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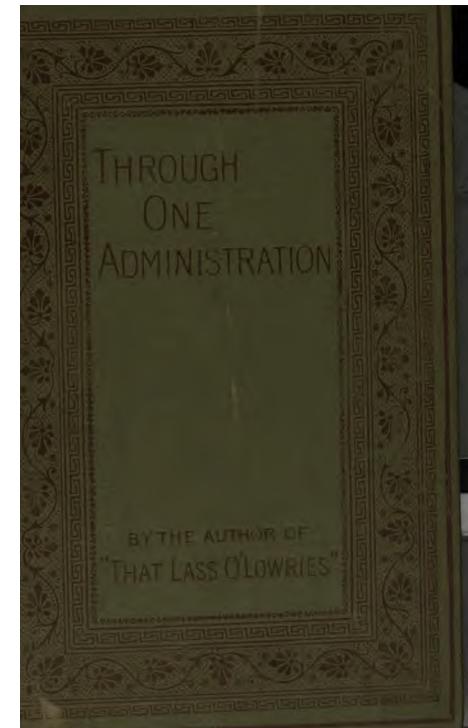
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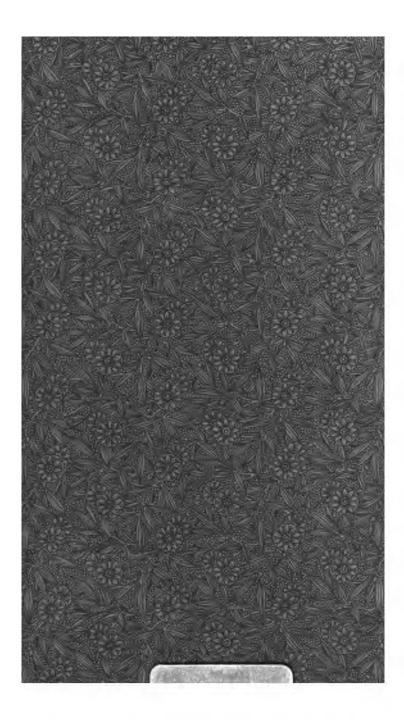
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THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION.

VOL. III.

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THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION.

BY

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT,

AUTHOR OF "THAT LASS O' LOWRIE'S," "HAWORTH'S," "LOUISIANA,"
"A FAIR BARBARIAN," ETC., ETC.

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THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION.

CHAPTER I.

SENATOR BLUNDEL.

THE next few weeks were not agreeable ones to Richard Amory. There was too much feverish anxiety and uncertainty in them. He had not yet acquired the coolness and hardihood of experience, and he felt their lack in himself. He had a great deal at stake, more than at the outset it had seemed possible he could have under any circumstances. He began to realise with no little discomfort that he had run heavier risks than he had intended to allow himself to be led into running. When they rose before him in their full magnitude, as they did occasionally when affairs assumed an unencouraging aspect,

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he wished his enthusiasm had been less great. It could not be said that he had reached remorse for, or actual repentance of, his indiscretions; he had simply reached a point when discouragement led him to feel that he might be called upon to repent by misfortune. Up to this time it had been his habit to drive up to the Capitol in his coupé, to appear in the galleries, to saunter through the lobby, and to flit in and out of committee-rooms with something of the air of an amateur rather enjoying himself; he had made himself popular, his gaiety, his magnetic manner, his readiness to be all things to all men, had smoothed his pathway for him, while his unprofessional air had given him an appearance of harmlessness.

"He's a first-rate kind of fellow to have on the ground when a thing of this sort is going on," one of the smaller satellites once remarked. "Nobody's afraid of being seen with him. There's an immense deal in that. There are fellows who come here who can half ruin a man with position by recognising him on the street. Regular old hahds they are—working around here for years, making an honest living out of their native land.

Every one knows them and what they are up to. Now, this one is different, and that wife of his——"

"What has she been doing?" flung in Planefield, who was present. "What has she got to do with it?"

He said it with savage uneasiness. He was full of restive jealousy and distrust in these days.

"I was only going to say that she is known in society," he remarked, "and she is the kind the most particular of those fellows don't object to calling on."

But, as matters took form and a more critical point was neared, as the newspapers began to express themselves on the subject of the Westoria lands scheme, and prophesy its failure or success, as it became the subject of editorials applauding the public-spiritedness of those most prominent in it, or of paragraphs denouncing the corrupt and self-seeking tendency of the times, as the mental temperature of certain individuals became a matter of vital importance, and the degree of cordiality of a greeting an affair of elation or despair, Richard felt that his air of being an amateur was becoming a thing of the past.

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He was too anxious to keep it up well; he did not sleep at night, and began to look fagged, and found it required an effort to appear at ease.

"Confound it!" he said to Planefield, "how can one be at ease with a man when his yes or no may be success or destruction to you. It makes him of too much consequence. A fellow finds himself trying to please, and it spoils his manner. I never knew what it was to feel a human being of any particular consequence before."

"You have been lucky," commented Planefield, not too tolerantly.

"I have been lucky," Richard answered, but I'm not lucky now, and I shall be deucedly unlucky if that bill doesn't pass. The fact is, there are times when I half wish I hadn't meddled with it."

"The mistake you made," said Planefield, with stolid ill-humour, "was in letting Mrs. Amory go away. Now is the time you need her most. There's no denying that there are some things women can do better than men; and when a man has a wife as clever as yours, and as much of a social success, he's blundering when he doesn't call on her for

assistance. One or two of her little dinners would be the very things just now for the final smoothing down of one or two rough ones who haven't opinions unless you provide them with them. She'd provide them with them fast enough. They'd only have one opinion when she'd done with them, if she was in one of the moods I've seen her in sometimes. Look how she carried Bowman and Pell off their feet the night she gave them the description of that row in the And Hargis, of North Carolina, House. swears by her; he's a simple, domesticated fellow, and was homesick the night I brought him here, and she found it out, heaven knows how, and talked to him about his wife and children until he said he felt as if he'd seen them. He told me so with tears in his eyes. It is that kind of thing we want now."

"Well," said Richard, nervously, "it isn't at our disposal. I don't mind telling you that she was rather out of humour with the aspect of affairs before she went away, and I had one interview with her which showed me it would be the safest plan to let her go."

"Out of humour!" said Planefield. "She has been a good deal out of humour lately,

it seems to me. Not that it's any business of mine; but it's rather a pity, considering circumstances."

Richard coloured, walked a few steps, put his hands in his pockets and took them out again. Among the chief sources of anxious trouble to him had been that, of late, he had found his companion rather difficult to get along with. He had been irritable, and even a trifle overbearing, and had at times exhibited an indifference to results truly embarrassing to contemplate, in view of the crisis at hand. When he intrenched himself behind a certain heavy stubbornness in which he was specially strong, Richard felt himself helpless. The big body, the florid face, the doggedly unresponsive eye, were too much to combat against. When he was ill-humoured. Richard knew that he endeavoured conciliate him; but when this mood held possession he could only feel alarm and ask himself if it could be possible that, after all, the man might be brutal and false enough There were times when he sat to fail him. and looked at him unwillingly, fascinated by the likeness he found in him to the man who had sent poor Westor to his doom.

Naturally, the old story had been revived of late, and he heard new versions of it and more minute descriptions of the chief actors, and it was not difficult for an overwrought imagination to discover in the two men some similarity of personal characteristic. Just at this moment there rose within him a memory of a point of resemblance between the pair which would have been extremely embarrassing to him if he had permitted it to assume the disagreeable form of an actual It was the resemblance between the influences which had moved them. In both cases it had been a woman-in this case it was his own wife, and if he had not been too greatly harassed he would have appreciated the indelicacy of the situation. was not an unrefined person in theory, and his sensitiveness would have caused him to revolt at the grossness of such a position if he had not had so much at stake and been so overborne by his associates. His mistakes and vices were always the result of circumstance and enthusiasm, and he hurried past them with averted eyes and refused to concede to them any substantiality. There is nothing more certain than that he had never allowed himself to believe that he had found Bertha of practical use in rendering Planefield docile and attracting less important luminaries. Bertha had been very charming and amiable, that was all; she was always so; it was her habit to please people—her nature, in fact—and she had only done what she always did. As a mental statement of the case, nothing could be more simple than this, and he was moved to private disgust by his companion's aggressive clumsiness, which seemed to complicate matters and confront him with more crude suggestions.

"I am afraid she would not enjoy your way of putting it," he said.

Planefield shut his teeth on his cigar and looked out of the window. That was his sole response, and was a form of bullying he enjoyed.

"We must remember that—that she does not realise everything," continued Richard, uneasily; "and she has not regarded the matter from any serious standpoint. It is my impression," he added, with a sudden sense of growing irritation, "that she wouldn't have anything to do with it if she thought it was a matter of gain or loss!"

Planefield made no movement. He was convinced that this was a lie, and his look out of the window was his reply to it.

Richard put his hands into his pockets again and turned about, irritated and helpless.

"You must have seen yourself how unpractical she is," he exclaimed. "She is a mere child in business matters. Any one could deceive her."

He stopped and flushed without any apparent reason. He found himself looking out of the window too, with a feeling of most unpleasant confusion. He was obliged to shake it off before he spoke again, and when he did so it was with an air of beginning with a fresh subject.

"After all," he said, "everything does not depend upon influence of that sort. There are other things to be considered. Have you seen Blundel?"

"You can't expect a man like Blundel," said Planefield, "to be easy to manage. Blundel is the possessor of a moral character, and when a man has a capital like that—and Blundel's sharpness into the bargain—he is not going to trifle with it. He's going to hold on to it until it reaches its highest

market value, and then decide which way he will invest it."

Richard dropped into a seat by the table. He felt his forehead growing damp.

"But if we are not sure of Blundel?" he exclaimed.

"Well, we are not sure of Blundel," was the answer. "What we have to hope is that he isn't sure of himself. The one thing you can't be sure of is a moral character. Impeccability is rare, and it is never easy for an outsider to hit on its exact value. It varies, and you have to run risks with it. Blundel's is expensive."

"There has been a great deal of money used," hesitated Richard, "a great deal."

Planefield resorted to the window again. It had not been his money which had been used. He had sufficient intellect to reap advantages where they were to be reaped, and to avoid indiscreet ventures.

"You had better go and see Blundel yourself," he said, after a pause. "I have had a talk with him, and made as alluring a statement of the case as I could, with the proper degree of caution, and he has had time to put the matter in the scales with

his impeccability and see which weighs the heavier, and if they can't be made to balance. He will try to balance them, but if he can't ——— You must settle what is to be done between you. I have done my best."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Richard, virtuously, "what corruption!"

It was an ingenuous ejaculation, but he was not collected enough to appreciate the native candour of it himself at the moment. He felt that he was being hardly treated, and that the most sacred trusts of a great nation were in hands likely to betray them at far too high a figure. The remark amounted to an outburst of patriotism.

"Have they all their price?" he cried.

Planefield turned his head slowly and glanced at him over his shoulder.

"No," he said; "if they had, you'd find it easier. There's your difficulty. If they were all to be bought, or none of them were to be sold, you'd see your way."

It did not seem to Richard that his way was very clear at the present moment. At every step of late he had found new obstacles in his path and new burdens on his shoulders. People had so many interests and so many

limitations, and the limitations were always related to the interests. He began to resolve that it was a very sordid and business-like world in which human lot was cast, and to realise that the tendency of humanity was to coarse prejudice in favour of itself.

"Then I had better see Blundel at once," he said, with feverish impatience.

"You haven't any time to lose," was Planefield's cool response. "And you will need all the wit you can carry with you. You are not going to offer him inducements, you know; you are only going to prove to him that his chance to do something for his country lies before him in the direction of the Westoria lands. After that——"

"After that," repeated Richard, anxiously.

"Do what you think safest and most practicable."

As the well-appointed equipage drew up under the archway before the lower entrance to the north wing of the Capitol, a group of men who stood near the doorway regarded it with interest. They did so because three of them were strangers and sightseers, and the fourth, who was a well-seasoned Washingtonian, had called their attention to it.

"There," he said, with an experienced air, "there is one of them this moment. beginning to be regarded as a fact that he is mixed up with one of the biggest jobs the country has ever known. He is up to his ears in this Westoria business, it's believed, though he professes to be nothing more than a sort of interested looker-on and a friend of the prime movers. He's a gentleman, you see, with a position in society, and a pretty wife who is a favourite, and the pretty wife entertains his friends; and when a man is in an uncertain frame of mind, the husband invites him to dinner, and the pretty wife interests herself in him. She knows how to do it, they say-and he goes away a wiser and a better man, and more likely to see his way to making himself agreeable. Nothing professional about it, don't you see. All quite proper and natural. No lobbying about that, you know-but it helps a bill through wonderfully. I tell you there's no knowing what goes on in these tip-top parlours about here."

He said it with modest pride and exultation, and his companions were delighted. They represented the average American with all his ingenuous eagerness for the dramatic exposure

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of crime in his fellow-man. They had existed joyously for years in the belief that Washington was the seat of corruption, bribery, and fraud; that it was populated chiefly with brilliant female lobbyists and depraved officials who carried their privileges to market and bartered and sold them with a guileless candour, whose temerity was only to be equalled by its brazen cheerfulness of spirit. They were, probably, not in the least aware of their mental attitude towards their nation's government, but they revelled in it none the less, and would have felt a keen pang of disappointment if they had been suddenly confronted with the fact that there was actually an element of most unpicturesque honesty in the House and a flavour of shameless impeccability in the Senate. They had heard delightful stories of "jobs" "schemes," and had hoped to hear more. When they had been taken to the visitors' gallery, they had exhibited an earnest anxiety to be shown the members connected with the last Investigation, and had received with private rapture all anecdotes connected with the ruling political scandal. They decided that the country was in a bad way, and felt a

glow of honest pride in its standing up at all in its present condition of rottenness. ardour had been \mathbf{a} little damped by an incautious statement made by their friend and guide, to the effect that the subject of the Investigation seemed likely to clear himself of the charges made against him, and the appearance of Richard Amory, with his personal attractions, his neat equipage, and his air of belonging to the great world, was something of a boon to them. wished his wife had been with him; they had only seen one female lobbyist as yet, and she had been merely a cheap, flashy woman, with thin, rouged cheeks and sharp, eager eyes.

"Looks rather anxious, doesn't he?" one asked the other, as Amory went by. He certainly looked anxious as he passed them; but, once inside the building, he made an effort to assume something of his usual air of gay good cheer. It would not do to present himself with other than a fearless front. So he walked with a firm and buoyant tread through the great vaulted corridors and up the marble stairways, exchanging a salutation with one passer-by and a word of greeting with another. He found Senator Blundel in

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his committee-room, sitting at the greencovered table, looking over some papers. was a short, stout man, with a blunt-featured face, gravish hair, which had a tendency to stand on end, and small, shrewd eyes. he had been in the House, his rising to his feet had generally been the signal for his fellow-members to bestir themselves and turn to listen, as it was his habit to display a sharp humour of a rough-and-ready sort. Richard had always felt this humour coarse, and having but little confidence in Blundel's possessing any other qualification for his position, regarded it as rather trying that circumstances should have combined to render his sentiments of such importance in the present crisis. Looking at the thick-set figure and ordinary face, he felt that Planefield had been right, and that Bertha might have done much with him, principally because he presented himself as one of the obstacles whose opinions should be formed for them all the more on account of their obstinacy when once biassed in a wrong direction.

But there was no suggestion of these convictions in his manner when he spoke. It was very graceful and ready, and his strong

points of good breeding and mental agility stood him in good stead. The man before him, whose early social advantages had not been great, was not too dull to feel the influence of the first quality and find himself placed at a secretly acknowledged disadvantage by it. After he had heard his name, his small, sharp eyes fixed themselves on his visitor's handsome countenance, with an expression not easy to read.

"It is not necessary for me to make a new statement of our case," said Richard, easily. "I won't fatigue you and occupy your time by repeating what you have already heard stated in the clearest possible manner by Senator Planefield."

Blundel thrust his hands into his pockets and nodded.

- "Yes," he responded. "I saw Planefield, and he said a good deal about it."
- "Which, of course, you have reflected upon?" said Richard.
- "Well, yes. I've thought it over—along with other things."
 - "I trust favourably!" Richard suggested.

Blundel stretched his legs a little and pushed his hands farther down into his pockets.

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"Now, what would you call favourably?" he inquired.

"Oh!" replied Richard, with self-possessed promptness, "favourably to the connecting branch."

It was a rather fine stroke, this airy candour, but he had studied it beforehand thoroughly and calculated its effect. It surprised Blundel into looking up at him quickly.

"You would, eh?" he said, "let us hear why."

"Because," Richard stated, "that would make it favourable to us."

Blundel was beguiled into a somewhat uneasy laugh.

"Well," he remarked, "you're frank enough." Richard fixed upon him an open, appreciative glance.

"And why not?" he answered. "There is our strong point—that we can afford to be frank. We have nothing to conceal. We have something to gain, of course—who has not?—but it is to be gained legitimately—so there is no necessity for our concealing that. The case is simplicity itself. Here are the two railroads. See," and he laid two strips of paper side by side upon the table. "A

connecting branch is needed. If it runs through this way," making a line with his finger, "it makes certain valuable lands immeasurably more valuable. There is no practical objection to its taking this direction instead of that—in either case it runs through the Government reservations—the road will be built—somebody's property will be benefited. Why not that of my clients?"

Blundel looked at the strips of paper, and his little eyes twinkled mysteriously.

"By George!" he said, "that isn't the way such things are generally put. What you ought to do is to prove that nobody is to be benefited, and that you're working for the good of the Government."

Richard laughed.

"Oh!" he said, "I am an amateur, and I should be of no use whatever to my clients if they had anything to hide or any special reason to fear failure. We have opposition to contend with, of course. The southern line is naturally against us, as it wants the connecting branch to run in the opposite direction; but if it has no stronger claim than we have, the struggle is equal. They are open to the objection of being benefited by the subsidies,

too. It is scarcely ground enough for refusing your vote—that some one will be benefited by it. The people is the Government in America, and the Government the people, and the interest of both are too indissolubly connected to admit of being easily separated on public measures. As I said, I am an amateur, but I am a man of the world. My basis is a natural, human one. I desire to attain an object, and though the Government will be benefited, I am obliged to confess I am arguing for my object more than for the Government."

This was said with more delightful, airy frankness than ever. But, concealed beneath this genial openness was a desperate anxiety to discover what his companion was thinking of, and if the effect of his stroke was what he had hoped it would be. He knew that frankness so complete was a novelty, and he trusted that his bearing had placed him out of the list of ordinary applicants for favour. His private conviction, to which he did not choose to allow himself to refer mentally with any degree of openness, was that, if the man was honest, honesty so bold and simple must disarm him; and, if he was not, ingenuousness so reckless

must offer him inducements. But it was not easy to arrive at once at any decision as to the tenor of Blundel's thoughts. He had listened, and it being his habit to see the humour of things, he had grinned a little at the humour he saw in this situation, which was perhaps not a bad omen, though he showed no disposition to commit himself on the spot.

"Makes a good story," he said; "pretty big scheme, isn't it?"

"Not a small one," answered Richard, freely.
"That is one of its merits."

"The subsidies won't have to be small ones," said Blundel. "That isn't one of its merits." Now, let us hear your inducements?

Richard checked himself on the very verge of a start, realising instantaneously the folly of his first flashing thought.

"The inducements you can offer to the Government," added Blundel. "You haven't gone into a thing of this sort without feeling you have some on hand."

Of course there were inducements, and Richard had them at his fingers' ends, and was very fluent and eloquent in his statement of them. In fact, when once fairly launched upon the subject, he was somewhat surprised

to find how many powerful reasons there were for its being to the interest of the nation that the land grants should be made to the road which ran through the Westoria lands and opened up their resources. His argument became so brilliant, as he proceeded, that he was moved by their sincerity himself, and gained impetus through his confidence in He really felt that he was swayed by a generous desire to benefit his country, and enjoyed his conviction of his own honesty with a refinement which, for the moment, lost sight of all less agreeable features of the proceeding. All his fine points came out under the glow of his enthusiasm-his grace of speech and manner, his picturesque habit of thought, which gave colour and vividness to all he said—his personal attractiveness itself.

Blundel bestirred himself to sit up and look at him with a new interest. He liked a good talker; he was a good talker himself. His mind was of a practical business stamp, and he was good at a knock-down blow in argument, or at a joke or jibe which felled a man like a meat-axe; but he had nothing like this, and he felt something like envy of all this swiftness and readiness and polish.

When he finished, Richard felt that he must have impressed him; that it was impossible that it should be otherwise, even though there were no special external signs of Blundel being greatly affected. He had thrust his hands into his pockets as before, and his hair stood on end as obstinately.

- "Well," he said, succinctly, "it is a good story, and it's a big scheme."
- "And you——?" said Richard. "We are sure of your——"

Blundel took a hand out of his pocket and ran it over his upright hair, as if in a futile attempt at sweeping it down.

- "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'll see you day after to-morrow."
- "But—" exclaimed Richard, secretly aghast.

Blundel ran over his hair again and returned his hand to his pocket.

"Oh, yes!" he answered. "I know all about that. You don't want to lose time, and you want to feel sure; but, you see, I want to feel sure, too. As I said, it's a big business; it's too big a business to assume the responsibility of all at once. I'm not going to run any risks. I don't say you want me to run

any; but, you know, you are an amateur, and there may be risks you don't realise. I'll see you again."

In his character of amateur, it was impossible for Richard to be importunate, but his temptations to commit the indiscretion were strong. A hundred things might happen in the course of two days; delay was more dangerous than anything else. The worst of it all was that he had really gained no reliable knowledge of the man himself and of how it would be best to approach him. He had seen him throughout the interview just as he had seen him before it. Whether or not his sharpness was cunning and his bluntness a defence, he had not been able to decide.

"At any rate, he is cautious," he thought. "How cautious it is for us to find out."

When he left him, Richard was in a fever of disappointment and perplexity, which, to his ease and pleasure-loving nature, was torment.

"Confound it all!" he said. "Confound the thing from beginning to end! It will have to pay well to pay for this."

He had other work before him, other efforts to make, and, after he had made them he returned to his carriage fatigued and over-

wrought. He had walked through the great corridors, from wing to wing, in pursuit of men who seemed to elude him like will-o'-thewisps; he had been driven to standing among motley groups, who sent in cards which did not always intercede for them; he had had interviews with men who were outwardly suave and pliable, with men who were illmannered and impatient, with men who were obstinate and distrustful, and with men who were too much occupied with their own affairs to be other than openly indifferent; if he had met with a shade of encouragement at one point, he had found it amply balanced by discouragement at the next; he had seen himself regarded, as an applicant for favour, and a person to be disposed of as speedily as possible, and, when his work was at an end, his physical condition was one of exhaustion, and his mental attitude marked chiefly by disgust and weariness of spirit.

This being the state of affairs, he made a call upon Miss Varien, who always exhilarated and entertained him.

He found her in her bower, and was received with the unvarying tact which characterised her manner upon all occasions. He poured forth his woes, as far as they could be told, and was very picturesque about them as he reclined in the easiest of easy chairs.

"It is my opinion that nothing can be done without money," he said, "which is disgraceful!"

"It is, indeed," acknowledged Miss Varien, with a gleam of beautiful little teeth.

She had lived in Washington with her exceptional father and entirely satisfactory mother from her earliest infancy, and had gained from observation—at which she was brilliant, as at all else—a fund of valuable information. She had seen many things, and had not seen them in vain. It may even be suspected that Richard, in his character of amateur, was aware of this. There was a suggestion of watchfulness in his glance at her.

"Things ought to be better or worse to simplify the system," she said.

"That is in effect what I heard said this morning," answered Richard.

"I am sorry it is not entirely new," she returned. "Was it suggested, also, that since we cannot have incorruptibility we might alter our moral standards and remove corruption by making all transactions mere matters of business? If there was no longer any penalty attached to the sale and barter of public privileges, such sale and barter would cease to be dishonour and crime. We should be better if we were infinitely worse. The theory may appear bold at first blush—no, not at first blush, for blushes are to be done away with—at first sight, I will say in preference; it may appear bold, but after much reflection I have decided that it is the only practicable one."

"It is undoubtedly brilliant," replied Richard; "but, as you say it would simplify matters wonderfully, I should not be at such a loss to know what Senator Blundel will do, for instance, and my appetite for lunch would be better."

"It might possibly be worse," suggested Miss Varien.

Richard glanced at her quickly.

"That is a remark which evidently has a foundation," he said. "I wish you would tell me what prompted it."

"I am not sure it was very discreet," was the reply. "My personal knowledge of Senator Blundel prompted it." "You know him very well," said Richard, with some eagerness.

"I should not venture to say I knew any one very well," she said, in the captivating voice which gave to all her words such value and suggestiveness. "I know him as I know many other men like him. I was born a politician, and existence without my politics would be an arid desert to me. I have talked to him and read his speeches, and followed him in his career for some time. I have even asked questions about him, and, consequently, I know something of his methods. I think—you see, I only say I think—I know what he will do."

"In Heaven's name, what is it?' demanded Richard.

She unfurled her fan and smiled over it with that delightful gleam of little white teeth.

"He will take his time," she answered. "He is slow, and prides himself on being sure. Your bill will not be acted upon, it will be set aside to lie over until the next session of Congress."

Richard felt as if he changed colour, but he bore himself with outward discretion.

"You have some ulterior motive," he said.
"Having invited me to remain to luncheon,
you seek to render me incapable of doing

myself justice. You saw in my eye the wolfish hunger which is the result of interviews with the savage senator and the pitiless member of Congress. Now I see the value of your theory. If it were in practice, I could win Blundel over with gold. What is your opinion of his conscience as it stands?"

It was said with admirable lightness and answered in a like strain, but he had never been more anxiously on the alert than he was as he watched Miss Varien's vivacious and subtly expressive face.

"I have not reached it yet," she said. "And consciences are of such different make and material; I have not decided whether his is made of interest or honesty. He is a mixture of shrewdness and crudeness which is very baffling; just when you are arguing from the shrewdness the crudeness displays itself, and vice versa. But, as I said, I think your bill will not be acted upon."

And then they went in to lunch, and, as he ate his lobster-salad and made himself agreeable beyond measure, Richard wondered, with an inward tremor, if she could be right.

CHAPTER II.

DAWNING LOVE.

MRS. SYLVESTRE did not leave town early. The weather was reasonably cool, the house on Lafayette Square was comfortable, and Washington in spring is at its loveliest. She liked the lull after the season, and enjoyed it to its utmost, wisely refusing all invitations to fitful after-Lent gaieties. She held no more receptions, but saw her more intimate acquaintances in the evening, when they made their informal calls. With each week that passed, her home gave her greater pleasure and grew prettier.

"I never lose interest in it," she said to Arbuthnot. "It is a continued delight to me. I find that I think of it a great deal, and am fond of it almost as if it was a friend I had found. I think I must have been intended for a housewife."

Mrs. Merriam's liking for Laurence Arbuthnot having increased as their acquaintance progressed, his intimacy in the household became more and more an established fact.

"One should always number, among one's acquaintance," the clever dowager remarked, "an agreeable, well-bred, and reliable manfriend. A man one can ask to do things, if unforeseen occasions arise. He must be agreeable, since one must be intimate with him, and for the same reason he must be well-bred. Notwithstanding our large circle, we are a rather lonely pair, my dear."

Gradually Mrs. Sylvestre herself had found a slight change taking place in her manner towards Arbuthnot. She became conscious of liking him better, and of giving him more mental attention, as she saw him more familiarly. The idea dawned by slow degrees upon her that the triviality of which she accused him was of an unusual order; that it was accompanied by qualities and peculiarities which did not seem to belong to it. She had discovered that he could deny himself pleasures he desired, that he was secretly thoughtful for

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others, that he was—also secretly—determined, and that he had his serious moments, however persistently he endeavoured to conceal them. Perhaps the Professor had given her more information concerning him than she could have gained by observation in any comparatively short space of time. "This frivolous fellow," he said to her one night, laying an affectionate hand on Arbuthnot's arm, as they were on the point of leaving the house together, after having spent the evening there, "this frivolous fellow is the friend of my old age. I wonder why."

"So do I," said Arbuthnot. "I assure you that you could not find a reason, Professor."

"There is a kind of reason," returned the Professor, "though it is scarcely worthy of the name. This frivolous fellow is not such a trifler as he seems, and it interests me to see his seriousness continually getting the better of him when he fancies he has got it under and trodden it beneath his feet."

Arbuthnot laughed again—the full, careless laugh which was so excellent an answer to everything.

"He maligns me, this dissector of the emotions," he said. "He desires artfully to

give you the impression that I am not serious by nature. I am, in fact, seriousness itself. It is the wicked world which gets the better of me."

Which statement Mrs. Sylvestre might have chosen to place some reliance in as being a plausible one, if she had not seen the Professor at other times, when he spoke of this friendship of his. It was certainly a warm one, and, then feeling that there must be reason for it, she began to see these reasons for herself, and appreciate something of their significance and value.

The change which finally revealed itself in her manner was so subtle in its character that Arbuthnot himself could not be sure when he had first felt it; sometimes he fancied it had been at one time, and again at another, and even now it was not easy for him to explain to himself why he knew that they were better friends.

But there was an incident in their acquaintance which he always remembered as a land-mark.

This incident occurred at the close of the season. One bright moonlight night, having a fancy for making a call upon Bertha, who was VOL. III.

not well enough to go out for several days, Mrs. Sylvestre made the visit on foot, accompanied by her maid. The night was so pleasant that they were walking rather slowly under the trees near Lafayette Park, when their attention was attracted by the sound of suppressed sobbing, which came from one of two figures standing in the shadow, near the railings, a few yards ahead of them. The figures were those of a man and a young woman, and the instant she saw the man, who was well-dressed, Agnes Sylvestre felt her heart leap in her side, for she recognised Laurence Arbuthnot. quite near the woman, and seemed trying to console or control her, while she-less a woman than a girl, and revealing in her childish face and figure all that is most pathetic in youth and helplessness-wept and wrung her hands.

"You must be quiet and have more confidence in-" Agnes heard Arbuthnot say; and then, prompted by some desperate desire to hear no more and to avoid being seen, she spoke to her maid.

"Marie," she said, "we will cross the street." But, when they had crossed the street, some chill in the night air seemed to have struck her, and she began to shiver so that Marie looked at her in some affright.

"Madame is cold," she said. "Is it possible that madame has a chill?"

"I am afraid so," her mistress replied, turning about hurriedly. "I will not make the visit. I will return home."

A few minutes later, Mrs. Merriam, who had settled her small figure comfortably in a large arm-chair by the fire, and had prepared to spend the rest of the evening with a new book, looked up from its first chapter in amazement as her niece entered the room.

"Agnes!" she exclaimed, "what has happened? Are you ill? Why, child! you are as white as a lily."

It was true that Mrs. Sylvestre's fair face had lost all trace of its always delicate colour, and that her hands trembled as she drew off her gloves.

"I began—suddenly—to feel so cold," she said, "that I thought it better to come back."

Mrs. Merriam rose anxiously.

"I hope it is not malaria, after all," she said.
"I shall begin to think the place is as bad as Rome. You must have some hot wine."

"Send it up stairs, if you please," said Agnes.

"I am going to my room: there is a large fire there."

And she went out as suddenly as she had appeared.

"I really believe she does not wish me to follow her," said Mrs. Merriam to herself. "Is this malaria?" And having pondered upon this question, while she gave orders that the wine should be heated, she returned to her book after doing it, with the decision, "No it is not."

Agnes drank very little of the wine when it was brought. She sat by the fire in her room and did not regain her colour. The cold which had struck her had struck very deep; she felt as if she could not soon get warm again. Her eyes had a stern look as they rested on the fire; her delicate mouth was set into a curve of hopeless, bitter scorn; the quiet which settled upon her was even a little terrible, in some mysterious way. She heard a ring at the door-bell, but did not move, though she knew a caller was allowed to go to Mrs. Merriam. She was not in the mood to see callers; she could see nobody; she wished to be left alone. But, in about half an hour, a servant came to her room

"Mr. Arbuthnot is down stairs, and Mrs. Merriam wishes to know if Mrs. Sylvestre is better."

Mrs. Sylvestre hesitated a second before she replied.

"Say to Mrs. Merriam that I am better, and will join her."

She was as white as ever when she rose, even a shade whiter, and she felt like marble, though she no longer trembled.

"I will go down," she said, mechanically. "Yes, I will go down.".

What she meant to say or do when she entered the room below, perhaps she had not clearly decided herself. As she came in, and Arbuthnot rose to receive her, he felt a startled thrill of apprehension and surprise.

"I am afraid you are not really better," he said. "Perhaps I should not have asked to be allowed to see you."

He had suddenly an absurd feeling that there was such distance between them—that something inexplicable had set them so far apart that it might almost be necessary to raise his voice to make her hear him.

"Thank you," she replied. "I was not really ill," and passed the chair he offered

her, as if not seeing it, taking another one which placed the table between them.

Arbuthnot gave her a steady glance and sat down himself. Resolving in a moment's time that something incomprehensible had happened, he gathered himself together with another resolve which did equal credit to his intelligence and presence of mind. This resolution was that he would not permit himself to be overborne by the mystery until he understood what it was, and that he would understand what it was before he left the house, if such a thing were possible. He had the coolness and courage to refuse to be misunderstood.

"I should not have hoped to see you," he said, in a quiet, level tone, still watching her, "but Mrs. Merriam was so kind as to think you would be interested in something I came to tell you."

"Of course she will be interested," said Mrs. Merriam. "Such a story would interest any woman. Tell it to her at once."

"I wish you would do it for me," said Arbuthnot, with a rather reluctant accession of gravity. "It is really out of my line. You will make it touching—women see things so differently. I'll confess to you that I only see the miserable, sordid, forlorn side of it, and don't know what to do with the pathos. When the poor little wretch cried at me and wrung her hands, I had not the remotest idea what I ought to say to stop her—and heaven knows I wanted her to stop. I could only make the mistaken remark that she must have confidence in me, and I would do my best for the childish, irresponsible pair of them—though why they should have confidence in me I can only say 'heaven knows,' again."

After she had seated herself, Agnes had lightly rested her head upon her hand as if to shade her eyes somewhat. When Arbuthnot began to speak, she had stirred, dropping her hand a moment later and leaning forward; at this juncture she rose from her chair, and came forward with a swift, unconscious-looking movement. She stood up before Arbuthnot and spoke to him.

"I wish to hear the story very much," she said, with a thrill of appeal in her sweet voice. "I wish you to tell it to me. You will tell it as—as we should hear it."

Nothing but a prolonged and severe course of training could have enabled Arbuthnot to preserve at this moment his outward com-

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posure. Indeed he was by no means sure that it was preserved intact; he was afraid that his blonde countenance flushed a little, and that his eyes were not entirely steady. He felt it necessary to assume a lightness of demeanour entirely out of keeping with his mental condition.

"I appreciate your confidence in me," he answered, "all the more because I feel my entire inadequacy to the situation. The person who could tell it as you ought to hear it, is the young woman who waylaid me with tears near Lafayette Park about half an hour ago. She is a very young woman, in fact, an infant, who is legally united in marriage to another infant, who has been in the employ of the Government, in the building I adorn with my presence. Why they felt it incumbent upon themselves to marry on an income of seventy-five dollars a month they do not explain in any manner at all satisfactory to the worldly mind. They did so, however, and lived together for several months in what is described as a state of bliss. They had two small rooms, and the female infant wore calico gowns, and did her own ridiculous, sordid, inferior housework, and rejoiced in the society

of the male infant when a grateful nation released him from his daily labours."

Agnes quietly slipped into the chair he had first placed for her. She did it with a gentle yielding movement, to which he was so little blind that he paused a second and looked at the fire, and made a point of resuming his story with a lighter air than before.

"They could not have been either happy or content under such absurd circumstances," he said, "but they thought they were. used to see the male infant beaming over his labours in a manner to infuriate you. His wife used to come down to bear him from the office to the two rooms in a sort of triumphal pro-She had round eyes and dimples in her cheeks, and a little round head with curls. Her husband, whose tastes were simple, regarded her as a beauty, and was given to confiding his opinion of her to his fellow-There was no objection to him but his youth and innocence. I am told he worked with undue enthusiasm in the hope of keeping his position, or even getting a better one, and had guileless, frenzied dreams of being able in the course of the ensuing century to purchase a small house 'on time.'

I don't ask you to believe me when I tell you that the pair actually had such a house in their imbecile young minds, and had saved out of their starvation income a few dollars towards making their first payment on it. didn't believe the man who told me, and I assure you he is a far more reliable fellow than I am."

He paused a second more. Was it possible that he found himself obliged to do so?

"They said," he added, "they said they 'wanted a home.'"

He heard a soft little sound at his side a soft, emotional little sound. It came from Mrs. Sylvestre. She sat with her slender hands clasped upon her knee, and as the little sound broke from her lips, she clasped them more closely.

"Ah!" she said. "Ah! poor children!" Arbuthnot went on.

"Ought I to blush to admit that I watched these two young candidates for Saint Elizabeth, and the poor house, with interest? They assisted me to beguile away some weary hours in speculation. I wondered when they would begin to be tired of each other; when they would find out their mistake, and loathe

the paltriness of their surroundings; when the female infant would discover that her dimples might have been better invested, and that calico gowns were unworthy of her charms? I do blush to confess that I scraped an acquaintance with the male infant, with a view to drawing forth his views on matrimony and life as a whole. He had been wont to smoke inferior cigarettes in the days of his gay and untrammelled bachelorhood, but had given up the luxurious habit on engaging himself to the object of his affections. He remarked to me that 'a man ought to have principle enough to deny himself things when he had something to deny himself for, and when a man had a wife and a home he had something to deny himself for, and if he was a man he'd do it.' He was very ingenuous, and very fond of enlarging confidingly upon domestic topics and virtues and joys, and being encouraged, could be relied upon so to enlarge -always innocently and with inoffensive youthful enthusiasm—until deftly headed off by the soulless worldling. I gave him cigars, and an order of attention, which seemed to please him. He remarked to his fellow-clerks that I was a man who had 'principles' and

'feelings,' consequently I felt grateful to him. He had great confidence in 'principles.' The bold thought had presented itself to him that if we were more governed by 'principles,' as a nation, we should thrive better, and there would be less difficulty in steering the ship of state; but he advanced the opinion hesitantly, as fearing injustice to his country in the suggestion."

"You are making him very attractive," said Mrs. Merriam. "There is something touching about it all."

"He was attractive to me," returned Laurence, "and he was touching at times. He was crude, and by no means brilliant, but there wasn't an evil spot in him, and his beliefs were of a strength and magnitude to bring a blush to the cheek of the most hardened. He recalled the dreams of youth, and even in his most unintelligently ardent moments appealed to one. Taking all these things into consideration, you will probably see that it was likely to be something of a blow to him to find himself suddenly thrown out upon the world without any resource whatever,"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Sylvestre, earnestly. "Surely you are not going to tell us——?"

"That he lost his office," said Laurence.
"Yes. Thrown out. Reason—place wanted for some one else. I shouldn't call it a good reason myself. I find others who would not call it a good reason; but what are you going to do?"

"What did he do?" asked Agnes.

"He came into my room one day," answered Laurence, "just as I was leaving it. He was white, and his lips trembled in a boyish way that struck me at the moment as being rather awful. He looked as if he had been knocked down. He said to me, 'Mr. Arbuthnot, I've lost my place,' and then, after staring at me a few seconds, he added, 'Mr. Arbuthnot, what would you do?'"

"It is very cruel," said Agnes. "It is very hard."

"It is as cruel as Death!" said Arbuthnot.

"It is as hard as Life! That such a thing is possible—that the bread and home and hopes of any honest human creature should be used as the small change of power above him, and trafficked with to sustain that power and fix it in its place to make the most of itself and its greed, is the burning shame and burden which is slung around our necks, and will

keep us from standing with heads erect until we are lightened of it."

He discovered that he was in earnest, and recklessly allowed himself to continue in earnest until he had said his say. He knew the self-indulgence was indiscreet, and felt the indiscretion all the more when he ended and found himself confronted by Mrs. Sylvestre's eyes. They were fixed upon him, and wore an expression he had never had the pleasure of seeing in them before. It was an expression full of charming emotion, and the colour was coming and going in her cheek.

"Go on," she said, rather tremulously, "if you please."

"I did not go on," he replied. "I regret to say I couldn't. I was unable to tell him what I should do."

"But you tried to comfort him?" said Agnes. "I am sure you did what you could."

"It was very little," said Laurence. "I let him talk, and led him on a little to—well to talking about his wife. It seemed the only thing for the moment. I found it possible to recall to his mind one or two things he had told me of her—probably doing it in

the most inefficient manner—but he appeared to appreciate the effort. The idea presented itself to me that it would be well to brace him up and give him a less deathly look before he went home to her, as she was not very well, and a childish creature at best. I probably encouraged him unduly, but I had an absurd sense of being somehow responsible for the preservation of the two rooms and the peace of mind of the female infant, and the truth is, I have felt it ever since, and so has she."

He was extremely conscious of Mrs. Sylvestre's soft and earnest eyes.

"That was the reason she called to see me to-night, and finding I had just left the house, followed me. Tom is ill—his name is Tom Bosworth. It is nearly two months since he lost his place, and he has walked himself to a shadow in making efforts to gain another. He has written letters and presented letters; he has stood outside doors until he was faint with hunger; he has interviewed members of congress, senators, heads of departments, officials great and small. He has hoped and longed and waited, and taken buffetings meekly. He is not a strong fellow, and it has broken him up. He has had several

chills, and is thin and nervous and excitable. Kitty—his wife's name is Kitty—is pale and thin too. She has lost her dimples, and her eyes look like a sad little owl's, and always have tears in them which she manages to keep from falling so long as Tom is within sight. To-night she wanted to ask me if I knew any ladies who would give her sewing. She thinks she might sew until Tom gets a place again."

"I will give her sewing," exclaimed Agnes. "I can do something for them if they will let me! Oh, I am very glad that I can."

"I felt sure you would be," said Arbuthnot.
"I thought of you at once, and wished you could see her as I saw her."

She answered him a little hurriedly, and he wondered why her voice faltered.

"I will see her to-morrow," she said, "if you will give me the address."

"I have naturally wondered if it was possible that anything could be done for the husband," he said. "If you could use your influence in any way—you see how inevitably we come to that—it always becomes a question of influence—our very

charities are of the nature of schemes; it is in the air we breathe."

"I will do what I can," she replied. "I will do anything—anything you think would be best."

Mrs. Merriam checked herself on the very verge of looking up, but though by an effort she confined herself to apparently giving all her attention to her knitting-needles for a few moments, she lost the effect of neither words nor voice. "No," she made mental comment, "it was not malaria."

Arbuthnot had never passed such an evening in the house as this one proved to be, and he had spent many agreeable evenings there. To-night there was a difference. Some barrier had melted or suddenly broken down. Sylvestre was more beautiful than he had It thrilled his very soul to ever seen her. hear her speak to him and to look at her. While still entirely ignorant of the cause of her displeasure against him, he knew that it was removed; that in some mysterious way she had recognised the injustice of it, and was impelled by a sweet, generous penitence to endeavour to make atonement. There was something almost like the humility of appeal

in her voice and eyes. She did not leave him to Mrs. Merriam, but talked to him herself. When he went away, after he had left her at the parlour door, she lingered a moment upon the threshold, then crossed it, and followed him into the hall. They had been speaking of the Bosworths, and he fancied she was going to ask some last question. But she did not; she simply paused a short distance from where he stood and looked at him. He had often observed it in her, that she possessed the inestimable gift of being able to stand still and remain silent with perfect grace, in such a manner that speech and movement seemed unnecessary; but he felt that she had something to say now and scarcely knew how best to say it, and it occurred to him that he might, perhaps, help her.

"You are very much better than you were when I came in," he said.

She put out her hand with a gentle, almost grateful gesture.

- "Yes, I am much better," she said. "I was not well then—or happy. I thought that I had met with a misfortune; but it was a mistake."
 - "I am glad that it was a mistake," he

answered. "I hope such things will always prove so."

And a quick flush rising to his face, he bent and touched with his lips the slim, white fingers lying upon his palm.

The flush had not died away when he found himself in the street; he felt its glow with a sense of anger and impatience.

"I might have known better than to do such a thing," he said. "I did know better. I am a fool yet, it seems—a fool!"

But, notwithstanding this, the evening was a landmark. From that time forward Mrs. Merriam looked upon their intimacy with renewed interest. She found Agnes very attractive in the new attitude she assumed towards their acquaintance. She indulged no longer in her old habit of depreciating him delicately when she spoke of him-which was rarely; her tone suggested to her relative that she was desirous of atoning to herself for her past coldness and injustice. was a delicious hint of this in her manner towards him, quiet as it was; once or twice Mrs. Merriam had seen her defer to him, and display a disposition to adapt herself to his opinions, which caused a smile to flicker

across her discreet countenance. Their mutual interest in their protégés was a tie between 🛎 them, and developed a degree of intimacy which had never before existed. The day after hearing their story, Agnes had paid the young people a visit. The two rooms in the third story of a boarding-house presented their modest household goods to her very touchingly. The very bridal newness of the cheap furniture struck her as being pathetic, and the unsophisticated adornments in the form of chromos and bright tidies—the last Kitty's own handiwork-expressed to her mind their innocent sentiment. Kitty looked new herself, as she sat sewing in a little rocking-chair drawn near to the sofa on which Tom lay, flushed and bright-eyed, after his chill; but there were premonitory signs of wear on her pretty childish face. rose, evidently terribly nervous and very . much frightened at the prospect of receiving her visitor, when Mrs. Sylvestre entered, and though reassured somewhat by the mention of Arbuthnot's name, glanced timorously at Tom in appeal for assistance from him. Tom gave it. His ingenuous mind knew very little fear. He tried to stagger to his feet, smiling, but was

so dizzy that he made an ignominious failure, and sat down again at Agnes's earnest request.

"Thank you," he said. "I will if you don't mind. It's one of my bad days, and the fever makes my head go round. Don't look so down-hearted, Kitty. Mrs. Sylvestre knows chills don't count for much. You see "—he said to Agnes, with an effort at buoyancy of manner—"they knock a man over a little, and it frightens her."

Agnes took a seat beside the little rockingchair, and there was something in the very gentleness of her movements which somewhat calmed Kitty's tremor.

"It is very natural that she should feel anxious, even when there is only slight cause," Mrs. Sylvestre said, in her low, sweet voice. "Of course, the cause is slight in your case. It is only necessary that you should be a little careful."

"That's all," responded Tom. "And I'm going to be careful. A man with a wife and home can't be too careful. He's got others to think of besides himself."

But, notwithstanding his cheerfulness and his bright eyes, he was plainly weaker than he realised, and was rather glad to lie down again, though he did it apologetically.

"Mr. Arbuthnot came in this morning and told us you were coming," he said. "You know him pretty well, I suppose."

"I see him rather frequently," answered Agnes; "but perhaps I do not know him very well."

"Ah!" said Tom. "You've got to know him very well to find out what sort of fellow he is; you've got to know him as I know him—as we know him. Eh! Kitty?"

"Yes," responded Kitty, a little startled by finding herself referred to, "only you know him best, Tom. You see, you're a man—"

"Yes," said Tom, with innocent complacency, "of course it's easier for men to understand each other. You see—" to Agnes, though with a fond glance at Kitty—"Kitty was a little afraid of him. She's shy, and hasn't seen much of the world, and he's such a swell, in a quiet way, and when she used to come to the office for me, and caught a glimpse of him, she thought he was always making fun of everything."

- "I thought he looked as if he was," put in Kitty. "And his voice sounded that way when he spoke to you, Tom. I even used to think, sometimes, that he was laughing a little at you—and I didn't like it."
- "Bless you!" responded Tom, "he wasn't thinking of such a thing. He's got too much principle to make friends with a fellow and then laugh at him. What I've always liked in him was his principle."
- "I think there are a great many things to like in him," said Mrs. Sylvestre.
- "There's everything to like in him," said Tom, "though, you see, I didn't find that out at first. The truth is, I thought he was rather too much of a swell for his means. I've told him so since we've been more intimate, and he said that I was not mistaken, that he was too much of a swell for his means, but that was the fault of his means, and the Government ought to attend to it, as a sacred duty. You see the trouble is he hasn't a family. If he was married, and had some one to take care of, it would be different. And what a fellow he would be to take care of a woman! I told him that, too, once, and he threw back his head and laughed; but he didn't laugh

long. It seemed to me that it set him off thinking, he was so still after it."

"He'd be very good to his wife," said Kitty, timidly. "He's very kind to me."

"Yes," Tom went on, rejoicing in himself, "he sees things that men don't see, generally. Think of his noticing that you weren't wrapped up enough that cold day we met him, and going into his place to get a shawl from his landlady, and making me put it on!"

"And don't you remember," said Kitty, "the day he made me so ashamed, because he said my basket was too heavy, and would carry it all the way home for me?"

Tom laughed triumphantly.

"He would have carried a stove-pipe, just the same way," he said, "and have looked just as cool about it. You'd no need to be ashamed; he wasn't. And it's not only that: see how he asks me about you, and cheers me up, and helps me along, by talking to me about you when I'm knocked over, and says that you mustn't be troubled, and I must bear up, because I've got you to take care of, and that when two people are as fond of each other as we are, they've got something to hold on to that will help them

to let the world go by and endure anything that don't part them."

"He said that to me, too, Tom," said Kitty, the ready tears starting to her eyes. said it last night when I met him in the street and couldn't help crying because you were ill. He said I must bear up for youand he was so nice that I forgot to be afraid of him at all. When I began to cry it frightened me, because I thought he wouldn't like it, and that made it so much worse that I couldn't stop, and he just put my hand on his arm, and took me into Lafavette Park, where there was a seat in a dark corner under the trees. And he made me sit down and said, 'Don't be afraid to cry. It will do you good, and you had better do it before me than before Tom. Cry as much as you like. I will walk away a few steps until you are better.' And he did, and I cried until I was quiet, and then he came back to me, and told me about Mrs. Sylvestre."

"He's got feelings," said Tom, a trifle brokenly, "he's got feelings and—and principles. It makes a man think better of the world, even when he's discouraged, and it's dealt hard with him."

Mrs. Sylvestre looked out of the nearest window; there was a very feminine tremor in her throat, and something seemed to be melting before her eyes; she was full of the pain of regret and repentance; there rose in her mind a picture of herself as she had sat before the fire in her silent room; she could not endure the memory of her own bitter contempt and scorn; she wished she might do something to make up for that half hour; she wished that it were possible that she might drive down to the Treasury and present herself at a certain door, and appeal for pardon with downcast eyes and broken voice. was glad to remember the light touch upon her hand, even though it had been so very light, and he had left her after it so hurriedly.

"I am glad he spoke to you of me," she "I—I am grateful to him. I think I can help you. I hope you will let me. I know a great many people, and I might ask for their influence. I will do anythinganything Mr. Arbuthnot thinks best."

Tom gave her a warmly grateful glance, his susceptible heart greatly moved by the sweetness and tremor of her voice. She was just the woman, it seemed to him, to be the

friend of such a man as his hero; only a woman as beautiful, as sympathetic, and having that delicate, undefinable air of belonging to the great enchanted world, in which he confidingly believed Arbuthnot figured with unrivalled effect, could be worthy of him. It was characteristic of his simple nature that he should admire immensely his friend's social popularity and acquirements, and dwell upon their unbounded splendour with affectionate reverence.

"He's a society fellow," he had said to Kitty in his first description of him. regular society fellow! Always dressed just so, you know-sort of quiet style, but exactly up to the mark. He knows everybody and gets invited everywhere, though he makes believe he only gets taken in because he can dance and wait in the supper room. He's out somewhere every night, bless you, and spends half his salary on kid gloves and flowers. says people ought to supply them to fellows like him, as they supply gloves and hat-bands at English funerals. He doesn't save anything; you know, he can't, and he knows it's a mistake, but you see when a fellow is what he is, it's not easy to break off with everything. These society people want such fellows, and they will have them."

It had been this liberal description of his exalted position and elegant habits, which had caused Kitty to stand greatly in awe of him, at the outset, and to feel that her bearing would never stand the test of criticism by so proficient an expert, and she had trembled before him accordingly and felt herself unworthy of his condescending notice, until having, on one or two occasions, seen something in his manner which did not exactly coincide with her conception of him as a luxurious and haughty worldling, she had gained a little courage. She had been greatly alarmed at the sight of Mrs. Sylvestre, feeling vaguely that she, also, was a part of these mysterious splendours; but after she heard the soft break in the tone in which she said, with such gentle simplicity, "I will do anything-anything-Mr. Arbuthnot thinks best," she felt timorous no more, and allowed herself to be led into telling her little story, with a girlish pathos which would have melted Agnes Sylvestre's heart, if it had not been melted already. It might, perhaps, better have been called Tom's story than her Own, as it was all about Tom—Tom's struggles, Tom's disappointments, Tom's hopes, which all seemed prostrated; the little house Tom had been thinking of buying and making nice for her; the member of Congress who had snubbed Tom; the Senator who had been rough with him; the cold he had taken; the chills and fevers which had resulted; the pain in his side. "We have used all our money," she ended, with a touching little catch of her breath—"if it had not been for Mr. Arbuthnot—Mr. Arbuthnot—"

"Yes," said Tom, wofully, "he'll have to go without a pair or so of gloves this month and smoke fewer cigars; and I couldn't have believed that there was a man living I could have borne to take money from, but, somehow, he made it seem almost as if he owed it me."

When Mrs. Sylvestre went away she left hope and comfort behind her. Kitty followed her into the passage with new light in her eyes.

"If I have the sewing," she said, clasping her hands, "it will be such a load off Tom's mind to know that we have a little money, that he will get better. And he knows I like

sewing, so, perhaps, he will not mind it much. I am so thankful to you! If Tonwill only get well," she exclaimed in a broker whisper, "if Tom will only get well!" And suddenly, in response to some look on Agnes' face, and a quick, caresing gesture, she leaned forward and was folded in her arms.

It is very natural to most women to resort to the simple feminine device of tears, but it was not often Mrs. Sylvestre so indulged herself, and there were tears in her eyes and in her voice, too, as she held the gentle, childish creature to her breast. She had felt a great deal, during the last twenty-four hours, and the momentary display of emotion was a relief to her. "He will get better," she said, with almost maternal tenderness, "and you must help him by taking care of yourself and giving him no cause for anxiety. You must let me help to take care of you. We will do all we can—" and there was something akin to fresh relief to her in the mere use of the little word "we."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE RIVER.

Mrs. Merriam saw faint traces of tears in Mrs. Sylvestre's eyes when she returned from her call on the Bosworths, and speculated, with some wonder as to what her exact mental condition was, but asked very few questions, feeling that, upon the whole, she would prefer to hear the version of the story given to Mr. Arbuthnot when he called. He did so the following evening, and, having seen the Bosworths in the interval, had comments of his own to make.

- "It was very good in you to call so soon," he said to Agnes.
- "I wished very much to call," she replied. "I could not have waited longer."
- . "You left a transcendent impression," said Arbuthnot. "Tom was very enthusiastic, and

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Kitty feels that all their troubles are things of the past."

"They talked to me a great deal of you," said Agnes. "I felt after hearing them that I had not known you very well—and wished that I had known you better."

She said it with a sweet gravity which he found strangely disturbing; but his reply did not commit him to any special feeling.

"They will prove fatal to me, I see," he said. "Don't allow them to prejudice you against me in that manner."

"I wish," she said, "that my friends might be prejudiced against me in the same way."

Then he revealed a touch of earnestness in spite of himself. They had both been standing upon the hearth, and he took a step towards her.

"For pity's sake," he said, "don't overrate me! Women are always too generous. Don't you see you will find me out, and then it will be worse for me than before."

She stood in one of her perfect, motionless attitudes, and looked down at the rug.

"I wish to find you out," she said, slowly. "I have done you injustice."

And then she turned away and walked across the room to a table where there were some books, and when she returned she brought one of them with her and began to speak of it. He always felt afterwards that the memory of this "injustice," as she called it, was constantly before her, and he would have been more than human if he had not frequently wondered what it was. He could not help feeling that it had taken a definite form, and that she had been betrayed into it on the evening he had first spoken to her of the Bosworths, and that somehow his story had saved him in her eyes. But he naturally forbore to ask questions or even touch upon the subject, and thanked the gods for the good which befell him as a result of the evil he had escaped. And yet, as the time passed by, and he went oftener to the house and found keener pleasure in each visit, he had his seasons of fearing that it was not all going to be gain for him; when he faced the truth, indeed, he knew that it was not all gain, and yet he was not stoic enough to turn his back and fly.

"It will cost!" he said to himself. "It will cost! But——."

And then he would set his lips together and be silent for an hour or so, and those of his acquaintance who demanded constant vivacity from him, began to wonder among themselves if he was quite the fellow he had been. the friendship was pleasant during the season, it was pleasanter when the gaieties ceased and the spring set in, with warmer air and sunshine, and leaves and blossoms in the parks. There was a softness in the atmosphere not conducive to sternness of purpose and self-denial. As he walked to and from his office, he found his thoughts wandering in paths he felt were dangerous, and once unexpectedly meeting Mrs. Sylvestre, when so indulging himself, he started and gained such sudden colour that she flushed also, and, having stopped to speak to him, forgot what she had intended to say, and was a little angry, both with herself and him, when a confusing pause followed their greeting.

Their interest in the Bosworths was a tie between them which gave them much in common. Agnes went to see them often, and took charge of Kitty, watching over and caring for her in a tender, half-maternal fashion, Arbuthnot took private pleasure in contemplating. He liked to hear Kitty talk about her, and, indeed, had on more than one occasion led her with some dexterity into doing so. It was through Kitty, at last, that his mystery was solved for him.

This happened in the spring. There had been several warm days, one so unusually warm, at last, that in the evening Mrs. Sylvestre accepted his invitation to spend an hour or so on the river with him. On their way there they stopped to leave a basket of fruit for Tom, whose condition was far from being what they had hoped for, and while making their call Kitty made a remark which caused Arbuthnot's pulse to accelerate its pace somewhat.

- "When you saw me crying in the street that night—" she began, addressing Agnes. Arbuthnot turned upon her quickly.
 - "What night?" he asked.
- "The night you took me into Lafayette Square," said Kitty; "Mrs. Sylvestre saw me, though I did not know it until yesterday. She was going to call on Mrs. Amory, and——"

Arbuthnot looked at Agnes; he could not have forborne, whatever the look had cost

him. The colour came into her cheek and died out.

"Did you?" he demanded.

"Yes," she answered, and rose and walked to the window, and stood there perfectly still.

Arbuthnot did not hear the remainder of Kitty's remarks. He replied to them blindly, and as soon as possible left his chair and went to the window himself.

"If you are ready, perhaps we had better go," he said.

They went out of the room and down the stairs in silence. He wanted to give himself time to collect his thoughts, and get the upper hand of a frantic feeling of passionate anger which had taken possession of him. If he had spoken he might have said something savage, which he would have repented afterwards in sackcloth and ashes. His sense of the injustice he had suffered, however momentary, at the hands of this woman whose opinion he cared for, was natural, masculine, and fierce. He saw everything in a flash, and for a moment or so forgot all else in his bitterness of spirit. But his usual coolness came to the rescue when this moment was past, and he began to treat himself scornfully as was his

There was no reason why she custom. should not think ill of him, circumstances evidently having been against him, he said to himself; she knew nothing specially good of him; she had all grounds for regarding him as a creature with neither soul nor purpose nor particularly fixed principles, and with no other object in life than the gratification of his fancies; why should she believe in him against a rather black array in the form of facts. was not agreeable, but why blame her? would not blame her or indulge in any such personal folly. Then he glanced at her and saw that the colour had not come back to her face. When he roused himself to utter a civil commonplace remark or so, there was the sound of fatigue in her voice when she answered him, and it was very low. She did not seem inclined to talk, and he had the consideration to leave her to herself as much as possible until they reached the boat-house. He arranged her cushions and wraps in the boat with care and dexterity, and, when he took the oars, felt that he had himself pretty well in hand. The river was very quiet, and the last glow of sunset red was slowly changing to twilight purple on the water; a sickle-shaped moon hung in the sky, and somewhere farther up the shore a night bird was uttering brief, plaintive cries. Agnes sat at the end of the boat, with her face a little turned away, as if she were listening to the sound. Arbuthnot wondered if she was, and thought again that she looked tired and a little pathetic. If he had known all her thoughts he would have felt the pathos in her eyes a thousand times more keenly.

She had a white hyacinth in her hand, whose odour seemed to reach him more powerfully at each stroke of the oars, and at last she turned and spoke, looking down at the flower.

- "The saddest things that are left to one of a bitter experience," she said, in a low voice, "are the knowledge and distrust that come of it."
- "They are very natural results," he replied, briefly.
- "Oh, they are very hard!" she exclaimed.

 "They are very hard! They leave a stain on all one's life, and—and it can never be wiped away. Sometimes I think it is impossible to be generous—to be kind—to trust at all——"

Her voice broke; she put her hands up before her face, and he saw her tremble.

"One may have been innocent," she said, "and have believed—and thought no evil—but after one has been so stained——"

He stopped rowing.

"There is no stain," he said. "Don't call it one."

"It must be one," she said, "when one sees evil—and is suspicious and on the alert to discover wrong. But it brings suffering, as if it were a punishment. I have suffered."

He paused a second and answered, looking backward over his shoulder.

"So did I—for a moment," he said. "But it is over now. Don't think of me."

"I must think of you," she said. "How could I help it?"

She turned a little more towards him and leaned forward, the most exquisite appeal in her delicate face, the most exquisite pathos in her unsteady voice.

"If I ask you to forgive me," she said, "you will only say that I was forgiven before I asked. I know that. I wish I could say something else. I wish—I wish I knew what to do."

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He looked up the river and down, and then suddenly at her. The set, miserable expression of his face startled her and caused her to make an involuntary movement.

"Don't do anything—don't say anything!" he said. "I can bear it better."

And he bent himself to his oars and rowed furiously.

She drew back and turned her face aside. Abrupt as the words were, there was no rebuff in them; but there was something else which silenced her effectually. She was glad of the faint light, and her heart quickened, which last demonstration did not please her. She had been calm too long to enjoy any new feeling of excitement; she had liked the calmness, and had desired beyond all things that it should remain undisturbed.

"There is one prayer I pray every morning," she had once said to Bertha, earnestly. "It is that the day may bring nothing to change the tone of my life."

She had felt a little ripple in the current ever since the eventful night, and had regretted it sorely, and now, just for the moment, it was something stronger. So she was very still as she sat with averted face, and the hour spent upon the water was a singularly silent one.

When they returned home they found Colonel Tredennis with Mrs. Merriam, but just on the point of leaving her.

- "I am going to see Amory," he said. "I have heard some news he will consider bad. The Westoria affair has been laid aside, and will not be acted upon this session, if at all. It is said that Blundel heard something he did not like, and interfered."
- "And you think Mr. Amory will be very much disappointed?" said Agnes.
 - "I am afraid so," answered Tredennis.
- "And yet," said Agnes, "it isn't easy to see why it should be of so much importance to him."
- "He has become interested in it," said Mrs. Merriam. "That is the expression, isn't it? It is my opinion that it would be better for him if he were less so. I have seen that kind of thing before. It is like being bitten by a tarantula."

She was not favourably inclined toward Richard. His sparkling moods did not exhilarate her, and she had her private theories concerning his character. Tredennis she was very fond of; few of his moods escaped her bright eyes; few of the changes in him were lost upon her. When he went away this evening, she spoke of him to Agnes and Arbuthnot—

"If that splendid fellow does not improve," she said, "he will begin to grow old in his prime. He is lean and gaunt; his eyes are dreary; he is beginning to have lines on his forehead and about his mouth. He is enduring something. I should be glad to be told what it is."

"Whatever he endured," said Agnes, "he would not tell people. But I think 'enduring' is a very good word."

"How long have you known him?" Mrs. Merriam asked of Arbuthnot.

"Since the evening after his arrival in Washington, on his return from the West," was the reply.

"Was he like this then?" rather sharply. Arbuthnot reflected.

"I met him at a reception," he said, "and he was not Washingtonian in his manner. My impression was, that he would not enjoy our society, and that he would finally despise us; but he looked less fagged then than he does now. Perhaps he begins to long for his daily Pi-ute. There are chasms which an effete civilisation does not fill."

"You guess more than you choose to tell," was Mrs. Merriam's inward thought. Aloud, she said—

"He is the finest human being it has been my pleasure to meet. He is the natural man. If I were a girl again, I think I should make a hero of him, and be unhappy for his sake."

"It would be easy to make a hero of him," said Agnes.

"Very!" responded Arbuthnot. "Unavoidable, in fact." And he laid upon the table the bit of hyacinth he had picked up in the boat, and brought home with him. "If I carry it away," was his private thought, "I shall fall into the habit of sitting and weakening my mind over it. It is weak enough already." But he knew, at the same time, that Colonel Tredennis had done something towards assisting him to form the resolution. "A trivial masculine vanity," he thought, "not unfrequently strengthens one's position."

In the meantime, Tredennis went to Amory. He found him in the room, which was, in its every part, so strong a reminder of Bertha. It wore a desolate look, and Amory had evidently been walking up and down it, pushing chairs and footstools aside carelessly when he found them in his way. He had thrown himself, at last, into Bertha's own special easy-chair, and leaned back in it, with his hands thrown out over its padded arms. He had plainly not slept well the night before, and his dress had a careless and dishevelled look, very marked in its contrast with the customary artistic finish of his attire.

He sprang up when he saw Tredennis, and began to speak at once.

- "I say!" he exclaimed, "this is terrible!"
- "You have been disappointed," said Tredennis.
- "I have been rui——" he checked himself, "disappointed isn't the word," he ended. "The whole thing has been laid aside—laid aside—think of it!—as if it were a mere nothing; an application for a two-penny-half-penny pension! Great God! what do the fellows think they are dealing with!"
- "Whom do you think is to blame?" said the colonel stolidly.
 - "Blundel, by Jove, Blundel, that fool and

clown!" and he flung himself about the room mumbling his rage and irritation.

"It is not the first time such a thing has happened," said Tredennis, "and it won't be the last. If you continue to interest yourself in such matters, you will find that out, as others have done before you. Take my advice, and give it up from this hour."

Amory wheeled round upon him.

"Give it up!" he cried, "I can't give it up, man! It is only laid aside for the time being. Heaven and earth shall be moved next year—heaven and earth! the thing won't fail—it can't fail—a thing like that; a thing I have risked my very soul on!"

He dashed his hand through his tumbled hair and threw himself into the chair again, quite out of breath.

"Ah, confound it!" he exclaimed. "I am too excitable! I am losing my hold on myself!"

Tredennis rose from his seat, feeling some movement necessary. He stood and looked down at the floor. As he gazed up at him, Amory entered a fretful mental protest against his size and his air of being able to control himself. He was plainly deep in thought

even when he spoke, for his eyes did not leave the floor.

- "I suppose," he said, "this is really no business of mine. I wish it was."
 - "What do you mean?" said Amory.

Tredennis looked up.

"If it were my business, I would know more about it," he said; "I would know what you mean, and how deep you have gone into this—this accursed scheme."

The last two words had a sudden ring of intensity in their sound, which affected Amory tremendously. He sprang up again and began to pace the floor.

- "Nothing ever promised so well," he said, "and it will turn out all right in the end it must! It is the delay that drives one wild. It will be all right next season—when Bertha is here."
- "What has she to do with it?" demanded Tredennis.
- "Nothing very much," said Amory, restively, but she is effective."
- "Do you mean that you are going to set her to lobbying?"
- "Why should you call it that? I am not going to set her at anything. She has a good

effect, that is all. Planefield swears that if she had stayed at home and taken Blundel in hand he would not have failed us."

Tredennis looked at him stupefied. He could get no grasp upon him. He wondered if a heavy mental blow would affect him. He tried it in despair.

"Do you know," he said slowly, "what people are beginning to say about Planefield?"

"They are always saying something of Planefield. He is the kind of man who is always spoken of."

"Then," said Tredennis, "there is all the more reason why his name should not be connected with that of an innocent woman."

"What woman has been mentioned in connection with him?"

"It has been said more than once, that he is in love with—your wife, and that his infatuation is used to advance your interests."

Richard stopped in his walk.

"Then it is a confoundedly stupid business," he said, angrily. "If she hears it she will never speak to him again. Perhaps she has heard it—perhaps that was why she insisted on going away. I thought there was something wrong at the time."

"May I ask," said Tredennis, "how it strikes you?"

"Me!" exclaimed Richard; "as the most awkward piece of business in the world, and as likely to do me more harm than anything else could."

He made a graceful, rapid gesture of impatience.

"Everything goes against me!" he said. "She never liked him from the first, and if she has heard this she will never be civil to him again, or to any of the rest of them. And, of course, she is an influence, in a measure; what clever woman is not? And why should she not use her influence in one way as well as another. If she were a clergyman's wife she would work hard enough to gain favours. It is only a trifle that she should make an effort to be agreeable to men who will be pleased by her civility. She would do it if there were nothing to be gained. Where are you going? What is the matter?" for Tredennis had walked to the table and taken his hat.

"I am going into the air," he answered; "I am afraid I cannot be of any use to you to-night. My mind is not very clear just now. I must have time to think."

"You look pale," said Amory, staring at him. "You look ghastly. You have not been up to the mark for months. I have seen that. Washington does not agree with you."

"That is it," was Tredennis's response. "Washington does not agree with me."

And he carried his hat and his pale and haggard countenance out into the night, and left Richard gazing after him, feverish, fretted, thwarted in his desire to pour forth his grievances and defend himself, and also filled with baffled amazement at his sudden departure.

CHAPTER IV.

A DINNER PARTY.

MRS. AMORY did not receive on New Year's day. The season had well set in before she arrived in Washington. One morning in January, Mrs. Sylvestre, sitting alone, reading, caught sight of the little coupé as it drew up before the carriage step, and laying aside her book, reached the parlour door in time to meet Bertha as she entered it. She took both her hands and drew her towards the fire, still holding them.

"Why did I not know you had returned?" she said. "When did you arrive?"

"Last night," Bertha answered. "You see I come to you early."

It was a cold day, and she was muffled in velvet and furs. She sat down, loosened her wrap and let it slip backwards, and as its sumptuous fulness left her figure it revealed it slender to fragility, and showed that the outline of her cheek had lost all its roundness. She smiled faintly, meeting Agnes's anxious eyes.

"Don't look at me," she said. "I am not pretty. I have been ill. You heard I was not well in Newport? It was a sort of low fever, and I am not entirely well yet. Malaria, you know, is always troublesome. But you are very well?"

- "Yes, I am well," Agnes replied.
- "And you begin to like Washington again?"
- "I began last winter."
- "How did you enjoy the spring? You were here until the end of June."
 - " It was lovely."
- "And now you are here once more, and how pretty everything about you is!" Bertha said, glancing round the room. "And you are ready to be happy all winter until June again. Do you know, you look happy? Not excitably happy, but gently, calmly happy, as if the present were enough for you."
- "It is," said Agnes. "I don't think I want any future."
 - "It would be as well to abolish it if one

could," Bertha answered, "but it comes—it comes!"

She sat and looked at the fire a few seconds under the soft shadow of her lashes, and then spoke again.

- "As for me," she said, "I am going to give dinner parties to Senator Planefield's friends."
 - "Bertha!" exclaimed Agnes.
- "Yes," said Bertha, nodding gently. "It appears somehow that Richard belongs to Senator Planefield, and as I belong to Richard, why, you see——?"

She ended with a dramatic little gesture, and looked at Agnes once more.

"It took me some time to understand it," she said. "I am not quite sure that I understand it quite thoroughly even now. It is a little puzzling, or, perhaps, I am dull of comprehension. At all events, Richard has talked to me a great deal. It is plainly my duty to be agreeable and hospitable to the people he wishes to please and bring in contact with each other."

"And those people?" asked Agnes.

"They are political men, they are members of committees, members of the House, members of the Senate—and their only claim to existence in our eyes is that they are either in favour of or opposed to a certain bill not indirectly connected with the welfare of the owners of the Westoria lands."

- "Bertha," said Agnes, quickly, "you are not yourself."
- "Thank you," was the response, "that is always satisfactory, but the compliment would be more definite if you told me whom I happened to be. But I can tell you that I am that glittering being, the female lobbyist. used to wonder last winter if I was not on the verge of it, but now I know. I wonder if they all begin as innocently as I did, and find the descent—isn't it a descent ?—as easy and natural. I feel queer, but not exactly disreputable. It is merely a matter of being a dutiful wife and smiling upon one set of men instead of another. Still, I am slightly uncertain as to just how disreputable I am. I was beginning to be quite reconciled to my atmosphere until I saw Colonel Tredennis, and I confess he unsettled my mind and embarrassed me a little in my decision."
 - "You have seen him already?"
- "Accidentally, yes. He did not know I had returned, and came to see Richard. He is quite intimate with Richard now. He

entered the parlour and found me there. I do not think he was glad to see me. I left him very soon."

She drew off her glove, and smoothed it out upon her knee, with a thin and fragile little hand, upon which the rings hung loosely. Agnes bent forward and involuntarily laid her own hand upon it."

"Dear," she said.

Bertha hurriedly lifted her eyes.

"What I wished to say," she said, "was that the week after next we give a little dinner to Senator Blundel, and I wanted to be sure I might count on you. If you are there—and Colonel Tredennis—you will give it an unprofessional aspect, which is what we want. But, perhaps, you will refuse to come?"

"Bertha," said Mrs. Sylvestre, "I will be with you at any time—at all times—you wish for or need me."

"Yes," said Bertha, reflecting upon her a moment, "I think you would."

She got up and kissed her lightly and without effusion, and then Agnes rose, too, and they stood together.

"You were always good," Bertha said. "I think life has made you better instead of

worse. It is not so always. Things are so different—everything seems to depend upon circumstances. What is good in me would be far enough from your standards to be called wickedness."

She paused abruptly, and Agnes felt that she did so to place a check upon herself: she had seen her do it before. When she spoke again it was in an entirely different tone, and the remaining half-hour of her visit was spent in the discussion of every-day subjects. Agnes listened, and replied to her with a sense of actual anguish. She could have borne better to have seen her less selfcontrolled: or she fancied so, at least. summer had made an alteration in her, which it was almost impossible to describe. Every moment revealed some new, sad change in her, and yet she sat and talked commonand was bright and witty and places. epigrammatic until the last.

"When we get our bill through," she said, with a little smile, just before her departure, "I am to go abroad for a year—for two, for three, if I wish. I think that is the bribe which has been offered me. One must always be bribed, you know."

As she stood at the window watching the carriage drive away, Agnes was conscious of a depression which was very hard to bear. The brightness of her own atmosphere seemed to have become heavy—the sun hid itself behind the drifting, wintry, clouds—she glanced around her room with a sense of dreariness. Something carried her back to the memories which were the one burden of her present life.

"Such grief cannot enter a room and not leave its shadow behind it," she said. And she put her hand against the window-side, and leaned her brow upon it sadly. curious, she thought, the moment after, that the mere sight of a familiar figure should bring such a sense of comfort with it as did the sight of the one she saw approaching. was that of Laurence Arbuthnot, who came with a business communication from Mrs. Merriam, having been enabled, by chance, to leave his work for an hour. He held a roll of music in one hand and a bunch of violets in the other, and when he entered, the room was accompanied by the fresh fragrance of the latter offering.

Agnes made a swift involuntary movement towards him.

"Ah!" she said, "I could scarcely believe that it was you."

He detected the emotion in her manner and tone at once.

- "Something has disturbed you," he said.
 "What is it?"
- "I have seen Bertha," she answered, and the words had a sound of appeal in them, which she herself no more realised or understood than she comprehended the impulse which impelled her to speak.
- "She has been here! She looks so ill—so worn. Everything is so sad! I——"

She stopped and stood looking at him.

- "Must I go away?" he said, quietly. "Perhaps you would prefer to be alone. I understand what you mean, I think."
- "Oh, no!" she said, impulsively, putting out her hand. "Don't go. I am unhappy. It was—it was a relief to see you."

And when she sank on the sofa, he took a seat near her and laid the violets on her lap, and there was a faint flush on his face.

The little dinner, which was the first occasion of Senator Blundel's introduction to the Amory establishment, was a decided success.

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"We will make it a success," Bertha had said. "It must be one." And there was a ring in her voice which was a great relief to her husband.

"It will be one," he said. "There is no fear of your failing when you begin in this way." And his spirits rose to such an extent that he became genial and fascinating once more, and almost forgot his late trials and uncertainties. He had always felt great confidence in Bertha.

On the afternoon of the eventful day Bertha did not go out. She spent the hours between luncheon and the time for dressing, with her children. Once as he passed the open door of the nursery, Richard saw her sitting upon the carpet, building a house of cards, while Jack and Janey and Meg sat about her enchanted. A braid of her hair had become loosened and hung over her shoulder; her cheeks were flushed by the fire; she looked almost like a child herself, with her air of serious absorbed interest in the frail structure growing beneath her hands.

"Won't that tire you?" Richard asked. She glanced up with a smile.

"No," she said, "it will rest me."

He heard her singing to them afterwards, and later, when she went to her dressingroom, he heard the pretty lullaby die away gradually as she moved through the corridor.

When she appeared again, she was dressed for dinner and came in buttoning her glove, and at the sight of her he uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"What a perfect dress!" he said. "What is the idea? There must be one."

She paused and turned slowly round so that he might obtain the full effect.

- "You should detect it," she replied. "It is meant to convey one."
 - "It has a kind of dove-like look," he said. She faced him again.
- "That is it," she said, serenely. "In the true artist spirit, I have attired myself with a view to expressing the perfect candour and simplicity of my nature. Should you find it possible to fear or suspect me of ulterior motives—if you were a Senator, for instance?"

"Ah, come now!" said Richard, not quite so easily, "that is nonsense! You have no ulterior motives."

She opened her plumy, dove-coloured fan and came nearer him.

"There is nothing meretricious about me," she said. "I am softly clad in dove colour: a few clusters of pansies adorn me; I am covered from throat to wrists: I have not about me. Could the effect a jewel better?"

"No, it could not," he replied, but suddenly he felt a trifle uncomfortable again. and wondered what was hidden behind the inscrutable little gaze she afterwards fixed upon the fire.

But when Blundel appeared, which he did rather early, he felt relieved again. Nothing could have been prettier than her greeting of him, or more perfect in its attainment of the object of setting him at his ease. must be confessed that he was not entirely at his ease when he entered, his experience not having been of a nature to develop in him any latent love for general society. had fought too hard a fight to leave him much time to know women well, and his superficial knowledge of them made him a trifle awkward, as it occasionally renders other men astonishingly bold. In a party of men, all his gifts

displayed themselves; in the presence of women he was afraid that less substantial fellows had the advantage of him—men who could not tell half so good a story or make half so exhilarating a joke. As to this special dinner he had not been particularly anxious to count himself among the guests, and was not very certain as to how Planefield had beguiled him into accepting the invitation.

But ten minutes after he had entered the room he began to feel mollified. Outside, the night was wet and unpleasant, and not calculated to improve a man's temper; the parlours glowing with fire-light and twinkling wax candles were a vivid and agreeable contrast to the sloppy rawness. The slender, dove-coloured figure, with its soft, trailing draperies, assumed more definitely pleasant proportions, and in his vague, inexperienced, middle-aged fashion he felt the effect of it. She had a nice way, this little woman, he decided; no nonsense or airs and graces about her; an easy manner, a gay little laugh. He did not remember exactly afterwards what it was she said which first wakened him up, but he found himself laughing and greatly amused, and when he made a witticism, he felt he had reason to be proud of, the gay little peal of laughter which broke forth in response had the most amazingly exhilarating effect upon him, and set him upon his feet for the evening. Women seldom got all the flavour of his jokes. He had an idea that some of them were a little afraid of them and of him, too. The genuine mirth in Bertha's unstudied laughter was like wine to him, and was better than the guffaws of a dozen men, because it had a finer and a novel flavour. After the joke and the laugh the ice was melted, and he knew that he was in the humour to distinguish himself.

Planefield discovered this the moment he saw him, and glanced at Richard, who was brilliant with good spirits.

"She's begun well," he said, when he had an opportunity to speak to him. "I never saw him in a better humour. She's pleased him somehow. Women don't touch him usually."

"She will end better," said Richard. "He pleases her."

He did not displease her, at all events. She saw the force and humour of his stalwart jokes, and was impressed by the shrewd business-like good nature which betrayed nothing. When he began to enjoy himself she liked the genuineness of his enjoyment all the more because it was a personal matter with him, and he seemed to revel in it.

"He enjoys himself," was her mental comment, "really himself, not exactly the rest of us, except as we stimulate him, and make him say good things."

Among the chief of her gifts had always been counted the power of stimulating people, and making them say their best things, and she made the most of this power now. She listened with her brightest look, she uttered her little exclamations of pleasure and interest at exactly the right moment, and the gay ring of her spontaneous sounding laugh was perfection. Miss Varien, who was one of her guests, sat and regarded her with untempered admiration.

"Your wife," she said to Amory, in an undertone, "is simply incomparable. It is not necessary to tell you that, of course, but it strikes me with fresh force this evening. She really seems to enjoy things. That air of gay, candid delight is irresistible. It makes her seem to that man like a charming little

girl—a harmless, bright, sympathetic little girl. How he likes her!"

When she went in to dinner with him, and he sat by her side, he liked her still more. He had never been in better spirits in his life; he had never said so many things worth remembering; he had never heard such sparkling and vivacious talk as went on round this particular table. It never paused or lagged. There was Amory, all alight and stirred by every conversational ripple which passed him; there was Miss Varien, scintillating and casting off showers of sparks in the prettiest and most careless fashion: there was Laurence Arbuthnot, doing his share without any apparent effort, and appreciating his neighbours to the full; there was Mrs. Sylvestre, her beautiful eyes making speech almost superfluous, and Mrs. Merriam, occasionally casting into the pool some neatly weighted pebble, which sent its circles to the shore; and in the midst of the coruscations. Blundel found himself, somehow, doing quite his portion of the illumination. Really these people and their dinner-party pleased him wonderfully well, and he was far from sorry that he had come, and far from sure that he should not come again if he were asked. He was shrewd enough, too, to see how much the success of everything depended upon his own little companion at the head of the table, and, respecting success beyond all things, after the manner of his kind, he liked her all the better for it. There was something about her which, as Miss Varien had said, made him feel that she was like a bright, sympathetic little girl, and engendered a feeling of fatherly patronage which was entirely comfortable. But though she rather led others to talk than talked herself, he noticed that she said a sharp thing now and then, and he liked that, too, and was greatly amused by it. He liked women to be sharp, if they were not keen enough to interfere with masculine preroga-There was only one person in the company he did not find exhilarating, and that was a large, brown-faced fellow, who sat next to Mrs. Merriam, and said less than might have been expected of him, though when he spoke his remarks were well enough in their way. Blundel mentioned him afterwards to Bertha when they returned to the parlour.

"That Colonel, who is he?" he asked vol. III.

her, "I didn't catch his name exactly. Handsome fellow, but he'd be handsomer if——"

"It is the part of wisdom to stop you," said Bertha, "and tell you that he is a sort of cousin of mine, and his perfections are such as I regard with awe. His name is Colonel Tredennis, and you have read of him in the newspapers."

"What!" he exclaimed, turning his sharp little eyes upon Tredennis, "the Indian man-I'm glad you told me that. I want to talk to him." And an opportunity being given him, he proceeded to do so with much animation, ruffling his stiff hair up at intervals in his interest, his little eyes twinkling like those of some alert animal.

He left the house late and in the best of humours. He had forgotten for the time being all questions of bills and subsidies. Nothing had occurred to remind him of such subjects. Their very existence seemed a trifle problematical, or, rather, perhaps, it seemed desirable that it should be so.

"I feel," he said to Planefield, as he was shrugging himself into his overcoat, "as if I had rather missed it by not coming here before."

"You were asked," answered Planefield.

"So I was," he replied, attacking the top button of the overcoat. "Well, the next time I am asked I suppose I shall come."

Then he gave his attention to the rest of the buttons.

"A man in public life ought to see all sides of his public," he said, having disposed of the last one. "Said some good things, didn't they? The little woman isn't without a mind of her own either. When is it she receives?"

"Thursdays," said Planefield.

"Ah, Thursdays."

And then they went out in company.

Her guests having all departed, Bertha remained for a few minutes in the parlour. Arbuthnot and Tredennis went out last, and as the door door closed upon them she looked at Richard.

"Well?" she said.

"Well!" exclaimed Richard. "It could not have been better!"

"Couldn't it?" she said, looking down a little meditatively.

"No," he responded, with excellent good cheer, "and you see how simple it was, and—

and how unnecessary it is to exaggerate it and call it by unpleasant names. What we want is merely to come in contact with these people, and show them how perfectly harmless we are, and that when the time comes they may favour us without injury to themselves or any one else. That's it in a nutshell."

"We always say 'us,' don't we?" said Bertha, "as if we were part-proprietors of the Westoria lands ourselves. It's a little confusing, don't you think so?"

She paused and looked up with one of her sudden smiles.

"Still I don't feel exactly sure that I have been—but no, I am not to call it lobbying, am I? What must I call it. It really ought to have a name."

"Don't call it anything," said Richard, faintly conscious of his dubiousness again,

"Why, what a good idea!" she answered.
"What a good way of getting round a difficulty—not to give it a name? It almost obliterates it, doesn't it? It is an actual inspiration. We won't call it anything. There is so much in a name—too much, on the whole, really. But—without giving it a

name — I have behaved pretty well and advanced our—your—whose interests?"

"Everybody's," he replied, with an effort at lightness. "Mine particularly. I own that my view of the matter is a purely selfish one. There is a career before me, you know, if all goes well."

He detected at once the expression of gentleness which softened her eyes as she watched him.

"You always wanted a career, didn't you?" she said.

"It isn't pleasant," he said, "for a man to know that he is not a success."

"If I can give you your career," she said, "you shall have it, Richard. It is a simpler thing than I thought, after all." And she went up stairs to her room, stopping on the way to spend a few minutes in the nursery.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE Professor sat in his favourite chair by his library fire, an open volume on his knee and his after-dinner glass of wine still unfinished on the table near him. He had dined a couple of hours ago with Mr. Arbuthnot, who had entertained him very agreeably, and had not long since left him to present himself upon some social scene.

It was of his departed guest that he was thinking as he pondered, and of certain plans he had on hand for his ultimate welfare, and his thoughts so deeply occupied him that he did not hear the sound of the door-bell, which rang as he sat, nor notice any other sound until the door of the room opened and some one entered. He raised his head and looked round then, uttering a slight ejaculation of surprise.

"Why, Bertha!" he said. "My dear! This is unexpected."

He paused and gave her one of his gently curious looks. She had thrown her cloak off as she came near him, and something in her appearance attracted his attention.

"My dear," he said, slowly, "you look tonight as you did years ago. I am reminded of a time when Philip first came to us. I wonder why?"

There was a low seat near his side, and she came and took it.

"It is the dress," she said. "I was looking over some things I had laid aside and found it. I put it on for old acquaintance sake. I have never worn it since then. Perhaps I hoped it would make me feel like a girl again."

Her tone was very quiet, her whole manner was quiet, the dress was simplicity itself. A little lace kerchief was knotted about her throat.

"That is a very feminine idea," remarked the Professor, seeming to give it careful attention. "Peculiarly feminine, I should say. And—does it, my dear?"

"Not quite," she answered. "A little.

When I first put it on and stood before the glass, I forgot a good many things for a few moments, and then, suddenly, I heard the children's voices in the nursery, and Richard came in and Bertha Herrick was gone. You know I was Bertha Herrick when I wore this — Bertha Herrick, thinking of her first party."

"Yes, my dear," he responded, "I—I remember."

There were a few moments of silence, in which he looked abstractedly thoughtful, but presently he bestirred himself.

"By the by," he said, "that reminds me. Didn't I understand that there was a great party somewhere to-night? Mr. Arbuthnot left me to go to it, I think. I thought there was a reason for my surprise at seeing you. That was it. Surely you should have been at the great party instead of here."

"Well," she replied, "I suppose I should but for some curious accident or other—I don't know what the accident is or how it happened—I should have had an invitation—of course if it had chanced to reach me, but something has occurred to prevent its doing so, I suppose. Such things happen, you

know. To all intents and purposes I have not been invited, so I could not go. And I am very glad. I would rather be here."

"I would rather have you here," he returned, "if such seclusion pleases you. But I can hardly imagine, my dear, how the party—"

She put her hand on his caressingly.

"It cannot be an entire success," she said; "it won't in my absence—but misfortunes befall even the magnificent and prosperous, and the party must console itself. I like to be here."

He glanced at her grey dress again.

"Bertha Herrick would have preferred the party," he remarked.

"Bertha Amory is wiser," she said. "We will be quiet together—and happy."

They were very quiet. The thought occurred to the Professor several times during the evening. She kept her seat near him, and talked to him, speaking, he noticed, principally of her children and of the past; the time she had spent at home, before her marriage, seemed to be present in her mind.

"I wonder," she said once, thoughtfully, "what sort of girl I was? I can only

remember that I was such a happy girl. Do you remember that I was a specially self-indulgent or frivolous one? But I am afraid you would not tell me, if you did."

"My dear," he said in response, "you were a natural, simple, joyous creature, and a great pleasure to us."

She gave his hand a little pressure.

"I can remember that you were always good to me," she said. "I used to think you were a little curious about me, and wondered what I would do in the future. Now it is my turn to wonder if I am at all what you thought I would be?"

He did not reply at once, and then spoke slowly.

"There seemed so many possibilities," he said. "Yes; I thought it possible that you might be—what you are."

It was, as he said this, that there returned to his mind the thought which had occupied it before her entrance. He had been thinking then of something he wished to tell her, before she heard it from other quarters, and which he felt he could tell her at no more fitting time than when they were alone. It was something relating to Laurence Arbuth-

not, and, curiously enough, she paved the way for it by mentioning him herself.

- "Did you say Laurence was here to-night?" she asked.
- "Yes," he replied, "he was so good as to dine with me."
- "He would say that you were so good as to invite him," she said. "He is very fond of coming here."

"I should miss him very much," he returned, "if he should go away."

She looked up quickly, attracted by his manner.

- "But there is no likelihood of his going away," she said.
- "I think," he answered, "that there may be, and I wish to speak to you about it."

He refrained from looking at her—he even delicately withdrew his hand so that if hers should lose its steadiness he might be unconscious of it.

- "Go away!" she exclaimed, "from Washington? Laurence! Why should you think so? I cannot imagine such a thing!"
- "He does not imagine it himself yet," he replied. "I am going to suggest it to him."

Her hand was still upon his knee and he felt a start.

"You are!" she said; "why and how? Do you think he will go? I do not believe he will."

"I am not sure that he will," he answered, "but I hope so; and what I mean is, that I think it may be possible to send him abroad."

She withdrew her hand from his knee.

"He won't go," she said; "I am sure of it."

He went on to explain himself, still not looking at her.

"He is wasting his abilities," he said; "he is wasting his youth; the position he is in is absurdly insignificant; it occurred to me that if I used, with right effect, the little influence I possess, there might finally be obtained for him some position abroad which would be at least something better, and might possibly open a way for him in the future. I spoke to the Secretary of State about it, and he was very kind, and appeared interested. It seems very possible, even probable, that my hopes will be realised."

For a few seconds she sat still; then she said, abstractedly:

"It would be very strange to be obliged to live our lives without Laurence; they would not be the same lives at all. Still, I suppose it would be best for him; but it would be hard to live without Laurence. I don't like to think of it."

In spite of his intention not to do so, he found himself turning to look at her. There had been surprise in her voice, and now there was sadness, but there was no agitation, no uncontrollable emotion.

"Can it be," he thought, "that she is getting over it? What does it mean?"

She turned and met his eyes.

- "But whether it is for the best or not," she said, "I don't believe he will go."
- "My dear," he said, "you speak as if there was a reason."
- "I think there is a reason," she answered,
 "and it is a strong one."
 - "What is it?" he asked.
- "There is some one he is beginning to be fond of," she replied; "that is the reason."

He kept his eyes fixed upon her.

- "Some one he is beginning to be fond of?"
 he repeated.
 - "I don't know how it will end," she said

"I am sometimes afraid it can only end sadly; but there is some one he would find it hard to leave, I am sure."

The Professor gradually rose in his chair until he was sitting upright.

"I wish," he said, "that you would tell me who it is."

"I do not think he would mind your knowing," she answered. "It seems strange you have not seen. It is Agnes Sylvestre."

The Professor sank back in his chair, and looked at the bed of coals in the grate.

"Agnes Sylvestre!" he exclaimed; "Agnes Sylvestre!"

"Yes," she said; "and in one sense it is very hard on him that it should be Agnes Sylvestre. After all these years, when he has steadily kept himself free from all love affairs, and been so sure that nothing could tempt him, it cannot be easy for him to know that he loves some one who has everything he has not—all the things he feels he never will have. He is very proud and very unrelenting in his statement of his own circumstances, and he won't try to glaze them over when he compares them with hers. He is too poor, she is too rich—even if she loved him."

- "Even!" said the Professor. "Is it your opinion that she does not?"
- "I do not know," she answered. "It has seemed to me more probable that—that she liked Colonel Tredennis."
- "I thought so," said the Professor. "I must confess that I thought so—though, perhaps, that may have been because my feeling for him is so strong, and I have seen that he——"
- "That he was fond of her?" Bertha put in as he paused to reflect.
- "I thought so," he said again. "I thought I was sure of it. He sees her often; he thinks of her frequently, it is plain; he speaks of her to me; he sees every charm and grace in her. I have never heard him speak of any other woman so."
- "It would be a very suitable marriage," said Bertha; "I have felt that from the first. There is no one more beautiful than Agnes—no one sweeter—no one more fit——"

She pushed her seat back from the hearth and rose from it.

"The fire is too warm," she said. "I have been sitting before it too long."

There was some ice-water upon a side-table, and she went to it and poured out a glass, and

drank it slowly. Then she took a seat by the centre-table and spoke again, as she idly turned over the leaves of a magazine without looking at it.

"When first Agnes came here," she said,
"I thought of it. I remember that when
I presented Philip to her, I watched to
see if she impressed him as she does most
people."

"She did," said the Professor. "I remember his speaking of it afterwards, and saying what a charm hers was, and that her beauty must touch a man's best nature."

"That was very good," said Bertha, faintly smiling. "And it was very like him. And since then," she added, "you say he has spoken of her often in the same way and as he speaks of no one else?"

"Again and again," answered the Professor.
"The truth is, my dear, I am fond of speaking of her myself, and have occasionally led him in that direction. I have wished for him what you have wished."

"And we have both of us," she said, half sadly, "been unkind to poor Laurence."

She closed the magazine.

"Perhaps he will go, after all," she said.

"He may see that it is best. He may be glad to go before the year is ended."

She left her book and her chair.

"I think I must go now," she said; "I am a little tired."

He thought that she looked so, and the shadow which for a moment had half lifted itself fell again.

"No," he thought, "she has not outlived it, and this is more bitter for her than the rest. It is only natural that it should be more bitter."

When he got up to bid her good-night, she put a hand upon either of his shoulders and kissed him.

"I am glad I was not invited to the grand party, dear," she said; "I have liked this better. It has been far better for me."

There were only a few yards of space between her father's house and her own, and in a few seconds she had ascended the steps and entered the door. As she did so she heard Richard in the parlour speaking rapidly and vehemently, and, entering, found that he was talking to Colonel Tredennis. The Colonel was standing at one end of the room, as if he had turned round with an abrupt movement; Richard was lying full length upon a sofa,

looking uneasy and excited, his cushions tumbled about him. They ceased speaking the moment they saw her, and there was an odd pause, noticing which, she came forward and spoke with an effort at appearing at ease.

"Do you know that this seems like contention," she said. "Are you quarrelling with Richard, Colonel Tredennis, or is he quarrelling with you? And why are you not at the reception?"

"We are quarrelling with each other violently," said Richard, with a half laugh. "You arrived barely in time to prevent our coming to blows. And why are you not at the reception?"

Bertha turned to Tredennis, who for a moment seemed to have been struck dumb by the sight of her. The memories the slender gray figure had brought to the Professor rushed back upon him with a force that staggered him. It was as if the ghost of something dead had suddenly appeared before him and he was compelled to hold himself as if he did not see it. The little gray gown, the carelessly knotted kerchief—it seemed so terrible to see them and to be forced to realise through them how changed she was. He had

never seen her look so ill and fragile as she did when she turned to him and spoke in her quiet, unemotional voice.

"This is the result of political machination," she said. "He has forgotten that we were not invited. Being absorbed in affairs of state, he no longer keeps an account of the doings of the giddy throng."

Then he recovered himself.

- "You were not invited!" he said. "Isn't there some mistake about that? I thought——"
- "Your impression naturally was that we were the foundation-stone of all social occasions," she responded; "but this time they have dispensed with us. We were not invited."
- "Say that you did not receive your invitation," put in Richard, restlessly. "The other way of stating it is nonsense."

She paused an instant, as if his manner suggested a new thought to her.

- "I wonder," she said slowly, "if there could be a reason—but no, I think that is impossible. It must have been an accident. But you," she added to Tredennis, "have not told me why you are not with the rest of the world."
- "I came away early," he answered. "I was there for an hour."

He was glad that she did not sit down—he wished that she would go away—it would be better if she would go away and leave them to themselves again.

- "It was very gay, I suppose," she said. "And you saw Agnes?"
 - "I have just left her," he replied.
- "You ought to have stayed," she said, turning away with a smile. "It would have been better than quarrelling with Richard."

And she went out of the room and left them together, as he had told himself it would be best she should.

He did not look at her as she ascended the staircase; he stood with his back to the open door, and did not speak until he heard her go into the room above them. Then he addressed Richard.

- "Do you understand me now?" he said, sternly. "This is the beginning!"
- "The beginning!" exclaimed Richard, with a half frantic gesture. "If this is the beginning—and things go wrong—imagine what the end will be!"

The room Bertha had entered was the nursery. In the room opening out of it, Jack and Janey slept in their small beds. Upon

the hearth-rug lay a broken toy. She bent to pick it up, and afterwards stood a moment holding it in her hand without seeing it; she still held it as she sank into a chair which was near her.

"I will stay here a while," she said. "This is the best place for me."

For a few minutes she sat quite still, something like a stupor had settled upon her; she was thinking in a blind, disconnected way of Agnes Sylvestre. Everything would be right at last. Agnes would be happy. This was what she had wished—what she had intended from the first—when she had brought them together. It was she who had brought them together. And this was the plan she had had in her mind when she had done it; and she had known what it would cost her even then. And then there came back to her the memory of the moment when she had turned away from them to pour out Laurence's coffee with hands she could not hold still, and whose tremor he saw and understood. Poor Laurence! he must suffer too! Poor Laurence!

She looked down suddenly at the broken toy in her hand.

"I will stay here more," she said. "It is

better here. There is nothing else! And if I were a good woman I should want nothing else. If I had only not spoken to Agnes—that was the mistake; if she will only forget it! Some one should be happy—some one! It will be Agnes."

She got up and went into the children's room, and knelt down by Janey's bed, laying the toy on the coverlet. She put her arms round the child and spoke her name.

"Janey!" she said. "Janey!"

The child stirred, opened her eyes, and put an arm sleepily about her neck.

"I said my prayers," she murmured. "God bless mamma and papa—and everybody. God bless Uncle Philip."

Bertha laid her face near her upon the pillow.

"Yes," she said, brokenly. "You belong to me and I belong to you. I will stay here, Janey—with you!"

CHAPTER VI.

A NOBLE FRIEND.

Sometimes during the winter, when she glanced around her parlour on the evenings of her receptions, Bertha felt as if she were in a waking dream. So many people of whom she seemed to know nothing were gathered about her; she saw strange faces on every side; a new element had appeared which was gradually crowding out the old, and she herself felt that she was almost a stranger in it. Day by day, and by almost imperceptible degrees at first, various mysterious duties had devolved upon She had found herself calling at one house because the head of it was a member of a committee, at another because its mistress was a person whose influence over her husband it would be well to consider; she had issued an invitation here because the recipients must

be pleased, another there because somebody was to be biased in the right direction. persons thus to be pleased and biased were by no means invariably interesting. There was a stalwart Westerner or so, who made themselves almost too readily at home; an occasional rigid New Englander, who suspected a lack of purpose in the atmosphere; and a stray Southerner, who exhibited a tendency towards a large and rather exhaustive gallantry. rule, too, Bertha was obliged to admit that she found the men more easily entertained than the women, who were most of them new to their surroundings, and privately determined to do themselves credit and not be imposed upon by appearances; and when this was not the case were either timorously overpowered by a sense of their inadequacy to the situation, or calmly intrenched behind a shield of impassive composure more discouraging than all else. It was not always easy to enliven such material: to be always ready with the right thing to say and do; to understand, as by inspiration, the intricacies of every occasion and the requirements of every mental condition; and while Bertha spared no effort, and used her every gift to the best of her ability, the result, even

when comparatively successful, was rather productive of exhaustion, mental and physical.

"They don't care about me," she said to Arbuthnot one night, with a rueful laugh as she looked around her. "And I am always afraid of their privately suspecting that I don't care about them. Sometimes when I look at them, I cannot help being everpowered by a sense of there being a kind of ludicrousness in it all. Do you know, nearly every one of them has a reason for being here, and it is never by any chance connected with my reason for inviting them. I could give you some of the reasons. Shall I? Some of them are feminine reasons and some of them are masculine. That woman at the end of the sofathe thin, eager-looking one — comes because she wishes to accustom herself to society. Her husband is a 'rising man,' and she is in love with him and has a hungry desire to keep pace with him. The woman she is talking to has a husband who wants something Senator Planefield may be induced to give him—and Senator Planefield is on his native heath here. That showy little Southern widow has a large claim against the government, and comes because she sees people she

thinks it best to know. She is wanted because she has a favourite cousin who is given patriotically to opposing all measures not designed to benefit the South. It is rather fantastic when you reflect upon it, isn't it?"

"You know what I think about it without asking," answered Arbuthnot.

"Yes, you have told me," was her response; "but it will be all over before long, and then — Ah! there is Senator Blundel! Do you know, it is always a relief to me when he comes;" and she went towards him with a brighter look than Arbuthnot had seen her wear at any time during the entire evening.

It had taken her some time herself to decide why it was that she liked Blundel and felt at ease with him; in fact, up to the present period she had scarcely done more than decide that she did like him. She had not found his manner become more polished as their acquaintance progressed; he was neither gallant nor accomplished; he was always rather full of himself, in a genuine, masculine way. He was blunt, and by no means tactful; but she had never objected to him from the first, and after a while she had become

conscious of feeling relief, as she had put it to Arbuthnot, when his strong, rather aggressive personality presented itself upon the scene. He was not difficult to entertain, at least. Finding in her the best of listeners, he entertained himself by talking to her, and by making sharp jokes, at which they both laughed with equal appreciation. He knew what to talk about, too, and what subjects to joke on; and, however apparently communicative his mood might be, his opinions were always kept thriftily in hand.

"He seems to talk a good deal," Richard said testily; "but, after all, you don't find out much of what he really thinks."

Bertha had discovered this early in their acquaintance. If the object in making the house attractive to him was that he might be led to commit himself in any way during his visits, that object was scarcely attained. When at last it appeared feasible to discuss the Westoria lands project in his presence, he showed no unwillingness to listen or to ask questions; but, the discussion being at an end, if notes had been compared no one could have said that he had taken either side of the question.

"He's balancing things," Planefield said.
"I told you he would do it. You may trust him not to speak until he has made up his mind which side of the scale the weight is on."

When these discussions were being carried on Bertha had a fancy that he was more interested than he appeared outwardly. Several times she had observed that he asked her questions afterwards which proved that no word had dropped on his ear unheeded, and that he had, for some reason best known to himself, reflected upon all he had heard. But their acquaintance had a side entirely untouched by worldly machinations, and it was this aspect of it which Bertha liked. There was something homely and genuine about it. He paid her no compliments; he even occasionally found fault with her habits. and what he regarded as the unnecessary conventionality of some of her surroundings; but his good-natured egotism never offended A widower without family, and immersed in political business, he knew little of the comforts of home life. He lived in two or three rooms, full of papers, books, and pigeonholes, and took his meals at an hotel. He

found this convenient if not luxurious, and more than convenience it had never yet occurred to him to expect or demand. But he was not too dull to appreciate the good which fell in his way; and after spending an hour with the Amorys on two or three occasions, when he had left the scene of his political labours fagged and out of humour, he began to find pleasure and relief in his unceremonious visits, and to look forward to them. came an evening when Bertha, in looking over some music, came upon a primitive ballad which proved to be among the recollections of his youth, and she aroused him to enthusiasm by singing it. His musical taste was not remarkable for its cultivation; he was strongly in favour of pronounced melody, and was disposed to regard a song as incomplete without a chorus; but he enjoyed himself when his prejudices were pandered to, and Bertha rather respected his courageous if benighted frankness, and his obstinate faith in his obsolete favourites. So she sang "Ben to him, and "The Harp that once through Tara's Halls," and others far less classical and more florid; and while she sang he sat ungracefully but comfortably by the •

fire, his eyes twinkling less watchfully, the rugged lines of his blunt-featured face almost settling into repose, and sometimes when she ended he roused himself with something like a sigh.

"Do you like it?" she would say. "Does it make you forget 'the gentleman from Indiana' and 'the Senator from Connecticut'?"

"I don't want to forget them," he would reply with dogged good humour. "They are not the kind of fellows it is safe to forget, but it makes my recollections of them more agreeable."

But after a while there were times when he was not in the best of humours, and when Bertha had a fancy that he was not entirely at ease or pleased with herself. At such times his visits were brief and unsatisfactory, and she frequently discovered that he regarded her with a restless and perturbed expression, as if he was not quite certain of his own opinions of her.

"He looks at me," she said to Richard, "as if he had moments of suspecting me of something."

"Nonsense!" said Richard. "What could he suspect you of?"

"Of nothing," she answered. "I think that was what we agreed to call it."

But she never failed to shrink when the twinkling eyes rested upon her with the disturbed questioning in their glance, and the consciousness of this shrinking was very bitter to her in secret.

When her guest approached her on the evening before referred to, she detected at once that he was not in a condition of mind altogether unruffled. The glances he cast on those about him were not encouraging, and the few nods of recognition he bestowed were far from cordial; his hair stood on end a trifle more aggressively than usual, and his short, stout body expressed a degree of general dissatisfaction which it was next to impossible to ignore.

Bertha did not attempt to ignore it.

"I will tell you something before you speak to me," she said. "Something has put you out of humour."

He gave her a sharp glance and then looked away over the heads of the crowd.

"There is always enough to put a man out of humour," he said. "What a lot of people you have here to-night! What do they come for?" "I have just been telling Mr. Arbuthnot some of the reasons," she answered. "They are very few of them good ones. You came hoping to recover your spirits."

"I came to look at you," he said.

He was frequently blunt, but there was a bluntness about this speech which surprised her. She answered him with a laugh, however.

"I am always worth looking at," she said.

"And now you have seen me ——?"

He was looking at her by this time, and even more sharply than before. It seemed as if he was bent upon reading in her face the answer to the question he had asked of it before, but he evidently did not find it.

"There's something wrong with you," he said. "I don't know what it is. I don't know what to make of you."

"If you could make anything of me but Bertha Amory," she replied, "you might do a service to society; but that is out of the question; and as to there being something wrong with me, there is something wrong with all of us. There is something wrong with Mr. Arbuthnot, he is not enjoying himself; there is something wrong with Senator Planefield, who has been gloomy all the evening."

- "Planefield," he said. "Ah! yes, there he is! Here pretty often, isn't he?"
- "He is a great friend of Richard's," she replied, with discretion.
- "So I have heard," he returned. And then he gave his attention to Planefield for a few minutes, as if he found him also an object of deep interest. After this inspection, he turned to Bertha again.
- "Well," he said, "I suppose you enjoy all this or you wouldn't do it?"
- "You are not enjoying it," she replied. "It does not exhilarate you as I hoped it would."
- "I'm out of humour," was his answer. "I told you so. I have just heard something I don't like. I dropped in here to stay five minutes and take a look at you and see if——"

He checked himself and rubbed his upright hair impatiently, almost angrily.

- "I'm not sure that you mightn't be enjoying yourself better," he said, "and I should like to know something more of you than I do."
- "If any information I can give you ——" she began.

"Come," he said, with a sudden effort at better humour, "that is the way you talk to We are too good friends for that."

His shrewd eyes fixed themselves on her as if asking the unanswered question again.

"Come!" he said. "I'm a blunt, oldfashioned fogey, but we are good, honest friends -and always have been."

She glanced across the room at Richard, who was talking to a stubborn opposer of the great measure, and making himself delightful beyond description. She wished for the moment that he was not quite so picturesque and animated; then she gathered herself together.

- "I think we have been," she said. "I hope vou will believe so."
- "Well," he answered, "I shouldn't like to believe anything else."

She thought that perhaps he had said more than he originally intended; he changed the subject abruptly, made a few comments upon people near them, asked a few questions, and finally went away, having scarcely spoken to any one but herself.

"Why did he not remain longer?" Richard asked afterwards, when the guests were gone and they were talking the evening over.

"He was not in the mood to meet people," Bertha replied. "He said he had heard something he did not like, and it had put him out of humour. I think it was something about me."

"About you!" Richard exclaimed. "Why, in heaven's name, about you?"

"His manner made me think so," she answered, coldly. "And it would not be at all unnatural. I think we may begin to expect such things."

"Upon my word," said Richard, starting up, "I think that is going rather far. Don't you see"—with righteous indignation—"what an imputation you are casting on me? Do you suppose I would allow you to do anything that—that—"

She raised her eyes and met his with an unwavering glance.

"Certainly not," she said quickly. And his sentence remained unfinished, not because he felt that his point had been admitted, but because, for some mysterious reason, it suddenly became impossible for him to say more.

More than once of late, when he had launched into one of his spasmodic defences:

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of himself, he had found himself checked by this intangible power in her uplifted eyes, and he certainly did not feel his grievances the less for the experiences.

Until during the last few months he had always counted it as one of his wife's chief charms that there was nothing complicated about her, that her methods were as simple and direct as a child's. It had never seemed necessary to explain her. But he had not found this so of late. He had even begun to feel that though there was no outward breach in the tenor of their lives, an almost impalpable barrier had risen between them. expressed no wish she did not endeavour to gratify; her manner towards himself-with the exception of the fleeting moments when he felt the check—was entirely unchanged. The spirit of her gaiety ruled the house, as it had always done; and yet he was not always sure of the exact significance of her jests and laughter. The jests were clever, the laugh had a light ring, but there was a difference which puzzled him, and which—because he recognised in it some vague connection with himself—he tried in his moments of leisure to explain. He had even spoken of it to

Colonel Tredennis on occasions when his mood was confidential.

"She used to be as frank as a child," he said, "and have the lightest way in the world; and I liked it. I am a rather feather-headed fellow myself, perhaps, and it suited me. But it is all gone now. When she laughs I don't feel sure of her, and when she is silent I begin to wonder what she is thinking of."

The thing she thought, the words she said to herself oftenest were: "It will not last very long." She said them over to herself at moments she could not have sustained herself under but for the consolation she found in them. Beyond this time, when what she faced from day to day would be over, she had not yet looked.

"It is a curious thing," she said to Arbuthnot, "but I seem to have ceased even to think of the future. I wonder sometimes if very old people do not feel so—as if there was nothing more to happen."

There was another person who found the events of the present sufficient to exclude for the time being, almost all thought of the future. This person was Colonel Tredennis, who had found his responsibilities increase

upon him also,—not the least of these responsibilities being, it must be confessed, that intimacy with Mr. Richard Amory of which Bertha had spoken.

"He is very intimate with Richard," she had said, and she had every reason for making the comment.

At first it had been the Colonel who had made the advances for reasons of his own, but later it had not been necessary for him to make advances. Having found relief in making his first reluctant half-confidences. Richard had gradually fallen into making When he had been overpowered by secret anxiety and nervous distrust of everything, finding himself alone with the Colonel, and admiring and respecting above all things the self-control he saw in him-a self-control which meant safety and silence under all temptations to betray the faintest shadow of a trust reposed in him-it had been impossible for him to resist the impulse to speak of the trials which beset him; and having once spoken of them, it was again impossible not to go a little further, and say more than he had at first intended. So he had gone on, from one step to another, until there had come a day when the Colonel himself had checked him for an instant, feeling it only the part of honour in the man who was the cooler of the two, and who had nothing to risk or repent.

"Wait a moment," he said. "Remember, that though I have not asked questions so far, I am ready to hear anything you choose to say—but don't tell me what you might wish you had kept back to-morrow."

"The devil take it all," cried Richard. dashing his fist on the table; "I must tell some one, or I shall go mad." Notwithstanding the misery which impelled him, he always told his story in his own way, and gave it a complexion more delicate than a less graceful historian might have been generous enough to bestow. He had been too sanguine and enthusiastic; he had made mistakes; he had been led by the duplicity of a wily world into follies; he had been unfortunate; those more experienced than himself had betrayed the confidence it had been only natural he should repose in them. throughout the labyrinth of the relation he wound his way-a graceful, agile, supple figure, lightly avoiding an obstacle here, dexterously overstepping a barrier there,

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and untouched by any shadow but that of misfortune.

At first he spoke chiefly of the complications which bore heavily upon him; and these complications, arising entirely from the actions of others, committed him to so little that the Colonel listened with apprehension more grave than the open confession of greater blunders would have awakened in him. "He would tell more," he thought, "if there were less to tell."

The grim fancy came to him sometimes as he listened, that it was as if he watched a man circling about the edge of a volcano, drawing nearer and nearer, until at last, in spite of himself, and impelled by some dread necessity, he must plunge headlong in. And so Richard circled about his crater: sometimes drawn nearer by the emotion and excitement of the moment, sometimes withdrawing a trifle through a caution as momentary, but in each of his circlings revealing a little more of the truth. The revelations were principally connected with the Westoria lands scheme. and were such in many instances as the Colonel was not wholly unprepared to hear. He had not looked on during the last year for

nothing; and often when Richard had been in gay good spirits, and had imagined himself telling nothing, his silent companion had heard his pleasantries with forebodings which he could not control. He was not deceived by any appearance of entire frankness, and knew that he had not been told all, until one dark and stormy night, as he sat in his room, Richard was announced, and came in pallid, haggard, beaten by the rain, and at the lowest ebb of depression. He had had a hard and bitter day of it, and it had followed several others quite as hard and bitter; he had been fagging about the Capitol, going the old rounds, using the old arguments, trying new ones, overcoming one obstacle only to find himself confronted with another, feeling that he was losing ground where it was a matter of life and death that he should gain it; spirits and courage deserting him just when he needed them most; and all this being over, he dropped into his office to find awaiting him there, letters containing news which gave the final blow.

He sat down by the table and began his outpourings, graceful, attractive, injured. The Colonel thought him so, as he watched him

and listened, recognising meanwhile the incompleteness of his recital, and making up his mind that the time had come when it was safer that the whole truth should be told. In the hours in which he had pondered upon the subject, he gradually decided that such an occasion would arrive; and here it was.

So, at a certain fitting juncture, just as Richard was lightly skirting a delicate point, Tredennis leaned forward and laid his open hand on the table.

"I think," he said, "you had better tell me the whole story. You have never done it yet. What do you say?"

The boarder on the floor below, who had heard him walking to and fro on the first New Year's night he had spent in Washington and on many a night since, heard his firm, regular tread again during the half hour in which Richard told, in fitful outbursts, what he had not found himself equal to telling before. was not easy to tell it in a very clear and connected manner; it was necessary to interlard it with many explanations and extenuations; and even when these were supplied. there was a baldness about the facts, as they gradually grouped themselves together, which it was not agreeable to contemplate; and Richard felt this himself gallingly.

"I know how it appears to you," he said; "I know how it sounds! That is the maddening side of it—it looks so much worse than it really is! There is not a man living who would accuse me of intentional wrong. Confound it! I seem to have been forced into doing the very things it was least natural to me to do! Bertha herself would say it—she would understand it. She is always just and generous!"

"Yes," said the Colonel. "I should say she had been generous."

"You mean that I have betrayed her generosity!" cried Richard. "That, of course! I expected it."

"You will find," said the Colonel, "that others will say the same thing."

He had heard even more than his worst misgivings had suggested to him, and the shock of it had destroyed something of his self-control. For the time being he was in no lenient mood.

"I know what people will say!" Richard exclaimed. "Do you suppose I have not thought of it a thousand times? I know

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what I should say if I did not know the circumstances. It is the circumstances that make the difference."

"The fact that they are your circumstances, and not another man's," began Tredennis; but there he checked himself. "I beg your pardon," he said, coldly. "I have no right to meet your confidence with blame. It will do no good. If I can give you no help, I might better be silent. There were circumstances which appeared extenuating to you, I suppose."

He was angered by his own anger, as he had often been before. He told himself that he was making the matter a personal cause, as usual; but how could he hear that her very generosity and simplicity had been used against her by the man who should have guarded her interests as his first duty, without burning with sharp and fierce indignation.

- "If I understand you," he said, "your only hope of recovering what you have lost lies in the success of the Westoria scheme?"
- "Yes," answered Amory, with his forehead on his hands, "that is the diabolical truth!"
 - "And you have lost?"
 - "Once I was driven into saying to you that

if the thing should fail it would mean ruin to me. That was the truth too."

The Colonel stood still.

"Ruin to you!" he said. "Ruin to your wife—ruin to your children—serious loss to the old man who——"

"Who trusted me!" Richard finished, gnawing his white lips. "I see it in exactly the same light myself, and it does not make it easier to bear. That is the way a thing looks when it fails. Suppose it had succeeded. It may succeed yet. They trusted me, and, I tell you, I trusted myself."

It was easy to see just what despair would seize him if the worst came to the worst, and how powerless he would be in its clutches. He was like a reed beaten by the wind, even now. A sudden paroxysm of fear fell upon him.

"Great God!" he cried. "It can't fail! What could I say to them—how could I explain it?"

A thousand wild thoughts surged through Tredennis's brain as he heard him. The old sense of helplessness was strong upon him. To his upright strength there seemed no way of judging fairly of, or dealing practically

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with, such dishonour and weakness. standard could be applied to a man who lied agreeably in his very thoughts of himself and He had scarcely made a statehis actions. ment during the last hour which had not contained some airy falsehood. Of whom was it he thought in his momentary anguish? Not of Bertha—not of her children—not of the gentle old scholar who had always been lenient with his faults. It was of bimself he was thinking-of Richard Amory robbed of his refined picturesqueness by mere circumstance, and placed by bad luck at a baleful disadvantage!

For a few minutes there was a silence. Richard sat with his brow upon his hands, his elbows on the table before him. Tredennis paced to and fro, looking downward. At length Richard raised his head. He did so because Tredennis had stopped his walk.

"What is it?" he asked.

Tredennis walked over to him and sat down. He was pale, and wore a set and rigid look, the chief characteristic of which was that it expressed absolutely nothing. His voice was just as hard, and expressed as little when he spoke.

"I have a proposition to make to you," he said; "and I will preface it by the statement that, as a business man, I am perfectly well aware that it is almost madness to make it. I say 'almost.' Let it rest there. I will assume the risks you have run in the Westoria scheme. Invest the money you have charge of in something safer. You say there are chances of success. I will take those chances."

"What!" cried Richard. "What!"

He sat upright, staring. He did not believe the evidence of his senses, but Tredennis went on, without the quiver of a muscle, speaking steadily, almost monotonously.

"I have money," he said, "more than you know, perhaps. I have had recently a legacy, which would of itself make me a comparatively rich man. That I was not dependent upon my pay you knew before. I have no family. I shall not marry. I am fond of your children, of Janey, particularly. I should have provided for her future in any case. You have made a bad investment in these lands; transfer them to me, and invest in something safer."

"And if the bill fails to pass!" exclaimed Richard.

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"If it fails to pass, I shall have the land on my hands; if it passes, I shall have made something by a venture, and Janey will be the richer; but, as it stands, the venture had better be mine than yours. You have lost enough."

Richard gave his hair an excited toss backward, and stared at him as he had done before; a slight, cold moisture broke out on his forehead.

"You mean—" he began, breathlessly.

"Do you remember," said Tredennis, "what I told you of the comments people were beginning to make? They have assumed the form I told you they would. It is best forfor your children that they should be put an end to. If I assume these risks, there will be no further need for you to use-to exert your-He began to look white about the mouth, and through his iron stolidity there was something revealed, before which Richard felt himself quail. "The night that Blundel came in to your wife's reception, and remained so short a time, he had heard a remark upon the influence she was exerting over him, and it had had a bad effect. The remark was made publicly at one of the hotels." He turned a little whiter, and the something all the strength in him had held down at the outset leaped to the surface. "I have no wife to—to use," he said; "if I had, by heavens, I would have spared her!"

He had held himself in hand and been silent a long time, but he could not do it now.

"She is the mother of your children," he cried, clenching his great hand. "And women are beginning to avoid her, and men to bandy her name to and fro. You have deceived her, you have thrown away her fortune; you have used her as an instrument in your schemes. I, who am only an outsider, with no right to defend her—I defend her for her father's sake, for her child's, for her own! You are on the verge of ruin and disgrace. I offer you the chance to retrieve yourself—to retrieve her! Take it, if you are a man!"

Richard had fallen back in his chair, breathless and ashen. In all his imaginings of what the future might hold, he had never thought of such a possibility as this—that it should be this man who would turn upon him and place an interpretation so fiercely unsparing upon what he had done! Under all his admiration and respect for the colonel, there had been

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hidden, it must be admitted, an almost unconscious touch of contempt for him, as a rather heavy and unsophisticated personage, scarcely versatile or agile enough, and formed in a mould somewhat obsolete and quixotic-a safe person to confide in, and one to invite confidence passively by his belief in what was presented to him; a man to make a good listener and to encourage one to believe in one's own statements, certainly not a man to embarrass and discourage a historian by asking difficult questions or translating too literally what was said. He had not asked questions until to-night, and his face had said very little for him on any occasion. Among other things, Richard had secretly—though leniently—felt him to be a trifle stolid, and had amiably forgiven him for it. It was this very thing which made the sudden change appear so keen an injustice and injury; it amounted to a breach of confidence, that he should have formed a deliberate and obstinate opinion of his own, entirely unbiased by the presentation of the case offered to him. He had spoken more than once, it was true, in a manner which had suggested prejudice, but it had been the prejudice of the primeval mind, unable to adjust

itself to modern conditions and easily disreearded by more experienced. But now !—he was stolid no longer. His first words had startled Richard beyond expression. His face said more for him than his words; it burned white with the fire he had hidden so long; his great frame quivered with the passion of the moment; when he had clenched his hand it had been in the vain effort to hold it still; and vet, the man who saw it recognised in it only the wrath and scorn which had reference to himself. Perhaps it was best that it should have been so, best that his triviality was so complete that he could see nothing which was not in some way connected with his own personality.

"Tredennis," he gasped out, "you are terribly harsh! I did not think you-"

"Even if I could lie and palter to you," said Tredennis, his clenched hand still on the table, "this is not the time for it. I have tried before to make you face the truth, but you have refused to do it. Perhaps you had made yourself believe what you told me—that no harm was meant or done. I know what harm has been done. I have heard the talk of the hotel corridors and clubs!" His

hand clenched itself harder and he drew in a sharp breath.

"It is time that you should give this thing up," he continued, with deadly determination. "And I am willing to shoulder it. Who else would do the same thing?"

"No one else," said Richard, bitterly. "And it is not for my sake you do it, either; it is for the sake of some of your ideal fancies that are too fine for us worldlings to understand, I swear!" And he felt it specially hard that it was so.

"Yes," replied the Colonel, "I suppose you might call it that. It is not for your sake, as you say. It has been one of my fancies that a man might even deny himself for the sake of an—an idea, and I am not denying myself. I am only giving to your child, in one way, what I meant to give to her in another. She would be willing to share it with her mother, I think."

And then, somehow, Richard began to feel that this offer was a demand, and that, even if his sanguine mood should come upon him again, he would not find it exactly easy to avoid it. It seemed actually as if there was something in this man,—some principle of

strength, of feeling, of conviction — which Almost constituted a right by which he might Contend for what he asked; and before it, in his temporary abasement and anguish of mind, Richard Amory faltered. He said a great deal, it is true, and argued his case as he had argued it before, being betrayed in the course of the argument by the exigences of the case to add facts as well as fancies. He endeavoured to adorn his position as much as possible, and, naturally, his failure was not entire. There were hopes of the passage of the bill, sometimes strong hopes, it seemed; if the money he had invested had been his own, if it had not been for the failure of his speculations in other quarters, if so much had not depended upon failure and success, he would have run all risks willingly. There were, indeed, moments when it almost appeared that his companion was on the point of making a capital investment, and being much favoured thereby.

"It is really not half so bad as it seems," he said, gaining cheerfulness as he talked. "But, after such a day as I have had, a man loses courage and cannot look at things collectedly. I have been up and down in the scale a score of time in the last eight hours.

That is where the wear and tear comes in. A great deal depends on Blundel; and I had a talk with him which carried us further than we have ever been before."

"Further," said Tredennis. "In what direction?"

Richard flushed slightly.

"I think I sounded him pretty well," he said. "There is no use mincing matters; it has to be done. We have never been able to get at his views of things exactly, and I won't say he went very far this afternoon, but I was in a desperate mood, and—well, I think I reached bottom. He half promised to call at the house this evening. I dare say he is with Bertha now."

Something in his flush, which had a slightly excited and triumphant air, something in his look and tone, caused Tredennis to start in his chair.

"What is he there for?" he said. "What do you mean?"

Richard thrust his hands in his pockets. For a moment he seemed to have lost all his grace and refinement of charm—for the moment he was a distinctly coarse and undraped human being.

"He has gone to make an evening call," he said. "And if she manages him as well as she has managed him before—as well as she can manage any man she chooses to take in hand, and yet not give him more than a smile or so—your investment, if you make it, may not turn out such a bad one."

CHAPTER VII.

AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW.

BERTHA had spent the greater part of the day with her children, as she had spent part of many days lately. She had gone up to the nursery after breakfast to see Jack and Janey at their lessons; and had remained with them and given herself up to their entertainment. She was not well; the weather was bad; she might give herself a holiday, and she would spend it in her own way, in the one refuge which never failed her.

"It is always quiet here," she said to herself. "If I could give up all the rest—all of it—and spend all my days here, and think of nothing else, I might be better. There are women who live so. I think they must be better in every way than I am,—and happier.

I am sure I should have been happier if I had begun so long ago."

And as she sat, with Janey at her side, in the large chair which held them both, her arm thrown round the child's waist, there came to her a vague thought of what the unknown future might form itself into when she "began again." It would be beginning again when the sea was between the new life and the old; everything would be left behind -but the children. She would live as she had lived in Virginia, always with the children —always with the children. "It is the only safe thing," she thought, clasping Janey closer. "Nothing else is safe for a woman who is unhappy. If one is happy one may be gay, and look on at the world with the rest; but there are some who must not look on-who dare not."

"Mamma," said Janey, "you are holding me a little too close, and your face looks—it looks—as if you were thinking."

Bertha laughed to reassure her. They were used to this gay, soft laugh of hers, as the rest of the world was. If she was silent, if the room was not bright with the merriment she had always filled it with, they felt themselves

a trifle injured, and demanded their natural rights with juvenile imperiousness. "Mamma always laughs," Jack had once announced to a roomful of company. "She plays new games with us and laughs, and we laugh, too. Maria and Susan are not funny. Mamma is funny, and like a little girl grown up. always have fun when she comes into the nursery." "It is something the same way in the parlour," Planefield had said, showing his teeth amiably; and Bertha, who was standing near Colonel Tredennis, had laughed in a manner to support her reputation, but had said nothing. So she laughed now, not very vivaciously, perhaps. "That was very improper, Janey," she said, "to look as if I was thinking. It is bad enough to be thinking. It must not occur again."

"But if you were thinking of a story to tell us," suggested Jack, graciously, "it wouldn't matter, you see. You might go on thinking."

"But the story was not a new one," she answered, "It was sad. I did not like it myself."

"We should like it," said Janey.

"If it's a story," remarked Jack, twisting

the string round his top, "it's all right. There was a story Uncle Philip told us."

"Suppose you tell it to me," said Bertha.

"It was about a knight," said Janey, "who went to a great battle. It was very sorrowful. He was strong, and happy, and bold, and the king gave him a sword and armour that glittered and was beautiful. And his hair waved in the breeze. And he was young and brave. And his horse arched its neck. And the knight longed to go and fight in the battle, and was glad and not afraid; and the people looked on and praised him, because they thought he would fight so well. But just as the battle began, before he had even drawn his sword, a stray shot came and he fell. And while the battle went on he lay there dying, with his hand on his breast. And at night. when the battle was over, the stars came out, he lay and looked up at them, and at the dark-blue sky, and wondered why he had been given his sword and armour, and why he had been allowed to feel so strong, and glad, and eager—only for that. But he did not There was no one to tell him. he died. And the stars shone down on his bright armour and his dead face."

"I didn't like it myself," commented Jack.

"It wasn't much of a story. I told him so."

"He was sorry he told it," said Janey, because I cried. I don't think he meant to tell such a sad story."

"He wasn't funny that day," observed Jack. "Sometimes he isn't funny at all, and he sits and thinks about things; and then, if we make him tell us a story, he doesn't tell a good one. He used to be nicer than he is now."

"I love him," said Janey, faithfully; "I think he is nice all the time."

"It wasn't much of a story, that is true," said Bertha. "There was not enough of it."

"He died too soon," said Jack.

"Yes," said Bertha; "he died too soon, that was it—too soon." And the laugh she ended with had a sound which made her shudder.

She got up from her rocking-chair quickly.

"We won't tell stories," she said. "We will play. We will play ball and blind-man's-buff—and run about and get warm. That will be better."

And she took out her handkerchief and tied it over her eyes with unsteady hands,

laughing again—laughing while the children laughed too.

They played until the room rang with their merriment. They had not been so gay together for many a day, and when the game was at an end they tried another and another, until they were tired and ready for their nursery dinner. Bertha did not leave them even then. She did not expect Richard home until their own dinner-hour in the evening, so she sat at the children's table and helped them herself, in the nurse's place; and they were in high spirits, and loquacious and confidential.

When the meal was over, they sat by the nursery fire, and Meg fell asleep in her mother's arms; and after she had laid her on her bed, Bertha came back to Jack and Janey; and read and talked to them until dusk began to close in about them. It was, as they sat so together, that a sealed package was brought to her by a servant, who said it had been left at the door by a messenger. It contained two letters—one addressed to Senator Blundel, and one to herself—and both were in Richard's hand.

"I suppose something has detained him,

and I am not to wait dinner," she thought, as she opened the envelope bearing her own name.

The same thing had occurred once or twice before, so it made but little impression upon her. There were the usual perfectly natural He had been very hard at work excuses. and would be obliged to remain out until some time past their dinner hour. an engagement at one of the hotels, and could dine there; he was not quite sure that he should be at home until late. Then he added, just before closing-

"Blundel said something about calling this evening. He had been having a hard day of it, and said he wanted a change. I had a very satisfactory talk with him, and I think he begins to see the rights of our case. Entertain him as charmingly as possible, and if he is not too tired and is in a good humour, hand him the inclosed letter. It contains testimony which ought to be argument, and I think it will be."

Bertha looked at the letter. It was not at all imposing, and seemed to contain nothing more than a slip of paper. She put it down on the mantel and sighed faintly.

"If he knew what a service he would do me by seeing the rights of the case," she said to herself, "I think he would listen to their arguments. I think he likes me well enough to do it. I believe he would enjoy being kind to me. If this should be the end of it all, it would be worth the trouble of being amusing and amiable one evening."

But she did not look forward with any great pleasure to the prospect of what was before her. Perhaps her day in the nursery had been a little too much for her; she was tired and would have been glad to be left alone. But this was not to be. She must attire herself, in all her bravery, and sing and laugh and be gay a little longer. How often had she done the same thing before? How often would she do it again?

"There are some people who are born to play comedy," she said afterwards, as she stood before her mirror, dressing. "They can do nothing else. I am one of them. Very little is expected of me, only that I shall always laugh and make jokes. If I were to try tragedy, that would be a better jest than all the rest. If I were to be serious, what a joke that would be!"

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She thought, as she had done a thousand times, of a portrait of herself which had been painted three years before. It had been her Christmas gift to Richard, and had been considered a great success. It was a wonderfully spirited likeness, and the artist had been fortunate in catching her brightest look.

"It is the expression that is so marvellous," Richard had often said. "When I look at it, I always expect to hear you laugh."

"Are they never tired of it," she said, "never tired of hearing me laugh? If I were to stop some day and say, 'See, I am tired of it myself. I have tears as well as the rest of you. Let me——'" She checked herself, her hands had begun to tremble——her voice; she knew too well what was coming upon her. She looked at herself in the glass.

"I must dress myself carefully," she said, "if I am to look vivacious. One's attire is called upon to do a great deal for one when one has a face like that."

Outwardly, her attire had done a great deal for her when, after she had dined alone, she sat awaiting her guest. The fire burned brightly, the old songs lay upon the piano, a low stand with a pretty coffee service upon it was drawn near her, a gay little work-basket containing some trifle of graceful work was on her knee. Outside, the night was decidedly unpleasant. "So unpleasant," she said to herself, "that it will surprise me if he comes." But though by eight o'clock the rain was coming down steadily, at half-past eight she heard the familiar heavy tread upon the door-step, and her visitor presented himself.

What sort of humour he was in when he made his entry, Bertha felt that it was not easy to decide; but it struck her that it was not a usual humour, and that the fatigues of the day had left their mark upon him. looked by no means fresh, and, by the time he had seated himself, she felt that something had disturbed him, and that it was true that he needed distraction.

It had always been very simple distraction she offered him, he had never demanded subtleties from her or any very great intellectual effort; his ideas upon the subject of the feminine mind were, perhaps, not so advanced as they might have been, VOL. III.

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belonged rather to the days and surroundings of his excellent, hard-worked mother and practical, unimaginative sisters, than to a more brilliant world. Given a comfortable seat in the pretty room, the society of this pretty and smiling little person, who poured out his coffee for him, enjoyed his jokes, and prattled gaily of things pleasant and amusing, he was perfectly satisfied. What he felt the need of, was rest and light recreation, cheerfulness and appreciation, a sense of relief from the turmoil and complications of the struggling, manœuvring, over-reaching, ambitious world he lived in.

Knowing this, Bertha had given him what he enjoyed, and she offered him no other entertainment this evening. She gave him his cup of coffee and talked to him as he drank it, telling him an amusing story or so of the children or of people he knew.

"I have been in the nursery all day," she said. "I have been playing blind-man's-buff and telling stories. You have never been in the nursery, have you? You are not like Colonel Tredennis, who thinks the society there is better than that we have in the parlour."

"Perhaps he's not so far wrong," said her guest, bluntly, "though I have never been in the nursery myself. I have a nursery of my own up at the Capitol, and I don't always find it easy to manage."

"The children fight, I have heard," said Bertha, "and sometimes call each other names, and it is even reported that they snatch at each other's toys and break those they cannot appropriate. I am afraid the discipline is not good!"

"It isn't," he answered, "or there isn't enough of it."

He set his coffee-cup down and watched her as she leaned back in her chair and occupied herself with the contents of her work-basket.

"Do you go into the nursery often?" he asked; "or is it out of the fashion?"

"It is out of the fashion," she answered, "but——" She stopped and let her work rest on her knee as she held it. "Will you tell me why you ask me that?" she said, and her face changed as she spoke.

"I asked you because I didn't know," he answered. "It seemed to me you couldn't have much time for things of that sort. You

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generally seem to be pretty busy with one thing and another. I don't know much about fashionable life and fashionable women. The women I knew when I was a boy—my own mother and her sisters—spent the most of their time with their children; and it wasn't such a bad way either. They were pretty good women."

"Perhaps it was the best way," said Bertha, "and I dare say they were better for it. I dare say we compare very unfavourably with them."

"I should not compare at all," he returned.

"I should not compare you. I don't know how it would work with you. They got old pretty soon, and lost their good looks; but they were safe, kind-hearted creatures, who tried to do their duty and make the best of things. I don't say they were altogether right in their views of life; they were narrow, I suppose, and ran into extremes; but they had ways a man likes to think of, and did very little mischief."

"I could scarcely estimate the amount of mischief I do," said Bertha, applying herself to her work cheerfully; "but I do not think my children are neglected. Colonel Tredennis would probably give a certificate to that effect. They are clothed quite warmly, and are occasionally allowed a meal, and I make a practice of recognising them when I meet them in the street."

She was wondering if it would not be better to reserve the letter until some more auspicious occasion. It struck her that in the course of his day's fatigues he had encountered some problem of which he found it difficult to rid himself. There were signs of it in his manner. He wore a perturbed, pre-occupied expression, and looked graver than she had ever seen him. He sat with his hands in his pockets, his hair on end, his bluff countenance a rather deeper colour than usual, and his eyes resting upon her.

"This isn't an easy world," he said, "and I suppose it is no easier for women than for men. I shouldn't like to be a woman myself, and have to follow my leader, and live in one groove from beginning to end. It is natural that some should feel the temptation to try to get out of it, and use their power as men use theirs; but it does not pay, it can't. Women were meant to be good—to be good and honest and true, and—and innocent."

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It was an amazingly ingenuous creed, and he presented it with a rough simplicity and awkwardness which might have been laughable but for their heavy sincerity. Bertha felt this seriousness instantaneously, and looking up, saw in his sharp little eyes, a suggestion of feeling which startled her.

"Wondering what I'm thinking of?" he said. "Well, I'm thinking of you. I've thought of you pretty often lately, and tonight I've a reason for having you in my mind."

"What is the reason?" she asked, more startled than before.

He thrust his hands deeper into his pockets; there was no mistaking the evidences of strong emotion in his face.

"I am a friend of yours," he said. "You know that; you've known it some time. My opinion of you is, that you are a good little woman—the right sort of a good little woman—and I have a great deal of confidence in you."

"I hope so," said Bertha.

She felt that as he gained warmth and colour, she lost them; she thought of the letter which lay on the mantelpiece within

a few feet of him, and wished that it was not so near. There had been evil spoken of her, and he had heard it. She realised that, and knew that she was upon her defence, even while she had no knowledge of what she was to defend herself against.

"I hope so," she said again, tremulously.
"I hope so, indeed;" and her eyes met his with a helplessness more touching than any appeal she could have made.

It so moved him that he could remain quiet no longer, but sprang to his feet and drew his hand from his pocket and rubbed it excitedly over his upright hair.

"D—— it!" he broke forth, "let them say what they will—let what will happen, I'll believe in you! Don't look at me like that; you are a good little woman, but you are in the wrong place. There are lies and intrigues going on about you, and you are too—too bright and pretty to be judged fairly by outsiders. You don't know what you are mixed up in; how should you? Who is to tell you? These fellows who dangle about and make fine speeches are too smooth-tongued even when they know enough. I'll tell you. I never paid you compliments or made love to you,

did I? I'm no good at that, but I'll tell you the truth, and give you a bit of good advice. People are beginning to talk, you see, and tell They have brought their lies to me: I don't believe them, but others will. There are men and women who come to your house, who will do you no good, and are more than likely to do you harm. They are a lot of intriguers and lobbyists. You don't want that set here. You want honest friends and an innocent, respectable home for your children, and a name they won't be ashamed of. Send the whole set packing, and cut yourself loose from them."

Bertha stood up also. She had forgotten the little work-basket, and still held it in her hands, suspended before her.

"Will you tell me," she said, "what the lies were—the lies you heard?"

Perhaps she thought, with a hopeless pang, they were not lies at all; perhaps he had only heard what was the truth, that she had been told to try to please him, that his good-will might be gained to serve an end. Looked at from Richard's stand-point, that had been a very innocent thing; looked at from his stand-point, it might seem just what it had seemed

to herself, even in the reckless, desperate moment when she had given way.

He paused a moment—barely a moment, and then answered her.

"Yes," he said, "I will tell you if you want to know. There has been a big scheme on hand for some time—there are men who must be influenced; I am one of them; and people say that the greater part of the work is carried on in your parlours here, and that you were set on me because you were a clever little manœuvrer, and knew your business better than I should be likely to suspect. That is what they say, and that is what I must believe, because——"

He stopped short. He had drawn nearer the mantelpiece, and as he spoke some object lying upon it caught his eye. It was the letter directed to himself, lying with the address upwards, and he took it in his hand.

"What is this?" he demanded. "Who left it here?"

Bertha stood perfectly motionless. Richard's words came back to her: "Give it to him if he is in a good humour. It contains arguments which I think will convince him." Then she looked at Blundel's face. If there

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could be any moment more unfit than another for the presentation of arguments, it was this particular one. And never before had she liked him so well or valued his good opinion so highly as she did now, when he turned his common, angry, honest face upon her.

"What is it?" he said again. "Tell me."

She thought of Richard once more, and then of the children sleeping up stairs, and of the quiet, innocent day she had spent with them. They did not know that she was an intriguing woman whom people talked of; she had never realised it herself to the full until this moment. They had delicately forborne giving any name to the thing she had done; but this man, who judged matters in a straightforward fashion, would find a name for it. But there was only one answer for her to make.

- "It is a letter I was to give you," she said.
- "And it is from your husband?"
- "I have not read it," she replied.

He stopped short a moment and looked at her—with a sudden suggestion of doubt and bewilderment that was as bad as a blow.

"Look here!" he said. "You were going to give it to me—you intended to do it?"

" Yes."

He gave her another look—amazement, anger, disbelief, struggling with each other in it—and then thrust his obstinate fists into his pockets again and planted himself before her like a rock.

"By the Lord!" he said. "I won't believe it!"

The hard common sense which had been his stronghold and the stand-by of his constituents for many a year came to his rescue. He might not know much of women, but he had seen intrigue, and trickery, and detected guilt, and it struck him if these things were here, they were before him in a new form.

"Now," he said, "tell me who gave it to you?"

"You will know that," she answered, "when you read it."

"Tell me," he demanded, "if you know what is in it."

"I know something," she replied, "of what is in it."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I'd give a great deal to know how much!"

Only Richard could have told him how much or how little; and he was not there.

"Come," he said, as she made no reply,

"they might easily deceive you. Tell me what you know, and I will believe you—and there are very few women in your place I would say as much to."

"I do not think," she answered, "that they have deceived me."

"Then," he returned, his face hardening, "you have deceived me!"

"Yes," she answered, turning white, "I suppose I have."

There was a moment of dead silence, in which his shrewd eyes did their work as well as they had done it at any time during his fifty years of life Then he spoke to her again.

"They wanted me here because they wanted to make use of me," he said. "You knew that?"

"They did not put it in that way," she answered. "I dare say you know that."

"You were to be fool me as far as you could, and make the place agreeable to me—you knew that?"

She turned paler.

"I—I have liked you very sincerely!" she broke forth, piteously. "I have liked you! Out of all the rest, that one thing was true! Don't—ah, don't think it was not!"

His expression for a moment was a curiously

undecided one; he was obliged to rally himself with a sharp rub at his hair.

"I'll tell you what I think of that when you have answered me another question," he said. "There is a person who has done a great deal of work in this matter, and has been very anxious about it, probably because he has invested in it more money than he can spare—buying lands and doing one thing and another. That person is your husband, Mr. Richard Amory. Tell me if you knew that."

The blood rushed to her face, and then left it again.

"Richard!" she exclaimed. "Richard!" and she caught at the mantel and held to it.

His eyes did not leave her for an instant. He nodded his head with a significance whose meaning was best known to himself.

"Sit down," he said. "I see you do not know that."

She did as he told her. It was as if such a flash of light had struck across her mental vision as half blinded her.

"Not Richard!" she cried out; and even as she said it, a thousand proofs rushed back upon her and spoke the whole shameful truth for themselves.

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Blundel came nearer to her, his homely, angry face, in spite of its anger, expressing honest good feeling as strongly as any much handsomer one might have done.

"I knew there had been deep work somewhere," he said. "I saw it from the first. As for you, you have been treated pretty badly. I supposed they persuaded you that you might as well amuse one man as another—and I was the man. I daresay there is more behind than I can see. You had nothing to gain as far as you knew, that's plain enough to me."

"No," she exclaimed, "it was not I who was to gain! They did not think of—of me!"

"No," he went on, "they lost sight of you rather, even when they had a use for you. It's apt to be the way. It's time some one should think of you, and I mean to do it. I am not going to say more against those who—made the mistake" (with a resentful shuffle of his shoulders as he put it thus mildly), "than I can help, but I am going to tell you the truth. I have heard ugly stories for some time, and I've had my suspicions of the truth of them, but I meant to wait for proof, and it was given me this afternoon. More was said to me than it was safe to say to an honest man, and

I let the person who talked go as far as he would, and he was too desperate to be cautious. I knew a bold move was to be made, and I guessed it would be made to-night."

He took the envelope from his pocket, where he had tucked it unopened. His face grew redder and hotter.

"If it were not for you," he said, "if I didn't have faith in your being the honest little woman I took you for, if I didn't believe you spoke the truth when you said you liked me as honestly as I liked you—though the Lord knows there is no proof except that I do believe you in spite of everything—I'd have the thing spread the length and breadth of the land by to-morrow morning, and there would be such an uproar as the country has not seen for a year or so."

"Wait!" said Bertha, half-starting from her seat. "I did not understand before! This is too much shame! I thought it was—only a letter! I did not know——"

He went to the fire.

"I believe that, too," he said grimly; "but it is not a little thing I'm doing. I'm denying myself a great deal. I'd give five years of my life——" He straightened out his short, stout

arm and closed hand with a robust gesture, and then checked himself. "You don't know what is in it. I don't know. I have not looked at it. There it goes," and he tossed it into the fire.

"The biggest fool of all," he said, "is the fool who takes every man for a knave. Do they think a country like this has been run for a century by liars and thieves? There have been liars and thieves enough, but not enough to bring it to a stand-still, and that seems to argue that there has been an honest man or so to keep a hand on their throats. When there are none left—well, it won't be as safe to belong to the nation as it is to-day, in spite of all that's bad in it."

The envelope had flamed up, and then died down into tindery blackness. He pointed to it.

"You can say it is there," he said, "and that I didn't open it, and they may thank you for it. Now I am going."

Bertha rose. She put her hand on the mantel again.

"If I do not thank you as I ought," she said, brokenly, "you must forgive me. I see all that you have spared me, but—I have had a heavy blow." He paused to look at her,

rubbing his upright hair for the last time, his little eyes twinkling with a suspicious brightness, which had its softness, too. He came back and took her hand, and held it in an awkward, kindly clasp.

"You are a good little woman," he said.
"I'll say it to you again. You were not cut out to be made anything else of. You won't be anything else. You are young to be disappointed and unhappy. I know all that—and there doesn't seem much to say. Advice wouldn't amount to much, and I don't know that there is any to give."

They moved slowly towards the door together. When they stood upon the threshold, he dropped her hand as awkwardly as he had taken it, and made a gesture toward the stairway, the suspicious brightness of his eyes more manifest than ever.

"Your children are up there asleep," he said unsteadily. "Go to them."

He turned away and shrugged himself into his overcoat at the hat-stand, opened the door for himself, and went out of the house without another word.

CHAPTER VIII.

RICHARD AT BAY.

THE last words of his half-reluctant, half-exultant confession had scarcely left Richard Amory's lips when Tredennis rose from his chair.

- "If you can," he said, "tell me the literal truth. Blundel is at your house with your wife. There is something she is to do. What is it?"
- "She is to hand him an envelope containing a slip of paper," said Richard, doggedly. "That is what she is to do."

Tredennis crossed the room, and took his hat from its place.

- "Will you come with me," he said, "or shall I go alone?"
 - "Where?" asked Richard.

Tredennis glanced at his watch.

"He would not call until late, perhaps," he said, "and she would not give it to him at once. It is ten now. We may reach there in time to spare her that, at least."

Richard bit his lip.

"There seems to be a good deal of talk of sparing her," he said. "Nobody spares me. Every folly I have been guilty of is exaggerated into a crime. Do you suppose that fellow isn't used to that sort of thing? Do you suppose I should have run the risk if he had not shown his hand this afternoon? She knows nothing of what she is to give him. There is no harm done to her."

"How is he to know she is not in the plot?" said Tredennis. "How is he to guess that she is not—what she has been made to seem to be? What insult is he not at liberty to offer her if he chooses?"

"She will take care of herself," said Richard.
"Let her alone for that."

"By heaven!" said Tredennis. "She has been let alone long enough. Has she ever been anything else but alone? Has there been one human creature among all she knew to help or defend or guide her? Who has given her a thought so long as she

amused them and laughed with the rest? Who----"

Richard got up, a devouring curiosity in his face.

"What is the matter with you?" he said. "Have you been——?"

The words died away. The Colonel's gleaming eye stopped him.

"We will go at once, if you please," said Tredennis, and strode out of the room before him.

When they reached the house, Bertha was still standing where her guest had left her a few moments before, and but one glance at her face was needed to show both of them that something unusual had occurred.

"You have had Blundel here?" Richard asked, with an attempt at his usual manner, which ill-covered his excitement. "We thought we saw him crossing the street."

"Yes," she answered. "He has just left me."

She turned suddenly and walked back to the hearth.

"He left a message for you," she said.

"That is it——" and she pointed to the last bit of tinder flickering on the coals.

"The-letter!" exclaimed Richard.

"Yes," she answered. "Do you want Colonel Tredennis to hear about the letter, Richard, or does he know already?"

"He knows everything," answered Richard, "as every one else will to-morrow or the day after."

For a moment his despair made him so reckless that he did not make an effort at defence. He flung himself into a chair and gave himself up to the misery of the hour.

"You knew," said Bertha, looking towards Tredennis, "and did not tell me. Yes, I forgot," with a bitter little smile, "there was something you warned me of once and I would not listen, and perhaps you thought I would not listen now. If you know, will you tell me what was in the letter? I do not know yet, and I want to hear it put into words. It was money—or an offer of money? Tell me, if you please."

"It was money," said Richard, defiantly. "And there are others who have taken the same thing peacefully enough."

"And I was to give it to him because—because he was a little more difficult, and seemed to be my friend. Do all female

lobbyists do such things, Richard, or was I honoured with a special service?"

"It is not the first time it has been done," he answered, "and it won't be the last."

"It is the first time I have done it," she returned, "and it will be the last. The—risk is too great."

Her voice shook a little, but it was perfectly cold; and though her eyes were dilated, such fire as might have been in them was quenched by some light to which it would have been hard to give a name.

"I do not mean the risk to myself," she said to Richard. "I do not count. I meant risk to you. When he burned the letter he said, 'Tell them I did it for your sake, and that it is safer for them that I did it."

"What else did he say?" asked Richard, desperately. "He has evidently changed his mind since this afternoon."

"He told me you had a reason for your interest in the scheme, which was not the one you gave me. He told me you had invested largely in it, and could not afford to lose."

Richard started up, and turned helplessly towards Tredennis. He had not expected this, just yet at least. "I—I—" he faltered.

The Colonel spoke without lifting his eyes From the floor.

"Will you let me explain that?" he asked.
I think it would be better."

There was a moment's silence, in which Bertha looked from one to the other.

"You?" she said.

Richard's lids fell. He took a paper-knife from the table he leaned against, and began to play with it nervously. He had become haggard, coarsened, weakened copy of himself; his hair hung in damp elf-locks over his forehead; his lips were pale and dry; he bit them to moisten them.

"The money," said Tredennis, "is mine. It was a foolish investment, perhaps, but the money—is mine."

"Yours!" said Bertha. "You invested in the Westoria lands!"

She put her hand in its old place on the mantel, and a strange laugh fell from her lips.

"Then I have been lobbying for you too," she said. "I—wish I had been more successful."

Richard put his hand up, and pushed

back the damp, falling locks of hair from his forehead restlessly.

"I made the investment," he said, "and I am the person to blame, as usual; but you would have believed in it yourself."

"Yes," she answered; "I should have believed in it, I dare say. It has been easy to make me believe, but I think I should also have believed in a few other things—in the possibility of there being honour and good faith——"

She paused an instant, and then began again.

"You told me once that you had never regarded me seriously. I think that has been the difficulty—and perhaps it was my fault. It will not be necessary to use me any more, and I dare say you will let me go away for a while after a week or so. I think it would be better."

She left her place to cross the room to the door. On her way there she paused before Colonel Tredennis.

"I beg your pardon," she said, and went on. At the door she stopped again one moment, fronting them both, her head held erect, her eyes large and bright. "When Senator Blundel left me," she said, "he told me to go to my children. If you will excuse me, I will go."

And she made a stately little bow, and left them.

CHAPTER IX.

A SOCIAL PERIL.

The great social event of the following week was to be the ball given yearly for the benefit of a certain popular and fashionable charity. There was no charity so fashionable, and consequently no ball so well attended; everybody was more or less interested, everybody of importance appeared at it, showing themselves for a few moments at least. Even Mrs. Merriam, who counted among the privileges earned by a long and unswervingly faithful social career, the one of immunity from all ordinary society duties, found herself drawn into the maëlstrom, and enrolled on the list of patronesses.

"You may do all the work, my dear," she said to Mrs. Sylvestre, "and I will appropriate the credit."

But she was not so entirely idle as she professed to be, and indeed spent several mornings briskly driving from place to place in her comfortable carriage, and distinguished herself by exhibiting an executive ability, a promptness and decision in difficulty, which were regarded with secret awe and admiration by her younger and less experienced colleagues. She had been out doing such work on the afternoon of the day before the ball, and returned home at her usual hour. But not in her usual equable frame of mind. This was evident when she entered the room where Mrs. Sylvestre sat talking to Colonel Tredennis, who had called. There were indeed such signs of mental disturbance in her manner, that Mrs. Sylvestre, rising to greet her, observed them at once.

- "I am afraid you have had an exciting morning," she said, "and have done too much work."
- "My dear," was the reply, "nothing could be more true than that I have had an exciting morning."
 - "I am sorry for that," said Agnes.
- "I am sorry for it," said Mrs. Merriam; "more sorry than I can say." Then turning to

Tredennis, "I am glad to find you here. I have been hearing some most extraordinary stories; perhaps you can tell me what they mean?"

"Whom do they concern?" asked Agnes. "We are entertained by many stories."

"They will disturb you as much as they have disturbed me," Mrs. Merriam answered. "They have disturbed me very much. concern our little friend, Mrs. Amory."

"Bertha!" exclaimed Agnes.

Her tender heart beat quietly, and a faint flush showed itself on her cheek; she looked up at Colonel Tredennis with quick, questioning eyes. Perhaps she was not as unprepared for the statement as she might have been. She had seen much during the last few weeks which had startled and alarmed her. Mrs. Merriam looked at Tredennis also.

"You may be able to guess something of what the rumours form themselves upon," she said. "Heaven knows there has been enough foundation for anything in that miserable Westoria land scheme."

"You have heard something of it this morning?" said Tredennis.

"I have heard nothing else," was the "The Westoria land scheme answer.

come to an untimely end, with a flavour of scandal about it which may yet terminate in an investigation. The whole city is full of it, and stories of Mrs. Amory and her husband are the entertainment offered you on all sides. I say 'Mrs. Amory and her husband,' because it is Mrs. Amory who is the favourite topic. She has been making the most desperate efforts to influence people; her parlours have been filled with politicians and lobbyists all the season; the husband was deeply involved in the matter; bribes have been offered and taken: there are endless anecdotes of Senator Planefield and infatuation, and the way in which it has been used. She would have accomplished wonders if it had not been for Senator Blundel, who suspected her and led her into betraying herself. It is Senator Blundel who is credited with having been the means of exploding the whole affair. He has been privately investigating the matter for months, and had an interview with Mrs. Amory the other night, in which he assured her of the most terrible things, and threatened her with exposure. That is the way the stories run."

"Oh! this is very cruel," said Agnes.

"Whatever is done must be done at once," replied Mrs. Merriam. "The conclusion of the matter is that there seems actually to be a sort of cabal formed against her."

"You mean—" began Agnes, anxiously.

"I mean," said Mrs. Merriam, "that my impression is that if she appears at the ball there are those who will be so rude to her that she will be unable to remain."

"Aunt Mildred!" exclaimed Agnes in deep agitation. "Surely such a thing is impossible."

"It is not only not impossible," returned Mrs. Merriam, "but it is extremely probable. I heard remarks which assured me of that."

"She must not go!" said Agnes. "We must manage to keep her at home. Colonel Tredennis—"

"The remedy must go deeper than that," he answered. "The fact that she did not appear would only postpone the end. The slights she avoided one night would be stored up for the future, we may be sure."

He endeavoured to speak calmly, but it was not easy, and he knew too well that such a change had come upon his face as the two women could not but see. Though he had feared this climax so long, though he had even seen day by day the signs of its approach, it fell upon him as a blow at last, and seemed even worse than in his most anxious hour he had thought it might be.

"She has friends," he said; "her friends have friends. I think there are those—besides ourselves—who will defend her."

"They must be strong," remarked Mrs. Merriam.

"There are some of them," he answered, "who are strong. I think I know a lady whose opinion will not go for nothing, who is generous enough to use her influence in the right direction."

"And that direction?" said Mrs. Merriam.

"If the opposing party finds itself met by a party more powerful than itself," he said, "its tone will change—and as for the story of Senator Blundel, I think I can arrange that he will attend to that himself."

"Mere denial would not go very far. I

am afraid," said Mrs. Merriam. "He cannot deny it to two or three score of people."

"He can deny it to the entire community," he answered, "by showing that their intimacy remains unbroken."

"Ah!" cried Agnes, "if he would only go to the ball, and let people see him talking to her as he used to-but I am sure he never went to a ball in his life!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Merriam, "that is really a very clever idea — if he could be induced to go."

"He is an honest man," said Tredennis, "And he is her friend. that sincerely—and I believe he would prove it by going anywhere to serve her."

"If that is true," said Mrs. Merriam, "a great deal will be accomplished—though it is a little difficult to figure to one's self how he would enjoy a ball."

"I think we shall have the pleasure of seeing," replied the Colonel. "I myself-" He paused a moment, and then added: "I chance to have a rather intimate acquaintance with him—he has interested himself in some work of mine lately, and has shown himself very friendly to me. It would perhaps be

easier for me to speak to him than for any other friend of Mrs. Amory's."

"I think you would do it better than any other friend," Mrs. Merriam said, with a kindly look at him.

The truth was that, since his first introduction to Colonel Tredennis, Blundel had taken care that the acquaintance should not drop. He had found the modest warrior at once useful and entertaining. He had been able to gather from him information which it was his interest to count among his stores, and, having obtained it, was not ungrateful, and, indeed, was led by his appreciation of certain good qualities he recognised in him into something bordering on an attachment for his new friend.

"I like that fellow," he used to say, energetically.

And realising something of this friendliness, and more of the honour and worth of his acquaintance, the Colonel felt that he might hope to reach his heart by telling his story simply and with dignity, leaving the rest to him. As for the lady of whom he had spoken, he had but little doubt that that kind and generous heart might be reached; he had seen

evidences of its truth and charity too often to distrust them. It was of course the wife of the Secretary of State he was thinking of—that good and graceful gentlewoman whose just and clear judgment he knew he could rely upon, and whose friendship would grant him any favour.

"She is very generous and sympathetic," he said, "and I have heard her speak most kindly of Mrs. Amory. Her action in the matter must have weight, and I have confidence that she will show her feeling in a manner which will make a deep impression. She has always been fond of Professor Herrick."

"That is as clever an idea as the other," said Mrs. Merriam. "She has drawn her lines so delicately heretofore that she has an influence even greater than was wielded by most of those who have occupied her position. And she is a decided and dignified person, capable of social subtleties."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Sylvestre, "it seems very hard that it should be Bertha who should need such defence."

"It is miserable," said Mrs. Merriam, impatiently. "It is disgraceful when one

considers who is the person to blame. It is very delicate of us not to use names, I suppose, but there has been enough delicacy—and indelicacy—and I should like to use them as freely as other people do. I think you remember that I have not been very fond of Mr. Richard Amory."

When Colonel Tredennis left them, he turned his steps at once toward the house of the woman who was his friend and upon whose assistance so much depended. To gain her sympathy seemed the first thing to be done, and one thought repeated itself again and again in his mind—"How shall I say it best?"

But fortune favoured him and helped him to speak as he had not anticipated that it would.

The lady sat alone in her favourite chair in her favourite room, when he was ushered into her presence, as he had frequently happened to be before somewhere about the same hour. A book lay open upon her lap, but she was not reading it, and he fancied had not been doing so for some time. He also fancied that when she saw him her greeting glance had a shade of relief in it, and her first words seemed to certify that he was not mistaken.

"I am more than usually glad to see you," she said. "I think that if you had not appeared so opportunely, I should have decided in about half an hour that I must send for you."

"I am very fortunate to have come," he answered, and he held her kind hand a moment, and there came into his face a look so anxious that, being in the habit of observing him, she saw it.

"Are you very well?" she asked, gently. "I am afraid not. You are rather pale. Sit down by my chair and let me look at you."

"Am I pale?" said the Colonel. "You are very good to notice it, though I am not ill. I am only—only—"

She looked at him with grave interest.

"Have you," she said, "have you heard of the illness of some friend? Is that it? I am afraid it is!"

"Yes," he answered, "that is it—and I am afraid you have heard of it, too."

"I am afraid I have," she returned.

"Such things travel quickly. I have heard something which has distressed me very much. It is something I have heard faint rumours of before, but now it has taken on a

definite form. This morning I was out, and this afternoon I have had some callers who were not averse to speaking plainly. I have heard a great many things said which have given me pain and which embarrass me seriously. That was the reason I was wishing to see you. I felt that you would at least tell me a story without prejudice. There is a great deal of prejudice shown—of course. We need expect nothing else. I am sure Professor Herrick can know nothing of this. Will you tell me what you yourself know?"

"That is what I came to do," said the Colonel, still paler, perhaps. "There is a great deal to tell—more than the world will ever know. It is only—to such as you that it could be told."

There was more emotion in his voice and face than he had meant to reveal; perhaps something in the kind anxiousness of his companion's eyes moved him—he found that he could not sit still and speak as if his interest was only the common one of an outsider, so he rose and stood before her.

"I cannot even tell you how it is that I know what I do to be true," he said. "I

have only my word, but I know you will believe me."

- "You may be sure of that," she answered.
- "I am sure of it," he returned, "or I should not be here, for I have no other proof to offer. I came to make an appeal to you in behalf of a person who has been wronged."
 - "In behalf of Mrs. Amory?" she said.
- "Yes," he replied, "though she does not know I am here, and will never know it. scarcely seems my business, perhaps; she should have others to defend her; but there are no others who, having the interest of relationship, might not be accused of selfinterest too. There is a slight tie of kinship between us, but it is only a slight one, andwe have not always been very good friends, perhaps, though it must have been my own I think I never pleased her very well, even when I saw her oftenest. She was used to brighter companionship. But her father liked me; we were friends, warm and I have felt almost as if I was his son, and have tried to spare him the knowledge of what would have hurt him. During the last few weeks I think he has had suspicions which have disturbed him, but they

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have not been suspicions of trouble to his child."

- "I felt sure of that," the lady remarked.
- "She has no suspicions of the true aspect of affairs," he continued, "though she has lately gained knowledge of the wrong done her. It has been a great wrong. She has not been spared. Her inexperience made her a child in the hands of those who used her as their tool. She understands now that it is too late—and it is very bitter to her."
- "You knew her when she was a girl," his companion said, with her kind eyes on his sad, stern face.
 - "Yes," he answered, "when she was a girl and happy, and with all of life before her, and—she did not fear it."
 - "I knew her, too," she replied. "She has greatly changed since then."
 - "I saw that when I returned here," he said. And he turned his head aside and began to take up and set down a trifle on the mantel. "At first I did not understand it," he added. "Now I do. She has not changed without reason. If she has seemed light, there are women, I suppose, who hide many a pain in that way. She has loved her children, and

made them happy—I know that, at least—and—and she has been a kind wife and an innocent woman. It is her friends who must defend her."

"She needs their defence," said his hearer.

"I felt that when I was out this morning, and when my callers were with me, an hour ago."

She held out her hand with sympathetic frankness. "I am her friend," she said, "and her father's—and yours. I think you have some plan—there is something you wish me to do. Tell me what it is."

"Yes," he answered, "there is something I wish you to do. No one else can do it so well. There are people who intend to testify to their belief in the stories they have heard by offering her open slights. It is likely the attempt will be made to-morrow night at the ball. If you testify to your disbelief and disapproval by giving her your protection, the popular theory will be shaken, and there will be a reaction in her favour."

"It is not to be denied," she said, "that it is only women who can aid her. It is women who say these things, as a rule, and who can unsay them. The actions of men in such matters are of less weight than they should be

—though it is true there is one man who might do her a service——"

"You are thinking of Senator Blundel," he said. "I—we have thought of that. We think—hope that he will come to the ball."

"If he does, and shows himself friendly toward her," she returned, "nothing more can be said which could be of much importance. He is the hero of the story, as I dare say you have heard. If he remains her friend, that proves that he did not accuse her of plotting against him, and that he has no cause for offence. If the story of the grand scene between them is untrue, the foundation-stone is taken away, and having the countenance of a few people who show their confidence with tact and discretion, she is safe. I will go to the ball, my friend, and I will use what influence I possess to insure that she is not badly treated."

"I knew you would be kind to her," Tredennis said, with kindling eyes. "I have seen you kind before to those who needed kindness, even to those who did not deserve it—and she does!"

"Yes, yes, I am sure she does!" she answered. "Poor child! Poor child!"

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And she gave him her hand again, and, as he wrung it in his, her eyes were fuller of sympathy than ever.

He reached Senator Blundel's rooms an hour later, and found him in the midst of his papers and pigeon-holes—letters and pamphlets to right of him, to left of him, before and behind him.

- "Well," he said, by way of greeting, "our Westoria friends are out of humour this morning."
 - "So I have heard," Tredennis answered.
- "And they may well be—they may well be," he said, nodding sharply. "And there are some fine stories told, of course."
- "I have come to tell you one myself, sir," said Tredennis.
- "What! cried Blundel turning on his chair, "you have a story?"
- "Yes," returned the Colonel, "not a pleasant one, and as it concerns you, I will waste as few words as possible."

He wasted no words at all. The story was a brief one, but as forcible as simple words could make it. There was no effort to give it effectiveness, and yet there were touches

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here and there which appealed to the man who heard it, as he had been rarely appealed to before. They brought before him things which had found a lodging in corners of his practical political mind, and had haunted him rather pathetically since the night he had shrugged himself into his overcoat, and left the slight, desolate-looking figure behind him. He had enjoyed his friendship too much not to regret it now that he felt it was a thing of the past; he had felt the loss more than once of the new element it had introduced into his life, and had cast about in his mind in vain for a place where he could spend a spare hour or so as pleasantly as he had often spent such hours in a bright parlour he knew of. Tredennis had half finished his relation he was moving restlessly in his chair, and uttering occasional gruff ejaculations, and when it came to an end he sprang up looking not a trifle heated.

"That's it, is it?" he exclaimed. "They have been inventing something new about her, have they, and dragged me into it into the bargain? And they are making up plots against her, poor little woman, as if she

hadn't been treated badly enough. A lot of gossips, I'll wager!"

"Some of them are good enough," said the Colonel. "They only mean to signify their disapproval of what they would have the right to condemn, if it were a truth instead of a lie."

"Well, they shall not do it at my expense, that's all," was the answer. "It is a lie from beginning to end, and I will do something toward proving it to them. I don't disapprove of her, they shall see that! She's a genuine good little thing! She's a lady! Any fool can see that! She won me over, by George, when everything was against her! And she accused nobody when she might have said some pretty hard true things, and nine women out of ten would have raised the very She's got courage, and—yes, and deuce. dignity, and a spirit of her own that has helped her to bear many a bitter thing without losing her hold on herself, I'd be willing to swear. Look here!" he added, turning suddenly and facing Tredennis. "How much do you know of her troubles? Something, I know, or you wouldn't be here?"

"Yes," answered the Colonel. "I know something."

"Well," he continued, in an outburst of feeling, "I don't ask how much. It's enough, I dare say, to make it safe for me to speak my mind—I mean safe for her, not for myself. There's a fellow within a hundred miles of here I should like to thrash within an inch of his life, and an elegant, charming, amiable fellow he is too, who, possibly, persuaded himself that he was doing her very little injury."

"The injury has been done nevertheless," said Tredennis gravely. "And it is her friends who must right it."

"I'm willing to do my share," said Blundel. "And let that fellow keep out of my way. As to this ball—I never went to a ball in my life, but I will appear at this one, and show my colours. Wait a minute!" As if an idea had suddenly struck him. "Go to the ball?—I'll take her there myself."

The spirit of combat was aroused within him; the idea presented itself to him with such force, that he quite enjoyed it. Here arraigned on one side were these society scandalmongers and fine ladies; here on the other was himself, Samuel Blundel, rough and blunt, but determined enough to scatter them and their lies to the four winds. rather revelled in the thought of the struggle, if struggle there was to be. He had taken active part in many a row in the House in which the odds had been against him, and where his obstinate strength had outlived the subtle readiness of a dozen apparently better equipped men. And his heart was in this deed of valour too; it glowed within him as he thought how much really depended upon him. Now, this pretty, bright creature must turn to him for protection and support. almost felt as if he held her gloved hand resting upon his burly arm already with a clinging touch.

"I'll take her myself," he repeated. "I'll go and see her myself, and explain the necessity of it—if she does not know all."

"She does not know all yet," said Tredennis, "and I think she was scarcely inclined to go to the ball; but I am sure it will be better that she should go."

"She will go," said Blundel, abruptly.
"I'll make her. She knows me. She will go if I tell her she must. That is what comes of

being an old fellow, you see, and not a lady's man."

He had not any doubt of his success with her, and, to tell the truth, neither had Colonel Tredennis. He saw that his blunt honesty and unceremonious, half-paternal domineering would prove to her that he was in the right; even if she were at first reluctant; and this being settled and the matter left in Blundel's hands, the Colonel went away. Only before going he said a few words, rather awkwardly:

"There would be nothing to be gained by mentioning my name," he said. "It is mere accident that—that I chance to know what I have spoken of. She does not know that I know it. I should prefer that she should not."

"What!" said Blundel. "She is not to know how you have been standing by her?"

"She knows that I would stand by her if she needed me. She does not need me; she needs you. I have nothing to do with the matter. I don't wish to be mentioned."

When he was gone Blundel rubbed his hair backward and then forward by way of variety.

"Queer fellow!" he said, meditatively. "Not quite sure I've exactly got at him yet. Brave as a lion, and shy as a boy. Absolutely afraid of women."

CHAPTER X.

UNEXPECTED AID.

In less than an hour his card was brought to Bertha as she sat with her children. She read it with a beating heart, and, having done so, put down Meg and her picture-book.

"I will go down at once," she said to the servant.

In two minutes she was standing in the middle of the parlour, and her guest was holding her hand in his, and looking at her earnestly and curiously.

- "You didn't expect to see me here, did you?" he said.
- "No," she answered; "but you are kind to come."
- "I didn't expect to be here myself," he said. "Where is your husband? Somebody told me he had gone away."

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"He is in New York," she replied.

He gave her one of his sharp glances and drew her toward a chair.

- "Sit down by me," he said. "You are in no condition to be kept standing. I want to talk to you. You mustn't look like that," he said. "It wont do. You are worn out, but you mustn't give up. I have come to order you to do something."
- "I will do anything you tell me," she answered.
- "You will? Well, that's good! I thought you would, too. I want you to take me to this ball that is to be given to-morrow night."

She started in amazement.

- "To the ball!" she exclaimed.
- "Surprises you, doesn't it? I supposed it would; it surprises me a little, but I want to go nevertheless, and I have a reason."
 - "I am sure it is a good one," she said.
- "It is," he answered. "None but the best would take me there. I never went to a ball in my life. You are the reason. I am going to take care of you."

A faint, sad smile touched her lips.

"Some one has said something more against me," she said, "and you want to

Refend me. Don't take the trouble. It is not worth while."

- "The place is full of lies about you," he newered, suddenly and fiercely. "And I am going to defend you. No one else can. They are lies that concern me as well as you."
- "Will you tell me what they are?" she sked.

He saw there was no room for hesitation, and told her what the facts were. As he poke he felt that they did not improve in he relation, and he saw the blood rise to her heeks, and a light grow in her eyes. When he had finished the light was a brilliant spark of fire.

- "It is a charming story," she said.
- "We will show them what sort of a story it is," he answered, "to-morrow night!"
 - "You are very good to me," she said. Suddenly she put her hand to her side.
- "Ah!" she exclaimed, it seems very strange that they should be saying these things of—Bertha Amory!"

She looked at him with a hopeless appeal in her eyes.

"Do they all believe them?" she said.
"Ah, how can they? They know I was not

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—like that! I have not done anything! I have been unhappy, but—but I——"

She stopped a moment — or was stopped by her breaking voice.

- "This has been too much for you," he said.
 "You are ill, child!"
- "I have been ill for some time," she answered. "And the last few days have been very hard."

She made an effort to recover herself.

- "I will go to the ball," she said, "if you think it best."
- "It is best," he replied. "And you need not be afraid——'
- "I am not afraid," she interposed quickly, and the spark of fire showed itself in her eyes again. "I might allow myself to be beaten, if it were not for my children; but, as it is, you will see that I will not be beaten. I will be well for to-morrow night at least. I will not look like a victim. They will see that I am not afraid."

"It is they who will be beaten," said Blundel, "if anything depends on me! Confound it! I shall *like* to do it."

CHAPTER XI.

BLUNDEL'S EFFORTS.

HE went home quite eager for the fray, and his eagerness was not allowed to flag. The favourite story came to his ears again and again. Men met him in the streets, and stopped to speak of it; others dropped into his rooms to hear the truth from himself, when he went to his hotel to dine; talkers standing in groups in the lobbies turned to look at him, and when he had passed them returned to their conversation with renewed interest. To the first man who referred to the matter he listened until he had said his say. Then he answered him.

"You want to hear the truth about that," he said, "don't you?"

"That of course," was the reply.

- "And you want to be able to tell the truth about it when you are asked questions."
 - "Most certainly."

"Well, then, the truth is that there isn't a word of truth in it from beginning to end; and if you want to tell the truth, say it's a lie, and add that I said so, and I am prepared to say so to every man who wants to interview me; and what is more, every man who tells another that it is a lie does me a favour that gives him a claim on me."

He repeated the same thing in effect each time an opportunity presented itself, and as these opportunities were frequent and each time he gained something of heat and lost something (of temper and patience, he was somewhat tired and by no means in the best of humours when he sat down to his dinner, in the big, glaring, crowded hotel dining-room amid the rattle of knives, forks, and crockery, the rushing to and fro of excited waiters, and the incoming and outgoing of hungry people. His calmness was not added to by observing that the diners at the tables near him discovered him as with one accord almost as soon as he entered, and cast glances of interest at him between the courses.

"Perfectly dreadful scene, they say," he heard one lady remark, with an unconscious candour born of her confidence that the clatter of dishes would drown all sound. "Went down on her knees to him and wrung her hands, imploring him to have mercy on her. Husband disappeared next day. Quite society people too. She has been a great deal admired."

What further particulars the speaker might have entered into there is no knowing, as she was a communicative person and plainly enjoyed her subject; but just at this juncture the lady to whom she was confiding her knowledge of the topics of the hour uttered an uneasy exclamation.

"Gracious! Maria!" she said. "He has heard you! I am sure he has! He has turned quite red—redder than he was—and he is looking at us! Oh, Maria!" in accents sepulchral with fright, "he is getting up! He is coming to speak to us! Oh!—Mari——!"

He was upon them at that very moment. He was accustomed to public speaking, and his experience led him to the point at once. He held his newspaper half folded in his hand, and, as had been said, he was a trifle redder than usual; but his manner was too direct to be entirely devoid of dignity.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but my name is Blundel."

The most hopelessly terrified of the ladies found herself saying that he "was very kind," and the one who had told the story gasped faintly, but with an evident desire to propitate, that she "had heard so."

"I take the liberty of mentioning it," he added, "because I have been sitting quite near to you and chanced to overhear what you were saying, and as you are evidently labouring under an impression I am interested in correcting, I felt obliged to intrude on you with a view to correcting it. I have been denying that story all day. It isn't true. Not a word of it. I never said an unkind word to the lady you mention, and I never had an unkind thought of her. No one has any right to speak ill of her. I am her friend. You will excuse my interrupting you. Here is my card." And he laid the card on the table, made a bow not so remarkable for grace, perhaps, as for perfect respectfulness, and marched back to his table.

There were few people in the room who did not turn to look at him as he sat down again, and nine out of ten began to indulge in highly-coloured speculations as to why he had addressed the women and who they were. There had never been a more popular scandal than the Westoria land scheme; the magnitude of it, the element of romance connecting itself with it, the social position of the principal schemers, all endeared it to the public heart. Blundel himself had become a hero, and had the rumours regarding his irreproachable and dramatic conduct only been rife at a time of election, they would have assured him an overwhelming majority. Perhaps as he approached the strangers' table there had been a fond, flickering hope cherished that these two apparently harmless women were lobbyists themselves, and that their disguise was to be rent from them and their iniquities to be proclaimed upon the spot. But the brief episode ended with apparent tameness and the general temperature was much lowered, the two ladies sinking greatly in public opinion, and the interest in Blundel himself flagging a little. There was one person, however, who did not lose interest in him.

This was a little, eager, bird-like woman who sat at some distance from him, at a small table alone. She had seen his every movement since his entrance, and her bright, dark eyes followed him with an almost wistful interest. It was Miss Jessup; and Miss Jessup was full to the brim and pressed down and running over with anecdotes of the great scandal, and her delicate little frame almost trembled with anxious excitement as she gazed upon him and thought of what might be done in an interview.

He had nearly finished his dinner before he caught sight of her, but as he was taking his coffee he glanced down the room, saw and recognised her.

- "The very woman!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Why didn't I think of that before?" And in five minutes Miss Jessup's heart was thrilled within her, for he had approached her, greeted her, and taken the seat she offered him.
- "I have come," he said, "to ask a favour of you."
- "Of me!" said Miss Jessup. "That does not sound exactly natural. I have generally asked favours of you. I have just been

looking at you and making up my mind to ask one."

"Wanted to interview me?" he asked. "Didn't you?"

She nodded her head, and her bright eyes brightened.

- "Well," sturdily, "I want you to interview me. Go ahead and do it."
- "You want to be interviewed!" she exclaimed, positively radiant with innocent joy. "No! Really?"
 - "I am here for that purpose," he answered. She left her seat instantly.
- "Come into the parlour," she said. "It is quiet there at this time. We can sit where we shall not be disturbed at all."

They went into the parlour and found at the far end of it the quiet corner they needed, and two chairs. Miss Jessup took one and Blundel the other, which enabled him to present his broad back to all who entered. Almost before he was seated Miss Jessup had produced her neat note-book and a pencil.

"Now," she said, "I am ready for anything; but I must say I don't see how I am favouring you."

"You are going to favour me by saving me

the trouble of contradicting a certain story every half-hour," he said.

"Ah!" ejaculated Miss Jessup, her countenance falling a little; "it is not true?"

"Not a word of it."

Humane little creature as she was, as she glanced down at her note-book, Miss Jessup felt that some one had been a trifle defrauded.

- "And there was no scene?"
- " No."
- "And you did not threaten to expose her?"
- " No."
- . "And you wish me to tell people that?"
- "Yes, as pointedly as possible, in as few words as possible, and without mentioning names if possible."
- "Oh, it would not be necessary to mention names; everybody would understand the slightest reference."
- "Well, when you have done that," said Blundel, "you have granted me my favour."
- "And you want it to be brief?" said Miss Jessup.
- "See here," said Blundel; "you are a woman. I want you to speak the truth for another woman as plainly, and—as delicately as a woman can. A man would say too

much or too little—that is why I come to you."

She touched her book with her pencil, and evidently warmed at once.

"I always liked her," she said, with genuine good feeling, "and I could not help hoping that the story was not true, after all. As it was public property, it was my business to find out all about it if I could; but I couldn't help being sorry. I believe I can say the right thing, and I will do my best. At any rate, it will be altogether different from the other versions."

"There won't be any other versions if I can prevent it," returned Blundel. "I shall have some interviews with newspaper men to-night, which will accomplish that end, I hope."

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Jessup, "then mine will be the only statement."

"I hope so," he answered. "It will if I have any influence."

"Oh, then," she said, "you have done me a favour, after all."

"It wont balance the favour you will have done me," he replied, "if you do your best in this matter. You see, I know what your best is, and I depend on it."

"Well," she said, "it is very kind of you to say so, and I will try to prove myself worth depending on, but—" And she scribbled a little in her note-book. "I don't mind telling you that the reason that is strongest in my mind is quite an unprofessional one. It is the one you spoke of just now. It is because I am a woman, too."

"Then she is safe," he returned. "Nothing could make her safer. And I am grateful to you beforehand, and I hope you will let me say so."

And they shook hands and parted the best of friends, notwithstanding that the interview had dwindled down into proportions quite likely to be regarded by the public as entirely insignificant.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BALL, AND AFTER IT.

It had certainly been expected by the public that the morning papers would contain some interesting reading matter, and in some respects these expectations were realized. The ignominious failure of the Westoria land scheme was discussed with freedom and vigour, light being cast upon it from all sides, but upon the subject which had promised most there was a marked silence. Only in one paper there appeared a paragraph—scarcely more—written with much clearness and with a combined reserve and directness which could not fail to carry weight. It was very well done, and said so much in little and with such unmistakable faith in its own statements and such suggestions of a foundation for that faith, that it was something of a shock to those who had

delighted in the most elaborate ornamentation of the original story. In effect it was a denial not only of the ornamentation, but of the story itself, and left the liberal commentator on the ornamentator of the ornamentation of the ornamentation, but of the ornamentator of the ornamentation, but of the ornamentator of the ornamentation, but of the ornamentator of th

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There was, however, no sense of discouragement in the mind of Senator Blundel as he attired himself for the fray when night arrived. His mood was a fine combination of aggressiveness, generous kindliness, hot temper, and chivalric good feeling. He thought all day of the prospect before him, and in the afternoon went to the length of calling at a florist's and ordering a bouquet to be sent to Mrs. Amory, choosing it himself and feeling some pride in the good taste of his selection. He was so eager, indeed, that the day seemed quite long to him, and he dressed so early after dinner that he had two or three hours to wait before his carriage arrived.

But it did arrive at last, and he went down to it, drawing on with some difficulty an exceedingly tight pair of gloves, the obduracy of whose objections to being buttoned gave him something to combat with and suited his frame of mind to a nicety.

He was not called upon to wait very long after his entrance into the parlour. A few moments after his arrival Bertha came down. She was superbly dressed in white, she carried his roses and violets, and there burned upon her cheeks a colour at once so delicate and brilliant that he was surprised by it. He had, indeed, rather expected to see her paler.

"Upon my soul," he said, "you don't look much frightened!"

"I am not frightened at all," she answered.

"That is a good thing," he returned. "We shall get on all the better for it. I never saw you with a brighter colour."

She touched her cheek with her gloved finger.

"It is not rouge," she said. "I have been thinking of other parties I have attended—and of how these ladies will look at me to-night—and of what they possibly said of me yesterday—and it has been good for me."

"It was not so good for them, however," he suggested, regarding her with new interest. Her spirit pleased him; he liked it that she was not ready to allow herself to be beaten

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down, that she held her head erect and confronted her enemies with resolute eyes; he had a suspicion that there were women enough who would have been timorous and pathetic.

"I could not hurt them," she replied. "It I lt would matter very little what I thought or said of them—it is only they who can harm me."

"They shall none of them harm you," he said, stoutly. "I will see to that—but I'm glad you are looking your best."

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But she could not help seeing that he was a trifle anxious about her. His concern manifested itself in occasional touches of half-paternal kindliness which were not lost upon her. He assisted her to put on her wrap, asked her if it was warm enough, ordered her to draw it closely about her, and tucked her under his arm as he led her out to the carriage with an air of determined protection not to be mistaken.

Perhaps his own views as to what form of oppression and opposition they were to encounter were rather vague. He was sufficiently accustomed to the opposition of men, but not to that of women; but, whatever aspect it assumed upon this occasion, he was valiantly determined not to be moved by it.

"I can't dance with you," he said, "that's true—I wish I could—but I will see that you have plenty of partners."

"I don't think the difficulty will be in the partners," Bertha replied, with a faint smile. "The men will not be unkind to me, you will see."

"They won't believe it, eh?" said Blundel.

Her eyes met his, and the faint smile had a touch of bitterness.

"Some of them will not believe it," she answered; "and some will not care."

There was not the slightest shade of any distrust of herself or her surroundings, either in her face or manner, when, on reaching their destination, she made her way into the cloak-room. The place was already crowded—so crowded that a new-comer was scarcely noticeable. But, though she seemed to see nothing, glancing to neither right nor left, and occupying herself with the removal of her wraps, and with a few calm last touches bestowed upon her toilet before a mirror, scarcely a trifle escaped her. She heard greetings, laughter, gay comments on the brilliancy and promise of the ball; she knew

where stood a woman who would be likely to appear as an enemy, where stood another who might be neutral, and another who it wa even possible might be a friend. But she e meant to run no risks, and her long training in self-control stood her in good stead; there was neither consciousness nor too much unconciousness in her face; when the woman whom she had fancied might lean toward friendliness saw and bowed to her, she returned the greeting with her pretty, inscrutable smile, the entire composure of which so impressed the matron who was disposed to neutrality, that she bowed also, and so did But there were others some one near her. who did not bow, and there were those who. discovering the familiar, graceful figure, drew together in groups, and made an amiable comment or so. But she did not seem to see When, taking up her flowers and her white ostrich-feather fan, she passed down the little lane, they expressed their disapproval by making way for her as she turned towards the door. She was looking at two ladies who were entering, and, general attention being directed towards them, they were discovered to be Mrs. Sylvestre and Mrs. Merriam.

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"Now," it was asked, "what will they do?".

What they did was very simple in itself, but very remarkable in the eyes of the lookers-on. They paused and spoke to the delinquent in quite their usual manner.

"We would ask you to wait for us," Mrs. Merriam was heard to say finally, "but there are so many people here to be attended to, and we saw Senator Blundel waiting for you at the door. May I tell you how pretty your dress is, and how brilliant you are looking?"

"Senator Blundel!" was repeated by the nearest groups. "It could not be Senator Blundel who is with her."

But those who were near enough to the door were subjected to the mental shock of seeing that it was Senator Blundel himself. He appeared in festal array, rubicund, and obstinately elate, and, stepping forward, took his charge's hand, and drew it within his portly arm.

"What!" he said, "you are not pale yet—and yet there were plenty of them in there. What did they do?"

"Three of them were good enough to bow

to me," she answered, "and the rest drester away and discussed me in undertones. The general impression was, I think, that I was well impudent. I did not feel impudent, and don't think I looked so."

"Poor little woman!" he said. "Poo little woman!"

"No! no!" she exclaimed, looking straighbefore her, with dangerously bright eyes "don't say that to me. Don't pity me, please -just yet-it isn't good for me. I need-I need-"

There was a second or so of dead silence. - ** She did not tell him what she needed.

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When they entered the ball-room a waltz == 3 was being played, and the floor was thronged with dancers; the ladies who formed the committee of reception stood near the door; a party of guests had just received the usual greetings and retired. The commandress-inchief turned to meet the new-comers. was a stately and severe dowager, with no intention of flinching from her duty; but her sudden recognition of the approaching senatorial figure was productive of a bewilderment almost too great for her experience to cope She looked, caught her breath, lost it

and her composure at one and the same time, cast a despairing glance at her aides, and fell a victim to circumstances. Here was the subject under ban calmly making the most graceful and self-possessed obeisance before her—and her escort was the man of whom it had been said that a few days ago he had exposed her infamous plotting. This was more than even the most experienced matron could be prepared for. It must be admitted that her presence of mind deserted her, and that her greetings were not marked by the ready tact which usually characterised them.

"My first ball, madam," remarked the Senator, scenting difficulty in the breeze, and confronting it boldly. "But for my friend, Mrs. Amory, I am afraid I should not be here. I begin to feel indebted to her already."

"It promises very well," said Bertha. "I never saw the room gayer. How pretty the decorations are."

They passed on to make room for others, leaving the estimable ladies behind them pale with excitement, and more demoralised than they would have been willing to admit.

"What does it mean?" they asked one

another. "They appear to be the best officends! What are we to understand?"

There was one kindly matron at the end of the line who looked after the pair with an expression of sympathy which was rather at variance with the severity of the *rôle* she had been called upon to enact.

"It appears," she said, "as if the whole story might be a fabrication, and the Senator determined to prove it so. I hope with all my heart he will."

By the time they reached their seats the news of their arrival had made the circle of their room. Bertha herself, while she had listened with a smile to her escort's remarks, had seen amazement and recognition flash out upon a score of faces; but she had preserved her smile intact, and still wore it when she took her chair. She spoke to Blundel, waving her fan with a soft, even motion.

"We have run the gauntlet," she said, "and we have chosen a good position. Almost everybody in the room has seen us—almost every one in the room is looking at us."

"Let them look!" he answered. "I have no objection to it."

"Ah, they will look!" she returned.

"And we came to be—to be looked at. And it is very good of you to have no objections. Do I seem perfectly at ease? I hope so—though I am entirely well aware that at least a hundred people are discussing me. Is the expression of my eyes good—careless enough?"

"Yes, child, yes," he answered, a little uneasily. There was an undertone in her voice which troubled him, much as he admired her spirit and self-control.

"Thank you," she said. "Here is a bold man coming to ask me to dance. I told you the men would not be afraid of me. I think if you approve of it, I will dance with him."

"Go and dance," he answered.

When her partner bore her away, he took charge of her flowers and wrap in the most valiant manner, and carried them with him when he went to pay his respects to the matrons of his acquaintance who sat against the wall discussing with each other the most exciting topic of the hour; and who, when he addressed them, questioned him as closely as good-breeding would permit, upon

all subjects likely to cast light upon thitopic.

"Never was at a ball in my life before," he admitted. "Asked Mrs. Amory to bring me. — 1e. Wanted to see how I should like it."

"With Mrs. Amory?" remarked matron on No. 1. "She is dancing, I believe."

"Yes," he said, good-naturedly. "She will be dancing all night, I suppose, and I shall be exarrying her flowers; but I don't mind it—in—n fact, I rather like it. I dare say there are two or three young fellows who would be glad enough to be in my place."

"I have no doubt," was the reply. "She has been very popular—and very gay."

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"She is very popular with me," said the Senator, "though I am an old fogey, and don't count. We are great friends, and I am very proud to be her escort to-night. I feel I am making my début under favourable circumstances."

There could be no doubt of his sentiments after that. He was her friend. He admired her. He even made a point of saying so. What became of the story of the scandal? It seemed to have ended in nothing and worse than nothing; there was something a

little ridiculous about such a tame termination to such an excitement. One or two of the ladies who had found it most absorbing looked aimlessly into space, and an embarrassed silence fell upon them.

Bertha ended her dance and returned to her seat. Her colour was even brighter than before, and her smile was more brilliant. a few moments a little group surrounded her, and her programme was half full. Blundel came back to his post like a sentinel. If she had been looked at before, she was regarded now with a double eagerness. Those who were not dancing watched her every movement: even those who danced asked each other questions. The group about her chair was added to and became gayer, but there were no women numbered in the circle. The general wonder was as to what would be done in the end. So far, round dances only had been danced. The next dance was a The music struck up, and the quadrille. dancers began to take their places. As they did so a party entered the room and made its way towards the end where the group stood about the chair. Bertha did not see it; she was just rising to take her station in the set nearest to her. The matron of the party, who was a figure so familiar in social circles as to be recognised at once by all who saw her, was accompanied by her daughter and an escort. It was the wife of the Secretary of State, and her cavalier was Colonel Tredennis.

"There is Mrs. Amory," she said to him as they approached. "She is taking her place in the quadrille. One moment, if you please."

Experience had taught her all that might be feared, and a quick eye showed her that something was wrong. Bertha advanced to her place, laughing a little at some jest of her partner's. She had not seen who the dancers were. The jest and the laugh ended, and she looked up at her vis-à-vis. The lady at his side was not smiling; she was gazing steadily at Bertha herself. It seemed as if she had been waiting to catch her eye. It was the "great lady," and, having carried the figurative pebble until this fitting moment, she threw it. She spoke two or three words to her partner, took his arm, turned her back, and walked away.

Bertha turned rather pale. She felt the blood ebb out of her face. There was no

mistaking the significance of the action, and it had not escaped an eye. This was more than she had thought of. She made a movement, with what intention she herself was too much shaken to know, and, in making it, her eyes fell upon a face whose expression brought to her an actual shock of relief. It was the face of the kind and generous gentlewoman who had just entered, and who, at this moment, spoke to her daughter.

"My dear," she said, "I think you promised Colonel Tredennis the first quadrille. Go and take that vacant place, and when you speak to Mrs. Amory ask her to come and talk to me a little as soon as the dance is over."

There was a tone of gentle decision in her voice and a light in her eye which were not lost upon the by-standers. She gave Bertha a bow and smile and sat down. The most fastidious woman in Washington—the woman who drew her lines so delicately that she had even been called almost too rigorous, the woman whose well-known good taste and good feeling had given her a power mere social position was powerless to bestow—had taken the subject of the hour's scandal under

her protection, and plainly believed nothing to her discredit.

In five minutes the whole room was aware of it. She had greeted Mrs. Amory cordially, she had openly checkmated an antagonist, she had sent her own daughter to fill the place left vacant in the dance.

- "She would not have done that if she had not had the best of reasons," it was said.
- "And Senator Blundel would scarcely be here if the story had been true."
- "He has told several of his friends that he is here to prove that it is not true!"
 - "He denied it again and again yesterday."
- "It was denied in one of the morning papers, and they say he kept it out of the rest because he was determined she should not be more publicly discussed."
- "She is not one of the women who have been in the habit of giving rise to discussion."
- "She is a pretty, feminine-looking little creature."
- "Poor girl! It must have been bitter enough for her."
- "Rather fine of old Blundel to stand by her in this way."
 - "He would not do it if there was not

something rather fine in her. He is not a ladies' man, old Sam Blundel. Look at him! How he looms up behind his bouquet!"

The tide of public opinion had taken a turn. Before the dance had ended two or three practical matrons who were intimately known to Colonel Tredennis's friendly supporter had made their way to her and asked her opinion and intentions frankly, and had received information calculated to set every doubt at rest.

"It is scarcely necessary for me to speak of my opinion of the matter," the lady said, "when we have the evidence of Senator Blundel's presence here with Mrs. Amory to-night. I should feel myself unpardonably in the wrong if I did not take the most open measures in the defence of the daughter of my old friend, who has been treated most unjustly. And I cannot help hoping that she will have other defenders than myself."

Several of the matrons so addressed were seated within speaking range when Bertha came to her friend at the close of the dance, and she recognised at once on approaching them that she need fear them no longer. But she could not say much in response to their greetings; she answered them briefly, bowed slightly, and sat down in the chair near the woman who had protected her. She could even say but little to her; the colour had died out of her face at last; the strain she had borne so long had reached its highest tension to-night, and the shock of the moment, received through an envious woman's trivial spite, slight as it might have been in itself, represented too much to her. As he had passed her in the dance and touched her hand, Tredennis had felt it as cold as ice, and the look of her quiet, white face had been almost more than he could bear to see.

"Bertha," he had said to her once, "for God's sake, take courage!"

But she had not answered him. A few months ago she would have given him a light, flippant reply if her very soul had been wrung within her, but now she was past that. As she sat by her friend, her hand shook as she held her fan.

"You were very kind to me just now," she said, in a low voice. "I cannot express my thanks as I wish."

"My dear," was the reply, "do not speak of it. I came to take care of you. I think you will have no more trouble. But I am afraid this has been too much for you. You are shivering a little."

"I am cold," Bertha answered. "I—feel as if—something strange had happened to me. It was not so before. I seem—to have lost courage."

"But you must not lose courage yet," she said, with a manner at once soft and firm. "A great many people are looking at you. They will be very curious to know how you feel. It is best that you should not let them see."

No one near could hear. She was smiling as if the subject of the conversation was the least important in the world.

"Listen to me," he said, in the same manner, "and try to look as if we were speaking of ordinary topics. I dare say you feel as if you would prefer to go away, but I think you must remain. Everybody here must understand that you have friends who entirely disbelieve all that has been said against you, and also that they wish to make their confidence in you public. I should advise you to appear to enjoy yourself moderately well. I think I wish you to dance

several times again. I think there will be no difficulty in arranging the next square dance. When the presidential party arrives, the President will, I have no doubt, be pleased to talk to you a little. It would be republican to say that it is absurd to consider that such a thing can be of consequence; but there are people with whom it will have weight. As soon as possible, I shall send you down to the supper-room with Senator Blundel. A glass of wine will do you good. Here is Senator Blundel now. Do you think you can talk to him in your usual manner?"

"I will try," said Bertha. "And if I do not, I think he will understand."

He did understand. The little incident had been no more lost upon him than upon others. He was glowing with repressed wrath, and sympathy, and the desire to do something which should express his feeling. He saw at once the change which had come upon her, and realised to the full all that it denoted. When he bore her off to the supper-room, he fairly bristled with defiance of the lookers-on who made way for them.

"Confound the woman!" he said. "If it had only been a man!"

He found her the most desirable corner in the supper-room, and devoted himself to her service with an assiduity which touched her to the heart.

"You have lost your colour," he said. "That won't do. We must bring it back."

"I am afraid it will not come back," she answered.

And it did not, even though the tide had turned, and that it had done so became more manifest every moment. They were joined shortly by Colonel Tredennis and his party, and by Mrs. Merriam and hers. It was plain that Mrs. Amory was to be alone no more; people who had been unconscious of her existence in the ball-room, suddenly recognised it as she sat surrounded by her friends; the revulsion of feeling which had taken place in her favour expressed itself in a hundred trifles. But her colour was gone, and returned no more, though she bore herself with outward calmness. It was Colonel Tredennis who was her first partner when they returned to the He had taken a seat near her ball-room. at the supper-table, and spoken a few words to her.

"Will you give me a place on your card,

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Bertha?" he had said, and she had handed it to him in silence.

He was not fond of dancing, and they h rarely danced together, but he wished to be near her until she had had time to recovered herself. Better he than another man who might not understand so well; he knew how to be silent at least.

So they went through their dance togeth er, exchanging but few words, and interest ed spectators looked on, and one or two remarked to each other that, upon the whole le, it appeared that Mrs. Amory was rather well supported, and that there had evidently be a mistake somewhere.

And then the Colonel took her back the her seat, and there were new partners; and between the dances one matron after another found the way to her, and, influenced by the general revulsion of feeling, exhibited a cordiality and interest in marked contrast with the general bearing at the outset of the evening. Perhaps there were those who were rather glad to be relieved of the responsibility and upon them. When the presidential party arrived, it was observed that the President himself was very cordial when he joined the

group at the end of the room, the centre figure of which was the wife of his friend and favourite cabinet officer. It was evident that he, at least, had not been affected by the gossip of the hour. His greeting of Mrs. Amory was marked in its kindness, and before he went away it was whispered about that he also had felt an interest in the matter when it had reached his ears, and was not sorry to have an opportunity of indirectly expressing his opinion.

The great lady took her departure in bitterness of spirit, the dances went on, Bertha went through one after another, and between her waltzes held her small court and was glanced at askance no more. Any slight opposition which might have remained would have been overpowered by the mere force of changed circumstances. Before the evening was at an end, it had become plain that the attempt to repress and overwhelm little Mrs. Amory had been a complete failure, and had left her better defended than it had found her.

"But she has lost something," Senator Blundel said to himself, as he watched her dancing. "Confound it!—I can see it—she is not what she was three months ago—

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she is not what she was when she came i the room."

Tredennis also recognized the change whehad come upon her, and before long know also that she had seen his recognition of and that she made no effort to conceal it from him. He felt that he could almost has ave better borne to see her old, careless gaiet by, which he had been wont to resent in secret bitterness of heart.

Once, when they chanced to stand alor ne together for a moment, she spoke to him imquickly.

"Is it late?" she asked. "We seem to have been here so long! I have danced so much Will it not soon be time to go home?"

"Do you want to go home?" he asked.

"Yes!" she answered, almost breathlessly
"the music seems so loud it bewilders me a
little. How gay it is! How the people dance
The sound and motion make me blind and dizzy, Philip!"

The tone in which she uttered his name was so low and tense that he was startled by it.

"What is it?" he asked.

"If there are many more dances, I am afraid—I cannot go through them—I think

—I am breaking down, and I must not—I must not! Tell me what to do!"

He made a movement so that he stood directly before her and shielded her from the observation of those near them. He realised the danger of the moment.

"Look up at me!" he said. "Try to fix your eyes on me steadily. This feeling will pass away directly. You will go soon and you must not break down. Do not let yourself be afraid that you will."

She obeyed him like a child, trying to look at him steadily.

"Tell me one more dance will be enough," she said, "and say you will dance it with me if you can."

"I will," he answered, "and you need not speak a word."

When the Senator found himself alone in the carriage with her his sense of the triumph achieved found its expression in words.

"Well," he said, "I think we have put an end to that story."

"Yes," Bertha answered, "they will not say anything more about me. You have saved me from that."

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She leaned forward and looked out of the window. Carriages blocked the street, and were driving up and driving away; policemen were opening and shutting doors and calling names loudly; a few street-Arabs stood on the pavement and looked with envious eyes at the bright dresses and luxurious wraps of the party passing under the awning; the glare of gas-light fell upon a pretty face upturned to its companions, and a girl's laugh rang out on the night air. Bertha turned away. She looked at Senator Blundel. Her own face had no colour.

- "I think," she said, "I think I have been to my last ball."
- "No-no," he answered. "That's non-sense. You will dance at many a one."
- "I think," she said, "I think this is the last."

Senator Blundel did not accompany her into the house when they reached it. He left her at the door, almost wringing her small cold hand in his stout warm one.

"Come!" he said. "You are tired now, and no wonder, but to-morrow you will be better. You want sleep and you must have it. Go in, child, and go to bed. Good-

night. God bless you! You will—be better to-morrow."

She went through the hall slowly, intending to go to her room, but when she reached the parlour she saw that it was lighted. She had given orders that the servants should not sit up for her, and the house was silent with the stillness of sleep. She turned at the parlour door and looked in. A fire still burned in the grate, her own chair was drawn up before it, and in the chair sat a figure, the sight of which caused her to start forward with an exclamation—a tall, slender, old figure, his gray head bowed upon his hand.

"Papa!" she cried. "Can it be you, papa? What has happened?"

He rose rather slowly, and looked at her; it was evident that he had been plunged in deep thought; his eyes were heavy, and he looked aged and worn. He put out his hand, took hers, and drew her to him.

"My dear," he said. "My dear child!" She stood quite still for a moment, looking up at him.

"You have come to tell me something," she said at length, in a low, almost monotonous

voice. "And it is something about Richard. It is something—something wretched."

A slight flush mounted to his cheek—a flush of shame.

"Yes," he answered, "it is something wretched."

She began to shake like a leaf, but it was not from fear.

"Then do not be afraid," she said, "there is no need! Richard—has not spared me!"

It was the first time through all she had borne and hidden, through all the years holding, for her, suffering and bitterness and disenchantment which had blighted all her youth—it was the first time she had permitted her husband's name to escape her lips when she could not compel herself to utter it gently, and that at last he himself had forced such speech from her was the bitterest indignity of all.

And if she felt this, the Professor felt it keenly, too. He had marked her silence and self-control at many a time when he had felt that the fire that burned in her must make her speak; but she had never spoken, and the dignity of her reserve had touched him often.

"What is it that Richard has done now, papa?" she said.

He put a tremulous hand into his pocket, and drew forth a letter.

"Richard," he said—"Richard has gone abroad."

She had felt that she was to receive some blow, but she had scarcely been prepared for this. She repeated his words in bewilderment.

"Richard has gone abroad!"

The Professor put his hand on her shoulder.

"Sit down, my dear," he said. "You must sit down."

There was a chair near her; it stood by the table on which the Professor had been wont to take his cup of tea; she turned and sat down in this chair, and resting her elbows on the table, dropped her forehead upon her hands. The Professor drew near to her side, his gentle, refined old face flushed and paled alternately; his hands were tremulous; he spoke in a low, agitated voice.

"My dear," he said, "I find it very hard to tell you all—all I have discovered. It is very bitter to stand here upon your husband's hearth, and tell you—my child and his wife—that the shadow of dishonour and disgrace

rests upon him. He has not been truthful; we have—been deceived."

She did not utter a word.

"For some time I have been anxious," he went on, "but I blame myself that I was not anxious sooner. I am not a business man—I have not been practical in my methods of dealing with him; the fault was in a great measure mine. His nature was not a strong one—it was almost impossible for him to resist temptation; I knew that, and should have remembered it. I have been very blind. I did not realise what was going on before my eyes. I thought his interest in the Westoria scheme was only one of his many whims. I was greatly to blame."

"No," said Bertha; "it was not you who were to blame. I was more blind than you—I knew him better than—than any one else."

"A short time ago," said the Professor, "I received a letter from an old friend who knows a great deal of my business affairs. He is a business man, and I have been glad to intrust him with the management of various investments. In this manner he knew something of the investment of the money which was

yours. He knew more of Richard's methods than Richard was aware of. He had heard rumours of the Westoria land scheme, and had accidentally, in the transaction of his business, made some discoveries. He asked me if I knew the extent to which your fortune had been speculated with. Knowing a few facts, he was able to guess at others—"

Bertha lifted her face from her hands.

- "My money!" she exclaimed. "My fortune!"
- "He had speculated with it at various times, sometimes gaining, sometimes losing—the Westoria affair seems to have dazzled him—and he invested largely——"

Bertha rose from her chair.

- "It was Philip Tredennis's money he invested," she said. "Philip Tredennis——"
- "It was not Philip's money," the professor answered; "that I have discovered. But it was Philip's generosity which would have made it appear so. In this letter—written just before he sailed—Richard has admitted the truth to me—finding what proof I had against him."

Bertha lifted her hands and let them fall at her sides.

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"Papa," she said, "I do not understand this—I do not understand. Philip Tredennis! He gave money to Richard! Richard accepted money from him—to shield himself, to——! This is too much for me!"

"Philip had intended the money for Janey," said the professor, "and when he understood how Richard had involved himself, and how his difficulties would affect you and your future, he made a most remarkable offer: he offered to assume the responsibility of Richard's losses. He did not intend that you should know what Such a thing would only have he had done. been possible for Philip Tredennis, and it was because I knew him so well, that, when I heard that it was his money that had been risked in the Westoria lands, I felt that something was wrong. He was very reticent, and that added to my suspicions. Then I made the discoveries through my friend, and my accusations of Richard forced him to admit the truth."

"The truth!" said Bertha—"that I was to live upon Philip Tredennis's money—that, having been ruined by my husband, I was to be supported by Philip Tredennis's bounty!"

"Richard was in despair," said the Professor,
"and in his extremity he forgot——"

"He forgot me!" said Bertha. "Yes, he forgot—a great many things."

"It has seemed always to be Philip who has remembered," said the Professor, sadly. "Philip has been generous and thoughtful for us from first to last."

Bertha's hand closed itself.

"Yes," she cried; "always Philip—always Philip!"

"What could have been finer and more delicate than his care and planning for you in this trouble of the last few days, to which I have been so blind!" said the Professor.

"His care and planning!" echoed Bertha, turning slowly towards him. "His! Did you not hear that Senator Blundel——"

"It was he who went to Senator Blundel," the Professor answered. "It was he who spoke to the wife of the Secretary of State. I learned it from Mrs. Merriam. Out of all the pain we have borne, or may have to hear, the memory of Philip's faithful affection for us...."

He did not finish his sentence. Bertha

stopped him. Her clenched hand had risen to her side, and was pressed against it.

"It was Philip who came to me in my trouble in Virginia," she said. "It was Philip who saw my danger and warned me of it when I would not hear him; but I could not know that I owed him such a debt as this!"

"We should never have known it from him," the Professor replied. "He would have kept silent to the end."

Bertha looked at the clock upon the mantel.

- "It is too late to send for him now," she said, "it is too late, and a whole night must pass before——"
- "Before you say to him—what?" asked the Professor.
- "Before I tell him that Richard made a mistake," she answered, with white and trembling lips, "——that he must take his money back—that I will not have it."

She caught her father's arm and clung to it, looking into his troubled face.

"Papa," she said, "will you take me home again? I think you must if you will. There seems to be no place for me. If you will let me stay with you until I have time to think."

The Professor laid his hand upon hers and teld it closely.

"My dear," he said, "my home is yours. t has never seemed so much mine since you eft it; but this may not be so bad as you hink. I do not know how much we may rely pon Richard's hopes—they are not always to e relied upon—but it appears that he has opes of retrieving some of his losses through certain speculation he seems to have regarded a failure, but which suddenly promises to prove a success."

"I have never thought of being poor," said Bertha; "I do not think I should know how o be poor. But, somehow, it is not the noney I am thinking of—that will come ater, I suppose. I scarcely seem to realise ret——"

Her voice and her hand shook, and she lung to him more closely.

"Everything has gone wrong," she said wildly, "everything must be altered. No one is left to care for me but you! No one nust do it but you. Now that Richard has gone, it is not Philip who must be kind to me—not Philip—Philip last of all!"

"Not Philip!" he echoed. "Not Philip!" vol. III.

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And as he said it, they both heard feet ascending the steps at the front door.

"My child," said the Professor, "that is Philip now. He spoke of calling in on me on his way home. Perhaps he has been anxious at finding me out so late. I do not understand you—but must I go and send him away?"

"No," she answered, shuddering a little, as if with cold, "it is for me to send him away. But I must tell him first about the money. I am glad he has come—I am glad another night will not pass without his knowing. I think I want to speak to him alone—if you will send him here, and wait for a little while in the library."

She did not see her father's face as he went away from her; he did not see hers; she turned and stood upon the hearth with her back towards the door.

She stood so when a few minutes afterwards Philip Tredennis came in; she stood so until he was within a few feet of her. Then she moved a little and looked up.

What she saw in him arrested for the moment her power to speak, and for that moment both were silent. Often as she had

ecognised the change which had taken place in him, often as the realisation of it had wrung ter heart, and wrung it all the more that she had understood so little, she had never before een it as she saw it then. All the weariness, he anxious pain, the hopeless sadness of his hast seemed to have come to the surface; he could endure no more; he had borne the strain too long, and he knew too well that the end had come. No need for words to tell him that he must lose even the poor and bitter comfort he had clung to; he had made up his mind to that when he had defended her against the man who himself should have been her defence.

So he stood silent, and his deep eyes looked out from his strong, worn, haggard face, holding no reproach, full only of pity for her.

There was enough to pity in her. If she saw anguish in his eyes, what he saw in hers as she uplifted them he could scarcely have expressed in any words he knew; surely there were no words into which he could have put the pang their look gave him, telling him as it did that she had reached the point where he could stand on guard no more.

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- "Richard," she said at length, "has gone away."
 - "That I knew," he answered.
 - "When?" she asked.
- "I had a letter from him this morning," he said.
- "You did not wish to tell me?" she returned.
- "I thought," he began, "that perhaps—" and stopped.
- "You thought that he would write to me too," she said. "He—did not."

He did not speak, and she went on.

"When I returned to-night," she said, "papa was waiting for me. He had received a letter too, and it told him—something he suspected before—something I had not suspected—something I could not know——"

Her voice broke, and when she began again there was a ring of desperate appeal in it.

"When I was a girl," she said, "when you knew me long ago, what was there of good in me that you should have remembered it through all that you have known of me since then—there must have been something—something good or touching—something more than the goodness in yourself—that made you

pitiful of me, and generous to me, and anxious for my sake? Tell me what it was."

"It was," he said, and his own voice was low and broken too, and his deep and sad eyes were a look she had never seen before—the look that in the eyes of a woman would have spoken of welling tears, "it was—yourself."

"Myself!" she cried. "Oh, if it was myself—and there were goodness and truth, and what was worth remembering in me, why did it not save me from what I have been—and from what I am to-day? I do not think I meant to live my life so badly then; I was only careless and happy in a girlish way. I had so much faith and hope, and believed so much in all good things—and yet my life has all been wrong—and I seem to believe no more, and everything is lost to me; and since the days when I looked forward there is a gulf that I can never, never pass again."

She came nearer to him, and a sob broke from her.

"What am I to say to you," she said, "now that I know all that you have done for me while I—while I—. Why should you have cared to protect me? I was not

kind to you—I was not careful of yo —ur feelings——"

"No," he answered, "you—were not."

"I used to think that you despised me "she went on; "once I told you so. I even tried to give you reason. I showed my worself to you—I was unjust and bitter—I hu—t you many a time."

He seemed to labour for his words, and ye he laboured rather to control and check that to utter them.

"I am going away," he said. "When made the arrangement with Richard, of which you know, I meant to go away. I gathered from what your father said, that you mean to render useless my poor effort to be of use to you."

"I cannot—" she began, but she could go no farther.

"When I leave you—as I must," he said, "let me at least carry away with me the memory that you were generous to me at the last."

"At the last," she repeated after him, "the last!"

She uttered a strange, little, inarticulate cry. He saw her lift up one of her arms,

look blindly at the bracelet on her wrist, drop it at her side, and then stand looking up at him.

There was a moment of dead silence.

"Janey shall take the money," she said. "I cannot."

What the change was that he saw come over her white face and swaying figure he only felt, as he might have felt a blow in the dark from an unknown h and. What the great shock was that came upon him he only felt in the same way.

She sank upon the sofa, clinging to the cushion with one shaking hand. Suddenly she broke into helpless sobbing, like a child's, tears streaming down her cheeks as she lifted her face in appeal.

"You have been good to me," she said.
"You have been kind. Be good to me—be kind to me—once more. You must go away—and I cannot take from you what you want to give me; but I am not so bad as I have seemed—or so hard! What you have wished me to be—I will try to be! I will live for my children. I will be—as good—as I can. I will do anything you tell me to do—before you leave me! I will live all my life after-

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wards—as Bertha Herrick might have live—it! Only do not ask me to take the emoney!"

For a few seconds all the room was still. When he answered her she could barely hear his voice.

"I will ask of you nothing," he said.

He lifted her hand and bowed his head over it. Then he laid it back upon the cushion. It lay there as if it had been carved from stone.

"Good-bye," he said. "Good-bye."

He saw her lips part, but no sound came from them.

So he went away. He scarcely felt the floor beneath his feet. He saw nothing of the room about him. It seemed as if there was an endless journey between himself and the door through which he was to pass. The extremity of his mortal agony was like drunkenness.

When he was gone, she fell with a shudder, and lay still with her cheek against the crimson cushion.

The Professor was sitting at her bedside when she opened her eyes again. Her first recognition was of his figure, sitting, the head bowed upon the hand, as she had seen it when she came first into the house.

- "Papa," she said, "you are with me?"
- "Yes, my dear," he answered.
- "And—there is no one else?"
- "No, my dear."

She put out her hand and laid it upon his arm. He thought, with a bitter pang, that she did it as she had often done it in her girlhood, and that, in spite of the change in her, she wore a look which seemed to belong to those days too.

"You will stay with me," she said. "I have come back to you."

CHAPTER XIII.

A PARTING.

MISS JESSUP was very eloquent in the paragraph which she devoted to the announcement of the departure of Colonel Tredennis. "the well-known hero of the plains, whose fine, bronzed face and soldierly figure had become familiar to us during the past three seasons." She could scarcely express the regret felt by the many friends he had made, on losing him, and, indeed, there ran throughout the flowers of speech a suggestion of kindly, admiring sympathy and womanly good-feeling which quite went to the Colonel's heart, and made him wonder at his own good fortune when he read the paragraph in ques-He was far away from Washington tion. when the paper reached him. He had

come tired of life at the capital, it was and, and had been glad to exchange with man who found its gaieties better suited him.

"It is true," he said to himself when he heard of this report, "that they were not suited to me, nor I to them."

How he lived through the weeks, performing the ordinary routine of his duty, and bearing with him hour by hour, night and day, the load of grief and well-nigh intolerable anguish which he knew was never to be lighter, he did not know. The days came and went. It was morning, noon, or night, and he did not feel the hours either long or short. There were nights when, his work being done, he returned to his quarters and staggered to his seat, falling upon it blind and sick with a heavy horror of the day.

"This," he would say, again and again, "this is unnatural. To bear such torture and live through it seems scarcely human."

Sometimes he was so wrought upon by it physically that he thought he should not live through it; but he bore so much that at last he gained a hopeless faith in his own endurance. He was not alone. It was as he had told her

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it would be. From the hour that he looked has last upon her, it seemed that her face had never faded from before his aching eyes. Had all the past to live over again, all its bitter mysteries to read in a new light and learn to understand.

There was time enough now for him to think it all over slowly, to recall to his mince every look and change and tone; her caprices, her coldness, the wounds she had given him, he bore them all again, and each time he came back with a pang more terrible to that last moment—to her last look, to her last, broken words.

"Oh, God!" he cried, "does she bear this too?"

He knew nothing of her save what he gained at rare intervals from Miss Jessup's society column, which he read deliberately from beginning to end as each paper reached him. The friends of Mrs. Amory, Miss Jessup's first statement announced, would regret to learn that the health of that charming young wife and mother was so far from being what was to be desired, that it necessitated a temporary absence from those social circles of which she was so bright and

graceful an ornament. For a while her name was missing from the lists of those who appeared at the various entertainments, and then he began occasionally to see it again, and found a little sad comfort in the thought that she must be stronger. His kind, brown face changed greatly in these days; it grew lean and haggard and hopeless, and here and there a grey thread showed itself in his close, soldier-cropped hair. He planned out heavy work for himself, and kept close in his quarters, and those of his friends who had known him before his stay in Washington began to ask each other what had so broken Philip Tredennis.

The first time that Mrs. Amory appeared in society, after her indisposition, was at the house of her friend, Mrs. Sylvestre. During her temporary seclusion she had seen Mrs. Sylvestre frequently. There had been few days when Agnes had not spent some hours with her. When she had been denied to every one else, Agnes was admitted.

"It is only fatigue, this," Bertha had said; but other people tire me so! You never tire me."

She was not confined to her bed. She had

changed her room, taking possession of the pretty pink and blue chamber, and lay upor the sofa through the days, sometimes looking at the fire, often with her eyes closed.

The two conversed but little; frequently there was silence between them for some time; but Agnes knew that she was doingas Bertha wished when she came and satwith her.

At the end of a week, Mrs. Sylvestre came in one morning and found Bertha dressed and sitting in a chair.

- "I am going down-stairs," she said.
- "Do you think you are strong enough?" Agnes asked. She did not look so.
- "I must begin to try to do something," was the indirect reply. "One must always begin. I want to lie still and not speak or move; but I must not do that. I will go down stairs, and I think I should like to see Laurence."

As she went down the staircase she moved very slowly, and Agnes saw that she clung to the balustrade for support. When she reached the parlour door she paused for a moment, then crossed the threshold a little hurriedly, and went to the sofa and sat down. She was

tremulous, and tears had risen to her eyes from very weakness.

"I thought I was stronger," she said. But she said nothing more until, a few moments later, she began to speak of Tom and Kitty, in whom she had been much interested. It had been at her suggestion that, after divers fruitless efforts, the struggle to obtain Tom a "place" had been abandoned, and finally there had been procured for him a position likely to prove permanent, in a house of business where principles might be of value. Tom's lungs were still a trifle delicate, but he was rapturously happy in the small home to purchase which Mrs. Sylvestre had advanced the means, and his simple bliss was greatly added to by the advent of Kitty's baby.

So they talked of Tom and Kitty and the baby, and of Arbuthnot, and his friendship for them, and the oddities of it, and his way of making his efforts and kindness seem more than half a jest.

"No one can be kinder than Laurence," Bertha said. "No one could be a truer friend."

"I think so now," Agnes answered quietly.

"He is not so light, after all," said Bertha.

"Perhaps few of us are quite as light as we seem."

"I did him injustice at first," Agnes replied.
"I understand him better now."

"If he should go away, you would miss him a little," said Bertha. "He is a person one misses when he is absent."

"Does he—" Agnes began. "I have not heard him speak of going away."

"There is just a likelihood of it," Bertha returned. "Papa has been making an effort for him with the Secretary of State. He might be sent abroad."

"I have not heard him refer to the possibility," said Agnes. Her manner was still quiet, but she had made a slight involuntary movement, which closed the book she held.

"I do not think papa has spoken to him for some time," Bertha replied. "And when he first referred to his plan, Laurence thought it out of the question, and did not appear to regard it seriously."

For a few moments Mrs. Sylvestre did not speak. Then she said:

"Certainly it would be much better for him than to remain here."

"If he should go," said Bertha, "no one

will miss him as I shall. We used to be so gay together, and now——"

She did not end her sentence, and for a while neither of them spoke again, and she lay quite still. Agnes remained to dine with her, and in the evening Arbuthnot came in.

When he entered the bright, familiar room, he found himself glancing round it, trying to understand exactly what mysterious change had come upon it. There was no change in its belongings—the touches of colour, the scattered trifles, the pictures and draperies wore their old-time look of having been arranged by one deft hand; but it did not seem to be the room he had known so long—the room he had been so fond of, and had counted the prettiest and most inspiring place he knew.

Bertha had not left the sofa; she was talking to Agnes, who stood near her. She had a brilliant flush on her cheeks, her eyes were bright when she raised them to greet him, and her hand, as he took it, was hot and tremulous.

"Naturally," she said, "you will begin to vaunt yourself. You told me I should break down if I did not take care of myself, and I have broken down—a little. I am reduced to lying on sofas. Don't you know how I always YOL. III.

derided women who lie on sofas? This is retribution; but don't meet it with too haughty and vainglorious a spirit; before Lent I shall be as gay as ever."

"I don't doubt it," he answered. "But in the meantime allow me to congratulate you on the fact that the sofa is not entirely unbecoming."

"Thank you," she said. "Will you sit down now and tell me—tell me what people are saying?"

" Of-" he began.

She smiled.

"Of me," she answered. "They were saying a great deal of me a week ago; tell me what they say now. You must hear in going your giddy rounds."

"You are very well treated," he replied.
"There is a certain great lady who is most uncomfortably commented upon. I can scarcely imagine that she enjoys it."

Her smile ended in a fatigued sigh.

"The tide turned very quickly," she said.
"It is well for me that it did. I should not have had much mercy if I had stood alone Ah! it was a good thing for me that you were all so brave. You might have deserted me, too—it would have been very simple—

and then—then the gates of paradise would have been shut against me."

- "That figure of speech meaning—?" suggested Arbuthnot.
- "That I should have been invited to no more dinner-parties and receptions; that no-body would have come to my Thursday Evenings; that Miss Jessup would never again have mentioned me in the Wabash Gazette."
- "That would have been very bitter," he answered.
- "Yes," she returned, "it would have been bitter, indeed."
- "Do you know," he said next, "that I have come to-night partly for the reason that I have something to tell you?"
- "I rather suspected it," she replied, "though I could scarcely explain why."
 - "Am I to hear it, too?" inquired Agnes.
- "If you are kind enough to be interested," he answered. "It will seem a slight enough affair to the world at large, but it seems rather tremendous to me. I feel a trifle overpowered and nervous. Through the kind efforts of Professor Herrick I have been honoured with the offer of a place abroad."

Bertha held out her hand.

"Minister to the Court of St. James!" she said. "How they will congratulate themselves in London!"

"They would," he replied, "if an ill-adjusted and singularly unappreciative government had not particularised a modest corner of Germany as standing in greater need of my special abilities." But he took her offered hand.

When he glanced at Mrs. Sylvestre—truth to say he had taken some precautions against seeing her at all as he made his announcement—he found her bestowing upon him one of the calmest of her soft, reflective looks.

"I used to like some of those quiet places in Germany," she said, "but you will find it a change from Washington."

"I think," he answered, "that I should like a change from Washington," and as soon as he had spoken he detected the touch of acrid feeling in his words.

"I should fancy myself," she said, her soft look entirely undisturbed, "that it might be agreeable after one had been here some time."

He had always admired beyond expression that touch of half forgetful, pensive calmness in her voice and eyes, but he did not enjoy it just now.

"It is a matter of temperament, I suppose," was his thought, "but, after all, we have been friends."

Neither could it be said that he enjoyed the pretty and picturesque stories of German life she told afterwards. They were told so well that they brought very near the life he might expect to lead, and he was not exactly in the mood to care to stand face to face with it. But he controlled himself sufficiently to make an excellent audience, and never had been outwardly in better spirits than he was after the stories were told. He was cool and vivacious; he told a story or two himself; he was in good voice when he went to the piano and sang. They were all laughing, when Agnes left the room to put on her wraps to return home.

When she was gone the laugh died down with odd suddenness.

"Larry," said Bertha, "do you really want to go?"

"No," he answered, turning sharply, "I don't want to go. I loathe and abhor the thought of it."

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- "You want," she said, "to stay here?"
- "Yes, I do," was his reply, "and that decides me."
- "To go?" she asked, watching his pale, disturbed face.
- "Yes, to go! There is nothing to stay here for. I need the change. I have been here long enough—too long!"
- "Yes," she returned, "I think you have been here too long. You had better go away —if you think there is nothing to stay for."
- "When a man has nothing to offer—" he broke off and flushed up hotly. "If I had a shadow of a right to a reason for staying," he exclaimed, "do you suppose I should not hold on to it, and fight for it, and demand what belonged to me? There might be a struggle-there would be; but no other man should have one jot or tittle that persistence and effort might win in time for me! A man who gives up is a fool! I have nothing to give up. I haven't even the right to surrender! I hadn't the right to enter the field and take my wounds like a man! It is pleasant to reflect that it is my own—fault. I trifled with my life; now I want it, and I can't get it back."

"Ah!" she said, "that is an old story!"

And then Agnes returned, and he took her home.

On their way there they talked principally of Tom and Kitty.

- "They will miss you greatly," Agnes said.
- "They will be very kind to do it," was his reply.
 - "We shall all miss you," she added.
- "Might I be permitted to quote the ancient anecdote of the coloured warrior, who, on running away in battle, was reproached and told that a single life counted as nothing on such great occasions, and that if he had fallen he would not have been missed—his reply to this heroic statement of the case being, that he should have been likely to miss himself. I shall miss myself, and already a gentle melancholy begins to steal over me. I am not the gleesome creature I was before good luck befell me."

But despite this lightness of tone, their walk was not a very cheerful one; indeed, after this speech they were rather quiet, and they parted with few words at the door, Arbuthnot declining to go into the house.

When Agnes entered alone, Mrs. Merriam looked up from her novel in some surprise.

- "I thought I heard Mr. Arbuthnot," she said.
- "He left me at the door," Mrs. Sylvestre answered.
- "What!" said Mrs. Merriam, "without coming to say good-night to me! I wanted to tell him what a dissipated evening I have been spending with my new book."
- "He has been telling us good news," said Agnes, standing before the fire and loosening her furs. "He has been offered a consulship."
- Mrs. Merriam closed her book and laid it on the table.
 - "Will he accept it?" she asked.
- "He could scarcely refuse it," Agnes replied.

 "It is a decided advance; he likes the life abroad, and it might even lead to something better in the future—at least one rather fancies such things are an opening."
- "It is true," reflected Mrs. Merriam, "that he seems to have no particular ties to hold him in one place rather than another."
- "None," said Agnes. "I don't know whether that is his fortune or his misfortune."
 - "His misfortune!" said Mrs. Merriam.

"He is of the nature to know how to value them. Perhaps, after all, he may form them if he goes abroad. It is not too late."

"Perhaps so," said Agnes. "That would be another reason why it would be better for him to go."

"Still," remarked Mrs. Merriam, "for my own part I don't call it good news that he is going."

"I meant," said Agnes, "good news for him."

"It is bad news for us," Mrs. Merriam replied. "He will leave a gap. I have grown inconveniently fond of him myself."

But Agnes made no response, and soon afterwards went to her room in silence. She was rather silent the next day when she made her visit to Bertha. Mrs. Merriam observed that she was rather silent at home; but, having seen her retire within herself before, she was too just to assign a definite reason for her quiet mood. Still she watched her with great interest, which had a fashion of deepening when Laurence Arbuthnot appeared upon the scene. But there was no change in her manner towards Arbuthnot. She was glad to see him; she was interested in his plans. Her gentle pleasure in his

society seemed neither greater nor less than usual; her gentle regret at his approaching absence from their circle said absolutely nothing. In the gaieties of the closing season they saw even more of each other than usual.

"It will be generous of you to allow me a few additional privileges," Arbuthnot said; "an extra dance or so, for instance, on occasion; a few more calls than I am entitled Will you kindly, if you please, regard me in the light of a condemned criminal, and be lenient with me in my last moments?"

She did not refuse to be lenient with him. Much as he had been in the habit of enjoying the evenings spent in her parlour, he had never spent evenings such as fell to him in these last days. Somehow it happened that he found her alone more frequently. Merriam had letters to write, or was otherwise occupied; so it chanced that he saw her as it had not been his fortune to see her very often.

But it was decided that he was to spend no more winters in Washington, for some time at least; and though he spent his evenings thus agreeably, he was making daily preparation for his departure, and it cannot be said that he enjoyed the task. There had been a time, it is true, when he would have greeted with pleasure the prospect of the change before him, but that time was past.

"I am having my bad quarter of an hour," he said, "and it serves me right."

But as the days slipped by he found it even a worse quarter of an hour than he had fancied it would be. It cost him an effort to bear himself, as it was only discretion that he should. His one resource lay in allowing himself no leisure. When he was not otherwise occupied, he spent his time with his friends. He was oftenest with the Professor and Bertha. He had some quiet hours in the Professor's study, and in the parlour, where Bertha sat or lay upon the sofa before the fire. She did not allow herself to lie upon the sofa often, and refused to be regarded as an invalid; but Arbuthnot never found himself alone with her without an overpowering realisation of the change which had taken place in her. But she rarely spoke of herself.

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"There is nothing more," she said, once, "to say about me."

She was willing enough to speak of himself, however, and of his future, and her gentle interest often moved him deeply.

"We have been such good friends," she would say—"such good friends. It is not often that a man is as true a friend to a woman as you have been to me. I wish—oh, I wish you might be happy!"

"It is too late," he would reply, "but I shall not waste time in complaining. I will even try not to waste it in regretting."

But he knew that he did waste it so, and that each passing day left a sharper pang behind it, and marked a greater struggle.

"There is a great deal of trouble in this world," the Professor said to him, simply, after watching him a few minutes one day. "I should like to know what you are carrying with you to Germany."

"I am carrying nothing," Arbuthnot answered. "That is my share."

They were smoking their cigars together, and through the blue haze floating about him the Professor looked out with a sad face.

- "Do you—" he said," "do you leave anything behind you?"
- "Everything," said Arbuthnot. The Professor made a disturbed movement.
- "Perhaps," he said, "this was a mistake. Perhaps it would be better if you remained. It is not yet too late——"
- "Yes it is," Arbuthnot interposed, with a faint laugh. "And nothing would induce me to remain."

It was on the occasion of a reception given by Mrs. Sylvestre that he was to make his last appearance in the social world before his departure. He had laid his plans in such a manner that, having made his adieus at the end of the evening, half an hour after retiring from the parlours, he would be speeding away from Washington on his way to New York.

"It will be a good exit," he said. "And the eye of the unfeeling world being upon me, I shall be obliged to conceal my emotions, and you will be spared the spectacle of my anguish."

There were no particular traces of anguish upon his countenance when he presented himself, the evening in question having arrived. He appeared, in fact, to be in reasonably good spirits. Nothing could have been more perfect than the evening was from first to last; the picturesque and charming home was at its best; Mrs. Sylvestre the most lovely central figure in its picturesqueness; Mrs. Merriam even more gracious and amusing than usual. The gay world was represented by its gayest and brightest; the majority of those who had appeared on the night of the appeared again. ball Rather late in the evening, Blundel came in fresh from an exciting debate in the Senate, and somewhat flushed and elated by it. He made his way almost immediately to Bertha. Those who stood about her made room for him as he She was not sitting alone to-night; there seemed no likelihood of her being called upon to sit alone again. She had not only regained her old place, but something more. The Professor had accompanied her, and at no time was far away from her. He hovered gently about in her neighbourhood, and rarely lost sight of her. He had never left her for any great length of time since the night Tredennis had gone away. He had asked her no questions, but they had grown very near to each other, and any mystery he might feel that he confronted only made him more tender of her.

When Senator Blundel found himself standing before her, he gave her a sharp glance of scrutiny.

"Well," he said. "You are rested and better, and all the rest of it. Your pink gown is very nice, and it gives you a colour, and brightens you up."

"I chose the shade carefully," she answered, smiling. "If it had been deeper it might have taken some colour away from me. I am glad you like it."

"But you are well?" he said, a little persistently. He was not so sure of her after all. He was shrewd enough to wish she had not found it necessary to choose her shade with such discretion.

She smiled up at him again.

"Yes, I am well," she said. "And I am very glad to see you again."

But for several seconds he did not answer her; standing, he looked at her in silence as she remembered his doing in the days when she had felt as if he was asking himself and her a question. But she knew it was not the same question he was asking himself now, but another one, and after he had asked it he did not seem to discover the answer to it, and looked baffled and uncertain, and even disturbed and anxious. And yet her pretty smile did not change in the least at any moment while he regarded her. deserted her entirely once during the evening. This was when she said her last words to He had spent the previous Arbuthnot. evening with her in her own parlour. before she went away—which she did rather early—they had a few minutes together in the deserted music-room, where he took her while supper was in progress.

Neither of them had any smiles when they went in together and took their seats in a far corner.

Bertha caught no reflected colour from her carefully chosen pink. Suddenly she looked cold and worn.

"Laurence!" she said, "in a few hours—" and stopped.

He ended for her.

"In a few hours I shall be on my way to New York."

She looked down at her flowers and then up at him.

"Oh!" she said, "a great deal will go with you. There is no one now who could take from me what you will. But that is not what I wanted to say to you. Will you let me say to you what I have been thinking of for several days, and wanting to say?"

"You may say anything," he answered.

"Perhaps," she went on, hurriedly, "it will not make any difference when it is said; I don't know;" she put out her hand and touched his arm with it; her eyes looked large and bright in their earnest appeal.

"Don't be angry with me, Larry," she said; "we have been such good friends and the best, best friends. I am going home soon. I shall not stay until the evening is over. You must, I think—until every one is gone away. You might—you might have a few last words to say to Agnes."

"There is nothing," he replied, "that I could say to her."

"There might be," she said, tremulously, "there might be—a few last words Agnes might wish to say to you."

He put his head down upon his hand and answered in a low tone:

"It is impossible that there should be." vol. III.

"Larry," she said, "only you can find out whether that is true or not, and—don't go away before you are quite sure. Oh! do you remember what I told you once?—there is only one thing in all the world when all the rest are tried and done with. So many miss it, and then everything is wrong. Don't be too proud, Larry—don't reason too much. If people are true to each other, and content, what does the rest matter? I want to know that some one is happy like that. I wish it might be you. If I have said too much, forgive me; but you may be angry with me. I will let you—if you will not run the risk of throwing anything away."

There was a silence.

"Promise me," she said, "promise me."

"I cannot promise you," he answered.

He left his seat.

"I will tell you," he said. "I am driven to-night—driven! I never thought it could be so, but it is—even though I fancied I had taught myself better. I am bearing a good deal. I don't know how far I may trust myself. I have not an idea about it. It is scarcely safe for me to go near her. I have not been near her often to-night. I am

driven. I don't know that I shall get out of the house safely. I don't know how far I can go, if I do get out of it, without coming back and making some kind of an outcry to her. One can't bear everything indefinitely. It seems to me now that the only decent end to this would be for me to go as quickly as possible, and not look back; but there never was a more impotent creature than I know I am to-night. The sight of her is too much for me. She looks like a tall, white flower. She is a little pale to-night—and the look in her eyes—I wish she were pale for sorrow—for me. I wish she were suffering; but she is not."

- "She could not tell you if she were," said Bertha.
 - "That is very true," he answered.
- "Don't go away," she said, "until you have said good-bye to her alone."
- "Don't you see," he replied, desperately, "that I am in the condition to be unable to go until I am actually forced? Oh!" he added bitterly, "rest assured I shall hang about long enough." But when he returned to the supper-room, and gave his attention to his usual duties, he was entirely himself again,

so far as his outward bearing went. He bore about ices and salads, and endeared himself beyond measure to dowagers with appetites, who lay in wait. He received their expressions of grief at his approaching departure with decorum not too grave and sufficiently grateful. He made himself as useful and agreeable as usual.

"He is always ready and amiable, that Mr. Arbuthnot," remarked a well-seasoned, elderly matron, who recognised useful material when she saw it.

And Agnes, who had chanced to see him just as his civilities won him this encomium, reflected upon him for a moment with a soft gaze, and then turned away with a secret thought her face did not betray.

At last the rooms began to thin out. One party after another took its departure, disappearing up the stairs and reappearing afterwards, descending and passing through the hall to the carriages, which rolled up, one after another, as they were called. Agnes stood near the door-way with Mrs. Merriam, speaking the last words to her guests as they left her. She was still a little pale, but the fatigues of the evening might easily have left her more

so. Arbuthnot found himself lingering, with an agonising sense of disgust at his folly. Several times he thought he would go with the rest, and then discovered that the step would cost him a struggle to which he was not equal. Agnes did not look at him; Mrs. Merriam did.

"You must not leave us just yet," she said. "We want your last moments. It would be absurd to bid you good-night as if we were to see you to-morrow. Talk to me until Agnes has done with these people."

He could have embraced her. He was perfectly aware that, mentally, he had lost all his dignity, but he could do nothing more than recognise the fact with unsparing clearness, and gird at himself for his weakness.

"If I were a boy of sixteen," he said inwardly, "I should comport myself in something the same manner. I could grovel at this kind old creature's feet because she has taken a little notice of me."

But at length the last guest had departed the last carriage had been called and had rolled away. Agnes turned from the doorway and walked slowly to the fire-place.

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"How empty the rooms look," she said.

"You should have a glass of wine," Mrs. Merriam suggested. "You are certainly more tired than you should be. You are not as strong as I was at your age."

Arbuthnot went for the glass of wine into the adjoining room. He was glad to absent himself for a moment.

"In ten minutes I shall be out of the house," he said; "perhaps in five."

When he returned to the parlour Mrs. Merriam had disappeared. Agnes stood upon the hearth, looking down. She lifted her eyes with a gentle smile.

"Aunt Mildred is going to ask you to execute a little commission for her," she said. "She will be down soon, I think."

For the moment he was sufficiently abandoned and ungrateful to have lost all interest in Mrs. Merriam. It seemed incredible that he had only ten minutes before him and yet could retain composure enough to reply with perfect steadiness.

"Perhaps," he thought desperately, "I am not going to do it so villainously after all."

He kept his eyes fixed very steadily upon her. The soft calm of her manner seemed to give him a sort of strength. Nothing could have been sweeter or more unmoved than her voice.

"I was a little afraid you would go away early," she said, "and that we could not bid you good-bye quietly."

"Don't bid me good-bye too quietly," he answered. "You will excuse my emotion, I am sure?"

"You have been in Washington," she said, "long enough to feel sorry to leave it."

He glanced at the clock.

"I have spent ten years here," he said; "one grows fond of a place, naturally."

"Yes," she replied.

Then she added;

"Your steamer sails—"

"On Wednesday," was his answer.

It was true that he was driven. He was so hard driven at this moment that he glanced furtively at the mirror, half fearing to find his face ashen.

"My train leaves in an hour," he said; "I will bid you——"

He held out his hand without ending his sentence. She gave him her slender, cold fingers passively.

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"Good-bye!" she said.

Mrs. Merriam was not mentioned. She was forgotten. Arbuthnot had not thought once of the possibility of her return.

He dropped Agnes's hand, and simply turned round and went out of the room.

His ten minutes were over: it was all over. This was his thought as he went up the stair-He went into the deserted upper room where he had left his overcoat. It was quite empty, the servant in charge having congratulated himself that his duties for the night were over, and joined his fellows down stairs. One overcoat, he had probably fancied, might take care of itself, especially an overcoat sufficiently familiar with the establishment to outstay all the rest. The garment in question hung over the back of a chair. Arbuthnot took it up and put it on with unnecessary haste; then he took his hat; then he stopped. He sank into the chair and dropped his brow upon his hand; he was actually breathless. He passed through a desperate moment as he sat there: when it was over he rose. deliberately freed himself from his coat again, and went down stairs. When he re-entered the parlour, Agnes rose hurriedly from the

sofa, leaving her handkerchief on the sidecushion, on which there was a little indented spot. She made a rapid step towards him, her head held erect, her eyes at once telling their own story, and commanding him to disbelieve it; her face so inexpressibly sweet in its sadness that his heart leapt in his side.

- "You have left something?" she said.
- "Yes," he answered, "I left—you."

She sat down upon the sofa without a word. He saw the large tears well up into her eyes, and they helped him to go on as nothing else would have done.

"I couldn't go away," he said. "There was no use trying. I could not leave you in that cold way, as if our parting were only an ordinary, conventional one. There is nothing conventional about my side of it. I am helpless with misery. I have lost my last shred of self-respect. I had to come back and ask you to be a little kinder to me. I don't think you know how cold you were. It was like death to drop your hand and turn away like that. Such a thing must be unendurable to a man who loves a woman."

He came nearer.

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"Beggars should be humble," he said. "I am humble enough. I only ask you to say good-bye a little more kindly."

Her eyes were full and more beautiful than ever. She put out her hand and touched the sofa at her side.

- "Will you sit here?" she said.
- "What!" he cried, "I?"
- "Yes," she answered, scarcely above her breath, "no one else." He took the place, and her slender hand.
- "I have no right to this," he said. "No one knows that so well as I. I am doing a terrible, daring thing."
- "It is a daring thing for us both," she said.
 "I have always been afraid—but it cost me too much when you went out of the door."
- "Did it?" he said, and folded her hand close against his breast. "Oh!" he whispered, "I will be very tender to you."

She lifted her soft eyes.

"I think," she said, "that is what I need."

CHAPTER XIV.

ALONE.

THE next six months Laurence Arbuthnot spent in his quiet corner of Germany, devoting all his leisure moments to the study of certain legal terms to which he had given some attention at a previous time when, partly as a whim, partly as the result of a spasm of prudence, he had woven himself a strand of thread to cling to in the vague future by taking a course of law. His plan now was to strengthen this thread until it might be depended upon, and he spared no determined and persistent effort which might assist him to the attainment of this object.

"I find myself an astonishingly resolute person," he wrote to Agnes. "I am also industrious. Resolution and industry never before struck me as being qualities I might

lay claim to with any degree of justice. Watts himself, with his entirely objectionable bee, could not 'improve each shining hour' with more vigour than I do, but-I have an object, and the hours are shining. Once there seemed no reason for them. It is not so now. I will confess that I used to hate these things. Do you repose sufficient confidence in me yet to believe me when I tell you that I actually feel a dawning interest in Blackstone, and do not shudder at the thought of the lectures I shall attend in Paris. Perhaps I do not reflect upon them with due deliberation and coolness—I cannot help remembering that you will be with me."

When he resigned his position and went to Paris she was with him. He had made a brief visit to Washington and taken her away, leaving Mrs. Merriam to adorn the house in Lafayette Square, and keep its hearth warm until such time as they should return.

It was when they were in Paris that they had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Richard Amory, who was very well known and exceedingly popular in the American colony. He was in the most delightfully buoyant

spirits; he had been very fortunate; a certain investment of his had just turned out very well, and brought him large returns. He was quite willing to talk about it and himself, and was enraptured at seeing his friends. The news of their marriage delighted him; he was enchanting in his warm interest in their happiness. He seemed, however, to have only pleasantly vague views on the subject of the time of his probable return to America.

"There is no actual necessity for it," he said, "and I find the life here delightful. Bertha and the children will probably join me in the spring, and we may ramble about for a year or so." And he evidently felt he had no reason to doubt the truth of this latter statement. Bertha had been present at her friend's marriage. She had been with her almost constantly during the last days She found great pleasure in preceding it. Agnes's happiness. There had been no change in her own mode of life. Janey and Jack went out with her often, and when she was at home spent the greater part of the time with her. She helped them with their lessons played with them, and made a hundred plans for them. They found her more entertaining

than ever. Others found her no less entertaining. The old bright circle closed about her as before, and was even added to. Mr. Amory had been called abroad by business, and might return at any moment. The Professor was rarely absent from his daughter's parlours when she had her guests about her. The people who had been interested in the Westoria scheme disappeared or became interested in something else. Senator Planefield had made one call after Richard's departure, and then had called no more. Bertha had seen him alone for a short time. and before he took his leave, looking a trifle more florid than usual, he had thrown into the grate a bouquet of hot-house roses.

"D— all this!" he cried, savagely. "What a failure it has been!"

"Yes," said Bertha; "it has been a great failure."

Senator Blundel did not disappear. He began to like the house again, and to miss his occasional evening there, if anything deprived him of it. He used to come and talk politics with the Professor, and hear Bertha sing his favourite ballads of sentiment. During the excitement preceding the

presidential election the Professor found him absorbingly interesting. The contest was a close and heated one, and the usual national disasters were prophesied as the inevitable results of the final election of either candidate. Bertha read her way industriously through the campaign, and joined in their arguments with a spirit which gave Blundel keen delight. She read a great deal to her father, and made herself his companion, finally finding that she was able to help him with his work.

"I find great comfort in you, my child," he said gently to her once, when she had been reading.

"Do you, dearest?" she answered, and she went to him, and, standing near him, touched his grey hair with her cheek. "I find great comfort in you," she said, in a low voice. "We seem to belong to each other as if—a little as if we had been left together on a desert island."

When she went away for the summer with her children, the Professor went with her. He had never wondered at and pondered over her as he did in these days. Her incomings and outgoings were as they had always been. She shared the summer gaieties and went her way with her world, but it was but a short time before the kind old eyes looking on detected in her the lack of all that had made her what she had been in the past. They returned to Washington the day after the election of the new President. Their first evening at home was spent in reading the newspapers and discussing the termination of the campaign.

When Bertha rose to go to her room she stood a moment looking at the fire, and there was something in her face which attracted the Professor's attention.

"My dear," he said, "tell me what you are thinking of."

She lifted her eyes and made an effort to smile, but the smile died out and left her face blank and cold.

"I am thinking of the last inaugural ball," she said, "and of Larry—and Richard—and of how I danced and laughed—and laughed—and that I shall never laugh so again."

"Bertha," he said, "my child!"

"No," she said, "never, never—and I did not mean to speak of it—only just for a moment it all came back," and she went quickly away without finishing.

After the election there came the usual temporary lull, and the country settled itself down to the peaceful avocation of reading stories of the new President's childhood, and accounts of his daily receptions of interested friends and advisers. The only reports of excitement came from the Indian country, where little disturbances were occurring which caused anxiety among agents and frontiers-Certain tribes were dissatisfied with the arrangements made for them by the Government, quarrels had taken place, and it had become necessary to keep a strict watch upon the movements of the turbulent tribes. This state of affairs continued throughout the winter; the threatened outbreak was an inestimable boon to the newspapers, but, in spite of the continued threatenings, the winter was tided over without any actual catastrophes.

"But we shall have it," Colonel Tredennis said to his fellow-officers; "I think we cannot escape it."

He had been anxious for some time, and vol. III.

his anxiety increased as the weeks went by. It was two days before the inaugural ceremonies that the blow fell. The Colonel had gone to his quarters rather early. A batch of newspapers had come in with the eastern mail, and he intended to spend his evening in reading them. Among these there were Washington papers, which contained descriptions of the preparations made for the ceremonies—of the triumphal arches processions, of the stands erected on the avenue, of the seats before the public buildings, of the arrangements for the ball. remembered the belated flags and pennants of four years before, the strollers in the streets, his own feelings as he had driven past the decorations, and at last his words:

"I came in with the Administration; I wonder if I shall go out with it, and what will have happened between now and then."

He laid his paper down with a heavy sigh, even though he had caught a glimpse of Miss Jessup's letter on the first sheet. He could not read any more; he had had enough. The bitter loneliness of the moment overpowered him, and he bowed his face upon his arms,

leaning upon the pile of papers and letters on the table. He had made, even mentally, no complaint in the last month. His hair had grown grizzled and his youth had left him; only happiness could have brought it back, and happiness was not for him. Every hour of his life was filled with yearning sadness for the suffering another than himself might be bearing; sometimes it became intolerable anguish; it was so to-night.

"I have no part to play," he thought; "every one is used to my grim face, but she—poor child!—poor child!—they will not let her rest. She has worn her smile too well."

Once, during the first winter of his stay in Washington, he had found among a number of others a little picture of herself, and had asked her for it. It was a poor little thing, evidently lightly valued, but he had often recalled her look and words as she gave it to him.

"Nobody ever wanted it before," she had said. "They say it is too sad to be like me. I do not mind that so much, I think. I had rather a fancy for it. Yes, you may have it, if you wish. I have been gay so long—let

me be sad for a little while, if it is only in a picture."

He had carried it with him ever since. He had no other relic of her. He took it from his breast-pocket now, and looked at it with aching eyes.

"So long!" he said. "So long!" And then again, "Poor child! poor child!"

The next instant he sprang to his feet. There was a sound of hurried feet, a loud knocking at his door, which was thrown open violently. One of his fellow officers stood before him pale with excitement.

"Tredennis," he said, "the Indians have attacked the next settlement. The devils have gone mad. You are wanted——"

Tredennis did not speak. He gave one glance round the room with its blazing fire and lonely, soldierly look; then he put the little picture into his pocket and went out into the night.

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER ADMINISTRATION.

In all her honest, hard-worked little life, Miss Jessup had never done more honest, hard work than she was called upon to do on the day of the inauguration. She had written into the small hours the night before; she had described bunting and arches, evergreens and grand stands, the visiting regiments, club uniforms, bands, banners, torch-lights and speeches, and on the eventful day she was up with the dawn, arranging in the most practicable manner her plans for the day. With letters containing a full and dramatic description of the ceremonies to be written to four Western papers, and with extra work upon the Washington weekly and daily, there was no time to be lost. Miss Jessup lost Each hour of the day was portioned

off-each minute, almost. Now she was to take a glance at the procession from the steps of the Treasury; now she was to spend a few moments in a balcony overlooking another point; she was to see the oath administered, hear the President's address and form an estimate of his appreciation of the solemnity of the moment; she was to take his temperature during the afternoon, and be ready to greet him at the ball, and describe dresses, uniforms, decorations, flags, and evergreens again. Even as she took her hasty breakfast she was jotting down appropriate items, and had already begun an article, opening with the sentence, "Rarely has Washington witnessed a more brilliant spectacle," &c.

It could scarcely be said that she missed anything when she went her rounds later. No familiar face escaped her; she recognised people at windows, in carriages, on platforms. Among others she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Amory, who drove by on her way to the Capitol with her father and Jack and Janey.

"She looks a little tired about the eyes," thought Miss Jessup. "She has looked a little that way all the season, though she keeps going steadily enough. They work as hard

as the rest of us in their way, these society women. She will be at the ball to-night, I dare say."

Bertha herself had wondered if she would find herself there. Even as she drove past Miss Jessup, she was thinking that it seemed almost impossible; but she had thought things impossible often during the winter which had gone by, and had found them come to pass and leave her almost as before. Gradually. however, people had begun to miss something There was no denying, they said, that she had lost some of her vivacity and spirit; some tone had gone from her voice; something of colour from her manner. Perhaps she would get over it. Amory had not behaved well in the Westoria land affair, and she naturally felt his absence and the shadow under which he rested.

"Very gradually," she said to the Professor once, "I think I am retiring from the world. I never was really very clever or pretty. I don't hide it so well as I used to, and people are finding me out. Often I am a little dull, and it is not likely they will forgive me that."

But she was not dull at home, or the

Professor never thought so. She was not dull now, as she pointed out objects of interest to Jack and Janey.

"I wish Uncle Philip were here!" cried Jack. "He would have his sword on and be in uniform, and he would look taller than all the rest—taller than the President."

The day was very brilliant to the children; they were as indefatigable as Miss Jessup, and missed as little as if they had been in search of items. The blare of brazen instruments, the tramp of soldiers, the rattle of arms, the rushing crowds, the noise and colour and excitement, filled them with rapture. When they finally reached home they were worn out with their delights. Bertha was not less fatigued; but, after the nursery was quiet and the children were asleep, she came down to dine with the Professor.

"And we will go to the ball for an hour," she said. "We cannot submit to having it described to us for the next two weeks by people who were there."

The truth was, that she could not sit at home and listen to the carriages rolling by, and watch the dragging hours with such memories as must fill them.

So at half-past ten she stood in her room putting the last touches to her toilet, and shortly afterwards she was driving with the Professor towards the scene of the night's She had seen the same scene on gaieties. each like occasion since her eighteenth year. There was nothing new about it to-night; there were some changes in dances and music, but the same types of people crowded against each other, looking on at the dancing, pointing out the President, asking the old questions, and making the old comments; young people whirled together in the centre of the ball-room, and older ones watched them, with some slight wonder at the interest they evinced in the exercise. Bertha danced only a few quadrilles. As she went through them she felt again what she had felt on each such occasion since the night of the ball of the last year-the music seemed too loud, the people too vivacious, the gaiety about her too tumultuous; though, judged by ordinary standards, there could have been no complaint made against it.

But, notwithstanding this feeling, she lingered longer than she had intended, trying to hide from herself her dread of returning home. No one but herself knew—even the Professor

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did not suspect, how empty the house seemed to her, and how its loneliness grew and grew until sometimes it overpowered her and became a sort of deadly presence. Richard's empty rooms were a terror to her; she never passed their closed doors without a shock.

At half-past twelve, however, she decided to go home. She had just ended a dance with a young attaché of one of the legations; he was a brilliantly hued and graceful young butterfly, and danced and talked well. There had been a time when she had liked to hear his sharp, slightly satirical nonsence, and had enjoyed a dance with him. She had listened to-night, and had used her pretty smile at opportune moments; but she was glad to sit down again.

- "Now," she said to him, "will you be so good as to find my father for me, and tell him I will go home?"
- "I will if I must," he answered. "But otherwise——"
- "You will if you are amiable," she said.
 "I blush to own that I am tired. I have assisted in the inaugural ceremonies without flinching from their first step until their last, and I begin to feel that His Excellency is safe and I may retire."

He found her a quiet corner and went to do her bidding. She was partly shielded by some tall plants, and was glad of the retreat they afforded her. She sat and let her eyes rest upon the moving crowd promenading the room between the dances; the music had ceased, and she could catch snatches of conversation as people passed her. Among the rest were a pretty, sparkling-eyed girl and a young army officer who attracted her. She watched them on their way round the circle twice, and they were just nearing her for the second time when her attention was drawn from them by the sound of voices near her.

"Indian outbreak," she heard. "Tredennis! News just came in."

She rose from her seat. The speakers were on the other side of the plants. One of them was little Miss Jessup, the other a stranger, and Miss Jessup was pale with agitation and professional interest, and her note-book trembled in her little bird-like hand.

"Colonel Tredennis!" she said. "Oh! I knew him. I liked him—every one did—every one! What are the particulars? Are they really authenticated? Oh, what a terrible thing!"

"We know very few particulars," was the

answer, "but those we know are only too well authenticated. We shall hear more later. The Indians attacked a small settlement, and a party went from the fort to the rescue. Colonel Tredennis commanded it. The Indians were apparently beaten off, but returned. A little child had been left in a house, through some misunderstanding, and Tredennis heard it crying as the Indians made their second attack, and went after it. He was shot as he brought it out in his arms."

Little Miss Jessup burst into tears and dropped her note-book.

"Oh!" she cried. "He was a good, brave man! He was a good man!"

The band struck up a waltz. The promenading stopped; a score or two of couples took their place upon the floor, and began to whirl swiftly past the spot where Bertha stood; the music seemed to grow faster and faster, and louder, and still more loud.

Bertha stood still.

She had not moved when the Professor came to her. He himself wore a sad, grief-stricken face; he had heard the news too; it had not taken it long to travel round the room.

"Take me home," she said to him. "Philip is dead! Philip has been killed!"

He took her away as quickly as he could through the whirling crowd of dancers, past the people who crowded, and laughed, and listened to the music of the band.

"Keep close to me!" she said. "Do not let them see my face!"

When they were shut up in the carriage together, she sat shuddering for a moment, he shuddering, also, at the sight of the face he had hidden; then she trembled into his arms, clung to his shoulder, cowered down and hid herself upon his knee, slipped down kneeling upon the floor of the carriage, and clung to him with both her arms.

"I never told you that I was a wicked woman," she said. "I will tell you now; always—always I have tried to hide that it was Philip—Philip!—"

"Poor child!" he said. "Poor, unhappy—most unhappy child!" All the strength of her body seemed to have gone in the wild clasp of her slender arms.

"I have suffered," she said. "I have been broken, I have been crushed. I knew that I should never see him again, but he was alive.

Do you think that I shall some day have been punished enough?"

He clasped her close to his breast, and laid his grey head upon her brown one, shedding bitter tears.

"We do not know that this is punishment," he said.

"No," she answered. "We do not know. Take me home to my little children. Let me stay with them. I will try to be a good mother—I will try——"

She lay in his arms until the carriage stopped. Then they got out and went into the house. When they closed the door behind them and stood in the hall together, the deadly silence smote them both. They did not speak to each other. The Professor supported her with his arm as they went slowly up the stairs. He had extinguished the light below before they came up. All the house seemed dark but for a glow of fire-light coming through an open door on the first landing. It was the door Philip Tredennis had seen open that first night when he had looked in and had seen Bertha sitting in her nursery-chair with her child on her breast.

There they both stopped. Before the

Professor's eyes there rose, with strange and terrible clearness, the vision of a girl's bright face looking backwards at him from the night, the light streaming upon it as it smiled above a cluster of white roses. And it was this that remained before him when, a moment afterwards, Bertha went into the room and closed the door.

THE END.





