-hearted; she melted every day when in Liddy's company, and under the influence of her son's persuasions and the sight of his happiness; but in the night hardened again, occupying herself with reminiscences of former hopes, and summoning up the ideal woman whom she had intended Lionel to marry, a girl who should be noble if possible, rich and beautiful, and with the highest connections, adding to the dignity of the house of Brotherton, as well as the happiness of its future head; and in this alternation the long journey was got through. There was a night in the railway between Marseilles and Paris, a night at Paris, a night in London, in every one of which this freezing process was performed. Every morning the same round had to be gone over again; by noon the ice was melted; by evening Lady Brotherton would listen between tears and smiles to her son's picture of his future life and all the happiness she would have in her daughter; and would kiss Liddy and bid her good night almost with an enthusiasm of tenderness. But before morning all this was undone, and she got up as unwilling as ever. By common consent Sir John was told nothing of it while the journey lasted. The information was only to be given him when he was safe at home, and his fatigues over. It was evening when Lydia, escorted by Harry, left finally the party of which she had so long formed part, and with which now her fate was linked so closely. She had stayed two days in London, days during which Lady Brotherton had been very kind to her —in the afternoon. And she was very kind to her on that evening, when she took her in her arms in a farewell embrace. She cried over Liddy, and called her my child, and bade God bless her.

"I don't know what I shall do without you. It will be like losing my right hand," Lady Brotherton said. And Lionel, as was natural, took a still more tender leave at the railway.

"I shall not be long after you," he whispered, with his head projected half-way into the carriage. Liddy shook her head.

"I don't build any hopes on that. Your mother will——"

"What will my mother do? If you think I will allow myself to be coerced by anyone——"

"But I shall!" said Lydia. "It must never, never be, Lionel, unless she is pleased."

"She will be pleased; but it shall be anyhow, whether she is pleased or not."

"Oh, no," Lydia said.

"Oh, yes, yes! and I shall have the last word," he cried. This little contention went on till the very moment of their parting, and Lydia put down her veil and cried gently when it was over, and the darkness had closed over her and her train, and all that chapter of her life was over. Was it over? for ever and ever done with, not one last moment still left between her and the blank of the elder world? It was dreadful, she knew, to feel as she did, to think of her home with despair, and all those lingering days which would pass without an incident, without a break, in dread monotony and quiet, nothing happening but a visit from Joan, nothing even to be afraid of but a fit of temper on her father's part. She was frightened by the prospect. It took away her breath. "Mother, dear mother!" she said to herself, with a gasp of self-disgust; that poor mother would be happy to-day thinking of her child's return; she would go all over the house to see that everything was in order for Liddy. There would be flowers gathered, and fresh curtains hung, and cakes made, and butter churned, and cream put upon the table for Liddy. And Liddy, she cried to herself, with an ache in her heart, Liddy would not care! Oh, the hypocrite she would have to be; the pretences she would have to make for love's sake! She must look happy whether she was happy or not; she must make believe even to be thankful to get home again. At this Liddy cried still more behind her veil. Harry observed her with curious eyes. He was very much interested in his little sister, and he thought he understood women—not like Lionel, who pretended that they were inscrutable; but then Harry was a married man.

“You don’t seem to be very cheerful about going home,” he said, at last.

“Oh, yes, very happy,” said Liddy, and cried; “It is only—such a change—Wandering about has been so different—and one never knows—”

Here she broke off, and made a vehement effort to be cheerful. “You will find it very different, too.”

“Yes, I shall find it very different; but I am always sorry for a girl—we can get away, but you can’t. You have never said a word to me, Liddy, but I am not so blind as not to see how things are. Are the objections—on their side?”

“I don’t know that there are objections. Yes, I suppose they are on their side. But how can I ever leave mother?” the girl cried, waking up to the other side of the question. She had never thought of it before, but now stared at her recovered brother, very pale, with large, wide-open eyes.

“Poor mother!” he said, softly. By dint of having children himself Harry had come to a little understanding. “She will never stand in anyone’s way,” he said. He began to perceive a little what life was to some souls. She had been happy in little Liddy, and now Liddy was going too. She would not struggle, but resign the last, with one more pathetic wringing of her hands. She had wrung those hands often for him, and he, more than any, had wrung her heart, and had thought little of it; but somehow he perceived it now. She would stand in nobody’s way. She would give up, having given up all her life; and now there would be no compensation possible, nature herself would be against her. A great pang of pity was in his heart for his mother. She did not know yet what was in store for her. Whoever was happy it must always be her fate to suffer for them all.

The rough little country phaeton, which Harry remembered long years ago, was waiting for them in the early morning at the station. Nobody knew that Harry was coming. The man who drove it stared at him. It was none of the young masters he knew (middle-aged Will and Tom being still indifferently called t’ young masters at the White House), and yet there was a look of the young masters, and of the old master, too, about this finely dressed (as Robin thought), foreigneering

gentleman, wrapping himself in his fur-lined coat against the chill freshness of the morning. Was it some one Miss Liddy had picked up in her travels? Liddy had a perception, as she got into the carriage—or, rather, remembered afterwards, that she had perceived other people, strangers, getting out at the little country station, which was not a very usual thing; but she was excited and preoccupied, and did not stay to look who they were, or even notice them much, at the time. She had not written home, except the merest intimation of her return, since she had found her brother, and now she was a little alarmed at her own reserve, wondering what her mother would say, whether she would know him at once, and what effect the discovery would have upon her. Such things had been known as people dying of joy. She began to grow alarmed and very nervous; and Liddy looked round upon everything, to tell the truth, with troubled and doubtful eyes. She was afraid even of the sight of the home landscape, the grey hills, the misty valley, the limestone houses, and dividing dykes, which were so very different from everything she had been seeing. But it was a beautiful morning, and all this grey northern world was bathed in the early glory of the sun; and to Lydia's great relief the country had not grown smaller, or the hills insignificant, or the sky dirty or prosaic, as people in Italy said. The blue was pale, but still it was heavenly blue; the white mists on the hills, here and there breaking away like the opening of a prison, unfolding on both sides and showing the grey slopes, the stony peaks, the lonely stormy Fells, were as full of poetry and dramatic life as ever. The stream still looked bold and rapid, the village friendly, nestling about the church and over the bridge. "It is not a bit like Italy," said Liddy, to her brother. He felt the sharpness of the morning air as he never would have done had he stayed among the Fells. "No, you can be quite confident on that subject," Harry said.

"But it is just as fine as ever," cried Lydia, with a little enthusiasm. "It is not small nor contracted, nor ugly, as I feared. It is finer than it used to be. These are real hills, after all; and it is so broad, and so pure, and such a delightful air. What would you give in Tuscany for air like that?"

"We should die of it in a month," Harry said, buttoning his furred coat at the throat.

Lydia was almost angry. He had been there so long, he had got choke full of Italian prejudice. But she was thankful, very thankful, to find that the country-side was still pleasant in her own eyes. And now they drive through the village, one or two early risers looking with expectant faces out of the windows and waving their hands to her as she passes, all with a look of surprise at the strange gentleman in his fur coat, quietly smoking his cigar behind: and the river is crossed, and they come within sight of the White House. Well! there was no doubt it looked small: she had been sure it must look small, grey and homely, and undistinguished, scarcely discernible in its whiteness, which was grey, like everything here, from the slope of the Fell-side. But Lydia had no time to make remarks of this description to herself, for immediately at the door there appeared a slim and tremulous figure, with clasped hands, looking out; and she gave a cry of uncontrollable joy and excitement, and sprang down, almost before the carriage stopped, from her seat, and into the arms of her mother. No, no! there was no change there! For a moment all her depression and heaviness, and sense of guilt and baseness, in the thought that her return was no pleasure to her, all melted away in real natural happiness to see that worn face, and feel the clasp of those tremulous arms again.

"Oh, Liddy, my darling! it's been long, long! but here I have you again, my own!"

"Oh, mother! why did I ever leave you?" cried the girl, and they clung together as if they would never part.

Mrs. Joscelyn had no eyes for anything but her child. She was about to lead her in with her arm round her.

"They will all be out in a minute, Liddy; but never mind, my pet, you'll see them later, and they'll bring in your boxes and all your things. Come in, come in, you must be tired with your night's journey—and let me look at you; I want no more, but just to look at you, you're better than Italy to me."

"Mother," Lydia said, holding back, "I have brought some one with me—a gentleman; you must give a welcome to him too."

"A gentleman!" Mrs. Joscelyn gave a little sigh of disappointment. "It will be Lionel. Yes, I am glad to see him;

but I should have liked you all to myself this first morning. He knows he is welcome, my dear."

"It is not Lionel, mother; it is some one whom I met—in Italy."

Mrs. Joscelyn began to tremble a little, and looked earnestly in her daughter's face, but not with any suspicion of the truth.

"I will try—to give anyone a welcome, my darling; if you love him, and if it is for your sake."

Harry had got down from the phaeton like a man in a dream. He gazed about him at the place which was so familiar, yet so strange, as if he had dropped from the skies, remembering everything all in a moment, his boyhood, his old childish holidays, his last night. He remembered the foolish exaggerated passion with which he stood, furious, shut out, before that closed door. He was full of agitation, of compunction, of wonder, at his own boyish unreasonableness, and at the long obdurate closing of his heart, which could not have been, he said to himself, had it not been full of other things. His heart beat as he looked at his mother, and heard the cry with which she clasped to her her other child. And Liddy was going to forsake her too, poor woman, poor mother! Somehow he thought more of this than of all the trouble he had himself brought upon her. He stood at a little distance, keeping his furred coat closely round him, stamping his feet a little to get them warm. Had he lived always on the Fells, he would have wanted no furred coat, and felt no cold in his feet. Then Lydia beckoned to him, and he went towards them. It was all he could do to keep calm. "I am sure the gentleman is very welcome, Liddy," he heard his mother say, in her tremulous voice. He came up to them where they still stood in the doorway. Something about his air, about his general aspect, startled her, though she was so pre-occupied, and Harry did not know how to contain himself as his eyes met hers. She gave him a smile, a little forced, with her lips, but her eyes more sincere, betrayers of her heart, investigated him with anxiety and wonder. He could not meet them without betraying himself. He took the hand she held to him, and bowed over it and kissed it, as he had learned to do in Italy; and he felt as he did so that the worn white hand, which he thought he must

have recognised had he seen no more of his mother, trembled. She said, “Come in, Sir,” with a quaver in her voice; “Come in —you are kindly welcome,” and tremulously led the way into the hall he remembered so well, and opened the parlour door. The fire was burning brightly within, the table laid for breakfast, everything as if he had left it the day before. Mrs. Joscelyn would have had her guest, who had set her all a-tremble, yet whom she thought she welcomed reluctantly, enter before her, in old-fashioned politeness; but when he held back, went in precipitately, holding Liddy by the hand. She turned round instantly to look at him again.

“Liddy—you have not told me—the gentleman’s name?” she said, feeling her head go round. “Liddy! I think—I must have seen him before.”

Then Harry could keep himself in no longer. He loathed a scene like every Englishman, but he forgot this, as even Englishmen do in moments of extreme feeling. He fell down on his knees before her, not knowing what he did. “Mother! will you forgive me?” he said. And he did not well know what followed, till the air cleared a little again, and the day came back, and they had put her in the great chair, her face like death, her eyelids quivering, her lips trembling and incapable of speech. She had given a great cry of “Harry! Harry!” which startled all the house.

Then some one else came noisily clattering down the stairs, crossing the hall with a heavy foot. “Where is my little Liddy?” Ralph Joscelyn said; and he added with a certain rough sympathy as he kissed his child, “I told her it was more than she was up to. Let her be, let her be—she will come round. I wanted her to bide in her bed, and I would bring you to her there. Well, and so you’re back, my lass—and welcome! There’s nobody like you to mend her. Did you bring—a doctor with you all the way?”

Then there was a pause; nobody spoke to give any explanation. “Did you bring a doctor with you,” Joscelyn repeated, with a sudden excited burst of laughter, “all the way? or who may this be?”

Harry turned round and came forward into the light, holding out his hand. “You turned me out last time I was here, father,”

he said, not able to forego the gratification of this taunt; “I ought to have asked your leave first before I came back now.”

Ralph Joscelyn stood and stared, a dark red colour coming over his face. He looked uncertainly from Liddy to the stranger. “I don’t know what you mean,” he said shortly; then, “Do you mean this is—Harry? that’s what your mother meant, shrieking out, disturbing everybody in the house. Look to your mother, Liddy! Well! you’ve been a long time coming back. You seem,” he said, looking at the new-comer from head to foot, “to have done well for yourself.”

“I have done very well for myself,” Harry said, shortly. “I want help from nobody now.”

“Well, my lad!” said Joscelyn, suddenly striking his hand into that of his son with another hoarse, unsteady laugh, “that’s the best of reasons why you should have whatever you want. You’re welcome home; and there’s a pretty property waiting for you. And it saves a confounded deal of trouble, I can tell you, that you should turn up now.”

All this time Liddy was kneeling by the chair, kissing her mother’s feeble hands and colourless face. There was no particular alarm about her among them; but she lay floating between life and death for a moment in the extremity of emotion which was too much for her feeble flesh and blood. Then the balance turned—the wrong way. If she died then, how happy for her! but instead she slowly came back, opened her eyes, and returned to life. “Is it a dream?” she said, feebly. “No—my Liddy, my darling, you are real; and the other—wasn’t there another?”

They all sat at breakfast half an hour after like people in a dream. Mrs. Joscelyn sat between her son and daughter, and looked at them alternately, and sipped a feeble cup of tea, and shed a tear or two of pure happiness. She was not strong enough yet to ask any questions; she put her hand now and then on Harry’s arm and patted it softly. She heard the story of how he was found out without understanding it in the least, and echoed feebly her husband’s loud but tremulous laugh at the name his son had taken. “Isaac Oliver—that’s the finest joke I ever heard in my life. Isaac—Oliver! Dang it, but that is the best joke——” And he laughed till the tears ran down his

cheeks. The young people both sat by with the strangest sense of unreality. To go away across half a world, and then come back again to the same unchanging scene, even to ameliorations of the past which bring out more clearly the astounding difference between it and them—how strange it is! In all Harry's knowledge of his father, he had never been so friendly or so amiable; but this only made the gentleman-peasant, the yeoman-horsedealer more extraordinary, as a father, to his son. Liddy had a far less shock to sustain in one sense, but a greater in another; for she had come home—and here was her natural place, love and duty and every tradition binding her; but, alas! her heart so far away.

The strange meal was still progressing, the whole family lingering over it; for the household table was a kind of natural centre and place of union; when wheels were heard again, and a carriage stopped at the door. "It will be Joan," Mrs. Joscelyn said; "she would not lose a moment in coming; and what will she say when she sees—oh, Harry, my boy! She has always had a warm heart for you—the warmest heart for you; we'll say nothing about old times; but her and me—Run out and meet your sister, Liddy, and say nothing, say nothing—let us see if she will know him." Mrs. Joscelyn put her hand upon his sleeve. "It's a pleasure to touch you—I like to touch you in case my eyes should be deceiving me. And did you ever think of your poor mother all these years?"

Liddy had run out—to meet her sister as she thought—and her father, not unwilling now that the meeting was over to leave his wife alone with her son, followed her, with the intent of taking another look, as he said to himself, of *his* pet, and making sure that he had really got her back. But Liddy, instead of running out to meet her sister, stood arrested in the doorway, watching the disembarkation from a rickety country coach of the strangest party that ever produced itself in the Fell-country. First came a little man with a high hat, a huge cloak with a faded lining of blue, which would have delighted a painter, flung over his shoulder, and a huge comforter round his neck; next a bundle of an old woman, wrapped in half-a-dozen shawls, one over the other, who rolled out of the quivering carriage, like something half benumbed and half asleep; lastly, a figure which sprang out as light as a bird,

pushing aside both the companions who held out anxious hands to assist her, and flew along the little path between the two grass plats. Liddy clasped her hands together in wonder and dismay.

"Mrs. Harry!" she cried, with consternation. She was so much surprised that she made no step to meet her; but stood transfixed, her face pale with astonishment. Rita was all aglow with pleasure, and excitement, and triumph. She flung herself upon Lydia as if she had been her dearest friend in the world.

"Look, I have done it!" she cried. "I am better than ever I was in my life. I am so happy. I like the cold. I like the country; I think it is beautiful! Call this England? it is Paradise! Oh, Liddy, Liddy, you dear little sister, I shall be as fond of you as Harry is—fonder, for he has me first to think of. I owe all this to you."

"Mrs. Harry!" Liddy repeated, with consternation. "Father, this is Mrs. Harry; if you were coming, why did you not come with us?" She could think of nothing that was kinder to say.

But Rita was too much delighted with herself to stand in need of words of kindness. She walked up to Ralph Joscelyn, and stretched up to him, offering her pretty glowing cheek to be kissed.

"How do you do, father?" she said. "Harry ought to present me to you, but I don't want any introduction. You are like him; our little boy is called Ralph, after you. Harry will be dreadfully angry when he sees me, and I dare not think what papa will say; but I am so happy to be in England that I don't mind. Will you take me in, please, to where my husband is?" and with the air of a little princess Rita took her father-in-law's arm. He was a stately, handsome old man, with his white hair. The eyes of the new-comer found no fault in him. The roughness which wounded his children was invisible to her. "He is almost as handsome as papa," she said to herself.

Meanwhile Liddy, still more bewildered, stood at the door, and watched the approach of the two other persons, not glowing and happy like Rita, but miserable, as unaccustomed travellers, half dead after a succession of night journeys, cold, and sick, and out of heart, could be. She could scarcely recognise the spruce little Paolo, in the worn-out, fagged

traveller, shivering in his big cloak, and trying in vain to satisfy the coachman with the money which he did not understand.

"Five shilling, that is six francs twenty-five, six francs twenty-five, my good man—it is six francs twenty-five, all the world over," he was saying, placing a solid French five-franc piece, with other moneys of the same coinage, in the driver's hand, and scorning all remonstrances. "No, no; I am no foreigner—you you will not cheat me. I am not von," cried Paolo, betrayed by excitement into inaccuracies which he had quite got the better of, "to be bullied. I am not von to pay too moche. I am English as you."

As for old Benedetta, who was the other companion of Rita's journey, she was prostrate with cold and fatigue. She did nothing but weep and groan as she sank upon the first seat in the hall. "Ah, Signorina! oh, Signorina! Sono morto! sono morto!" she cried, while Paolo took off his hat, by this time somewhat battered, and smiled a forlorn smile, his teeth chattering as he spoke. "All things that have been spoken of the English climate are below the truth," he said. "Miss Joscelyn will forgive me, I have the cold just in my bones; but Miss Joscelyn, and also, indeed, Signorina Rita, one is bound to say it, they bloom like the rose."

"Now, don't be angry," said Rita, walking her father-in-law in to the parlour door, which was slightly open, and through which she saw the glimmer of the fire, and the white cloth of the breakfast-table, and appearing before her astonished husband, like some mischievous spirit, in a glow of happiness and delight, "don't be angry, Harry. I am going to telegraph directly to papa. I am perfectly well, and delighted with everything. I am not cold a bit. I am not tired. England, I always was sure of it, is just the place for me. Present me to your mother. Dear madam," she cried, after a little pause of contemplation, dropping Joscelyn's arm, and darting forward, "I see you are ill; you are all trembling with the emotions you have had this morning. And, I am sure, it is quite natural; you don't want me to make them more. But kiss me once, please, for I know I shall love you. I am your Harry's wife."

“Rita!” cried Harry, finding room at last to express his sentiments, “what, in the name of all that is foolish, brings you here?”

“Thank you, dear mother,” said Rita, in return for the astonished kiss which poor Mrs. Joscelyn had bestowed. She sat down by her without any invitation, and took one of her hands and caressed it between her own. “I never had any mother,” she said; “I do not know what it means; nor did I ever want one of my own, for papa has been everything to me. But it is sweet to borrow Harry’s mother, and have her for mine, too; not borrow,” she added, kissing Mrs. Joscelyn’s hand, “you are mine because you are his, is it not so? Harry, do not look so like a bear, but come and kiss me, too.”

“Rita, your father will never forgive me,” cried Harry, obeying his wife with no bad grace, yet incapable of withholding his lecture; “he will say it was my fault. And how did you persuade him to let you go?”

“He did not let me go. I said I was going to the villa to the children. He will not find out till Sunday, that is to-morrow, and he will have my telegram first. There is no harm done. I believe,” she added, tranquilly, “he will be as glad as any one to think I have taken it into my own hands. And look, I am not cold. I liked the air above everything. Poor Paolo and Benedetta chattered with their teeth, but it was delightful to me. My poor little mamma was a girl; I am full grown, strong; and I adore England. It is beautiful. I am enchanted with the Fells. The grey is lovely; it is your only colour. Harry, Harry, you great bear, say you are glad to see me, or your mother will think we are not fond of each other: which is not true, dearest, dearest lady,” said Rita, once more kissing Mrs. Joscelyn’s hand.

“I am sure anybody would be fond of you,” Mrs. Joscelyn said, gazing with wonder and awe—but flattered, touched, astonished beyond measure—at this beautiful young woman, so enthusiastic, so self-possessed, so fluent, whom she had never heard of before.

“Oh, fond of her, what has that to do with it?” cried Harry. “So you have brought Benedetta and poor Paolo,” he cried.

After this Paolo was brought in, and warmed and fed; but it took a long time to bring him round. He had thought it a very fine thing to come off to England for his holiday, romantically following a beautiful young lady, helping another to reunite herself to her husband; but the journey and the privations, want of sleep and over-fatigue, and the wind of an English May, blowing at six o'clock in the morning over the Fells, had been too much for poor Paolo. He sounded his friend a few days after, when he had partially recovered his spirits, as to the custom in English families when they married their daughters.

"For example," he said, "Amico, if it is not impertinent. A young lady like Miss Joscelyn; so beautiful, so charming. When your parents make up their minds to marry her, they will of course make it a condition that the 'usband being so happy should live near?"

"Certainly they would make the condition," said Harry, promptly. "Could anyone be so cruel, do you think, Paolo, as to take away her last prop from my mother? They are everything to each other, as you can see."

"It is true," said Paolo, much crestfallen. And next day he took a tearful leave, kissing Liddy's hand with respectful deference. The unusual salutation made her blush quite unnecessarily. It was a resignation of all pretensions on Paolo's part. He could have made, he said afterwards, as great a sacrifice to his love as any man; but to have lived on what they called the Fells, was more than it was possible to contemplate. But he was a little consoled by a burst of bright weather in London, and saw the Parks and the Row in all their glory, and lost his heart to a great many other English young ladies before he carried it, pieced up again so as to be serviceable for actual living, but in a sadly battered and shattered condition, back again to Leghorn; where he was a great authority upon everything English to the end of his days.

Rita turned out to be right, as she so often was. Her father, after the first shock, was glad beyond measure that the venture had been made and proved successful, and that the embargo was taken off his native country, and he could permit him to return. The accumulations of Uncle Henry's money was enough to make a pretty, old-fashioned house out of

Birrenshead, where the Harry Joscelyns settled down, Mr. Bonamy with them, though without giving up the Italian villa and its associations. Mr. Bonamy got a C.B. and many compliments when he retired from the service, though he had never been anything more than a Vice-Consul. As for Lydia and her concerns, it is needless to say that they ended prosperously; for what was there that Lady Brotherton could refuse to her only son? and Sir John saw only through her eyes. So this marriage was accomplished also towards the autumn, before the year was out, from the time of their first acquaintance. Harry and his children were known to be coming home by that time, as soon as the house was ready for them, "Which was something for mother to look forward to," Joan said. "A thing to look forward to is almost better than a thing she's got, to mother," according to that authority. "She can't fret about it till she has it." But nobody could be more tender and sympathetic than Joan when Lydia was married and went away, leaving a blank that nothing could fill up. "It's hard to say what's the good of us women," she said, "to rear children and never have them but when they're babies, and think all the world of them, and watch them go away. Phil and me, we are best without any, though that's a hard trial too. But, mother, don't you make a fuss, poor dear. It's the way of the world, and it's the course of nature, and there isn't a word to say."

This was the case, and Mrs. Joscelyn felt it. She clasped her hands as she had done so often, and held them up to heaven in prayer that was perpetual. That was all. She saw her children now and then, and they were all happy, and in no need of her. What could any woman desire more?

THE END.

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