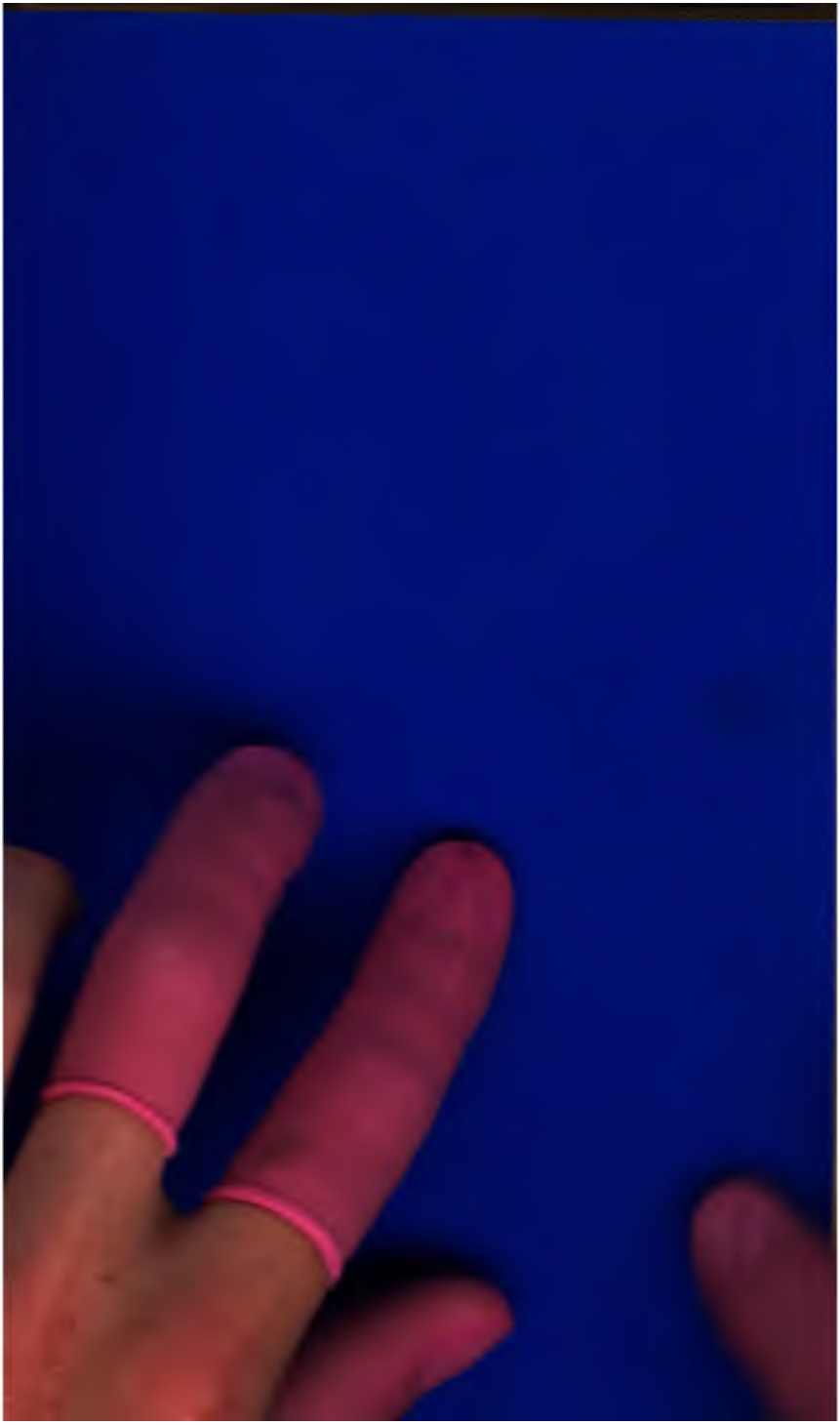

THE

HOUSE OF ELMORE.

A FAMILY HISTORY.

"When will the ancient curse be still'd, that weighs
Upon our house? Some mocking demon sports
With every new-formed hope, nor envious leaves
One hour of joy. So near the haven smiled—
So smooth the treacherous main—secure I deem'd
My happiness; the storm was lulled; and bright
In evening's lustre gleam'd the sunny shore:
Then through the placid air the tempest sweeps,
And bears me to the roaring surge again!"

SCHILLER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE HOUSE OF ELMORE.

BOOK II.—CHAPTER VIII.

THE GREAT CLIVERTON BALL.

THE day registered in the chronicles of Cliverton as the brightest of Red-Letters, came at length—the day of the Great Ball. I felt very nervous and exciteable all the morning with the knowledge of my secret; I felt assured the eyes of each respective inmate of 'The Rest' were upon me, and read my plans upon a self-accusing front.

Twenty times within the hour had I arrived at the conclusion that I would resign the

opportunity of seeing life in the gayest of gay colours, and let the ball pass without the presence of an Elmore. I had no strong wish to go for the sake of the pleasure it might bring me, and in which I might take my share—that had all vanished with my disappointment. I thought that I should experience no gratification in the crowd, save the melancholy one of dancing with Celia Silvernot, and foiling Redwin for once with his own weapons. And yet there *was*, despite the jealous envy which gnawed at my heart still, a pleasurable thrilling of blood in my veins, when I thought of dancing with Celia —dancing with her at the great Cliverton Ball! They had spoken of the ball, too, the preceding evening, at Silvernot's, and Redwin had been there, and full of information concerning the preparations that were being made for the company's reception; and Celia's and Arabella's ball-dresses had arrived from London, and they had flown to their rooms with them, and spent half the evening, gossiping over them, much to the suppressed chagrin of Paul Redwin, Esquire.

I was very glad of Celia's absence, when Mrs. Silvernot hazarded the following—

"I wonder you do not learn dancing, Mr. Luke?'

"It hardly seems necessary—I see so little society."

"But then, you could have gone to the ball with us."

"Ah, yes!"

"I suppose you have a moral objection?" said Redwin, laughingly.

"Not at all, Redwin. On the contrary, I dare say I should like it."

"Oh! then, we shall see you start forth some day, perhaps."

"I have no doubt of it."

The subject was changed. And now the morning had dawned, and I, with my secret locked so close and kept so dark, was ready and prepared.

My father was very pale and thoughtful all the morning, and whenever his eyes met mine, they seemed to my accusing conscience symbolical of a reproach. I felt that I was about to deceive him, to betray his confidence, and I

could not meet his glance without a scarlet cheek. It was ever on my lips to tell him of my resolution, and then the turning of a leaf of his book (he was reading by the fireside), or a movement of his arm on the favourite leathern chair in which he sat, checked me into silence.

Unable to remain longer with him, assuming a calmness that I did not feel, I strayed about the rooms of the house in a listless manner. I could not read, or write, or do any thing but think of the ball.

I gave no thought as to the means by which I should return to 'The Rest.' I knew that it would be very late at night or in the early morning, and that they would be greatly alarmed at my prolonged absence, and that all must be known in a few hours: but I did not care for that.—I thought I could stand against and respond to all just words condemnatory of my deceitfulness, after the ball was over and the re-action had set in; but I could not fix my mind as to the probabilities that might arise now. I had but two ideas—the Cliverton Ball and Celia Silvernot

I met Agnes on the stairs, whilst I was ascending them for the fifth time. The reader will probably remember an old habit of mine, in wandering up and down these stairs, when perplexed or excited.

"Do you know what to-day is, Luke?" she asked.

"The day of the month?" I asked, in return.

"No, no—what will happen to-day—what this day will celebrate?"

"Why, a good many things, I have no doubt," I replied, very much confused.

"Ah! you boys have not so tenacious a memory as I have. Why, the Cliverton Ball takes place to-day—the ball which we are to be kept from on account of a silly prejudice that has no meaning. I dare say, Luke, we are the only representatives of the gentry, within thirty miles, who will not be there."

"I shouldn't wonder," assented I, with the gravest of countenances.

"You're too phlegmatic and indolent to wonder at anything, Luke," said she, curtly; "and—but Miss Osborne will wonder, too, if I stay here."

She tripped gracefully away, and I resumed my meanderings from room to room, and got rid of a few heavy hours in a close scrutiny of nature from every window of the house.

Our friend, the rector, called in the morning, too, and the old subject was revived, to my prolonged embarrassment.

"I have no doubt, Mr. Elmore," said he, to my father, "that I shall be spending this evening with you—no matter that I have made up my mind to some hours' dry study over mathematics—a furbishing up of old lessons, at home; still, nevertheless, I am sure, impulse will make me shut up my books, and come and see you."

"I shall be glad of your company, Mr. Silvernot."

"What a time it is since we have had a long chat together, Elmore. Do you remember the old nights, years ago, when we argued and expounded over the fire—they seem all gone now"—with a slight sigh of regret.

"It is not my fault, my dear friend."

"No, no," said he, quickly—"I do not imply as much—I do not imply as much. How is Mr. Vaudon?"

The inquiry came so quickly after the last assertion, that it sounded like a reason for his less frequent visits. It may have been so.

"He is very well. You must come to-night, Silvernot," said my father—"I shall be quite alone. Vaudon has business to transact, he tells me, which will take him to Cliverton."

"To Cliverton!" cried the rector. "I cannot fancy our friend figuring in a ball-room, or I might suppose he was going to the assembly with the rest of the world."

"What, Vaudon!" said I, with a laugh.

"No, it don't seem likely," said the rector; "about as likely as my making my appearance there in full dress, or you, Luke—ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" I reiterated, in my best deceptive manner.

"But the girls are going at the house," said the rector—"and Mrs. S. goes to take care of them; and my worthy father goes because other worthy fathers are going: and there's a card-room—and, I regret to say it, Mr. S., senior, has a sneaking attachment to whist. He never plays it at home—that is, when I am there—out of respect for my cloth;

but I am very much mistaken if they don't have a quiet rubber at Wharnby House when my back's turned. But it does them little harm, I dare say—and they only play for bone fish and ivory halfpennys, and that's not extravagant gambling, is it?"

"Decidedly not."

"Besides, there's no reason why my father should be a parson, because I chance to be one, or a stern disciplinarian,"—looking fierce—"and a rigid moralist, like me. He could not do it.

"I suppose," continued our friend, warming his hands at the fire, "the Cliverton ball does not affect in any manner the denizens of 'The Rest?"

Neither my father nor I replied.

"Hardly worthy of an answer, eh?" looking up sharply; "well, I don't think it is, myself. There's one opinion of mine, that will ever be unalterable — I hate dancing. I try to reason Celia out of it, and laugh at Arabella in the most satirical manner, but I make no impression—they *will* dance."

"The ladies are all fond of dancing," I said.

"So they are, Luke," with a merry chuckle peculiar to himself; "that's why they are so giddy and full of fancies—their brains get in a whirl, poor things! I'm not fond of public balls either, and I wish the officers of the —th were quartered in Canada, with all my heart."

My father and the rector entered into another field of discussion, and I left the room, and continued my restless progress, waiting for the day to pass.

It was time to dress, at last, and I stole into my room and locked the door, fearful of intrusive eyes. It wanted three hours to sunset, and six or seven to the ball; but, to elude suspicion, it was necessary that I should leave 'The Rest' in the broad daylight. I trembled as I dressed myself, not with cold, or fear, but with an indescribable and violent thrilling in every joint of my body, that almost made the teeth chatter in my head. After I was dressed, I took an admiring stare at myself in the dressing-glass, and thought that, taking moustache and white-satin waistcoat seriously into consideration, I did not

appear to be such a bad-looking fellow, after all, and should pass muster even at Cliverton Assembly Rooms. I felt, for the first time, that I should like to join in the scene merely for the pleasure of it, and, for a few moments, even forgot my love for Celia Silvernot.

Having enshrouded my elegance in a great coat, and, with extraordinary forethought at the last minute, taken my white tie off and placed it in my pocket, substituting in its place my customary black-silk neckerchief, I boldly sallied out of my chamber, and strolled leisurely through the house and into the stable-yard, in the most hypocritical *nonchalant* manner in the world.

"Tom."

"Yes, sir."

Tom in his shirt sleeves emerged from one of the stables.

"My horse."

"Going alone, sir?"

"Yes, I shall not want you this time, Tom."

"Sorry for that, sir. It lowers the respectability of the house, a good deal, going

without your groom so much sir," said he, insinuatingly.

"Well, to-morrow we must assert our dignity Tom."

"Yes, sir, if you please."

Tom who had taken to heart my frequent journies without his attendance in the rear, brightened up and disappeared into the stable to fetch my horse, with wonderful alacrity.

In a few minutes I was mounted.

"You're sure I'm not to come to day, Mr. Luke, sir?"

"Quite sure."

I was on the move when he called out,—

"Stop, sir, please. There's a white something or t'other hanging out of your tail pocket, sir."

"Oh! it's nothing—it's nothing," said I, hurriedly thrusting my neckcloth to the lowest depths of that great coat, which Tom had been eyeing half wonderingly, and half suspiciously, probably thinking I was rather warmly clad for so mild an Autumn month.

I looked back at the house, as I cantered along the drive. My father was standing at

the window of a sitting-room seldom used, and looking in my direction, and I fancied I could detect a few paces from him the figure of Jacques Vaudon. I waved my hand in farewell greeting, and he gave a wan smile of recognition. There was nothing singular in my riding from 'The Rest' without a preliminary announcement—it was my invariable custom, when setting forth alone, yet I half fancied I was detected, and that he was about to throw the window up and call me back in the old peremptory manner that he had used to me, when my preceptor and admonitor. I gently touched my horse with the whip, and we started off more quickly, and were through the lodge gates that Johnson had thrown back, and on the road to Cliverton.

How thankful I felt that my quick-eyed groom had caught sight of the 'something white!' What an ignominious exposure of my deeply-laid plan it would have been, to have exhibited to my father's eyes, as he stood there at the window, the ball-room tie streaming from my pocket, and flaunting like a banner in the wind!

It was oppressively hot in my great coat, but it could not be helped in any way—it was a minor suffering, essential to my after amusement. Why did the officers of the —th have their ball in the beginning of October, when December would have suited my great coat so much better!

There were other mortifications in store for me. There had been no rain for above three weeks at Wharnby, and the chalky dust flew in clouds around me, and peppered my black dress trowsers (new for the occasion) and took all the lustre out of my patent boots, and settled in my hair, and round my upper lip, and on those very fringy whiskers that made so little progress, and gave me the appearance of a hard-working miller, who had been more than extra busy lately. Then I had no money in my great coat, and upon arriving at the first turnpike, I had to exhibit all my hidden glory to the toll-keepers gaze, and display my white satin waistcoat, and embroidered shirt to his undisguised admiration, whilst in search for three-pence halfpenny. But I got to Cliverton in good time, and put up at the Black Bull,

and hired a private-room and a couple of clothes-brushes, and passed half-an-hour in hard exercise, and three-quarters-of-an-hour in re-adornment, before a looking-glass over the mantel-shelf, the frame stuck about with cards and bills of auction, and houses to let. Then I dined, and after that washed my chalky face in an adjoining room, and re-dressed for the occasion itself, and spun the time out till it was quite dark. I was only a few doors off Bentboys', and consequently could obtain a tolerable view of the assembly rooms, and watch how affairs were getting on therein from my window, which drawing a chair close unto, I constituted as post of observation.

I looked at my watch. Seven o'clock—and the ball commenced at nine;—two hours to wait.

Two hours! More than that. I couldn't go dashing over the way immediately they flung open the entrance doors, as if it were essential I should be a first arrival, and have the ball-room entirely to myself!—no, I must wait till there was a goodly muster assembled, and then enter unobserved.

I began to feel excessively nervous about it altogether. The room was already lighted up very brilliantly, and, although the blinds were drawn, and the curtains closed, there was a flood of radiance streaming into the street and lighting up the houses opposite, and making my room quite lively.

A tap at the door.

"Come in."

"Will you have lights, sir?" inquired a smart chambermaid, looking in.

"If you please, yes," I replied, with a start. I felt uncommonly confused. This would never do, to be embarrassed before a chambermaid, because I was in full dress. How should I ever face the terrible crowd of fashionables over the way!

The door re-opened, and the maid entered with wax-candles, and placed them on the table. I could not help it; had it been for my life, I should have jumped up and looked into the street with an absorbing interest, for I knew she would glance at me curiously, and my courage was at a very low ebb, indeed.

Never mind! there were two hours good

to screw that up into its 'sticking place;'—I should be full of Spartan fortitude by that time.

What a miserable length the hours were!—I read every placard stuck about the looking-glass and mantle-shelf—I could have recited every bill of auction with perfect ease, and have painted every article in my private room on canvass, with my eyes shut.

Eight o'clock. I looked out of window again. Something pattered against the glass. Could it be possible the rain had come at last, had chosen this night of all nights to break the long dry season? Yes, there it was, smothering the window-panes with thick, heavy beads, and falling steadily into the street, and darkening the dusty road, and making the white pavement in an instant as full of spots as a leopard's skin.

Perhaps it was only a shower. I took half-a-dozen turns up and down my room, and looked out once more. Raining faster than ever, the drops chasing each other down the glass like mad—the street looking very misty—the road full of puddles, the pavement

glossy with the wet, and giving back the rays of light from shop-windows with undiminished brilliancy.

I sat down, clenched my chin in both my hands, and stared out, holding a council of war with myself.

What should I do now? To cross over the road was to smother myself in mud, and make my *debût* in dirty boots.—That wouldn't do. To hire a glass coach to be taken only over the way—that was ridiculous in the extreme. To jump across the mud in three springs, the act of a lunatic. To hire a pair of boots of the ostler, or some one, and take my patent boots in my hand, and put them on either in the gentleman's room or on the stairs—that would expose me to severe criticism. To go across on horseback—that would give rise to some broad jests from the damp mob round the doors. It must be the glass-coach, ridiculous as I thought it, if it pour like this much longer.

Half-past eight. Raining worse than ever.

Nine o'clock. The doors were opened. There was an immense oil-skin canopy at-

tached to the portico, and erected over the pavement. I could see men in livery at the doors, and flitting about the hall, and the slightest glimpse in the world of a broad flight of stairs, carpeted with crimson cloth. All this looked inviting, but then what a ride home to Wharnby I had in perspective. How it did rain!

There were glass-coaches going out of the Black Bull yard—possibly, to fetch visitors. The dreadful idea suggested itself to me—supposing that all the glass-coaches were engaged! I rang the bell immediately.

The maid promptly made her appearance.

"Can I have a glass-coach?"

"I'm afraid not, sir, at present," she answered, "but I'll ask."

Five minutes elapsed, and the landlord himself, after announcing his presence by a preliminary tap, entered the room.

"Very sorry, sir, but all the glass-coaches are engaged for the ball, sir."

"I merely wish to be taken across."

"I suppose so, sir—I'm afraid you must wait an hour, sir.

"Very well. Let me know when it is ready."

"Yes, sir."

Another hour to wait. Should I get into the ball-room at all? I resumed my post at the window; the place beneath presented an appearance of bustle at last. There were a great many people hemmed round the doors, totally indifferent to the heavy falling rain—there were two or three link-boys, tearing about the road, with spluttering lighted torches—the carriages were arriving in all directions, and getting jammed in masses down the street, and trying to form in something like a line, and failing wofully, and coachmen's voices in high altercation with each other, made the night resonant with noise. I could not see the visitors for the shining wet tops of the carriages, and wondered whether it were possible for me to get across at all, even without the aid of a glass-coach.

I could see the figures of the visitors thrown in shadow against the window-blind—some were promenading up and down, others had already begun to dance, and I could hear dis-

tinctly the music of the large band as I paced my room in a high state of excitement.

The whole scene, so full of life and action, had made me nervous and extremely agitated —I wanted to be gone, yet shrank from going—I heaped a thousand curses on the head of the landlord of the Black Bull for being behind the hour in his promise for a coach, and yet, when the coach really was ready, and waiting for me, I invented half-a dozen unnecessary delays, in order to protract and retard the final move. The glass-coach had to emerge from a back entrance of the Black Bull into a dark country road, and then wind about for above half a mile, until it reached the leading thoroughfare of Cliverton, and joined in the rank of carriages, so slowly moving to the ball. It rained very heavily, and the constant rattling on the coach-top did not tend to calm my nervous state of being.

Twenty minutes' funereal progress, and the lights were blazing round me, and there were noises in my ears that seemed to stun me, and make me feel as if I were under water, and fast drowning; then, the carriage stopped,

and the door was wrenched open with a jerk, and the steps lowered with a crashing noise.

"As quick as you can, if you please, sir."

I managed to get out of the carriage in a confused heap, and brought a sally of boisterous laughter on my head from the unwashed citizens of Cliverton, by striking my hat against the top of the coach-door, and sending it in an ungraceful manner over my eyes.

I reached the hall: there was a flight of stairs before me, and, what with the exertion of struggling from beneath my hat, and the passing up the stairs of gentlemen in full-dress, and officers in scarlet and gold, and ladies in silks and satins, and gauzy materials of ethereal texture, peeping from opera-cloaks and mantles, stood perfectly bewildered.

I ascended the stairs, and tendered my ticket to a gentleman who stood behind a green-baize table on the first landing, as if he were about to deliver an impressive lecture to the crowd that flowed towards him; and, observing the gentlemen filing off into a retiring room, imitated their example. I laid down my hat, looked vacantly at my pale face in the

great glass, at which half-a-dozen gentlemen were going through elaborate fantasias with ivory-handled hair brushes, and breathed a little freer.

Feeling, in a remarkable manner, out of my element, I brushed my hair to gain time, drew on a pair of white-kid gloves—in imitation of a very cool young ensign at the end of the room—and tried to summon resolution to dash into the great ball going on a few yards distant.

Observing the ensign, after a lingering look at the glass, saunter towards the door, I made a plunge after him, fraught with the sudden resolve of entering with him, and, trusting to the glory of his martial appearance, to pass unobserved into the assemblage.

There were several gentlemen hanging about the doors—as gentlemen will do at balls—and I had some difficulty in keeping the ensign in sight as I passed through.

I could not have entered at a more unlucky moment, for the last note of the finale ceased as I set foot in the ball-room; the dancers of the quadrille seemed all walking towards me,

as if with the intention of shaking hands, and my first impulse was to fly. I paused. The ensign continued his way unmoved by the crowd of guests; the talking, laughing, the chandeliers, the wreaths of flowers on the wall, the crowds of faces; he disregarded them all, looking right and left, as if for his party, grouped somewhere on the crimson ottomans ranged around the room. If he discovered his friends, I felt that I should be lost. He walked to the end of the spacious ball-room without attaining the object of his search, and then turned, and, putting his hands behind him, stood calmly surveying the scene, as if it was all his property, and all under his entire management A vacant seat attracted my notice, I left my pilot and took possession of it, and began to grow more composed and rational.

The orchestra was erected at the side of the room, near the door by which I had effected my entrance, and was crowded with musicians, and round its sides were hanging fancy programmes, printed in gold letters, of the dances. There were already some hundreds

of visitors assembled, and the constant shifting of colours presented to the eye, heightened by the officers of the —th regiment, in their scarlet uniform, was, to one so habitually quiet as myself—one who had never seen a large party since he was a child —a bewildering scene; and the effect from which was not easily got over.

They began to dance once more; the music of the magnificent band restored me to myself, and made me long to share in the pleasures of the moment; the figures whirled by me in rapid succession, all with happy faces—lovely English faces, that are seen only to perfection in crowded scenes of gaiety like this.

I could see neither Celia nor the Silvernot family anywhere; they had evidently not yet arrived, and I was alone in the midst of the bright world.

Oh! stern father, hater of such scenes, couldst thou see thy son, now!

Whilst the waltz was proceeding, a very little man—perhaps, half-an-inch smaller than the rector of Wharnby, but with an immense head, that would have matched Goliath's—

escorted a lady down the room with great care, keeping close to the ottomans, in order to avoid contact with the ropes.

I drew my feet closer together, to allow them to pass, but they suddenly halted, looked round the room, and then took the vacant seat beside me. The lady was of somewhat a diminutive stature, like her companion, but of exquisite proportion, and a bright flashing face, round which showered a myriad of the blackest ringlets—that reminded me of Celia. She wore a light satin dress, thickly decorated with lace, and the large diamond spray scintillating in her raven hair told of some high-born or well-to-do lady in the county of Cliverton. She glanced, as if unconsciously, towards me; and I felt the colour rising to my cheeks beneath the quick, momentary glance of two of the brightest eyes I had ever seen.

"I do not perceive the Colonel, James," she said to her companion, in the most dulcet of voices.

"He's always late," he replied, in a voice of the shrillest treble; "and yet he should be first man at a thing of this sort, Ernestine."

"I do not see any of our friends or acquaintances," said the lady, opening and shutting a carved ivory fan very rapidly—"we are isolated here."

"If I mistake not, Stalker's just entered the room," cried her escort, jumping to his feet, and striving to catch a glimpse of the door through the maze of waltzers; "yes, it must be he—I saw his bald head."

Slowly advancing in a similar manner to that which the last arrivals had adopted, came a burly man of four or five and forty years of age, of florid complexion, and with a broad, open face, somewhat prepossessing, which lit up with recognition as he caught sight of the lady and gentleman seated near me. He advanced at a more rapid pace, and stretching out a hand to each of them, shook theirs heartily, and disclosed a set of large, white teeth, in the jolliest manner possible.

"What, my old friends, I am delighted to welcome you," he said, in a rich, hearty voice. "Mr. Dartford, you are looking well, my dear sir; and"—turning to the lady—"you are looking better than well, Mrs. Morton."

"Ever a flatterer, Colonel."

"But you do not introduce me to your friend, Dartford"—with a half smile at me.

Here was confusion worse confounded for me; but I, summoning up fortitude, hastened to reply.

"Your pardon, Colonel Stalker," I said, in a rapid tone of voice—"I am quite alone here, and have not the pleasure of an acquaintance with this lady or gentleman. I trust you will allow me to express personally my thanks for the receipt of your kind letter, which has obtained me admittance to this ball."

"You are—let me see, you are——?" he stopped short.

"My name is Elmore."

"Mr. Elmore!" extending his white gloved hand towards me—"to be sure! I am very glad to have the pleasure of introducing myself to you."

He shook hands very heartily. I never saw a man so delighted to see me in my life. It was quite embarrassing.

"Did I understand that you were quite alone?" he asked.

"At present, sir."

"That is excessively awkward at a Cliverton Ball," said the Colonel—"will you allow me?"

Without waiting for my answer, he turned to his friends, and said—

"Here is a young friend of mine I have much pleasure in introducing to you, with your kind leave, Mrs. Morton."

"I shall be very happy to have the honour," with another quick glance at me, and a winning smile lighting up her face.

Colonel Stalker made the required introduction and repeated the ceremony with Mr. Dartford, without asking his permission at all, said a few more commonplaces with the freshest of looks and then, the waltz having come to a conclusion, turned to greet other friends who were clustering thickly about him.

"A very affable man, the colonel," suggested Mr. Dartford, in his piping tones.

"He appears a perfect gentleman," I replied.

"Yet that man is a complete tyrant to his subordinates," said Mr. Dartford, "a complete

tyrant, sir. He'd flog a man within an inch of his life for a saucy word. An advocate for the *cat*, sir."

"Indeed."

Not relishing the conversation of Mr. Dartford which turned on an uncalled-for topic, and which appeared to me somewhat false and at variance with the manner in which he had received the colonel, I ventured to address myself to Mrs. Morton.

"The ball is very well attended, is it not, madam?"

"It appears so," with a shrug of her white shoulders; "I have never been at a Cliverton ball before—I am not partial to *country* balls — there is so much pretension about them."

There was the slightest curl of her red lip as she glanced round, indicating the same comment applied to the company. She looked full at me as she spoke. How very beautiful she was, how young and yet a Mrs. Morton!

"You Cliverton people," she said, lightly; "have such grand ideas, such exalted notions,

which never come to anything. Now this ball is a very commonplace affair, and yet the officer's of the gallant —th consider there has never been its equal. As for the ladies they must be all peeresses in their own right, they are so grand and imposing. I beg pardon, *self*-imposing."

The little handsome lady was evidently out of temper, or she could never have uttered such bitter remarks on the Cliverton beauties.

"You are severe, madam."

"No, Mr. Elmore, I am only just," she replied; "but you are a gentleman and are chivalric in the ladies defence. I daresay," her eyes sparkled with meaning; "you know of an exception to the rule, sir?"

"I am quite a stranger, madam," I replied, evasively.

"You do not live at Cliverton?"

"No, at Wharnby."

"Wharnby," she said; "that is a charming little place, I have heard. My brother, Mr. Dartford," with a wave of her fan; "has lately purchased some ground at Wharnby. You have a sea view there, Mr. Elmore?"

"A very fine one."

"Ah! I have no view but London smoke, in my choked-up square in town."

The walk was concluded and we were silent; I, for want of a subject, Mrs. Morton deep in observation of the passing visitors who promenaded to and fro, and not one of whom escaped the quick searching glance of the dark eyes beside me.

A quadrille was forming; I felt I ought to ask Mrs. Morton to dance with me, but she appeared so immeasurably above me, so great a lady, that it would be almost impertinent to solicit such an honour.

I hazarded it at last and the graccful bend of the head in assent made me feel proud of my partner and highly flattered by her compliance with my wish

We took our places ere the music commenced, and James Dartford sat perched on the ottoman with the gravest of faces, holding his sisters fan and vinaigrette.

Certainly there was something particularly fascinating about Mrs. Morton, and I stumbled two or three times in my figures whilst

absorbed in watching the gliding movements of my partner. Who could she be! Where was Mr. Morton! If she had been taller, how her figure would have resembled Celia's!

Oh! Celia, where was she! Life had its charms, and society much attractive power, for I had not dwelt on my own sorrows these last few hours, and had nearly forgotten Celia Silvernot.

I was sorry when the dance was over, and I had led her to her place, and resumed my own by her side. It was my duty to take my departure now; I was monopolising her attention, and keeping other gentlemen, who passed with envying eyes at my position, at arm's length;—but it required some strength of mind to break away and mingle with the crowd. The colonel made his re-appearance with a lady on his arm, whom he introduced to Mrs. Morton as Mrs. Colonel Stalker;—and friends of the colonel and his lady coming up fast around us, Mrs. Morton was soon the centre of an admiring circle.

She was very witty—very much at her ease—very brilliant in conversation—and I took refuge in Mr. Dartford.

"Your sister tells me she is a resident in London, sir."

"Yes, a true Londoner, or Londoness," replied he, with his shrill, whistling voice; "but it don't agree with her, poor thing—I must persuade her to live at Cliverton, I think."

"The air of Cliverton —— excuse me."

I darted up and hurried towards the door.

She had come at last—she, Celia, my first love—the last hope of my life!

I advanced towards her. She was leaning on Paul Redwin's arm, and blushing beneath the gaze of so many ardent eyes. Mr. Silvernot senior, with Mrs. Silvernot and his eldest daughter on his arms, followed behind the young couple, exchanging bows and smiles with many of the guests.

"Is that a Silvernot?" I heard a voice exclaim.

"Yes, the youngest of the family. What do you think of her?"

"A fine girl. Who's her companion?"

"Don't know; but he's a lucky fellow—eh!"

"Lucky! I wish I were in his place!"

I heard no more—I was standing before them and intercepting their progress.

Celia raised her dove-like eyes, and, for a moment, did not know me, I presented so changed an appearance in my full dress; then her pretty eyes and mouth rounded into perfect O's with amazement, and she cried almost breathlessly—"Mr. Luke!"

Redwin stared and looked in a puzzled manner at me, and the senior members of the family gasped with astonishment.

"Good God!" at last ejaculated Mr. Silvernot; "is anybody ill?"

Why I should come to the Cliverton Ball in a white satin waistcoat and a spotless tie, if anyone were suddenly attacked at 'The Rest' with a serious malady, was above my comprehension, but I nevertheless replied—

"I hope not, Mr. S."

"Bu—bu—but, what—what brought you!"

"My horse."

"Yes, yes; but you have not come to dance!"

"Oh! yes, I have," very calmly.

"And you never mentioned a word to us about it," said Celia, reproachfully.

"Your pardon; try and remember a ride from Wharnby, one summer afternoon, Miss Celia."

The whole incident sprang to her recollection and, I know not why, but her face flushed scarlet, and she looked down upon the ground.

"You're an extraordinary fellow, Elmore," said Redwin, in somewhat of a drawling tone, "you are fond of mystery and surprises. Quite romantic, on my honour."

"There's nothing mysterious in coming to a ball, Redwin," I answered; "I presume I have an equal right, even with yourself."

"But why did you not tell us?" chirped Mrs. Silvernot; "it is so singular, Luke."

"Does your father know it, too?" asked Arabella."

"I am not a school-boy, Miss Silvernot," I replied, "and I certainly have not asked permission."

"Come, Celia," said Redwin to the lovely girl, whose hand rested on his arm, "we are making quite a blockade. Let us diminish the number of barriers." He moved on with

her. I looked after them with an envying, jealous gaze; they were a handsome pair—they were a fair couple, and attracted more than common notice as they walked down the centre of the room; and I thought his place might have been mine; that hand might have rested on my arm so confidingly, so full of trust; and she might have loved me—ay! have loved me, had he not come home from France!

"Lancers! Lancers!" cried the M.C.

There was confusion and much pressing immediately; the room was getting crowded, and the stewards, of which Colonel Stalker was one, had much difficulty in obtaining the requisite space. I lost sight of the Silvernots, and full of that purpose which had led me hither, I hastened in quest of Redwin and his charge.

They were waiting for the set to be formed, at the further end of the room, and I was just in time.

"Celia," I said, in a hasty voice, "I claim a promise, made that summer afternoon I spoke of. You have not forgotten it, I feel assured."

"What *does* the fellow mean?" murmured Redwin, half angrily to Celia.

"Fellow! Mr. Redwin," I cried fiercely; "curb your tongue, sir. I am a gentleman."

His face reddened.

"It was a harsh expression, Elmore," said he frankly; "you will pardon me—but your sudden challenge, I must confess, irritated me. There, look over it."

He extended his hand, and I took it in all friendship. The apology was made so heartily —for none knew or was more scrupulous of good breeding than himself—that I regretted my interference, and wished that I had let the promise drop. I knew he loved her, and that her heart was wholly his, why should I stand between them and thrust myself upon their notice, seeking to mar the happiness I could not enjoy myself? I would retire.

"Well, let me return," said I, with forced cheerfulness; "I am hardly in the right myself. Miss Celia," turning to her, "I absolve you. Considering *all things*, I resign my claim. Time cancels a long debt."

There was a rosy blush on her face, as I

concluded; but she arrested my departure, by saying, quickly:—

"Nay, a promise is a promise; it is fair that I should fulfil my share in it. Paul, you must excuse me this dance, for the sake of my true word. In an idle conversation, many months ago, I said that, if he were at this ball, I would be his partner for my first dance."

Redwin looked as if he would read my soul, but I was thinking of how strangely 'Paul' sounded, and how earnestly she sought extenuation in his eyes. '*Idle conversation!*' To me it was full of meaning and of interest, and every word was graven on my mind.

"You do not care?" she said in so low a tone, that it was a marvel my quick ears caught the import of the words.

"Oh, no!—do as you like," he replied, carelessly, "Mr. Elmore and I will not cross swords about it. You must break one promise or the other—break mine, of course. *Au revoir.*"

He strode away with a very cloudy brow, and left me Celia's partner, and two big tears in Celia's eyes.

He was not worthy of her. So rough a speech—so crude and sharp a return for her high sense of honour, was far from just or gentle. But is not love all injustice, and made up of folly?—and jealousy, its twin sister, has she not the passions of the tiger?

The dance that I had looked forward to so long was not a happy one, after all; for Celia was grave, and forgetful of her part; and, now and then, I saw her meek eyes looking for the tall form of Paul Redwin in the distance, who, as a sort of sacrifice, was dancing with Miss Silvernot, and scowling at her with savage intensity.

Mrs. Morton, and an officer, were our *vis-a-vis*, and she smiled a recognition, and, when waiting for her turn, stood evidently analyzing Celia.

"You were not chivalric in vain, Mr. Elmore," she whispered, with a merry smile, as, for a moment, I went through the usual complications of a figure with her.

I had not time for a reply, for she was with her partner again.

Celia had seen her speak to me, and, for-

getting her sorrow for a moment, in her surprise, said—

"Do you know that lady, Mr. Luke?"

"I have been introduced to her this evening."

"Why! you are colouring!" with the prettiest smile I had seen that night.

"Colouring! Miss Celia."

"Oh! I see. You must introduce me. Our turn."

Redwin had seen the smile of Celia, and he frowned gloomily, and looked more savage than ever. Smiling, and flirting, too!—was that a part of her promise? Very well—very well!

The Lancers reached a termination; I was bowing my acknowledgments very gratefully, and Redwin, with Arabella on his arm, was coming towards us, and evidently studying how to transfer that worthy spinster to my care, when a suppressed whisper thrilled through the room,—a low murmuring, that sounded like a sea, and that appeared to pervade the whole assemblage, rang in my ears, and nearly all eyes were turned towards the door.

"Who are they?"

"How superbly lovely."

Celia's hand grasped my arm convulsively.

"Look!—look! There, by the door!"

I staggered with intense astonishment, and passed my hand across my eyes, as if waking from a dream; for there, entering the room, slowly, calmly, and regally, were Jacques Vaudon and my sister, Agnes!

Vaudon, full-dressed, and with his jet black beard descending almost to his chest, although a striking figure, was almost unheeded in the interest excited by the young girl who leant upon his arm, and who, in the costly dress of richest lace, with gems shining and sparkling about it, and a jewelled spray—resembling Mrs. Morton's—in her hair, appeared like the queen of this grand fête, as she moved towards us, perfectly at her ease.

Questions were flying around us on all sides concerning them.

'They must be foreigners!' 'Who can *she* really be?' Did you ever see so striking a face?' 'Have you seen them before?' 'Who is he with her?'

Celia and I were before them.

"Vaudon—Agnes!" I ejaculated, and "Agnes!" cried Celia, at the same time.

It was their turn to be astonished; for my appearance was as undreamt of as their own; and Agnes exhibited her surprise by a cry of "Luke!—You here?" And Vaudon for one moment elevated his eyebrows in mild surprise. I was too much confused to notice the effect my sudden appearance had upon them in the eager questions that I poured upon her, and which she paid little heed to, being now in the centre of the Silvernots, with Celia close to her side, and Paul Redwin looking on.

I turned to Vaudon.

"Unravel this mystery, Jacques Vaudon," said I, sharply; "there is more beneath for me to hear, man."

"Let us take one turn up this room together, Luke," said he, linking his arm within mine; "it is soon told, and easily explained."

"I listen," said I, when we had commenced our promenade.

"You are surprised at the presence of Agnes, Luke?"

"Yes."

"Yet, if I mistake not, there is a more valid reason for her presence than your own."

"How so?"

"Your sister came with her father's consent, Luke," said he, smiling sardonically,—"did you, my prodigal?"

"I did not," I answered; "but how did she obtain it?"

"Easily enough, I believe," he said; "your father was not in an obstinate mood; and Agnes' whole heart was set upon the ball, and it would have been a cruel harshness to dash all her girlish anticipation to the ground. Your father sacrificed all his old resolves in according her his permission,—as your father's friend, I could do no more than offer the sacrifice of my time as a fitting escort."

"You are very kind."

"Spoken in a satirical vein, friend Luke, or I am in great error," said he, as we wheeled round to return, "but in faith it *was* a sacrifice—for there is nothing in this gaudy scene, this raree show to charm one, to whom all pleasurable feelings are dead and buried. I

shall take my post by one of these pillars, and watch the many springs at work, within this crowd of puppets—I may find amusement, perhaps here or in the card-room, if I look philosophically at it There go to your friends."

"But you have not spoken to the Silvernots, yet, Vaudon."

"If they desire my company, Luke, they will know where to find me," said Vaudon, "so go to your friends; if you have spirit in you, Paul Redwin's night at Cliverton should not be a very happy one."

"Why not?"

"He robbed you of a prize—if you cannot win her back, you can at least sting him, by a false attention to her."

"I have more charity within me," I replied.

"Good boy," he said, drily.

I left Vaudon to occupy the position he had indicated, by one of the pillars wreathed with flowers and laurel, against which he fixed himself rigid as a statue, and perfectly unmoved by the inquiring looks, and curious stares bent on him, composed himself to observe

all that passed beneath his notice. I joined the group of Wharnby friends round Agnes. Agnes laughed merrily, as she said to me half-aside,—"I shall never forget your stupid look of amazement, Luke—it was worth coming from 'The Rest,' to see."

"Let us talk seriously a moment. Will you walk with me?"

"They will dance in a minute," she said, evasively.

"Not for five minutes at least, Aggy.

"How very tiresome you are," said she, taking my arm, "now what have you to say?"

"Firstly, how did you obtain my father's consent. It seems so strange, so incomprehensible, that he who has kept so strict a watch over your lightest actions, all his life, should let you come to this ball."

"I do not ask by what means you obtained admittance, Luke."

"You do not care."

"Not much," she replied, with a smile, "you are here—that is enough for me."

"But not your brother," I answered

quickly, "there has been some trick, in which Vaudon has connived, and my father has been misled, or duped by false representations, that you or he or both have made. I *know* it."

"Nonsense," said she, looking admiringly at her bouquet,—"there have been no false representations made. I merely said,—'father, Miss Osborne has taught me to dance—Miss Osborne sees no harm in dancing.—I have learnt that I might go to the Cliverton ball, where all my friends are going—will you give me your consent?'"

"And he?"

"Why, he demurred at first, and then said,—'Go.' Mr. Vaudon offered to accompany me hither, and my father merely bound me to secresy with my brothers. He was so afraid they would want to see life, Luke—would you think it?" asked she, lightly.

"Rail on," said I, still doubting this naïve statement.

"Now take me back again!"

"One moment," I said—a frightful thought suggesting itself—a thought which stunned me—"when did you ask my father?"

Her cheek crimsoned, as she replied—"In the evening."

"Yes, in the evening late in the evening, was it not?" cried I, almost stifling.

"It was late, certainly."

"*When he was drunk!*" I hissed—"when he was incapable of thought, and hardly had a knowledge of where he was, or whom you were. Oh! Aggy, Aggy—God forgive you—that was not a woman's action!"

Her scheme discovered, she looked back my reproach, and drew herself up haughty and defiant.

"It was my only chance of coming hither, and I see not the evil of the means. I asked him when at least he was more rational and took not such ungenerous views of life or of life's duties. I did not steal out like a thief, and play the selfish hypocrite — at least, I asked."

"I would rather you had stolen out at night, and come alone in the darkness and the rain, than have had you walking in this room with me—you, but a child, too!—with the knowledge of the reproach you must be unto yourself."

"I bear my self-reproach very lightly, then," she said, snatching her hand from my arm; "and you will please to spare me your comments, which are but those of a poor coward."

"Another question," I cried, "and then rejoin the Silvernots, and enjoy your first ball if you can—From whence came these jewels?"

"They were my mother's."

"Does *he* know you wear them, Agnes?"

"That is a second question," said she, hurrying away from me.

She had answered it by her evasive manner, and her humiliation was complete to me; and, although in her own esteem she had not abated one jot of self-respect—nay, rather had taken to herself the vanity of success, my heart bled for her want of right—for that lack of moral principle, which, seeking an object, cared not for the eyes with which others looked upon her.

And Vaudon, who leant against the pillar, watching us, and clutched his great black beard with his white gloved hand—with what look did *his* eyes take in and estimate the daughter of the Elmores? With no feeling of sorrow—

with no regret for his best friend's child—could that man's nature be affected; all that he thought lay buried in that broad breast, and that high, white forehead, along with the many secrets his mysterious life could tell of.

Another dance had commenced, but Agnes and the Silvernots were too full of discussion to pay much attention to it; and, far from inclined to join in it myself, I entered into a fragmentary dialogue with Paul Redwin, in the place thereof.

Redwin was in as abstracted a mood as myself, so we were not particularly lively or witty during our discourse, and both were half-listening to a dialogue on the seat beside us.

"But, Agnes dear, what a bold stroke for a young lady!"

"Why is it bold, Celia?"

"You are not yet '*out!*'"

"Pardon, dear," replied my sister—"I do not consider myself a school-girl; and Miss Osborne I look upon as a friend—not as a governess. I am your own age, Celia."

"Yes, yes," said Celia; "but you think I am blaming you, whereas I am so very glad

to see you—I cannot tell you how glad, Agnes."

"'The Rest' is an unfashionable place, and I have not studied etiquette in coming hither; the Elmores do not bestow much consideration upon the usages of polite society," said Agnes; "besides, who is to know at this ball that I am not quite seventeen, and have still a governess?"

"Ah! who, indeed!"

"And then I am a young woman. Do not I look a young woman, Celia?"

"I hardly knew you, Agnes," answered Celia, very much perplexed, for Agnes was as argumentative, as perfectly unembarrassed, as graciously pleasing, as if she had been the *belle* of the Cliverton season, and reigning beauty of all balls and parties for the last six months.

Redwin, who wished to do something, and who felt conscious of appearing particularly 'stickish,' turned to the young ladies who were conversing by his side, and said—

"I presume Miss Agnes Elmore scarcely remembers the Master Redwin of old times,

and yet Miss Celia hardly considers a second introduction to an old friend necessary."

"I beg your pardon, Paul," said Celia, "I was just puzzling my poor memory with endeavouring to think if Miss Elmore had not seen you at our house since your return."

"Poor memory!" said Paul, somewhat meaningly; "what a shocking affliction is a bad memory."

Paul Redwin had not yet got over the first dance, and was chewing the bitter cud of his reflections with a grave intentness.

"A second introduction is assuredly out of place, Mr. Redwin," said Agnes, smiling; "I have a perfect recollection of our interview, and apologise for not arresting your attention towards my humble self some minutes since."

Paul Redwin took the extended hand, and bowed over it with great gallantry.

"Miss Elmore need not apologise," he said, laughingly; "for my part, I think an introduction almost necessary—for time has made a great change in her, and it is a new face I greet."

He looked a compliment, and Agnes half-inclined her head, as if acknowledging it.

Poor Celia sat between them with a blank expression on her pretty features. She hardly liked Mr. Redwin to sit by her side and talk across to her dear friend, and smile and look compliments at her; but she did not know for what reason she disliked it, and thought, perhaps, it was her low spirits and concern because dear Paul was disappointed in his dance, that made her feel so dull.

Yes—so dull! She had anticipated spending the happiest of evenings, and yet she was very dull. How strange it was, to be sure!

Redwin and my sister still sat chatting gaily with Celia between them, who joined in occasionally with a forced smile, and on whose countenance the shade of perplexity seemed more deep than ever. Mr. Silvernot had got tired of sitting still, and was yawning perceptibly, and hinting to Mrs. Silvernot that he thought he should adjourn to the card-room for half-an-hour or so. Mrs. Silvernot and Arabella were criticising the dancers, and Vaudon, in the distance, stood still immoveable, and deeply interested in the study he had chosen.

"Are you engaged for the *next* dance, Celia?" asked Redwin.

"No, Paul."

"No other engagements made in *idle conversation?*"

"How cruel you are this evening," she said in a tone not intended to reach my ears;—"Have I offended you?"

"No, Celia," he answered in the same low tone; "but I did not know if ——"

I moved away from them lest my contiguity to them should give me the appearance of an eaves-dropper, and slided four seats down, and engaged Miss Arabella for the next dance, purely out of respect to the family.

The ball grew more lively—the spirit of Terpsichore seemed hovering over its votaries below; dance followed dance, hardly without a minute's intermission—all the guests had assembled—the Great Cliverton Ball was in the flower of its strength, and going off with great *éclât.*

I danced with Miss Silvernot, and Redwin and Celia were partners, at last; and Agnes had been introduced to Captain Clifford—a

friend of the Silvernots'—a very pale-faced young man, with white hair and pink eyes, like a rabbit, and who, I have no doubt, was of an easy and impressionable nature; for he had been immediately smitten, and, in fact, was observed to stand gazing dreamily at her from distant parts of the room for the remainder of the evening.

Agnes was in the full glory of her heart—her eyes were rivalling, with their light, the diamonds in her hair—her cheek was flushed—her red lips parted—her whole look that of one carried away by the glowing excitement of the hour; and, despite the quarrel we had had together, and the deceit I was fully aware she must have practised to have gained the position she was holding, I felt proud that the beauty of the room was my own sister.

Proud, and yet fearful. While my heart thrilled with vanity, I trembled inwardly at I knew not what. So fair, and yet her little brain so full of scheming, and of craft. So young in years, so old in thought!

Her mother's jewels were blazing ostentatiously about her form—Heaven preserve her

from inheriting the smallest portion of that mother's nature with the gems that have descended to her, or she has taken, as her right—a sinful legacy at best!

The smallest portion of her nature!—I dared not breathe that hope to heaven, for it had shown itself to-night with her duplicity, when her guardian angels were sleeping.

Oh! angels, wake!—'tis time! The distant scene is indistinct and dim, and there are figures veiled and dark, standing as in the luridness of night, beckoning her towards them!

She was no longer a girl—she had shaken off all childish thoughts—she stood before me in all the glare of myriads of lights, with music swelling through the room, and crowds of faces round her, and dancers whirling past —a woman!

And that strange look, which no one seemed to notice but myself—that look which made her beautiful and dazzling, and triumphant, and which had no heavenly stamp of holiness upon it, how fearfully cognizant was I of it to-night!

She moved through the dance all grace, and did more than justice to her teaching—she attracted all eyes near her into a strange, earnest gaze; and her name, Miss Elmore, of 'The Rest,' at Wharnby, was murmured many times that night.

Redwin danced with Agnes the following quadrille, and Celia had Colonel Stalker for a partner.

Agnes and Redwin were capital partners for a quadrille; they had so much to say between the figures, and Redwin inclined his tall form very earnestly to every word, and was entirely forgetful of the beautiful great eyes of the younger Miss Silvernot, which were more than once hidden by their trembling lids.

My aristocratic friend was evidently interested in my sister; there was a fascination in her manner that bewildered him, and made his heart beat faster when she spoke to him, or looked into his face with her own steady, undecipherable gaze.

Mrs. Morton and I were companions again, and I mentally compared my position to Redwin's; for, certainly there was something that attracted me to Mrs. Morton.

We were quite a friendly pair, this time; and I could hardly reconcile myself to the belief that I had not known her years ago, and this was only a re-union. I found myself getting witty, and indulging in repartee, and escorting Mrs. M. to the refreshment-rooms, and listening eagerly to every brilliant, flashing sentence she could turn so well, and use so ably.

"That lovely girl is your sister, Mr. Elmore?" she said, as we promenaded—I holding my head very loftily, and proud of the lady on my arm.

"The lady in the white-lace dress?"

"Of course. How I should like to know her!"

"Will you allow me to introduce her to you?"

"Oh! willingly. Nothing could give me greater pleasure."

It was done. I escorted Mrs. Morton to where my sister sat, and where Paul Redwin lingered, although Celia, white as death, sat with her mother, and plucked the flowers unconsciously from her rich bouquet, and scattered them at her feet.

I introduced Mrs. Morton to my sister—they were excellent friends in five minutes. Mrs. Morton's winning manner soon attracted sister Agnes. They joined the Silvernots, and entered into fresh introductions, and we all made a family party on the crimson ottomans; Vaudon left his post, and came and joined us; and the small brother of Mrs. Morton brought his great head, which he rolled in an unpleasant way on his shoulders—over to our side, too—and was introduced by his handsome sister Ernestine, and began to flirt in an awfully heavy manner with Arabella Silvernot, who smiled graciously at his attentions, and whose visage wore a far less acidulated aspect than had been represented thereon since she had entered the ball-room doors.

The night wore on. It was two o'clock before I had thought it twelve; and one or two parties of ladies and gentlemen had taken their departure. Redwin had danced with Celia twice, and with Agnes once more, and was now pressing my sister a third time.

"I am engaged three deep."

"The fourth dance?"

"Nonsense—I shall disappoint my third by going home. Mr. Vaudon is getting tired of the fête—are you not?"

"I think I am"—stifling a yawn.

"You do not dance, Mr. Vaudon?" asked Mrs. Silvernot.

"No, my dear madam," he replied, "unless some one of my own age condescends to take pity on me. What say you, Mrs. S.?"

This was somewhat flattering to Mrs. S., who was fifteen years his senior at least, and she beamed with smiles,—"No, I never dance, I am content to see the young enjoy themselves, Mr. Vaudon."

"So am I," said Vaudon, "if you reject me, I must decline entering into this giddy vortex. Suppose we look in at the card-room, and see how many half crowns Mr. S. has lost in following Deschappelles' counsels."

He offered her his arm, and they walked towards the door.

Redwin renewed his proposition.

"I will not promise, Mr. Redwin," said Agnes, shaking her head with serious resolve at him,—"Celia, can I."

"What can you not dear?" with a faltering voice.

"Dance any more with Mr. Redwin."

"I do not know, I am sure, Agnes," said Celia, "I should have thought the question could have been better answered by yourself."

"Are you engaged next dance, Celia?" said Agnes.

"Yes, am I not, Arabella?"

"I believe so," said Arabella, sharply turning her head for a moment, from Mr. Dartford, who was talking something about pockets of hops.

"I did not know if it were the next," said Celia, wearily.

"And the next?"

"No."

"Then, Mr. Redwin," in a quick whisper to Paul, "I shall dance with you no more."

Redwin looked up, met her glance, and looked down again.

"Oh! how my head aches, Arabella,'' murmured Celia,—"Oh! when are we going home!"

I heard the low words so faintly whispered,

and my heart yearned for her again, and my old love went flowing back towards her, in an unchecked torrent, in sympathy with her gentle heart. It was beating dully or throbbing wildly, through *his* manner, his reserve and inattention, but I loved her for the suffering I read upon her face. I could have stood before Paul Redwin, and pointing to the slighted girl, have said,—

"See there, man.—You won her heart—you took her from me when I might by earnest, unremitting love, have gained her for myself;—bruise and rend it not, now it is wholly yours—and beats for you alone."

But it was an idle moment or two, that would soon be forgotten in the even tenor of their future life, and the doors of 'The Rest' would close upon Agnes Elmore—and Paul Redwin would be wholly Celia's. Who should say he was not her's now—may not he devote one half-hour to a lady he has not seen since his childhood!

Mr. Silvernot, accompanied by his spouse, and Vaudon, re-entered the ball-room, about three, when the company were thinning.

Colonel Stalker joined our group, and begged the honour of Miss Elmore's hand, but it was getting late, and Vaudon was impatient.

"Then my entreaty is a hopeless one, Miss Elmore."

"For this time I must be excused," replied Agnes.

"I shall certainly give you a call in a day or two," said the Colonel to me: "I shall bring my gun, and have an hour's sport, Mr. Elmore, with your leave."

"I shall be delighted to welcome you at 'The Rest,'" I answered, although perfectly aware I should not be delighted in the slightest degree whatever.

Mr. Dartford and his sister had risen, and the latter kissed Agnes affectionately, like a dear relative and old friend.

"Our carriage is waiting," said she; "I must hurry off. You will come and see me at Cliverton, before London engulphs me again, my dear Miss Agnes, will you not?"

Agnes readily assented.

"And Mr. Elmore," piped her brother, "I

should be happy to have an hour's chat with you. Thornville Villa—the first house on the high road—mind, I expect you."

"I certainly shall avail myself of your kind invite," said I, bowing low.

"Oh! yes, Mr. Elmore *must* come," cried Mrs. Morton, as she extended her hand to me.

I felt confused, and my heart fluttered as she placed her hand in mine and smiled her adieux, and looked so very beautiful that I could but see her face and dancing ringlets in the room. I slightly pressed her hand, in my excitement, and then felt I had taken an unwarrantable liberty; but she did not observe it, for she smiled and said—"Remember."

She was gone, and still the bright black eyes were part of a vision before me, and the dulcet tones of her voice, "Remember," were ringing in my ears.

We were waiting under the great stone portico for the carriage to come up, and the Silvernots had been carried off to Wharnby House, with Celia still very dull, and Redwin gloomily thoughtful, by her side.

"What do you mean to do about your horse, Luke?" asked Vaudon.

"I shall send Tom for it in the morning, or —fetch it myself."

"Ay, fetch it," mused Vaudon.

"And call on the pretty widow, Luke. Thornville Villa will not be far out of the way," said Agnes.

"The pretty widow! Is Mrs. Morton a widow?"

"Were you ignorant of that fact?"

"Yes."

"What a young widow! She must have seen great misfortune," I thought, "in her few short years of life—Poor Mrs. Morton!"

It was still raining heavily, and in the few moments after we had quitted Cliverton, we had relapsed into a rigid silence, which remained unbroken hour after hour as we glided towards our home. Vaudon fell asleep with his great cloak wrapped tightly round him. Agnes sat looking at her bouquet, and thinking for herself deeply, and the diamond spray kept flashing in the meagre light of the carriage lamp, like some fiery life hovering above her head: whilst I half dozed and, though still

conscious of the presence of Vaudon and my sister opposite, was dancing at the ball with Mrs. Morton, who faded into Celia and back again to some one I had never seen before, clothed in widow's weeds and wailing for the dead.

'The Rest.' Servants were awaiting us, and we entered the house. Standing in the hall was a dim figure which upon advancing nearer proved to be my father. Agnes covered the diamonds with her hood.

"You have returned," he said to me, and me alone; "it is what I expected. I have not been deceived in you, for are not you all the children of deceit. What have I to look forward to? Poor Luke. Poor Luke."

Why did he pity me, and shake his head so sorrowfully, as he went slowly up the stairs towards his room? Why had he this night when he had been alone so long after the rector had gone home, abstained from the evil draughts which lowered and degraded him?

All mystery—no sun—no light of day around 'The Rest.'

* * * *

I pause at the close of this era in my life.

The figure born of fever that has marched side by side with me so long, pauses likewise, but points towards the distance and covers with one shrouded arm his face of stone. It moves again, surely, slowly, and I drag my aching feet along the rugged path we tread that path from which the snow of youth has vanished for ever!

END OF BOOK THE SECOND.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

POLITE ATTENTIONS.

My head ached the morning after the ball. I felt listless, and apathetic — a youth without an object in the world, now the great event at Cliverton had passed, and the stately room wherein I had danced so lightly and found so much of the pleasures that my home denied, was already passing into mourning, and the chandeliers and crimson ottomans were being shrouded in their canvass coverings, and looking repentant for last night's dissipation, and wan and meagre in the accusing daylight.

Ah ! that daylight, that accuses so many of us, that stings so many consciences, that covers so many cheeks with shame — that sheds

its broad effulgence, and brings us into the glaring noon, and presents to our bleared eyes the gaunt spectre of the joyous yesterday, and mocks us with the brightness in which we stand a mark!

There were no comments made upon the incidents of the preceding night; had it been a great crime, the lips could not have been closer sealed.

Gilbert and Edward were kept in ignorance of Agnes and myself having been at the Cliverton Ball, and my father and Vaudon were more than usually silent the entire morning.

Miss Osborne was a trifle more grave than ordinary, and looked wonderingly at my father, and was, on the whole, evidently perplexed with the Elmore family, each member of which was a little mystery to her. Miss Osborne and my sister had gone on amicably together to the present time, and the former had, by her gentle manners and calm authority, at least won the respect of her pupil, and probably as much of her affections as it was in Agnes' power to bestow.

Miss Osborne was a graceful ornament to 'The Rest.' More of a companion to Agnes than a governess, and more of a housekeeper (the most lady-like of housekeepers!) than either, she seemed to fill a vacuum that had ever been apparent in the Elmore household, and to relieve the dullness that had centered round it with the cheering influence of her presence.

She was like a daughter to my father, and a sister to us, and a general favourite with all.

Gifted as she was with intellectual powers, of which we never knew the full extent, she hid them all beneath a natural reserve and a quietness of demeanour that had been habitual to her from a child. She had ever a soft, winning smile for her friends, ever a cheerful word for the servants; but, nevertheless, it would have struck an observer that her natural expression of feature was one of grave and deep thought. Had he seen her sitting alone, looking at the fire, or from the window at the sea, as I have seen her scores of times, with her deep, thinking eyes, looking far beyond the hour, and a saddening look upon those

features, so delicately pale, he would have found conjecture ripening into certainty.

Miss Osborne was a very early riser, and would be out of the house and straying along the sands, or on the cliffs, hours before the shutters of 'The Rest' had opened to the morning; or we should find her in the park, careless of the heavy dew that bent the grass earthwards with its weight, absorbed in some choice book, some prized author, that 'lent enchantment' to the passing hour.

Vaudon, so ready with his sneers—so quick with a sarcastic allusion to anything that was singular, or out of the common way—refrained from his usual acrid commentaries on the housekeeper of 'The Rest;" he seemed to subside into the general respect that was entertained towards her, and listened with more attention—often with marked interest—to that conversation in which she took a part. Then there was Gilbert—poor, methodical, great-hearted Gilbert—always consulting Miss Osborne on some subject connected with his studies, or holding some argument with her upon a topic to which it might give rise, and

listening—he hardly knew it himself—with suspended breath to every word she uttered.

I felt a sinking in my breast when I noticed his rapt attention one morning, about three days before the ball. What a fresh misfortune would it be if he ever conceived an affection for Miss Osborne! What a dooming of my crippled brother to the same throes and agonies which I had felt myself! The pain without an alloy for him—for Miss Osborne had an inward pride, that would allow of no injurious motives being attributed to her, and no linking of the name of Mr. Elmore's son with hers. I felt assured of that. And, if such misfortune should ever be for Gilbert, there was another pride to thwart him—the strange, evil pride, that was the grand attribute of my father's character. But all this was surmise. My brother Gilbert in love! Tush!—it was one of my dreamy follies, that vanish into air—that fade and die ere many minutes born.

But the day after the ball—the day which put an end to my father's visionary idea of keeping his eldest and youngest son in ignorance of our having been (how had he ever

calculated in stopping the hundred currents by which the news might come to them?)—is the subject of the present chapter.

The Elmore family were scattered about the house in divers occupations. About one o'clock in the day, Vaudon and my father were in the garden, sauntering up and down before the lake; Gilbert and Edward were in the parlour; Miss Osborne was busy over the account-book; Agnes was practicing the music of several dances played the last evening; and I was trying to read Shakspeare's 'Henry VIII.', and thinking of Celia, and Mrs. Morton, and sister Agnes, and Jacques Vaudon, between every line. A loud ringing at the bell—horses' feet clattering along the path—a pause and then, one of the servants entered the room in which I sat with my brothers.

"Well, what is it?"

"A card, sir—for Miss Agnes."

"For whom?" cried Gilbert.

"Miss Agnes—a gentleman, sir."

"Take it to her, then," I observed.

This expedient seemed never to have suggested itself to the domestic; he had been so

habituated to submitting everything to my father, that it was not till after some reflection he retired, murmuring something about 'he thought that Mr. Elmore,' &c.

Agnes, with a flushed cheek, came hurriedly into the room with the card in her hand.

"Oh! Luke, here's Mr. Redwin."

"Redwin!" cried her brothers, simultaneously.

"Yes, don't shout so," said Agnes, involuntarily smoothing her glossy hair. "He will be here directly. He has come to inquire after me."

"What a considerate fellow, to be sure," bawled Edward. "To inquire after *you*, Aggy! Are you certain it is not my unworthy self?"

"Mr. Redwin," cried the servant.

For the second time, Paul Redwin entered 'The Rest;' and his first coming, and abrupt departure, recurred to him as it did to us, and flushed his cheek somewhat. He glanced round the room, as if seeking some particular object, and then advanced with extended hand to Agnes.

"I could not pass 'The Rest,' Miss Elmore, without calling to inquire if you were well, and free from any ill effects that late hours and fatigue will sometimes bring, by way of counterbalance to our pleasures."

"You are very kind, Mr. Redwin, to think of me."

"Think!"

"My brothers," said Agnes, quickly, with a wave of the hand, "you have seen them?"

"To be sure,"—wheeling round, and shaking hands with us—"Mr. Edward Elmore, I should not have known you. Mr. Gilbert, we have met but lately. Mr. Luke, you appear to be suffering from no ill effects of yesterday—or this early morning, more correctly speaking."

"What is ——?" began Edward, when Gilbert gently touched him on the arm, and commanded silence by a look.

"Be seated, Mr. Redwin," said Agnes.

"I thank you," said Redwin, taking the seat indicated; "may I venture to hope you spent a pleasant evening?"

He was speaking to Agnes; and I, in con-

junction with my brothers, observed Paul Redwin, as, leaning forward in his chair, he addressed my sister.

He was scrupulously exact in his dress, of course, and was very fashionable and dandified, without a thread awry in his clothes, or a curl out of proportion in his dark chestnut hair; but still he hardly reminded me of the Paul Redwin I had seen before. There was not that cool and easy way that sat upon him so naturally and complacently—not that perfectly contented, ever-at-home demeanour which he exhibited at Wharnby House, with the Silvernots. He seemed forcing his old way and style with a great effort; he tried to appear as he had ever appeared at Wharnby House; and yet he stammered a little, coloured a great deal, and once or twice (a very rare event for Paul Redwin) made a dead pause, as if at a loss how to proceed with a common-place conversation.

It was time for Mr. Redwin to put an end to a visit of courtesy; but he lingered, and looked in his hat, and then shily askance at Agnes, sitting before him, and looking so

pretty in her morning dress; and then, meeting my glance, became as red as fire, for no cause that was perceptible to me.

"Well, I am prolonging my visit," said he, jumping to his feet suddenly—"my grandmother will be puzzling her poor head as to my whereabouts."

"Are you going to Wharnby House, Mr. Redwin?" asked Agnes.

"I—I—oh, yes; I am going to cut across the country to the house, directly," he said, confusedly.

"Will you be the bearer of a little note to Celia from me?" asked Agnes. "I am ashamed to trouble you, but I——"

"Do not mention trouble, Miss Elmore," said Redwin—"I shall feel highly honoured by the post of messenger"

"Ever flattering, Mr. Redwin," cried Agnes, opening a small rosewood desk by the window, and seating herself thereat.

"I *shall* feel honoured, *indeed*," said Redwin—and then, as if he thought he had reiterated his assertion too earnestly, added lightly—"Are not all gentlemen honoured by

commands given by a lady? you will bear me out in that, Luke?"—turning to me.

"Oh, certainly!"

There was a pause, broken by the hurried scratching of Agnes's pen. Redwin, who had not re-seated himself, stood, hat in hand, looking at her in an abstracted manner; Gilbert, as if unaware of his presence, conversed with Edward, in a low tone; and I, with the consciousness of appearing particularly stupid, sat, with Shakspeare in my hand, staring at all in turn.

At this juncture the door opened, and my father and Vaudon entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Redwin," said Vaudon, as he shook hands.

"Mr. Redwin!" murmured my father, half vacantly—"Redwin—Redwin; who is Redwin, Vaudon?"

Before Vaudon could reply, the object of his inquiry interposed.

"Permit me to call to your remembrance, Mr. Elmore, the Master Paul Redwin of some years ago, who had the temerity to propose a change of education for your sons, which pro-

posal was not received in such good faith as I, poor boy, had looked for. We parted with an ill grace, if you recollect."

"I recollect," said my father, stiffly; "have you called for an apology? If I remember rightly, you were going to remind me of the time when you became a man. I presume you consider that time has arrived, by your second appearance at 'The Rest.'"

Paul Redwin jerked up his head proudly, and looked back my father's supercilious glance. There was a sharp reply on his lips, and the second appearance would probably have brought about the same result as the first, had he not remembered Agnes, *his* daughter, was sitting before the desk at the window, and looking at him and her father half-entreatingly.

The words to which he might have given utterance were checked, and Agnes, rising with her note, said,—

"Papa, this is a friend of mine—for he is a friend of the Silvernots, and we respect them, all of us. This gentleman was at the ball, last-night, and has called this morning to pay

a common courtesy," then; in a lower tone, inaudible to all but me, close unto their side, "you forget yourself, papa—*we* are Elmores."

"True—and the Elmores were all courtesy themselves once," he muttered; then turning to the visitor, he said,—"Mr. Redwin, I ask your pardon. I am an irritable man, and have more than a common share of man's infirmities. I pray you to excuse my harshness."

Redwin bowed.

"We will not detain you, Mr. Redwin," said Agnes, delivering her missive into his hands, "time may be precious to you. You will not forget my note?"

"You may rely upon me, Miss Elmore."

Mr. Redwin was bowing his adieux, when I cried,—

"I am going to Cliverton, Redwin. I will accompany you a little way on the road, with your permission."

"That will be capital."

"To Cliverton, Luke?" inquired my father.

"Yes: I left my horse at the Bull Inn last

night. Tom started this morning on foot to Cilverton, and will await my coming."

"Why do you go then?"

"I have a small bill to settle."

"Ah! true."

He said it with a half groan, for the change that had come upon me. But a little boy a a few years back, all confidence in and obedience to him, and now talking of settling my bills at the Black Bull Inn!

Gilbert restrained his exhibition of surprise before Redwin, and sat with a contracted brow, brooding over the mysterious incidents of the morning.

I took my departure with Redwin, and we were soon some distance from 'The Rest,' with Redwin's groom clattering behind our horses heels.

"What a surprising father you have, Elmore," said he, as we rode on; "I don't know whether I like or hate him. You see I'm frank with you."

"Very."

"If it were not for my doubts as to the reception I might receive, I should often give you a look in at 'The Rest,'" he said.

"Never fear, Redwin."

"You see I've no male companion of my own age, about Wharnby," said Redwin, "and when I am not at Wharnby House, you cannot imagine how dull my evenings are at home, with my grandmother Elmore," said he, "I have a bright thought. Come and see me!"

"Thank you," I replied, "but excepting a chance visit to Wharnby House, like yourself, I seldom leave my home."

"But we are young men, each wanting to kill time, Luke Elmore."

"Kill time!" said I, "surely Paul Redwin's time is wholly pre-occupied! There's a young lady who would chide you, methinks, if you spent *many* evenings from Wharnby House." He turned his head away from me with a start, and for a moment we rode on in silence.

Presently he looked at me, with a laugh.

"You're a shrewd fellow, Elmore, but I hardly understand you. Surely, you are not like the fair sex in general, and detect a proposal in every light attention?"

"But you are engaged, Redwin," said I,

smiling faintly; "why seek to hide what all Wharnby is well aware of, friend?"

"Engaged!" he cried, then moderating his tone, said, "so they say I am engaged? Do *you* think so, Elmore?"

"I have not much doubt."

He looked very sternly before him, and once his upper lip quivered as with pain, and over his strikingly handsome face flitted a softening expression that usurped the old look of haughtiness so peculiar to his countenance.

He did not speak again till we were near the home of the Silvernots.

"Are you going to join me?" asked he, pointing to the house with his whip.

"I have not time — I may look in as I return."

"Good-day."

He extended his hand, and shook mine warmly.

"Is it a compact?" he said.

"What?"

"Our future merry meeting."

"As you will. We shall see each other shortly, at Wharnby House, and then I

shall find you have changed your mind, Redwin."

"Perhaps so."

His look returned to its old haughtiness, as he spurred his horse and rode on, leaving me to continue my way alone.

I reached Cliverton about the middle of the afternoon, and found Tom awaiting my arrival at the bar of the Black Bull Inn.

Having settled all demands that my host of the preceding evening had upon me, I remounted, and my groom imitated my example.

"This way, sir?" enquired Tom.

"Yes, this way."

I had turned in the direction towards London, much to the astonishment of my groom, who, whistling softly to himself, shook his head and followed.

A quarter of an hour's trot took us out of Cliverton and on the high road. It was not long before a tasteful villa of small dimensions caught my eye and arrested further progress. There was a winding gravel path leading to the house, bordered on each side with beds of

scarlet geraniums, which late as the season, were in full blossom and looked bright and fresh. On the stone pillar to which the gate was attached was written 'Thornville Villa,' and on the brass plate of the gate itself shone forth the name of 'Dartford.'

"Wait a few moments, Tom," said I leaping from my horse, and pushing back the gate.

"All right, sir."

But Tom's looks, as I hastily caught a glimpse of them, evidently said "All wrong." There was a queer twist of his lips, and a knotty appearance about his whole face, that suggested an idea of great mental exertion used to solve some exceedingly tough problem, which indicated no signs of giving up.

Was my manner a problem to myself? I thought not. May not a gentleman enquire after a lady's health after having met her at a ball, without incurring suspicion and bringing grave doubts to himself? Pooh! ridiculous! Had I not received Paul Redwin at 'The Rest,' this very morning, as a visitor to my sister?—To be sure. Rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tat, tat,

tat, TAT! What an extraordinary little brass knocker!—it seemed charged with electricity; the contact with it sent such a peculiar thrill, ing through my veins.

A small footman (everything seemed on a small scale here, as in a doll's house) answered my imperative summons.

"Is Mrs. Morton within?"

"Yes, sir."

I slipped my card into his hand, and followed him to a sitting-room in miniature, the walls of which were ornamented with several portraits in gilt frames, all of Mr. Dartford, in simpering attitudes, with books and blue sky in the background.

The room was chilly and disconsolate, and there was a large inkstand on the table, as big as Mr. Dartford's head, and was the only article that suggested magnitude in the establishment.

A few books, a desk, and a green-baized table by the window, led me to imagine that the room into which I had been shown was Mr. Dartford's study, and I was not mistaken.

"Will you please to follow me, sir?"

With my eyes bent upon a twinkling pair of calves of unexceptionable proportions, I kept in the track of the small footman.

He stopped, and flung back a door.

"Mr. Elmore."

I was in the room, and Mrs. Morton was advancing towards me.

"This is an unexpected honour, Mr. Elmore."

She was as pretty as ever in the daylight, and I fancied (was it fancy?) that there was the slightest of slight rosy blushes for an instant on her face.

"I hope you will forgive the liberty I have taken, Mrs. Morton," said I, with her tiny hand in mine; "but I could not resist the opportunity of looking in at Thornville Villa."

"You have not come with that sole purpose, all the way from Wharnby, Mr. Elmore?" said she, laughingly; "I surely have not received so great an honour."

"I certainly had business at Cliverton, but had I not ——"

"There, there — be seated, Mr. Elmore;

you are very kind to think of me at all; but spare me protestations."

I took the seat indicated by a wave of her white hand, and she resumed her place before the fairy work-table, from which my arrival had disturbed her.

"Your sister—she is well?"

"Quite well, I thank you. May I hope the same for Mr. Dartford?"

"Oh! Mr. Dartford is never ill," said she, lightly; "he has an iron constitution, and late hours never affect him. He will be here directly; I have expected him home this last half hour."

We fell into a hasty chat about the ball, the company, the Silvernots, and my sister.

Of the latter she said—

"I have a promise from that charming girl, Mr. Elmore—I look to you for its fulfilment. I return to London in a few weeks, and Miss Agnes and I must be great friends by that time."

"My want of persuasion shall not detain her at Wharnby, Mrs. Morton," said I, rising to depart.

"Going so soon?" said Mrs. Morton, rising also,—"this is a hasty call. Will you not stay till Mr. Dartford returns, and dine with us? It is a long ride to Wharnby."

"My best thanks, but you must excuse me, madam," said I.

"Mr. Dartford would be delighted to have the pleasure."

"Pray present my best respects to him."

"Ah! Mr. Elmore, there are other calls to make," said she, looking at me with all the power of her dark eyes,—"that young lady to whom you hastened, on her entrance, last night, and whom you danced with immediately. Am I right, Mr. Elmore?"

I coloured. I could not hear any allusion to Celia Silvernot unmoved; and it was with a stammering tongue I hastened to reply, when Mr. Dartford relieved me from my embarrassment, by his sudden appearance at the door.

"No, no, Mr. Elmore!" screamed he, pumping my right arm in a vigorous manner; "not off, sir—we shall never allow that. You must dine with us, sir—must he not, Ernestine, eh—eh?"

"Mr. Elmore has probaby, other engagements," answered his sister, moving away from us somewhat indifferently. "What attraction can we offer, to prolong his stay—we two prosy little people?"

"Why not stay, Luke Elmore?" was the whisper at my heart; what inducement have you to hurry homewards and fly the new friends who offer hospitality so warmly! I glanced almost unconsciously at Mrs. Morton—she had seated herself at the work-table once more, and was bending over some lace upon it till her ringlets showered before her face, and hid it from my view.

"I have no other engagement, Mr. Dartford," said I, hesitatingly; "but really I am such a stranger, and my riding-coat is so out of place, and have merely called to——"

"No ceremony, Mr. Elmore—a fig for ceremony," whistled Mr. Dartford; "it is decided; stay you shall."

He skipped to the bell-rope with an ape-like agility, and rang.

The small footman appeared at the door.

"Tell the page to call in Mr. Elmore's

groom, and show him to your room and make him welcome, and let John look to the horses."

"Yes, sir."

"There, sir—it is done; be seated."

"My brother has more influence than I have, it appears, Mr. Elmore," said the young widow, without looking up; "yet I am the oldest friend by half a minute, at least."

"He! he!" laughed Mr. Dartford; "half a minute!—that's precise, anyhow—he! he!"

Such a horrible laugh, or attempt to laugh, I had never heard in the course of my life, as Mr. Dartford's. I fairly shuddered, and set my teeth hard to keep them from experiencing that peculiar sensation called 'on edge.'

It is not my intention to dwell at great length upon this scene, which familiarized me to the inmates of Thornville Villa, and increased the strange interest I took in one of them. It is almost sufficient for the future development of records that have to pass beneath this hand, to say, that I dined with them and sat next to Mrs. Morton, who was at one time brilliantly conversational, flashing sentence after sentence of witty allusion to present life at home, or

of interest in the world, with a rapidity of utterance and fluency of speech that was perfectly bewildering, and at another, in an abstracted mood, which, no doubt, carried her thoughts far away from present company.

She left us after dessert, and Mr. Dartford tendered me a cigar across the table.

"Thank you," said I, putting it down.

"You do not smoke?" he asked, lighting his Cuba at the same time, and puffing behind it till he seemed swelling towards me like a figure in a phantasmagoria.

"Never."

"Well, it is a bad habit, but it's one not easily got over," said Dartford; "I smoked myself into a jaundice with bits of cane at school, and that gave me a taste for it, I suppose. My poor sister's husband, too—ah! he *was* a smoker! It is my belief"—lowering his voice—"he smoked himself as dry as a stick, broke up, and died. They said it was a consumption—I think it was exhaustion."

"You speak of Mr. Morton?"

"Yes—he died at twenty-five; that was three years ago."

"He was Mrs. Morton's senior by many years, I should imagine."

"Two years—that's all;—my sister is only five-and-twenty now, and looks younger, I take it."

I ventured to agree with him.

"Between ourselves, sir, if he hadn't died, she would have looked five-and-eighty by this time. He was a bad man, sir—a thorough—— but he's gone—he's gone now. You don't drink!"

This was the second person I had heard Mr. Dartford comment upon during my short acquaintance with him, and neither had received a flattering eulogium from his lips. It was an unpleasant way with him, and made me fidgetty. Before we went upstairs into a tastefully-furnished drawing-room in miniature, where Mrs. Morton awaited us, he had in all confidence picked to pieces for my especial delectation three more characters appertaining to the gentry of Cliverton, and bestowed no word of praise on any single being existent in the neighbourhood, with the exception of the slight allusion to his sister that I have already mentioned.

Mrs. Morton had no more dull fits during the evening. She played the piano at my wish, with the skill of a great master. She replied, "She did not sing—she had no voice," to my solicitation, and then, after some pressing, broke into a flood of such entrancing melody as is seldom heard out of the precincts of the Royal Opera—a melody of voice, so clear, so full of tone, that with my senses ravished from me, I sprang to my feet, and leant across in wonderment and ecstacy.

"You do not sing!" I exclaimed, upon her rising from the music-stool; "you do not sing, Mrs. Morton! What could you mean by telling me you had no voice?"

"Oh! but you may be a bad judge, Mr. Elmore."

We sat before the fire, a curious trio perhaps, and Mr. Dartford brought up the Silvernots as a topic for conversation, and made such deep inquiries concerning them, and waited so patiently for answers from me, with his large head on one side in fixed attention, that beginning to imagine he must have some

hidden reason in the back-ground, I answered more evasively.

Mrs. Morton detected my rising doubts, for she changed the subject to Wharnby, and Wharnby's coming greatness, and interested Mr. Dartford in it immediately, and drew him out into a lengthy, but a very dry,discourse on property, and land-tax, till my head fairly ached again with the shower of statistics he kept flinging against it for my mind to grapple with.

Mrs. Morton sang again a plaintive ballad —a song of mourning for one lost—so sweetly, so pathetically, that I could hardly see her graceful figure at the piano for the swimming in my eyes. I thought of her husband, who had died so young, and how she sat there, recalling him to her memory at that moment, and venting her sorrow in such heart-piercing strains of heavenly music—music that I could scarcely think akin to earth.

It was a shock to me to see her look up from the pages of music before her with the old bright smile, the eyes sparkling and tearless, the tone of voice melodious but unfaltering, and say—

"It is rather a pitiful strain, is it not? But the composer is a German, and the Germans are a melancholy-mad sort of a race, and dull in the extreme."

She rattled over the first few notes of the waltz we had had together last night, and added—

"That is better music."

"One will be remembered equally as well as the other," I said, gallantly.

"Ah! Mr. Elmore—take care. I mistrust a flatterer."

She looked full at me, and shook her curls, and held up one finger encircled by many a gem, and laughed a low, musical, heart-stirring laugh.

Oh! that look: it stirred my blood, and made my chest heave, and my eyes betray the admiration I felt at the dazzling beauty seated at the piano, before which I stood—that beautiful woman, whom, for the wild moment, I loved. That look has never left me. It is beside me as I write distinct and palpable as ever; but where are the visions, fleet and maddening of that moment, when she hid her

deep-liquid orbs with her long Circassian lashes, as if fearful of my glance?

I went away reluctantly—the hours had sped with winged celerity—and 'The Rest' was twelve miles from Cliverton.

I left her standing in the drawing-room, bidding me 'good-night,' with a sunny smile of farewell greeting, and her brother followed to the hall, and stood talking several minutes with me.

Out in the road at last, with Mr. Dartford, shrieking 'Good night!' in a wild falsetto, from the door.

I looked up instinctively at the lighted windows of the drawing-room, as I leaped astride my horse.

The slight figure of Mrs. Morton crossed and recrossed the light within, to and fro, to and fro—backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards—rapidly flitted her shadow by the blinds, as if she were pacing the room, actuated by some strong feeling, convulsive with grief or maddening by rage.

I could not forget it, even when I was miles away.

Tom's dry cough—a very hard, grinding cough—evidently intended to attract notice, finally aroused me.

"Well, Tom, have you spent a pleasant evening?" I called out.

"Thankee, sir, I hope you have," he said. "No offence to the gentleman and lady of the house, Mr. Luke,—but, axing pardon, the evening might have been pleasanter in the servants'-room—take it all together, sir."

"How was that, Tom?"

"Why, sir, I'm an Englishman, and hates being pumped—that's all, Mr. Luke."

"Pumped!"

"Yes, sir. I hate your inquiring, inquisitive set of fellows, that want to know all about your master, and master's family. But that's like lawyer's sarvants."

"Lawyer's?"

"Yes, sir—why, of course, you knowed Mr. Dartford was a lawyer?—he's got a great office near the Bull."

"Has he?"

"Yes, sir. But they didn't get much out of me that'd stand for positive fact, sir, *I'm* inclined to think."

Tom relapsed into a silence which was occasionally broken by a deep chuckle, significant of his own diplomacy, as we rode towards home and Wharnby.

CHAPTER II.

CHANGE!

WINTER has fallen again upon 'The Rest;' the north winds blow furiously across the cliffs, and freezingly sweep onwards from the dull restless sea, whose heavy waves break with a rolling crash against the rocks of Wharnby, and vanish into spray. I have attained to nineteen years, and bear them with a proud consciousness of the importance they bestow upon me, and the manly look they, in my vain belief, have brought unto my personal appearance.

The gradual march of events, from my call at Thornville Villa, unto the present time, (the snow-flakes are falling heavily and

noiselessly from the murky heavens overhead, and making of hill and dale, and woodland, one icy blank around,) is worth noting, by those who may have found a passing interest in the characters which this story brings back to life long gone before.

With Mrs. Morton—gay, fascinating, accomplished Mrs. Morton !—I have had many interviews previous to her departure for that "choked-up square," her residence in which she had so regretted on the night of the great ball. My sister Agnes and I have paid Mrs. Morton a visit at her brother's house, and been warmly welcomed, and made much of; and Agnes thinks her preferable to Celia Silvernot. My father, who has sunk into an apathetic indifference concerning the progress of his children, makes no comment upon our going or return, but looks at us with his bloodshot eyes, and passes a wasted hand across his forehead, as if endeavouring to call us to remembrance, and to find out what business we had at 'The Rest,' in which he chanced to be concerned.

My feelings for Mrs. Morton are beyond analysis. I cannot fathom them, or dissect

the real influences that bind me towards her as with a mighty spell. I do not try to do so. I am content with the present, and seek no clearer insight through the dim fluttering veil that hangs across the threshold over which I am destined to pass foot. I know that in her society I am as one infatuated by her beauty, whose eyes are dizzy with drinking in her charms, and whose head appears to whirl and throb beneath the strange power which she wields over me, and which increases each time I see or sit beside her. In the first few hours of absence, I can think of little else but the songs she has sung so melodiously before the piano in the little drawing-room, and the glances we have interchanged. Sometimes I think that I am not indifferent to her; and she, who has mingled with the world—the bright, glittering side of the world—so much, has found in me something not of her sphere —something unlike those with whom many months of each year are passed, and is attracted by it for the very adverseness of its nature. But this may be a youth's vanity, or she may be testing the strength of her powers

of caption on my inexperience to while away dull hours at Cliverton. I do not love her—I feel assured of that. There are none of those swayings of the whole soul—those sensations of reverence, and almost holy adoration, that I had had once, and that had been blasted by the lightning; but there is, in place thereof, a fevered, burning recollection, which I cannot grapple with, and which leaves but empty air in my clenched hands whenever I vainly seek to grasp the reality which shackles my thoughts to Mrs. Morton.

We part, with many promises.

"You will come to London, Mr. Elmore?" she says—"I shall be able to receive you at my house, in Cavendish Square, with more satisfaction than I have done at Cliverton."

"Rely upon it, my dear madam," I reply, "if I ever visit London, I shall eagerly avail myself of the opportunity of renewing our acquaintance; but I fear it must be your return to Cliverton that will give me the pleasure of seeing you again."

"Oh, I hate Cliverton!" cries the little lady; "and my brother is so tiresome and

prolix over his papers and red tape. You *must* have some business to bring you to London, now and then, I feel assured."

"I can scarce' remember being in the mighty Babylon, madam," I answer.

"Well—there is my card," she says, tendering it to me; "if you ever deign to pay me a visit, you are welcome. Good-bye—I shall write to Agnes."

She passes from my sight, and I am very dull and out of spirits for the next few days.

Miss Osborne has assumed all the duties of housekeeper to 'The Rest,' and has resigned the office of governante over my sister, Agnes, to whom teaching would be now out of place, indeed. There is an existent affection between Miss Osborne and her late pupil, which is exhibited by the latter, despite all her angry fits of impatience, and sharp rejoinders to questions quietly asked of her by Miss Osborne.

Miss Osborne is attached to Agnes more than she herself imagines, and takes great interest in all concerning her late pupil, and often hazards friendly advice and counsels,

when she considers it necessary on her part to offer them. Agnes is sometimes reprimanded too in a sweet manner, full of sisterly reproof, which, though not always a counteracting agent, subdues at times the variable nature of my sister, from its very power over her better self.

Still not a hundred Miss Osborne's could move her one jot from her own determinations when they are fixed, and bent upon, and not a hundred more could decipher all the thoughts that throng busily, ever busily in the recesses of that heart, of which no one has the key.

Friendly meetings pass between Wharnby House and 'The Rest,' week after week, and in addition, Paul Redwin often comes riding up the avenues to see his old friend, Luke! He has become so attached to me, that my heart bounds to him like a Pythias to a Damon, and in my new-formed friendship, I forget that deep attention to my brother Gilbert, which should ever be his due—forget that Redwin has stepped between me and my first love, forget everything but that he is very often at 'The Rest,' and that the great red-brick

house in which his grandmother resides, occasionally holds Luke Elmore within its walls.

Mrs. Redwin improves upon further acquaintance, and setting aside a weakness on her part, in conversing on no other subject than her dear grandson Paul, is an amiable old lady of an aristocratic order.

Paul Redwin's visits to 'The Rest,' at first frowned menacingly at, by my haughty sire, are tolerated for my sake, and his dashing manner, and frank ways often cause my father to smile behind his hand, and have even worn off the first unfavourable impressions which Gilbert entertained for him—impressions which had birth in their susceptibility for me.

And Paul Redwin, with all his dashing, frank manner, his volubility of discourse, his loud ringing laughs, is peculiarly alive to every movement of my sister Agnes, and has an attentive ear for every word she utters and falters in his voice if he speak a dozen syllables to her in succession.

Yes, it is all over with Paul Redwin! He has forgotten his first vows, although he dare not say so to himself—he has left the first

image he set up in his idolatry, alone on the dry sands of a desert, standing grimly in the light of that burning sun which seems to mock its desolation—he has sought another shrine, and with blazing eyes and panting breath, kneels down and worships with a tenfold passion—a passion he had never dreamed himself capable of being so great a slave unto.

The crisis of so many first-loves is fast advancing. Celia's cheek grows more ashen, and her look more wan and her red lips are tightly compressed as with pain, when she hears of Paul, *her* Paul paying such frequent visits to 'The Rest.' Agnes, on the contrary, wears a brighter look upon her face and a more sparkling light within her eyes, and her cheeks are flushed with the glow of conquest —the first conquest of the girl of seventeen! She thinks not of her dear friend, Celia, sitting at home with her great heart that held so much of love broken at its outset, misplaced at the beginning, shattered in its youth. She flirts with Redwin, and bends her head to hear his whispered compliments, when we are

altogether at Wharnby House, and the flush of scorn, and of awakened pride, gleams across Celia's face, and shows the woman—she who has been to Redwin but little more than a poor jest—rousing herself to a sense of her position. The night is well remembered, with the fire burning and crackling in the grate, and the Silvernots and Elmores circled round it,—Vaudon taking down some books from a case in the recess, and reading them as he stands—and Mr. Dartford (yes, Mr. Dartford) next to Arabella, and quite a large-headed gallant in his attentions. My father and Gilbert are absent, and the rector is at home in his villa near the church.

Agnes and Celia are side by side, and Redwin next to Agnes. The old by-play, as at the Cliverton Ball, but more divulged on Redwin's part, whose very look is intense love; and which Agnes meets so oddly unconscious, and flinches not away at, in her simplicity and innocence! Mrs. Silvernot looks restlessly from the corner seat, and fidgets, with her nervous hands, at the gold watch chain round her neck.

The night is well remembered, with its partings, with the cold kiss which Celia gives back to Agnes—she is not false enough to lavish the old warm caresses on the pretty robber,—with the earnest, searching gaze Celia gives Paul Redwin, as he extends his hand.

In the confusion of adieux, Celia forgets that I am standing at the back, and says to him, in a voice that is hardly articulate, from its suppressed agony—

"Paul, you will not come here again. Please don't, for my sake — for I cannot bear it."

"Celia!" he stammers forth.

"Do not say a word—it would be a folly or a falsehood, and either would be unworthy of you. I am so glad you have never said a word to mamma about it—it is so much the best."

"Celia!" he says again.

"I do not reproach you—*she* is so beautiful, how could you help it, Paul? She is so much above me, and is so different in her manner from my old way of pleasing you in everything. I only wish— I—I only wish you had not come so often here."

"You say, come here no more?"

"Oh! no more—no more!" she pleads—"I shall soon get happy, if I do not see you, and know that you are really engaged to her, and have forgotten the silly talk we had one day together."

"But, Celia——"

"It is useless," she interrupts, in a firmer tone, "if you gave me your oath this night that all should be altered—I could not love you truly any more. You never loved me—your heart strays away too soon."

I hear all this unseen; it is spoken so quickly, that hardly a moment of time has intervened; and it is ended—that short dialogue of despair—and Celia has stolen unnoticed to her room, ere all "good-nights" have been interchanged.

The night is cold, and the snow falls thickly on us in our passage from the street-door to the carriage-steps. Redwin's face is dark and frowning, as he escorts Agnes quickly across the strip of snow.

"Why, what is the matter, Mr. Redwin?" I hear her ask. "A fresh quarrel

with poor Celia? How black and angry you are looking, to be sure!"

"*Miss Silvernot* and I never quarrel, Miss Agnes. We are hardly interested enough in each other to quarrel."

"Jesting again, Mr. Redwin."

"Nay,"—he whispers something, and she darts away from his arm, and is in the carriage-

Vaudon, Edward, and I follow. Agnes sits silent, and I fancy her hand trembles.

"Good-night, gentlemen," cries Redwin.

We echo his good-night.

"Good-night, Agnes."

She is close to the window, and yet does not answer.

"Good-night, Agnes," he says a second time.

My ears are very quick to-night—for, though low is the response, I hear her whisper back at last—

"Good-night——Paul!"

CHAPTER III.

PAUL REDWIN KEEPS HIS PROMISE.

THE evening of the following day, I rode over to Mrs. Redwin's to keep an appointment with her grandson.

I found the old lady and Redwin seated together by the fire, the former listening to some energetic speech of Paul's with great attention, and wiping her eyes, from time to time, with her lace handkerchief.

"You are but a boy,—indeed, my dear Paul, you are but a simple boy."

"Oh! nonsense, grandmother, I was of age last week, you know."

"Your poor father was thirty ——"

"Mr. Elmore," announced the servant.

"Ah! Luke, old fellow, you are late," and

"Good evening, Mr. Elmore," were my salutations.

Mrs. Redwin lingered a few moments, asking some unimportant questions, and then, at a sign which my quick glance detected the grandson bestowing upon her, departed with an audible sigh.

Redwin was not in his usual spirits; there was a forced air of hilarity in his manner which was not natural; and more than once, for the want of something to say, he snatched up the poker and battered ferociously at the coals.

With an inward guess at the coming disclosure, I was content to wait patiently for the denouement.

"Shall we play that Gambit once more?" he asked, pointing to the chess-table and ivory men thereon.

"With pleasure."

He drew the table between us, and silently we arranged the men Paul knocked the king off the table, in his attempt to make the first move, picked it up, and then swept the pieces *en masse* to the centre.

"It's no use, Elmore," he said; "I have some advice to ask you—some disclosure to make known."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Some months ago, friend Luke," commenced he, plunging into the subject, "you twitted me with a partiality for the society of the Silvernots, and hinted that I was not entirely free from an affection for the younger daughter. In confidence, Elmore, I own I was touched — slightly impressed, that was all. I never proposed to the parents of Celia, understand."

"But to Celia herself," I remarked.

"No, no," he quickly replied; "a few gallant words—a flirtation, if you will—no more, upon my honour."

"Then, you have to tell me that with the first love you are tired; and that to have won her heart, and not to wear it, was your object—do I comprehend you?"

I said it sternly, with the pale face and trembling figure of last night's Celia before me.

"Not my object, as God's my witness,

Elmore!" he cried, passionately; "I was in a dream, and all was unreal and full of visions. I have remorse burning at my heart for the few words of love I ever said to her. But she is young, and we have seen but little of each other; and so the delusion will soon wear out, and die of its own weakness. But, Elmore, I have found out my first fancy was delusive through the real love, the fierce passion which men know, and which wrings the heart-strings with its intensity. I have seen the one without whom my whole life will be a curse—my existence a dead blank—I love your sister Agnes with my whole soul."

"Oh! Redwin, I expected this avowal. I know not what to say."

"Listen," said he, placing his hand upon my arm and speaking in a tremulous voice that told of the depth of his excitement; "from the night of the Cliverton Ball, I have loved your sister — she is so beautiful, so good."

"Spare me her praises—I am her brother."

"But you must know her virtues, her loveliness—you, happy fellow, see her every day,"

he ran on rhapsodically; "she is perfection, is she not?"

"To your tale. Is there not more to tell?"

"When I first saw Agnes, and—first loved her, Luke, I thought of Celia, and felt like a traitor in her sight. Candidly, my friend, I tried to wrestle with this new-born passion for Celia's sake—for my own word, my own half-uttered expressions, made though they were in a light hour, and jesting mood. I started the following day for Wharnby House, and yet impelled as it were by destiny, I found myself at the lodge gates of 'The Rest.' We met more frequently — I saw Agnes everytime I called on you—I loved her, I felt my whole happiness was bound up in her consent."

"And she so young."

"Young!" he cried; "she will be eighteen soon, Luke."

"True."

"Now, Luke, I believe that Agnes is aware of my attachment, and that — that she would not reject me."

"You are lucky in your loves, Redwin."

"Oh! I have great hope," he said, without heeding my remark; "It is that which lightens my heart and makes me happy. But I spoke of advice. — it is necessary, you will own. How shall I proceed, Luke?"

"Proceed?"

"Yes, with your—father."

He looked blankly at me for a reply.

My father! I had not thought of him. What would he say or do, and how would he receive so startling a revelation?

Redwin saw my dubious look.

"Your father is an enigma, Elmore, and I dread an interview with him more than all. He may crush me with his bitter tirades, he may forbid me the house — he — Agnes's father!"

"You must watch your opportunity, Paul."

"I wish to be engaged to Agnes — to know that no one can step between me and her—to call her my betrothed, my promised bride."

What a difference had love made in Paul Redwin! Where were the foppish airs — the

pretentious style so characteristic of him—the self conceit in which he wrapped himself—the mannerism which had grown with his growth. To me—all gone.

"And what has your grandmother to say concerning this engagement?" I asked; "there are two sides worthy consideration, Redwin."

"Oh! my grandmother thinks I have just come from school and am hardly fit to be trusted alone yet," he said with a laugh.

"She has objections?"

"Hardly objections, Elmore," said he; "but she is alarmed at my strength of purpose. She has so long considered me a little boy, who requires careful watching, and who must not go out in the night air without a woollen comforter and a respirator, that I am not a man in her opinion; and never shall be, were I to live to three score years and ten. But I have her consent for all that—she has but one name on her heart, and that is 'Paul.'"

Mrs. Redwin rejoined us by the fireside, and Redwin brought up the topic of his

second love, and the old lady smoothed her silk dress with her white, jewelled hands, and crossed them in her lap, and listened attentively to her grandson, gazing at him with a mingled look of love and anxiety. Whenever he spoke of Agnes's beauty, and his own unworthiness, which he did fifty times within the hour, she grew fidgetty, and tossed her head indignantly from side to side. Paul unworthy of her! There was not a crowned head in all Christendom that would not have been honoured by the alliance—her own dear Paul!

"Paul is so young a man, Mr. Elmore," said she, turning to me with an odd, commingling look of friendship and dignity, "that he may not know his own mind—youth is so changeable, so full of caprice. He may be in love with your sister;—perhaps he is, poor boy, perhaps he is."

"Perhaps, grandmother," indignantly reiterated Paul.

"My dear Paul," she answered quickly, how *can* you know? Have you not been as variable as the wind, like your poor father,

from a child of three years old? Did you ever make up your mind resolutely to anything? You know you never have."

"I have made up my mind at last."

"He thinks so," said she, turning to me pityingly, "so let him have his way. He has nothing to do but to make known his intentions and his wishes to your father, Mr. Elmore, and to become engaged, and to forget his old grandmother as quickly as if she had never been."

"Never to forget her, or to change in his deep love for her," he said, laying his hand affectionately on hers.

The old lady brightened up directly.

"Ah! youth—youth!—would that you could all be furnished with perspective glasses," she said, holding his hand in hers, "or that your wisdom teeth came earlier. Well, you will be a happy couple, I hope—I'm sure I don't see what is to hinder you, myself. But don't be rash, Paul—you don't think of marrying directly. Let it be a long engagement, my own boy. Don't throw me off too soon—let me prepare and get reconciled to our separation."

"A long engagement! How many months do you ——?"

"Months! child," cried the old lady—"years—years."

Paul gave a blank smile at me, and passed his hands through his hair, but said no more.

"Paul will never desert Wharnby, and will never mingle in the dissipations of London seasons and London frivolities—your sister must not expect that," she said.

"I am not aware what expectations my sister may build on or look forward to, my dear Mrs. Redwin. I have but heard of my friend Paul's attachment to Agnes this evening, from his own lips."

"It will be better not," continued she, not heeding my remark, "she will, doubtless, think so herself. That unfortunate occurrence which has ——"

She stopped—Redwin looked embarrassed, and I felt the blood mounting to my face. It was the first sting I had received from strangers—the first sign of the inheritance of disgrace left me by my erring mother.

"But we need not continue the subject,"

she said, quickly; "from all that I can hear, Miss Elmore is a quiet, amiable young woman, and will make Paul a good wife. Dear me, how very strange it sounds. *Paul's wife!* Lord bless us!"

Agnes was the principal subject of conversation during the evening, and I returned home with my ears ringing with her praises. Paul came, day after day, and left, morning after morning, or evening after evening, with his undivulged confession to my father. He sat by Agnes's side — he talked alone to her — he had no voice or ears for any one save her alone — he sat as one entranced; and even Edward, who took little heed of events passing around in which he was unconcerned, knew all about it, and teazed Agnes into a frenzy, after Paul's departure, or in my father's absence.

But my father sat moodily eyeing them, without dreaming of the secret of their love, or went to another room with Vaudon, and spent the evening thither, returning late at night, after Paul had ridden home, with bloodshot eyes, and the drunkard's stamp on every

movement. Paul summoned up his courage for a final effort; and, after begging me not to leave the room, took advantage of being with my father, one winter's morning.

My father was sitting in his leathern chair by the fireside, holding a book in his shaking hands, when Paul, with an unsteady voice, dashed into the subject.

"My dear Mr. Elmore," he began, "you—you will excuse my abruptness, I hope; but the matter upon which I desire to arrest your attention is so very important, that ——"

He came to a dead stop upon my father closing his book, and looking him steadily in the face.

"I am your servant, Mr. Redwin," he said, languidly.

"Mr. Elmore," Paul began again, after a re-assuring look from me, "you will pardon my embarrassment, but I would speak upon a subject all-important to myself, and in which my whole life is bound. You cannot have been blind to my affection for your daughter Agnes, and ——"

"Affection!—Agnes!"—he murmured—"Agnes!—affection? Go on, if you please—I surely comprehend you not."

Paul, fearful of a second interruption, dashed into the heart of his discourse, and, having once broken through the iee, gave vent to a flood of eloquence and passionate exhortation which carried my father out of his dreamy state into a man eagerly attentive, and tremblingly alive to every word. Paul concluded at last, and, white as death, awaited the reply. My father glanced from him to me, gave a groan, as if of pain, and was several minutes silent. We waited patiently till he broke silence, which he did in an almost inaudible tone of voice—

"It matters little what I say or assert—my children think and act for themselves. You speak as if Agnes's love were already won—the love of a child of seventeen!"

"I speak—I hope ——"

"Give me an attentive hearing, Mr. Redwin," he said, calmly. "I have listened to your own discourse—nay, I have been moved by it. I was not aware of the changes time has made upon me and my children—children that were little boys and girl, when I first made my rest upon this coast; and now, as with a turn of a hand, the scene changes,

and a suitor for my daughter comes to tell me I must rest no more—I must awake to the old bustle of world and action, and live no longer for my own peace. You love her?"

"Beyond all the expression that my speech can give," cried Paul.

"You are a rich man, the son of a gentleman?"

"I am."

"Then what I have to urge against my daughter's choice. My brain has echoed with thoughts, about her future life so long—has schemed for her—has trembled for her after destiny—ay, trembled sir,—that I can resign my charge with a light heart, and thank God she is in good hands. Mr. Redwin, you have my consent. You have fulfilled your promise, and reminded me you have become a man."

He extended his hand towards my friend, who grasped it warmly and poured forth his thanks.

"I have one wish to express concerning this engagement, Mr. Redwin."

"And that is ——?"

"That it be a long one."

"I trust ——"

"It is better in some cases—it is the death-blow in others. I think it will be better for you both that three years or thereabouts intervene (she will be twenty then) before you think of a home of your own and a wife at your hearth."

"But my dear Mr. Elmore, for what reason?" urged Paul.

"Supposing that you have formed too high an estimate of my daughter's character—or rather my daughter's love for you, would it not be wiser policy to find out you have been deceived, ere the wedding-ring binds her to you for a life-time? Agnes is but a girl, hardly released from the tasks of a governess, and the routine of a child's education, and her mind is not yet formed, and she may take her fancies for love till the bloom of romance is brushed away, and the fruit is sour and unripe or turns to ashes on the lip."

"I have every confidence, Mr. Elmore."

"Ay, now!" bitterly replied my father, "we enter life all confidence, but how many quit it with those feelings at the breast, with which they started in the race, all energy.

for Agnes Elmore; no life of home, or angels 'neath the roof tree. Her destiny is written otherwise—the seal is set upon her fate.'"

"A morbid fear, dear father."

"It is not alone in Agnes, but more or less in all of you, the taint of the guilty blood inherited from one lost to every sense of right," he cried vehemently. "I have no faith in my children. They put no trust in me: I put no trust in them."

"Have you learned to disbelieve in all our affection and respect, then?" I asked reproachfully.

"What have you done indicative of a son's honour to his father?" he retorted. "What confidence is there between us? All self—self."

I could not reply: I felt the accusation was not altogether groundless. That I had a son's love for him I knew, but that I had ever shown it by word or action, ever let it step between me and my inclinations, I could not prove, and so remained silent with bowed head.

"And Gilbert, is there confidence there?

not believe in Agnes's life passing on so smooth a sea—I dare not think so, looking on her face. That face gives the lie to peace and contentment. I dream of it mingling with the crowd, I see it with other faces bent down and observing—faces of men and women, and grinning devils."

"Father!" cried I, alarmed at his increasing passion.

"It is her mother's face—the selfsame face that I stood before God's altar with when sixteen summers had but shed a beauty on it bright as heaven, but false as hell. She has the old ways—the superficial airs of society, as if she had mixed with throngs of fashionable people all her life, and knew them thoroughly. Luke, Agnes has been my mental curse from a pretty child with golden ringlets, dancing about the house—from a grave, thoughtful little girl, wandering about the chambers of 'The Rest'—to now, a young woman, distinct again, and full of schemes that have herelf in view. God grant all this to be but hallucination, but I hear a voice thundering in my ears like doom—'No rest

own, and wives of your own, and cares of your own, this will be 'The Rest.' Not till then."

I exerted my endeavours to dissuade him from the crude opinion he had formed upon his children without avail; the more argument I strived to enforce as the truth upon his stubborn mind, the less did he seem open to conviction.

I must see Gilbert, and disclose all particulars of the interview, and we must take counsel together against this growing darkness of my father's mind, and wrestle against his unnatural prejudice, and find the weapons that we have to combat against, and the enemies we have to meet.

But the day expired without a conference with Gilbert, and the next morning there were more urgent thoughts, and too much distress in a new shape to give my old suspicions utterance.

In the morning my father was found in his bed with a livid face and half-deadened form, marked by the silent leaden hand of paralysis that had drawn the heavy folds of

his curtains away in the still night, and with its noiseless strength struck at him in the dark and left him a poor helpless clod of earth upon his bed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WANING LIGHT OF HOME.

It was many weeks before my father could pass from his room leaning heavily on Vaudon's arm, and griping at the hand-rail for support at every tread.

Weeks and weeks before he sat in his leathern chair, shrunken, emaciated, and livid as the dead with the changes of years and years upon him.

The black hair had become an iron grey—the eyes were sunken, bloodshot, and glaring, his left hand was palsy-stricken, and his right was dead and withered like the side on which the leaden hand had fallen.

The tall form was no longer erect, and un-

bending, and he appeared one over whom the Psalmist's allotted period of years had passed and bowed him to the earth. With the changes on his outward form came another change in his seething brain that was never still, and never calm, and that had been diseased since she who should have been a mother to us dishonoured him in the proud days of its strength. All the evil nature, the sinful pride, the wild irritability, the gloomy mistrust increased a hundred fold in his affliction; and all the good, the high sense of honour, the father's love, vanished and became a void.

From the day he came down stairs, a tottering old man side by side with the dark majestic figure of his mysterious friend — so great a contrast with his broad chest and and sturdy giant frame to the one who leant upon his arm, he seemed to have no more thought for his sons—to have no more consideration for them —hardly to be aware that they were even present with him.

To Gilbert's affectionate concern he replied by a cold apathy that was not feigned, or by a

mocking irony as if he were returning sarcasm for sarcasm — to Edward and me he never addressed a word, and hardly deigned a reply, although I have seen his wandering eyes glancing suspiciously at us if we spoke together in an undertone, as though we were plotting against his life. To Redwin who came every evening he was equally indifferent and never commented on the engagement between him and Agnes, and indeed seemed to have forgotten all particulars of the interview, although future events will prove that his recent affliction had not cancelled the recollections of the day when Paul Redwin kept his promise and proved his manhood. To Miss Osborne, he was coldly polite; but, to Agnes, he was a doting father lavishing upon her the most extravagant marks of affection, and exhibiting a father's pride in praises of her beauty, intellect and grace, which, so contrary to his old manner, he would repeat in rapid succession with his arm round her or his hand in hers. He never stirred from 'The Rest' now; he could not listen patiently to the remonstrances of his old friend the little

rector, and seemed never at ease in his presence, and but released when he was gone.

And that accursed pride had assumed such wild authority over him, that even Vaudon had to succumb to it, and give way to his new arrogance. He would speak of his riches and his position for hours at a time; and in one interview between Mrs. Redwin and him, he had assumed such lofty airs, that the old lady had abruptly taken her departure, without a word concerning the "engagement," and had registered a vow never to cross the Elmore threshold again on any pretence whatever; and he would draw his dressing-gown closer round him when he passed the servants in the passages, lest their touch should bring contamination. Added to all this, the besotting influence of drink (fatal habit, that knows no change till its victim lies within the grave!)—the ravings, or childish weepings, whilst beneath its influence—and one may conjecture the little happiness contained within the walls of 'The Rest.'

And though my father knew it not—and though I never whispered the secret to my

brothers, to Agnes, to Miss Osborne, or Jacques Vaudon—and I never read upon their faces the terrible conviction that seared my own mind, and made me tremble with a mighty fear—I knew all these signs were of a second madness, and that his reason was unsound and shaking since his illness, if even before that time he had been wholly sane; or that his misanthropy of old days, or his sudden love of drink, were not but different phases of an intellect that had never recovered from its fall.

Redwin, with consummate tact, steered clear of my father in his sullen moods, and forgot any restraint he might have felt, in his close attention to Agnes, and in his unconsciousness of events drifting before his eyes.

To Redwin and Agnes, the time seemed passing magically; and the influence of that new-born passion appeared to have a salutary effect upon the character of my sister, whose dark shadings seemed receding in the light.

But time went on—the north winds went back beyond the sea—the drifting spars and floating remnants of old wrecks were no longer washed ashore—the green, young buds ex-

panded into leaves, beneath the glowing sun that set later every night behind the distant sea-line far away—the earth grew bright with flowers—and spring was young and golden.

The loves of Redwin and Agnes made steady progress; and, if Agnes were a trifle more capricious and more exacting towards her lover, there was nothing antagonistic to female nature in that—and Redwin bore all most complacently, and kept his loftiness in the background, and his old off-hand way completely out of sight.

Mrs. Morton having left Wharnby, and Redwin coming to 'The Rest' night after night, my old ways were returned to perforce, and I seldom quitted home for two hours together, excepting when I paid occasional visits to Wharnby House, where I saw nothing of Celia Silvernot. She had gone to London, to spend the winter at a distant relative's, Mrs. Silvernot informed me. She had not been very well—and change, Mrs. Silvernot thought, would do her good.

But there was a frequent guest in the place of the smart Paul, in my new-found acquaint-

ance, Mr. Dartford, who had resigned his bachelor tactics after five-and-thirty years of single-blessedness, and had come, lance in rest and helmet fixed, into the lists, with the Arabella colours in his plume.

Yes, hope had again sprung into being, and the elder daughter of the Wharnby House was soft and amiable, and had accepted the proposals from Mr. Dartford, and had become engaged to his large head, and the day was fixed for some early date in summer.

I had another subject for my marked observance in the person of Miss Osborne, who began to attract an uncommon interest towards her. I noticed that Miss Osborne had paid a visit every week to Cliverton for some months past, and had not considered it worthy of comment or observation, till the regularity of the time and day struck me as peculiar. Connecting this incident with the day on which Agnes and I escorted her from Cliverton, I—although not naturally inquisitive—puzzled my brains in the endeavour to attribute some feasible motive for her somewhat eccentric conduct; but, none presenting

itself, I was contented to remain in ignorance, perfectly assured of her honour and integrity.

I have said but little of Miss Osborne, but what pages could I not fill of her gentleness—her sisterly attachment to us all—the love and esteem in which we all held her—the hold she had upon our hearts! Her life had been of such an even tenor, so little disturbed by our petty troubles or household trifles, that, until the time of my father's sudden illness, she had almost dreamed away her life.

Since his recovery, she appeared to me to have become suddenly depressed in spirits, or to be suffering from ill health; her face was paler than ordinary, and her lips almost bloodless; and more than once I had entered the room appropriated to her, on some slight errand, and found her with her thin, white hands spread before her face.

"You are not well, Miss Osborne," I ventured to observe, upon discovering her position in the manner indicated.

"Yes, I am, Mr. Luke" said she, snatching her pen from the desk, and writing, hurriedly, a few lines on some paper before her;

"oh! I am very well. What reason have you for thinking otherwise?"

"You are looking pale, Miss Osborne."

"Oh! it is only my contrast with your rosy cheeks," she said, with a forced laugh; "I am naturally pale."

I shook my head in doubt.

"You will pardon me, Miss Osborne," I said, "but I must not place credence in your statement. You are harassed, and have some weight upon your mind—I can see it in your face. Surely you have known us long enough to put trust in us, and to believe that we can assist you."

"No, no!" she said, shading her eyes, "you mistake me—I am not ill—I am very well. I thank you for your cheering words—I have every faith; but I am well, Mr. Luke, indeed, I am."

It would have been useless, as well as cruel, to attempt to press her further, or to convince her against her will; so I let the matter drop; and Miss Osborne seemed growing paler and more wan with every day.

I had seen but little of my brother Gilbert

for several days; he had been closeted in his room, writing very earnestly, and we had but met at the dinner-table in the evening; so, more and more interested in Miss Osborne, and concerned for her failing health, I resolved to enter my brother's study, and confer with him upon the subject, trusting to his keen perceptions to throw some light upon the mystery.

To my surprise, no answer was returned to my knock, and I softly entered the room, and stood amazed.

The white blinds had not been drawn up since the preceding night, and threw a sombre shadow over everything—on the books upon the table, and the despairing figure of my brother Gilbert, who was leaning over his unopened desk, with outstretched arms and weary head.

The thought immediately suggested itself to me that there was a sympathy in the grief or inward sorrow of Miss Osborne and Gilbert, and that my power might go far to alleviate it.

I closed the door, and locked it on the

inner side, as 'a preventive against intruders, and advanced towards Gilbert. I had never seen him overcome by distress and doubt before, and I knew that it was no common power could have bowed his strong nature to submission.

"Gilbert!"

I laid my hand upon his shoulder, and he started to his feet, and, holding by the table for support, looked at me wildly, almost defiantly.

"Gilbert!"

His features softened, and he replied.

"Oh! Luke—what is it?"

"I have come to seek you, but I have not come to see my elder brother prostrated by affliction without offering him a brother's help."

"There is a true heart yet," he murmured; "I had imagined the new life of society—the new friends at your side—had weaned you from the cripple."

"There is no power in society, or friend that could do that," I answered.

"Thank God for it."

"But, Gilbert, what has happened?—what fearful mystery could lower you to that sad figure of despair?"

He hesitated.

"Do you fear to confide in me?—do you fear I shall abuse your trust, or offer you no comfort?"

"'When condolence is of no avail, it is cruelty to use it.'"

They were my own words, uttered on that summer evening when we stood in the hall of 'The Rest,' after that visit to Wharnby House, in which my love died before its time, and my hopes were trampled to the ground.

"Do not mock me with my own words, Gilbert! Remember those more true, spoken on the sick-bed of my youth, when you came, changed in all but a brother's heart, to sit beside me and say—'I shall have you to help me—your kind heart to guide me. A brother's love unites us in a bond, which no misfortune will now ever separate.'"

"I will tell you."

He said it in a hollow tone of voice, motioning me at the same time to his side.

We stood by each other, his hand upon my arm, his large, black eyes, fixed steadily on my face.

"Luke, I have loved."

That was all his secret—all his powerful grief—told in the few words just uttered, proved by the haggard features turned towards me.

"My dear Gilbert!"

"Where is the alleviating balm for that burning pain which seems as if it would never die, but gripes at the heart-strings, and tears away all self-control?"

"But——"

"But whom have I loved, ask you? Can I love but one?—have I seen but one face worth the loving?"

"Miss Osborne?" I replied, half interrogatively.

"Yes, Miss Osborne—beautiful, intellectual, gifted by God with rare powers, of which you know nothing, but which I worship. Thrown into constant companionship with me, I loved her above all earthly bliss, all earthly ties. I told my love a few weeks back—I poured

out the burning secrets of my breast, but (bitterly) I was a cripple, a poor, deformed outcast."

'It was not for that."

"How know you?" he asked sharply; "for what else could she so coldly, so silently, reject my love, and turn from me with her haughty step and her cold expressions of respect, esteem—all, all but love?"

"Did she say there were no obstacles on your side—no father's pride even?—a barrier as insurmountable as destiny?"

"She would not express one word for good or evil in the case. At first she struggled to be gone, and then, overpowered by my excited speech, she stood and listened, white as death, and trembling like a leaf. She heard me out, and then replied—'That it was madness to hope on my part, for it was an impossibility, and beyond all hope.' She said more."

He stopped and drew a long breath. I waited patiently for him to continue.

"She concluded in icy words, and to the effect," he resumed, after a long pause, "that she trusted there would be no recapitulation of the subject to her—that it should pass,

and be forgotten—but for a word, a look, to betray my feelings, and wound hers again, would be the signal for her to leave 'The Rest' for ever."

"Did she offer no kind word to mitigate the harshness of her refusal?"

"She was deeply pained with the knowledge that I had ever looked so beneath my position, and regretted she had ever come to Wharnby. No more."

"This is a terrible revelation," I said, "but there is nothing to advise but forgetfulness. I believe it is better that Miss Osborne should have annihilated all hope and love, than that she should have responded to your passion, and brought misery on both of you."

"Why do you think that, Luke?"

"Our father's pride, I have already said—a pride that would not give way to save you from disgrace or ruin."

"I do not know," he answered dubiously, "I have never tasked it, and I cannot think he would step between me and the ambition of my life."

"You know him not. Your ambition, in his eyes, would have been a degradation."

"And he despises the world," said Gilbert; "strange inconsistency."

"And Vaudon ——"

"Oh, Vaudon!" he interrupted; "that man knows my secret, I feel assured. He meets me in my walks, besets my path, and hints what folly it were to degrade oneself by a low marriage; and tells me stories of elopements and disgrace, as if the story of my own mother were not graven deep enough."

"What think you Vaudon counsels?"

"He never speaks enough to give me ground to meet him, or refute him," said Gilbert; "but my blood boils with his cold sneers. He would applaud my lowering Miss Osborne to a grave of ignominy, if it was in the power of man, and curse my folly by an honourable marriage. But we are pitted against each other, and there will be a battle ere long—ay, a battle to the death."

"What do you mean?"

"No matter, Luke. Time, time. We shall see the mask drop ere long, and then—Heaven for the Elmores!"

"To return to your distress—which I do,

Gilbert, most unwillingly—suffer me to ask one question. Supposing Miss Osborne had refused your offer, not for want of appreciation of the generous and unselfish affection which prompted it— not for want of love for you in return —but for her own true estimation of our father's character, her knowledge of the grief, and the division she would call up in the household, and the certainty of a dark futurity for both,—do you not think, if she had acted for such reasons, she has acted well?"

"I do not know. I think that would be a greater torture to me—a more cruel fate. God forbid *that*, for her sake, as well as mine."

Seeing the agony my supposition caused him —a supposition which, I believed, nigh unto the truth, I forbore to increase his anguish by particulars of Miss Osborne's sorrow—a reason for which was now apparent to me—and let the darkness rest over both their lives, knowing how unavailing any efforts of my own would be to draw aside the curtain, held down by stronger hands than mine.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHOICE.

Oh, that contest where the battle-field is home! Where sons take part against the sire—where sire hurls his maledictions on his offspring, who stand defiant and accusing—where wife and husband, sworn one at God's altar, have every thought and wish distinct—where the fire goes out upon the hearth, and the wailing notes of the heavy-laden, sound like spirit-voices through those echoing rooms and passages, deserted by the Presence!

Gilbert was right. A battle to the death was threatening, and my brother was buckling for the contest, and arming with a sense of right that should have been invincible.

Roused to a deeper observance of passing events, by my last conference with Gilbert, I saw the mask he spoke of, slowly, but steadily dropping to the ground.

Vaudon was not the Jacques Vaudon of that time when he sat before the fire, and told the children stories that held them spell-bound till the evening was passed—not even the Vaudon of years back; he had taken higher ground, and emboldened by my father's infatuated attachment to him, become the dictator and tyrant.

The servants feared him more than their rightful master; and, though he seldom spoke above his usual tone of voice, and hardly deigned to bestow upon them a single glance, there was a perceptible dread amongst the domestics of 'The Rest,' and his lightest word was a command too fearful to be disobeyed.

What did he seek? That was ever the mystery that wrapped round him an impenetrable cloak. If he sought riches, why mingle with the children of his patron, and seek to win their confidence, and teach them nothing that was good? Why plot and scheme against

them, and lay trepans, to ensnare them with the lurking malice of the great father of evil? For what purpose did he, day after day, full of a new project, suddenly veer round and talk of nothing but Miss Osborne to my father, and spare no withering comment upon her actions, and adjudge no worthy motive to them?

He had had scarcely an angry word with any dwellers beneath 'The Rest,' and yet how truly Gilbert and I judged his false smiles, and the glittering deceitfulness lurking in his flashing eyes. As for my father and his twin-children, they were blind, and the light seemed never coming!

It was in the spring. So bright a morning, so full of sunshine, that I took no evil augury from the day that was ever marked in deepest characters—written with an iron stylus on my heart, for ever ineffaceable.

Entering from the garden through the French window, as the clock was striking twelve, I came upon my father, in his chair before the fire, listening intently with his white upturned face to Vaudon, who leant

with folded arms across the back, and recited some engrossing tale. Vaudon started upon perceiving my entrance, and ceased speaking.

"Go on, Vaudon—go on!"

"It is Luke," he whispered.

"Is the subject one so full of conspiracy that I may not listen thereunto?" I said; "if so, I will retire."

"Tell him," said my father.

"Tush!—for what object?" said Vaudon, turning on his heel.

My father seemed very agitated; his eyes were burning luridly—his breathing hard and fierce.

"Stay, Vaudon!" I cried, actuated by a motive that was undefinable; "it is my father's wish. Save not all your evil news and torturing anxieties for one poor mind so ill to bear them—let a son share the distress which unmans the sire thus."

Vaudon turned, and faced me with a deep-browed, lowering look, and his hand upon his beard.

"Tell him, Vaudon—it will strike home."

"Strike home!"

"Let him know all," continued my father. "See the fresh disgrace plotting against me—my eldest son—my Gilbert!"

"Who couples his name with reproach, or breathes a word unallied to purity and honour concerning him, lies!" I vociferated.

The indignation of my manner fired all the passion in my father, who leaped from his seat, fell back again, and raved madly and incoherently, with his left arm brandished above his head.

I turned away, heart sick.

"Calm him, Vaudon, if you have the power," I cried, appealingly.

"He will recover speedily," replied Vaudon, with composure, as he crossed his arms on his broad chest.

My father ceased abruptly, passed his hand across his face, looked at me fiercely, then broke forth again.

"He would disgrace the Elmores! He would marry her! He has kept it all from me—caring not if its shock brought me to the grave. It was all arranged by this unworthy son—this serpent I have nourished till it

stings me—this son I once had faith in—I once loved!"

"Who says this?"

"Who, but my only friend—the true rock that has never flinched from me in my distress—the only landmark in this dreary waste!"

"This man?" I said—pointing to Vaudon, and turning on him a stern gaze.

"I spoke of it as one who had your father's nterest at heart, and who, being your father's friend, could not see him betrayed by a son so unworthy of his confidence," replied Vaudon, meeting my look with one equally as stern.

"And you believe him, father?—believe all the guilty colouring he has thrown around some fragment of a truth, caught eavesdropping, or learnt from some prying servant who retails his news, with exaggerated statements, to this spy and coward?"

Vaudon recoiled with amazement as I gave vent to the long pent-up passions in my breast—he had never dreamed of me as champion of my brother's cause.

"Spy and coward!" he yelled, recovering from his amazement, and advancing menacingly

towards me. "Recal your words, or your father's presence shall not save you from the chastisement you merit."

"Chastisement!" I echoed—"not at your guilty hands. Keep back, for I cannot trust myself."

"*I* am the defender of my own honour, brother Luke," cried Gilbert, as he entered the room, and advanced towards my father.

We stood transfixed: my father turned away his head, as Gilbert came beside his chair, and touched his hand. It was the one spared to him from the shock, and he drew it hastily away.

"Father."

No answer.

"You have not a word to say—not one question to ask; but, believing in all the accusations that that evil man has chosen in his blackened soul to fix upon your son, are content to let them rest there, without listening to the defence he has to urge."

His voice was very firm—his whole look and manner betokened some decisive project which he had come to carry out.

He waited long for a reply. None came.

"You are content?"

"I am."

"Would nothing have its weight?"

"I believe all."

"That I have loved Miss Osborne, I have no compunction in asserting."

"False, false in all but that disgrace."

"And that if I had won her love in return, I should ——"

"Cease," thundered my father, looking up at last, "why come to this room to taunt me with all you would have done, or the ignominy that you had in store for me. Go."

Gilbert coloured, but flinched not.

"This is the first time in our lives we have interchanged an angry word—has your confidence in me faded all at once?"

"I have no confidence in your protestations —I know everything."

"I am your eldest son."

"You are one of the many curses God has heaped upon me."

Gilbert turned to Vaudon.

"To you, and you alone, can be attributed

the evil that has grown, and grown with many a long day, until the fruit has dropped at my feet at last, full of corruption and of poison. There will be a day of recompence between us."

He turned to his father.

"Mr. Elmore, you have a choice to make."

"Well?"

"Between that man, whose shadow lies a heavy and impenetrable darkness on your heart,—as on those he has studied many years to injure, and your son, whose love has never lessened, and will never droop or fall away, no matter what result this day may bring about—choose!"

"What mean you?" with a deepening frown.

"One roof shelters us not. It is not in my power, had I the will, to cringe beneath the iron rule of that false-styled friend, who asserts my place and ousts me from a love that is my right. This man you bid begone, or I an injured son, go forth to seek my fortune in a world that cannot be more unjust, and look

for protection in that mighty Father, who knows the secrets of us all. I go with hope —I go without an angry or revengeful feeling, ere another hour has passed, or I stay without the man who pays his patron's bounty by a slander that drags him to the grave."

"Go, unnatural child of a false wife. It is better for us all. I have no choice to make."

"So strong a hold as this," murmured he, "well then, it is better for us all, indeed."

"The day that parts us shall never have an end," cried my father, "I shall have no son named Gilbert from that hour."

"You have no son named Gilbert, *now*, sir," replied my brother, "he died when he was young. Remember!"

"I will not forget," was the bitter answer.

"I go, sir."

"Go."

There was no relenting in the fierce red eyes, no quivering of the lash. Vaudon, with a smile of triumph, stood like a trophy of his craft, by my father's side.

"I will not ask your blessing now, sir, but in a future time when the curse of blindness is

removed, and you are suffered by Him above to judge, think of me then—a son, for ever lost to you."

"But, Gilbert," I cried, finding speech at last, "you will not go. This is sheer madness."

He shook his head.

"Then, you go not alone."

"Folly!" he cried—"a rash assertion that cannot be maintained. You, Luke, must remain here, a foil to *him*," pointing to Vaudon. "It is your duty."

"And yours."

"Not mine—not mine! Judge by what has passed to-day."

He stood at the door, hesitated, went back, and, stooping over my father, lightly pressed his lips upon the furrowed brow, that neither moved nor shrunk back as he advanced.

"It is the last in life! Forgive me, sir! The last!"

He moved quickly from the room, hardly leaning for support upon his crutch, or conscious that he used it.

I lingered a moment, to watch the effect of Gilbert's departure on my father; but he

moved not in his chair, and I left him with his evil genius standing motionless and erect by his side.

I followed Gilbert to his room, and found the trunks already packed and corded.

He noted my astonished looks.

"I had expected the sequel, Luke," said he, "and prepared for it."

"And you will go and leave us all?"

"Ah! what have I to stop for? A father's love exchanged for hate—no faith put in my word—my name commingled with a curse! And I, his son!"

"But it is his madness."

"No, no—it is an uprooting of all trust—no more."

"You will not stay!—you leave me here your heritage of sorrow!—you will not let me share the world with you!"

"For my father's sake, and not for mine, dear Luke," he answered; "he can spare me, my absence will be a relief to him; but you—you *must* remain."

"What do you intend? What ideas of the life before you can you have?"

"Plenty."

"And if you fail?"

"If I fail entirely, I will write to you for help."

"You will?" I cried.

"On my honour."

"And if you succeed?"

"Then, some day we shall meet again, God willing! We have not parted for life, dear Luke—it is a 'good-bye' for a few years, at the most."

"I can but think it all a dream!" I cried; "it is beyond my comprehension. It is so wild and strange—a leaf out of romance, not reality, existent and before me."

"Luke," said he, sadly, "it is hard to part, to go forth alone with no father's blessing on my head, and leave that villain beneath this roof. I trust in you to fight my battles, to step between him and his evil purposes, when they start into the glaring light."

"And yet you have not the courage."

"You do not know me," he replied. "I have not a father's love; my will is set aside, my word unheeded, my name blasted and

dishonoured. Can I remain here so great a mark of scorn?"

"No, no!" I said. "But if my turn come, can I do less than act the same; or must I cringe and fawn at Vaudon's knees, and intercede with him for my father's mercy?"

"Your turn will never come, my brother," said Gilbert; "one sacrifice will be enough, and mine be it. If there be good to follow, I go willingly."

No protestations, no prayers and entreaties of mine, could for a moment shake his resolution. He heard them with quivering lips, and big heavy tears, and straining chest; but there was not a moment's wavering in him.

He was going! 'The Rest' was no more for him: he, a child unto the world, fraught with no experience, strengthened by no advice, was departing from his home without a settled view before him, in the midst of dangers and temptations, of which he was as ignorant and helpless as an infant.

He was going! The bright sun that stream-

ed into his room and poured a flood of gold upon him, appeared to shine but for his misery. His room! that old room, wherein he had lain a cripple, and beside which bed that father, so stern and unyielding, had once prayed and wept for his firstborn, and watched night after night in feverish anxiety over him he now discarded like a hireling.

He was going! I should see his pale, noble countenance no more, hear no more welcome from his lips, sit no longer by his side, profit never again by his counsel, nor be heartened under affliction with his cheering speech, and guided by his hand.

He was going! There would be a great void in 'The Rest' that no time could fill, no fresh face cover. It would remain for ever a black gap, speaking of the one gone—it would tell of Gilbert's absence in a thousand little things, even his birds singing in their golden cages by his study windows, would miss him morning after morning, and the dull faces of servants would be ominous of loss and significant of mystery.

He would take no leave of his sister, or his

brother Edward, he did not feel he had the strength to support more trials. He bade me watch over them, and give to them his best love and his most sincere wishes for their happiness, with a prayer to meet again at some future time, and find affection still burning for him in their hearts.

He said nothing of Miss Osborne, but went out for a few moments, and gazed at her through the window of the room, where she, unconscious of the watcher, sat and thought.

He came back more pale and wan, and rested for some time on the chair by the bedside, the same chair in which his father had watched him years ago.

He rose at last with a heavy sigh.

"You will forward my boxes to Cliverton, Luke," he said, "and let them proceed to London by the morning coach, and remain at the office till I send for them."

I could not speak, but bowed my head in acquiescence.

"Is there anything more to say but good bye?"

"I will go with you to Cliverton."

"I am going to Wharnby, to procure some conveyance."

"I will accompany you."

"No, no; Luke—I go alone. Let me depart a solitary traveller, and have my thoughts free, and my step unwatched. I could not bear even my brother's presence in the first mile from home."

I did not press him further—I saw it was his wish—his last wish!

A servant tapped at the door. I went to it, and opening it slightly, asked his errand.

"A note from Mr. Elmore for Mr. Gilbert."

I took it, and the servant departed.

"He has relented Gilbert," I cried; "I knew his heart was not iron, and that he loved you."

"Dreamer, dreamer," said Gilbert, tearing open the letter—"look here. The old panacea for human wrong—the smoother of rough paths, rock-hewn and stony."

He let several bank-notes, for a large sum, drop from his hands to the floor.

"Let them remain," said Gilbert. "It is not his gold I covet, or his wealth I envy. I

will not so humble myself, and give way to his pride, as to start in life with all its necessaries bought me. There is no lesson to be learned from that. Even a son he hates—a son he believes guilty of machinations against his rank or his position, he showers his money on—not for old love, old memory, or kindred ties—but for the name of Elmore! Return them, Luke, when I am gone. I work my way alone."

He put both his hands in mine, and looked at me long and earnestly — his favourite brother!

"This is the hardest parting, Luke—there is none so poignant, or that wounds so deep. I pray the God to bless you."

We both had much to say, but yet our lips were white and motionless, and our tongues refused to move. If we, two young men, wept like children, ere the bitter parting came, there was no selfish grief mingling with the disruption of ties, that we—in our narrow conceptions of fraternity—had pictured knit for ever, and proof against all shock. If we were less than men, we had thoughts more pure, and feelings deeper, in those few fleeting

moments, before he—my elder brother, loved above them all, and endeared to me beyond all word-expression—left 'The Rest,' never to come back!

Oh! never to come back. The wind might moan around 'The Rest' in sympathy with the lost—the waves might dash against the white cliff, sea-beaten and rugged, neath the storm, whereon in happier days, freer of limb and bolder in his strength, he had carved 'Gilbert' three feet above his brothers' names—aspiring record left for Time! But he was of the Past, and wind and wave told me in my loneliness of what had been once, and what would never be again!

* * * *

The Figure stands, and waits once more, and gives me time to reach it ere it slowly glides on, leading me and beckoning. The way is steeper, and more wild, and childhood far beneath—a green valley in the mist—breathes of Peace departed.

High above my head, the tortuous path proceeds; and there are briars and weeds, and tangled brushwood in my course, and

night seems deepening over head. There are no stars to light my way, and the shadowy figure grows more indistinct, and I can see but the drapery of crape fluttering in the wind, and the extended arm pointing to the distance. Across my path—a few stumbling footsteps in advance—I see a darkness impalpable and strange, over which the figure, bound to me for life, passes, and then halts. It makes a threatening sign to the lowering heaven, unlit by heaven's light, and then awaits my coming by an open grave!

I reach it, and a sudden knowledge comes unto me, and I shrink back and call aloud a name. The figure motions to me, and once more I advance; and, kneeling at the open pit, round which flit shapes indistinct and visionary, that seem weeping, I pray for an erring soul, called back to render its account, and tell of all its stewardship.

The Spectre stands and gazes on me with its mysterious face of Death, waiting for the traveller at that landmark where Life ends, and maketh a last sign!

END OF THE FOURTH BOOK.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

WHARNBY'S GREATNESS.

WHARNBY has risen into greatness and into fashion—(without which, what is greatness in itself?)—and has become a living spot in a green waste, to which come streaming, in its season, the myriad pleasure-seekers of great London, who, needing health, wives, heart, or excitement, come to the sea-shore and sit beneath the white cliffs, and make a world of Wharnby.

The sands—those lonely, deep-strewn sands, where three brothers wandered, in time past, as on the sands of a wild desert—are thickly sown with human creatures, who have brought their passions, plots, and worldliness to face

the restless sea, and their loud jests and noisy laughter to rouse the echoes of the dear old rocks, that frown a hundred feet above them in their rugged grandeur.

Did my father conjecture, even in a madness full of wild improbabilities, such a change as this? Did he look forward to the faces he had shunned and fled from after his disgrace, following him to that solitary 'Rest,' and holding festival beneath, mocking him with the old frivolity, the old heartlessness, the old love of show, the old giddy turmoil for an object that was never good, or held a worthy season.

Two years and a-half have stolen away since Gilbert left us for a new and unknown life, and there has been no sign made, and we know nought of him. He has gone for ever from 'The Rest.' We feel it in his unyielding silence—and my father has a son the less, and I a brother. My father has forbidden all mention of his name, and holds him dead in his remembrance, though bearing enmity against the power of his will, that could throw off all allegiance, and disown an ability to be a slave.

It is early in the autumn. Every morning the sands of Wharnby are densely thronged; music floats upward to 'The Rest;' amusements of various kinds go on unceasingly; romantic young ladies, with faces screened from the sun's rays, sit on the sands and read the last new love story, or stand contemplatively at the water's edge, and think of Robert and James at their ledgers, in dusky London counting-houses. Bathing machines, clumsy and innumerable, are dragging about their human burthens; horses and donkeys are racing to and fro; fathers of families gravely dig holes in the deep sand for the edification of their offspring, or go to sleep with coloured silk handkerchiefs over the face, and telescopes and umbrellas clutched tightly in their sun-burnt fists; men about town—moustached, high-cheek-boned men — well known in billiard-rooms and hells at night, or in Regent-street and broad West-end thoroughfares by day, promenade to and fro, with their bold libertine gaze in every female face; sprigs of nobility, fast running to seed beneath the influence of late hours and endless dissipation, strut listlessly about, and kill time

by slow degrees. Life varied, and of all colours, is in full flower at Wharnby.

And Wharnby in itself:—Streets on streets full of bazaars, assembly-rooms, fifty-windowed hotels, libraries, jewellers—all that a fashionable can desire, or hold dear in his capacious mind.

And the cliffs, for half a mile on either side, are lined with rows of houses termed Terraces and Crescents, private hotels, and boarding-houses, all white, with green balconies and jalousies, fronting the murmuring sea, with promenades of great length before them, and seats for weary visitors, and circles marked for military bands.

Such is Wharnby; and Cliverton, jealous and full of envy, hides its diminished head, and sinks to insignificance. Wharnby has its harbour all complete, with lighthouse and landing-place, and dry docks, and inner basins, and forests of masts, point upwards from their refuge, and the stone monument at the entrance, records the laying of the first stone by the Royal Highness mentioned in a preceding chapter, whose idle words made Wharnby famous, and of worthy note.

Upon 'The Rest' there hangs a deeper gloom—there is no confidence between its members—each buries its secrets and says nothing. We move about like phantoms with closed lips and thoughtful gaze, and have no knowledge of each other. My father sits huddled in his chair all day, more chary of speech than ever, more irritable, and with look more vacant—one thing remains; the sudden demonstration of affection for his daughter Agnes, has not subsided, and her power over him seems greater than Jacques Vaudon's. He can refuse her nothing, and she is not backward in requests.

Agnes has become still more the woman. There is a self-consciousness of her surprising beauty in every movement that she makes, there is self-study in every action that sets a grace upon her.

Paul Redwin is more infatuated with my sister than ever—a long engagement has but rivetted upon him stronger chains. How proud he is of her too, how he struts behind her into Wharnby Church, and flings back his head, conscious of the value of his prize and of the many admiring glances — side-long,

askance or full—as the crowded congregation chance to differ in mode of church observance,—bestowed upon her. He sees not Celia, of less-commanding beauty, but of that gentle loveliness that wins unto the heart, in the pew by the side, with her parents—he has forgotten her, and she perhaps—for her bright look has returned, and there is no sign of inward pain or gnawing-care upon her face—has learned to smile at the first fantasy of her young life.

Agnes fully conscious of her power over Paul, and of the boundless extent of his affection, asserts her supremacy at times, and acts little comedies for her own amusement. She is variable in her manner towards him, astounding him by a freezing reception at 'The Rest,' on some occasions, or feigning indifference to all he acts and says on others, or teazing him to a frenzy, with a simulation of intense interest in some stranger, coined expressly for the occasion, from her own imagination.

But a smile subdues the angry storm she has raised, and Paul emerges from his sulks at a sunny glance, and forgets unpleasant reminiscences in the hour before him and is the beau-

ideal of an attentive lover. He is anxious for his marriage, and only waits his opportunity to have a long conversation with my father that will put an end to suspense. Agnes vexes him sometimes by expressions of a desire to extend the engagement another year, and laughs at his reproaches and pleads her youth and unsettled mind with such mock earnestness that Paul tears his curly hair in his delirium. To me, she appears even in no hurry to leave 'The Rest,' and become Mrs. Redwin, and when I plead for Paul whom I esteem and have a brother's love for, she answers with a curl of her red lip :—

"Why should I be so eager to resign my freedom and shut myself out from the world before I have caught a glimpse of it? Paul is of a very jealous disposition and will lock me up in his convent and make a lady-abbess of me and give me a bunch of keys, and think me perfect."

"With such a father confessor your convent will be gay enough."

"But nevertheless a convent," continued Agnes, still harping on the world, or that artificial life which she considers it.

"Do you know, Agnes, I almost doubt if you have a true attachment to Paul Redwin?"

"Why so, my special pleader."

"Oh! for many reasons, Aggy," I reply.

"I cannot say," she remarks lightly; "I have had no choice, Luke. He is very handsome and loves me, and I——I don't dislike him very much."

I say no more. She is in a humour of her own, and would take an opposite side to any point of argument, whether right or wrong, I might think it worth while to stand upon or endeavour to enforce. Redwin arrives at 'The Rest,' and his reception, owing to our late converse, is far from warm or complimentary.

My brother Edward has not improved with years, and has an affinity in selfishness to his twin sister, although a selfishness distinct from hers, having no ambition intermingled with it, to elevate its grossness. He has become stout, thick-set and heavy-looking. A keen searching look, characteristic of the Elmore family, and said to be seen more or less on every face pertaining to it, he is entirely free from. He is stolid, dull, and inexpressive.

He has a large sum hoarded in the Cliverton Bank, which he intends to transfer to the new Wharnby firm when he thinks it safe enough to invest his capital therein. He has no pleasure in society, and is on the whole, an uncompanionable young man. If he have one friend in the world without, it is Mr. Dartford of Cliverton, with whom he sometimes spends an evening, and finds possibly some congeniality of sentiment. Mr. Dartford has married Miss Silvernot and a great maternal care is set at rest in her respected mother's breast. She is provided for! Holiest of mottoes in calculating mother's book of precepts is this 'provided for.' It matters not whether disparity of age or mind or taste stand in the way, so that Benedict be rich, and have a heavy bank-book, and a respectable name in society —though the latter qualification can be waived upon emergency—it is enough to say 'She is provided for.' If Benedict, aforesaid, after the honey-moon, keep late hours and score his dissipations on his wife's heart as well as on his own face, if he make a slave of her, and rule a despot and grind her down beneath his iron heel, teaching her *his* way to obey

and love, and honour, 'she is provided for, thank God!'

Not that I would impugn the sobriety or morality of Mr. Dartford; he is like ice, so chaste and cold. He is a hard-headed as well as a large-headed man, and lives in his deeds and parchments, and japanned boxes full of family secrets and family decadence, and has entered upon marriage as he would upon a mortgage.

Mrs. Dartford, late Arabella Silvernot, is not an imaginative person, neither is she imbued with any of youth's romance or folly, any more than with youth itself; so she is content with her liege lord at Thornville Villa, who is a rising man, and has the reputation of having the sharpest eye for flaws in the county. I believe it.

Miss Osborne is still at 'The Rest,' and still makes many journeys to Cliverton. She has a face of care, but her voice is still as gentle and as kind. She is still unconscious of the reason for Gilbert's departure, and in ignorance of the many aspersions Vaudon had once affixed upon her name. My father has forgotten all about

them, and though never expressing a word to the effect, has evidently a respect for Miss Osborne as a housekeeper and a lady of education, and is still proud of her as presiding genius at 'The Rest.' Agnes, in odd moments of affection, sometimes seeks Miss Osborne, and sits at her feet, and rests her head in her lap, and talks and listens to good counsel, and appears to me to be some one else—not Agnes Elmore; she is so patient, and attentive, and affectionate. And in those times, Miss Osborne seems to set aside her grave earnestness, and to bend over her as if she were a younger sister, dearly loved, and to rest her hands upon her glossy braids or ringlets of fair hair, as if she blessed her as she sat. But when weeks pass, and Agnes seeks her not, the light upon her face fades gradually and perceptibly, and she retires within herself, and holds communion with thoughts congenial to herself alone.

Vaudon, dark and mysterious as ever, is still my father's friend and counsellor. To spare my father more pain and dangerous excitement, I am courteous to Vaudon in his presence; and there is a false peace between

us, which we both are cognizant of, and both feel, as we face each other at our father's table. There stands between us the Disowned —we both feel that he has left a legacy of hate, and we think of it and him each time we intersect each other's path, and love each other none the better for the recollection.

When Gilbert first left Wharnby, there were many embarrassing circumstances that naturally followed. The rector of Wharnby, always greatly attached to Gilbert, harassed my father to madness with his enquiries, and finally received an imperious summons to be silent, which offended the rector for six months; and the servants went about the house, looking amazement; and Agnes and Edward held a consultation with me, and could not understand my explanations. What had good, quiet Mr. Vaudon to do with it? It was a silly whim of Gilbert's; they were sorry, and missed him for a time—and then, they grew accustomed to his absence, and forgot him.

The Silvernot family—decreased by one provided for—are happy enough at Wharnby House, and I have become more frequent in

my visits lately, and am led thither by an old atttaction, or a new one that has sprung from out its ashes. I see Celia very often. I note the roses once more blooming on her cheeks—I hear her voice—I see her smile—I feel again old passions claiming an ascendance. Month after month has passed unto this time, and I have rode with her and her brother, and seen her meet Paul and Agnes on the road and betray no sign of distress, or blush at her old lover, or seem envious of Agnes's sway over him, but always calm, and self-possessed, and lovely.

I begin to look forward once more in my dreams—my old love seems coming back to me; but I build no more daring fabrics in the future. I hold my heart in check, and wait and watch, and give no indication that the old wound is still unhealed; but take once more to my load of doubt and anguish, concealing this time from them all my secret, with tact bought by my experience and my riper manhood.

CHAPTER II.

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW FACES.

"LUKE, I want an escort."

"Paul will be here in about half-an-hour, Agnes," I replied.

"Paul will not come till the evening, brother," was the answer.

"Indeed!"

"Paul Redwin, Esquire went away seriously offended, last night, about some trifle or other —so I give him till the evening to smooth the ruffled plumes of his dignity; he will not descend from his stilts before then."

"Miss Osborne will have much pleasure in accompanying you," I remarked.

"But I shall not have much pleasure in accompanying Miss Osborne."

"Really, you flatter me by so decided a preference, Aggy, Might I recommend Mr. Edward Elmore?"

"You may recommend no one but yourself, scrapegrace!" said she; "so, put on your hat and your best looks, and take me a walk along the cliffs."

"You insist?"

"I insist!" she repeated.

"May I venture to enquire wherefore my society is so indispensable, Agnes?"

"Why, Mr. Vaudon is engaged, and Miss Osborne is so serious a companion, and requires more energy to rouse than I can afford this morning; and as for Edward, I would as soon walk with that great mastiff in the coach-yard."

"Then I will sacrifice an hour to please you for once."

"For once, you may well say," she remarked; "but 'sacrifice' is a misplaced word. Sacrifice—with such a handsome sister. Fie, Luke."

"There, there, Miss Vanity, I consent. Let me know when you are ready."

Luke Elmore and his sister Agnes were

quite good friends that morning; and, considering the latter had parted with her betrothed rather distantly the preceding night, she was in excellent spirits, and far from depressed.

In half-an-hour we were strolling in the direction of Wharnby Harbour, which looked picturesque in the distance as it swept boldly into the blue sea. There was a fresh breeze on the cliffs, which caught Agnes's veil, and blew it from her bright face, and deepened the roses on her cheek. Far beneath us, lay the sands, dotted with innumerable figures; and the murmuring of many voices, the creaking of wheels appertaining to bathing-machines, the noise of vendors of toys and shell ornaments (made in London, and forwarded to Wharnby !), the roll of the tide as it came in rapidly, the strains of music from wandering minstrels—some lame, some blind, some extravagantly dressed in old theatrical costume, the refuse of the wardrobe of some country theatre —formed a medley of sound which came welling to us from the giddy mass below.

Agnes kept her looks fixed on the busy scene, enacting more than a hundred feet

below, as if fascinated by the murmur of the world—the stream beneath her vision ever passing and repassing.

"Shall we descend?" she asked, suddenly.

"Descend!" I exclaimed—"the saints forbid. What, mix with that vulgar mob—that *olla podrida!*—You are jesting?"

"I see no harm," calmly replied my sister; "there are many amongst 'the vulgar mob' who hold a higher position, and have a greater name than we have."

"And have a more vulgar taste," concluded I.

"Have your own way," said she. "I thought it might be a change from our eternal dreariness; but I am all obedience."

We continued our walk, and, as we neared Wharnby, two or three straggling visitors passed, and honoured us by lengthy stares

"With your permission, Agnes, we will return."

"Oh! this is the promenade," cried Agnes, "and the new terrace. There are very few people here. Let us stroll to the end, and then return. Have you an objection?"

It was a level grass-plat, stretching a con-

siderable length, flanked on the right by a row of white houses of pretentious size, profusely ornamented with stone-work, and gaudily painted balconies and blinds. There were a few persons about—one or two fine ladies seated in the balconies of the houses mentioned, busy over fancy-work, or water-colour sketching, and some used-up dandies lolling on the seats, with the knobs of their riding-canes between their teeth.

"Well, we will take the promenade, Agnes."

I repented of my acquiescence before we had proceeded many yards; there appeared such a cool survey taken of us by the visitors, which, to me, was not so peculiarly embarrassing as annoying. Agnes, as collected as at her home, walked by my side. her hand on my arm, unmoved at the fixed looks of passers-by, or the simpering lackadaisical ogling of more than one dandy and prim fop, perfectly self-convinced of the great impression he was making by a glance.

One of these gentlemen attracted my particular attention, and caused me once or twice to instinctively clench my right hand, as if I had him by his lemon-coloured stock. He

was a tall man, of about thirty years of age, with sandy whiskers, thin nose, and large, grey, meaningless-looking eyes, one of which was adorned with a gold-mounted eye-glass attached to a broad silk ribbon round his neck. His head was surmounted by a small white cap, with a capacious brim, which had been carelessly thrown on his head in a jaunty, look-at-me sort of a way, which, I have no doubt, he considered particularly attractive. A loose coat of a light colour, and waistcoat and trousers of an enormous check pattern, together with a pair of patent leather slippers, completed the attractive portions of his morning costume. This man, after a careful survey of Agnes through his eye-glass, and a half-smile of admiration, wheeled round as we passed, and proceeded in our wake, cutting at the grass with a small riding-cane as he followed us.

I glanced over my shoulder at him, and he honoured me with a steady, undiscomfited gaze, which made my blood stir a trifle quicker in my veins.

"We have an attendant cavalier, Agnes," I said; "I am afraid I must bring my gentleman to reason, if he dog us like this."

"Nonsense," said Agnes, "let him be, poor fellow; he is happy now."

Agnes made the remark so ludicrously compassionate, that I could hardly refrain from exhibiting signs of my appreciation of her humour to the Wharnby visitors, who were coming thickly on parade.

The gentleman in the rear being accosted by a party, consisting of two ladies and two gentlemen, and forced to halt, we were for a few minutes rid of our intruder.

We reached the end of the promenade, and turned to retrace our steps.

The individual with the lemon stock and eye-glass was still talking to his friends as we passed.

I have said there were four. They consisted of an old gentleman, very much bent—a stout and imposing lady of about fifty—a youth of seventeen or eighteen, in a midshipman's dress, with a curly head of hair, of a reddish hue, and a young woman, a few years his senior, also of a sanguine complexion, with a flat little nose, pressed tight against her face.

The gold-mounted young man leaned forward, and made some comment concerning us,

for the midshipman and the two ladies instantly bent an enquiring gaze upon us. I threw back a defiant glance, which was quickly changed to an expression of astonishment, as the stout lady cried out loudly—

"Sir John—sir John!—I never saw such a likeness!"

"Good *Gord!* madam—what do you mean by startling me like that for?" savagely retorted the old gentleman, without paying any heed to her remark.

But the lady was absorbed in her surprise, and stood clutching the arm of Sir John, and pointing to my sister Agnes.

"Do you mean to say, my dear madam," asked our first friend, "that you know any young lady resembling that charming creature?" He raised his glass and said again in a more drawling tone—"Charming creature."

The remark was evidently intended for Agnes's ears, and letting her hand drop from my arm, I advanced with an angry frown and a menacing intention.

"I do not know who you may be, sir, and I have no desire to know," I said in a voice

suppressed with passion; "but let me assure you, sir, that another such offensive remark, or studied impertinence, shall be rewarded as it deserves."

"And how, my good fellow?"

"By horsewhipping you," I replied, with a significant glance at his riding cane.

"Ri—di—cu—lous in the extreme," he drawled; but I detected a perceptible change of colour, and a backward flinching movement.

The stout lady looked at me, and again at Agnes, gasping forth—"It is very strange. All very strange."

"Chastise the puppy, my good sir! chastise the puppy!" cried the elderly gentleman; "he's an arrant coward, sir; by Jove, sir, he sold out of his regiment last week because it was ordered to Calcutta, and he was afraid of yellow fever. Thrash him, sir; it will do him good."

"Sir John Boyington!" remonstrated the individual alluded to, "I am shocked at your absur—di—ty."

"Luke," cried Agnes, indignantly, "why do you wrangle with those people, in that coarse manner? Take me away."

She flung upon the group a disdainful glance, and took my arm.

But the stout lady, unobservant of the repeated chuckling cry of Sir John, expressive of his full consent to my awarding chastisement to the young man so lavish with his compliments, of the scorn expressed in Agnes's countenance, or the fury in my own, cried to my sister—

"I ask your pardon, but can it—is it—are you—Elmore?"

"Elmore!" I reiterated.

"Your name is Elmore?" she asked of Agnes.

"Yes, Madam," replied Agnes, haughtily.

"I knew it; how very like your unhappy mother and my poor sister. Oh! good gracious! Sir John, it is my niece."

"The devil," replied Sir John, with remarkable emphasis.

"Aunt!" exclaimed Agnes; "what, my aunt that I have not seen since a little girl—Aunt Witherby?"

"Hush! my dear," she said; "Mr. Witherby has long since slept in peace. Three years since, I accepted the hand of Sir John

Boyington. And it is you, really—my dear, dear, *dear* child."

She folded Agnes in her arms, and kissed her on both cheeks.

"And is this your brother?" turning to me. "My nephew, Gilbert, that I remember so well."

"My brother Gilbert is in London, madam," I replied. "I am the second son."

"Oh, Luke!" extending her hand, "Luke is the name, to be sure."

I answered in the affirmative, and greeted that sister of my mother, whom I had not seen since the night which celebrated my poor father's wedding day, and brought a curse of dishonour in the train of its false festival.

"Let me introduce you to your cousins, Miss Jane Witherby, and Mr. John Witherby, —you remember when you used all to play together at our house? Oh! those past times!"

We bowed to the young midshipman—who was a pleasant-looking young fellow enough, with his red, curly hair, and swarthy face, and twinkling little black eyes—and his sister. It

was like cousins meeting for the first time, we were so young when we saw each other last. I felt there was a tie between us, as I shook their hands.

"Lady Boyington," cried Sir John, in a tone of reprimand.

"My dear," she answered.

"I should have thought etiquette would have suggested that a baronet was not to be placed last on the list of introductions—and be hanged to you!"

This was a most uncourteous method of terminating his speech, and Agnes and I exchanged wondering glances.

"I really beg pardon, Sir John, but in the natural embarrassment of meeting, I had quite forgotten you. Sir John Boyington—Miss Elmore. Mr. Elmore—Sir John Boyington."

Sir John with an odd smirk on features, wrinkled and seamed into a complicated network, took off his hat, and bowed profoundly.

"And to complete the circle, suffer me to make known to you, Mr. George Boyington—a very amiable step-son, and a great blessing to me."

Mr. George Boyington, my sister, and I,

exchanged salutations—Mr. Boyington bowed very politely to me, and totally unmindful of our altercation, half-extended his hand in the coolest manner imaginable, an action which I affected to overlook.

"So you are still residing at Wharnby, or have you come hither for the autumn, my dear nephew?" inquired Lady Boyington, as she took my proffered right arm, and Miss Jane Witherby with becoming graciousness took my left. Mr. George Boyington, had with enviable pertinacity, attached himself to Agnes, and was using his best endeavours to rub off any unfavourable impression he might have made, and Sir John and his step-son young Witherby, followed in the rear.

"We have lived at Wharnby many years."

"*Since* ——?"

"Yes, madam."

"Your father is still implacable in his resentment?"

"My father is bowed down by his cares, my dear madam, and never speaks of *her*."

"It was sad—it was very sad," shaking her head, "what a disgrace to the family, to be sure. For months, my dear nephew, I

assure you, I trembled to meet the eye of society."

I had nothing to reply.

"What a beautiful girl your sister has grown, Luke?" said Lady Boyington, rambling in her speech, from one subject to another, "and we used to call her, little dame Elmore, she was so prim and quiet, and old-fashioned."

"She has improved."

"She is a matchless girl," cried she, quite enthusiastically,—"what a sensation she would make in London! What a pity she should be buried alive in Wharnby!"

"Oh! London is well stocked with loveli ness, madam."

After devoting some portion of my discourse to my cousin Jane—who was a quiet, chirping little body, with a very musical voice—I ventured to remark to my aunt, that Sir John seemed a pleasant, candid old gentleman, and to congratulate her on her standing in society.

"Candid—yes," said she, "a trifle too candid—do you not think so, Luke?"

"I am hardly competent to judge."

"But, then, Sir John has served in the navy all his life; and sea-faring men are blunt and rough. I suppose it's the salt water."

"And Sir John has been in more than one great battle," added Jane Witherby, full of her step-father's praise; "and was once cut down by a cutlass, and left for dead on the deck."

"Ah! a frightful wound in the head—just a hair's breath within being an idiot," added Lady Boyington; "and, indeed, there are some invidious persons who have even ventured to declare he is somewhat more than eccentric, but there's no truth in it—sane, my dear nephew—sane as I am."

I looked at my aunt—she was stout and large-featured, and her good looks had been lost many years, and were beyond redemption. There was a small degree of eccentricity in Sir John offering her his hand, I thought; but if there were few charms about my aunt's personal appearance, there was certainly a less number of attractions in Sir John.

But, then, he was a baronet, and his title gilded seventy-five years, and glossed over a little eccentricity. Why, of what value would a title be, if it did not?—a mere name!

Lady Boyington had made up her mind to see the present residence of my father, and so

continued by my side, as a matter-of-course, and asked innumerable questions respecting members of the family of Elmore, their present pursuits and future intentions, totally excluding her daughter from any share in the conversation.

Agnes and her admirer were positively flirting together in the background, when I bestowed a glance in that direction. George Boyington had dropped his eye-glass, and was particularly attentive; and had become so interested in his fair charge, that he had let the riding-cane slide from his hands, and was wholly unconscious of it being already in the possession of two dirty fisherboys, who were strolling in the opposite direction, and exulting over their prize, much to the satisfaction of the midshipman and Sir John, who were laughing one against the other, till the tears streamed down their cheeks.

"You have found something par-tic-u-lar-ly lively for a topic, I presume, gentlemen?" said Mr. Boyington, aroused by a more than common shout of exhilaration.

"By Jove! we have, sir!" cried Sir John. "Tell him, Jack—tell him, by all means; he

will enjoy it so. There's a real amethyst in the handle; I heard him say so this morning."

But Mr. Boyington had become entranced again, and Jack Witherby was too bashful to enter into any explanation before the pretty lady his half-brother was escorting so cavalierly.

We were within a few yards of home. I hesitated how to proceed; I could not shake them off my arms, and tell them that they could accompany me no further, and I knew my father's nature too well, to believe he would give them anything but a freezing welcome to 'The Rest;' dreading, also, the result of an interview with the sister of my mother—this worldly woman hanging on my arm.

"And that is your father's estate?" she asked.

"Yes, madam."

"A fine place. Has it a title?"

"'The Rest.'"

"'The Rest?' How strange, to be sure. 'The Rest!' Dear me."

"He had resolved to rest from the world—to shun his fellow men—and so he gave it that name; a forbidding one to strangers!"

This was a good hint, but it was not taken.

"Ahem! yes—so I should think. Strangers must be particularly annoying to him—but near relations and friends, who claim affinity with him—what a relief it will be to see those old faces once again! How surprised he will be!"

Fearful of the effect of their abrupt appearance upon my father, I was about to enter into an explanation of a more decided character, when the voice of Sir John hailed me from the rear.

"Mr. Elmore!" he shouted.

I felt a tingling in my ears, at the rough salutation, but stopped and looked back.

"That horrid ship's habit of vociferating at the top of his lungs," peevishly said Lady Boyington to her daughter.

"Mr. Elmore will excuse him, I am sure," said my cousin to me.

"I beg you not to mention it."

"Mr. Elmore, I'm dead beat, sir! I'm as lame as an old cart-horse, and as dry as a ship's cow after a six months' voyage. I hope we have not a much greater distance to go before we partake of your hospitality."

This was the last turn of the screw, and I could struggle against fate no more—I resigned myself to circumstances, and re-assured the worthy baronet, by indicating 'The Rest' with my hand, not feeling disposed to carry on a dialogue at so considerable a distance from my interlocutor.

"Aunt!" cried Agnes—"you must step in and partake of luncheon, and see father."

"Oh! I think we had better return—say, till the evening."

As that expedient would have been worse than the present, I added my entreaties to Agnes's, and we passed through the lodge-gates—old Johnson aghast with consternation, tremblingly looking after us.

"Upon my honour, Mr. Elmore, a very fine estate!" expressed Mr. George Boyington, in a conciliatory tone, as he looked right and left with his eye-glass, and drawled out his encomiums as if he were reciting a lesson in words of one syllable—"a mag—ni—fi—cent estate!"

"'Tis somewhat large," I answered, coolly and anxiously, debating within myself the best method of procedure.

We were advancing up the drive—a few more steps would bring us round the curve of laurel bushes, and face to face with 'The Rest.' I resolved.

"Your pardon, ladies," I said, rapidly—"but my father is in delicate health, and I think it would be better to prepare him."

I did not wait for their replies—but, letting their hands gently drop from my arm, I hurried to the house—through the front entrance, along the hall, and into the room where my father sat. He was alone.

"Father, a strange series of incidents has occurred which has thrown us into the presence of old friends—very old friends—who were known in London. I have hastened hither to ward off any shock that their sudden arrival might create."

He looked bewildered, and I had to repeat my tidings in a slower tone, my rapidity of utterance having failed to convey to his mind a clear statement of the facts.

"Coming here!" cried my father—"Old friends known in London! Why do you bring them here? Send them away—say I am ill—say I am dead—say I am in my grave!"

"But ——"

"Vaudon! Vaudon! Come to my help! A plot against me—*a plot against me!*" he cried, wildly—"help, Vaudon! Vaudon!"

The man sought for opened the door of the room, and, at his usual slow pace, came silently gliding into the room.

"What has happened?"

"Bar the door, and keep them out!" cried my father, vehemently. "This son brings the accursed faces of the past back with him."

"Gilbert Elmore!" exclaimed Vaudon, catching at a ray of light.

"Not Gilbert Elmore," I said sternly; "there would be cause for God's blessing on the day that brings him back—not fear."

"Explain, explain!" demanded Vaudon.

For my father's sake, I yielded to his imperious summons. "Lady Boyington, or Mrs. Witherby, my aunt, is within a few yards of 'The Rest,' with her husband and my cousins." My father shrieked out like a woman, and his colour changed to the lividness of the dead. He tried to speak, but the words seemed choking him. He pointed to the door with frantic gesticulation.

"It is too late, Elmore," said Vaudon, cool and unmoved; "we must see them. Brandy, Luke."

I rushed to the chiffonier, and filled a wine glass.

Vaudon snatching the glass from my hand, poured its contents down my father's throat.

The effect was instantly apparent: he sat up, and the death-like look faded from his face.

"That woman—that woman of all others. *Her* sister. Oh! Vaudon, is there no resource?"

"None," said Vaudon. "Rouse yourself, and look at the trouble fearlessly. It is a passing shadow that will soon be gone. Let her not return to London, to spread a thousand reports of your condition, for the pity of her friends, and the false condolement of the clubs. You are tracked—stand at bay!"

The pride of Elmore flushed on my father's cheek, beneath the bold counsel of Vaudon. He would meet them.

"Let luncheon be prepared, Vaudon," he murmured, "and let the servants wait at table. See to it all."

"I will. Listen—they approach."

They came into the room—a crowd of unwelcome guests—and my father stood up to receive them. Lady Boyington rushed at him with sisterly affection, and extended her arms; but my father, shrinking back, held out his left hand.

"You will forgive my left hand, Mrs. Witherby," he said, "an attack of paralysis has deprived me of my right."

"My dear Elmore," cried my aunt, seizing it, "I can scarcely believe it to be you. How you are changed—how pale, and haggard, and afflicted! Oh! dear, dear me!"

"My health has improved of late years, and my afflictions I can bear, madam."

Introductions were gone into, and passively received by my father.

"You are acquainted with Mr. Vaudon, I believe, Mrs. Witherby," said my father, indicating that gentleman to her.

"Lady Boyington, sir," corrected Sir John; "why do you persist in groaning out, Mrs. Witherby,—Lady Boyington!"

My father and Sir John frowned at each other in an inauspicious manner, whilst Lady Boyington advanced to Vaudon.

"I had quite forgotten the name, and years have changed you, Mr. Vaudon, also," said she, extending her hand, "yet you were an old friend, too."

"We soon forget old friends, Lady Boyington," said Vaudon, with his hand in hers, "although I should have known you at first sight. Time has not dealt so harshly with you as it has with me."

Lady Boyington turned away with a smiling face at the compliment, and resumed her conversation with my father, who, having overcome the first effects of their unlooked-for visit, became more of the host, and less of the misanthrope, although his bright, restless eyes, boded no good effect from the suppressed excitement their arrival had created.

Lady Boyington had attached herself to her brother-in-law, and was showering on him her worldly narratives, and incidents of her artificial life, till he sat heart-sick and stupified. Becoming aware of his wandering attention, she changed the topic, and spoke of Agnes's beauty, and went into raptures of expatiation on the subject. Then Edward made his appearance, and she asked after Gilbert, and my

father sternly forbade a second inquiry concerning him, and Lady Boyington looked puzzled, but held her peace, as desired. Mr. George Boyington had taken a seat by Agnes's side, and Agnes seemed bent on achieving a conquest over the exquisite—she smiled so winningly, and chatted with him so confidentially, and looked playfully reproachful, or dubious, at his flatteries. Sir John having attached himself by two fingers to the buttonholes of Vaudon's coat, had left the young midshipman and his sister in an isolated position—so, full of charitable intention, I took a seat by their side, and made their acquaintance more fully.

They were very agreeable cousins, mine, and I felt that to know more of them would not be displeasing to me; I felt still more the link between us, and we were soon far from strangers. Jack Witherby (he detested the name of John) was a bold, spirited young fellow, and his sparkling little eyes were full of fun and daring. He had been in one engagement, and spoke of it as capital and first-rate, as though it were some exhibition or grand novelty. He had nothing to talk of but

the sea—it was his one hobby, and he made much of it.

It is needless to add, in this place, that he was an especial favourite of Sir John's.

Vaudon, watching his opportunity, had left the room and abandoned Sir John to his own resources, and we were all talking and forming quite a friendly group, when Paul Redwin, with the familiarity of a friend of the family, darted in, unannounced.

"Well here I am, Agnes, and——oh!"

Amazed at the unexpected assembly into which he had unceremoniously precipitated himself he stopped short and made a half-bow as if of recognition.

"Oh! Paul," cried I; "here are some new friends, or rather old friends with new faces, I shall have great pleasure in introducing to you."

"I am highly honoured."

Paul recovering from his embarrassment was the perfect gentleman, and went through the ceremony of introduction in a graceful manner, keeping his great brown eyes on Agnes and Mr. Boyington.

There was no vacant chair near his be-

trothed, so he came towards me and entered into detail concerning some carriage horses he had lately purchased. But carriage horses were not uppermost in Paul's mind, and he kept turning from me to look across at Agnes, and was very forgetful of his part and extremely inattentive to my answers.

Agnes pertinaciously kept her head away from Paul and continued her lively dialogue with greater spirit, adding a few more thorns in her lover's side.

"Upon my soul, Luke," he said; "its terribly warm to day."

He fidgetted with his fingers at his neckerchief as if it were unpleasantly tight, and wiped his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief, and tried to look unconcerned respecting anything but the oppressive heat of the atmosphere.

"Don't you find it sultry in the extreme?" he asked.

"The autumn *is* mild," I asserted.

"Mild!" echoed Paul; "pooh! I never was in such a heat in my life!"

Poor Paul Redwin. He had come over full of repentance for yesterday's little differ-

ence, and had been full of a delightful reconciliation, and had anticipated all that he would say, and all that Agnes would reply. And he had found the house full of company, and Agnes listening, and more than listening to a young man very particular in his attention, and very much entranced and wrapt up in *his* Agnes. No wonder it was warm !

How plainly to my memory did his wounded feelings recal that night at Wharnby House, where I saw him after many years, and where he played the leading character and thrust me into the background, and won Celia's heart, but to set it aside for another beneath it in all variety of comparison.

But he was too much my friend, for me to take any gratification in his pain — I had forgiven the past and could feel for every sting that made him start, and writhe, and jump from his place to look out into the garden, and perform numberless absent actions illustrative of his tortured mind. I read all that he suffered, and endeavoured to relieve him.

I advanced to Agnes, and said in a voice inaudible to her new admirer " Think of Paul Redwin

I left the words to have their proper effect and returned to my friend. But Agnes was not to be reprimanded, even by a brother, and my remonstrance might as well have never been expressed.

Luncheon was announced in the dining-room, and Paul started forward to offer his arm to Agnes; but he was already forestalled, and Mr. George Boyington was the favoured individual.

Paul came back very crestfallen, and hotter than ever.

"I say, Luke," he asked, in an angry whisper—"who did you say that—that *mincing fool* was?"

It was a strong expression—and Paul was generally very choice in his expressions; but I made a due allowance for his case, and had not a very flattering opinion of the heir to the Boyington estate, myself.

"Mr. George Boyington."

"Then I don't mind telling you, Luke, that Mr. George Boyington had better be less particular to Agnes, or Mr. George Boyington and I will come to a private understanding with each other."

"Never mind him, Paul—you're not jealous, surely?"

"Jealous—ha! ha!—that's a good idea, Luke," he cried; "no, no—jealous, indeed. I'm not of a jealous disposition—far from it, Elmore. Oh, no!"—and he glanced poisoned daggers at Boyington and Agnes disappearing through the doorway.

We had luncheon in the dining-room, with more than extra state, to please my father's pride, and to demonstrate the grandeur of his position; and Paul picked at his cold fowl, and fell into thought, and began to grow haughty and reserved, and declined to return an answer to Sir John, who was seated next him, by anything more conversational than a freezing monosyllable.

The luncheon was concluded, and there were rumours of departure, and Lady Boyington was pressing my father to come and see her at her marine residence—hired for two months, at a hundred pounds per month, servants included, Sir John grumbled out—and my father was replying in a decided negative.

"Well, Agnes and the boys must come—I take no denial from that quarter. I take no denial, understand?"

"Oh! we shall be too happy!"

My father looked half inclined to contravene this statement — but, meeting Agnes's glance, he turned away with a stifled sigh.

We were all standing.

"And, perhaps, Mr. Redwin will favour us?" suggested Mr. Boyington, drawing on his gloves.

"Thank you!" said Redwin, in the dryest of voices.

"We shall have very great pleasure in Mr. Redwin's company," added Lady Boyington.

"Thank you!"—with the regularity of an automaton.

They had left 'The Rest' at last, and my father had turned to his old room, and sunk exhausted into his chair.

"Go with them—see them as often as you all like, if there can be any gratification in their company; but a curse on the one who brings those wolves and vultures to this house again!"

Paul was buttoning his coat up to the chin.

"Are you going?" calmly asked Agnes.

"Yes, I am, Agnes," said Paul, decisively; "yes, I *am*, Miss Elmore. I shall come to-

morrow evening; but, at present, I fear my society would be an intrusion on pleasant thoughts; and"—in a voice intended for Agnes alone—"I think, Agnes, you have been more than unkind and inconsiderate, as well as unmindful of the relative positions we occupy towards each other. Think of it, if you please; and——Good morning!"

Agnes replied but with a merry laugh; and Paul strutted out of the house, still suffering from the weather.

CHAPTER III.

CELIA!

A WEEK sufficed to put us on terms of the greatest familiarity with the Boyington and Witherby family, making of them and us dear relatives and friends—thanks to the efforts of Agnes Elmore, to bring about the same. I had very little objection to urge; for, despite my antipathy to George Boyington—an antipathy that did not grow less upon closer intimacy—I felt there was a claim upon Lady Boyington existent in my breast. She was the sister of my mother—her own sister; and, despite her worldliness, and mannerism, and airs of pretension, I took no common pleasure in her society. Although several years my mother's senior, yet I fancied that, in the fea-

tures marked by Time's relentless scythe, I could distinguish some faint glimmerings of my mother's patrician look, as I remembered it so long ago! And she would speak about my mother, too; and tell me stories of my father's courtship and his adoration, and wonder how such love as they both had had, when they were married, should have died away an unprofitable vision. She mingled with her stories and her lamentations, much selfish counsel that the head teaches and fashion gives allowance to—much of precepts telling of the earth, earthy, and little of the heaven, beneath which we busy ants grope on—on to a futurity; but the charm was still visible to me through all, and afar off—like a dim figure in a wild landscape—passed the figure of my mother.

My father, firmly resolved to avoid all intercourse with our new friends, kept to his first intention, and closed 'The Rest' upon their visits. He was content to be alone, and though irritated and dissatisfied at the resumption of that acquaintance began in childhood, regarded it as a lesser evil, which a few weeks would soon remediate. So we paid

frequent visits to No. 54, Bellevue Terrace, Upper Cliff, Wharnby, and saw more of life, and heard more of the din of the world.

There were plenty of visitors at the Boyington residence, and they were pleasant *réunions* in the autumn evenings, when the brilliant drawing-rooms were full of guests—real, high-bred, London-polished guests.

Agnes seemed more than ever in her element, and more fitted to adorn. She had quite won the affections of Lady Boyington, who was never happy out of her society, and whose eyes would look admiringly at her from distant corners of the room, when she sat surrounded by half-a-dozen young men, all rivals with each other for a word. George Boyington, fearfully interested in Agnes, became more of the man, and less of the fop; and once or twice I had been the witness to variable changes of colour on his brazen cheeks, when his particular friends kept too long, or danced too often, with his cousin Agnes. George Boyington persisted in calling her cousin, and reminding his acquaintances that she was his favourite cousin, too. And George, how fond he was of me!—how entirely forgetful of our first

meeting, and its threatened result!—how partial to anything appertaining to an Elmore! Yes, this man about town, this boaster of his conquests at his club, this fellow who had been a ladies' man all his life, and who had ever a scurrilous jest or covert insinuation to make respecting the weaker sex, was caught by a smile from a country girl!

I took a fancy to my real cousins, and we were great friends—Jack Witherby, (he would be called Jack,) was the best tempered, wildest, jolliest of fellows—always getting into some mischief, and scrambling with cat-like agility out of it, and as full of pranks as a monkey. He was very partial to long strolls with me across the cliffs, where he would jeopardize his life, and freeze every drop of blood in my veins, by walking on the extremest verge, in order that he might attain greater facility in his aim at parties on the sands beneath, with small cubes of chalk, or pebbles, or pieces of hard earth—he was not particular as to his selection of material—yet for all this, he was the most sheepish, and most bashful of lads; he would colour up and stammer out an inaudible series of words, if

Agnes had a question to ask of him, or an observation to make, and would sit in a corner of the drawing-room full-dressed, and uncomfortable, on reception-nights, with his carroty, and curly head, bobbing aside every minute, to elude detection, and evade mortal glance.

And prim, quaint, cousin Jane, what good friends we were, and how little of your mother's teachings had you inculcated!—for you cared nothing for the world's attractions, and were more happy in a solitary evening walk, than in a dazzling ball-room.

Sir John Boyington, did not appear much on the scene; Lady Boyington's chief study, was to keep him as much as possible out of the way on reception-nights, lest his nautical manners and his unfashionable style of address, should jar upon the sensitive nerves of her guests, and Sir John preferred his pipe in the back room, looking over the slate roofs of the new town, and took great interest in the smoke of the chimneys, and the patent cowls and waterspouts, and was seldom wearied with his study of them.

There was little doubt in my mind that

Sir John Boyington, had never completely recovered from the effects of the cutlass, in his last naval engagement—despite Lady Boyington's incessant protestations to the contrary; he was a shade more than eccentric, or there would never have been a mysterious kind of valet of powerful build, attached to the establishment, who kept Sir John in sight, when the family were engaged, and sat with him for a few hours whilst he smoked his great meerschaum over Wharnby house-tops.

Paul Redwin had a great objection to the whole of the Boyington family—he excepted not even Jack Witherby, and kept him at a distance, with stately bows and ceremonious deportment; he accompanied Agnes occasionally to her aunt's house, on the Upper Cliff, and was exceedingly disagreeable, during his stay thither, and terrifically ill-tempered and argumentative, when we walked home on fine evenings to 'The Rest.' As for Mr. George Boyington, if there ever was a mincing, namby-pamby, insignificant, conceited, twaddling, self-sufficient jackanapes, it was he, in the opinion of Paul Redwin, and he expressed the same to Agnes, and Agnes laughed and thought Paul

severe, and that Mr. Boyington was very agreeable, and quite a gentleman. Paul sneered at *gentleman*, and thought Agnes prejudiced. Agnes considered Paul rude, and uncivil in the extreme, and begged to inform him, that Mr. Boyington was her friend, and should command more respect. Paul became satirical, and fell into raptures concerning Agnes' taste, upon which Agnes appeared charmed likewise, and coincided with him in everything, which acquiescence finished Paul, and sent him home with a 'Good evening, Miss.'

Lady Boyington, had broached a topic in conversation, after some dozen meetings, which had set more than one thinking deeply, and had sown the seed of many desires in fruitful ground. This was the expression of a wish that Agnes should accompany the family to London, for a few weeks or months, after the expiration of the Wharnby season.

"Not that London is in full flower of society at this period of the year, my dear niece," said Lady Boyington; "But Sir John is a strange man, and *will return*, and I should be so happy if you would form one of our

party. Oh! you must contrive to obtain Mr. Elmore's consent I shall insist upon it."

"Oh! no denial, pos—i—tive—ly no denial," cried Mr. George Boyington.

"Yes, we shall decide upon it; and you, Luke, must join us, too," ran on Lady Boyington. "Agnes has not seen London since she was a pretty little girl—it will be so great a change and will do her so much good. And there's Mr. Redwin will give his consent, I am sure."

Agnes tossed her head playfully, and cried —"Mr. Redwin, indeed!"

Mr. Redwin was not present to make reply, but I hazarded a few words condemnatory of the proposed expedition.

The subject was changed, but Agnes was thoughtful the remainder of the evening—the idea of going to London never left her from that night.

She brooded on the feasibility of the plan; she set her brains scheming to bring about the result; she made a study of her wish.

When we were alone together, she said to me—"What do you think, Luke, of going to London?"

"I have no wish, and you——"

"And I——?" said she.

"Should have none," I concluded.

"Because I am engaged," she said in a rapid tone: "oh! this eternal engagement, how you din my ears with its one single monotonous note! Every word and gesture of your own and Paul's seems to imply 'you are engaged.' I see it in Paul's look, in your own manner; I read it a hundred times a night at my aunt's—it is universal, and you torture me with its unchangeableness. Am I to forego a few weeks' pleasure with my own relatives—the only relatives we have—because I am engaged. If you do not choose to accompany me, I shall still go. I have already made up my mind."

"Agnes!"

"It is truth. I have made up my mind," she repeated.

"To go to London, with the Boyingtons—you!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, to go to London—and with the Boyingtons."

"But—Paul?"

"Paul will not deny me the gratification of

so natural a wish, but if he assume his dictatorial airs, and assert his right of prohibition then—I shall still go."

She closed her red lips, and set her small white teeth, and I read the inflexibility of her purpose in the determined look upon her face.

"And our father, Agnes? Set aside Paul Redwin, as with a callous indifference you feign to do, there stands still a great barrier in the way."

"It can be removed."

"I do not believe even your influence can exert so great a force."

"It can; it shall!"

"But——"

"Shakspeare said 'No buts,' Good night, Luke."

She tripped away to her room, leaving me full of doubt, and harassed by this new project, so suddenly formed, but so unshaken in its indomitable strength.

It was three weeks before I heard more of it.

Meanwhile, those three weeks contained the nucleus of all the real happiness I have ever

known, and set me thinking more about myself, and less of the troubles that seemed hovering around 'The Rest.'

Does it matter now if they were formed of empty air, and but illusive, lasting a few weeks at most, and then swiftly vanishing before me, tending, in the events they brought about, to make me what I am? They were weeks of unalloyed happiness, in which all was forgotten—father, absent brother, present relatives, and home faces, and I can look back upon them without remorse, and feel my yearning heart still throbbing at the memories they recal to me.

I have deferred to this time—save a faint allusion to a hope that I believed had been for ever cast adrift, or foundered—the new purpose of my life.

It is all mockery, and yet I live those three weeks o'er again, and read my lesson from them.

They were the old days, before Redwin came home from Paris. With every hour the spell grew stronger on me—the hope took deeper hold—my past feelings came flowing back with tenfold strength—the first love of my life!

Wharnby House again held me within its walls, day after day, and 'The Rest' seemed ever deserted by my presence. There were a few hours devoted to my aunt and cousins once or twice a week, and the remainder of my time to Celia. I had forgotten everything, save that I once more loved her. I had succumbed to the gentleness and purity that encircled her, as with a halo, and made myself her worshipper. We were much together; we had been brought into contact with each other from our childhood; we recalled old scenes and old associations, that came naturally with them; we spoke of Paul, and she blushed not; of his engagemeut to Agnes—and the smile left not her lip, nor the brightness her full dark eyes. We were like sister and brother—and my heart was young.

Slowly—steadily—I worked onwards to her love, gaining progress every day. I noted a change at last—a silent understanding of the attentions that I ventured to offer—a rosy cheek more than once, or twice, or thrice, when I have greeted her, and the thrilling sense of happiness I had never felt before was making heavenly visions of the future. It

was so pure a love—it had so bright an object—that I trod enchanted ground, and painted life in vivid colours, that glowed before me on my way.

It was in the beginning of the three weeks when I ventured to make a confidant of the rector. I told him of my love, its death, and its revival; I laid every fibre of my heart bare before him, assured of his advice, his generous appreciation, his great unselfishness. He had expected the disclosure—he had long seen the love within me for his sister—and yet he broke down like a child, and fairly cried.

"Bless my soul, what a fool I am!" he said, wiping his eyes; "but I am so happy, my dear Luke; you do not know how happy you have made me. I have wished for Celia and you to become betrothed for years and years, and when young Redwin stepped in, I was as miserable as you were. But that's past"—shaking my hand—"Paul was not fit for Celia—there was not spirit enough in her dear, loveable nature, for him—and the folly expired of sheer weakness. But the last year, Luke, I have detected symptoms in both

of you of something stronger than mere caprice—something like the oak of slow growth, but of sure strength, defiant of tempest and misfortune."

"And do you believe that Celia has forgotten Redwin, and that she would not reject my proposals? Do you give me hope?"

"Every hope," cried he, releasing my hand with a warm pressure. "I should be the last to offer one word of encouragement, if I had not seen the state of the weather long since, Luke. There, take your first opportunity, and wait for *Impulse*—there's nothing like it—and God bless you both. Amen."

Fearful of another break down, he dashed out of his room, and left me to get out of the vicarage in the best manner I could under the circumstances.

Ever considerate, he framed an excursion next day, to Cliverton; and, early in the afternoon, I accompanied Celia and him to Mr. Dartford's. We were on horseback, and the little rector hung very kindly in the background, and stopped his horse more than half-a-dozen times to admire a sea view, or a country prospect, till Celia grew alarmed at his

non-appearance. But the opportunities given were not made available; each time we were cantering together along the road, my courage left me, my hand trembled, my lips became parched and dry, my head swam, and I rode on in a busy whirl, with a tongue that felt like a leaden weight upon my speech. The thought kept ever before me—if I should have been mistaken; if I were doomed to the old terrible agony of the heart—that dreadful feeling of loneliness and despair which there is no shaking off, but which hangs on mind, and thought, and action? She was so beautiful, I could not give credence to a return of that love which I felt myself within my breast; I could not speak, though my life had been the forfeiture.

She was very silent, and embarrassed, too—a secret consciousness of impending disclosure kept her head turned from me, and her eagerness to discuss common-place subjects, and to remark common-place things, added to my reserve; so that we rode into Cliverton still occupying our relative positions, and the rector, blue with cold, on account of repeated stoppages, joined us a few minutes after our entry into the town.

We found an old face at the Dartford's. Coming suddenly upon me with all its beauty, its well-known fascinating smile, I started, and cried out her name.

"Mr. Elmore, it is some time since we have met."

"It is, indeed, my dear Mrs. Morton. I am happy in welcoming you to Cliverton."

Mrs. Morton and Celia exchanged greetings; they had met but for a moment at the ball in years past (for the marriage of her brother had not induced Mrs. Morton to leave London), and the rencontre was somewhat frigid on both side. Arabella—a more agreeable hostess than a spinster—welcomed us heartily; and Mr. Dartford, coming in a few minutes after our arrival, completed the family circle at Thornville Villa.

Mrs. Morton and I talked of our past meetings, and she appeared more lovely and more winning; but the rich, soft voice, so low and musical—the brilliant eyes shadowed by their silken lashes—the small perfect figure—the undefinable charm that had been ever apparent in each look and movement, were all of no avail towards me. I was unmoved, cold,

courteous, and complimentary. The strange glances that half-returned your own, and spoke volumes of encouragement, were harmless, and fell upon one clothed in armour and invincible. I could not believe it was she who had exerted so mysterious an influence over me—I felt but the admiration I should have had for a beautiful portrait, or a matchless work of sculpture—nothing more.

Throughout the afternoon there was no thought more than this, and the fevered passion of my breast was dormant or had died.

As I stood looking upon Celia and Mrs. Morton, a wild fancy came across me—born of imagination, within the room, as I watched them talking by the fire—that they were my good and evil angels! They were both dark-haired and eyed; and yet, looking at them from a distance, I could not divest myself of this impression, and of the great difference between them, and that heaven and earth were not more distinct, or had a greater line of separation drawn between them, than their respective natures.

And yet they were both so lovely! But Celia, to me, appeard the type of love, seek-

ing the stars, and soaring upward; and Ernestine Morton, that of the earthly passion, full of aspirations and wishes akin to our mortality.

I gazed at them, full of the startling idea that had formed itself within my brain, that they were the antithesis of each other, and that my future life was linked with both of them. So great a hold had the thought possessed itself of my common sense and reason, that when Mrs. Morton came towards me at a later portion of the day, my first impulse was to make a backward step.

The day wore away, and we were going back to Wharnby.

"Then I am never to see you in Cavendish Square, Mr. Elmore?" she said to me. "You are perfectly content at Wharnby?"

"I do not know of any reason that can give me the pleasure of visiting you in London."

"Ah! you are contented, I see, Mr. Elmore," she said, gaily. "Well, I am going on to Wharnby in a few days. Perhaps I may meet you before I return to town. I will not say good-bye."

"I look forward to many meetings."

She changed colour.

"No, you do not," she cried, in a quick, stifled tone—"you have no place for me even in your memory. We each take a different path in life, and shall soon forget each other. By your sudden start and astonished looks to-night upon our meeting, I saw you had not thought of me—not given me one poor thought—since we met last at my brother's house!"

She turned from me with a haughty step, and left me bewildered at this accusation. She was distant and repelling till the last moment of our visit, and drew her hand from mine ere it had been hardly tendered me, upon taking my farewell.

There would have been food for much perplexity in the eccentric courage of Mrs. Morton, had I not had a topic of deeper import to myself to dwell upon. I had no remembrance of Mrs. Morton—and was conscious of Celia alone, and of her riding by my side.

"We shan't be home till dark," said the rector, looking up at the sky—"that's decidedly unpleasant. I merely intended a call, and here we've made it two hours or more. It's nearly sunset."

He looked at me with an inquiring glance, and read my wishes on my grave face.

"Ahem!" coughed he—"it's so cold this evening—for it *is* evening—that I shall gallop a mile or two, and wait for you at the cross roads."

"We may all increase our pace, I think," suggested Celia.

"Not for the world!" cried the rector, with a feigned alarm I could never have supposed him capable of assuming. "Your horse might take fright, and a pretty thing that would be. No!" said he, decisively—"I've an impulse on me to get to the cross roads before"—looking at his watch—"before six o'clock; and get there I will, too."

And, without waiting for further remark or expostulation, he was off at a pace more consistent with a fox-hunter, than a peaceable and praiseworthy minister of the Church of England.

The old symptoms began to return before he was out of sight, but I controlled them, and resolved to know my destiny.

A few minutes—silent, agonizing minutes—then my heart gave way; the flood-gates of

my passion were beaten down beneath the tide of love that poured forth from my lips. It was uttered quickly, suddenly; and she drew the veil of her riding-hat close over her face, and rode on with heaving bosom, and shaking hands—but not away from me, I thanked God—not away from me!

"Celia, I can remain no longer silent, nor must you be longer ignorant of my one secret—the all-powerful secret that has dwelt with me so long! It is my love—the great love of my life—a love with but one object, having but one ambition. It is my love for you, born ere we were man and woman, increasing month by month and year by year—though silent and despairing often—until it has come to this avowal, and seeks an answer to its long idolatry. I have loved you from my boyhood; you have been the bright figure in the foreground of all my dreams; and to cast me away without a hope, is to blast the current of a life—to annihilate all settled purpose in me! Oh! Celia, not to love in vain—not to tear aside the cold formalities of friendship in a wild belief that has no foundation but in my visions—oh! not for that, this prayer to

love me in return—oh! not for that, dear Celia!"

She tried to answer me, but could not. We rode on silently together, then she essayed again, but in so low a voice, that I, greedy listener, could hardly distinguish the reply, although bending in my saddle eagerly towards her.

"Oh, Luke!—I wish it had not been—I wish—no, no—I cannot say *that*, even—but ——"

"Oh! frightful '*but*,' rising up black and ominous to mar my love!"

"But I have loved before," she murmured, after a long pause.

"But it is past?" I cried, anxiously.

Another pause, and then her voice again—low, musical, and soft

"Luke, you have been candid with me—I will be so with you. Whether my first love be past or not, I cannot say—I do not know. Mine are affections not lightly won, and not easily turned away or drawn aside. I have tried to forget him, and I believe and hope I have succeeded. I have prayed to do so, night after night, for years. Can I, for the

strong love of your nature, make so poor a return as a divided heart, or a love made old before its time?"

"But you do not love him, now?"

She reflected, then, looking me full in the face for the first time, said "No."

"Then, you can love again; there is no death of love in the heart of a young girl. Oh! Celia, do not for vague scruples, which have no definition and can command none, throw away my every hope of future happiness. I will be all to you—I will be happy, if you will give me hope to win you!"

"Luke," she answered, in an agitated voice, as she bent her head towards the saddle, away from my ardent gaze, "had I not believed that I could love and prize the heart you offer, I would not have listened to you so long, or entered into so strange an explanation. If you are content to know that I esteem you more than any other living at this moment, and will give me time to learn to love you as you deserve, I—I will learn that lesson with a true devotion."

She drew aside her veil, and smiled through the swimming tears, as she extended her

hand frankly—the sign of her engagement. Bewildered by love, by happiness within my grasp, real, tangible, as I had scarcely dreamed of, I felt too light for earth, my whole being seemed transformed—the world had changed—there was more light and sunshine in it, although but a faint mark—a blood-red curve, was lingering above the heap of dark clouds beyond the tinted sea.

What a happy ride to the cross roads! Sacred from this record, those few brief minutes of existence, that interchange of confidence, that halcyon era in my new born bliss.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST LINK BROKEN.

I SPOKE of three weeks pure happiness, not implying that the term of my engagement but extended to that period, but that there were no other cares, no other thoughts of anxiety or trouble, to counteract the sensation of deep joy. I had informed my father of my engagement, and he had but inclined his head, in the habitual indifferent way, with which he received all intelligence not immediately connected with his own thoughts or feelings.

He had scarcely sufficient interest in the matter to betray much surprise, or to offer any congratulation, in his morbid ideas —fostered by the evil friend so constantly, —he believed we were all working for our-

selves, all wrapped in our own selfish views, and, but estimating him as a nonentity; as one to be set aside and disregarded in all we undertook.

Agnes had promised secresy with the Boyingtons, respecting my engagement, but either through forgetfulness of our mutual compact, or pique at my former revelations concerning her own engagement to Paul Redwin, she whispered it in confidence to her aunt, who, worthy old lady, informed the remainder of the family.

I had to suffer a myriad of congratulations, at Belle-Vue Terrace, and to bear up against some very rough jests of Sir John, who had taken it into his head to make his appearance in an old dressing-gown, as we were sitting down to supper, and on whom no persuasions of Lady Boyington to induce him to retire, could have the slightest effect.

Lady Boyington murmured something about 'so nautical!' gave a sickly smile at the company, and resumed her place. After those three weeks there came the alloy. I was perplexed in the gloom that seemed increasing and gathering over 'The Rest,' and this was

more apparent, and came with greater force, after returning with so light a heart from Wharnby House. Agnes was determined in her project—there was no shaking her from it—no argument to counteract the force with which she clung to her first resolution.

I had promised to let her be the means of making it known to the family and to Paul—to set about her plans in her own way, and work the end of her ambition for the nonce, as her own judgment might suggest. I had sought to wean her from this new fantasy by speaking of Paul and of my father, and of the opposition she must expect from them, and the evil it would bring on all of us. To no purpose. The one thought of London was a talisman which drew her on, which overlooked all obstacles, which would set aside all entreaty of her lover, all threat of her stern sire.

There were bounds to the apathy of my father. I felt assured that his love for Agnes would not give assent to her going to London with her aunt, and that the very suggestion would madden him with its overwhelming force. I set this picture before Agnes with

all the power I was capable of. I drew it in its deepest shades, forming a parallel even with her and Gilbert. She heard me out attentively, looked at me with an unflinching gaze, and answered defiantly—'I shall go to London.'

The circle in which the Boyingtons moved—the glittering radiations from its circumference—had dazzled one of Agnes's temperament beyond the bounds of reason, had set aside all calculations, and framed her mind to take but one impression.

"Mr. Luke," said Miss Osborne to me one morning, "may I inquire if any event of importance be about to take place at 'The Rest?'"

"Concerning whom, Miss Osborne?"

"Concerning Agnes," she replied. "You will think me inquisitive, but I have remarked much abstraction of manner in your sister, and yet much determination towards some unknown project."

"I will believe you earnest for her welfare, and interested in Agnes Elmore, my dear Miss Osborne, but not inquisitive."

"The interest for Agnes is deeper than my

own heart knows," she said; "I cannot fathom its intensity. She is something more than a younger sister to me. This is strange, and a little romantic, seeing we are not great confidants, Mr. Luke—is it not?"

Before I could reply, she went on ——

"It is because she is the only girl whose age approximates to my own that I know or love, and my affections are concentrated in her. Sometimes"—with a sigh—"I wish she would put more trust in me—I would not betray it."

"My sister will not long withhold her secret from you, Miss Osborne, I feel assured," said I; "but I have promised that from her own lips shall come the disclosure."

"You look grave, Mr. Luke," she said, quickly; "is it of importance—is it likely to do her harm?"

"I see no good to spring from the result," I answered, "but I fear all injury. Your keen discernment will place all those fears before you when Agnes makes known her wishes, Miss Osborne—wishes which I trust in you and in your influence to combat against."

"I am powerless," she murmured; "my influence is no more than a name."

"I have seen it exercised with some effect."

"But oh! how seldom," she exclaimed, "and in what small matters, and of what unimportance!"

"God grant that you may succeed in this more serious one."

"Is it so urgent?" she asked breathlessly; "can I not divine it? Does it concern Mr. Vaudon? for he and Agnes have held long conferences together the last few days, and they are even now walking in the garden."

"Ha!"

I hastened to the window, and looked out.

In the distance, crossing and recrossing a small grass plat at a slow regulated pace, were Vaudon and Agnes. Vaudon had his heavy cloak hanging carelessly from his shoulders, and one hand—the old habit—on his black beard. Agnes, intent on all he said, and listening as to sage advice, walked by his side, and looked eagerly in his face.

What a contrast! The bronzed Egyptian-looking face, dark, impenetrable, silent-looking, and betraying nothing, and the lovely face of the young girl, flushed, eager, and expectant.

"If she profit by *his* teaching, Miss Osborne," I said bitterly, "God help your own—for it is futile and worth nothing."

"You mistrust that man?" she inquired quickly.

"As I mistrust all that is false and double-faced—as I mistrust a liar!"

Miss Osborne was silent.

"You must pardon my vehemence, Miss Osborne." I said less energetically, "but my blood cannot run placidly within my veins at so sad a sight as that," pointing to them in the distance. "Agnes can learn no good from him whose fatal influence deprived my father of a son."

"Of a son!" she cried, turning a deadly white; "of a son—of Gilbert—of——"

She stopped, and a burning flush suffused her face, flickered there a moment, and then vanished, leaving her whiter than before.

"I have betrayed the secret of a household," I said, "if so great a secret could have been so long kept without incurring your suspicions. There is no cause to be more explicit, Miss Osborne, there is so little to explain, and even less that I could say to you.

It is enough to know that through that man I have lost the kindest, best, truest of brothers, and my father, though he know it not, the most exemplary of sons."

She appeared greatly agitated, her slight figure shook violently, and her thin white hands grasped the back of a chair for support.

"I do not wish—I do not ask to know the reasons that have caused so sad a disrupture in your family, Mr. Luke," she said, looking down, "but as you have broached the subject, and spoken of it of your own free will, may I ask—if—if you have heard from him since the day he left 'The Rest?'

"No," I answered mournfully.

"Have you reason to suppose that he is well?"

"I had his promise to me that he would write, if he were unprosperous with the world."

"You may have thought me heedless or unmindful of his welfare, Mr. Luke," she said, still looking down as if she feared to meet my glance, "but there seemed so strict a silence kept concerning him that I felt any recurrence to his name on my part would have

been unfitting and unkind. But—but it was not for want of my esteem. You have not thought me unmindful of him, Mr. Luke?"

"I have not been so unjust."

We both turned towards the window again, as if with tacit consent to preclude all further conversation. They were standing on the lawn and Agnes was taking leave of him, and by her manner evidently reminding him of some promise he had made. She looked behind and held up her finger to him as she came along the winding gravel paths towards the French window at which we were standing.

As Agnes advanced I flung it back, and she entered looking bright and happy.

I had formed the sudden resolution, whilst she was advancing to the house, of confronting her with Miss Osborne, ere the impressions left by her conference with Vaudon had formed into any settled shape.—There should be some antidote to the poison, ere the poison was many minutes old.

"The old topic, Agnes," asked I.

She looked quickly from Miss Osborne to me —it was a rapid searching glance and I hastened to reply to it.

"I have made no explanation to Miss Osborne," I said; "I have left it for yourself alone and have kept strictly to my promise."

Miss Osborne hastened to reply.

"Dear Agnes, do not think I wish to force myself into your confidence, or assert a right to share it. But if you have some great intention, we are all interested—and surely you believe we all would do our best to help you or advise you?"

"Well then," said Agnes, taking off her bonnet and passing her hands over her braided hair; "we will have a chat about it. It is a slight matter after all, but Luke's gloomy countenance suggests a gunpowder plot at least. Are you going, Luke?"

"I think the conference might have a better———"

"Not at all," interrupted Agnes; "you know all about it. Come join us by the fire, Luke. You will not go to Wharnby House, before dinner," with a significant smile.

"I am your humble servant."

Agnes was evidently fearful of a *tete-a-tete* discourse with Miss Osborne, and imagined that the subject might assume a less particular

appearance if I made a third party to the conference. We drew our chairs before the fire, and Agnes leant her hand affectionately on the shoulder of Miss Osborne.

"Now the great mystery is simply this—I am going to London with my aunt."

For all the light air Agnes had assumed, the announcement was so astounding that Miss Osborne caught Agnes by the hand and cried out: "To London!" in piercing tones that startled both of us.

"It is very strange," said Agnes peevishly; "that the name of London, should have so terrible an effect. Is it the abode of giants, or devouring wolves, or full of enchanted castles kept by three-headed ogres like we read of in children's story-books, that the very name should alarm you so, Miss Osborne?"

"To London!" Miss Osborne could only reply.

"Yes, to London, with my aunt and cousins —sufficient protection for even the daughter of an 'Elmore.'"

"But, Agnes," said Miss Osborne; "what inducement is there to go to London? You will pardon me for mentioning it, my

dear girl, but your engagement—your father's strong dislike to fashionable life — your own pursuits—your home."

"Miss Osborne," said Agnes, withdrawing her hand from hers, and looking fixedly at her, "these superficial arguments have been used so often, and commented upon so much by Luke, that a recapitulation of them is tedious and most unnecessary. There is a misunderstanding concerning my proposed trip. You look upon it as a grave expedition—I, as a pleasant journey, and a little change. Why my engagement should keep me from a friendly visit, though that visit be to my relations in London, I cannot see—or why my father's objections should debar me from a natural wish, and my pursuits stand in the way of its accomplishment."

"It is not the going—it is the wish to go," cried Miss Osborne, warmly—"it is the vain desire of mixing in society, of courting adulation, of mingling with that false, artificial stream, from which you have been kept aloof, that will do you moral injury."

"Moral injury!" cried Agnes, starting up with flashing eyes; "what teaching have I,

then, received from you, that all your inculcations are so estimated? Am I so weak of will—so prone to flattery—so fragile in my very nature—that, like a bright mirror, a mere breath must tarnish me?"

"I have judged your character truly, I believe, dear Agnes, and you are wronging me by your vehemence."

"And my character?" asked Agnes, imperiously.

"Is this," answered her preceptor. "You are good-hearted, and there is sterling gold beneath the surface; but it is so hidden, and the warm promptings of the heart so checked, that your better self only predominates at times. You study your own will too much; and yet, a flattering speech will lead you; and your love of admiration stands out a distinguishing mark that all can see! Have I not fought hard to win your respect without debasing you by studied compliments?"

"The respect is gone for ever, Miss Osborne," said Agnes, drawing her tall form to its queenly height; "the love between us is destroyed and lost. You lower me before my brother—you seek to lower me in my own

esteem. I thank you for the knowledge of myself that you have given me—a degrading knowledge that I cannot profit by."

"I have said it for your good," replied Miss Osborne, with a faltering voice; "I have told a hard truth in hope of dissuading you from the purpose you have formed. Oh! Agnes, in the deep love that my heart holds for you, place credence, and believe its promptings. Give up this scheme that can but end in ill, and that will stir up so much of misconstruction. Put aside my love—regret and shun me when we meet; nay, be an utter stranger to me; but do not go to London. For your father's sake—your own!"

"For Paul's!" I cried—"for his love that claims you as a destined wife, that holds you sacred to himself alone."

"My father will grant me his consent," said Agnes, coldly. "I will ask him before you all to-morrow, and he will give it me of his free accord. I ask none other. For Paul's sake, Luke—and why for Paul's? Have I to bow to a tyrannical dominion, that *he*, of all others, is to command my actions, and to rule them?"

"Listen unto others—not always to yourself!" cried Miss Osborne, imploringly. "I am not so urgent without a cause, although to it you are blind. This family——"

"Stop!" said Agnes—"they are my friends. All these protestations and melo-dramatic scenes are not worthy of the theme. You over-act your part, Miss Osborne. I am not affected by your eloquence; and, were it to the purpose, I am not your pupil, and am free from school-dominion. Give me a will of my own—not dictate to me as if I were a helpless child. My will is formed!"

Miss Osborne let her hands drop to her side, and her head bend, with the agony of her grief. There was no resisting the look on Agnes's face — it was immoveable. Death could not have changed it, but have alone impressed it more indelibly. 'Her will was formed'—was graven as in marble!

As she glided from the room, Miss Osborne, in the bitterness of her grief, cried out, as though her heart would break—"Oh! how I loved her — how I loved her in my loneliness!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SECOND.

AGNES went out, with her brother Edward, a few minutes after her altercation with Miss Osborne, and did not return till within a few minutes before the dinner-hour. They had been to Lady Boyington's, and Agnes was in high spirits with her visit.

Paul came in after dinner, and took his accustomed place.

"When is Paul to learn your intention, Agnes?" I inquired, aside.

"To-night, I think," she said, carelessly—"for I go next Monday."

"Next Monday!—and to-day is Friday."

"An unlucky day for disclosures, as for everything else; but it is of little consequence—and I am not superstitious."

It was a custom for the members of the family to divide into two sections after dinner —Miss Osborne, Agnes, Paul, and I, adjourning to the music-room, leaving Edward with my father and Vaudon. Edward had no love for associating with those whose ages appeared by nature to be more congenial to his own, and was content to remain with Vaudon and my father, and to listen to their grave discourse till he grew sleepy, when he stretched himself at full length on the couch, and slept peacefully until further summons.

With the exception of Miss Osborne, who pleaded a sick-headache, we strolled to the music-room. It was a favourite lounge of ours; and there, free from all the restraint which my father's presence imposed, we have passed many pleasant hours.

Paul was in capital spirits, I had seldom seen him more cheerful, or more engaging. There were no Boyingtons to acidulate his temper, no rivals in the way, no simpering fops, sidling towards Agnes with the intention of asking her to dance, — no admirers, no paper-gallants and carpet knights, sighing at her feet, or making eyes of soft persuasion.

Paul was always happy when alone with her,—but his jealous temperament would not allow of a third person between him and Agnes; he was a perfect lover, fond of monopoly, and exacting in the extreme.

To-night he was the true Paul Redwin. Perfectly at home—he rattled on in his discourse, with a jest, and a laugh for everything.

Agnes sat at the piano, her fingers wandering carelessly over the keys, striking plaintive chords, and looking thoughtful. Perhaps, she was thinking, like myself, of the change that would be in Paul Redwin's spirits soon, and postponing her declaration out of pity for the shock.

"I say, Luke," cried Paul, a merry smile lighting up his handsome face, "are you off to Wharnby House to-night?"

"In a few minutes," I replied, "have you any commands?"

"No—my best respects, that's all," said he.

"Play my sentimental French song, dear," said he, clearing his throat, "I'm taken musical. Luke, take a seat, and 'I'll enchant thine ear.'"

"Thank you, but I must really depart."

"Very well, I'll enchant my own," said Paul, "I sha'nt be gone when you come back, I daresay, and if you are pressed for time now, why I must let you off that's all."

"Are you disposed for a ride with me, Redwin."

"Excuse me," with a mock bow of great politeness.

"You will not?"

"Why, it is so seldom that I get a quiet evening, thanks to those confounded Boyingtons and their everlasting soirées, that I really must decline."

Agnes laughed—it was her policy to keep Paul in the best of spirits. She trusted to her own powers of persuasion, which backed by his love, gave her hope of obtaining his consent.

"*Au Revoir*, then."

"*Au Revoir*. Now, Agnes, the song, and then we will rejoin the good folks in the parlour."

I left them, he standing by her side, and looking down upon her smiling up-turned face, with his dark, earnest, loving eyes. He stood by her side, tall, erect and handsome, without a care to gnaw at his heart's core, without a

thought of the secret of Agnes' impending and threatening over him.

I reached Wharnby House about seven in the evening, and Celia welcomed me with a bright smile.

It was a happy evening. We were all in all to each other—there were no jarring thoughts to our own—no interruptions to our felicity. The rector was absent; Mrs. Silvernot sat at the table, with her spectacles across her little peaked nose, absorbed in her novel from the new library at Wharnby. The rector was not expected, or she would have carefully set it aside until his departure, and listened to his plans about his church, or the new infants' school he was building down the lane. Miss Wigginton was at her mother's, in London, for a few weeks; and Mr. Silvernot, senior, had gone to a public dinner at the Albion Hotel, and was not expected home till late. I played chess with Celia, and looked over some new music that had come from London, and, then, tired of both occupations, I won her over to talk of our future—that golden, brilliant future which was never written in my book of destiny, that I should share!

It was the first time we had looked forward, and she sat blushing by my side, and turning away her head, and yet not unhappy, or unwilling to listen to my projects.

Mrs. Silvernot had fallen asleep over the heroine's rescue from the 'Baron of the Black Forest, by Sir Spotless de White'—of course, the hero, and a perfect gentleman—and was nodding gracefully in her chair. Her troubles were over, her vigilance at rest—her Celia engaged. She was a strange woman. Since the end of Celia's first love-dream, her whole thoughts had been concentrated in finding a substitute for Redwin, and of marrying her youngest daughter. For this purpose she had taken her to town relatives, and accepted every invitation to neighbours' parties and given entertainments of her own, and had been foiled by Celia's own calm indifference to the admirers that crowded round her. And yet, if we were married, Mrs. Silvernot would cry bitterly at the altar, and feel the parting as deeply as mothers do feel, and be miserable and lonely the remainder of her life with Miss Wigginton, three-volume novels, and sal-volatile. Unfathomable inconsistency! So Mrs.

Silvernot slept, and we painted fancy pictures in our glowing minds, and love was taking deeper root within us.

That night I told her of the past first love that had been foiled by my accomplished rival. I spoke of my agony at finding Redwin the usurper of my place, and of the memorable night of my return—a night spent before the hollow burning fire wherein I had sacrificed the treasures and love tokens I had garnered for so long a time. And she could so well feel sympathy for all my disappointment, and return my smile, and whisper, "If I were reconciled now with my second love?" No need to tell my answer in that happy moment. No need to dwell upon a scene like this—a scene that draws the hot tears from me as I bend over this reminiscence, and sears my heart with its old memories, and makes a child of me.

It was late when I took my leave of Celia and Mrs. Silvernot. I had not ridden to Wharnby House, having purposed to enjoy a moonlight walk on my return, with the cool winds blowing from the sea.

I had set foot on the country road, when a hoarse, suffocating voice, greeted me.

"Elmore!"

I turned, and, from the shade of an an adjacent clump of trees, came forth Paul Redwin.

"Paul!—what is the matter?—what has happened?"

I could divine the cause, but the very suddenness of his appearance extorted the unnecessary queries.

"I have been waiting for you by those trees some hours."

"You have quarrelled with Agnes?"

"A quarrel not of my own seeking, God knows," he said. "Luke, I have waited for you to ask if you, *her* brother, have no power to stop this project? I ask for her own sake, not for mine, now—not for mine!"

I looked into his face. The moonlight revealed features sternly set, over which the old air of haughtiness was fluttering.

"If you have failed, how can I succeed?"

"You are her brother," he answered; "there is some tie between you—some natural love—but I am an idler—one fitted to amuse her dull hours—nothing more."

"You misjudge yourself!"

"Not I," he said; "if a woman love the man destined for her husband, she will give consideration to his wishes, and sacrifice her dearest hopes to please him. I have had right on my side; I have had all that makes right; I have sought to demonstrate all to her; I have knelt at her feet—grovelled before her in the dust to turn her from her fallacies."

"And she gives no ear?"

"She set me at defiance; she spoke of her right to command *my* actions," cried Paul, excitedly; "she boasted of these new-found friends, the pleasures she had enjoyed with them, the anticipations she had in her intended London visit; she spoke and thought of everything but the feelings of that heart she has cast aside for ever."

"Oh!—not that, Redwin—it has not ended like that?"

"It has ended—it is for ever broken off," he said—"the long years of love, where I have worshipped her, and would have died for her. If she had asked me, this accursed night, to sacrifice my life for hers, I would have done it, Luke, without a murmur. But

it was not in my nature—I loved her too well—her name, her future place as my own wife—to say, 'Go with your friends; go as if you were unfettered by the tie of an engagement; go with that heartless crew of fashionables; mix with their world, follow their pursuits, and forget me till you return!' I *could not* say that, Luke. I have been at your aunt's house, and seen her son-in-law and his male friends hovering about her, with their wanton glances, in my own presence, seeking to gain her smiles, to win her from me before my own eyes; and yet I was to let her go to London with them all! No, no; she loved me not, or she would have said, like a true woman, 'Paul, you are the best judge of my actions, and of what wounds *you*—I will stay!"'

"Was there no relenting?"

"None," he said; "she flung me off as though I were a dog. She severed the bonds by which we were united; she brought the books and trinkets I had given her, and showered them before me in her passion; she cast me from her mind, her heart, glorying in the deed!"

"What is to be done?"

"Nothing," he said; "my pride is humbled, my hope of life is gone. If Agnes gave up her wish to-morrow, and become as I first knew her, I could not say, 'I love you!' There is a burning within me, at my heart, but it is not love, nor hate, nor anything that has a name. I feel that I am wholly changed —that I am a man seeking some object which no hand from heaven points out, and yet which urges me and goads me on. I must have excitement; I should go mad if I took to my old life. Oh! Luke, old friend, the poorest beggar in the streets may pity me this moment!"

"Courage, dear Redwin," I said; "there are many fairer and with minds more disciplined than Agnes, that will make you a good wife, and as happy a home as you deserve. This is the first overwhelming feeling, and it bears you down. To-morrow will bring its true counsel and make a man of you."

He shook his head.

"I shall not come to 'The Rest' again, of course. I shall be glad to see you at my house in a few weeks; but you must give me

time to think and act. I could not bear to meet your face yet awhile. I have not the nerve. I may go abroad to-morrow, or I may live and die in Wharnby. I know not what a day may decide for me. But whatever comes about—whatever Fate deals out for me, remember this—Paul Redwin has no dearer friend, nor one he holds in greater honour and esteem, than Luke Elmore of 'The Rest.'"

He grasped my hand, and wrung it long and silently, looking at me with a softened expression on his haggard face, and then struck into a by-path leading to his home, and was gone.

The gay notes of the piano saluted me on my return to 'The Rest.'

I walked to the music room. Agnes was seated at the instrument; she was alone. The heap of presents Redwin had brought her in happier times, lay in a rude heap upon the floor.

She looked round upon my entrance. Her eyes were very bright, her cheek somewhat flushed and red, but she was calm and passionless, and struck the keys firmly and wit unshaking fingers.

"Well, Luke—you are late."

"Have you been here since I left?"

"No; I presided at the tea table, and played backgammon with Vaudon—but it was tedious, so I have returned."

"I have seen Paul."

She shrugged her white shoulders and played on.

"He has told me the result."

"He is confiding."

She played the music softly whilst we were speaking, like an accompaniment.

"Is it possible, Agnes, that you can sit and play there, knowing the ruin you have made of his affection—the severance of an engagement that has extended over years?"

"Why not?" she said, looking round in mild surprise—"the engagement was a weak one—made in haste, and long since, on my part, repented. I am no fitting wife for Paul Redwin, Esquire; and we both believe it. It has all happened for the best. This is a new set of quadrilles I am playing—do you like them?"

"You celebrate your new existence?"

"New! Luke?"

The music softly playing.

"You have entered upon a new life with the heartlessness that has characterized this night. You will look back upon it some day with regret. You stand upon a threshold gazing in at a bright scene, where the guests are many, and the colours are enchanting, and where the flowers are strewn thickly for your tread. But the guests, who welcome you, wear masks—the colours will grow faint, and fade—the flowers but hide the snares and pitfalls into which many as undaunted as Agnes Elmore have fallen and been lost!"

"Strange, brother mine, you deal in metaphors, and I cannot understand them. This 'La Poule' is charming!"

Long after I had gone to my own room the music came softly stealing to my ears, and ringing in low melody throughout 'The Rest.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE THIRD!

TRUE to her promise, and sanguine as to the result, Agnes made her appearance at the breakfast-table, the next morning, full of the bold determination of asking her father's consent to her intended visit.

There was a smile of anticipated triumph on her red lips, and her full blue eyes looked meaningly at me. There was a cold "Good-morning" for Miss Osborne, and then a total disregard of the presence of her best friend. Agnes was not one easily to forget.

Edward and Vaudon came in a few minutes after we were seated.

"Where is papa?" eagerly asked Agnes.

"He will be here directly," answered Vaudon, evading her inquiring glance.

For the first time a suspicion of the nature of Vaudon's good offices crossed the thoughts of my sister, and her little hand closed convulsively.

That Vaudon was in my sister's confidence I had been long aware, and that he knew of Agnes's intention, and encouraged it, there was no doubt of. Had Agnes relied upon this man to use his influence for her sake, and, knowing her own power likewise over her father, placed implicit trust in the combined influence working for one end? Had he played her traitor at the last moment, and struck another blow for the great scheme he was planning?

My father entered. I felt my heart beating very fast, and glanced at Agnes. She was unmoved, and rose to greet him with her morning kiss.

He turned away as she advanced and moved on as if unconscious of her being near, and sank heavily into his seat.

I had seen many changes in my father, but at his first coming to 'The Rest' in his sick-bed a paralytic man, and but a step between life and death, or glaring from his

leathern chair and denouncing his own son, I had never seen him look like this.

His face was of an ashen grey, a dull leaden colour that was fearfully unnatural; his long hair was tangled and disordered, and his dress had evidently not been taken off since the preceding night. The red fiery eyes were sunken in his head, and gleamed like a wild beast's.

"You are not well, sir," cried Miss Osborne.

"Luke, go for the doctor!" cried Edward, really alarmed at his appearance.

"I am well, I am very well," muttered my father; "what makes you think that I am ill?"

He stretched a shaking hand out for his breakfast cup, and sought to look down our fears.

It was a silent meal — we felt a heavy weight upon our tongues which kept us mute, we were conscious of some event about to take place more or less connected with my sister, and the very uncertainty of its nature kept us all but one, and she the principal

and most concerned, feverish and fearfully expectant.

My father spoke not during the meal, he sat looking before him into vacancy and the clattering noise of the cup shaking in his hand, but told of the inward agitation from which he sat there, a poor sufferer.

Suddenly the clear musical voice of Agnes broke the silence.

"Papa."

I sought to catch her eye, but she conscious of my object, looked at her father and at him alone.

"Another time," I cried; "not now, Agnes! See you not his state? Have you no reason or compassion, girl?"

"I am very well," murmured my father again.

"Agnes!" pleaded Miss Osborne.

But Agnes had commenced.

"Papa, Lady Boyington has kindly invited me to her town mansion, and offered me the shelter of her roof for a few weeks. I have become attached to her, I love her very dearly, and I have consented to accompany her. There is but your consent to ratify my own,

and make your daughter happy. You will not deny it? You are not afraid to trust me to her care, or to trust me with myself?"

She placed both her hands upon his arm and looked into his face with an old winning expression that had never failed her yet.

He neither turned nor moved, nor seemed to be aware that she was hanging over him in her false fondness — he looked still forward at the vacant space and said:—

"It is your wish to go?"

"It is."

"To leave 'The Rest' and go to London?'

"Yes."

"To part for ever from me?"

"For ever, dear papa!"

"Ay."

"I do not understand. It is my wish to see London. I have been brought up too strictly, and too well, to suffer from any temptations that it may present. A virtuous girl is as safe in cities as in a wilderness."

"I came to 'The Rest' for peace. I came that I might keep my children from the curse of society and aloof from the evil that it brings.

In Agnes Elmore, I saw but the same face that had deceived me, and I prayed that it might never leave my side until my death or her own marriage. I feared for that face ere it grew a woman's—I find the confirmation of my fears this day."

"You have no trust in your own daughter?"

"None."

A gloomy look settled on Agnes' brow.

"You will give me yonr consent?"

"You are engaged to a young man of honourable principles, a true gentleman. Has he given you *his* permission?"

Agnes did not answer.

"Has he—but no matter, he has not!"

"May I go, papa?" persisted Agnes, her form dilating, and her chest heaving with excitement.

Still looking before him, he continued,—

"The woman you would go with, is a woman of the world, one whose precepts are all worldly, and whose soul is all calculation, and self-interest. I have known her in her youth —I have seen her but a few months back unchanged. This woman was the sister of

your mother, Agnes—the elder sister and from whom your mother received the greater portion of her education. You still wish to go?"

"Yes."

"I have known all this some weeks, I have heard my only friend,—my only good adviser, —patiently and sorrowfully. You have rejected all his counsel; all his admonitions."

"What!" cried Agnes.

"Headstrong and resolved, you pass all friendly warning by."

"May I go?" again asked Agnes, sharply.

"I have never sought to force the inclination of my children; since they have passed the boundary of childhood, I have allowed each to think and act, believing the remembrance of my teaching was strong enough to keep them from all ill. I have been deceived. Still, I put no force upon their actions, each is his or her own master—I have but to express my wish, and then let them act by it or not—I have done my part."

He took a long breath, and went on again.

"My wish is, that you should stay! By going with that woman and her family, you inflict the heaviest blow upon me. You bring

back all the horror and disgrace I have come hither to avoid. You dishonour me, and pile coals of fire upon my head. If you will remain I will love you as no daughter has been loved, and every whim of your own shall have its gratification—but if you go, I never wish to see you more—I cast you from my heart—I lose all common respect—I hate and loathe you from that hour!"

His forced calmness was abandoning him, and the wild passion, more natural to him, was possessing him,—"I will not deprive you of your inheritance—it is a daughter's right, and I have an Elmore's pride. Had you been a man, I would have closed the doors of this house for ever against your return as I have done against your wilful brother's. But it is enough that your inheritance of love will be for ever lost, and if you go, may God forgive your wilfulness."

"You put no force upon my actions, and yet your madly pile threat on threat to thwart me," cried Agnes, indignantly, "but I am not easily deterred by the imaginations you have brooded on, until you think every step I take requires a guiding hand. Father, I shall go."

He gave a low smothered cry, and hid his face—I sprang towards him, crying,—

"She will not go—it is but her rash assertion in her anger,"—he shook me off and looked up again, stern and wild.

"And Vaudon," said Agnes, "I have to thank you, for your double-dealing. I see the study you have made and congratulate you on its fair success—I should have doubted all your specious phrases and your lying tongue, as others have doubted you years since."

"You rave, Agnes. I have done my best to ——"

"No more. I am not blind."

Agnes rose, and, with the old, old look, went slowly towards the door. Miss Osborne sprang forward, but Agnes waved her hand, imperiously crying—"Back—I would be alone!"

All that day Agnes kept to her own room, and my father sat where she had left him, vacant and almost unconscious. The servants glided in and out—Vaudon sat by him—I tried to gain his ear—but, like some one stricken into stone, he sat crushed by his disregarded love.

He went to his room at his usual hour, and came down on the Sunday and took his old place, and sat there rigid and immoveable as on the preceding day. I laid a book upon his knees, and there it lay, open at the same page, until it fell to the ground. I tried one last appeal to Agnes—I begged and implored her, for our father's sake, as I had never begged or implored throughout my life; but the fatal perversity of her mind was not skaken by the urgency of my appeals, and she was adamant.

The Monday came. Her boxes had been taken from the house by the servants, and she was ready to depart. She came into the room, equipped for her journey, to bid us 'good-bye.' Taking no heed of Vaudon, or of Miss Osborne, as if they were her deadliest enemies—and one may have been, at least—she stooped and kissed her father on the forehead.

He murmured something like "Good-bye," but the words were indistinct and vague; and the look he gave her, might have turned her even then, it was so mournful in its very sternness.

"Will you come and see my aunt, Luke, before we go?"

I escorted her to the cliff on which the house of my aunt was placed, bade my relatives good-bye, and turned to Agnes.

"For the last time, stay."

"Impossible!"

"Think what you have done. Good God! Agnes, can you really be so young, and yet so impenetrable to human sorrow? Your own father, Agnes—your own father!"

"I am going on a visit," she said, calmly.

It was a cold farewell I took of her, and we parted.

I returned home to find my father still seated in the chair as I had left him. I spoke to him, and told him that I had seen her safe with her aunt; but he paid no attention to my words, and kept the same dull apathetic stare.

A fearful presentiment of evil came across me, as I looked at him. The face seemed changed since I had seen it last—the leaden colour more intense—the lips and nose more prominent, and the breath more short.

"Vaudon," I cried, "I cannot leave him

in this listless state! He is ill! I will go for Dr. Whittaker."

"I am better."

They were the first words he had distinctly spoken for days, and my heart felt relieved, and beat freer and more light.

"Will you walk with me round the garden? The air is mild, and will revive you, sir."

He shook his head.

"I think some medical advice is necessary, still."

"No, no!" he cried, hastily.

But I was not content, and on my own responsibility despatched a servant for the old physician that had attended my brother Gilbert in his illness.

I spent the time till his arrival anxiously watching my father in his chair. When he had seen him, he looked grave and walked aside with Vaudon, and held a whispered conference.

Presently, Dr. Whittaker came across to me.

"Your father must be taken to his room directly. I shall not leave to night."

"Is there danger?"

"I regret to say the greatest!"

He was carried more than led to his room. I despatched a second servant to Wharnby, with orders, if Agnes had already started, to follow her to London with a hasty note which I had written. The telegraph had not at that time annihilated space.

When he was in his bed, he turned upon his withered side, and reached out his thin, white hand to me.

"God bless you!"

"Oh! father, father, not those words; oh! not spoken with that look—oh! father."

There was a faint smile, and he let go my hand and pointed to an iron chest beside the window.

"What is it, Elmore?" asked Vaudon.

My father, with a prolonged ringing cry, sprang up in his bed. The doctor crossed hastily towards him.

"Keep him back! keep him back! My Will, my Will! Gilbert—son—'The Rest!'"

He fell back in his bed, and rose once more and struggled for his life, and raved of Gilbert, Vaudon, and 'The Rest.' I flung my arms round him in my agony, and called upon his

name, and prayed to God to spare him to his children. But the great seal was set, the final word was written, and through my blinding tears I watched his life die out as he lay pillowed 'gainst my breast.

CHAPTER VII.

REST!

He rests at last! Free from his overbearing load of grief, he sleeps in peace—poor, weary, suffering pilgrim! and all the sorrows of his life are forgotten in 'The Rest!'

How many years—slow, dragging, cruel, years—have gone by in the flight of time, since he looked so calm, so peaceful, and so untired with brooding thought, as now—sleeping in his coffin!

Through the darkened rooms and gloomy passages I wander, borne down by my loss, oppressed by an iron weight, lowered to the dust.

How many self-accusations come crowding on me now, from years back, a wilful child, to this sad time, embracing within that long,

long space such myriads of reproaches! What might I not have been to him in his loneliness —what comfort to his saddened years, had I studied him the more and myself the less? Had I ever sought to alleviate the burden of his dishonour by showing to him a son's love, and giving proof of it in action? Had not his thoughts and mine been ever separate? Had not our paths diverged more and more from each other's since I became a man and acted for myself? Would it have ended thus—would his life have passed away like a fleeting vision, leaving so dark a reality to accuse me—had I made his wishes, strange as they were, my first consideration?

But it is too late—the time will never come again—the hour is passed for ever—the gulf that stands between time and eternity divides us—the grave shuts out all hope!

Day and night I move about the house without an object; I come upon my brother Edward, listlessly walking up and down the room, or sleeping in that sacred leathern chair before the fire, exhibiting his grief in a dull stupor and a heavy silence. I meet Vaudon gliding like a ghost about the house, his hand

upon his beard, his dark eyes bent upon the ground. Is there any memory of love for the old friend he has parted with on earth? Is there a self-accusation in *his* breast—one sorrowful recollection at his heart? I read an appreciation of my inward grief, and a kind sympathy in all I feel, in the pale face of Miss Osborne, and I hear words of consolation breathed from her lips to me, and they fall like summer rain, and bring me comfort for the time.

And friends come to 'The Rest,' and pay their last duty to the dead. And the rector kneels with me in that silent room inhabited by death, and we pray together long and earnestly; and Celia places both her hands in mine at parting, and looks her consolation through her tears; and Paul Redwin comes one night and grasps my hand—sits beside me, silent in his companionship, and disappears, I scarce know how or in what manner, and leaves me in my loneliness.

There comes a letter, bordered deep with black, stamped with the London post-mark, and written by a hand to which I am a stranger. I break the seal and read:—

No —, Park-lane.

"My dear, dear Nephew,

"The sudden shock which the arrival of the servant has caused poor Agnes, followed, as it was, by your fatal letter bringing the cruel tidings of your father's death, will totally prevent her immediate return. The dear child is very ill indeed, and I think, with your permission, it will be better for her to remain with me in London—such associations as 'The Rest' will bring to her sensitive mind being sorrowful and unnecessary. You will perceive the force of this yourself, my afflicted boy. Our own physician is attending Agnes, but she is very much depressed. Poor Sir John is also 'cut up' in a remarkable degree, and my feelings you can well imagine. Agnes desires from her sick couch the expression of her deep regret for her irreparable loss, and sends her best love to yourself and Edward, in which I heartily unite with her.

Believe me, my dear Luke,

Your affectionate aunt,

Lydia Boyington.

I place the letter aside; it is of little conse-

quence whether the daughter weep over her father's grave or not; he would have wished it, perhaps, but my sister's indisposition—I can see her in her elegance of grief, pillowed on the couch before the fire—prevents the last token of respect. So let it be. It cannot sting the silent sleeper for whom I am mourning here!

I seal the iron chest in which is deposited my father's will, keeping home-secrets safe until a fitting time. I take his pocket-book from the desk, and do the same, and, amongst old papers, I detect a letter, the superscription of which is—'To my son, Luke Elmore.' Time enough—time enough for the contents of that epistle, written as from the grave to me—sad, holy record, which I treasure in my breast.

The darkness of the night steals on: we lay him in the old churchyard of Wharnby, and my tears fall thickly o'er his resting-place. There are many followers to his final home—and the long train of servants, in deep mourning, add to the number. It had been his wish, in old time, and the last sign of pride was not denied his memory.

Returning home—leaving that dear one be-

hind—I feel that he is really gone, and that one tie the more has broken with that new mound of earth, beneath which my father sleeps!

* * * *

The Figure reaches the apex of the mountain, and points to the path by which we have struggled to its lofty eminence. Looking back, how dark a road with, ah! how little light upon it, is revealed beneath my gaze! Above, one star—a star in which my vain love has built its faith—shines dimly; and, as I look, the figure shakes its head, and make its gesture of command.

But the dull vista of my past is sunshine to the ebon gloom of that dark future, down the steep mountain side of which, the figure leads the way. More rugged and more fierce, I start back from my guide, and look for help towards the star. It darts through space—that one light—and is gone!

Still onwards, ever onwards, with this genius of my life—slowly, painfully along the downward path! There are figures in this gathering darkness known to me, and I seek to touch them, and they recede as I advance.

Still onwards, following the shadows!

END OF BOOK THE FOURTH.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILL.

THE Elmore seal upon the iron chest, in that room where my father died, is broken—and my own hands have unlocked the weighty mass of metal, and drawn from its receptacle my father's Will!

His Will—and I abide by it! I murmur not, nor speak a bitter word, nor heap one cruel accusation—it is enough for me that he has written it.

No matter in what mood, or stung by what false promptings;—he has thought it best—and I fold my arms across my chest, as if to stay the wild beating of my heart, and am content.

My soul is heavy, and my mind is clouded,

I am stern, silent—and yet uncomplaining. I am suffering within—not for the loss of my inheritance—not for the bar he has laid upon my progress; but for the wrong estimation he has ever had of me—the ignorance of my filial love—the inability to test the truth of my own mind—the misconception of everything concerning me.

The tenor of the Will is this :—

To Vaudon, Jacques Vaudon, his dear friend, his old companion—so run the phrases of affection—he leaves nearly a third of his whole fortune, adding thereunto — as if he could not pile sufficient riches upon the man to testify to him his last token of regard—'The Rest,' and all estates belonging to it.

To Edward Elmore, is left a sum of money equalling that apportioned to Jacques Vaudon; there is no word of comment made, he dismisses him with so many thousand pounds—a legacy and birthright. To his loved daughter, Agnes Elmore, the same portion is allotted, and then follows the name of Luke, and there is left to him— three hundred pounds a year! From all his wealth, from the riches which have accumulated by long interest until they

have swollen into a fortune that kings might envy on their thrones, he leaves me this poor pittance!

Brought up as I have been, knowing no money's value and putting no value on it, taught from my cradle to be considered the child of a rich man, the sum seems poorer by comparison, and I feel that it would have been less degrading to have been wholly cast aside and struck off from his slightest notice like his first-born son, than to have inherited this mammon's stigma which seems crushing me with its reproach.

"Within my desk is a letter for the eyes of my son Luke alone," he writes; "and therein he will find and give justice to the reasons that have actuated me in bequeathing the above sum to him."

Vaudon and the rector of Wharnby are executors to this strange Will, dated a year back, and signed by witnesses and drawn up at my father's dictation by a legal hand Vaudon is left the trustee over the property of Edward and Agnes, and their sole guardian until twenty-one years of age. I am by law, a man and my own master, and there is no

ruler over the legacy which my father has bestowed upon me.

I take the letter from my breast when I am alone, and open it, and reverentially gaze upon the lines written tremblingly by his left hand and crossed, stained, and almost indistinct. It must have been a great task for him in his affliction, and the paper is blistered in many places as with tears.

I read:—

"'The Rest.'

"November 18th, 18—.

"MY DEAR SON,

"These lines written with an aching heart and tortured mind are intended for your eyes alone, when I am dead to the world and at peace in the grave. Yesterday I made my Will. To you, as my *eldest son*, it is my duty to explain some portion of it that is mysterious, and which appears to you unjust. You will blame me in your anger, but in the end you will judge me fairly, and believe that I have acted well. I have left to Jacques Vaudon, Edward, and Agnes, the same sums of money, adding to Jacques Vaudon's, the house in which I live, for

he is attached to it—far more than my children are—and I would not have him cast away from its memories. He has been my only staff, my helping hand — he is poor, I out of gratitude have enriched him. I have left you three hundred pounds a year—it is sufficient for a country gentleman. You will have shelter at 'The Rest,' and have horses, servants, all at your command while within the circle of that home you have so long despised, and instructed by that friend's advice which you have always shunned—I have left you no more for this reason—You are a lover of the world, and its temptations are great to a man of wealth. You would have despised 'The Rest'—rejected all good counsel, mixed with the lying faces of false friends, made my name as it was of old—cursed your own existence, forgotten brother, sister, home, your father's memory, and your own honour.

"I have kept you from these dangers by my Will. London will offer no temptations now, for your income will not suffice to keep you in your ancient splendour. You will remain at Wharnby—your pride will not allow of anything else. You will become a good man,

and, if you marry—I hardly wish it—a kind husband and father, neglecting neither wife nor children for society; and the wife, not having wealth before her in her choice, will be to you that which God ever denied to me!

"If I keep you from evil, from temptation, I have not done wrong. I feel less weight upon my mind since this Will has been completed, and I hope that I have fulfilled my duty by you all. To your brother Edward, cold and unimaginative, an exalted station is necessary, and will *command* respect. To Agnes—she will be the wife of a good young man, and I have given her a marriage portion, and the fears which I once had for her are subdued or wholly gone. She will never see London—that world of vanity and sin; and her whole life is changed, and bright and radiant. I feel it as I write.

"My concern is now alone for you. I have long lost your love and confidence—it is an affliction I foresaw years ago. Strong in your intentions, wilful and heedless, and not to be turned aside from any rash endeavour, I have done my best to restrain your wild impetuosity. The fierce passions that led you along the

rocky paths by the sea-side when a boy—the eager desire for fashionable life when a young man, have ripened, and yet must fall to the ground by the means I have adopted. That it pains me to adopt them, believe me, my dear Luke; but there is no second course, or I would take it.

"The ways of life are varied and unknown, and evil may follow from this intended good, and jealousy, envy, and uncharitableness choke up the well-springs of your best affections; but judge me rightly, Luke, and, if I have wounded you deeply and irreparably, forgive me—I mean all for the best! Looking forward to the grave, and standing, perhaps, upon its brink, I write these words to you.

"Ever your affectionate father,

"GILBERT ELMORE."

Strange wandering epistle, speaking of the goodness of his heart in its very sternness, I read it, and re-read it, and ponder more upon it.

'If I have long lost your love and confidence!' Recrimination speaking from the grave, accusing me of my old apathy, my life

silence, and stinging more than all! And yet he loved me—I know it now—I read it in these lines—I find it in the motive for my poor inheritance, and I am comforted.

Misjudging ever—in his eldest son denying his affection, and never mentioning his name; in Agnes, elevating her above her right or merits; in Vaudon, placing him above us all, and blind to every fault of his, and trustful only in the most unworthy; in myself, doubting, fearful, and full of apprehension; never taking a right view of the figures passing beneath his eyes.

Was there a waking light that fearful morning, when he sprang up in his bed, and pointing to his chest, cried out,—

"Keep him back!—keep him back! My Will!—my Will! Gilbert—son—'The Rest!'"

I believe so, and I am happier in my belief. Confirmed by his wild terror and his shrieking cries for Gilbert that succeeded, is that conviction fixed upon me.

Amongst his papers, I find another letter addressed to no son in particular, but applying unto each. There is no date, no mark to tell how long a time it is since it was written. It runs thus,—

'It is the duty of a son to avenge a family's dishonour—the stain that rests upon the name of Elmore, is still branding it, and a whole life's curse is covering it with shame. Seek not the quarrel, but abide the time. It will come one day to the father or the son, and then act. For the seducer and adulterer, there is but one atonement!'

I raise the letter to my lips, and murmur a vow—I steal forth to the churchyard, and over the new grave renew my pledge to the dead.

I meet Vaudon on the road, and we walk home together. He is friendly in his actions towards me, and links his arm within my own, as if he would draw me to his heart. I am too moody and depressed to pay much heed to his discourse, so we walk on, two grave figures homewards. I hear words that fall meaningless upon my ears of his offer of service, and his desire that I should make 'The Rest' my home—his 'Rest!' He would have us still one family, still united. I try to say some words, expressive of my thanks in return, but my proud spirit chokes me, and I merely incline my head. He leaves me not

till within the hall, and then he presses my hand and glides away. He seems content with the result of his long study, and would propitiate the children of his patron. Even Gilbert might receive a welcome home, if he came back to 'The Rest.' Edward has been won—he has great faith in Vaudon—he looks upon him as his second father, and is almost forgetful of the first, and certainly quite reconciled to the home-loss that we have suffered.

He is curious about me, and wonders what I shall do with three hundred a year—"You have such lofty notions, that I don't know how you'll get on. Certainly, there's a home now. But when you marry, Luke?"

When I marry! My heart beats fast—the blood quickens in my veins—and yet I feel that I could weep for one heart-cheering word, or one sentence of true love.

Time passes. Miss Osborne bids farewell to 'The Rest.'

"Your sister is constantly absent; and I accepted not the office of housekeeper from Mr. Vaudon's hands," she says to me; "and, above all, I wish to go It was only my affection for Agnes that has kept me at 'The

Rest' so long—and she has thrown me off, and we may never meet again. Nay, do not urge me to stay—a hundred nameless reasons now command my resignation."

"All welcome faces are vanishing before me!" I exclaim, mournfully.

"Not *all*, Luke."

"I cannot say one will remain long, Miss Osborne," I reply to her meaning look—"I am learning to despair."

Vaudon, more energetic, begs Miss Osborne to retain the post she has long filled so gracefully; but, to all entreaties, she gives a calm denial, and is resolved to go. The night before her going, Vaudon is very thoughtful, and the book he holds, he keeps open at one place. He rises from his seat after two hours reverie, and walks slowly to the music-room, where Miss Osborne is looking over old papers of her own, and remains there twenty minutes talking to her, and then returns and takes up his book once more at the same unread place.

The morning sees her last farewell—her last wishes for our happiness—and she goes not away tearless or unmoved. She places her hand in mine, and offers me her cheek to

kiss, as confidingly as though I were her brother. Edward and Vaudon have given their adieux, and have left us alone together.

"When you meet your brother Gilbert, you will not fail to remember me to his notice, and say, in my last parting from 'The Rest,' I bore him kind remembrance."

"When I meet him, dear Miss Osborne!"

One swimming look round the well-known room, and she is gone—and one more guardian spirit of 'The Rest' belongeth to the past!

I am dull and dispirited by a sense of weariness that has been upon me since my father's death. I have no power to shake it off—there is no alleviation from it. I feel no change yet, from my change of fortune; it is the old life with the old scenes passing before me, and its false calmness is deceptive.

There is little to wean my mind from the present. Celia is staying at an aunt's, fifty miles away, and does not return to gladden me, or give me brighter thoughts. I feel her absence keenly—it seems unnatural, and shrouded in some mystery. I write, and she replies—and her loving letter re-assures me,

and an interchange of notes becomes some compensation for her long, long sojourn in the West of England.

"She has been so shocked by your poor father's death," says Mrs. Silvernot, "that, for her health's sake, I was forced to send her from her native place."

Her health! I am content to wait until her return, for then will she not be well again? —and happiness and love, will they not come back with her?

There is a something, to which I cannot give a name, that steals upon me when I visit Wharnby House. It is not lack of kindly greeting—and yet the welcome jars. Mr. Silvernot calls me 'his dear Luke,' and shakes my hand for a considerable length of time; and Mrs. Silvernot is so charmed to see me, and so pressing for me to prolong my stay, and yet I am not at my ease, until the warm-hearted and impulsive rector makes his appearance, and rouses me from my depression. I set it down to Celia's absence—but am not satisfied. I attribute it to my own saddened feelings—but discontent and doubt still keep busy at my brain.

I call at Mrs. Redwin's one evening in the beginning of the February month, and find, to my astonishment, that her grandson, Paul, has been absent three weeks. Mrs. Redwin receives me coldly at first, then, her thin lips quiver, and she takes off her gold spectacles, and drops them on the table, and begins to cry.

She wipes her eyes, and makes an apology for her weakness.

"He has never left me, since he came home from school, for more than a whole day." she says, "and now he has gone to France again, and for pleasure, too—Oh! your wicked sister—oh! your wicked sister."

I look at the fire, and make no reply. The old lady wrings her hands, and continues—

"What a terrible change is in my dear, dear grandson! Before—before this unhappy engagement terminated, he was like a bird—so gay and free, and thoughtless. It was 'Agnes did this, and 'Agnes said that;' and that name was on his lips sixty times within the hour, at least. Then, he changed so suddenly—his handsome brave face became full of lines, and his darling eyes lost their merry sparkle; and

he would sit staring at this fire for hours, and sit brood, brood, brood, until I thought I should come in some morning and find him dead before it."

Another flood of tears, and she proceeds—

"Six months ago, it would have been my death blow, if he had said to me, 'Grandmother, I shall leave you for a few months, and go to Paris;' but when he did say so, I felt quite relieved. I knew it would do him so much good, the change. If he had only taken me with him, I should have been happy again. Heigho!"

"I trust the change may do my old friend good."

"Oh! I hope so, I am sure. I shall die if he comes back, full of care—he so young too!"

She cries once more, and reproaches my sister in her grief, and I have nothing to reply. She steals a glance at me, and becomes more composed.

"But I am very selfish in my sorrow," she says; "and you have lost a father, and yet come here to cheer up a poor woman. Paul is gone, but you take your seat in the old

place—and how kind and good it is of you, to be sure! When some of my dear grandson's friends called last week, and I told them he was gone to Paris, they said something about my health, and went away. But you are a very considerate young man, indeed. And Paul was fonder of you than all the rest too, dear Paul!"

Her grandson never leaves her thoughts; he mingles with every subject, and his name is the last word I hear, as after an hour's conversation, I take my departure homewards.

Agnes writes home to 'The Rest.' She has become resigned to her loss, and her aunt has persuaded her to accompany the family to Brighton.

Time passes onward — Spring — Summer. They talk of Celia's return—what a long stay it has been!

Agnes has written to her guardian a strange letter, and he tosses it to me, and asks for my advice.

It is expressive of a wish to remain with her aunt Boyington. Her ladyship has become so much attached to her, and she to her ladyship, and 'The Rest' would conjure up so

much unpleasant reminiscences, and be a source of so much unhappiness.

"I have no advice to give," I say in answer to his look.

"Nor I," he replies; "we know the strength of Agnes Elmore's *wishes* by this time. Let her have her way."

He writes the same night to that effect, and I sit and watch his rapid pen, and his unmoved marble face, from behind my book, and love him not for all his new friendliness towards me.

Edward is looking over some plans and reading letters from his banker, and there is not one ennobling thought upon his face.

I feel alone with them. They have no call upon my sympathy. At home, or far away, we are all divided—scattered threads that seem impossible ever to be gathered by mortal hand again in harmony of mind and place—in mind, from my brother Edward, who has no common aim with me—in place, from Gilbert, in his loneliness, and Agnes, in the splendour of her life.

CHAPTER II.

BITTERNESS.

In the early summer, Celia Silvernot came home.

It was with a conscious feeling of that happiness, born to me when I told my love, riding home from Cliverton, that I went to welcome back my betrothed to Wharnby House.

She was changed since I had seen her last; there was less bloom upon her cheeks, and the lustre in her eyes was somewhat dimmed.

"Home at last, dear Celia," I cried warmly.

"At last," she echoed with a faint smile.

"You are unwell; you have been very ill and kept it from me, Celia! Oh! why did you do that?"

"I have not been well, Luke," she said faintly, "but I am better now. You, too, are pale and looking haggard."

She seemed speaking under a restraint—she seemed mentally wrestling with some intention, and the tears were in her eyes once, when I chanced to look steadily and fixedly at her.

"Celia, you have something to tell me?"

"No, no, I have not!"

"Yes—I read a secret in your looks. Do you fear to place your trust in me?"

"I have — oh! another time — another time!"

She assumed more of her true manner, and I gave way to her intercession; and her parents and the rector joining us, the day went by without a solution to the mystery.

Not alone that day, but many others intervened, before the clue to this new riddle was given me to unravel. I thought of everything that might have its influence to work upon her health; I read something inexplicable on the face of Mrs. Silvernot, and an embarrassed stammering manner of the old gentleman's towards me; and there was a sinking

in my own breast each time I stood before them, as if I were fearful of some terrible disclosure.

The secret was betrayed, at last.

One morning I was shown into their state sitting-room—a room seldom used for ordinary occasions,—and left alone after the servant had muttered—

"Mrs. Silvernot will be with you immediately, Mr. Elmore."

I inclined my head to the domestic, and then pondered on the meaning of this stately reception, and wherfore it was used towards me. Had I offended them unintentionally? What did it all portend?

The room, notwithstanding its Indian vases, its girandoles and mirrors, its costly lace-work, and inlaid furniture, was cold and cheerless-looking; and I sat surrounded by its manifestations of luxury, a dark figure in my mourning.

The door opened, and Mrs. Silvernot came in.

She was a little agitated, and her hands were far from steady, and her slim figure shook slightly, as I rose to greet her.

"Be seated, Mr. Elmore—pray do not rise."

Mechanically I complied, keeping my eyes fixed searchingly upon her; and she drew a chair within a few paces of me, and dropped into it, and lay fluttering some minutes.

I made no effort to break the silence. I sat regarding her, my hat still in hand, in a posture of grave attention. The whole truth had come upon me. I read it on her face the moment she came with her swimming gait into the room. I was burning as with fever, and yet I kept my place, and waited for her explanation.

After two choking efforts, she commenced in a husky voice, that did but partially clear off during the whole period of our interview—

"You may have detected—that is—have seen, Mr. Elmore, a distant manner—that is, again, not hardly distant; but a manner, on *our* side, different from that which we have generally adopted towards so old a friend as yourself."

"Well, madam?"

My cold reply added to her embarrassment, and she made more than one effort to continue.

"It is but fair that you should require an explanation, and, as you have appeared to be perplexed at our demeanour, and not aware of—of—of—I beg pardon, I am sure."

"Let us pass to the main subject, Mrs. Silvernot; this I presume to be but preliminary."

"Ahem!" she recommenced, making an ineffectual attempt to clear her throat; "it is a painful topic, and I have to speak of it with deep regret, Mr. Elmore—with very deep regret indeed—ahem!"

Another pause.

"Mr. Elmore," she cried suddenly, "I am a mother. In a mother's hands is placed the care of her daughters by a merciful Providence, and on the mother rests all responsibility. I should not be acting a maternal part if I did not make them my first care. By Arabella I have done my duty, and, when it pleases the Ruler of the Universe, Mr. Elmore—when, I say again, it pleases the Ruler of the Universe—to call me to His account, no blame can attach to me for want of love concerning her."

"You mention care for Arabella, and a

mother's love for her, as if that care and love were wanting for your younger daughter, or as if you had not exercised those attributes so strictly or so justly in Celia's case. I am following your meaning, Mrs. Silvernot?"

"Partly, sir—partly," she said, the flowers in her cap shaking with mild indignation at my interruption; "I should not be acting like a mother, were I to be less watchful and considerate. Now a mother's first care, when the daughter is a woman, is to see her affections properly engaged—to see that they are not misplaced, and that the object of her attachment can support her in that station of life to which she has been habituated from her childhood. When you honoured her by proposals for her hand, there were natural expectations of it being a suitable match, and I freely accorded my consent. Your father's Will has, in a most extraordinary manner, dashed those expectations to the ground. Three hundred a-year is but a poor income, if you consider it well, Mr. Elmore. You must give up horses, carriages, servants, and your own good sense will tell you what establishment so small an annuity can maintain. I am

sorry—I am grieved—I am very grieved! It is painful to make such a statement, and I had hoped that you would, of your own free will, have resigned your claim upon her, without subjecting yourself to this cruel explanation—cruel both to your feelings and to mine."

"For this reason, Celia was kept away so long, madam?"

"It was best."

"Madam," said I, rising, "I cannot give you an answer till I have seen your daughter. If she wish it—if she ask it of me—I will throw aside all my hopes, and let them wither in my sight. But she is pledged to me of her own word, and I will have her ask *me* to cancel this engagement, with the lips that granted a consent to it."

"Things were so different when she accepted you."

"Mrs. Silvernot," said I, looking upon her in her chair with blazing eyes, "this difference between the present and the past is not considered by that Ruler of the Universe you study, or has one atom's weight in the scale which turns against me. 'Horses, carriages,

servants', were not my consideration when I sought your daughter's hand. It was my love for her, madam—the strength of ardour that years had matured within my breast—that made me seek her, and that has but ripened to bear fruit like this! Three hundred pounds will not keep those appurtenances of rank, but they would have supported a quiet, happy home, and left us nothing to regret; her affection would have looked beyond the trappings of the rich, and set no store by them. Our valuation would have been of the heart, and, if we had been content, God would have blessed us, and a loving mother could have wished no more. Nay, if such wish came, I am not helpless or bedridden—I have a brain to work, have great friends, who might have pointed out the way and aided me; and England has many offices that a gentleman can fill."

"Things were so different," she feebly murmured. She sat trembling violently beneath the torrent of indignant words poured forth and had but that old worldly reply to summon in extenuation.

"Mr. Silvernot is aware of your desire—of course?"

"Most certainly."

"And the rector?"

"Yes."

"They both think and agree with you, madam?"

"My son has no voice in the matter, Mr. Elmore — he cannot enter into the delicate points of so sensitive a question."

"He preaches humility," I answered between my set teeth.

"I have talked to Celia. She is a good dutiful girl, and has been brought up to honour and obey me, and I have no fear for her; she will give her consent to annul this unfortunate engagement for her mother's sake—her family's."

"For all but mine!"

"Dear Mr. Elmore," said she in a more conciliatory tone; "I should have been proud of a son-in-law, in you. I looked forward to it—indeed I did."

She rose and extended her hand towards me as if to conclude all further argument, and there was a self-satisfaction in her smile which gave way to a blank expression on her face, when I said firmly:—

"I will see Miss Silvernot."

"Mr Elmore—I hope and trust——"

"I will see Miss Silvernot in your presence if it please you, or without it, if you have compassion for me; but in either case, I quit not Wharnby Honse without a word of parting."

"It is impossible. Her health—her——"

"Spare me your excuses—their evasiveness will avail you nothing," I said; "see her I must, and will."

I flung myself heavily into the chair again, crossed my arms upon my heaving chest and looked defiance at her.

She made one more appeal, to which I turned a deaf ear; she laid her hand beseechingly upon my arm but I shook it off with an indignant cry, and pointed to the door.

She went out slowly, and closed it after her.

When I was alone, all the stifled emotion that had been so long pent up, burst forth, and I sprang from my seat and paced the room, and dashed my clenched hand in my face, and struck the table till the vases and glass-shades clattered on the mantel-shelf and

brackets. I had lost all command over reason—I was beyond self-control—I was maddened by the humiliations I had suffered. No indignity could have so abased me, and lowered me in my own eyes. I felt my pride —that Elmore pride, which was so stubborn and unyielding—stung and aroused, and overpowering my mind. Half-an-hour, and still alone. I grasped the silken bell-rope dangling from the wall, and rang a summons through the house.

A servant made his appearance.

"Will you inform Miss Silvernot that I am waiting?"

"Yes, sir."

Alone, and silence deeper than before. I walked to the window, and looked out at the quiet landscape, so bright and fresh that summer morning, and at the rippling blue sea, stretching far beyond, and glittering in the suns rays—its air of peace and beauty so great a contrast to my angry soul. There were two men walking on the distant road, and their faces were towards me. Two homely labourers, who looked happy, and yet who were trudging along barefooted, and in search

of work—and from the cornfields, deep among the golden grain, that swayed in the gentle breeze, came the merry laughter of young maidens—sweet music borne to my ears, a melody of joy.

I turned away—I could not gaze longer into the light and sunshine—its radiance was blinding me.

She came not. The gilded time-piece struck the hour, and I was still desolate. She would not come, though I was parting from her for ever—although I might never see her more!

I rang again, and the servant re-appeared.

"Did you deliver my message to Miss Silvernot?"

"Yes, sir."

"And she ——?"

"Miss Silvernot is with her mother, Mr. Elmore," he said, looking dubiously at me.

"What answer were you requested to deliver?" I asked, sharply.

"Not—not any, sir—Miss Sil——"

"Not any! You can go."

The door was closed, and I was shut in once more with my loneliness. I felt that all was lost, and that the flowers of my heart

were broken, torn, and trailing at my feet, and that no bud or blossom would ever come again! I felt it in her fear of meeting me, and her avoidance of my entreaties and my prayers: there was a tacit acknowledgement in this keeping from my sight. My rage, and the hot turmoil of my passion, subsided, and in their place came such a perception of utter misery, and over which was drawn the thick, heavy folds of my despair, concealing the murder of my love, stabbed to its death, before the altar of its worship.

I looked round the room with a dark, troubled gaze.

"Not worth a word—not worth a word!"

The time-piece arrested my eye, supported by its carved wreath and group of Loves.

"I will give her half an hour more."

Slowly, painfully it passed away, and the silver bell struck once to note the progress of the hand upon the dial.

"Never to enter this house again, or of my will to meet its inmates, or seek a friendship begun in an old time and ended here; I swear to God!"

With the dark, troubled look more settled

on my face, I raised my hand to heaven to bear witness to my oath, and then passed out.

Through the passages to the hall door, my feet echoing on the marble pavement; into the light of heaven, and beneath its blazing sun, I went upon my way.

CHAPTER III.

FEVER VISIONS.

WELL could I understand that maddening disquietude inimical to old habits and associations, that had drawn Paul Redwin from his home and hurried him to Paris, seeking forgetfulness in the vortex, whirling far away! When we lose a great faith we have had, or find deception in that which we have trusted without dreaming of suspicion, what a deep wound it makes, and what a scar is ever left upon our retrospection! Hast thou not, reader, felt a strange yearning for universal change after some great affliction that has crushed thee with its fall? or art thou some fortune's favourite, who hast known nothing of life's sorrows, and whose petty troubles have

been written upon rose-leaves, and whose minor cares have not added one wrinkle to the brow? Amongst the many suffering, there may be, here and there, scattered like jewels in the mine, some such envied beings, whose guardian angel's wings have been ever spread before them, keeping aloof the Vultures of the Mind. I am not understood by those—it must be experience not imagination that can follow out the train of horrors that hold all things familiar to the eye in an abhorrence, and as something desirable to be shunned and shut out from the light.

Wharnby, for the time, became hateful to my memory. It was a desert strewn with dead aspirations, and I panted to be gone and quit of it. I had ridden along this road with Celia. I had strayed in happier times down that green foot-path, where the trees met over head, and interlaced their branches, and made beneath a lovers' walk, and where amongst the rustling leaves the birds were ever singing. There was not a spot but which had its story for me, and which was cruel satire now.

I must leave Wharnby. There was but that resource. 'The Rest' was loathsome to my

sight—the rolling sea beyond its boundaries, seemed in its restless turmoil, to mimic the agitation at my brain—and strangers whom I met upon the high-road, or passed upon the cliffs, gazed anxiously at my face, and stopped and looked back after me.

I was harassed by the desire to leave Wharnby, and deterred by that letter written from one dead. It was his dying wish—it spoke from the grave—it accused me each hour of my life, and I dared not go.

That I was bound to 'The Rest' for an entire existence, was a too frightful thought—that Vaudon and my brother Edward, were doomed to be ever my companions—the sceptic and the miser,—both cold and grave, and solemn, and each an antithesis to my burning youth.

Three days after the blow, the rector came to 'The Rest.' The servant brought up his card to me, in my own room.

The very name of Silvernot made the glow of shame and wounded pride, mantle over my face.

"I am not well. I am engaged."

"Sir?" cried the servant, half-doubting my reply.

"I decline to see Mr. Silvernot—give what answer pleases you best, and leave the room."

A few minutes had elapsed, when Jacques Vaudon stood before me.

"What has happened, Luke? You decline to see the rector—your friend and earthly counsellor, and heavenly teacher—strange."

I saw by his curling lip, and mocking eyes he knew my secret, or that the rector had informed him of some portion of it.

"I wish to be alone."

"Brood not on irreparable misfortune—'tis the wisdom of the slave. Come with me."

"No, leave me."

He was gone, and I could breathe freer in his absence. Presently he came again.

"The rector makes a last entreaty. He begs that you will see him. I can hardly restrain his *impulse*"—with a sneer, "from prompting him to force his way into your presence."

"I have done with the Silvernots," I cried, "I know them not—each one is a stranger to me, from this time. Tell him that he has mistaken his object in this visit—that I am a *poor* man, that my *carriage*, *horses*, *servants*

are all confiscated, and I stand lower in the world's opinion. There is nothing to be gained by my friendship now."

"Timon of Athens, I will do your bidding."

When he had once more left me, a pang of sharp remorse, smote me for my conduct to the rector—he had been so old and true a friend; *he* had not embittered my existence, or stood between me and my only love,—had not his selfish mother even acknowledged that?

I paused—strode forward—hesitated—advanced again—*the door closed!*

I returned to my old position, and he rode away from 'The Rest.'

"It matters not," I murmured, "if I have offended him—we shall not meet again; and oblivion will soon erase the traces of the wound. Better to lose sight of every face that reminds me of my utter misery—better to die and be buried in my father's grave!"

Oh! fatal hour, in which I refused to see that valued friend! Oh, hour! when the last red spark went out, and the gates of hope were barred against me ever more!

"Again here?"

For the third time, Jacques Vaudon obtruded on my reveries.

"An unwelcome greeting, Luke!" he said, in his deep, hollow voice—"but we are acquainted with each other too well, to stand upon much ceremony, or take umbrage at a slight offence. So the engagement is broken off?"

"I require no comment upon it," I said, quickly.

"I will make none," replied Vaudon.

"Then leave me to myself—I am sick and ill."

"Luke Elmore!" said Vaudon, in an impressive tone—"there have been differences between us, and you have shunned me often, and looked upon me with an eye of hate. I will not speak of your injustice, or of my wish to be your friend. I will offer you my advice—my help."

"I ask for neither."

"I will give——"

"Stay!" I interrupted—"offer me not the patronage of your support, Jacques Vaudon! I have inherited my father's pride."

"You are an enigma, Luke," said Vaudon, unmoved by my vehemence; "but I am your friend, for all that credulous curl of the lip. You are ill—wearied. Go to London."

"Ha! London!"—I looked up more eagerly.

He noted my roused attention, and continued—

"If you do not have change, you will sink into an idiot; there are all the symptoms in full force," pointing to me. "Let not the Silvernots pity as well as despise you. Go, and look after Agnes—and return when it pleases you."

"I will think of it, Vaudon."

"Has your faith in woman's love—love, pure and disinterested—been shaken since your disappointment; or is your imaginary idol still fixed, and strong, and waiting for your self-abasement?"

"Ask me not!" I cried—"I am not myself in thought or heart. For the love of Heaven, leave me! I cannot think or reason."

The same night I was helpless on my couch. The fever I had had when a boy was once more my fearful visitant; and night and day I writhed upon my bed of fire, and raved of old times and incidents and hopes. The music clashed around me as of yore, or died

in waves of melody, and mingled with the waves of the sea without; and the Figure—that dark Figure, spectral and grim and deathly!—sat ever by my bedside, wrapped in its sable garments, and its face turned from me. It was there when Vaudon, or my brother, or the doctor came into the room, and I pointed to it, and prayed them all to drag it from my sight; but still it cowered near me—and they but looked at each other, and then at me, and shook their heads.

There came another vision in my delirium. Waking from a sleep of horror, methought the face of Celia was bending over me, and tears were falling on me as I lay. I tried to rise up in my bed, but could not—I essayed to call her by her name, and she held up her hand as if commanding silence—I heard, plain as reality, a well-known voice bidding her come away, and then she vanished, slowly, slowly, from my yearning gaze, and the figure came once more, and took its place of watch.

That face of beauty, pale and changed, as though with some heavy sorrow, was so impressed upon me, that when I recovered consciousness, I cried to Vaudon—

"She has been here!"

"She—who?"

"Celia—Miss Silvernot."

"You are wandering still, Luke."

"I saw her—she stood here, and looked at me. Oh! Vaudon, say she came!"

"I hoped to find you better to-day—Dr. Whittaker spoke confidently," he said, half aloud; "is it possible she would have come to 'The Rest,' or thought of coming, Luke? There, sleep."

"Possible! Oh! no."

I buried my hot head in the pillows with a stifled groan. What should she care for me?

It was a girl's fancy, not a woman's love—she was led on and urged, and I alone was the victim!

I grew better. The fever seemed to have been more intense, although of less duration, than the illness of my boyhood, and within a fortnight I could leave my couch, and sit pillowed in my chair by the open window, and feel the fresh and scented air upon my temples.

Dr. Whittaker proposed change.

"There is nothing like change of air, Mr.

Elmore. Your mind requires diversion—try London."

London again—it was every one's advice, and my own desire led in that direction.

London! I might see Gilbert there—might meet him, and share his home—his hearth—and be his brother. What had I to induce me ever to come back to Wharnby? —Paul Redwin and my brother Edward.

The first was away, and might never return—and the second would not miss me.

'London will offer no temptations now, for your income will not suffice to keep you in your ancient splendour.'

He had never said 'stay,' and it was not pleasure that could tempt me; and my income would not suffice to mingle with those of my own station in life, and in Wharnby was a living burial.

So, I would go. It was determined. Alone, unattended, even by my groom, I had resolved to depart.

The night before my departure, I took my farewell of Edward and Jacques Vaudon.

"Do you intend to start early in the morning, Luke?" asked Vaudon.

"Soon after sunrise."

"You are eager to be gone," said Edward; "there must be something very attractive in the great city. I have no doubt we shall meet within it."

"Meet within it!" cried I; "you do not intend a visit to London, Edward?"

"Perhaps," replied Edward; "if my guardian will permit me?"

Vaudon inclined his head in acquiescence, and then said to me:

"When shall we welcome back the prodigal to 'The Rest?' "

"I do not know," I answered; "I have no scheme upon which I am resolved. I am eager for a busy life — for some honourable occupation that will keep my mind engaged."

"Can I offer you my help?" said Vaudon; "I have many friends whose influence may be of service to you."

"I thank you, but——."

"But you would be independent," said Vaudon, marking my hesitation; "well it is best."

His thick eyebrows lowered for a moment, then the austere look passed off.

Before I left them in the sitting-room, he extended his hand towards me, saying :—

"Good-bye. We have not been great friends since I came to 'The Rest," but let all enmity cease with our parting."

I took the hand passively in mine; I felt the protestations of his service and the frankness of his concluding words were false and hollow, and I never saw him standing before me, or heard the deep reverberating tones of his voice, without Gilbert, pale and care-worn as I had seen him last, rising up beside him, and keeping back all communion with my father's friend.

After shaking hands with Edward more cordially and frankly, I went to my room, and throwing up the window, sat before it, my elbow on the sill, my chin clenched between my hands, and mused upon my journey till the clock of Wharnby church struck one, in the distance.

In the morning, ere Vaudon and Edward had descended from their rooms, I was standing at the lodge gates, looking back upon 'The Rest,' with old Johnson whimpering by my side.

"It's hard to see the young masters go

away like this," he said, wiping his left eye with the back of his horny hand; "but you will soon be back, I hope, Mr. Luke."

"It may be many years, Johnson," I answered; "many long years."

"Then I shan't see you any more, sir," said he; "for I'm nigh upon ninety now, and every winter makes me more ailing like. Ah! me."

Still further on my way. A thought struck me as I wandered by the cliffs. It was a duty to give Edward my best counsel before I left my home, and to have warned him against too great a trust in Vaudon. Then came the conviction of his stubborn mind, and how vain would have been my endeavours to make impression on it—this twin brother of my sister Agnes.

How each offspring of the Elmores, though distinct in temperament and inclination and pursuit, was firm of purpose and of obdurate will! Would it have been better had they been less led by their own wishes and promptings? Who can tell?

Into the churchyard, and standing bareheaded by my father's grave.

"Not in wilful disobedience to thy last requests, or for a love of that world of which thou falsely dreamed thy son a devotee, leave I my home behind."

One prayer over the grave—one look at the sculptured tablet with his name and age, and then I pass out of the churchyard, and close the wicket-gate upon his 'Rest.'

* * * *

In the starless night I still can see the figure leading onwards with its extended arm.

I hear the roar of a great world—the hum of a giant hive of human souls, and near me rise spires and pinnacles, cathedral tops and house roofs, crowded in one mass, and part of the darkness in which I am enshrouded, and yet looming from it in appalling density.

I listen. From church spires and domes, there ring peal on peal of marriage bells—clanging their metal tongues discordantly, and sounding dismally—not joyfully—from out the darkness.

Ring on! My heart is heavy—my spirit crushed beneath an iron heel—there is no harmony in marriage bells for me!

Ring on!—ring on! The mountain side

gives echo to the jarring, clashing peals; and to the thrilling voices of the bells I follow my silent guide, and the gates of the great city are thrown back, and noiselessly we enter.

END OF VOL. II.

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