A Lucky Disappointment

BY

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"The Master Passion"
"Captain Norton's Diary"
"Petronel" etc.

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CHAPTER I.

"Well, then, mother, is it to be or not to be?"

"If you take my advice, Laura, it will not be; not, that is to say, until Charles Hamilton is able to return to England and claim you, in person, for his wife."

"Then I may as well break off my engagement with him at once," I answered, impetuously, tapping the table before which I stood with the paper I held in my hand.

"You have heard what he says in this letter: that he is so tied by the duties of his business that it is impossible he can leave it to fetch me himself, and that if I will not consent—or, rather, if you will not consent that I shall join him at the Cape of Good Hope, our marriage must be indefinitely postponed. And, considering we have now been engaged and separated for six years, the case is, to say the least of it, a hard one."

I spoke quickly, for I was an only daughter, who had been allowed to have pretty much my own way, and to speak and act as I chose; and on this subject I both thought and felt very deeply.

"Laura, my child," responded the calm voice of my mother (my mother never spoke otherwise than calmly and quietly to me), "you are of age; you must decide this
matter for yourself. Only, since you ask my opinion, I
must say that I consider the fact of your having been sepa­
rated from young Hamilton for six years makes the pro­
posal of your going out to him, instead of his coming home
for you, still more objectionable."

"I shall go to his mother's house," I answered, briefly.

"True; but you must remember that we know nothing
of his family, nor on what terms they are likely to receive
you. In my eyes, it appears you will be running a great
risk in acceding to this proposal."

"But at all events I know enough of Charles," I said,
dignantly, as I pressed my hand upon a locket contain­
ing my lover's portrait, which I wore about the region of
my heart, with rather more ostentation than was neces­
sary. "One would think, mother, to hear you talk, that
I was going out to marry a perfect stranger."

My mother sighed. Perhaps it occurred to her how
ready I seemed to exchange my quiet home, where affec­
tion had been lavished on me, for the uncertain pleasures
of a life of matrimony.

"You knew him six years ago, dear Laura, when you
were a girl of seventeen, and he a youth of twenty—a prom­
ising youth, I admit—but it's very unlikely that what he
was then, he is now; or that the last six years have not
made as much alteration in his mind as they have doubt­
less done in his body. You must not expect to meet the
same Charles with whom you parted, Laura."

"Of course not," I answered, with a certain amount of
contempt; "who ever thought I should. He will be much
bigger and browner and more manly looking; and his
beard and mustache will make all the difference in the world in him. But he will only be so much the handsomer, mother, for the change."

"I hope so, darling; I hope that all may turn out just as you anticipate. But don't decide too hastily, Laura; take time for thought, my child; for when once you have put your hand to the plow there will be no turning back."

I left the room and sought my own apartment.

My mother's depreciating way of alluding to my prospects nettled me no less than her words. What was there in the marriage before me with which to find fault?

It was true that I had been separated from my future husband for the space of six years. Six years before, in that same little village of Langley, where I lived all my life, Charles Hamilton had asked me if I would wait for him until he should be rich enough to return to England and make me his wife.

He had been a blue-eyed, light-hearted boy in these days, who had been sent home from the Cape for the purpose of studying agriculture, and placed under the tuition of a farmer in the neighborhood of our house.

Farmer Cross had no control over the actions of his gentlemen pupil, and so it had come to pass that, from forming our acquaintance, he was always at my mother's cottage, and ended by making love to myself.

My poor mother was in a dreadful state when she found that it had come to an engagement between us; and, in her anxiety to do right, had consulted every one in the village on the subject, from the clergyman down to our own domestic.
And every one's opinion appears to have been the same: that we were such a mere boy and girl that nothing could ever come of the engagement, and, left alone, it would die a natural death; particularly as separation was one of the ordeals it must inevitably undergo. But these good people do not calculate the fact that, when no counter-influences are brought upon the field of action, separation has not always the salutary effect upon which they reckon.

Charles's subsequent life at the Cape and mine at Langley had been much the same in this respect. We had neither of us been brought in contact with persons who were likely to fascinate us more than each other; and the end of our six years found us, apparently, as devoted as we had been on parting. We had corresponded liberally, and the accounts he had sent me of the country of his adoption had fired me with desire to see its beauties for myself. I had passed too quiet an existence to be good for any one. My life at Langley had been monotonous in its dull tranquillity, and, being naturally of a curious and ambitious spirit, I thirsted to leave it for new scenes. I was young, my life was all before me, and I scarcely considered what it would be to my poor mother to be left alone in her old age—her only daughter settled in a foreign land. For though I had brothers, they were all out in life, and living at some distance from Langley, I being the youngest of the family.

Of Charles Hamilton's people, as my mother had observed, we knew nothing. His father had married young, and gone out to the Cape of Good Hope, where he had embarked in the wine trade; and Charles himself was the
only one of the brothers who had been sent to England for the purposes of education. But he had written me flourishing accounts of his mother and sisters; of the gayety of their society, and the beauty of their house and gardens. And what woman in love (or supposing herself to be) ever felt disposed to condemn unheard the connections which she hoped to make her own?

So that I was very positive that Charles's mother would be almost as dear to me as my own, and that his sister would amply supply the companionship, the want of which I had felt from childhood.

When I was once more by myself I pulled out my lover's portrait and examined it. Not but that every line of the portrayed features was as familiar to me as if I had painted them; but that I wished to look at them, as it were, in a new light, and to try and picture, not what they were, but what they had become. It was a fair, frank face which the locket disclosed to my view; not very spirited or brilliant perhaps, but mild and good-tempered looking, and with light hair and blue eyes, which had no more character in them than those possessed by hundreds of English boys. But my heart and will supplied all that was deficient in my treasured portrait; photographs were always unflattering, I argued, to myself; besides, Charley was certain to have changed greatly during the years of our separation.

And then I drew in fancy the figure of a tall, athletic man (boys always grew immensely at that age, I silently decided), with fine, bronzed features, heavy mustache, and a glorious beard (for my fiancé had casually announced the possession of such an appendage), and grew quite eager
to meet the ideal I had raised, as I thought how proud I
should be to call myself his wife.

My lover's letter had been accompanied by one from his
father to my mother, written certainly in a less eager
strain, but in which the old gentleman plainly seconded his
son's proposition that I should join them at the Cape; and
gravely informed us that it was impossible that Charles
could be spared from the business for several years to come.

After a few days' consideration, it was finally settled
that I should go. I had worried my mother into giving
her consent, not so much by actual words, as by showing
her how much I should suffer a contrary decision to affect
my spirits and behavior toward herself. My brothers were
against my being allowed to take the step; but I was all in
all to my mother, and her sons' wishes were as nothing
compared to mine. The more shame to me that I could
have had the heart to leave her home for that of strangers.

However, as soon as the matter was settled, my simple
outfit was procured, and in the course of another couple of
months I found myself on board "The Earl of Winstan-
ley," and bound for the Cape of Good Hope.

To affirm that I did not suffer in leaving my home, and
separating from my own friends, would be to make myself
out worse than I really was. For weeks before I sailed,
my rest by night, and peace of mind by day, were dis-
turbed by the thoughts of the coming parting, and when I
had finally said "good-bye," and felt that, at least, it
must be years before I met my mother and brothers again,
I experienced the deepest distress, and for some hours
wished that I had taken their advice, and never consented
to make the voyage by myself. But a little while sufficed
to shake off my despondency, and restore me to my usual
spirits. Hope was strong within me; I argued that all
women in the event of marriage had to undergo the pain
of separation from their friends, and my term of absence
would probably be no more than if I had settled in any of
the remoter districts of Scotland or Wales. Consoling my-
self with this idea, I tried to banish every unpleasant
thought, and to make myself agreeable to my fellow-pas-
sengers. But here an annoyance arose for which I was
quite unprepared. My mother had known of no lady jour-
neying to the Cape; and, although I had reached the
mature age of twenty-three, it was not considered right
that I should travel without proper chaperonage. I was
placed, therefore, under the charge of the wife of the cap-
tain of the vessel, who accompanied him, and whom I soon
found to be as curious on the subject of the reason of my
voyage as the other females on board. Was I going out as
a governess, companion, or lady’s-maid? or was it merely
on “spec”? They did not ask me these questions in so
many words, but so vigilantly did they watch, and so con-
tinuously did they probe me, that my life was soon ren-
dered quite wretched by their impertinence. I did not
quite like to confess the purpose of my journey; it had
seemed all right, and just as it should be, when I had dis-
cussed the prospect of it with my friends at home; and yet
I felt shy of mentioning it before strangers. But I found
the suppositions they continually raised were worse to bear.
At last I summoned courage to say that I was going out to
be married, and had the satisfaction of hearing my news
greeted with just such a tirade of modest surprise as I had anticipated. It is so easy to be shocked at the expense of one’s friends. Just, however, as the various queries, such as “Was it not rather an unusual proceeding?” and “Did I not feel very uncomfortable at the idea of landing alone?” were making my cheeks burn, the remark of a lady who was returning to the Cape after a twelvemonths’ absence tended greatly to reassure and please me.

“Mr. Hamilton, did you say, Miss Grey?—the son of Mr. Hamilton of Rosenwalt? Well, you are a lucky girl! Why, he is considered the handsomest young man in Cape Town!”

So it was true, then; I had not deceived myself, as my poor mother feared, and Charles had developed into all I had prognosticated. I held my head higher after I had heard this lady’s opinion of my fiancé, and the rest of the females on board ceased to annoy and learned to envy me.

“The Earl of Winstanley” made a fine run to the Cape, and within two months of our leaving England we arrived in Table Bay. It was late in the evening that we anchored, and as soon as ever the day dawned, boats began pulling off from the shore to the ship, and the greatest excitement prevailed on board. The women donned their most becoming dresses, for all intended to land, whether they remained at the Cape or not. For my part I brushed my hair back, and let it flow loose, in the manner in which Charles Hamilton had liked to see it; and then, attiring myself in a simple fresh toilet, which I had reserved for the occasion, took my seat on deck, and watched eagerly for the arrival of my lover. The ship lay sufficiently close
in shore to permit me to watch the bustling activity which prevailed upon the quay, and to perceive part of the quaint fashion of the old town, half Dutch, half English, of which I was so soon to become a member. The sights also which were to be seen around the vessel’s side: the boats oared by rows of grinning black faces; the sellers of fruits and vegetables, of ostrich eggs and feathers and "karosses;" the washerwomen standing up in their swaying barks, and clamoring for our clothes—were all sufficiently novel to attract my notice and claim my interest, had I any to spare for them. But I was totally absorbed in my expectation, my certainty, rather, of seeing Charles Hamilton. I turned my eyes away from all else to strain them toward the shore, from which I only waited to see him embark. I felt perfectly sure that he would come to meet me himself, and I had made my anticipations patent to all my companions.

"Not fetched yet, Miss Grey?" inquired one or two of them, with malicious pity, as they were themselves lowered into the boats waiting to convey them on shore, until I began to feel annoyed at their remarks, and almost ready to cry at the delay. As I sat there, shading my face from observation with my parasol, a little, thin, gray-haired man, whom I had seen ascending the ship’s side a short time before, approached me with a bow.

"Miss Grey, I believe?"

"Yes," I answered, wondering what he wanted with me.

"I have a boat waiting, miss, ready to convey you on shore. If you have any box you wish to take with you,
please to let me know where it is. The rest of your luggage will be landed this evening.”

“But—who are you?” I stammered.

“My name is Browne, miss, at your service. I am the steward of Mr. Hamilton’s plantation at Rosenwalt. I have come, by master’s orders, to take you on shore.”

“Isn’t Charles—isn’t Mr. Hamilton well?” I asked. I could not imagine that he would have permitted anything but sickness to prevent his welcoming me himself. The steward was evidently quite aware of the connection about to be established between us.

“Mr. Charles is quite well, I believe, miss; he was compelled to make a short journey up-country on business last week, but we expect him home to-morrow, or the next day at the latest.”

I was greatly disappointed. When one has been expecting a desired event to take place momentarily, the certain delay of a few hours or days appears like an age in prospect. With the knowledge that my lover was not even in Cape Town, all the bright hopes I had been picturing seemed to fade in a moment. But I tried to reason myself out of my folly, and, by the time the old man had placed the articles I had desired to take with me in the boat, had regained my equanimity, if not my cheerfulness.

Landing in the country, each feature of which was entirely new to me, was sufficiently exciting to banish for awhile every other thought. I was charmed with the novel appearance of the quay, and its dark porters; with the avenue of limes, beneath which we walked up to the hotel; with the hotel itself, built like an English house, but on
the raised path-way—outside which, benches and little tables for such as chose to rest and drink, faced by six stiff trees cut formally short, gave it all the look of a Dutch hostelry. By the time we had arrived at the inn it was eleven o’clock, and the steward, who had a carriage in waiting, intimated to me that it had been arranged I should take my breakfast there before proceeding further.

This announcement much astonished me, as, from my lover’s description, I had always understood that his father’s estate of Rosenwalt stood at no great distance from Cape Town.

“Rosenwalt! true,” replied Browne, when I hinted as much to him; “but my orders, miss, were to take you to Rhineberg.”

I stared in amazement. I knew that Rhineberg was the residence of Mrs. Ransom, Charles’s married sister; but why I was to go to her house instead of that of my future father-in-law I could not imagine.

“You must be mistaken!” I exclaimed. “It was always arranged that I was to stay with Mrs. Hamilton.”

“I don’t think I am, miss,” he replied; “but there’s a note for you in the pocket of the carriage, which, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll go and fetch.”

In a few minutes he returned and put a letter in my hand, the contents of which ran thus:

“My dear Miss Grey,—As my mother is easily fatigued, and unequal to the exertion of bearing any unnecessary trouble, we have decided that it is best that the marriage should take place from Rhineberg, instead of
Rosenwalt. Browne has received orders, therefore, to bring you here at once.

"Believe me, yours sincerely,

"Louise Ransom."

That was all. Not a line of welcome; not a word to say that they anticipated the connection with pleasure, or that they were glad to know that I had reached their home in safety.

I felt that the fact of my place of destination having been transferred from Rosenwalt to Rhineberg, without asking my consent, was no compliment; it was even a breach of the promise made by letter to my mother, in which Mr. Hamilton had said that if she would consent to my joining his son at the Cape, we should be married from his own roof; but I could have overlooked and forgiven that, had there been a word of affection to mitigate the disappointment and the sense of slight which it engendered.

As it was, I felt not only affronted, but hurt; I was alone in the hotel when I read the note, and, for a few minutes, remembering my lonely condition and how I had placed myself in the power of the Hamiltons, I wept bitterly.

But soon pride, coming to my aid, enabled me to master my feelings. It would not do to let the dependents of the household know that I was wounded. So I dried my eyes quickly, and, calling the steward, desired him to order my breakfast at once, as I was hungry. Had my mind been occupied with less unpleasant thoughts, I must have greatly enjoyed the first Cape meal, for I had never tasted such a
variety of dishes in my life before, nor seen so many placed upon the table at one time. As it was, however, I was too excited to eat otherwise than sparingly; and before long I found myself upon the road to Rhineberg.

CHAPTER II.

As the carriage bearing my sorrowful self rolled through Cape Town on its way to the country, I perceived that trees were liberally intermixed with the shops and houses of which the former was composed, giving it much the appearance of an old-fashioned market town at home, to which the raised path-ways, guarded by wooden posts and swinging chains, contributed their share. We passed several large and handsome buildings, and out of one, a church, there issued a long procession of men and women, dressed in every color of the rainbow, which Browne, turning round from the coach-box, informed me was a Dutch wedding. But as soon as we had left the streets behind us, the scene changed to one of far greater interest, and I was lost in admiration of the various plantations we passed, and the many trees and flowers which I had never seen, and hardly heard of before. Patches of bright scarlet cacti and purple geraniums, lining the banks on either side the road, were smothered with dust from the revolving wheels of our conveyance, whilst among the hedges I could perceive a tangled mass of unpruned roses and Cape jasmine, clinging to and smothering one another.

A love of nature was one of the most marked qualities of
my disposition, and I could hardly persuade myself to sit quietly in the carriage and pass by so much that was new and attractive to me. So great was my admiration and delight, that for awhile it had the power to banish the unpleasant thoughts which had possessed me until then; but as the carriage, after about an hour's drive, turned off the main road and commenced to traverse a beautiful avenue, above which the branching foliage nearly met, and which Browne informed me was the approach to Rhineberg, they returned in full force. The avenue was more than a quarter of a mile in length, and before we had reached the large white house, built somewhat in the Italian style, with wide verandas, and glass windows to the ground, I had worked myself up into a fever of expectation and suspense.

It had plenty of time to cool. The servant who received me at the open hall-door ushered me into a drawing-room, large enough to have been a ball-room, and as empty as a ball-room by daylight. It looked cool and pleasant enough, with its matted floors and cane-work sofas and chairs, but it might have been Pandemonium itself for aught I knew to the contrary.

Gorgeous tropical creepers clustered about the light pillars of the veranda, and their scarlet and orange and purple blossoms peeped in at the open window. A long silky-haired dog, with large eyes and a diminutive nose, of which I had never seen the like before, but which I afterward learned was a native of Java, advanced to attract my notice, and two dark-eyed children, with bare feet and very scanty attire, came and stared in my face, and uttered some words in an unknown tongue to me; but I felt no in-
clination to admire or speak to any of them. My heart was throbbing loudly under a sense of neglect, and I said to myself more than once that, had Charles been at home, he would not have permitted such slight to be shown me. For nearly half an hour was I left alone in the drawing-room of Rhineberg, and though a servant did enter during that time, and silently place a tray with wine and fruit and biscuits before me, I took no notice of either him or it, and the little children had rifled the dishes and decamped with their booty before I had realized what they were about.

At the end of that space, however, approaching footsteps were shortly followed by the entrance of Mrs. Ransom—a fine specimen of what are vulgarly termed "Cape fillies," being fair and blue-eyed, but unusually stout for a woman of five-and-twenty.

She advanced toward me in the coolest manner; and whilst she was offering the apologies for her delay which would have been due to the most ordinary visitor, was evidently making good use of her sight in scanning every particular of my personal appearance.

"I suppose Browne told you that my brother is not here?" she said, as she examined the spotted muslin which I wore, and thence let her eyes rove upward toward my gray straw hat and feather. "He may be home to-night or to-morrow, or the next day; it is impossible to determine; but his business is sure not to detain him long."

"I suppose he scarcely expected the "Earl of Winstanley" to arrive so soon?" I said, with an attempt to excuse his absence.

"Whether or no, he could not have delayed his jour-
ney," replied Mrs. Ransom. "Everything must give way to business. But he is sure to be back in a day or two, and I suppose you can manage to survive so long without him."

The last words were said in a tone which nettled me to reply:

"Having survived very well without him for six years, perhaps I may."

Mrs. Ransom evidently did not like the coolness of my answer, for she rejoined rather quickly:

"Oh! I naturally concluded you were anxious to meet him; but perhaps it is just as well you should be philosophical in the matter, for Charles's wife must not expect to have him with her always. And now perhaps you will like to be shown to your room."

I did not like to say anything at that moment to Mrs. Ransom about the change which had been made in my plans for me. I felt too sore upon the subject, and did not think I could discuss it calmly. I therefore deferred the mentioning it to a future period. But when, after the lapse of an hour, spent by myself, I returned to the sitting-room, and found the party augmented by the presence of my future mother and sisters-in-law, who had come to lunch at Rhineberg for the purpose of being introduced to me, I felt even more diffident than I had done before.

Mrs. Hamilton was a stout old lady, not unlike her married daughter—making allowance for the difference in years. She was gayly and extravagantly dressed, and her fat neck and arms were almost covered by the amount of
jewelry which she wore; but further than that she panted very much after any exertion, I did not perceive any traces of the delicacy which was supposed to have deterred her from receiving me as a guest. Her unmarried daughters, two in number, were handsome girls, rather overblown, perhaps, and possessing too high a color for beauty; but that I found to be the usual fault of girls who had been reared at the Cape. They were, at all events, affable in their behavior toward me, which their mother was not. She received me much in the style that her eldest daughter had done; looking me well over, as she imprinted a formal kiss upon my forehead. And after the first salutation and an inquiry as to what sort of a voyage the "Earl of Winstanley" had made was over, they all turned to one another and discussed Cape news, as though I had lived amongst them for years, or was of too little importance to demand any further notice. I, for my part, feeling that some sort of explanation for my being at Rhineberg instead of Rosenwalt was due from my future connections, sat silent, one moment resolving I would be the first to speak, and the next shrinking within myself as I thought of what the consequence of such a proceeding might be. Meanwhile luncheon was served, and we passed into the dining-room.

Mrs. Ransom and her mother sat together at the head of the table, carrying on a whispered conversation with each other, most of which appeared to refer to myself, if I might judge from the guilty looks which I encountered each time I happened to turn my eyes their way. The younger sisters, Amalia and Caroline, on the contrary,
seemed friendly disposed toward me, and rallied me greatly on the want of appetite which I displayed.

"Have you ever tasted 'matrimony,' Miss Grey?" exclaimed Amalia, as she pushed a plate of preserves toward me. "I am sure you will like it; it is only composed of peaches," she continued, laughing as I disclaimed any wish to try the article in question—"peaches preserved in salt and sugar—a mixture of sweet and sour, you know. Now, do take a little of it on my recommendation."

"I shouldn't have thought Miss Grey would have required much pressing to try matrimony," interrupted the acrimonious voice from Mrs. Hamilton.

I had been about to comply with Amalia's request, but at her mother's remark I colored deeply and pushed the plate away from me. This is what I had subjected myself to by acceding to her son's solicitation. Her daughters seemed to think that she had gone too far, for they turned the conversation quickly, and commenced to talk of a party which they had attended the night before.

"I wish you had been there, Louisa," said Caroline. "There were upward of sixty people, and we had such a capital dance. Claude didn't want to go at first, but he was very glad afterward to think that we had persuaded him. He was quite taken by Mrs. Callaghan's niece, and danced with her the whole evening. Indeed, they flirted horribly, there is no doubt."

"It looks very bad indeed to see a young woman run after a young man like that," interposed Mrs. Hamilton. "I shall never think much of Miss Callaghan after what I witnessed last evening."
"But it was all very innocent, mamma," remonstrated Amalia; "she likes dancing, and so does Claude, and there is no harm in it."

"It might lead to harm, Amalia. If Miss Callaghan begins by running after your brother to dance with him, she may end by running after him to marry him; there have been such instances before now; and, in my idea, a girl can not be too reserved and reticent. It is her business to be sought; the man's to seek her. No good ever came yet of a young woman being bold and forward, and showing herself too eager to be married."

At these remarks, so evidently intended for myself, my cheeks burned, and I had the greatest difficulty to prevent the tears coming into my eyes. What would I have given at that moment to be safe at home again under my mother's wing! What had I done that I should be subjected to such cruel affronts? Why was not Charles there to shield me from the ill-nature of his relations?

When the meal was ended and the ladies asked me to join them in a drive, I pleaded fatigue, and begged to be left to spend the afternoon by myself. They did not seem in the least hurt by my refusal, and in a few minutes more I found myself alone—free to think whether I would or no, and, if I so chose it, to regret. The bedroom which had been allotted me, like all the other rooms in the house, was large and looked toward the front. I flung myself upon a cane-work couch which stood in one of the verandaed windows, and moodily gazed out upon the garden and surrounding plantation.

What a wealth of flowers and fruit was there! The
“loquat” trees bending beneath their golden load; the shaddocks, like huge green balls, scarcely distinguishable from their broad leaves; the “cashew nuts,” and the “cassavas,” with many English productions; above all, the orange-trees, the glory of southern Africa! There they stood, by tens and twenties, such trees as I had never dreamed of; towering ten and twelve feet in height, with luxuriant boughs which lay upon the ground, and formed a leafy arbor of themselves; whilst they were laden, not only with the orange fruit, both green and yellow, but with thick bunches of the orange-blossom, pure and white and waxen-looking, throwing out its strong perfume until the close air was heavy with the scent.

Beneath my bedroom window, up the veranda of which a Cape wisteria and the red trumpet-creeper had entangled growths, a brilliant macaw was screaming on his perch at the antics of a little monkey, with which two black nurses and Mrs. Ransom’s children were playing on the lawn; and, above all, the glaring sun was beating, as it seemed to my English eyes, most pitilessly.

But the fatigue and excitement I had undergone, added to the heat and loneliness, soon overpowered my meditations, and lulled me, almost insensibly, to repose. Before I knew what was coming over me, the scent of the orange-blossom had ceased to fill my nostrils; the shrill cry of the angry macaw, my ears; the children and their swarthy attendants had faded from my sight, and I was asleep. When I woke up again, the sun had considerably gone down; the evening breeze was cool and refreshing; the children had disappeared from the lawn; and on referring
to the little watch at my side (the parting present which my dear mother had so ill-afforded to bestow on me), I found that I had been sleeping for three hours, and that it was six o'clock.

Still I lay but half awake, drowsily listening to the hum of the insects which had appeared with sunset, and to the chirp of the birds busy amongst the fruit, and calculating that the return of the carriage with Mrs. Ransom would be time enough for me to dress for dinner.

From where I lay, I commanded the entire view of the avenue drive, which, though long, was straight, and I had not lain regarding its leafy vista for more than a few seconds before I saw something which fully roused me to consciousness.

It was only the figure of a man advancing on foot toward the house, but one in which I could not believe myself to be mistaken. A tall, muscular figure, dressed in loose shooting-clothes, which became it well, with a gun thrown carelessly across the shoulder, a shot-belt and powder flask buckled round the waist, and high boots which reached to the knee. For some minutes, having sprung from my recumbent posture, I stood and watched this figure, trembling; certain that it could be no other than my Charles, returned, as his sisters said he might do, that night, instead of on the morrow.

As the man approached nearer to the house, and raised his head, my certaintie became redoubled. There was the beard, the mustache, just as I had pictured them; the hair and eyes, a shade darker perhaps than they used to be; but for the rest he did not seem to be much altered. But
had I entertained any doubts as to his identity, it would have been all dispelled when Mrs. Ransom's youngest child ran from the house into his arms, and called him "uncle."

Trembling with anticipation, and wondering whether Charles had yet heard of my arrival, I hastened to receive and welcome him. Without a look at my disheveled hair or tumbled muslin dress, with my heart beating loudly and my eyes overflowing with love, I ran quickly down the broad uncarpeted staircase, and met him in the matted hall.

"Charles! Charles!" I exclaimed, aloud, in my delight, as I threw myself into his arms; "how thankful I am that you have come!"

I was weeping with excitement and relief; but another disappointment was in store for me. Charles did not press me to his breast, nor imprint a kiss of welcome on my lips, as I had expected him to do. On the contrary his strong hand seemed to put me gently but decidedly from him, although the look which beamed in his face was not one of coldness or displeasure. Yet my pride was wounded by his apparent indifference.

"What do you do that for?" I said, in surprise, as for the first time my eyes were fully raised to meet his own. Something in them startled, almost alarmed me; yet I continued my reproaches. "Do you not know who I am, Charles? Are you not glad to see me?"

"I believe—I am afraid—that is to say——" he commenced to stammer.

At that moment, whilst I breathlessly waited for an explanation of his conduct, one of Mrs. Ransom's little chil-
A LUCKY DISAPPOINTMENT.

Children, who had been standing by the while, an open-mouthed spectator of the interview, shriply exclaimed:

"Don't stay here, Uncle Claude! Come with me; I want you."

Claude! As the name left the child's lips, I felt as though I had been turned to stone. In a moment the mistake I had made, and the indiscretion of which I had been guilty, flashed across my mind; and, withdrawing myself from the stranger with a sudden bound, I flew to the other side of the hall, and buried my face in my hands. Claude Hamilton followed, and tried to reassure me.

"Miss Grey, pray don't let this occurrence annoy you; it was a natural mistake, though an awkward one. No one need know it but ourselves."

"Oh! what have I done—what have I done?" I exclaimed, feeling, in the first horror of my confusion and surprise, as if I had committed a breach of propriety which no amount of time could remedy.

"Nothing very dreadful, I hope," he answered, smiling. I could hear he smiled, although I dared not lift my eyes to his. "After all, remember that I shall soon be your brother."

But the fact that I was destined to become the wife of Charles Hamilton had no power to overcome my shame at the thought that I had mistaken and so nearly embraced a stranger for him. I would not listen to nor look at nor speak to Claude again; but groping my way up the staircase, crying silently as I went, hid myself in the recesses of my own room. It was well for me that I had not yet dressed for dinner, else I might have sat and brooded over
this fresh humiliation until I had rendered myself unfit to appear at the table. As it was, however, the exertion dependent on unpacking my dinner-dress and robing myself in it was sufficient distraction to my unhappy thoughts to prevent my devoting any more tears to the situation in which I had placed myself. Shortly after I had regained my room I heard the carriage conveying Mrs. Ransom home roll up the avenue, and knew that the remainder of my time must be devoted to making myself ready to meet her.

I have said nothing in these pages relative to my personal appearance, because I believe that no woman sees herself as others see her; added to which, were I to state that I was pretty, I should lay myself open to the charge of conceit; or, that I was plain, to that of the pride which apes humility. It was not likely that I had arrived at the age of twenty-three without hearing divers opinions concerning myself, or adopting those which best pleased me. I had not been without my flatterers even in Langley, and I have little doubt that I made the most of what I heard. Yet I do not think I thought more of my looks than the generality of my sex do. I knew my own good points, and I would not willingly have parted with them; but I did not possess that petty ill-nature which prevents a woman from acknowledging she sees any beauty in others, or makes her attempt to extoll her own looks by decrying those of her rivals. Such a phase of female nature, to me who had mixed with few besides my doting mother and a small circle of old friends, was something almost entirely new; and I received my first lesson in it that evening.

I was thoroughly blonde, and one charm which I pos-
A LUCKY DISAPPOINTMENT.

seemed (at least I suppose it is a charm to such as admire it) was a very white skin. I think I was a little vain of my skin. I had always taken the utmost care of it, as well as of my complexion, and as I stood before the glass that evening, fastening the knots of blue ribbons in my hair and on my dress, I could not help remarking my smooth white neck and arms, and wondering, with a blush at my own conceit, whether Charles had forgotten how much he used to admire them. The windows of my room were thrown wide open, and through the casements came stealing the perfume of a cigar, smoked by some one (Claude Hamilton I concluded, reddening under the recollection evoked by his name) in the veranda below. I suppose that my unpacking must have rather delayed my toilet, for in a short time he was joined by his sister, Mrs. Ransom, as I heard by the voice, who appeared to have finished her dressing before mine. They commenced to talk together, and either had forgotten the proximity of my apartment, or miscalculated the power of their voices, for I heard every word they said as distinctly as though I had been beside them. After a few commonplace remarks Mrs. Ransom introduced my name.

"Have you seen Miss Grey yet, Claude?"

My breath stopped, as I waited to hear his answer; but it was unconcern itself.

"Yes; I met her in the hall as I came in. She is not at all like what I expected."

"What did you expect?" asked Mrs. Ransom, sharply.

"Well, half a country maid and half an old maid, from your description, Louisa."
"How could I describe what I had never seen?"
"That's what I always told you; but you were positive you must be right."
"I don't see that I was so far wrong, now."
"Well, I do. I think Charles is an uncommonly lucky fellow. I had no idea he was clever enough to feather his nest in this way. There's the advantage of being an eldest son, and sent to England. I think she's the fairest woman I've ever seen."
"Fairest woman you've ever seen!" exclaimed Mrs. Ransom, contemptuously; "what nonsense you're talking, Claude! Why, there are dozens of girls in Cape Town fairer than Miss Grey!"
"I've never met them then. I've never seen a skin that wouldn't look yellow beside hers. I used to think you fair, Louisa. Ha! ha!"

The laugh was too much for Mrs. Ransom. I think it would have been difficult for any woman to bear quietly.

She turned upon her brother like a fury.
"I neither wish nor care for your opinion on my skin. If I chose to demean myself by using paint and powder, I might appear as fair as Miss Grey."
"Do you mean to say that she paints and powders?" he asked, incredulously.
"I'm sure of it. I saw her arms and neck this morning through her muslin dress. No skin could be so white that was not artificially colored."
"I'm sorry for poor Miss Grey," he answered, coolly.
"I'm afraid she'll find her cosmetics won't stand in this
hot climate. She'll be weeping rosy tears during dinner-time if she does not take care.'”

“I see that you don’t believe me, Claude,” said Mrs. Ransom, with an offended air; “but you’ll find that I am right, nevertheless.”

“Well, it will not be of much consequence to me any way,” he answered, briefly; and then the dinner-gong sounded, and they rose to re-enter the house, and I had to smother my indignation at what I had heard, and to run down quickly to join them in the dining-room.

CHAPTER III.

Before I had overheard Mrs. Ransom’s conversation with her brother I had felt very shy of meeting Claude Hamilton again; but as I traversed the staircase on my way to the dining-room, I found that this feeling had, in a great measure, subsided. I saw that he had no intention of disclosing my unfortunate mistake, and I felt so grateful to him for his reticence, and for taking my part against his sister, that I should have been disappointed to find myself deprived of his protection. He was the only one of the Hamiltons I had yet seen of whom I thought I could make a friend, and my heart warmed toward him as none can understand save those who, like myself, have had the misfortune to be suddenly cast into the bosom of a family which has no welcome for them. When I first entered the dining-room at Rhineberg, it seemed to me full of men. There was old Mr. Hamilton of Rosenwaite
come over to pay his respects to me; Mr. Ransom, a thoughtful-looking man, absorbed in business; his partner, Mr. Golding, who took upon himself to provide the comic part of the entertainment; the Dutch overseer, Mr. Reinagle; and, though last, not least, Claude Hamilton, who with the exception of his long boots and shooting apparatus, was in much the same costume as when I had encountered him before. Indeed, all the gentlemen appeared to me as under-dressed as the ladies were overdressed. A *laissez-aller* style was evidently the fashion at Cape Town; and as the attire was rough, so was the conversation, which, instead of being made general, as courtesy called for, was, amongst the business men at least, confined to the topics in which they were most interested. Mrs. Ransom had brought her sister Amalia back to dinner with her, and they with myself were the only females present. As I entered the room I could not help glancing at the rosy neck and arms which showed above Mrs. Ransom’s blue satin dress, and Amalia’s pink tarlatan—such arms and necks as Rubens would have loved to paint—and comparing them, with a thrill of secret satisfaction, with my own. So, in the face of a real misfortune, such as the distaste my future family had conceived for me promised to be, I was vain and foolish enough to triumph in a circumstance not only in itself utterly unimportant, but for which I was neither entitled to feel pride individually, nor to receive praises from others.

As soon as I made my appearance the whole party sat down to dinner. Old Mr. Hamilton, having shaken my hand in a formal sort of manner, took no further notice of
me; Mr. Ransom never even asked for an introduction; Mr. Golding entered into a conversation, which was far too familiar to suit my taste, without waiting for one, and the Dutch overseer, without pretending to speak, stared at me so fixedly and continuously across the table that he quite put me out of countenance.

Mr. Ransom and Amalia chatted together, almost ignoring my presence, and it was only Claude, who, taking his seat by my side, and devoting himself to my wants, appeared to remember that I was a stranger and a guest, and called for some little attention at their hands.

As soon as the dinner was concluded, the men commenced to smoke, and the ladies moved into the veranda. Here, as before, my hostess and her sister appeared to have so many topics of mutual interest to discuss that I felt myself de trop, and after a little while I rose from my seat, and wandered away from the house down some of the leafy avenues by which we were surrounded. The air was deliciously cool by that time; many flowers which closed during the heat of the day had opened their gorgeous blossoms to the evening breeze; strange birds hopped across the path I traversed, or looked shyly at me from neighboring branches; strange fruits hung in clusters from almost every tree. All I saw was calculated to attract and please me, but I had no heart to notice anything; out of sight of the veranda and its unfriendly occupants, my rebellious tears would come stealing down my cheeks as I thought of how I had anticipated my arrival amongst the Hamiltons, and how grievously I had been disappointed. If they had not wished me to marry Charles, or were determined to set
their faces and steel their hearts against me, why had they not said so before it was too late? Could I have dreamed of meeting such opposition on their parts, would I ever have placed myself in the painful situation which I then occupied? No, not for Charles, nor for fifty thousand Charleses, my tell-tale conscience frankly whispered.

But I was frightened at that confession; it seemed as though I had never spoken so openly with my heart before. I put the thought away from me almost by force. I called myself ungrateful, and unworthy of his love, and inwardly reiterated that, in order to repay the affection which had so long been mine, I would go through twice as much that was disagreeable as I had already encountered.

The tears were yet freshly on my cheeks when Claude Hamilton parted the boughs and stood beside me.

"Why, Miss Grey! I thought we had lost you," and then, perceiving my emotion, he added, quickly, "I hope that nothing has happened to annoy you?"

A chance expression of sympathy from a stranger will often have as much or more effect than the familiar accents of a friend. Claude Hamilton's commonplace remark fell so soothingly upon my ear that I broke down altogether. I felt so utterly alone that I would have been thankful to a dog who had shown me any kindness.

"Oh, no, Mr. Hamilton!" I sobbed, scarcely knowing, between shame and vexation, what I said; "that is, nothing in particular. I only feel a little strange—and—and—lonely. I shall be better in a minute or two."

"It is unavoidable that you should feel strange at first," he said, gravely; "but I am sorry that you should
feel lonely. What are Louisa and Amalia about that they permit you to walk by yourself? They should be showing you the points of interest about the plantation. There is a good deal to be seen here."

"They don't like me!" I answered, vehemently. "I can see that they don't. It's the same with all of them—your mother and the rest. Oh, Mr. Hamilton! I wish I had never come!"

How his handsome face clouded over!

"You forget that Charles has not yet arrived," he said, kindly; "it will be very different for you when he is here."

"I don't know that!" I answered, sadly.

"It ought to be; he will be much to blame if he does not make it so;" and then he added, in a different tone, "Come, Miss Grey, will you trust yourself to take a walk with me? I will engage to introduce you to all the beauties of Rhineberg, and, as in duty bound, will show you first the oldest tree on the plantation; so old a tree with so sturdy a trunk that we have had a platform with a circular bench and table placed in the first forks of its branches, and mount up there regularly, at the conclusion of every vintage, to drink success to the wine trade."

The idea of a lot of men drinking toasts in the branches of a tree amused me, and I smiled.

"I am glad to see that smile," said Claude, good-naturedly; "you and I will get on capitally together, Miss Grey, I know."

"But you don't believe that I paint!" I said, earnestly. The thought that he might believe it had pressed upon me
more than once during dinner-time, and now that he appeared so friendly and affable toward me I could not help wishing to disimbue his mind of the possible idea.

He stared at me for a moment, surprised at the question; then, as recollection returned to him, he colored deeply and looked amazed.

"How did you hear that?" he demanded.

"I couldn't help hearing it," I said, apologetically; "the windows of my room were open, and you and Mrs. Ransom talked so loud."

He muttered something rather uncomplimentary to Mrs. Ransom, and then he added:

"If you heard one part of our conversation you must have heard the other. I think I gave my opinion on the subject pretty freely, and I know I meant what I said. Miss Grey, pray don't think me capable of ever dreaming of such a thing! I would as soon distrust the whiteness of the orange-blossoms around us." And, as he spoke, he pulled a large bunch of the fragrant flowers and held them toward me. "I believe one to be as pure and true as the other," he said, softly.

I scarcely knew what to answer to this speech. I wanted to thank him for taking me on trust, but an unaccountable feeling of shyness prevented me. I accepted the orange-blossom and said, "Thank you," as I fastened it into my bosom. He might take the words to apply either to his offering or his good opinion. For my own part, he had spoken so fervently and looked so tenderly at me, that I felt shy of continuing the subject.

He led me round the plantation, showing me all that
was worth looking at; and it was perhaps an hour later
that we re-entered the drawing-room of Rhineberg.

It was empty. Lights were burning from silver sconces
fixed against the wall, and the tea and coffee equipage was
on a side-table, but there was no appearance of any of the
party we had left there.

"Where are the ladies?" asked Claude Hamilton, as
the bell which he rang was answered by the appearance of
a black waiter.

"Gone to the play, sar; gone ten, twenty minutes 'go.'"

"To the play? Didn't Mrs. Ransom ask for Miss
Grey?"

"Missy Ransom send look for missy on lawn two, three
times; but couldn't see nowhere; so then Missy Ransom go."

"All right; bring fresh coffee, and take away these tea-
things."

But though Claude Hamilton said, "All right," he did
not appear to think so, for he moved restlessly about the
room, whilst more than one expression of anger burst from
his lips. I tried to treat the matter as if it were of no con-
sequence, though I could not help thinking that they might
either have taken more pains to find me, or put off their
engagement for one evening.

"I am surprised to find you have a theater in Town," I said, with apparent unconcern; "I do not re-
member that Charles ever mentioned it to me."

"Has he not?" he answered. "Oh, yes! we have a
theater, and a very tolerable one; and everybody of any
consequence here has a box of their own. My brother will
doubtless get one for you."
"I fancy I shall often patronize the play, then," I said, smiling; "for it will be all new to me. I have lived in such a tiny village that I have scarcely ever been to a theater, and I am very fond of any dramatic amusement."

"You ought to have gone to-night," he answered, with a clouded brow, and then, coming to a stand-still, he took the chair beside my own. "Miss Grey, what can you think of us all? We must seem utter barbarians to you."

"You don't, at all events, Mr. Hamilton."

"But the rudeness of my sisters in leaving the house without you! I am not surprised at the others forgetting etiquette. My father is an old man, and Ransom lives in his business; but Louisa and Amalia should at least know what is due to a stranger. They are not commonly polite."

"Please don't say anything more about it!" I exclaimed, beginning to feel quite uncomfortable at the extent of his annoyance; "it is of little consequence after all, and is no one's fault but my own. I should not, against the advice of all my friends, have placed myself in such a questionable position."

"It was so good, so generous of you to do so," he returned, fervently.

"Thank you, it was wise."

"Don't say that; my brother will make you alter your opinion."

"He can't prevent its being said, or thought, that I have proved myself very eager to marry him."

"I should like to hear any one hint at such a thing in my presence," returned Claude, energetically. "They
are jealous of you, Miss Grey; that's the fact. You are going to be the wife of the eldest son, and by and by you will be the most important lady in the family, and my mother and sisters would have liked to keep Charles to themselves now and forever. It would have been the same with any one he proposed to marry."

"Are they fond of him, then?" I asked.

"They consider him of some importance—of a great deal more importance than my unworthy self, for instance. I might marry whom I chose, and they would never ask a question on the subject; but then I’m nobody compared to Charles."

He raised his laughing, blue eyes to mine as he spoke, and I thought that his wife would prove a very happy woman, whomsoever she might be.

"Charles will have Rosenwalt, of course, at my father’s death," he continued, presently.

"And you?"

"Oh! I shall have a fortune, too, by that time, I hope. My destination is not Cape Town. I am bound for Australia."

"Not really? What! to live there?"

I felt quite disappointed at the mere idea, for I had already been calculating on what a charming brother Claude Hamilton would be to me.

"Yes; to settle altogether on a farm of my own; my taste has always been that way, and my father will do so much for me. I don’t care for the Cape, nor the wine trade."

I hung down my head and began to play with the ends
of ribbon which adorned my dress. Then, the only one of my new connections whom I thought that I should ever like was destined to make his home in another country, and I should be left without one friend amongst them. Charles must indeed prove all, and more than all I had pictured him to be, to make up to me for isolation like this.

This intelligence of Clauda's appeared to have an effect upon both our spirits, for we spoke little after that, and what we said was uttered in a very subdued strain. I talked to him of Langley, and my quiet life there; and he told me some simple stories and anecdotes of Charles's adventures when up the country; and when the black waiter appeared with a tray of wine and spirits, I took the opportunity to say good-night and leave him. He came with me to the very foot of the staircase, expressing his hope that I was not much fatigued, and seemingly very unwilling to let go the hand which I placed in his at parting. And then I was once more in my bedroom; my head and heart in a whirl as I reviewed the incidents of the past day, and felt that in a few hours I had lived a life of expectation and disappointment. Of one thing I was certain. I heartily hoped that the mistake I had made with respect to Claude Hamilton had not been unnatural, and that his brother would prove to be very like himself.

I thought I had never met any one with looks that pleased me better, or manners which, possessing the native courtesy that every true man intuitively feels toward a woman, had set me more at my ease. I am afraid, as I composed myself to slumber that night, my last thoughts were more with Claude than with Charles Hamilton. The
vivid present took firmer hold on me than the half-re-membered past, and the features of the younger brother, which I had seen but for a day, appeared the more familiar of the two. Had I been deceiving my heart for so many years, and cherishing not the reality, but a creature of my own imagination? I did not, at that moment, go so far as to ask myself the question which was solved before the setting of the next day’s sun.

People living in hot climates invariably go late to bed and rise early. I suppose the little exercise which they take enables them to dispense with part of their repose. I know I should have been glad to sleep longer than I was permitted to do on the following morning. But to keep one’s eyes closed at Rhineberg after four o’clock seemed to be simply impossible.

Mr. and Mrs. Ransom’s loud conversation, as they prepared for a ride on horseback; the shrill voices of the children, demanding their early meal; the chattering of hybrid and native servants beneath my open windows, added to the trampling of horses’ feet, and the hurry and scurry consequent on a large party of people leaving the house—rendered further rest a thing to be longed for, but not to obtain. I rose, weary both in body and in spirit, for the varied excitement of the previous day had unstrung my nerves; but after a cold bath and a cup of hot chocolate, brought me by a good-natured-looking half-caste woman, I felt so much refreshed that I became impatient to finish my dressing, that I, too, might make the most of the cool morning hours. But before I had quite completed my toilet, a shower of small pebbles thrown at my casement,
which, bounding through the veranda, were scattered over the matting under my feet, attracted me toward the window.

There was Claude Hamilton; his beaming face turned upward to meet mine, looking as though I had known it for years, instead of hours.

"Make haste, Miss Grey, and come down. You are losing the best part of the morning."

"I shall be ready in a moment," I replied. "I have but to put on my hat and mantle."

I leaned over the railing of the veranda as I spoke, looking down upon him, and his blue eyes seemed to be brought wonderfully close to mine.

"Now, do make haste!" he repeated. "I have something to tell you."

"What is it?"

"You sha’n’t know till you come down here, or perhaps you may not come at all."

"In that case, I had better join you at once," I said, suiting the action to the word; "for it must be something wonderfully interesting which would keep me in-doors at this delicious hour. What is your news?" I continued, as I joined him in the garden, and he wrung my proffered hand.

"Charles will be home to-day, at noon."

I smiled in return for his intelligence, but I felt that the smile was a forced one; and, instead of being the happier for what he had told me, a leaden weight seemed suddenly to drop upon my breast, and keep my gayety a prisoner there.
For this change in my sentiments I was totally unable to account.

I knew that I ought to feel rejoiced at the prospect of meeting my lover again, and until the day before I had done so.

What had happened to me in the interim to cause such a difference in the feelings with which I anticipated his arrival?

I had no time to ask myself the question; I was only sensible of the change. I had commenced the present interview so cheerily that, dreading lest Claude Hamilton should detect my indifference toward his brother, and despise me for it, I made a strong effort to overcome the depression which had so mysteriously attacked me, and, as I believed, succeeded in my object.

"Indeed! Are you quite sure? How did you hear it?"

"From the best authority, Miss Grey; his stockman, who preceded him into the town this morning."

"Then Charles does not know of my arrival?"

"He will hear that the ship is in before he reaches Rhineberg," Claude answered, "and it will not be very long, depend upon it, before you see him here."

I was silent, and presently he continued, but in a lower strain:

"And I suppose it will not be very long either before we have a wedding at Rhineberg?"

"I don't know," I replied, sadly; "I have heard nothing about it. I suppose the management of it will be left to your mother and sisters, as I conclude it was they who
arranged that it should take place from here, instead of Rosenwalt."

"That was a very great mistake," he said, decidedly.

"And one which a life-time may not set right," I answered in the same manner. "Did Charles know of their intentions before he left Cape Town?"

"I believe he did, but I am not sure. Don't ask me any questions about it, Miss Grey, please, for it is a most unpleasant subject to me. I told them what I thought of it—plainly enough; and it annoyed me greatly to find that after all you had been brought to Rhineberg."

"I think the sooner I get out of it the better," I rejoined with a careless laugh.

"For Charles—certainly."

"For every one who has an interest in me, Mr. Hamilton."

He sighed, but did not answer. I sighed also, and so heartily that I forgot to try and analyze the meaning of his doing so.

We were still sitting in the veranda when Mr. and Mrs. Ransom came home from their ride. As Claude lifted the latter from her horse, he told her what he had told myself.

"The stockman came in this morning with a drove of bullocks. Charles will be back by noon."

"Thank you for nothing," she answered, pertly. "I knew that last night."

"From whom?"

"From Ernestine Von Beck. We met her at the theater; and she had received a letter."

At the mention of this name, I could see that Claude's
face became dark with anger, and for a minute he looked at Mrs. Ransom fixedly. She returned the gaze with interest, and made no secret of it.

"Well! what are you staring at?"

"I thought that it was my father's desire that we held no communication with the Von Becks, Louisa?" he replied.

"So it may be with regard to Amalia and Caroline—I never question his orders to my sisters; but he has no authority over me, and I choose to select my own acquaintances."

"In which you show as little delicacy as common sense," he retorted, not overpolitely.

Mrs. Ransom tossed her head. "I shall ask Ernestine Von Beck to my house if I see fit."

"Louisa! you wouldn't dare do so?" he said, quickly.

"I dare everything," she replied; "and it is nothing to me how things turn out. So don't you aggravate me, Claude. Now, Miss Grey," she continued, speaking to me in a tone of voice that was extremely offensive, "if you want any breakfast you had better come in and take it, for we are always punctual at Rhineberg."

I rose in silence and followed her. It was not likely that the circumstance of the person whom they styled Ernestine Von Beck having received a letter from my absent lover had escaped me; but I did not at that time attach any significance to the fact. Ernestine Von Beck might have been an old friend of the family—a middle-aged woman, a mother, a grandmother, for aught I knew to the contrary; I was not going to vex myself about a trifle.
The words which had passed on the subject between Mrs. Ransom and her brother interested me much more. I could see that she possessed an unpleasant temper, liable at any moment to clash with those of her nearest relations. What wonder, then, that she should not make herself agreeable to me, who had no such claim upon her?

Claude did not enter the breakfast-room until the meal was half over, and Mr. Ransom had left it. Then he occupied a seat at the further end of the table, and eat what he took upon his plate in moody silence.

Mrs. Ransom’s children were playing about the room. They always seemed to be in every part of the house at once—now they were racing round the table, an unruly little pair, anon chasing each other through the props of the veranda, or playing Bo-peep with the skirt of their mother’s riding-dress; then they attacked their uncle, and he was in no mood to be patient with infantine liberties.

He shook them off more than once, and at last he spoke hastily, and offended one of the young rebels, for she ceased romping, and stood at a little distance from him with her finger in her mouth.

“I have told you several times that you must not tease me at breakfast, Amy,” he said, in excuse for himself.

“I saw you,” she exclaimed, in an apparently vague manner. But Claude took no notice of the words.

“I saw you,” repeated the child, maliciously.

“What did you see, darling?” asked her mother.

“What are you talking about?”

“I saw him kiss her,” the dreadful infant replied, pointing a sugary finger in my direction.
I started, and grew scarlet under the accusation, and Claude did not look much more comfortable.

"What is this?" said Mrs. Ransom, looking from one guilty face to the other.

"It is a lie," shouted Claude Hamilton. "Send those brats off to the nursery, Louisa. What are they always kicking about here for?"

"It isn't a lie," whimpered little Amy, afraid lest his request should be carried into execution. "Johnnie and I saw you yesterday—didn't we, Johnnie!—in the hall, and she kissed you."

Matters were growing worse each moment, and I saw that, if I did not wish to be accused of more than I was guilty of, I had best hasten to make a clean breast of the whole affair; so I commenced, but, what with my deepening color and trembling eagerness, under considerable difficulties.

"Amy is mistaken, Mrs. Ransom; she makes rather a sweeping accusation, but the real fact is that—"

"Miss Grey, let me explain it to my sister," urged the voice of Claude Hamilton. And then he continued: "The whole truth is this, Louisa—Miss Grey heard yesterday that Charles had arrived, and ran down-stairs to meet him—"

"No! no one told me so," I interposed, anxious there should be no further mistake; "but I had seen you coming from the window, and thought you were he."

"You thought Claude was my brother Charles?" said Mrs. Ransom, incredulously; "you must be rather shortsighted, Miss Grey."
“I saw him from a little distance,” I faltered; “and it is so many years—I had half forgotten—I thought Charles must be so altered from when I parted with him.”

Mrs. Ransom burst into a rude laugh.

“Charles like Claude! You have a good idea of your future husband, Miss Grey! I wonder you were not afraid of coming out to join a person of whom you must have so slight a recollection. And so you mistook one for the other—ha! ha! ha!”

“Only for a minute,” I pleaded, earnestly, though my cheeks burned beneath her insulting manner; “and there was nothing—I assure you there was nothing—of the sort Amy mentioned. The child is mistaken—indeed she is.”

“Oh! pray don’t take the trouble to enter into explanations with me, Miss Grey,” replied Mrs. Ransom. “Amy has very good eyesight; she is not usually mistaken, and—”

“Did you not hear Miss Grey tell you that she was?” shouted Claude Hamilton, rising from his seat. “It was a most natural mistake on Miss Grey’s part, one into which anybody might have fallen, and the only thing which passed between us was—”

“Now, my dear Claude,” interrupted his sister, as she, too, rose, “I have not the slightest wish to learn what passed between you and Miss Grey. It was all very delightful, I have no doubt; but still such proceedings are rather irregular; they are not what we have been used to at Rhineberg, and I shall not be sorry when Charles himself is on the spot. I presume there will be no more ‘mistakes’ then,” she concluded, with a spiteful emphasis on
the word, as she quitted the room, taking her children with her.

I scarcely knew what to do or say. I was miserable at the imputation cast upon me, indignant at the affront, and ashamed to hear my name so coupled with that of Claude Hamilton.

He, having whistled for a few moments after his sister left us, and finding that I neither moved nor spoke, came over to my side of the table.

"Never mind, Laura! (May I call you Laura?)" he asked par parenthese.

"You may call me anything that is kind, for I have need of it, Heaven knows!" I answered, bitterly.

"I feel you have. I wish I could wring that little animal's neck for saying what she did; but don't let it worry you. It is of no real consequence, after all, and Charles will be here soon, remember!"

I did remember; but the thought, if it had not yet ceased to give me pleasure, failed to inspire me with confidence. If his mother and his sisters thought so highly of Charles, could he be the man who would battle for me against his own relations?

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CHAPTER IV.

Yet I could not but look forward to the arrival of my lover with some degree of anticipation, as an occurrence which must ameliorate my position with respect to Mrs. Ransom. Surely, in the very presence of my future husband, she would not presume to insult me even by insinua-
tion. When the breakfast had been cleared away, and the business of the day begun, and I felt that each moment as it rolled into the past brought Charles nearer to my side, I grew very nervous, and, consulting my watch every five minutes, spent the time, as my hostess did not fail to remark, between my looking-glass and the hall-door. At last, tired of repeated disappointments, and unwilling to provoke further jesting on the part of Mrs. Ransom, I resolved to make up my mind not to expect him until the hour appointed for his arrival, and to that end sought my room in order to unpack some books which I had received at parting; food for the mind being an aliment totally unprovided for the household of Rhineberg. The occupation took me some little while, but I could afford to be lazy over it, since the clock had but just struck ten. The first volume which came to my hand was the "Essays of Elia," and with it I returned to the drawing-room, resolved to compose myself quietly on the sofa, and to remain there until I had cause for stirring. As I entered it, however, I perceived that a visitor had arrived in my absence; a small, spare man, who was standing with his back toward me, talking to Mrs. Ransom. At the first glance I started, and asked myself if it were possible it could be Charles; but a decided negative followed the silent question. There was nothing in the figure or general appearance of the stranger to remind me of my lover. Yet, as I made my appearance, Claude Hamilton started uneasily from his seat, Mrs. Ransom ejaculated, "Here is Miss Grey," as though my name had formed the topic of their conversation, and the stranger, as I considered him, turn-
ing quickly round, advanced to meet me, and, with a
glad surprise, exclaimed:

"Why, Laura! you are not in the least changed. You
are the same as when we parted. I should have known
you anywhere!"

And then he took me in his arms, and kissed me more
than once upon the cheek, and Claude had slipped
away through the open window, as though not caring to
witness the proceeding, before I had had time to collect my
scattered senses, or to realize that the man before me was
indeed Charles Hamilton, and that I had met my betrothed
again. I was so taken by surprise that I could not speak
to him. I only struggled faintly in his embrace, and then
resigned myself to what I considered the inevitable.

But if an absence of six years had had no power to
change me in his eyes, I could not echo the sentiment. At
first sight, with my ideal still strongly impressed upon my
mind, I thought he was so altered that I should not have
recognized him in the street; but, on a more lengthened
inspection, I saw that the strangeness lay not so much in
his features and figure having changed, as their having
failed to attain the standard I had raised for them. In
fact, Charles Hamilton was much the same as he had ever
been; it was I whose mind and tastes had grown and
altered with the lapse of years. He had been a frank, fair-
haired, blue-eyed, fresh-complexioned lad when we parted;
he was still blue-eyed and fair-haired; but the frankness
and the freshness were gone. His skin was sallow, his hair
was thin, and his figure had acquired a slight stoop; but I
do not think that such immaterial deficiencies would—
after the first disappointment—have been felt by me, had he retained the free, careless manner which I had loved in him of old. But I had not been many minutes in his presence before I felt that that had vanished with his boyhood.

The cares of business had engrossed him for many years, and were already beginning to leave their traces in the puckered brow, keen eyes, and occasionally soured mouth. They had left their traces on his character no less than on his face; he was far oftener absorbed in calculations than striving to make himself agreeable; or thinking about prices in the wine-trade than forming parties of pleasure. The whole weight of the business of Rosenwalt was laid upon his shoulders, and he entered into it far too eagerly to render him a pleasant companion for women. I am now speaking from my later experience of Charles Hamilton; I knew all this to my cost in a few hours after, but on our first meeting every feeling was swallowed up in the consternation which I felt at the alteration in his personal appearance.

"Well, Laura," he said, as he noticed my vague and wondering air, "what are you thinking of? Have I taken you by surprise, or do you think me as unchanged as I do you?"

"Oh! you are very changed," I murmured, finding my voice at last—"very changed, indeed. I thought you would be quite different!"

It was a careless speech. Had I had time to consider before I spoke, perhaps I should not have uttered it. It was an unlucky speech into the bargain, for Mrs. Ransom took immediate advantage of it to observe to her brother,
with an air of patronage: "You must not be surprised at Miss Grey's not knowing you, Charley, dear, for six years is a long stretch for the memory; and she mistook Claude for you yesterday." I thought his brow clouded at that, but I disdained to offer any further explanation of the mistake before Mrs. Ransom. She had evidently not believed me at the breakfast-table, and she might proceed to do her worst. My blood was up, and I was ready to defy her. But, turning to Charles, I said:

"I have been preparing my mind so assiduously to perceive a great alteration in you, Charles, that I believed you must have become what I fancied you would. Directly I looked in your brother's face, and heard his voice, I knew that it was not you."

He seemed satisfied with my defense, and proceeded to ask me all sorts of questions respecting Langley and my friends there; stopping every now and then to express his pleasure at seeing me in such good health and looks. He repeated this declaration so often that, at last, I began to suspect that either he had forgotten my appearance more than he chose to confess, or was surprised himself at the gratification he felt in meeting me again.

We sat conversing together until luncheon-time, to which Mrs. Ransom summoned us, with a sarcastic remark to her brother, that if he did not intend to live entirely on love, he had better conduct me to the dining-room. Claude was already seated at the table. I thought that he looked glum, or out of spirits, and I felt myself much as though I had reason to ask his pardon for some unknown offense. The meal proceeded chilly, Charles and Mrs.
Ransom being the only talkers, and it was not long before the former rallied me on my silence.

"What are you thinking of, Laura? Not grumbling England, I hope, nor feeling tired already of Charleston Town?"

"I have not seen enough of the town to become tired of it," I answered, evasively.

"Have you been over the plantation?"

"Yes; your brother was kind enough to show it to me yesterday."

"And to the theater?"

At the mention of the theater, Mrs. Ransom reddened, and Claude Hamilton looked up from his plate. I answered in the negative.

"We will go to-night if it is agreeable to you, Louisa. Claude, will you accompany us?"

They both agreed to do so; and the thrill of pleasure which I felt at the idea of spending a whole evening sitting by the side of Claude Hamilton alarmed and startled me. When the afternoon sun had partly set, Charles asked me to take a stroll with him in the grounds, and there he put the question which I dreaded, although I knew that it must come.

"Well, Laura, and when is to be?"

"The wedding, I suppose you mean, Charles? Oh! I don't know. Any time which pleases yourself."

"But it is your business to fix the day."

"In that case, I say the sooner the better."

"I am glad to hear you confess that," he answered, "for it is my own sentiment."

"Don't take it as a special compliment to yourself,
Charles, for I should be happier anywhere (except at Langley) than I am here.”

“Indeed! You surprise me, Laura. What have you to find fault with at Rhineberg?”

“With everything,” I cried, impetuously, “except the house itself—and especially with my being here at all.”

“I don’t understand you,” he answered, gravely; “I wish you would explain yourself.”

I felt far less attraction toward this man, who seemed so like a stranger to me, than I had done toward his brother; but at the same time I knew that in him I had a right to repose the confidence, and from him to accept the sympathy, which it was almost treasonable to expect the other either to give or take. So that I unburdened my heart without reserve.

“Your father’s letter to my mother,” I replied, “was to request that she would permit me to join you at Rosenwalt. My relations were greatly set against the idea of my coming out at all, but they never would have consented to it had they known my destination was to be Rhineberg.”

“But what difference can it make?” he argued. “The accommodation here is infinitely better than at Rosenwalt, and my sister is surely a more suitable companion for you than my mother.”

“I don’t know anything about your mother,” I rejoined, hastily. “I have seen her but once, and then she struck me as being very disagreeable; neither is it a question of accommodation, nor one place being better than another. I might prefer Rhineberg infinitely to Rosenwalt, and yet that does not do away with the indignity of
my being here whilst they are perfectly able to receive me at the other house."

"Do you wish to go there, then?" he demanded, seriously; "because I will speak to my mother and have the exchange effected, if you desire it."

"Not for worlds!" I exclaimed; "I never wish to set my foot in Rosenwalt until it belongs to you."

"Laura," he said, in surprise, "what can have incensed you to feel so strongly against my mother? what has she done to offend you?"

"What has she done?" I echoed; "what have they all done (except your brother) ever since I arrived here, to make me feel the position in which I am placed from acceding to your request? They have neglected me, and sneered at me, and shown me in every possible way that I was neither wanted nor welcome. If I could have imagined, Charles, that I should have to undergo half the indignities I have already suffered at their hands, I never would have come out to you—I would have died first. They have not behaved like ladies, nor even like women, to me."

He tried to soothe me in a manner which only aggravated me the more. He spoke to me as though I were an angry child, or an enraged animal, or anything else which required coaxing, but was not fit to be reasoned with. And his touch and the tones of his voice seemed strange and unfamiliar to me! my heart did not go out in answer to them, and I moved uneasily from beneath the one, and derived no comfort from listening to the other.

"You are quite mistaken, Laura, I am sure" (this was
the cue which Charles took up). "As to the indignities and insults, and all that sort of thing, they are merely the effects of your own imagination. You are tired and upset after your long voyage, and indisposed to see things in their best light. You will talk very differently after a few days' rest."

"I shall never say otherwise than that your mother's and sisters' reception of me was a cruel one," I said, emphatically.

"Or that you fancied so," he provocingly repeated.

"My mother is a dear, good creature, who wouldn't hurt any one's feelings if she knew it—"

"Then it's time she did know it," I irreverently interposed.

"And as for your coming to Rhineberg," he continued, "you should be very much pleased at the exchange. You will have enough of Rosenwalt by and by."

The argument did not satisfy me.

"You do not understand my feelings on the subject, Charles. You do not seem to see that the mere fact of the exchange being made signifies that they did not want me at Rosenwalt."

"No, I can't say I do see it," he replied; "but we have wandered from our subject, Laura. Will this day week suit you for our wedding?"

I had said "The sooner the better;" but a week seemed short notice. Yet my aversion to remaining the guest of Mrs. Ransom overcame my desire to ask for further delay.

"So be it," I said, carelessly; "this day week I will become your wife, and my own mistress."
But as I acquiesced, a shudder ran through my frame, and I experienced that awful sense that something was wanting in my life; that something which should have been substance was but a shadow; and that the best hope I entertained had slipped from my fingers even as I grasped it.

I turned sick with the fear of what was before me, the intrusting of my happiness to one, my love for whom was no longer an assurance.

Charles did not appear to notice the sudden change which had come over me. He thanked me for my compliance, urging, as a reason for its necessity, that he expected to leave Cape Town again for another business trip in the course of a few weeks.

"But you will not leave me till I am settled," I exclaimed, in dismay.

"Certainly not!" he answered; "you shall be quite at home, Laura, depend upon that, before I am cruel enough to leave you to yourself."

I was just about to ask him some particulars respecting our future home, when the dinner-bell sounded, and we separated to dress. As I did so, I could not help contrasting my feelings with those of the day before. Then I had been in a whirl of conflicting emotions; anticipation had been keen within me; and hope, notwithstanding the little desagremens I had undergone, still flourished.

Now, I felt sunk in the deepest despondency, my anticipations had not been realized; I had been leaning on a broken reed; the standing ground seemed cut away from beneath my feet. I dressed myself, caring little how I
looked, and every now and then breaking the silence which surrounded me with heavy sighs.

When I re-entered the drawing-room I found Claude Hamilton there alone. I suppose that my varied feelings had flushed my face, for he told me, with an attempt at a smile, that happiness was a beautifier to me. I accepted his compliment in silence, because I was ashamed to tell him what I felt; but I tried to turn the conversation.

"Where have you hidden yourself all day, Mr. Hamilton? I have hardly seen you since the morning."

"I did not think you would need me now, Miss Grey," he answered, "or miss me either." His return to the more formal appellation did not escape my ears, but I would not notice it.

"It would not do for me to get in the habit of missing you," I said, trying to speak cheerfully, "since you are about to leave us altogether."

"No, indeed," he answered; "and the sooner I go, I think, the better it will be for me."

I was looking upward as he spoke, and I could not mistranslate the meaning in his eyes. My ready blush set his own cheek alight, and he turned away from me quickly, and walked out upon the lawn.

The dinner passed much the same as it had done the day before; the same company was at table, and as soon as coffee had been partaken of, the carriage came round to the door, and Mrs. Ransom and myself, with Claude and Charles Hamilton, took our departure for the theater.

The theater was a much prettier and more pretentious building than I had given Cape Town credit for possessing.
It was about the size of the smaller London theaters, and was gayly decorated with white and gold and crimson, and built with boxes all the way round, in the style of the opera-houses. We had not been long in our places before I perceived that the box next to ours was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, and their daughters; but beyond a general nod of recognition, and a few whispers across the division to Mrs. Ransom, they took no particular notice of our party. The play was the old drama of "Black-Eyed Susan;" indifferently performed, of course, but I was so complete a novice to all dramatic amusements that I was entertained by it, and my whole attention was riveted upon the stage. When the curtain fell upon the first act, and I looked up to express my delight at what I had seen, I found that Charles had left the box to speak to his mother, and that Mrs. Ransom, who had seen the same piece several nights running, was fast asleep. Only Claude, seated beside me, with his handsome eyes fixed upon my face, was there to speak to. I blushed at detecting how he was employed.

"You are not attending, Mr. Hamilton; you can have no idea how very pretty it is. Did you hear that last song?"

"I am afraid I have been hearing and seeing very little, Miss Grey; very little, that is to say, upon the stage."

"Then you don't deserve to come to the theater," I replied; "you would have been just as well content at home."

"Pardon me; but I beg to differ from you there: I should not have been in such good company at home."
"You are moderate in your desires," I replied, "considering that of what you call 'good company' one leaves the box, another falls asleep, and a third is engrossed with the scene before her."

"But if you are happy you would not have me grudge it you. I shall never grudge you any of your happiness, Miss Grey, however much I may envy it," he added, softly.

"How full the house appears!" I remarked, as I looked at the pit filled with Dutch and half-caste faces, and at the boxes, which were a mass of gay head-dresses and sparkling ornaments.

"Yes, we are essentially a pleasure-loving colony," he replied; "if we are not feasting we are dancing, and if we are not dancing we are sitting at the play. In a second-rate way, Cape Town is as gay as most places."

"You will miss it all when you go out to Australia."

"I wish it were the thing I shall miss most," he answered.

I had his glasses in my hands at this time, and was scanning the upraised faces in the pit.

"Do you see that girl with red roses in her hair and very black eyes?" I said, after a pause. "She has been turning round every now and then to look at me ever since we entered the theater, and she has such a vicious appearance I feel quite frightened of her."

I had asked the question half in jest, but Claude Hamilton appeared to take it in earnest.

"Which—where?" he demanded; and then, as I particularized the individual, exclaimed hastily: "Oh, don't
look at her, Miss Grey—turn your head the other way. She's only some half-caste Dutch girl, who, being anxious to see a new arrival from England, has the impertinence to stare you out of countenance. Balk her curiosity by turning your back for inspection instead of your face."

I laughed at his request, but did as he desired; for the gaze of the large black eyes fixed continuously upon my face began to annoy whilst it amused me. But when the play was ended, and our party, together with that from Rosenwalt, were standing in the vestibule of the theater waiting for the carriages, I saw the same girl approach us, and take up her station directly in front of me. She was a fine young woman, of about my own age, but in whose features there lurked the unmistakable signs of a mixed blood. She was very gayly dressed in blue and white muslin; in her crinkled black hair was twined a wreath of damask roses; and large gold ornaments depended from her ears. She edged her way through the crowd until she was close beside us; and then, to my surprise, I heard her address Mrs. Ransom as though they were on the most familiar terms.

"Are you going straight home? My sisters and I are bound for the assembly rooms."

The gentlemen left us at that moment to call the carriages, and I fancied that my hostess looked uneasy under this address, for she answered very hurriedly:

"Oh, indeed! yes—I dare say; but I can't speak to you, Miss Von Beck, because papa is with us."

The girl gave a loud laugh, and moved slightly on one side.
“And so is Charles, I see. Well, I’m not afraid of either of them. I’ve as good a right to talk to you as anybody else—better too—when all’s said and done.”

I felt indignant at the presumption of the creature in daring to call my betrothed by his Christian name; but I could neither remark on it nor demand an explanation before herself. In another minute the gentlemen had returned to us. I saw old Mr. Hamilton give an angry glance toward the corner where Mlle. Von Beck was standing, and thence look at his eldest son; but if Charles perceived the look, he neither returned nor commented on it, but busied himself in conducting me to the carriage. As we were about to drive off, I saw Mlle. Von Beck again, standing on the steps of the theater, and still persecuting me with her malignant gaze.

“Who is that girl?” I said, as we drove home; “those fierce black-eyes of hers will haunt my dreams.”

But either Charles did not hear my question, or choose to answer it, and I did not consider it worth while to put it to him a second time.

CHAPTER V.

In compliment to myself, I supposed, and wishing to see as much of me as possible after so long a separation, Charles Hamilton, who usually resided with his parents at Rosenwalt, had taken up his quarters at Rhineberg, and the first thing by which I was awakened on the following morning was the sound of old Mr. Hamilton’s voice as he angrily discussed some topic with his eldest son. The old
gentleman appeared to have come over to Rhineberg thus early on purpose to speak with Charles on the subject which annoyed him, for I heard his feet grating up and down the gravel beneath the veranda as he attempted to enforce his arguments, and occasionally the tones of his voice were rendered almost inaudible by the passion to which he gave way.

Fearful of hearing something as unpleasant concerning myself as had assailed my ears once before from the same quarter, I tried to slip out of bed and close the windows of my room, but the figure of Claude Hamilton lying on the grass directly in front of them forbade my showing myself in undress; so that there remained nothing for me to do but to remain quiet, and hear as little as I could. Yet that little proved too much for the peace of my mind.

"I will not allow it, Charles," exclaimed the angry tones of my future father-in-law. "You know very well that one of the conditions on which you were permitted to have your intended wife from England was, that all intimacy was broken off between our family and that of the Von Becks."

"And who says it isn't?" asked my lover, sullenly.

"I say so," returned his father.

"You know nothing about it," was the contemptuous reply; "it's not my fault if the girl intrudes herself upon our notice. I am sure I wish we had never gone to the play."

"If it had not been last night, it would have been some other night," said Mr. Hamilton. "If a decided and unequivocal stop is not put upon her proceedings, we may be
annoyed at any time. Your promise, Charles, was to end it at once and forever.”

"And so I have," he replied.

"Yet you wrote to her from up-country," remarked his brother, carelessly.

The conversation was becoming too interesting for me to put any further restraint upon my inclinations. On the contrary, I felt I had a right to listen. What was this treason of which I had heard nothing until now? I could fancy that Charles had colored under Claude's remark, but he made no reply.

"Is this true?" demanded his father.

"It was only a line to say I was about to return. I was not aware then that the 'Earl of Winstanley' had arrived. It is not possible to break off an old friendship in a day."

"Friendship?" repeated Claude, incredulously.

"Well, it was never intended to be more," rejoined his brother.

"Not on your side, perhaps."

"No, sir," said Mr. Hamilton, turning fiercely on his younger son, "not on his side, nor yours, nor mine, nor on the side, I hope, of any one belonging to my family. I'll have no Dutch half-castes taking the place of my wife and daughters; nor," returning to Charles, "since she is here, will I stand by and see that young woman from England insulted by Ernestine Von Beck. Over Louisa I have no control; but if she attempts to notice Amalia or Caroline again, I'll let her know my mind on the subject plainly enough. And now, when is the marriage to be?"
“In a week,” replied Charles.

“In a week? ay, that’s right; the sooner the better, or you may sow such seeds of future discord for yourselves as will produce a bitter harvest. When Miss Grey is your wife there can be no withdrawal, and she must hold her own against such insolence.”

“You had better not speak so loud; her room is just above here,” urged Claude, in a lower voice. How my heart thanked him for thinking of my feelings!

“You are right, Claude,” said his father; “we can not be too cautious; at all events, till the ceremony is over. Meanwhile, Charles, I advise you to find amusement for your future wife within the grounds of Rhineberg, for nowhere else will she be safe from the attacks of Madame Von Beck or her amiable daughter.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” ejaculated Charles, angrily.

“One would think, to hear you talk, that the woman had committed an assault upon Laura.”

“The woman means mischief, Charles, nevertheless. You may take my word for it; and, if she can put a spoke in your wheel yet, she will.”

Some incoherent mutterings on the part of my betrothed followed this speech, and then his father and brother walked away from him (or, from losing the sound of their voices, I supposed so), and he was left to his own meditations.

It is to be hoped they were more agreeable than mine. To say I was indignant at what I had overheard is not enough; indignation is no word for the mingled rage, shame, and regret that waged fierce war together in my bosom. Rage that Charles should have dared to lure me
from my home by assurances of unaltered affection, and 
 promises of eternal fidelity, when, most probably, he had 
 been holding out the same hopes to another woman; 
 shame, that I should have been so easily tricked into be­ lieving his falsehoods; and regret, deep and bitter regret, 
 that I had disregarded the advice of all my friends, and 
 had been bent upon having my own way. The "bitter 
 harvest," of which Mr. Hamilton had spoken, had, in my 
 case, already begun.

I felt grateful to the old man and his younger son for 
 the considerate manner in which they had alluded to my 
 name; but my cheeks burned beneath the idea that I was 
 an object of pity to them, a creature whose highest hap­ 
 pine was to depend on the success with which she was 
 cheated. But none should have it in their power to say 
 that of me. No sooner had I taken in the import of their 
 conversation than I made up my mind never to marry 
 Charles Hamilton. The difficulties by which such a de­ 
 cision would surround me—the onus which in consequence 
 would be attached to my name—did not trouble me. With 
 the knowledge that he could have cared for or pretended to 
 care for such a woman as Ernestine Von Beck, the scales 
 dropped from my eyes, and I realized that I had been cher­ 
 ishing not the living man, but a phantom which did not 
 exist, raised by my own imagination. I had made a fear­ 
 ful mistake, the consequences of which might follow me 
 all my life; but it had been an honest error. I had cheat­ 
 ed no one but myself; and what I had confessed to feeling 
 I had believed I felt. But as I recalled many a well­ 
 known and remembered passage in the letters of Charles
Hamilton, in which he had vowed again and again that his love for me was as true as on the day we parted, my contempt for his pusillanimous conduct knew no bounds. Yet, although I believed that I had fully decided not to become his wife, I could not all at once see my way straight before me. I had made a long and perilous voyage in order to attain the end which now I scornfully rejected; but where was I to go? how should I procure a passage back to England? who would assist me in this dilemma? As I thought of my want of funds and friends, and remembered that I was an unprotected stranger in a strange land, my tears fell fast. Yet I did not swerve from my purpose, and the first thing to be done was to have an explanation with Charles Hamilton.

I dressed myself quickly and appeared at the breakfast-table, where he, whom I no longer looked upon as my betrothed, was the only one from Rosenwalt present. Claude must have returned home with his father; I could not help feeling chagrined when I found how readily he gave up my company to its lawful monopolizer. But I managed to behave to Charles as though he were any other gentleman, and as soon as the meal was concluded, I asked him to take a stroll with me in the garden. I was determined not to let my courage ooze away through delay, and we were no sooner out of hearing of the occupants of Rhineberg than I opened the subject which disturbed me.

"Charles, I overheard the conversation between your father and yourself this morning. Who is this Mademoiselle Von Beck, and what is her connection with yourself? I must beg you to give me a candid explanation."
He stared at me for a moment, looking much surprised and confused, and then he stammered:

"I don’t understand what you mean, Laura."

"I can imagine that a little time to collect your thoughts will not be ungrateful to you, Charles; and I have no wish to hurry you; but my meaning is plain enough. On what terms has your acquaintance with Ernestine Von Beck been conducted?"

"On ordinary terms," he answered, though not very decidedly. "Von Beck was overseer of Rosenwalt until something went wrong in the accounts, when my father turned him off, since which we have been requested to hold no communication with his family; but they used to visit at Rosenwalt at one time, and it is rather difficult to break off an acquaintance with women who persist in forcing themselves upon your notice."

"And is this all?" I exclaimed, with surprise.

"Really all! My father was angry because Mademoiselle Von Beck came and stood near our party last night at the theater. How could I help it? The theater does not belong to me."

"But you wrote to her, Charles; I heard your brother say so, and Mr. Ransom also."

His pale face flushed beneath this accusation; but he did not answer it. I put it in another form.

"Did you not write to her from up the country?"

"Just a line on business."

"What business? Remember, Charles, I have a right to ask you the question. This is a matter which concerns me deeply."
He pondered for a moment, and then he said:

"Well, if you must know, it was about a matter of money which I owe to her father; but this is a secret, Laura, mind! The fact is, the governor hitherto has kept me so short that I have been compelled sometimes to borrow for my necessary expenses; but that will be all altered now; for from the day of our marriage I am to be taken into the house as a partner."

"Then you have really never made love to Ernestine Von Beck?"

"Never!" he answered, and he said the word quite stoutly.

This assertion staggered me. I could not disbelieve his positive denial, and yet the impression that my first ideas were right was a very strong one. I walked by his side for a few seconds in silence, and then I said:

"Well, I will believe you, Charles, and I trust I may never repent my faith in you; for I could forgive anything sooner than being deceived. I certainly thought, from what I overheard, that your father had stronger reasons than those you adduce for disliking your intimacy with the Von Becks."

"It is dangerous to judge any one by the fragments of a conversation," he replied, coolly. "Had you heard the whole, you would have thought differently. I rather fancy my father has an inkling that I have borrowed money from his late overseer."

"Which would fully account for his anger," I returned, eagerly. I was anxious to believe him true, although the alternative might prove the happier thing for me.
"Exactly so; and now, Laura, if you are quite satisfied with regard to my probity, I will leave you, as my presence is needed at Rosenwalt this morning."

He said farewell to me in the avenue where we stood, and walked toward the house, whence after a few minutes he returned in a closed carriage, from the window of which he waved his hand as he rapidly passed me on his way to Rosenwalt. For my own part, I still lingered in the avenue, hardly knowing whether I was pleased or sorry at the issue of our interview.

He had so far cleared himself in my eyes that I feared I should be no longer justified in breaking off my engagement with him on account of Mlle. Von Beck; and yet I could not say that my heart was lightened of its load, or that I anticipated my marriage with any more complacency than before. Occupied with painful thought, I sauntered up and down the shady avenue, full of perplexity and indecision; recalling the angry words and tones of old Mr. Hamilton, and trying to reconcile them with the unequivocal denial which his son had put upon them. As I did so I noticed, more than once, a black face peeping from behind the trunk of a tree, which, directly it caught sight of me, dodged and was lost to view. After this little maneuver had been gone through two or three times, it struck me that it must be done to attract my attention, and I drew nearer to the spot where I had seen it. As soon as I had approached the tree, the dusky face peeped from behind it again, and a skinny black arm and hand were extended toward me, bearing a soiled envelope.

"Is this for me?" I asked as I took the uninviting-look-
ing missive, which bore no address, in my hand. The woolly head nodded several times violently; two rows of shining white teeth, surrounding a very red tongue, were disclosed for my benefit; and then the black hands were clapped together, the black legs put themselves in motion, and the messenger had scudded across the brushwood like a wild deer, and was out of sight before I had broken the seal of my unknown correspondent.

It is unnecessary here to give the actual contents of that letter, which was both ill-written and ill-spelled. The pith of it, however, was to revive my worst suspicions; to assure me that I had been grossly deceived; that another had a better right to become Charles Hamilton's wife than myself; and that if I were not satisfied with the truth of what I read, and would be at a certain shop in Cape Town that evening, the writer would meet me and give me undeniable proofs of her assertion.

At any other time I should have treated such an anonymous communication with the contempt it deserved, but at that moment I was not competent to judge what was the best or most proper to be done. I had little doubt that the letter I held came from one or other of the Von Becks; the woman who "meant mischief" as old Mr. Hamilton had observed, and from whose assaults I should not be safe beyond the precincts of Rhineberg. But (so I argued with myself) it was quite necessary that before I made any direct quarrel with Charles, I should be certain that he had not spoken the truth to me; and from what Claude and his father had said that morning, I did not think I had much chance of extracting any information
from them. The Hamiltons, for their own sakes, would try to keep me in ignorance of the truth until after I was married, for a certain onus must accrue to their name should I, after having come out from England expressly to marry their son, leave the Cape without fulfilling my engagement. The thought of all this made me resolve that I would say nothing more upon the subject until I had met the writer of my letter. If she could give me proof that the intimacy of my lover with Mlle. Von Beck had not been merely that of friendship, showing him to have uttered a falsehood to me, I would break with him at once; if not, if she had nothing further to adduce than what I had already heard, I supposed that I must bear the consequences of my headstrong folly.

The method for carrying out my project was made easier to me than I had anticipated, for when I returned to the house and told my hostess that I wished to go to the town that evening to make a few purchases, she at once offered to take me there, as she had some visits to pay herself, and would leave me at the shops whilst she went her rounds.

This plan suited me as well as any other; for things had come to that pass, that the risk of detection had no power to frighten me. All I desired was to succeed in obtaining the interview which, one way or the other, was to set my doubts at rest.

For the remainder of the day, therefore, I stayed very quiet; behaving to Charles, who made his reappearance at luncheon, as though nothing were the matter, but urging fatigue or disinclination whenever he proposed any method for bringing about another tête-à-tête between us.
I felt that I could not again trust myself to a private interview with him. I should have blurted out my indignation and contempt before their time.

At the hour appointed I drove with Mrs. Ransom into Cape Town. The writer of my note had requested me to meet her at Mercer's, the largest milliner's shop in the place. It was easy, therefore, when Mrs. Ransom asked me where I wished to go, to disarm her of all suspicion by inquiring which was the best milliner that they possessed.

"Mercer's is the largest," she readily replied; "but you will find the articles at the native shop, Ramasawmy Chetty's, very good."

"I think I should prefer Mercer's," I said, carelessly; and accordingly at Mercer's door I was deposited, and Mrs. Ransom's carriage bore her away to the houses of some of her friends.

I made some trifling purchases at the counter, keeping a good lookout the while. Presently a respectable-looking native woman approached me with a second note.

"You missy from England?" she said, interrogatively. I answered in the affirmative.

"Coming from Rhineberg?"

"Yes."

"Then, missy, read this chit."

The "chit," as she called it, was merely to intimate that the bearer had instructions to bring me face to face with my unknown correspondent, and therefore I rose at once and followed her, anxious, but without dread. She led me cautiously through several by-streets until she stopped at the garden gate of a brick house, lifting the
latch of which she noiselessly traversed the paved pathway, edged by dwarf orange-trees in pots, and treading in her footsteps I soon found myself in a stone hall, through which I was shown into a pleasant sitting-room, and the woman left me, I supposed, to inform her mistress of my arrival.

As soon as I found myself alone I regretted I had come; it seemed so mean and underhand a mode of obtaining information; but my repentance was too late, for just as I was thinking of walking back to Mercer's, and had turned toward the door for that purpose, I found my pathway barred by the stout person of a half-caste Dutch woman, unmistakably the mother of the girls I had seen at the theater the night before.

"Well, mees," she commenced, in her broken English, "so you are come. You will well see that I could not meet you at de shop myself for fear that Mrs. Eansom should also be there."

"Yes, I am come," I echoed; "and now that I am here I regret it. I do not believe you can have anything to tell me respecting Mr. Hamilton that I do not already know; but be pleased to say what you have to say at once, for I am in a hurry."

"Ah! you do not believe, mees, that I can tell you anything dat you do not already know," said the fat woman, sinking into a chair. "Well! dat may be de truth, but, if so, I do not well perceive how you can wish to marry Mr. Charles Hamilton, to take him away from de poor girl, my daughter."

"If to marry him is to take him away from your
daughter,” I cried, “I have no wish to do so. But first you must prove to me that it is the case.”

“My proof is dis; dat he has promised a long time ago to marry my daughter, and that now he will break dat word. I can show you letters, mees, and presents which he has given; will dat be sufficient?”

“Quite—if I can identify them. But, first, is not your name Von Beck?”

“It is so, mees.”

“I ask, because I have also been hearing something about you this morning, Madame Von Beck. I have been told that your husband was dismissed from his place, as overseer of Rosenwalt, for dishonesty, and that that is the reason why Mr. Hamilton has been requested by his father to break off all acquaintanceship with your family.”

I said this in order to make the woman believe that everything concerning themselves had been revealed to me, and to prevent her thinking it worth while to exaggerate for my benefit. But she was far too cunning to be so taken in.

“Ah! he told you dat, did he, mees? Then he did not speak all de truth to you. The ill-fortune of my poor husband had noting to do wid de anger of Mr. Charles and his fader. Dat was because he loved my daughter, and wished to marry her.”

“But it is impossible!” I gasped; “it can not be true. He has been engaged to me for the last six years.”

Mme. Von Beck shook her head, with a smile of incredulity.

“Ernestine!” she called, in a shrill voice, “bring dose
letters, my child, and dose beautiful presents which Mr. Charles give you, and which I tell you to make ready. And now, mees, you will see!” she continued, as we awaited her daughter. In another minute Ernestine Von Beck had entered the room. I have a dim recollection that her manner was self-sufficient and triumphant, but I disdained to take any notice of her. I would not even look at the “beautiful presents,” which might have been obtained from any one, but for the letters I held out an eager, trembling hand.

Yes! trembling, although I did not love the man. It is not a pleasant thing to have to acknowledge one’s self deceived in the presence of the woman to whom the affections of one’s lover have been transferred.

The letters, five or six in number, were not long; but they were unmistakable proofs of Charles’s infidelity.

The terms in which he had addressed this girl; the confidences he had reposed in her; the soothing manner in which he had answered her reproaches, disgusted and enraged me; but when I came upon my own name, which he had dared to canvass before these people, and read that he excused himself for his intention of marrying me on the score that his father had threatened to refuse him the partnership he coveted, unless he broke off all intimacy with Ernestine, and fulfilled his engagement with myself, I had read enough. On the witness of his own handwriting, he had been playing a double game for months, or even years; and his anxiety that I should join him at the Cape had arisen, not from his devotion to me, but his desire to raise himself.
I dashed the letters on the table with a suddenness that startled the sluggish Dutch women, and, with a rapidity for which they were unprepared, commenced to walk toward the outer door.

"Stop, mees!" exclaimed Mme. Von Beck; "you have not tell what you think of dese letters and dese presents. Have not Mr. Charles behave very badly toward my poor daughter?"

"He has behaved infamously toward both of us," I replied, "and I thank you for information which has prevented my making myself miserable for life. As for you, mademoiselle," I continued, turning for the first time toward Ernestine Von Beck, "from this moment the course is clear, and, as far as I am concerned, you are welcome to marry Charles Hamilton to-morrow;" and without stopping to hear anything further, I ran quickly down the garden-path again, and emerged into the public road.

At first I hardly knew what to do. I felt as though I should wander about Cape Town homeless and friendless till I died. But the next moment I knew that I must act; that day was waning, and my mind must be made up at once. Of one thing I was determined; I would go back neither to Rhineberg nor Rosenwalt. I had been cruelly insulted and deceived, and I would set foot in no house belonging to the Hamiltons again. Neither would I re-encounter Mrs. Ransom; she had been cognizant of this affair between her brother and Ernestine Von Beck, and yet she had said that she should ask her to Rhineberg if she chose. I would not, therefore, give her the opportunity of triumphing in my humiliation.
I walked back quickly to Mercer's, and requested them, when Mrs. Ransom called for me, to say that I had found other means of returning home. This was a message I knew which would so affront her that she would take no further trouble on my behalf.

And having done that, I bent my steps toward the hotel where I had breakfasted upon my first arrival, and informed the proprietors that I had come to stay there. They were, of course, all obsequiousness to my wishes, and placed two of their best rooms at my disposal, having reached which, I called for pen, ink, and paper, and had dispatched the following letter by a messenger to Rhineberg before another hour had passed over my head:

"My dear Mrs. Ransom,—I am sorry to leave your house without warning; but it is quite impossible I can return there. I have learned every particular relative to your brother's former connection with Mademoiselle Von Beck, and I could not think of being the means to make him break his promises in that direction. My intention, therefore, is to return to England by the next opportunity, and if you will have the kindness to send my boxes and wearing apparel to the subjoined address, you will oblige,

"Yours sincerely,

"Laura Grey."

CHAPTER VI.

As soon as I knew that my letter was on its road to Rhineberg, I felt, comparatively speaking, at rest. I had plunged myself into a dilemma, from which at that moment I saw no means of extrication; but I was no longer in dread of being sacrificed in marriage for want of courage to declare the change which had taken place in my sentiments. Therefore, notwithstanding the difficulties which beset my path, my mind was easier, and I made an excellent meal, and should have retired to rest had I not been compelled to wait until my boxes were sent from Rhineberg.

At ten o'clock, from the confused sounds of talking and bustling which I heard in the corridor of the hotel, I thought they had arrived; but the next moment the door of my room was flung open, and Mr. Hamilton and his son Charles appeared before me. I rose to greet them, nervous at the thought of the coming interview, but firm in my resolve that no arguments, however subtle, should shake the determination which I held. The father was first to speak.

"We were grieved, my dear Miss Grey, grieved beyond measure, to hear of the sudden step which you have so unadvisedly taken. I trust that a few hours’ reflection has proved sufficient to show you that you have been too hasty, and that you will consent now to accompany me back to Rosenwalt. I have come here with the express purpose of
persuading you to do so, and my carriage is waiting at the door."

I went up to the old gentleman and shook his hand.

"Mr. Hamilton, during the short period that we have been acquainted you have spoken kindly of and to me. I am much obliged to you for it. I would gladly comply with any request of yours which did not interfere with my idea of what is right; but in this case it would do so; going back to Rosenwalt would imply that I still intended to marry your son, and that is now quite out of the question."

"No such thing, my dear—no such thing!" exclaimed the old man. "This has been an unfortunate misunderstanding between you, which a little talk will soon clear away."

"No talking can undo facts," I answered; "I have seen the letters which your son wrote to Mademoiselle Von Beck, and comprehend fully now why he was so anxious to marry me, whilst he was making love to another woman."

"Not making love," interposed Charles, eagerly; "it was simply a piece of nonsense, Laura; a flirtation pour passer le temps."

I regarded him with contempt.

"Was it 'pour passer le temps' that you spent your money upon that woman, Charles? that you dared to discuss my name in your letters to her, and to assert that you fulfilled your engagement to me merely on compulsion, and because your father had threatened you otherwise with the loss of his partnership?"
At this question he shrunk, abashed, into himself, and my attention returned to Mr. Hamilton.

"I don't wish to defend my son," said the latter; "I know that he has behaved very foolishly, wrongly, if you please; but my belief is, Miss Grey, that few marriages would take place in this world were strict fidelity insisted on beforehand, especially when such an ordeal as a six years' separation is taken into consideration. Charles's fault has been one of the head more than the heart, and I can see that he already deeply regrets it."

"He regrets that I have heard of it," I said, shortly.

"And of the deed itself, my dear young lady, which, whether in jest or earnest, was utterly foolish and ill-advised. But I am sure, notwithstanding, that he retains a very sincere affection for yourself, and if you love him—"

"But I don't love him," I said, decidedly.

They both stared at me—the old man incredulously, Charles more incredulously still.

"I can see you don't believe it," I continued; "and, considering that I undertook so long a journey expressly to become his wife, it must, upon a first hearing, sound strange to you. But I did not know it myself until I met him again. I loved Charles as a boy; but he is no longer what I loved, and my affection has disappeared with the qualities that provoked it. This is the whole truth, and though, had I believed him faithful to me, I could have kept my promise to the very letter, yet, having been compelled to speak, were there not another man in the world, I could never now consent to be his wife." And having
said my say, I turned aside, as though the subject were concluded.

But Mr. Hamilton recommenced his entreaties.

"Miss Grey, pray come back with me to Rosenwalt; you must, indeed. You can scarcely have considered what a scandal your remaining at this hotel will cause. Come to Rosenwalt, if only until matters are finally settled between you."

"As far as I am concerned they are already settled," I replied, firmly. "I shall never be the wife of your son, Mr. Hamilton, and therefore Rosenwalt is no place for me. Besides, I decline to accept the hospitality of ladies who could stand by, knowing me to be deceived, and permit me to remain so."

"But all that will soon be forgotten," he urged, "if you will but return. Charles would never have married Mademoiselle Von Beck with my consent, Miss Grey; and he is ready now to promise upon his honor never even to speak to her again."

"I will not be the means of putting so painful a restraint upon his inclinations," I answered, proudly. "If Mr. Charles Hamilton chose to bestow his name upon a negress to-morrow it would make no difference in the world to me; for he and I are virtually parted forever."

"But what are your plans, what do you intend to do?" he asked, with surprise.

"I have scarcely made any yet," I answered, "but I believe that I shall stay here until an opportunity offers for me to return to England."
"But to go back to Langley unmarried—you who sailed thence for that specific purpose, Miss Grey."

"You think it will be a shame to me, Mr. Hamilton, a disgrace that will cleave to me all my life. Perhaps so; but I should take greater shame to myself could I consent to forget the manner in which Charles has written to me; the disgrace lay in my consenting to join one of whom I evidently knew so little."

"But where are your funds?" said the old man, advancing toward me. "Miss Grey, if you are bent upon this proceeding (of which I earnestly entreat you to consider twice) you must allow me to furnish you with the means of returning to your mother's care."

"Your intentions are kind, Mr. Hamilton; but you must think poorly of my pride if you imagine I could accept your offer."

"But how else can you obtain a passage?"

"I know not," I said, vehemently; "but I feel this, that I would rather beg, borrow, or steal the money than take it from you. That I will work as a dress-maker or a servant, in order to obtain it, rather than be indebted to any one of the name of Hamilton again. It has too bitter a sound to me. I am not ungrateful to you, I hope; but no persuasion shall make me accept your assistance. I would rather die of want in Cape Town—"

"You are obstinate, young lady," he replied, buttoning up his pocket again, "and I fear you may have cause to regret your refusal. However, I have said all that I can think of to persuade you to do what is wise; and therefore I conclude it is of no use my staying here any longer."
He turned to quit the room as he spoke. Charles lingered behind.

"Laura, is there no chance for me?" he said, pleadingly.

"Not the slightest," I answered, in a cold voice.

"But if you would only listen," he urged, "I think I could excuse myself a little in your eyes. You see, six years is a devilish long time, Laura, and perhaps your beauty had somewhat lost its influence over me, and then a man meets with so many temptations that a woman never dreams of; but directly I met you again, and saw your eyes and hair and figure lovelier even than when I parted with you, all my affection revived, it did, indeed; it came back fresher than ever; and now I wouldn't change you for any woman in the world—if you would only believe it," he added, mournfully.

"Too late, Charles!" I said, carelessly; "you see you wrote all this sort of thing in your letters to me, and I did believe it; and perhaps you remember the proverb, 'Once bit, twice shy.'"

"You have no heart," he said, angrily.

"Not for you, I confess it; but, though I feel now that I have been keeping faith all these years with a shadow, it was faith, Charles, true and undefiled; and I never resorted to nonsense in any shape, in order to make the time pass, until I consented to join you here."

"Of course, if you are determined to harp on that theme, it is of no use attempting to argue with you. You are like all your sex, Laura—utterly hard and unforgiving where another woman is concerned,"
“Not so, Charles. For my own sake I must con­descend to refute the accusation. Had you deserted me for Mademoiselle Von Beck, and been honest enough to let me know it, I could have forgiven you, though perhaps not all at once; but it is the deceit you have practiced which has so disenchanted me. Your letters never failed or varied in their hackneyed expressions of attachment; you have tried to do the cruelest thing of which a man is capable toward a woman, in comparison to which open infidelity is kindness; to let me marry you under the belief that your heart was entirely mine, and that in the very eyes of the woman to whom you had made so light of your supposed affection for me. It was a mean, cowardly act to con­template, Charles, especially toward one who so trusted you as to cheerfully leave all her friends for your sake.”

Then, as he was shrinking out of the room, looking terribly ashamed, I remembered that I had loved him, and my speech appeared bitter to myself.

“Don’t go yet,” I added, hastily; “we may not meet again. Let us, at least, shake hands and part friends.”

“Oh, Laura! Can’t you forgive me?” he said, in a low voice, as our hands met.

“Yes—freely,” I answered, in a cheerful tone; “and the more so, that I have not been undeceived too late. Had that been the case, I am afraid to think what I should have felt toward you.”

“But the talk that this will raise,” he complained; “the unpleasantness for you.”

“Fear nothing for me, Charles. I will take care of myself, and not permit the ‘talk’ to make me too unhappy.”
So, now, good-bye, and my worst wish for us both is, that we may speedily forget all this annoyance."

"I shall never forget it," he said, in a mournful voice, as he left the room.

And, notwithstanding my boasted indifference, I also felt that it would be long before the trace left by the occurrences of the last few days would be erased from the surface of my life.

After I had retired to rest, I thought long and deeply over the interview that had passed. I had told Mr. Hamilton very glibly that I would work as a dress-maker or a servant to obtain my passage money, sooner than lay myself under any further obligation to him; but I knew it was a thing easier said than done. After much cogitation I believed that my best plan would be to remain quietly where I was until I had communicated the fact of my intended return to my mother. I had a small sum of money which I had brought out with me, and which I believed to be sufficient to maintain me until I heard from England; then if my parent was unable to let me have what I required, I would try and get my passage paid home by some lady in return for my services; an opportunity which my landlady informed me occurred by almost every homeward bound vessel which put into Table Bay. The young are not apt to anticipate difficulties in their way; I felt quite sure that by some mode or other my path would be made easy to me, and fell asleep under the full conviction that, in the end, all would come right.

But the next morning, as I was sitting at breakfast, Claude Hamilton suddenly walked into the room, and my
heart gave a great, glad leap at the sight of him, which made me feel that to leave the Cape again would be sorry work for more reasons than one.

He looked very sad at the turn things had taken, and he showed no hesitation in alluding to the cause of his finding me there, although his sympathy was uttered in a hesitating voice.

"Miss Grey—I am so ashamed—so bitterly ashamed—of all this!"

"You need not be, Mr. Hamilton; it is no fault of yours."

"But it is my family who have brought it on you."

"You are not responsible for the sins of your family, and I have never connected you with them—even in thought."

"Thank you," he said, curtly; and then, after a pause,

"Is it true that you are determined to go home?"

"Quite true! What else could I do?"

"I am sure I don't know, but it seems very dreadful—that you should have been asked and entreated to leave your own home for ours, and then—that this should be the upshot! Charles has behaved shamefully, infamously to you, and had I had my will, you should have heard of it long ago."

"I wish I had," I answered; "but as it is, it is useless to discuss the subject. It may seem strange to you to hear me say so, Mr. Hamilton, but I am thankful now that it has happened."

"So am I," he said, abruptly.

"It is far better I should have discovered it before than
after my marriage, and from the moment I remet your brother (you won’t be offended with me for saying this) I felt that I had been living under a delusion, and that I did not love him.”

“Thank God!” ejaculated Claude; and then he added, hastily, “for you, that is to say, Miss Grey; it was so much better, as you observe, that you should be made aware of the truth at once.”

“It was much better,” I answered, quietly; “and now that we understand that fact, let us discuss something else. Is Mrs. Ransom very much offended at my leaving Rheineberg?”

“Her offense is of little consequence,” said Claude, thereby betraying that she was; “the only thing I can think of now is yourself. What do you propose to do?”

Then I unfolded to him all my plans, and told him what I had settled in my own mind the night before.

Claude disapproved of them. He thought that waiting in Cape Town until I heard from home, which must be at the least a period of two months, might prove exceedingly unpleasant to me.

“Fancy,” he said, “your being cooped up in this hotel, without horse or carriage at your command, and then the risk, every time you venture out, of meeting some of my family, or those abominable Von Becks.”

“Oh, I don’t mind the Von Becks,” I answered, gayly; the very presence of Claude Hamilton seemed to put me in good spirits; “I bear them no malice, poor things! They have only done what they consider the best for themselves, and every one has a right to try for that! And as
to a carriage, I have never been used to one, and am well able to walk."

"But not alone," he argued; "indeed, Miss Grey, you will encounter a thousand annoyances of which you can have no idea. Pray let me persuade you, since you are resolved upon returning to England, to go at once; the mail-steamer will start in a few days."

"But that can not be," I replied, "because—to tell you the plain truth, Mr. Hamilton—I have not the money. Your father offered it to me, but I refused to accept it. I am not even sure that my mother has it to send me yet. I must wait until I hear something from her."

"And if she should not send it?" he asked, anxiously.

"Then I shall go home in attendance on some lady, or any one who wants a servant, and will pay my passage in return for my services."

To see Claude Hamilton’s face fall was almost laughable.

"As a servant!" he exclaimed—"you to work your way home like any soldier’s wife; it shall never be; I will not hear of it. Miss Grey! Laura! you refused this money from my father, but you will take it from me—as a loan, if you so will; but, anyway, say you will, and start by the next steamer."

He was looking straight at me with his pleading blue eyes, and I hesitated.

"I can not bear to think of you, living lonely and unprotected here, still less returning to your mother in any way but as a lady should. Laura, to oblige me, to show that you do not extend to me the feeling of aversion with
which my family have inspired you, say that you will accept my offer.'"

He clasped my hand as he spoke; our eyes met; and I said, "Yes."

It was so sweet to think that he cared for my welfare; that some one in that strange land held me in his thoughts, and suffered with me!

In the course of a few days the mail-steamer for England arrived, and when she left again, I sailed in her.

Claude Hamilton arranged everything for me, paid my passage money (which I made him fully understand was to be considered as only a loan); secured my berth, and finally put me and my belongings on board. When he had shaken hands for the last time, and I had lost sight of his handsome bronzed face and manly figure, I went down into my cabin and cried, to think I should never meet his kindly glance again. I believe that the Hamiltons were quite taken aback by the news that I was gone; that they had imagined that, being without funds, it was impossible I could leave the Cape without their knowledge, and had cherished the idea that after a few weeks of reflection I should come to my senses again, and announce myself ready to fulfill my broken engagement.

Were such the case, Claude Hamilton must have been as delicate in keeping the secret of his generous loan to me as he had been in making the offer of it. My voyage home was melancholy and monotonous in the extreme. I had no opportunity to announce the blasting of my hopes of matrimony to my poor mother, and the thought of the surprise and sorrow she would experience at seeing me
burst in upon her at Langley, almost swallowed up the joy I felt at meeting her again.

The reality exceeded my worst expectations. It is needless, neither have I the space to relate the welcome I received. That my mother was glad to see me once more no one could doubt, but the fact of my returning after so public a departure was a source of bitter humiliation to her.

She was not free, poor, dear soul, from those petty feelings by which women bred in the depths of the country are apt to let themselves be governed, and the fear of what "people" would say and think, was greater to her than the thankfulness with which she should have contemplated my escape from a marriage which could have ended only in misery.

People, that is to say, the people who reside in Langley, did say and think a great deal, there is no doubt; but as they did not presume to canvass the subject before my face, I tried not to let imagination take too great a hold on me. I had many annoyances to encounter; and not a little impertinence, but I regarded it all as part of the price I was called upon to pay in exchange for my deliverance.

My brothers advanced the sum with which to return the money I had borrowed from Claude Hamilton, and when it was sent to him, I ventured to write a few lines to thank him for his great kindness to me. And then my last link with the past seemed broken, and I settled myself down to be a good daughter to my mother, and to try and make her forget the disappointment which she had sustained on my behalf.
She was a very good mother to me; she never re­proached me with my obstinacy or willfulness; and a dis­mal shake of the head as she alluded to "poor Laura's dis­appointment," or a heavy sigh when I arrayed myself in any of the articles of my unused trousseau, were the sole evidences she used to give that the circumstance was not forgotten by her. After a little while, also, the strangeness with which my old friends had first greeted me wore off; and I filled the old place in Langley which had been mine before I left it.

Yet I was not happy. I had quite determined in my own heart that I should never make another attempt to enter the marriage state, but not because I regretted Charles's infidelity, or had been thereby rendered distrustful of the faith of man. I believed in the worth of the human race as sincerely as I had ever done, more so, perhaps, when I reflected on the kindness which had been shown me by Claude Hamilton—for here lay the secret of my discomfort. The tones, the words, the looks of the younger brother had lingered with me longer than they should have done; they haunted me by day and returned to me in my dreams; and the knowledge fretted me, because I had no wish to waste more of my life upon an illusion, and I verily believed I should never see nor speak with him again.

Yet, had I not done so, I should never have written down these passages in my life's history. They would have had too mournful a termination to find favor in the sight of any reader.

It only remains for me, therefore, to tell how and under
what circumstances I did meet him again. I had never
expected it, I can safely say that, and yet when it came
how natural it seemed. It was on a spring afternoon,
some six months after I had returned to Langley, that, as
I was sitting by my mother's sofa, our servant suddenly
appeared with the intelligence that a gentleman of the
name of Hamilton was in the drawing-room, and wished to
speak to me. My poor mother reddened all over at the
sound of Hamilton, and my first impulse was that it must
be Charles, come over to try and effect a reconciliation be­
tween us, and I sprung to my feet, exclaiming:

"I will not see him, mother! I told him my mind
frankly before we parted, and he must be crazy to imagine
that I will retake my word."

"But what is to be done, then?" asked my mother,
trembling. "Am I to speak to him, Laura? Oh, dear!
oh, dear!"

Her plaintive helplessness appealed to me more than any
firmness would have done. I felt that I was a coward, and
I told her so.

"I will go, mamma, and at once. It is but to repeat
my decision, and to beg him to leave us. Langley is no
place for him now."

So I left the room without further hesitation, and en­
tered the drawing-room. What was my pleasure—my sur­
prise, as Claude came forward to receive me! Had I not
known my own sentiments regarding him before, they
must have become patent to me as he pressed my hand
warmly in his, and sent the hot blood coursing from my
heart to my face to assure him of his welcome. In a few
minutes more I had introduced him to my mother, who, judging my feelings by her own, was puzzled to think why I should appear so pleased to see any one bearing the name which had become so odious to her ears. However, she had heard sufficient of Claude's kindness toward me to know that she must not class him with the rest of his family, and, therefore, it was not long before she had invited him (since his stay at Langley was short) to remain and take tea with us.

He accepted the invitation almost gratefully, as though he had hardly expected so much at our hands, and as we strolled into the garden, whilst the meal was being prepared, he told me so.

"I was half afraid to come down here," he said; "I feared the sight of me might make your mother angry, and perhaps be distasteful to yourself."

"You can hardly have thought that," I answered, quickly; "or else you must believe that I have very little gratitude in my composition."

"I believe nothing but what is good of you, Miss Grey; but your memories of the Cape must naturally be unpleasant ones."

"Indeed they are not!" I replied, with a laugh; "not all of them, that is to say. I care too little about them now to permit the recollection to annoy me."

"Is that really the case?" he asked, eagerly; "have you no lingering regrets for the disappointment you then experienced?"

"Not for myself," I said, looking him full in the face. "I feel only thankful when I recall it. I think it was a
most lucky disappointment. By the bye—how is Mademoiselle Von Beck?"

"I am afraid I can not inform you accurately, for we have seen nothing of them lately. Charles, to my certain knowledge, has never spoken to one of the family since you left; and both Mr. Ransom and my father have put their vetoes on my mother and sisters doing so. But I did hear, the other day, that Ernestine was going to marry a half-caste."

"Poor Charles!" I said, pathetically.

"Is there no hope for him, Miss Grey?" asked his brother.

"Not the remotest! Have you come over to plead his cause? It will be lost labor, Mr. Hamilton, I warn you."

"I had no such intention," he answered, softly; "I only wished to ascertain your feelings on the subject."

"But why are you here?" I continued; "I thought you were to be in Australia by this time."

"I thought so also; but there have been delays, and I have felt unsettled; and so I thought I would run over to England for six months first, and pick up a few hints on farming. It is not fair the elder brother should have all the advantages."

I glanced at Claude's athletic frame and pleasant face, and thought he had not much reason to complain.

"And when you have picked up your hints, I suppose you will run back again?"

"Yes—perhaps—that is to say—"

"Perhaps? but it depends on yourself."

"Not entirely, Laura."
Directly he said those words I knew what he meant; and I could have thrown my arms about his neck, and thanked him for his love. But all I did was—to say nothing at all! Finding I helped him no further, Claude stole a downward look at me, and repeated his effective sentence.

"It will not depend entirely upon myself, Laura. I came to England for a specific purpose."

"Indeed!"

"Aren't you curious to know what it is?"

"You said just now—to pick up hints on farming."

"And shall I take nothing else back with me?"

I was about to say, "A wife perhaps;" but it seemed such folly to play with words when our hearts were bursting. So I just looked up in his clear eyes, with their soft glance lowered to meet mine, and something must have betrayed the truth to him, for he bent down and kissed me.

Oh! I was so happy! I was so tremulously, eagerly happy, that I burst out crying where I stood.

"Laura—dearest! have I offended you?"

Claude kept repeating this question; but I only shook my head, and sobbed the more, till at last he drew me into a little arbor which was near at hand, and on the principle, I suppose, of "a hair of the dog that bit you," administered so many doses of the same cordial that I was compelled at last to stay my tears, in dread of being kissed away.

Oh! how foolish! how blessed in retrospect seem such times!

My mother's horror when she heard that I had engaged myself to another man of the name of Hamilton may be
imagined better than described. Yet she could not help acknowledging that Claude was “perfect”—or she said so, to please me—and very different from his elder brother.

We were married, and he brought me out to Australia, where, after a few years of separation, I had little difficulty in persuading my mother to join us. Our farm is thriving, and so is our family; and I never look at Claude, whom I can not remember to have given me other than kind words and kinder looks, without heaving a sigh of thankfulness for the termination to my lucky disappointment.

THE END.
LOST IN THE MARSHES.

By FLORENCE MARRYAT.

On the east coast of the county of Norfolk, there lay a village which shall be distinguished by the name of Corston. It was bounded on the one side by the sea, on the other by the open country, and besides the two or three gentlemen farmers whose possessions comprised all the agricultural land within a radius of five miles, it could boast of a church and resident parson—a coastguard with its attendant officer, and above all, close contiguity with Rooklands, the estate of the Earl of Worcester. And those who are acquainted with the moral and social aspect, as it existed forty or fifty years ago, of the more insignificant villages of Norfolk, will acknowledge that Corston was favored above its fellows. The sea coast in its vicinity brought many a gay riding party over from Rooklands, either to enjoy the fresh breezes, or to bathe in the sparkling waves from some sequestered nook, whilst the congregation of the church was made up of drafts from some four or five outlying hamlets which had not the advantage of a place of worship of their own. Conceive then what a much larger audience the Corston parson could depend upon, when the women had a prospect of seeing the bonnets from ten miles round (to say nothing of a chance of the Rookland aristocrats taking it into their heads to drive out), in addition to listening to his somewhat uninteresting sermons. The coastguard, too, was a cause of constant excitement on account of the Admiralty having been in the habit of bestowing the appointment on old, worn-out, half-pay lieutenants who chose to expire almost as soon as they obtained it, and
really, notwithstanding the church and the parson and Rooklands, there was not much in Corston worth living for. But at the time this story opens, the charge of the coast had not long been put in the hands of (comparatively speaking) a young and hale man who bid fair to keep anybody else out of it for a long while to come. His office was no sinecure though, for, notwithstanding the difficulty of landing, the coast was a celebrated one for smugglers, and as soon as the dark months of winter set in there was no lack of work for the preventive officers. For the village of Corston did not, of itself, run down to the sea. Between it and the ocean, there lay the salt marshes, a bleak, desolate tract of land, which no skill or perseverance could reclaim from apparent uselessness. Except to the samphire and cockle-gatherers, the salt marshes of Corston were an arid wilderness which could yield no fruit. Many a farmer had looked longingly across the wide waste which terminated only with the shingled beach, and wondered if it were possible to utilize it. But as it had been from the beginning, so it remained until that day; its stinted vegetation affording shelter for sea-fowl and smugglers' booty only, and its brackish waters that flowed and ebbed with the tides, tainting the best springs on the level ground of Corston. It was the existence of these marshes that rendered the coastguard necessary to the village, which would otherwise have become a perfect nest of smugglers. As it was, notwithstanding all the vigilance of Mr. John Burton and his men, many a keg of spirits and roll of tobacco were landed on the coast of Corston, and many a man in the place was marked by them as guilty, though never discovered. For they who had lived by the salt marshes all their lives were cunning as to their properties and knew just where they might bury their illegal possessions with impunity when the tide was low and find them safe when it had flowed and ebbed again. Everyone was not so fortunate. Lives had been lost in the marshes before now—ay, and of Corston men too, and several dark tales were told by the gossips of the village of the quagmires and quicksands that existed in various parts of them, which looked, although they never were, both firm and dry, but had the power to draw man and horse with the temerity to step upon them, into their unfathomable depths. But if the smugglers
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kept Mr. Burton and his men fully occupied on the sea-
shore, the poachers did no less for Lord Worcester's
band of gamekeepers at Rooklands, and Farmer Murray,
who had a drop of Scotch blood running in his veins, and
was never so much alive as when his own interests were
concerned, had only saved his game for the last three
years by having been fortunate enough to take the biggest
poacher in Corston, red-handed, and let him off on con-
dition that he became his keeper and preserved his covers
from future violence. "Set a thief to catch a thief" is a
time-honored saying, and Farmer Murray found it an-
swer. Isaac Barnes, the unscrupulous poacher, became a
model gamekeeper, and the midnight rest of the inhab-
itants of Mavis Farm had never been disturbed by a stray
shot since; though the eldest son, George Murray, had
been heard to affirm that half the fun of his life was gone
now that there was no chance of a tussle with the poach-
ers. Such was the state of Corston some forty years ago.
The villagers were rough, uneducated, and lawless, and
the general condition of the residents, vapid and uninter-
esting enough to have provoked any amount of wicked-
ness, if only for the sake of change or excitement.

* * * * * * * * *

It was the end of September, and the close of a glorious
summer. The harvest had been abundant and the Nor-
folk soil, which knows so well how to yield her fruits in
due season, was like an exhausted mother which had just
been delivered of her abundance. The last sheaves of
golden corn were standing in the fields ready to be car-
rried to the threshing barn, the trees in the orchards were
weighed down with their wealth of pears and apples, and
in every lane clusters of bare-headed children with their
hands full of nuts and their faces stained with blackberry
juice, proved how nature had showered her bounties on
rich and poor alike. Lizzie Locke, who was making her
way slowly in the direction of the village, with a huge
basket on her arm, stopped more than once to wipe her
hot face, and pull the sun bonnet she wore further over
her eyes, although in another couple of days the October
moon would have risen upon the land. She was a young
girl of not more than eighteen or twenty years, and, as
her dress denoted, bred from the laboring classes. Not
pretty—unless soft brown hair, a fair skin and delicate features, can make a woman so—but much more refined in appearance than the generality of her kind. The hands that grasped the handle of her heavy basket had evidently never done much hard work, nor were her feet broadened or her back bent with early toiling in the turnip or the harvest fields. The reason of this was apparent as soon as she turned her eyes toward you. Quiet blue eyes shaded by long lashes, that seldom unveiled them—eyes that, under more fortuitous circumstances, might have flashed and sparkled with roguish mirth, but that seemed to bear now a settled melancholy in them, even when her mouth smiled: eyes, in fact, that had been blinded from their birth.

Poor Lizzie Locke! There was a true and great soul burning in her breast, but the windows were darkened and it had no power to look out upon the world. As she stood still for a few moments' rest for the third or fourth time between the salt marshes and Corston, her quick ear caught the sound of approaching horses' feet, and she drew on one side of the open road to let the rider pass. But instead of that, the animal was drawn up suddenly upon its haunches, and a pleasant young voice rang out in greeting to her. "Why, Lizzie, is that you? What a careless girl you are—I might have ridden over you."

"Miss Rosa," exclaimed the blind girl, as she recognized the voice and smiled brightly in return.

"Of course it's Miss Rosa, and Polly is as fresh as a two-year-old this morning. She always is, when she gets upon the marshes. It's lucky I pulled up in time."

The new comer, a handsome girl of about the same age as Lizzie, was the only daughter of Farmer Murray of Mavis Farm. Spoilt, as one girl amongst half-a-dozen boys is sure to be, it is not to be wondered at that Rosa Murray was impetuous, saucy, and self-willed. For, added to her being her father's darling, and not knowing what it was to be denied anything in his power to give her, Miss Rosa was extremely pretty, with gray eyes and dark hair, and a complexion like a crimson rose. A rich brunette beauty that had gained for her the title of the Damask Rose of Corston, and of which no one was better aware than herself. Many a gentleman visitor at Rooklands had heard of the fame of the farmer's pretty daugh-
ter, and ridden over to Corston on purpose to catch a
glimpse of her, and it was beginning to be whispered
about the village that no one in those parts would be con-
sidered good enough for a husband for Miss Rosa, and
that Mr. Murray was set upon her marrying a gentleman
from "London," any gentleman from London being con-
sidered by the simple rustics to be unavoidably "the glass
of fashion and the mold of form." Mr. Murray was
termed a "gentleman farmer" in that part of the county,
because he lived in a substantially-built and well-furnished
house, and could afford to keep riding horses in his stable
and sit down to a dinner spread on a tablecloth every day.
But, in reality, his father had commenced life as a plow-
man in that very village of Corston, and it was only neces-
sary to bring Farmer Murray into the presence of Lord
Worcester and his fashionable friends to see how much of
a "gentleman" he was. He had made the great mistake,
however, of sending his children to be educated at schools
above their station in life, the consequence of which was
that, whilst their tastes and proclivities remained plebeian
as his own, they had acquired a self-sufficiency and idea
of their merits that accorded ill with their surroundings
and threatened to mar their future happiness. The Dam-
ask Rose of Corston was the worst example amongst
them of the evil alluded to. She had unfortunately lost
her mother many years before, so was almost completely
her own mistress, and the admiration her beauty excited
was fast turning her from a thoughtless flirt into a heart-
less coquette, the most odious character any woman can
assume.

But with her own sex, and when it suited her, Rosa
Murray could be agreeable and ingenuous enough, and
there was nothing but cordiality in the tone in which she
continued her conversation with Lizzie Locke.

"What are you doing out here by yourself, child? You
really ought not to go about alone. It can't be safe."

"Oh, it's safe enough, Miss Rosa. I've been used to
find my way about ever since I could walk. I've just come
up from the marshes, and I was going to take these cockles
to Mavis Farm to see if the master would like them for
his breakfast to-morrow."

"I daresay they will be very glad of them. George
and Bob are awfully fond of cockles. What a lot you've
gathered, Lizzie. How do you manage to find them, when you can't see?"

"I know all the likeliest places they stick to, Miss Rosa, as well as I do the chimney corner at home. The tide comes up and leaves them on the bits of rocks, and among the boulders, and some spots are regular beds of them. I've been at it half my life, you see, miss, and I just feel for them with my fingers and pick them off. I can tell a piece of samphire, too, by the sound it makes as I tread over it."

"It's wonderful," said Rosa; "I have often been surprised to see you go about just as though you had the use of your eyes. It seems to make no difference to you."

Poor Lizzie sighed.

"Oh, miss! it makes a vast difference—such a difference as you could never understand. But I try to make the best of it, and not be more of a burden upon aunt and Larry than I need to be."

"I'm sure they don't think you a burden," said the other girl, warmly. "But I wonder I didn't meet you on the marshes just now. I've been galloping all over them."

"Not past Corston Point, I hope, miss," exclaimed Lizzie, hurriedly.

"Yes, I have! Why not?"

"Oh, don't go there again, Miss Rosa. It isn't safe particularly on horseback. There's no end of quagmires beyond the Point and you can never tell when you'll come on one and be swallowed up, horse and all."

Rosa Murray laughed.

"Why aren't you swallowed up then, Lizzie?"

"I know my way, miss, and I know the tread of it too. I can tell when the soil yields more than it should at low tide that I'm nearing a quicksand. When the Almighty takes away one sense, He sharpens the others to make up for it. But the sands are full of danger; some of them are shifting too, and you can never tell if they're firm to-day whether they won't be loose to-morrow. Do take heed, Miss Rosa, and never you ride beyond Corston Point without one of the young gentlemen to take care of you."
LOST IN THE MARSHES.

"Well, I'll remember your advice, Lizzie, for I don't want to be swallowed up alive. Good-by."

She put her horse in motion and cantered on some little way in advance—then suddenly checked him again and turned back. All Rosa Murray's actions, like her disposition, were quick and impulsive.

"By the way, Lizzie, it's our harvest-home supper to-night. You must be sure and make Larry bring you up to the big barn with him."

The blind girl crimsoned with pleasure.

"Oh, Miss Rosal! but what should I be doing at your supper? I can't dance, you know. I shall only be in the way."

"Nonsense! You can hear the singing and the music; we have made papa get a couple of fiddlers over from Wells; and you can eat some supper. You will enjoy yourself, won't you, Lizzie?"

"Yes, miss, I think so—that is, if Larry and aunt are willing that I should go; but it's very good of you to ask me."

"You must be sure and come. Tell Larry I insist upon it. We shall all be there, you know, and I shall look out for you, Lizzie, and if I don't see you I shall send some one round to your cottage to fetch you."

Lizzie Locke smiled and courtesied.

"I'll be sure and tell Larry of your goodness, miss," she said, "and he'll be able to thank you better than I can. Here comes a gentleman," she added, as she withdrew herself modestly from the side of the young lady's horse.

The gentleman, whom Lizzie Locke could have distinguished only as such from the different sound produced by his boots in walking, was Lord Worcester's head gamekeeper, Frederick Darley. He was a young fellow to hold the responsible position he did, being only about thirty years of age, and he had not held it long; but he was the son of the gamekeeper on one of Lord Worcester's estates in the south of England, and his lordship had brought him to Rooklands as soon as ever a vacancy occurred. He was a favorite with his master and his master's guests, being a man of rather superior breeding and education, but on that very account he was much disliked by all the poor people around. Gamekeepers are not usually popular in a
poaching district, but it was not Frederick Darley's position alone that made him a subject for criticism. His crying sin, to use their own term, was that he "held his head too high." The velveteen coat he usually wore, with a rose in the button-hole, his curly black hair and waxed mustache, no less than the cigars he smoked and the air with which he affected the society of the gentry, showed the tenants of Rooklands that he considered himself vastly above themselves in position, and they hated him accordingly. The animus had spread to Corston, but Mr. Darley was not well enough known there yet to have become a subject for general comment. Lizzie Locke had never even encountered him before.

He was walking from the village on the present occasion swinging a light cane in his hand, and as Rosa Murray looked up at the blind girl's exclamation, she perceived him close to her horse's head.

"Good morning, Miss Murray," he said, lifting his hat.

"Good morning," she replied, without mentioning any name, but Lizzie Locke could detect from the slight tremor in her voice that she was confused at the sudden encounter.

"Were you going down to the beach?"

"I was going nowhere but in search of you."

"Shall we walk toward home then?" said Rosa, suiting the action to the word. She evidently did not wish the blind girl to be a party to their conversation. She called out "Good-by, Lizzie," once more as she walked her horse away, but before she was out of hearing, the little cockle-gatherer could distinguish her say to the stranger in a fluttered voice,—

"I am so glad you are coming over to our harvest-home to-night."

"One of the grand gentlemen over from Rooklands come to court Miss Rosa," she thought in the innocence of her heart, as she turned off the road to take a short cut across the country to Mavis Farm. Meanwhile the couple she alluded to were making their way slowly toward Corston; she, reining in her horse to the pace of a tortoise, whilst he walked by the side with his hand upon the crutch of her saddle.

"Could you doubt for a moment whether I should come?" said Frederick Darley in answer to Rosa's question.
"Wouldn't I go twenty—fifty miles, for the pleasure of a dance with you?"

"You're such an awful flatterer," she replied, bridling under the compliment; "but don't make too sure of a dance with me, for papa and my brothers will be there, and they are so horribly particular about me."

"And not particularly fond of me—I know it, Miss Murray—but I care nothing at all about it so long as—"

"As what?"

"As you are."

"Oh, Mr. Darley! how can you talk such nonsense?"

"It's not nonsense! it's sober sense—come, Rosa, tell me the truth. Are you playing with me or not?"

"What do you mean by 'playing'?"

"You know. Are you in earnest or in jest? In fact—do you love me better than you love your father and your brothers?"

"Mr. Darley! You know I do!"

"Prove it then, by meeting me to-night."

"Meeting you? Are you not coming to the harvest-home?"

"I may look in, but I shall not remain long; I shall only use it as an excuse to come over to Corston. Mr. Murray is suspicious of me—I can see that—and your brothers dislike me. I don't care to sit at the table of men who are not my friends, Rosa. But if you will take an opportunity to slip out of the barn and join me in the apple copse, I will wait there for you at ten o'clock."

"Oh! Frederick—if papa should catch me!"

"I will take care of that! Only say you'll come."

"I should like to come—it will be so lovely and romantic. Just like a scene in a novel. But I am afraid it is very wrong."

"What is there wrong in a moonlight stroll? 'The summer nights were made for love,' Rosa, and we shall have a glorious moon by nine o'clock to-night. You won't disappoint me, will you?"

"No, indeed I won't; but if anything should be discovered you will promise me—"

"What? I will promise you anything in the world."

"Only that you will shield me from papa's anger—that
you will say it was all your fault. For papa is dreadful when he gets in a temper."

"If you should be discovered—which is not at all likely—I promise you that, rather than give you back into papa's clutches, I will carry you straight off to Rooklands and marry you with a special license. Will that satisfy you? Would you consent to be my wife, Rosa?"

"Yes!" she replied, and earnestly, for she had been captivated by the manner and appearance of Frederick Darley for some weeks past, and this was not the first meeting by many that they had held without the knowledge of her father.

"That's my own Damask Rose," he exclaimed triumphantly; "give me a kiss, dear, just one to seal the contract; there's no one looking!" He held up his face toward her as he spoke—his handsome insouciant face with its bright eyes and smile, and she stooped hers to meet it, and give the embrace he petitioned for.

But some one was looking. Almost as Rosa's lips met Darley's a frightened look came into her eyes, and she uttered a note of alarm.

"What is it, darling?"

"It's my brother George! He's coming this way. Oh! go, Mr. Darley—pray go across the field and let me canter on to meet him." He would have stayed to remonstrate, but the girl pushed him from her, and thinking discretion the better part of valor, he jumped over a neighboring stile and walked away in the direction she had indicated, whilst she, with a considerable degree of agitation, rode on to make what excuses she best could for the encounter to her brother. George Murray was sauntering along the hedge-row switching the leaves off the hazel bushes as he went, and apparently quite unsuspecting of anything being wrong. But the first question he addressed to his sister went straight to the point.

"Who was that fellow that was talking to you just now, Rosa?"

She knew it would be of no use trying to deceive him, so she spoke the truth.

"It was Mr. Darley!"

"What's he doing over here?"

"How should I know? You'd better ask him yourself? Am I accountable for Mr. Darley's actions?"
"Don't talk nonsense. You know what I mean perfectly well. Did he come over to Rooklands to see you?"
"To see me—what will you get into your head next?"
"Well, you seemed to be hitting it off pretty well together. What were you whispering to him about just now?"
"I didn't whisper to him."
"You did! I saw you stoop your head to his ear. Now look here, Rosa! Don't you try any of your flirtation games on with Darley, or I'll go straight to the governor and tell him."
"And what business is it of yours, pray?"
"It would be the business of every one of us. You don't suppose we're going to let you marry a gamekeeper, do you?"
"Really, George, you're too absurd. Cannot a girl stop to speak to a man in the road without being accused of wanting to marry him? You will say I want to marry every clodhopper I may dance with at the harvest-home to-night next."
"That is a very different thing. The plow-boys are altogether beneath you, but this Darley is a kind of half-and-half fellow that might presume to imagine himself good enough to be a match for you."
"Half-and-half indeed!" exclaimed Rosa, nettled at the reflection on her lover; "and pray, what are we when all's said and done? Mr. Darley's connections are as good as our own, and better, any day."
"Halloa! what are you making a row about? I'll tell you what, Rosa. It strikes me very forcibly you want to 'carry on' with Lord Worcester's keeper, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for thinking of it. You—who have been educated and brought up in every respect like a lady—to condescend to flirt with an upstart like that, a mere servant! Why, he's no better than Isaac Barnes, or old Whisker or any of the rest of them, only he's prig enough to oil his hair, and wear a button-hole, in order to catch the eye of such silly noodles like yourself."
"You've no right to speak to me in this way, George. You know nothing at all about the matter."
"I know that I found Darley and you in the lane with your heads very close together, and that directly he caught sight of me he made off. That doesn't look as if
his intentions were honorable, does it? Now, look you here, Rosa. Is he coming to the barn to-night?"
"I believe so!"
"And who asked him?"
"I don't know," she replied, evasively; "papa perhaps—or very likely Mr. Darley thought he required no invitation to join a plowman's dance and supper."
"Well, you're not to dance with him if he does come."
"I don't know what right you have to forbid it."
"None at all! but if you won't give me the promise I shall go straight to the governor, and let him know what I saw to-day. He's seen something of it himself, I can tell you, and he told me to put you on your guard, so you can take your choice of having his anger or not."

This statement was not altogether true, for if Farmer Murray had heard anything of his daughter's flirtation with the handsome gamekeeper it had been only what his sons had suggested to him, and he did not believe their reports. But the boys, George and Robert, now men of three or four-and-twenty, had had more than one consultation together on the subject, and quite made up their minds that their sister must not be allowed to marry Frederick Darley. For they were quite alive to the advantages that a good connection for her might afford to themselves, and wanted to see her raise the family instead of lowering it.

Rosa, however, believed her brother's word. Dread of her father's anger actuated in a great measure this belief, and she began to fear lest all communication between Darley and herself might be broken off if she did not give the required promise. And the very existence of the fear opened her eyes to the truth, that her lover was become a necessary part of life's enjoyment to her. So, like a true woman and a hunted hare, she temporized and "doubled."
"Does papa really think I am too intimate with Mr. Darley, George?" she inquired trembling.
"Of course he does, like all the rest of us."
"But it's a mistake. I don't care a pin about him."
"Then it will be no privation for you to give up dancing with him to-night."
"I never intended to dance with him."
"Honor bright, Rosa?"
"Well, I can't say more than I have. However, you will see. I shall not dance with him. If he asks me, I shall say I am engaged to you."

"You can say what you like, so long as you snub the brute. I wonder at his impudence coming up to our 'Home' at all. But these snobs are never wanting in 'cheek.' However, if Bob and I don't give him a pretty broad hint to-night that his room is preferable to his company, I'm a duffer! Are you going in, Rosa?"

For the young people had continued to walk toward their own home, and now arrived at the farm gates.

"Yes. I've been in the saddle since ten o'clock this morning, and have had enough of it."

"Let me take Polly round to the stables before the governor sees the state you've brought her home in, then," said George, as his sister dismounted and threw him the reins. He could be good-natured enough when he had his own way, and he thought he had got it now with Rosa. But she went up to her chamber bent but on one idea—how best to let Mr. Darley know of what had passed between her brother and herself, that he might not be surprised at the caution of her behavior when they met in the big barn.

* * * * * * * * *

Meanwhile Lizzie Locke having left her basket of cockles at Mavis Farm, had reached her cottage home. Her thoughts had been very pleasant as she journeyed there and pondered on the coming pleasure of the evening. It was not often the poor child took any part in the few enjoyments to be met in Corston. People were apt to leave her out of their invitations, thinking that as she was blind she could not possibly derive any amusement from hearing, and she was of too shrinking and modest a nature to obtrude herself where she was not specially required. She had never been to one of the harvest-home suppers given by Farmer Murray (in whose employ her cousin Laurence worked), though she had heard much of their delights. But now that Miss Rosa had particularly desired her to come, she thought Larry would be pleased to take her. And she had a print dress nice and clean for the occasion, and her aunt would plait her hair neatly for her, and she should hear the sound of Larry's voice as
he talked to his companions, and of his feet whilst he was
dancing, and, perhaps, after supper one of his famous old
English songs—songs which they had heard so seldom of
late, and the music of which her aunt and she had missed
so much.

It was past twelve o’clock as she entered the cottage,
but she was so full of her grand news that she scarcely
remembered that she must have kept both her relations
waiting for their dinner of bacon and beans.

“Why, Lizzie, my girl, where on earth have you been
to?” exclaimed her aunt, Mrs. Barnes, as she appeared on
the threshold. Mrs. Barnes’ late husband had been brother
to the very Isaac Barnes, once poacher, now gamekeeper
on Farmer Murray’s estate, and there were scandalmongers
in Corston ill-natured enough to assert that the taint was
in the blood, and that young Laurence Barnes was very
much inclined to go the same way as his uncle had done
before him. But at present he was a helper in the stables
of Mavis Farm.

“I’ve been along the marshes,” said Lizzie, “gathering
cockles, and they gave me sixpence for them up at the
farm; and oh, aunt! I met Miss Rosa on my way back,
and she says Larry must take me up to the big barn this
evening to their harvest-home supper.”

Laurence Barnes was seated at his mother’s table already
occupied in the discussion of a huge lump of bread and
bacon, but as the name of his master’s daughter left Lizzie’s
lips it would have been very evident to any one on the
look-out for it that he started and seemed uneasy.

“And what will you be doing at a dance and a supper,
my poor girl?” said her aunt, but not unkindly. “Come,
Lizzie, sit down and take your dinner; that’s of much
more account to you than a harvest merry-making.”

“No till Larry has promised to take me up with him
this evening,” replied the girl, gayly, and without the
least fear of a rebuff. “You’ll do it, Larry, won’t you?
for Miss Rosa said they’d all be there, and if she didn’t see
me she’d send round to the cottage after me. She said,
‘Tell Larry I insist upon it;’ she did, indeed.”

“Well, then, I’m not going up myself, and so you can’t
go,” he answered roughly.

“Not going yourself!”

The exclamation left the lips of both women at once,
They could not understand it, and it equally surprised them. Larry—the best singer and dancer for twenty miles round, to refuse to go up to his master’s harvest-home! Why, what would the supper and the dance be without him? At least, so thought Mrs. Barnes and Lizzie.

“Aren’t you well, Larry?” demanded the blind girl, timidly.

“I’m well enough; but I don’t choose to go. I don’t care for such rubbish. Let ’em bide! They’ll do well enough without us.”

Lizzie dropt into her seat in silence, and began in a mechanical way to eat her dinner. She was terribly disappointed, but she did not dream of disputing her cousin’s decision. He was master in that house; and she would not have cared to go to the barn without Larry. Half the pleasure would be gone with his absence. He did not seem to see that.

“Mother can take you up, Liz, if she has a mind to,” he said presently.

“I take her along of me!” cried Mrs. Barnes, “when I haven’t as much as a clean kerchief to pin across my shoulders. You’re daft, Larry. I haven’t been to such a thing as a dance since I laid your father in the church-yard, and if our Liz can’t go without me she must stop at home.”

“I don’t want to go, indeed I don’t, not without Larry,” replied the blind girl, earnestly.

“And what more did Miss Rosa say to you?” demanded her aunt, inquisitively.

“We talked about the sands, aunt. She’d been galloping all over them this morning, and I told her how dangerous they were beyond Corston Point, and we was getting on so nicely together, when some one came and interrupted us.”

“Some one! Who’s some one?” said Laurence Barnes, quickly.

“I can’t tell you; I never met him before.”

“’Twas a man, then?”

“Oh yes! ’twas a man—a gentleman! I knew that, because there were no nails in his boots, and he didn’t give at the knees when he walked.”

“What more?” demanded Larry, with lowered brows.
“Miss Rosa knew him well, because they never named each other, but only wished ‘good-morning.’ She said, ‘What are you doing here?’ and he said, ‘Looking after you.’ He carried a rose in his hand or his coat, I think, for I smelt it, and a cane, too, for it struck the saddle flap.”

“Well, that’s enough,” interrupted Laurence fiercely.
“I thought you wanted to hear all about it, Larry?”
“Is there any more to tell, then?”
“Only that as they walked away together, Miss Rosa said she was so glad he was coming up to the harvest home to-night.”

“So he’s a-going, the cur!” muttered the young man between his teeth. “I know him, with his cane, and his swagger, and his stinking roses; and I’ll be even with him yet, or my name’s not Larry Barnes.”

It was evident that Mr. Frederick Darley was no greater favorite in the cottage than the farm.

“Whoever are you talking of?” said Larry’s mother.
“Do you know the gentleman Lizzie met with Miss Rosa?”

“Gentleman! He’s no gentleman. He’s nothing but a common gamekeeper, same as uncle. But don’t let us talk of him any more. It takes the flavor of the bacon clean out of my mouth.”

The rest of the simple meal was performed in silence, and then Mrs. Barnes gathered up the crockery and carried it into an outer room to wash.

Larry and Lizzie were left alone. The girl seemed to understand that in some mysterious way she had offended her cousin, and wished to restore peace between them, so she crept up to where he was smoking his midday pipe on the old settle by the fire, and laid her head gently against his knees. They had been brought up from babes together, and were used to observe such innocent little familiarities toward each other.

“Never mind about the outing, Larry. I’m not a bit disappointed, and I’m sorry I said anything about it.”

“That’s not true, Liz. You are disappointed, and it’s my doing; but I couldn’t help it. I didn’t feel somehow as if I had the heart to go. But I’ve changed my mind since dinner, and we’ll go up to the harvest-home together, my girl. Will that content you?”
"Oh, Larry! you are good!" she said, raising herself, her cheeks crimsoned with renewed expectation, "but I'd rather stop at home a thousand times over than you should put yourself out of the way for me."

A sudden thought seemed to strike the young man as he looked at Lizzie's fair, sightless face. He had lived with her so long, in a sisterly way, that it had never struck him to regard her in any other light. But something in the inflection of her voice as she addressed him, made him wonder if he were capable of making her happier than she had ever been yet. He cherished no other hopes capable of realization. What if he could make his own troubles lighter by lightening those of poor Liz? Something of this sort, but in much rougher clothing, passed through his half-tutored mind. As it grasped the idea he turned hurriedly toward the girl kneeling at his knee.

"Do you really care about me, lass?" he said. "Do you care if I'm vexed or not? Whether I come in or go out? If I like my dinner or I don't like it? Does all this nonsense worry you? Answer me, for I want to know."

"Oh! Larry, what do you mean? Of course I care. I can't do much for you—more's the pity—without my poor eyes, but I can think of you and love you, Larry, and surely you know that I do both."

"But would you like to love me more, Liz?"

"How could I love you more?"

"Would you like to have the right to care for me—the right to creep after me in your quiet way wherever I might happen to go—the right to walk alongside of me, with your hand in mine, up to the harvesting home to-night; eh, Liz?"

The girl half understood her cousin's meaning, but she was too modest not to fear she might be mistaken. Larry could never wish to take her, blind and helpless, for his wife.

"Larry, speak to me more plainly; I don't catch your meaning quite."

"Will you marry me then, Liz, and live along of mother and me to the end of your life?"

"Marry you!—Be your wife!—Me! Oh, Larry, you can't mean it! never."

"I do mean it," replied her cousin with an oath, "and
I'll take you as soon as ever you'll take me if you will but say the word."
  "But I am blind, Larry."
  "Do you suppose I don't know that? Perhaps I like you blind best."
  "But I am so useless. I get about so slowly. If anything was to happen to aunt, how could I keep the house clean and cook the dinners, Larry? You must think a bit more before you decide for good."

But the poor child's face was burning with excitement the while, and her sightless eyes were thrown upward to her cousin's face as though she would strain through the darkness to see it.

  "If anything happened to mother, do you suppose I'd turn you out of doors, Liz? And in any case, then, I must have a wife or a servant to do the work—it will make no difference that way. The only question is, do you want me for a husband?"

  "Oh! I have loved you ever so!" replied the girl, throwing herself into his arms. "I couldn't love another man, Larry. I know your face as well as if I had seen it, and your step, and your voice. I can tell them long before another body knows there's sound a-coming."

  "Then you'll have me?"

  "If you'll have me," she murmured in a tone of delight as she nestled against his rough clothes.

  "That's settled, then, and the sooner the bans are up the better! Here, mother! Come along and hear the news. Lizzie has promised to marry me, and I shall take her to church as soon as we've been cried."

  "Well! I am pleased," said Mrs. Barnes. "You couldn't have got a neater wife, Larry, though her eyesight's terribly against her, poor thing! But I'm sure of one thing, Liz, if you can't do all for him that another woman might, you'll love my lad with the best among them, and that thought will make me lie quiet in my grave."

The poor cannot afford the time to be as sentimental over such things as the rich. Larry kissed his cousin two or three times on the forehead in signification of the compact they had just entered into, and then he got up and shook himself, and prepared to go back to his afternoon work,
"That's a good job settled," he thought as he did so; "it will make Lizzie happy, and drive a deal of nonsense may be out of my head. But if ever I can pay out that scoundrel Darley I'll do it, if it costs me the last drop of my blood."

The blind girl regarded what had passed between her cousin and herself with very different feelings. Condemned, by reason of her infirmity, to pass much of her young life in solitude, the privation had repaid itself by giving her time and opportunity for an amount of self-culture, which, if subjected to the rough toil and rougher pleasures of her class, she never could have attained. Her ideas regarding the sanctity of love and marriage were very different from those of other Corston girls. She could never have "kept company," as they termed it, with one man this month and another the next. Her pure mind, which dwelt so much within itself, shrank from the levity and coarseness with which she had heard such subjects treated, and believing, as she had done, that she should never be married, she had pleased herself by building up an ideal of what a husband should be, and how his wife would love and reverence him. And this ideal had always had for its framework a fancied portrait of her cousin Laurence. In reality, this young fellow was an average specimen of a fresh-faced country youth, with plenty of color and flesh and muscle. But to the blind girl's fancy he was perfection. Her little hands from babyhood had traced each feature of his face until she knew every line by heart, and though she had never acknowledged it even to herself, she had been in love with him ever since she was capable of understanding the meaning of the term. So that although his proposal to marry her had come as a great surprise, it had also come as a great glory, and set her heart throbbing with the pleasant consciousness of returned affection.

She was in a flutter of triumph and delight all the afternoon, whilst Larry was attending to his horses, and hardly knew how to believe in her own happiness. Her aunt brushed and plaited her long hair for her till it was as glossy and neat as possible, and tied her new cherry-colored ribbon round the girl's throat that she might not disgrace her son's choice at the merry-making. And then Lizzie sat down to wait for her affianced lover's return,
the proudest maid in Corston. Larry came in punctually for his tea, and the first thing he did was to notice the improvement in his little cousin’s appearance; and indeed joy had so beautified her countenance that she was a different creature from what she had been on the sands that morning. The apathy and indifference to life had disappeared, and a bright color bloomed in her soft cheeks. As she tucked her hand through her cousin’s arm, and they set off to walk together to Farmer Murray’s harvest-home, Mrs. Barnes looked after them with pride, and declared that if poor Liz had only got her sight they would have made the handsomest couple in the parish.

Larry was rather silent as they went up to the barn together, but Liz was not exigeante, and trotted by his side with an air of perfect content. When they arrived they found the place already full, but the “quality” had not yet arrived, and until they did so, no one ventured to do more than converse quietly with his neighbor, although the fiddlers from Wells were all ready and only waiting a signal to strike up. But in those days the working men did not consider their festival complete without the presence of the master, and it would have been a sore affront if the members and guests of the household had not also joined them in order to open the ball and set the liquor flowing. In these days of Radicalism perhaps they find they can get on just as well without them. Larry still kept Lizzie’s arm snugly tucked within his own as he described to her how beautiful the walls of the barn looked hung with flags and decorated with flowers and evergreens, and what a number of lamps there were, and what a lot of liquor and eatables were stowed away at the further end. He was still talking to her rapidly, and, as she imagined, somewhat uneasily, when a cheer rose up from a group of rustics outside, and Larry gave a start that almost disengaged her from his clasp.

“What’s the matter?” she demanded. “Is it the gentry coming, Larry?”

“Yes! ’tis they, sure enough. Keep close to me, Liz—I don’t want to part from you, not for one moment.”

“Oh, Larry! that do make me feel so happy,” she whispered. As she spoke, the party from Mavis Farm entered the barn and were received with a shout of welcome. Mr. Murray, a fine, hale old gentleman, and his
sons came first; then Miss Rosa, looking rather conscious, tripping after her brothers in a white muslin dress. The farmer advanced to the beer barrel, and having filled his glass, drank success to all present, and asked them to give three cheers for a bountiful harvest. When that ceremony was completed the fiddlers struck up a merry country dance, and every one was at liberty to drink and caper about. The young people from Mavis Farm all took part in the first dance, and Rosa Murray came up and asked Larry if he would be her partner on the occasion. She ought in fairness to have opened the ball with her father's bailiff or one of the upper servants, but she preferred the young groom, with whom she held daily intercourse, and she was accustomed to go her own way without reference to anybody's feelings. As she approached the cousins she gave Lizzie a kindly welcome.

"I am so glad you have come up, Lizzie; and now your cousin must get a nice seat until this dance is ended, for I intend him to open the ball with me."

This was considered a great honor on the part of the villagers, and the blind girl colored with pleasure to think that her fiancé had been selected for the ceremony.

"Oh, Miss Rosa, you are good! Larry, why don't you thank the young lady, and say how proud you shall be to dance alongside of her?"

But Larry said nothing. He reddened, it is true, but more from confusion than pleasure, and he was so long a time settling Lizzie to his satisfaction, that Rosa was disposed to be angry at his dilatoriness, and called out to him sharply that if he were not ready she should open the ball with some one else. Then he ran and took his place by her side, and went through the evolutions of "down the middle" and "setting at the corners" with a burning face and a fast-beating heart. Poor Laurence Barnes! His young mistress's constant presence in the stables and familiarity with himself had been too much for his susceptible nature. She was to him, in the pride of her youthful loveliness and the passport it afforded her for smiling upon all classes of men, as an angel, rather than a woman, something set too high above for him ever to reach, but yet with the power to thrill his veins and make his hot blood run faster. The touch of her ungloved hand in the figures of the dance made him tremble, and the
glance of her eyes sickened him, so that as soon as the
terrible ordeal was concluded he made her an awkward
salute, and rushed from her side to that of the beer barrel,
to drown his excitement in drink. And it was just then
that he had left Lizzie Locke.

"That was beautiful, Larry," she exclaimed, with glowing
cheeks. "I could hear the sound of your feet and
Miss Rosa's above all the others, even when you went to
the further end of the barn. It must be lovely to be able
to dance like that. But it has made you thirsty, Larry.
That's the third glass, isn't it?"

"Yes, lass, it's made me thirsty. But don't you keep
counting my glasses all the evening, or I shall move your
chair a bit further off."

She laughed quietly, and he flung himself upon the
ground and rested his arm upon her knee. He seemed to
feel safer and more at peace when by Lizzie's side, and she
was quite happy in the knowledge that he was there.
The Mavis Farm party did not dance again after the barn
had been opened, at least Miss Rosa did not. But she
moved about the barn restlessly. Sometimes she was in,
and sometimes she was out. She did not seem to know
her own mind for two minutes together.

"Why is that fellow Darley skulking about here,
Larry?" demanded Isaac Barnes of his nephew. "I've
seen his ugly face peeping into the barn a dozen times.
Why don't he come in or stay out? I hate such half-and-
half sneaking ways."

Larry muttered an oath, and was about to make some
reply when George Murray came up to them.

"Is that Mr. Darley I see hanging about the barn door,
Isaac?" he inquired of their own keeper.

"That it be, Master George; and as I was just saying
to Larry here, why not in or out. What need of dodging?
He don't want to catch no one here, I suppose?"

"He'd better try. I'd soon teach him who the barn
belongs to."

"And I'd back you, Master George," cried Larry resolu-
tely. The strong-brewed Norfolk ale was giving him a
dash of Dutch courage.

"Would you, Larry? That's right! Well, I can't be
in all parts of the barn at once, and father wants me to
take the bottom of the supper-table, so you keep your eye
on Mr. Darley for me, will you? and if he looks up to any­thing, let me know.”

“I'm your man, Master George,” replied Larry heart­ly.

Rosa was near enough to them to overhear what had passed. Her brother had intended she should do so. But when he set his wit against that of a woman he reckoned without his host. Rosa had been on the look-out for Frederick Darley from the beginning of the evening, and during the first greeting had managed to slip a little note into his hand, warning him of her brothers’ animosity, and begging him to keep as much as possible out of their sight until an opportunity occurred for her joining him in the apple copse. Now, she felt afraid of what might happen if there were an encounter between the two young men, and decided at once that her best plan would be, as soon as she saw George safely disposed of at the supper-table, to tamper with his spy. And unfortunately Rosa Murray knew but too well how to accomplish this. Young Barnes’ infatuation had not been unnoticed by her. She would have been aware of it if a cat had ad­mired her. She knew his hand trembled when he took her foot to place her in the saddle, and that he became so nervous and agitated when she entered the stable as often to have to be recalled to a sense of his duty by a sharp rebuke from the head groom. She had known it all for months past, and it had pleased her. She was so vain and heartless that she thought nothing of what pain the poor fellow might be undergoing. She laughed at his presump­tion, and only considered it another feather in her cap. But now she saw her way to make use of it. The dancing had recommenced, and was proceeding with vigor, and the huge rounds of beef and legs of mutton on the supper-table were beginning to be served out. George was in full action, leading the onslaught with his carving-knife, when Rosa Murray approached Laurence Barnes.

“Won't you dance again, nor go and have your supper, Larry dear?” Lizzie was asking, with a soft caress of her hand upon the head laid on her knee.

“I don't want to dance no more,” said Larry, “and I sha'n't sup till the table's clearer and you can sup with me, Liz.”

“That's very good of you, Barnes,” said Rosa, who had
caught the words; "but if you'll take Lizzie to the table now, I'm sure George will find room for you both."

"No, thank you, miss," he answered; "I promised Master George to bide here till he came back, and I mustn't break my word."

"Then I shall sit here with you, and we'll all have supper together by-and-by," replied Rosa. "Have you been gathering cockles again this afternoon, Lizzie?"

"Oh, no, miss!" said Lizzie, blushing at the recollection of how her afternoon had been employed; "it's high tide at four o'clock now, and I haven't been out of the house again to-day."

"Did your cousin tell you how she scolded me for riding in the salt marshes, Barnes?"

"Well! it is dangerous, miss, for such as don't know the place. I mind me when Whisker's grandfather strayed out there by himself—"

"Oh, Larry!" cried Lizzie, "don't go to tell that terrible tale. It always turns me sick!"

"Is that what they call the Marsh Ghost, Barnes? Oh! I must know all about it. I love ghost stories, and I have never been able to hear the whole of this one. Where does it appear, and when?"

"Lizzie here can tell you better than me, miss—she knows the story right through."

"It's a horrible tale, Miss Rosa. You'll never forget it, once heard."

"That's just why I want to hear it; so, Lizzie, you must tell it me directly. Don't move, Barnes, you don't inconvenience me. I can sit up in this corner quite well."

"Well, miss, if you must hear it," began the blind girl, "it happened now nigh upon twenty years ago. Whisker's grandfather, that used to keep the lodge at Rooklands, had grown so old and feeble the late lord pensioned him off and sent him home to his own people. He hadn't no son in Corston then, miss, because they was both working in the south, but his daughter-in-law, his first son's widdy, that had married Skewton the baker, she offered to take the old man in and do for him. Lord Worcester allowed him fifty pounds a-year for life, and Mrs. Skewton wanted to take it all for his keep, but the old man was too sharp for that, and he only gave her ten shillings a-week and put by the rest, no one knew where nor for
what. Well, miss, this went on for three or four years may be, and then poor Whisker had grown very feeble and was a deal of trouble, and his sons didn’t seem to be coming back, and the Skewtons had grown tired of him, so they neglected him shamefully. I shouldn’t like to tell you, miss, all that’s said of their beating the poor old man and starving him, and never giving him no comforts. At last he got quite silly and took to wandering about alone, and he used to go out on the marshes, high or low tide, without any sense of the danger, and everybody said he’d come to harm some day. And so he did, for one day they carried his body in from Corston Point quite dead, and all bruised with the rocks and stones. The Skewtons pretended as they knew nothing about how he’d come to his death, but they set up a cart just afterward, and nothing has ever been heard of the old man’s store of money, though his sons came back and inquired and searched far and near for it. But about six months after—Larry! ’tisn’t a fit tale for Miss Rosa to listen to!’”

“Nonsense, Lizzie! I wouldn’t have the ghost left out for anything. It’s just what I want to hear of.”

“Well, miss, as I said, six months after old Whisker’s death he began to walk again, and he’s walked ever since.”

“Where does he walk?”

“Round and round Corston Point every full moon, wringing his hands and asking for his money. They say it’s terrible to see him.”

“Have you ever seen him, Barnes?”

Larry colored deeply and shook his head. The peasantry all over England are very susceptible to superstition, and the Corston folk were not behindhand in their fear of ghosts, hobgoblins, and apparitions of all sorts. This young fellow would have stood up in a fight with the best man there, but the idea of seeing a ghost made his blood curdle.

“Dear me, miss, no,” said Lizzie, answering for him, “and I hope he never may. Why, it would kill him.”

“Nonsense, Lizzie. Barnes is not such a coward, I hope.”

Something in Miss Murray’s tone made the blood leap to her retainer’s face.

“I’m not a coward, miss,” he answered quickly.
"Of course not; I said so. But any man would be so who refused to go to Corston Point by night for fear of seeing old Whisker's ghost. He walks at full moon, you say! Why, he must be at it to-night, then! There never was a lovelier moon."

"Don't, miss," urged Lizzie, shivering.

"You silly goose! I don't want you to go. But, I must say, I should like to try the mettle of our friend here."

"I beg your pardon, miss; did you mean that for me?" said Larry quickly.

"Yes, I did, Barnes. What harm? I should like to see some one who had really seen this ghost, and I'll give my gold watch chain to the man who will go to Corston Point to-night and bring me a bunch of the samphire that grows upon the top of it."

Larry's mind was in a tumult. Some wild idea of rendering himself admirable in Rosa Murray's eyes may have influenced his decision—or the delight of possessing her watch chain may have urged him on to it. Anyway, he rose up from the floor, and with chattering teeth, but a resolute heart, exclaimed,—

"I'll take you at your word, miss. I'll go to Corston Point and bring you the samphire, and prove to you that Larry Barnes is not a coward."

"Larry, Larry, you'll never do it!" cried Lizzie.

"Let me alone, my girl. I've made up my mind, and you won't turn it."

"You are a brave fellow, Barnes," said Rosa. "I believe you're the only man in Corston that would have taken my wager. And, mind, it's a bargain. My gold watch chain for your bunch of samphire and news of old Whisker's ghost." She was delighted at the idea of getting him out of the way.

"But, Larry! Miss Rosa! Think of the danger," implored poor Lizzie. "Oh, he'll never come back; I know he'll never come back."

"What are you afraid of, Lizzie? Doesn't Barnes know the sands as well as you do? And the moonlight is as bright as day. It's silly to try and stop him."

"But he's going to be my husband, miss," whispered Lizzie, weeping, into Miss Murray's ear.

"Oh! if that's the case, perhaps he'd better follow your
wishes," rejoined Eosa coldly. "Mine are of no con­sequence, of course, though I'd have liked Barnes to wear my chain—we've been such good company together, haven't we, Larry?"

Her smile, and the way in which she spoke his name, determined him. He had heard the whispered conversa­tion between her and Lizzie, and he felt vexed—he didn't know why—that it should have occurred.

"Be quiet, Liz," he said, authoritatively. "What's to be has nothing to do with this. I'm only too glad to oblige Miss Eosa, even with a bit of sapphire. Good-by, my girl, and good-by, miss; it's close upon the stroke of ten, so you mayn't see me again till to-morrow morning; but when you do, it'll be with the bunch of sapphire in my hand!"

He darted away from them as he spoke, and left the barn; whilst Lizzie Locke, disappointed at his departure, and frightened for his safety, wept bitterly. But the noise around them was so great, and everyone was so much occupied with his or her own pleasure, that little notice was taken of the girl's emotion.

"Come, Lizzie, don't be foolish," urged Miss Murray, in a whisper, afraid lest the errand on which she had sent Larry should become public property. "Your lover will be back in an hour, at the latest."

"He'll never come back, miss! You've sent him to his death; I feel sure of it," replied Lizzie, sobbing.

"This is too ridiculous," said Rosa. "If you intend to make such a fool of yourself as this, Lizzie, I think you had much better go home to your aunt. Shall I send Jane Williams back with you? You know her; she's a kind girl, and she'll lead you as safely as Larry would."

"No; thank you, miss; Larry said he would return to the barn with your sapphire, and I must wait here till he comes—if ever he comes," she added mournfully.

"Well, you've quite upset me with all this nonsense, and I must have a breath of fresh air. If Master George, or papa, should ask for me, Lizzie, say I've got a head­ache, and gone home for a little while. I'll be round again before Larry's back; but if anything should keep me, tell him he shall have the chain to-morrow morning. For he's a brave fellow, Lizzie, and whether he sees the
ghost or not he shall keep my watch chain as a wedding present."

She patted the blind girl's hand before she tripped away; but no amount of encouragement could have driven the conviction from Lizzie Locke's breast that her lover was a doomed man; and added to this, she had an uncomfortable feeling in her heart (though too undefined to be called jealousy), that his alacrity in complying with his young mistress's request arose from something more than a desire to maintain his character for courage in her eyes. So the poor child sat by the beer barrel, sad and silent, with her face buried in her hands; and so she remained till midnight had sounded from the church clock, and the lights were put out, and the festivities concluded, and some kind neighbor led her back to her aunt's house. But neither Miss Rosa nor Larry had returned.

* * * * * * * *

Miss Rosa's "breath of fresh air" meant of course, her appointment with Frederick Darley in the apple copse. She had got Larry nicely out of the way (notwithstanding the fears of his betrothed), and there was no obstacle in her path as she left the barn and approached the place of meeting. She had taken the precaution to wrap a large, dark shawl round her white dress, and thus concealed, crept softly down the lane and through the lower meadow unobservant or unheeding that her father's terrier, Trim, had followed her footsteps. Mr. Darley was in waiting for her, and a lover-like colloquy ensued. He did not again mention the subject of marriage, at which Rosa was somewhat disappointed; for she believed that, notwithstanding her brother's assertions to the contrary, Mr. Murray might not refuse his consent to her becoming Frederick Darley's wife; and he certainly was the handsomest man round about, Lord Worcester himself not excepted. But in the midst of their tender conversation, as Darley was telling Rosa he loved her better than ever man had loved woman in this world before, Trim commenced wagging his tail and snuffing the grass.

"What is the matter?" cried Rosa, in alarm. "Down, Trim, down—be quiet, sir! Oh, Frederick! surely no one can be coming this way."

"Don't be afraid," said her companion; "throw your
shawl over your head and trust to me. I will answer for it that no one shall molest you whilst under my protection."

But he had not calculated upon having to make his words good in the presence of her father and brother.

Trim would not lie down, nor be quiet, but kept on with his little signals of warning, until two dark figures could be discerned making their way toward them over the grass, when he bounded away to meet them. Rosa guessed who the new-comers must be, and her heart died within her for fear. She would have screamed, but Darley placed his hand before her mouth. There was no escape for the lovers, even if an attempt to escape would not have increased suspicion, for the apple-copse was a three-cornered field that had but the one entrance through which they had come. In another moment the four had met, and Rosa recognized her father and her brother George. How they had guessed they would find her there she did not stay to ask or even think. All her thought was how to shield herself from the farmer's anger. The fact was that George had wished to seat his sister at the supper-table, when, finding that she and Darley and Larry had all three mysteriously disappeared, he had communicated his suspicions and the events of the morning to his father, and they had sallied forth together in search of the missing daughter, and were on their way to the farm, where they had been told she had gone, when Trim's unwarrantable interference led them to the very spot.

Mr. Murray's rage was unbounded. He did not wait for any explanations, but walked up straight to Rosa and demanded,—

"Is this my daughter?"

The girl was too frightened to speak as she clung to her lover's arm, but Darley, perceiving that an amicable settlement was out of the question, replied in the same tone,—

"What right have you to ask, sir?"

"The right of a father, Mr. Darley, who has no intention to let disgrace be brought into his family by such as you."

He pulled Rosa by the arm roughly as he spoke, and dragged the shawl from her face.
“So it is you, you jade, and you would try and deceive your father, who has never refused you a thing in his life. That’s the gratitude of women. However, you’ll pay for it. You’ve had your first clandestine meeting and your last. No more gamekeeper’s courtships for you if I know it.”

“By what right, Mr. Murray, do you insult me, or this young lady, in my presence? If I have persuaded her to do a foolish thing, I am sorry for it, but you cannot give a harsher name to a lover’s moonlight walk.”

“I do give it a harsher name, sir, and you know it deserves it. A lover’s moonlight walk indeed! You mean a scoundrel’s endeavor to get an innocent girl into his clutches.”

“Papa! papa! you are quite mistaken. Mr. Darley has asked me to marry him. He will marry me to-morrow by special license if you will only give your consent.”

“Marry you to-morrow! you poor fool! You’ve been swallowing every lie he chose to tell you. He can’t marry you to-morrow nor any day, and for a good reason. He’s a married man already.”

Rosa screamed, George uttered an oath, and Darley darted forward.

“Who told you so, Mr. Murray?”

“Never mind who told me; you know it is true. Can you deny that you left a wife down south when you came to Rooklands? Lord Worcester does not know it, perhaps, but there are those who do.”

“Who is your informant?” repeated Darley.

“I shall not tell you; but if you don’t clear out of my meadow and Corston within half-an-hour, and promise never to show your face here again, I’ll lay the whole story before his lordship.”

“Are you going, or shall I kick you out?” inquired George.

Frederick Darley thought upon the whole he’d better go. He turned on his heel with an oath, and slunk out of the apple copse like a beaten cur.

“Come, my girl,” said Farmer Murray, not unkindly, as he commenced to walk homeward, with his hand still on Rosa’s arm; “you’ve been a fool, but I hope you’ve been nothing worse. Never see nor speak to the man again, and I’ll forgive you.”
“Oh, papa! is it really true?” she answered, sobbing.

“It’s as true as Heaven, Rosa! It was Larry Barnes told it me a week ago, and he had it from one of the Whiskers, who worked near Lord Worcester’s estate in Devon, and knew Mrs. Frederick Darley by sight. You’ve had a narrow escape, my girl, and you may thank Larry for it.”

“Poor Larry!” sighed Rosa; and if she could have known what was happening to poor Larry at that moment, she would have sighed still deeper. He had accepted her wager, and rushed off at her bidding to get the bunch of samphire that grew at the top of Corston Point. His brain was rather staggered at the idea of what he had undertaken, but he had been plentifully plied with Farmer Murray’s “Old October,” and it was a bright, moonlight night, so that he did not find the expedition after all so terrible as he had imagined. The salt marshes were very lonely, it is true, and more than once Larry turned his head fearfully over his shoulder to find that nothing worse followed him than his own shadow; but he reached the Point in safety, and secured the samphire, without having encountered old Whisker’s ghost. Then his spirits rose again, and he whistled as he commenced to retrace his steps to the village. He knew he had been longer over the transaction than he had expected, and that he should be unable to see Miss Rosa that night; but he intended to be up at the farm the very first thing in the morning, and give the bunch of samphire into her own hands. He did not expect to receive the watch chain; he had not seen the ghost, and had not earned it; but Larry’s heart was all the lighter for that. He would not have exchanged a view of the dreaded specter even for the coveted gold chain that had hung so long round the fair neck of his divinity. But as he turned Corston Point again, he started back to see a figure before him. The first moment he thought it must be old Whisker’s ghost, but the next convinced him of his error. It was only Mr. Darley—Lord Worcester’s gamekeeper! He had been so absorbed in angry and remorseful thought since he left the apple copse that he had unwittingly taken the wrong turning, and now found himself upon the wide, desolate waste of the salt marshes, and rather uncertain on which side to find the beaten track again which led to the road
to Rooklands. The two men were equally surprised and disgusted at encountering one another.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Darley, insolently.

"What business is that of yours?" replied the other.

"The salt marshes belong to me, I suppose, as much as they do to you."

"You're not likely to have business here at this time of night. You've been dogging my footsteps," said Darley, without the least consideration for probability.

"Follow you!" exclaimed Larry, with a big oath; "it would be a long time before I'd take the trouble to care what happened to you. And since you ask my business here, pray what may yours be? You didn't think to find Farmer Murray's daughter in the marshes at twelve o'clock at night, did you?"

"You insolent hound! how dare you take that young lady's name upon your lips in my presence?"

"I've as good a right to name her as you have—perhaps better. It was at her bidding I came here to-night. Did she send you here, too?"

"I shall not condescend to answer your question nor to link our names together. Do you know what you are?"

"I know what you are, Mr. Darley, and that's a villain!"

Poor Larry had said he would have it out with him, and he thought his time had come. A sudden thought flashed through Darley's brain that here was the informer who had stopped his little game with the farmer's pretty daughter.

"Are you the man," he demanded fiercely, "who has thought fit to inform Mr. Murray of my antecedents?"

"Antecedents" was a long word for Larry's comprehension, but he grasped the meaning somehow.

"If you'd say, am I the man who told the master that you have got a wife and children down in Devonshire, I answer 'Yes;' and I hope he's told you of it and kicked you out of the barn to-night for a scoundrel as you are, to try and make love to his daughter."

"You brute!" cried Darley, throwing off his coat; "I'll be revenged on you for this if there's any strength left in my arm."
“All right,” replied the young countryman; “I’ve longed to punch your head many and many a day. I’m glad it’s come at last. There’s plenty of room for us to have it out here, and the devil take the hindmost.”

He flew at his adversary as he spoke, and fastened his hands on to his coat-collar. Larry was the younger and the stronger-built man of the two, but Frederick Darley had had the advantage of a politer education, in which the use of his fists was included, so that after a very little while it would have been evident to any bystander that Barnes was getting the worst of it. He had energy and muscle and right on his side, but his antagonist, unfortunately, possessed the skill, and after he had stood on the defensive four or five times, he seized his opportunity, and with a dexterous twist threw Larry heavily from him on the ground. The young man fell backward, crashing his skull against a projecting fragment of rock, and then lay there, bleeding and unconscious. Darley glanced around him—not a creature was in sight. The broad harvest moon looked down placidly upon the deed of blood he had just committed, but human eyes to see it there were none. Finding that Barnes neither stirred nor groaned, he stooped down after a while, and laid his hand upon his heart. It had stopped beating. The body was getting cold. The man was dead!

Darley had not intended this, and it alarmed him terribly. His first idea was what he should do to secure his own safety. If he left the body there, would it be discovered, and the guilt traced home to him, or would the incoming tide carry it out to sea, and wash it up again, weeks hence perhaps, as a drowned corpse upon the shore? He thought it might. He hoped it would. He remembered Larry’s words that Miss Rosa had sent him there that night. It was known, then, that he had gone to the marshes, and the fact was favorable.

He dragged the corpse a little way upon the sands that it might the sooner be covered by the water; but finding it left deep traces of its progress, he lifted it with some difficulty upon his shoulders, and after carrying it perhaps a couple of dozen yards toward the sea, flung it with all his force before him. What was his amazement at seeing the body immediately sink in what appeared to be the solid ground, and disappear
from view? Was it magic, or did his senses deceive him? Darley rubbed his eyes once or twice, but the miracle remained the same. The sand, with its smooth, shining surface was before him, but the corpse of Larry Barnes had vanished. With a feeling of the keenest relief—such relief as the cowardly murderer who has cheated the gallows must experience—the gamekeeper settled his clothes, glanced once or twice fearfully around him, and then, retracing his steps, ran until he had gained the high road to Rooklands. But retribution dogged his murderous feet, and he was destined never to reach his master's home. When the morning dawned upon Corston, a fearful tale was going the round of its cottages. The body of Lord Worcester's gamekeeper had been found on the borders of the estate, shot through the heart, as it was supposed, in an encounter with poachers, as traces of a fierce struggle were plainly visible around him.

And Laurence Barnes was missing!

The two circumstances put together, seemed to provide a solution of the mystery. Everyone in Corston knew that poor Larry had not been entirely free from the suspicion of poaching, and most people had heard him abuse Frederick Darley, and vow to have vengeance upon him. What more likely, then, that Larry, having been taken at his old tricks, had discharged his rusty gun at the gamekeeper, and sent him out of the world to answer for all his errors. This was the light by which Corston folk read the undiscovered tragedy. All, that is to say, but two, and those two were the dead man's mother and his betrothed, who knew of his visit to the Point, and fully believed that old Whisker had carried him off.

The murder of Frederick Darley made quite a sensation in Corston. Lord Worcester gave his late gamekeeper a handsome funeral, and monument in the churchyard; and Rosa Murray lost her spirits and her looks, and wore a black ribbon on her bonnet for three months, although she dared not let her father know the reason why. But Darley had been so generally disliked that, when the first horror at his death had subsided, people began to think he was a very good riddance, and though Rosa still looked grave if anyone mentioned his name, there was a certain young farmer who rode over from Wells to see her every
Sunday, on whom the gossips said she seemed to look with considerable favor. And so, in due course of time, the name of Darley appeared likely to become altogether forgotten.

But not so Larry Barnes. Larry was a native of Corston, and had been a general favorite there, and his mother still lived amongst them to keep his memory green. No one in the village thought Larry was dead, except Lizzie and Mrs. Barnes. The rustics believed that, finding he had shot Darley, he had become alarmed and ran away—left the country, perhaps, in one of the numerous fishing smacks that infest the coast, and gone to make his fortune in the "Amerikys." Larry would come back some day—they were assured of that—when the present lord was dead and gone, perhaps, and the whole affair was forgotten; but they were certain he was alive, simply because they were. But Lizzie Locke knew otherwise—Lizzie Locke, to whom a glimpse of heaven had been opened the day of his death, and to whom the outer life must be as dark as the inner henceforward. She mourned for Larry far more than his mother did. Mrs. Barnes had lived the best part of her life, and her joys and her sorrows were well-nigh over, but the poor blind girl had only waked up to a consciousness of what life might hold for her on the awful day on which hope seemed blotted out for ever. From the moment her cousin left the barn at Rosa's bidding, Lizzie drooped like a faded flower. That he never returned from that fatal quest was no surprise to her. She had known that he would never return. She had waited where he had left her till all the merrymaking was over, and then she had gone home to her aunt, meek, unrepining, but certain of her doom. She had never been much of a talker, but she seldom opened her mouth, except it was absolutely necessary, after that day. But she would take her basket, whenever the tide was low, and walk down to Corston Point and sit there—sometimes gathering cockles, but oftener talking to the dead, and telling him how much she had loved him. The few who had occasionally overheard her soliloquies said they were uncanny, and that Lizzie Locke was losing her wits as well as her eyes. But the blind girl never altered her course. Corston Point became her home, and whenever it was uncovered by the tide, she might be seen sit-
ting there beside her cockle basket, waiting for—she knew not what, talking to—she knew not whom.

* * * *

The autumn had passed, and the winter tides had set in. Rosa Murray never rode upon the Corston Marshes now—she was more pleasantly engaged traversing the leafless lanes with the young farmer from Wells. Most people would have thought the fireside a better place to mourn one’s dead by than out on the bleak marsh; yet Lizzie Locke, despite her cotton clothing and bare head, still took her way there every morning, her patient, sightless eyes refusing to reveal the depths of sorrow that lay beneath them. One day, however, Mrs. Barnes felt disposed to be impatient with the girl. She had left the house at eight o’clock in the morning and had not returned home since, and now it was dark, and the neighbors began to say it was not safe that Lizzie should remain alone on such a bitter night, and that her aunt should enforce her authority to prevent such lengthy rambles. Two or three of the men went out with lanterns to try and find her, but returned unsuccessful, and they supposed she must have taken shelter at some friend’s house for the night. Lizzie Locke knew the marshes well, they said (no one in Corston better), and would never be so foolish as to tempt Providence by traversing them in the dark, for the currents were at their worst now, and the quicksands were shifting daily. The logs and spars of a ruined wreck of a year before had all come to the surface again within a few days, and with them a keg of pork, preserved by the saline properties of the ground in which it had been treasured, so that its contents were as fresh as though they had been found yesterday. Inquiries were made for the blind girl throughout the village, but no one had seen anything of her, and all that her friends could do was to search for her the first thing in the morning, when a large party set out for Corston Point, Mrs. Barnes amongst them. Their faces were sad, for they had little hope that the cruel tide had not crawled over the watching girl before she was aware of it, and carried her out to sea. But as they neared the Point they discovered something still crouched upon the sand.

“It can’t be Lizzie,” said the men, drawing closer to
each other, though a bright, cold sun was shining over
the February morning. "It can't be nothing mortal,
sitting there in the frost, with the icy waves lapping over
its feet."

But Mrs. Barnes, who had rushed forward, waved her
arms wildly, and called to them,—

"It's him! It's my Larry, washed up again by the
sands; and poor Lizzie has found him out by the touch of
her finger."

The men ran up to the spot, and looked upon the sight
before them. The corpse of Larry Barnes, with not so
much as a feature changed by the hand of Time—with all
his clothes intact and whole, and a bunch of samphire in
his breast—lay out upon the shining sands, stiff as marble,
but without any trace of decomposition upon his fresh
young features and stalwart limbs.* And beside him,
with her cheek bowed down upon his own, knelt Lizzie
Locke. Lizzie, who had braved the winter's frost, and
withstood the cold of a February night, in order to watch
beside the recovered body of her lover.

"Lizzie!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnes. "Look up now;
I've come to comfort thee! Let us thank Heaven that
he's found again, and the evil words they spoke of him
must be took back."

But the blind girl neither spoke nor stirred.

"Can't thee answer, my lass!" said Isaac the poacher,
as he shook her by the arm.

The answer that she made was falling backward and
disclosing her fair, gentle face—white and rigid as her
lover's.

"Merciful God! she is dead!" they cried.

Yes, they were right. She was dead—she was at rest.
What she had waited for she had found. What she had
striven for she had gained. How many of us can say the
same? Larry had been restored to her. The shifting
quicksand had thrown him upon earth again, and had she
not been there, his body might have been washed out to
sea, and no further knowledge gained of his fate. But she
had saved his dust for consecrated ground—more, she had

* This is a fact, the corpse of a fisherman having been preserved
in like manner for some nine months when buried in the salt marshes
of Norfolk.
saved his character for the healing of his mother's heart. For in his breast there still reposed the bunch of samphire he had periled his life to gather for the farmer's daughter, and grasped tight in his hand, they found the neckcloth of Lord Worcester's gamekeeper—a crimson silk neckcloth, recognized by all three—and which Larry had seized and held in the last deadly struggle. And the men of Corston looked on it and knew the truth—that their comrade was no murderer, but had fallen where he was found in a quarrel (probably pre-arranged) with Frederick Darley; and they cursed the gamekeeper in their hearts.

But Lizzie was at rest—happy Lizzie Locke! sleeping in the quiet churchyard at Corston, with her cheek pillowed on her Larry's breast.
Leopold-Ferdinand, Duc de Brabant.

By Florence Marryat.

The death of a child is at all times a subject of mournful interest: it is so sad to see the hereditary curse falling on the innocent heads of those who in themselves have done nothing to merit the punishment of sin. But when the lost child is an only child, or an only son, our sympathies with the bereavement are increased tenfold; so proud do we know each other to be, of perpetuating the frailties of which we are but too conscious, and leaving behind us an inheritor of the misery we have endured. And if ordinary children (of which a few hundreds more or less in the world make little difference) are to be thus bewailed, what words can paint strongly enough the condolence with which we should approach the subject of that royal parent who so lately lost at one stroke his only son, and (in the direct line) the sole heir to his throne! The interest felt by all Englishmen in the royal family of Belgium lies deeper than in the mere fact of their near connection with our own Sovereign and her lamented consort. From the time that first Léopold came over, a gallant bridegroom, to our shores, to wed the Princess Charlotte (that darling of the nation), and left them so shortly afterward widowed and childless, we have taken almost as keen an interest in all that concerned him and his children as though death had never stepped in to sever the link between us. And this feeling has been warmly kept up as much by the condescension with which Léopold II. has followed in the footsteps of his father, by taking an interest in all things British, and showing the utmost
courtesy to, and consideration for, the foreigners of that
country residing in his dominions, as by the intimate rela-
tions maintained between the royal families of England
and Belgium.

It may be said, then, and without exaggeration, that
when the sad news that the young Duc de Brabant had
at last succumbed to the cruel malady which had kept
him in constant suffering, and the nation's hopes in a
state of fluctuation for nine months past, was dissemi-
nated throughout Brussels, his royal parents received as
much sympathy in their sorrow from the English resi-
dents in that capital as from their own people. The
Belgians mourned their future king; but we wept with
the father and mother over the cradle of their only son.

The loss was not an ordinary one, for the child was not
an ordinary child; and this assertion is made, not from
newspaper gleanings, but the report of those who knew
him intimately. His photograph confirms this fact; for
the calm, sensible face depicted there has none of the
careless, laughter-loving expression which characterizes
his age; although when in health the Duc de Brabant is
said to have been as playful and merry as other little
children. But sickness came too soon to rob his features
of all but the serene patience which became habitual to
them, and before any change could arrive to restore their
original expression he has passed away from amongst us,
and nothing remains to recall his memory but the few
words which can be written of so innocent and uneventful
a life.

Léopold-Ferdinand-Elie-Victor-Albert-Marie, Duc de
Brabant, Comte de Hainault, and Duc de Saxe, was born
at the palace of Laeken, on the 12th of June 1859. He
was the second child of his parents, after ten years of
wedded life, consequently his birth was hailed with all
the greater acclamation for fulfilling hope deferred to the
hearts of his people. When born, he had every appear-
ance of possessing a robust constitution, being plump and
well made, with broad shoulders and an open chest; with
a formation, in fact, containing the promise of so much
muscular strength, that the obstinate ravages of the fatal
disease which has taken him from us have been a matter
of surprise to all who knew the child as he once was.

The method of his bringing up, also, and the careful
manner in which his studies and employments were regulated, should have tended to increase, rather than detract from, the bodily health which he bid fair to enjoy. His education, intrusted to M. le Comte Vanderstraten-Ponthoz, and to Monsieur le Lieutenant Donny, was skillfully directed in such a way as to maintain a wholesome equilibrium between the development of his physical force and that of the brilliant mental faculties with which the young prince was gifted. The employment of his time was carved out with the greatest minuteness, and out-door exercises alternated with mental labor so as to procure for both mind and body the repose they needed. The prince invariably left his bed at six in summer, and seven in winter, and breakfasted an hour after he rose; when he worked with his tutor till ten o'clock. A run in the park or a ride on his pony served him for recreation; and at one he joined his father and mother at luncheon—a meal which the king and queen always took en famille. Before resuming his studies, the little prince went out again with his tutor, dined at six, and was then at liberty to amuse himself until his bed-time, which was fixed for eight o'clock. Such a life could hurt no one: no enforced studies were exacted from his tender brain, nor was the heir of Belgium sacrificed to the desire to see him turn out a prodigy; he lived as other happy and well-cared-for children live, making his short life one long holiday; and, until within ten months of his decease, showed no symptoms whatever of ill-health.

Then the first signs of sickness, said to be consequent on the suppression of some childish disorder, became apparent, and increased until they culminated in pericarditis, or inflammation of the membranes of the heart, the affection which ultimately destroyed him. At its commencement, this complaint had all the appearance of a heavy cold, accompanied by a dry, violent cough, which was soon followed by a pallid face and wasted figure, the sure signs of impoverished blood.

When the first grave consultation had confirmed the diagnostic of the attendant physicians, that the pericardium or membrane of the heart was affected, all the efforts of science were immediately put in requisition to arrest the progress of the evil; but without avail, for they proved powerless to stay the rapid decline of his natural powers,
by dropsy, the usual effect of heart disease. The swelling of the stomach and chest of the poor little invalid now became enormous; the respiratory organs no longer performed their office, and the cough redoubled in intensity. It became most distressing, scarcely ceasing day or night; and the gravest fears began to be entertained for his lungs. The apartments of the prince, though large and airy, and situated on the ground floor of the right wing of the palace of Laeken, and opening on the park, did not contain sufficient vital air for his need. When it was necessary to close the windows of the chamber, which was only done at night (for the suffering child found no relief except in a free current of air), servants placed on either side his bed kept up a continual fanning, and by that means occasionally gained him a few moments of repose. Every morning, under the guardianship of his tutor, Monsieur Donny, the prince was taken into the park in a little pony-carriage led by a groom, and made the tour of the domain four or five times. Toward the middle of the journey the pony and servant were changed, for the promenade was long, and often occupied several hours; and, occasionally, the poor father and mother, so soon to be bereaved, might be seen following on horseback, and wistfully regarding the little carriage which held the object of their dearest hopes. It was a triste and melancholy procession, and resembled a funeral cortège more than anything else.

Toward one o'clock the prince would stop, generally near the aviary of pheasants, and lunch with his preceptor; for, strange to say, his appetite, though feeble, never abandoned him until the very last. Soon the carriage was again in motion and making the circuit of the park, for it was only by a continual change of air that the poor child was enabled to breathe with any ease. The affection of the prince for Monsieur Donny was incredible. Throughout his illness he insisted upon his being continually at his side, would not take his meals without him, and obliged him to sleep in his apartments; and Monsieur Donny (although he had been married but a few weeks when the first serious symptoms of illness appeared) never quitted the royal child for a moment until he was carried out of the palace of Laeken for the last time. About the month of October there appeared to be some amelioration
in the prince's condition, and hopes were almost con­
dfidently entertained of his ultimate restoration to health.
But these hopes were of short duration, although the bul­
etins issued daily, fluctuated so much in their statements
that it was difficult to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.
The king is said to have bad no hope from the commence­
ment of the disorder, and his despair was proportionately
great. His grief was so profound that he became a mere
shadow of himself; and yet, with that manly fortitude
which resists an open expression of what it feels, might
be seen at all times, pacing the palace and gardens of
Laeken with calm dry eyes, but a fixed, mournful look,
which seemed as though he had always before him a vision
of the pitiless death which was about to strike him in his
tenderest affections.

At night he would constantly rise from his own bed to
go with bare feet and noiseless step, and hang over the
coch, where his child, with angelic patience, was await­
ing his doom. This patience, so calm as to appear almost
unnatural, and which excites surprise in those who have
not nursed little children through mortal illnesses, seems
to have been a characteristic of this little child. Number­
less anecdotes have, of course, been related of him during
the last months, many of which are totally without
foundation, but one in particular was so widely spread
that it gained general credence. It was the fact of his
feigning sleep when suffering great pain if he heard the
approach of his father's footstep, lest he should be ques­
tioned relative to his state, and read the disappointment
his answer must have caused. "If I pretend to sleep," he used to say to his attendants, "my father will think
that I am better."

But during the daytime his father was seldom absent
from his side, and was never weary of trying to extract
some slight support on which to hang hope by question­ing
the child as to his feelings and symptoms. One day, when
the little tragedy was drawing very near its close, and the
prince was suffering from one of those attacks which so
often threatened to be fatal, the king approached the bed
to learn some news of his condition, and receiving, for the
first time, no reply save such as was conveyed by the lan­
guid, half-raised eyes,

"Je vous ennui, n'est-ce pas, mon enfant!" he ex-
claimed; and unable to control his feelings, rushed away into the park in order to conceal them.

On Christmas-day the king, in an attempt, if possible, to distract the child's mind, had a large Christmas-tree set up in the midst of his apartment, made brilliant with wax tapers, and hung with numbers of beautiful playthings and other ornaments calculated to attract one of his age.

The Duc de Brabant, after having duly admired the tree and its belongings, and appearing to take pleasure in examining and handling the playthings with which it was laden, asked his attendants to bring a large box to his bedside; and having seen all his presents packed away in it, gave it to Doctor Henriette (one of his attendant physicians), and begged him to distribute its contents amongst the little invalids in the hospital. This is but one trait amongst a thousand from which might have been predicated what sort of king this child, if spared, would eventually have made. He was positively adored by the people of the royal household—those servants who were under his control; and by seeing him play at sovereign with whom one read the natural nobility of his yet undeveloped character. When any of his servants had committed a fault and deserved a reprimand from the officer on duty, the Duc de Brabant would accuse himself of the negligence in order to save the real offender from punishment. He was nursed throughout his illness by two Sœurs de Charité, who paid him the utmost attention, and of whom he became proportionately fond. It was said that on the first of January the Duc de Brabant asked his father for the sum of six thousand francs: "Pour ces deux anges qui me veillaient." This anecdote was afterward contradicted; but it possesses at least the merit of giving the general idea of the disposition of Léopold Ferdinand. He was the most generous little heart possible, and he would have despoiled himself of everything to make one creature happy.

On Thursday evening, the twenty-first of January, when it became known in Laeken that the prince was really dying, the whole community was in commotion; and when toward nine o'clock the report was spread that all was over, nothing was to be seen but mournful and downcast countenances, and the commissioner of police
was forced to reassure the people by telling them that the child still lived. These sentiments were but natural, for the progress of the disease had been suspended during so many months that the dangerous state of the royal invalid was but thoroughly realized. The public had begun to think that the doctors must be mistaken in their diagnostics; and thus, when the bulletins from the palace intimated that there was a fatal aggravation of the symptoms, the news could not fail to throw the whole country into a state of consternation. The last agony of the unfortunate child (whose sufferings had been greatly accelerated ever since the fourteenth of January) commenced at five in the evening of the twenty-first, and did not terminate till forty minutes past twelve, at which time he drew his last breath in a long sigh of relief. MM. Henriette and Wimmer, who had so assiduously tended the royal child since the appearance of the disease to which he succumbed, were summoned to the palace of Laeken by a dispatch from M. le Comte Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz a few minutes after the last crisis had commenced, and did not again quit the bedside of the invalid, though they had the grief of seeing all their science powerless to do more than assist at the last moments of him whose life but a few months before they had hoped to save.

From the time the crisis set in, Prince Léopold-Ferdinand recognized no one, although his intelligence was not completely obscured; for when the king or queen spoke to him he appeared to understand what they said, although it was impossible for him to respond, even by a gesture, to the loving words which were lavished upon him. He died, as so beloved a child should die, between his father and mother, who, during the last hours, never quitted his side. In his chamber at this time were Madame la Duchesse D‘Ursel, mistress of the queen's household; Monsieur le Comte Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz, maréchal of the palace; Monsieur Donny, the prince's preceptor; MM. Henriette and Wimmer, the two Soeurs de Charité who had nursed him through his illness, and the two valets de chambre of the Duc de Brabant. All were silent, as, awestricken, they waited, in the midst of that calm night, to hear the rustling wings of the Angel of Death; and the peaceful solemnity of the last hour was undisturbed, save
by the voice of the chaplain, who recited the prayers for the dying. Monseigneur le Comte de Flandre, brother to the king, who had been summoned to the palace by the same dispatch which had brought MM. Henriette and Wimmer, arrived there at half-past ten, and quitted Laeken again at midnight; he was, not, therefore, present at the last moments of his nephew. It was the same with Monsieur Devaux, the king’s secretary, who retired at half-past nine to his own apartments.

When all was over, and life had finally quitted the poor little body which had suffered so much, the father and mother, one after another, strained the corpse in their arms, and covered it with kisses, until the king, desirous of sparing the queen so mournful a spectacle, led her by force from the couch where rested the inanimate remains of the sole heir to their crown. On the morning following his decease the body of the little prince was completely robed in white, and placed on the bed in the chamber where he had died, and which is next to that in which his grandfather, Léopold I., drew his last breath. A crown of white roses, fresh and pure as his own brief life, was placed on the pillow immediately above his head, and a little virgin, with several playthings with which he had essayed to while away some of the weary hours of pain, were placed at the foot of his couch. An altar was improvised on a large chest of drawers, placed between two windows of his bedroom, where a crucifix hung in the midst of lighted candles, converting the chamber of death into a temporary chapel. Here the Sœurs de Charité watched the dead child through the night, as they had watched him for so many previous months.

The body of the little prince was not embalmed, as the queen steadfastly set her face against such a proceeding, but was interred in the same condition in which he had died. The corpse was not at all decomposed, but it was terribly thin. The face wore the pallor of marble, and was not at all swollen or otherwise disfigured. The child appeared to sleep, and so he did, although the sleep will be eternal. On the same day the following proclamation was placed on the walls of the capital:

"AUX HABITANTS DE BRUXELLES.

"CONCITOYENS,—Le pays vient d’eprouver une perte immense. Le Prince Royal a succombé cette nuit au mal cruel qui menaçait
The following letter of condolence, addressed by the permanent deputation of the Provincial Council of Brabant, to their bereaved king and queen, appears to me so touchingly worded, that I give it in the original, fearful of spoiling by translating it:

"SIRE, MADAME,—Il a plu à la Providence de nous envoyer, au milieu de nos prospérités, une bien douleureuse épreuve. Le Prince Royal est mort! ... mort avant d'avoir accompli sa dixième année! ... Ce coup cruel, que nos vœux n'ont pu conjurer, nous frappe tous au cœur. Il ravit un fils à votre amour, à nous le jeune Prince promis à de hautes et si précieuses destinées. Dans une adversité si grande, nous le savons, toutes les paroles sont vaines. Il y a des afflictions que rien ne console. Nous pouvons, du moins, mêler la tristesse de nos regrets à l'amertume des vôtres, et, associés à votre légitime douleur, souffrir et pleurer avec vous.

"Oui, pleurons! Mais gardons une entière confiance dans l'avenir. Dieu n'a pas cessé de protéger la Belgique et la dynastie qui lui est inséparablement unie.

"La députation permanente du Conseil Provincial du Brabant."

After which followed the signatures of the president and those members of the council who signed the address in the name of the entire body.

But the loyal sympathy of the Belgians did not vent itself in words only. As soon as the death of their young prince was officially announced, black flags on the Belgian colors, smothered in crape, were displayed from the balconies of the principal houses, whilst the fronts of many of them were completely hung with funereal drapery, and most of the shops and all places of amusement were closed. The ships lying in the Belgian ports lowered their flags half-mast high, in sign of general mourning; and all the principal families in Brussels and most of the English residents appeared in black.

The bells of the cathedral and other churches kept tolling at intervals during the first and succeeding days, to announce the melancholy news; all fêtes and public rejoic-
ing were suspended, as well as private balls and concerts; and the ministerial conferences were adjourned.

Meanwhile the body of the young prince, which had been watched ever since his death by the officers of the household, was placed in a triple coffin, lined with white silk in the presence of the king and queen, the Archbishop of Malines, and several members of the royal household. This melancholy ceremony of bidding the last earthly adieu is said to have been, as is natural, the occasion of a most heartrending scene. The young prince had received the insignia of the Chevalier de la Toison d'Or d'Espagne, shortly after the ascension of his father Leopold II. to the throne; and this insignia was placed on his coffin during the funeral obsequies—which were fixed to take place at eleven o'clock on Monday, the twenty-fifth; at which time also was to be performed (according to the rites of the Roman Catholic religion), in the church of Notre-Dame at Laeken, the first funeral mass for the repose of his innocent soul.

Accordingly, before eight o'clock on the morning of the day appointed, a procession of people eager to witness the ceremony lined the road to the church and palace of Laeken. At the palace, the guests were received in the rotunda, where they had to await the arrival of the body, to form themselves in cortège. Monsieur le Baron Prisse, adjutant of the Palace, and Monsieur de Wyckersloth were appointed to receive them. Only a very few were admitted into the temporary chapel, where rested the mortal remains of the little prince; and which was most tastefully decorated. The walls and ceiling were draped with black; an altar had been erected between the two windows, before which stood the coffin, supported on a small black bier. It was covered with a white pall, embroidered with a large golden cross, upon which lay a wreath of white roses. This erection, lighted by four gold candelabra on black pedestals, and a chandelier from the ceiling, under which the coffin rested, had a very solemn and imposing effect. On the black drapery with which the room was hung, were shields emblazoned with the royal arms. At a quarter to eleven the clergy arrived. They consisted of the Archbishop of Malines, the Bishops of Belgium, accompanied by their canons and secretaries; the rectors of the parishes of Laeken and the capital; several envoys
from the provinces, and a representative of each of the religious orders now established in Brussels. At their arrival at the palace, which they entered two by two, the principal members of the clergy were admitted into the temporary chapel, where were already assembled H.M. the King; H.R.H. the Comte de Flandre; Monseigneur le Prince de Ligne; and several officers of the household, amongst whom was Monsieur Donny, the prince's tutor, who since the morning could not be persuaded to quit the remains of his beloved pupil. After the usual prayers, the coffin was delivered into the hands of some of the non-commissioned officers of the army, and such of the Garde-Civique as had been deputed to carry it to its last resting-place. The coffin was of black wood, with silver nails and ornaments; lions' heads formed the handles, and a splendid ivory crucifix was on the lid, but there was no plate, descriptive of the name or distinctions of the deceased child.

As soon as the coffin had been placed on the bier on which it was to be carried, the white pall with its golden cross was thrown over it, and the funeral cortège was set in motion. The pall was held by MM. les Généraux Chazal and Pletinckx; MM. Frère-Orban, Minister of Finance, and Bara, Minister of Justice; Dolez, President of the Chamber, and Omalius d'Halloy, President of the Senate.

The king, with the Comte de Flandre, headed the procession. He was pale, and appeared sadly changed; his step was slow and faltering, and he was obliged to lean for support on the arm of his royal brother. They were attired in the uniform of lieutenant-generals of the army, and opposite to where they wore the ribbon of the Order of Léopold hung a long black crape scarf. Both seemed much affected, but the father had evidently great trouble in keeping back his tears; and one can well imagine that it must have been real courage on his part to attend the sad ceremony in person. Immediately after the king and his brother, who walked behind the little coffin, came the officers of the household of the king, queen, and Comte de Flandre; the ambassadors or plenipotentiary ministers of the various Powers, the generals of the army, and several other persons of distinction.

Amongst the representatives of the different Powers
were two special envoys: these were M. de Jamund, aid-de-camp of the Prince Royal of Prussia, to represent his Prussian Majesty; and M. Schreckenstein, who did the same for the Prince of Hohenzollern. It was painful to see M. Donny, who formed part of the melancholy procession: his face bore such evident traces of the suffering he had passed through; and when the mortal remains of the little prince passed him in leaving the palace, he burst into tears. This long cortège was brought up at the rear by the invited guests and clergy already enumerated, after which came an empty hearse: first an ordinary one, of which the drapery had been exchanged for ornaments of black and gold, and escutcheons, with the Belgian lion placed on each side of the seat; whilst six horses, caprimsoned with black, their heads surmounted with plumes, drew the funeral car. The dead child’s little pony, sitting astride which he had been photographed in various positions, covered with crape and led by two grooms, followed the hearse; and twelve court carriages, their lamps enveloped in crape, and their coachmen in deep mourning, came after it. In this order, preceded and followed by troops of horse, as guards of honor, the procession slowly wended its way toward the church by Montagne du Tonnere. Its departure from the palace was proclaimed by volleys of artillery, which continued throughout the ceremony, and indeed from daybreak cannons fired at intervals, had announced the coming solemnity; first, every half-hour, and afterward, every five minutes. The bells of all the churches, also of the capital and its suburbs did not cease tolling until the funeral obsequies of the young prince were completed. At the gate of the palace a company of Grenadiers presented arms to the coffin, and a little further on the barrack-guard went through the same ceremony. Along the whole length of the road was assembled a silent crowd: at every window appeared eager and interested faces, amongst whom were a large number of women,—all dressed in deep mourning, and many weeping. It was reckoned, and without exaggeration, that more than forty thousand people went to Laeken that day to see the child of their king buried. From the palace to the church the coup d’œil of the procession was very imposing.

A veil of black seemed to hover over the vast multitude,
who, with uncovered heads, paced slowly beneath the wintry sky; and the rays of frosty sunshine, powerless as they were to warm on such a day, had yet sufficient brilliancy to outshine the lights which flickered in a sickly manner in the carriage lamps, overshadowed by their coverings of crape.

When the coffin arrived at the church it was already nearly filled with the functionaries of the different administrations of Brussels and the provinces. There were also representatives of all the constituted bodies, most of the governors of the province, and deputations of the communal and provincial councils. MM. le Capitaine Nicaise and Lahure, junior, were appointed to keep order in the church; and the places for each body of functionaries were marked beforehand by printed bills. The king and the Comte de Flandre occupied seats in front of the altar; those belonging to their households sat behind. The diplomatic body was to the right of the bier, on which rested the coffin—the various deputations to the left; and all the rest of the assemblage were disposed in the two aisles of the church.

The building was completely hung with black; each pillar bore an escutcheon, in the center of which was blazoned a golden lion, surmounted by the word "Obiit," and the date of the child's death. The bier, placed in the middle of the church, and at the entrance of the choir, was raised upon a pedestal covered with black velvet, bordered with ermine and embroidered with lions. The bier itself was covered with a white pall, on the top of which was placed a wreath of roses, just like the one which lay upon the coffin whilst in the temporary chapel, and was surmounted by a black canopy bordered with heavy gold fringe, from which fell four large curtains, enveloping the pedestal. Round the coffin burned numerous wax tapers, and on the four panels of this funereal erection, and at each corner of the altar, were the royal arms of Belgium. The Archbishop of Malines was the principal officiator at the ceremony, and it was he who pronounced the Absolution, standing beneath a canopy of crimson velvet fringed with gold, which had been raised for him to the right of the altar. The suffragan bishops took a part in the service; but the mass was sung.

Directly it was concluded, the coffin was placed in the
chapel in front of the vault where King Léopold I. and Queen Marie-Louise already rest, and there it will remain until the three coffins can be together moved to the permanent vault in course of erection in the new church at Laeken.

Then the king came forward, and, having placed on the coffin of his child a wreath of white flowers, left the church to return to the palace. He was terribly moved, and had difficulty in restraining his tears until he should have regained his carriage.

The Mass for the Dead was then resumed, and lasted for an hour and a half; and it was two hours before the funeral ceremonies were finally completed.

On the following Wednesday, the church of Ste. Gudule and St. Michel at Brussels having been hung in the same lavish manner with black and white, a second Grand Mass was said and sung there for the repose of the little prince’s soul; and then the whole business was over, and people began to talk of something else. But it will be a long time before Belgium forgets her Prince Royal or the bereavement of her king.

The funeral was, perhaps, as grand a one as ever was given for a child, and the decorations of the churches, biers, and coffin things to be remembered; but the way in which true Belgians will love best to think of Léopold-Ferdinand, Duc de Brabant, will be the recollection, treasured by his father and mother—the recollection of a pure dead face, freed from all suffering and pain, lying on its once familiar bed, a little virgin clasped in the inanimate hand, and a wreath of white roses laid upon the pillow; but above all, of a happy soul freed from the suffering of sin, and in the enjoyment of a kingdom from the possession of which the temptations attendant upon wearing an earthly crown might have debarred him.

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