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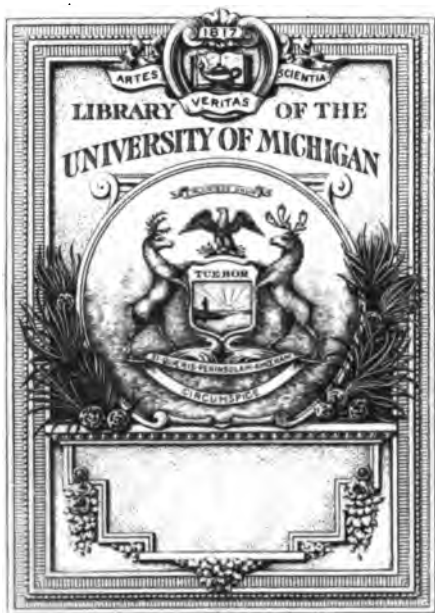
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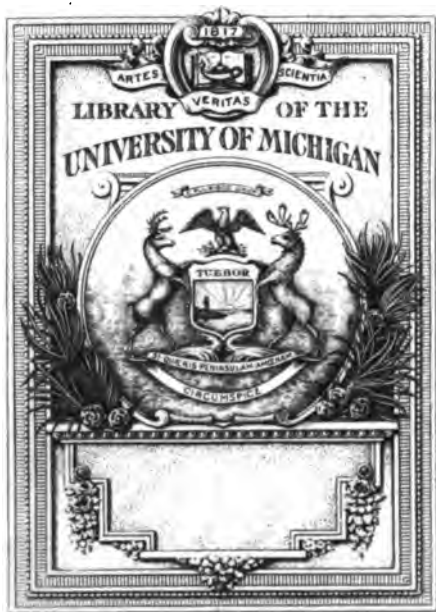
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THE
LADY OF THE AROOSTOOK.

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THE LADY OF
THE AROOSTOOK

BY
WILLIAM D. HOWELLS



Author's Edition

VOL. II

EDINBURGH
DAVID DOUGLAS, CASTLE STREET

1891

Edinburgh University Press
I. AND A. CONSTABLE, PRINTERS TO HER MAJESTY.

THE
LADY OF THE AROOSTOOK.



XV.

THE foreboded storm did not come so soon as had been feared, but the beautiful weather which had lasted so long was lost in a thickened sky and a sullen sea. The weather had changed with Staniford, too. The morning after the events last celebrated, he did not respond to the glance which Lydia gave him when they met, and he hardened his heart to her surprise, and shunned being alone with her. He would not admit to himself any reason for his attitude, and he could not have explained to her the mystery that at first visibly grieved her, and then seemed merely to benumb her. But the moment came when he ceased to take a certain cruel pleasure in it, and he

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approached her one morning on deck, where she stood holding fast to the railing where she usually sat, and said, as if there had been no interval of estrangement between them, but still coldly, "We have had our last walk for the present, Miss Blood. I hope you will grieve a little for my loss."

She turned on him a look that cut him to the heart, with what he fancied its reproach and its wonder. She did not reply at once, and then she did not reply to his hinted question.

"Mr. Staniford," she began. It was the second time he had heard her pronounce his name; he distinctly remembered the first.

"Well?" he said.

"I want to speak to you about lending that book to Mr. Hicks. I ought to have asked you first."

"Oh, no," said Staniford. "It was yours."

"You gave it to me," she returned.

"Well, then, it was yours,—to keep, to lend, to throw away."

"And you didn't mind my lending it to him?" she pursued. "I"—

She stopped, and Staniford hesitated, too. Then he said, "I didn't dislike your lending it; I disliked his having it. I will acknowledge that."

She looked up at him as if she were going to speak, but checked herself, and glanced away. The ship was plunging heavily, and the livid waves were racing before the wind. The horizon was lit with a yellow brightness in the quarter to which she turned, and a pallid gleam defined her profile. Captain Jenness was walking fretfully to and fro; he glanced now at the yellow glare, and now cast his eye aloft at the shortened sail. While Staniford stood questioning whether she meant to say anything more, or whether, having discharged her conscience of an imagined offence, she had now reached one of her final, precipitous silences, Captain Jenness suddenly approached them, and said to him, "I guess you'd better go below with Miss Blood."

The storm that followed had its hazards, but Staniford's consciousness was confined to its discomforts. The day came, and then the dark came, and both in due course went, and came again. Where he lay in his berth, and whirled and swung, and rose and sank, as lonely as a planetary fragment tossing in space, he heard the noises of the life without. Amidst the straining of the ship, which was like the sharp sweep of a thunder-shower on the deck overhead, there plunged

at irregular intervals the wild trample of heavily-booted feet, and now and then the voices of the crew answering the shouted orders made themselves hollowly audible. In the cabin there was talking, and sometimes even laughing. Sometimes he heard the click of knives and forks, the sardonic rattle of crockery. After the first insane feeling that somehow he must get ashore and escape from his torment, he hardened himself to it through an immense contempt, equally insane, for the stupidity of the sea, its insensate uproar, its blind and ridiculous and cruel mischievousness. Except for this delirious scorn he was a surface of perfect passivity.

Dunham, after a day of prostration, had risen, and had perhaps shortened his anguish by his resolution. He had since taken up his quarters on a locker in the cabin; he looked in now and then upon Staniford, with a cup of tea, or a suggestion of something light to eat; once he even dared to boast of the sublimity of the ocean. Staniford stared at him with eyes of lack-lustre indifference, and waited for him to be gone. But he lingered to say, "You would laugh to see what a sea-bird our lady is! She hasn't been sick a minute. And Hicks, you'll be

glad to know, is behaving himself very well. Really I don't think we 've done the fellow justice. I think you 've overshadowed him, and that he 's needed your absence to show himself to advantage."

Staniford disdained any comment on this except a fierce "Humph!" and dismissed Dunham by turning his face to the wall. He refused to think of what he had said. He lay still and suffered indefinitely, and no longer waited for the end of the storm. There had been times when he thought with acquiescence of going to the bottom, as a probable conclusion; now he did not expect anything. At last, one night, he felt by inexpressibly minute degrees something that seemed surcease of his misery. It might have been the end of all things, for all he cared; but as the lull deepened, he slept without knowing what it was, and when he woke in the morning he found the Aroostook at anchor in smooth water.

She was lying in the roads at Gibraltar, and before her towered the embattled rock. He crawled on deck after a while. The captain was going ashore, and had asked such of his passengers as liked, to go with him and see the place. When Staniford appeared, Dunham was loyally refusing to

leave his friend till he was fairly on foot. At sight of him they suspended their question long enough to welcome him back to animation, with the patronage with which well people hail a convalescent. Lydia looked across the estrangement of the past days with a sort of inquiry, and Hicks chose to come forward and accept a cold touch of the hand from him. Staniford saw, with languid observance, that Lydia was very fresh and bright; she was already equipped for the expedition, and could never have had any doubt in her mind as to going. She had on a pretty walking dress which he had not seen before, and a hat with the rim struck sharply upward behind, and her masses of dense, dull black hair pulled up and fastened somewhere on the top of her head. Her eyes shyly sparkled under the abrupt descent of the hat-brim over her forehead.

His contemptuous rejection of the character of invalid prevailed with Dunham; and Staniford walked to another part of the ship, to cut short the talk about himself, and saw them row away.

"Well, you 've had a pretty tough time, they say," said the second mate, lounging near him. "I don't see any fun in sea-sickness *myself*."

"It's a ridiculous sort of misery," said Staniford.

"I hope we shan't have anything worse on board when that chap gets back. The old man thinks he can keep an eye on him." The mate was looking after the boat.

"The captain says he hasn't any money," Staniford remarked carelessly. The mate went away without saying anything more, and Staniford returned to the cabin, where he beheld without abhorrence the preparations for his breakfast. But he had not a great appetite, in spite of his long fast. He found himself rather light-headed, and came on deck again after a while, and stretched himself in Hicks's steamer chair, where Lydia usually sat in it. He fell into a dull, despairing reverie, in which he blamed himself for not having been more explicit with her. He had merely expressed his dislike of Hicks ; but expressed without reasons it was a groundless dislike, which she had evidently not understood, or had not cared to heed ; and since that night, now so far away, when he had spoken to her, he had done everything he could to harden her against himself. He had treated her with a stupid cruelty, which a girl like her would resent to the last ; he had forced her to take refuge in the

politeness of a man from whom he was trying to keep her.

His heart paused when he saw the boat returning in the afternoon without Hicks. The others reported that they had separated before dinner, and that they had not seen him since, though Captain Jenness had spent an hour trying to look him up before starting back to the ship. The captain wore a look of guilty responsibility, mingled with intense exasperation, the two combining in as much haggardness as his cheerful visage could express. "If he's here by six o'clock," he said grimly, "all well and good. If not, the Aroostook sails anyway."

Lydia crept timidly below. Staniford complexly raged to see that the anxiety about Hicks had blighted the joy of the day for her.

"How the deuce could he get about without any money?" he demanded of Dunham, as soon as they were alone.

Dunham vainly struggled to look him in the eye. "Staniford," he faltered, with much more culpability than some criminals would confess a murder, "I lent him five dollars!"

"You lent him five dollars!" gasped Staniford.

“Yes,” replied Dunham, miserably; “he got me aside, and asked me for it. What could I do? What would you have done yourself?”

Staniford made no answer. He walked some paces away, and then returned to where Dunham stood helpless. “He’s lying about there dead-drunk, somewhere, I suppose. By Heaven, I could almost wish he was. He couldn’t come back, then, at any rate.”

The time lagged along toward the moment appointed by the captain, and the preparations for the ship’s departure were well advanced, when a boat was seen putting out from shore with two rowers, and rapidly approaching the Aroostook. In the stern, as it drew nearer, the familiar figure of Hicks discovered itself in the act of waving a handkerchief. He scrambled up the side of the ship in excellent spirits, and gave Dunham a detailed account of his adventures since they had parted. As always happens with such scapegraces, he seemed to have had a good time, however he had spoiled the pleasure of the others. At tea, when Lydia had gone away, he clapped down a sovereign near Dunham’s plate. “Your five dollars,” he said.

“Why, how”—Dunham began.

"How did I get on without it? My dear boy, I sold my watch! A ship's time is worth no more than a setting hen's,—eh, captain?—and why take note of it? Besides, I always like to pay my debts promptly: there's nothing mean about me. I'm not going ashore again without my pocket-book, I can tell you." He winked shamelessly at Captain Jenness. "If you hadn't been along, Dunham, I couldn't have made a raise, I suppose. *You* wouldn't have lent me five dollars, Captain Jenness."

"No, I wouldn't," said the captain, bluntly.

"And I believe you'd have sailed without me, if I hadn't got back in time."

"I would," said the captain, as before.

Hicks threw back his head, and laughed. Probably no human being had ever before made so free with Captain Jenness at his own table; but the captain must have felt that this contumacy was part of the general risk which he had taken in taking Hicks, and he contented himself with maintaining a silence that would have appalled a less audacious spirit. Hicks's gaiety, however, was not to be quelled in that way.

"Gibraltar wouldn't be a bad place to put up at for a while," he said. "Lots of good

fellows among the officers, they say, and fun going all the while. First-class gunning in the Cork Woods at St. Roque. If it hadn't been for the *res angusta domi*,—you know what I mean, captain,—I should have let you get along with your old dug-out, as the gentleman in the water said to Noah." His hilarity had something alarmingly knowing in it: there was a wildness in the pleasure with which he bearded the captain, like that of a man in his first cups; yet he had not been drinking. He played round the captain's knowledge of the sanative destitution in which he was making the voyage with mocking recurrence; but he took himself off to bed early, and the captain came through his trials with unimpaired temper. Dunham disappeared not long afterwards; and Staniford's vague hope that Lydia might be going on deck to watch the lights of the town die out behind the ship as they sailed away was disappointed. The second mate made a point of lounging near him where he sat alone in their wonted place.

"Well," he said, "he did come back sober."

"Yes," said Staniford.

"Next to not comin' back at all," the mate continued. "I suppose it was the best

thing he could do." He lounged away. Neither his voice nor his manner had that quality of disappointment which characterises those who have mistakenly prophesied evil. Staniford had a mind to call him back, and ask him what he meant; but he refrained, and he went to bed at last resolved to unburden himself of the whole Hicks business once for all. He felt that he had had quite enough of it, both in the abstract and in its relation to Lydia.

XVI.

HICKS did not join the others at breakfast. They talked of what Lydia had seen at Gibraltar, where Staniford had been on a former voyage. Dunham had made it a matter of conscience to know all about it beforehand from his guide-books, and had risen early that morning to correct his science by his experience in a long entry in the diary which he was keeping for Miss Hibbard. The captain had the true seafarer's ignorance, and was amused at the things reported by his passengers of a place where he had been ashore so often; Hicks's absence doubtless relieved him, but he did not comment on the cabin-boy's announcement that he was still asleep, except to order him let alone.

They were seated at their one o'clock dinner before the recluse made any sign. Then he gave note of his continued existence by bumping and thumping sounds within his state-room, as if some one were dressing there in a heavy sea.

"Mr. Hicks seems to be taking his rough weather retrospectively," said Staniford, with rather tremulous humour.

The door was flung open, and Hicks reeled out, staying himself by the door-knob. Even before he appeared, a reek of strong waters had preceded him. He must have been drinking all night. His face was flushed, and his eyes were bloodshot. He had no collar on; but he wore a cravat and otherwise he was accurately and even fastidiously dressed. He balanced himself by the door-knob, and measured the distance he had to make before reaching his place at the table, smiling, and waving a delicate handkerchief which he held in his hand: "Spilt c'logne, tryin' to scent my hic—handkerchief. Makes deuced bad smell—too much c'logne; smells—alcoholic. Thom's, bear a hand, 's good f'low. No? All right, go on with your waitin'. B-ic—business b'fore pleasure, 's feller says. Play it alone, I guess."

The boy had shrunk back in dismay, and Hicks contrived to reach his place by one of those precipitate dashes with which drunken men attain a point, when the luck is with them. He looked smilingly round the circle of faces. Staniford and the cap-

tain exchanged threatening looks of intelligence, while Mr. Watterson and Dunham subordinately waited their motion. But the advantage, as in such cases, was on the side of Hicks. He knew it, with a drunkard's subtlety, and was at his ease.

"No app'tite, friends; but thought I'd come out, keep you from feeling lonesome." He laughed and hiccuped, and smiled upon them all. "Well, cap'n," he continued, "'covered from 'tignes day, 'sterday? You look blooming's usual. Thom's, pass the—pass the—victuals lively, my son, and fetch along coffee soon. Some the friends up late, and want their coffee. Nothing like coffee, carry off 'fec's." He winked to the men, all round; and then added, to Lydia: "Sorry see you in this state—I mean, sorry see me—Can't make it that way either; up stump on both routes. What I mean is, sorry hadn't coffee first. But *you're* all right—all right! Like see anybody offer you disrespect, 'n I'm around. Tha's all."

Till he addressed her, Lydia had remained motionless, first with bewilderment, and then with open abhorrence. She could hardly have seen in South Bradfield a man who had been drinking. Even in haying, or other sharpest stress of farm-work, our

farmer and his men stay themselves with nothing stronger than molasses-water, or, in extreme cases, cider with a little corn soaked in it; and the Mill Village, where she had taught school, was under the iron rule of a local vote for prohibition. She stared in stupefaction at Hicks's heated, foolish face; she started at his wild movements, and listened with dawning intelligence to his hiccup-broken speech, with its thickened sibilants and its wandering emphasis. When he turned to her, and accompanied his words with a reassuring gesture, she recoiled, and as if breaking an ugly fascination she gave a low, shuddering cry, and looked at Staniford.

"Thomas," he said, "Miss Blood was going to take her dessert on deck to-day. Dunham?"

Dunham sprang to his feet, and led her out of the cabin.

The movement met Hicks's approval. "Tha's right; 'sert on deck, 'joy landscape and pudding together,—Rhine steamer style. All right. Be up there m'self soon 's I get my coffee." He winked again with drunken sharpness. "I know wha's what. Be up there m'self, 'n a minute."

"If you offer to go up," said Staniford,

in a low voice, as soon as Lydia was out of the way, "I'll knock you down!"

"Captain," said Mr. Watterson, venturing, perhaps for the first time in his whole maritime history, upon a suggestion to his superior officer, "shall I clap him in irons?"

"Clap him in irons!" roared Captain Jenness. "Clap him in bed! Look here, you!" He turned to Hicks, but the latter, who had been bristling at Staniford's threat, now relaxed in a crowing laugh:—

"Tha's right, captain. Irons no go, 'cept in case mutiny; bed perfectly legal 't all times. Bed is good. But trouble is t' enforce it."

"Where's your bottle?" demanded the captain, rising from the seat in which a paralysis of fury had kept him hitherto. "I want your bottle."

"Oh, bottle's all right! Bottle's under pillow. Empty,—empty's Jonah's gourd; 'nother sea-faring party,—Jonah. S'cure the shadow ere the substance fade. Drunk all the brandy, old boy. Bottle's a canteen; 'vantage of military port to houseless stranger. Brought the brandy on board under my coat; nobody noticed,—so glad get me back. Prodigal son's return,—fatted calf under his coat."

The reprobate ended his boastful confession with another burst of hiccuping, and Staniford helplessly laughed.

"Do me proud," said Hicks. "Proud, I 'sure you. Gentleman, every time, Stanny. Know good thing when you see it—hear it, I mean."

"Look here, Hicks," said Staniford, choosing to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, if any good end might be gained by it. "You know you're drunk, and you're not fit to be about. Go back to bed, that's a good fellow; and come out again, when you're all right. You don't want to do anything you'll be sorry for."

"No, no! No, you don't, Stanny. Coffee'll make me all right. Coffee always does. Coffee—Heaven's lash besh gift to man. 'Scovered subse-subsequently to grape. See? Comes after claret in course of nature. Captain doesn't understand the 'lusion. All right, captain. Little learning dangerous thing." He turned sharply on Mr. Watter-son, who had remained inertly in his place. "Put me in irons, heh! You put me in irons, you old Triton. Put *me* in irons, will you?" His amiable mood was passing; before one could say so, it was past. He was

meditating means of active offence. He gathered up the carving-knife and fork, and held them close under Mr. Watterson's nose. "Smell that!" he said, and frowned as darkly as a man of so little eyebrow could.

At this senseless defiance Staniford, in spite of himself, broke into another laugh, and even Captain Jenness grinned. Mr. Watterson sat with his head drawn as far back as possible, and with his nose wrinkled at the affront offered it. "Captain," he screamed, appealing even in this extremity to his superior, "shall I fetch him *one*?"

"No, no!" cried Staniford, springing from his chair; "don't hit him! He isn't responsible. Let's get him into his room."

"Fetch me *one*, heh?" said Hicks, rising, with dignity, and beginning to turn up his cuffs. "*One!* It'll take more than one, fetch *me*. Stan' up, 'f you're man enough." He was squaring at Mr. Watterson, when he detected signs of strategic approach in Staniford and Captain Jenness. He gave a wild laugh, and shrank into a corner. "No! No, you don't, boys," he said.

They continued their advance, one on either side, and reinforced by Mr. Watterson hemmed him in. The drunken man has the

advantage of his sober brother in never seeming to be on the alert. Hicks apparently entered into the humour of the affair. "Sur-hic-surrender!" he said, with a smile in his heavy eyes. He darted under the extended arms of Captain Jenness, who was leading the centre of the advance, and before either wing could touch him he was up the gangway and on the deck.

Captain Jenness indulged one of those expressions, very rare with him, which are supposed to be forgiven to good men in moments of extreme perplexity, and Mr. Watterson profited by the precedent to unburden his heart in a paraphrase of the captain's language. Staniford's laugh had as much cursing in it as their profanity.

He mechanically followed Hicks to the deck, prepared to renew the attempt for his capture there. But Hicks had not stopped near Dunham and Lydia. He had gone forward on the other side of the ship, and was leaning quietly on the rail, and looking into the sea. Staniford paused irresolute for a moment, and then sat down beside Lydia, and they all tried to feign that nothing unpleasant had happened, or was still impending. But their talk had the wandering inconclusiveness which was inevitable, and

the eyes of each from time to time furtively turned toward Hicks.

For half an hour he hardly changed his position. At the end of that time, they found him looking intently at them; and presently he began to work slowly back to the waist of the ship, but kept to his own side. He was met on the way by the second mate, when nearly opposite where they sat.

"Ain't you pretty comfortable where you are?" they heard the mate asking. "Guess I wouldn't go aft any further just yet."

"You're all right, Mason," Hicks answered. "Going below—down cellar, 's feller says; go to bed."

"Well, that's a pious idea," said the mate. "You couldn't do better than that. I'll lend you a hand."

"Don't care 'f I do," responded Hicks, taking the mate's proffered arm. But he really seemed to need it very little; he walked perfectly well, and he did not look across at the others again.

At the head of the gangway he encountered Captain Jenness and Mr. Watterson, who had completed the perquisition they had remained to make in his state-room. Mr. Watterson came up empty-handed; but the captain bore the canteen in which the com-

mon enemy had been so artfully conveyed on board. He walked, darkly scowling, to the rail, and flung the canteen into the sea. Hicks, who had saluted his appearance with a glare as savage as his own, yielded to his whimsical sense of the futility of this vengeance. He gave his fleeing, drunken laugh: "Good old boy, Captain Jenness. Means well—means well. But lacks—lacks—forecast. Pounds of cure, but no prevention. Not much on bite, but death on bark. Heh?" He wagged his hand offensively at the captain, and disappeared, loosely floundering down the cabin stairs, holding hard by the hand-rail, and fumbling round with his foot for the steps before he put it down.

"As soon as he's in his room, Mr. Watterson, you lock him in." The captain handed his officer a key, and walked away forward, with a hang-dog look on his kindly face, which he kept averted from his passengers.

The sound of Hicks's descent had hardly ceased when clapping and knocking noises were heard again, and the face of the troublesome little wretch reappeared. He waved Mr. Watterson aside with his left hand, and in default of specific orders the

latter allowed him to mount to the deck again. Hicks stayed himself a moment, and lurched to where Staniford and Dunham sat with Lydia.

“What I wish say Miss Blood is,” he began,—“what I wish say is, peculiar circumstances make no difference with man if man’s gentleman. What I say is, everybody ’spec’s— What I say is, circumstances don’t alter cases; lady’s a lady— What I want do is beg you fellows’ pardon—beg *her* pardon—if anything I said that firs’ morning”—

“Go away!” cried Staniford, beginning to whiten round the nostrils. “Hold your tongue!”

Hicks fell back a pace, and looked at him with the odd effect of now seeing him for the first time. “What *you* want?” he asked. “What you mean? Slingin’ criticism ever since you came on this ship! What you mean by it? Heh? What you mean?”

Staniford rose, and Lydia gave a start. He cast an angry look at her. “Do you think I’d hurt him?” he demanded.

Hicks went on: “Sorry, very sorry, ’larm a lady,—specially lady we all respect’. But this particular affair. Touch—touches my

honour. You said," he continued, "'f I came on deck, you 'd knock me down. Why don't you do it? Wha's the matter with you? Sling criticism ever since you been on ship, and 'fraid do it! 'Fraid, you hear? 'F-ic—'fraid, I say." Staniford slowly walked away forward, and Hicks followed him, threatening him with word and gesture. Now and then Staniford thrust him aside, and addressed him some expostulation, and Hicks laughed and submitted. Then, after a silent excursion to the other side of the ship, he would return and renew his one-sided quarrel. Staniford seemed to forbid the interference of the crew, and alternately soothed and baffled his tedious adversary, who could still be heard accusing him of slinging criticism, and challenging him to combat. He leaned with his back to the rail, and now looked quietly into Hicks's crazy face, when the latter paused in front of him, and now looked down with a worried, wearied air. At last he crossed to the other side, and began to come aft again.

"Mr. Dunham!" cried Lydia, starting up. "I know what Mr. Staniford wants to do. He wants to keep him away from me. Let me go down to the cabin. I can't

walk ; *please* help me !” Her eyes were full of tears, and the hand trembled that she laid on Dunham’s arm, but she controlled her voice.

He softly repressed her, while he intently watched Staniford. “ No, no !”

“ But he can’t bear it much longer,” she pleaded. “ And if he should ”—

“ Staniford would never strike him,” said Dunham, calmly. “ Don’t be afraid. Look ! He’s coming back with him ; he’s trying to get him below ; they’ll shut him up there. That’s the only chance. Sit down, please.” She dropped into her seat, hid her eyes for an instant, and then fixed them again on the two young men.

Hicks had got between Staniford and the rail. He seized him by the arm, and, pulling him round, suddenly struck at him. It was too much for his wavering balance : his feet shot from under him, and he went backwards in a crooked whirl and tumble, over the vessel’s side.

Staniford uttered a cry of disgust and rage. “ Oh, you little brute !” he shouted, and with what seemed a single gesture he flung off his coat and the low shoes he wore, and leaped the railing after him.

The cry of “ Man overboard !” rang

round the ship, and Captain Jenness's order, "Down with your helm! Lower a boat, Mr. Mason!" came, quick as it was, after the second mate had prepared to let go; and he and two of the men were in the boat, and she was sliding from her davits, while the Aroostook was coming up to the light wind and losing headway.

When the boat touched the water, two heads had appeared above the surface terribly far away. "Hold on, for God's sake! We'll be there in a second."

"All right!" Staniford's voice called back. "Be quick." The heads rose and sank with the undulation of the water. The swift boat appeared to crawl.

By the time it reached the place where they had been seen, the heads disappeared, and the men in the boat seemed to be rowing blindly about. The mate stood upright. Suddenly he dropped and clutched at something over the boat's side. The people on the ship could see three hands on her gunwale; a figure was pulled up into the boat, and proved to be Hicks; then Staniford, seizing the gunwale with both hands, swung himself in.

A shout went up from the ship, and Stani-

ford waved his hand. Lydia waited where she hung upon the rail, clutching it hard with her hands, till the boat was alongside. Then from white she turned fire-red, and ran below and locked herself in her room.

XVII.

DUNHAM followed Staniford to their room, and helped him off with his wet clothes. He tried to say something ideally fit in recognition of his heroic act, and he articulated some bald commonplaces of praise, and shook Staniford's clammy hand. "Yes," said the latter, submitting; "but the difficulty about a thing of this sort is that you don't know whether you haven't been an ass. It has been pawed over so much by the romancers that you don't feel like a hero in real life, but a hero of fiction. I've a notion that Hicks and I looked rather ridiculous going over the ship's side; I know we did, coming back. No man can reveal his greatness of soul in wet clothes. Did Miss Blood laugh?"

"Staniford!" said Dunham, in an accent of reproach. "You do her great injustice. She felt what you had done in the way you would wish,—if you cared."

"What did she say?" asked Staniford, quickly.

“Nothing. But”—

“That’s an easy way of expressing one’s admiration of heroic behaviour. I hope she’ll stick to that line. I hope she won’t feel it at all necessary to say anything in recognition of my prowess; it would be extremely embarrassing. I’ve got Hicks back again, but I couldn’t stand any gratitude for it. Not that I’m ashamed of the performance. Perhaps if it had been anybody but Hicks, I should have waited for them to lower a boat. But Hicks had peculiar claims. You couldn’t let a man you disliked so much welter round a great while. Where is the poor old fellow? Is he clothed and in his right mind again?”

“He seemed to be sober enough,” said Dunham, “when he came on board; but I don’t think he’s out yet.”

“We must let Thomas in to gather up this bathing-suit,” observed Staniford. “What a Newportish flavour it gives the place!” He was excited, and in great gaiety of spirits.

He and Dunham went out into the cabin, where they found Captain Jenness pacing to and fro. “Well, sir,” he said, taking Staniford’s hand, and crossing his right with his left, so as to include Dunham in his congratu-

lations, "you ought to have been a sailor!" Then he added, as if the unqualified praise might seem fulsome, "But if you'd been a sailor, you wouldn't have tried a thing like that. You'd have had more sense. The chances were ten to one against you."

Staniford laughed. "Was it so bad as that? I shall begin to respect myself."

The captain did not answer, but his iron grip closed hard upon Staniford's hand, and he frowned in keen inspection of Hicks, who at that moment came out of his state-room, looking pale and quite sobered. Captain Jenness surveyed him from head to foot, and then from foot to head, and pausing at the level of his eyes he said, still holding Staniford by the hand: "The trouble with a man aboard-ship is that he can't turn a black-guard out-of-doors just when he likes. The Aroostook puts in at Messina. You'll be treated well till we get there, and then if I find you on my vessel five minutes after she comes to anchor, I'll heave you overboard, and I'll take care that nobody jumps after you. Do you hear? And you won't find me doing any such fool kindness as I did when I took you on board, soon again."

"Oh, I say, Captain Jenness," began Staniford.

"He's all right," interrupted Hicks. I'm a blackguard; I know it; and I don't think I was worth fishing up. But you've done it, and I mustn't go back on you, I suppose." He lifted his poor, weak, bad little face, and looked Staniford in the eyes with a pathos that belied the slang of his speech. The latter released his hand from Captain Jenness and gave it to Hicks, who wrung it, as he kept looking him in the eyes, while his lips twitched pitifully, like a child's. The captain gave a quick snort either of disgust or of sympathy, and turned abruptly about and bundled himself up out of the cabin.

"I say!" exclaimed Staniford, "a cup of coffee wouldn't be bad, would it? Let's have some coffee, Thomas, about as quick as the cook can make it," he added, as the boy came out from his state-room with a lump of wet clothes in his hands. "You wanted some coffee a little while ago," he said to Hicks, who hung his head at the joke.

For the rest of the day Staniford was the hero of the ship. The men looked at him from a distance, and talked of him together. Mr. Watterson hung about whenever Captain Jenness drew near him, as if in the hope of overhearing some acceptable expression in which he could second his superior officer.

Failing this, and being driven to despair, "Find the water pretty cold, sir?" he asked at last; and after that seemed to feel that he had discharged his duty as well as might be under the extraordinary circumstances.

The second mate, during the course of the afternoon, contrived to pass near Staniford. "Why, there wa'n't no *need* of your doing it," he said, in a bated tone. "I could ha' had him out with the boat, *soon enough*."

Staniford treasured up these meagre expressions of the general approbation, and would not have had them different. From this time, within the narrow bounds that brought them all necessarily together in some sort, Hicks abolished himself as nearly as possible. He chose often to join the second mate at meals, which Mr. Mason, in accordance with the discipline of the ship, took apart both from the crew and his superior officers. Mason treated the voluntary outcast with a sort of sarcastic compassion, as a man whose fallen state was not without its points as a joke to the indifferent observer, and yet might appeal to the pity of one who knew such cases through the misery they inflicted. Staniford heard him telling Hicks about his brother-in-law, and dwelling upon the peculiar relief which the

appearance of his name in the mortality list gave all concerned in him. Hicks listened in apathetic patience and acquiescence ; but Staniford thought that he enjoyed, as much as he could enjoy anything, the second officer's frankness. For his own part, he found that having made bold to keep this man in the world he had assumed a curious responsibility towards him. It became his business to show him that he was not shunned by his fellow-creatures, to hearten and cheer him up. It was heavy work. Hicks with his joke was sometimes odious company, but he was also sometimes amusing ; without it, he was of a terribly dull conversation. He accepted Staniford's friendliness too meekly for good-comradery ; he let it add, apparently, to his burden of gratitude, rather than lessen it. Staniford smoked with him, and told him stories ; he walked up and down with him, and made a point of parading their good understanding, but his spirits seemed to sink the lower. "Deuce take him !" mused his benefactor ; "he's in love with her !" But he now had the satisfaction, such as it was, of seeing that if he was in love he was quite without hope. Lydia had never relented in her abhorrence of Hicks since the day of his

disgrace. There seemed no scorn in her condemnation, but neither was there any mercy. In her simple life she had kept unsophisticated the severe morality of a child, and it was this that judged him, that found him unpardonable, and outlawed him. He had never ventured to speak to her since that day, and Staniford never saw her look at him except when Hicks was not looking, and then with a repulsion which was very curious. Staniford could have pitied him, and might have interceded so far as to set him nearer right in her eyes ; but he felt that she avoided him, too ; there were no more walks on the deck, no more readings in the cabin ; the checker-board, which professed to be the History of England, In 2 Vols., remained a closed book. The good companionship of a former time, in which they had so often seemed like brothers and sister, was gone. " Hicks has smashed our Happy Family," Staniford said to Dunham, with little pleasure in his joke. " Upon my word, I think I had better have left him in the water." Lydia kept a great deal in her own room ; sometimes when Staniford came down into the cabin he found her there, talking with Thomas of little things that amuse children ; sometimes when he

went on deck in the evening she would be there in her accustomed seat, and the second mate, with face and figure half averted, and staying himself by one hand on the shrouds, would be telling her something to which she listened with lifted chin and attentive eyes. The mate would go away when Staniford appeared, but that did not help matters, for then Lydia went too. At table she said very little ; she had the effect of placing herself more and more under the protection of the captain. The golden age, when they had all laughed and jested so freely and fearlessly together, under her pretty sovereignty, was past, and they seemed far dispersed in a common exile. Staniford imagined she grew pale and thin ; he asked Dunham if he did not see it, but Dunham had not observed. "I think matters have taken a very desirable shape, socially," he said. "Miss Blood will reach her friends as fancy-free as she left home."

"Yes," Staniford assented vaguely ; "that's the great object."

After a while Dunham asked, "She's never said anything to you about your rescuing Hicks?"

"Rescuing? What rescuing? They'd have had him out in another minute, any

way," said Staniford fretfully. Then he brooded angrily upon the subject: "But I can tell you what: considering all the circumstances, she might very well have said something. It looks obtuse, or it looks hard. She must have known that it all came about through my trying to keep him away from her."

"Oh, yes; she knew that," said Dunham; "she spoke of it at the time. But I thought"—

"Oh, she did! Then I think that it would be very little if she recognised the mere fact that something had happened."

"Why, you said you hoped she wouldn't. You said it would be embarrassing. You're hard to please, Staniford."

"I shouldn't choose to have her speak for *my* pleasure," Staniford returned. "But it argues a dulness and coldness in her"—

"I don't believe she's dull; I don't believe she's cold," said Dunham, warmly.

"What *do* you believe she is?"

"Afraid."

"Pshaw!" said Staniford.

The eve of their arrival at Messina, he discharged one more duty by telling Hicks that he had better come on to Trieste with them. "Captain Jenness asked me to

“speak to you about it,” he said. “He feels a little awkward, and thought I could open the matter better.”

“The captain’s all right,” answered Hicks, with unruffled humility, “but I’d rather stop at Messina. I’m going to get home as soon as I can,—strike a bee-line.”

“Look here!” said Staniford, laying his hand on his shoulder. “How are you going to manage for money?”

“Monte di Pietà,” replied Hicks. “I’ve been there before. Used to have most of my things in the care of the state when I was studying medicine in Paris. I’ve got a lot of rings and trinkets that’ll carry me through, with what’s left of my watch.”

“Are you sure?”

“Sure.”

“Because you can draw on me, if you’re going to be short.”

“Thanks,” said Hicks. “There’s something I should like to ask you,” he added, after a moment. “I see as well as you do that Miss Blood isn’t the same as she was before. I want to know—I can’t always be sure afterwards—whether I did or said anything out of the way in her presence.”

“You were drunk,” said Staniford, frankly, “but beyond that you were irre-

proachable, as regarded Miss Blood. You were even exemplary."

"Yes, I know," said Hicks, with a joyless laugh. "Sometimes it takes that turn. I don't think I could stand it if I had shown her any disrespect. She's a lady,—a perfect lady; she's the best girl I ever saw."

"Hicks," said Staniford, presently; "I haven't bored you in regard to that little foible of yours. Aren't you going to try to do something about it?"

"I'm going home to get them to shut me up somewhere," answered Hicks. "But I doubt if anything can be done. I've studied the thing; I am a doctor,—or I would be if I were not a drunkard,—and I've diagnosed the case pretty thoroughly. For three months or four months, now, I shall be all right. After that I shall go to the bad for a few weeks; and I'll have to scramble back the best way I can. Nobody can help me. That was the mistake this last time. I shouldn't have wanted anything at Gibraltar if I could have had my spree out at Boston. But I let them take me before it was over, and ship me off. I thought I'd try it. Well, it was like a burning fire every minute, all the way. I thought I should die. I tried to get something from the sailors; I tried

to steal Gabriel's cooking-wine. When I got that brandy in Gibraltar I was wild. Talk about heroism! I tell you it was superhuman, keeping that canteen corked till night! I was in hopes I could get through it,—sleep it off,—and nobody be any the wiser. But it wouldn't work. O Lord, Lord, Lord!"

Hicks was as common a soul as could well be. His conception of life was vulgar, and his experience of it was probably vulgar. He had a good mind enough, with abundance of that humorous brightness which may hereafter be found the most national quality of the Americans; but his ideals were pitiful, and the language of his heart was a drolling slang. Yet his doom lifted him above his low conditions, and made him tragic; his despair gave him the dignity of a mysterious expiation, and set him apart with all those who suffer beyond human help. Without deceiving himself as to the quality of the man, Staniford felt awed by the darkness of his fate.

"Can't you try somehow to stand up against it, and fight it off? You're so young yet, it can't"—

The wretched creature burst into tears. "Oh, try,—try! You don't know what

you're talking about. Don't you suppose I've had reasons for trying? If you could see how my mother looks when I come out of one of my drunks,—and my father, poor old man! It's no use; I tell you it's no use. I shall go just so long, and then I shall want it, and *will* have it, unless they shut me up for life. My God, I wish I was dead! Well!" He rose from the place where they had been sitting together, and held out his hand to Staniford. "I'm going to be off in the morning before you're out, and I'll say good-bye now. I want you to keep this chair, and give it to Miss Blood, for me, when you get to Trieste."

"I will, Hicks," said Staniford, gently.

"I want her to know that I was ashamed of myself. I think she'll like to know it."

"I will say anything to her that you wish," replied Staniford.

"There's nothing else. If ever you see a man with my complaint fall overboard again, think twice before you jump after him."

He wrung Staniford's hand, and went below, leaving him with a dull remorse that he should ever have hated Hicks, and that he could not quite like him even now.

But he did his duty by him to the last.

He rose at dawn, and was on deck when Hicks went over the side into the boat which was to row him to the steamer for Naples, lying at anchor not far off. He presently returned, to Staniford's surprise, and scrambled up to the deck of the Aroostook. "The steamer sails to-night," he said, "and perhaps I couldn't raise the money by that time. I wish you'd lend me ten napoleons. I'll send 'em to you from London, There's my father's address : I'm going to telegraph to him." He handed Staniford a card, and the latter went below for the coins. "Thanks," said Hicks, when he reappeared with them. "Send 'em to you where?"

"Care Blumenthals', Venice. I'm going to be there some weeks."

In the grey morning light the lurid colour of tragedy had faded out of Hicks. He was merely a baddish-looking young fellow whom Staniford had lent ten napoleons that he might not see again. Staniford watched the steamer uneasily, both from the Aroostook and from the shore, where he strolled languidly about with Dunham part of the day. When she sailed in the evening, he felt that Hicks's absence was worth twice the money.

XVIII.

THE young men did not come back to the ship at night, but went to a hotel, for the greater convenience of seeing the city. They had talked of offering to show Lydia about, but their talk had not ended in anything. Vexed with himself to be vexed at such a thing, Staniford at the bottom of his heart still had a soreness which the constant sight of her irritated. It was in vain that he said there was no occasion, perhaps no opportunity, for her to speak, yet he was hurt that she seemed to have seen nothing uncommon in his risking his own life for that of a man like Hicks. He had set the action low enough in his own speech ; but he knew that it was not ignoble, and it puzzled him that it should be so passed over. She had not even said a word of congratulation upon his own escape. It might be that she did not know how, or did not think it was her place to speak. She was curiously estranged.

He felt as if he had been away, and she had grown from a young girl into womanhood during his absence. This fantastic conceit was strongest when he met her with Captain Jenness one day. He had found friends at the hotel, as one always does in Italy, if one's world is at all wide,—some young ladies, and a lady, now married, with whom he had once violently flirted. She was willing that he should envy her husband; that amused him in his embittered mood; he let her drive him about; and they met Lydia and the captain, walking together. Staniford started up from his lounging ease, as if her limpid gaze had searched his conscience, and bowed with an air which did not escape his companion.

“Ah! Who's that?” she asked, with the boldness which she made pass for eccentricity.

“A lady of my acquaintance,” said Staniford, at his laziest again.

“A lady?” said the other, with an inflection that she saw hurt. “Why, the marine animal, then? She bowed very prettily; she blushed prettily, too.”

“She's a very pretty girl,” replied Staniford.

“Charming! But why blush?”

"I've heard that there are ladies who blush for nothing."

"Is she Italian?"

"Yes,—in voice."

"Oh, an American *prima donna*!" Staniford did not answer. "Who is she? Where is she from?"

"South Bradfield, Mass." Staniford's eyes twinkled at her pursuit, which he did not trouble himself to turn aside, but baffled by mere impenetrability.

The party at the hotel suggested that the young men should leave their ship and go on with them to Naples; Dunham was tempted, for he could have reached Dresden sooner by land; but Staniford overruled him, and at the end of four days they went back to the Aroostook. They said it was like getting home, but in fact they felt the change from the airy heights and breadths of the hotel to the small cabin and the closets in which they slept; it was not so great alleviation as Captain Jenness seemed to think that one of them could now have Hicks's state-room. But Dunham took everything sweetly, as his habit was; and, after all, they were meeting their hardships voluntarily. Some of the ladies came with them in the boat which rowed them to the Aroostook; the

name made them laugh; that lady who wished Staniford to regret her waved him her handkerchief as the boat rowed away again. She had with difficulty been kept from coming on board by the refusal of the others to come with her. She had contrived to associate herself with him again in the minds of the others, and this, perhaps, was all that she desired. But the sense of her frivolity—her not so much vacant-mindedness as vacant-heartedness—was like a stain, and he painted in Lydia's face when they first met the reproach which was in his own breast.

Her greeting, however, was frank and cordial; it was a real welcome. Staniford wondered if it were not more frank and cordial than he quite liked, and whether she was merely relieved by Hicks's absence, or had freed herself from that certain subjection in which she had hitherto been to himself.

Yet it was charming to see her again as she had been in the happiest moments of the past, and to feel that, Hicks being out of her world, her trust of everybody in it was perfect once more. She treated that interval of coldness and diffidence as all women know how to treat a thing which they wish not to have been; and Staniford, a man on

whom no pleasing art of her sex was ever lost, admired and gratefully accepted the effect of this. He fell luxuriously into the old habits again. They had still almost the time of a steamer's voyage to Europe before them; it was as if they were newly setting sail from America. The first night after they left Messina Staniford found her in her place in the waist of the ship, and sat down beside her there, and talked; the next night she did not come; the third she came, and he asked her to walk with him. The elastic touch of her hand on his arm, the rhythmic movement of her steps beside him, were things that seemed always to have been. She told him of what she had seen and done in Messina. This glimpse of Italy had vividly animated her; she had apparently found a world within herself as well as without.

With a suddenly depressing sense of loss, Staniford had a prevision of splendour in her, when she should have wholly blossomed out in that fervid air of art and beauty; he would fain have kept her still a wilding rosebud of the New England wayside. He hated the officers who should wonder at her when she first came into the Square of St. Mark with her aunt and uncle.

Her talk about Messina went on; he was

thinking of her, and not of her talk ; but he saw that she was not going to refer to their encounter. " You make me jealous of the objects of interest in Messina," he said. " You seem to remember seeing everything but me, there."

She stopped abruptly. " Yes," she said, after a deep breath, " I saw you there ;" and she did not offer to go on again.

" Where were you going, that morning ?"

" Oh, to the cathedral. Captain Jenness left me there, and I looked all through it till he came back from the consulate."

" Left you there alone !" cried Staniford.

" Yes ; I told him I should not feel lonely, and I should not stir out of it till he came back. I took one of those little pine chairs and sat down, when I got tired, and looked at the people coming to worship, and the strangers with their guide-books.

" Did any of them look at you ?"

" They stared a good deal. It seems to be the custom in Europe ; but I told Captain Jenness I should probably have to go about by myself in Venice, as my aunt's an invalid, and I had better get used to it."

She paused, and seemed to be referring the point to Staniford.

" Yes,—oh, yes," he said.

"Captain Jenness said it was their way, over here," she resumed; "but he guessed I had as much right in a church as anybody."

"The captain's common sense is infallible," answered Staniford. He was ashamed to know that the beautiful young girl was as improperly alone in church as she would have been in a café, and he began to hate the European world for the fact. It seemed better to him that the Aroostook should put about and sail back to Boston with her, as she was,—better that she should be going to her aunt in South Bradfield than to her aunt in Venice. "We shall soon be at our journey's end, now," he said, after a while.

"Yes; the captain thinks in about eight days, if we have good weather."

"Shall you be sorry?"

"Oh, I like the sea very well."

"But the new life you are coming to,—doesn't that alarm you sometimes?"

"Yes, it does," she admitted, with a kind of reluctance.

"So much that you would like to turn back from it?"

"Oh, no!" she answered quickly. Of course not, Staniford thought; nothing could be worse than going back to South Bradfield. "I keep thinking about it," she added.

“You say Venice is such a very strange place. Is it any use my having seen Messina?”

“Oh, all Italian cities have something in common.”

“I presume,” she went on, “that after I get there everything will become natural. But I don’t like to look forward. It—scares me. I can’t form any idea of it.”

“You needn’t be afraid,” said Staniford. “It’s only more beautiful than anything you can imagine.”

“Yes—yes; I know,” Lydia answered.

“And do you really dread getting there?”

“Yes, I dread it,” she said.

“Why,” returned Staniford lightly, “so do I; but it’s for a different reason, I’m afraid. I should like such a voyage as this to go on for ever. Now and then I think it will; it seems always to have gone on. Can you remember when it began?”

“A great while ago,” she answered, humouring his fantasy, “but I can remember.” She paused a long while. “I don’t know,” she said at last, “whether I can make you understand just how I feel. But it seems to me as if I had died, and this long voyage was a kind of dream that I was going to wake up from in another world. I often used to think, when I was a little girl,

that when I got to heaven it would be lonesome—I don't know whether I can express it. You say that Italy—that Venice is so beautiful; but if I don't know any one there"—She stopped, as if she had gone too far.

"But you do know somebody there," said Staniford. "Your aunt"—

"Yes," said the girl, and looked away.

"But the people in this long dream,—you're going to let some of them appear to you there," he suggested.

"Oh, yes," she said, reflecting his lighter humour, "I shall want to see them, or I shall not know I am the same person, and I must be sure of myself, at least."

"And you wouldn't like to go back to earth—to South Bradfield again?" he asked presently.

"No," she answered. "All that seems over for ever. I couldn't go back there and be what I was. I could have stayed there, but I couldn't go back."

Staniford laughed. "I see that it isn't the other world that's got hold of you! It's *this* world! I don't believe you'll be unhappy in Italy. But it's pleasant to think you've been so contented on the Aroostook that you hate to leave it. I don't believe there's a man on the ship that wouldn't feel

personally flattered to know that you liked being here. Even that poor fellow who parted from us at Messina was anxious that you should think as kindly of him as you could. He knew that he had behaved in a way to shock you, and he was very sorry. He left a message with me for you. He thought you would like to know that he was ashamed of himself."

"I pitied him," said Lydia succinctly. It was the first time that she had referred to Hicks, and Staniford found it in character for her to limit herself to this sparse comment. Evidently, her compassion was a religious duty. Staniford's generosity came easy to him.

"I feel bound to say that Hicks was not a bad fellow. I disliked him immensely, and I ought to do him justice, now he's gone. He deserved all your pity. He's a doomed man; his vice is irreparable; he can't resist it." Lydia did not say anything: women do not generalise in these matters; perhaps they cannot pity the faults of those they do not love. Staniford only forgave Hicks the more. "I can't say that up to the last moment I thought him anything but a poor, common little creature; and yet I certainly did feel a greater kindness for him after—what I—

after what had happened. He left something more than a message for you, Miss Blood ; he left his steamer chair yonder, for you."

"For me?" demanded Lydia. Staniford felt her thrill and grow rigid upon his arm, with refusal. "I will not have it. He had no right to do so. He—he was dreadful! I will give it to you!" she said, suddenly. "He ought to have given it to you. You did everything for him ; you saved his life."

It was clear that she did not sentimentalise Hicks's case ; and Staniford had some doubt as to the value she set upon what he had done, even now she had recognised it.

He said, "I think you over-estimate my service to him, possibly. I dare say the boat could have picked him up in good time."

"Yes, that's what the captain and Mr. Watterson and Mr. Mason all said," assented Lydia.

Staniford was nettled. He would have preferred a devoted belief that but for him Hicks must have perished. Besides, what she said still gave no clew to her feeling in regard to himself. He was obliged to go on, but he went on as indifferently as he could. "However, it was hardly a question for me at the time whether he could have been got out without my help. If I had

thought about it at all—which I didn't—I suppose I should have thought that it wouldn't do to take any chances."

"Oh, no," said Lydia, simply, "you couldn't have done anything less than you did."

In his heart Staniford had often thought that he could have done very much less than jump overboard after Hicks, and could very properly have left him to the ordinary life-saving apparatus of the ship. But if he had been putting the matter to some lady in society who was aggressively praising him for his action, he would have said just what Lydia had said for him,—that he could not have done anything less. He might have said it, however, in such a way that the lady would have pursued his retreat from her praises with still fonder applause; whereas this girl seemed to think there was nothing else to be said. He began to stand in awe of her heroic simplicity. If she drew every-day breath in that lofty air, what could she really think of him, who preferred on principle the atmosphere of the valley? "Do you know, Miss Blood," he said gravely, "that you pay me a very high compliment?"

"How?" she asked.

"You rate my maximum as my mean temperature." He felt that she listened inquiringly. "I don't think I'm habitually up to a thing of that kind," he explained.

"Oh, no," she assented, quietly; "but when he struck at you so, you had to do everything."

"Ah, you have the pitiless Puritan conscience that takes the life out of us all!" cried Staniford, with sudden bitterness. Lydia seemed startled, shocked, and her hand trembled on his arm, as if she had a mind to take it away. "I was a long time labouring up to that point. I suppose you are always there!"

"I don't understand," she said, turning her head round with the slow motion of her beauty, and looking him full in the face.

"I can't explain now. I will, by-and-by, —when we get to Venice," he added, with quick lightness.

"You put off everything till we get to Venice," she said, doubtfully.

"I beg your pardon. It was you who did it the last time."

"Was it?" She laughed. "So it was! I was thinking it was you."

It consoled him a little that she should have confused them in her thought, in this

way. "What was it you were to tell me in Venice?" he asked.

"I can't think, now."

"Very likely something of yourself—or myself. A third person might say our conversational range was limited."

"Do you think it is very egotistical?" she asked, in the gay tone which gave him relief from the sense of oppressive elevation of mind in her.

"It is in me,—not in you."

"But I don't see the difference."

"I will explain sometime."

"When we get to Venice?"

They both laughed. It was very nonsensical; but nonsense is sometimes enough.

When they were serious again, "Tell me," he said, "what you thought of that lady in Messina, the other day."

She did not affect not to know whom he meant. She merely said, "I only saw her a moment."

"But you thought something. If we only see people a second we form some opinion of them."

"She is very fine-appearing," said Lydia.

Stanford smiled at the countrified phrase; he had observed that when she spoke her mind she used an instinctive good language;

when she would not speak it, she fell into the phraseology of the people with whom she had lived. "I see you don't wish to say, because you think she is a friend of mine. But you can speak out freely. We were not friends; we were enemies, if anything."

Staniford's meaning was clear enough to himself; but Lydia paused, as if in doubt whether he was jesting or not, before she asked, "Why were you riding with her then?"

"I was driving with her," he replied, "I suppose, because she asked me."

"*Asked* you!" cried the girl; and he perceived her moral recoil both from himself and from a woman who could be so unseemly. That lady would have found it delicious if she could have known that a girl placed like Lydia was shocked at her behaviour. But he was not amused. He was touched by the simple self-respect that would not let her suffer from what was not wrong in itself, but that made her shrink from a voluntary semblance of unwomanliness. It endeared her not only to his pity, but to that sense which in every man consecrates womanhood, and waits for some woman to be better than all her sex. Again he felt the pang he had remotely known be-

fore. What would she do with these ideals of hers in that depraved Old World,—so long past trouble for its sins as to have got a sort of sweetness and innocence in them,—where her facts would be utterly irreconcilable with her ideals, and equally incomprehensible?

They walked up and down a few turns without speaking again of that lady. He knew that she grew momentarily more constrained toward him; that the pleasure of the time was spoiled for her; that she had lost her trust in him; and this half amused, half afflicted him. It did not surprise him when, at their third approach to the cabin gangway, she withdrew her hand from his arm and said, stiffly, "I think I will go down." But she did not go at once. She lingered, and after a certain hesitation she said, without looking at him, "I didn't express what I wanted to, about Mr. Hicks, and—what you did. It is what I thought you would do."

"Thanks," said Staniford, with sincere humility. He understood how she had had this in her mind, and how she would not withhold justice from him because he had fallen in her esteem; how rather she would be the more resolute to do him justice for that reason.

XIX.

HE could see that she avoided being alone with him the next day, but he took it for a sign of relenting, perhaps helpless relenting, that she was in her usual place on deck in the evening. He went to her, and, "I see that you haven't forgiven me," he said.

"Forgiven you?" she echoed.

"Yes," he said, "for letting that lady ask me to drive with her."

"I never said"—she began.

"Oh, no! But I knew it, all the same. It was not such a very wicked thing, as those things go. But I liked your not liking it. Will you let me say something to you?"

"Yes," she answered, rather breathlessly.

"You must think it's rather an odd thing to say, as I ask leave. It is; and I hardly know how to say it. I want to tell you that I've made bold to depend a great deal upon your good opinion for my peace of mind, of late, and that I can't well do without it now."

She stole the quickest of her bird-like glances at him, but did not speak; and though she seemed, to his anxious fancy, poising for flight, she remained, and merely looked away, like the bird that will not or cannot fly.

“You don’t resent my making you my outer conscience, do you, and my knowing that you’re not quite pleased with me?”

She looked down and away with one of those turns of the head, so precious when one who beholds them is young, and caught at the fringe of her shawl. “I have no right,” she began.

“Oh, I give you the right!” he cried, with passionate urgency. “You have the right. Judge me!” She only looked more grave, and he hurried on. “It was no great harm of her to ask me; that’s common enough; but it was harm of me to go if I didn’t quite respect her,—if I thought her silly, and was willing to be amused with her. One hasn’t any right to do that. I saw this when I saw you.” She still hung her head, and looked away. “I want you to tell me something,” he pursued. “Do you remember once—the second time we talked together—that you said Dunham was in earnest, and you wouldn’t answer

when I asked you about myself? Do you remember?"

"Yes," said the girl.

"I didn't care, then. I care very much now. You don't think me—you think I can be in earnest when I will, don't you? And that I can regret—that I really wish"— He took the hand that played with the shawl-fringe, but she softly drew it away.

"Ah, I see!" he said. "You can't believe in me. You don't believe that I can be a good man—like Dunham!"

She answered in the same breathless murmur, "I think you are good." Her averted face drooped lower.

"I will tell you all about it, some day!" he cried, with joyful vehemence. "Will you let me?"

"Yes," she answered, with the swift expulsion of breath that sometimes comes with tears. She rose quickly and turned away. He did not try to keep her from leaving him. His heart beat tumultuously; his brain seemed in a whirl. It all meant nothing, or it meant everything.

"What is the matter with Miss Blood?" asked Dunham, who joined him at this moment. "I just spoke to her at the foot of the gangway stairs, and she wouldn't answer me."

“ Oh, I don't know about Miss Blood—I don't know what's the matter,” said Staniford. “ Look here, Dunham ; I want to talk with you—I want to tell you something—I want you to advise me—I— There's only one thing that can explain it, that can excuse it. There's only one thing that can justify all that I've done and said, and that can not only justify it, but can make it sacredly and eternally right,—right for her and right for me. Yes, it's reason for all, and for a thousand times more. It makes it fair for me to have let her see that I thought her beautiful and charming, that I delighted to be with her, that I—Dunham,” cried Staniford, “ I'm in love !”

Dunham started at the burst in which these ravings ended. “ Staniford,” he faltered, with grave regret, “ I *hope* not !”

“ You hope not? You—you— What do you mean? How else can I free myself from the self-reproach of having trifled with her, of” —

Dunham shook his head compassionately. “ You can't do it that way. Your only safety is to fight it to the death,—to run from it.”

“ But if I don't *choose* to fight it?” shouted Staniford,—“ if I don't *choose* to run from it? If I” —

"For Heaven's sake, hush! The whole ship will hear you, and you oughtn't to breathe it in the desert. I saw how it was going! I dreaded it; I knew it; and I longed to speak. I'm to blame for not speaking!"

"I should like to know what would have authorised you to speak?" demanded Staniford, haughtily.

"Only my regard for you; only what urges me to speak now! You *must* fight it, Staniford, whether you choose or not. Think of yourself,—think of her! Think—you have always been my ideal of honour and truth and loyalty—think of her husband"—

"Her husband!" gasped Staniford. "Whose husband? What the deuce—*who* the deuce—are you talking about, Dunham?"

"Mrs. Rivers."

"Mrs. Rivers? That flimsy, feather-headed, empty-hearted—eyes-maker! That frivolous, ridiculous— Pah! And did you think that I was talking of *her*? Did you think I was in love with *her*?"

"Why," stammered Dunham, "I supposed—I thought— At Messina, you know"—

"Oh!" Staniford walked the deck's

length away. "Well, Dunham," he said, as he came back, "you've spoilt a pretty scene with your rot about Mrs. Rivers. I was going to be romantic! But perhaps I'd better say in ordinary newspaper English that I've just found out that I'm in love with Miss Blood."

"With *her!*" cried Dunham, springing at his hand.

"Oh, come now! Dont *you* be romantic, after knocking *my* chance."

"Why, but Staniford!" said Dunham, wringing his hand with a lover's joy in another's love and his relief that it was not Mrs. Rivers. "I never should have dreamt of such a thing!"

"Why?" asked Staniford, shortly.

"Oh, the way you talked at first, you know, and"—

"I suppose even people who get married have something to take back about each other," said Staniford, rather sheepishly. "However," he added, with an impulse of frankness, "I don't know that I should have dreamt of it myself, and I don't blame you. But it's a fact nevertheless."

"Why, of course. It's splendid! Certainly. It's magnificent!" There was undoubtedly a qualification, a reservation, in

Dunham's tone. He might have thought it right to bring the inequalities of the affair to Staniford's mind. With all his effusive kindness of heart and manner, he had a keen sense of social fitness, a nice feeling for convention. But a man does not easily suggest to another that the girl with whom he has just declared himself in love is his inferior. What Dunham finally did say, was: "It jumps with all your ideas—all your old talk about not caring to marry a society girl"—

"Society might be very glad of such a girl!" said Staniford, stiffly.

"Yes, yes, certainly; but I mean"—

"Oh, I know what you mean. It's all right," said Staniford. "But it isn't a question of marrying yet. I can't be sure she understood me,—I've been so long understanding myself. And yet, she must, she must! She must believe it by this time, or else that I'm the most infamous scoundrel alive. When I think how I have sought her out, and followed her up, and asked her judgment, and hung upon her words, I feel that I oughtn't to lose a moment in being explicit. I don't care for myself; she can take me or leave me, as she likes; but if she doesn't understand, she mustn't be left

in suspense as to my meaning." He seemed to be speaking to Dunham, but he was really thinking aloud, and Dunham waited for some sort of question before he spoke. "But it's a great satisfaction to have had it out with myself. I haven't got to pretend any more that I hang about her, and look at her, and go mooning round after her, for this no-reason and that; I've got the best reason in the world for playing the fool,—I'm in love!" He drew a long, deep breath. "It simplifies matters immensely to have reached the point of acknowledging that. Why, Dunham, those four days at Messina almost killed me! They settled it. When that woman was in full fascination it made me gasp. I choked for a breath of fresh air; for a taste of spring-water; for—Lurella!" It was a long time since Staniford had used this name, and the sound of it made him laugh. "It's droll—but I always think of her as Lurella; I wish it *was* her name! Why, it was like heaven to see her face when I got back to the ship. After we met her that day at Messina, Mrs. Rivers tried her best to get out of me who it was, and where I met her. But I flatter myself that I was equal to *that* emergency."

Dunham said nothing, at once. Then,

"Staniford," he faltered, "she got it out of me."

"Did you tell her who Lu— who Miss Blood was?"

"Yes."

"And how I happened to be acquainted with her?"

"Yes."

"And that we were going on to Trieste with her?"

"She had it out of me before I knew," said Dunham. "I didn't realise what she was after; and I didn't realise how peculiar the situation might seem"—

"I see nothing peculiar in the situation," interrupted Staniford, haughtily. Then he laughed consciously. "Or, yes, I do; of course I do! You must know *her* to appreciate it, though." He mused a while before he added: "No wonder Mrs. Rivers was determined to come aboard! I wish we had let her,—confound her! She'll think I was ashamed of it. There's nothing to be ashamed of! By Heaven, I should like to hear any one"— Staniford broke off, and laughed, and then bit his lip, smiling. Suddenly he burst out again, frowning: "I won't view it in that light. I refuse to consider it from that point of view. As far as

I'm concerned, it's as regular as anything else in life. It's the same to me as if she were in her own house, and I had come there to tell her that she has my future in her hand. She's such a lady by instinct that she's made it all a triumph, and I thank God that I haven't done or said anything to mar it. Even that beast of a Hicks didn't; it's no merit. I've made love to her,—I own it; of course I have, because I was in love with her; and my fault has been that I haven't made love to her openly, but have gone on fancying that I was studying her character, or some rubbish of that sort. But the fault is easily repaired." He turned about, as if he were going to look for Lydia at once, and ask her to be his wife. But he halted abruptly, and sat down. "No; that won't do," he said. "That won't do at all." He remained thinking, and Dunham, unwilling to interrupt his reverie, moved a few paces off. "Dunham, don't go. I want your advice. Perhaps I don't see it in the right light."

"How is it you see it, my dear fellow?" asked Dunham.

"I don't know whether I've a right to be explicit with her, here. It seems like taking an advantage. In a few days she will be with her friends"—

"You must wait," said Dunham, decisively. "You can't speak to her before she is in their care ; it wouldn't be the thing. You're quite right about that."

"No, it wouldn't be the thing," groaned Staniford. "But how is it all to go on till then?" he demanded desperately.

"Why, just as it has before," answered Dunham, with easy confidence.

"But is that fair to her?"

"Why not? You mean to say to her at the right time all that a man can. Till that time comes I haven't the least doubt she understands you."

"Do you think so?" asked Staniford, simply. He had suddenly grown very subject and meek to Dunham.

"Yes," said the other, with the superiority of a betrothed lover ; "women are very quick about those things."

"I suppose you're right," sighed Staniford, with nothing of his wonted arrogant pretension in regard to women's moods and minds, "I suppose you're right. And you would go on just as before?"

"I would indeed. How could you change without making her unhappy—if she's interested in you?"

"That's true. I could imagine worse

things than going on just as before. I suppose," he added, "that something more explicit has its charms ; but a mutual understanding is very pleasant,—if it is a mutual understanding." He looked inquiringly at Dunham.

"Why, as to that, of course I don't know. You ought to be the best judge of that. But I don't believe your impressions would deceive you."

"Yours did, once," suggested Staniford, in suspense.

"Yes ; but I was not in love with her," explained Dunham.

"Of course," said Staniford, with a breath of relief. "And you think— Well, I must wait!" he concluded grimly. "But don't—don't mention this matter, Dunham, unless I do. Don't keep an eye on me, old fellow. Or, yes, you must! You can't help it. I want to tell you, Dunham, what makes me think she may be a not wholly uninterested spectator of my—sentiments." He made full statement of words and looks and tones. Dunham listened with the patience which one lover has with another.

XX.

THE few days that yet remained of their voyage were falling in the latter half of September, and Staniford tried to make the young girl see the surpassing loveliness of that season under Italian skies; the fierceness of the summer is then past, and at night, when chiefly they inspected the firmament, the heaven has begun to assume something of the intense blue it wears in winter. She said yes, it was very beautiful, but she could not see that the days were finer, or the skies bluer, than those of September at home; and he laughed at her loyalty to the American weather. "Don't you think so, too?" she asked, as if it pained her that he should like Italian weather better.

"Oh, yes, — yes," he said. Then he turned the talk on her, as he did whenever he could. "I like your meteorological patriotism. If I were a woman, I should stand by America in everything."

“Don't you as a man?” she pursued, still anxiously.

“Oh, certainly,” he answered. “But women owe our continent a double debt of fidelity. It's the Paradise of women, it's their Promised Land, where they've been led up out of the Egyptian bondage of Europe. It's the home of their freedom. It is recognised in America that women have consciences and souls.”

Lydia looked very grave. “Is it—is it so different with women in Europe?” she faltered.

“Very,” he replied, and glanced at her half-laughingly, half-tenderly.

After a while, “I wish you would tell me,” she said, “just what you mean. I wish you would tell me what is the difference.”

“Oh, it's a long story. I will tell you—when we get to Venice.” The well-worn jest served its purpose again; she laughed, and he continued: “By the way, just when will that be? The captain says that if this wind holds we shall be in Trieste by Friday afternoon. I suppose your friends will meet you there on Saturday, and that you'll go back with them to Venice at once.”

“Yes,” assented Lydia.

"Well, if I should come on Monday, would that be too soon?"

"Oh, no!" she answered. He wondered if she had been vaguely hoping that he might go directly on with her to Venice. They were together all day, now, and the long talks went on from early morning, when they met before breakfast on deck, until late at night, when they parted there, with blushed and laughed good-nights. Sometimes the trust she put upon his unspoken promises was terrible; it seemed to condemn his reticence as fantastic and hazardous. With her, at least, it was clear that this love was the first; her living and loving were one. He longed to testify the devotion which he felt, to leave it unmistakable and safe past accident; he thought of making his will, in which he should give her everything, and declare her supremely dear; he could only rid himself of this by drawing up the paper in writing, and then he easily tore it in pieces.

They drew nearer together, not only in their talk about each other, but in what they said of different people in their relation to themselves. But Staniford's pleasure in the metaphysics of reciprocal appreciation, his wonder at the quickness with which she

divined characters he painfully analysed, was not greater than his joy in the pretty hitch of the shoulder with which she tucked her handkerchief into the back pocket of her sack, or the picturesqueness with which she sat facing him, and leant upon the rail, with her elbow wrapped in her shawl, and the fringe gathered in the hand which propped her cheek. He scribbled his sketch-book full of her contours and poses, which sometimes he caught unawares, and which sometimes she sat for him to draw. One day, as they sat occupied in this, "I wonder," he said, "if you have anything of my feeling, now-a-days. It seems to me as if the world had gone on a pleasure excursion, without taking me along, and I was enjoying myself very much at home."

"Why, yes," she said, joyously; "do you have that feeling, too?"

"I wonder what it is makes us feel so," he ventured.

"Perhaps," she returned, "the long voyage."

"I shall hate to have the world come back, I believe," he said, reverting to the original figure. "Shall you?"

"You know I don't know much about it," she answered, in lithe evasion, for which

she more than atoned with a conscious look and one of her dark blushes. Yet he chose, with a curious cruelty, to try how far she was his.

“How odd it would be,” he said, “if we never should have a chance to talk up this voyage of ours when it is over!”

She started, in a way that made his heart smite him. “Why, you said you”— And then she caught herself, and struggled pitifully for the self-possession she had lost. She turned her head away; his pulse bounded.

“Did you think I wouldn’t? I am living for that.” He took the hand that lay in her lap; she seemed to try to free it, but she had not the strength or will; she could only keep her face turned from him.

XXI.

THEY arrived Friday afternoon in Trieste, and Captain Jenness telegraphed his arrival to Lydia's uncle as he went up to the consulate with his ship's papers. The next morning the young men sent their baggage to a hotel, but they came back for a last dinner on the Aroostook. They all pretended to be very gay, but everybody was perturbed and distraught. Staniford and Dunham had paid their way handsomely with the sailors, and they had returned with remembrances in florid scarfs and jewelry for Thomas and the captain and the officers. Dunham had thought they ought to get something to give Lydia as a souvenir of their voyage; it was part of his devotion to young ladies to offer them little presents; but Staniford overruled him, and said there should be nothing of the kind. They agreed to be out of the way when her uncle came, and they said good-bye after dinner. She came on deck to watch them ashore. Stani-

ford would be the last to take leave. As he looked into her eyes, he saw brave trust of him, but he thought a sort of troubled wonder, too, as if she could not understand his reticence, and suffered from it. There was the same latent appeal and reproach in the pose in which she watched their boat row away. She stood with one hand resting on the rail, and her slim grace outlined against the sky. He waved his hand ; she answered with a little languid wave of hers ; then she turned away. He felt as if he had forsaken her.

The afternoon was very long. Toward night-fall he eluded Dunham, and wandered back to the ship in the hope that she might still be there. But she was gone. Already everything was changed. There was bustle and discomfort ; it seemed years since he had been there. Captain Jenness was ashore somewhere ; it was the second mate who told Staniford of her uncle's coming.

"What sort of person was he?" he asked vaguely.

"Oh, well! *Dum* an Englishman, any way," said Mason, in a tone of easy, sociable explanation.

The scruple to which Staniford had been holding himself for the past four or five days

seemed the most incredible of follies,—the most fantastic, the most cruel. He hurried back to the hotel; when he found Dunham coming out from the *table-d'hôte* he was wild.

“I have been the greatest fool in the world, Dunham,” he said. “I have let a quixotic quibble keep me from speaking when I ought to have spoken.”

Dunham looked at him in stupefaction. “Where have you been?” he inquired.

“Down to the ship. I was in hopes that she might be still there. But she’s gone.”

“The Aroostook gone?”

“Look here, Dunham,” cried Staniford angrily, “this is the second time you’ve done that! If you are merely thick-witted, much can be forgiven to your infirmity; but if you’ve a mind to joke, let me tell you you choose your time badly.”

“I’m not joking. I don’t know what you’re talking about. I may be thick-witted, as you say; or you may be scatter-witted,” said Dunham, indignantly. “What are you after, any way?”

“What was my reason for not being explicit with her; for going away from her without one honest, manly, downright word; for sneaking off without telling her that she

was more than life to me, and that if she cared for me as I cared for her I would go on with her to Venice, and meet her people with her?"

"Why, I don't know," replied Dunham, vaguely. "We agreed that there would be a sort of—that she ought to be in their care before"—

"Then I can tell you," interrupted Staniford, "that we agreed upon the greatest piece of nonsense that ever was. A man can do no more than offer himself, and if he does less, after he's tried everything to show that he's in love with a woman, and to make her in love with him, he's a scamp to refrain from a bad motive, and an ass to refrain from a good one. Why in the name of Heaven *shouldn't* I have spoken, instead of leaving her to eat her heart out in wonder at my delay, and to doubt and suspect and dread—Oh!" he shouted, in supreme self-contempt.

Dunham had nothing to urge in reply. He had fallen in with what he thought Staniford's own mind, in regard to the course he ought to take; since he had now changed his mind, there seemed never to have been any reason for that course.

"My dear fellow," he said, "it isn't too late

yet to see her, I dare say. Let us go and find what time the trains leave for Venice."

"Do you suppose I can offer myself in the *salle d'attente*?" sneered Staniford. But he went with Dunham to the coffee-room, where they found the *Osservatore Triestino* and the time-table of the railroad. The last train left for Venice at ten, and it was now seven; the Austrian Lloyd's steamer for Venice sailed at nine.

"Pshaw!" said Staniford, and pushed the paper away. He sat brooding over the matter before the table on which the journals were scattered, while Dunham waited for him to speak. At last he said, "I can't stand it; I must see her. I don't know whether I told her I should come on to-morrow night or not. If she should be expecting me on Monday morning, and I should be delayed—Dunham, will you drive round with me to the Austrian Lloyd's wharf? They may be going by the boat, and if they are they'll have left their hotel. We'll try the train later. I should like to find out if they are on board. I don't know that I'll try to speak with them; very likely not."

"I'll go, certainly," answered Dunham, cordially.

"I'll have some dinner first," said Staniford. "I'm hungry."

It was quite dark when they drove on to the wharf at which the boat for Venice lay. When they arrived, a plan had occurred to Staniford, through the timidity which had already succeeded the boldness of his desperation. "Dunham," he said, "I want you to go on board, and see if she's there. I don't think I could stand not finding her. Besides, if she's cheerful and happy, perhaps I'd better not see her. You can come back and report. Confound it, you know, I should be so conscious before that infernal uncle of hers. You understand!"

"Yes, yes," returned Dunham, eager to serve Staniford in a case like this. "I'll manage it."

"Well," said Staniford, beginning to doubt the wisdom of either going aboard, "do it if you think best. I don't know"—

"Don't know what?" asked Dunham, pausing in the door of the *fiacre*.

"Oh, nothing, nothing! I hope we're not making fools of ourselves."

"You're morbid, old fellow!" said Dunham, gaily. He disappeared in the darkness, and Staniford waited, with set teeth, till he came back. He seemed a long time

gone. When he returned, he stood holding fast to the open fiacre-door, without speaking.

"Well!" cried Staniford, with bitter impatience.

"Well what?" Dunham asked, in a stupid voice.

"Were they there?"

"I don't know. I can't tell."

"Can't tell, man? Did you go to see?"

"I think so. I'm not sure."

A heavy sense of calamity descended upon Staniford's heart, but patience came with it. "What's the matter, Dunham?" he asked, getting out tremulously.

"I don't know. I think I've had a fall, somewhere. Help me in."

Staniford got out and helped him gently to the seat, and then mounted beside him, giving the order for their return. "Where is your hat?" he asked, finding that Dunham was bareheaded.

"I don't know. It doesn't matter. Am I bleeding?"

"It's so dark, I can't see."

"Put your hand here." He carried Staniford's hand to the back of his head.

"There's no blood; but you've had an ugly knock there."

"Yes, that's it," said Dunham. "I remember now; I slipped and struck my head." He lapsed away in a torpor; Staniford could learn nothing more from him.

The hurt was not what Staniford in his first anxiety had feared, but the doctor whom they called at the hotel was vague and guarded as to everything but the time and care which must be given in any event. Staniford despaired; but there was only one thing to do. He sat down beside his friend to take care of him.

His mind was a turmoil of regrets, of anxieties, of apprehensions; but he had a superficial calmness that enabled him to meet the emergencies of the case. He wrote a letter to Lydia which he somehow knew to be rightly worded, telling her of the accident. In terms which conveyed to her all that he felt, he said that he should not see her at the time he had hoped, but promised to come to Venice as soon as he could quit his friend. Then, with a deep breath, he put that affair away for the time, and seemed to turn a key upon it.

He called a waiter, and charged him to have his letter posted at once. The man said he would give it to the *portier*, who was sending out some other letters. He

returned, ten minutes later, with a number of letters which he said the portier had found for him at the post-office. Staniford glanced at them. It was no time to read them then, and he put them into the breast pocket of his coat.

XXII.

AT the hotel in Trieste, to which Lydia went with her uncle before taking the train for Venice, she found an elderly woman, who made her a courtesy, and, saying something in Italian, startled her by kissing her hand.

"It's our Veronica," her uncle explained; "she wants to know how she can serve you." He gave Veronica the wraps and parcels he had been carrying. "Your aunt thought you might need a maid."

"Oh, no!" said Lydia. "I always help myself."

"Ah, I dare say," returned her uncle. "You American ladies are so—up to snuff, as you say. But your aunt thought we'd better have her with us, in any case."

"And she sent her all the way from Venice?"

"Yes."

"Well, I never *did*!" said Lydia, not lightly, but with something of contemptuous severity.

Her uncle smiled, as if she had said something peculiarly acceptable to him, and asked, hesitatingly, "When you say you never did, you know, what is the full phrase?"

Lydia looked at him. "Oh! I suppose I meant I never heard of such a thing."

"Ah, thanks, thanks!" said her uncle. He was a tall, slender man of fifty-five or sixty, with a straight grey moustache, and not at all the typical Englishman, but much more English-looking than if he had been. His bearing toward Lydia blended a fatherly kindness and a colonial British gallantry, such as one sees in elderly Canadian gentlemen attentive to quite young Canadian ladies at the provincial watering-places. He had an air of adventure, and of uncommon pleasure and no small astonishment in Lydia's beauty. They were already good friends; she was at her ease with him; she treated him as if he were an old gentleman. At the station, where Veronica got into the same carriage with them, Lydia found the whole train very queer-looking, and he made her describe its difference from an American train. He said, "Oh, yes—yes, engine," when she mentioned the locomotive, and he apparently prized beyond its worth the word

cow-catcher, a fixture which Lydia said was wanting to the European locomotive, and left it very stubby. He asked her if she would allow him to set it down; and he entered the word in his note-book, with several other idioms she had used. He said that he amused himself in picking up these things from his American friends. He wished to know what she called this and that and the other thing, and was equally pleased whether her nomenclature agreed or disagreed with his own. Where it differed, he recorded the fact, with her leave, in his book. He plied her with a thousand questions about America, with all parts of which he seemed to think her familiar; and she explained with difficulty how very little of it she had seen. He begged her not to let him bore her, and to excuse the curiosity of a Britisher, "As I suppose you'd call me," he added.

Lydia lifted her long-lashed lids half-way, and answered, "No, I shouldn't call you so."

"Ah, yes," he returned, "the Americans always disown it. But I don't mind it at all, you know. I like those native expressions." Where they stopped for refreshments he observed that one of the dishes, which was flavoured to the national taste,

had a pretty tall smell, and seemed disappointed by Lydia's unresponsive blankness at a word which a countryman of hers—from Kentucky—had applied to the odour of the Venetian canals. He suffered in like measure from a like effect in her when he lamented the complications that had kept him the year before from going to America with Mrs. Erwin, when she revisited her old stamping-ground.

As they rolled along, the warm night which had fallen after the beautiful day breathed through the half-dropped window in a rich, soft air, as strange almost as the flying landscape itself. Mr. Erwin began to drowse, and at last he fell asleep; but Veronica kept her eyes vigilantly fixed upon Lydia, always smiling when she caught her glance, and offering service. At the stations, so orderly and yet so noisy, where the passengers were held in the same meek subjection as at Trieste, people got in and out of the carriage; and there were officers, at first in white coats, and after they passed the Italian frontier in blue, who stared at Lydia. One of the Italians, a handsome young hussar, spoke to her. She could not know what he said; but when he crossed over to her side of the carriage, she rose and

took her place beside Veronica, where she remained even after he left the carriage. She was sensible of growing drowsy. Then she was aware of nothing till she woke up with her head on Veronica's shoulder, against which she had fallen, and on which she had been patiently supported for hours. "Ecco Venezia!" cried the old woman, pointing to a swarm of lights that seemed to float upon an expanse of sea. Lydia did not understand; she thought she was again on board the Aroostook, and that the lights she saw were the lights of the shipping in Boston harbour. The illusion passed, and left her heart sore. She issued from the glare of the station upon the quay before it, bewildered by the ghostly beauty of the scene, but shivering in the chill of the dawn, and stunned by the clamour of the gondoliers. A tortuous course in the shadow of lofty walls, more deeply darkened from time to time by the arch of a bridge, and again suddenly pierced by the brilliance of a lamp that shot its red across the gloom, or plunged it into the black water, brought them to a palace gate at which they stopped, and where, after a dramatic ceremony of sliding bolts and the reluctant yielding of broad doors on a level with the water, she passed

through a marble-paved court and up a stately marble staircase to her uncle's apartment. "You're at home, now, you know," he said, in a kindly way, and took her hand, very cold and lax, in his for welcome. She could not answer, but made haste to follow Veronica to her room, whither the old woman led the way with a candle. It was a gloomily spacious chamber, with sombre walls and a lofty ceiling with a faded splendour of gilded panelling. Some tall, old-fashioned mirrors and bureaus stood about, with rugs before them on the stone floor; in the middle of the room was a bed curtained with mosquito-netting. Carved chairs were pushed here and there against the wall. Lydia dropped into one of these, too strange and heavy-hearted to go to bed in that vastness and darkness, in which her candle seemed only to burn a small round hole. She longed forlornly to be back again in her pretty state-room on the Aroostook; vanishing glimpses and echoes of the faces and voices grown so familiar in the past weeks haunted her; the helpless tears ran down her cheeks.

There came a tap at her door, and her aunt's voice called, "Shall I come in?" and before she could faintly consent, her aunt

pushed in, and caught her in her arms, and kissed her, and broke into a twitter of welcome and compassion. "You poor child! Did you think I was going to let you go to sleep without seeing you, after you'd come half round the world to see me?" Her aunt was dark and slight like Lydia, but not so tall; she was still a very pretty woman, and she was a very effective presence now in the long white morning-gown of camel's hair, somewhat fantastically embroidered in crimson silk, in which she drifted about before Lydia's bewildered eyes. "Let me see how you look! Are you as handsome as ever?" She held the candle she carried so as to throw its light full upon Lydia's face. "Yes!" she sighed. "How pretty you are! And at your age you'll look even better by daylight! I had begun to despair of you; I thought you couldn't be all I remembered; but you are,—you're more! I wish I had you in Rome, instead of Venice; there would be some use in it. There's a great deal of society there,—*English* society; but never mind: I'm going to take you to church with me to-morrow,—the English service; there are lots of English in Venice now, on their way south for the winter. I'm crazy to see what dresses you've

brought ; your aunt Maria has told me how she fitted you out. I've got two letters from her since you started, and they're all perfectly well, dear. Your black silk will do nicely, with bright ribbons, especially ; I hope you haven't got it spotted or anything on the way over." She did not allow Lydia to answer, nor seem to expect it. "You've got your mother's eyes, Lydia, but your father had those straight eyebrows : you're very much like him. Poor Henry ! And now I'm having you got something to eat. I'm not going to risk coffee on you, for fear it will keep you awake ; though you can drink it in this climate with *comparative* impunity. Veronica is warming you a bowl of *bouillon*, and that's all you're to have till breakfast !"

"Why, aunt Josephine," said the girl, not knowing what bouillon was, and abashed by the sound of it, "I'm not the least hungry. You oughtn't to take the trouble"—

"You'll be hungry when you begin to eat. I'm so impatient to hear about your voyage ! I am going to introduce you to some very nice people, here,—English people. There are no Americans living in Venice ; and the Americans in Europe are so queer ! You've no idea how droll our

customs seem here ; and I much prefer the English. Your poor uncle can never get me to ask Americans. I tell him I'm American enough, and he'll have to get on without others. Of course, he's perfectly delighted to get at you. You've quite taken him by storm, Lydia ; he's in raptures about your looks. It's what I told him before you came ; but I couldn't believe it till I took a look at you. I couldn't have gone to sleep without it. Did Mr. Erwin talk much with you ?”

“He was very pleasant. He talked—as long as he was awake,” said Lydia.

“I suppose he was trying to pick up Americanisms from you ; he's always doing it. I keep him away from Americans as much as I can ; but he will get at them on the cars and at the hotels. He's always asking them such ridiculous questions, and I know some of them just talk nonsense to him.”

Veronica came in with a tray, and a bowl of bouillon on it ; and Mrs. Erwin pulled up a light table, and slid about, serving her, in her cabalistic dress, like an Oriental sorceress performing her incantations. She volubly watched Lydia while she ate her supper, and at the end she kissed her again. “Now you feel better,” she said. “I knew

it would cheer you up more than any one thing. There's nothing like something to eat when you're home-sick. I found that out when I was off at school."

Lydia was hardly kissed so much at home during a year as she had been since meeting Mrs. Erwin. Her aunt Maria sparely embraced her when she went and came each week from the Mill Village; anything more than this would have come of insincerity between them; but it had been agreed that Mrs. Erwin's demonstrations of affection, of which she had been lavish during her visit to South Bradfield, might not be so false. Lydia accepted them submissively, and she said, when Veronica returned for the tray, "I hate to give you so much trouble. And sending her all the way to Trieste on my account,—I felt ashamed. There wasn't a thing for her to do."

"Why, of course not!" exclaimed her aunt. "But what did you think I was made of? Did you suppose I was going to have you come on a night-journey alone with your uncle? It would have been all over Venice; it would have been ridiculous. I sent Veronica along for a dragon."

"A dragon? I don't understand," faltered Lydia.

“Well, you will,” said her aunt, putting the palms of her hands against Lydia’s, and so pressing forward to kiss her. “We shall have breakfast at ten. Go to bed!”

XXIII.

WHEN Lydia came to breakfast she found her uncle alone in the room, reading Galignani's Messenger. He put down his paper, and came forward to take her hand. "You are all right this morning, I see, Miss Lydia," he said. "You were quite up a stump, last night, as your countrymen say."

At the same time hands were laid upon her shoulders from behind, and she was pulled half round, and pushed back, and held at arm's-length. It was Mrs. Erwin, who, entering after her, first scanned her face, and then, with one devouring glance, seized every detail of her dress—the black silk which had already made its effect—before she kissed her. "You *are* lovely, my dear! I shall spoil you, I know; but you're worth it! What lashes you have, child! And your aunt Maria made and fitted that dress? She's a genius!"

"Miss Lydia," said Mr. Erwin, as they

sat down, "is of the fortunate age when one rises young every morning." He looked very fresh himself in his clean-shaven chin, and his striking evidence of snowy wristbands and shirt-bosom. "Later in life, you can't do that. She looks as blooming," he added, gallantly, "as a basket of chips,—as you say in America."

"Smiling," said Lydia, mechanically correcting him.

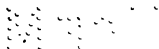
"Ah! It is? Smiling,—yes; thanks. It's very good either way; very characteristic. It would be curious to know the origin of a saying like that. I imagine it goes back to the days of the first settlers. It suggests a wood-chopping period. Is it—ah—in general use?" he inquired.

"Of course it isn't, Henshaw!" said his wife.

"You've been a great while out of the country, my dear," suggested Mr. Erwin.

"Not so long as not to know that your Americanisms are enough to make one wish we had held our tongues ever since we were discovered, or had never been discovered at all. I want to ask Lydia about her voyage. I haven't heard a word yet. Did your aunt Maria come down to Boston with you?"

"No, grandfather brought me."



"And you had good weather coming over? Mr. Erwin told me you were not sea-sick."

"We had one bad storm, before we reached Gibraltar; but I wasn't sea-sick."

"Were the other passengers?"

"One was." Lydia reddened a little, and then turned somewhat paler than at first.

"What is it, Lydia?" her aunt subtly demanded. "Who was the one that was sick?"

"Oh, a gentleman," answered Lydia.

Her aunt looked at her keenly, and for whatever reason abruptly left the subject. "Your silk," she said, "will do very well for church, Lydia."

"Oh, I say, now!" cried her husband, "you're not going to make her go to church to-day!"

"Yes, I am! There will be more people there to-day than any other time this fall. She must go."

"But she's tired to death,—quite tuckered, you know."

"Oh, I'm rested now," said Lydia. "I shouldn't like to miss going to church."

"Your silk," continued her aunt, "will be quite the thing for church." She looked hard at the dress, as if it were not quite the

thing for breakfast. Mrs. Erwin herself wore a morning-dress of becoming delicacy, and an airy French cap; she had a light fall of powder on her face. "What kind of overthing have you got?" she asked.

"There's a sack goes with this," said the girl, suggestively.

"That's nice! What is your bonnet?"

"I haven't any bonnet. But my best hat is nice. I could"—

"No one goes to church in a hat! You can't do it. It's simply impossible."

"Why, my dear," said her husband, "I saw some very pretty American girls in hats at church, last Sunday."

"Yes, and everybody *knew* they were Americans by their hats!" retorted Mrs. Erwin.

"I knew they were Americans by their good looks," said Mr. Erwin, "and what you call their stylishness."

"Oh, it's all well enough for you to talk. You're an Englishman, and you could wear a hat, if you liked. It would be set down to character. But in an American it would be set down to greenness. If you were an American, you would have to wear a bonnet."

"I'm glad, then, I'm not an American,"

said her husband ; " I don't think I should look well in a bonnet."

" Oh, stuff, Henshaw ! You know what I mean. And I'm not going to have English people thinking we're ignorant of the common decencies of life. Lydia shall not go to church in a hat ; she had better *never* go. I will lend her one of my bonnets. Let me see, *which* one." She gazed at Lydia in critical abstraction. " I wear rather young bonnets," she mused aloud, " and we're both rather dark. The only difficulty is I'm so much more delicate"— She brooded upon the question in a silence, from which she burst exulting. " The very thing ! I can fuss it up in no time. It won't take two minutes to get it ready. And you'll look just killing in it." She turned grave again. " Henshaw," she said, " I *wish* you would go to church this morning !"

" I would do almost anything for you, Josephine ; but really, you know, you oughtn't to ask that. I was there last Sunday ; I can't go every Sunday. It's bad enough in England ; a man ought to have some relief on the Continent."

" Well, well. I suppose I oughtn't to ask you," sighed his wife,—" especially as you're going with us to-night."

"I'll go to-night, with pleasure," said Mr. Erwin. He rose when his wife and Lydia left the table, and opened the door for them with a certain courtesy he had ; it struck even Lydia's uneducated sense as something peculiarly sweet and fine, and it did not overawe her own simplicity, but seemed of kind with it.

The bonnet, when put to proof, did not turn out to be all that it was vaunted. It looked a little odd, from the first ; and Mrs. Erwin, when she was herself dressed, ended by taking it off, and putting on Lydia the hat previously condemned. "You're divine in that," she said. "And after all, you are a traveller, and I can say that some of your things were spoiled coming over,—people always get things ruined in a sea voyage, —and they'll think it was your bonnet."

"I kept my things very nicely, aunt Josephine," said Lydia conscientiously. "I don't believe anything was hurt."

"Oh, well, you can't tell till you've unpacked ; and we're not responsible for what people happen to think, you know. Wait!" her aunt suddenly cried. She pulled open a drawer, and snatched two ribbons from it, which she pinned to the sides of Lydia's hat, and tied in a bow under her chin ; she caught

out a lace veil, and drew that over the front of the hat, and let it hang in a loose knot behind. "Now," she said, pushing her up to a mirror, that she might see, "it's a bonnet; and I needn't say *anything*!"

They went in Mrs. Erwin's gondola to the palace in which the English service was held, and Lydia was silent, as she looked shyly, almost fearfully, round on the visionary splendors of Venice.

Mrs. Erwin did not like to be still. "What are you thinking of, Lydia?" she asked.

"Oh! I suppose I was thinking that the leaves were beginning to turn in the sugar orchard," answered Lydia faithfully. "I was thinking how still the sun would be in the pastures, there, this morning. I suppose the stillness here put me in mind of it. One of these bells has the same tone as our bell at home."

"Yes," said Mrs. Erwin. "Everybody finds a familiar bell in Venice. There are enough of them, goodness knows. I don't see why you call it still, with all this clashing and banging. I suppose this seems very odd to you, Lydia," she continued, indicating the general Venetian effect. "It's an old story to me, though. The great beauty of Venice is that you get more for

your money here than you can anywhere else in the world. There isn't much society, however, and you mustn't expect to be very gay."

"I have never been gay," said Lydia.

"Well, that's no reason you shouldn't be," returned her aunt. "If you were in Florence, or Rome, or even Naples, you could have a good time. There! I'm glad your uncle didn't hear me say that!"

"What?" asked Lydia.

"Good time; that's an Americanism."

"Is it?"

"Yes. He's perfectly delighted when he catches me in one. I try to break myself of them, but I don't always know them myself. Sometimes I feel almost like never talking at all. But you can't do that, you know."

"No," assented Lydia.

"And you have to talk Americanisms if you're an American. You mustn't think your uncle isn't obliging, Lydia. He is. I oughtn't to have asked him to go to church, —it bores him so much. I used to feel terribly about it once, when we were first married. But things have changed very much of late years, especially with all this scientific talk. In England it's quite different from what it used to be. Some of the

best people in society are sceptics now, and that makes it quite another thing." Lydia looked grave, but she said nothing, and her aunt added, "I wouldn't have asked him, but I had a little headache, myself."

"Aunt Josephine," said Lydia, "I'm afraid you're doing too much for me. Why didn't you let me come alone?"

"Come alone? To church!" Mrs. Erwin addressed her in a sort of whispered shriek. "It would have been perfectly scandalous."

"To go to church alone?" demanded Lydia, astounded.

"Yes. A young girl mustn't go *anywhere* alone."

"Why?"

"I'll explain to you, sometime, Lydia; or rather, you'll learn for yourself. In Italy it's very different from what it is in America." Mrs. Erwin suddenly started up and bowed with great impressiveness, as a gondola swept towards them. The gondoliers wore shirts of blue silk, and long crimson sashes. On the cushions of the boat, beside a hideous little man who was sucking the top of an ivory-handled stick, reclined a beautiful woman, pale, with purplish rings round the large black eyes with which, faintly smiling, she acknowledged Mrs.

Erwin's salutation, and then stared at Lydia.

"Oh, you may look, and you may look, and you may look!" cried Mrs. Erwin, under her breath. "You've met more than your match at last! The Countess Tatocka," she explained to Lydia. "That was her palace we passed just now,—the one with the iron balconies. Did you notice the gentleman with her? She always takes to those monsters. He's a Neapolitan painter, and ever so talented,—clever, that is. He's dead in love with her, they say."

"Are they engaged?" asked Lydia.

"Engaged!" exclaimed Mrs. Erwin, with her shriek in dumb show. "Why, child, she's married!"

"To *him*?" demanded the girl, with a recoil.

"No! To her husband."

"To her husband?" gasped Lydia. "And she"—

"Why, she isn't quite well seen, even in Venice," Mrs. Erwin explained. "But she's rich, and her *conversazioni* are perfectly brilliant. She's very artistic, and she writes poetry,—Polish poetry. I *wish* she could hear you sing, Lydia! I know she'll be frantic to see you again. But I don't see

how it's to be managed ; her house isn't one you can take a young girl to. And *I* can't ask her : your uncle detests her."

"Do you go to her house?" Lydia inquired stiffly.

"Why, as a foreigner, *I* can go. Of course, Lydia, you can't be as particular about everything on the Continent as you are at home."

The former oratory of the Palazzo Grinzelli, which served as the English chapel, was filled with travellers of both the English-speaking nationalities, as distinguishable by their dress as by their faces. Lydia's aunt affected the English style, but some instinctive elegance betrayed her, and every Englishwoman there knew and hated her for an American, though she was a precisian in her liturgy, instant in all the responses and genuflexions. She found opportunity in the course of the lesson to make Lydia notice every one, and she gave a telegraphic biography of each person she knew, with a criticism of the costume of all the strangers, managing so skilfully that by the time the sermon began she was able to yield the text a statuesquely close attention, and might have been carved in marble where she sat as a realistic conception of Worship.

The sermon came to an end ; the ritual proceeded ; the hymn, with the hemming and hawing of respectable inability, began, and Lydia lifted her voice with the rest. Few of the people were in their own church ; some turned and stared at her ; the bonnets and the back hair of those who did not look were intent upon her ; the long red neck of one elderly Englishman, restrained by decorum from turning his head toward her, perspired with curiosity. Mrs. Erwin fidgeted, and dropped her eyes from the glances which fell to her for explanation of Lydia, and hurried away with her as soon as the services ended. In the hall on the water-floor of the palace, where they were kept waiting for their gondola a while, she seemed to shrink even from the small, surly greetings with which people whose thoughts are on higher things permit themselves to recognise fellow-beings of their acquaintance in coming out of church. But an old lady, who supported herself with a cane, pushed through the crowd to where they stood aloof, and, without speaking to Mrs. Erwin, put out her hand to Lydia ; she had a strong, undaunted, plain face, in which was expressed the habit of doing what she liked. " My dear," she said, " how wonderfully

you sing ! Where did you get that heavenly voice ? You are an American ? I see that by your beauty. You are Mrs. Erwin's niece, I suppose, whom she expected. Will you come and sing to me ? You must bring her, Mrs. Erwin."

She hobbled away without waiting for an answer, and Lydia and her aunt got into their gondola. "Oh ! How glad I am !" cried Mrs. Erwin, in a joyful flutter. "She's the very tip-top of the English here ; she has a whole palace, and you meet the very best people at her house. I was afraid when you were singing, Lydia, that they would think your voice was too good to be good form,—that's an expression you must get ; it means everything,—it sounded almost professional. I wanted to nudge you to sing a little lower, or different, or something ; but I couldn't, everybody was looking so. No matter. It's all right now. If *she* liked it, nobody else will dare to breathe. You can see that she has taken a fancy to you ; she'll make a great pet of you."

"Who is she ?" asked Lydia, bluntly.

"Lady Fenleigh. Such a character,—so eccentric ! But really, I suppose, very hard to live with. It must have been quite a release for poor Sir Fenleigh Fenleigh."

"She didn't seem in mourning," said Lydia. "Has he been dead long?"

"Why, he isn't dead at all! He is what you call a grass-widower. The best soul in the world, everybody says, and very, very fond of her; but she couldn't stand it; he was *too* good, don't you understand? They've lived apart a great many years. She's lived a great deal in Asia Minor,—somewhere. She likes Venice; but of course there's no telling how long she may stay. She has another house in Florence, all ready to go and be lived in at a day's notice. I wish I had presented you! It did go through my head; but it didn't seem as if I *could* get the Blood out. It *is* a fearful name, Lydia; I always felt it so when I was a girl, and I was *so* glad to marry out of it; and it sounds so terribly American. I think you must take your mother's name, my dear. Latham is rather flattish, but it's worlds better than Blood."

"I am not ashamed of my father's name," said Lydia.

"But you'll have to change it some day, at any rate,—when you get married."

Lydia turned away. "I will be called Blood till then. If Lady Fenleigh"—

"Yes, my dear," promptly interrupted

her aunt, "I know that sort of independence. I used to have whole Declarations of it. But you'll get over that, in Europe. There was a time—just after the war—when the English quite liked our sticking up for ourselves; but that's past now. They like us to be outlandish, but they don't like us to be independent. How did you like the sermon? Didn't you think we had a nicely-dressed congregation?"

"I thought the sermon was very short," answered Lydia.

"Well, that's the English way, and I like it. If you get in all the service, you *must* make the sermon short."

Lydia did not say anything for a little while. Then she asked, "Is the service the same at the evening meeting?"

"Evening meeting?" repeated Mrs. Erwin.

"Yes,—the church to-night."

"Why, child, there isn't any church to-night! What *are* you talking about?"

"Didn't uncle—didn't Mr. Erwin say he would go with us to-night?"

Mrs. Erwin seemed about to laugh, and then she looked embarrassed. "Why, Lydia," she cried at last, "he didn't mean church; he meant—opera!"

"Opera! Sunday night! Aunt Jose-

phine, do you go to the theatre on Sabbath evening?"

There was something appalling in the girl's stern voice. Mrs. Erwin gathered herself tremulously together for defence. "Why, of course, Lydia, I don't approve of it, though I never *was* Orthodox. Your uncle likes to go; and if everybody's there that you want to see, and they will give the best operas Sunday night, what are you to do?"

Lydia said nothing, but a hard look came into her face, and she shut her lips tight.

"Now you see, Lydia," resumed her aunt, with an air of deductive reasoning from the premises, "the advantage of having a bonnet on, even if it's only a make-believe. I don't believe a soul knew it. All those Americans had hats. You were the only American girl there with a bonnet. I'm sure that it had more than half to do with Lady Fenleigh's speaking to you. It showed that you had been well brought up."

"But I never wore a bonnet to church at home," said Lydia.

"That has nothing to do with it, if they thought you did. And, Lydia," she continued, "I was thinking while you were singing there that I wouldn't say anything

at once about your coming over to cultivate your voice. That's got to be such an American thing, now. I'll let it out little by little,—and after Lady Fenleigh's quite taken you under her wing. Perhaps we may go to Milan with you, or to Naples,—there's a conservatory there, too; and we can pull up stakes as easily as not. Well!" said Mrs. Erwin, interrupting herself, "I'm glad Henshaw wasn't by to hear *that* speech. He'd have had it down among his Americanisms instantly. I don't know whether it is an Americanism; but he puts down all the outlandish sayings he gets hold of to Americans; he has no end of English slang in his book. Everything has opened *beautifully*, Lydia, and I intend you shall have the *best* time!" She looked fondly at her brother's child. "You've no idea how much you remind me of your poor father. You have his looks exactly. I always thought he would come out to Europe before he died. We used to be so proud of his looks at home! I can remember that, though I was the youngest, and he was ten years older than I. But I always did worship beauty. A perfect Greek, Mr. Rose-Black calls me: you'll see him; he's an English painter staying here; he comes a *great* deal."

"Mrs. Erwin, Mrs. Erwin!" called a lady's voice from a gondola behind them. The accent was perfectly English, but the voice entirely Italian. "Where are you running to?"

"Why, Miss Landini!" retorted Mrs. Erwin, looking back over her shoulder. "Is that you? Where in the world are you going?"

"Oh, I've been to pay a visit to my old English teacher. He's awfully ill with rheumatism; but awfully! He can't turn in bed."

"Why, poor man! This is my niece whom I told you I was expecting! Arrived last night! We've been to church!" Mrs. Erwin exclaimed each of the facts.

The Italian girl stretched her hand across the gunwales of the boats, which their respective gondoliers had brought skilfully side by side, and took Lydia's hand. "I'm glad to see you, my dear. But my God, how beautiful you Americans are! But you don't look American, you know; you look Spanish! I shall come a great deal to see you, and practise my English."

"Come home with us now, Miss Landini, and have lunch," said Mrs. Erwin.

"No, my dear, I can't. My aunt will be raising the devil if I'm not there to drink

coffee with her ; and I've been a great while away now. Till to-morrow !” Miss Landini's gondolier pushed his boat away, and rowed it up a narrow canal on the right.

“I suppose,” Mrs. Erwin explained, “that she's really her mother,—everybody says so ; but she always calls her aunt. Dear knows who her father was. But she's a very bright girl, Lydia, and you 'll like her. Don't you think she speaks English wonderfully for a person who's never been out of Venice ?”

“Why does she swear ?” asked Lydia, stonily.

“*Swear ?* Oh, I know what you mean. That's the funniest thing about Miss Landini. Your uncle says it's a shame to correct her ; but I do, whenever I think of it. Why, you know, such words as God and devil don't sound at all wicked in Italian, and ladies use them quite commonly. She understands that it isn't good form to do so in English, but when she gets excited she forgets. Well, you can't say but what *she* was impressed, Lydia !”

After lunch, various people came to call upon Mrs. Erwin. Several of them were Italians who were learning English, and they seemed to think it inoffensive to say

that they were glad of the opportunity to practise the language with Lydia. They talked local gossip with her aunt, and they spoke of an approaching visit to Venice from the king; it seemed to Lydia that the king's character was not good.

Mr. Rose-Black, the English artist, came. He gave himself the effect of being in Mrs. Erwin's confidence, apparently without her authority, and he bestowed a share of this intimacy upon Lydia. He had the manner of a man who had been taken up by people above him, and the impudence of a talent which had not justified the expectations formed of it. He softly reproached Mrs. Erwin for running away after service before he could speak to her, and told her how much everybody had been enchanted by her niece's singing. "At least, they said it was your niece."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Rose-Black, let me introduce you to Miss"—Lydia looked hard, even to threatening, at her aunt, and Mrs. Erwin added, "Blood."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Rose-Black, with his picked-up politeness, "I didn't get the name."

"Blood," said Mrs. Erwin, more distinctly.

“Aöh!” said Mr. Rose-Black, in a cast-off accent of jaded indifferentism, just touched with displeasure. “Yes,” he added, dreamily, to Lydia, “it was divine, you know. You might say it needed training; but it had the *naïve* sweetness we associate with your countrywomen. They’re greatly admired in England now, you know, for their beauty. Oh, I assure you, it’s quite the thing to admire American ladies. I want to arrange a little lunch at my studio for Mrs. Erwin and yourself; and I want you to abet me in it, Miss Blood.” Lydia stared at him, but he was not troubled. “I’m going to ask to sketch you. Really, you know, there’s a poise—something bird-like—a sort of repose in movement”— He sat in a corner of the sofa, with his head fallen back, and abandoned to an absent enjoyment of Lydia’s pictorial capabilities. He was very red; his full beard, which started as straw colour, changed to red when it got a little way from his face. He wore a suit of rough blue, the coat buttoned tightly about him, and he pulled a glove through his hand as he talked. He was scarcely roused from his reverie by the entrance of an Italian officer, with his hussar jacket hanging upon one shoulder, and his sword caught up in his left hand.

He ran swiftly to Mrs. Erwin, and took her hand.

"Ah, my compliments! I come practise my English with you a little. Is it well said, a little, or do you say a small?"

"A little, cavaliere," answered Mrs. Erwin, amiably. "But you must say a good deal, in this case."

"Yes, yes,—good deal. For what?"

"Let me introduce you to my niece, Colonel Pazzelli," said Mrs. Erwin.

"Ah! Too much honour, too much honour!" murmured the cavaliere. He brought his heels together with a click, and drooped towards Lydia till his head was on a level with his hips. Recovering himself, he caught up his eye-glasses, and bent them on Lydia. "Very please, very honoured, much"—He stopped, and looked confused, and Lydia turned pale and red.

"Now, won't you play that pretty *barcarole* you played the other night at Lady Fenleigh's?" entreated Mrs. Erwin.

Colonel Pazzelli wrenched himself from the fascination of Lydia's presence, and lavished upon Mrs. Erwin the hoarded English of a week. "Yes, yes; very nice; very good. With much pleasure. I thank you. Yes, I play." He was one of those

natives who in all the great Italian cities haunt English-speaking societies ; they try to drink tea without grimacing, and sing for the ladies of our race, who innocently pet them, finding them so very like other women in their lady-like sweetness and softness ; it is said they boast among their own countrymen of their triumphs. The cavalieri unbuckled his sword, and laying it across a chair sat down at the piano. He played not one but many barcaroles, and seemed loath to leave the instrument.

“ Now, Lydia,” said Mrs. Erwin, fondly, “ won’t you sing us something ? ”

“ Do ! ” called Mr. Rose-Black from the sofa, with the intonation of a spoiled first-cousin, or half-brother.

“ I don’t feel like singing to-day,” answered Lydia, immoveably. Mrs. Erwin was about to urge her further, but other people came in,—some Jewish ladies, and then a Russian, whom Lydia took at first for an American. They all came and went, but Mr. Rose-Black remained in his corner of the sofa, and never took his eyes from Lydia’s face. At last he went, and then Mr. Erwin looked in.

“ Is that beast gone ? ” he asked. “ I shall be obliged to show him the door, yet,

Josephine. You ought to snub him. He's worse than his pictures. Well, you've had a whole raft of folks to-day, — as your countrymen say."

"Yes, thank Heaven," cried Mrs. Erwin, "and they're all gone. I don't want Lydia to think that I let everybody come to see me on Sunday. Thursday is my day, Lydia, but a few privileged friends understand that they can drop in Sunday afternoon." She gave Lydia a sketch of the life and character of each of these friends. "And now I must tell you that your manner is very good, Lydia. That reserved way of yours is quite the thing for a young girl in Europe: I suppose it's a gift; I never could get it, even when I *was* a girl. But you mustn't show any *hauteur*, even when you dislike people, and you refused to sing with *rather* too much *aplomb*. I don't suppose it was noticed, though,—those ladies coming in at the same time. Really, I thought Mr. Rose-Black and Colonel Pazzelli were trying to outstare each other! It was certainly amusing. I never saw such an evident case, Lydia! The poor cavaliere looked as if he had seen you somewhere before in a dream, and was struggling to make it all out."

Lydia remained impassive. Presently she

said she would go to her room, and write home before dinner. When she went out Mrs. Erwin fetched a deep sigh, and threw herself upon her husband's sympathy.

"She's terribly unresponsive," she began. "I supposed she'd be in raptures with the place, at least, but you wouldn't know there was anything at all remarkable in Venice from anything she's said. We have met ever so many interesting people to-day,—the Countess Tatocka, and Lady Fenleigh, and Miss Landini, and everybody, but I don't really think she's said a word about a soul. She's too queer for anything."

"I dare say she hasn't the experience to be astonished from," suggested Mr. Erwin easily. "She's here as if she'd been dropped down from her village."

"Yes, that's true," considered his wife. "But it's hard, with Lydia's air and style and self-possession, to realise that she is merely a village girl."

"She may be much more impressed than she chooses to show," Mr. Erwin continued. "I remember a very curious essay by a French writer about your countrymen: he contended that they were characterised by a savage stoicism through their contact with the Indians."

“Nonsense, Henshaw ! There hasn't been an Indian *near* South Bradfield for two hundred years. And besides that, am I stoical ?”

“I'm bound to say,” replied her husband, “that so far as you go, you're a complete refutation of the theory.”

“I hate to see a young girl so close,” fretted Mrs. Erwin. “But, perhaps,” she added, more cheerfully, “she'll be the easier managed, being so passive. She doesn't seem at all wilful,—that's one comfort.”

She went to Lydia's room just before dinner, and found the girl with her head fallen on her arms upon the table, where she had been writing. She looked up, and faced her aunt with swollen eyes.

“Why, poor thing !” cried Mrs. Erwin. “What is it, dear ? What is it, Lydia ?” she asked, tenderly, and she pulled Lydia's face down upon her neck.

“Oh, nothing,” said Lydia. “I suppose I was a little homesick ; writing home made me.”

She somewhat coldly suffered Mrs. Erwin to kiss her and smooth her hair, while she began to talk with her of her grandfather and her aunt at home. “But this is going to be home to you now,” said Mrs. Erwin,

“and I'm not going to let you be sick for any other. I want you to treat me just like a mother, or an older sister. Perhaps I shan't be the wisest mother to you in the world, but I mean to be one of the best. Come, now, bathe your eyes, my dear, and let's go to dinner. I don't like to keep your uncle waiting.” She did not go at once, but showed Lydia the appointments of the room, and lightly indicated what she had caused to be done, and what she had done with her own hands, to make the place pretty for her. “And now shall I take your letter, and have your uncle post it this evening?” She picked up the letter from the table. “Hadn't you any wax to seal it? You know they don't generally mucilage their envelopes in Europe.”

Lydia blushed. “I left it open for you to read. I thought you ought to know what I wrote.”

Mrs. Erwin dropped her hands in front of her, with the open letter stretched between them, and looked at her niece in rapture. “Lydia,” she cried, “one would suppose you had lived all your days in Europe! Showing me your letter, this way,—why, it's quite like a Continental girl.”

“I thought it was no more than right you

should see what I was writing home," said Lydia, unresponsively.

"Well, no matter, even if it *was* right," replied Mrs. Erwin. "It comes to the same thing. And now, as you've been quite a European daughter, I'm going to be a real American mother." She took up the wax, and sealed Lydia's letter without looking into it. "There!" she said, triumphantly.

She was very good to Lydia all through dinner, and made her talk of the simple life at home, and the village characters whom she remembered from her last summer's visit. That amused Mr. Erwin, who several times, when his wife was turning the talk upon Lydia's voyage over, intervened with some new question about the life of the queer little Yankee hill-town. He said she must tell Lady Fenleigh about it,—she was fond of picking up those curios; it would make any one's social fortune who could explain such a place intelligibly in London; when they got to having typical villages of the different civilisations at the international expositions,—as no doubt they would,—somebody must really send South Bradfield over. He pleased himself vastly with this fancy, till Mrs. Erwin, who had been eyeing Lydia critically from time to time, as if making note of her

features and complexion, said she had a white cloak, and that in Venice, where one need not dress a great deal for the opera, Lydia could wear it that night.

Lydia looked up in astonishment, but she sat passive during her aunt's discussion of her plans. When they rose from table, she said, at her stiffest and coldest, "Aunt Josephine, I want you to excuse me from going with you to-night. I don't feel like going."

"Not feel like going!" exclaimed her aunt in dismay. "Why, your uncle has taken a box!"

Lydia opposed nothing to this argument. She only said, "I would rather not go."

Oh, but you *will*, dear," coaxed her aunt. "You would enjoy it so much."

"I thought you understood from what I said to-day," replied Lydia, "that I could not go."

"Why, no, I didn't! I knew you objected; but if I thought it was proper for you to go"—

"I should not go at home," said Lydia, in the same immoveable fashion.

"Of course not. Every place has its customs, and in Venice it has *always* been the custom to go to the opera on Sunday night." This fact had no visible weight

with Lydia, and after a pause her aunt added, "Didn't Paul himself say to do in Rome as the Romans do?"

"No, aunt Josephine," cried Lydia, indignantly, "he did *not*!"

Mrs. Erwin turned to her husband with a face of appeal, and he answered, "Really, my dear, I think you're mistaken. I always had the impression that the saying was—an Americanism of some sort."

"But it doesn't matter," interposed Lydia decisively. "I couldn't go, if I didn't think it was right, whoever said it."

"Oh, well," began Mrs. Erwin, "if you wouldn't mind what *Paul* said"—She suddenly checked herself, and after a little silence she resumed, kindly, "I won't try to force you, Lydia. I didn't realise what a very short time it is since you left home, and how you still have all those ideas. I wouldn't distress you about them for the world, my dear. I want you to feel at home with me, and I'll make it as like home for you as I can in everything. Henshaw, I think you must go alone, this evening. I will stay with Lydia."

"Oh, no, no! I couldn't let you; I can't let you! I shall not know what to do if I keep you at home. Oh, don't leave it that

way, please! I shall feel so badly about it"—

"Why, we can both stay," suggested Mr. Erwin, kindly.

Lydia's lips trembled and her eyes glistened, and Mrs. Erwin said, "I'll go with you, Henshaw. I'll be ready in half an hour. I won't dress *much*." She added this as if not to dress a great deal at the opera Sunday night might somehow be accepted as an observance of the Sabbath.

XXIV

THE next morning Veronica brought Lydia a little scrawl from her aunt, bidding the girl come and breakfast with her in her room at nine.

“Well, my dear,” her aunt called to her from her pillow, when she appeared, “you find me flat enough, this morning. If there was anything wrong about going to the opera last night, I was properly punished for it. Such wretched stuff as *I* never heard! And instead of the new ballet that they promised, they gave an old thing that I had seen till I was sick of it. You didn’t miss much, I can tell you. How fresh and bright you *do* look, Lydia!” she sighed. “Did you sleep well? Were you lonesome while we were gone? Veronica says you were reading the whole evening. Are you fond of reading?”

“I don’t think I am, very,” said Lydia. “It was a book that I began on the ship. It’s a novel.” She hesitated. “I wasn’t reading it; I was just looking at it.”

“What a queer child you are! I suppose you were dying to read it, and wouldn’t because it was Sunday. Well!” Mrs. Erwin put her hand under her pillow, and pulled out a gossamer handkerchief, with which she delicately touched her complexion here and there, and repaired with an instinctive re-arrangement of powder the envious ravages of a slight rash about her nose. “I respect your high principles beyond anything, Lydia, and if they can only be turned in the right direction they will never be any disadvantage to you.” Veronica came in with the breakfast on a tray, and Mrs. Erwin added, “Now, pull up that little table, and bring your chair, my dear, and let us take it easy. I like to talk while I’m breakfasting. Will you pour out my chocolate? That’s it, in the ugly little pot with the wooden handle; the copper one’s for you, with coffee in it. I never could get that repose which seems to come perfectly natural to you. I was always inclined to be a little rowdy, my dear, and I’ve had to fight hard against it, without any help from *either* of my husbands; men like it; they think it’s funny. When I was first married, I was very young, and so was he; it was a real love match; and my husband was very well off, and when I be-

gan to be delicate, nothing would do but he must come to Europe with me. How little I ever expected to outlive him !”

“ You don’t look very sick now,” began Lydia.

“ Ill,” said her aunt. “ You must say ill. Sick is an Americanism.”

“ It’s in the Bible,” said Lydia, gravely.

“ Oh, there are a great many words in the *Bible* you can’t use,” returned her aunt. “ No, I don’t look ill now, and I’m worlds better. But I couldn’t live a year in any other climate, I suppose. You seem to take after your mother’s side. Well, as I was saying, the European ways didn’t come natural to me, at all. I used to have a great deal of gaiety when I was a girl, and I liked beaux and attentions ; and I had very free ways. I couldn’t get their stiffness here for years and years, and all through my widowhood it was one wretched failure with me. Do what I would, I was always violating the most essential rules, and the worst of it was that it only seemed to make me the more popular. I do believe it was nothing but my rowdiness that attracted Mr. Erwin ; but I determined when I had got an Englishman I would make one bold strike for the proprieties, and have them, or die in the

attempt. I determined that no English-woman I ever saw should outdo me in strict conformity to all the usages of European society. So I cut myself off from all the Americans, and went with nobody but the English."

"Do you like them better?" asked Lydia, with the blunt, child-like directness that had already more than once startled her aunt.

"*Like* them! I detest them! If Mr. Erwin were a real Englishman, I think I should go crazy; but he's been so little in his own country—all his life in India, nearly, and the rest on the Continent,—that he's quite human; and no American husband was ever more patient and indulgent; and *that's* saying a good deal. He would be glad to have nothing but Americans around; he has an enthusiasm for them,—or for what he supposes they are. Like the English! You ought to have heard them during our war; it would have made your blood boil! And then how they came crawling round after it was all over, and trying to pet us up! Ugh!"

"If you feel so about them," said Lydia, as before, "why do you want to go with them so much?"

“My dear,” cried her aunt, “to beat them with their own weapons on their own ground,—to show them that an American can be more European than any of them, if she chooses! And now you’ve come here with looks and temperament and everything just to my hand. You’re more beautiful than any English girl ever dreamt of being; you’re very distinguished-looking; your voice is perfectly divine; and you’re colder than an iceberg. Oh, if I only had one winter with you in Rome, I think I should die in peace!” Mrs. Erwin paused, and drank her chocolate, which she had been letting cool in the eagerness of her discourse. “But, never mind,” she continued, “we will do the best we can here. I’ve seen English girls going out two or three together, without protection, in Rome and Florence; but I mean that you shall be quite Italian in that respect. The Italians never go out without a chaperone of some sort, and you must never be seen without me, or your uncle, or Veronica. Now I’ll tell you how you must do at parties, and so on. You must be very retiring; you’re that, anyway; but you must always keep close to me. It doesn’t do for young people to talk much together in society; it makes scandal about

a girl. If you dance, you must always hurry back to me. Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Erwin, "I remember how, when I was a girl, I used to hang on to the young men's arms, and promenade with them after a dance, and go out to supper with them, and flirt on the stairs,—*such* times! But that wouldn't do here, Lydia. It would ruin a girl's reputation; she could hardly walk arm in arm with a young man if she was engaged to him." Lydia blushed darkly red, and then turned paler than usual, while her aunt went on. "You might do it, perhaps, and have it set down to American eccentricity or under-breeding, but I'm not going to have that. I intend you to be just as dull and diffident in society as if you were an Italian, and *more* than if you were English. Your voice, of course, is a difficulty. If you sing, that will make you conspicuous, in spite of everything. But I don't see why that can't be turned to advantage; it's no worse than your beauty. Yes, if you're so splendid-looking and so gifted, and at the same time as stupid as the rest, it's so much clear gain. It will come easy for you to be shy with men, for I suppose you've hardly ever talked with any, living up there in that out-of-the-way village; and your manner is very good.

It's reserved, and yet it isn't green. The way," continued Mrs. Erwin, "to treat men in Europe is to behave as if they were guilty till they prove themselves innocent. All you have to do is to reverse all your American ideas. But here I am, lecturing you as if you had been just such a girl as I was, with half a dozen love affairs on her hands at once, and no end of gentlemen friends. Europe won't be hard for you, my dear, for you haven't got anything to unlearn. But *some* girls that come over!—it's perfectly ridiculous, the trouble they get into, and the time they have getting things straight. They take it for granted that men in good society are gentlemen,—what we mean by gentlemen."

Lydia had been letting her coffee stand, and had scarcely tasted the delicious French bread and the sweet Lombard butter of which her aunt ate so heartily. "Why, child," said Mrs. Erwin at last, "where is your appetite? One would think you were the elderly invalid who had been up late. Did you find it too exciting to sit at home *looking* at a novel? What was it? If it's a new story I should like to see it. But you didn't bring a novel from South Bradfield with you?"

"No," said Lydia, with a husky reluctance. "One of the—passengers gave it to me."

"Had you many passengers? But of course not. That was what made it so delightful when I came over that way. I was newly married then, and with spirits—oh dear me!—for anything. It was one adventure, the whole way; and we got so well acquainted, it was like one family. I suppose your grandfather put you in charge of some family. I know artists sometimes come out that way, and people for their health."

"There was no family on our ship," said Lydia, "My state-room had been fixed up for the captain's wife"—

"Our captain's wife was along, too," interposed Mrs. Erwin. "She was such a joke with us. She had been out to Venice on a voyage before, and used to be always talking about the *Du-cal* Palace. And did they really turn out of their state-room for you?"

"She was not along," said Lydia.

"Not along?" repeated Mrs. Erwin, feebly. "Who—who were the other passengers?"

"There were three gentlemen," answered Lydia.

"Three gentlemen? Three men? Three

— And you—and”— Mrs. Erwin fell back upon her pillow, and remained gazing at Lydia, with a sort of remote bewildered pity, as at perdition, not indeed beyond compassion, but far beyond help. Lydia's colour had been coming and going, but now it settled to a clear white. Mrs. Erwin commanded herself sufficiently to resume: “And there were—there were—no other ladies?”

“No.”

“And you were”—

“I was the only woman on board,” replied Lydia. She rose abruptly, striking the edge of the table in her movement, and setting its china and silver jarring. “Oh, I know what you mean, aunt Josephine, but two days ago I couldn't have dreamt it! From the time the ship sailed till I reached this wicked place, there wasn't a word said nor a look looked to make me think I wasn't just as right and safe there as if I had been in my own room at home. They were never anything but kind and good to me. They never let me think that they could be my enemies, or that I must suspect them and be on the watch against them. They were Americans! I had to wait for one of your Europeans to teach me that,—for that officer who was here yesterday”—

"The cavaliere? Why, where"—

"He spoke to me in the cars, when Mr. Erwin was asleep! Had he any right to do so?"

"He would think he had, if he thought you were alone," said Mrs. Erwin, plaintively. "I don't see how we could resent it. It was simply a mistake on his part. And now you see, Lydia"—

"Oh, I see how my coming the way I have will seem to all these people!" cried Lydia, with passionate despair. "I know how it will seem to that married woman who lets a man be in love with her, and that old woman who can't live with her husband because he's too good and kind, and that girl who swears and doesn't know who her father is, and that impudent painter, and that officer who thinks he has the right to insult women if he finds them alone! I wonder the sea doesn't swallow up a place where even Americans go to the theatre on the Sabbath!"

"Lydia, Lydia! It isn't so bad as it seems to you," pleaded her aunt, thrown upon the defensive by the girl's outburst. "There are ever so many good and nice people in Venice, and I know them, too,—Italians as well as foreigners. And even amongst those you saw, Miss Landini is one

of the kindest girls in the world, and she had just been to see her old teacher when we met her,—she half takes care of him ; and Lady Fenleigh's a perfect mother to the poor ; and I never was at the Countess Tatocka's except in the most distant way, at a ball where everybody went ; and is it better to let your uncle go to the opera alone, or to go with him ? You told me to go with him yourself ; and they consider Sunday over, on the Continent, after morning service, anyway !”

“ Oh, it makes no difference !” retorted Lydia, wildly. “ I am going away. I am going home. I have money enough to get to Trieste, and the ship is there, and Captain Jenness will take me back with him. Oh !” she moaned. “ *He* has been in Europe, too, and I suppose he's like the rest of you ; and he thought because I was alone and helpless he had the right to— Oh, I see it, I see now that he never meant anything, and— Oh, oh, oh !” She fell on her knees beside the bed, as if crushed to them by the cruel doubt that suddenly overwhelmed her, and flung out her arms on Mrs. Erwin's coverlet—it was of Venetian lace sewed upon silk, a choice bit from the palace of one of the ducal families—and buried her face in it.

Her aunt rose from her pillow, and looked in wonder and trouble at the beautiful fallen head, and the fair young figure shaken with sobs. "He—who—what are you talking about, Lydia? Whom do you mean? Did Captain Jenness"—

"No, no!" wailed the girl, "the one that gave me the book."

"The one that gave you the book? The book you were looking at last night?"

"Yes," sobbed Lydia, with her voice muffled in the coverlet.

Mrs. Erwin lay down again with significant deliberation. Her face was still full of trouble, but of bewilderment no longer. In moments of great distress the female mind is apt to lay hold of some minor anxiety for its distraction, and to find a certain relief in it. "Lydia," said her aunt in a broken voice, "I wish you wouldn't cry in the coverlet: it doesn't hurt the lace, but it stains the silk." Lydia swept her handkerchief under her face, but did not lift it. Her aunt accepted the compromise. "How came he to give you the book?"

"Oh, I don't know. I can't tell. I thought it was because—because— It was almost at the very beginning. And after that he walked up and down with me every night,

nearly ; and he tried to be with me all he could ; and he was always saying things to make me think— Oh dear, oh *dear*, oh dear ! And he *tried* to make me care for him ! Oh, it was cruel, cruel !”

“ You mean that he made love to you ?” asked her aunt.

“ Yes—no— I don’t know. He tried to make me care for him, and to make me think he cared for me.”

“ Did he *say* he cared for you ? Did he”—

“ No !”

Mrs. Erwin mused a while before she said, “ Yes, it was cruel indeed, poor child, and it was cowardly, too.”

“ Cowardly ?” Lydia lifted her face, and flashed a glance of tearful fire at her aunt. “ He is the bravest man in the world ! And the most generous and high-minded ! He jumped into the sea after that wicked Mr. Hicks, and saved his life, when he disliked him worse than anything !”

“ *Who* was Mr. Hicks ?”

“ He was the one that stopped at Messina. He was the one that got some brandy at Gibraltar, and behaved so dreadfully, and wanted to fight him.”

“ Whom ?”

“ This one. The one who gave me the

book. And don't you see that his being so good makes it all the worse? Yes; and he pretended to be glad when I told him I thought he was good,—he got me to say it!" She had her face down again in her handkerchief. "And I suppose *you* think it was horrible, too, for me to take his arm, and talk and walk with him whenever he asked me!"

"No, not for you, Lydia," said her aunt gently. "And don't you think now," she asked after a pause, "that he cared for you?"

"Oh, I *did* think so,—I *did* believe it; but now, *now*"—

"Now, what?"

"Now, I'm afraid that may be he was only playing with me, and putting me off; and pretending that he had something to tell me when he got to Venice, and he never meant anything by anything."

"Is he coming to"—her aunt began, but Lydia broke vehemently out again.

"If he had cared for me, why couldn't he have told me so at once, and not had me wait till he got to Venice? He *knew* I"—

"There are two ways of explaining it," said Mrs. Erwin. "He *may* have been in earnest, Lydia, and felt that he had no right

to be more explicit till you were in the care of your friends. That would be the European way which you consider so bad," said Mrs. Erwin. "Under the circumstances, it was impossible for him to keep any distance, and all he could do was to postpone his declaration till there could be something like good form about it. Yes, it might have been that." She was silent, but the troubled look did not leave her face. "I am sorry for you, Lydia," she resumed, "but I don't know that I wish he was in earnest." Lydia looked up at her in dismay. "It might be far less embarrassing the other way, however painful. He may not be at all a suitable person." The tears stood in Lydia's eyes, and all her face expressed a puzzled suspense. "Where was he from?" asked Mrs. Erwin, finally; till then she had been more interested in the lover than the man.

"Boston," mechanically answered Lydia.

"What was his name?"

"Mr. Staniford," owned Lydia with a blush.

Her aunt seemed dispirited at the sound. "Yes, I know who they are," she sighed.

"And aren't they nice? Isn't he—suitable?" asked Lydia, tremulously.

"Oh, poor child! He's only *too* suitable.

I can't explain to you, Lydia ; but at home he wouldn't have looked at a girl like you. What sort of looking person is he ?”

“He's rather—red ; and he has—light hair.”

“It must be the family I'm thinking of,” said Mrs. Erwin. She had lived nearly twenty years in Europe, and had seldom revisited her native city ; but at the sound of a Boston name she was all Bostonian again. She rapidly sketched the history of the family to which she imagined Staniford to belong. “I remember his sister ; I used to see her at school. She must have been five or six years younger than I ; and this boy”—

“Why, he's twenty-eight years old !” interrupted Lydia.

“How came he to tell you ?”

“I don't know. He said that he looked thirty-four.”

“Yes ; *she* was always a forward thing too,—with her freckles,” said Mrs. Erwin, musingly, as if lost in reminiscences, not wholly pleasing, of Miss Staniford.

“*He* has freckles,” admitted Lydia.

“Yes, it's the one,” said Mrs. Erwin.

“He couldn't have known what your family was from anything you said ?”

“ We never talked about our families.”

“ Oh, I dare say ! You talked about yourselves ?”

“ Yes.”

“ All the time ?”

“ Pretty nearly.”

“ And he didn't try to find out who or what you were ?”

“ He asked a great deal about South Bradfield.”

“ Of course, that was where he thought you had always belonged.” Mrs. Erwin lay quiescent for a while, in apparent uncertainty as to how she should next attack the subject. “ How did you first meet ?”

Lydia began with the scene on Lucas Wharf, and little by little told the whole story up to the moment of their parting at Trieste. There were lapses and pauses in the story, which her aunt was never at a loss to fill aright. At the end she said, “ If it were not for his promising to come here and see you, I should say Mr. Staniford had been flirting, and as it is he may not regard it as anything more than flirtation. Of course, there was his being jealous of Mr. Dunham and Mr. Hicks, as he certainly was ; and his wanting to explain about that lady at Messina—yes, that looked peculiar ?

but he may not have meant anything by it. His parting so at Trieste with you, that might be either because he was embarrassed at its having got to be such a serious thing, or because he really felt badly. Lydia," she asked at last, "what made *you* think he cared for you?"

"I don't know," said the girl; her voice had sunk to a husky whisper. "I didn't believe it till he said he wanted me to be his—conscience, and tried to make me say he was good, and"—

"That's a certain kind of man's way of flirting. It may mean nothing at all. I could tell in an instant, if I saw him."

"He said he would be here this afternoon," murmured Lydia, tremulously.

"This afternoon!" cried Mrs. Erwin. "I must get up!"

At her toilette she had the exaltation and fury of a champion arming for battle.

XXV.

MR. ERWIN entered about the completion of her preparations, and without turning round from her glass she said, "I want you to think of the worst thing you can, Henshaw. I don't see how I'm ever to lift up my head again." As if this word had reminded her of her head, she turned it from side to side, and got the effect in the glass, first of one ear-ring, and then of the other. Her husband patiently waited, and she now confronted him. "You may as well know first as last, Henshaw, and I want you to prepare yourself for it. Nothing can be done, and you will just have to live through it. Lydia—has come over—on that ship—alone,—with three young men,—and not the shadow—not the ghost—of another woman—on board!" Mrs. Erwin gesticulated with her hand-glass in delivering the words, in a manner at once intensely vivid and intensely solemn, yet somehow falling short of the due tragic effect. Her husband stood pulling

his moustache straight down, while his wife turned again to the mirror, and put the final touches to her personal appearance with hands which she had the effect of having desperately washed of all responsibility. He stood so long in this meditative mood that she was obliged to be peremptory with his image in the glass. "Well?" she cried.

"Why, my dear," said Mr. Erwin, at last, "they were all Americans together, you know."

"And what difference does that make?" demanded Mrs. Erwin, whirling from his image to the man again.

"Why, of course, you know, it isn't as if they were—English." Mrs. Erwin flung down three hair-pins upon her dressing-case, and visibly despaired. "Of course you don't expect your countrymen"—His wife's appearance was here so terrible that he desisted, and resumed by saying, "Don't be vexed, my dear. I—I rather like it, you know. It strikes me as a genuine bit of American civilisation."

"American civilisation! Oh, Henshaw!" wailed Mrs. Erwin, "is it possible that after all I've said, and done, and lived, you still think that any one but a girl from the greenest little country place could do such a

thing as that? Well, it is no use trying to enlighten English people. You like it, do you? Well, I'm not sure that the Englishman who misunderstands American things and likes them isn't a little worse than the Englishman who misunderstands them and dislikes them. You *all* misunderstand them. And would you like it, if one of the young men had been making love to Lydia?"

The amateur of our civilisation hesitated and was serious, but he said at last, "Why, you know, I'm not surprised. She's so uncommonly pretty. I—I suppose they're engaged?" he suggested.

His wife held her peace for scorn. Then she said, "The gentleman is of a very good Boston family, and would no more think of engaging himself to a young girl without the knowledge of her friends than you would. Besides, he's been in Europe a great deal."

"I wish I could meet some Americans who hadn't been in Europe," said Mr. Erwin. "I should like to see what you call the simon-pure American. As for the young man's not engaging himself, it seems to me that he didn't avail himself of his national privileges. I should certainly have done it in his place, if I'd been an American."

“ Well, if you'd been an American, you wouldn't,” answered his wife.

“ Why ?”

“ Because an American would have had too much delicacy.”

“ I don't understand that.”

“ I know you don't, Henshaw. And there's where you show yourself an Englishman.”

“ Really,” said her husband, “ you're beginning to crow, my dear. Come, I like that a great deal better than your cringing to the effete despotisms of the Old World, as your Fourth of July orators have it. It's almost impossible to get a bit of good honest bounce out of an American, nowadays,—to get him to spread himself, as you say.”

“ All that is neither here nor there, Henshaw,” said his wife. “ The question is how to receive Mr. Staniford—that's his name—when he comes. How are we to regard him? He's coming here to see Lydia, and she thinks he's coming to propose.”

“ Excuse me, but how does she regard him ?”

“ Oh, there's no question about that, poor child. She's *dead* in love with him, and can't understand why he didn't propose on shipboard.”

"And she isn't an Englishman, either!" exulted Mr. Erwin. "It appears that there are Americans and Americans, and that the men of your nation have more delicacy than the women like."

"Don't be silly," said his wife. "Of course, women always think what they would do in such cases, if they were men; but if men did what women think they would do if they were men, the women would be disgusted."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Her feeling in the matter is no guide."

"Do you know his family?" asked Mr. Erwin.

"I think I do. Yes, I'm sure I do."

"Are they nice people?"

"Haven't I told you they were a good Boston family?"

"Then upon my word, I don't see that we've to take any attitude at all. I don't see that we've to regard him in one way or the other. It quite remains for him to make the first move."

As if they had been talking of nothing but dress before, Mrs. Erwin asked: "Do you think I look better in this black mexicaine, or would you wear your écru?"

"I think you look very well in this. But why— He isn't going to propose to you, I hope?"

"I must have on something decent to receive him in. What time does the train from Trieste get in?"

"At three o'clock."

"It's one, now. There's plenty of time, but there isn't any too much. I'll go and get Lydia ready. Or perhaps you'll tap on her door, Henshaw, and send her here. Of course, this is the end of her voice,—if it is the end."

"It's the end of having an extraordinarily pretty girl in the house. I don't at all like it, you know,—having her whisked away in this manner."

Mrs. Erwin refused to let her mind wander from the main point. "He'll be round as soon as he can, after he arrives. I shall expect him by four, at the latest."

"I fancy he'll stop for his dinner before he comes," said Mr. Erwin.

"Not at all," retorted his wife, haughtily. And with his going out of the room, she set her face in a resolute cheerfulness, for the task of heartening Lydia when she should appear; but it only expressed misgiving when the girl came in with her yachting-

dress on. "Why, Lydia, shall you wear that?"

Lydia swept her dress with a downward glance. "I thought I would wear it. I thought he—I should seem—more natural in it. I wore it all the time on the ship, except Sundays. He said—he liked it the best."

Mrs. Erwin shook her head. "It wouldn't do. Everything must be on a new basis now. He might like it; but it would be too romantic, wouldn't it, don't you think?" She shook her head still, but less decisively. "Better wear your silk. Don't you think you'd better wear your silk? This is very pretty, and the dark blue does become you, awfully. Still, I don't know—I don't know, either! A great many English wear those careless things in the house. Well, *wear* it, Lydia! You *do* look perfectly killing in it. I'll tell you: your uncle was going to ask you to go out in his boat; he's got one he rows himself, and this is a boating costume; and you know you could time yourselves so as to get back just right, and you could come in with this on"—

Lydia turned pale. "Oughtn't I—oughtn't I—to be here?" she faltered.

Her aunt laughed gaily. "Why, he'll ask for *me*, Lydia."

"For you?" asked Lydia, doubtfully.

"Yes. And I can easily keep him till you get back. If you're here by four"—

"The train," said Lydia, "arrives at three."

"How did you know?" asked her aunt, keenly.

Lydia's eyelids fell even lower than their wont. "I looked it out in that railroad guide in the parlour."

Her aunt kissed her. "And you've thought the whole thing out, dear, haven't you? I'm glad to see you so happy about it."

"Yes," said the girl, with a fluttering breath, "I have thought it out, and *I believe him*. I"— She tried to say something more, but could not.

Mrs. Erwin rang the bell, and sent for her husband. "He knows about it, Lydia," she said. "He's just as much interested as we are, dear, but you needn't be worried. He's a perfect post for not showing a thing if you don't want him to. He's really quite superhuman, in that,—equal to a woman. You can talk Americanisms with him. If we sat here staring at each other till four o'clock,—he *must* go to his hotel before he comes here; and I say four at the earliest;

and it's much more likely to be five or six, or perhaps evening,—I should die !”

Mr. Erwin's rowing was the wonder of all Venice. There was every reason why he should fall overboard at each stroke, as he stood to propel the boat in the gondolier fashion, except that he never yet had done so. It was sometimes his fortune to be caught on the shallows by the falling tide ; but on that day he safely explored the lagoons, and returned promptly at four o'clock to the palace.

His wife was standing on the balcony, looking out for them, and she smiled radiantly down into Lydia's anxiously lifted face. But when she met the girl at the head of the staircase in the great hall, she embraced her, and said, with the same gay smile, “ He hasn't come yet, dear, and of course he won't come till after dinner. If I hadn't been as silly as you are, Lydia, I never should have let you expect him sooner. He 'll want to go to his hotel ; and no matter how impatient he is, he 'll want to dress, and be a little ceremonious about his call. You know *we* 're strangers to him, whatever *you* are.”

“ Yes,” said Lydia, mechanically. She was going to sit down, as she was ; of her

own motion she would not have stirred from the place till he came, or it was certain he would not come ; but her aunt would not permit the despair into which she saw her sinking.

She laughed resolutely, and said, "I think we must give up the little sentimentality of meeting him in that dress, now. Go and change it, Lydia. Put on your silk, — or wait : let me go with you. I want to try some little effects with your complexion. We've experimented with the simple and familiar, and now we'll see what can be done in the way of the magnificent and unexpected. I'm going to astonish the young man with a Venetian beauty ; you know you look Italian, Lydia."

"Yes, he said so," answered Lydia.

"Did he? That shows he has an eye, and he'll appreciate what we are going to do."

She took Lydia to her own room, for the greater convenience of her experiments, and from that moment she did not allow her to be alone ; she scarcely allowed her to be silent ; she made her talk, she kept her in movement. At dinner she permitted no lapse. "Henshaw," she said, "Lydia has been telling me about a storm they had just before they reached Gibraltar. I wish you

would tell her of the typhoon you were in when you first went out to India." Her husband obeyed ; and then recurring to the days of his civil employment in India, he told stories of tiger-hunts, and of the Sepoy mutiny. Mrs. Erwin would not let them sit very long at table. After dinner she asked Lydia to sing, and she suffered her to sing all the American songs her uncle asked for. At eight o'clock she said with a knowing little look at Lydia, which included a sub-wink for her husband, " You may go to your café alone, this evening, Henshaw. Lydia and I are going to stay at home and talk South Bradfield gossip. I've hardly had a moment with her yet." But when he was gone, she took Lydia to her own room again, and showed her all her jewelry, and passed the time in making changes in the girl's toilet.

It was like the heroic endeavour of the arctic voyager who feels the deadly chill in his own veins, and keeps himself alive by rousing his comrade from the torpor stealing over him. They saw in each other's eyes that if they yielded a moment to the doubt in their hearts they were lost.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Erwin said abruptly, " Go to bed, Lydia !" Then the girl broke

down, and abandoned herself in a storm of tears. "Don't cry, dear, don't cry," pleaded her aunt. "He will be here in the morning, I know he will. He has been delayed."

"No, he's not coming," said Lydia, through her sobs.

"Something has happened," urged Mrs. Erwin.

"No," said Lydia, as before. Her tears ceased as suddenly as they had come. She lifted her head, and drying her eyes looked into her aunt's face. "Are you ashamed of me?" she asked hoarsely.

"Ashamed of you? Oh, poor child"—

"I can't pretend anything. If I had never told you about it at all, I could have kept it back till I died. But now— But you will never hear me speak of it again. It's over." She took up her candle, and stiffly suffering the compassionate embrace with which her aunt clung to her, she walked across the great hall in the vain splendour in which she had been adorned, and shut the door behind her.

XXVI

DUNHAM lay in a stupor for twenty-four hours, and after that he was delirious, with dim intervals of reason in which they kept him from talking, till one morning he woke and looked up at Staniford with a perfectly clear eye, and said, as if resuming the conversation, "I struck my head on a pile of chains."

"Yes," replied Staniford, with a wan smile, "and you've been out of it pretty near ever since. You mustn't talk."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Dunham. "I know about my being hurt. I shall be cautious. Have you written to Miss Hibbard? I hope you haven't!"

"Yes, I have," replied Staniford. "But I haven't sent the letter," he added, in answer to Dunham's look of distress. "I thought you were going to pull through, in spite of the doctor,—he's wanted to bleed you, and I could hardly keep his lancet out of you,—and so I wrote, mentioning the

accident and announcing your complete restoration. The letter merely needs dating and sealing. I'll look it up and have it posted." He began a search in the pockets of his coat, and then went to his portfolio.

"What day is this?" asked Dunham.

"Friday," said Staniford, rummaging his portfolio.

"Have you been in Venice?"

"Look here, Dunham! If you begin in that way, I can't talk to you. It shows that you're still out of your head. How could I have been in Venice?"

"But Miss Blood; the Aroostook"—

"Miss Blood went to Venice with her uncle last Saturday. The Aroostook is here in Trieste. The captain has just gone away. He's stood watch and watch with me, while you were off on business."

"But didn't you go to Venice on Monday?"

"Well, hardly," answered Staniford.

"No, you stayed with me,—I see," said Dunham.

"Of course, I wrote to her at once," said Staniford, huskily, "and explained the matter as well as I could without making an ado about it. But now you stop, Dunham. If you excite yourself, there'll be the deuce to pay again."

"I'm not excited," said Dunham, "but I can't help thinking how disappointed— But of course you've heard from her?"

"Well there's hardly time yet," said Staniford evasively.

"Why, yes, there is. Perhaps your letter miscarried."

"Don't!" cried Staniford, in a hollow under-voice, which he broke through to add, "Go to sleep, now, Dunham, or keep quiet, somehow."

Dunham was silent for a while, and Staniford continued his search, which he ended by taking the portfolio by one corner, and shaking its contents out on the table. "I don't seem to find it; but I've put it away somewhere. I'll get it." He went to another coat, that hung on the back of a chair, and fumbled in its pockets. "Hollo! Here are those letters they brought me from the post-office Saturday night,—Murray's, and Stanton's, and that bore Farrington's. I forgot all about them." He ran the unopened letters over in his hand. "Ah, here's my familiar scrawl" — He stopped suddenly, and walked away to the window, where he stood with his back to Dunham.

"Staniford! What is it?"

"It's—it's my letter to *her*," said Staniford, without looking round.

"Your letter to Miss Blood—not gone?" Staniford, with his face still from him, silently nodded. "Oh!" moaned Dunham, in self-forgetful compassion. "How could it have happened?"

"I see perfectly well," said the other, quietly, but he looked round at Dunham with a face that was haggard. "I sent it out to be posted by the *portier*, and he got it mixed up with these letters for me, and brought it back."

The young men were both silent, but the tears stood in Dunham's eyes. "If it hadn't been for me, it wouldn't have happened," he said.

"No," gently retorted Staniford, "if it hadn't been for *me*, it wouldn't have happened. I made you come from Messina with me, when you wanted to go on to Naples with those people; if I'd had any sense, I should have spoken fully to her before we parted; and it was I who sent you to see if she were on the steamer, when you fell and hurt yourself. I know who's to blame, Dunham. What day did I tell you this was?"

"Friday."

“A week ! And I told her to expect me Monday afternoon. A week without a word or a sign of any kind ! Well, I might as well take passage in the Aroostook, and go back to Boston again.”

“Why, no !” cried Dunham, “you must take the first train to Venice. Don’t lose an instant. You can explain everything as soon as you see her.”

Staniford shook his head. “If all her life had been different, if she were a woman of the world, it would be different ; she would know how to account for some little misgivings on my part ; but as it is she wouldn’t know how to account for even the appearance of them. What she must have suffered all this week—I can’t think of it !” He sat down and turned his face away. Presently he sprang up again. “But I’m going, Dunham. I guess you won’t die now ; but you may die if you like. I would go over your dead body !”

“Now you are talking sense,” said Dunham.

Staniford did not listen ; he had got out his railroad guide and was studying it. “No ; there are only those two trains a day. The seven o’clock has gone ; and the next starts at ten to-night. Great heavens ! I could

walk it sooner ! Dunham," he asked, "do you think I'd better telegraph ?"

"What would you say ?"

"Say that there's been a mistake ; that a letter miscarried ; that I'll be there in the morning ; that"—

"Wouldn't that be taking her anxiety a little too much for granted ?"

"Yes, that's true. Well, you've got your wits about you now, Dunham," cried Staniford, with illogical bitterness. "Very probably," he added, gloomily, "she doesn't care anything for me, after all."

"That's a good frame of mind to go in," said Dunham.

"Why is it?" demanded Staniford. "Did I ever presume upon any supposed interest in her ?"

"You did at first," replied Dunham.

Staniford flushed angrily. But you cannot quarrel with a man lying helpless on his back ; besides, what Dunham said was true.

The arrangements for Staniford's journey were quickly made,—so quickly that when he had seen the doctor, and had been down to the Aroostook and engaged Captain Jenness to come and take his place with Dunham for the next two nights, he had twelve hours on his hands before the train for Venice

would leave, and he started at last with but one clear perception,—that at the soonest it must be twelve hours more before he could see her.

He had seemed intolerably slow in arriving on the train, but once arrived in Venice he wished that he had come by the steam-boat, which would not be in for three hours yet. In despair he went to bed, considering that after he had tossed there till he could endure it no longer, he would still have the resource of getting up, which he would not have unless he went to bed. When he lay down, he found himself drowsy ; and while he wondered at this, he fell asleep, and dreamed a strange dream, so terrible that he woke himself by groaning in spirit, a thing which, as he reflected, he had never done before. The sun was piercing the crevice between his shutters, and a glance at his watch showed him that it was eleven o'clock.

The shadow of his dream projected itself into his waking mood, and steeped it in a gloom which he could not escape. He rose and dressed, and meagrely breakfasted. Without knowing how he came there, he stood announced in Mrs. Erwin's parlour, and waited for her to receive him.

His card was brought in to her where she lay in bed. After supporting Lydia through the first sharp shock of disappointment, she had yielded to the prolonged strain, and the girl was now taking care of her. She gave a hysterical laugh as she read the name on the card Veronica brought, and crushing it in her hand, "He's come!" she cried.

"I will not see him!" said Lydia instantly.

"No," assented her aunt. "It wouldn't be at all the thing. Besides, he's asked for me. Your uncle might see him, but he's out of the way; of course he *would* be out of the way. Now, let me see!" The excitement inspired her; she rose in bed, and called for the pretty sack in which she ordinarily breakfasted, and took a look at herself in a hand-glass that lay on the bed. Lydia did not move: she scarcely seemed to breathe; but a swift pulse in her neck beat visibly. "If it would be decent to keep him waiting so long, I could dress, and see him myself. I'm *well* enough." Mrs. Erwin again reflected. "Well," she said at last, "you must see him, Lydia."

"I"—began the girl.

"Yes, you. Some one must. It will be all right. On second thought, I believe I should send you, even if I were quite ready

to go myself. This affair has been carried on so far on the American plan, and I think I shall let you finish it without my interference. Yes, as your uncle said when I told him, you're all Americans together; and you *are*. Mr. Staniford has come to see you, though he asks for me. That's perfectly proper; but I can't see him, and I want you to excuse me to him."

"What would you — what must I" — Lydia began again.

"No, Lydia," interrupted her aunt. "I won't tell you a thing. I might have advised you when you first came; but now, I— Well, I think I've lived too long in Europe to be of use in such a case, and I won't have anything to do with it. I won't tell you how to meet him, or what to say; but oh, child," — here the woman's love of loving triumphed in her breast, — "I wish I was in your place! Go!"

Lydia slowly rose, breathless.

"Lydia!" cried her aunt. "Look at me!" Lydia turned her head. "Are you going to be hard with him?"

"I don't know what he's coming for," said Lydia dishonestly.

"But if he's coming for what you hope?"

"I don't hope for anything."

"But you did. Don't be severe. You're terrible when you're severe."

"I will be just."

"Oh, no, you mustn't, my dear. It won't do at all to be *just* with men, poor fellows. Kiss me, Lydia!" She pulled her down, and kissed her. When the girl had got as far as the door, "Lydia, Lydia!" she called after her. Lydia turned. "Do you realise what dress you've got on?" Lydia looked down at her robe; it was the blue flannel yachting-suit of the Aroostook, which she had put on for convenience in taking care of her aunt. "Isn't it too ridiculous?" Mrs. Erwin meant to praise the coincidence, not to blame the dress. Lydia smiled faintly for answer, and the next moment she stood at the parlour door.

Staniford, at her entrance, turned from looking out of the window and saw her as in his dream, with her hand behind her, pushing the door to; but the face with which she looked at him was not like the dead, sad face of his dream. It was thrillingly alive, and all passions were blent in it,—love, doubt, reproach, indignation; the tears stood in her eyes, but a fire burnt through the tears. With his first headlong impulse to console, explain, deplore, came a thought that struck

him silent at sight of her. He remembered, as he had not till then remembered, in all his wild longing and fearing, that there had not yet been anything explicit between them; that there was no engagement; and that he had upon the face of things, at least, no right to offer her more than some formal expression of regret for not having been able to keep his promise to come sooner. While this stupefying thought gradually filled his whole sense to the exclusion of all else, he stood looking at her with a dumb and helpless appeal, utterly stunned and wretched. He felt the life die out of his face and leave it blank, and when at last she spoke, he knew that it was in pity of him, or contempt of him. "Mrs. Erwin is not well," she said, "and she wished me"—

But he broke in upon her: "Oh, don't talk to me of Mrs. Erwin! It was you I wanted to see. Are *you* well? Are you alive? Do you"— He stopped as precipitately as he began; and after another hopeless pause, he went on piteously: "I don't know where to begin. I ought to have been here five days ago. I don't know what you think of me, or whether you have thought of me at all; and before I can ask I must tell you why I wanted to come then, and

why I come now, and why I think I must have come back from the dead to see you. You are all the world to me, and have been ever since I saw you. It seems a ridiculously unnecessary thing to say, I have been looking and acting and living it so long ; but I say it because I choose to have you know it, whether you ever cared for me or not. I thought I was coming here to explain why I had not come sooner, but I needn't do that unless—unless"— He looked at her where she still stood aloof, and he added : " Oh, answer me something, for pity's sake ! Don't send me away without a word. There have been times when you wouldn't have done that ! "

" Oh, I *did* care for you ! " she broke out. " You know I did "—

He was instantly across the room, beside her. " Yes, yes, I know it ! " But she shrank away.

" You tried to make me believe you cared for me, by everything you could do. And I did believe you then ; and yes, I believed you afterwards, when I didn't know what to believe. You were the one true thing in the world to me. But it seems that you didn't believe it yourself. "

" That I didn't believe it myself ? That I— I don't know what you mean. "

"You took a week to think it over! I have had a week, too, and I have thought it over, too. You have come too late."

"Too late? You don't, you can't, mean—Listen to me, Lydia; I want to tell you"—

"No, there is nothing you can tell me that would change me. I know it, I understand it all."

"But you don't understand what kept me."

"I don't wish to know what made you break your word. I don't care to know. I couldn't go back and feel as I did to you. Oh, that's gone! It isn't that you did not come—that you made me wait and suffer; but you knew how it would be with me after I got here, and all the things I should find out, and how I should feel! And you stayed away! I don't know whether I can forgive you, even; oh, I'm afraid I don't; but I can never care for you again. Nothing but a case of life and death"—

"It was a case of life and death!"

Lydia stopped in her reproaches, and looked at him with wistful doubt, changing to a tender fear.

"Oh, have you been hurt? Have you been sick?" she pleaded, in a breaking voice,

and made some unconscious movement toward him. He put out his hand, and would have caught one of hers, but she clasped them in each other.

“No, not I,—Dunham”—

“Oh!” said Lydia, as if this were not at all enough.

“He fell and struck his head, the night you left. I thought he would die.” Staniford reported his own diagnosis, not the doctor’s; but he was perhaps in the right to do this. “I had made him go down to the wharf with me; I wanted to see you again, before you started, and I thought we might find you on the boat.” He could see her face relenting; her hands released each other. “He was delirious till yesterday. I could not leave him.”

“Oh, why didn’t you write to me?” She ignored Dunham as completely as if he had never lived. “You knew that I”— Her voice died away, and her breast rose.

“I did write”—

“But how,—I never got it.”

“No,—it was not posted, through a cruel blunder. And then I thought—I got to thinking that you didn’t care”—

“Oh,” said the girl. “Could you doubt me?”

“You doubted me,” said Staniford, seizing his advantage. “I brought the letter with me to prove *my* truth.” She did not look at him, but she took the letter, and ran it greedily into her pocket. “It’s well I did so, since you don’t believe my word.”

“Oh, yes,—yes, I know it,” she said; “I never doubted it!” Staniford stood bemazed, though he knew enough to take the hands she yielded him; but she suddenly caught them away again, and set them against his breast. “I was very wrong to suspect you ever; I’m sorry I did; but there’s something else. I don’t know how to say what I want to say. But it must be said.”

“Is it something disagreeable?” asked Staniford lightly.

“It’s right,” answered Lydia, unsmilingly.

“Oh, well, don’t say it!” he pleaded; “or don’t say it now,—not till you’ve forgiven me for the anxiety I’ve caused you; not till you’ve praised me for trying to do what I thought the right thing. You can’t imagine how hard it was for one who hasn’t the habit!”

“I do praise you for it. There’s nothing to forgive *you*; but I can’t let you care for me unless I know—unless”— She stopped.

and then, "Mr. Staniford," she began firmly, "since I came here, I've been learning things that I didn't know before. They have changed the whole world to me, and it can never be the same again."

"I'm sorry for that; but if they haven't changed you, the world may go."

"No, not if we're to live in it," answered the girl, with the soberer wisdom women keep at such times. "It will have to be known how we met. What will people say? They will laugh."

"I don't think they will in my presence," said Staniford, with swelling nostrils. "They may use their pleasure elsewhere."

"And I shouldn't care for their laughing, either," said Lydia. "But oh, why did you come?"

"Why did I come?"

"Was it because you felt bound by anything that's happened, and you wouldn't let me bear the laugh alone? I'm not afraid for myself. I shall never blame you. You can go perfectly free."

"But I don't want to go free!"

Lydia looked at him with piercing earnestness. "Do you think I'm proud?" she asked.

“Yes, I think you are,” said Staniford, vaguely.

“It isn’t for myself that I should be proud with other people. But I would rather die than bring ridicule upon one I—upon you.”

“I can believe that,” said Staniford devoutly, and patiently reverencing the delay of her scruples.

“And if — and” — Her lips trembled, but she steadied her trembling voice. “If they laughed at you, and thought of me in a slighting way because” — Staniford gave a sort of roar of grief and pain to know how her heart must have been wrung before she could come to this. “You were all so good that you didn’t let me think there was anything strange about it” —

“Oh, good heavens ! We only did what it was our precious and sacred privilege to do ! We were all of one mind about it from the first. But don’t torture yourself about it, my darling. It’s over now ; it’s past—no, it’s present, and it will always be, for ever, the dearest and best thing in life. Lydia, do you believe that I love you ?”

“Oh, I must !”

“And don’t you believe that I’m telling you the truth when I say that I wouldn’t,

for all the world can give or take, change anything that's been?"

"Yes, I do believe you. Oh, I haven't said at all what I wanted to say! There was a great deal that I ought to say. I can't seem to recollect it."

He smiled to see her grieving at this recreance of her memory to her conscience. "Well, you shall have a whole lifetime to recall it in."

"No, I must try to speak now. And you must tell me the truth now,—no matter what it costs either of us." She laid her hands upon his extended arms, and grasped them intensely. "There's something else. I want to ask you what *you* thought when you found me alone on that ship with all of you." If she had stopped at this point, Staniford's cause might have been lost, but she went on: "I want to know whether you were ever ashamed of me, or despised me for it; whether you ever felt that because I was helpless and friendless there, you had the right to think less of me than if you had first met me here in this house."

It was still a terrible question, but it offered a loop-hole of escape, which Staniford was swift to seize. Let those who will justify the answer with which he smiled

into her solemn eyes : "I will leave you to say." A generous uncandour like this goes as far with a magnanimous and serious-hearted woman as perhaps anything else.

"Oh, I knew it, I knew it!" cried Lydia. And then, as he caught her to him at last, "Oh—oh—are you *sure* it's right?"

"I have no doubt of it," answered Staniford. Nor had he any question of the strategy through which he had triumphed in this crucial test. He may have thought that there were always explanations that had to be made afterwards, or he may have believed that he had expiated in what he had done and suffered for her any slight which he had felt; possibly, he considered that she had asked more than she had a right to do. It is certain that he said with every appearance of sincerity, "It began the moment I saw you on the wharf, there, and when I came to know my mind I kept it from you only till I could tell you here. But now I wish I hadn't! Life is too short for such a week as this."

"No," said Lydia, "you acted for the best, and you are—good."

"I'll keep that praise till I've earned it," answered Staniford.

XXVII.

IN the Campo Santi Apostoli at Venice there stands, a little apart from the church of that name, a chapel which has been for many years the place of worship for the Lutheran congregation. It was in this church that Staniford and Lydia were married six weeks later, before the altar under Titian's beautiful picture of Christ breaking bread.

The wedding was private, but it was not quite a family affair. Miss Hibbard had come down with her mother from Dresden, to complete Dunham's cure, and she was there with him perfectly recovered; he was not quite content, of course, that the marriage should not take place in the English chapel, but he was largely consoled by the candles burning on the altar. The Aroostook had been delayed by repairs which were found necessary at Trieste, and Captain Jenness was able to come over and represent the ship at the wedding ceremony,

and at the lunch which followed. He reserved till the moment of parting a supreme expression of good-will. When he had got a hand of Lydia's and one of Staniford's in each of his, with his wrists crossed, he said, "Now, I ain't one to tack round, and stand off and on a great deal, but what I want to say is just this: the Aroostook sails next week, and if you two are a mind to go back in her, the ship's yours, as I said to Miss Blood, here,—I mean Mis' Staniford; well, I *hain't* had much time to get used to it!—when she first come aboard there at Boston. I don't mean any pay; I want you to go back as my guests. You can use the cabin for your parlour; and I promise you I won't take any other passengers *this* time. I declare," said Captain Jenness, lowering his voice, and now referring to Hicks for the first time since the day of his escapade, "I did feel dreadful about that fellow!"

"Oh, never mind," replied Staniford. "If it hadn't been for Hicks, perhaps I mightn't have been here." He exchanged glances with his wife, that showed they had talked all that matter over.

The captain grew confidential. "Mr. Mason told me he saw you lending that chap money. I hope he didn't give you the slip?"

“No ; it came to me here at Blumenthals’ the other day.”

“Well, that’s right ! It all worked together for good, as you say. Now you come !”

“What do you say, my dear ?” asked Staniford, on whom the poetic fitness of the captain’s proposal had wrought.

Women are never blinded by romance, however much they like it in the abstract. “It’s coming winter. Do you think you wouldn’t be sea-sick ?” returned the bride of an hour, with the practical wisdom of a matron.

Staniford laughed. “She’s right, captain. I’m no sailor. I’ll get home by the all-rail route as far as I can.”

Captain Jenness threw back his head, and laughed too. “Good ! That’s about it.” And he released their hands, so as to place one hairy paw on a shoulder of each. “You’ll get along together, I guess.”

“But we’re just as much obliged to you as if we went, Captain Jenness. And tell all the crew that I’m homesick for the Aroostook, and thank all for being so kind to me ; and I thank *you*, Captain Jenness !” Lydia looked at her husband, and then startled the captain with a kiss.

He blushed all over, but carried it off as boldly as he could. "Well, well," he said, "that's right! If you change your minds before the Aroostook sails, you let me know."

This affair made a great deal of talk in Venice, where the common stock of leisure is so great that each person may without self-reproach devote a much larger share of attention to the interests of the others than could be given elsewhere. The decorous fictions in which Mrs. Erwin draped the singular facts of the acquaintance and courtship of Lydia and Staniford were what unflinchingly astonished and amused him, and he abetted them without scruple. He found her worldliness as innocent as the unworldliness of Lydia, and he gave Mrs. Erwin his hearty sympathy when she ingenuously owned that the effort to throw dust in the eyes of her European acquaintance was simply killing her. He found endless refreshment in the contemplation of her attitude towards her burdensome little world, and in her reasons for enslaving herself to it. He was very good friends with both of the Erwins. When he could spare the time from Lydia, he went about with her uncle in his boat, and respected his skill in row-

ing it without falling overboard. He could not see why any one should be so much interested in the American character and dialect as Mr. Erwin was ; but he did not object, and he reflected that after all they were not what their admirer supposed them.

The Erwins came with the Stanifords as far as Paris on their way home, and afterwards joined them in California, where Staniford bought a ranch, and found occupation if not profit in its management. Once cut loose from her European ties, Mrs. Erwin experienced an incomparable repose and comfort in the life of San Francisco ; it was, she declared, the life for which she had really been adapted, after all ; and in the climate of Santa Barbara she found all that she had left in Italy. In that land of strange and surprising forms of every sort, her husband has been very happy in the realisation of an America surpassing even his wildest dreams, and he has richly stored his note-book with philological curiosities. He hears around him the vigorous and imaginative locutions of the Pike language, in which, like the late Canon Kingsley, he finds a Scandinavian hugeness ; and pending the publication of his Hand-Book of Americanisms, he is in confident search of the miner

who uses his pronouns cockney-wise. Like other English observers, friendly and unfriendly, he does not permit the facts to interfere with his preconceptions.

Staniford's choice long remained a mystery to his acquaintances, and was but partially explained by Mrs. Dunham, when she came home. "Why, I suppose he fell in love with her," she said. "Of course, thrown together that way, as they were, for six weeks, it might have happened to anybody; but James Staniford was always the most consummate flirt that breathed; and he never could see a woman, without coming up, in that metaphysical way of his, and trying to interest her in him. He was always laughing at women, but there never was a man who cared more for them. From all that I could learn from Charles, he began by making fun of her, and all at once he became perfectly infatuated with her. I don't see why. I never could get Charles to tell me anything remarkable that she said or did. She was simply a country girl, with country ideas, and no sort of cultivation. Why, there was *nothing* to her. He's done the wisest thing he could by taking her out to California. She never would have gone down, here. I suppose James Staniford

knew that as well as any of us ; and if he finds it worth while to bury himself with her there, we've no reason to complain. She did *sing*, wonderfully ; that is, her voice was perfectly divine. But of course that's all over, now. She didn't seem to care much for it ; and she really knew so little of life that I don't believe she could form the idea of an artistic career, or feel that it was any sacrifice to give it up. James Staniford was not worth any such sacrifice ; but she couldn't know that either. She was good, I suppose. She was very stiff, and she hadn't a word to say for herself. I think she was cold. To be sure, she was a beauty ; I really never saw anything like it,—that pale complexion some brunettes have, with her hair growing low, and such eyes and lashes !”

“Perhaps the beauty had something to do with his falling in love with her,” suggested a listener. The ladies present tried to look as if this ought not to be sufficient.

“Oh, very likely,” said Mrs. Dunham. She added, with an air of being the wreck of her former self, “But we all know what becomes of *beauty* after marriage.”

The mind of Lydia's friends had been expressed in regard to her marriage, when the Stanifords, upon their arrival home from

Europe, paid a visit to South Bradfield. It was in the depths of the winter following their union, and the hill country, stern and wild even in midsummer, wore an aspect of savage desolation. It was sheeted in heavy snow, through which here and there in the pastures, a craggy boulder lifted its face and frowned, and along the woods the stunted pines and hemlocks blackened against a background of leafless oaks and birches. A north-west wind cut shrill across the white wastes, and from the crests of the billowed drifts drove a scud of stinging particles in their faces, while the sun, as high as that of Italy, coldly blazed from a cloudless blue sky. Ezra Perkins, perched on the seat before them, stiff and silent as if he were frozen there, drove them from Bradfield Junction to South Bradfield in the long wagon-body set on bob-sleds, with which he replaced his Concord coach in winter. At the station he had sparingly greeted Lydia, as if she were just back from Greenfield, and in the interest of personal independence had ignored a faint motion of hers to shake hands; at her grandfather's gate, he set his passengers down without a word, and drove away, leaving Staniford to get in his trunk as he might.

"Well, I declare," said Miss Maria, who had taken one end of the trunk in spite of aim, and was leading the way up through the path cleanly blocked out of the snow, "that Ezra Perkins is enough to make you wish he'd *stayed* in Dakoty!"

Staniford laughed, as he had laughed at everything on the way from the station, and had probably thus wounded Ezra Perkins's susceptibilities. The village houses, separated so widely by the one long street, each with its path neatly tunnelled from the roadway to the gate; the meeting-house, so much vaster than the present needs of worship, and looking blue-cold with its never-renewed single coat of white paint; the graveyard set in the midst of the village, and showing, after Ezra Perkins's disappearance, as many signs of life as any other locality, realised in the most satisfactory degree his theories of what winter must be in such a place as South Bradfield. The burning smell of the sheet-iron stove in the parlour, with its battlemented top of filigree iron work; the grimness of the horse-hair-covered best furniture; the care with which the old-fashioned fire-places had been walled up, and all accessible character of the period to which the house belonged had been effaced,

gave him an equal pleasure. He went about with his arm round Lydia's waist, examining these things, and yielding to the joy they caused him, when they were alone. "Oh, my darling," he said, in one of these accesses of delight, "when I think that it's my privilege to take you away from all this, I begin to feel not so very unworthy, after all."

But he was very polite, as Miss Maria owned, when Mr. and Mrs. Goodlow came in during the evening, with two or three unmarried ladies of the village, and he kept them from falling into the frozen silence which habitually expresses social enjoyment in South Bradfield when strangers are present. He talked about the prospects of Italian advancement to an equal state of intellectual and moral perfection with rural New England, while Mr. Goodlow listened, rocking himself back and forth in the hair-cloth arm-chair. Deacon Latham, passing his hand continually along the stove battlements, now and then let his fingers rest on the sheet-iron till he burnt them, and then jerked them suddenly away, to put them back the next moment, in his absorbing interest. Miss Maria, amidst a murmur of admiration from the ladies, passed sponge-cake and coffee: she confessed afterwards

that the evening had been so brilliant to her as to seem almost wicked ; and the other ladies, who owned to having lain awake all night on her coffee, said that if they *had* enjoyed themselves they were properly punished for it.

When they were gone, and Lydia and Staniford had said good-night, and Miss Maria, coming in from the kitchen with a hand-lamp for her father, approached the marble-topped centre-table to blow out the large lamp of pea-green glass with red woollen wick, which had shed the full radiance of a sun-burner upon the festival, she faltered at a manifest unreadiness in the old man to go to bed, though the fire was low, and they had both resumed the drooping carriage of people in going about cold houses. He looked excited, and, so far as his unpractised visage could intimate the emotion, joyous.

“ Well, there, Maria ! ” he said. “ You can’t say but what he’s a master-hand to converse, any way. I d’ know as I ever see Mr. Goodlow more struck up with any one. He looked as if every word done him good ; I presume it put him in mind of meetin’s with brother ministers : I don’t suppose but what he misses it some, here. You can’t

say but what he's a fine appearin' young man. I d' know as I see anything wrong in his kind of dressin' up to the nines, as you may say. As long's he's got the money, I don't see what harm it is. It's all worked for good, Lyddy's going out that way; though it did seem a mysterious providence at the time."

"Well!" began Miss Maria. She paused, as if she had been hurried too far by her feelings, and ought to give them a check before proceeding. "Well, I don't presume you'd notice it, but she's got a spot on her silk, so't a whole breadth's got to come out, and be let in again bottom-side up. I guess there's a pair of 'em, for carelessness." She waited a moment before continuing: "I d' know as I like to see a husband puttin' his arm round his wife, even when he don't suppose any one's lookin'; but I d' know but what it's natural, too. But it's one comfort to see 't she ain't the least mite silly about *him*. He's dreadful freckled." Miss Maria again paused thoughtfully, while her father burnt his fingers on the stove for the last time, and took them definitively away. "I don't say but what he talked well enough, as far forth as talkin' goes; Mr. Goodlow said at the door 't he didn't know's he ever passed

many such evenin's since he'd been in South Bradfield, and I d' know as *I* have. I presume he has his faults ; we ain't any of us perfect ; but he *doos* seem terribly wrapped up in Lyddy. I don't say but what he'll make her a good husband, if she must *have* one. I don't suppose but what people might think, as you may say, 't she'd made out pretty well ; and if Lyddy's suited, I d' know as anybody else has got any call to be over particular."

THE END.

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