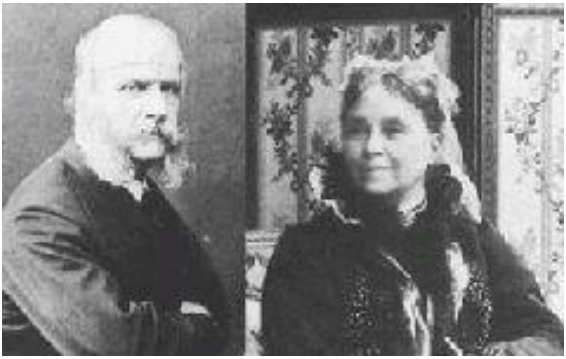
Edith Wharton
The Complete Works

The Novels

Wharton's birthplace, West 23rd Street, New York City



Wharton's parents: George Frederic Jones and Lucretia Rhinelander Jones

Fast and Loose[1]

"LET WOMAN BEWARE
How she plays fast loose thus with human despair
And the storm in man's heart." Robert Lytton: Lucile.

DEDICATION

To Cornelie
"[Donna] beataebella" [illegible]
Quinta.
(October 1876)

A Novelette By David Olivieri

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[1] Although this is Wharton's first novel, written between 1876 and 1877 when she was only fourteen years old, it was not published until after the author's death in 1938. *Fast and Loose* is a romantic story about a wayward young lady and the unhappy marriage that results from her imprudence. Despite its immaturity and inconsistency of style, the short novel hallmarks Wharton's later recurring themes of the English aristocracy, country house life, the London season and the consequences of unfortunate marital unions.

CHAPTER I. Hearts and Diamonds

"'TIS BEST TO be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new!"
Song.

A dismal Autumn afternoon in the country. Without, a soft drizzle falling on yellow leaves damp ground; within, two people playing chess by the window of the fire-lighted drawing-room at Holly Lodge. Now, when two people play chess on a rainy afternoon, tete-a-tete in a room with the door shut, they are likely to be either very much bored, or rather dangerously interested; in this case, with all respect to romance, they appeared overcome by the profoundest ennui. The lady — a girl of about 18, plump soft as a partridge, with vivacious brown eyes, a cheek like a sun-warmed peach-occasionally stifled a yawn, as her antagonist, curling a slight blonde moustache (the usual sign of masculine perplexity) sat absently meditating a move on which the game, in his eyes, appeared to depend; at last, pushing aside her chair, she rose stood looking out of the window, as though even the dreary Autumn prospect had more attraction for her than the handsome face on the other side of the chess-board. Her movement seemed to shake her companion out of his reverie, for he rose also, looking over her shoulder, at the soft, misty rain, observed rather languidly,

“Cheerful weather!” “Horrid!” said the girl, stamping her foot. “I am dying of stagnation.” “Don’t you mean to finish the game?” “If you choose. I don’t care.” “Nor I–It’s decidedly a bore.” No answer. The bright brown eyes the lazy blue ones stared out of the window for the space of five slow minutes. Then the girl said: “Guy!” “My liege!” “You’re not very amusing this afternoon.” “Neither are you, my own!” “Gallant for a lover!” she cried, pouting turning away from the window. “How can I amuse a stone wall? I might talk all day!” She had a way of tossing her pretty little head, drawing her soft white forehead, that was quite irresistible. Guy, as the most natural thing in the world, put his arm about her, but was met with a sharp, “Don’t! You know I hate to be taken hold of, Sir! Oh, I shall die of ennui if this weather holds.” Guy whistled, went to lean against the fireplace; while his betrothed stood in the middle of the room, the very picture of “I-won’t-be-amused” crossness. “Delightful!” she said, presently. “Really, your conversation today displays your wit genius to a remarkable degree.” “If I talk to you, you scold, Georgie,” said the lover, pathetically. “No, I don’t! I only scold when you twist your arms around me.” “I can’t do one without the other!” Georgie laughed. “You do say nice things, Guy! But you’re a bore this afternoon, nevertheless.” “Isn’t everything a bore?” “I believe so. Oh, I should be another person galloping over the downs on Rochester! ‘What’s his name is

himself again!' Shall we be able to hunt tomorrow?" "Ask the clerk of the weather," said Guy, rather dismally. "Guy! I do believe you're going to sleep! Doesn't it rouse you to think of a tear 'cross country after the hounds? Oh, Guy, a red coat makes my blood run faster!" "Does it? — Georgie, have you got 'Je l'ai perdu' — the thing I sent you from London?" "Yes — somewhere." "I am going to sing," said Guy.

"What a treat!" "As you don't object to my smoking, I thought you mightn't mind my singing." "Well," said Georgie, mischievously, "I don't suppose it does matter much which sense is offended. What are you going to sing?" Guy, without answering, began to hunt through a pile of music, at last laid a copy of "The ballad to Celia" on the piano-rack. Georgie sat down, while he leaned against the piano, struck a few prelude-chords; then he began to sing in a rich barytone, Ben Jonson's sweet old lines. At the end of the first stanza, Georgie shut the piano with a bang. "I will not play if you sing so detestably out of time, tune everything. Do make yourself disagreeable in some less noisy way." "I think I shall make myself agreeable — by saying goodbye." "Very well, do!" "Georgie — what is the matter?" He took her little hand as he spoke, but she wrenched it away, stamping her foot again. "Dont dont dont! I'm as cross as I can be I won't make friends!" she cried in a sort of childish passion, running away from him to the other end of the room. He stood

for a moment, twirling his moustache; then, taking up his hat, said, “Goodbye.” “Goodbye — Are you very angry?” she said, coming a step or two nearer, looking up through her soft lashes. “No, I suppose not. I believe I have been boring you confoundedly.” “I suppose I have been very cross.” “Not more than I deserved, probably. I am going to London for a few days. Will you give me your hand for goodbye?” She stood still a moment, looking at him thoughtfully; then put out her hand. “Ah, Guy, I am a worthless little thing,” she said, softly, as he took it. It was her left hand a ring set with diamonds twinkled on it. “Worth all the world to me!” he answered; then lifted the hand to his lips turned away. As his receding steps sounded through the hall, Georgie Rivers, taking a screen from the mantel-piece, sat down on the rug before the fire, with a thoughtful face out of which all the sauciness had vanished. As she watched the fire-light play on her ring, she began to think half-aloud as her childish fashion was; but Guy was cantering along the high road to West Adamsborough, if there had been anyone to tell him what she said, he would [have] laughed — [have] doubted it. As there was no one, however, Georgie kept her meditations to herself. “I know he thinks me a coquette,” she whispered, leaning her head against her hand, “ he thinks I like to trifle with him — perhaps he is angry — (he looks very handsome when he is angry) but he doesn’t know — how should he? — that I mean

to break it off. I ought to have done it today, I might have ended that beginning of a quarrel by giving him back the ring; but, oh dear, I wish — I wish I didn't care for him quite so much. He is so cool handsome! And he is the only man I ever knew who neither despises me nor is afraid of me. Oh, Georgie, Georgie, you miserable little fool! I didn't mean to let him kiss my hand; he surprised me into it, just as he surprised me into accepting him. He always puts me off my guard, somehow! But it must be done. Perhaps I am in love with him, but I hope I haven't quite lost my common sense. It must be done, I say! I declare, I shall make an utter goose of myself in a minute! Where's that letter?" She put her hand into her pocket, brought out an envelope, pompously sealed with a large coat of arms motto;, drawing out the folded sheet which it contained, slowly read aloud these words, written in a crabbed, old-fashioned hand:

> My dear Miss Rivers: Ever since I was honoured by an introduction to you, my admiration for your charms accomplishments has increased; I have been sufficiently marked by your favour to hope that what I am about to say may not seem an entirely unwarrantable liberty. Although we are separated by many years, I do not perceive why that should be an obstacle to a happy union; I therefore venture to beg that, if the profoundest admiration respect can awaken responsive

sentiments in your own bosom, you will honour me with your hand. I shall await with impatience your reply to my proposals, am, my dear Miss Rivers, with deep esteem, Your faithful Servant "Breton."

Georgie folded the letter again, went on with her reflections in this wise. "I suppose I should have let him know that I was engaged to Guy, but it was so jolly to have an old Lord dangling about one, head over ears in love, figuratively speaking, going down on his noble, gouty knees every time one came into the room. And I really didn't think it would come to a climax so soon! I marked him by my favour, did I? And the poor old creature has got tipsy, like an old blue-bottle on a little drop of syrup. He is really in love with me! Me, Georgie Rivers, a wicked, fast, flirtatious little pauper — a lazy, luxurious coquette! Oh, Guy, Guy! — I mean, Oh, Lord Breton, Lord — ha? what's the matter?" For something dropped close by Georgie's ring, that sparkled as clearly in the fire-light as its own diamonds. "Crying! Crying! I thought I had no heart. I have always been told so. Ah, the horrid thing." She brushed the bright thing that was not a diamond away, but just then her eyes brimmed over with two more, she was obliged to dry them with her pocket handkerchief, talking on all the while. "This is too ridiculous. Georgie getting sentimental! Georgie booh-hoohing over a

lover, when she's got a real, live Lord, with a deer-park, a house in London ever so much a year, at her feet! What else have I always wished for? But, come, I will think of it calmly. Say I am in love with Guy (if I have no heart, how can I love anybody?) say I am in love with him. He is poor, rather extravagant, lazy just as luxurious as I am. Now, what should we live on? I should have to mend my clothes, do the shopping, I should never ride or dance or do anything worth living for any more; but there would be pinching patching starvation (politely called economy) I should get cross, Guy would get cross, we should fight, fight, fight! Now — take the other side of the picture. First, Lord B. is really in love with me. Second, he is venerable, sleepy fixed in his own ruts, would give me twice as much liberty as a younger man; third, I should have three fine houses, plenty of horses as many dresses as I could wear, (I have a large capacity in that way!) nothing to do but coquet with all the handsome boys whose heads I chose to turn; fourth, I should be Lady Breton of Lowood, the first lady in the county! Hurrah!" As Georgie ended this resume of the advantages of her ancient suitor, she clapped her hands together jumped up from the hearth-rug. "It must be done. I am sure Guy I could never be happy together, I shall write tell him so, the sooner the better. I suppose Mamma will be a little scandalized, but I can settle that. And when shall I ever have such a chance again?" She

reopened Lord Breton's letter, read it for the third time, then went up to the writing table that stood between the two windows. "The sooner the better, the sooner the better," she repeated, as she sat down took out a sheet of paper stamped with the Rivers crest. She dipped her pen in ink, dated the blank sheet — then paused a moment, with contracting eye-brows. "No. I suppose that I must write to Guy first. What shall I say? It is so hard… I… hush, you little idiot! Are you going to change your mind again?" With this self-addressed rebuke, she re-dipped her pen, began to write hastily —

Dear Guy: I am sure we can never be happy as anything but friends, I send you back the ring which will be far better on someone else's hand. You will get over your fancy, I shall Always be, Your Affectionate Cousin G.R.

To Guy Hastings Esqr.

It was soon over, she laid the pen down pushed the paper away quickly, covering her eyes with her hand. The clock, striking the hour on the chimney-piece, roused her with a start. "I suppose I had better take this ring off," she said, slowly, gazing at the hoop of diamonds. "There is no use in hesitating — or the battle is lost. There — what is it, a ring? It will be replaced by another (with bigger diamonds) tomorrow afternoon." She drew it off hurriedly, as though the operation were painful, then looked at her unadorned hand. "You

change owners, poor little hand!" she said softly. Then she kissed the ring laid it away. After that it was easier to go on with her next note, though she wrote two copies before she was satisfied that it was proper to be sent to the great Lord Breton. The note finally ran thus:

My dear Lord Breton: I was much flattered by your offer, which I accept, remaining Yours truly (I shall be at home tomorrow afternoon.)

Georgina Rivers.

"Like answering a dinner-invitation," commented Georgie; "but I can't make it longer. I don't know what to say!"

CHAPTER II. Enter Lord Breton

"AULD ROBIN GRAY cam 'a courtin' me."
Lady Barnard.

Let it be understood by the reader, in justice to Miss Rivers, that, before she despatched the note with which our last chapter closes, she shewed it to her mother. As she had expected, that lady offered some feeble opposition to her daughter's bold stroke. It was early the next morning Mrs. Rivers — a nervous invalid, of the complainingly resigned sort — was still in her bedroom, though the younger members of the

family, Kate, Julia Tom, had breakfasted been called to their lessons, by Miss Blackstone, their governess. Georgie therefore found her mother alone, when she entered with the answer to Lord Breton's letter in her hand; it was easy, after one glance at the small figure on the couch, with faded hair, pink lids yielding wrinkles about the mouth, to see why, though "Mamma would be a little scandalized" it would be easy to "settle that." If Mrs. Rivers had ever been a beauty much mourning malady had effaced all traces thereof from her gentle, sallow face framed in a heavy widow's cap; she was one of those meek, shrinking women who seem always overwhelmed by their clothes, indeed by circumstances in general. She greeted her daughter's entrance with a faint smile, observed in a thin, timid voice "that it was a beautiful morning." "Yes," said Georgie, kissing her, "jolly for hunting. How did you sleep, little Mamma?" "Oh, well enough, my dear — as well as I could have hoped," said Mrs. Rivers, sighing. "Of course Peters forgot my sleeping-draught when he went into West Adamsborough yesterday, but what else could I expect?" "I am very sorry! The man never had his proper allowance of brains." "Nay, my dear, I do not complain." "But I do," said Georgie, impatiently. "I hate to be resigned!" "My child!" "You know I do, Mamma. But I want to speak to you now. Will Payson be coming in for anything?" "Indeed I can't tell, my dear." (Mrs. Rivers was never in her life known to

express a positive opinion on any subject.) “Very well, then” said Georgie, “I will make sure.” She locked the door, then came sat down at her mother’s feet. “Now, Mamma, I am going to shock you,” she said. “Oh, my dear, I hope not.” “But I tell you that I am,” persisted Georgie. “Now listen. I have decided that I shouldn’t be happy with Guy, I have written to tell him so.” Mrs. Rivers looked startled. “What has happened, my love?” she asked anxiously. “I hope you have not been quarrelling. Guy is a good boy.” “No, we have not been quarrelling — at least, not exactly. But I have thought it all over. Guy I would never get on. And I am going to accept Lord Breton!” “Good gracious, my dear!” cried Mrs. Rivers, in mingled horror admiration at her daughter’s sudden decision. “But what will Guy say?… Have you reflected?…” “I have set Guy free; therefore I am at liberty to accept Lord Breton.” “But — so soon? I don’t understand,” said poor Mrs. Rivers, in humble perplexity. “Of course the engagement will not be announced at once; but Lord Breton’s letter requires an answer I have written it.” She handed the note to her mother, who looked over it with her usual doubtful frown, but whose only comment was a meek suggestion that it was very short. “I can’t write four pages to say I’ll accept him,” said Georgie, sharply; Mrs. Rivers, reflecting that her unusual crossness was probably due to concealed agitation, only said mildly, “but poor Guy.” “Why do you pity Guy, Mamma? He will be rid

of me, if he is really in love with me — why, men get over those things very quickly." "But I cannot help thinking, my dear…" "Don't, Mamma!" cried Georgie, passionately, "don't think. I have made up my mind, if you talk all day you can only make me cry." The last word was almost a sob, Georgie turned sharply away from her mother. "I am afraid you are unhappy, darling child." "Why should I be?" burst out Georgie, with sudden fierceness. "Don't be so foolish Mamma! Why should I be unhappy? It is my own choice, I don't want to be pitied!" She ran out of the room as she ended, Mrs. Rivers' anxious ears heard her bedroom door slam a moment later. The note was sent duly, that morning; in the afternoon the various members of the family saw, from their respective windows, Lord Breton of Lowood ride up to the door of Holly Lodge. Georgie, with an unusual colour in her face, which was set off by the drooping ruffle of lace about her soft throat, came in to her mother's room for a kiss a word or two. Now that Guy's ring had really been sent back, she seemed to have nerved herself to go through the day resolutely; with a quick, firm step, her head higher than its wont she went downstairs to meet her suitor. Lord Breton was leaning against the mantel-piece where Guy had stood yesterday; it would have been hard to find a greater contrast to that handsome young gentleman than Georgie's noble lover. Fifty-eight years of what is commonly called hard living had left heavy traces on

what in its day was known as a fine figure; in the Lord Breton whom some few could remember as "that gay young buck" the present generation saw nothing but a gray gouty old gentleman, who evidently enjoyed his port wine sherry generously. He came forward as Georgie entered, bending over her hand (it was not the hand that Guy had kissed) said, pompously: "I need not say how deeply I feel the honour you confer on me, Miss Rivers. This is indeed a happy day!" "Thank you," said Georgie, with a wild desire to draw her hand away; "you are very kind, Lord Breton." "No, no," returned his lordship affably; "I only rejoice in being allowed to call mine a young lady so abundantly endowed with every charm as Miss Rivers — as — May I call you Georgina?" Georgie started; no one had ever called her by her name, preferring the boyish abbreviation which seemed to suit her lively, plump prettiness best; but, after all, it was better he should not call her as Guy did. Georgina was more suitable for the future Lady Breton. "You have won the right to do so," she said, as she sat down, Lord Breton took a chair opposite, at an admiring distance. "A most precious right," he replied, conjuring up the ghost of what some might recall as a fascinating smile; but which was more like a bland leer to the eye unassisted by memory. "Let me assure you," he continued, "that I know how little a man of my advanced years deserves to claim the attention of a young lady in the lovely bloom of youth;

but — ahem — I hope that the name, the title — above all the respect esteem which I lay at her feet may compensate—" he paused, evidently wondered that Georgie did not reply to this sublime condescension; but as she was silent, he was forced to take up the thread of his speech. "As I said in my letter, you will remember, Miss… Ah… Georgina — as I said in my letter, I do not see why difference of age should be an obstacle to a happy union; as — ahem — since your views so happily coincide with mine, permit me to — to adorn this lovely hand with — a — with—" here Lord Breton, finding that his eloquence had for the moment run dry, supplied the lack of speech by action, producing a brilliant ruby set in large diamonds, slipped it on Georgie's passive hand. "I hope you will accept this, as a slight token of — of…" "It is very beautiful," said Georgie, colouring with pleasure, as the dark fire of the ruby set off the whiteness of her hand. "You are most generous. But you will forgive me if I do not wear it, at least in public. I should prefer not to have the engagement announced at once." Lord Breton looked justly astonished, as he might have done if a crossing-sweeper to whom he had tossed a shilling had flung it back in his face. "May I ask why this — this secrecy must be preserved?" he said, in a tone of profound, but suppressed, indignation; remembering, just in time, that though the wife is a legitimate object of wrath, it is wise to restrain one's self during

courtship. “I am going to shew you what a spoiled child I am, by refusing to tell you,” said Georgie, putting on an air of imperious mischievousness to hide her growing agitation, “ I know you will humour me. I am so used to having my own way, that it might be dangerous to deprive me of it!” If she had not said this with a most enchanting smile, naughty yet appealing, Lord Breton might not have been so easily appeased; but being charmed with this pretty display of wilfulness (as men are apt to be before marriage) concluding that her mother might have something to do with the obstruction she would not name, he only said, with a bow, “The loss is on my side, however! I shall count the days until I can proclaim to the world what a prize I have won.” Georgie laughed; a sweet, little bird-like laugh, which was as resistless as her pout. “You pay me so many compliments that I shall be more spoiled than ever! But you will not have to wait long, I promise you.” “No waiting can be very long while I am privileged to enjoy your companionship,” said Lord Breton, rising to the moment triumphantly. “Oh, for shame! Worse worse!” cried Georgie. “But I think Mamma is in the study. Won’t you come in see her?”

CHAPTER III. Jilted

"THERE CAN BE no reason Why, when quietly munching your dry-toast butter Your nerves should be suddenly thrown in a flutter At the sight of a neat little letter addressed In a woman's handwriting."
Robert Lytton: Lucile.

Guy Hastings was finishing an unusually late breakfast at his favourite resort in London, Swift's Club, St. James St., on the morning after his parting with Georgie, when a note addressed in her well-known hand, with its girlish affectation of masculiness, was handed to him by a Club servant. Although he was surprised that she should have written so soon, (she seldom, during his trips to London, wrote to him at all) he was not excited by any stronger emotion than surprise slight curiosity, for the words that passed between them the day before had appeared to him nothing more than a lover's quarrel developed by bad weather ennui he was too well accustomed to unaccountable phases in his cousin's April character to imagine that anything serious could be its consequence. A man, however, who is as deeply in love as Guy was, does not have a letter in the beloved one's handwriting long unopened; though a pile of other envelopes "To

Guy Hastings Esqr." were pushed aside until fuller leisure after breakfast, he broke Georgie's seal at once. One glance at the hurriedly written lines sufficed to change the aspect of life completely. At first there came a sense of blank bewilderment, followed, upon reflection, by indignation at this undeserved slight; these emotions combined were enough to make him turn from the breakfast-table, thrusting the package which contained the ring into his breast-pocket, to escape from the clatter movement of the breakfast room. One might have supposed that every member of the club would be off shooting, fishing, hunting or travelling at this unfashionable time, but of course, as Guy went down to take refuge in the reading-room he was fastened upon by a veteran club bore, who talked to him for half an hour by the clock, while all the time Georgie's note was burning in his pocket. At last the bore discovered that he had an engagement, with deep regret (more for Guy's sake than his own) was obliged to break off in the midst of an Indian anecdote; but he was replaced almost immediately by Capt. Doublequick of the — th, who always had a new scandal to feast his friends on, now for dearth of listeners, came to tell Guy the fullest details of "that affair with young Wiggins the little French Marquise." This delectable history, embellished with the Capt.'s usual art, lasted fully another half hour; Guy was in the last stages of slow torture when the unconscious Doublequick espied a

solitary man at the other end of the room who had not heard all about "young Wiggins." Left to himself, Guy, with the masculine instinct of being always as comfortable as possible, settled himself in an armchair, reread Georgie's note, slowly, carefully repeatedly, as though he fancied it might be an optical delusion after all. But it was one of Georgie's virtues to write a clear hand. The cruel words were there, remained the same, read them as he would. At last, as he sat half-stupidly staring at the few lines, a purpose formed itself within him to write at once ask the meaning of them. Think as he would, he could not remember having, by word or act, justified Georgie in sending him such a letter; he concluded that the best thing the simplest he could do, was to demand an explanation. He loved her too deeply reverently to believe that she could mean to throw him over thus; he thought he knew the depths shallows of her character, though he was not blind to her faults, he would never have accused her, even in the thought, of such unwarranted heartlessness. Having determined, then, on this first step, he called for pen paper, after tearing up several half-written sheets, folded sealed this letter.

What have I done to deserve the note I got from you this morning? Why do you send the ring back? God knows I love you better than anyone on earth, if I am at fault, it is ignorantly. If you have found out you don't care for me, tell me so — but for Heaven's sake don't

throw me over in this way without a word of explanation. G.H. Miss Rivers. Holly Lodge, Morley-near-W. Adamsbro.

Every one of those few words came straight from Guy's heart; for Georgie Rivers had been his one "grande passion," his love for her perhaps the noblest, strongest feeling he was capable of. Indeed, I am disposed to think that the life of "a man about town" (the life which Guy had led since his college days five years before) is apt to blunt every kind of feeling into a well-bred monotone of ennui, it is a wonder to me that he had preserved so strong intact the capacity of really "falling in love." Of course, he had had a dozen little affaires de coeurs here there before his heart was really touched; a man who lives as fast free as Guy Hastings had done, seldom escapes without "the least little touch of the spleen" — but he had outgrown them one after another as people do outgrow those inevitable diseases, until the fatal malady seized him in the shape of his pretty cousin. His love for her had influenced his whole life, blent itself into his one real talent, for painting, so that he sketched her bewitching little head a thousand one times, looked forward in the future, after his marriage, to turning his brush to account, selling his pictures high, in the still dimmer To-be becoming an R.A. How many an idle amateur has dreamed in this fashion! Meanwhile, he had enjoyed himself, made love to her, lived neither better nor worse than a

hundred other young men of that large class delightful for acquaintance, but dangerous for matrimony, whom susceptible young ladies call “fascinating” anxious mothers “fast.” Now, though like takes to like, it is seldom that two people of the same social tastes fall in love with each other; Mr. Rapid, who has been in all the escapades going, connected with a good many of the most popular scandals, is attracted by Miss Slow, just out of a religious boarding-school, with downcast eyes monosyllabic conversation; Miss Rapid, who has always been what Punch calls “a leetle fast,” settles down to domesticity with good, meek-minded Mr. Slow. Such is the time-honoured law of contrasts. But Guy Hastings Georgie were one of those rare exceptions said to prove the rule which they defy. If Guy had tasted the good things of life generously, his cousin was certainly not wanting in a spice of fastness. Yet these two sinners fell mutually in love at first sight, remained in that ecstatic condition until Georgie’s unaccountable note seemed to turn the world temporarily upside-down. That unaccountable note! After answering it calling for a servant to post his answer, he thrust it away in his pocket, since “there was no help for it,” resolved to make the best of the matter by forgetting it as quickly as possible. There are few young men who do not turn with an instinct of abhorrence from the contemplation of anything painful; some possess the art of “drowning dull care”

completely. Guy, however, could not shake his disagreeable companion off; he must have shewed it in his face, for as he was leaving the club, in the forlorn hope of finding some note or message from Georgie at his rooms, a familiar voice called out "Hullo, Guy Fawkes, my boy! I didn't know you were in town! Had a row? What makes your mustachios look so horridly dejected?" "Jack Egerton!" exclaimed Guy, turning to face the speaker, a short, wiry-built little man with reddish whiskers honest gray eyes, who laid a hand on his shoulder, gravely scanned him at arm's length. Guy laughed rather uneasily. No man likes to think that another has guessed his inmost feelings at first sight. "Yes," said Egerton, slowly, "your Fortunatus purse has run out again, Poole has too much sense to send that blue frock coat home, or you've had a row about some pretty little votary of the drama, been O jolly thrashed — or — Araminta, or Chloe or Belinda (we won't say which) has been shewing you some charming phase in her character usually reserved for post-nuptial display. Come now, Knight of the Dolorous Visage, which is it?" Jack Egerton (commonly called Jack-All, from his wonderful capacity for doing everything, knowing everybody being everywhere) although by some years Guy's senior, had known him at Cambridge (poor Jack was there through several sets of new men) had struck up a warm friendship with him which nothing since had shaken. Egerton shared Guy's artistic inclinations, was

like him “a man about town,” a general favourite, so that the similarity of their life had thrown them together ever since they forsook the shade of Alma Mater, Jack steering the “young Duke” as he always called Guy, out of many a scrape, Guy replenishing Jack’s purse when his own would allow of such liberality. Guy then, who would not have betrayed himself to any other living man, found it a great relief to unburden his woes to Jack Egerton, knowing that he possessed the rare talent of keeping other people’s secrets as jealously as his own. “Hang it, there is a row,” said the lover, pulling the dejected moustache. “But for Heaven’s sake come out of this place. We shall be seized upon by some proses in a minute. Come along.” He ran his arm through Egerton’s, the two sallied forth into the streets, making for the deserted region of Belgravia. It was not until they were in the most silent part of that dreary Sahara between the iron railings of a Duke who was off in Scotland, the shut windows of an Earl who had gone to Italy, that Jack, who knew his companion “au fond,” broke the silence by, “Well, my boy?” Guy glared suspiciously at a dirty rag-picker who was expressing to himself his ragbag the deepest astonishment “that them two young swells should be ‘ere at this time o’ year”; but even that innocent offender soon passed by, left him secure to make his confession in entire privacy. “Look here” he said, taking Georgie’s note from his pocket handing it to Egerton. (Although the engagement

between them, which had been of short duration, was kept private, he was shrewd enough to guess that his friend knew of it.) Jack, leaning against the Duke's railings, perused the short letter slowly; then folded it up relieved himself by a low whistle. "Well?" groaned Guy, striking his stick sharply against His grace's area-gate, "What do you think of that? Of course you know that we were engaged, she always said she cared for me, all that — until that thing came this morning." Jack looked meditatively at his friend. "I beg pardon," he said, slowly, "but did you have a row when you last saw her?" "No, upon my honour none that I was conscious of! It was yesterday — beastly weather, you remember, we were a little cross, but we made it up all right — at least, I thought so." "Of course you thought so," said Jack, calmly; "The question is, who provoked the quarrel?" "God knows — if there was a quarrel — I did not. I would go to the ends of the earth for her, Jack!" "Then excuse me again, old boy — then she tried to pick a quarrel?" Guy paused — it seemed treason to breathe a word against his lady, yet he could not but recall how strange her behaviour had been— "I–I believe I bored her," he stammered, not caring to meet Jack's eyes. "Did she tell you so?" "Well — yes; but, you know, she often chaffs, I thought — I thought…" "You thought it was a little love-quarrel to kill time, eh?" said Jack, in his short, penetrating way. "Well, my dear boy, so it might have been, but I don't

think it was." "What do you think then?" said Guy, anxiously. "Don't be afraid to tell me, old fellow." "Look here, then. You are a handsome young gaillard — just the sort that women like, the worse luck for you! — I haven't a doubt your cousin (she shall not be named) fell in love with you. But — taking a slight liberty with the proverb— "fall in love in haste, repent at leisure" — How much have you got to support a wife on?" "Deucedly little," said Guy, bitterly. "Exactly. And you like to live like a swell, have plenty of money to pitch in the gutter, when society requires it of you. Now, I dare say your cousin knows this." "Well?" "Well — she has more good sense just as much heart as most young ladies of our advanced civilization. She has had the wit to see what you, poor fool, sublimely overlooked — that what is comfort for one is pinching for two (or — ahem! three) — the greater wit to tell you so before it is too late." Jack paused, looked Guy directly in the face. "Do you understand?" "I don't know… I… for Heaven's sake, Jack, out with it," groaned the lover. Jack's look was of such deep, kindly pity as we cast on a child, whom we are going to tell that its goldfish is dead or its favourite toy broken. "My poor boy," he said, gently, "don't you see that you have been — jilted?" —

CHAPTER IV. The End of the Idyl

"THROUGH YOU, WHOM once I loved so well — Through you my life will be accursed."

Georgie had just come home from a ride to the meet with Lord Breton, on the day after her engagement to that venerable peer, when her mother called to her that there was a letter on her table upstairs in Guy's handwriting. Georgie changed colour; she had not expected this, had thought to cast off "the old love" more easily. It came now like a ghost that steals between the feaster his wine-cup; a ghost of old wrongs that he thought to have laid long ago but that rises again again to cast a shadow on life's enjoyments. Georgie, however, determined to take the bull by the horns, went up to her room at once; but she paused a moment before the pier-glass to smile back at the reflection of her trim figure in the dark folds of a faultless habit, crowned by the most captivating little "topper" from under which a few little brown curls would escape, despite the precaution which Georgie of course always took to brush them back into their place. Then, setting her saucy, rosebud mouth firmly, she turned from the glass opened Guy's letter. If she had not been very angry at his having written at all, she might have been in danger of giving Lord Breton the slip, coming back

to her first choice; for she did love Guy, though such a poor, self-despising thing as love could have no legitimate place in the breast of the worldly-wise Miss Rivers! But she was angry with Guy, having read his appeal tore it up, stamped her foot nearly broke her riding-whip in the outburst of her rage. After that, she locked her door, threw herself into what she called her "Crying-chair"; a comfortable, cushioned seat which had been the confidante of many a girlish fit of grief passion. Having cried her eyes into the proper shade of pinkness, all the while complaining bitterly of Guy's cruelty the hardness of the world, her own unhappy fate, she began to think that his letter must nevertheless be answered, having bathed her injured lids and taken an encouraging look at Lord Breton's ruby flashing on her left hand, she wrote thus:

> My dear Guy: I don't think I deserved your reproaches, or, if I did, you must see that I am not worth your love. But I will tell you everything plainly. Knowing (as I said before) that we could never be happy together, I have engaged myself to Lord Breton. You will thank me some day for finding our feelings out releasing you before it was too late — though of course I expect you to be angry with me now. Believe me, I wish that we may always be friends; it is for that reason that I speak to you so frankly. My engagement to Lord Breton will not be announced yet. With many

wishes for your happiness, Yours "Georgina" Rivers. To Guy Hastings Esqr. Swift's Club, Regent St. London W.

Georgie was clever politic enough to know that such desperate measures were the only ones which could put an end to this unpleasant matter; but she was really sorry for Guy wanted to make the note as kind gentle as possible. Perhaps Guy felt the sting none the less that it was so adroitly sheathed in protestations of affection unworthiness. He was alone in the motley apartment, half-studio, half smoking-room study, which opened off his bedroom at his London lodgings. He had not had the heart to stay at the Club after he had breakfasted; but pocketed Georgie's note (which was brought to him there) went home at once. Inevitable business had detained him in town the day before, but he had determined to run down to West Adamsborough that morning, having prepared Georgie by his note. Now his plans, indeed his whole life, seemed utterly changed. There comes a time in the experience of most men when their faith in womankind is shaken pretty nearly to its foundations; that time came to Guy Hastings as he sat by his fire, with a bust of Pallas (adorned by a Greek cap a faded blue breast-knot) presiding over him, read his dismissal. But here I propose to spare my reader. I suppose every lover raves in the same rhetoric, when his mistress plays him false,

when to you, Sylvia, or you, Damon, that bitter day comes, you will know pretty accurately how Guy felt what Guy said. Let us, then, pass over an hour, reenter our hero's domain with Jack Egerton, who, at about 11 o'clock, gave his sharp, short rap at the door of that sanctum. "Who the devil is it?" said Guy, savagely, starting at the sound. "Your Mentor." "Jack? — Confound you! — Well, come in if you like." "I do like, most decidedly," said Egerton briskly, sending a puff of balmy Havana smoke before him as he entered. "What's the matter now? I've been at Swift's after you, didn't half expect to find you moping here." "I don't care where I am," said Guy with a groan. "Sit down. What is the use of living?" "Shall I answer you from a scientific, theological or moral point of view?" "Neither. Don't be a fool." "Oh," with a slight shrug, "I thought you might like me to keep you company." Guy growled. "I don't know whether you want to be kicked or not," he said, glaring at poor Jack, "but I feel deucedly like trying it." "Do, my dear fellow! If it will shake you out of this agreeable fit of the dumps I shall feel that it is not paying too dearly." Guy was silent for a moment; then he picked up Georgie's letter held it at arm's length, before his friend. "Look there," he said. Jack nodded. "My death warrant." He stooped down pushed it deep into the smouldering coals — it burst into a clear flame, then died out turned to ashes. "Woman's love," observed Jack sententiously. Jack

was a boasted misogynist, if he had not pitied Guy from the depths of his honest heart, might have felt some lawful triumph in the stern way in which his favourite maxim, "Woman is false" was brought home to his long unbelieving friend; such a triumph as that classic bore, Mentor, doubtless experienced when Telemachus broke loose from the rosy toils of Calypso. "There," he continued. "If you have the pluck to take your fancy — your passion — whatever you choose to call it, burn it as you burned that paper, I have some hopes for you." Guy sat staring absently at the red depths of the falling fire. "Did a woman ever serve you so, Jack?" he asked, suddenly, facing about looking at Egerton sharply; but Jack did not flinch. "No," he said in a voice of the profoundest scorn; "I never gave one of them a chance to do it. You might as well say, did I ever pick up a rattle-snake, let it twist round my arm say: 'Bite!' No, decidedly not!" "Then you believe that all women are the same?" "What else have I always preached to you?" cried Jack, warming with his favourite subject. "What does Pope say? "Every woman is at heart a rake'! And Pope knew 'em. And I know 'em. Look here; your cousin is not the only woman you've had to do with. How did the others treat you? Ah — I remember the innkeeper's daughter that vacation in Wales, my boy!" "Don't," said Guy reddening angrily. "It was my own fault. I was only a boy, I was a fool to think I cared for the girl — that's nothing. She is the only woman I ever

loved!" "So much the better. The more limited one's experience, the less harm it will do. Only guard yourself from repeating such a favourite folly." "There's no danger of that!" "I hope not," said Egerton. "But I have got a plan to propose to you. After such a little complaint as you have been suffering from, change of scene climate is considered the best cure. Come to Italy with me, old fellow!" "To Italy!" Guy repeated. "When? How soon?" "The day after tomorrow." "But-I–I meant — I hoped… to see her again." Jack rapped the floor impatiently with his stick. "What? Expose yourself to the contempt insult, or still worse, the pity, of a woman who has jilted you? For Heaven's sake, lad, keep hold of your senses!" "You think I oughtn't to go, then?" said Guy, anxiously. "Go! — out of the fryingpan into the fire I should call it," stormed Jack, pacing up down the littered room. "No. He must be a poor-spirited fellow who swims back for salvation to the ship that his pitched him overboard! No. Come abroad with me, as soon as you can get your traps together, let the whole thing go to the deuce as fast as it can." Jack paused to let his words take effect; Guy sat, with his head leaning on his hand, still studying the ruins of the fire. At last he sprang up caught his shrewd-headed friend by the hand. "By Jove, Jack, you're right. What have we got to live for but our art? Come along. Let's go to Italy — tomorrow, if you can, Jack!" And go they did, the next day. As his

friends used to say of him, “Jack’s the fellow for an emergency.” His real, anxious affection for Guy, his disinterested kind-heartedness conquered every obstacle to so hasty unexpected a departure; four days after he parted with Georgie in the drawingroom of Holly Lodge, Guy Hastings was on his way to Calais, looking forward, through the distorting spectacles of a disappointed love, to a long, dreary waste of life which was only one degree better than its alternative, the utter chaos of death.

CHAPTER V. Lady Breton of Lowood

“A SORROW’S CROWN of sorrow is remembering happier things.”
Tennyson: Locksley Hall.

It is sometimes wonderful to me how little it takes to make people happy. How short a time is needed to bury a grief, how little is needed to cover it! What Salvandy once said in a political sense, “Nous dansons sur un volcan,” is equally true of life. We trip lightly over new graves gulfs of sorrow separation; we piece patch draw together the torn woof of our happiness; yet sometimes our silent sorrows break through the slight barrier we have built to ward them off, look us sternly in the face —

A month after Guy Hastings Egerton started on

their wanderings southward, Miss Rivers' engagement to Lord Breton of Lowood was made known to the fashionable world, a month after that (during which the fashionable world had time to wag its tongue over the nine-day's wonder of the old peer's being caught by that "fast little chit") Georgie became Lady Breton. As a county paper observed: "The brilliant espousals were celebrated with all the magnificence of wealth directed by taste." Georgie, under her floating mist of lace went up the aisle with a slow step, not a few noticed how intensely pale she was; but when she came out on her husband's arm her colour had revived she walked quickly bouyantly. Of course Mrs. Rivers was in tears; Kate Julia, in their new role of bridemaids fluttered about everywhere; Miss Blackstone put on a gown of Bismarck-coloured poplin (her favourite shade) a bonnet of surprising form rainbow tints, in honour of the occasion. But perhaps the real moment of Georgie's triumph was when the carriage rolled through the grand gateways of Lowood, after long windings through stately trees slopes of shaven lawn, passed before the door of her new home. Her heart beat high as Lord Breton, helping her to descend, led her on his arm through the wide hall lined by servants; she felt now that no stakes would have been too high to win this exquisite moment of possessorship. A fortnight after this brought on the bright, busy Christmas season; as Lord Breton was desirous of keeping it festively,

invitations were sent out right left. Georgie, although perhaps she had not as much liberty as she had dreamed, found her husband sufficiently indulgent, unless his express wishes were crossed; when, as the game-keeper once remarked, “His lordship were quite pinacious.” She enjoyed, too, the character of Lady Bountiful, the tribute of obsequious flattery which everybody is ready to pay to the mistress of a hospitable house; but it was not long before she felt that these passing triumphs, which her girlish fancy had exaggerated, palled on her in proportion as they became an understood part of her life; praise loses half its sweetness when it is expected. At first she would not confess to herself the great want that seemed to be growing undefinably into her life; but as the gulf widened, she could not overlook it. There is but one Lethe for those who are haunted by a life’s mistake; Georgie plunged into it. I have hinted that she had had a reputation for fastness in her unmarried days; this reputation, which grew as much out of a natural vivacity daring as out of anything marked in her conduct, grew to be a truth after she became Lady Breton. She dashed into the crowd to escape the ghosts that peopled her solitude with vague reproaches; as the incompleteness of her mischosen life grew upon her day by day it gave new impetus to the sort of moral opium-eating which half-stifled memory. Lord Breton did not care to stay her; he took a certain pride in the

glitter that his young wife's daring manners carried with them; for in pretty women, fastness has always more or less fascination. And Georgie had to perfection the talent of being "fast." She was never coarse, never loud, never disagreeably masculine; but there was a resistless, saucy elan about her that carried her a little beyond the average bounds laid for a lady's behaviour. It seemed as though her life never stood still, but rushed on with the hurry brawl of the streamlet that cannot hide the stones clogging its flow. Altogether, she fancied herself happy; but there were moments when she might have said, with Miss Ingelow: "My old sorrow wakes cries"; moments when all the hubbub of the present could not drown the low reproach of the past. It was a very thin partition that divided Georgie from her skeleton.

One day, when the last Christmas guests had departed from Lowood, the new relay had not arrived, Lord Breton, who was shut up with a sharp attack of gout, sent a servant to Georgie's dressing-room, to say that he would like to see my lady. She came to him at once, for even his company, his slow, pompous speeches, were better than that dreadful solitude; although gout did not sweeten his temper. "My dear," he said, "seeing that ivory chess-board in the drawing-room yesterday suggested to me an occupation while I am confined to my chair. I used to be a fair player once. Will you kindly have the board brought

up?" As it happened, Georgie had not played a game of chess since the afternoon of her parting with Guy, her husband's words, breaking upon a train of sad thought (she had been alone nearly all day) jarred her strangely. "Chess!" she said, with a start. "Oh, I–I had rather not. Excuse me. I hate chess. Couldn't we play something else?" Lord Breton looked surprised. "Is the game so repugnant to you that I may not ask you to gratify me this afternoon?" he asked, serenely; Georgie felt almost ashamed of her weakness. "I beg your pardon," she said. "I play very badly, could only bore you." "I think I can instruct you," said Lord Breton, benignly; mistaking her aversion for humility, delighted at the display of this wife-like virtue. "Oh, no, indeed. I am so stupid about those things. And I don't like the game." "I hoped you might conquer your dislike for my sake. You forget that I lead a more monotonous existence than yours, when confined by this unfortunate malady." Lord Breton's very tone spoke unutterable things; but if Georgie could have mastered her feeling, the spirit of opposition alone would have been enough to prick her on now. "I am sorry," she said, coldly, "that my likes dislikes are not under better control. I cannot play chess." "You cannot, or will not?" "Whichever you please," said Georgie, composedly. Lord Breton's wrath became evident in the contraction of his heavy brows; that a man with his positive ideas about wifely submission, marital authority, should have his reproofs

answered thus! “I do not think,” he observed, “that you consider what you are saying.” “I seldom do,” said Georgia, with engaging frankness. “You know I am quite incorrigible.” “I confess, Lady Breton, I do not care for such trifling.” “I was afraid I was boring you. I am going to drive into Morley. Shall I order you any books from the library?” enquired Georgie, graciously. But as she rose to go, Lord Breton’s ire burst out. “Stay!” he exclaimed, turning red up to his rough eye-brows. “I repeat, Lady Breton, that I do not think you know what you are saying. This trivial evasion of so simple [a] request displeases me; I must again ask you to sacrifice part of your afternoon to the claims of your husband.” Georgie, who [was] standing with her hand on the door, did not speak; but her eyes gave him back flash for flash. “Will you oblige me by ringing for the chess-board?” continued Lord Breton, rigidly. “Certainly. Perhaps you can get Williamson to play with you,” said Georgie, pulling the bell. (Williamson was my lord’s confidential valet.) “I beg your pardon. I believe I have already asked you to perform that function, Lady Breton.” “And I believe that I have already refused,” said Georgie, regaining her coolness in proportion as her husband grew more irate. At this moment, Williamson appeared, Lord Breton ordered him to bring up the chessboard. When he was gone, Georgie saw that matters had gone too far for trifling. She had set her whole, strong will against playing the

game, she resolved that Lord Breton should know it at once. “I do not suppose,” she said, looking him directly in the face, “that you mean to drive me into obeying by force. Once for all, I cannot I will not, do as you ask me. You have insulted me by speaking to me as if I were a perverse child, not the head of your house; but I don’t mean to lose my temper. I know that gout is very trying.” With this Parthian shot, she turned left the room. Lord Breton, boiling with rage, called after her — but what can a man tied to his chair with the gout do against a quick-witted strategist in petticoats? Lord Breton began to think that this wife-training was, after all, not mere child’s play. This was the first declaration of open war; but it put Lord Breton on the alert, spurred Georgie into continual opposition. After all, she said to herself, quarrelling was better than [the] heavy monotony of peace; Lord Breton was perhaps not quite such a bore when worked into a genuine passion, as when trying to be ponderously gallant. Poor Georgie! When she appeared on her husband’s arm at the county balls dinners in the flash of her diamonds the rustle of her velvet lace, it seemed a grand thing to be Lady Breton of Lowood; but often, after those very balls dinners, when she had sent her hundred-eyed maid away, stood before the mirror taking off her jewels, she felt that, like Cinderella, after one of those brief triumphs, she was going back to the ashes rags of reality.

CHAPTER VI. At Rome

"I HE, Brothers in art."
Tennyson.

A large studio on the third floor of a Roman palazzo; a room littered crowded picturesque in its disorderliness, as only a studio can be. A white cast of Aphrodite relieved by a dull tapestry background representing a wan Susannah dipping her foot in the water, while two muddy-coloured elders glare through a time-eaten bough; an Italian stove surmounted by a coloured sporting print, a Toledo blade a smashed Tyrolean hat; in one corner a lay-figure with the costumes of a nun, a brigand, a sultana a Greek girl piled on indiscriminately; in another an easel holding a large canvas on which was roughly sketched the head of a handsome contadina. Such was the first mixed impression which the odd furnishing of the room gave to a newcomer; although a thousand lesser oddities, hung up, artist-fashion, everywhere, made a background of bright colours for these larger objects. It was a soft February day, the window by which Guy Hastings sat (he was lounging on its broad, uncushioned sill) was opened; so that the draught blew the puffs from his cigarette hither thither before his face. Jack Egerton, who shared the studio with him, was painting before a small easel, adding the last

crimson touches to a wild Campagna sunset, of course they kept the ball flying between them pretty steadily, as the one worked the other watched. “That will be a success,” observed Guy, critically. “For whom did you say it was painted?” “A fellow named Graham, an English merchant, with about as much knowledge of art as you I have of roadmaking. But it is such a delightful rarity to sell a picture, that I don’t care who gets it.” “How did he happen to be trapped?” Jack laughed. “Why, I met him at your handsome Marchese’s the other day, she made a little speech about my superhuman genius, which led him to take some gracious notice of me. I hinted that he might have seen one of my pictures (that confounded thing that Vianelli’s had for a month) in a shop-window on the Corso, he remembered it, enquired the price. ‘Very sorry’ said I, ‘but the thing is sold. To an English Earl, an amateur, whose name I am not at liberty to mention.’ He gobbled the bait at once, ordered this at a splendid price, I ran down to Vianelli’s, let him into my little game, told him to send the picture home at once, then sent some flowers to the Marchese!” Guy laughed heartily at his friend’s ruse, then observed, “I wish you had mentioned that I had some pictures which I would part with as a favour.” “By degrees, my boy, by degrees. He will come to the studio, to see this chef d’oeuvre, then you shall be introduced as a painter of whose fame he has of course etc., etc. By the way, I

shouldn't wonder if he came today." Guy knocked the ashes off his cigarette got up from his seat. "I thought Teresina would have come this morning," he said, "but I hope she won't. She gets so confoundedly frightened when anybody comes in, one feels like such a fool." "Guy!" said Egerton, suddenly, laying down his brush. "Well, old fellow?" "Are you going to make an ass of yourself?" "Not that I know of. How do you mean?" Guy stood opposite his friend, looked him frankly in the face. "I mean," said Jack, resuming his work, "Are you going to fancy yourself in love with this pretty little peasant, get into no end of a scrape?" "I don't know." "Well, then, be warned. What is the saying? Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle." "Very likely not. But… Ah, here she is. I know that tremulous little knock." Guy opened the door as he spoke, to admit a contadina, in holyday dress, with a gold chain about her soft olive throat a clean white head-dress above her lustrous braids pinned with a silver dagger. She could not have been more than 16 years old, was of that purest type of the Roman peasant which is so seldom met with nowadays. Her large, languid blue-black eyes were so heavily fringed that when she looked downward (as she almost always did, from an instinct of fawn-like timidity) they scarcely gleamed through their veil; there was not a tinge of colour in the transparent olive cheek which made her full, sensitive mouth look all the redder as it parted on a row of pearl-white teeth, when Guy greeted

her with his usual gentle gayety. It was no wonder that Jack had his fears. Little Teresina, with her trembling shyness her faint smiles, her low, sweet Italian, was a more dangerous siren than many an accomplished woman of the world. “I expected you” said Guy, smiling, as she stepped timidly into the room; speaking in Italian, which Jack, as he bent quietly over his work, wished more than ever to understand. “Look here,” Guy continued, pointing to the sketched head in the corner, “I have not touched it since because I knew I could not catch those eyes or that sweet, frightened smile without looking at you again.” As he spoke, he moved the easel out into its place, began to collect his brushes, while Teresina went quietly to place herself in a large, carved armchair raised on a narrow dais. When Guy had finished his preparations, arranged the light to his complete satisfaction, he sprang up on the dais, with an old red cloth on his arm stretched it at Teresina’s feet. “Now, piccola,” he said, standing at a critical distance, “let us see if you are properly posed. Wait a minute. So.” He came close to her, adjusted a fold in her dress moved her soft, frightened hand a little. “Are you so much afraid of me, cara?” he asked, smiling, as he felt it tremble. “I am not very hard to please, am I?” Teresina shook her head. “There,” said Guy, “that is right, now. Only lift up those wonderful lashes. I do not want to paint the picture of a blind contadina, do I?” All this, spoken in a soft tone which was natural to Guy

when addressing any woman, made poor Jack groan inwardly at his own stupidity in not understanding that sweet pernicious language that sounded like perpetual love-making! Having perfected Teresina's attitude, Guy sat down before his canvas, began to paint; every now then saying something to provoke the soft, monosyllables that he liked so well. "Where did you get that fine gold necklace, piccola?" he asked, beginning to paint it in with a few preparatory touches. "It is not mine. It belongs to la madre," said Teresina. "She wore it at her wedding." "Ah, perhaps you will wear it at yours. Should you like to get married, Teresina?" "I don't know," said Teresina, slowly. "La madre wants me to marry Pietro (the carpenter, you know) but I would rather kill myself!" There was a flash in the soft velvet eyes, that made Guy pause in undisguised admiration; but it died in an instant, no art of his brush or palette could hope to reflect it. "Is there anyone else you would like to marry, Teresina?" She was silent; he repeated his question. "Why do you ask me, Signore?" said the girl, dropping her lids. "I wish you would go on painting." Guy was not a little astonished at this outburst; went on with his work quietly, to Jack's intense relief. After about an hour of silence (Jack was obstinately dumb during Teresina's presence in the studio, believing that those infernal models could understand anything a fellow said) a round knock at the door made Guy breathe a low "confound it!" Egerton

called “Come in,” the next moment a portly gentleman, unmistakably English from top to toe, stood on the threshold. “Mr. Graham!” said Jack, rising. “You find me at work on the last touches of your little thing. Let me present my friend, Mr. Hastings, whose fame of course… I need not say — Mr. Graham bowed, was very much honoured by an introduction to Mr. Hastings. Mr. Graham spoke in a satisfied, important voice. Mr. Graham had the uneasy, patronizing air of a man who stands higher than his level, is not quite sure of his footing. “You see,” Jack continued, lightly, moving a chair forward for his august visitor, “that we painters are not quite such idle fellows as the world makes us out to be. Hastings I take advantage of this fine light for our work.” “So I observe,” said Mr. Graham, with a bow. “I see you’ve nearly done my order — a very nice little bit (as you artists would say) a very nice little bit.” As Mr. Graham spoke, his eye wandered about the motley room, in its course rested on Teresina. As Guy had said, she got “so confoundedly frightened” when any stranger was present; it was the first year she had been hired as a model, the miserable life had not yet rubbed off her girlish bloom. When she met Mr. Graham’s scrutinizing eyes, her lashes drooped a soft crimson stole over her neck face, making her lovelier than ever; “let me go, Signore,” she whispered to Guy, who had approached her to rearrange some detail in her dress. Then, without a word, she slipped

down from her elevation, stole quickly out of the room, still followed by Mr. Graham's gaze. "A model, eh? A very pretty little girl, Mr. Hastings. And a very nice picture — a very good likeness." Mr. Graham threw his head back critically fancied, worthy man, that he had been eminently calculated to discriminate justly in art. "Have you been long at that, eh?" he continued, nodding towards the picture. "Two sittings," said Guy, shortly; he was vexed that this intrusion had put his shy bird to the flight, could not abide this goodnatured bourgeois patronage which Jack laughed at professed to like as a study of character. "A very pretty, sweet little girl," said Mr. Graham, who had a weighty way of repeating his remarks as if they were too precious to pass at once into oblivion. "But I am told that those models haven't much character, Mr. Hastings, eh?" "A common mistake," Guy returned coldly. "Ah!" said Mr. Graham. But Jack's effusive politeness flattered him more than the stern reserve of Jack's handsome, sulky friend; Guy was left to himself, while the merchant Egerton talked together. It was not until the former rose to go, that he was again drawn into the circle of conversation. "I hope we shall see you at our apartment, no. 2 via —, Mr. Egerton. You — Mr. Hastings — you also, Sir. I shall be happy to introduce my wife daughter. I shall have my little commission tomorrow, then? Good morning to you, gentlemen." And Mr. Graham marched out with what (he flattered

himself) was a ducal elegance of manner carriage. When the door was shut, Guy relieved himself of, “I hate your confounded shopkeepers!” “Every man who buys my pictures is my brother,” exclaimed Jack, dramatically, “whatever be his station in life!” “Odd — because I never knew one of your brothers to do such an ingenuous thing!” observed Guy, gathering up his brushes. “Guy, my boy! You’re getting sarcastic.” “Very likely. I am going to the deuce by grande vitesse.” “Why don’t you stop at a station by the way?” said Egerton, rising with a yawn from his easel. “It would be a pity to reach your destination so soon.” “What does it matter?” returned Guy, bitterly, turning away to stare out of the window. “A good deal, my boy, to some people.” I might have thought so once,” said Guy very low. Jack was silent; he lighted his cigar leaned back in a medieval armchair puffing meditatively. After a while he said, “Are you falling in love with Teresina?” Guy started. “No,” he said, “I don’t think I am falling in love with anybody. If I have any heart left, I haven’t enough for that. Poor little Teresina!” “Why do you pity her?” said Jack, sharply. “Because she is young — I believe — sincere.” “Pity such virtues don’t last longer in persons of her class!” said Egerton.” “But you’ve got her in your head. Now, what are you going to do with her?” “Paint her.” Nonsense!” Jack jumped up laid a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Look here, my boy,” he said, in his quick

way, “since you left London with me last Autumn you have been doing your best to shew what I have always said — that there is nothing like a woman for ruining a man’s life. In short, you have been going rapidly to the dogs. Well; I am not a parson either, I don’t care to preach. But, for Heaven’s sake, don’t give way one instant to another woman! If, as you say, this child is innocent honest, leave her so. Don’t let those confounded soft eyes twist you into the idea that you’re in love.” “Poor little Teresina!” said Guy again.

CHAPTER VII. The Luckiest Man in London

“OH, TO BE in England, now that April’s there.”
Robert Browning: Dramatic Lyrics.

As the warm Roman Winter melted into Spring, Jack Egerton felt growing upon him the yearning which the poet expressed above; excepting that he would have transposed the month made it May, or, in other words, “the season.” In short, he got a little tired of his painting the Bohemianism of his life in Rome; would have been only too glad if he could have carried Guy off with him. But Guy would not go. His love had not been of the slight sort which can be cast off like a dress out of fashion, at the right time; he dreaded being within reach of the possibility of seeing his cousin

again. As it is with many another young man of like class habits, the warp in his love had warped his life; an undertone of bitterness ran habitually through it now, which Jack had striven in vain to destroy. Guy had decided to spend the Summer in Alp-climbing; but he intended to stay on in Rome until the end of April, so that Jack, who started homeward in the early part of that month, left him still there. Jack got back to England in time to pay several duty visits to his relations in the country; but the opening season found him in London again, ready, as the phrase is, for everything "going." Everybody was glad to see "Jack-All" back again; but his welcome at Swift's was perhaps the warmest the most heartily gratifying that he got. "Hullo, melancholy Jacques!" cried some familiar voice as Jack stalked into the reading room one mild May evening. "Back from Rome, eh? An R.A. yet?" More than one took up the chorus; Jack found himself surrounded by a group of laughing flaneurs, all asking questions, "chaffing," regaling the newcomers with town news. "How's Hastings?" said a tall Life-Guardsman (a Duke's son) who had joined in the circle of talk over the broadcloth shoulder of a wiry little Viscount. "Didn't Hastings go to Rome with you?" "Of course he did," said the Viscount, who knew everybody. "Don't you know, Hasty was so awfully gone on old Breton's wife, she jilted him — didn't she, Jack? Stunning little woman!" "Yes," said someone

else, “Hasty was entirely done up by that. It was hard lines.” “Has Hasty gone in regularly for painting?” enquired the Life Guard’s man; staunch Jack, who had not answered a word to this volley, turned the subject dexterously. “Yes. He has joined the Alpine Club.” “Instead of the Royal Academy?” “Whoever made that witticism ought to be blackballed,” said the Viscount. “Can’t you give Jack full swing, all of you?” “By all means! Fire away, old boy. How many women are you in love with, how many pictures have you sold how many people have you quarrelled with?” “I am in love with as many women as I was before,” said our stout misogynist, “ I have sold two pictures” (“Why did you make him perjure himself?” observed the Viscount parenthetically) “ I have quarrelled with everybody who didn’t buy the rest.” There was a general laugh; just then Lord Breton (who was one of the Patriarchs of the Club) came up caught sight of Jack. “Ha! Mr. Egerton. I understood you were in Italy,” said his lordship condescendingly. “Have you been long in town? If you have no prior engagement, dine with me tomorrow night at 8.” And Lord Breton passed on with a bow, while Jack stood overwhelmed by this sudden condescension. “By Jove,” said the Lifeguardsman as the old peer passed out of hearing, “I believe you’re the luckiest man in London!” “Why?” said Jack, amused. “Why! Don’t you know that you’re going to dine with the fastest, handsomest, most bewitching woman in

town? Don't you know that everybody's mad over Lady Breton?" "Yes!" added the Viscount. "Tom Fitzmore of the — th little Lochiel (Westmoreland's son, you know) had a row about her that might have ended seriously if the Duchess of Westmoreland hadn't found out gone down on her knees to her eldest hope, imploring him to give it up. Lochiel is a muff, went off to Scotland obediently, but Fitzmore was furious." "They say Monsieur is as watchful as a dragon as jealous as an old woman, but she plays her cards too cleverly for him," resumed my lord Lifeguardsman. "I've danced with her once, by Jove! it's like moving on air with a lot of roses soft things in your arms." "And how she sings!" cried the Viscount, waxing warm. "I swear, it's a pity she's a lady. She'd make a perfect actress." "But old B. ('Beast' they call him you know— 'Beauty the Beast')," explained the other, "is awfully suspicious never lets her sing except to a roomfull of dowagers ugly men." "Thanks!" observed the quick-witted Viscount. "I've heard her sing twice." "Which proves the truth of my statement," quoth the Lifeguardsman coolly, lounging off towards another group, while the little nobleman, in a deep note of mock ferocity called after him for an explanation. This was not the last that Jack heard of Lady Breton's praises. The next day he went to see a friend, a brother-artist (whose fame, however, exceeded Jack's) saw on his easel the head of a woman with a quantity of white lace

pearls folded about a throat as round soft as a Hebe's. Her soft, chesnut-brown hair fell in resistless little rings wavelets about a low white arch of forehead, beneath which two brilliant hazel eyes, with curly fringes, glanced out with a half-defiant, half-enticing charm. The features, which had no especial regularity, were redeemed by the soft peachbloom on either rounded cheek, the whole face made piquant by a small nose, slightly "tip-tilted," a dimple in the little white chin. Although Jack could find no real beauty in the lines of the charmingly-poised head, some nameless fascination arrested his eyes; he stood before the picture so long that the artist, who was just then busy with another portrait called out, "What! Are you losing your heart too, Benedick?" "Who is it?" said Jack. "What! don't you — It's the handsomest — no, not the handsomest, nor the most beautiful, nor the prettiest, woman in London; but, I should say, the most fascinating. Isn't that face irresistible? That is Lady Breton!" Jack started; perhaps he for the first time fully understood what had darkened Guy Hastings' life. "Yes," continued his friend, enthusiastically, "she is the sensation of the season. And no wonder! There is a perfect magic about her, which, I see by your face, I have been fortunate enough to reflect in part on my canvas. But if you knew her!" "I am going to dine there tonight," said Jack turning away, his admiration changed to a sort of loathing, as he thought of the

destruction those handsome eyes had wrought. “Are you? Let me congratulate you. You’re the luckiest man in London,” cried the portrait-painter, unconsciously repeating the words which had hailed Jack’s good-fortune at Swift’s the night before. “And this,” thought Egerton, “is what a woman gets for spoiling a man’s life!” Nevertheless, prompted by a certain curiosity (which Jack was careful to call a natural interest in the various phases of human nature, since to confess the desire of seeing a woman — even the woman whom all London was raving about — would have been high-treason to his cherished misogynism) — actuated, I say, by this feeling, he looked forward rather impatiently to the evening which was to introduce him to the famous Lady Breton;, as he was ushered by a resplendent Jeames up the velvet-spread staircase of her Belgravian mansion, was aware of that pleasurable sensation with which an ardent play-goer awaits the lifting of the curtain upon the first scene of a new drama. How the curtain lifted, what scenes it disclosed, how unexpectedly it fell, our next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER VIII. Jack the Avenger

"I HAVE A heart tho' I have played it false."
Old Play.

Lady Breton was leaning against the chimney-piece in her splendid drawing-room, hung with violet satin, illuminated by sparkling chandeliers. Her black velvet dress set off the neatly-moulded lines of her figure, which seemed to have gained in height stateliness since her unmarried days in Holly Lodge; the low, square-cut bodice revealed a bosom the whiter by contrast to a collar of rubies clasped closely about the throat. She was watching, half-absently, the flash of her rings, as she leaned her chin upon one drooping hand; was so absorbed in some silent reverie, that she scarcely noticed the pompous entrance of her lord master, until that noble gentleman observed, "I have asked Egerton to dine here tonight. I believe you know him." "I?" said Georgie, starting slightly. "N — no — I do not know him." But she did know that he was Guy's friend travelling companion. "A very gentlemanly fellow, of good family," said Lord Breton, graciously, "though an artist." A moment later, fortunately for his peace of mind, just too late to catch these words, Mr. Egerton was announced. Lord Breton went ponderously through an introduction to "Lady Breton, my friend Mr.

Egerton"; then he found himself sitting in a very easy chair, with only a velvet-covered tea-table between himself the most popular woman in London. Certainly, the charm of her face, her tone, her gesture, was irresistible. Her ease was so engaging, there was such a pretty spice of freedom in her speech manner, her coquetry was so artless original, that Jack had surely succumbed if he had not seen in this fascinating Lady Breton the destroyer of his friend's happiness. Ten minutes later, after another stray man, a distant relative of Lord Breton's, had made his appearance in dinner-array, Egerton had the whitest of hands lying on his coat-sleeve was leading his hostess to the dining-room, in a very delightful frame of mind. The parti quarre was kept alive, during the elaborate courses of the dinner, by Lady Breton's vivacity; as she employed herself in drawing Jack out (Jack was a clever talker) the two kept a constant flow of words circulating. Every moment, as he watched her heard her voice, the fascination the loathing increased together. In truth, Georgie had laid herself out to conquer this clever friend of Guy's; she in part succeeded. When at last she rose, with her rich draperies falling about her a deeper flush on her cheek, swept out of the room, a dullness fell on the three men which Lord Breton's sublimity was not likely to relieve. Jack was glad when the time which etiquette orders to be devoted to nuts wine (Lord Breton's wine was by no means contemptible) was

over, the gentlemen went to the drawing-room to join Georgie; nor was his i pleasure impaired by the fact that Lord Breton soon challenged his other guest to a game of billiards. “Let us stay here, Mr. Egerton,” said Georgie, with a smile. “It always makes my head ache to see Lord Breton play billiards. You don’t mind staying?” Jack protested. “Ah! I see you are like all other men — you always flatter.” “How can we help it when there is so much to flatter?” “That is a doubtful compliment, but I will take it at its best, as one must everything in this life. Do you take tea, Mr. Egerton?” Jack had an old-maid’s passion for the fragrant brew, watched with no small enjoyment the quick movements of Georgie’s pretty hand as she filled sweetened his cup. “There! You have got to pay for my services by getting up to fetch it, since you will plant yourself at the other end of the room,” she said, laughing, as she handed it to him. “Thanks. I find that English tea is a different thing from Roman tea,” said Jack, leaning back luxuriously, so that he could watch her as she sat opposite, in a charming negligee attitude, as easy as his own. “But one doesn’t go to Rome for tea! At least, I believe not,” she said, taking up her cup. “What does one go to Rome for?” returned Jack; “as I sit here, in this charming drawing-room, with London on every side, I wonder how anyone can care to go abroad?” “Really,” said Georgie, smiling, “your words have a double entendre. Is it my drawing-room, Mr. Egerton,

or London that makes it hard to go abroad?" "To those who have the happiness of knowing you, I should say — both." "Unanswerable! Compliments always are — But do tell me, Mr. Egerton, if you have seen my cousin Guy — Mr. Hastings, lately?" She said it lightly, easily, in the tone she had used to rally amuse him a moment before; there was no change in voice, or manner. Jack was disagreeably startled out of his train of lazy enjoyment; in the charm of her presence he had nearly forgotten his loyalty to Guy, but the lightness of her tone as she named him, brought all the horror jarringly back. He changed in a moment from the mere drawing room lounger, with a flattering repartee for every remark, into the stout friend the "good hater." He was our old Jack Egerton again. For a moment he did not answer her; 8c as she appeared absorbed in the contemplation of the fan which she was opening furling, perhaps she did not see the angry flash in his honest gray eyes. When he spoke she did look up, with undisguised astonishment in her pretty face. "I think, Lady Breton," said Jack, sternly, "that you should be able to answer your own question." "What can you mean, Mr. Egerton? Why do you speak in that solemn oracular manner?" "Excuse me, Lady Breton," returned Jack; "I cannot speak in any other tone of my friend!" "Than the solemn oracular?" said Georgie, mischievously. "You must pardon me," Egerton answered gravely," If I ask you not to speak so lightly

on a subject which… which…" "Pray go on, Mr. Egerton," she said, in a low, taunting voice; it urged him on, before he knew it, to utter the truth. "I believe," he returned quickly, "that we are speaking at cross-purposes, but since you give me permission I will go on tell you frankly that I cannot sit still and listen to such mere trifling with his name from the woman who has ruined Guy Hastings' life." Her colour deepened, but her voice was quite controlled as she said, "I do not think I gave you permission to insult me." "Nor did I mean to insult you, Lady Breton; if I have, order me out of your drawing-room at once — but I must speak the truth." "Since when have you developped this virtue, Mr. Egerton? Well—" she set her lips slightly, "go on. I will listen to the truth." "You have heard what I said," Jack answered, coldly. "Let me see" — Jack noticed that she composed herself by an effort— "that I had ruined Guy — Mr. Hastings' life." "As you must ruin the life of any man who has the misfortune to love you. You know your power." "Well — suppose I do. Did you come from Rome to tell me this, Mr. Egerton?" she said, bitterly. "No. And I see that I shall repent having told you," said Jack. "Let us talk of something else." "Not at all! Since you broached the subject, it shall be your penalty to go on with it as long as I choose." "Are you so unused to the truth, Lady Breton, that even such harsh truths as these are acceptable?" "Perhaps." She paused, playing with her fan; then, suddenly, flashing

one of her superb looks at him; “How you despise me!” she said. “You think I cared nothing for — for him?” “I cannot think that if you had cared for him, you would have thrown him over.” “Ah — you know nothing of women!” “I believe” said Jack, very low, “I know too much of them.” “And you despise them all, do you not?” she cried. “Yet — I have a heart.” “My friend did not find it so,” said Jack, pitilessly. Her eyes flashed; she bit her lip (the blood had fled from her whole face) before she could answer. “How do you know that you are not wronging me?” “If I am wronging you, why is my friend’s life cursed?” he exclaimed. “No, Lady Breton! The wrong is on your side, when I think of him, of what he might have been, I cannot help telling you so.” Her agitation had increased perceptibly, she rose here, as if to find a vent for it in the sudden movement. Jack could not help thinking how her pallour altered her. There ran through his head, half unconsciously, the wonderful words that describe Beatrix Esmond when she finds her guilt discovered: “The roses had shuddered out of her cheeks; she looked quite old.” He waited for Georgie to speak. “What he might have been,” she repeated slowly. “What have I done? What have I done?” “You have very nearly broken his heart.” She gave a little cry, put her hand against her breast. “Don’t! Don’t!” she said, wildly.

“I did love him, I did care — I believe my heart is nearly broken too!” She tried to steady her voice, went

on hurriedly. “I was young silly ambitious. I fancied I didn’t care, but I did — did. I have suffered too, the more bitterly because what you say is true. I have wronged him!” She sank down on a chair, hiding her face in her hands, Jack, who had not expected this passionate outburst, was not a little appalled by what he had brought about. But it was too late now to undo it; Georgie was thoroughly shaken out [of] her habitual artificial composure. The mask had fallen off, oh, how sadly, sadly human were the features behind it! “And you,” she went on, “are the first who has dared to tell me what I have felt so long! I could almost thank you—” She paused once more, Jack knew that her tears were falling, though she screened her face with one lifted hand. “Instead of that,” he said, “you must forgive my frankness — my impertinence, rather — in speaking to you in this way.” “No — no. I think I feel better for it,” she almost whispered. “But one thing more. Does he — does he think of me as you do?” “Do not ask me,” said Jack, gently. “I think of you with nothing but pity.” “And he — he despises me? He thinks I do not care for him? Oh — it will break my heart. And yet,” she went on, with a moan, “what else have I deserved? Oh, my folly, my folly! But you believe I do love him? You see how wretched, how—” She did not notice, that, as she spoke, leaning toward Jack with her hand half outstretched, Lord Breton’s voice was sounding near the door; but Jack did. “Yes,”

he said, composedly, taking up an album, "these photographs are charming. Have you seen the last of the Princess of Wales?" Georgie's tact would ordinarily have exceeded his; but she had been carried far beyond external observances, could only sit silent, with white, compressed lips as the gentleman entered. When Lord Breton came up to the tea-table, however, she rose, said: "Will you excuse me? I do not feel quite well — it is very warm. Will you give me your arm?" She took her husband's arm he led her to the door. "Lady Breton's delicate health is a continual source of anxiety to me," he explained as he came back. But circumstantial evidence was against Jack, there was a scowl of suspicion beneath my lord's heavy politeness. A few days later, Egerton called at the house, but my lady was out; although he saw her several times at balls drums races, always resplendent always surrounded by a faithful retinue of adorers, he had no opportunity of exchanging a word with her.

CHAPTER IX. Madeline Graham

"THE LADY, IN truth, was young, fair gentle."
Robert Lytton: Lucile.

Since his parting with Georgie Rivers, the disappointment of his love, Guy Hastings had been, as

Jack expressed it: “going rapidly to the dogs.” Now there are many modes of travelling on this road; the melodramatic one in which the dark-browed hero takes to murder, elopement, sedition; the commonplace one in which drinking, gambling duelling are prominent features; the precipitate one of suicide; finally that one which Guy himself had chosen. He did not kill himself, as we have seen, nor did he run away with anyone, or fight a duel, or drink hard; but he seemed to grow careless of life, money health, to lose whatever faith tenderness he had had in a sort of undefined skepticism. Perhaps this least perceptible is yet the most dangerous way of “going to the dogs”; it is like the noiseless dripping of lime-water which hardens the softest substance into stone. Guy’s life was no longer sweet to him. He felt himself sliding away from all ties of kindliness affection, did not care to stay his course; he thought his heart was withered that nothing could revive it. Perhaps the first thing that came near touching it, shewed that it had any vitality left, was Teresina. Not that he loved her; Jack need not have been anxious on that score. But there is a dangerous sort of interest pity which may too easily be mistaken for love, which Guy felt towards the little contadina. She appealed to the heart he thought dead by her shyness her soft, leaning temper; to his eye by the rich, languid beauty which could in no way bring to his mind another kind of prettiness with which his bitterest memories were

associated. He painted the girl over over again, interested himself in her; but whatever danger might have been in store was warded off by a confession that Teresina made one April morning, with blushes tears, to the Signore. She was in love, poor little soul, with Matteo, old Giovanni the blacksmith's son; but Matteo was poor, Teresina's parents had destined her to be the wife of the rich carpenter, Pietro. So she told Guy; her story so completely enlisted his sympathy that he not only went to see the Padre bribed him largely to let Teresina marry where her heart was, but wrote to Mr. Graham, who had bought one of his pictures, got a nice little sum from the generous merchant. This was some time after Jack's departure, a week after Guy left Rome for his Summer wanderings in Switzerland, followed by the gratitude of two honest peasant hearts.

The soft July day, a little more than two months after this, he was walking along the old covered bridge at Interlaken, when the sound of voices reached him from the other end, a moment later a stout, fair lady, who seemed to move in an English atmosphere, so clear was her nationality, appeared with a girl by her side. The girl was tall elancee, bore an unmistakeable resemblance to the elder lady; a few yards behind them Guy espied the florid, whiskered countenance of Mr. Graham. The merchant was the first to speak his recognition, in his usual loud tones, while the ladies fell back a littie, the girl began to sketch with her parasol.

“Mr. Hastings here!” exclaimed Mr. Graham. “This is a surprise! Been here long, eh? Mrs. Graham, my dear, this is Mr. Hastings, the gentleman who painted that pretty little face you make so much of; this is my daughter, Mr. Hastings.” These introductions over, Guy perforce turned his steps recrossed the bridge with the family party. He talked to Mrs. Graham, while the girl walked behind with her father; but his quick artist’s eye had taken in a glance the impression that she was thin, but well-built, exquisitely blonde, with large blue eyes, almost infantine in their innocent sweetness. She spoke very little, seemed retiring unaffected; he noticed that her voice was low musical. As for Mrs. Graham, she may best be described as being one of a large class. She was comely simple-mannered, intensely proud of her husband her daughter, satisfied with life altogether; one of those dear, commonplace souls, without wit or style, but with an abundance of motherliness that might cover a multitude of fashionable defects. Guy was universally polite to women, but Mrs. Graham’s bland twaddle about hotels, scenery railway carriages (the British matron’s usual fund of conversation when taking a relaxation from housekeeping on the continent) was not very absorbing, his eyes wandered continually towards her daughter Madeline, her father had called her. He wondered why the name suited her soft, blonde beauty so well; he wondered if she were as refined as she looked; indulged in so many of those lazy speculations

which a young man is apt to lavish on a beautiful girl, that Mrs. Graham's account of their journey over the Cornice was almost entirely lost to his inattentive ears. Finally, as they drew near home, Madeline stopped to fill her hands with flowers, he picked up her sunshade, falling back by her side to admire her nosegay. This young gentleman — who would have called himself "a man of the world" thought he knew woman-kind pretty well, from the actress to the Duchess — had never seen before the phenomenon of an unsophisticated English beauty among the better classes. "I think that ladies' hands were made for gathering flowers," he observed. "It is the prettiest work they can do." Madeline blushed; "It is the pleasantest work, I think," she said, in her clear, shy tones, bending her tall head over her field-blossoms. Guy thought of "The Gardener's Daughter," wondered whether her golden hair was as pale soft as Madeline Graham's. "But you can paint them," the girl added. "How I envy you!" "If you are so fond of flowers, you should learn to paint them yourself, Miss Graham," said Guy. "Ah — if I could. I don't think I have any talent." "You must let me find that out," he returned, smiling. "I should like to teach you." Madeline blushed again; indeed, every passing emotion made her colour change waver exquisitely. Guy liked to watch the wildrose flush deepen fade on the pure cheek beside him; it was a study in itself to make an artist happy. "You know," he went on, "all

talents are not developped at once, but lie dormant until some magic touch awakens them. Your love for flowers may help you to find out that you are an artist." "I am very fond of pictures," said Madeline, simply. "I love the Madonna heads with their soft, sweet eyes blue hoods. But then, you know, I am no judge of art — Papa is." At another time, Guy would have smiled at this daughterly illusion; now it only struck him as a very rare pretty thing. "One does not need to be a judge of art to love it," he said. "The discrimination comes later; but the love is inborn." She lifted her wide blue eyes shyly to his face. "I suppose you have both," she said, gravely. "Very little of either, I am afraid," said Guy, smiling. "I am little more than an amateur, you know." Just then, Mr. Graham, who had gone forward with his wife, called Madeline. "Come, come, my dear. It is getting damp we must be off to our hotel. Our paths divide, here, eh? Mr. Hastings. Come see us." "Goodbye," said Madeline, with a smile. "Goodbye," he answered; "shall you be at home tomorrow afternoon?" "Yes. I believe so. Shall we not, Mamma?" "What, my dear? Yes," nodded Mrs. Graham. "Do come, Mr. Hastings. It's a little dull for Madeline here." And they parted, Guy lifting his hat, lingering a moment to watch them on their way. "A very nice young fellow, eh?" said Mr. Graham, as Madeline slipped her hand through his arm. "Excellent family. Excellent family." "And so polite," cried Mrs. Graham.

“I declare he talked beautifully.” “I think he is very handsome,” said Madeline, softly. “And how clever he is, Papa.” “Clever, eh? Yes — yes; a rising young fellow. And very good family.” “But it’s a wonder to me he took any notice of you, Maddy,” observed Mrs. Graham. “Those handsome young men in the best society don’t care for anything under an Earl’s wife.” “But he is a gentleman, Mamma!” said Madeline with a blush. The next afternoon, a servant was sent up to Mr. Graham’s apartments at the Hotel Belvidere with a card; which a maid carried into an inner room, where the following dialogue went on while the Hotel servant waited. “Mr. Hastings, Mamma — what shall I do?” “See him, love. I am not suffering much.” “Oh, Mamma, I can’t leave you alone!” “With Priggett, my dear? Of course. Perhaps he might know of a physician.” “Of course, Mamma! I will see him. Ask the man to shew Mr. Hastings up.” And when Guy was ushered into the stiffly-furnished sitting room a pale young lady with her crown of golden hair somewhat disturbed her white dress rumpled, came forward to meet him. “Oh, Mr. Hastings…” “Has anything happened, Miss Graham?” The tears were hanging on Madeline’s lashes her quiet manner was changed for a trembling agitation. “Mamma has sprained her ankle,” she said, “ Papa is away. He went to the Lauterbrunnen this morning, an hour ago Mamma slipped on the staircase—” she ended rather abruptly by pressing her

handkerchief to her eyes. “My dear Miss Graham, how unfortunate! Have you sent for a physician? Can I do anything for you?” “Oh, thanks,” said Madeline, “we have got the maid I have bound her ankle up, but we didn’t know where to find a physician.” “How lucky that I came!” Guy exclaimed. “I believe there is no good native doctor, but Sir Ashley Patchem is at my Hotel I will go back at once.” “Oh, thank you, thank you!” Madeline could scarcely control her tears, as she held her hand out. “May I come back see if I can help you in any other way?” Guy said, as he took it; then he was gone, at a quick pace. Half an hour later, the famous London physician was in Mrs. Graham’s room at the Hotel Belvidere. “A very slight sprain, I assure you,” he said, as Madeline followed him anxiously into the sitting-room. “Don’t disturb yourself. Only have this sent for at once.” He put a prescription in her hand, as he left the room Guy came in again. “I am so much relieved,” said Madeline, “ I don’t know how to thank you.” “What does Sir Ashley say?” “It is very slight, not at all dangerous. I am so thankful! But this prescription… I suppose one of the servants…” “Let me take it,” said Guy. Then, glancing at his watch; “Mr. Graham ought to be here shortly, but you will send for me in case of need, Miss Graham? Are you sure that I can do nothing else?” “You have done so much,” Madeline answered, with a smile. “No, I think everything is arranged, as you say Papa will be here

soon." "I will not delay the prescription, then. Goodbye, Miss Graham!" "Goodbye." She held out her hand again, as to a friend, again he took it pressed it for an instant. As he walked homeward in the soft Summer dusk, he had the pleasant feeling of a man who knows that he has gained the admiration gratitude of a pretty, interesting girl by an easy service just at the right time. No man wins his way so easily as he who has the good luck to prove himself "a friend in need"; Guy felt that in one day he had come nearer to Madeline Graham than months of casual acquaintance could have brought him.

CHAPTER X. At Interlaken

"THROUGH THOSE DAYS Youth, love hope walked smiling hand in hand."
Old Play.

IT is certain that in this world the smallest wires work the largest machinery in a wonderful way. The twist that Mrs. Graham's foot took on the Hotel staircase, led gradually up a ladder of greater events to a most unexpected climax, influenced her daughter's life as the most carefully laid plans could perhaps not have done. Strangely wonderfully, "Dieu dispose." The Grahams had not intended to remain over a week at Interlaken, had all their Summer plans arranged after

the approved tourist fashion. These plans Mrs. Graham's sprained ankle of course overset. Slight at the accident was, it tied her to her couch for five weeks at the least; all that could be done was to accept the circumstances engage the best rooms which the Hotel Belvidere could offer, for that length of time. Mr. Graham was thoroughly disgusted. "To be mewed up in this hole," he complained to Hastings, "with nothing to do but look at the mountains out of one's bedroom windows. In fact, though the continent is very pleasant for a change very nice to travel in, England's the place to be quiet in!" "Yes, I agree with you," said Guy; "but I hope this unfortunate accident won't frighten you off to England?" Mr. Graham shook his head despondently! "I wish it could, my dear Hastings, I wish it could. But, you see, our Madeline is too delicate for the rough English weather, as we've got to choose between Nice Rome of course we'll go to Rome again." As for Madeline, she accepted the change with youthful adaptability, invented fancy-work for her mother, collected flowers, played on the rattling Hotel piano which had been moved into her sitting-room, took long walks with her father Mr. Hastings. These walks, indeed, were the pleasantest part of her quiet, contented days; Mr. Hastings talked so well got her such pretty wild-flowers, she said simply to her mother. And Mrs. Graham sighed. Madeline was a good, dutiful girl, full of worship for her father; but perhaps she was not sorry

when, on the morning which had been chosen for a long pilgrimage, Mr. Graham got some business letters which required immediate answers, announced at the breakfast table that he could not go. “Oh, what a pity, John,” said Mrs. Graham, from the sofa. “It is such a beautiful day, Maddy has been counting on this walk.” Madeline looked studiously at her plate, but the pink was beginning to flutter up into her cheek. “Nonsense!” said Mr. Graham. “Madeline shall go, of course. What do you suppose Hastings wants with an old fellow like me, eh? No, no, Mother; Madeline shall go they will be only too glad to be rid of me.” “Oh, Papa!” murmured Madeline. But when Guy Hastings appeared an hour later, she was ready in her gray walking dress, with a quantity of light blue veil floating about her leghorn hat looped around her throat. There was a slight flush on her face, she had never looked more lovely. “This morning was made for a walk,” said Guy, as he stood by Mrs. Graham’s couch. “But the one we have planned is long. I hope we shall not tire Miss Graham.” “Oh, no,” said Madeline, coming up, “but — Papa can’t come this morning.” “Mr. Graham has some business letters to attend to,” explained Mrs. Graham. Guy glanced at Madeline; “You are dressed,” he said: “won’t you trust to my guidance?” Madeline stood still, blushing; but just then Mr. Graham came in, overhearing Guy’s words, said warmly: “Yes, indeed she will! Take good care of her, Hastings. I say, she

will be glad to have her old father out of the way." "Oh, Papa," said Madeline again. So the two started out, Guy carrying her flower-basket shawl, through the sunny morning weather. A handsome couple they made; as they walked through the Hotel garden together, a Russian princess, who was taking an early airing, observed to her little French secretary: "that those English were fiancees; she could see it." As they reached the gate, a little child who was racing after a hoop, stumbled fell crying across their path; Madeline stooped down picked him up very tenderly. "Are you hurt?" "Not very much, Madame," said the child; Madeline felt the blood flying into her face, wondered whether Guy were very much vexed at having her mistaken for his wife. On through the sunny morning weather: who can tell of that walk, with all its pretty little incidents, surprises adventures? It was such a pastoral as drops now then between the tragedies farces of life. Madeline was perfectly happy; if Guy was not as happy as she, he was in a better mood than he had been for many a day, the bright morning air, the beautiful scenery, the sweet English face at his side, warmed him more more into hearty enjoyment. As they walked, the flower-basket was filled with new trophies; when they reached their destination, Guy spread Madeline's shawl under a nut-tree, sat down by her side to sketch. "Why not take a drawing lesson today?" he said, as she watched him pointing his pencils making

his slight preparations. “I think one could learn anything in such beautiful weather.” “I had rather watch you,” said Madeline, “ you know I have to arrange my flowers too. Oh, what a beautiful day!” “Perfect. I didn’t know what an attractive little nook Interlaken is before.” “And you are going tomorrow?” asked Madeline, dropping her lashes. “I think so. Every artist is at heart a wanderer — begging Pope’s pardon for taking such a liberty with his line. There, Miss Graham, what do you think of those outlines?” “How quick you are! Oh, how cleverly you have done it.” Guy laughed. “Such injudicious praise as yours would soon spoil me,” he said. “I suppose so,” Madeline returned naively. “You know I am so ignorant.” Guy went on with his sketch; he revelled in the deep, luxurious Summer silence, the whisper of the leaves above his head, the easy consciousness that if he did lift his eyes from his work they would meet nothing less in harmony with the radiant day than Madeline Graham’s fair, sweet face bent above her flowers. Now then, as the sketch grew beneath his quick pencil, she offered her shy criticism or her shyer praise; but for the most part they were silent, as though afraid by word or movement to break the spell of peacefulness that had fallen upon them. It was not until they had again reached the gate of the Hotel garden, that either reverted to Guy’s coming departure. “I am glad that our last walk has been so pleasant,” he said. “I wonder how

many more walks you will take after I am gone." "You are really going?" He saw the colour creep upwards, the long lashes tremble. "I had intended to go," he answered, leaning against the gate. "I suppose — I suppose it has grown dull," murmured Madeline. "It has grown so pleasant that I wish I had not reached my limit," said Guy. "When a man proposes to spend two days at a place, lengthens his visit to nearly two weeks, as I have done, he must begin to consider how much time he has left for the rest of his tour." "We shall miss you," ventured Madeline, overwhelmed with blushes. "Papa, I mean, will…" "Won't you miss me?" said Guy, very low. Madeline's half-averted cheek turned a deeper crimson; her heart was beating stormily, everything seemed to swim before her. "I don't know," she whispered, tremblingly. In any other person, at any other time, such an answer would have been bete; in Madeline Graham, with the sunset light striking her pale golden braids, the church-bells coming softly through the sweet evening air, as they stood by the gate, it seemed to Guy Hastings very sweet musical. "If I thought you would miss me I should be almost glad to go," he said, quietly. "And yet, I do not know why I go. It is so peaceful here, that I feel as if life were worth a little — if I go, I shall probably do my best to tumble down a ravine." Madeline lifted her blue eyes in wonderment; she had never heard him speak so before. "Yes," he went on, "You do not know what it is to feel

that everything is worthless heartless, as I have done. I envy you. I almost wish that I were going to stay here." He paused;, moved by the weary sadness which his voice words had for the first time betrayed, Madeline gathered heart to say, holding out her hand: "I don't understand, but I am very sorry for you. You must have had a disappointment. Stay here." And Guy stayed; why not? As he had said, life seemed worth a little in this friendly atmosphere of peace, in Madeline's society. An inexpressible charm, which he scarcely acknowledged to himself, made her society pleasant; the quiet, Arcadian days were an utter contrast to the dash hurry of his unsatisfied life; he had found a palmtree in the desert-sand he sat down to rest. As for Madeline, on the day when she met Guy in the covered bridge, that mysterious thing called "love at first sight" had entered in taken possession of her heart. His manner had, indeed, a great fascination for all; he was unusually gentle serious with Madeline; then he was handsome, Madeline, though she was not, like her Papa, a judge of art, had the good taste common to most girls, to admire a handsome face. As for those words of his by the gate, to say that she was a woman is to say that they aroused her sympathy admiration as nothing else could have done, raised Guy into a suffering hero. Nothing could be purer more childlike than Madeline's passion; it blent with her life like a strain of sweet music, in which as yet there were no

jarring chords; there was nothing noisy or turbulent about it. So the Summer stole on through balmy days short, warm nights; Guy lingered at Interlaken, Madeline saw him daily. He certainly treated her with marked admiration, both Mr. Mrs. Graham were not slow to draw their conclusions therefrom; but he spoke no word of love, as the happy days passed, seemed inclined to remain "half her lover, all her friend." Nor did Madeline feel the want of a closer appeal to her heart. The present was all-sufficient. Why should this pastoral ever end, or if it was to end, why should she not enjoy it the more fully now? Her love for Guy was as yet almost too idealized abstract to demand a reciprocation. Enough that he was by her side, that he was glad to be there. Mr. Graham, too, was quite easy on the subject. Madeline was a pretty girl, Hastings was evidently very much gone on her; he was of good family she had money enough for both; no match could be more desirable, none seemed more likely to prosper. It was natural that they should like to spin out their courtship-days; young people have the whole world before them, are never in a hurry. But Mrs. Graham was not so well-pleased with the turn affairs had taken. "Don't be so confident, John," she said, anxiously. "I had rather trust Maddy with a good, honest business man than one of these fine, fast young fellows. Very likely he is only amusing himself; what does he want with a merchant's daughter? No, no; it will come to

nothing if it goes on much longer the child's heart will be broken. I have heard stories enough about Mr. Hastings his set, I don't believe in one of them!" "Nonsense!" said Mr. Graham, angrily. He had set his heart on the match these warnings of his wife's, which he could not in his heart despise, made him uneasy.

CHAPTER XI. The End of the Season

"ADIEU, BAL, PLAISIR, amour! On disait: Pauvre Constance!
Et on dansait jusqu'au Jour chez l'ambassadeur de France."
Delavigne.

On a certain evening near the close of those busy, rushing summer months which Londoners call "the season," Lady Breton was sitting alone in the long, luxurious dressing-room which opened off her satin-hung boudoir. She wore one of those mysterious combinations of lace ribands soft folds called a wrapper, as she leaned back rather wearily in her deep-arm-chair, her slippered feet were stretched out to meet the glow of the small wood-fire crackling on the hearth. There was no other light in the room, but the fire-flash, unless a certain dull twilight gleam through the dark folds of the curtains, deserves such a name; for my lady had given orders not to be disturbed, adding

that she would ring for the lamps. But in the soft, flickering of the flames, that rose fell fitfully, it was a very white mournful face that sank back in the shadow of the crimson cushion; a face in which there was no discernible trace of the rosy, audacious Georgie Rivers whom we used to know. Nor was it the splendid, resistless Lady Breton who had taken London by storm that Summer; but only a very miserable little personage, occasionally breaking the twilight hush of the warm room with a heavy, aching cough, that made her lean shivering nearer the pleasant blaze. In fact, Georgie had at last broken down, in body mind, under the weight of her bitter mistake; which all her triumphs her petty glories seemed only to make bitterer, with a sense of something empty unsatisfied, lower than the surface-gayety of the ball-room. The pang had deepened deepened, driving her farther into the ceaseless rush of society with the vain hope of losing her individual sorrow there; no one was gayer than Lady Breton. But at home, in the grand house, with its grave servants its pictures treasures, that was no more hope of forgetting than abroad. Any sympathy that might eventually have grown up between the old lord his young wife, had been frozen by Georgie's persistent indifference to him; whatever love his worn-out old heart had at first lavished on her, was lost in the nearer interests of a good dinner or an amusing play. Lord Breton, in short, relapsed entirely into his

bachelor-habits, was only with his wife, or conscious of her existence when she presided at his table, or entered a ball-room at his side. He was not ungenerous; he allowed her plenty of liberty still had a comfortable pleasure in feeling that he was the possessor of the most charming woman in London — but day by day, she became less a part of his life. And still at her heart clung the love that she had despised of old, whose unconquerable reality she was learning now — too late. Jack Egerton's reproaches seemed to have been the last drop in her cup of shame bitterness — again again came the wretched, haunting thought that she had lost Guy's esteem forever, nothing could win back the place in his heart that she had sold so cheap. So she mused on in the closing darkness, over the firelight, it was 8 o'clock when she rang for her maid, who came in with the lamps a bottle of cough-syrup for my lady. Georgie rose wearily from her seat, drawing a soft shawl close about her shoulders;, as the maid stood waiting for orders, said between her painful coughing: "I shall dress for the ball now, Sidenham." "But, my lady," the woman answered, "you have had no dinner." "No, I did not want any, thanks. It is time to dress." "But — my lady," persisted the maid, "your cough is so bad… indeed, my lady…" Georgie interrupted her with an impatient movement. "My white dress, Sidenham. Have the flowers come home?" "Yes, my lady." And the process of the toilette began. Sidenham had a real

attachment for her mistress, but she knew that my lady could brook no questioning of her will, being a good servant, went about her duty obediently. Lord Breton had dined out that evening, but at about 9.30, as Sidenham was putting the last touches to Georgie's hair, he knocked unexpectedly at the dressing-room door, then came in, in his evening dress. "I hoped you were in bed by — good Heavens!" he exclaimed, as Georgie rose in her glistening satin. "You don't mean to say that you are going out tonight?" Sidenham, shaking out my lady's train, looked volumes of sympathy at my lord. "Oh, certainly," returned Georgie, unconcernedly. "It is the Duchess of Westmoreland's ball tonight, you know." "But this is madness — madness. Your cough was much worse today — such exposure at night would be extremely dangerous." Georgie was clasping her diamonds, with her back turned towards him, merely shrugged her white shoulders slightly. "Let me dissuade you," Lord Breton continued, with real anxiety. "Surely it is little to forfeit one ball — the last of the season — for one's health's sake. Your physician would certainly not advise such imprudence, such absolute risk." "Very likely," said Georgie, nonchalantly, "but— 'when the cat's away the mice will play,' you know." "I know that going out tonight would be folly on your part; let me beg you to desist from it." "My white fan, Sidenham. I presume," said Georgie, turning to face her husband as she spoke,

“that I shall have your escort?” “I am going to the ball.” “And yet” she continued lightly, “you wish to exile me from it? I should die of ennui in half an hour alone here!” “Then — then, may I offer you my company?” he said, eagerly, taking the cloak from Sidenham’s hands. “Let us give up the ball, Georgina.” Georgie was really moved; such a demonstration was so unusual on Lord Breton’s part, that it could not fail to touch her. But it was not her role to shew this. “No indeed!” she replied, clasping her bracelet, coming closer to him. “Why should either of us be sacrificed? Instead of suicide for one, it would be — murder for both! Please put my cloak on.” “You go then?” said Lord Breton, coldly, with a gathering frown. “Oh, yes. As you say, it is the last ball of the season. Tomorrow I shall do penance.” And drawing her cloak close, with a suppressed cough, she swept out of the room. The Duchess of Westmoreland’s ball, at Lochiel House, was a very grand a very brilliant affair, a very fitting finale to one of the gayest seasons that people could recall. Everybody (that is, as her Grace expressively said, “everybody that is anybody”) was there; the darling of the night was, as usual, the fascinating Lady Breton. White as her white dress, unrelieved by a shade of colour, she came in on her husband’s arm; people remembered afterwards, how strangely, deadly pale she was. But she danced continually, talked laughed with everyone more graciously than ever, raised the hearts of

I don't know how many desponding lovers by her charming gayety goodnature. She was resting after the last quadrille, when the Duke of Westmoreland himself, came up to her, with the inexpressibly relieved air of a model host who, having done his duty by all the ugly dowagers in the room, finds himself at liberty to follow his own taste for a few moments. "I don't think" he said, answering Georgie's greeting "that you have seen the Duchess's new conservatories. Will you let me be your cicerone?" "How did you guess, Duke," she returned, gaily "that I was longing to escape from the heat light? Do take me, if I am not carrying you off from any more — agreeable — duty!" "My duty is over," said the Duke, smiling. "But you are coughing tonight, Lady Breton, I cannot allow you to go into the cooler air without a wrap." Signing to a servant, he sent for a soft fur mantle, having folded it carefully about Georgie's shoulders, led her on his arm through the long brilliant suites. Followed by many an envious many an admiring eye, she walked on with her proud step, talking lightly winningly to her noble escort, until they reached the folding doors of the great conservatories. The Duke led her in, they paused on the threshold looking down the green vista of gorgeous tropical plants. The gay dance-music came like a soft echo from the distant ball-room, mingling with the clear tinkle of fountains that tossed their spray amid the branching ferns palm-trees on which the Chinese

lanterns swung from the ceiling, shed an unreal, silvery glow. For a moment neither spoke; then Georgie looked up at her host with a bright smile. “Fairyland!” she exclaimed. “No one shall persuade me that this is the work of anyone less ethereal than Queen Mab herself! Is it real? Will it last?” “I hope so,” his Grace answered, laughing; “it would be a pity that her Elfin Majesty’s work should vanish in a single night.” “Only, as children say, ‘it is too good to be true,’ “ said Georgie, merrily. “At least, to us lesser mortals, who are not accustomed to all the marvels of Lochiel House.” “Will you come on a little further?” said the Duke, well-pleased. “I want to shew you some rare ferns. Here they are.” And so they passed along the aisle of mingled green, in the soft moonlike radiance; pausing here there to admire or discuss the Duke’s favourite specimens. At the end of the long, cool bower a broad ottoman stood in a recess filled with ferns; Georgie asked to sit down before entering the next conservatory. “You are tiring yourself, Lady Breton?” asked the Duke, anxiously, sitting down beside her, drawing the mantle, which had slipped down, over her shoulder. “No, not tired, indeed,” she answered, “but half dizzy with so much beauty. I must sit still to be able to enjoy it perfectly — sit still, drink it in.” “It is a relief after the crowded rooms,” assented his Grace. “I was longing to be here all the evening.” “I cannot wonder. Do you know, Duke,” said Georgie, laughing,

“if I were disposed to be sentimental I should say that I envied the gardener who has these conservatories in charge more than anyone in Lochiel House!” The Duke echoed her laugh. “If it suits you to be sentimental just now, Lady Breton, the gardener — an old protege of mine — is a very fit subject. He has a romance attached to him.” “Better better!” cried Georgie. “He can come in here dream of it!” “I daresay though — poor fellow! — he would rather forget it,” said the Duke. Georgie started slightly, a strange look came into her eyes. “Oh, if we could but forget,” she half-whispered; then, in a different tone: “but what of the gardener? I will not let you off with that story; you must play Princess Scheherazade, Duke!” “Most obediently, though poor Watson probably never intended his poor little love-affair to serve such a grand purpose. Well— ‘anything, but to the purpose’ is my motto, Lady Breton, so here is the whole romance. Watson came into my father’s service as a lad rose to be one of the undergardeners down at Morley Towers. There he wooed my mother’s maid, a pretty young woman, who in the end spoiled two lives by her ambition. — Are you ill, Lady Breton?” “No, no,” said Georgie, hastily, playing nervously with her bouquet, “please go on. I am quite impatient.” “Watson,” continued the Duke, “was successful in his suit, the wedding was arranged, much to the poor fellow’s happiness — for he was as genuinely in love, Lady Breton,” said the Duke, with

slight sarcasm, “as any gentleman would have been — the wedding, I say, was arranged, when my father brought home a fine French valet, who got a larger salary, had altogether a higher seat in the synagogue, than Watson. The bride, whose head was turned by the attentions of this more fascinating rival, gave Watson the slip — jilted him, and — great Heavens! You are faint, Lady Breton — what is it?” The bouquet had slipped from Georgie’s powerless hands, she could scarcely answer, as the Duke bent over her, “it will be over — in a moment—” “Let me call someone,” said his Grace, anxiously; but she shook her head, whispered faintly, “No, no… Do not call… it will be over…” “I will get you some wine. Can you wait here alone?” She gave a little, frightened cry caught his hand wildly. “Don’t leave me! I… I… am better… now. I don’t want anything… Take me away, Duke!” Sorely perplexed, he helped her to rise, giving her his arm, led her very slowly back through the conservatory. She had evidently rallied her strength for the effort, for though she did not trust herself to speak, her step was almost steady; at last, to the Duke’s intense relief, they reached the doors. The room on which the conservatory opened was hung with pictures during the earlier part of the evening had been deserted for the other end of the suite; but the crowd had taken a new turn now people were thronging in, to fill the interval before supper. Once or twice in his anxious progress through the crush the

Duke was arrested, not a few astonished glances met Lady Breton's white, suffering face; but they had nearly gained a door leading by a back way to the cloak-room, when his Grace felt the cold hand slip from his arm, Georgie fell backward fainting. In an instant they were ringed in by a startled, eager crowd; but the Duke, lifting the slight, unconscious form in his arms, refused peremptorily all offers for assistance, despatching a messenger for Lord Breton, himself carried Georgie into a dressing-room, out of reach of the bustle curiosity of his officious guests.

CHAPTER XII. Poor Teresina

"WHEN PAIN anguish wring the brow, a ministering Angel thou!"
Scott: "Marmion."

The returning Winter found Guy Hastings again at Rome, in the old studio which he Egerton had shared the year before; but Jack was still in England, though he wrote in the expectancy of joining his Telemachus in the early Spring. Meanwhile Guy, on settling down in his Winter quarters, began to apply himself with real assiduity to his art. He painted a successful picture which was bought by an Italian connoisseur; inspirited by this piece of good fortune, grew more more attached to the great work he had heretofore treated as play. He

had lost his utter recklessness in this deepening interest, a new softening influence seemed to have entered into his imbittered life since the happy weeks at Interlaken. This influence was not the less tender or pleasant that it was somehow connected with a pair [of] sweet, childlike blue eyes a low voice full of shy music. Little did Madeline, cherishing the secret of her first love in silence, guess the innocent change she had worked in her hero; perhaps Guy himself scarcely realized her quiet power. When the Grahams came back to Rome however, the intercourse which had charmed the Interlaken days, was renewed; Guy was always welcomed in their apartment, many a little breakfast or supper was given in their honour in his sunny studio. Mr. Graham, too, discovered that Madeline's portrait must be painted; twice a week she her mother would knock at Guy's door, until, when the last coat of varnish was dry the picture sent home, he grew to miss the timid rap the pleasant hour that ensued to discover that it had been, unconsciously, the brightest part of his day. Madeline's frail health grew stronger, her shy laugh gayer; though one parent was far from satisfied with the cause, both could not but rejoice over the effect of this change. Altogether, the Winter was a happy, if a quiet one to the few with whom our story is most concerned; as the days slipped by, they forged the imperceptible links of interest sympathy which were drawing Guy nearer to Madeline. One of these links

was brought about by a little personage who by this time had nearly dropped out of Guy's remembrance, although her face was reflected on more than one canvas hung upon his studio wall. He was hurrying homeward near dusk on a soft day toward the end of January, taking a short cut to the Piazza —, struck a little, out of the way street, apparently quite deserted in the waning light. The houses were old ruinous, if Guy had found time to pause, their tumbling picturesqueness would have delighted his artist-eye; but as it was, he was in too great haste to notice anything, until at a turn in the street he nearly stumbled across a little drooping figure huddled against a broken flight of steps. Bending down in astonishment, he asked in Italian what was the matter. There was no answer, or movement, he repeated his question more anxiously. Just then a coarse-faced woman came swinging down the street bare-headed, paused in astonishment to see the handsome Signore Inglese bending over a little, cowering contadina with her face hidden. "Eh, she won't move, Signore," said the woman, grinning. "She's been there these three hours." "Is she dead?" asked Guy, pityingly. "Dead? Santa Maria! No, not she. Maybe she is crazy." "You cannot leave her here," said Guy; "if she is alive she should be taken in somewhere." The woman shrugged her shoulders. "I tell you, she won't move. I don't know who she is." "Poverina!" said Guy, very low; but he had scarcely spoken when a tremor shot through the

crouching form at his feet, a faint little cry reached him. “Signore — it is Teresina!” “Teresina,” repeated Guy in amazement. “Are you ill? What is the matter?” “Eh,” said the woman, staring, “The Signore knows her, then?” “What has happened?” Guy continued, as a burst of sobs answered his questions. “Will you get up, Teresina, let me carry you into some house?” But she did not lift her hidden face, nor move from her cowering attitude. Guy was in sore perplexity. He could not leave her, not knowing whether she was ill or frightened in some way; the woman who had been watching him with an expression of sleepy surprise on her heavy face ran off here in pursuit of a brown-legged little boy who was scampering toward the Piazza. Just then, as Guy was gazing doubtfully down the crooked street, two people appeared moving quickly against the dark sunset glow; one a short, plain-faced little woman, with the indefinable air of an English servant — the other tall, blonde, with soft blue eyes her hands full of flowers. “Miss Graham!” exclaimed Guy, as she recognized him with a start a deepening blush. “What is the matter?” said Madeline, glancing with surprise towards Teresina while Priggett, the maid, hung back with a disapproving stare. “Who is that poor creature, Mr. Hastings?

Why,” she continued suddenly, “it must be your little peasant — Teresina!” “So it is,” said Guy, “ I cannot find whether she is ill or only unhappy. She will

not move, I cannot get her to answer my questions." "Poor thing!" and Madeline, regardless of the dirty cobble-stones her own soft, pretty dress, knelt down beside Teresina; began to speak in her sweet, shy Italian. "Will you not tell us if you are suffering?" she said; "we are so sorry for you we cannot leave you here." "Miss—" said Priggett in an agony, "Miss, it's growing very dark." "Never mind, Priggett. Mr. Hastings, will you hold these flowers, please?" putting her roses into his hand, she quietly slipped her arm about Teresina raised the poor little drooping head tenderly. "I do not think she is in pain — speak to her, Mr. Hastings." Guy bent over her said a few soothing words; Madeline, still kneeling by her side, asked again very gently: "What is it, Teresina?" "Tell the Signora," urged Guy. "She is very kind wants to help you." Teresina was still sobbing, but less violently now she made no attempt to hide her face; in a few moments they caught a little, trembling answer. "I am hungry." "Poor thing — poor thing—" said Madeline, through her tears. "Have you no home?" She gave a little shriek tried to hide her face, repeating passionately "No, no, no!" "She is not fit to answer any questions," said Madeline. "Mr. Hastings, she must be carried into some house at once taken care of." The woman who had stared at Guy came back just then from her chase to the piazza; calling her, they persuaded her to let Teresina be taken into her house close by. Guy lifted the poor,

fainting creature in his arms Madeline followed, for once regardless of Priggett's indignant glances, while the woman led the way up some tumbling steps into a wretched little room. The night had fallen when, having left some money sundry directions, they turned once more into the lonely street, Madeline shyly accepting Guy's escort home. "I will go see the poor thing tomorrow," she said, her sweet voice full of pity. "I think she has had a great blow. She does not seem really ill — only exhausted." "She could not be under kinder care — poor child!" said Guy, thoughtfully. "I cannot understand what has happened. She was happily married to her lover last year — as you know." "He may have died. How lonely she seemed! O poor, poor thing — it makes me feel almost guilty to think how loved happy I am while others…" Madeline brushed away her tears hastily, for a few moments neither spoke. The next morning found Priggett her young mistress hurrying down the same obscure street, laden with baskets shawls, towards the house into which Teresina had been carried. She was still lying on the low bed where they had left her the night before, her great eyes wide with grief, her childish face haggard with lines of suffering. "She won't eat much, Signora," said Giovita, the woman of the house, as Madeline bent anxiously over the bed, "but I think she'll be better soon, poor fanciulla!" Teresina turned her eyes to the fair, pitying face that stooped above her. "You are the

beautiful Signora," she whispered, "that came to me last night. The Signore Inglese said you would be kind." Madeline's colour brightened softly; he called her kind! "I want to be your friend, Teresina," she answered; "for he has told me a great deal about you, we are both so sorry for you!" Teresina sighed. A new contentment was entering into her eyes as they met those other eyes, pure tender as a guardian Angel's. "You look like one of the Saints in the great pictures," she murmured dreamily.

"It was at Easter — I saw it — the saint with the white face like yours." "Never mind that, Teresina," Madeline said gently. "I want you to tell me why you were so hungry unhappy all alone in the street last night. Do not be afraid to tell me. If you have no friends, I want to help you take care of you." "I have no friends," Teresina whispered, still gazing up at Madeline. "Oh, I am so unhappy, Signora… I ran away to starve all alone… I could not kill myself…" she shuddered hid her face with a burst of sobs. At first Madeline could win no more from her, but gradually, as she sat by the wretched bedside, she learned the story of Teresina's sorrow. She had been married — poor child! — to her sweetheart, Matteo, they had been so happy, until Matteo could get no work, grew harsh reckless. Teresina was unhappy, cried because he did not love her any more — the bambino died of the fever, Matteo got worse worse. Still there was no work,

Teresina was ill at home — Matteo said he could not feed her. He used to go out all day, one day he did not come back; she never saw him again, she knew that he had deserted her. “Oh, it was so lonely without the bambino,” ended the poor little wife, through her tears. “I could not bear to go home, for the Madre is dead the Padre was so angry when I married Matteo — I did not want anything but to run away hide myself — die.” But she did not die; Madeline felt a new interest in her after this watched comforted her tenderly; in a few days she was strong enough to be moved from the wretched house to the Graham’s apartment. They sent for her father, a rough old peasant who would have nothing to do with her, cursed her for marrying against his will. Teresina begged with passionate tears not to go back to him; Madeline had grown so attached to her that she easily prevailed on her father to keep the poor child at least for the present. On Teresina’s part there had sprung up a blind adoration of the beautiful Signorina who was the Signore Inglese’s friend; she asked nothing but to stay with her always serve her follow her like a dog. Guy was not a little interested in the fate of his poor little model; Madeline’s kindness to her won him more more. Few girls, he thought, would have behaved as nobly, as impulsively as tenderly as Madeline had done. And so it was that Teresina’s misfortune revealed to him the earnest, quiet beauty of this shy English girl’s character, made him think more

more seriously every day that in this world of sin folly darkness there are after all some pure spirits moving, like sun-gleams in a darkened chamber.

CHAPTER XIII. Villa Doria-Pamfili

"IF THOU CANST reason, sure thou dost not love."
Old Play.

On one of those delicious languid days of Spring that follow in the footsteps of the short Roman Winter, the Grahams drove out to spend a long afternoon at the Villa Doria-Pamfili, where the violets anemones were awake in every hollow, the trees putting on their tenderest silver-green. Guy rode by the side of the carriage, having breakfasted that morning with its occupants engaged to join them again in the afternoon. Day by day Madeline's society had grown sweeter more needful to him, her soft presence effacing as nothing else could the bitter past. Great sorrows cast long shadows; in reality the gloom of his disappointed love still hung darkly over Hastings' life; but it was a softened gloom when he was at Madeline's side, losing his heart-loneliness in her sunny companionship. When a man marries without falling in love he always has at hand an elaborate course of reasoning to prove beyond all doubt the advisableness of the step he takes; some

such process was occupying Guy's thoughts as he trotted along on his chesnut, Rienzi, beside the Grahams' carriage. Since his engagement had been broken he had, as we have said, felt all hope interest in life slipping away from his empty grasp; now that he had met known Madeline it struck him with what renewed dreariness he would return to his old, reckless ways when their paths divided. More than once he had dreamed of his motley studio with a fair figure moving continually about it, or a soft, flushed face bending over him as he worked; had wondered if life would not get a new zest with someone beside him to be cherished worked for until death. Madeline's peculiar innocence shy simplicity had soothed him in contrast to the gay, wilful charms with which his most cruel recollections were united; he thought that here was a shrinking, clinging creature who would need his tender protection look up to him always for the help love that another had despised. In short, on that sweet Spring afternoon, the impressions reflections of the whole Winter had nearly resolved themselves into a determination to ask Madeline for his wife, when the whole party reached the gates of the Villa Doria. Giving Rienzi over to his groom, Guy stood by the carriage to help Madeline her mother out; then they all strolled along through the beautiful princely grounds. Madeline's passion for flowers was very pretty that day; prettier than ever it seemed to Hastings, as she bent down to fill her hands

with violets, or ran on in search of a new blossom under the greening boughs. Oh, the sunshiny peacefulness of that long Spring afternoon, under the soft Italian sky, with the wood-flowers underfoot the tree-branches closing above, bubbling over with the earliest bird-music of the new-drest year! They wandered on in the delicious Spring-time idleness that had fallen upon them all; now then resting on a bench in some quiet alley or soft, violet-sown slope, or pausing to admire a beautiful view — all forgetting that even in the Villa Doria-Pamfili, on a Heavenly day of Spring, the hours will fly the sun stoop to the west. Strolling along by Madeline's side, carrying her sunshade her cloak, Guy recalled Robert Spencer's bright words: "How lightly falls the foot of Time That only treads on flowers!" He repeated them to her, adding as he glanced down at his feet, "literally true here, is it not, Miss Graham? You trample a violet at every step." "Oh, I am so sorry for them!" said Madeline, earnestly; "but what can I do? My hands are quite full." She was standing still, in her floating white dress, framed by rising boughs, holding a great mass of the balmy purple treasures. Guy Hastings had never seen a fairer picture in a fairer setting. "If I had my pallette canvas here, Miss Graham, I should paint you as you stand, for a Proserpine." "I am glad you haven't then," returned Madeline, laughing, "for I should be longing to escape in search of some more flowers, how tired I should get, standing so long." "You

will be tired now if you don't rest a little," said Guy. They were standing near an old grey stone bench, hidden in tree-shadows, with a cushioning of deep moss anemones around it. "Let us sit down, Miss Graham," he continued. "You are dropping your violets at every step my practical mind suggests that they should be tied together to prevent further loss." Madeline laughed, sat down while he quietly folded her cloak about her, then took his place at her side. Mr. and Mrs. Graham had walked on slowly, were presently lost among the trees; but neither Guy nor Madeline noticed this — which is perhaps scarcely surprising. It suited Hastings very well to be sitting there, holding the violets, while Madeline's soft hands took them from him one by one bound them carefully together; he had never found her quite so lovely as on that golden afternoon. "Am I to have none as a reward for my help?" he asked, as she took the last violets to add to her bunch. "You are very miserly with your treasures, Miss Graham." "Because I don't think you love them as well as I do," she said, smiling. "But you did hold them very well, here is your reward." She handed him two or three, with her soft blush, he was very near kissing the white ungloved hand that offered them. But reflecting that so sudden a proceeding might startle his shy damsel, break up the sweet, idle course of their tete a tete, he wisely refrained, only thanked her as he put the violets in his coat. "I shall wear them as my Legion of honour," he added, smiling. "But they

will fade so soon! Do you know," said Madeline, glancing up into the handsome blue eyes bent on her face, then looking quickly downward with a blush, as if she had read some secret there too subtle to be put into words— "do you know, it always makes me a little sad — foolishly, I suppose — to gather flowers, when I think of that." "Gather ye roses while ye may!" hummed Guy, laughing. "I don't think the flowers are to be pitied, Miss Graham." "Why not?" said Madeline, very low. "Why not? Because — I put myself in their place judge their feelings by — my own." Madeline's heart beat quicker, she sprang up suddenly. "Where is Papa, Mr. Hastings? I think…" Guy caught her hand. "Stay, Miss Graham," he said as she rose. "Before you go, I want to say a few words to you. Will you hear me?" He led her quietly back to her shady seat, sat down beside her again, leaning forward to catch sight of her half-turned face dropped lashes. "I do not know," he went on, in his low, winning voice, "what right I have to say these words, or to expect an answer; for I feel, day by day, as I watch you, so young, so happy, so beautiful — pardon me — I feel how little I can give in return for what your kindness has encouraged me to ask."

He spoke with a calm grave gentleness as far removed from the anxious, entangled faltering of a lover as if he had been offering friendly criticism or long-prepared advice. Madeline's only answer was the

rising crimson on her cheek; he continued, in the same quiet, undisturbed tones: “I told you once that there was little interest or happiness left in my life — a wasted life I fear it has been! — but since I have known you, Miss Graham, it has seemed as though an Angel were beckoning me back to a new existence — a more peaceful one than I have ever known.” He paused. His eyes had wandered from the flushed face at his side to the golden streaks of sunset barring the soft Western sky. It seemed to Madeline as if the wild, hot beating of her heart must drown her voice; she could not speak. “You know — you must know—” he said presently, “how miserably little I have to offer — the battered remains of a misspent life! Heaven forbid that I should claim the same right as another man to this little hand, (let me hold it). Heaven forbid that I should call myself worthy of the answer I have dared to hope for!” She had half-risen again, with a faint attempt to free her hand; but he rose also, quietly drew her closer. “Madeline, can you guess that I want to ask you to be my wife?” He had possession of both her hands, she did not struggle but only stood before him with eyes downcast burning cheeks. “Will you give me no answer, Madeline?” he said, gently. There was a faint movement of her tremulous lips, bending down he caught a soft, fluttering “Yes.” He lifted her right hand to his lips for a moment neither spoke. Then Madeline said, in a frightened, half-guilty voice, “Oh, let us go to

Papa." "They are coming to us," returned Guy, still detaining her, as he caught sight of Mr. Mrs. Graham moving slowly towards them under the shadowy ilex-clumps. "Why do you want to run away from me, Madeline? I have the right to call you so now, have I not?" "Yes," she murmured, still not daring to meet his kind, searching eyes. "But, come, please, let us go meet them. I… I must tell Mamma, you know…" "One moment. I have another right also, dear one!" He stooped kissed her quickly as he spoke, then drawing her trembling hand through his arm, led her forward to the advancing couple under the trees. Madeline's tearful confusion alone would have betrayed everything to her mother's quick eyes. "Oh, Mamma, Mamma," she cried, running to Mrs. Graham hiding her face. Guy came up, in his quiet easy way, looking frankly into the mother's rosy, troubled face. "I have asked Madeline to be my wife," he said, " she has consented." "Maddy, Maddy," cried Mrs. Graham, tearfully, "is it so, my dear?" But Mr. Graham was disposed to view things more cheerfully, while the mother daughter were weeping in each other's arms, shook Hastings' hand with ill-concealed delight. "She is our only one, Hastings, we could not trust you with a dearer thing, but — there, I won't exactly say 'No'!" "Believe me," Guy returned, "I know how precious is the treasure I have dared to ask for. I shall try to make myself worthy of her by guarding her more tenderly than my own life

— if indeed you consent—" Madeline turned a shy, appealing glance at Mr. Graham as she stood clinging to her mother. "Eh, Maddy?" said the merchant, goodnaturedly, "what can the old father say, after all? Well — I don't know how to refuse. We must think, we must think." "Madeline," said Hastings, bending over her, "will you take my arm to the carriage?" They did not say much as they walked along in the dying sunset light; but a pleasant sense of possessorship came over Guy as he felt the shy hand lying on his arm — who can sum up the wealth of Madeline's silent happiness? And so they passed through the gates, the Spring twilight fell over Villa Doria-Pamfili.

CHAPTER XIV. Left Alone

"DEATH, LIKE A robber, crept in unaware."
Old Play. (From the Spanish)

Three slow weeks of illness followed Georgie's imprudence at Lochiel House; in September when she began to grow a little better, she was ordered off to the Mediterranean for the Winter. She scarcely regretted this; the trip in Lord Breton's yacht would be pleasant, any change of scene welcome for a time — but as far as her health was concerned, she cared very little for its preservation, since life in every phase grew more

hopelessly weary day by day. Favourable winds made their passage short smooth, but when they reached the Mediterranean Georgie was too poorly to enjoy the short cruise along its coast which had been planned, they made directly for Nice. After a few dreary days of suffering at a Hotel, Lord Breton gave up all idea of prolonging his yachting by his physician's advice moved at once into a small sunny villa where Georgie could have perfect quiet for several months. She was very ill again, it was long before she recovered from the exhaustion of the journey. Even when she began to grow better lie on her lounge or creep downstairs, it was a cheerless household; for Lord Breton, cut off by recurring attacks of gout from any exercise or amusement that the town might have afforded, grew daily more irritable gloomy. Nor did Georgie attempt at first to rouse herself for his sake; it was hard enough, she thought, to be shut up forever face to face with her own unquenchable sorrow remorse. It did not occur to her that wherever her heart might be, her duty lay with her husband. She learned this one March day, as we do learn all our great heart-lessons, suddenly plainly. Her physician had been to see her, in taking leave said very gravely: "in truth, Lady Breton, I am just now more anxious about your husband's welfare than your own. He suffers a great deal, needs constant distraction. You will excuse my saying, frankly, that I think the loneliness, the want of — may I say sympathy? in his

life, is preying upon him heavily. I cannot tell you to be easy, where I see such cause for anxiety." These words — grave direct, as a good physician's always are — affected Georgie strangely. Could it be that he too suffered, felt a bitter want in his life? she questioned herself. Could it be that she had failed in her duty? that something more was demanded of her? And with this there came over her with a great rush, the thought of her own selfish absorption neglect. Had he not, after all, tried to be a kind a generous husband? Had she not repulsed him over over again? In that hour of sad self-conviction the first unselfish tears that had ever wet her cheek sprang to Georgie Breton's eyes. Remorse had taken a new a more practical form with her. For once she saw how small, how base petty had been her part in the great, harmonious drama of life; how mean the ends for which she had made so great a sacrifice; how childish the anger disappointment she had cherished — how self-made the fate against which she had railed. She had looked forward that day to a drive, the chief pleasure excitement of her monotonous hours; but ringing the bell, she countermanded her carriage, went downstairs to her husband's room. Lord Breton was sitting helpless in his arm-chair, the sun dazzling his eyes through the unshaded window, his newspapers pushed aside as if whatever interest they contained had long ago been exhausted. He looked up with some surprise when Georgie entered with her slow, feeble

step, crossing the room quietly dropped the Venetian shade. “Thank you,” he said. “The sun was blinding. I hope you are feeling better today, Georgina?” “Oh, yes, I think so,” she returned with a brave effort at gaiety, as she sank down in a low chair. “But I am afraid you are suffering. I… I am awfully sorry.” Lord Breton’s amazement waxed stronger. He even forgave the slang in which this unusual sympathy was clothed. “My pain is not very great,” he replied, affably, “ I think has been slightly alleviated thanks to Dr. W. I hope soon to be released from my imprisonment.” “You must be bored,” assented Georgie, then added suddenly as a new thought struck her: “I think you said once you liked… you were fond of playing chess. I… shall we play a game today?” Lord Breton wondered if the world were upsidedown. “Yes,” he said, even more affably, “I was once a good player, it has always been a favourite pastime of mine. I never proposed it to you, as I understood that — that you had a peculiar aversion to the game.” Georgie turned scarlet. “That is nothing,” she said, hastily. “I think there is a board in the sitting-room. I will ring.” She sent for the board, the contest immediatly began. How was it that in this new impulse of self-sacrifice Georgie began to lose the lonely weight of her sorrow, brighten herself in proportion as her efforts dispersed Lord Breton’s moody dullness? They were both good players, but Georgie being the quicker-witted would have won had

her tact not shewn her that she could please Lord Breton better by allowing herself to be defeated. It was quite late when the game ended, Georgie had absolutely forgotten her drive; but her husband had not. “Surely you are going out today, Georgina?” he said. “You should have gone earlier, indeed. I fear I unintentionally detained you…” “Not at all!” she returned, promptly. “I had not meant to go.” “Nevertheless you should take advantage of the favourable weather. It is not yet too late.” “I had rather stay here, please,” said Georgie, but Lord Breton would not hear of it. He ordered the carriage, she went up to dress with a lighter heart than she carried for many a day. As she came down again, some impulse made her enter her husband’s room. “There is nothing I can do for you in the town?” she asked. “No, nothing at all, nothing at all,” returned Lord Breton in a gratified voice. “Be careful of the evening air. You are well-wrapped?” “Oh, yes,” she said, lingering. “I shall not be long gone. Goodbye.” “Goodbye.” She took a short drive in the mild Spring air, came back, strengthened freshened, before sundown. Strangely enough, there was no one to help her from the carriage but Sidenham, who always accompanied her; in the hall she was met by her physician. A sudden foreboding rushed through her mind as she saw him coming towards her. “What is it?” she said faintly. He gave his arm led her quietly into the empty salon. “Sit down,

Lady Breton. Compose yourself, for Heaven's sake," he said. "Lord Breton is — very ill." She looked at him in a dazed way. "I–I don't think I understand," she gasped. "Your husband is very dangerously ill," said the physician again. "How can that be? He was much better when I went out — tell me, tell me!" Sidenham had brought a glass of wine, which she swallowed hurriedly at a sign from the doctor. "Now tell me," she repeated, wildly. "My dear Lady Breton, try to quiet yourself. You say he seemed better — in better spirits — when you went out?" "Yes — I thought so." "So his servant tells me," the physician continued gently. "He said he had not seen his master in such good spirits since he came to Nice. — Compose yourself — Take some more wine. — Half an hour ago I was sent for—" he paused, in that pause she snatched at the truth he was trying gently to postpone. "He is dead?" she whispered. "Tell me at once. I am calm." "He has been taken from us," the physician answered, his voice tremulous with emotion. "Taken from us without suffering, thank God! His servant went into his room found him… dead. I was sent for at once." "Go on," said Georgie, in a low voice, fixing her tearless eyes on his earnest, pitying face. "I can hear all. He died without… pain?" "Entirely. Nothing could have been more sudden or painless." For a little while neither spoke; then Georgie rose suddenly. "Take me to him," she said, in the same calm voice. "Take me, please." "Can you bear it — so

soon, Lady Breton?" "Take me," she repeated. "I told him I would come back soon!" She put her hand on the doctor's arm, he led her out across the hall in silence; but at the door of her husband's room she fainted suddenly, fell back as she had done at Lochiel House. They carried her up to her room, it was long before her consciousness could be restored. When she was roused from her stupour it changed into wild fever delirium, for nearly a week after Lord Breton's sad quiet funeral, she lay raving and moaning on her darkened bed. The fever was quieted at last, but she was terribly weakened even when her mind returned scarcely realized that she had entered into the first days of her widowhood. It was talked of all over Nice, how the old English peer, Lord Breton of Lowood, had been carried off suddenly by the gout, while his wife was out driving; how rich haughty he was; how she, poor young creature, delicate, bright beautiful, just 21, had been left there in the sunny Mediterranean town, far from friends home, with no one but her physician her servants to care for her or to comfort her — had been left there — alone. But perhaps no one quite guessed all the peculiar bitterness that those words contained when, with her returning consciousness they dawned upon Georgie— "left alone."