Fair Ines

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"I don't know that I can undertake that."

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FAIR INES

BY

ETHEL TURNER

(*Mrs. H. R. Curlewis*)

AUTHOR OF "THAT GIRL," "THE FAMILY AT MISRULE,"
"THREE LITTLE MAIDS," ETC.

"*Oh, saw ye not fair Ines?*
She's gone into the West
To dazzle when the sun goes down
And rob the world of rest."

HOOD.

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PROLOGUE

At eighteen months of age, one perfectly calm summer evening, the time somewhere between six and seven, Ines began to scream quite distressfully.

A devoted mother searched anxiously for a pin; a father, startled but philosophic, said "Peaches," and looked at the fruit-plate to see whether he had absent-mindedly given three of these delicacies to his daughter instead of the by-custom-sacred one. Two remained untouched on the plate. The infant had her hand stretched out peremptorily.

"Want!" she said.

"Want!" she said again.

"Want!" she screamed at last, finding that no attention was being paid to her demands.

It was some time before the parents discovered that it was the setting sun their offspring demanded. It hung there, just across a mountain gorge, a ball of red and orange, with incredibly beautiful shafts of purple light.

And all offered here was an indiarubber doll with its features erased, and a duck fashioned by some well-meaning female out of cotton wool.

What right-minded infant would not have demanded the stretching out of parents' omnipotent hands to obtain that better thing ?

At five the child's passion for beauty caused her to be taken up by the police.

She was walking in the botanical gardens with her nurse,—or rather without her nurse, for that person had established herself on a seat and given herself up to the delights of her novelette.

Ines hovered for an hour or more among the flower-beds, and no butterfly in all the place did less damage.

But she came suddenly in her wanderings on a bed of poppies of most bewildering beauty, and she fairly flew into their midst; gathered and gathered, kissed them, talked to them. She filled her upturned frock with the lovely things, stuck them thickly into her hat, added now a scarlet, now a yellow, now a purple one to the huge bunch in her hand.

Law-abiding children on the paths watched her in wildest envy. She must plainly be some enormously favoured being—the Governor's little girl, doubtless, or the head gardener's. There was certainly nothing furtive about her conduct; she even made dashes out from her fairy fortress and gave of her wealth to them from time to time—pink poppies, mauve poppies, poppies like driven snow; little boys and girls stood along the path holding these in their

astonished hands, their eyes and mouths round with wonder.

Someway the news was flashed to a gardener on another path. He came along, rake in hand and quite disbelieving.

Ines, with a sudden throb of pity for him in his ugly earth-stained clothes, ran to him and held out a handful of poppies.

"Here," she said with heartiest goodwill, "*you* can have these, poor man."

Men who have to do with the earth seldom have hearts of stone when confronted with human frailty, but this particular gardener had taken a most enormous pride in his poppies, and used to hang about the bed on holidays simply because he was thirsting to hear the "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" of the public. His wrath was excusable. Besides, there were those staring boys and girls; plainly an example must be made of this offender.

On the next path was a constable, who had been sent to inquire about some breach of the peace that had occurred the preceding day. The gardener whistled for him.

"She's been stealing. Take her to gaol at once," he said in a loud voice, and lower to the man, "I've got to learn her a lesson, young imp. Take her as far as the gate to give her a good fright."

The policeman put his hand on her shoulder, and she did not offer *him* a poppy, for with all

those beautiful buttons he did not awaken her sympathy like the poor ugly gardener had done.

"Come along with you," he said.

"Where to?" she inquired amiably. "Coming along" generally proved to be good fun.

"Gaol!" he said darkly.

There was not a suspicion of fear in her eyes.

"Flowers there?" she inquired. "Lots? Like this?" She flung a loving glance at the poppies.

"Come along," he said. "I'll get my 'and-cuffs out to you in half a second."

She allowed herself to be steered along, the angered gardener and a dozen or so of frightfully excited little boys and girls behind her.

But before they got to the gate something in the sight of the little white-socked legs in front of him softened the gardener's heart and made him realise that few children could stand an ordeal like this.

"There," he said to the constable, "that'll do. She won't do it again, I dare say, eh, Sissie?"

He expected a terrified face to be turned to him, expected drenched eyes and a trembling mouth ready to promise good behaviour for the rest of her life.

But when he looked under the sun-hat, the face was quite unruffled; just smiling and happy.

He began to repent his softness. "I think she'd better go to gaol, after all," he said.

Still no cloud came on the little face. Between them they catechised her—the policeman and the gardener. She had never heard of such a place as gaol, had no idea whatever of the offices of a policeman.

The gardener enlightened her; it was plainly time that some one did. He drew a lurid picture of malefactors like herself being dragged off through the streets by policemen who were quite adamant to parents' entreaties, and being locked up in a dark stone place and fed on bread and water.

And now it was the policeman's heart that realised such terrors must be broken more softly to such a child. "There, that'll do," he said. "You'll go and give 'er convulsions in a minute."

But the gardener, looking again under the mushroom hat, found perfect trust and peace still on the little face. He discharged a more homely shot.

"Your mammy won't be able to get to you —doors all padlocked, windows barred," he said.

Ines laughed in his face. "*I* know," she said, "you're having fun with me."

She was used to people "having fun with her"; there were dozens of her father's artist friends much addicted to the amusement.

The men looked at her helplessly. There is

no saying what their next move would have been but that the delinquent maid hove suddenly in sight. Straight from the company of earls and duchesses—indeed, they were still tucked under her arm—she treated the sordid persons in front of her with such haughtiness, they quickly lowered their crests.

"Go on with you!" she said. "A pretty pair! Not enough spunk to catch spielers, so you try to take a baby up."

The gardener tried to defend himself from her shower of words by pointing out the poppies, most of which the child was still tightly grasping.

"*Go* on!" said the maid. "I'm ashamed of you calling yerselves men. A handful of flowers! As if her father wouldn't have made it all right with you, if yer'd come to me like gentlemen and told me about it quietly."

So impressive, indeed, was the high-born manner she had caught from the aristocratic personages in her book, that before five minutes more were gone the episode was over and she was on her way home with her charge.

"But why did you take them, darling?" her much-shocked mother said.

"They were pretty," said Ines.

"But you can't go about taking everything that you see is pretty," objected the mother.

"Yes, you can, mummie," said Ines, "when they's not in shops or houseses." Which made her second strenuous effort to insist that any-

thing beautiful in nature must belong to herself quite as much as to any one else.

Time and circumstance, the policemen of life, took her by the shoulder. "We'll have to learn her," they said as grimly as the gardener had done.

CHAPTER I

TO LET—A COTTAGE

" There the year is sweet, and there
Earth is full of secret springs."
Atalanta in Calydon.

A CIRCLE of gently-swelling hills—Australian hills, smooth and sweetly green as an English park in the spring.

At the roots of the hills the village Wyama, quiet and leisured, picturesque from the heights or from a bird's point of view, but quite commonplace when you stood down on the white road and looked it straight in the face.

Here and there the habitations, which for the most part clustered or straggled about the winding road in the hollow, stepped back and, having climbed half-way up the hill-slopes, clung there aslant.

Thus on a western slope two cottages stood almost hand-in-hand, for not more than forty or fifty feet separated their walls. Behind them, their grazing-lands ran up to the hill's crest, with not as much as a two-rail fence to mark their division. In front ran down two long and

narrow garden strips, but these of late years had a stone wall between them.

Wyama would have told you sadly, but with a certain amount of philosophic acceptance, of the building of these places. How they had belonged to a pair of brothers, a very David and Jonathan, who since they were boys had worked side by side in the district, asking nothing better than to work side by side. And how in the pride of their early manhood they had taken unto themselves wives from other districts. And how they had left behind them the old farm in the hollow, and climbed higher and built the hand-in-hand cottages, and there carried in triumph the new wives, asking now nothing better than that they should all live happily together there to the end of their lives. And how within a month the wives quarrelled. How within a year they dragged their husbands into the feud. And how within three, life was so plainly impossible at such close quarters that Mr. and Mrs. David flung off to try shopkeeping in the city, and Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan, unable to bear the sudden quiet, went further into the country and prospered at cattle-raising.

Then stood the cottages empty for half a year, for Wyama was comfortably settled itself, and the soil of West Slope was not good enough to attract outsiders very readily. So David and Jonathan sulkily reduced the rents and advertised the places in the papers, as well as plastering

them with To Let notices. David's went first.

John Erwin, an artist lately from the old world, though Australian by birth, had been staying at the village hotel, delighted with the " bits " that the waterfalls and creeks and dales around afforded his brush. But while there he was seized with the very paralysis that he had, at medical orders, taken the long voyage to Australia to ward off. Except for his young daughter Ines, who was with him, he had no ties in the world, and his " home " fitted into his travelling-boxes that were covered with a crazy patchwork of luggage labels from various towns in England and Southern Europe. The city doctor, hastily summoned, concurred with the Wyama doctor: Erwin had better stay where he was, and give the quiet hills the chance of putting to rights his disordered nervous system.

" How long may it be, doctor ? " said Ines —" honestly, if you please."

The doctor named a year—two years—even—but there he pulled himself up and said that that particular kind of paralysis always baffled them, and it was possible that the patient might surprise them yet by quite a rapid recovery.

" Six months ? " said the girl.

" Oh, come," said the doctor, " you must give it a little longer than that."

So she went out to find a cottage where she might make her invalid more comfortable, and

at less expense than was possible in a wayside hotel.

David's and Jonathan's were the only places vacant in Wyama, and she instantly chose the former, because Mrs. David had planted a climbing rose by a verandah post, and Mrs. Jonathan had done nothing at all to reclaim her wilderness.

The furnishing question presented difficulties.

Mrs. Beattie, the minister's wife, was lending her advice in the emergency—not so much because it "was her duty, and she did," as because she thought other people might consider it her duty—one of the many odd, unscheduled duties attached to her position.

"It's very expensive to get everything up from the towns," she said. "Do you know the Bartons had to pay three pounds for bringing their new sideboard up?"

"Well," said Ines with an eye-twinkle, as she recalled the huge and pretentious article of furniture, "I am sure it was well worth it—to the carter."

Mrs. Beattie considered that ambiguity was only permissible from the pulpit.

"I don't understand you," she said coldly.

"Oh," said Ines penitently, "all that glass and carving—think how heavy it must be!"

"It is certainly a very handsome affair," assented Mrs. Beattie, with a sigh at the thought of her own scratched and shabby one, "but I

suppose you don't want to spend heavy sums like that in freight."

"Oh no, certainly not," said Ines; "the simplest things will answer. I think all furniture ought to be made to fold up and pack into portmanteaus, don't you?"

Mrs. Beattie made no answer to this; the more she saw of the artist's daughter, the more assured she was the girl was of a most frivolous nature; still, she was young, only nineteen or thereabouts, and certainly could not be trusted alone with so weighty a business as the setting up of a home.

"I have heard of a house of furniture that is to be sold by auction at Murwumba to-morrow week, and I will go with you if you like," she said. "Brodie would charge you very little to run the things over in his carts from there."

Ines thanked her gratefully—the opportunity seemed an excellent one—and ran off to David's cottage to face the rooms, and see what she would actually need to set up her housekeeping.

And when the morning of the sale came and Mrs. Beattie rattled round to the hotel in her hard-worked yellow sulky, the girl was quite excited at the prospect of buying furniture.

She was in the highest spirits; Mrs. Beattie told her husband afterwards, it was plain the girl had very little real feeling.

"Her poor father lying stricken on the balcony

like that, and she going off as laughing and happy as if she were going to a picnic," she said.

But that was just it; all life, now the first heavy dread was removed, came along exactly like a picnic. Erwin made a delightful invalid; true he could not move at present unassisted, and that busy, brush-wielding arm of his lay pathetically still; but the old twinkle had come back to his eyes, and the old jests and quaint sayings back to his lips.

He was full of eagerness to get to the cottage, and to send to town for the packing-cases of dear old books and magazines and such.

He was going to think out all the pictures of his future life during this idle time, he told Ines, and really study the principles of his art as he had had little time to do in his past roving life of making pretty pot-boilers.

While Ines was away at the sale to-day he was to mark—with his left hand—the catalogues lying beside him. And then, with twenty pounds—for such a sum Ines had last night decreed for the purpose, when they ran over their oddly kept accounts—the lists were to go to certain booksellers in Sydney and Paris and Florence for such books and prints as would help towards this end—this studying of Art with neither pencil nor brush.

So there he lay in the balcony sunshine, eager to begin on the catalogues.

And off rattled Ines in the yellow sulky, every sparkle of the glorious morning reflected in her dancing eyes.

"Do you know," she said, in a sudden warm-hearted burst to the woman beside her, "this will be the very first home I shall have had since I was nine! It is quite an intoxicating thought. You can't believe how often I have longed for beds, and chairs, and tables of our very own."

"But why didn't you have a home in England?" said the lady, pricking up her ears at the girl's tone, for, try as it would, Wyama had been able to find out very little about this artist beyond the fact that he had gone off, when Ines was two or thereabouts, to see the Old World galleries, as so many of the New World artists do; that he had taken sixteen years to see them, but as soon as ill health came had turned with a sick longing to the land of his birth.

A shadow crossed the girl's face. "When mother died, ten years ago, poor father sold everything. He could not bear the thought of a home without her."

"And you have lived like this ever since?" said the lady, horrified at such a bringing up; "just a holiday-making life like you had here before he was ill?"

The girl both nodded and shook her bright young head.

"Sometimes father used to have a fit of qualms, and hustle me off to boarding-schools," she said, "but always before I'd been there six months he would get so lonely, or I so homesick, he had to send for me back again."

"No wonder you are so——" breathed Mrs. Beattie—the words really forced from her. But then she stopped.

"So what?" said Ines, with sudden anxiety; "so what, dear Mrs. Beattie?"

The woman turned her light blue eyes a moment on the face beside her. A girlish face, sweetly rounded, warmly coloured; with eyes of a hazel-grey, full of sunshine, and crinkly brown hair with a sunshine glint in it massed lightly under her shady hat. The hat was quite simple—Mrs. Beattie's own, from a neighbouring town, had probably cost twice as much—but there was a little French twist to it here, and a turn to the ribbon there, that defied the power of all Wyama's eagerly emulous amateur milliners. Similarly, the dress—merely muslin, and every one knew that muslin cost nothing; but the same stamp of an artist's hand was on it.

"So French!" sighed the Wyama girls despairingly, whenever it fluttered past.

"No wonder I am so what?" repeated Ines softly, and peeped mischievously under the dip of her companion's hat.

"Feather-brained," had certainly been the

term in Mrs. Beattie's mind, but the sudden battery of those hazel eyes turned full upon her undid her at once, and she softened.

"I mean, my dear," she said, "it is not to be expected that you should be quite as steady as other girls."

CHAPTER II

AN AUCTION SALE

And now they were at the sale.

The yellow sulky, its shafts on the ground, stood among a contingent of forty-nine other sulkies and buggies, and "Currant," the Beattie veteran quadruped, was nibbling in a paddock along with forty-nine other quadrupeds. Ines had admired the business-like way in which Mrs. Beattie unharnessed him and took him into the paddock: the care of the horse, when no one else was about to relieve her, was another of the unscheduled duties of the minister's wife.

"But why Currant?" said Ines, hearing her friend by this name adjure the animal to "come up."

Mrs. Beattie looked a little apologetic, for indeed the vicarage was not given to wanton humour in the naming of its dumb animals.

"Our boy Charlie called it that," she said. "He is the one who—went to sea."

The sudden film that came over her hard blue eyes sent Ines' thoughts to a tale the landlady had told her of the managing and worrying

ways of Mrs. Beattie having driven her eldest boy to run away to sea.

"Of course it is a foolish name," she went on; "he was called Prince Charlie when we bought him, but some way we cannot break ourselves of using the other."

"Oh, it is a very good name," said Ines warmly, her anxiety to praise the Charlie who brought that film over the mother's eyes leading her to forget that it was the crushed, unindividual look of the steed that made the name a fitting one.

"He is a much better horse than you may think," said Mrs. Beattie coldly.

"I'm sure he is," agreed Ines quickly. "Look how soon he has brought us over the hills; it is hardly eleven yet."

"We had better get inside and look round," said Mrs. Beattie, mollified much more readily than was her habit.

They wandered through the rooms; the sale was at a bankrupt farmer's, whose home had been held as the acme of style and "gentility" by the poorer farmers around. Mrs. Beattie grew quite excited as they made their progress among the chattels and movables.

"Look at this couch," she whispered to Ines. She punched it in several parts of its anatomy and sat down heavily on several other parts. "Springs everywhere; and see all this plush and the tassels—why, it must have cost eight pounds

at least—and yet Mrs. Jordan wouldn't give a halfpenny to the new organ. My dear, you ought to bid for it—it would be a bargain at five pounds."

"But it isn't long enough for father to lie comfortably on," objected Ines; "and think of lying on plush on a summer's day! And the colour of it—no, we won't let *that* tempt us."

"Well, what about this sideboard?" said Mrs. Beattie, undaunted—"real cedar, my dear; and see the canopy top; and here's a cupboard most beautifully fitted to hold wine-bottles." Then she remembered that she was the minister's wife, and added, "Of course you need not use it for wine, you could keep other things in it."

"Yes," said Ines dreamily, "there was one in a house we stayed in at Cannes, and the landlady's little boy used it for his white mice. I wonder where they kept the wine."

"Well, how much would you go to for it?" said Mrs. Beattie, ignoring the reminiscence. "You might get it knocked down to you for six pounds."

"Six pounds!" cried Ines. "Six pounds for that!"

"We may even get it for less," said the minister's wife, joyously glad to find the girl impressed at last.

"What a wicked waste of money it would be," breathed Ines. "Just think what lovely things

six pounds can buy ! " She looked at the red horror with indignant eyes.

" Oh, well," said Mrs. Beattie, " if you think you can't afford it, of course; but I thought you told me you had brought fifty pounds to buy the things with."

" So I have," said Ines unhappily, and dare not add, " but not things like these."

In the bedrooms the girl was equally difficult to deal with. She said she could not afford wardrobes, so Mrs. Beattie only sighed a little at their handsome mirrors.

" But you must have beds," said the distressed lady.

Ines looked meditatively at the nightly couches where Mr. Jordan and Mrs. Jordan, and the whole tribe of Jordan had reposed for many years, and a mutinous look came over her face.

" I think I will let my one extravagance be quite new beds—beds warranted fresh-laid, in fact," she said. " Think of the years we have used other people's beds in hotels and boarding-houses—don't you think it is a justifiable ambition, Mrs. Beattie ? "

" Well, there is a good deal in that," agreed Mrs. Beattie. " I confess I shouldn't like it myself. Let us go into the kitchen."

" I'll bid for this lot for you," she said presently, indicating a consignment of heavy black boilers and saucepans—" that is, if they go at

anything under twelve shillings. One or two are a little burnt, but you could have it scoured off."

"Oh, oh," cried Ines, "please don't—the horrid, black, heavy things!"

"Don't be such a child!" said Mrs. Beattie; "saucepans cannot be pretty."

"But they can," the girl insisted—"dear little enamel things, and aluminium. What on earth could father and I eat that would need cooking in those monstrous things?"

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Beattie, "of course you *are* a small family. But perhaps they would make two lots of them—I could do with a few myself."

But no, the girl would not have as much as one of them.

"I'm going to do a lot of the cooking myself, and I should die if I had to do it in those," she said. "Do you know, for nearly a month once on the Pyrenees we lived in my chafing-dish, and you know the size of *that* saucepan."

But Mrs. Beattie, with a hopeless look on her face, led the way to the front room, where the bidding was beginning.

Three-quarters of an hour went past in the overloaded room, and not one thing had Ines lifted a finger for. The clock went—the solid black marble monument with gilt statues and columns that Murwumba farmers' wives thought the handsomest and most enviable thing in the

world, albeit it eternally pointed to a quarter to four—the clock went for fifteen shillings, and Ines sat unmoved. The carpet, the thick floral carpet—" real Wilton pile," as Mrs. Beattie wailed, was knocked down to the butcher for three pounds despite Mrs. Beattie imploring permission to say " Three five."

The ownership of the plush sofa was transferred to the landlord of the hotel. The great red sideboard with the canopy top became the property of a poultry farmer for the sum of six pounds ten.

A ship that never was on land and sea—a pink and green blown-glass ship under a glass shade was going, going at seventeen and six.

" A pound," said Mrs. Beattie with a sudden wildness in her eye.

" But I don't want it," said Ines, dismayed at the idea of such a possession.

" No," said Mrs. Beattie in a fluttering way, " it—it is for myself. I—my bedroom is a little bare—make a pretty ornament."

And the girl remembered the story of sailor Charlie, and squeezed her hand in a most sympathetic manner.

Now and again while these proceedings were going on, there had peeped in at the door an odd little elfin figure, a little girl of six, with a worried, restless look on her face.

" One of the little Jordans," Mrs. Beattie answered, when Ines, who was watching the

child, asked to whom she belonged. It was an open secret this morning that Mrs. Jordan and several of her girls had shut themselves up in the dairy while the sale of their goods was proceeding, it being inconvenient for them to entirely leave the farm at the time.

Ines noticed that the child, each time she appeared in the doorway, listened to the bidding for a moment with intense anxiety on her face, then shrank back into the hall, relief in her eyes.

The auctioneer came to the very last lot in the room—a common little mantelpiece ornament—a china shepherd holding a tiny lamb under his arm.

"What bids for this," he said—"sixpence? Thank you, ma'am, ninepence? Going at ninepence, ninepence, ninepence, going, going——"

But at that moment a piercing shriek rang over the room, and every eye turned to the door. There stood the little girl with a white, strained face, wringing her hands in the wildest way.

"Daft," said some one.

Others seemed amused. For the most part, however, no one seemed to understand what was wrong, and the auctioneer, anxious to get on to other rooms, went on in his high voice.

"Ninepence—this handsome china ornament, going for ninepence."

"A shilling," called Ines' clear voice across the room.

"Two shillings," growled a heavy-faced farmer not far away from her.

"Three shillings," said Ines.

"Four shillings," said the farmer.

"Five shillings," said Ines.

"Six shillings, hang it!" said the farmer, turning an angry red face on the rival bidder.

"Seven shillings," said Ines steadily.

The auctioneer turned the article over in his hand for a better inspection; he would not have given threepence for it himself; but that was no matter.

"Seven shillings," he cried; "this unique ornament in finest china going for seven shillings!"

"Eight," said the farmer.

"Nine," said Ines.

Mrs. Beattie was almost in convulsions. "Are you mad?" she whispered. "They have them at Sands in Wyama at sixpence each. Are you quite mad?"

"Not quite," said Ines, a steady eye on the farmer.

He was plainly weakening. As long as it was a matter of silver his courage was high, but this was running into a matter of actual gold.

"Nine and six," he said.

"Ten," said Ines.

She had won. The farmer shook his head ruefully, and backed out of the doorway.

"Ten shillings," said the auctioneer; "going

at ten shillings, ten, ten—no one make a higher bid ? It's yours, miss."

Mrs. Beattie was almost purple with suppressed wrath.

" Of all the wild, mad, insane proceedings——" she began.

But Ines had the ridiculous little ornament safely in her hand, and was smiling across to the wild-eyed child. The little one, however, gave her one look of horror and reproach, and fled away out of sight.

The crowd was moving slowly out of the room, and even Mrs. Beattie's access of wrath had to wait.

Out in the passage Ines made a flank movement, and instead of being swept into the dining-room with other pressing would-be purchasers, found herself free of Mrs. Beattie, and indeed quite alone. Then off she set on her quest ; room after room she hunted through, in cupboards, under the beds—often a child's refuge in an anguish of desolation—through the kitchen and pantries.

The heavy-faced farmer was standing at the back door.

" Did you notice a child pass through ? " said Ines, " a little girl, in a pink frock and no hat ? "

The farmer looked hard at her, then jerked his head in the direction of some distant outbuildings.

"Cryin' her eyes out," he said fiercely.

The girl ran across the ground. Past the cow-bails, the calf-pen—no sign of the child.

But near the fowl-houses a sound of hiccoughs reached her, and she hurried in. And there, sitting on a hen's nest, sobbing her very heart out, was the little pink frock.

"There," said Ines, "don't cry, darling; look, it's quite safe."

The child drew the ornament wildly to her, and went on sobbing, but very different sobs now that the relieved tears fell down on the little lamb.

"You dear little thing!" said Ines, her own eyes wet: she stooped to kiss the tear-stained face.

But the child darted off, in a fit of half shyness, half shame at her tears, and fled away into the bush, her shepherd fast in her hand.

At the back door Ines found the farmer still standing. He looked hard at her again, then spoke.

"Would you be agreeable to take twelve shillings for that nornyment, miss?" he said.

Ines shook her head. "I really couldn't," she said.

"It's like this," he said, going very red, "it belongs to a little kid as has her heart set on it. I seen her cry out when it was put up."

Then Ines laughed out. "Let us shake hands on it," she said.

Then the farmer gave a great roar, and gripped her outstretched hand.

"Ain't a man a blunderbuss now?" he said. "Cost you ten shillings, so I have. Might 'a guessed a girl like you would 'a noticed."

The kitchen was emptying as Ines hurried back, conscience-stricken, to Mrs. Beattie. The contingent of saucepans was being gathered up by the baker's wife, the very doormat had been knocked down to some one, and Ines reflected she really could have done with the doormat, and so have retained a remnant of Mrs. Beattie's respect.

There were only the bedrooms left, where there was nothing she might buy.

Oh no, happy respite, there was the hall. The auctioneer was stopping there now for a second, and she determined she would buy anything, everything, blindly, just so as not to appear too ungrateful to her friend.

But the idea of bidding personally was hateful again. She pushed gently through the crowd to try to find her protector again, and as she pushed, the linoleum beneath her feet, and the hat-rack over her head, and a gaudily painted drain-pipe umbrella-stand at her elbow rapidly changed hands. There was no time to reach Mrs. Beattie, but the auctioneer noticed the girl who had bought the shepherd as he indicated the last lot, a barometer hanging on the wall.

"This very fine barometer in its han'somely carved case—what offers?—no one make a single bid?—what say?—come, some one—will you offer a pound, miss?—you seem to have a taste for art things. Shall I start it at a pound, miss?"

Ines nodded desperately. There was nothing she wanted much less than a barometer, and she had not the remotest notion what they should cost, but Mrs. Beattie must be appeased.

"A pound—this fine barometer—unfailing index of the weather to be expected—absolute necessity in a farming community—only a pound—a pound?"

But the farming community had for years seen the handsome article pointing steadfastly to Rain, through a drought and fine, through a deluge, and did not rise to the occasion.

"Gone," said the auctioneer, and Ines found herself in possession of the first of her household gods.

Not one word dare she speak, however, to the minister's wife for the first four miles of the return journey, and that lady drove on in the stoniest silence.

But during the fifth mile the girl peeped under the woman's hat two or three times, and at the sixth white stone she slipped an arm round the rigid waist, and rubbed a soft cheek penitently against the rein-arm.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," she whispered; "do forgive me. I know I've wasted your time shamefully, and I'm coming up to the Rectory to sew some lovely little things for the bazaar to try to make up."

Mrs. Beattie struggled hard with herself; nor husband, nor children, nor servants, nor friends ever found her as easily appeased as this after an injury; it was her immovable custom to maintain, even after expressions of sorrow had been exacted, a dignified after-sulking for at least an hour.

Why did her resentment melt like this before the witch of a girl at her elbow?

She tried to consolidate it again. "Five good hours wasted," she began, "and what have you done? Wasted ten shillings on a silly little ornament for a child to break—oh yes, that red-faced man told me about it, but if you had wanted to make up to the child you could have bought her another shilling ornament at the store, and it would have been just the same to her."

"Not *just*," said Ines softly.

"And then you go and spend a pound on a barometer that has been the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood for years."

"Yes, that *was* foolish," admitted Ines, and the tone of her voice was so penitent that Mrs. Beattie, to her own amazement, found herself smiling indulgently.

"Oh, well," she said, "I suppose we all make foolish purchases at times." And the recollection of the blown-glass ship, that was keeping the barometer company under the seat of the sulky, suddenly ceased from gnawing at her conscience.

CHAPTER III

THE WHARTONS

AWAY on the eastern slopes of Wyama stood the house and wide lands of the Whartons. Time was—eighty or ninety years ago—when all Wyama belonged to one Wharton, a lieutenant in the army who, serving the country he had been sent to help to keep in order, had the misfortune to lose a leg in a pitched engagement with some turbulent miners. The then Governor of the Colony, anxious to compensate him both for his past services and his misfortunes, pressed upon him one of the big land grants that were such common gifts at the time, and the lieutenant hung up his sword and sent to England for a library of books upon model farming.

A squad of convicts reared him his house—a long, low, solidly built, brick place. He had been told that his walls would have to be of wood, like all of the early places, but hobbling round his new estate he found one day some clay of excellent quality, and the next, among his "assigned" men, an English brickmaker doing time.

He introduced the two, therefore, and the result still showed, red and rough, but very durable, in the older portions of Wendover House, as he called the place after his old English home. He himself grew sheep on the place, and waxed wealthy from them ; his sons added cattle when the possession of the estate fell to them; and his grandsons, Douglas and Sholto, at present managing it, kept the fine, park-like paddocks exclusively for exclusive cattle. As years had gone past, many thousand acres had been sold to improve the remaining thousands, but it was still one of the largest and most remunerative estates in the State, and a stranger had not been half-an-hour in Wyama before it had been pointed out to him half-a-dozen times.

The present occupants of Wendover were Mrs. Wharton, a thin, ceaselessly active woman of seventy ; her two sons, Douglas and Sholto ; and her unmarried daughters, Cade and Elizabeth.

To Ines, just settled down with her father in David's cottage, there fluttered in one morning Mrs. Beattie, quite agitated.

" The Whartons are coming to call on you this afternoon," she said ; " is there anything I can do to help ? I met Miss Cade, and she asked me were you quite settled. Did I do wrong ? Would you rather have had more time to prepare for them ? "

" Oh no," laughed Ines ; " bring on your bears."

Mrs. Beattie frowned at such shocking irreverence directed against the first family in the district by a chit of a girl in a cottage like this.

"I assure you they don't call on every one," she said. "It will be a very fortunate thing for you—a lonely girl like you are—if they like you."

"But suppose," said Ines—"suppose such a terrible thing, Mrs. Beattie, as that *I* don't like *them?* What then?"

"Oh, nonsense," said Mrs. Beattie; it was so preposterous to imagine not liking people who owned an estate like Wendover that she simply could not waste breath over discussing it. "Now, would you like me to lend you Lucy to help you with the afternoon tea-things, or shall I send one of the children? I wish they had waited till that State girl I have got you had arrived."

"Have you anything to say against the afternoon tea I have prepared for you on several occasions?" said Ines.

"Certainly not. I've enjoyed it very much," said Mrs. Beattie; "beautifully arranged, I will say."

"Very well," said Ines; "what is good enough for the friend who has helped me over several tight places is quite good enough for stray callers."

But Mrs. Beattie departed only half mollified;

the beaten brass tray, the quaint thin cups and saucers and the lemon served as alternative for milk, and the tiny almond cakes, pleased a certain novelty-loving side of her own nature, but she was by no means sure what the Whartons would think of an afternoon tea equipage so entirely unlike the solid and important one that was borne in to the Wendover drawing-room by the Wendover housemaid on the stroke of four.

Mrs. Wharton and her daughters sparred a little after their customary fashion, as they drove the two or three miles that separated East Slope from West Slope.

Cade had wanted the victoria to be dragged out for the visit from its seldom-disturbed repose in the coach-house. It was not often that she asked such a thing, for the wagonette and the dogcart and pony-carriage were all pleasanter for these country roads, and she was quite content for the dust-sheets to be lifted from the victoria only on occasions when such distinguished visitors were staying in the house as the Governor's wife or the Bishop's sister.

Why she had proffered the request she hardly knew herself, though if she had brutally dissected her own motives she would have found that a desire to impress " that girl " was at the bottom of the reason.

Ines had held a subtle and tantalising interest for Cade since the days when the girl and her

father had first come to the township. Life in Wyama was undoubtedly a narrow affair, though Mrs. Wharton would have been appalled at such a notion, and Elizabeth would have practically pointed out the impossibility of such an accusation being true. Did they not continually have visitors staying in the house? Aunts and cousins mostly, and for any prolonged stay, it is true; but still politicians came occasionally from Friday to Monday, and distinguished visitors from England and other countries were rarely allowed to leave Australia's shores without being carried off to see the model Wendover estate and spend a night there. Was there not a special suite of rooms—bedroom, dressing-room, bath-room and sitting-room kept entirely for such visitors? Did they not give a garden-party every spring and an evening at home every autumn? Did they not subscribe to the city libraries and receive parcels of the newest fiction twice a week by train?

Life at Wendover dull, narrow! Why, the difficulty was, as Mrs. Wharton insisted, to find sufficient hours in every day for the manifold interests of their life.

"Oh yes, we're busy enough," Cade would agree restlessly.

That girl down at the hotel, that slight unformed girl with the exquisite face that the dullest farmer on the road turned round to see again, awoke in Cade a mood of strange unrest

and dissatisfaction. There was the natural pang of envy for the girl's beauty and youth—poor Cade was three-and-thirty and absolutely without any claim to looks—but there was also a feeling of exasperation that a moneyless girl should dance so happily along Life's highway and extract joy and gladness from all sorts of trifling things, while she (Cade) and her mother and Elizabeth, for all their wealth, walked along so soberly and heavily.

But perhaps the precise cause for the suggestion about the victoria was the pique Cade felt at the girl's plain lack of interest in themselves, the Whartons, of Wendover House.

They had passed the artist and his daughter frequently on the roads, themselves driving, as is the fixed habit of country people, the Erwins walking, and with inexplicable enjoyment as travellers not uncommonly do. But Ines' face never quickened with any interest as it might have done upon viewing the chief family in the district; it is to be questioned whether her eyes really saw them at all, though those same eyes could follow with much eagerness a merry child trotting past on a pony, a string of bullocks yoked to a dray, a Chinaman staggering between his balancing baskets. But a narrow-faced old lady and two plain, somewhat dowdy girls well on in life—what interest did they hold for those eager young eyes, that had had set out for them, almost as soon as they could see, so much of

the Old World's intoxicating beauty, so many of its vivid interests and strong personalities ?

That is mainly why, when the call was decided upon for that afternoon, Cade suggested the victoria should be used.

" It is months since it was out," she said ; " the leather will be getting musty. I don't think we ought to get out of the habit of using it when we pay calls."

" Call at one of those bits of cottages in the victoria ! You must be out of your senses, child," said Mrs. Wharton, who, despite her limitations, had a sound sense of proportion.

" They have only taken it because there was no other place to take," said Cade sulkily.

" Why, they're as poor as rats. You must know that. The man's an artist." Mrs. Wharton had all the landed proprietor's contempt for nomads. She would have grudgingly granted you that there was an exception here and there, for she had read of Leighton's and Millais' splendid homes ; but it would have required an earthquake to shake her firmly-conceived notion that artists were a superior species of gipsy, who moved from town to town earning odd five-pound notes for painting one's portrait in oils or one's favourite view in water-colours.

Even Elizabeth seemed to have a distorted notion of the new-comers. Elizabeth was of a sparse and narrow build, with light, worried-

looking grey eyes and an undecided mouth. At forty she was as completely under the rule of her autocratic old mother as she had been at four.

"It would be ridiculous, of course, to go in the victoria," she said; "the pony-carriage will do quite well. But I think Luke might as well put on his livery."

"Put on his livery, when he's got those fowls to pluck before he goes, and all the windows to hose the minute he gets back! Why, he would have to shave, too—the whole afternoon wasted! At your age, Elizabeth, I might have expected a little more sense." The vigorous old lady actually snorted in her anger.

Elizabeth's nose grew a little pink, as was ever its wont when she was acutely hurt—and nothing hurt her quite so severely as reference to her age.

"Perhaps you'd rather not go at all," she said coldly. "I don't see that we can spare the afternoon if Douglas is bringing that American here to-night. I have the Worcester china to give out, and the silver, and to do the table flowers and make the salad, and fifty things."

"I've said I'll go, and I'll go," said the determined old lady. "Go and get on your hats. Cade, tell Luke the dogcart will do; Sholto has just come in it, and it will save time harnessing again."

She resented the loss of the afternoon herself, for she had a new man in the orchard whom she was anxious to follow up and surprise in some expected ignorance of pruning. But she was also alive to the duties of her position, and when Mrs. Beattie had told her of the motherless girl and her paralysed father settling down among them, she had at once determined to extend the Wendover hand to them. Still, it was quite enough, she considered, that it was the Wendover hand; any glove that came handy would do to cover it.

She looked critically at the two cottages as Luke drew up.

"What fools men are," she said; but this was merely the remark she always made when she saw the isolated places and remembered the story of their building.

"Why," said Elizabeth, "the other one is taken too. Look, the windows are open, and there's a man digging—two men."

And such, indeed, was the condition of Jonathan's cottage. The air of neglect that had so long hung over it was hardly dispersed, but undoubtedly it was occupied. Smoke was rising from its chimney, and its windows, still cobwebbed and opaque with dust, were flung up; several travelling-rugs were airing on a fence, and two or three trunks and portmanteaus still stood out on the verandah.

"Two men and a boy," said Elizabeth, as

they climbed down to the ground from the high step.

"Like the sums we used to do at school," said Cade. "Why, one of them looks like a gentleman."

"And one of them *is* a Chinaman," said Mrs. Wharton. "Isn't it Hop Ling, Elizabeth? I've a great mind to go and ask the rascal why he didn't come to the lettuce-beds on Monday when I had engaged him."

"Oh, I don't think I would, Mother," said Cade uncomfortably, for her digging gentleman appeared to her more and more deserving of the title as they drew nearer to where he was working close beside the low dividing wall.

But Mrs. Wharton was bent upon her defective Celestial; her wrath stirred again as she remembered the unsatisfactory lettuce-beds with which no one but a Chinaman seemed able to do anything. She walked to the wall and looked over.

"My good man," she said in the bland, patronising tone she kept for such of her tradesmen and dependants as had not offended her, "will you allow me to speak to your Chinaman? I engaged him to come to me last Monday, and this is Friday."

Her "good man" took off a blue cap and bent his head in the swift accustomed fashion not common to anybody's "good men."

" With much pleasure," he said. " John, a lady wishes to speak to you."

He moved away himself out of earshot, carrying his spade with him ; but the boy stopped work and looked and listened with interest as a boy will.

" Why you not come to me, John ? " demanded the lady. " All my lettucee they makee no hearts—every day get worse. Why you not come when I engage you ? "

Hop Ling regarded her with the magnificent unblinking serenity of his race.

" No savee," he said.

" You very bad man, John, you savee quite well," said Mrs. Wharton ; " why you not come Monday ? "

John remained imperturbable. " You no engagee me," he said.

" I did engage you : you say the same thing each time for excuse, John. Did you forget ? "

" Welly bad head top," said John gravely.

" Well, when you give me days ? " persisted Mrs. Wharton.

John surveyed the ground he was at work upon.

" Byemby, when all this done," he answered ; then he waved his hand over the twin garden in which the ladies were standing, " and byemby when all that done."

Mrs. Wharton's temper rose as the last hope for her lettuce died.

"You very untrustworthy fellow, John," she said. "Don't you know that the first engagement you make is the one you ought to keep? You ought not to make others until that is fulfilled."

John's face resumed its smooth bland look; the faint crinkles of intelligence that had appeared around the eyes died away.

"No savee," he murmured mournfully.

"Oh, mother," said Cade impatiently, "do come along. Can't you see he doesn't want to come and has no intention of coming? And I don't wonder, either, the way you follow him round to see if he is doing his work properly."

Mrs. Wharton took not the faintest notice of the outburst, but beckoned majestically to the boy, who was still resting on his garden-fork good-humouredly watching the fray.

He came at once, but in a guarded manner; he was a native of the district, and had been employed on the Wendover lettuce-beds before this himself.

"Kindly go and tell that man I wish to speak to him."

The boy crossed the ground to Cade's digging gentleman and gave the message, which was obeyed at once.

"You are——?" began Mrs. Wharton.

The man gave her a keen glance. "The present tenant of this cottage," he said.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Wharton; "so I imagine. It was your name I asked for."

Elizabeth's nose grew pink again, Cade's pale cheeks red.

"Scott Sheldon, at your service," he said, a little stiffly but not discourteously.

"I think you are probably not aware, Mr. Sheldon," said the undaunted old lady, "as you are doubtless a new-comer to Wyama, that in engaging the services of this man, Hop Ling, you have forced him to break an engagement he made to come to me for the whole of this week. My lettuce-beds and the asparagus-plots are almost ruined."

"I am sorry to hear this." Sheldon looked in rather a perturbed way at the Chinaman. "Why didn't you tell me this, Hop Ling?"

"No savee," said Hop Ling, smiling widely.

"Will you kindly make him understand that he is to come to me to-morrow for the week?" said Mrs. Wharton.

Sheldon rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," he said; "he accepted my engagement to come to me for three months, and I have already waited a week for him while he put the garden you are standing in in order. He told me he had no further engagement."

"Perhaps not. The race is not to be trusted as far as it may be seen," said Mrs. Wharton; "but now that you understand the situation

you will have the kindness to see that the fellow is at my house—Wendover House—at seven to-morrow morning. Good-afternoon." She gathered her black silk skirts a little more tightly in her hand and made to move away. Cade and Elizabeth clutched their sunshades closer to them, ready to follow. But the battle was not won.

The new tenant of Jonathan's cottage stood in silence a moment. He was rather above the average height, of a lean build, though well enough knit. The face was clean-shaven, and not without a certain look of power; the eyes a greyish brown, compellent. Not in the least good-looking, the girls decided, for it was with a square jaw and unsmiling mouth and hard young eyes that he was surveying them.

"I don't know that I can undertake that," he said slowly; "my work here is important—to me. To let the man go now would be a serious hindrance."

"And what about my lettuces?" said the indignant lady. "They are of no account, I presume?"

Sheldon's eyes grew harder. "If you honestly consider that a few lettuces for table are as important as a man's livelihood you may have him," he said.

"This is your livelihood?" The lady's gloved hand waved over the sloping, weed-choked place.

"It is."

"Oh, if that is so I suppose I must waive my claim," said Mrs. Wharton discontentedly; "but it means that we shall have no salads for weeks. My lettuce-beds——"

The young man flung back his head as if he had had enough of the subject.

"John," he said, "you will go and fulfil your engagement with this lady to-morrow."

But John backed precipitately away. "No —no," he said. "Me no plomisee to go to her never. Only say byemby. Me no likee."

"You will perhaps absolve me from blame," said Sheldon, and moved his spade-hand as if anxious to get back to work. But the old lady, with eyes full of anger, was walking swiftly up the path to David's cottage.

CHAPTER IV

AT DAVID'S

DAVID'S cottage, in the time of David himself, was merely one of the commonplace, weatherboard, mud-coloured places with which all Australian country towns are at first bespattered, until with leisure and the accumulation of money, there grows up the feeling for architecture on a more artistic and individual plan.

It had been possessed of the customary front verandah, the narrow hall with two circumscribed rooms on either side of it, and the kitchen with another small room or two at the rear, that made it of the identical pattern that was used in the making of three parts of the cottages in Wyama; as if houses were of just about the same importance to the scheme of life as Crimean shirts, and might just as readily be drafted out by the hundred dozen and scattered around, "ready made."

But Ines had happened along just as David had come up, sulky at the non-letting of his cottage, to put it in the painters' hands and see if "redding" it up a little would find it a tenant.

It is possible that David had latent artistic possibilities quite unsuspected by his wife. But it is just possible also that he was a mere human man, as well as a landlord, and Ines had turned her eyes upon him.

Anyway, before he went back to his shop-keeping in the city, he was committed to several improvements that afterwards, in colder blood, he hardly liked to tell Mrs. David about.

For instance, he had consented to letting Ines have it all her own way with the painting. Let her choose the colours as she would, which permission alone would have horrified Mrs. David, who knew as well as any one that to expect a girl, not quite twenty, to select durable colours, would be to expect a miracle.

Then Ines had demonstrated to David how sorely she needed air—that, in fact, she and her father simply could not breathe without air, though so many of the other people in the village seemed so constituted that they were able to do so in their homes. And she had wheedled him into taking some partitions down inside,—the one that made the hall, for instance, and the one between the two rooms that had been sitting-room and dining-room.

This gave her, although it opened directly on to the front door, a large and airy apartment that delighted her, although David looked at it with many misgivings when it was done.

"But I thought young ladies like you," he

said, " liked to have drorin'-room and hall and dining-room all separate. It's the first thing a poor woman thinks of, having them separate, after she's had to get along in one room for everything."

" Oh, we'll manage," said Ines joyfully, and her eyes sparkled so delightfully at the sight of her big room that David dismissed his qualms and consoled himself by recollecting that the partitions could go back when these people left and he got everyday tenants again. He even added a French window at the far end of the room, and with the despised partitions constructed beyond it a kind of summer room or verandah where the paralysed artist might have his sofa and be in the sunlight all day.

So when Mrs. Wharton and her daughters stepped on the verandah and found the front door open to all the winds of heaven, they found, instead of the dead little passage they were accustomed to find in such houses, the pleasantest of rooms spread out before them.

The plastered walls were distempered in a cool and delightful shade of green, except for a deep frieze of cream, on which Ines had herself painted here and there, in swift, telling strokes, a loose trailing pattern of nasturtiums and green leaves. Cream curtains hung fresh and untortured at the windows, a light stencil pattern of nasturtium leaves defining their borders.

The floor was polished, and had rugs here and there of green and white colouring. For the rest, a furniture dealer, come to appraise, would have found the room a tragedy and gone away with tears in his eyes.

For there was nothing but a low divan, piled with cushions in covers soft in texture and colouring, a few chairs, a low bookcase, a little round table under one window, and a larger one, square, under another.

On the walls pictures in plenty—delightful "bits" of foreign towns, an Alp, gleaming white out of darkness, a Spanish child face with unscrutable eyes and babyish lips, a Venetian house-front with its feet in green water that was exquisitely patched with shadow.

None of the pictures were of any great value, for Erwin had never been much more than a pretty trifler with the brush, but they were full of tender memories and delight for themselves. Flowers too, there were, here and there, tawny and gold and crimson velvet nasturtiums, lifting burning faces out of shallow brass bowls. Cade looked at their beauty in surprise : at Wendover House, where the rose-garden never failed and the orchid-house gave freely of its treasures, they had never thought of gathering such things as nasturtiums for the vases.

But here came the young mistress of the house—after they had rapped some half-a-dozen times.

" Oh, I am so very sorry," she said, " it is so hot too. The bell is broken, and I have not had it mended yet."

She found them comfortable seats, produced palm leaves, set a simple punkah in motion.

Mrs. Wharton unburdened her mind at once of the defaulting Chinaman ; she had to talk of something, and all her mind at the moment was concentrated on lettuces. Besides, it was as well the girl should know that the new neighbour had undesirable qualities. Then Ines found that she too had been unwillingly " undesirable " ; she had kept John from the Wendover lettuce-bed the whole of last week.

" But come and see what he has done," she said, after she had been graciously forgiven for not having known. " Oh, I am going to have such a lovely garden. I lie awake nearly every night planning it. Isn't gardening *lovely ?* I've never had a big one to myself before, though I've done wonders with window-boxes and little beds."

Mrs. Wharton was almost conquered. Cade and Elizabeth took but the most tepid interest in gardening, but with herself it was an all-absorbing passion. This eager face, all aglow with the subject, warmed her heart. She went outside again into the sunshine with her young hostess, and listened to the soaring plans as they walked round the domain.

Here was going to be a rose-bed, cream and

yellow roses only. No earth was to show at all, nothing but a carpet of deep purple pansies around the roses' feet. Delphiniums were going into this bed—all the sweet range of tender blues, and for their carpet, lobelia. Over that archway, wisteria was already growing; did not Mrs. Wharton think a coppery polyanthus planted on the other side would make a lovely tangle in the spring? That thin ring-barked gum tree with its branches all lopped close, was it not an eyesore in a garden? But here were a crimson and a white rambler planted at the base, and they were to be trained to make of it a pillar of fire and snow. This long, low dividing wall of crude field stones, did it not offer itself to a delicious scheme of small creeping things—periwinkle, mosses, lichens, virginia creeper? How could people have lived here and never done anything to it yet?

Mrs. Wharton entirely forgot her lettuces, forgot that her man waiting outside had those fowls to pluck when he went home. She poured out advice, threw what little cold water was necessary on the kindling schemes, but offered other schemes in their place. Such a spot was too exposed for delphiniums, but what about ten week stocks in all the mauve gradations? That corner was too shady for clumps of daffodils, but what about lilies of the valley?

"Too dear," said Ines decidedly. "I looked them up in the catalogue and they were ten

shillings a dozen. We are only allowing ourselves a pound for all the spring bulbs."

"And quite enough too," said the old lady, "far too much indeed. You will send no more orders to the seedsman, my dear, till we have seen that Wendover cannot supply you. I have twice as many lilies of the valley as I need."

In the background Cade and Elizabeth, profoundly uninterested, sighed softly, and recalled Ines to her duties. She carried them back into the coolness of her green and white room, and without leaving them produced the tea-things.

Cade and Elizabeth watched her in a fascinated way; their own belongings that had always so entirely satisfied them seemed suddenly clumsy, ugly—early Victorian. Their very frocks dissatisfied them, their good linen coats and skirts made by an expensive tailor. Yet what did Ines wear? It was only a white muslin with a pale blue sprig in it here and there. A blue ribbon made her waist-belt, a blue ribbon was threaded through the little muslin collar and knotted at the neck, a cluster of pink live roses was tucked into her waist-ribbon.

"She's like a girl in a book, or a poem, or a picture," thought Elizabeth, watching her enviously; "she looks as if she has never seen or heard anything ugly in her whole life. I wonder has she? I wonder what her life has been to make her like this?"

Later, when Mr. Erwin waked from his afternoon sleep, and was able to see the visitors on his sunny verandah for a little time, Cade put a question brusquely to the girl.

"If you came across something horribly ugly what would you do?" she said.

Ines looked quite startled for a moment.

"Where—what sort of thing?" she said.

"Anything—anywhere," said Cade.

Ines looked thoughtful. "I'd turn round and go some other way to avoid it," she said.

"If there wasn't any other way?" persisted Cade.

"I think I'd try to cover it up," said Ines, after a minute's pause, "grow flowers over it, or drape it over with something. What would you do?"

"Neither," said Cade. "I think there is a certain strength in ugliness. The world would be very tame if you made everything pretty-pretty like that. There are quite as many ugly things in nature as pretty ones, *I* think. It doesn't look as if we shall be very good friends, does it?"

"I think we might be very good enemies, though," said Ines, smiling.

CHAPTER V

AT JONATHAN'S

" Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be,
For my unconquerable soul."

HENLEY.

AT Jonathan's none of these changes had taken place. The mean hall, papered with a cheap, glazed paper, still confronted the open door. The front sitting-room, that in Mrs. Jonathan's time had been a shrine for a plush suite, a black and gold overmantel, and a bewildering number of the small articles which ladies make " out of nothing " for sale at church bazaars, was now practically destitute. There was a table it was true, but it had not even the decent covering of a cloth over its scratched, gaunt anatomy. There were two chairs. There was a packing-case, its top littered with paper-covered pamphlets and books on farming. Absolutely no other article. Across the passage a room was furnished as a bedroom: that is to say, there was a stretcher bed in it, while some clothes hung behind the door, and two or three portmanteaus,

expensive-looking, heavy affairs in tan leather, stood against the wall.

The next two rooms were entirely empty. The bath-room was furnished with its stationary galvanized bath, a towel and a pat of soap. The kitchen had the bare requisites for the plainest cooking, together with a table and a chair.

This was the home of Scott Sheldon, the eldest son of his mother who had been a widow, but not for long. Scott's own father had been a hard-working country doctor of unblemished reputation. His step-father, acquired when he was a little lad of six, was a baronet, impecunious, and with standards of honour that were puzzling at times even to a little lad of six. When Scott was ten, and the new little half-brother, Cecil, an exquisitely pretty four-year-old, the baronet died and left his widow very little but debts. A brother of the dead country doctor stepped forward at this point and gave Lady Barnsley a hundred a year for the education of his nephew, Scott Sheldon, family pride forbidding that the little fellow should be dependent on the baronet's invisible income.

Lady Barnsley still had two hundred a year, the fruit of careful provision for her by her first husband, but from her second husband's estate she realised little more than fifty pounds a year.

As she pointed out, therefore, to her eldest son,

the avuncular hundred for education was out of all proportion for such a purpose, and seemed an almost cruel contrast to the prospects of little Cecil, for whom no uncle, though he had several possessed of titles, money and honours, stepped forward and offered to assist to the extent of a suit of clothes.

Scott, a squarely built, plain lad with the big heart and fine nature of his father, agreed instantly.

"We'll go halves, of course," he said, "keep half for Cec and half for me."

"Perhaps your Uncle Evan wouldn't like that," said Lady Barnsley doubtfully. She was a delicate-looking, fluffy-haired woman, with appealing blue eyes, and the weak mouth that so often accompanies such.

"Oh, he won't mind," said Scott, "I s'pose he didn't think a hundred would go as far as you say you can make it."

"It would not run to a good boarding-school for both of you," said his mother, "though it would be just sufficient for you alone. But it would be enough for us to live here in this country town and for you both to go to the Grammar School."

Scott's face fell. He had so passionately wanted to go away to a big school and be a boy amongst boys.

Since the advent of his step-father they had lived a nomadic sort of life, now in Continental

hotels, now in narrow, fashionable quarters in London. For five years he had been like a plain, honest little English plant that asks nothing better than to be left to spread out its roots in some clean, free field, but is denied it. He had been pulled up and transplanted in so many sorts of strange soils that his roots began to have a numb sort of feeling.

And even now it might not be healthy, ordinary, school-boy life.

He looked round the drawing-room of the still fashionable little house that his mother had taken in a country town. It seemed to consist to his crude eyes chiefly of lamp-shades and cushions, and since these were so strictly guarded from boyish contact he felt that they must be among the very expensive things of life.

"We—we, couldn't we do without quite so many of this sort of thing, mother?" he said half timidly—"Education's a big thing, you know." His uncle, at the funeral, had impressed it upon him how important education was. The world outside—oh, he had had glimpses of that struggling, teeming world, Paris glimpses, London glimpses, glimpses in nearly all the big cities of the Continent—would claim him in another five or six years, and a thrill of fear passed through his boyish soul at the thought of getting into that fighting world without a weapon. His uncle had impressed upon him that education was the only weapon

when there was no wealth. Yes, he must make an effort to assure himself that the weapon would be good.

"Do without so many of what?" said his mother.

Scott instanced, timidly, the lamp-shades, those mammoth, rose-pink affairs of chiffon and fine lace, that might not be approached without a warning word, that gave so abominable a light one could not even learn one's home lessons by them, that were a constant source of danger from a match. Surely here, said his practical young mind, was the place to economise.

But his mother had wept, had called him barbarous in wishing to take from her her poor little comforts, had said he was as ruthless as his father, who had once actually asked her to leave overcrowded England and let him start his profession again in some new country like Australia.

"A country where I might have had to do my own work, a country where there are black fellows and bushrangers, and bush fires and other frightful things. How can you be so cruel, Scott? Look at me, do I look fit for the rough things of life?"

Scott looked at her and realised his barbarity. This frail little figure with the wet, blue eyes and the trailing dress of pathetic black, of course she must have her comforts. He would defend her lamp-shades for her with his life.

"That's all right, darling mother," he said, his own eyes full of tears, "you shall always have pretty things. I'll go to the Grammar School here and come home at nights. Then there'll be plenty left for Cec, won't there?"

Still Lady Barnsley was not quite satisfied; she had an uncomfortable feeling that the uncle might not quite approve of the transaction, though he had certainly told her that he left the details of the education to her since he hated details.

"I feel as if, perhaps, your uncle ought to know," she said weakly.

"Tell him," quoth Scott, seeing no reason for concealment. "Say I'm quite willing to go to the Grammar School. It's a rattling good school, they say. And that then there'll be enough for both of us."

But Lady Barnsley conveyed the resolution in her own way.

She stated the fact that she was most averse from sending her dear eldest son away from her own care to a public school. That he had expressed a great wish to go to the Grammar School here in the town where she was making her home, and that she was unwilling to thwart him. That, of course, keeping him at home would make a difference to her expenses, but that she thought by dint of careful management, she could make the hundred just suffice for the purpose.

The uncle, who had always hated detail, was

not too well pleased with the notion, but he disliked interference and imagined that a mother was the best person to leave to manage her son's affairs. So he merely continued to send his cheques quarterly, marked " For the education of my nephew, Scott Sheldon."

Two or three times in the next five years he journeyed all the way to the Little Mitcham Grammar School, to personally receive the head master's report and see his nephew. The report was invariably favourable; the head master said he had no more dependable, finer-natured lad in the school than Scott. Not clever, nor brilliant in the least, but hard-working, determined, full of spirit and courage. If he wanted brilliancy there was Cecil, now.

Scott brought Cecil up to be introduced to the gruff uncle who never would cross his mother's threshold. Cecil had the face of a chorister on a Christmas card, his mother's eyes, his mother's skin helped him to it; Scott had taken his swarthy complexion and keen, dark eyes from his father.

Cecil already—at ten—wrote verse that was without a doubt unique, kept ahead of his school-fellows in all class subjects, played both violin and piano in the manner of a young virtuoso, painted in water colour with no little skill, and withal, not uncommonly, carried off sports' prizes for fleet running, high jumping and so on.

His mother's pride in him was both pathetic and contagious.

Scott, living beside her, came under the influence of it, and soon his own pride in Cecil almost equalled hers. The gifted lad was lovable too; he poured out a wealth of hero-worship at Scott's feet, and never dreamed of undertaking anything of which Scott disapproved.

"A pardlike spirit, beautiful and swift," was the quotation that the wife of the head master, a poetic, sentimental lady, had applied to Cecil, and the quotation spreading into the school, had given the boy the nickname of "The Pard."

There was one thing unusual about him—his extreme susceptibility to pain and discomfort; another thing he had inherited from his mother, unlike Scott, who had his father's Stoic virtues of fortitude and endurance. As a baby, a smack on the arm had been enough to throw sensitive Cecil almost into convulsions. As a six-year-old, a fall, a cut knee, a bad bruise, brought so deathly a look to his face that onlookers used to be quite alarmed. To Scott, vigorous, well-hardened, it used to seem so pitiful a thing that on all possible occasions when pain might be borne by proxy, he took it on himself, and made Cecil stand by. There was the farmer's thrashing for the stolen apples—how many men are there in the world who have not just one stolen

apple blotting their boyhood's fair page! Cecil had been practically under the whip when Scott had rushed the farmer, game as a young bull-dog, and had hung doggedly on to his whip arm.

"Cut, you little ass," Scott shouted, as Cecil, white as a sheet, hung tremblingly near.

Upon which permission Cecil promptly dashed through the orchard gate, and made off down the road as if all the fiends of Hades were in pursuit.

Of course, Scott was no match for the farmer, though he had been able to delay matters; the man, a surly, ill-conditioned fellow, always at enmity with the school-boys, got the boy down, and inflicted such a thrashing for his interference, that Scott carried the wales on his body for weeks after.

Still, he reflected grimly, unpleasant as it was, it was better than if it had been Cecil; Cecil would have never come through it alive.

Similarly at school he saved Cecil's skin a dozen times in the course of the years they were there together, by cheerfully shouldering the younger boy's transgressions.

"This is Cec," he had said, proudly displaying him to his uncle.

The gruff fellow looked at the slight, beautiful boy, with the brilliant eyes and the delicately cut mouth.

"Hum," he said, and turned away indifferently. He had no notion whatever that he

himself had been paying Cecil's quarterly school bills, and Cecil's violin and piano lessons for so long. He had no notion that Cecil was better dressed than Scott, who in truth, as his mother often complained, never paid for dressing. Scott seemed happy enough, spoke affectionately of his mother, was evidently proud of the girlish-looking half-brother, and there the matter ended.

At nineteen Scott went to Oxford, partly on a scholarship that he had won by sheer hard and unremitting work, partly on what could be spared from Cecil's needs out of the hundred pounds.

His ambitions were not as soaring as Cecil's. Cecil wished to be the greatest musician, artist, and poet, the world had ever known. Scott felt a career like his father's would entirely satisfy him.

After three years at Oxford he began to walk the hospitals, and felt that his weapon for fighting the great world was coming closer every day to his hand.

And just at that point the gruff uncle died without making any will, and the son who returned from America to receive his inheritance saw no reason whatever for continuing that long-paid hundred a year to a cousin he had never seen.

Great consternation reigned in Lady Barnsley's breast, for Cecil's artistic habits grew more and more expensive.

She went to fling herself on the charity of her second husband's brother, a prosperous London merchant. She implored his aid in giving a chance to a youth acknowledged by all who knew him to be most rarely talented.

The merchant detested talent, distrusted it with all his heart. He sent his sister-in-law away weeping because the only offer of help that he made his nephew was the promise of a stool in his counting-house.

"He's got to take it, too," said Scott shortly, when acquainted with the mission. "Look here, mother, you and I have been doing our best to make a fool of Cecil. He's seventeen now, and no more fit for a man's work than a girl. All these accomplishments of his are very pretty, but just about as much use to him as a buttonhole of flowers would be in a shipwreck."

"But he may be one of the greatest poets of the century," wailed Lady Barnsley. She said nothing now of art, for she had secretly coaxed a great painter down to the boy's studio, and he had told her frankly that, though pretty and full of a delicate imagination, the pictures she had thought so great were in no respect a whit better than those of five out of every six of the students at any serious art class in London.

Similarly, a great musician, wheedled into a frank opinion, would say nothing beyond the fact that the boy had a good ear and an

accurate memory; he could not discern any sign of great promise.

But the only poet approached for opinion had declared that it was impossible to tell at such an early age, and had quoted Tennyson's "Juvenilia" as an example.

"Ten years hence England may ring with his name as a poet," the mother protested tearfully.

"Well," said Scott patiently, "taking a stool in an office isn't going to stop it. If he's going to be a poet it will out sooner or later. But if he isn't, what are you going to give him to fight the world with?"

His own boyish fear of that world where men must fight and struggle as soon as they were grown, had returned to him. His proposed medical career was at an end for him—for the present. He had counted hopefully on his uncle's help for two or three years more, and had looked forward to the day when he could go down to the kindly old fellow and tell him he needed it no longer. But this sudden cutting off left him just launched at sea and without an oar. He must put back modestly and shape that oar now for himself.

But experience and growing wisdom showed him the wrongfulness of the course his mother was taking with Cecil. Where stretched the fair, ever-smiling sea that she vaguely expected should see his voyaging? The lad must cease from playing in the shallows and at once learn

something of seamanship. Indeed, he was so insistent that Lady Barnsley finally gave in to him, and consented to Cecil going up to London and entering the sordid office. She nourished the secret hope that the old merchant would be so struck by his talent and winning ways that he would speedily make him a partner, which would, in some slight degree, compensate for the loss of his chances as a poet.

But Scott must actually see him into his uncle's care in London, and Scott must find some work that would enable them both to board together in the unpretentious boarding-house that was to serve until Lady Barnsley could dispose of her house in Little Mitcham and come to London.

Scott accompanied the "pard-like spirit" to the den of commerce and handed it over to the uncle—quite as grim and gruff a one as his own had been. Uncles seemed to him to shed all their illusions about life very readily.

The old merchant gave ten minutes of his time to conversation with Cecil, and then summoned his confidential clerk and delivered him over into that person's care.

"Take him and lick him into shape, Smith," he said. "I'm his uncle, God help me, but I wouldn't attempt the job myself."

Cecil walked after the clerk, the pink of mortification upon his face, which still possessed much of its choir-boy quality.

Scott, smarting for the boy, spoke up a little

warmly; instanced the mother's possibly unwise education, but stated that it was not too late, and that there was any amount of good in the boy.

The old merchant heard him out with patience; something in Scott's blunt manner and plain face took his liking, while Cecil's good looks and manners had done nothing but irritate him. He questioned him as to what he was doing himself.

"Looking for a job too," said Scott, with a rather grim smile.

"And what can you do? Piano and violin too?"

Scott had to confess to a moderate knowledge of Latin, Greek and the higher mathematics. Also to about six months' acquaintance with the complicated piece of machinery known as the human frame divine. It was to further that knowledge that he was "looking for a job."

The old man regarded him thoughtfully from under shaggy eyebrows.

"Can't offer you as soft a job as I've given that lily-handed nephew of mine. A pound a week he's to cost me for making a nuisance of himself—oh, don't tell me! I know the type."

"Give him his chance," said Scott good-humouredly.

"Well—aren't I doing it? A pound a week, just because your mother had blue eyes and cried. But she didn't cry over you—didn't mention you, I believe. How was that?"

"She knew I was able to shift for myself," Scott said.

"Hum. Proud at all?"

"Not unduly, I hope," Scott smiled.

"There's a billet vacant down in our office at the Docks. Two pounds a week, but it's take off your coat and sweat at it. What do you say?"

"I say thank you," said Scott, and stood up energetically. "I calculated that I was going to waste three months looking for something, and then that it wouldn't be much more than fifty a year. Thank you, sir."

The old merchant kept his eye on Scott. He let him "sweat at it" for nearly a year to test him; then, pleased with the result, gave him work in which he might use his brain and which brought with it a salary of two hundred.

Scott saved a hundred and twenty in the first year of it towards the medical course that was waiting, like a serial story, to be continued. The year after he saved a hundred. And both years he could have put more away only that he was continually helping Cecil, who was still drearily drawing his one pound a week and finding his tastes refused to be satisfied upon such a meagre sum.

Then came the great tragedy. The old merchant's name was forged to a cheque for two hundred pounds, and suspicion for three days pointed directly to Cecil. He at least had cashed the cheque.

The old man, blind with rage at his misused trust, set the law in motion.

The following day Scott walked into his private room without knocking, and stood before him with ashen cheeks and wild eyes.

"I did it," he said; "Cecil only cashed it for me."

The old man's rage increased, for here his trust had been greater. With Cecil he had known in his inmost heart that he should not actually prosecute, for the sake of the name which was his own. But he had no motive for upholding the stainlessness of the name of Sheldon, and with a frightful oath at his own misjudged trust, he rang up for a police officer before Scott had fairly finished his speech.

The trial was purely a formal matter, for no defence was offered, and within a month the boy—he was still little more than that—was beginning to work out his sentence of three years with hard labour.

At the end of it, of course, life in England was impossible. The medical career seemed broken for ever.

"You must find me fifty pounds immediately," he said sternly to Lady Barnsley, the day that he was released, "you and Cecil between you. I shall leave for Australia at the end of this week. You can sell something." He almost said contemptuously, "Sell your lampshades." During the long years in prison he had had time to think over many things.

His mother gave him the roll of notes tremblingly; the next day he walked out of her presence to his exile without one further word.

She tried to console herself by packing for him; she ordered him two or three new suits, ties, shirts, collars, forgetting that he was going to a land of "black fellows and bushrangers and other horrible things." She bought some handsome portmanteaus and a cabin trunk, and had his initials "S. S." printed on them in gold. He used to look at them grimly as they confronted him for weeks in his third-class cabin.

Cecil went down to see him off. The choir-boy expression had faded from his face and the brilliancy from his eyes. He looked merely what he was—a self-centred young man, prone to fits of extreme nervousness and despondency. One of the fits was plainly on him now as he timidly came up to where Scott stood on the deck watching the final preparations for departure.

"I—won't you say good-bye?" he said,—and tears sprang into his eyes as he said it.

A senseless fury possessed Scott. He could hardly restrain himself from taking his half-brother by the neck and dropping him over the side of the vessel into the mixture of bilge water and muddy Thames that lapped there. But he just managed to restrain himself.

"Pah!" he said, and turned on his heel and shut himself in his cabin till the vessel was well out to sea.

CHAPTER VI

RUST IN WHEAT

"Each life's unfulfilled, you see.
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy.
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
Starved, feasted, despaired—been happy."
Youth and Art.

At the commencement of the long voyage to Australia Scott had determined that there could be no longer any other life for him but one on the land. It was a detail that he knew rather less about the land than he knew of the Wolfian theory of the universe. He set himself doggedly to acquire what knowledge was possible when the only soil beneath his feet was separated by a several miles' depth of water. The ship's library was a well-endowed one, and the young nation's providence for its immigrants had stocked the steerage shelves with countless books and pamphlets teeming with information about Australian soil.

A first-class passenger, Munro by name, a man of great wealth and an ardent believer in the exhaustless resources of Australia, took much interest in the immigrants at the other

end of the vessel and spent many a day talking to them, answering their endless questions about the new land, and giving advice and the best information in his power.

Scott was not exactly an immigrant, for he had paid his full third-class fare, but he was glad to avail himself of Munro's kindly advice.

Munro on his part became greatly interested in the sombre-eyed, self-contained young Englishman, who seemed applying himself almost savagely to the task of acquiring all information possible about soils and temperatures and irrigation, and so on.

Munro's particular enthusiasm was the possibility of turning New South Wales into the richest wheat-growing district in the world. He believed that with the greatest ease she could entirely transcend with wheat the reputation she had in the world's ear for wool growing.

" Only, mind you," he said to Scott, " it's got to be a certain kind of wheat, and wheat without rust. That's the little task I've set myself to accomplish before I'm called to judgment up above. I've got to produce a wheat that will stand a test where all other wheats have failed. Do you know how many kinds of wheat there are ?—do you know anything at all of wheat ? "

" No," said Scott, " but I should like to—if there is anything in it. See here, Mr. Munro, I'm not a brilliant chap, but I've got fairly good powers of grafting at anything. Suppose I took

this up—this experiment business—do you think, as a man of business, that I could make a livelihood at it? I'll confess I'm attracted to it from your accounts."

"Let me show you a little further," said Munro.

And now the long days in the tropics saw the two men seated in a quiet corner of the deck, intent on the contents of one of Munro's boxes.

Children gathered near when first the contents were brought out, their imagination soaring at the sight of dozens of tiny bags securely fastened at the neck. But when, on these being opened, nothing appeared but grains of common wheat such as were daily flung to common fowls, why then they no longer made little nuisances of themselves, but let the two men alone.

Scott soon learned to discriminate between Bearded and Beardless Wheats, Red and White Wheats, Woolly Wheats. He could pick out the coarse Polish Wheat at a glance; the rarer Spelt Wheat carried his thoughts over the centuries: this was what the Swiss lake-dwellers and ancient Romans had cultivated and what still was grown in many mountainous parts of Europe.

Munro was enthusiastic over Mummy Wheat. The original Mummy Wheat, he told Scott, had been grown from seeds found in the Egyptian mummy cases—or at all events, such was the story. Wheat from these grains had been grown in England with ears having ten or eleven

branches, and as many as a hundred and fifty grains in one ear; whilst sixty ears had been produced from one single seed.

Scott wanted to know why any other sort was ever planted, and Munro was forced to acknowledge that, despite this prolific quality, this wheat did not serve the purposes of the farmers as well as many others.

That was the problem—to find a wheat that would serve all the purposes of the farmer, that would resist disease, grow in a hot climate, not be too particular about soil, and produce a phenomenal number of bushels to the acre.

Munro's enthusiasm communicated itself to Scott; the latter felt it might be a not unworthy life work to devote himself to the subject. Only would it pay? Could he make a livelihood?

Nearing Perth, Munro made him an offer. The proximity to the goldfields sent an electric tingle of restlessness among the immigrants. Why go to farther States and labour from dawn to dusk for countless years when nuggets might —just might—be picked up for the stooping?

A certain percentage decided to "stop off" and take their chance when the vessel reached the city; the steadier heads, and the married men, persuaded by fearful wives, reluctantly overcame the temptation. Scott was balancing the notion himself when Munro made his offer. Munro already had three experimental farms of his own where his wheat theories were under-

going test. Would Sheldon undertake a fourth ? In short, if he, Munro, hired a place in a locality he had in mind, would Sheldon undertake for two years—two seasons were the very least they might make suffice—to devote himself to the experiments ?

Scott's heart leaped at the idea. Nearing land his old boyish fear of plunging into the fighting world without a weapon had returned.

" I should like it of all things," he said.

" I propose to take a place somewhere to the west," Munro continued, " quite a small place will do. Doubtless I can get such a one as I have in my mind for fifty pounds a year. I should allow you fifty for working expenses and fifty for your own salary. How does that strike you ? "

" It strikes me as uncommonly generous," said Scott impetuously. " You know nothing of me, unless it is to know I am quite ignorant of the work. But I'll do my best to see you are not sorry."

Munro became a little more cautious : he was wealthy because he had never forgotten in his life to be, first of all, a good man of business. As a matter of fact, he allowed his other three experimenters salaries of a hundred and fifty a year, and none of them had displayed the grasp and ability that Scott did. Still, of course, some offset must be made for ignorance of land matters.

He looked keenly at the young man. "Of course, we will have the matter on a proper business basis," he said. "You have never talked of yourself or your people, I notice, but doubtless you can give me quite satisfactory accounts. For instance, what have you been doing since you left school?"

The colour dropped clean out of Scott's face.

"Eh?" said Munro, looking at him more sharply.

Scott looked him full in the face.

"I was three years at Oxford," he said, "six months walking the hospitals, eighteen months in a merchant's office—three years in Dartmoor —they were up a week before I came away."

Munro got up and flung tempestuously back to his own class. But nearing Adelaide eight days later he returned.

"See here," he said, "I've been thinking that over. I recognise that you weren't compelled to tell me. Most men would have kept it to themselves."

Scott merely looked out to sea.

"I've decided to let it make no difference. What was it for?"

"Forgery," said Scott, and looked physically sick for a moment.

"Hum. Well, have you got any money at all?"

"Thirty pounds."

"Better than nothing; I needn't give you

anything on trust in that case. I'll find the farm, and send in just the necessary implements. At the end of each three months I'll pay you a visit, and if all is satisfactory, pay you your salary. Will that do ? "

" That will do, thank you."

Munro recollected that the salary for that length of time would amount to twelve pounds ten, an incredibly paltry sum it seemed to himself at that moment.

" At the same time," he added, and a little more genially, " I have no objection to you making whatever you can for yourself out of the farm, after all the wheat experiments are seen to. You will naturally have much time over. I'd advise you to try a little dairying or poultry. You might even run a few sheep. It will all be experience to you."

" Thank you," said Scott, " I'm more than satisfied." He swallowed a lump in his throat. " You shan't regret it, Mr. Munro."

" I hope not. I hope not," said Munro, and hastened back to the first-class deck. He might be employing Sheldon, but he felt diffident about lingering any longer for those long talks with a man who had been in Dartmoor three years.

Landed in Sydney, Munro cast around for his new farm, and settled upon Wyama.

The Whartons were friends of his of many years' standing; and the country around was

country upon which he had long cast an approving eye. When he found Jonathan's farm was to let, a place with just the soil and slope to suit his experiments, he at once took it upon lease. At Wendover House he could always count upon pleasant hospitality when he ran up to see how the experiment was working.

Nothing could have been arranged more comfortable he considered. There was even an excellent Government farm in an adjacent town, where his new disciple could go once or twice a week for the agricultural lectures that were delivered there by an expert.

He returned to Sydney within two days, and presenting Scott with his railway ticket—with only just a shade of doubt in his eyes—he urged him to get away and begin operations without any further delay.

And so Fate, who had been sitting aloft holding the separate threads of two lives so wide apart for so many years, now with a decisive movement of her hands brought them close, close together.

There was nothing any longer but a low stone wall dividing them from actual union.

CHAPTER VII

HYACINTH

Scott himself, however, at this period, would as soon have thought of crossing that low stone wall and entering into communication with the bright-haired girl on the other side of it, as of hammering on the doors of heaven and demanding speech with the angels within.

It was Hyacinth who arranged the whole matter.

Ines had refused to have a competent servant installed in her cottage. "We really can't afford it," she said to Mrs. Beattie, who was demonstrating the impossibility of the girl managing her own work.

"Can't afford it!" repeated Mrs. Beattie, "and you've just sent an order to the florists for bulbs and seeds and plants! And all those frightfully expensive art books in there that have just come! Why, you must have more money than you know what to do with!"

Ines was used to Mrs. Beattie's well-intentioned, penetrating ways by this time.

"Ah but," she said gravely, "those are

luxuries. Father and I have always been able to supply ourselves with the luxuries of life by going without the necessities."

Mrs. Beattie stiffened as she always did at irreverence.

"That is simple nonsense, of course," she said; "there are some things every one must have."

"But who is to decide what those things must be?" said Ines. "One's neighbours or one's self?"

"What is an actual necessity for me, must be the same for you. The things themselves decide," said Mrs. Beattie.

"Sideboards with canopy tops?" said Ines mischievously—Mrs. Beattie continually bemoaned the loss of that bargain at the sale.

"Ah well, you will live to regret missing that yet. It would have filled up that long, bare wall, and think of the things it would have held."

"But, then, I couldn't have afforded anything for it to hold," protested Ines. "No, no; father's motto for ever!"

"And what is that, pray?"

"Take care of the luxuries and the necessities will take care of themselves."

Mrs. Beattie sighed patiently, and attacked the question of a servant again.

A strong woman from a cottage ten minutes' walk away came in night and morning to assist Mr. Erwin, and move him from his bedroom to

the sunny verandah or the sitting-room. She also did the scrubbing and laundry work of the cottage.

Mrs. Beattie was much opposed to the employment of this woman, who added to her crime of not coming to church that of drink.

"It would be money into your pocket to give her up, and take a strong, capable general, who would manage everything for you and help your father too."

But Ines had come to lean on the woman who drank and never went to church. She was a big, tender-hearted creature, who had nursed a crippled husband devotedly for years, and worked nobly for his support. It was only after his death that her loneliness had betrayed her into drink. Since David's cottage had been taken, and the wide eye of its lamp looked down all through the long, dark evenings on her little home at the foot of the hill, she had pulled up remarkably. It reminded her that some one was depending upon her again.

"She suits father so wonderfully," said Ines, "no capable general could have the knack of those big bony hands of hers. No, no, you must leave me Mrs. Shore."

But in addition to Mrs. Shore's salary the girl felt quite unable to take a servant in the house.

"Apart from the fourteen or fifteen shillings a week for her wages she would double my bills,

and never let me into my own kitchen," she said, " and father loves my cooking."

In the end, however, she consented to having a " State girl " to help her, for she grew to grudge the time the household tasks took her away from her invalid.

It was Mrs. Beattie who, in her post of district visitor for the State children drafted into homes in the locality, suggested this means of help.

Ines listened to the details with profound attention. She might, she learned, become possessed of an able-bodied girl of twelve to sixteen, who was one of the many hundreds of orphans fathered and mothered by the State. The girl would come to her with a good stock of clothing, but when that was worn out the clothing would be the employer's own charge.

" Unbleached calico is good enough, and strong lilac prints—you would have some old clothes of your own also," commented Mrs. Beattie, " that question need not trouble you."

No actual wages were to be paid it seemed, though Ines must send a sum of seven or eight shillings a month for the State to bank to the account of its orphan, which sum at the end of the period of orphanhood, namely sixteen, would be handed to the girl together with her freedom.

Also a trifle of weekly pocket-money must be paid, and doctors' bills met in case of illness.

The other items on the great blue document

sent by the State for signature need not worry them, Mrs. Beattie assured father and daughter. A good home with respectable people, that was the main point upon which the would-be-fatherly State insisted.

"My only fear is that Ines will be too lax, Mr. Erwin," Mrs. Beattie said, shaking her head at Ines; "they want keeping up to the mark—these girls—little wretches some of them are. Kindness seems to demoralise them, but with a strict hand, I have seen some of them turn out quite well."

Still it was not without misgivings Ines awaited the arrival of the girl, who after some months' delay, was assigned to her. She was thirteen, stated the document, and her name was Eliza Hopper.

When one stood on the verandah and looked out at dusk with wide eyes on the world that lay stretched out in billows to the horizon line, and reflected that one had consented to take an entity from that world, a flesh-and-blood girl, Eliza Hopper, aged thirteen, and be responsible for her welfare, moral and physical, one felt a sudden shrinking of courage. Suppose one failed? Suppose some day, somewhere, a deep voice asked, "What did you do with Eliza Hopper, aged thirteen?" Ines began to wish she had not been so much in haste to get a somebody, for whom she must be responsible, to wash her dishes.

But then through the dusky garden came the form of Mrs. Beattie, followed close behind by a small, square figure dragging a telescope basket.

At the gate twinkled the lights of the yellow sulky that had cheerfully added to its day's duties the task of calling at the station for the State orphan, and delivering her into the hands of her future mistress.

"So very good of you—thank you so much," Ines said, kissing the grim Rectory lady with much warmth. The Rectory lady liked the young girl's kisses; there was a warmth and spontaneity about them that appealed to a long-chilled heart. Ines never seemed to take for granted the kindnesses done to her; they always seemed to her lovely things, and when done by some one whose life was congested with such services, touching things.

"But you will come in and have dinner—do, dear; there are some lovely quail Mr. Wharton sent, done on toast and with buttered bread-crumbs." The girl urged her towards the verandah.

"No, no—choir practice night, and I must see Bobbie and Fred started at their home-lessons. Couldn't possibly waste the time. She's small, but may answer."

Ines had taken a small, rough hand in hers in the darkness; that was the only welcome she had yet had time to give to the State orphan. But now she drew her forward.

"And this is little Eliza," she said; "I am so glad you have come to help me, dear. Are you tired? Was the journey very long?"

"No," said a sullen voice.

"No, Miss Ines!" corrected Mrs. Beattie sharply.

"No, Miss Ines," muttered the girl.

Ines gave the rough, cold hand another gentle little pressure.

"See, dear—you sit on the step a minute," she said; "I want to take Mrs. Beattie to the gate."

Tucked in the sulky, Mrs. Beattie seemed too anxious to start.

"A nasty, sullen little wretch, I'm afraid," she said; "I'm so sorry. I particularly asked the Matron to select me a nice one. I suppose she was the only one. Still, I'll do my best to exchange her for you if she doesn't answer. Remember, a strict hand—that is what they want. They say she can work well and she's past the school age, so you won't have to send her away for half a day."

"You have been very, very good," said Ines, "and I dare say she is not sullen at all—just shy. I should be desperately shy myself in her place, poor little soul."

The yellow sulky bumped away. "Remember, a strict hand," floated back through the dark.

"A strict hand!" assented the young laughing voice.

And at Jonathan's, Scott went in, content, to his tea. He had heard her voice yet another time.

Ines took the little girl into the pleasant light of the cottage, and up to the sofa where the invalid lay.

"Here is my little helper come out of the darkness, father," she said.

Erwin laid his well hand over the red one that still grasped firmly the handle of the Japanese basket. He looked at her compassionately; she was such a plain, dull, sulky-looking atom.

"Out of the darkness into the light, like a little moth," he said whimsically; "well, I hope we shan't burn your wings. You have wings, haven't you—tucked away somewhere under that grey cloak?"

The girl lifted sullen eyes.

"No," she said. Then she looked half aggressively at Ines. "I mean, No, sir."

"Oh yes, you have," smiled Ines; "they are folded just now, that is all. Nice, gauzy wings that will let you float anywhere you like. I will show you them some day."

The girl sighed. She was used to all sorts of people—kind people, cruel people, people who were indifferent. But she had not come across mad people before.

"Come along and have some tea," said Ines, and swept her off to the kitchen. There, on a small table that held pretty china and a vase of

pansies, was spread a pleasant meal that caught the girl's eyes instantly.

"But you must take your hat off first, and put down the basket," said Ines, and led the way across the passage to a little room—a dainty little room with the bedstead enamelled pale blue, and the box dressing-table and washstand covered in a soft cretonne, patterned in big blue daisies. Pictures on the wall, happy refreshing things, not just crude almanacs. On the dressing-table a blue vase filled with pink roses.

"Now wash, and take off your hat, and then come out to your tea," Ines said.

"Aren't you 'fraid I'll mess your room?" said the girl fearfully; "I can go out to the tap or to me own room."

"This is your room," smiled Ines.

The girl looked disbelievingly at the flowery bedspread and the pink roses, then distrustfully at the pictures, but said nothing at all. When Ines came back she found the girl had carefully put her hat and grey cloak under the bed to save "messing the counterpin." She had also unstrapped the telescope basket that held all her possessions, and she directed Ines' attention to the written list that was pasted inside the lid.

"Matron said for you to look through straight off," she said.

"But not when there are two hot little

birds waiting for you in the kitchen," said Ines.

"Straight off," said Eliza; "here, I'll sing out and you tick them off. One best dress—under there, the plaid one; two working-dresses; four night-gowns——"

"Nonsense, nonsense, to-morrow will do," said Ines; "come to tea."

"It's the rule," said Eliza sulkily.

"Not my rule," said Ines; "come along at once."

But they did their duty by the Institution's rule the next day, and all the orphan's wardrobe was laid out in stacks on the bed. The underclothing was of serviceable, unbleached calico, made without a vestige of trimming. "Some of the girls crochet lovely and put it on their best things," Eliza said; "there was one going to teach me, but she left."

The State did not harrow the feelings of the orphans it sent away by insisting on a uniform, but the Matron could not think of beauty when she went to select materials, while the demands of serviceability pressed so hard. Yet she not infrequently was liberal with colour in the matter of best dresses, wotting that the grey woof of life for her charges demanded an occasional brilliant thread. But she had no discrimination.

Eliza was a sallow, peak-faced creature with inky hair cut quite short and dull grey eyes.

And her best frock was a creation of green and red plaid, the material so thick and stout that when set in gathers round the waist, as was the customary pattern in the Institution, it stuck out in clumsy folds, and made the child look as broad as she was long.

She gave the dress a savage tweak as she held it for Ines' inspection.

"'Twas bought for Jess Jenkins," she said, "on'y Jess didn't like it, and she could always get round Matron; so they said it could do for me. I wanted vilet like Lucy's. Now I've got to wear it two years. I like my workings better."

The "workings" were dark lilac prints made in a shapeless fashion, straight from the neck. Stout aprons of holland were supplied in good number.

The boots seemed the sorest spot, however, in the outfit. There was one stout pair of calf boots, in nowise different from boys' bluchers.

"They make your feet *that* tired," said Eliza, with a sigh, "I'd much rather be barefoot."

And there was another pair, calf also, but cut a little more with regard to the shape of a foot.

"Me Sunday ones," said Eliza. "I'm goin' to do like Jess Jenkins. She saved her sixpences—you got to give me sixpence a week pocket, it's the rule—and she got a pair o' tans, just lovely, two straps and a buckle, four and six."

"Put them all away—quickly," said Ines. The crude, ugly garments positively hurt her eyes.

Eliza laid them on the shelves that a carpenter had put up for the purpose.

She looked admiringly at the said shelves; Ines had treated them just as she did her own—covered them with pale blue wallpaper, and put pale blue bags of lavender here and there. The whole was hidden by a curtain of the daisied cretonne.

"It's a real shame to cover 'em up with my ugly things," the girl said.

"Do you *like* pretty things?" Ines said, though she knew she might just as well have asked did she like flowers, and sunlight, and rainbows, and the colours on the breasts of birds. The instinct is God-given and universal.

The girl began to cry. "I never get none," she said, "everything I get's ugly. Matron, she thinks anything does for me 'cause I'm bad looking. Lucy, her hair curls, and they give her blue ribbing—Matron's sister did. Christmas I wanted the box with shells on it off the tree—all lined with pale blue. And I got a frog that was a pincushion. Threw it away next day, so I did. Jess, she got the shell box, and she'd got a handkicher sashy too."

Ines put her arm round the poor little ugly thing.

"See here, dear," she said, "I'm going to

look after you now. I'll make you a new lot of clothes, and you shall help choose the stuffs yourself. I told you I was going to find your wings for you, didn't I ? "

Mrs. Beattie was shut up with a cold for a fortnight, and unable to do anything to effect the change she had spoken of. But when at last she knocked at David's cottage she imagined Ines had managed the exchange herself; for the door was answered by a smiling-faced girl, who wore the neatest of pink print frocks, with a white muslin apron made with frills, and white muslin collar and cuffs.

Ines had gone down to the village to the post, but the little maid was quite equal to the event; she ushered the visitor in to wait, and she offered a new book and a magazine to while away the time, reappearing after a few minutes with the tea-tray, just as Ines always had it.

" When did you come ? " demanded Mrs. Beattie.

Eliza smiled. " You brunged me yourself," she said.

" You are not Eliza Hopper," said Mrs. Beattie decisively.

" No, ma'am," said Eliza happily, " Miss Ines said as I could choose a new name, and I choosed Hyacinth."

" What absurd folly ! " ejaculated Mrs. Beattie, and Ines returning at the moment, and

Eliza withdrawing, she proceeded to dilate on the excessive folly of unsuitable names.

"Yes, I know it sounds a little absurd," said Ines penitently, "and I did suggest less fantastic ones. I hoped she might like Rosie, or Eva, or Lily, or Beryl—something pretty and simple. But I found she had such a frantic passion for the name of Hyacinth that I yielded. I told her, though, I should probably call her Cynthia before people, and we would keep Hyacinth for private use."

"It will entirely unfit her for life," protested Mrs. Beattie.

"I think not," said Ines gently; "there's a pink hyacinth out in the garden, and she's got an idea that she would like to make herself just as fresh, and clean, and fragrant as that. It is a pathetic little ambition, but it won't do any harm."

"My dear," said Mrs. Beattie, "you are hopeless. When you have lived in the world as long as I have done, you will find this sort of thing does not wear."

"Shall I?" said Ines, with wistful eyes—"I wonder shall I?"

CHAPTER VIII

OUT OF THE STORM

" He looked at her as a lover can ;
She looked at him as one who awakes ;
The past was asleep and her life began."
The Statue and the Bust.

It was Hyacinth who broke down the stone-wall barrier, and brought the grey thread of life on Jonathan's side into actual communication with the gold thread on David's side.

It was a wild, wet evening, and the eyes of the two cottages blinked out as if through a haze of thick tears on the village below.

Mrs. Shore's invariable hour for attention to the invalid was seven o'clock ; not once before had she missed it. But to-night it was eight, and Ines went to peer again and again through the darkness for a sight of the angular, familiar figure.

Erwin was tired, inclined to be fractious with the waiting. He would not listen to Ines' suggestion that she and Hyacinth should between them move him in his invalid-chair into the bedroom, and help him on to the bed. He declared that he would stay where he was all

night; but he plainly felt much injured and upset.

At last Hyacinth came to the door and made round, excited eyes to denote to Ines that her presence was required in the kitchen.

The girl slipped away from her father's side, closed the door, and hastened outside. Mrs. Shore had arrived at last, but the vision was much more terrifying than reassuring. She was plainly suffering from the effects of drink, and was such a mud-splashed, soaking creature, it was difficult to recognise her for the same trustworthy, respectable woman who had come and gone so long.

"I said as I'd come, and I done it," she said, and plunged across the kitchen. "See that"—she displayed a bleeding forehead—"fell over a log. See that"—she held out an arm dripping with mud—"fell in the creek. Six times I've been down on my blessed nose this night. But said as I'd come, and I done it."

Ines was quite white with the shock.

"You can go back at once, Mrs. Shore," she said; "I am ashamed of you and much disappointed."

"Now then—none of your talk," shouted the woman; "get out of the way, and I'll go and get him to bed. Oh I'm drunk sure 'nough, but not too drunk for that."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Ines spiritedly; "do you think I would have him

upset by seeing you in this state ? Go back at once—I don't want a noise out here." She took the woman's arm, led her firmly to the door and opened it.

But then she paused aghast. The storm had increased in fury, and beat wildly in their faces at the opening of the door. One could not have turned a dog out—much less a woman who had been so long a tower of strength for them. She shut the door again and looked helplessly at her visitor.

" N'more of this," said Mrs. Shore, " I've got to get that man to bed. Out of the way or I'll lay about with my hands."

Ines walked across and locked the door that led from the kitchen into the house.

" Hyacinth," she said in a low voice, " I'm sorry, but I'm afraid she must have your bedroom to-night—I'll lock her in. You can have a bed made up in mine."

Hyacinth's eyes went round with horror. That muddy, dishevelled figure in the pale blue room round which she had twined a very passion of love!

" There's yer pa's bell," she said, too agitated to remember that she was learning not to use this phrase.

" Come with me," said Ines, " I can't leave you alone with her. Come along—I'll lock the door after us, and leave her in here for a time."

" Miss Ines, she'd clean ruing my room,"

wailed the little girl. "Oh, I know 'em! me aunt was took same way once a week, and me mother too—only not so ofing. They're fair terrors, worse'n men a lot."

Erwin fretfully wanted to know wasn't that Mrs. Shore's voice he heard, and why didn't she come and put him to bed.

"Yes, it is her voice," said Ines, thankful that the storm had been able to drown its significant loudness, "but she is not well, dear. Will you wait a little longer, patiently, while I see what I can do with her?"

"If she's well enough to walk up here, she is well enough to do all I want," Erwin said crossly.

"She is frightfully wet; I must give her some dry clothes. I'm afraid you *must* wait, dear," Ines said.

Her brain was working rapidly. Perhaps there was something one could give to intoxicated people to sober them suddenly, and bring them to their senses! Hyacinth would know, possibly—Hyacinth, who held keys to much strange knowledge of which she herself was ignorant.

She spent a few minutes pacifying her invalid, finding him a fresh magazine, begging him to have patience. Then she slipped away again to confer with Hyacinth. And there was no sign of the girl!

The bedrooms were empty, the little lobby

near the kitchen where a moment since the pink frock had been standing, showed bare. She was not in the bath-room, not in the narrow passage that ran along the kitchen quarters, not in the little blue bedroom for which she had so desperately feared " ruing."

There remained nowhere but the kitchen, and the key of that was in Ines' own hand.

Then the back door was opened by a hurried hand, and in burst the little girl, triumph on her face. She wore a man's coat and a man's soft hat; just behind her was Scott Sheldon.

" He'll pretty soon fix things for us," she said, her voice bursting with pride in her deed. " I was a muggins not to think of him afore."

Ines, startled, turned to the new-comer who had stridden hastily across the threshold he had never thought to cross, and had closed the door in the face of the wild storm outside.

" You must certainly let me help you, Miss Erwin," said Scott, " it is a most unpleasant position for you. Where is she ? "

Ines showed her key. " I was so afraid of her getting to my father and upsetting him. Yet such a night—I couldn't let her go out into the storm again, could I ? She is soaking wet as it is. What can we do ? "

Scott rubbed his chin a moment. " Where does she live ? " he said, " I'll soon marshal her home and tell her people to see her into dry things. She can't stay here, whatever happens."

"Right at the foot of the hill," Ines said, "and she has no people at all. She would lie there wet till morning. I have a little bedroom——"

"No, no, no," cried Hyacinth.

"Dear, we could take all the pretty things away first, and make it nice again to-morrow."

"No, no, no," Hyacinth said, and the tears gushed out wildly, "the stable—chuck her out in that. She'd be dry there, and I'll lend her my blankets."

"Why," said Scott, "I might have thought of it before—I have several empty rooms—she shall have one of them; we can manage some sort of a shake-down for her. Perhaps you will give me some dry things for her."

"But oh, what a trouble for you," said Ines distractedly. "How can I calmly push my troubles off on to your shoulders?"

Scott's sombre face gleamed with a sudden smile; it was like a touch of sunshine on a winter landscape.

"See how much broader they are than yours," he said.

"But, but——" said Ines; then she gathered comfort from his eyes, clear, warm, hazel, that were telling her he was most honestly glad to be of service to her.

"Ah well," she said, "I thank you with all my heart."

"An' I do too," said the voice of Hyacinth,

quivering with delight. "Let me come an' help—oh, bless you, I know how to manage 'em —there was me aunt, she——"

"Now see here, Miss Erwin," said Scott, "you must please obey orders and let me take charge. The first order is that you go away into the house and sit down quietly. This small woman will help me far better than you can. She has given me to understand that she knows the business."

"Me aunt," began Hyacinth proudly—"me mother, but not so ofing. An' in our street there——"

"I must see her dry first," said Ines, and opened the child's coat—"yes, see, she ran to you in her print frock; it is dripping."

"Yes, yes," said Scott, "I had forgotten; the water was pouring off her."

"My troubles!" said Hyacinth, "nothink matters now me bedroom's not goin' to get spiled."

But Ines hastened her to that beloved apartment, and saw a hasty change effected, though the girl clung to hat and coat.

"He lent me 'em," she said, "I'm goin' back with him to help him fix her up. I don' mind what I do for 'er now she ain't goin' to have me bed."

But Scott would have no feminine help at all in the removal. He dismissed Ines into the security of the house, impressing it upon her

that her part must be to keep the invalid from worrying. He kept Hyacinth a moment or two to hold the door open for him. Then in he marched to confront the angry, powerful woman, who was beginning to batter at the door and throw tins about to testify to her disapproval of the locked door.

"My word, he mus' be strong," Hyacinth said, admiringly recounting after the event, "he jus' tooked her by the arm an' she fought him like anything, but he never let go and off he marched her into the rain, same as if he'd been a bobby running her in."

He came back after twenty minutes or so for dry clothes for her. Luckily there were a working-dress, shoes and stockings that the woman kept in the laundry for use on wash-days. Ines added blankets and other comforts.

"I have made up a fire for her," he said, "you can put her out of your thoughts now. She is a good deal more comfortable than she deserves to be."

Then off he went again.

Ines had to break it to her father that Mrs. Shore would be quite unavailable to-night.

"But Hyacinth and I can manage beautifully," she said.

"Go away," said Erwin, "I shall stay where I am all night. Now, go away—you only upset me."

But there was knocking again outside, and here was Scott back yet again.

"Now I have come to help your father into bed," he said in the most businesslike fashion. "It is the only thing that will give our unfortunate friend a chance to go to sleep. She has it on her mind that she hasn't seen him comfortable, and she is not so lost, it is plain, that she can bear the thought of his discomfort."

Again there was the natural disinclination to trouble a stranger; then again Ines found reassurement in the man's eyes: he was the one under the obligation, not she.

She took him in to her father, and introduced him as their neighbour who was kindly giving Mrs. Shore a room this wild night. She set them talking, and brought coffee both to cement the sudden acquaintance, and to warm Scott after his wet journeyings.

A sudden remark of Sheldon's precipitated them into a warm friendship. He was leaning back in his arm-chair, the delicate china cup in his hand, pictures, books, cushions, all the gentle touches of life to which he had been stranger now for years, once more around him. That hideous chasm of years seemed suddenly gone. He might have been back in Lady Barnsley's lamp-shaded drawing-room, sipping his after-dinner coffee.

His eyes, wandering along the pleasing green wall that Mrs. Beattie had wanted to fill up with the red sideboard, was arrested by a picture.

"Why," he said, "that's the bridge at Little Mitcham!"

Erwin's canvases never soared to great subjects. He had practically never outgrown the desire to paint moss-covered mill-wheels, and rustic bridges, and ruined churches, that assails most art students in their very early days. But the years had taught him to handle them more dexterously. This was the old bridge at Little Mitcham, it was true, but the old air hung about it, soft and strange, and the old skies of boyhood looked down on it, and the water that lapped the sloping green sides was the same smiling water in which Scott's eyes had so often been reflected. In the near distance among the trees a grey tower was suggested with a skilful flick or two of purple paint. Scott had not the slightest trouble in recognising it for the tower of his old Grammar School.

Erwin was delighted. The picture had always so pleased himself that he could not bear to part with it. He was so often dissatisfied with his work; he was able to realise that he had only been given the artist's eye to see

> "The beauty and the wonder and the power,
> The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
> Changes, surprises,"

not the hand that might worthily make these live for other eyes to see.

But he had almost satisfied himself with this little picture. He had snatched it out of the heart of a warm autumn landscape, and here,

He laid his finger on one end of the bridge.
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twelve thousand miles away, a wild storm outside, it glowed out on his walls so warm and vivid it first caught the eye of the visitor, and then forced his instant recognition.

"You really know it?" cried Ines.

He had set his coffee-cup down and gone to look closer.

"I jumped off at that spot"—he laid his finger on one end of the bridge—"when I was ten to save a boy."

Ines had not time to commend the courage of the act before he added to the statement—

"It was not that his life was in danger—merely his best hat. Probably it was to save myself too—he was my brother and so much younger I should have been held responsible had it gone down."

"But why should you have jumped?" said Ines; "it looks deep—why didn't you run over the bridge and down the bank—and—and hook it out with a stick in the approved fashion?"

Scott was looking at the little picture with smouldering eyes.

"Because there was always a good deal of the young ass about me, I suppose," he said slowly; "I saw it was turning over and would soon fill and sink, so I took the short cut. And it's not quite as deep as you've made it look, Mr. Erwin. I touched the bottom and nearly smashed my foot—remember I was laid up all the holidays for it."

" Oh," said Ines, " was it really as shallow as that, are you sure—sure ? If you say so I shall break my heart afresh."

" I'm afraid it couldn't have been much over four feet, or I shouldn't have hurt myself so badly," said Scott.

" And that was in—oh, about what year would that have been ? "

Scott deducted fifteen years from his present age.

" Must have been about ninety-two," he said.

" And we were there—when, father ? "

The date was on the picture, the artist reminded them—they turned it eagerly over—August ninety-one.

" And four feet deep ! " Ines cried again. " Listen, father, you shall now hear one of the hidden tragedies of my life. The time you painted that—do you remember?—I was with you—a scrap of a girl who was quite happy to play for hours near you while you painted. I had a little china doll—had just bought her in a shop in the High Street of Mitcham, and something about her blue eyes or black-painted head appealed to me passionately. I had never loved a doll so dearly on so short an acquaintance. Well, I was holding her up to look over the side of the bridge at the mighty river rolling beneath—and she fell in."

Erwin was listening, amused.

"I don't remember that," he said; "I do remember being undecided whether to put you in the picture leaning over in your white frock, but thinking better of it as you seemed so restless."

"Restless! Of course I was," said Ines, "I remember my tragic situation as keenly as possible. On the one hand my doll, gone, sunk out of sight beneath the cruel waters. On the other—you. All my little griefs I knew were so real to you that if I told you you would plunge in and perhaps be drowned in trying to save her for me."

"It would have depended on my coat," said Erwin. "Possibly if it had been very old and the day very warm—well, there is no knowing what foolishness I might have been guilty of."

"Picture me," said Ines, "torn to pieces like that! No one knows what a frenzy of agony a child can endure. My heart positively bleeds for myself at this distance. And you dare to tell me it was hardly four feet deep, Mr. Sheldon."

"You could have waded in and got it with a stick," smiled Scott.

Erwin acted now like a spoiled child. Nothing would induce him to go to bed. Ines must get out the sketch-books and look through and see if there were any other bits of Mitcham or the neighbourhood.

And so an hour or two flew past. Scott's boyish pleasure in the ray of sunlight that had

fallen athwart his life, soon died down. He grew nervous—anxious to get away. Yet he must await Erwin's pleasure. He could not seize the great chair and push it off to the bedroom, and force the man to bed. But he grew quieter, quieter; presently he found he was not even allowing himself to meet Ines' bright gaze.

But at last Erwin consented to be helped to bed.

"A very decent fellow," was the ultimatum when Sheldon was gone; "positively helped me just as well as Mrs. Shore does. He's coming in the morning, too, if she isn't better. We shall find him a pleasant neighbour, I can see. Very decent of him to come to the rescue like this. Plainly a man of a good deal of discernment and education."

Ines said little. Scott had not seemed in the least eager to come again, had plainly been anxious to get away last night. All that he seemed bent on doing was helping them over the difficulty Mrs. Shore had made.

He had certainly not grasped at the invitation Mr. Erwin had extended—to come in and spend another evening soon, looking at the sketches. When it was proffered he had looked instantly away from them both, and had muttered something about working very hard at nights, and about not being his own master.

Ines felt oddly piqued.

CHAPTER IX

A GALLANT CAVALIER

"Oh turn again, fair Ines!
Before the fall of night,
For fear the moon should shine alone
And stars unrivalled bright.
And blessed will the lover be
That walks beneath their light,
And breathe the love against thy cheek
I dare not even write!"

HOOD.

WYAMA began to take a deep interest in the frequency with which Mr. Douglas Wharton's horse was seen to ascend the hill near the top of which clung the cottages of David and Jonathan.

Wyama saw no reason to suppose that Mr. Douglas rode up so frequently to see young Sheldon, the reserved, quiet fellow who had taken Jonathan's and was planting it in oddest fashion with small squares of wheat.

And it did not tell itself that the eldest son of Wendover House spent so many of his afternoons that had hitherto been strictly devoted to the superintendence of the estate, just to while away the hours for a paralysed artist.

Wyama was healthily human. On the hill

dwelt a beautiful maiden; it regarded it as inevitable, therefore, that the feet of many knights' horses should go pricking up the rise. Sholto Wharton rode up almost every day.

Ines had not been two months at David's before Sholto was her thankful slave, pressing eagerly to see her at every possible chance. But Wyama did not busy itself with his visits; no one had time to notice which way the horse of a boy of sixteen was turning.

But with Mr. Douglas it was a different matter. Mr. Douglas was older even than the elder Miss Wharton, and her age was perilously close to forty. He, like Sholto, was good-looking; it had often been commented on that the men of the Wharton family had absorbed all the good looks, and the girls had been woefully forgotten.

Douglas, in these days, was a stone heavier than his critical conscience permitted him any pleasure in being. Now and again when he brushed his hair, he looked at it doubtfully on top, where it was certainly no thicker than it had been ten years ago. Sometimes when his intimate friends married, or had sons born to them, he sighed, for both of these things had been in his own scheme for himself, and yet they had never come off.

Possibly his education had been too well attended to. The only son of the house for many years, Lieutenant Wharton had been loath to send him away to school, and had engaged

instead for his education the services of a brilliant young Cambridge man who had been obliged to break off a most promising career at the University, and come to Australia for his health.

Douglas was young, ardent, purposeful, and swiftly was kindled by the flame that burned in his tutor, one Kemp. The man had a passion for everything being of the best. It might be quite simple of its kind, but there must be no doubt about it being brought to the highest degree of perfection. If they were undertaking to grow pansies from seed, tutor and pupil, first of all the seed must be of the best strain procurable, and next they must spend themselves unsparingly in the matter of soil, situation, attention. If they were carpentering in the old tool shed, merely making a boat together to sail on the Wyama creek, there must be nothing slipshod in the wood. A simple design might be chosen, but there must be no slovenly touch about it, not one unfaithful part. The same with all lessons, all games.

The little girls and their governesses laughed and shook their heads. Life was too short for such care, they declared; too crowded with thousands of things each of which demanded a little attention. It would be absurd to work like that over everything one did.

"No," said young Kemp, "either let them alone or swot your hardest."

He died suddenly; worked clean out before

he was four-and-twenty. It was as if a flame he had himself sedulously fanned and fed had consumed him.

Douglas was at an impressionable age when the young man died, and the death accentuated the memory of the teachings. He went to school and managed to shake off a little of the influence, but he was never able to eradicate the now strongly formed habit of "swotting." Also he developed a keenly critical faculty as he grew older; nothing quite satisfied him, he saw flaws everywhere. "Douglas' divine discontent," laughed his sisters.

At forty he was still unmarried, though most unwillingly so. His sisters, and even his mother foretold for him a crooked stick so long had been his searching in the wood. But he shook his head and kept up the seeking.

She must be young, of that he was quietly assured. When he was eighteen, forty had struck him as in nowise too old for a lady, his youthful fancy being at the time chained by a charmer of that age. But now he was forty, eighteen struck him as the ideal age.

She must be beautiful; of that he was absolutely assured, and the beauty must go deeper than the skin. It was this second qualification that led him to make no further advances to several girls whose faces he had temporarily admired. She must be of gentle birth, of gentle breeding, and gloriously healthy. His

own open-air life among the sunlit spaces of Wendover made the thought of ill-health or delicacy abhorrent to him. She must be accomplished and well-educated, else how might she befit her post of future lady of Wendover ?

The Wyama girls had long since accepted him as a hopeless bachelor ; hardly one of them troubled to as much as stick a rose in the front of her dress when he was to be expected. " Such ridiculous ideals ! " they said, tossing their heads ; Cade had been indiscreet enough to whisper once to a close friend a few of the qualities her eldest brother thought necessary in his bride.

Cade herself fell so short of the qualities that she took a vicious pleasure in taunting her brother for his romantic notions.

He had just rejected a fresh candidate for his vacant post. That is to say, a discerning mother had angled for an invitation to Wendover and had brought there for a couple of weeks a daughter who unaccountably " hung fire." The girl was good-looking, bright in manner, and eager now to please where once she had only sought to be pleased.

But Douglas did nothing more than ride out with her in an afternoon and make one at a bridge table with her at night. He never asked her to walk across and look at the creek in the moonlight, or to saunter up and down the passion-vine walk.

"What in the world was the matter *this* time?" said Cade, when mother and daughter had packed up and departed unwept, unsung.

"God lor', you're not serious, are you?" said Douglas; "she'll never see thirty again."

It was not callous indifference to a sister's feelings—a sister who also would never see thirty again—that permitted him to make this speech. For he had explained to both sisters once and for all, that any disparaging remarks he made about age referred only to the special standard he had set for himself in matrimonial matters. Over thirty was nothing to most men, the bloom of womanhood, an assurance that the insipidity of girlhood was exchanged for the riper mind and good-fellowship of companionable womanhood.

It was merely that temperamentally he felt unable to be attracted by any one over the first rosy exuberance of girlhood.

But Cade was very scathing; for, womanlike, whatever he might say to the contrary, she applied the disparagement to herself.

"I think—I think the way men look at these things is just wicked," she said passionately; "you—why should *you* be so fastidious? You are over forty yourself—you are getting a bald patch, you are beginning to put on flesh; you are getting settled in your ways, didactic. Let me tell you this, no fresh and beautiful young girl such as you expect will ever care for you. She may accept you because you have money.

But don't flatter yourself it will be because she loves you as she could love a man of five-and-twenty."

"Keep your hair on, keep your hair on, my dear child," said Douglas, helping himself, perfectly unmoved, to another cigar out of the big box a servant had just brought out for him to the verandah.

"You have let opportunities slip away," continued Cade, "and now instead of being more fastidious than ever you ought to expect to have to take some one a little faded and *passé*."

"Heaven forbid!" said Douglas.

"You ought; you are *passé* yourself," cried Cade, now thoroughly worked up to her subject. "Do you ever look at yourself in the glass? What do you see there that is going to attract any beautiful girl?"

"I see a remarkably well preserved man," said Douglas, and puffed his lazy, tantalising cigar smoke over the verandah rail. "And let me tell you this, young woman, if you were half as well preserved you wouldn't be here at this moment trying to scratch my eyes out. No, you'd have a home of your own and something better to do."

It was a bitter brotherly speech, but the allusion to his bald patch rankled and demanded revenge.

"See me," he continued; "here I am, happy as a king though unmarried. If the right

maiden comes along, very well and good. If she doesn't, also well and good. I can rub along. See you, disappointed, getting bad-tempered, don't care a dump about anything. You know you ought to be ashamed to wear the hideous frocks you do."

"I c-could have m-married if I'd l-liked," said Cade, dissolving into tears at the spectacle of herself thus held up to view.

"Of course you could, of course you could," said Douglas soothingly—by now more than a little ashamed of himself, "why, the drawing-room used to be littered up with 'em at one time. But don't you see, my girl, since you didn't like, you've no right to be turning sour now. Why don't you enjoy life and make the most of your opportunities? You've got enough of them. The mater only tyrannises over you because you've got so little spirit, she finds it's the easiest course. Assert yourself, enjoy yourself, and for the rest, let *me* alone."

It was not much more than a month after this wordy encounter, that there fluttered right down amongst them a maiden actually possessed of all the qualifications demanded by Douglas.

He seemed positively dazed at the happening after so many years; again and again he turned his horse's head to the hill, and pressed up to assure himself yet again that his ideal was indeed flesh and blood.

Cade looked on somewhat sardonically. She remembered quite well what she had told him

respecting the impossibility of a man of his age making a young girl care for him. More than that, she knew that he remembered.

But she said nothing when she saw him hang up his punching ball on a verandah and exercise at it for twenty minutes a day; nothing when she found a bottle of much-advertised hair restorer on his washstand. She merely smiled at him.

He made an open ally of Elizabeth. He had persuaded Ines to let him teach her to ride. Or rather he had persuaded her father that she was looking a little pale, and that nothing but horse-exercise would counteract the effect of the sick-nursing she was doing.

Erwin consented with much readiness. In truth it irked him inexpressibly that the hey-day of his girl's youth should be sacrificed at his invalid-chair.

He drove her from him to garden from time to time, or to go for a jolting drive in Mrs. Beattie's hard-working sulky. More than that he had been unable to manage; she flatly refused to play golf, to join the tennis club, to go to picnics.

But when Douglas appeared one day, riding on his usual grey horse, and leading beside him a brown, soft-eyed creature with a skin like satin and a mane like wavy silk, who could have refused to be lifted up into the saddle? Elizabeth had actually sent a riding-skirt in addition to lending her saddle. In common gratitude to Elizabeth they must not be sent back unused.

And so began the riding-lessons. They occupied an hour of every day. At first Ines would only go about the adjacent paddocks, from where she might be summoned at any moment by Hyacinth waving from the verandah. But gradually as the sense of security deepened and the invalid professed himself more and more independent of her, they went farther afield.

And from among his wheat-patches Scott watched them with tragic eyes. A few times during the absences he had laid down his tools and gone to talk with Erwin on his verandah; a thing he never did when Ines was at home, which was a fact the girl noticed rather curiously.

For some time Erwin had been both puzzled and hurt at the aloofness of his neighbour. Invalided as he was, he had come to feel he had an invalid's privilege to be entertained, and had called out cheery invitations to Scott from his verandah, after the first few days' introduction, or had sent Hyacinth to the wall with a message asking him to come and smoke.

Scott made excuses; he was going out, he had arrears of work, his animals must be attended to. Erwin accepted the statements cheerfully once or twice, but the third time he plainly felt rebuffed.

"I shan't ask him again, Ines," he said, "he certainly wants to show me that he can't waste his valuable time with a crippled neighbour."

"You ain't goin' to be arstked in no more," said Hyacinth, gone to return two of Scott's chickens which had escaped bounds.

"No?" smiled Scott, "how's that, Hyacinth?"

"Sez he won't have charity visits. Sez you don't want to waste time with cripples. But he's not like ornerary cripples a bit, I think. You should 'a' seen me aunt, all drawed up in a 'eap, and y'ad to feed her like a baby. Why don't you come, Mr. Shelding?"

This was a serious matter, and Scott went over the following day, carefully watching for an hour when Ines was away.

Erwin was a little stiff. He was whiter, and thinner too, than when Scott had been there last; there was plainly no improvement in his condition, and his restlessness in confinement seemed to demand an explanation why this neighbour withheld the neighbourliness that might have given some alleviation of the hard lot.

Scott smoked in silence for a little time, then with a sudden whitening of the face, took his pipe out of his mouth.

"I want to explain to you why I don't accept your kind invitations, Mr. Erwin," he said. "I should like to come very much, but it is not fair to you; I am a disgraced man."

Erwin had all the catholicity of the cosmopolitan, and the face in front of him was both a strong and a good one.

"Whatever it was, it is past," he said; "it is the present that matters."

"What do you know of my present?" said Scott.

"Just as much as you know of mine," said Erwin tranquilly.

Scott turned this over in his mind, his pipe in his hand.

"You mean you are willing to accept me as I stand, even though I tell you I am an outcast from all decent society?" he said at last.

"Exactly," said Erwin; "whatever happened it was a mistake, your mistake, some one else's mistake. You aren't making any more. Fill up your pipe and chuck me the matches."

Scott swallowed hard.

"But what about your daughter?" he said, and his heart thumped against his side.

Erwin moved restlessly. The limitations of womanhood were always annoying him.

"Yes, yes," he said, "of course that's a different thing. One has to keep one's womenfolk in cotton wool, of course. Not that I think, mind you, that my little girl could get any harm from you, whatever you were. Still, it's customary, of course."

"Of course," assented Scott.

"Perhaps when she's out——" Erwin began.

"That will be best," said Scott.

"But the evenings are the worst—I get so abominably lonely in an evening, Sheldon."

"Perhaps you could tell her she need not speak to me," suggested Scott, his heart fit to burst at the exquisite torment he was proposing for himself.

"I might send her to bed," Erwin said a little eagerly, "it would be a genuine charity, Sheldon, if you'd sometimes spare an evening to a fellow with one leg, in very truth, in the grave."

"Oh come, it's not as bad as that," said Scott, and saw the plain vision of that delicate room with its flowers and pictures and easeful chairs, and Ines rising and going away with averted face, sent to bed because he was not fit to sit in the same atmosphere with her.

Still, he would see her. He would be nearer to her even than when she was working in her garden and he in his, which had hitherto seemed the summit of joy to him. He would hear her voice about the thin-walled place, speaking to Hyacinth, to the dog, the kittens. He would sit in the chairs she had sat in, see her work-basket again with the frills of blue muslin in the making, and the little silver thimble, and the strawberry pincushion, into which for some occult reason she sometimes ran her needle.

"You'll come?" Erwin said wistfully, "and not mind if I send her away? You'll understand? She's no mother, you know; I have to be both parents."

"I'll come," said Scott, "and I'll understand —entirely."

"Don't let me be selfish, though," said Erwin, "an invalid grows to be an exacting beast. Don't come when you've anything better to do."

"I shan't easily get that," said Scott, "I'm

the loneliest devil in the world. It will mean more than you can guess to come in here in an evening."

So much Ines heard—just his last speech, as she came through the room, flushed from her ride, and out to the back verandah. There was a heart-stir in the man's voice, too, and her girl heart answered it. Lonely! Of course he must be—and coming in now often in an evening. How glad she was the room was so pretty; she would fill it with flowers—make it prettier still! She would make coffee—he had drunk three cups that first night, and said he had tasted none like it for many years. They would talk over voyages, and England, and their childish memories of France and Flanders and of Lille, where they had both spent a miserable winter, and of Verona, which they both remembered as permeated with sunshine.

He was coming often now in an evening. She did not even confess to herself that she had been oddly hurt because he had so studiously refrained from coming before. He was coming often in an evening because he too was lonely.

And then she was informed that when he did come she would be expected to retire to bed, there being no other sitting-room in the cottage!

It was this embargo more than anything else in the beginning, that entirely destroyed any chance of the success of the siege Douglas was laying to her heart.

CHAPTER X

PRINCIPALLY PAROCHIAL

THE yellow sulky was slowly climbing the Three Hill Rise, which steep bit of elevation had to be surmounted ere one could get away from the sleepy leisure of Wyama, and plunge into the more bustling life of Murwumba.

Currant took his own way and plodded up in his peculiarly dreary and dogged fashion, Mrs. Beattie sitting with the reins loose in her lap, but mechanically murmuring "Get up" from time to time as a matter of duty.

The lady felt as much at peace with the world as, constitutionally, she was able. A few things rankled—her servant after breakfast had scraped a hole in the enamel of the new milk boiler; one of the stops of the organ had suddenly refused to act; and Bobbie, her second son, had climbed a tree in his new school suit and left three square inches of the tweed of it on a fork of a high bough. But in the main the world was going smoothly.

The stipend fund was practically made up this quarter without any humiliating necessity

of themselves being obliged to help get up a concert or a bazaar to make the figures stretch to the rightful number.

Mrs. Wharton had given—and without undue pressure—fifty pounds to the building fund for the new schoolroom, and several lesser amounts had been promised with positive cheerfulness.

True, a sale of work would be necessary to complete the amount that was required before the trustees would consent to begin operations, but when a sale of work was not for her husband's stipend arrears, Mrs. Beattie quite enjoyed it. It involved hard work, it was true, but it brought the parishioners into friendlier touch with each other than anything else. At the last one, for instance, Miss Dwyer, the baker's niece, who gave music lessons and had never before subscribed a penny to any church object, sent in to the Children's Clothes Stall a beautifully smocked frock. Every one knew that the fine stitching had been meant for a little niece, but Miss Dwyer and the little niece's mother having quarrelled violently a week before the bazaar, the Children's Clothes Stall unexpectedly reaped the benefit. The little garment—it was positively a triumph of intricate smocking—was snapped up by the doctor's wife for her small girl; but when the same small girl was seen in it at church the following week, the second party to the quarrel, the mother of the denuded little niece, was so

overcome at the sight that she owned herself humbly in the wrong to Miss Dwyer before the church gate was reached. The result, not an immediate one—for smocking, interlarded with crotchets and quavers and minor scales, takes time—was that a twin frock appeared in church on Sabbath mornings and all was peace: or as near peace as might be obtained in any parish: you could not stay to worry over the circumstance that the doctor's wife did not like the duplication of a garment which she had been pleased to consider exclusive, and sat down a little sulkily to make her child another frock for church.

Then there was Miss Elizabeth's cushion. Miss Elizabeth, urged possibly by the presence of so much art on the hill, conceived the idea of "going in for stencilling."

After she had stencilled a border of attenuated waratahs round the morning-room tablecloth, and a "new art" design in each corner of her own bedspread, and tulips up and down her own window curtains, and irises at irregular intervals along the walls of a back passage, she came rather to a standstill.

Mrs. Wharton had much too profound a contempt for anything Elizabeth could do in the art line to allow her to touch with profaning fingers anything for the important rooms of the house. If this stencilling—silly, monotonous work she considered it, herself—were really the

latest thing in decoration, and if the upholsterer who did much work from time to time in the Wendover drawing-room considered it suitable—well, they would have an art decorator up for a day or two and have the thing done properly. But this messing, amateur work of Elizabeth's was not to be taken seriously.

Sholto, big, warm-hearted lad, touched at the sight of Elizabeth's nose, which, at the snub, assumed its wonted pink aspect, promptly invited her to come and operate on the frieze in his bedroom. It was the only undecorated frieze in the house, and had been left in a state of plain cream plaster at the boy's own request; for, he said, to wake and look up and find ships sailing, or maidens dancing, or trees sprouting right up against his ceiling would be enough to unhinge his mind in the early hours. Later in the day, he said, the mind had more fortitude, and could bear up against such shocks in other rooms.

But the poor little pink nose unmanned him, and he gave Elizabeth's arm a warm squeeze.

"If it will promise faithfully not to break its little neck on the step-ladder, and if it will put hay or onions, or whatever the proper thing is, to take the smell of paint away, it shall come and have a go at my wall, so it shall," he said.

"But you won't like it, will you?" Elizabeth said doubtfully.

"Like it no end," he returned stoutly. "I'm

much impressed by what you say. Any one can have a podgy paperhanger's patterns on his walls, but it isn't every one who can bestow a touch of irresistible individuality on a room." Sholto was delighting in an alliterative vein of late.

So Elizabeth, her heart warmed by the permission, set out to bestow the touch.

For a week all was well. She was merely thinking out her design. She felt, as possibly Raphael felt when, after being confined to relatively small work for long, the Pope handed over to him the fresco decoration of the Camera della Segnatura. All space seemed hers, and she went about with eager eyes searching for patterns, till it seemed she saw men as stencils walking.

Finally she settled on her design. Brown tree boughs conventionalised to dip and meet at certain points; at each point two doves sitting peaceably. "I'm trying to get the effect of perfect peace and rest, so suitable for a bedroom," she had said, the fire of art burning in her light-blue eyes. Down each corner of the room a tree trunk was to be stencilled, as if springing luxuriantly from the floor or skirting-board, and reaching up to the frieze, where it would send its carefully-measured branches all along the top of the wall for innumerable carefully measured birds to sit upon.

Even the cutting of the stencil, though

rather a large piece of work, was surmounted. And then came the application. "It is such rapid work, once the pattern is cut," Elizabeth said, "that I hope to be finished by to-night, Sholto. But if I *should* want an extra day, you won't mind sleeping in one of the spare rooms for just one night, will you?"

But three weeks, four weeks, five weeks passed and there were only two tree trunks done and two sides of the frieze. A start was indeed made on the third side, and the bough design was completed, but the ties of the birds had broken, and Elizabeth was too tired and discouraged to make a fresh bird stencil; so the remaining points gaped empty.

Indeed, the whole effect was extremely dispiriting; and when the ardent decorator climbed down finally from the steps which she had mounted on top of a heavy table, her poor nose went pink with mortification.

She had plainly held the stencil crookedly, for some of the turtle-doves sat two or three inches higher than their fellows. And were they turtle-doves at all? Sholto could not be persuaded that they were not intended for fowls roosting, and gravely pointed out the fact that she had given them two legs apiece, whereas every one knew that roosting fowls only possessed one. Details of the great scheme were splashes of brown paint here and there on the lower wall, brown paint on the linoleum,

brown paint on the bed curtains and the chairs and the wardrobe mirror.

For a fortnight the heavy table and the steps and the little pots of paint and the sheets of cut tin congested the room.

"If you don't finish, I'll get it done at your expense," Sholto threatened.

"Of course I am going to finish. Any one is liable to a few mistakes," Elizabeth said.

Another fortnight passed.

"If you don't finish, I'll finish it myself," said Sholto. "I'm sick of sleeping in spare rooms; I'm beginning to feel like a stranger within the gates."

"I told you I am trying to cut new stencils; don't be so impatient," said Elizabeth irritably.

At last she had them cut, though indeed she had quite lost interest in the work; and but for exposing herself to the family's laughter she would have called in a professional long before this.

When she at last put on a big protective apron and set out for the room, she found it locked.

"Mr. Sholto's had it locked for more'n a week," volunteered a maid. "Wouldn't even let me in to give it its cleaning on Wednesday."

Elizabeth waited for the boy's return and asked for the key. He beat up all the family and bade them come and look.

"Just a few little notions of my own," he said deprecatingly, and, unlocking, displayed them.

In the spaces where the birds should have been he had painted opossums hanging by their tails to the boughs. Up the tree trunks he had native bears climbing, each with a young one on its back. Six or seven kangaroos loped in fine style across the fourth wall, while the remaining places were filled in with here a kookaburra, there a platypus, here two emus, there a native cat.

He had pressed Mr. Erwin into the joke, and that gentleman had outlined the creatures with his left hand while Sholto sat beside him turning them into stencils, with the result that met Elizabeth's stricken gaze. Even Mrs. Wharton had to smile.

"But to-morrow," she said, "we'll send for Jackson and have the place freshly kalsomined —if they *can* kalsomine over that dark paint. If not, he must paper it all over."

"Who steals my purse, steals trash," said Sholto; "but he who filches my frieze from me I'll shoot on the spot."

And he was so obdurate in the matter that Jackson was called in only to cover up the splashes on the lower wall; and Elizabeth's frieze remained and became quite famous.

But it sent her back to less soaring work—the cushion, in fact, that Mrs. Beattie, jogging up the hill behind Currant, considered had helped to promote the peace of the parish.

It was of beautiful design; and Elizabeth

grew so enamoured of it as she worked on it that it was a real wrench to hand it over, as promised, to the fancy-work stall. She hung near it half the day of the sale, watching to see who the purchaser might be. A Mrs. Patterson it was, a bitter-tongued woman, who had estranged nearly every one from her and lived a lonely life in a cottage just out of the town.

The Whartons had hardly spoken to her for years. But when Elizabeth saw her buy the cushion, buy it quite eagerly, and speak with praise about its "novelty," all old scores were forgotten, and Elizabeth actually went and invited her to have tea with her in the marquee outside, and paid the double charge with real pleasure.

The matter did not even end there; Elizabeth drove out to the lonely cottage on several occasions later on, and Mrs. Patterson, not realising that any one could be calling to renew acquaintance with a cushion, became positively gracious.

At the very top of the rise Currant stood still, as was his wont after a climb, until he had rested somewhat.

Sheldon, walking five miles to his weekly wheat lesson in the next township, overtook the sulky, and would have passed with a formal "Good afternoon."

But Mrs. Beattie was instantly alert. She had a word or two for this young man. She

did not at all approve of this young man. He did not come to church; he was to be seen working in his wheat-patches at any time on a Sunday; when her husband had called on him, he had given no account whatever of himself, though that, Mrs. Beattie had determined, was possibly Mr. Beattie's fault, who never asked the right questions.

But when she herself had gone to see him one afternoon when she had been with Ines, and when she herself had plied him with question after question—and who else was privileged to question the strange young men in the parish if not herself?—Scott had been absolutely monosyllabic.

"I hope you like this place," she said; "strangers generally do."

"Oh yes," said Scott.

"Is it as pretty as the place you come from?"

"Yes."

"And where was that? I am always interested in knowing where people come from, aren't you?"

"No," said Scott, "not in the least."

She tried again after a minute or two. "Are you related to the Sheldons of Mundanoon?"

"No."

"Perhaps the Bathurst Sheldons?"

"No."

"It is not a very common name."

"Isn't it?" said Scott.

"I once knew a clergyman named Sheldon—the Rev. James Sheldon—possibly an uncle?"

"Not an uncle."

"Your father was not a clergyman?"

"No."

"A farmer?"

"No."

She discontentedly realised that she could not go through the whole list, from tinker, tailor.

"You are not a Presbyterian, I think?"

"No."

"Surely not a Roman Catholic?"

"No."

"But my husband said you did not belong to our church."

"No."

"Ah, Wesleyan, then. Well, I have known some very good Wesleyans, too. You will find Mr. Barker an excellent minister—a trifle prolix, possibly, and, if I may say it, lax in some matters, but in earnest, very much in earnest."

"Yes?"

In the end she went back much ruffled to Ines.

"Positively the only thing he volunteered of his own free-will," she said, "was that he was a Wesleyan. I might have saved my time. Well, I wish Mr. Barker joy with him."

"A Wesleyan? Why, he said he used to go as a boy to St. Michael's, in Little Mitcham, and that is a Church of England," said Ines thought-

lessly. "Father had a painting of it, and he remembered it quite well."

"He is English, then, is he?" said Mrs. Beattie thirstily.

"He spoke of coming from England," Ines answered more guardedly.

"I dare say his father was some petty tradesman, though he looks like a gentleman himself," said Mrs. Beattie. "When a man refuses to tell what his father was, you may be sure it was some trade he is ashamed of."

"You didn't ask him point blank what his father was?" said Ines.

"Of course I did," said Mrs. Beattie indignantly. "Why not, pray? We must know something of the people who settle down among us. Perhaps not every one could ask, but I, the wife of his minister, have surely some privileges."

"But I thought you found out that Mr. Barker was his minister," said Ines mischievously.

No one ever found Mrs. Beattie quite in the wrong.

"When I put the question about his father he was not to know that I was not the wife of his minister," she said.

Nothing could have persuaded the lady that she had overstepped the bounds of good taste. There were countless questions that she really would like to have put, but had refrained. Questions like—How was it that, while his

clothes were so well cut and his portmanteaus of so obviously expensive a make, he had no furniture? Why was he living alone? How much was he making out of this abandoned farm of Jonathan's, and so on?

She washed her hands of him, however, after this; delivered him over, body and soul, to Mr. Barker, and was nonplussed when Mr. Barker, on being taxed, repudiated the new member of his flock. This gentleman had gone up dutifully to Jonathan's at Mrs. Beattie's instigation, though he was portly and hated hills. But Scott had calmly denied that he was of that minister's faith, and he had been obliged to trot down again without as much as the encouragement of a cup of tea.

Scott's eyes had smouldered as he let Mrs. Beattie out of his gate; a more obnoxious woman he felt he had never met.

And yet those quick, curious eyes of hers, glancing about his room, had really been full of kindness; she quite yearned to "red things up" for him, to sew a button on his coat, to mother him a little. Had he not so rebuffed her, she would have continually been sending him jars of her own preserved peaches, pots of her best marmalade and pickles, bottles of her home-made hop beer. But she must have him classified first, like the rest of her parishioners, and know just in which of her mental pigeon-holes to keep him.

She washed her hands of him for weeks and weeks, only giving him a jerk of her head as she walked up Ines' garden. She was not to know that he felt more kindly to her now; that he had taken himself to task for being possibly discourteous to her. For Erwin had spoken of her with warmth.

"A porcupine, perhaps, sir, but full of the milk of human kindness. As possibly porcupines always are, only we never trouble to get past the bristles. Her kindnesses to my little girl have been as the sands of the sea."

Scott no longer disliked his inquisitor; and now, as he passed her motionless vehicle, he took off his hat with a smile that was positively genial.

She looked at him more and more suspiciously; why, he was actually good-looking when he smiled like that; there was something which was quite captivating and boyish about him as he smiled up at her and strode on with easy, swinging steps through the bright sunshine, as if he loved every breath of it.

Mr. Douglas walked somewhat heavily.

Mr. Douglas' head did not show crisp young hair like this when he uncovered it.

And Ines had blushed the other day, blushed in the oddest, most unaccountable manner, when the name of the neighbour had come up in conversation.

This must be seen to without delay.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE YELLOW SULKY

He was at the foot of the first hill when she overtook him. Indeed she had tried not to be so long, but Currant would not budge one step until he had had the spell he considered necessary after the hill. Still, when that was over he put his ears back and loped forward with big, uneven strides, rattling the sulky and its occupant vigorously after him. Mrs. Beattie had never suffered from indigestion in her life ; Currant and the yellow sulky saw to that.

" Let me give you a lift, Mr. Sheldon," she said, pulling up when she caught her prey.

" You are very good," said Scott, " but I like the walk. The air is like wine on a day like this."

" It is the same air up here," she smiled.

" That's so," he said, and showed his teeth pleasantly a moment, " but it is not the same locomotion. A walk like this shakes one up."

Mrs. Beattie might have pointed out that Currant was peculiarly fitted to perform the same office, but she contented herself with

saying, "Oh, very well—if you compel a lady to a solitary drive when she would like a companion."

"That is a very different matter," Scott said, and without more ado climbed in beside her with as gallant an air as he could muster. Deep in his heart he was not displeased; this was a friend of Ines, this woman beside him; it were impossible that she could go very far and not mention the name. He would be able to warm himself again at the sound of her name; the opportunities of so doing were so seldom that he could not let one pass.

Mrs. Beattie made no mistake this time. She asked him no questions at all; merely rippled out for him what seemed an endless stream of parochial news—Mrs. Patterson's unfortunate temper, Jack Anderson's dog that had been caught in a rabbit trap, Miss Dwyer's good fortune in getting the Evanses' three girls as music pupils, the Evanses' marvellous output of butter per week, the forthcoming sale of work.

Scott waited patiently; Wyama was a place of limitations; if the population was to be passed in review like this they must run up sooner or later against the longed-for name.

The Whartons were brought out in array. Mrs. Wharton, who had with such generosity just given fifty pounds to the fund; Sholto Wharton, who was such a fine lad and so full of humour. (Mr. Sheldon had heard, of course, of

the wonderful frieze he had painted round his bedroom? Every one was taken in to see it; so delightfully Australian. For her part she did the same thing, encouraged by all means in her power the love of Australian things; it was a sentiment one felt was due to one's country.) Miss Cade and Miss Elizabeth, such nice lady-like girls—not pretty, perhaps, but, then, beauty was nothing; it was worth that counted, and the world was beginning to realise the fact. Or, at all events, so it seemed to her. In her young days there seemed to be much more talk of beauty, and running after beauty than now. People were growing more sensible.

"Or more resigned, perhaps," said Scott, "they think beauty is dying out. For myself I'm inclined to think so too. At all events, when I was seventeen I used to think every second girl I talked to was pretty. But I don't think so now. Are there any pretty girls in Wyama?" He felt that he was approaching his subject with Machiavellian discreetness.

Mrs. Beattie shot a disturbed glance at him.

"A few," she said shortly.

Then she returned to her pæan of the Whartons: the acres they owned, the horses, the value of the horses, the prize cattle—statistics were showered upon his devoted head.

"And the place is entailed, mind you! At least, I don't know whether I am quite right in saying entailed—am I? Does entail hold in

Australia ? At all events it is the same thing, Mr. Douglas inherits the whole estate ; oh, the sisters and Sholto are well provided for too, but all that vast place, all those wonderful horses go to Mr. Douglas and no one else."

" Indeed," said Scott indifferently. But he did not feel indifferent. His antagonism to Douglas was of the fiercest order.

" Yes, a fortunate woman his wife will be. One of the richest properties in the state, Wendover is. It is a marvel to every one that he has not married before. But,"—mysteriously—" he is going to mend his ways at last."

" Indeed," said Scott, and he wondered if the woman would think him mad if he leapt out of the sulky. To calmly sit beside her while she told him of Ines' engagement would be, he felt, beyond his powers of endurance.

She whipped Currant up as if she knew what he was meditating.

" The ways of Providence are inscrutable," she said ; " Mr. Erwin little dreamed when that stroke of his overtook him at the hotel that it was the most fortunate thing that could have happened."

" I trust he realises the fact," said Scott sardonically.

" Of course he does," said Mrs. Beattie, " what father wouldn't be willing to undergo a little bodily inconvenience for an opportunity

for his daughter to make a match so brilliant a girl in a London season might envy her ? "

Scott closed his teeth hard one second.

" They are actually engaged, then ? " he said. Better get the bad moment over instantly.

" Well, I won't say that," said Mrs. Beattie unwillingly, " it is not given out yet, but I believe it is practically settled. Her father confided in me that it was an inexpressible comfort to him to realise that she would be safe when he had gone. He has very little to leave her. And Mrs. Wharton has not raised the least objection ; indeed Miss Cade told me she has been prepared to take Miss Erwin to her heart ever since she went up to the cottage and discovered that she had a passion for gardening."

" And the lady herself ? " said Scott's dry lips.

" Oh, of course, girls are a little difficult," said Mrs. Beattie ; she could hardly say that she ached to box Ines' ears for her silly shilly-shallying in the matter. Douglas had proposed, she knew, but when taxed, Ines had denied an engagement.

Of course, it was all the silly nonsense of a girl who liked to heighten her value by not giving in too soon. At the same time there was that blush to be explained, that sudden, unaccountable wave of colour that had once rushed over the girl's face at Scott's name.

There must be no nonsense like this when

Providence had worked so hard to settle the matter so beautifully for all concerned.

The young man beside her looked white, dull; as if the wine of the day had suddenly failed him.

"I think I'd like to get out and walk now," he said in a low voice. The voice had a tremble in it, an absolutely inconquerable tremble.

The quick, light eyes beside him bent themselves on him, and all his secret was bare to her.

A tear came into the eyes, the hard, curious eyes of the woman. She was intensely sorry for him; her heart, indeed, actually bled for him for the moment. She had boys herself, and some day they, too, might suffer like this. But still, he must not be allowed to interfere with the direct workings of Providence.

"It will mean wonderful happiness for her," she said in a low voice; "she would have had to work for her living. She doesn't look the sort of girl to have to work, does she? You must think of that."

"Yes," said Scott, "of course. But I think I will get out and walk."

She gave him a sympathetic rub with her arm. There was nothing she would not have done for him. She determined that Ines' engagement once settled, she would bend all her energies to finding a nice girl for this poor lad with the fixedly staring grey eyes.

"Let me get out," he said again.

Then she had a brilliant thought. Why should he not marry Elizabeth or Cade ? Well, possibly Elizabeth was a little old for him, but Cade could not be so very many years his senior. It would not be so unequal after all ; Cade had no looks, and her youth was gone and her temper a little uncertain, but then she had money for ample compensation for such trifling defects. And he was young and good-looking, and plainly a gentleman—Cade would be fortunate in such a husband.

She felt herself by this actually a coadjutor of Providence, and said in an almost solemn voice, " Mr. Sheldon, I want you to come to afternoon tea with me to-morrow. Miss Cade Wharton is coming. I want you to know her."

" Forgive me," said Scott, " I *must* walk the rest of the way. Good-bye ! Thank you for the lift."

He pulled the reins for himself, and Currant turned his head as if to inquire who was taking liberties with him.

But the young man had leapt out without waiting for the horse to do more than slacken, and Mrs. Beattie regretfully watched him stride on in front of her at a great pace for a few hundred yards and then swing off along a branching road down which it were useless to follow him.

CHAPTER XII

AN EVENING AT DAVID'S

"The face of her, the eyes of her,
The lips, the little chin, the stir
Of shadows round her mouth."

Time's Revenges.

INES' constant ministrations had clothed the naked dividing wall between the two cottage gardens with the loveliest garment of green, splashed here and there with the blue of creeping jenny, the grey blue of stone crop, mesembryanthemum's radiant upturned faces, and climbing geranium's many colours.

The plants crept over to Scott's desolate side; laid tentative little fingers on the bareness there; then, with a rush, spread joyously along in their tender task of beauty.

Scott loved every blossom that crossed to his side. He had a feeling that Ines had sent them across, though he would have been amazed to know that indeed she had so done.

No one knew how often her trowel filled up little crannies on the wall-top with rich soil, and stuck quick-growing plants in them, and gave them just the necessary turn and twist

that should induce them to creep—not on her own side.

She had thought that she must go hungry for primroses in Australia, since she might not go and dig them up out of the woods for herself. But Mrs. Wharton had sent her along a great basketful of the thick-leaved little plants, and she had set them with keenest pleasure in deep pockets of earth along the wall-top, and now there they were, clumps of the tender yellow things, smiling shyly, clumps of their braver cousins, polyanthuses, with their velvet faces of brown and crimson; there they were for the lonely man next door to enjoy the touch of England as well as herself.

She was a little sick for England in those days of wearing anxiety, while the bright sun of Australia smiled so persistently all the time. And the more peculiarly English flowers curiously ministered to the sickness. Her patch of lilies of the valley, her little corner of real snowdrops, not snowflakes, the ineffable cleanliness and joy of the tulips near the verandah, the little bush of lad's love, the tangle of London pride, the lavender plant, the first crocuses, they both gave and took from her the acutest sense of nostalgia.

And so it must be with Scott, she reasoned: that poor, lonely fellow who had but just torn up his roots from English soil, and was trying to set himself again in new land, with not so

much as one friendly hand to help pat down the raw and roughened soil around him.

She continually presented him with plants. Her father's embargo she refused to treat seriously, and if ever she saw Scott working in his little wheat-patches when she was gardening, she would make some merry communication or other.

Erwin himself might be lying on the front verandah all the time the communication took place.

"Mr. Sheldon," she would call insistently.

Mr. Sheldon, cap in hand, would cross to the wall.

"Take this creeping rose and put it in this instant at the foot of that post—no, that one; it will get a better aspect. Your verandah is a simple disgrace to you."

And he would obey, and worship the rose as it grew to beauty.

"Mr. Sheldon, are you there?"

"I believe I am, Miss Erwin."

"Didn't I see you merely walking up and down?"

"I was thinking, I believe."

"You mustn't think when you are out of doors and the sun shines. Take your spade and dig a nice little bed over there. Needn't be very big. I'm going to give you some of my cactus dahlias. Only, mind, you must feed them well, or they won't work for you."

What could Sheldon do when Erwin lay there quite unprotesting—even smiling at his daughter's bullying ways.

"Mr. Sheldon!"

"Miss Erwin!"

"I do get so tired of your horrid wheat-patches. Next time you go to Murwumba I am going to climb over the wall and set poppy seeds all up and down the rows. Won't it look lovely when the sweet little things peep up everywhere?"

Perhaps Sheldon would "forget his place"—would answer her girlish nonsense boyishly.

"If you do, I'll come over and sow wheat in your pansy bed. I've got a new bag of it."

"Have you, really? Didn't the last go right? Don't tell me any rust is coming on that last lot."

"Yes, unluckily. But I think I know where I went wrong. I overdid the sulphate."

Erwin hardly troubled about the embargo now. The little girl was safe. When he slipped out of life, Douglas would be there to take his place. He had the highest respect for Douglas; there was no one he had ever met to whom he felt he would more willingly give his little girl. But the good fellow bored him a little; when he wanted company he asked for no one better than Sheldon.

And what harm could Sheldon do her? It was a big sea, this sea of life; ships that pass in the night must speak to each other in passing.

Even were Sheldon the black pirate barque that he said he was, it could not hurt a little white-sailed boat to call out to him " All's well " from time to time. More especially when there was a man-o'-war hovering near, anxious to take up the boat with little white sails.

He let things drift comfortably along, and even on the nights when Scott came in—and they were most nights now—and Ines most contumaciously refused to go to bed, alleging important sewing and the need of the big lamp—he lay back trustfully in his big chair, and even occasionally enjoyed the battle of words that sometimes waged between the two. But, for the most part, Ines sat and stitched in silence, stitched dreams and plans and terrors into a filmy mass of frills.

Now and again Scott, glancing across at her, would find her hands idle, her eyes staring out before her at the unblinded window. Subtly conscious that her face was not visible to her father, quite unconscious that Scott was there, so she would sit, the straight lines of her figure a little drooped, her mouth corners quite straight, her eyes filled with the woe of the universe.

It startled Scott, this mood of hers. What could be her grief ? What was it those wide, mournful eyes were looking at ?

One evening the conversation brought out in so many words the truth of the fact he dreaded.

Erwin was talking art, leaning back among

his pile of soft pillows and talking a little languidly but with a good deal of enjoyment. He had phrased happily two or three times, and that always gave him pleasure; he had reduced to actual words a nebulous theory of art that had often floated through his mind; he had forced Scott to see the error of his ideas on one particular point, and it was by no means easy to force such a thing, for as a thinker Scott was, as he knew well, far ahead of himself.

Scott retaliated for having been proven wrong by flinging a burning brand into the conversation.

"There's more humbug about art than there is about anything else in the world," he said. "You have just declared that these sales we were talking of, £60,000 for an original Rembrandt, £80,000 for a Botticelli, and so on, show that the love of art is deepening in us as a nation."

"And I maintain it," said Erwin; "at all events, it illustrates it better than if the cable had said it was for racehorses these big sums had changed hands."

"Not a bit of it," said Scott; "not a bit more than when the papers announce that a rare stamp has changed hands for a preposterous number of thousands. It's no more love of art that crowds those art sales than it is love of the moon. It's just the philatelist's thirst for an original, a first issue. I'm not objecting to the thirst, mind you; let a man have his hobbies. All I protest against is that it should be done

under the cloak of a love for art. Not one man in ten thousand can tell the difference between a clever copy and an original. The experts may know—it's their business ; but you and I—well, I, at all events—get precisely as much artistic gratification out of the copy that is a clever forgery as out of the genuine canvas."

" If it is only a question of sincere artistic gratification," said Ines, " I know it was never those worth-their-weight-in-rubies pictures we used to see in Italy that gave me this feeling. I could admire them reverently—now and again I could understand them. If I had been rich I should like to have bought one and presented it to my native town. But I didn't want to bring them home and hang them up because they awoke exalted moods in me or appealed passionately to my sense of beauty. The pictures that did that were, as a rule, modest little affairs, with a twenty- or a fifty-guinea ticket on them."

" That's because you were an ignorant little puss," said Erwin.

" Perhaps," said Ines ; " anyhow, I never sighed that I hadn't twenty thousands for a Rubens, but sometimes I've felt a sense of hunger for months because I hadn't twenty guineas for a bit of canvas that spoke straight to me."

And now Scott put in some fighting for his hostess.

" You ought not to have had to sigh," he said ;

" you ought to have been able to go to the nearest stationer and order a fine reproduction of it in colour."

" For a couple of pounds, I suppose ? " said Erwin.

" Well, yes," said Scott, " if you couldn't get it for thirty shillings or a pound. The ideal price for a picture is half-a-guinea, of course."

" Go on," said Erwin ; " this is interesting. The only plaint I've ever had to make against this world is that it never appreciated me enough to pay more than fifty guineas for a canvas of mine. I didn't know before that the buyer had paid just fifty-one pounds nineteen and sixpence too much for it."

" He did," said Scott ; " that is, if he had only wanted it for its charm and beauty, and had not minded some one else buying it for the sake of possessing the original. There ought to be no difference between reproductions of books and pictures."

" What insensate nonsense ! " said Erwin.

" Oh, I know what you'll say," Scott said, " but it isn't so. You'll tell me it is the intimate work of the artist's hands that counts—just the amount of his own ego he was able to spread on the canvas for you ; that no reproduction can hope to reproduce this. I tell you it isn't."

" You're not seriously in earnest, Sheldon ? You're just foisting a freakish fancy on me, as our friend Sholto would say."

" I am not," said Scott. " Take the giants of literature. They pour their work out palpitatingly on paper—young Sholto's jargon is contagious, isn't it ?—but they don't say, Behold this masterpiece ! bear it carefully to the National Gallery or Westminster Abbey and charge the nation sixty thousand pounds for it. This manuscript is instinct with life, just as it flowed from my hand. No, they chuck it to the printer and he reels off ten thousand or ten million copies of it, and if it wants it all the world can go buy. Can you conceive of one copy of *Vanity Fair*, and that the property of some haughty nobleman who condescends to allow his housekeeper to display it to the vulgar herd on Thursdays, two to five, if the family happens to be away ? "

" Don't make my blood run cold," said Ines. " I simply can't conceive such a thing."

" Of course you can't," Scott said ; " instead, what do you do ? You take half-a-crown from your pocket and go out and purchase the giant bound in cloth. You bring him home, and every one of his tricks he must do for you, you only, while you sit at ease in your own arm-chair. Why should I have to know that though I can get a few of Whistler's pictures in reproduction, by far the greater number of them are shut up in English private houses and the owners would no more dream of giving or selling copyright of them than they would dream of letting there be duplicates made of their clothes or their jewels ? "

"But, you Goth," said Erwin, "aren't you going to allow anything for the instinct of exclusiveness? Savages haven't it, but men of culture have. I'm not going to buy a picture a duplicate of which I'll meet in every house in the village."

"You don't object to your books being duplicated. You buy your copies of Nietzsche and Maeterlinck and Bernard Shaw"—he ran his eye over the adjacent book-table—"and don't in the least object if you walk into the next house and find it also in possession of the trio. Indeed, you are actually pleased; it creates a bond between you at once."

"But," said Ines, "pictures are more obtrusive—pictures stare one in the face all the time. When you tire of a book you can give it a push to the back of the bookcase. But unless we follow the Japanese and build us a go-down, we've got to confront our pictures for shorter or longer periods—generally longer; it is surprising how long a picture will hang on a wall after a whole household has outgrown it. I certainly should get a sensation of disgust if I met my selection of pictures in every third house in the village."

"You wouldn't be in the least danger of doing so, Miss Erwin;" said Scott; "with tens of thousands of good pictures in the world and tens of thousands of varying tastes, the kaleidoscope wouldn't often turn up the same pattern."

"Although it be a little out of fashion, there is much sense and valour in this Welshman," quoted Ines whimsically, "eh, daddie?"

But then there came the sudden electricity into the conversation.

"Ines," said her father, "when you are mistress of Wendover, for the love of Heaven don't take that sort of notion with you! It is my dearest pleasure to lie and think of you as a patron of the fine arts—going to the spring exhibitions and gladdening the poor devils of painters' hearts by buying all the pictures you have hanging space for. You won't insist on ten-shilling pictures, my girl?"

"No, daddie," said Ines gravely; "I shall always offer the more dignified half-guinea."

"But you'll buy pictures, my girl—originals, plenty of them?" he persisted. "To the devil with all reproductions!"

"I'll buy originals, daddie," said the girl, "whenever I can't get reproductions just as good at a guinea." There was a fine colour in her cheeks, and for one second her eyes, lifting themselves, met Scott's. The man's were full of renunciation; the thing he had known so well so long, was known still better to him, that was all. The girl's eyes were baffling; not proud or confused or shy, simply wistful. Scott could not read them at all.

"I'll get the coffee," she said, and slipped away.

Scott moved closer to his host and spoke in a slightly thicker voice than usual.

"Did you ever tell her—Miss Erwin—that I had disgraced my name?"

Erwin looked much disturbed at such a sudden cloud on the bright evening.

"Er—er—you told me that I had better," he said uncomfortably.

"And you did?"

"Yes; just a few words."

"Can you remember what you said?"

"Er—I'm not quite sure, Sheldon."

"Try to remember, if you don't mind."

"Oh, just what you told me. That you had done something disgraceful in the past and that you were trying to live it down."

Scott swallowed hard.

"I don't think I quite said that," he said; "I told you I was a disgraced man."

"Isn't it the same?" said Erwin a little timidly.

"No," said Scott, "thank God, it isn't. If you don't mind I should like to tell you a little more of my life. I'm beginning to see there is no reason I should not."

"Yes, yes," said Erwin, "whenever you like, my dear fellow. To-morrow night, eh? To-night?"

"No, not to-night; you are tired," said Scott compunctiously, for indeed the invalid looked curiously fragile.

"Well, perhaps I am tired. To-morrow night, then. Is that Mrs. Shore I hear? I should like her to see me to bed at once."

He had his coffee in his bedroom, and Ines and Scott drank theirs alone. Neither spoke one word all the time.

When Ines put down her cup, she saw that Scott had gone a little white.

"Will you walk down as far as the gate with me, Miss Erwin?" he said; "you will think it strange of me to ask you, but there is something I should like to tell you."

And now Ines' colour flamed up to the very roots of her hair. Her hand trembled, her heart thudded so loudly she thought he must hear.

"Will you come?" he said again, for she did not move.

"Yes, I will come," she said, her voice low.

CHAPTER XIII

EASING THE BURDEN

"In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed."

HENLEY.

THE whole thing had become suddenly insupportable to Scott.

He could never hope to be anything more than a friend to this girl; apart from his disgrace, apart from his poverty, apart from her engagement there was the impossible bar he had himself made.

But a very fury of passion against Douglas had seized him. He could no longer bear that they should stand in such inconceivably different positions before her—Douglas with his head held proudly, as his lands and wealth and unblemished records entitled him to hold it; himself a fugitive from the land of his birth, his head hanging, his eyes unable to meet his fellows'.

He could not bear her pity any longer; oh, he knew why she had been so friendly and full of kindness to him! She would have been the

same to any stoned and limping dog that came along. He would not have her pity any more; he could not support it one further instant.

At the gate she paused, fair Ines, into whose ear many a confession of man's love had been poured; you had only to look at her eyes, her shining hair, that incomparable turn of neck, to know that this must be so. Yet there she stood, not won by any of them. Her lashes lay on her cheeks; never before had she found it so impossible to lift them.

"Miss Erwin," he said, "I asked your father once to tell you about me—my disgrace. He did so, I learn. Now I want to tell you myself."

And now her lashes lifted.

"Don't," she said. "Father didn't want to know. I don't. Whatever you did you are sorry, and it is past."

"But I never did anything except act like an egregious fool," he said, his voice full of sudden passion.

She looked at him startled, and without more ado he plunged into his part.

He told of his mother, of Cecil, the whole story right up to the forgery.

Cecil had committed the forgery, not himself. He, the elder brother, had merely taken the punishment. He had got in the habit of doing so from earliest youth.

"Mind, I don't commend myself for taking his lickings when he was a delicate little chap,"

he said; "any big fellow would have done as much. But he was a man when he did this thing—two-and-twenty; I ought to have left him to sweat it out himself."

"It was—beautiful of you, though, not to do so," said Ines.

She was able to see the beauty of the act, but at the same time she shrank appalled at such a wild self-sacrifice.

"Beautiful!" he said; "it was raving insanity. It was the mere frothy emotionalism of a boy. They played on my good nature—I'd always had a fair store of that. Some one ought to have protected me from myself."

"Tell me all about it," she said briefly. Her heart seemed shedding tears for the tragedy from which he was tearing away the curtain that had covered it for four long years.

The words were nothing, but looking down he caught the glint of tears in her eyes. So he told her all.

Not a word in praise of his own deed—very little in complaint of Cecil; it was the futility of his sacrifice that seemed to have driven the iron into his soul.

To Scott the whole thing leapt into life again: he saw himself opening the door of the tiny sitting-room he and Cecil had shared while they had been in the London office, opening it with a blither hand than usual. He had just paid his quarter's salary into the bank intact, thanks

to his frugality and some overtime work that he had been doing. It brought him nearer than ever to the day when he could go back to his interrupted medical course. He had whistled for sheer lightness of heart as he came up the staircase; they would have a jolly evening to celebrate the event, he determined—would get Iris and her mother, the boarders from the ground floor sitting-room, to come up and help Cecil make music. No, they would be recklessly extravagant for once; they would carry Iris and her mother off to the *Gondoliers*, which, a play-bill had told him as he came home, was running at one of the theatres. Yes, Cecil's high-class repertoire and the vague, plaintive little songs of Iris, were not in keeping with his mood to-night. He wanted something light and rollicking; he would see to it, too, that he himself sat next to Iris; he was going to pay the piper and Cecil could mind the mother. He went up-stairs two steps at a time.

His mother was sitting on the sofa—his mother, out of mourning, of course, years ago, but with eyes more tear-drenched than he remembered, even when his step-father lay just dead.

She sprang to her feet as he came in, she flung herself a minute on his neck, then she drooped lower, lower; to his incredulous horror he found she was kneeling to him, clasping him around the knees, praying, beseeching some wild thing

of him. His startled senses after a little time conveyed to him the meaning of the words she was babbling between the sobs that shook her so wildly. Cecil had wanted money, he had got with bad companions—ah, why had he, Scott, failed in the charge she had given him of the boy? He had wanted money desperately and had signed his uncle's name to a cheque. Hundreds of similar cheques passed through his fingers weekly; he had madly supposed it might not be detected; in all that great stream of paper money always going forth to be cashed, the rash boy, beside himself with worries, had thought one more would hardly be noticed, and had promised himself that he would pay the sum back almost immediately. Even if it were detected the boy told himself that his uncle could not do anything to him, because their names were the same; at the worst he would turn him out of the office, and he detested the office so heartily the fear of that held no very great terror.

The attempt was the most pitiful of failures; in truth it was so clumsily done it had not a hope of success. The uncle's anger burst its bounds. He swore by Heaven that, name or no name, he would prosecute. Cecil, in terror, wired for his mother; he simply lacked the courage to go to Scott with the story. Lady Barnsley was in London in the course of two hours, despite the fact that there was no train:

she had gone to a friend and commandeered the use of a motor-car for the frightful emergency. She went on her knees to her brother-in-law, and wept till she was absolutely unrecognisable for a pretty woman. The old man was adamant —or else he determined to strike terror into her heart before he forgave. He got up and left her, almost in hysterics, in his office, then sent his confidential clerk in to assist her to a cab. Like a drowning woman she thought of Scott—Scott, who had always saved Cecil before.

"You want me—you actually want me to say *I* did this accursed thing?" Scott burst out at last. "Great heavens, do you know it means gaol?"

Yes, she knew—the uncle had seared her roughly with the fact. "It wouldn't kill *you*," she whispered—"you have courage, strength; Cecil would die under it—he would be dead in less than a month. You know he would."

Yes, he did know it. Cecil was hardly less abnormally sensitive now, as a young man, than he had been as a beautiful and precocious boy, whose lips had gone blue, whose pulse had almost failed in moments of pain or fear of punishment.

"You know he would not survive it a week," wailed the mother. "The doctor told me only six months ago his heart showed signs of great weakness and that he would not answer for the consequences of any great shock. You know it means actual death to him."

Yes, Scott had small doubt of this. That Cecil could survive disgrace and imprisonment certainly seemed impossible to hope. But yet, warmly though he loved the boy—he had had no one but his mother and Cecil to occupy his heart all his life—he was too sane, too human, too healthily attached to life and all its chances to readily contemplate so intolerable a thing.

He refused angrily: it seemed incredible to him that a mother—she was his mother as well as Cecil's—could ask so inhuman a sacrifice from one brother to another.

The conflict lasted all the night—every hour of it that lay between the seven o'clock of a London dusk and the seven of a London dawn. Afterwards the memory was only a confused blur to Scott, like the memory of some frightful nightmare that paralysed the senses.

Sometimes Cecil came into it—Cecil, already looking as nearly like a corpse as he might; Cecil, who one minute bade his mother be still and protested that nothing would allow him to let Scott do what she asked, and the next wept as wildly as any girl, or fell back shivering, unconscious with sheer terror, and had to be revived with spirits and a little green bottle of smelling-salts that was hastily borrowed from Iris down-stairs, who also was subject to fainting attacks.

In the end Scott seemed to grow stupefied; he began to think that there was indeed nothing

else to be done. There seemed no other alternative; either Cecil and his mother must be sacrificed, or he himself must. The habit of a lifetime showed him only one path.

His mother was pathetically optimistic. The uncle would relent when he knew it was Scott, to whom he had of late showed many marks of favour, and not Cecil, whom he had always frankly disliked and despised. Even if the worst came to the worst and he did prosecute, it would be a light sentence, a first offender's sentence—three months probably!

"Three days would ruin me for life—in my profession," Scott had said, his throat working.

"No, no. You could go to a new country, study there at a fresh university," she said; "Cecil and I would strip ourselves of everything to give you the money to do so. The whole of both our lives would be devoted to trying to repay you for the sacrifice."

Different moods came and went with Scott during that frightful, endless night. Now it was a mood of exaltation—a sort of illumination of the wonderful words that "greater love than this hath no man, that a man should lay down his life for another." That quiet youth of his in Little Mitcham had given time for much reading and some dreaming; it seemed to him that chivalry demanded this of him. Such a mood was succeeded by one of pity, sheer self-pity that he was so little to his mother that she

could ask this of him, so little to Cecil that he could accept it of him. Finally indifference came; his feelings were benumbed—let them have their way.

His mother, hardly daring to breathe lest she disturb the victory she had won, sent for a cab. Cecil lay in an exhausted sleep on the sofa and did not know the moment he was left alone.

They were at the office the moment the doors were open, and Lady Barnsley remained in the cab while her eldest son walked up the steps with the gait almost of a drunken man. Two minutes later the old merchant arrived.

"I did it," Scott said, with wild eyes and ashen cheeks. "Cecil only cashed it for me."

It was not all this Scott told to the girl with wet eyes in the far-off Australian garden—just the bare outline of it was all he troubled her with, though now and again feeling became too strong for him and she had an illuminating flash or two of the whole affair.

"It was noble—noble of you," she said as he finished. She even put out her hand and wrung his for a moment, so swept off her feet she was by the wave of sympathy that washed over her.

He clung to the warm girl hand a moment, then dropped it with a hard effort.

"No," he said. "Do believe me, Miss Erwin, it was not noble at all. Oh, I'm not trying to depreciate myself; I dare say I thought it a bit fine myself once or twice while I was shut up.

But it really wasn't. I tell you it was mere sentimentalism that a man of my age—I was six-and-twenty—ought not to have been guilty of. If there'd been anything noble about it I shouldn't feel as I do now—a bitter hatred for them both—my mother as well as Cecil."

"You don't," said Ines, "only now and again in flashes, which is only human. You know you don't hate them all the time."

"I always despise them," said Scott, "and I'd never willingly touch their hands again."

"Have they done as they said?" said Ines, with natural curiosity; "sent you help—tried to repay?" She knew more than a little of the austerity of her neighbour's life.

"They tried," said Scott; "oh, I'll give them credit for that. They paid my passage—I've been able to return it to them, thank Heaven! And they've sent money three or four times; but I send it back—it would choke me to touch it."

"Thank you for telling me, thank you very much! I can't tell you how I appreciate your confidence," said Ines. "Have you told any one else?"

"Not I," said Scott. "Who would have believed me? I'm not even sure if your father will, but I'm going to tell him on chance. No; I've got to go through with it, of course, only——"

"Only what?" said Ines.

His voice became suddenly thick.

"I couldn't bear for *you* to think me a blackguard," he said. "I don't owe him that—that to shelter him *you* should think ill of me."

He seemed to himself to be standing more erect; he had flung off the intolerable weight that had made his shoulders stoop. He felt the equal of Douglas—ah, had he only met her sooner! Her eyelashes still gleamed wet in the faint light from the cottage. She was standing quite close to him, the breeze blowing her hair till once a little loosened strand of it actually touched his cheek. It was unendurable that he might not catch her in his arms, strain her to him, kiss her with lips that longed so bitterly. Something like a groan forced itself to his lips.

"What did you say?" she said startled.

He shook his head. He was almost past speech. He opened the gate and walked out, then came back one instant.

"Thank you for listening," he said in a thickened voice. "Good-night!" And without even touching her hand again he went; she saw him striding up his own garden path, saw him open his door, walk in and shut it behind him.

She went back to her cottage and cried herself to sleep like a child.

CHAPTER XIV

HYACINTH'S TASTE OF POWER

"Oh, love as long as love thou canst.
Oh, love as long as love will keep.
The day will come, the day will come,
When at a grave you stand and weep."
Freiligrath.

INES was dressed for going out by nine o'clock the next morning.

"Lor', Miss Ines!" said Hyacinth, to whom the sight of Ines with gloves on had become an extremely rare one, so persistently had the girl stayed about the cottage and immediate paddocks for the last two months. "Goin' to town, Miss Ines?" Hyacinth always spoke of a visit to the sleepy little village as "going to town."

"No," said Ines, "I'm going to walk over to Wendover; I want to use the telephone."

Hyacinth quite approved of this. She brushed an imaginary speck off her young mistress's sleeve.

"Glad you've got on your leaf dress, Miss Ines," she said.

"And you don't want me to add any pink bows?" said Ines, smiling.

"No, yous was right, miss."

"What?" said Ines, shaking her head.

"I mean *you* was right," corrected Hyacinth; "virginy creeper, that's what you are, turning to brown and yellow." She reflected a moment, and then added argumentatively, "But yous laid pink roses with the virginy on the cloth, I seen you, Miss Ines."

"Ah, but," said Ines gravely, "virginia creeper is so much prettier than my dress, I can take liberties with it."

"What a bit of luck your shoes match, miss—not being new ones neither," continued the little maid—"and your gloves. Think I'll have brown, too, for my new winter dress as you said I could have." She held her head on one side, considering Ines with the eye of an artist that is seeking hints for its own guidance.

She spoke without fear of being snubbed. Ines permitted plenty of these intimate little remarks from her lonely young handmaid. The girl's brightened face was sufficient reward; it was only when Mrs. Beattie was in the house, delivering some of the lectures that Ines did not know State orphans ought to receive, that any of the old sullenness showed.

A perfect passion for beauty and colour had taken possession of the poor, plain little thing. The seed of it that Ines had planted in her during her first week in the cottage had sprouted marvellously, and it was only by a good deal of vigilance that Ines was able to keep it in restraint at all.

The child, released suddenly from the drab of life in which she had moved so long, tended, as was natural, to a riot of colour.

She wanted to put green and yellow paper, pinked into fantastic patterns, on the shelves of the snow-white dresser. She yearned to festoon red art muslin round the plain little bath-room, to enamel the verandah chairs strawberry pink "like down at Mrs. Huggins," to put big coloured "tie backs" with butterfly bows on the straight hanging curtains of the sitting-room.

Ines found she had to assume the position now of lecturer on the subjects of restraint in art and the doctrine of suitability, and it was much harder work than the mere pointing out of beauty had been.

"Yes, I think I'll pick on brown," Hyacinth repeated, resting on the broom with which she had been sweeping out her shining little kitchen, washing-up operations being completed.

"I thought you said crimson," said Ines, and added temptingly, "like that deep crimson dahlia in the round bed."

The rich colour and velvety texture of the cactus dahlia filled the little girl's eye at once.

"Oh, so," she said, "yes. Look at it now, Miss Ines. Prettier than brown a lot. When you're in the sun, colours jump out of you, miss, but when you're not that brown does look a bit dull. That's why I said about the pink bows."

"I mustn't delay," said Ines. "I don't want

to keep Mrs. Shore here too long. Now what have you to do ? "

" Turn out your room nine to ten, ten to a quarter-parst water me own garding, quarter-parst to half gather the peas, half to quarter-to shell 'em, quarter-to his chicking brof and a flower on the tray—snapdragon I think ; there's a beauty out this morning, and you can always play rabbits with it when you're tired of lookin' at it. L'eleven to quarter-parst——"

" That will do," smiled Ines. " I shall be back by then I hope. And, Hyacinth ! "

" Miss ! "

" Remember, even if Mrs. Shore is a little sharp with you, you are not to say anything about *that* to her."

Hyacinth began to sweep industriously to save herself the necessary answer.

" Do you hear me, Hyacinth ? " repeated Ines, turning back from the step.

Hyacinth swept harder than ever, banging her broom round so vigorously that the tins began to rattle.

" Eliza," said Ines gently, " do you hear me ? "

" Very well, Miss Ines," said Hyacinth, brought to her knees in an instant.

" You promise ? "

" See my finger wet, see it——" began Hyacinth recklessly.

" Just a plain promise will do," said Ines.

" I promise solemnly not to round on Mrs.

Shore," said Hyacinth discontentedly; "all the same, Miss Ines, she rounds on me somethink dreadful, when you're not 'ere."

"There's no need for you to go near her," said Ines.

Hyacinth considered this aspect of the matter, but it promised dulness. She temporised.

"Y'only mean, of course, I'm not to say *that* when she gets on to me?"

"Yes, yes, that is all I mean," said Ines hastily.

Mrs. Shore was perfectly well able to hold her own in the war that ceaselessly went on between herself and Hyacinth, excepting only in one instance. When matters reached a crisis between them Hyacinth used to say—

"Yah, old 'toxication, who had to be locked up in the kitching and a gentleman sent for to proteck the mistress!"

At this poor Mrs. Shore used to break down and weep helplessly. That black, stormy evening, months ago now, was the sole occasion of her backsliding—to any palpable degree at all events—since Mr. Erwin had needed her. Both Mr. Erwin and Miss Ines, and even the gentleman who had been sent for, had been most magnanimous in the matter, and, after once assuring her that they knew quite well the fault would never be repeated, had never by word or look referred to it again.

But Hyacinth had found in the occurrence a very effective weapon of defence against the

uncertainties of temper that the bi-daily visitor permitted herself to show in the kitchen.

The moment matters grew strained between them Hyacinth would begin to lurch about the kitchen with a fixed and glassy eye, or pick up a tumbler and go through a spirited pantomime of drinking at a bar, or drop suddenly on to a chair and give vent to foolish babblings.

It was not from Mrs. Shore alone the girl had picked up this character study; her portrayals showed the mark of the more frequent and intimate study that is best yielded in one's immediate domestic circle.

It was only after Mrs. Shore had borne this cross in silence for some months that Ines discovered it. She had been much puzzled to find the reason why the woman would go into the kitchen with a smile on her face for her eleven o'clock tea and so frequently emerge in a flood of tears. Finally it all came out with a sob. It was that girl in there. Wouldn't give it a rest, not a day. Smallest thing, like set a saucepan down a minute on the clean table, and there she was, rubbing it into her.

"Rubbing what?" Ines said, mystified.

"Oh, *you* know," said poor Mrs. Shore.

But Ines was quite at sea.

"Me sudden illness that night," whispered the woman.

So Ines was forced to keep the peace by the threat of pains and penalties to be suffered.

Hyacinth had been mulcted of a sash, a pink hair-ribbon, even sentenced to wear the plaid frock for one whole day, and yet the sinful propensity was not eradicated. It was in truth the girl's sole taste of what it was like to wield power; she could not entirely relinquish it.

At last Ines set off. Scott, sowing fresh wheat, watched the brown frock till it merged in the autumn landscape of which it all the time seemed a part—warm brown stuff of a texture a little rough, soft brown felt hat, nestling on the brown-gold hair, brown silk scarf twisted round her neck and fluttering out in the breeze, russet gloves, russet shoes that matched—she was too good an artist for it to be as Hyacinth had assumed by a "bit of luck."

She walked with a less springing step than usual. Hyacinth's chatter had distracted her for a little time, but indeed something gnawed at her all the time.

There was a numbness in her father's left hand this morning that worried her. The doctors had not told her that such might be expected, or even if to be expected, whether it might prove to be a new danger. It was just a thing that had not occurred before, and though she made light of it to him when he fretfully complained he could not hold his magazine comfortably, though she rubbed the hand and laughed and said it was the first bite of winter, still she did not like it. She thought she would

send Hyacinth quietly to ask the doctor to come round—he came only twice a week now. Then she remembered that he was away, taking two days' duty at the hospital in Bonnethorne, twenty miles away, where an inexplicable outbreak of typhoid had taxed the staff beyond its powers. She must ring him up and ask him if there were any gravity in the symptom.

How to ring him up? She could not do it by the proxy of Hyacinth, or Mrs. Shore—or even of Scott, next door, who would have shown such pleasure in being asked. None of them could answer the doctor's questions but herself.

She lingered for a short time, even when her hat was on in the hope that Mrs. Beattie might drive up, as she often did in the early morning after driving her boys to the preparatory school that had so tiresomely established itself three miles from the Rectory. When Ines asked why the boys did not walk the distance like most Australian boys, who thought nothing of three miles, Mrs. Beattie only shook her head doubtfully. She hardly liked to explain that she never settled down properly to the day's duties until she had seen the school-gate safely closed on her offspring.

It was during the walk to school one day that Charlie had run away to sea. There were only two left now, Bobbie and Fred. Suppose that a similar wild idea entered into their heads while traversing that dusty red road? Certainly she

nagged less now, even when they brought their nature collections into their bedrooms; and she let them keep two pets each; some of poor Charlie's grievances with his home life had been that she "got on to a fellow so" and "never let a chap keep a dog." But boys seemed to lack understanding somehow. Charlie had gone one hot summer day; suppose Bobbie and Fred had some grievance brewing in their round little heads, and took the road's long chance to run clean away out of her arms? The drive to school—the little boys hated deliberately walking to the hated place—had established itself as an intimate and precious part of the day. They drove in turns, Bobbie and Fred; they gnawed their breakfast fruit in the intervals; they talked about congenial subjects like the habits of centipedes, and the chances of Fraser winning the school bat, never of undone home-lessons, or unaccountable holes in Sunday trousers, or pond aquaria in washstand soap-dishes beginning to smell to heaven. That long, red road that wound up, up as far as the preparatory school and then with a sharp turn vanished round a corner, always gave Mrs. Beattie a sense of insecurity and humiliation. It was upon it that Charlie had been seen by an acquaintance for the very last time, trudging determinedly, his face set away from his mother and towards the sea that called him from hundreds of miles away.

But plainly, this morning busy Mrs. Beattie

had no time for the Erwins, so Ines could not calculate on doing her errand and being back in three-quarters of an hour, which was Currant's time unless he felt otherwise disposed. Driving, Ines could have telephoned from the post office, but when it came to a matter of walking it was almost as short to cut across the paddocks at the north end of the village and then up one of the long drives that led to Wendover. She could count on using the Wendover telephone the moment she reached it, and not to have to wait for half-a-dozen other people to take the order of priority, and exact the precise three minutes' conversations from the telephone to which their pennies entitled them.

Furthermore, Mrs. Wharton appealed to the anxious girl as a very tower of comfort in distress. Lieutenant Wharton had suffered from paralysis before his death, the effects of his almost forgotten accident reasserting themselves in this form as the physical powers grew feebler. Several times the old lady had made suggestions invaluable to the invalid's comfort; she had even, on one or two occasions, prompted the doctor with a hint about something the specialists had done for the Lieutenant. So the girl turned her face to Wendover, yearning for assurance from the old woman that the new numbness was nothing to mind about.

But at the cottage gate something prompted her, and she ran back along the path.

"Daddie, a horrid memory pressed that I had only kissed you fourteen times this morning," she said, reappearing at Erwin's chair, "and you know seventeen is our inviolable number."

They exchanged three more, he pretending to protest, but in reality sunning himself in the warmth of her love.

"Be off," he said. "I was just congratulating myself that I had got rid of you for once. Be off, you limpet! And why doesn't that cavalier of yours bring your horse along? I shall begin to think he has jilted you, if I don't see him here in another day or two."

The words were playful, but there was a faint shade of anxiety in his eyes. Certainly Douglas had asked his permission to speak to Ines. And certainly Ines had blushed and hidden her face on her father's shoulder when he had teasingly asked was all well.

But the rides had been discontinued, and Douglas had not been to the cottage for days. Surely there had been no quarrel between the young people as early as this?

"You have not quarrelled, have you, my girl—you and Wharton?" he said anxiously.

"What an idea!" said Ines. "I don't believe he would let me quarrel with him if I tried."

Erwin gave a sigh of relief. A year ago he had lain worrying half of every night to think of leaving his little girl unprovided for. But

Providence had been marvellously good, as Mrs. Beattie had often reminded him, and he could think of the future now with the most perfect peace in his heart.

"Be off," he cried again.

She kissed him passionately once more.

"I couldn't love any mere husband as I do you, you dearest, dearest of fathers," she said, breathless with the statement and the fervent kiss together.

He pulled her ears, and a wisp of her hair, and bade her not make blisters come to her wicked little tongue.

But the gratified love shining in his eyes sent her away with a swelling heart.

CHAPTER XV

TO WENDOVER AND BACK

Up the Wendover slopes she went with hastening steps.

She loved the bushland approaches to this great place. The gums had been let alone here, towering red gums, blue gums, silver gums, bean-like saplings, they had it all their own wild way up the slopes; just space enough had been cleared for a ten-foot-wide path to wind between them, that was all, and no one troubled to even sweep up the thick carpet of grey-green leaves that had so softly fallen.

It was different, of course, when you began to come to the white fences. The hand of man was discernible then, an indefatigable hand. Lawns, smooth as velvet, spread themselves here and there; English oaks and elms and sycamores waved their branches, and happily enough, among the coral trees and the planes and the camphor laurels. Here stretched a pergola, wistaria hanging heavily through its widely latticed roof. Here was the long, vine-covered walk leading to the tennis courts; many

a tale of love had been whispered here, with the green and brown passion fruit hanging down shamelessly to listen. There blazed the flower-beds and in the midst of them, large, red-faced, comfortable, sprawled the big house itself. Architecturally it was of low structure, and indeed it seemed to sprawl. The first time Ines had seen it, some ridiculous flight of imagination had induced her to liken it in her mind to some great, comfortable animal basking there in the sunlight. And though she knew it well by this, and in a measure was fond of it, the simile had never quite departed from her. It always struck her as a house without a soul.

As she went up the well-gravelled, immediate drive, she was able to conceive pretty well of the occupations of the entire family. Douglas was away on horseback somewhere; since she would not leave the cottage and ride with him in a morning he had returned to his morning work of looking after the estate. Sholto was probably at the Rectory. It was vacation at the University just now, but Sholto's Greek was of so negligible a quantity that the examiners might be disposed not to notice that it was there in the next examination, if he did not make some slight effort between terms. The ladies of the household were, doubtless, in what Sholto termed a perfect pother of pots and pans. It was not that there were no maids at Wendover, but housekeeping was on such a tremendous scale

there that it took help from every one to keep the great wheel moving.

Cade was probably on the back verandah filling the thirty odd vases of drawing-room, dining-room and halls with flowers. It was work for which she had not the least taste nor liking, but Mrs. Wharton would not have dreamed of allowing a housemaid to waste time and enjoy herself doing it.

Elizabeth, doubtless, was conscientiously plodding through the dusting of the drawing-room's precious china, of which there were, what Sholto called, countless cartloads. Presently she would have to check the laundry linen with the housemaid; then there were the week's bills to be gone through with the cook, the orchids to water—she hated orchids, but the new glass-house gardener was so incompetent Mrs. Wharton turned the task over to Elizabeth lest a Cypripedium should receive a drachm too much water, or a Peristeria a drachm too little. It was doubtful whether Elizabeth would get a moment to as much as think out a new stencil pattern until late in the afternoon.

If they had delighted in their work, or had even felt a glow of interest in it, it would have been a different thing; but long, long years of it had made it inexpressibly monotonous to both of them and they went through it in the dreariest way. Yet it never occurred to either of them to firmly refuse to so squander so many

hours of the day. Their mother had settled it, years since, in her own mind, that they could do nothing better with their time, and they always seemed to lack the spirit to resist the tight rein with which she still drove them. It is more than possible, too, they realised vaguely that there were a great number of hours between breakfast and bed-time, and that those hours might seem doubly long if they turned too many of these little duties over to hired hands.

Ines' ring disturbed the ponderous machinery of the house, which was always in full working order at this hour. It was very rarely the front-door bell rang so early. Even Mrs. Beattie had been taught that she must not come to Wendover on any pretext, earlier than the luncheon hour. This was Mrs. Wharton's hour in the kitchen, the hour that strained the patience of the cook and the kitchenmaid almost to snapping point. She went through pantries, poked into the ice-chest, lifted the lid of the bread-pans, weighed out stores, all with an air of the profoundest suspicion that she would find everything wanting. Even when she found nothing whatever to complain about, she never went further than giving a dissatisfied sort of sniff. Then the writings upon the kitchen slates began, the elaborate orders for luncheon—there were rarely less than four courses even for that meal,—the menu for the late dinner, the meals for the servants, and the semi-servants, such as the

visiting upholsterer, the dressmaker making morning blouses, the electrician who was fixing the kitchen bells, and so on.

Sholto, dropping in unexpectedly for lunch once with the Erwins, expressed his satisfaction at the simplicity of the meal he received—a savoury omelette, cooked in the chafing-dish at table, cream cheese and brown bread-and-butter, a rock melon, a glass of light wine and later black coffee.

"Our meals seem perfect orgies in comparison," he complained.

Ines' ring disturbed all this—the concentration of half the members of the household on the question of luncheon, to which event it still wanted three hours.

"I won't see *any one*," said Mrs. Wharton to the housemaid. "You can tell them so. The idea of disturbing me as early as this! I haven't even been out to start the men. And Miss Cade won't see them—I don't want the flowers standing about all day. And Miss Elizabeth won't. Don't show them in the drawing-room; Miss Elizabeth's in there dusting and can't be hindered. If they come as early as this they must expect to stand at the door. You can go and see who it is."

The girl came back to report Miss Erwin—wanted to use the telephone, wanted to see Mrs. Wharton; if Mrs. Wharton very much engaged, would not ask to see her but hoped she might use the telephone.

" You told her I would be there in a moment ? You showed her into the drawing-room ? "

" No, ma'am."

" Do you mean to tell me you left her at the door ? "

" You said I was to," said the maid sulkily.

" I didn't expect you to act like a born fool," said Mrs. Wharton, brushing her indignantly aside and stalking to the front door.

The young girl's able generalship, her beauty, her pathetic position, her love of gardening, one or all of these had completely won over the tart old woman. She went to her now, hands outstretched, sincere anxiety in her eyes ; she knew that nothing but an emergency had brought her thus far so early.

Ines told her tale, and was reassured quite in motherly fashion. The new chill in the air would be enough to account for it ; his circulation, of course, must be very bad lying there so long. Still, they would ring up the doctor.

The doctor seemed reassuring too ; asked plenty of questions, said " Yes " and " Yes " in answer to them ; told Ines she might give a dose or two of the red medicine perhaps, said that as he found he must come over that afternoon to see Mrs. Huggins' young hopeful, who was reported to have appendicitis but much more probably had an attack of green peaches, he would try to make time to come up the hill too—just to reassure her, that was all.

The girl hung up the receiver at last, relief on

her face. The tension had been too great for her and she found, to her dismayed amaze, that she was crying and could not stop. And, equally to her amaze, that she was crying actually in Mrs. Wharton's arms.

They had a luxurious ten minutes together in a little room off the hall. The girl had not allowed herself the relief of giving way for months; the woman had not fondled and comforted any one like this since her grown children were quite small. Something in her old heart stirred, something that told her that the sweetest thing life could yet give to her would be the feel of little grandchildren climbing into her lap, clinging around her neck.

Ines dared not indulge long, for she was anxious to be back at her post. The old lady offered to have the dogcart got ready, which was certainly an offer that she would not have made to Cade or Elizabeth at a sacred hour like the present, when Luke was cleaning the harness.

But Ines refused; it would take the half-hour's walk to blow the signs of tears from her face, she said. She must have that time alone, quite alone to get calm once more.

Mrs. Wharton walked down to the edge of the bushland drive with her. Then she kissed her wistfully.

"Be quick and make up your mind, dear," she said. "You are keeping me on tenterhooks

as well as that boy of mine. He is a good boy, child—we should all do our best to make you happy. You are not a coquette, are you ? "

Nor Cade nor Elizabeth nor Sholto, no, nor Douglas himself could have credited it that this was the overbearing, tyrannous old mother they knew, speaking in this almost suing tone.

The girl started away from the old woman's arm, her face flaming crimson.

" Yes, I am a coquette," she said. " I don't love him. I shall never marry him. I—I—oh I am treating him shamefully ! "

She began to cry again, then broke away and started off, almost running to get back home.

But the long slopes gave her back her self-control again, the keen wind of the early autumn dried her tears. By the time she had crossed the flat paddocks at the north of the village she was mistress of herself once more, as indeed she must be before she reached her cottage. Out of sheer defiance to her own spirits she began to sing—a little French song it was that she had known as a child—

> " Ah ! si j'avais un sou tout rond,
> J'acheterais un blanc mouton,
> La Verdi, la Verdon
> Et ioupe ! sautez donc, la Verdon."

To Scott, hastening down the slope to her through a tangle of bush, the gay words were carried and flung in his face in all their merry insolence. A very sweat broke out on his brow.

Then she saw him.

"Good-morning, Mr. Sheldon," she said gaily. "What are you doing down here?—they won't let you make a wheat-patch here, you know; this belongs to Mr. Huggins, and if he saw us trespassing he would get us both took up."

Then she lifted her eyes to his face; she had been diffident of doing so before, fearing her eyelids were still reddened. But now she was tense in every limb in a second.

"Tell me," she cried. "Father—he is ill!" She sprang from him, started to run.

He strode after her, caught her arm, tucked it firmly in his own.

"Hold on to me," he said; "we can go more quickly so. Now, you've got to be a brave girl."

"Don't be slow," she gasped. "Tell me at once."

"I'm going to," he said, and held her arm more tightly. "Your father is dead. He died half-an-hour ago, in my arms. Quite painlessly. Believe me, quite painlessly."

CHAPTER XVI

'THERE IS SOME ONE ELSE'

It was the day after the funeral.

Mrs. Beattie had been obliged to pack up her telescope basket and return home to Bobbie and Fred, Mr. Beattie and the organ. She had stayed with Ines for the two days preceding the funeral the funeral's long and unreal day, and all the next morning.

But as the girl only shook her head when delicately approached on the subject of crape and the dressmaker, shook it wearily, and as she only sat and stared out of the window and did not even cry, it seemed to Mrs. Beattie, passionately eager though she was to be of comfort, that there was no further use for her and she had better therefore return to her legitimate duties.

So she sent Hyacinth down to the Rectory to request the attendance of Currant and the sulky, and she packed up, and wandered uncertainly round the silent sitting-room, and more than ever was oppressed with the sense of the space to spare in it and the crying pity it was that the chance to buy in the red sideboard had been missed.

She stood disconsolately before the barometer, which seemed to hold an honoured place in one corner. Ines had declared she must find a use for the object since she had spent a solid pound upon it, and she had tried it variously as a letter rack, a bill file, a duster holder, and a portfolio. Finally she had had a brilliant notion; she illuminated and stuck up in it every Sunday what she called her text for the week, and what Mrs. Beattie called shocking irreverence.

For the texts were from Mark Twain, quite as likely as not, or from Gilbert, or *Alice in Wonderland*. Cheery, humorous little bits of wisdom they were, and they helped to keep the flag of courage flying in the two cottages oftener than any of them dreamed.

To-day Mrs. Beattie was confronted by the verse—

> "The centipede was happy quite
> Until the toad for fun
> Inquired which leg comes after which?
> Which worked her mind to such a pitch,
> She lay bewildered in the ditch,
> Considering how to run."

The text had not been changed for a whole week.

The episode of the purchase of the barometer came back to the lady, mingled with the memory of the blown-glass ship and Charlie. The memory of Charlie produced restlessness. She must get back to Bobbie and Fred at once—a nostalgia for her own home assailed her. But she made one more effort with Ines while Currant came

leisurely up the hill, with Mr. Beattie, dreamy-eyed, holding the reins, and Hyacinth on the back seat, given up to the luxurious fancy that this was another funeral and she was chief mourner. Hyacinth held her handkerchief to her eyes the whole way, and after a time Mr. Beattie, catching the flutter of it out of his eye corners, turned and asked had she something in her eye. When he saw her tragic face—she had just been reciting the " Dust to dust " portion out of the Prayer-book to herself—he came to the conclusion that his wife had misjudged her and that she was a most tender-hearted girl. When they got to the gate he gave her a shilling, surreptitiously, and bade her buy herself some chocolate. On which the girl thanked him with her very heart in her eyes, for she had passionately wanted to " go into black " for her late master, and Miss Ines seemed to be taking no steps whatever in the matter. The shilling would at least buy crape for her sleeve and a handkerchief with a black border.

" My dear," said Mrs. Beattie, as the sulky came in sight and still Ines sat aimlessly looking out of the window, " you must rouse yourself; you must indeed. It is more than time that you saw to your mourning. Make it yourself if you like; it will give you something to do. Except the best dress—you had better leave that to Parker and Lang—crape is difficult stuff. Now, will you let me help? If you don't like to go down to the shops just yet,

make a list out and I will go to Bonnethorne for you. Six yards will be ample, as you won't like to have much trimming. Shall I get voile, or what about Persian cord ? It wears well but never is so good a black as voile, I think. And what about dyeing ? Your brown now—it is all wool, I think ; that ought to take the dye well."

Ines found that she must make an effort and be explicit.

" Dear Mrs. Beattie," she said, " it is good of you. But don't trouble. I shall not think of buying mourning. He "—she paused just one second—" hated it more than you can guess. A woman a mass of black used to make him feel positively ill, he said. He could not bear the colour to come near him."

" But—but," said Mrs. Beattie doubtfully, " he is gone now, my dear, and he would wish you to do what is the orthodox thing, I am sure."

" No ; daddie never wished me to do that in his life," said the girl with a dreary little smile.

" Even if you don't wear it at home you must when you go out," urged Mrs. Beattie, " people would think it so strange. Just let me order you one dress, Ines." Her voice was actually beseeching.

But Ines would not listen. Nothing would induce her to send for the length of black material.

" But you *can't* wear colours, it would be positively unnatural," wailed Mrs. Beattie.

"I have some white woollens—I will wear those if you like," Ines said, with a wan smile, "and there is a grey somewhere. But not black, indeed."

So Mrs. Beattie departed, adding it to her tasks to soothe the susceptibilities of the neighbourhood on the subject by explaining that artists never acted like ordinary people, and that the poor man had left solemn injunctions for his daughter not to wear black.

Mrs. Shore remained in the cottage, as some sort of a prop to Ines and Hyacinth. Mrs. Wharton had driven over in the morning and begged to carry them both off to Wendover until things were settled.

But how could Ines accept such an invitation?

"She is a girl and to be won," said the old woman to Douglas on her return, calmly appropriating Shakespeare's wisdom for her own. "Go over this afternoon and refuse to take no."

So Douglas went.

The girl met him with burning face, and checked the rush of words of love that sprang to his lips at this first sight of her in her desolation.

"I have treated you shamefully," she said. "I dare not even ask you to forgive me. When you asked me two months ago if I could care for you, I—I said I didn't know."

"Yes," he said, puzzled, "that was not treating me shamefully, little girl. Of course you didn't know. I hadn't given you long

enough. I have been quite content to wait—and hope."

"But I did know," the girl said, her cheeks burning deeper and still more deep; "I knew quite well I could never care for you. It was for his sake—my father's. He wanted it so badly—he was so terrified at the thought of leaving me unprovided for. I—I felt nothing mattered but letting his mind be at rest."

"And you would have married me?" Douglas said with a slow, quiet smile that gave his face a good deal of character of its own; "well, I should not have objected to that. The love would have come." He drew nearer to her; there was deep love in his eyes; she was hard to win, this little girl, but ultimately it would be all right; he really had no very serious doubt of it.

"No," she said vehemently, "I should never have married you. That is where I have been so—so callous to you. Listen! The doctor told me these three months were the critical ones of his illness—that he might be taken suddenly—as he was; or make quite a good recovery."

"Yes?" said Douglas, still uncomprehending.

"I sacrificed you. If it were indeed his last few months I decided he should be happy till the end of them—should go happy. He trusted you so much."

"And if he had recovered?"

"Then I decided he would be strong enough to bear the truth, which was that I did not

return your love and could never, never marry you."

"Ah!" he said, and sat with his eyes fixed on the carpet for nearly five minutes.

"It was unforgivable of me," she said in a stifled tone. "I shall never forgive myself. It seems like the most heartless coquetry, for I know I let you think there might be hope. Only—it wasn't quite heartless. Nothing could tell you how I suffered over it."

"If I try again, Ines—very, very hard—not just yet, perhaps, but some months ahead—a year ahead if you wish it—might there be a little hope for me?"

Still the girl shook her head, drearily.

"A girl is not always sure of her feelings," he pleaded. "You may change to me. If I am patient—very patient?"

It was a brave man and a good who stood before her.

But still she shook her head.

"Then there is some one else?" he said quietly.

And now the colour rushed all over her face. She had no need to speak one word. He was answered now.

"If you knew how I hate myself," she sobbed, "you would forgive me."

He lifted her hand to his lips.

"I forgive you with all my heart," he said. "Good-bye, little girl."

CHAPTER XVII

SHOLTO

THEN there came Sholto, hard on his brother's heels.

Mrs. Shore would have kept him back, for she knew the girl lay huddled up on the desolate sofa of the back verandah. But the boy pushed wildly past the woman, the tears running down his own cheeks, for he had caught the sound of sobs.

He went out and fell down on his knees beside her, put both his arms round her.

"Ines," he said, "Ines, Ines!"

Never in all his after life did Sholto feel so divine a flame of love as the one that at sixteen consumed him for this girl years ahead of him in age.

He ached to fight the world for her, to do some heroic act that should even cost him his life so long as she was served, but these things might not be, and all he might do was to kneel beside her like this and cry like a child just because she was so hurt and cried. No one else had comforted her so much. When they both were a little calmer and sitting side by side, he,

horribly ashamed of his eyes, said in a low voice—

"Are you going to marry old Douglas, Ines?"

"No," she said, "though I do like him very, very much."

"He's a good chap," said the younger brother generously.

"I know, I know."

"But you aren't going to marry him?"

"Oh no."

"Ines!"—he flung a tempestuous arm round her again—"darling, do wait for me. I'll be twenty in—in no time. I'm a man now, though I don't seem very old. Do wait for me, darling. Oh, I would work for you so hard; all the rest of my life would go to trying to make you happy. Do say you will, darling, darling!"

Ines actually kissed him, the poor blurred face so close to her own was so loving, so boyish, so beseeching. There was not a suspicion of a smile on her face; she did not even ask him to consider himself as her brother; just murmured, "Poor old Sholto—dear old Sholto! I love you for loving me so much. I care for you almost more than every one in Wyama."

"As much as Douglas?" asked the working lips. He knew that she was refusing him, and his poor young heart was almost bursting with his misery, but he wanted to hear that he was preferred to that brother of his.

"Much more than Douglas," she assented.

"Then why won't you? Darling, darling! four years is no difference at all—I'm much older than you really because I'm a man. I could never love more than this—I could never love any woman after you."

She was very gentle with him. She did not even smile at this statement, or assure him that he would love like this half-a-dozen times before he was twenty.

But it was essential that she should not give a spark of hope for him to keep wildly fanning into life while his studies came to an absolute standstill.

"It's a dreary world, Sholto," she said. "You love me and can't have me, and"—the words stuck in her throat—"there's some one I care for and—can't have."

The boy sat up as straight as a soldier; dropped her hand as if it burned him. Just twice his chest rose and fell.

"Of course. We might have expected it," he said. "In England, of course. But why shouldn't you have him? You'll be able to go back now. Why not go by the next boat?—that will be the best. I'll get you all the dates of sailing. It's—it's only six weeks on board. In six weeks you'll be happy again, dar—Miss Ines."

Ines rang for tea, which Hyacinth brought—Hyacinth, quite annoyed because the young gentleman stood looking out into the back

garden all the time instead of noting how deftly the tray was arranged.

Going away, the boy lingered a moment before he mounted his horse; Ines was giving the beautiful creature the piece of sugar it had never failed to get from her hand. He repeated his intentions of sending at once to Sydney for information about each and all of the mail steamers; he stated the fact that relatives often trusted him with the task of choosing their berths, as he really knew a thing or two in that way.

"I couldn't bear for them to give you a cabin where you'd get the afternoon sun in the tropics," he said; "morning sun doesn't matter—the cabins get a chance to cool down before bedtime."

"I haven't settled anything yet," she said, "but when I do it will be to you and you only I'll come for help."

He gathered the reins into his hand and looked at the stirrup.

"'Fraid you think me a pretty choice specimen of a young ass, Miss Ines," he said.

"I think you the dearest boy in the world," the girl said warmly.

He flung himself up into the saddle.

"No, no," he smiled, "a particularly perfect puppy in the pink of preservation."

But the quick young tears had come to his eyes again.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME ONE ELSE

"Love has been so long
Subdued in me, eating me through and through,
That now 'tis all of me and must have way."
On a Balcony.

"An' now," said Hyacinth to Mrs. Shore, "'ere comes that Mr. Shelding. Like a party it's been, the whole day. Hasn't it? But I dare say the same tea'll do him, if you left the pot on the stove. He won't be as p'ticler as real gentlemen like Mr. Wharton and young Mr. Wharton, will he?"

They were in the kitchen discussing the week's events, not a little exhilarated and lifted out of their usual rut by the sudden happenings.

Hyacinth was setting a tray for Ines, setting it with much care and affection. All the time that Mrs. Beattie had been there the task of carrying things actually to her mistress's side had been denied her; Mrs. Beattie had insisted upon doing that office herself. But at last the house was their own again.

At the same time she did not hasten to make

the tea. She was giving Ines time to calm down again.

The fatherless girl had shut herself in on the secluded back verandah, for the large sitting-room, giving, as it did, straight on to the front verandah, lacked privacy too much for use just now. And the tears, at last freely started by Sholto's boyish affection, seemed as if they never would cease to flow.

She moved the big screen that had so long been used to keep draughts away from the sofa head—moved it until it hid the sofa—and then she crept into its shelter and, lying face downwards, buried her head in the pillows and let the sobs come.

"Do 'er good," said Mrs. Shore, who now and again heard the pathetic sound in the kitchen. "Unnatchral it was, her not shedding a tear all this time. I've seen 'em like that before, bear up quite stony all the first day and the second day—even with th' undertakers tramping round. An' if I'd my way they wouldn't be let into houses, them men, not till they'd put list slippers on. Plain croolty I call it at times when people has got nothink to do but strain their ears for sounds. But I never see even the stoniest of 'em last out the funeral day like she did and not cry one tear."

"I have," said Hyacinth, "me aunt did. Never cried a drop till me father went down and told her a week after that the ole man, me

uncle, hadn't kep' up his 'surance and she wouldn't get a sixpence."

"I'm talking about people who've got their natchral affections," said Mrs. Shore with dignity.

"Meanin' me aunt hadn't ?" cried Hyacinth, up in arms at once.

"Didn't you tell me yourself she useter throw saucepan lids at him ?" said Mrs. Shore pacifically.

Hyacinth assumed a limp and lurching attitude in a second.

"Only when she was like that," she said, and added with a confidential wink, "*you* understand !"

But Mrs. Shore was too genuinely depressed at the trouble in the house to care about insults to-day. Besides, what did her own good behaviour matter now ? There was no one, not one soul left who needed her.

"You'd think there'd be some one as 'ud come and stand by her just now, wouldn't you ?" she said, and mopped her eyes as the uncontrollable sobs reached her again. "Not just Mrs. Beattie ; she don't count, of course."

"Of course not," agreed Hyacinth ; "she's paid to do it, 't least, it's part of his work, clergyman an' all that—any one that dies she's got to go an' do the same. My goodness, isn't the house a diff'rent place without her !"

"Listen," said Mrs. Shore pitifully, "it's heart-breaking, isn't it ?"

Hyacinth's heart was by no means as soft as that of the scarred old woman who had battled with life since she was nine years old—fifty long years now.

" Yes," she said judicially, " it's hard for her. But it's the best thing that could have 'appened. He was quite useless, and she'd have lost 'er chanst always tied up by his side."

Mrs. Shore rose up and began feebly to fold an armful of tea towels she had brought in from the line. Hyacinth's philosophy was too much for her; she suffered from a heart constitutionally too warm, though there were few who suspected her of the malady.

" All the same," Hyacinth went on, yielding a little, " I wish there was some relingtive as would come. There's her black 'as got to be thought of. Suit her real well, it will."

" Not as much as an aunt, isn't there ? " said Mrs. Shore anxiously. An aunt would have been an immense load off her own mind.

" On'y forynurs right over in Englan'," said Hyacinth.

The light began to die out across the sky as Ines sobbed her heart out on the sofa. It had been about half-past four when Sholto went, and it was almost an hour later now.

The first violence of her grief was spent; sometimes she sat upright, away from the cushions and looked about her with eyes round with terror. The loneliness appalled her; she

dared not think of life at all without that helpless figure in the house to plan and care for.

The long stress of the long, long year was over; the almost intolerable strain of the last three months, when she had been entirely obsessed by the doctor's prediction—recovery or death. But not even physical relief had come with the sudden snapping of the strain; nothing but a frenzied feeling of loss at no longer having the strain.

She stared down at her helplessly hanging hands; what was there any more for them to do? She pressed them together, she bit her lips, forced down the sob that rose again in her throat. She was not going to break into crying again; it would distress Hyacinth and Mrs. Shore, but here were the shadows gathering deeper and deeper, and what was she to do? No one in all the house but Hyacinth and Mrs. Shore—not one who really cared! Ah, why had she sent Sholto away? He would have helped to keep the terror of the loneliness away another hour or two.

How could she bear it?—oh, why didn't Scott come? She suddenly felt she must die if Scott did not come and gather her into his arms. He had never told her he loved her; never once by word of lip. But she knew. Never had any man who had come to care for her looked at her with just the look that came into his eyes when they met. He loved her, he loved her but he

would never tell her so, never with that black blot behind him in the English life! Well, she would tell him, then, that was all. Between herself and him, both of them struggling, drowning in a sea of misery, what question could there be of pride?

"The next-door gentleman at the door, dearie," said Mrs. Shore outside the screen, and delicately refraining from as much as a look within.

Hyacinth almost pushed the old woman down, so fiercely did she thrust her aside, saying in a wrathful whisper, "I'm servant here, not you. You're only the char, *now*."

Inside the screen she said, "Mr. Shelding at the door, Miss Ines, an' I tole him it wasn't no use, you'd been seein' other gen'lmen and was that upset. So he sez to arst you if you could see him to-morrer."

The desolate girl thrilled with a wave of returning life.

"No, no," she said; "I will see him now."

"Your eyes is real bad," said Hyacinth significantly.

"I don't care," said the girl, and pushed the screen away and stood up in the shadowy room. "Ask him to come."

Hyacinth walked through the sitting-room. "After all," she said to herself, "it's gettin' pretty dark, an' it's only *him*. I wouldn't have liked Mr. Douglas to have seed her with her face all blotched like that."

Scott came across the little space at a step, his heart so full for her suffering that he could not speak one word.

He had seen Douglas enter that afternoon and had been glad, honestly glad to think that there was some one with the right to comfort her. He came himself, not with the right but only the consuming wish to comfort. He had been unable to sit in his cottage and picture her there alone for the first time as the shadows gathered so sombrely. How came it that they had all gone, one after another, and left her there quite alone with only that unfortunate old woman and that ignorant girl ? He must see to this for himself.

The girl took a step to meet him. She seemed to have suddenly lost control of herself.

" Oh," she said, " how could you be so long in coming ? "

Then he read the incredible tale in her swimming eyes, and a simple madness seized him. He snatched her in his arms, kissed her again, again, again, wet cheeks, poor eyes, piteously trembling lips.

She clung to him wildly, sobbed, laughed, shivered in her joy and misery.

It was not for five minutes that remembrance came hurtling down on him like a poisoned javelin.

His arms dropped to his sides, he looked at her with ashen cheeks.

" God forgive me," he said, " I had forgotten. I am engaged."

CHAPTER XIX

IRIS

And this is how it sometimes seems to some men that Fate delights to work. They see her sitting bland, smiling, allowing her victims to play in the sunshine, careless and unafraid, as calm-eyed children. She stoops down and whispers to them that this is how she has ordered life for them; oh yes, others have felt her whip, but not these—she is always going to grant sunshine for these. She puts her hand into the bag by her side, and with a large, benevolent smile flings out of it golden balls, honours and gifts of most exquisite love. They grasp them eagerly and go on happily with their play; it will be always so, always this sunshine, always these lovely gifts.

Then they look up and suddenly all her face has darkened. She snatches back her gifts, she drives them out of the sunshine. Even that is not enough; she pursues them wherever they try to creep, pursues them with stinging pebbles, sometimes with whips and sharp-edged stones. Nothing they can do any more can placate her.

True, they did nothing before to deserve her smiles, but now, however they strive, she is relentless. On and on she drives them—will she ever weary ? Will the pitiless stones follow them right through the rest of life ?

Scott had asked the question. Now Ines asked it. But Fate kept her counsel closely, as she ever does

The incredible thing indeed was true.

It was to Iris, the friend of that far-away London boarding-house, that Scott was engaged. She was a frail little thing, quite pathetically beautiful. The soul of a poet shone out of her great blue eyes ; her mouth was sensitive, the colour ebbed to and fro in her cheeks with every mood.

The only child of a mother who worshipped her, who lived only for her, it practically seemed another edition of the case of Lady Barnsley and Cecil. Only, the girl was full of sweetness as well as of sentiment, full of endearing little ways, capable of a love for all the unhappy people in the world. That, perhaps, was the flaw in her soundness ; she had a leaning towards the unhappy. Even as a child she never bestowed all the wealth of her affection on a healthy and merry little kitten or dog ; it was always the crippled ones, the dejected, that she gathered to her heart.

The mother, a Mrs. Bassett, a widow with an income just large enough to enable her to live

and bring up her one child in moderate comfort, had of late years kept up no settled home. In the winter she carried her girl off to Italy or the South of France, to protect her from climatic dangers. In the summer they wandered pleasantly among the English lakes, or took a Devonshire cottage, or tasted the pleasures of one of the quieter seaside places. For headquarters in London they retained the ground floor at the modest but comfortable boarding-house to which Scott and Cecil had found their way.

The young people soon made friends; the boys on the top floor seemed lonely—what more natural thing than that the ground floor should ask them down to the piano? Mrs. Bassett had unimpeachable characters of them from the landlady: clerks in an office they were certainly, and badly off, but sons of Lady Barnsley and, better than that, nephews of John Barnsley, the big woollen merchant in Gravesend Street.

So the intimacy continued. Scott, working doggedly hard both at his office work and his medical reading, which he was trying to keep up, did not avail himself of the drawing-room invitations as much as Cecil, but still he went from time to time. He was a man with the home passion deeply planted in him, and this simple, pleasant room with gentle little Mrs. Bassett and large-eyed Iris moving about it seemed the nearest approach to his notions of

home that he had yet been granted. He never liked to think of that wandering childhood of his, spread out over half the map of Europe. And in the lamp-beshaded home in Little Mitcham, something had always been lacking. But here was gentleness, genuineness, much affection, and the graces of life to which he had been quite a stranger for those two first strenuous years in London. He found it very pleasant after a hard day's work.

He was not in the least in love with Iris. He felt himself indeed at any time better able to talk to Mrs. Bassett. Iris was too fond of poetry for him; he had never cared for poetry. She never looked at things quite healthily, it seemed to himself, who had already all a medical man's keen admiration of the perfectly normal. Besides, it seemed clear to him that she preferred Cecil's companionship; she and Cecil had very many things in common.

Quite conceivably he might have drifted into love with her; she was so pretty, so feminine, and she formed so entirely his whole gallery of girl-acquaintance at present.

But in the midst of the pleasant days he was plunged without a second's warning straight into the ice-cold sea of the tragedy.

When he stood dazed in the ante-room of the court after his sentence, a constable touched his arm. "Ladies to see you," he said. "Not quite the rule, in course, but I can manage it

as the Court's not riz yet. You can have five minutes."

He walked to the door, admitted the ladies—Mrs. Bassett and Iris—and then considerately turned his back.

Iris rushed to Scott's side, seized his hand, pressed it, the tears running down the delicate fairness of her face. *She* believed in him, *she* did not care a bit if he had done this dreadful thing: never let him think he had no friends left; all the three years she would be thinking of him and praying for him—he must promise her not to lose courage—he must promise her never to lose faith. She was half beside herself with agitation; a doctor would have diagnosed the attack as hysteria.

Poor little Mrs. Bassett stood helplessly by. She herself had been immeasurably shocked at the crime, and of her own will would have never taken the hand of its perpetrator again. She felt all the indignation and fear of a mother-hen who has just learnt that a fox has been in company with her only chicken.

But Iris had dragged her to the court. Iris had insisted on sitting through the entire trial and listening to every word. Iris had, after the sentence, seized her by the arm and carried her off to a side door, and insisted that she should bribe the constable to an immediate interview with the sentenced man. She had obeyed. No one but herself knew the force of

will that existed in her slender daughter—no one but herself would have credited the fact that so frail-looking a creature had an obstinacy absolutely inconquerable, by a mother at least.

She stood now, looking in a terrified way from Scott to the girl. He seemed behaving very well; he thanked Iris steadily for her great kindness; he assured her that it would be the only memory that he should care to dwell on during his imprisonment; but he honestly seemed embarrassed by the visit, and looked over at her mother once or twice as if to say, "Why on earth did you let her come to a place like this?"

Still, the memory was really a pleasant one in the blank dead days that followed. How blank and how dead the days, let that man say who has watched one thousand and ninety-five of them crawl by, one by one—always one by one.

When he became entitled to indulgences—as after a year he did, so hard was he striving, lashed by the awful fear that he might sink to degradation like his companions, surrounded always by them and cut off from hope—when he became entitled to these, Iris began to write to him. Her hysteria seemed in nowise to have abated; the letters she wrote to him were practically love-letters. How might he dream that he was merely the object of the girl's immeasurable pity—merely the crippled cat of her childhood! She did not even guess this

herself. When the long term was over she was there to meet him, Mrs. Bassett, resigned and subjected, by her side.

They carried him off in a cab to the boarding-house. He tried his best not to go, appealed to Mrs. Bassett that he ought not to go, that he was no fit person now to take there. The lady only sighed and looked helplessly at Iris.

"Tell him you insist on him coming, mother," the girl said.

"I insist on you coming," Mrs. Bassett said with perfect obedience.

In the drawing-room Scott found they were left together, himself and Iris, grown even prettier than ever and with a kind of startling, ethereal beauty now. Again she took his hand, spoke words of courage, hope, affection.

How could she know that this was mere depraved artistic temperament in herself; that a definite picture was formed in her mind of a man, deeply, darkly sinning though repentant, and herself, the guardian angel of his life, dragging him out of the mire and ever pointing upward?

How could he know it either? Shattered by the confinement, his nerve gone, almost his courage gone; the floodgates of emotion opened at the sight, the odour of this room where he had leaned back in that chair and dreamed his dreams of life, and close beside him this sweet-faced girl—he had seen no woman's face at all for three long years—what wonder if he trembled

exceedingly and lost his self-control? He tried to thank her for her wonderful goodness to him, and broke down completely.

She put her arms round his neck in a passion of abnegation and he told himself that he was in love, cruelly, pitifully in love. He summoned his manhood to him and went out at once and told Mrs. Bassett; begged her to carry the girl away to the Continent and give her such gaiety and occupation that she would speedily forget him. It were preposterous to think that he could contemplate shadowing her life, preposterous to think that he would allow her to suffer for her generosity.

Mrs. Bassett merely shook her head dejectedly. Iris had announced her intention of "sticking to him," and that intention would be, she knew, carried out. Only twice before in her life had she really thwarted the girl, and on both occasions she had nearly lost her, for Iris threatened to go into a decline so promptly, and had seemed so instantly on the point of doing so, that the poor lady had hauled down her flag in submission.

She did not want a third doctor to come round and chill her heart with a diagnosis of "symptoms of rapid decline—if she has set her heart on anything let her have her way."

"No," the unfortunate mother said, "we must make the best of it. You must start in another country. We mustn't cross her."

Scott absolutely refused, however, to hold the

girl bound to him. He intended to start for Australia in two days, he said, and she was to remember he held her free as air.

She had looked up at him with a great shining in her eyes.

"But *I* hold *you* bound," she said softly.

Never, even on the long, weary voyage, had Scott been able to derive pleasure from his "engagement." He had the sense all the time that he was taking advantage of a girl's romantic sense of sacrifice.

Every time he wrote in answer to her letters —and many of these came to the wheat farm— beautiful letters, couched in both lofty and tender vein, letters intended to keep him from slipping again from the path of righteousness among the temptations of the new land—every time he answered these letters he told her she was free, free as air, and he should rejoice to hear that she was engaged to a man whose life was not irretrievably ruined.

But she only wrote back, on pale mauve paper delicately scented with heliotrope: "I am engaged to a man whose life is *not* irretrievably ruined. I am engaged to you."

"But when did you first realise you did not really love her?" said Ines, listening with most rueful countenance to the best outline Scott could give, in fairness to both Iris and himself, of this chapter of his life.

"God help me," answered Scott, "I knew it from the first moment I saw your face."

CHAPTER XX

TO LET—A COTTAGE

THE autumn days slipped insensibly away, and winter, the mild Australian winter lay on Wyama, hill and dale.

David's cottage still held Ines. In Jonathan's Scott was yet to be found.

At first every one had insisted that Ines must leave her cottage, that it was inconceivable to imagine her staying there in the loneliness and with the place full of such sad memories.

And Ines, bowing for once to the accepted notion that what every one said must of necessity be right, wrote to David and informed him that though six months of her lease still had to run, she would be greatly obliged if, under the circumstances, he could see his way to cancel it, or if he could not do this, if he would give her permission to sub-let.

Now David had been carried quite off his respectable feet by Ines, whom he still remembered as a young lady who had induced him to make alterations to his cottage that no landlord in rightful possession of his senses should have dreamed of making.

When the time arrived for Mrs. David to say she would "run up to Wyama and have a look at the old place," then David knew his bad quarter of an hour would be well on the way.

He had never explicitly told his wife about the changes that had been made; had merely referred casually to having had to do a "few little jobs" at the place, artists, as every one knew, not being like "ordinary people."

At the distance of twelve months he was not too clear himself as to what the alterations had been; he had merely a confused memory that walls had been torn up by the roots and carried out and made to do duty in other places. That strange and perishable colourings had been used in the painting, and that a dado had been caused to flourish right up next to the ceiling, instead of down near the skirting-board where ordinary people, not connected with art, were content to keep their dadoes, the same proving economical in the end, being easily renewed when soiled by furniture and children's fingers.

The letter from his tenant filled his breast with fear. Once the cottage was empty Mrs. David would insist upon going to see it. Half-a-dozen times lately, when the suburban road had been exceptionally dusty and the suburban people exceptionally slow to pick up the bargains she offered them, she had "wondered how little Wyama was gettin' along," "wondered if that there red rose she put in was growin' yet,"

" wondered if lizards still came out and sat on that silly ole stone wall."

No, David had not the courage to precipitate a crisis. So he wrote laboriously—

" Dear Miss," he wrote, " Being sorry not to oblige it being a lady and young and trouble having come to her and cetera but the patitions made it unpossible, others not in the art line not liking notions but re the sublet you can do as you like and Cross at the news agency would be the best man for her to give it to."

Cross at the News Agency came and looked round, doubtfully; the skied dado prejudiced him at once; but he supplied a large board that said " To Let," and he requested five shillings for five insertions in the *Wyama News* of the fact that a desirable cottage property was to let.

Numbers of people came at once to look—such numbers, indeed, that Ines began at once to pack her books and to write to Sydney to inquire about rooms. Most of the people she recognised, however, with surprise; there was Miss Dwyer, for instance, who would surely find it impossible to run about and deliver two music lessons (at sixpence a lesson) twice a week to thirty pupils from so out-of-the-way a place. There was the butcher's wife, who had bought the Wilton pile carpet at the sale; there were quite a dozen farmers' wives from farms on which you might have reasonably supposed them settled for life. Certainly they, most of them,

instanced hypothetical aunts or sisters-in-law or cousins-by-marriage as the reason of their coming to "take a look round," said aunts, sisters-in-law and cousins having asked them to keep their eyes open for a suitable place.

How was Ines to know that she and her cottage were regarded in Wyama just now as something almost as interesting as the Bioscope Exhibition which came to Wyama two or three times a year? And undoubtedly cheaper: you paid sixpence for entrance to the Bioscope Hall, while at the cottage admission was absolutely free as long as that notice board was up.

At last rumour might be confirmed. Walls *had* been removed; it was no idle tale. There was no sideboard; there was no piano—not as much as one for which payment was being made at the rate of half-a-crown a week. There was no carpet—just bits of mats lay about, while the boards were made dark and slippery. Plenty of pictures—old stock of the artist's of course that had not moved off. The servant's room done up just ridiculous; enough to unfit a girl for service the rest of her life. And it was true as death about her not going into black. White dresses all the time—just a black band at the waist, and even that, it was said, Mrs. Beattie had to beg for on her bended knee.

After a time Ines unpacked her books again; it was plain sub-letting took a little time. She had been a little shy at first about showing pros-

pective tenants round herself, and had left the task to Hyacinth; but as the weeks slipped by she determined that it was work she must take upon her own shoulders for fear Hyacinth might be missing desirable points.

A few people, genuinely seeking new homes, came along. And then Ines found that what was one man's meat was undoubtedly another man's poison.

"No front room!" one woman said.

"On the contrary," smiled Ines, "it is all front room."

"I mean no proper sitting-room," said the woman, looking from side to side as if she might detect one hidden away.

"I like the feeling of spaciousness it gives," said Ines.

"But you can't do without a sitting-room," urged the woman, the wife of a prosperous poultry farmer who had professed himself satisfied with West Slope for his own purposes if "the missis" liked the cottage. "You must have a sitting-room. Why, you'd have to have your meals in the same room as you kep' your ornyments and the piano!"

Ines showed the back verandah, which had been so cosily closed in that it made a very presentable little room.

"I have my meals chiefly here now," she said. "Perhaps you might like to do the same."

The woman looked round the limited space.

"Eight of us to dinner, Sundays,—we always kill a pair, and either my sister or his sister and their families come,—how'd we squeeze in? How'd the girl get roun' the table to move the plates?"

There was reason in this.

The woman was back in the large sitting-room.

"And the carpet it 'ud take if you *did* keep it as a sitting-room—or a drorin'-room—you could really call that sized room a drorin'-room and not be puttin' on side."

"You don't like polished boards?" said Ines.

The woman looked a little offended.

"My man's always been able to give me a carpet," she said. "My trouble is my present one's next to new and would do quite well in a *proper* room. But it would only be a ohaysus, as the saying is, here."

Once or twice she seemed on the point of yielding—of graciously forgiving the removal of the partitions, for something pleased her. Perhaps it was the green glazed pot with the daffodils growing and flowering in it; perhaps it was the way the sunlight lay on the stream above the bridge at Little Mitcham; perhaps it was that the nasturtiums near the ceiling appealed to a novelty-loving sense in her own heart.

But in the end a memory assailed her, and made the whole thing absolutely impossible. Where would they put the 'all stand? Cedar

and a big glass let in, bevelled edges, mind you, a box for the time-table and things, place for rumbrellers, hold eight 'ats all at the same time. Where would they put the 'all stand ?

Ines realised that persuasion was useless, gave her visitor a cup of tea seeing that she had come so far, and saw her out to her buggy with the best grace she could muster.

But she saw her mistake at last, and began to wonder which would cost the least: to put the partitions back in their places, or to let the cottage stand untenanted until the end of the lease.

One hundred a year still remained to her she found, but the doctoring and the indulgence of her father's last wishes had brought the current account of loose money very low. She crinkled her brows in hard thought when the clerk at the bank in the village, in answer to her question as to her balance there, said, " Seven pounds, fourteen and eightpence, Miss Erwin." The next twenty-five pounds—her income was to come along in sums of that size quarterly—was not due for two months.

Plainly there was not sufficient margin to continue to pay fifteen shillings a week for the cottage and also to pay for living elsewhere.

She explained this to Mrs. Beattie, to Mrs. Wharton, to the doctor's wife, all of whom were telling her she must not stay up there. Of

course, they all promptly invited her to come and stay with them. Wendover had room and to spare, surely, for a slip of a girl. Mrs. Beattie could have found no one she would rather have to occupy her painfully severe spare room at the Rectory ; the doctor's wife would have been thankful for the companionship. But the girl, bruised and bleeding still, clung passionately to her independence, her solitude.

" I'm not even sure if it's proper, just you and no one but a girl like Hyacinth living here all alone," Mrs. Beattie said, as her last word one afternoon as she was driving away after a fruitless attempt to dislodge Ines from her stronghold.

At this Ines went in with crinkled brows. She had seen Mrs. Beattie's very doubtful gaze go to the blue cap that could be seen amid the wheat two hundred yards away.

Hyacinth met her. Hyacinth plainly pleased about something, though trying hard to conceal her pleasure.

" She's been at it again," she announced ; " thought she had when she never turned up for the ironing : baker's boy he tole me, he says he saw her over near Murwumba, slep' in the bush, never came home for nights an' nights, got stickin' plaster on her forrid, one of her thumbs tied up. A tramp, he got in her winder when she was away, and took her blankets and 'er clock what you gave her, and her weddin' ring

that was too loose, and everythink he could lay his hands on. Police, he's just gone and she's sitting there quite dazed like."

Ines heard the story with a sick heart. She had proved the poor old woman's sterling goodness more than ever during the time of her own trouble. She caught up a cap.

"I'm going down to see her," she said.

"You'll have to let me come with you; master, he never let you go alone, you know," said Hyacinth, only too eager to see a scene where a tramp and a policeman had so recently been among the dramatis personæ.

"No," said Ines, troubled; "I can't let you, with that dreadful cough of yours. It is beginning to rain too. No, I will put on my macintosh and be back soon. Light the lamp and set tea. You won't be lonely with Mr. Sheldon so close at hand."

Hyacinth felt a little ill-used, but cheered up after a minute or two. She had been wanting her mistress out of the house for some days to get a chance to try on a beautiful opera cloak that she had only lately discovered in one of the boxes marked, "Not wanted on the voyage." These boxes had become a perennial resource to the girl during Ines' absences; their treasures seemed endless.

Ines hurried through the garden and away down the hill through the light rain and the gathering shadows. She carried a lantern for

the return journey, for indeed it was a rough bit of country.

The poor old woman was sitting alone, sober and dazed amid the ruin of her home. The baker's boy had not exaggerated the story of the tramp's depredations—nothing the man could carry and turn to any account had been left behind.

Other little comforts that Ines had been used to seeing about the place had gone too; the lamp—the old woman was sitting with only the light from a bit of candle—the tablecloth, the rocking-chair, the carpet, the china ornaments, the varnished safe that had been full of relics of old days.

The tramp was not responsible for the absence of these; they had been recklessly sent for by their owner to satisfy the demands of the publican at Murwumba, into whose debt the old woman had plunged deeply during her week's absence.

Ines was stricken with remorse to think that, so full of her own troubles had she been, she had never given the poor old thing a thought for all this week; had never even missed the customary gleam of light far down the hill.

She took the old, trembling hands in her own.

"Oh, I am so sorry, so very sorry for this," she said; and indeed the abject misery of this "cottage interior" as the artists call it, would have touched harder hearts.

"Own fault," said Mrs. Shore drearily, "own fault, my dear. Brought it on meself. No one to blame."

"I didn't even know you were away. When did you get back?"

"Two days," said the old woman, "three p'raps. Sat in this chair all the time. Don't never want to get out of it."

"But has no one been to see you?" Ines cried.

"Oh yes," said the old woman apathetically; "Mitchell and the new pleece, and Johnnie—baker's boy, you know, good boy." She looked with vague appreciation at Johnnie's silent tribute to misfortune—half a loaf of bread, an apple and a little heap of peppermints.

"Mrs. Beattie can't have heard," said Ines, comforting herself.

"Don't go to church," said the old woman succinctly.

Ines lit a fire and made tea, found a tin of sardines, jam, biscuits, and insisted on a meal being eaten.

Then for ten minutes they sat in silence—battered old woman with the wistful eyes, smooth-cheeked girl with the corners of her mouth drooped over these world woes.

"Don' worry about me, missie dear," the old voice said at last. "I'm nearly through with things. Sixty's old when you've had a life like mine."

"You will live to be seventy at least," said Ines inexorably. "Now the question is, what are you going to do? Ten years is a good time."

Mrs. Shore looked round her stripped room with eyes into which fear began to creep. Certainly the prospect of ten years without any comforts left was a little terrifying.

"It'll have to be the asylum," she said sullenly; then added, with a gleam in her eyes, "they're not kep' like prisoners, I hear. They can break out sometimes. An' they've always got to take you back after you've done your time."

This to be the end of a life of almost unexampled endurance and devotion! It was more than any eager-hearted girl could bear.

"Now see here," said Ines, after her thoughts had moved with lightning swiftness for a time, "I have thought everything out. Listen to this. I can't let my cottage, so I shall go on living in it for several months more at least. It is lonely for me there with no one older than Hyacinth. I want you to come and live with me as long as I am there."

"I wouldn't live on no one's charity," said the old woman angrily; "leastways on no one's but State's—that don't count quite so much. I've always worked my way along, I have."

"I don't propose to show you charity," said Ines promptly; "I am not rich enough to.

I have very little left, and I can't send Hyacinth away. No; this is what I propose."

She placed her hastily-conceived offer before the old woman.

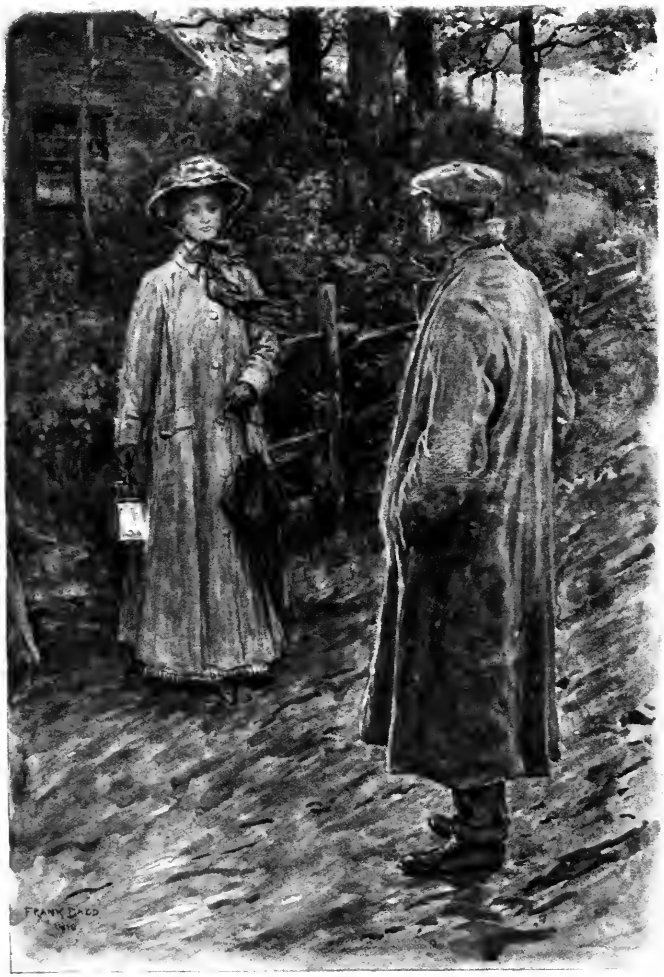
There was room at the cottage, now, for one extra. Ines would make a room neat and comfortable for her, her own cupboard, own teapot, own bed, and so on; she would not feel too much uprooted. There would be meals for her always, either in the kitchen with Hyacinth or in her own room. In return she would do Ines' washing and ironing, but there would be no wages—she must quite understand that Ines could not afford to offer *charity*. Such work, however, would not take her more than one day in the week. Ines would undertake to find other work for her—a little washing, or nursing, or sewing—that would put a few shillings for spending money into her pocket weekly.

Mrs. Shore thought the proposition out in silence. All the best part of her nature cried out in thankfulness at this prospect of being protected against herself from the temptations that loneliness and the long, empty hours made so irresistible to her.

"Well," she said, "since it's doin' you a favour, Miss Ines, I'm willin'. You'll be able to have all the white frocks you like now. But mind, I wouldn't accep' no one's *charity*."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," said Ines heartily.

It was agreed that she should "move up" in



Just outside the gate Scott was standing.

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the morning. They remembered that another source of income for her would be this cottage, which would possibly bring something like half-a-crown a week.

"Good-night," said Ines; "I must run back now. I have left Hyacinth alone."

"I shall call her Eliza," said the old woman firmly; "she can't expect *me* to Hyacinth her."

It was too late to argue the matter now.

"I will send her down in the morning to help you carry little things," Ines said, "and Johnnie baker boy will bring the rest. You will be sure to come? I feel I can't manage another day without a responsible person in the house."

"It's hurryin' me," grumbled Mrs. Shore. "There's a lot will want doing here for a tenant. I don't think I can manage to be there till after lunch. You must wait till then, Miss Ines."

"Afternoon will do, quite well," said Ines meekly. "Good-night, Mrs. Shore."

She lighted her lantern, and started out into the damp, dark air.

Just outside the gate Scott was standing, as he had patiently stood all through the interview.

CHAPTER XX

ONE WILD, WET EVENING

"The moon made thy lips pale, beloved;
The wind made thy bosom chill."

SHELLEY.

THEY had spoken no word to each other since, their young hearts broken by the bitter cruelty of fate, they had agreed to part for ever on the day when Hyacinth had remarked it was "almost like a party."

What else might they do?

Oh, virtue is not a quality that belongs, as a cynic says, exclusively to the angels.

Here were two flesh-and-blood young things, wild with unavailing love for each other, and yet piteously, pitifully trying to do "the right thing."

How could they but consider that far-off girl who had so nobly stepped forward when all the rest of the world hung back? Not once did Ines feel anything but admiration for her; not even in her wildest moment of temptation did she contemplate reaching out for her own happiness at the expense of that of Iris.

As for Scott, he did her bidding. Almost he

would have sacrificed Iris; this, when his love for the girl so close to him became a pain past endurance. He would tell himself at such a time that Iris had not really cared for him, had acted as she had done out of a very insanity of pity. At others he saw the absolute improbability of so acting; indeed, the girl must have cared, have cared so genuinely that with a nature organised so excessively finely as was hers to brutally write that he loved another would be to give an actual death-blow.

At other times, again, he forgot everything and gave himself up to the intoxication of the incredible fact that it was for himself that Ines cared, not for Douglas, not for any of the men she had met in the past—just for him alone.

Night after night he would walk his garden staring with tireless eyes at the lamp-light shining through the blind of her sitting-room.

Fate was relentless in her dealings with his life; well, he would not whine—would just forge along as best he could on the directed lines. His was a perfectly simple nature, and took it that there were directed lines. One was never left in doubt as to which were these lines. It was only when one was not honest and tried to confuse the issues for oneself, that one paused to wonder whether the lines that led through the luxurious valley might not actually be the ones directed, and not those that ran to the austere hill's top.

But he allowed himself this weakness—this standing in the garden and flooding his heart with the light of her lamp, and the knowledge that she loved him too.

Ines made an even more heart-breaking effort than his; she tried to cut herself off from thinking of him at all. He belonged to Iris; it was wrong, actually wrong for her to remember the dear clasp of his arms, the rain of his kisses on her face, his eyes with their look of incredulous happiness. Yet they seemed with her always, these memories; with her when she rose, with her as she filled her day full as she might with work that should make her forget, with her as, wearied yet sleepless, she put out her light.

It was his eyes that she seemed to see all the time—those grey, insistent eyes that had always been watching her when he talked to her father, that made themselves felt across the wall of stones, across the street when they passed each other, across life itself.

But she must not think of them; they were for Iris to think of, brave, noble Iris watching on the other side of the sea. For herself she must work, walk till she almost dropped—anything, anything to get away from this love and feel at peace with herself.

Yet when the cottage would not let, joy leapt like a live thing in her heart. She need not go away—she could not go away; indeed, how, if she went, might she have enough to live on?

Besides, she was of a little use here; she was making a home for Mrs. Shore and for Hyacinth, who, if she left, would be condemned to the drab of life again.

Her first thought for taking Mrs. Shore had been indeed for the woman's own protection. Instantly afterwards she hugged the new tie she had made that kept her where she could still see the man she loved with all her heart.

They had agreed that they must not talk to each other, that might make the conflict hard beyond all hope of victory. But for her to see his cap moving about the wheat; for him to watch her light, sometimes to hear her voice—ah, the Fates must leave them little things like that!

And then she ran out into the rain and almost into his arms. Almost. He dropped them to his side the next second.

"Ah," she said, "you should not have come—you should not have come."

But her heart leapt high and insolent with joy.

He steadied his voice.

"I can't let you run about like this alone," he said. "I watched you come out. It is now nearly eight."

Had it taken so long to persuade the obstinate old woman that she would not be taking charity?

She steadied her voice, pressed her hand to that leaping heart, and told him of the occurrence.

"You should have sent Hyacinth for me," he

said. " I would have gone to Mrs. Shore. You must never do this again—do you hear, Ines ? "

The assumption of authority did not vex her ; it only wrapped her warmly like a garment in the bitter cold of winter.

" Promise me," he said.

" I promise."

" The house hasn't let—what are you going to do ? "

" No, it hasn't let—no one will take it."

" Thank God for that ! "

" Oh hush ! You shouldn't. Ah, we oughtn't to be talking—it makes it harder, oh, so much harder ! "

" Nothing could be harder than it is, Ines—it is too hard. I—can't bear it." He stopped stock still in the rain ; they stared at each other with wet, white faces and wild young eyes.

" Ines ! " he said, the odour of his wet macintosh so close gave her a feeling of dizziness. " Ines, one more kiss."

One second since he had been swearing to himself he would not say it.

" No," she said, and prayed that he would not listen to her.

" No ! " and prayed that he would. " No," and prayed, like a Jesuit, " yes, yes ! I can be sorry after."

Then the clean rain swept her face, a gust of it sent cold, sword-like, from heaven.

" No," she gasped, " dear, dear Scott, no !

Don't let's do anything we'll be sorry for afterwards. Think of her. Let us think of her."

Still he did not move. Still his lips seemed seeking for her face in the darkness.

"Think of *me*," she whispered; "don't make —it harder for me."

That was the weapon. He yielded to it at once.

They were almost at her garden gate. He opened it—almost pushed her inside; then plunged back to the darkness of the bush, to walk and walk till he should have himself in hand again.

CHAPTER XXII

AT DAVID'S AND JONATHAN'S

"And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins."
Atalanta in Calydon.

THE spring had come, winter had departed. Not so much as a footmark had he left behind him. Where had he gone? Who cared? Perhaps he sank away, slowly, imperceptibly into the ground and was absorbed into the soil as were most other things from kings to field flowers.

Perhaps he rose in the night, and, clutching the mane of the west wind as it stampeded by, was borne on its back to far and uncomprehended lands that needed his presence.

Perhaps the clouds dropped low and caught him up to the skies, there to lie hidden and harmless till another year.

Who cared where was the place of his now abiding?

Winter had gone, and the spring was here; that was all that mattered.

The wattle had waked and all Wyama was

sweetly awave with it. West Slope stood with its feet in a tangle of gold—gold for a girdle, gold wreathed round its head. Half-way down, the cottages clung just as they had clung since they were born there. Still they looked down on the village with inscrutable eyes; still their hands hung, side by side as if but a moment were needed and they would be clasped for ever.

And in all that time, all the time it had taken for the slow sap to rise up into the wattle, and swell it root and branch, and break out into new leaves, and push out pin-point buds and swell these, a little larger and a little larger till they burst into gold, all the hours, and days, the weeks and months this had taken, they had spoken no other word to each other, those two on either side of that long stone wall. Not one other word, though the sap had stirred in them too, and swelled most piteously, though their young hearts were bursting—bursting just like the wattle with a wealth of gold.

These are not the days of troubadors. Scott had no lyre. He merely worked doggedly at the task that he had taken up.

Mariana of the Moated Grange lives in a poem.

Ines met the problem of the days and nights with work. She dare not grant herself the luxury of saying

> "I am aweary, aweary,
> I would that I were dead."

The twenty-five pounds quarterly was not

quite enough for comfort for three of them, though it went further than many would have supposed.

Mrs. Shore and Hyacinth had taken to working off their enmity in rival poultry and vegetable undertakings. Two surprisingly prolific patches of cauliflowers, peas and such culinary delights sprang into existence; broods of chickens chipped their way out of eggs, were steered through the Scylla of chickendom, and appeared, brown to a turn, or delicately masked in sauce, under the dish-cover on Ines' table. Milk and fruit were cheap. Living came in reality to less than it had done many a time in the French or Italian villages, where they had been promised that they could live on next to nothing and grow fat.

But Hyacinth's trifling wages must be paid and her pathetic love of pretty colours satisfied to a reasonable extent; books and magazines and such must be bought to keep the waters of life from stagnation. So Ines took up again a craft she had practised a little in London—metal work. Sheets of brass and copper were sent from town, and for several hours in the day there came to Scott in his wheat, sounds of the sharp tap, tapping. Then there went back to the Arts and Crafts Society in the city quaint brass finger-bowls, coffee-trays of delightful design, finger-plates for doors, panels for furniture. There came to be an actual demand for

the work of the unseen country member—the lady at Wyama. It was not that her work was as intrinsically good as that of other people who had spent years at it, but her designs were so full of originality and charm that they covered the defects of manual skill. In a little time her earnings were quite considerable. Then she had a Stencil class once a week in her large room, many of the neighbouring girls as well as Elizabeth Wharton being only too glad to have such an opportunity for acquiring the easy art. For years afterwards, when Ines was no longer to be found in Wyama, traces of her influence could be seen on the cushions, curtains and evening scarves of the township, while friezes became positively popular and dadoes were foresworn.

All this time Mr. Munro had come periodically to look after his wheat experiments. At first the records had been a little success, failure, failure, a little success ; but for the last six months the failures had been fewer, and Scott had quite a valuable note-book full of observations and deductions.

The old man said very little ; he had been very taciturn since Scott had made that confidence on board ship, but he was none the less pleased. None of the other three men he had engaged in the work had gone so far, made such persistent study of soils. Scott had been conscienceless in his demands for soil samples—not just enough for a flower-pot full for this class of seed and a

flower-pot full for that. He insisted upon having a couple of cartloads from all manner of districts, and he had his place laid out like a chessboard and labelled such and such a soil and such and such a seed sown under such and such circumstances.

Munro examined the accounts sharply, and was at any time prepared to find that Scott had "done him in," as he termed it; but as time went on he found his Englishman returned him better value for less money than the Scotchman, the Dane, or the Australian he had set severally to work.

On his last visit, after looking silently at the specimens and noting the sincerity that had evidently been put into the work, he approached Scott.

"Find it pays you well enough?"

"By no means," said Scott. "At the end of my time—a week now, isn't it?—I'll have to try something else, of course. Still, I've learnt a lot; it will all come in useful."

"What's your idea?"

Scott shook his head. "I shall have to go out and look for it," he said. "I had thought a farm, but it's too slow; those fellows have been at it for two generations." He waved his arm to Wyama—Wyama with its modest and struggling-looking homesteads scattered in all directions; it seemed as if Wendover, sprawling on the eastern hills, had left little for any one else.

"That's because they are fools," said the old man.

"Perhaps. But I can't wait. It is essential that I should be making a bigger income. I may try sheep, perhaps—I've been making a few experiments with them so far—learning the ropes."

"Wheat's the thing," urged the old man.

"For you," said Scott, "not for me. I ought to have made my way to the wool-sheds, I believe; they tell me that's work soon learned and five pounds a week can be earned at it."

"Wheat's the thing," said the old man; "they don't shear all the year round, remember. See here, I'll give you a change. You can have Macmurtrie's job at Merinderie; he's spoiling to be sent up to my Queensland place. Yes, you can have Macmurtrie's, and I'll put Hansen in here; do him good to see your methods."

"And the salary?" said Scott. He dare not contemplate any more of this fifty pounds a year work.

The old man had had an excellent lunch over at Wendover; had just received a telegram telling him that his favourite racehorse had won the Cup in Melbourne; in Queensland the wool crop of his great station had been thousands of pounds better than the year before; here in New South Wales the horses he was breeding were at the very top of the market. Let but this wheat hobby of his succeed and he positively had nothing left to ask of Fortune.

"Stick up to it with all your might and we'll call it two fifty," he said; "there's a good furnished cottage, too—Macmurtrie was a married man, and I had to pander to his wife's tastes. You can be a married man yourself on that, eh? But mind, all your time's mine then—you'll have to eat wheat and drink wheat and dream wheat till you worry the thing through. Well, what do you say?"

"I say it's a most generous offer," said Scott, "most generous. But——"

"Well?"

"Will you give me two or three hours to decide?"

The old man nodded, his estimation of his employee falling a little; he considered it a time when much promptness should have been shown.

"Where shall I come, sir? To Wendover? Will six o'clock suit you?"

"That'll do."

When he had gone Scott walked up David's path and knocked at the door.

Hyacinth answered it

"Lor, Mr. Shelding," she said, "you never come, do you?" and added confidentially, "Quarrelled, haven't you?"

"Miss Erwin in?" said Scott ceremoniously.

Hyacinth was recalled to her place.

"She's having afternoon tea with Mrs. Beattie, they're in the brekfus-room," which was the

name she herself chose to call the back verandah when she did not term it " the morning-room."

Scott took a seat in the big sitting-room, and exhausted his geography of distant places to which he considered Mrs. Beattie might well be consigned.

Mrs. Beattie bristled at the news Hyacinth brought; the very roses in her bonnet seemed to quiver into fresh life.

" I thought you told me he had never crossed the threshold since your father died," she said.

Ines had stood up with startled eyes.

" He has not," she said; " something must have happened. I will go and see."

" And I will go with you," said Mrs. Beattie, standing up also, a very tower of conscious strength. " It is not proper that a young girl like you should receive gentlemen alone."

She followed Ines into the sitting-room and sharply regarded their greeting. She took a seat exactly between them: Scott was on the sofa, Ines on a wicker chair, she herself on a stiff one, as became her attitude.

" It is a warm day," she said.

Scott agreed.

" No doubt rain is coming up from the east," she said.

Scott thought it possible.

" It is needed. The farmers have had a discouraging spring, a most discouraging spring.

Last year there was fully an inch more rainfall during this same month."

"Indeed," said Scott.

"If no rain comes the prospects for the show will be quite destroyed."

Scott was a man of simple methods, not in the least versed in drawing-room fencing. A very big question had arisen and must be answered at once. It could not be delayed because a little sallow-faced woman with light blue eyes and preposterous vegetation in her bonnet stood between them and barked, just like the agitated little fox-terrier that rushes to the door, and refuses you admission to the house to which you have been so warmly invited.

Scott looked at her with a pleasant enough smile.

"As you may imagine, Mrs. Beattie," he said, "I didn't come to discuss weather. I came because I had an important question that I wanted to ask Miss Erwin. Shall you think me hopelessly lost to good manners if I beg her to walk out on to the verandah with me?"

The green rose agitated itself violently; it communicated its movement to the grey and the purple until the entire ornamentation seemed fiercely amove.

"I must say, Mr. Sheldon, that I never—*never* heard such a request made to a lady in my life before. 'Will I get up and walk out of the room'—that is what you are asking me?"

"No, no," said Scott, "it is I who ask to be allowed to move."

"I sit in this room with an orphan girl—a girl with no one else to look after her—and you flatly, without any explanation, ask to be left alone with her!" The poor woman was actually gasping; she had no doubt whatever that, but for the happy accident of her own presence here this afternoon, Scott would have by this time asked Ines to marry him. What other important question could any young man have to ask of a young girl?

"Dear Mrs. Beattie," Ines said, "you forget Mr. Sheldon and I are old friends; my father welcomed him here night by night, my friend must welcome him. Of course I will come on to the verandah with you, Mr. Sheldon! But I will get your tea first, Mrs. Beattie—I remember you had only just started it. Come and have this chair; it is more comfortable. And will you have a book till I come back? I shan't be many minutes."

But Mrs. Beattie was beyond speech. She got up, tremulously pulled down her veil, collected a few stray possessions—her district note-book, Bobbie's printing-book which she had brought to show Ines, a shabby hand-bag, an umbrella,—and stalked to the door.

"Listen to his question," she said. "I will go home again."

Ines followed her to the gate, refusing to

believe that she could be in earnest. She tried laughter, cajolery, pleading. Mrs. Beattie was adamant, and climbed into the stronghold of the yellow sulky.

"Let her go—what does she matter?" Scott had whispered at a moment when he might whisper unobserved.

But Ines had been honestly distressed.

Finding, however, that nothing would soften the indignant lady, she drew back.

"You are behaving both childishly and with great unkindness, Mrs. Beattie," she said. "I think, after all, I had better let you go home."

But she watched sadly from the gate till the yellow blur had merged into the wattle at the foot of the hill.

Then she went back to Scott.

CHAPTER XXIII

THREE HUNDRED MILES

" Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer."

BROWNING.

SCOTT plunged headlong into the news of Munro's offer.

" Of course you took it ? " Ines said, but she drew her breath in a little; there was a still colder sea to be plunged into, she found, and she was already so very, very cold.

" I was a coward," he said in a low tone; " to save my life I could not answer him 'yes' on the spot, I had to wait for you to bid me to say it."

" Is—is it very far away ? " Her lips trembled suddenly like a child's.

" Three hundred miles."

" Three—hundred miles ! "

" Three hundred."

Their eyes saw the entire distance, mile after mile stretching away into eternity, she at one end of it, he at the other. And there was only

one way they might shirk the terrors of it. They might sweep Iris clear out of their way, run down to Mr. Beattie, stand before him together at the altar for ten little minutes, then take the three hundred miles hand-in-hand. The same devil whispered the same thought to each of them; their eyes fell before each other's just a moment; their faces paled and coloured, coloured and paled.

Then they looked at each other with piteous courage.

"Three hundred miles makes no difference," said Ines.

"Not the least," assented Scott.

"When shall you go?"

"Straight away, I believe."

"Scott"—the girl's voice sounded as if she were drowning—"don't say good-bye to me when the time comes—I couldn't bear it. Just go."

"I—couldn't bear it either."

"Scott——"

"My darling——" Indeed he did not know he used the word.

"Go now, will you?"

They did not dare to even take each other's hand.

Just looked once more, once more, and parted.

CHAPTER XXIV

CADE

" The hope I dreamed of was a dream,
Was but a dream : and now I wake,
Exceeding comfortless and worn and old
For a dream's sake."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

Two hours later, starting off for Wendover to accept Munro's offer, Scott met the boy from the post office pressing up.

" Cable for you, Mr. Sheldon," he said, and stood watching with interested eyes while Scott read. Cables were very infrequent events in the little post office, and this one, running as it did into a matter of twenty-four words at three shillings a word, caused him to regard the young man from the hillside with much more care than he had heretofore exercised.

The paper in Scott's hands shook for just one imperceptible second.

" Cecil has confessed. Your presence urgently needed. Catch next boat. Big legacy. A hundred pounds cabled with this for fare."

The sender was his mother.

He stood still a moment, the impulse again strong to go back and tell Ines at once of the matter.

Then with a groan he realised that, much as the message meant, it left life still an arid desert for him.

Three hundred miles or twelve thousand—it made no difference.

He broke the Government rules by presenting the messenger with a gratuity of half-a-crown; he might have forgotten it in the shock of the moment but that the boy said significantly: "We've got the hundred coming along to the office next train; Mr. Evans says he'll be able to give it you by eleven to-morrow. A hundred's a lot of money, isn't it, sir?"

"It is," said Scott, and promptly disbursed half-a-crown for the information.

Then he continued his walk to Wendover to tell Munro of the impossibility of accepting his offer.

Cade was in the garden when he got there—Cade fluttering about in a blue muslin dress, with a girlish hat on her head and a basket of roses on her arm.

Indeed she was to be forgiven: Mrs. Beattie had dropped outrageous hints in her barefaced attempt to console Scott for the loss of Ines. Cade had actually been presented with the notion that the young man at Jonathan's, who had already fluttered her heart, was much attracted

to herself, but would need some encouragement, as he seemed to be of a most retiring disposition, and would naturally consider his position most unequal to hers.

Cade, left neglected for so many years, began actually to thrill when she met the man. He was attracted to her—ah, blessed thought, she had not then lost all power to attract!

She had been quite charming to him one afternoon when they had met at the Rectory. Mrs. Beattie had entrapped Scott there in her determined manner, entreating his help for Bobbie, who, she said, was in difficulties with his collection of beetles. Scott had confessed to having collected beetles himself as a boy, and had thought he had not even yet forgotten all his lore. He promised a Saturday afternoon most cheerfully for the little fellow, and, armed with some shallow boxes, sheets of cork and pins, made his way to the Rectory, there to be conducted, as he imagined, to the boy's own quarters.

But instead, he was established in the drawing-room at an insecure little table, cleared of its ornaments while he waited.

Bobbie was there, Bobbie in his best suit, and with a very sulky and very clean face. Fred lurked in the doorway, Fred also attired in garments that in nowise suited the hallowed freedom of Saturday afternoon.

"Well," said Scott good-naturedly, trying to

dispel the boy's sullenness which he attributed to shyness, " let's get on ; bring on your bears, old man."

Bobbie produced a few miserable specimens of the insects ; they were roughly piled up in cocoa tins that held also old nails, bits of string, pebbles and what not.

Scott gave the boy a keen look. Was this the " enthusiastic beetle collector " his mother had spoken of ?

Remembering the infinitude of care he had bestowed on his own specimens at an equally early age, he felt rather disgusted that he should have been asked to waste time on some one so little in earnest.

But possibly the boy only wanted putting on the right lines. He opened one of the boxes he had brought, cut the sheet of cork to fit the bottom of it, pasted a piece of writing-paper on the lid, and then, showing the best spot to pierce Mr. Beetle's spine, he began to sort and transfix the specimens.

This was a hairy-tailed cockchafer, he said, and neatly wrote its name and number on the lid ; this was a black-striped whale beetle. Here was an Emperor, here a King ; that dull-coloured one was known as the Potato beetle ; this little chap as the Macleay Tick beetle.

Bobbie looked merely bored at the statements, though his mother pretended the liveliest interest and tried to enliven the proceedings by making

such remarks as " Potato beetle ; look, Bobbie, that must be the one that makes the potatoes so bad ; Variable Apple beetle, called so from its changeable green wings, I suppose."

In the doorway Fred fidgeted ceaselessly. He would not join the circle of three heads at the rickety little table, protesting that he didn't collect, but he sighed heavily from time to time, and whenever Scott looked over to him he was looking impatiently at the clock. How was Scott to know that the boys had been caught on their way to play football with their compeers, torn out of their jerseys, and thrust hastily into their detested best suits, all because their mother had " been and gone " and invited some one to come and help them with one of their nature collections ?

At the time Bobbie felt no more interest in beetles than in the differential calculus ; he had collected, it was true, a few months ago, but that was no reason that he should lose his dearly-prized Saturday afternoon.

After a little time, however, his sulkiness abated, and he began to perceive that Scott might be a man and a brother and not a subtly introduced Saturday school-master.

The growing order among the specimens interesting him at last, and Scott's remarks on the quaint habits of the different creatures made him forget the goal he had meant to get.

When Mrs. Beattie slipped away murmuring

something about tea, Fred, who had been for some time lending half an ear, came from his stronghold of the door and stood—half-persuaded to go in for beetles too—by the table. If only they had not been in the drawing-room, and in their best clothes, they would have forgiven the lost game.

And then, just as the second box full was being classified, who should drive up but Miss Cade Wharton ? She had been invited to come and discuss the formation of her proposed club for reading the work of Australian poets.

There was an " Old English Poetry Club " in Murwumba, and it seemed a reflection on the culture of Wyama that nothing of the sort existed here. It was Sholto who had suggested that they should let Chaucer alone for a time, and get to know their own poets instead. " List to the lays of the languishing local lights," was his remark to his sister, who was undertaking to find members for the club.

Cade, like Scott, had had no notion that there would be any other visitor at the Rectory. But, unlike Scott, she was far from being ill-pleased.

The little boys glowered at her from the corner to which they had retreated with a finicking strip of cake each and a finicking plate to hold against the crime of crumbs on the carpet.

" Can't we go *now ?* " they asked their mother in a loud whisper.

"Certainly not," whispered Mrs. Beattie, "that would be *most* ill-bred."

So they had to sit and listen to the fact that Miss Cade hated those horrid beetles, and didn't know how any one could pick them up. Stamps she considered an infinitely cleaner hobby for any boy; she had collected stamps herself. They had to listen to the plans for the new club: their father and mother were enrolled; even they themselves, they found to their horror, were enrolled as "Associate Members."

"Even school-boys ought to know their Gordon and their Kendall and their Paterson and their Lawson," said Miss Cade.

They found that Mr. Sheldon was not being enrolled, and envied him his courage.

When pressed hard for his reason, he laughed and said he had never liked the idea of taking his literature in public. He liked it best in bed, last thing at night.

"Can't we go *now?*" said Bobbie, out loud this time and with defiance on his face.

Through the open window had come a shout from the football paddock.

"Certainly not," said his mother, and frowned at him so severely that Scott hastened to swallow the rest of his tea and go back to the boxes.

But what sort of an entertainment was it now to them? Scott made an effort to get back to his earlier manner of anecdote that he had seen was successful with the boys, but Miss

Cade had no notion of not talking too, and capped his interesting bits of information about the golden cockchafer with a long reminiscence of how one flew into church one day and nearly settled on a lady's bonnet.

A howl of triumph was wafted through the window.

"Can't we go *now?*" wailed Bobbie, and at last Scott understood that these were mere victims in front of him, not embryo entomologists. He stood up himself.

"This will have to be continued in our next, Mrs. Beattie," he said; "perhaps the boys would like to come up to my cottage some day when they've nothing better to do—eh, boys?"

The boys were regarding him with beaming faces. They would have promised to go to the end of the world at some future date, so long as they might be released now.

"Well," said Mrs. Beattie reluctantly, "you may go for just a little game; but don't get too rough with each other."

The boys backed from the room as decorously as they might, then tore to their rooms to strip off the clothes of ceremony.

"Excuse me just a minute," Mrs. Beattie said; "if I don't see to it they are quite capable of playing football in those knickerbockers."

Scott could not rush after her and demand his hat and the opening of the front door, so for ten minutes he had to sustain a conversation

with Cade, which was precisely what his hostess intended him to do.

The situation actually angered him. Try as he would he could not keep quite aloof from people, as he considered a man in his situation ought to do. There were a few things he wanted less than an introduction to people like the Whartons. Yet he could not be a boor. When Miss Cade met him so graciously, what could he do but respond with as much geniality as he could muster? He must have succeeded beyond his expectations, for long afterwards Cade treasured the thought of their *tête-à-tête* in the choked little drawing-room of the Rectory.

And when Munro mentioned that the man was coming for an interview with himself at Wendover at six o'clock, Cade could not resist the somewhat pathetic desire to be "discovered" in a picturesque situation.

She had roses tucked in her belt—just as Ines might have had—roses stuck in the ribbon of her hat, roses in her gathering-basket.

"Ah, Mr. Sheldon!" she cried, genuine pleasure in her eyes at the sight of some one who was "attracted to her," "I am glad to see you at Wendover. Don't they say it is never too soon to make use of your friends? I am going to request you to climb this ladder and cut me some of those roses at the top of the trellis."

But he only looked at her with troubled eyes.

"Don't write me down a churl," he said,

"but indeed I must not stop; may I call one of your gardeners? I see one across there. I am afraid I am five minutes late for my appointment as it is."

He called to the man, lifted his hat and strode on along the wide, smooth drive. The muslin dress, the girlish hat, the roses—he had not even seen them with his outer vision.

Even when she learned that he was going away, Cade could not quite let the cherished notion that she had an attraction for him die. It was not that she had come to actually care for him, but she had found the thought that she was cared for inexpressibly sweet and soothing.

She gathered roses the next day and asparagus and strawberries, and drove off with them to Mrs. Beattie, who had a keen appreciation of such things.

And Mrs. Beattie, touched by the attention, found herself unburdening her mind of the ingratitude and high-handed behaviour of Ines.

"I have done with her—done with her for ever," she said, a red spot burning on her cheek. "I think we have all been mistaken in her. I consider the way she treated your brother was disgraceful. And now this young Sheldon—you can see he has quite lost his head; it will be the same with him soon. Of course she would not dream of marrying any one so frightfully poor; she is merely flirting with him."

"You—you mean," said poor Cade, her little

rose-coloured dream suddenly paling into plain grey, "that Mr. Sheldon, too, cares for her?" She was aware of the state of the affections of both her brothers, but this idea had never crossed her mind before.

Mrs. Beattie was so thoroughly upset by the happening that she entirely forgot her confidante was also the object of her recent match-making attempt.

"He is simply mad about her—clean, raving mad," she said wrathfully.

Driving home, Cade turned her eyes to West Slope, and seemed to see her rival's exquisite face in all its young glow and charm.

"Oh, things aren't fair!" she said passionately, "things aren't fair at all!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAST STRAND

THERE was no longer a trace of wattle on West Slope; things of richer hue had taken its place. Orange Christmas bells flamed in the bush fastnesses, waratahs lit the grey greenness here and there with scarlet points of flame.

No longer were the swelling hills clothed in tender green. Summer was here, and her hot breath had scorched nearly all the land into a weary tint of brown.

"Miss Ines," said Hyacinth, "I've been thinking about my new frock as you said I could have, and I've picked on green. The girl next door's got one, an' it looks that cool you can't think."

She wiped her perspiring face as she spoke.

Ines was standing on the verandah looking across at the horizon line. She did not seem to hear Hyacinth's remark.

But Hyacinth was not easily repulsed.

"That new dress as you said I could have, Miss Ines," she said patiently. "How do you like the notion of green—pale, mind you, and

just p'raps a pink bow in me hair to relief it ? "

" Yes," said Ines, " very well. If you like."

" There's one at sevenpence at Jay's," continued Hyacinth undaunted, " only it mightn't wash. Sevenpence is cheap, isn't it ? If you go to ninepence now there's one as has got pink rosebuds on and 'ud wash lovely, the man says."

" Very well, very well," said Ines.

Hyacinth picked a few more bits of fluff off the doormat.

" At 'levenpence ha'penny there's one just—ravenously lovely, Miss Ines. Maiden-'air fern sort of pattern and poppies. Like a real garden. Takes your breath it's that pretty. 'Spose you wouldn't go to 'levenpence ha'penny, Miss Ines ? "

Ines drew her brows together.

" That mat is quite clean enough, Hyacinth," she said. " Go and get on with your other work. You can get the frock I promised, though you really have a great many. Sevenpence is quite enough for a print. I won't give more."

Hyacinth drooped, and went inside.

Mrs. Shore came out—Mrs. Shore with her head hanging a little.

" An' I'm really to go, Miss Ines ? " she said.

" I gave you fair warning," said Ines. " I said if you relapsed again I could not have you here."

" It wasn't as bad as time before, Miss Ines,"

said the old woman; "only one night away, and able to do me washing same as ever next day. You mustn't be too hard on a little thing like that."

"I should never know when to depend on you again," said Ines coldly; "I will do as I said—try to find you work somewhere till your cottage is empty. But I won't break my word." The last words were delivered quite sharply.

The old woman went inside again timidly, and Ines left the horizon line alone and stared at her garden.

Spring had gone out of that too: the jonquils, the daffodils, the violets, the anemones, all were gone. Portulacca blazed on the stone wall, crude sunflowers and gaillardia made masses of colour here and there, but the soul of the once sweet place was departed. It might have been any one's garden to-day. Ines was honestly trying to find something to do with the long day stretching before her. Three months of her lease had still to run, and she felt too spiritless to make new plans or do anything but stay just as she was.

She told herself that when the cool autumn came she would feel more energy, more inclination to take an interest in her own life, but until then she wanted to stay quiet and undisturbed.

There were days when she never opened her lips from morning till night except for some necessary word to Hyacinth or Mrs. Shore.

Days when she slipped away and hid in the bush whenever she saw a Wharton vehicle creeping up the road, or the yellow sulky or any one from the outer world.

Why was there no place in the world where any one with a hurt like hers could creep and be free from sight and sound of other people ?

Why had gone all the kindly impulses that had once warmed her blood ? What was this cruelly sharp light in which she now saw her little world ?

Hyacinth she found nothing but a tiresome, common girl with a distorted love of colour. Mrs. Shore, a weak, miserable old woman, hardly worth the effort of keeping from her besetting sin. Oh, probably she would give her just one more trial, but she did not feel greatly interested in the result. Mrs. Beattie she could hardly bear to see and speak to. It was not that they were not reconciled after their quarrel. When the news came that Scott had sailed for England, Mrs. Beattie went up quite humbly to the cottage and asked Ines' forgiveness for her fit of bad temper.

And Ines had forgiven her quite freely, even given her a brass tray and a stencilled table-cloth, when asked, for the bazaar for reducing the church debt. But she found herself now-a-days continually irritated almost beyond endurance by the woman's ill-fitting clothes, by the extreme dowdiness of her bonnets, by her

parochial chatter, by the very sight of Currant and the sulky.

The salt of life had lost its savour, and wherewithal might it be salted ?

She had expected that the knowledge that she had done the right thing would keep her up—exalt the days for her. But such was not the case. Scott had gone. She had waved farewell to him ; by this time he must be in England. Soon he would write to her as they had agreed, would tell her of his marriage. But at present all was silence, and, once the letter had come, all would be silence again till eternity.

The morning dew and verdure had gone from her life as they had gone from the Wyama hills. Some scorching breath had taken both together.

She had waved to Scott. That was the only memory she cherished just at present.

When the time of his sailing was known to her—a Saturday at noon—she packed a small bag on the day before, and told Mrs. Shore that she was going away for a day or two. All the two hundred miles to Sydney she travelled, and stayed the night at the house of a one-time friend. Mrs. Beattie imagined her gone, as she had gone two or three times before, to arrange matters connected with her metal work.

Not till the gangways were taken away did the girl show herself on the wharf, for deep in her heart she knew that neither of them was as

strong as they imagined. But she could not—ah, she could not let him go without a farewell look.

The great liner was moving imperceptibly; countless strands of coloured ribbon fluttered in the wind, one end held in the hands on board, one by those left behind on the wharf. Women waved gay or sad farewells from behind great baskets and bouquets of flowers, the parting trophies.

But Scott stood apart from all this, quite alone; perhaps almost the only soul on board with no one to call good-bye, good-bye.

Then a little back from the concourse of people on the wharf he saw her, in her white dress, with the black ribbon at her waist, and the black hat framing her white face.

There was nothing that they might do but wave and gaze at each other, gaze at each other and wave.

But it comforted them both in some subtle manner, warmed their poor young hearts though it blinded their eyes.

The last strand of ribbon snapped. The crowd broke up and the girl's figure was lost in it.

On deck the solitary figure near the funnel became a blur that faded and disappeared. Scott had gone. Ines had gone. But the world rolled steadily as ever; steadily as ever shone the sun.

It was no more to that world, that sun, Ines whispered to herself, than the crushing out of life of two ants, the breaking of two butterflies' wings, the sudden fall to earth of two birds.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN LONDON

" No, when the fight begins within himself
A man's worth something."

BROWNING.

IN London Scott made straight for his mother's house.

He found her altered—less fluffy, less carefully dressed; lines of care were on her face, shadows under her eyes; there seemed a new sincerity about her—something had been born in her amid her troubles that had deepened her nature.

She put her arms round her lost son's neck, but the action was a timid one; she expected repulse. Yet the love shining in her eyes was very deep—deeper than it had ever been. Scott thrilled as he realised it. She had sacrificed him, but she loved him after all, and she was his mother. He stooped his head and kissed her tenderly again and again, complete forgiveness in every kiss.

Then she told him her news, haltingly and

with tears, but with no comments, no lamentations for herself.

Cecil had had an illness a year ago that had brought him to the verge of death. Iris had helped to nurse him back to convalescence, and had obtained a great influence over him which she used in the wisest way, strengthening his character in a manner that even his mother could hardly believe. There came a day when the unhappy boy unburdened himself to the girl of his miserable crime, and his still more miserable conduct in letting his brother bear his guilt.

And now Iris took his life into her hands as if it had been a piece of plastic clay and she the potter.

There had been a flaw in the first making of him, she allowed, but he was to rise from this illness an absolutely new man, and a happy man.

Cecil mournfully asked how that might be—what happiness might he ever reach to across the ruined life of a brother ?

Iris turned her clear eyes on him.

" Of course you must retrieve that first of all," she said. " The first day that you are really strong we will go to your uncle and tell him everything."

Cecil lay back among the cushions of his sofa and trembled exceedingly for a minute or two. Then he rose suddenly to his feet, a great, gaunt boy with hollow eyes.

"I'm strong enough this moment," he said. "If I wait till I'm stronger I shall be too weak."

And indeed he knew himself.

Iris sent for a cab; then hastily ran to Lady Barnsley's room and acquainted her with her son's decision.

The fragile-looking girl carried everything before her as she had a habit of doing; though indeed, on this one occasion, she had not to plead very long.

"It will kill him," the mother said.

"No," said Iris, "it is the not telling that is killing him. Can't you see it? It is that that has caused this breakdown. It is sapping his life, and you know it."

Yes, the mother did know it. Indeed it was sapping her own life too; the sacrifice she had demanded in an hour of sheer insanity of grief had become a thing almost too monstrous for her to bear the thought of.

She had grown pale, large-eyed, had withdrawn herself from the world, lived in an atmosphere of unceasing reproach ever since the event. And not the least bitter part of her knowledge was that the sacrifice had availed little. Cecil was eating his heart out more surely even than he would have done had he gone through with his punishment himself.

So Iris carried the day, and the mother sat back in her chair shaken to the soul, but almost

thankful that some one had given him courage to make the right stand at last.

The cabman pulled up at the address given to him, the old merchant's city office whose dingy steps both Scott and Cecil had trodden so often.

"Wait for us," Iris said.

The cabman's eye was on Cecil. "Will I lend him a hand?" he said.

Iris turned her eyes to Cecil.

"No, thank you," she said; "he is quite strong enough."

Cecil pulled himself together and followed her.

At the door of the merchant's own room, however, he quailed again.

"I—I don't believe I'll be able to speak," he said.

And now the girl gave him a little sympathetic pressure on his arm.

"That's all right," she said. "I'll tell."

But when they got inside, and the old merchant was frowning heavily at the interruption and the sight of petticoats in business hours, he recovered again, and took the matter into his own hands.

"I've been a coward and rogue, sir," he said.

"But he is ill and very sorry, Mr. Barnsley," supplemented Iris, with cheeks as white as his own.

Barnsley shot a glance at her. "He seems able to speak, madam," he said,

Iris swallowed hard,

"You are quite right," she said. "I oughtn't to interrupt. Only to say this—he is just out of a sick bed—make him sit down."

"Sit down," said Barnsley, quite without emotion. Then he saw that the only chairs were set back against the wall—half the length of the room from his desk. He could not let a slip of a girl go and get them, and his nephew was clearly incapable of the task, so he strode across the carpet and brought the seats himself.

"Now then," he said grimly.

"I've been a coward and a scoundrel for five years," repeated Cecil, "and I'm sick of it. I haven't come to ask you to forgive me—I don't want to be forgiven. Only I've got to tell you, of course."

The telling took five minutes at most—five years of misery and crime that had infected so many healthy lives, and the tale of it took five minutes! At the end of it the merchant sat silent for a long space of time. His thoughts had gone to the scapegoat.

"Where is he now—your brother?" he asked at last.

"Australia," said Cecil.

"Doing anything?"

"Not much."

"Had to give up medicine, I suppose?"

"Yes."

Silence again; just the sharp eyes glancing

to and fro from under the shaggy eyebrows. Then he spoke again.

"What do you propose to do?"

"As right a thing as I can at this late hour," Cecil said. "Give myself up to the authorities and do what I can to clear his name."

"H'm. Prepared to go straight on with it?"

"This afternoon."

"H'm." Barnsley got up and took a couple of turns up and down his room. Then he pulled up.

"Go home now," he said, "and come and see me again in the morning. I've got to think this over." Then he looked at Iris. "May I ask what you have to do with this?" he said.

Cecil looked at her with kindling eyes.

"Trying to show a cur that he needn't be a cur always," he said.

The old man shook hands with her.

"Bring him to see me to-morrow, my dear," he said.

He held his hand out to Cecil.

"It's the first time I've liked you in your life, lad," he said.

They went again on the morrow, and the old man laid before them his intentions.

They found that thinking it all over had left him merciful; he found himself grown too old for schemes of vengeance. Sheldon had paid the price for the crime; it must not be charged for again.

"See here," he said, "I made my will some months ago, and little as I liked you you got your share with the rest of the family—five hundred a year to be exact. I gave myself the pleasure last night of crossing your name out, and putting Sheldon's in in your place."

"Thank you, sir," said Cecil, and meant it honestly.

"He won't wait for it either till I'm dead," continued Barnsley; "his income starts from to-day."

"Thank you," said Cecil again, his mind hugely relieved to know that Scott might at once go on with his course.

"For you," said Barnsley, "the best thing you can do is make and sign a full confession, and then slip off to Canada and change your name. Make a fresh start, my lad. Here's a bit of paper to help it."

The bit of paper was for two thousand pounds.

"But!" gasped Cecil, "my punishment! I want to take it, don't you understand?"

"You've taken it, I haven't a doubt," said Barnsley. "The thing now is to get a move on you. You've been sitting with your feet in the gutter long enough."

Cecil stumbled blindly back to his cab.

CHAPTER XXVII

IRIS SMOOTHS OUT THE SCROLL

"If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain and wholly well for you."
BROWNING.

AND so Scott came home to find the papers devoting quite a paragraph each to his name.

Fear seized him for Cecil's safety; it was intolerable that the sacrifice should have been in vain after all. But the law stretched but a feeble arm after the real culprit who, it discovered, had fled the country. It had had an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and even when it found it had not been quite the right eye, precisely the right tooth, it felt it had had a glut of the affair, and it made merely a perfunctory effort to reach the real offender.

The brothers did not meet. Before Scott's ship came up the Thames, Cecil was on Canadian soil, the light in his eyes more hopeful, more purposeful than any that had shone there since he was an ambitious school-boy.

It was arranged that Lady Barnsley was to follow him, leaving her name and title behind

her, and taking the name that Cecil had chosen for his future one in the new land.

There was then nothing to delay the marriage of Iris and Scott, Barnsley's munificent reparation making it possible for the medical career to be resumed at any moment. Only the girl was oddly captious now.

She seemed paler and frailer than ever; instead of welcoming Scott with eagerness she shrank from him plainly in dismay.

He feared that his manner had lacked the warmth and eagerness of the gladly returned lover, and began to urge as strongly as he could that the marriage be celebrated almost immediately.

"Will you let it be next month?" he begged.

"Ah—not as soon as that."

"Six weeks?" he said. "Why delay any longer?"

She agreed finally to six weeks, looking like some particularly forlorn but determined martyr as she did so.

He went away perplexed—only to be recalled by a messenger just as he gained his hotel.

When he went back the girl looked whiter than ever; her face seemed nothing but eyes, big, tragic eyes.

"I am not going to break my word, Scott," she said. "I promised to marry you and I will. But I feel I must not, in honesty to you, let you

marry me till I have told you the real state of my feelings."

"Yes," said Scott, absolutely at sea. He tried to take her hand as a lover should. But she shivered away from him.

"I have come to—care for Cecil," she whispered.

It was out—the frightful secret that had been gnawing at her for the last few months.

She had come to care for Cecil. Of course she had come to care for Cecil.

Was not he the maimed creature now? The praise of Scott was in every one's mouth, Scott was strong and well, was passing rich, able to pursue the profession he loved. But Cecil was broken in health, in spirit, in reputation; the finger of scorn pointed at him; he had fled from the land of his birth and was alone in a far-away land. Of course she had come to care for Cecil.

But why was Scott laughing? Was ever tragedy met before like this with smiles?

"Forgive me," he said; "I'm laughing because I'm sure the Fates are laughing at us. We have both been so industriously attempting to manage our own lives, and all the time they have been so much better managed for us."

And he told her of Ines and the tale of his life in Wyama.

Mrs. Bassett was amazed when they came out of the drawing-room half-an-hour later, hand-

in-hand and laughing like two children, for she knew of the impossibly tragic part Iris had set herself to play—to marry this one man while she cared for another. Could it be that, after all, she cared for this one best ?

But the girl flung a loving arm round her waist.

" Come and pack up, darling," she said. " We are going to Canada to Cecil at once. Scott, I wonder couldn't we manage to have the same wedding day after all ? Only four people in it, instead of two ? "

Scott said that he would hasten to do his part in the matter ; that he purposed starting for Marseilles in a couple of hours, there to catch up the week's liner that had already started on its journey to Australia.

CHAPTER XXVIII

'ALL'S RIGHT WITH THE WORLD'

"And there they were in each other's arms as if the long years had never been."

W. MORRIS. *The Sundering Flood.*

SHE was trying to start the stone wall into beauty once again when he came.

The summer lay dead and autumn was bursting into its warm and lovely life—the Australian autumn that is like another spring. The very wattle was deceived and bloomed again, not in the riotous manner of its spring blooming perhaps, but it tipped the bush with golden lights, and made golden once again the girdle on West Slope.

Scott had sent no word of his coming; a cable could not explain, and he was travelling as fast as any letter might.

He saw her moving up and down the long wall as he came up the slope. She was in white, and there was a black ribbon at her waist, just as on the day when she had faded from his eyes as he thought for ever.

But there was a red carnation stuck in the waist ribbon.

"She's getting over it," Hyacinth had said joyfully, noting the return to her old habit of wearing flowers. "She's getting just like herself again. Made me a pincushing for my room and some new musling collars."

"She's getting over it—improving a lot," Mrs. Beattie had said, with satisfaction. "I am sure Charlie coming back from sea has done her a lot of good: she is always asking him up to spend evenings with her, and he says she plays games with him and sings and is as gay as anything."

"She's getting over it," Cade Wharton said. "She has hired a horse for a couple of hours a day and rides all round the countryside. I shouldn't wonder if there mightn't be a chance for you yet, Douglas."

But Douglas knew that his answer had been a final one.

"She isn't getting over it a bit," said Mrs. Shore, whose old eyes had clearer vision than most; "she's just trying to be cheerful so as to keep us cheerful. I don't believe she'll ever get over it. Some things you can't: look at me; I'll never get over losing my man, not if the Lord goes on forgetting me and leaves me to live to be a 'undred. But I've got up to knowin' you can't go round with a long lip all the time. I'm cheerful enough I hope."

Hyacinth could not resist such a fine opportunity.

"Bit too cheerful, now and again, eh, Mrs. Shore?" she said.

Ines set her plants, tiny promises of all the colours of the sunset and the dawn. She tried to look ahead, the five or six months that must pass before their blossoming.

She would be—where would she be? It seemed as if some shutter fell in her brain every time she tried to make plans for the future. She felt as if here was the only niche in the world that would not be absolutely intolerable just yet, and she stayed on, paying for the cottage month by month, much to David's content. Some day, of course, she must strike out into the sea, but just for a little longer this quiet backwater.

She had a trowel full of nemophylla in her hand—the spring before, the top of the wall had been starred all over with the intense blue of the eager little flower.

"It's like handsful of heaven," Scott had said, when she called him to admire.

"I hope you are properly grateful to me for reaching it down," she returned.

"I—am properly grateful," he said, and looked across at her,—ah, she remembered even now how he looked across.

A sudden sense, almost of sickness assailed her. How could she grow "handsful of heaven"

ever again ? It must be something else—something plain and bright and matter-of-fact, portulacca, for instance.

But first she must put the nemophylla away. She dug a hole in the ground at her feet—laid in the little plants, leaves and roots and all, and covered them over with the moist brown earth. A blinding tear fell on the little grave.

Footsteps came up the quiet path ; she moved hurriedly to get away from them, fearful of lifting eyes a-swim to a visitor.

Then they were in each other's arms, and there was no woe any longer for them in all the world, nor had there ever been any, nor would there be any more until the end of time.

THE END

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