

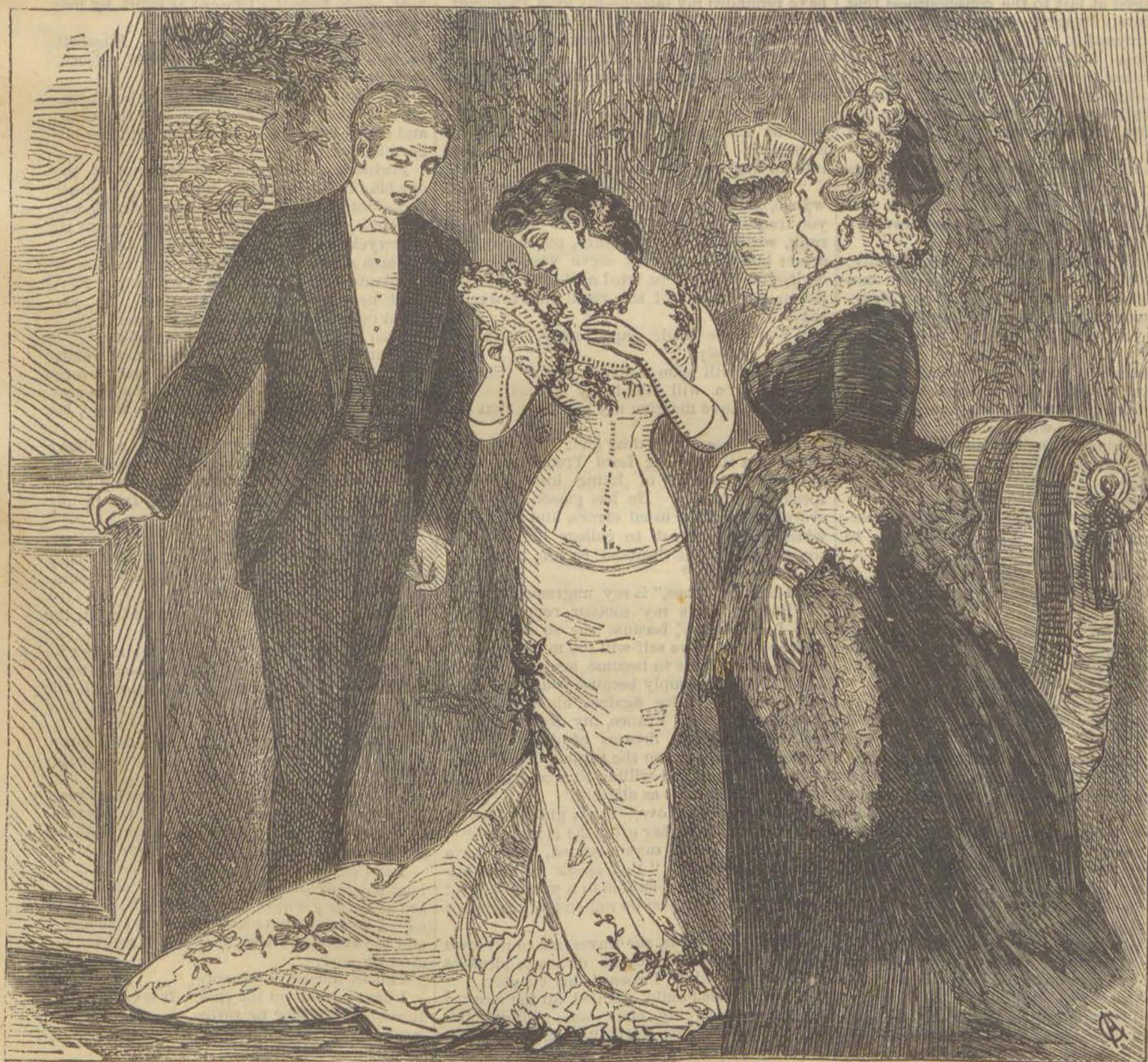
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"A SPLENDID BOUQUET OF MY FAVORITE FLOWERS."

The Secret Marriage; or, A Duchess in Spite of Herself.

BY SARA CLAXTON.

CHAPTER I.
A WILLFUL YOUNG LADY.

THE time, Autumn—bright, beautiful Autumn, loveliest of seasons! The creeper which half covers the old Hall is just beginning to mingle

crimson and yellow among the wealth of green leaves, which, in their luxuriant abundance, force their way into the breakfast-room through the open windows, which look over one of the fairest prospects in all Oakshire; and ours is a county famous for its landscapes, witness the hordes of artists who come down in their summer holidays to sketch its most prominent beauties.

The morning air is perfumed with the scent of the dying mignonette; the smooth lawn is alight with scarlet, yellow, and purple flowers, dotting the velvet grass, which soothes the vision, so apt to be dazzled with the glare of color and the beams of the morning sunshine.

The place is Creswycke Hall, the ancient baronial residence of our

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family; and all the territory on which I am gazing, so far as I can see, belongs to my father, Baron Creswycke.

The hour is nine A. M., the invariable breakfast time at the Hall. My father, tall and portly, a white-haired, smooth-shaved gentleman, is drinking his coffee and reading the newspaper. My mother, *petite* in stature, gentle, low-voiced and smiling, bearing still the traces of great loveliness, is dispensing the tea and coffee.

I, Cecilia Creswycke, lazily stretched in a lounging chair, am drinking in with my whole soul the supreme loveliness of the early morning hour, in which I am so earnestly absorbed that I do not heed my father's glances at me from over his newspaper, nor my mother's gentle entreaties that I should eat my breakfast, which, as we do not have servants in the room at breakfast time, she has just placed before me with her own gemmed and delicate hands.

I am roused at last to the consciousness that I am absolutely hungry—famishing, I presently declare myself to be.

My mother laughs—the most silvery peal out of fairyland is my dear mother's laugh.

"I wonder," she says, "my dear Celia, if you can realize even what that word means."

"Starving, fainting, dying of inanition," I declare.

"And nothing to satisfy hunger with," says my father, pointing to the dainties on the table, in the shape of *pates*, fish, eggs, fruit and potted meats—for our breakfast is always a Scotch one in its variety of edibles.

"The poor," says my mother, thoughtfully, "the destitute poor, I mean, are the only ones who can define the word satisfactorily. Pray, my dear, meantime, satisfy the famine which threatens you, and let us get on with our breakfast."

There ensues a momentary silence, broken by a servant bringing in the letters, which are given to Lord Creswycke, who hands every letter to its rightful owner.

There are none for me this morning; so, for want of better occupation, my eyes return to the landscape.

I break the silence.

"Papa, I can just catch from here the corner of Craddon Vale. Does that belong to you?"

He looks up from the letter he is reading.

"No, my dear; it belongs to the Duke of Carruthers."

"That's a pity," I say, listlessly; "or else all we see from this point of view would be your property, papa."

"And yours one day, Cecilia."

I get up and kiss him fondly.

"May that day be a very long way off!" I say.

Then I sit down again, intending to finish my breakfast, little anticipating the fruits my innocent observation would bear, before many seconds.

"It was a curious remark, that of yours, my dear, just now," says my father, presently.

"Was it papa?" I reply, absently. "Why?"

"Because—Well, Cecilia, I may as well take this opportunity—in fact, I have just had a letter from the Duke of Carruthers, and—if you choose, my love, that same Vale of Craddon, which you so much admire, may one day be added to the Creswycke lands, and the two estates united."

My face flushes up at this speech.

"I do not understand what the Duke of Carruthers has to do with the matter."

"Nonsense, Cecilia," says my revered parent, testily. "You know quite well what is meant."

"If the Duke has made me an offer," I say, demurely, "his Grace is too old. I am only eighteen, and he must be as old as you are, papa."

"You know very well, Miss Creswycke, that the Duke has done nothing of the kind."

"He is a widower, papa," is my answer.

"With an only son, whose earnest wish, Cecilia, is to obtain your hand. I have spoken to you about this before."

"I know, my dear father. I thought I had given an answer—a positive negative—a—"

"Pshaw! What do girls of your age know about their own minds? You have seen no one else?"

"That I have not," I reply, energetically.

"The young man bears a high character," pursues my father. "The Duke has renewed the proposals for the marriage, and—"

"Does me the honor to imagine that I am to be bought and sold like a horse. The Duke of Carruthers, I have heard you say, is one of the old school, papa. Command me to the new school of parents, then. I decline at once and forever the honor of becoming Marchioness Tremaine in the present, or the Duchess of Carruthers in the future. I need never marry at all to obtain a title. I shall be a baroness in my own right."

Which was quite true, only that I need not have reminded my father—my kind, indulgent, loving father—that having no son, the title of his house descended to the female line.

I see he is extremely angry, and an appealing look from my mother recalls me to myself in a moment.

"I beg your pardon, dear father. I really have no inclination for matrimony—at least, at present. Surely you would never force me into an ungenial marriage?"

"Ungenial be hanged!" thunders Lord Creswycke, gathering up his letters. "What is it you require, young lady? You are offered rank, wealth, far beyond mine, and high character; but that will not serve you. Depend on it, you shall not be tried again!" And the Baron dashes out of the room in a towering rage.

"You have made papa angry," says my mother, gravely.

"Oh, he will soon come to again. Surely, mamma, you will stand my friend? You would not have me give my hand without my heart?"

"By no means, my dear girl; but you have never seen this young Lord Tremaine. Give yourself a chance of liking him. Report speaks well of him. He has passed a college ordeal without the usual errors, and even sins, which so often attach to college life. He is, too, we hear, well disposed to use, not abuse, his great wealth."

"I hate paragons," is my ungracious reply.

"Rather," says my mother, reprovingly—and I feel sorry, because she so seldom reproves—"you love self-will too much, my dear Cecilia, and refuse to become acquainted with Lord Tremaine simply because you have taken up a silly prejudice against his very name. You should live in France, my dear, where no well-regulated girl dreams of disputing the wish of her parents on the subject of matrimony, but is ready and willing to accept the husband they point out as eligible."

"And to fall in love," I say, giddily, "with any one who ogles her after she is married."

"Fie, my love!" says mamma, rising in a dignified manner. "You speak in a flighty manner, not to be tolerated in a young lady of birth. Take care you do not end by marrying a plebeian."

With these words, she leaves me to my own reflections, which are by no means so pleasant as those with which I opened this chapter.

I am a spoiled child—spoiled all the more, I believe, because my birth was a disappointment to my parents originally; and when the fondly-hoped-for son never made his appearance they took to idolizing the daughter who had appeared.

Hitherto, from my birth to eighteen years of age, I have had my own way in most things; and now comes this vexed question of marriage, with one I have never yet seen, whom I do not care to see, just because he is an heir-apparent to a dukedom; and I—well, I am heiress-apparent to a barony.

My father's title descends in the female line. There was, ages ago, in the time of that domineering, vindictive, vain old vixen, called Good Queen Bess, a certain Baroness Cres-

wycke, who made her mark in the annals of our family.

It was then, as now, fashionable to imitate royalty. She took Bess for her model; vowed she would never marry; hunted, flirted and maneuvered for power, all in the Elizabethan style.

There is her portrait now in the gallery. It is said to be like me. She was tall, dark-haired, with the large, soft black eyes (which they say I have inherited from her); the brunette skin, set off by the rich, deep roses of the cheeks; the small, pearly teeth.

Yes, I often gaze at Diana Creswycke's picture, and see my own form in that of my ancestress. I trust I shall not make such a finish as she did.

After coqueting with scores of noble suitors, like her illustrious model, Diana ended by falling in love with one of "low degree"—in fact, one of her own servitors—and, in her fortieth year, made herself a byword at court by marrying him.

In vain did she beg her patroness, Elizabeth, to raise the object of her misplaced affection by a patent of nobility.

The Queen so mocked and jeered her former favorite that in dudgeon she left the Court, and ended her days in obscurity with her low-born husband.

Fortunately they had no children, so that our blue blood remained untainted by this ignoble interloper. The title at her death, with the lands, went to a cousin, in whose veins the Creswycke blood ran in its pristine purity.

Diana's memory remains to her female descendants as a caution and a warning. No; I shall never so degrade my race. No love could ever make me so lose my senses.

I am wearied at length with thinking.

I rise and walk into the garden, and wander about till I come to my favorite tree, a large elm, beneath whose umbrageous shade a seat, as luxurious as wrought-iron can be made, has been placed especially for my use.

About a yard before it flows a silvery stream, large enough for a pleasure-boat. Superb swans float about the spot. Every morning they are accustomed to be fed by my hands.

I have provided myself with bread from the breakfast table for those pretty creatures. They come to my call, and I amuse myself with summoning each by its pet name.

Then I hear, to my great amazement, the ripple of oars.

Looking up, I perceive my swans sailing indignantly away, and a pleasure-boat, almost as noiseless as the birds' motion through the water, glides past me, a male form, clad in a rowing costume, propelling the tiny craft.

I can not see the oarsman's face, for a large, flapping hat, of the Spanish sombrero shape, hides his features effectually.

As he passes he takes a rose from his breast—throws it lightly toward me. It falls exactly at my feet—a rich, glowing flower, with the dew of early morning still on its petals.

Ere I can recover from my amazement, the boat has tacked round, and rower and vessel are as quickly out of sight as they had appeared. The swans have gathered round me again, and the sun mounts high, before I recover my astonishment.

This is, indeed, a romance!

I have picked up the rose. It is very lovely. It would be a pity to throw it away. I will wear it at dinner-time, and—By the way, is not the rose a declaration of love?

I think of this incident a great deal more than it deserves.

At dinner-time Lord Creswycke appears to have forgotten my offense of the morning. He is in high spirits, this dear old father of mine.

Before he came to the title, he had been in the navy, first as midshipman, rising till he had become a post-captain; and then his two brothers died, and my grandfather insisted on my father's giving up his profession, and residing with him at the Hall to look after the property till his death. Papa did not marry during his father's lifetime.

The old "salt" remains strong in Lord Creswyke, and whenever he hears of a great naval victory, his old professional zeal breaks forth.

To-day, news has arrived of some sea-fight, in which Britannia has not only ruled the waves, but overruled the enemy, and papa is in ecstasies of naval triumph. He is so good as to fight the battle over again, at dessert, for the benefit of poor mamma and myself, till he discovers that my mother is fast asleep, and that my answers are slightly incoherent, when he terminates the battle by saying, "There, go along to your piano! It is no good talking to women about these things! Sampson, bring me another bottle of the '20 port!"—by which command we know it will be late before he comes in to tea.

CHAPTER II. IN THE SULKS.

THERE are now but few fine days on which I can rest on my favorite seat beneath the elm, and read, or watch my pet swans feed.

I have not forgotten the rose-offering, thrown to me on that memorable August morning—never cease speculating on the well-knit, manly figure of the mysterious oarsman, whose individuality I have vainly tried to discover. I was silly enough to put the rose away in a little silver casket, and there it will remain till the mystery be solved; so, there, possibly, it may remain forever.

Time passes so quickly, it is nearly three months since this romantic affair happened, and I cannot even guess my knight's name.

By the way, a very disagreeable reality is about to threaten my comfort. I hate having new servants, and especially those who are personal attendants. Richards, our footman—a young man who has been in our family, first as helping-boy, then as page, and, when he grew too tall and big to serve in that capacity, as footman—is going to leave. My father has taken a fit of patronizing into his head, and has procured Richards an excellent situation at his club in London as under-steward—a place in which it seems the young man is sure to be advanced.

Well, I suppose it is selfish to wish to keep him from a better position.

My mother has done nothing but talk about it.

"My dear Cecilia," she said to me this morning, as I sat in her room, "your papa intends to replace Richards by an attendant out of livery—not exactly a groom of the chambers, because, though that is well enough for a household like that of the Duke of Carruthers, we do not keep state sufficient for such a servant, but an attendant in plain clothes, who—who, in short, a—"

Here dear mamma stammered and hesitated, till I looked up from my embroidered slippers, astonished.

"In plain clothes, mamma," I exclaim. "Who, then, will go out with the carriage, if we have no livery servant?"

"Oh," said my mother, "James, who is in the stables, will be promoted to second footman, and will wear livery. He is getting too tall, your papa says, for a groom."

"It is very annoying," I reply, "changing servants in this way. And pray who is to replace Richards? Some of papa's paragons, I suppose. How I detest new servants!"

"This new one, my dear," said my mother, "is a relative of Mrs. Hressing."

Mrs. Hressing is our housekeeper, and had formerly been in the family of the Duke of Carruthers.

"Oh, then, I suppose," I said, carelessly, "it will be all right. Hressing must give him a good drilling, and tell him not to be forever in the way."

I am not one of those young ladies who cannot walk out without a footman after her. Even in London it is a nuisance; but in the country it is simply an absurdity. So I will have none of this new servitor trotting about in my wake like a tame lapdog, only that it would be impossible to make a pet of him, like my dear little Rowley, my King Charles span-

iel, with his great dark eyes and his loving dog's heart. By the by, Rowley came from the Duke's. Papa, who is always trying to please his undutiful girl, begged him from the trainer at Carruthers Castle; and Rowley, who was then about eighteen months old, fell in love with me directly; and I with him.

Will the new man attend to him, I wonder? —or, as the Yankees say, will he be "too tall" for such work?

"Let him beware, my Rowley, of treading on your dear toes or your lovely, feathery tail; for if he does, my pet—"

Rowley jumps up, and snatches a kiss; that is, he licks my cheek—lucky it has no pearl powder on it.

"Down, Rowley! behave yourself! Here is Lord Creswyke."

And my father, tall, portly, and important, comes toward us, bearing an immense bouquet of flowers—so choice, that if Grinsell, our gardener, sees them by chance, his scanty locks will bristle up with sheer envy. Our green-houses are very fine, but no flowers can compete with these. They are deposited in my lap, and I receive them with hesitation, for I have a disagreeable prescience of where they come from; so I pretend to view the lovely blossoms with great indifference.

"These are for you, my dear; an offering—"

"Sweets to the sweet, of course," I reply, pertly. "Oh, spare me, dearest papa! I know the whole vocabulary of ducal compliments by heart."

"Upon my word, Miss Creswyke, you are—"

"Impervious to bribes. What am I to do in return for this magnificent bouquet?"

"You will have one twenty times choicer the day you become Lady Tremaine."

"My dearest father," I exclaim, with a grave and severe air, "how can you put me to so much pain? Surely that message was never sent to me?"

"Cecilia, you do not deserve so much notice. The position I am empowered to offer you is one which the highest in the land would hardly scorn."

"This is a novel way of wooing, I must own," I exclaim, in excited tones. "A proposal made to my father instead of myself! Has the Duke of Carruthers become a Grand Turk, and does his son deem this a way to win a bride?"

I dash the flowers down as I speak; and Rowley, who has become excited at seeing my excitement, believing he has discovered the cause of my anger in the poor flowers, pounces on them with a shrill bark, and in two minutes the blossoms are scattered about, and only a bundle of stalks seen, which Rowley is shaking as if it were a rat.

Lord Creswyke is so angry that he threatens the King Charles with his cane; but, rushing to the poor little spaniel, I inclose him in my arms—a shield between him and my enraged parent. The scene is becoming serious, so I take to my heels with Rowley, and never stop till I am safe in my own room.

They may lock me up, and keep me on bread and water, but I will never accept Lord Tremaine; nor will I ever now be introduced to him. If he comes, I will be a voluntary prisoner. I will keep my room.

A rap at the door, and Rowley begins to growl. It is my mother!

If there be one thing above another in which Lady Creswyke takes an innocent pride, it is her talent for diplomacy.

Now, it is quite right that in families there should be a mediator. Mamma fulfills that blessed office, if not to every one else's entire satisfaction, at least perfectly to her own. It is in that character, I perceive, directly she enters the room, that she now appears. Dearly as we love each other, there has always been a tendency to contention between myself and my father ever since I had a will of my own, and candor compels me to acknowledge I had that at a very early period of existence. But Lady Creswyke is here to persuade me to ask

forgiveness for my recent rudeness, and to coax me into yielding. To the first I will say, "Yes—it will be my duty!" To the latter "No! emphatically no! Never!"

"Cecilia, my dear—what! not dressed for dinner, my child? How terribly red your eyelids are! You have been crying. Some words with papa? Well, well, you know his hot temper. If you would only fall into his views—"

"You know I cannot,"—suppressing an hysterical sob.

"Will not, my love, I fear! What else but obstinacy makes you de' ermine not even to be introduced to Lord Tremaine? It has such a very peculiar look, you know, and places papa in such an awkward position."

"My dear mother, you know the particular attributes of the Creswykes?"

"Well, yes—obstinacy."

"Firmness," I suggest.

"Well, in my opinion, the words are frequently synonymous. I thank goodness I never was obstinate. I assure you, Cecilia, when your papa first proposed to me, I refused him twice. But, then, my father and mother reasoned with me, and I allowed myself to be persuaded; and I am sure, my dear, I have never repented."

"Never, mamma—never?"

"No, my love, never. When my lord used to fall into one of his rages, I just quietly got out of the way, and it was all over in ten minutes, and he never scolded me, so that I could not complain."

"My father is unjust and persecuting."

"He means all for your advancement and happiness, my dear!"

"He had better let me be happy in my own way," I reply.

"But, at any rate, you are too young to contend with him. I fear, indeed, my love, you have been spoilt with too much indulgence. Come, dress yourself, and look your best. You know papa cannot bear to see young girls badly dressed; and the servants, besides, will make remarks; and, after all, it was, I hear, the fault of that snarling little beast."

So she designates my poor dog, who, still on my knee, looks at me from time to time with his gazelle-like eyes, licking my cheek and my hands, as if for consolation.

"Come, my darling, dress, and come down with me to dinner. I will take your arm into the drawing-room. You will go and kiss papa, and all will be well; it only needs a little management."

And the end is, that my maid is summoned; I dress; and, though I had intended to remain in my own room, and not go down to dinner, I do just what I am bid, enter the drawing-room—fortunately there are no guests—fling myself into papa's arms, sob a little, then two or three kisses are exchanged, and, as my mother phrases it, all is well—for a time. Papa pets me all dinner-time, makes me drink a glass of his own particular Madeira with him, and we converse amicably about nothings.

"By the by," says Lord Creswyke, presently, "our new domestic comes to-day. I am sure, Cecilia, you will be pleased with him—quite a gentleman-like young man. I believe, my dear"—addressing himself particularly to my mother, who, always of uncertain appetite, is coqueting with some *surreme* on her plate, which I notice she sends away almost untouched—"a superior class of young men are now quite reconciled to the idea of acting as servants to the nobility and gentlemen. Lowly born, most of them, but well educated—men, in short, who might, among the chances of mundane things, lift themselves in the scale of society; but there are too many—too many young fellows in the world"—drinking off his Madeira with great gusto—"so they are glad to accept service."

Of course, I must remark upon this.

"I was always of the opinion," I observe, "that there are too many young men in the world."

"I don't know," says mamma, pathetically,

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"but I do know that there are too many women in the world—forlorn creatures! However, my dear"—to papa—"I hope Richards will do well when he leaves us."

The servants were out of the room at this moment, during an interval of the courses.

"Decidedly he will," says my lord, confidently. "Richards is a young fellow who would make his way anywhere. If he minds what he is about, his berth will be very soon worth four or five hundred a year."

"And then," said I, laughing, "he can marry Jennings, my maid. I think it is a pity true lovers should be parted. However, at first, Jennings turned a deaf ear to him."

"But she changed her mind," says papa. "Women always do that; they are privileged to do so; and a young fellow who takes no for an answer, the first, or even the second time, it is said, does not deserve a wife at all."

As I can very well see which way the conversation is tending, I hasten to change it, and, as soon as I can finish my dessert, I run into the hall; and, though it is very cold, I take a wrap from off the pegs, tie on my hat, and hasten to my favorite spot—the tree bending over the stream.

I have not sat there many minutes, when I hear footsteps, and, looking up, there is Richards, bare-headed and humble, standing before me.

"I am going this evening, Miss Creswycke," he says, "and am taking this opportunity of returning thanks for all your kindness" (What kindness, I wonder, except that I have never been harsh to the poor fellow?) "these many years—ever since you were quite little, miss?" (Richards himself is only seven-and-twenty.) "I hope you will enjoy your health, miss, and all kinds of happiness!"

"Good-by, Richards!" I reply, and hold out my hand, for I have none of that base sort of pride which disdains to shake hands with a poor man because he is a servant. "Since you must go, I wish you prosperity. Mind you don't forget old friends."

I allude to Mary Jennings.

If Richards had been a chivalrous retainer, he would have bent his knee, and kissed the tips of my fingers. But he does not know anything about chivalry; and when I hold out my hand, his eyes sparkle with gratification, and he shakes it heartily.

"Go to Jennings," I say; "she has a little present to give you that may serve you to remember me by."

The young man has nothing more to say, and is evidently embarrassed how to get himself out of this leave-taking creditably.

I take pity on him.

"Go now, Richards, and find out Jennings. Saying good-by to her will take a long time, you know."

He grins, bows very low, and—exit Richards.

I resume my thoughts. Insensibly they fall on our new domestic. What will the young man be like? Not awkward, I trust. I do so dislike a heavy, lumping person moving about one. I begin to think I should prefer a cottage, with just enough rooms to live in, and not to be worried with all the appendages of rank and fortune. I smile at myself. I, who would fain wed in the highest rank, if only my heart could be given with my hand!

After all, what does it signify? Just at this moment all things seem to me as they appeared to the wisest of men (who, by the way, in his old age, turned out both foolish and wicked), the preacher, whom men have quoted through countless generations. Vanity! Of what use am I? What good do I do? A selfish atom—a—a—I am nodding. Some dreamy influence seizes me which I cannot resist. In less than another minute I have ceased to speculate—to philosophize. I am fast asleep!

It was evening when I departed for the "land of dreams"—not that I had any; my slumbers, whatever induced them, were perfectly free from visions of any kind.

I awoke as suddenly as I had fallen asleep,

and my waking eyes fell on an object before me not at all unpleasant. It was a young man, seemingly about five-and-twenty years of age, tall, and of a slender, soldierly figure. He wore neither beard nor mustache. His complexion was of that Saxon type of fairness which to brunettes is peculiarly attractive, from, I suppose, the force of contrast to themselves. His eyes, of a deep, dark, brilliant blue, were fixed on me as I awoke with a start—for I naturally imagined I had been surprised by a visitor. Yet his costume puzzled me. He was attired in a suit of black cloth—coat, vest, and trowsers all alike; and with a white cravat. He did not wear these clothes in the fashion of a gentleman's evening costume, for the coat was of the shape called frock.

There was something so irresistibly attractive in the appearance of this stranger that I awaited with much curiosity the announcement of his name.

The Unknown bowed reverently.

"I have been sent in every direction, Miss Creswycke," he said, "to look for you. Lord and Lady Creswycke are waiting for their coffee."

"And who is it I am speaking to?" I inquired, rising from the garden-chair on which I had fallen into such untimely slumbers.

"I beg pardon, madam—may I assist you? I am Spenser, the new"—he hesitated—"servant."

My cheek flushed.

Could this be possible? And I took this man for a gentleman!

I recovered myself quickly.

"Go back; say I am coming directly. You hear?"

For he stood gazing as if he had not really heard my command—somewhat, I own, haughtily spoken.

He made no answer, but bowed again, and went away, while I followed him, speculating, as I went into the house, on the strange surprise I had received, and which I could not forget.

It was the new domestic's duty to wait at table, and I was curious to observe how he fulfilled this portion of it. That he was prompted continually by our old and somewhat pompous butler, I could very plainly perceive. Once, when he was handing me a cup of coffee, Sampson being busy at the side-board, he trembled so obviously that the coffee fell on my dress.

I only smiled.

"Poor fellow!" I said to myself; "he is nervous. He has never been used to waiting at table, that is very clear. However, that is papa's affair, not mine."

What he wanted in skill he made up in zeal, however. He is quick, too, in perception, for he knew what I wanted before I could frame a request in words. Papa, however, seemed especially delighted with him; and my mother looked admiringly on, as he handed round the different cups.

While we were at the table, my little dog—who had, I suppose, missed me—began scratching at the door.

"Let the dog in," I said to the new servant; and he hastened to obey me.

Instead of Rowley's running to me and devouring me with caresses, to my great surprise the little creature—who, as becomes his breed, is surly with strangers—stopped short for a minute; then, with a cry of joy, rushed to Spenser, as our new man is called, and strove by every means in his power to show his satisfaction. He licked the attendant's feet, he crouched down, he jumped round him—in short, I was forgotten.

"Come here, Rowley!" said I. "What is this? Rowley seems to know you!"—turning to the man, who strove in vain to quiet the dog, whose joyful excitement was not to be abated. "Papa," said I, "is not this curious? Rowley growls at every stranger he sees! It is very remarkable, for he cannot have known Spenser before. Be quiet, sir, or you shall have no sugar!"

And I caught the little animal in my arms, but even then he strained to get to the object of his delighted surprise.

"Perhaps," said my mother, "Spenser puts him in mind of some one he has seen before."

"He is an animal of great discernment," said my father.

I stared, and thought Lord Creswycke did not display much discretion.

"Well," said I, "I am very glad he likes you, Spenser; for you will have to wash and attend to him. Richards always did."

Spenser bowed.

"I shall be too happy, madam."

Madam! How intensely polite! I am always "miss" to these kind of people; but Spenser is evidently of a different class to the generality of servant-men.

And Rowley was washed the very next day, and his glossy black coat was glossier than ever. Not a hair of his pendulous ears was left uncombed; every bit of the flue of his delicate tan paws was dressed till it looked like floss silk.

He was scented with choice perfume, and his throat was decorated with a dark blue ribbon; and any owner of pets, who knows the extreme vanity of these spoiled canine creatures, can imagine Rowley's intense gratification when, borne in Spenser's arms, he was presented to me by the new domestic.

"Upon my word, Spenser," I say, "your attention to Rowley does you credit."

"Your praise, madam, more than repays me. I did take some pains with the little fellow."

"For my part, I am surprised he did not bite you. He is very ready with his teeth."

I took out my purse, and placed a tiny bit of gold in Spenser's hand.

Looking up, I saw his face was flushed, but without guessing the cause, having had little experience of gifts refused.

I proceeded—"You must take that, Spenser, for the expense you have been put to—for perfumes and ribbon, I mean."

He laid the coin down.

"Forgive me, madam; I require nothing of the sort. I have gone to no expense."

"Nay; I am not used to refusal. You must take this, Spenser. I insist—I command!"

"Any command of yours, madam, must be obeyed"—taking up the half-sovereign and pressing it to his lips. "I will keep it."

It was my turn to color now, and to put an end to this absurdity, which I did, haughtily enough.

"That will do, Spenser. I do not require your attendance just now. You may go."

And Spenser quitted the room, leaving me with an odd kind of feeling—half anger, half wonder; and through it all, an odd sort of respect for the courtly manners of a gentleman displayed in the person of a servant.

When I drive out with my mother, I relate this strange scene to her, expecting she will display some resentment; but on the contrary, she laughs at it, and says something about the world being turned upside down, and that many gentleman nowadays possess the manners of a groom; so that, says mamma, "it is not so very surprising for a groom to display the feelings of a gentleman."

Why it is that I feel annoyed at this speech, for my life I cannot tell; only I am compelled to answer, "But Spenser is not a groom, mamma. He is a—a superior servant; and if educated beyond his class, cannot, I suppose, help showing it."

"Take no notice of it, my dear," says mamma. "He will not forget himself again, I dare say."

"But that sort of homage from one's servants," I reply, "is so ridiculous in these days. I really think papa has engaged a personage too good for the common wear and tear of daily life. I shall tell him so."

"Don't do anything of the kind," says my mother, quite in a fright, apparently. "What are you going to wear, my love, for Lady Merideth's ball?"

And then we began to converse about satins and laces, of jewels and colors.

"My brunette skin requires a strong contrast. Blue or pink I summarily reject."

"Why not wear amber?" my mother suggests.

"No; it is a cold color."

"Mauve?"

"My dear mother—detestable! I have it—I shall wear carnation. You are going to lend me your diamonds. Carnation with trimmings of silver tulle! Oh, dearest mamma! let us drive into Rillton, and call at the dressmaker's."

"Nonsense, my love! Write to Worth, and order the dress. There will be plenty of time."

We drive home, and I write my orders, inclosing my measure.

Jennings is to send Spenser off with the letter at once to Rillton—the nearest post town.

This ball is to be a very grand affair. Lady Merideth's son and heir will come of age on that date; and there is to be the feasting and speech-making usual when a young man of wealth arrives at years of discretion; and methinks Tom Merideth is specially marked out for that.

His doting parents, however, see no fault in him, and this ball is to assemble all the beauty and rank of Oakshire.

It has been talked of for a twelvemonth, and yet my dress has been left to the last minute. No matter, I have inclosed my photo to Worth, and have the utmost confidence in the costume he will supply, having simply indicated the colors and materials.

The ball is uppermost in my thoughts now, and I chatter about it during dinner-time, feeling rather glad, by the way, that our gentleman-like servant is not in waiting to hear my frivolous remarks, which I think would somewhat diminish his chivalric respect.

Rather strange, Miss Creswycke, that you should deign to care about what the man thinks.

Of course papa inquires where Spenser is, not seeing him behind his chair as usual, and I have to avow he is gone to Rillton on my errand.

"Six miles there, and six miles back," says my father, gravely. "My dear,"—to mamma,—"could not one of the grooms have been sent?"

"Not with a letter of so much consequence," I say.

"Women's nonsense! I thought, Cecilia, you were above such frivolities!"

"I like pretty things, papa, as well as other girls. Besides, you don't want me to look a fright. I desire to look particularly well at this ball!"

"Want to catch young Tom Merideth, eh?" said my father, his face expanding into broad smiles, and perfectly regardless of mamma's warning. "Hush, my dear! the servants!"

"All right, my love! I know all about it. Young Tom is a pickle, Miss Creswycke. Allow your father to direct your choice; you will never repent. Lord—"

Dearest of mothers, your exquisite management steps in here.

She rings the bell—enter the servants; and as I keep silence except to ask for loads of things I do not want, and cannot eat when they are served, peace is preserved. And dinner over, I escape to my apartments—my tiny gem of a boudoir, opening into my bed and dressing-rooms—my den, where I can sit alone, and read, work or think.

Will the Knight of the Rose be at the ball, I wonder for the twentieth time. I cannot but hope so, and that he will claim an introduction. Although I do not know his features, I am certain I shall recognize his air, his *tournure*. It was no common "Bill," "Tom," or "Harry" who threw that rose at my feet. It was a gentleman, not noble, perhaps, but a man of distinguished birth and breeding. No one can mistake those attributes even in the disguise of a laborer.

Strange! at that minute Spenser comes into my head to contradict my assertion. In the position of a menial, he, too, possesses that nameless air of refinement, that indescribable something, which alone pertains to blood. If I had met Spenser in my own rank of society, or, indeed, on that equivocal ground called professional, I should have been sure, whatever his status, that he had been born a gentleman. If Spenser now had been a secretary, a land agent, even! But a servant! Where are my thoughts? What are you thinking about, Cecilia Creswycke? Surely I am too much given to self-examination. A good thing, one's clergyman tells one; but I am not quite sure it is on all points. Once admit an idea, and how the mind will harp upon it!

I—I have a great mind to gladden my father's heart, and ask to be introduced to Lord Tremaine. But no; I have vowed I would not, and Creswykes never go from their word; but I will keep out of the way as much as I can, and will persuade papa to look out for promotion for Spenser. We do not, I am sure, require such very superior servants.

Spenser posted my letter, and in a week's time my costume arrived from Paris faultlessly perfect. Silk of the brightest carnation, with trimmings of silver tulle, and bouquets of lilies of the valley. It harmonizes well with my dark hair and pale complexion, to which it lends a glow that is usually wanting to my skin. As the time approaches for this ball, my spirits are in quite a flutter. How silly of me!

If I made others blush for me as often as I blush for myself, Heaven help me! I should have few friends; and, indeed, at this present time, I have not any—not one real, downright, intimate friend of my own sex.

As for friendship in the other, I do not believe in it.

If a man begins by being merely a woman's friend, he ends by falling in love with her, be she ugly or handsome, and then, adieu to friendship. No; a man's friendship is impossible, except in the case of a brother.

Ah! if I had such a relative I would make him my friend and confidant in all things. I can fancy him, if genial—such a personage as Spenser, for instance—what an inestimable brother he would make!

What am I thinking of? Were any of the Creswykes I wonder, afflicted by insanity? If so, can I be in the incipient stage of that terrible disease?

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW UPPER SERVANT.

"Time and the hour run through the roughest day," and they ran through my smooth ones also, till that of the Merideths' ball came. No disasters had happened; no colds had been caught; the carriage horses, which have a happy knack of falling sick on these occasions, were in high health and spirits; there was a full moon and no appearance of rain. I have to forsake my usual occupations on this day, and to save myself for the eventful night.

At seven o'clock we are all dressed and assembled in the drawing-room. The festivities have been held at Merideth Hall the whole day; but we declined the dinner on the lawn in the midst of the tenants, and thus escaped very great fatigue, as Lady Merideth could testify.

There are three girls at the Hall, from twenty years old to sweet seventeen; the eldest son, Tom, and a juvenile horror, who, till very lately, rejoiced in the name of Baby, but who now, being at the interesting age of twelve, is nominated as Master Harold—a young gentleman who is renowned for being the most outrageously spoiled and mischievously-inclined boy in the county.

It is to be hoped that he will be safe in bed long before our advent at the Hall.

I flatter myself we look very nice, mamma

and myself. Point lace of great value trims her robe, and mamma wears rubies with her myrtle-green velvet. She looks charming; and, as for myself—well, I see in my pier-glass a slight figure, a very little above the common height of woman, clad in a bright, shiny silk of a vivid carnation color.

The dress has a graceful train, and is looped up with silvery gauze draperies, dotted with small bouquets of lilies of the valley. My dark and silky hair taken off my face, has, above its clusters and coils of plaits, a lily of the valley wreath; and I am anxiously waiting to see if the gardener has procured a bouquet of the same flowers to match. Diamonds flash amidst my hair, on my bosom, round my throat and in my ears.

To my great annoyance, the butler, Sampson, comes to tell me that the man cannot procure any lilies of the valley. He brings in his hand a bouquet of snowy camellias.

"How vexatious!" I exclaim. "My dress will be spoiled! I so depended on Smith's getting them! What am I to do?"

A slight noise causes me to turn my head, and I perceive Spenser, who stands at my side with—oh, delight!—a splendid bouquet of my favorite flowers, arranged in an exquisite bouquet-holder of dead silver. I utter an exclamation of joy.

"Where did you get these lovely flowers, Spenser? Oh, how much I am obliged to you! What trouble you must have taken!"

"They were left for you, Miss Creswycke," he replied, "five minutes ago. There was no message."

"No message! Who brought them?"

"A—a man in the dress of a groom, I think," Spenser answered, stammering.

"Good heavens! can it be the Knight of the Rose, and shall I see him to-night? Can I wear his flowers?" is my thought. "Shall I take the bouquet, mamma?" (aloud).

"Certainly, my love. It has really arrived quite *apropos*. I suppose I must put up with these despised camellias. Well, I am only an old woman, so they will do very well for me."

"You look a very lovely old woman," I reply, fondly kissing her; for we are all alone, Spenser having left the room as soon as he saw me appropriate the flowers. "Papa ought to feel very proud of you. Here he is."

And presently, the carriage waiting, and our papa, like all other elderly gentlemen, being absurdly particular about his horses, we started.

On this occasion the head groom wears livery, and stands behind. Spenser rides on the box with the coachman, having attended mamma and myself into the carriage. I can not avoid remarking his appearance.

"People," I say, "will certainly take our man, Spenser, for one of the family."

"People," says Lord Creswycke, "may mind their own business. If I choose to bring a servant out in plain clothes with me, what has that to do with any one?"

"Nothing, of course, papa; only I think Spenser dresses too much for his station. He looks like an invited guest rather than a servant."

"He looks," said my irate parent, "like what he is—a—an upper servant—a respectable person. What do you mean? Has he a dress coat on?"

"I do not know much about coats," I reply; "but I should define his present costume as semi-full dress. He has gloves on; wears an exotic flower in his coat, and—"

What thought is it that darts into my brain, and on this night of all others? Good heavens! I must be foolish.

It is this—is Spenser a servant, after all? His look, his dress, his appearance this evening are entirely those of my own class. What can I surmise? I become lost in thought. But then Hressing owns the relationship between them, and—Oh, Cecilia Creswycke, I thought: you prided yourself on not being romantic! Of what are you dreaming?

I look at my parents. Mamma is gently dozing. My father is immersed in a magazine,

and I resume my speculation to the end of the journey.

Not a very long one. We arrive in the midst of a very general confusion. The day *fête* is evidently not long ended; the evening one commencing. The house is one blaze of light. Tents are scattered all over the very extensive grounds of Merideth Hall, carriages are setting down guests, and the county families are fast arriving. Our carriage draws up before the door, and Spenser is there offering his arm for Lady Creswycke to descend by. He comes directly afterward to do the same office for myself.

Another time I should have accepted this assistance as a mere part of his duty. Now I motion his extended arm away, alight by myself, and seize hold of Lord Creswycke's arm just as he is making an elaborate bow to the host of the night, who receives his guests downstairs, his son by his side, while Lady Merideth, surrounded by her daughters, is at the top of the grand staircase performing the same ceremony in a very elaborate and graceful manner.

Tom Merideth has made me put him down for the third dance in my list. He opens the ball with Lady St. Jennyns, the great lady of our county.

My list is soon filled, though we know very few of the young men who are among the most eligible of partners.

Harold Merideth, who is running about wild, attired in a light blue velvet suit, and knickerbockers with point lace collar, etc., persecutes me to give him a dance; and at last I promise the urchin that, if there is a country dance in the course of the evening, I will have him for a partner.

As, at best, a country dance is but a romp, I do not mind giving Master Pickle this gratification; for I love to be good-natured to children, and, for that matter, would sooner dance with Harold than Tom. My partners are first-rate, and I enjoy myself thoroughly. I am fond of dancing, and they say I dance well, so I do not find my card empty, or myself among the "wallflowers."

Just as I am whirling away with Tom Merideth to one of Waldteufel's most inspiring waltzes, looking up by chance to the orchestra, which is a small gallery perched aloft in the ball-room, I perceive Spenser, who is apparently intently watching our gyrations with great interest.

Nothing very astonishing, after all, in this discovery of mine. The man must go somewhere, I suppose, and somehow I can never imagine our stately servitor in a tavern, or among the gentry of the servants' hall.

I dismiss the matter from my thoughts, for here comes young Harold to claim my promise for a country dance. We are flying through it, up the middle and down again, and then rest for a minute, when Harold takes the opportunity of whispering, "Miss Creswycke, do you like larks?"

"Birds?" I reply, vaguely; for, though I hear the boy's words, I scarcely heed them.

"Birds!" he answers, with a grin. "No; but there will be a jolly lark presently. Don't you be frightened."

I reply that I am not very easily frightened; and then it is our turn to set off again, and the dancing waxes into a romp, becoming by degrees fast and furious.

I find I have suddenly lost my madcap partner, and am rushing about by myself. Thinking there has been enough of this mad revel, I drop out of the throng, and rest for a few minutes against the back of a stray chair, when suddenly a crash rings through the ball-room—the loud, unmistakable crash of an explosion. The center glass chandelier has fallen, and flames start up before my affrighted vision, while shrieking figures dart about in all directions.

In the excitement I can not keep still; but I, too, begin darting about, and my dress, with its light draperies, is in a blaze, which my wild running about increases.

I am in flames from head to foot. The last

thing I behold is a tall figure, which leaps from the musicians' gallery, and which crushes me into darkness and oblivion with heavy woollen clothes and wraps.

I awake, to find myself in tortures of pain. But I am safe indeed and, to my great astonishment, the pain is in my feet and lower limbs; my hands, arms and face are without a scratch or blemish. I am assured my parents are safe; that I am, indeed, the only person among the birthday revelers who has been seriously injured; that I am still in the house of the Merideths, and that in the panic I should have inevitably perished, but for the presence of mind of one of my father's own servants.

"Spenser?" I inquire, feebly; and the answer of the nurse is in the affirmative.

My burns are again dressed, and I am left to repose; but memory has resumed her sway, and repose will not come. I have a distinct recollection that directly after I was enveloped in all that mass of woolly material, against which in my madness I struggled hard, I had heard a well-known voice utter words which that voice had no business to utter under any circumstances to me, Cecilia Creswycke.

"My love!" it said—"my own dear love! my life! Oh, Heaven, if I should lose you!"

I am loved by my father's menial—that menial the preserver of my life! I might be grieved by such a sad revealing—not, perhaps, angered; for who can help loving? Servants are human beings, are they not? But the revelation is worse, thousands of times worse, more wretched. I am loved by my inferior; and I—oh, shame! oh, terror!—but this bed of pain and sickness has no disguises—I love my inferior in return! The revelation comes to me—it permeates the innermost recesses of my mind, my soul.

I have met my fate—my other half—oh, agony! oh, dire humiliation!—in my father's hired servant—"a serf, a slave!"

No, not that. "A man's a man for a' that." I cannot raise him to my level. I must sink perforce to his!

All that is dear to me—my pride, my self-respect—must be renounced if this man's love be recognized; and (the knowledge is forced on me somehow) if I do not recognize it, I must crush my own heart. Can I do either? What—what will become of me? At noon my parents are to visit me; but at noon my misery has so pressed on my nervous system that I am delirious; and my parents, who almost worship Spenser as their child's preserver, are overwhelmed with fears that his efforts have been unavailing, and that the flat has gone forth which is to leave them childless.

Yet youth and an untainted constitution triumph at last. When I am considered strong enough to be talked to, mamma tells me the news. I have been laid up for three weeks, and am not considered yet able to be taken home.

Harold Merideth, the scapegrace schoolboy who has caused all this mischief, whose pranks, alas! revealed to me the state of my own heart—would I had ever remained in ignorance—has been sent off to school in the direst disgrace, his pocket-money cut off, and himself the object of universal execration.

Tom has obtained a commission, and has departed to join his corps. One of the Miss Merideths received an offer at the ball just before the explosion of Master "Pickle's" fireworks, and is now an "engaged" young lady—engaged to a neighboring squire of good patrimony.

All this Lady Creswycke relates with much satisfaction, sitting at my bedside. She has not yet mentioned the subject which I long, yet tremble, to hear. But when her budget of news is exhausted she begins, "And Spenser, my dear—Are you cold, my dear Cecilia?"—for I shiver at that name. "Surely that is impossible. This room is so snug, so warm, I am sure you will miss none of your home comforts here. What a mercy the Hall was not burnt down! But what was I saying? Are you not longing, my love, to thank the preser-

ver of your life? though the burns were not the worst you had to contend against. They were superficial, and the doctor says will not leave a mark; but the shock to your system was the material point. However, please Heaven, that danger is over."

Shortsighted parent! how little she surmises the real shock, from which I shall never recover!

She continues: "Spenser, my love, burnt himself seriously in saving you. He can scarcely yet use his hands, but Hessing has nursed him nicely. He is getting all right now. Of course we have dispensed with his services during his illness, without supplying his place. We are so grateful, my love, so pleased you should owe your safety to him."

"Why?" I naturally inquire.

Lady Creswycke's color rises.

"One of our own people," she stammers; "so much better than a stranger. We can reward him, you know."

"Do not attempt it," I exclaim, in a voice so stern that mamma looks all amazed. "Do not insult the man to whose courage and presence of mind I owe my life!"

At this minute my mother is summoned from the room, and I am left again to think, to wonder, to tremble. If they but dreamed even of the reward their servitor has already received—the heart of their petted, idolized heiress!

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE AND PRIDE.

I HAVE to submit to the tortures of hearing my father's raptures on the subject of Spenser's bravery; of his gratitude for my preservation, thinking all the while how much happier for myself it would have been had that ill-timed accident at the ball indeed proved fatal.

"For how," said I to myself—my sole confidante—"how is it to end?—in the life-long agonies of a suppressed passion, or in finally giving way to it, and by so doing, mar my future existence when the brief day of passion is over, and breaking the hearts of parents whom I so dearly love? Ah, me! was ever fate like mine?"

Then recurs the thought of my ancestress, Diana. Am I bound to perpetuate her waywardness and her misdeeds?

How I execrate that imp of mischief, Master Harold Merideth! But for his tricks I might have escaped the knowledge of my own heart; have never heard words that revealed to me a passion which from that hour, I knew was reciprocated.

Some one else might have appeared on the scene—some one of my own rank—who would have wooed, and very likely have won me; and thus I might have escaped from knowing the passion, which now I could never ignore.

A servant! Oh, if he had only been but a little higher in the social scale—a very little—a clerk, a poor curate, a steward. But a man who has waited behind my chair!

I flush with burning indignation at myself.

"I will crush his insolent pretensions at once when we meet again."

Meet again, and he is an invalid, like myself—maimed in his efforts to save my useless, idle life.

Is it his fault that I am a mere butterfly in this world of woe and struggle? His fault that he is a toiler, earning the livelihood that comes to me without an effort?

Is he not rather the nobler being, who, but for the mere accident of birth, would be as much my superior as I now affect to be his? Can I not raise him socially to my height? Alas! alas! never!

I wish I was well enough to be taken home, and believe I am. Let me see if I cannot compass the matter.

So I feign the most joyous spirits, and talk about home and its surroundings, till I make the doctor believe that I am homesick, and that my return thence would perfect my cure.

I foster this idea, and after a week's successful machinations have the delight of hearing that the day is fixed for my removal.

"But you never ask after poor Spenser, my dear," says mamma, reproachfully. "I could not have believed, Cecilia, you were so ungrateful."

Had she but known how little I thought of any other being!

"How is he getting on?" I ask, in a tone of pretended indifference.

"He, like yourself, my love, is convalescent. Dr. Johnson attends him likewise. He will come here to fetch us when we return."

"In our carriage?"—with a start.

"No, my love," says my mother, who imagines my question to result from pride. "In the first place, there would be no room; in the second, you would not like it. He will return in the coach with my maid, and your Jennings."

"Thank Heaven!" I murmur, sinking back in my chair; for I am now sitting up.

"Cecilia," says my mother, gravely, and with that hesitation and stammering which always affects her speech whenever she mentions Spenser, "I hope you do not dislike that poor young man?"

"Not I, my dear mother," I reply, with bravado. What would I give honestly to say I did!

"Because, my love, think what we should be suffering now, but for his heroic action!"

I pretend to laugh; but the tears come into my eyes.

"Remember how every one else took flight, and left you to your fate. Be grateful a little, Cecilia—be grateful a little, my dear, to this young man."

"I am grateful, dear mamma," sadly. "Grateful enough, I am sure, even to satisfy you."

She does not dream of the hidden meaning in my words; but takes both my hands into her own, and presses my brow with her motherly, tender lips.

My return home was fixed for the very next day after this conversation. I had made my adieu, and returned my thanks to our host and hostess, who descended with us through the hall to see us into our carriage. I was on my father's arm, but when about to step in, my mother having preceded me, there was a familiar face; but, oh, how pale and how noble! and a familiar arm was extended to assist me. It was an awkward moment—my parents were looking at me. The Merideth family were gaping, servants and all, with open eyes, on the convalescent heiress. Every soul there was aware of the deep debt of gratitude I owed this man; but no creature knew that already I had repaid it with the gift of my whole heart.

The face of my preserver flushed up as I leaned for a moment on his arm, and spoke a few words low in his ear.

"I cannot thank you now at this moment—for my life; but let me see you at a convenient opportunity. I have more to say."

He started, and I verily thought was about to kiss the hand which rested on his arm. If so, he recollects himself in time, and bowed himself to his mistress lowly, though scarcely in menial fashion.

I had never before seen him do that, this Paladin among attendants, and as quickly as I could, entered the carriage. Mamma nodded her head at me approvingly.

"You could not say more now, child," was her remark, "but you let the poor fellow perceive you had a fitting sense of your obligations."

And then I closed my eyes all the way home, where the servants were all assembled to welcome me back, and to overwhelm me with their congratulations. He assisted me out, and hastily saying, "Thanks all, and Heaven bless you!" I flew up-stairs, and reaching my own room, locked myself in, and gave free vent to my overwrought feelings by that unfailing feminine resource—"a good cry."

CHAPTER V.

THE DOCTOR'S PRESCRIPTION.

I HAD a relapse of illness after that, and paid

dearly enough for returning home too hastily—before, indeed, I was able to brave the fatigue and the emotions consequent on that effort. So that it was many days—a fortnight, at least—before I was again able to come down-stairs. I had, however, the satisfaction of hearing that Spenser had not suffered for his exertions in coming to Merideth Hall and accompanying us home, and that he was rapidly recovering under the experienced treatment of our housekeeper, his relative.

He had insisted on riding to Rillton—five miles there and five miles back—I was told, to bring Dr. Jephson to me, though a groom could have very well undertaken the task. At a previous period of my life I should have laughed at such Quixotic devotion in one of his station. I did not laugh now by any means. I understood the motive but too well. I was hardly sorry for my illness. It had saved me for a time from that solitary interview which I knew must come, and which I dreaded so greatly. Often, when my nurses had believed me to be dozing, had I been thinking of that time to come, planning what to say, how to look, to demean myself, that no encouragement might be taken, no irrevocable words uttered, by which I might be compromised.

Oh, youth!—heedless, ill-judging. How easily you believe that you can stem the tide of passion with a barrier of pride and reserve! Vain idea! I rehearsed my sayings and doings, and all the time my inmost heart knew that, should the man presume, that very heart would be displayed to him in all its weakness, its intensity and trembling devotion.

No wonder that my agitation, interfering as it did with my rest, appetite, and every function of life, kept me an invalid so long that Doctor Jephson became dismayed.

"My dear Miss Creswycke," he said, at last, "you are unnerving your own mind, and thus prolonging an illness which now ought to succumb. You must take tonics now, and exercise in the fresh air, and your roses will soon come back. There is at present too much of the pallor of the lily, and if you do not take care it will turn to the hue of a yellow lily, which is not becoming to brunettes as handsome as you are."

And with that compliment, the good doctor thought he had conquered my aversion to arouse myself; and so, in truth, he had.

No woman wishes to appear ugly in the eyes of even a presumptuous lover, and brunettes rarely can bear to display the colors of ill-health; so I determined to make the effort, which, perhaps, might determine my fate.

"Yet no," I argued; "had I not confidence in myself? I must try now to effect the removal of my preserver."

I am ordered by my doctor to come down at luncheon time every day; and it chances on one occasion that when I descend, my father and mother, who had driven to Rillton, had not returned; so that I sat alone waiting their arrival.

A slight noise aroused me from a reverie, and I perceived the object of my too-frequent thoughts enter. I mean Spenser. I could not avoid a start and a flush; but, doubtless, he remembered my words, and sought my presence to have them realized.

Well, it must come. I rise from my chair, and glance toward him. I know instinctively that the young man rushes toward me. It is for me to speak. He waits for it.

"You—you are quite well now, I trust?" I can think of nothing else to say. "I wished to tell you how grieved I am that you should have suffered so much on my account."

The answer comes in low, rich tones.

"Oh, it was sweet to suffer for you; but my anguish lest you should succumb to the shock was far worse to bear than my trifling wounds."

"You call them trifling!—we do not think them so. But Lord and Lady Creswycke will see you requited for the great, great service you rendered. For myself, I would offer re-

ward, only I feel sure you would not accept it from me."

My embarrassment brightens as I proceed.

"And you are right, madam—quite right. There is but one reward I could accept from you, and I dare not hope for that."

My confusion is at its height. What can he mean? He surely would not dare!

He proceeds: "Still, madam, I am a man. If I say to you that I am not what I seem—that I am here only for your dear sake—you will infer my rank may be akin to your own. You must not think so. Though no menial, regard me as a poor man—a lowly one; but I would ask you, Cecilia Creswycke, to remember a rose which, months ago, was the only messenger I dared send to whisper of my love, my devotion."

I am so amazed at this revelation that I forget all, except that he tells me—oh, welcome, welcome words!—that he is no menial.

"What!" I exclaim. "Were you that mysterious visitor who, on that summer's morning, threw me a rose? I have it still! I—" I stop. What am I saying? "Sir, you must not go on. I do not know who you are. I only know that this is very, very wrong. I must not deceive my parents. Hark! I hear the carriage wheels. Leave me, Spenser! Nay, I command you! I must think. Oh, Heaven help me! Leave me! Go now!—I insist!" And looking up, I see, to my intense relief, that he is gone.

Fortunately, luncheon is served directly, and my father and mother are so engrossed with some incidents of their visit, and are so eagerly discussing some local scandal they have heard, that my agitation and total inability to eat are unnoticed.

After a weary, weary time, during which my struggles to appear calm end in nearly choking me, my mother rises, and too thankful to escape my father's eye, I follow her.

Lady Creswycke invariably retires to her room for an hour, while my father takes a forty minutes' nod; so that I can escape to my own apartments.

Oh, bliss!—Spenser is not a servant.

There is no sleep for me. I have thoughts too bitter for rest, anguish too great for Nature's sweet restorer.

I feel, indeed, as if I should never sleep again; and when Lady Creswycke glides into my room to whisper "Good-night," and kiss her "darling," I feign excessive sleepiness and scarcely respond.

Already I am become an adept in dissimulation.

When I was next day visited by the doctor, my hollow eyes and stricken looks amazed him.

"You must have air and horse exercise," he said. "This will never do. This young lady must go out, my lady," turning to my mother. "You must use your authority. A ride every morning, from twelve till two. No; it is of no use," seeing me about to remonstrate. "You must, in a great measure, be your own doctor; and when I call again, if you follow my prescription, I shall find you better."

With this peremptory mandate the good doctor departed, and a look in his eyes threatens plainer speech if I refuse to do his bidding. I dread too much that he will tell my father and mother that my mind, and not my body, is affected.

But now I suffer a new terror. If I ride, Spenser will be the companion of these excursions. My father may accompany me sometimes; but, like most sailors, Lord Creswycke is not partial to horse exercise, and, indeed, a very indifferent rider.

How can I permit this audacious—no, that is not the word—presuming lover to gain opportunities of furthering his suit?

I have a great mind at once to declare all to my father, but turn faint at the very thought. I am too great a coward. My parent has a violent temper; there might be murder.

Unfortunate girl that I am! What will be-

come of me? I must use these opportunities to urge Spenser to leave the Hall.

I make a great stand against this daily medicine of air and exercise, but in vain. My father is delighted with the prescription. He vows my mare, Clarissa, is eating her head off in her stable; and further, that she is being ruined for a lady's horse by being ridden only by grooms.

"Besides, my dear, there is Spenser to ride with you. A first-rate horseman is Spenser; he has nothing else to do. You begin to-morrow."

"Oh, no, my dear father, not without you!"

"My dear love, impossible! Do you want to kill me? I have no horse in my stable fit for my weight. If I ride, it will bring on the gout. I feel twinges at the bare thought of it."

What more can I say? I have resisted. I must submit to fate and circumstances. After all, perhaps, it is as well to have this means of explaining fairly that he must retire, or else I shall appeal to my father. Yes, that must be my plan. He is a gentleman, and when he sees my firm resolution, will not persecute me with addresses which are as useless as they ought to be unbearable.

CHAPTER VI.

TWICE SAVED.

I CAN read in the eyes of my attendant, on the occasion of my first ride, that he is as delighted at the opportunity fate has placed in his way, as I am vexed and annoyed at being thrown into his society. That is, I know, I ought to be vexed about it; but is there not, oh, 'Spirit of Truth,' residing in my inmost heart, a sense of joy that I am alone in his presence, without other eyes to take note of my looks and agitation?

It is a delicious morning when we set out together. The dew scarcely yet off the soft turf, the skies serenely blue, the sun gilding the hedges and the tree-tops. All nature seems lovely and peaceful. We ride on in silence for some time, though already Spenser, I perceive, is nearly at my side, instead of at the respectable distance which, as my personal attendant, he had kept between us so long as we were in sight of the Hall.

I could plainly perceive he was awaiting an opportunity to speak. What will he say, I wonder? But I perceive he is watching my mare Clarissa somewhat closely. She has almost forgotten her mistress, I do believe, for she is somewhat skittish beneath the rein, and I have to hold her tightly in hand. This conduct of the mare gives him his opportunity.

"Be careful with Clarissa, Miss Creswycke; there is a look of defiance in her eye this morning that I do not like. She has not been well exercised of late, I fear."

"Thank you; I will take care. She knows how to obey." Then, with a sudden determination, for something must be said, and I am desperate, "I trust others will also know how to obey, when necessity commands!"

He comprehends my meaning in a moment.

"I can obey in most things; but if you are Necessity, I have but to trust you will be a merciful one!"

I bite my lips.

He continues, "We were interrupted the other day before I could explain myself fully. Miss Creswycke, you must have heard words which, in the agitation of a terrible crisis, escaped me. I cannot deny those words—nay, presuming as you may deem me, I do not wish to deny them. My life is bound up in yours, and as I know what you must feel at the idea of being addressed by a menial, it is at least a duty toward you as well as myself to let you know that I have accepted such duties, only in the hope of winning you."

"Are you of my own rank? Answer. You cannot! Oh, sir, whoever you may be, was it the action of a gentleman so to involve me in the appearance of wrong, and to engage my affections clandestinely, when—"

"Cecilia," with a joyful cry, "do you, then, own I have engaged them? Nay, hear me

out. However appearances may be against me, I am, if poor, a gentleman—one whose dearest hope was to win your love, whose utmost ambition was to experience that so rich a treasure could be bestowed on me irrespective of rank or wealth."

"Do you know that were I to marry so far beneath the social station of my parents, I should have but my hand to give? I should inherit neither money nor land from Lord Creswycke if I were weak enough to yield to persuasion. Be warned in time, sir, and oh, leave this place—make any excuse—but go! Nay"—for he was eager to speak, and his hand was on the rein of my mare, as if then and there he was ready to take possession of me, and bear us both away, "you must hear me. I rejoice that you are no servant. I know I am proud; but I could not have borne to think that I had yielded to— Oh, Heaven! what—what am I saying? Go, sir; this is delirium. Yet you saved my life; but for you I had not been here breathing the air of this lovely day. Only I cannot disobey my parents, nor break their hearts. You must go, and that speedily, or my father must interfere between us. You do not know him yet. His love of rank is too great to permit him for one moment to forget it. Even if you were not noble, wealth might prevail with him; but without that—"

"One word more, Cecilia Creswycke. If by toil, by energy, I could win that wealth, and with it your father's consent, would you be mine?"

"Ah, why put an impossible case?"

"I must be answered."

But I could not—dared not—speak such words. Yet what need had he of them? The blood that rushed into my pale face; the eyes that fell beneath his ardent gaze; the trembling of my weak frame, all spoke a language that most men can interpret but too plainly.

All this time I had had great trouble in holding the mare in. Clarissa wanted sorely to rush into a gallop. Just then my nerves were terribly tried, and I felt faint. My hand relaxed from my hold on the rein, and I felt all at once my danger.

I cried out, "Oh, save me!"

But the mischief was done. Her ears thrown back, her tail lashing the wind, in one moment Clarissa was off; and I, helpless, weak, and thoroughly unnerved, was clinging to her neck, my hat off, my long hair, escaped from its net, flowing down my back, yet conscious still that Spenser's hand was yet on the bridle-rein, and conscious too that we were both tearing toward the river as swiftly as the wind itself.

We were equals in that moment of terror; only a helpless girl and a brave man, who protected her at the peril of his own life, were present. Who thought then of rank, or wealth, or station? We should die together. That was my only thought.

"Save yourself!" I cried; and my breathless words reached him.

"If I cannot save you, my beloved, may I, too, perish!" was the answer. "But hold on—only hold on!"

And I did. The end came swiftly enough. The horses—for Spenser's horse was as much beyond control now as the mare—had neared the banks of the river. Clarissa took the stream. My last look showed me Spenser throwing himself off his steed; while, my senses failing, my grip on the mare's neck loosened, and I felt the waters close over me, and then I knew no more.

When I awoke to consciousness, I was lying on the grass beside the river, and Spenser, drenched as I was myself, was bending over me, pale as death. Several other persons were near us. We were pitiable objects, truly.

Presently a carriage was brought, and I was assisted into it. An inn was not far off. It was thither I was to be conveyed; and in a few minutes the landlady had seen me placed in a warm bed.

"How was I saved?" I asked, as soon as my lips could frame a question.

"The gentleman with you, miss," was the landlady's reply, "jumped into the river, and, though he nearly lost his own life, swam with you ashore."

"And the mare?"

"The gentleman, miss" (even she took him for a gentleman), "begged me not to tell you; but I see no good in hiding it. The mare is drowned."

Poor Clarissa!—poor pet! Never more shall I pat your glossy neck!—never more feed you with bread and apples!

I gave a great sob.

"And the—I mean Spenser—is he hurt?"

"Not in the least, miss. He has mounted his own horse, which was not a bit the worse, and, after sending a doctor to you, will go on to the Hall to tell my lord and lady. Now, miss, try to sleep a little, please."

Bruised and shaken, I could not even reflect; but one thing came into my mind, and would not go out of it—twice saved by him! I am no more my own. My life belongs to him only now—now, and forevermore!

CHAPTER VII.

FAIRLY SUBDUED.

ANOTHER long, tedious illness; for though, strange to say, I took no cold, the fright and agitation of my adventure brought on a nervous fever, from which my recovery was tedious, and the inevitable confinement to my room irksome beyond belief, for I wanted to see him, my preserver—my Fate, I fondly called him.

My pride was humbled now, quenched, I believe, in the stream from whose waters his strong nerve and vigorous arms had snatched me. All conversation was for a long time prohibited, or my mother would have poured forth afresh, Spenser's praises into my willing ears.

When I was permitted to hear and converse, Spenser, and Spenser alone, was the theme on which both my parents loved to dwell. So warm were they, indeed, on the subject, that once I began to speculate on the chance of my dear, warm-hearted, and hot-tempered father giving consent to the union of his heiress with her preserver.

If such a thought dwelt with me for a moment, however, I was doomed pretty quickly to be undeceived.

In a few weeks I was sufficiently recovered to be permitted to come down to breakfast, and unreproved, gave my hand, in the presence of both Lord and Lady Creswycke, to my lover.

I called him so now to myself.

During the meal, Spenser remained, as usual, in the apartment, but his attentions seemed devoted to me only.

"Cecilia," said my father, "I am greatly pleased you are so much better. You are looking quite yourself again."

"Yes, papa," I said; "I am getting on now, I think. I ought to be; I have been an invalid for an unconscionable time."

"The Duke of Carruthers and the Marquis of Tremaine are coming here next week, my love, to visit us for two or three days," says Lord Creswycke, looking at me pointedly, "and I hope you will be at your best by then."

If color be needful to beauty, I must at that particular moment have satisfied the most exacting of parents.

My cheeks were burning.

I glared at Spenser, but he was calmly arranging some flowers in a bouquet-glass by my plate.

"So keep up your spirits, my darling," pursued papa, as he rose, twirling his gold glasses in his hand. "You will have plenty of amusement. His Grace is the *beau ideal* of a stately courtier, and his son is— Oh, by the by, Spenser, do you know Lord Tremaine?"

"I have seen him, my lord, frequently," answers Spenser, gravely.

"A fine fellow—very!" said my lord. "You know my opinion of him, Cecilia," says my

father; "and remember, my dear, I have not altered my mind. A word to the wise," adds Lord Creswycke, and then leaves the room.

My mother rose.

"Cecilia, my darling, come to my room presently. I want to arrange some little matters. Are you able to walk to-day?"

"I will attempt a little stroll in the shrubberies about twelve," I reply. "Spenser,"—turning to him—"you will please attend me at that time. Mamma, I will go with you now."

Then Lady Creswycke gave me her arm, and—my cheeks still burning, but my mind resolved and steadfast—I ascended with her to her dressing-room.

I was breathless with fatigue and agitation by the time I got to my mother's dressing-room. I had not been there for some time, but every article in it was imprinted indelibly on my mind.

Much of the important business of my not very long life had been transacted here.

I wonder what I am to hear on the present occasion?—for Lady Creswycke's *sanctum* is the place where dear mamma advises, lectures, or delivers my father's ultimatum—unalterable as those of the Medes and Persians.

I have a presentiment, which presently is fulfilled.

Lady Creswycke first makes me what she terms comfortable, and by her extreme anxiety in this process I feel certain she is about to make me the very reverse.

I am not deceived.

"So, my love," she commences, "we are to have visitors next week."

"How extremely tiresome!" I answer. "What can bring these people here now?"

"My dear child, that is easily answered. You!"

I stare.

"Dear mamma! how can that possibly be?"

"Cecilia, you know all about it as well as I do. We have but waited till you were well enough to have the matter discussed. Your papa has desired me to break it to you."

"Break—break what?"

"This marriage with Lord Tremaine. Both my lord and the Duke have decided that such an alliance is the wisest thing for both parties. You will break papa's heart if you refuse. The Duke desires Lord Tremaine to marry, and being himself in failing health, it is now doubly desirable that he should do so. Only some foolish crotchet about being loved for himself, and not for his title and estates, has hitherto prevented his visiting here; but now—"

"He will return," said I, "as wise as he came. Mother, I will never marry Lord Tremaine. I have said so before. I repeat it. I will marry to please myself, or I can remain single."

"My dear Cecilia—"

"I must reiterate it, mamma. I have not been in society. I have seen no one, but have kept here in the country, waiting, it would seem, Lord Tremaine's pleasure to come and look at me. His pleasure has been to be insultingly tardy. It is too late now."

"Your illness has interfered. I am sure the Duke has been unceasing in his inquiries."

"I do not doubt the Duke's attentions; those of his son are very questionable. I am weary, mamma, of this discussion. My mind is fixed."

"Not to accept the Marquis, Cecilia?—for I know the object of this visit—it is to propose."

"On two or three days' acquaintance!—preposterous! I will not even see the man!"

"I do not see how you are to avoid a meeting, my dear."

"Nevertheless, you may tell my father my mind is made up. I am surprised at his want of spirit. I always detested the Marquis of Tremaine; now I despise him. Imagine Cecilia Creswycke marrying a man whom she despises!"

And with that I rise and leave the room, going to my own, where I encounter my maid Jennings. I surprise her by falling into a passion of tears, and apostrophizing myself as the

most unfortunate girl in the universe. Jennings is tender-hearted, and loves me.

"My dear, dear young lady," she says, "oh, what is the matter?"

"Jennings, would you like to see me married against my inclination?"

Jennings opens her rather light blue eyes with horror.

"Never, miss; you don't say so?"

"But I do; and I will never be forced—never! Besides— Dare I trust you?"

"With your life, Miss Creswycke; you know it."

"I believe you. Well, I will put you to the proof by and by; not now. Dress me quickly. I am going to walk."

"Shall I go with you, miss?"

"No; I have Spenser to attend me. I shall not be long, for I have to dress for dinner, though I do not believe that I shall go down to-day."

"There is company, miss. I heard Mrs. Hessing say so."

"Then I shall not go down, decidedly. Now, quick! My hat—a parasol! The sun is hot, and my eyes ache."

I lean on my maid's arm; descend the stairs, where he is waiting. A glance between us is enough. He follows me out from the hall door, through the shrubberies. A path, called the Long Walk, leads into the park, close to the thickets which shelter a herd of deer.

It is but little frequented. Here I stop. I have walked rapidly, and am weary and exhausted. My attendant stops also.

"I did not," I say, "intend going further than this; but I have much to say. There will be no interruption near the deer-thickets; follow me there!"

He mutely acquiesces, and we proceed. We are alone—alone!—and I know the great turning point of my life is reached. I am here for a purpose, liable certainly to be prevented by circumstances; but a purpose which decides me to throw away ambition, rank, station, all I so believed in and valued from childhood till now, into the scale of gratitude and—love! love! Ah, if I did not love, should I be so grateful? I believe not. I wavered till my father's cruel message determined the waverer. Now I am firm.

He commenced the conversation.

"How shall I sufficiently thank you for contriving this opportunity? I should never have found it without, at least, exposing you to censure, perhaps reproof."

"I am little used to that, as you must have seen since your sojourn here. They say our—forgive the word—servants know us better than we do ourselves. Well, in your assumed menial capacity, undertaken, as you have told me for my sake—"

"And told you truly!"

"You must have arrived at a tolerable estimate of my character"—trifling with a heath-bell I had gathered from the turf. "Tell me now, do you think I am worth so much pains and trouble as you have taken for me?"

"Worth a thousand times more than my poor efforts have cost!"

"You are a poor man, you say. Have you thought what kind of poor man's wife I should make? I scarcely know how people who are poor live."

"When I said that," he replied, "I spoke relatively. Although I have no rank, and, therefore, can live in no state, my resources will at least enable me to maintain my wife in comfort. I am educated; can obtain employment. Yet giving me your love would entail on you a sacrifice. I have no deer-parks to offer, no servants, no equipage; plain dress, plain living, a plain home gilded only with affection, guided only from day to day by hope and trust! I do not ask you to share deep poverty and privation. I offer simply no superfluities, unless abundance of devotion and love come under that category."

I looked up at him.

"It was not to discuss such points I came here. My life belongs to you! Twice you

have saved that life. I—I came to say that if you so care for me, so love me, you—you have won me! I am yours!"

He seized both my hands, and pressed them first to his lips, then to his heart.

"Can I, indeed, be so blessed?" he said.

"I have had a struggle," I say, presently, "but that struggle is over. The thought of my parents would have deterred me from receiving your addresses. Now they desert me. My father would drive me into marriage with a man I detest. And that is—you heard yourself his announcement this very morning—Lord Tremaine! A man I have not even seen, and who has not even tried to see me—a pretty plain proof that his aversion is equal to my own!"

"But how, my Cecilia (forgive me, you are mine now)—how do you know he has not tried to see you?"

"Has he not delayed a meeting by every means in his power?"

"If I have understood rightly, so have you."

"I had cause; I have been so worried about Lord Tremaine that I hate and detest his very name."

"Poor fellow!" falls from Spenser's lips.

"You pity him?"

"Tremaine is not a bad-meaning fellow. I was at Oxford with him. But you must not, my own love, be persecuted! Things are now at a crisis! Will you let me arrange events?"

Before we parted he had gained my promise to fly with him, and by an immediate marriage to put Lord Tremaine's pretensions to flight. A friend of Spenser's, whose living was a few miles from the Hall, would unite us. From thence we were to proceed to London. I was to take Jennings into our confidence, and she was to accompany us in our journey.

"Trust to me, dearest," said Spenser; "it shall all be easily arranged. You will have but to rise early, enter the carriage I will have in waiting at Thornhill; James Cullenford will unite us at the earliest possible hour. The rail will then convey us to London, where we shall be before your flight is discovered. Nothing could be easier."

But still I was troubled.

"Let us thoroughly understand each other," I said. "I can bring you no money, and my jewels I shall make a point of leaving behind. A poorer bride you could not well have. I do not believe I have twenty pounds left of my last quarter's allowance."

He did but smile.

"Just as I would have it," he replied. "My dear love, you are treating me as if I really were the footman I have pretended to be. I am provided with funds."

He pressed my hand to his lips, and followed me back to the Hall.

It was nearly luncheon-time; but my father and mother had driven out to pay visits, and no doubt to discuss my abominable behavior; so ordering a tray to be sent up to my room, I escaped thither, and, over my luncheon, deliberated on the best way of gaining over Jennings to my cause.

She is in the dressing-room, engaged in needlework. Well, in my new condition, she will not have much to do. I wonder if I shall have to learn how to make my own bonnets and gowns? Some women have an inborn taste that way, but I never had. From a baby I submitted myself to be dressed by other people, and never interfered much with my milliners and dressmakers. Jennings makes most of my dresses; and very well the girl does it, too. I watch her while I discuss my chicken, and think I should like to learn. But, after all, am I going really to be so poor? I fancy not. He said relatively poor. What may that mean?—and, oh! why can not I help him? But I have not, like some girls, an independent fortune. Would that I had, if only a hundred a year. Papa's allowance to me is two hundred, out of which I find my dresses and gloves.

A very liberal one I considered it; but, of course, that will be stopped, unless he should forgive me, and take my husband into favor. But I have not the least hope of this. I believe

rather in his going to the grave, without forgiving me at all, and disinheriting me entirely.

These thoughts are by no means agreeable.

I turn to Jennings.

"I said I would speak to you on my return. What are you doing there?"

"Your dress for this evening, Miss Creswycke."

"You need not go on with it. I shall not go down-stairs to-night. Presently you can take a message."

"I have nothing particular to do, miss; I can go on with the dress."

"It does not matter; I shall not wear such dresses much longer, Jennings."

The girl opens her eyes widely but makes no remark.

"Jennings!"

"Yes, miss."

"When are you going to marry Richards?"

"Goodness knows, miss! At least, we are in no hurry. When we have saved a little money: not before, I know."

"But I am going to marry," I say; "and that very quickly. Hush, girl! do not holla out; walls have ears sometimes!"

"You surprise me so, miss, I am all of a tremble!"

"Will you follow my fortunes, Jennings? But listen! I am going to wed with a poor man. Now let me tell you."

She listens in silence, and, at the end of my narrative, declares that she will do all I wish, and that she will retain her situation with me."

"Always supposing," I say, "that I can afford to keep you. I have no more idea than yourself in what way I am going to live. All I know is that I have given my word, and that my heart goes with my hand. Give me my desk now."

Then I write a little note, which Jennings is to deliver to Spenser, who, I add, will give her further instructions.

This off my mind, I fall to musing. Such a step as the one I am about to take is no light matter; but it is now irrevocable.

I begin to read; Jennings brings my tea; and, after that, Lady Creswycke comes up in a great fuss, because she hears I am not going down to dinner.

"But, as we have some people coming, my love," she says, "perhaps it will be as well. Spenser has desired leave to go out, and your papa has given it. What, indeed, could we refuse that inestimable young man? Keep yourself quiet, my pet; and remember, Cecilia—oh! always remember—your happiness, my darling girl, is the sole wish of our hearts! You must forgive your parents if they take the most desirable way to secure your felicity."

Her words go straight to my heart. I have a great mind to fall on my knees and confess all. But I know the consequences, and I know I owe a duty to him who holds my future in his hands. I kiss her fondly.

"Mamma, I have a favor to ask. Give me that photo of yours I like so much. I want it for my album. I have papa's. I want yours to match."

"My love, of course"—the tears rising in her still handsome eyes. "I will send my maid with it when I go to my room. There! you dear, foolish child, good-night!"

And presently it is brought. I place it in my album. This little picture will soon be the only mother I shall have.

All that night I lie awake, thinking, hoping, fearing, planning, but never once faltering in the fealty I owe to the man whom now, I own, I love beyond everything in life.

CHAPTER VIII.

PREPARING TO ELOPE.

IT was Tuesday evening which I have last recorded. On the following morning of Wednesday Jennings brings me a letter containing full directions how to proceed in what our grandmothers would have deemed a very prosaic method of eloping.

My departure, which could not possibly, as

we had agreed, be delayed, on account of the visit of the Duke of Carruthers and his son, was fixed for the next day (Thursday morning), at daybreak.

"When your maid has packed a few necessaries for you, my dearest," ran the letter—"and take as little as you possibly can, for you can provide yourself with all things in London—you will have nothing more to do than to equip yourself at six o'clock to-morrow morning in a traveling dress, and walk with Jennings out of the glass door which leads from the dining-room into the shrubberies. I will be there to lead you to a carriage, which will be in waiting a little below the park. We shall proceed to the village of Thornhill. At the church there, my old friend, James Cullenford, the incumbent will unite us. The railway-station being close at hand, we shall book through to London. All this may be achieved without haste, fear, or any anxiety but the natural one, which, I know will possess your gentle heart at leaving home for one comparatively a stranger, but whose life henceforward will be devoted to make yours happy. One line in reply, which your maid, who will be faithful to us, will convey to me.

"Yours, in all faith and sincerity,

"HERBERT SPENSER."

The first time I ever knew the baptismal name of this man, who, by this time to-morrow, would be my husband!

Well, it is no common or vulgar name, and I rejoice that it is not; for, though *Juliet* may ask, "What's in a name?" to youthful love it is a very great deal.

Still, the suddenness of my departure causes the blood to rush to my face, and my whole frame to tremble. I had then, perhaps, given my last kiss to my mother!

I had a great mind to go down-stairs; and, under the pretense of saying something, to hug my dear, hot-headed, darling old father to my heart; but, as I had previously signified I should breakfast in my own room, I could not well do this without exciting surmises, which would be inconvenient.

I also determined not to descend until dinner-time, for I felt I could but ill keep up the pretense of my usual demeanor for many hours, and knew that I could easily retire altogether after dessert. Sending down a message to Lady Creswycke to that effect, I found myself at liberty to attend to my packing.

I had a very handsome traveling ulster, beneath which I determined to wear a rich gray silk dress, trimmed with Brussels lace. Besides this, Jennings was directed to pack, in a small portmanteau, a plain dark dress for every-day wear, and a velvet jacket for out of doors. These, with some linen, was all I would take, except my dressing-case and album.

I left my jewels and the rest of my wardrobe in my drawers. Nor did I even take a favorite book.

My faithful maid was not long in making these arrangements; and before I descended for the last time to dinner, all was in readiness.

I was late, however, in entering the dining-room; for, there being no company, my parents were already seated before I entered. Spenser was in his usual place.

My extreme paleness struck my father, I suppose, for I felt as if I was indeed a traitress thus to join my family on the eve of my deserting them forever.

"Cecilia," papa says kindly—and, at the very sound of that dear voice, tears rise in my eyes—"if you did not feel equal to the dining down-stairs, why did you make the effort?"

"I am not ill, dear papa; only a little nervous, that is all."

"Well, now you are come, let me have the pleasure of seeing you eat a good dinner."

But this is a sheer impossibility, though Spenser (Herbert I am learning to call him) devotes himself to the sole business of tempting me to eat.

I am so ill at ease, that conversation seems impossible; and, if Lady Creswycke had not come to the rescue, a deep silence would certainly have reigned throughout dinner-time.

When the dessert was placed on the table, Spenser, as usual, left the room, not without a glance at me, which lit up my wan face with crimson, and made my observant father exclaim, "Cecilia, my love, you are feverish.

You must have no wine, and mamma and I will excuse you. Come here, my darling; kiss your tyrannical old father, and then go to bed."

"Oh, papa!"

"And oh, Cecilia! Bless you, my darling! I should not be kissing this hot cheek and feverish lips,"—kissing me again and again as he spoke—"but for the noblest fellow in the world, though he is but a servant! You must be very good to poor Spenser, pet."

Faster and faster came the blood into my throat and face.

"Papa, how?"

"No queenly airs, my darling! When you are Lady Tremaine, you must advance him; but we will manage all that."

"Papa, you know that can never be."

"Tut, tut! Go to bed, now, like a darling! Here, mamma, send this naughty girl to her own room!"

"But, papa, forgive me. Bless your poor Cecilia!"

"Yes, yes. Bless my darling—now, always, forever, under any circumstances!"

And, with a joyous cry, I throw myself on his broad chest, and hug him, till Lord Creswycke looks as if he thought me delirious. Mamma folds me in her arms. I kiss her over and over again. It is my last good-by.

As I enter the hall, he is waiting, ready to place a light in my hand. As I take it, that hand is pressed significantly. It reminds me of my plighted promise.

I incline my head slightly; and, ascending the staircase, the last I see of my betrothed is that he returns to the dining-room, where I have left my parents.

CHAPTER IX.

MARRIED.

IT may be supposed I do not sleep—though, after ascertaining that Jennings has left nothing to be done, I retire to bed. As the long hours are ticked off by the great clock on the staircase (a piece of mechanism popularly supposed to be coeval with the rise of the family, and costing scores of pounds to repair when it is out of order), the house sinks into a silence unbroken, except now and then by a single footstep, velvet-shod, of some servant, who has been kept up, going off to bed.

I count every hour, and sink to sleep at last as the ghostly clock strikes four. At five I am aroused by Jennings, who is fully dressed, and who, while I am taking my bath, makes coffee over a spirit-stove, which was in use during my illness.

When I am entirely dressed, my ulster is thrown on, my furs are wrapped about me, my hat arranged, and I prepare to quit the house of my childhood and youth.

The little luggage of myself and my maid have been conveyed the previous night to Herbert's room. We are unencumbered. A few minutes only remain, and I place on my table a note, addressed to Lord Creswycke. It contains a prayer for pity, love, forgiveness. It is extremely incoherent, and would do little to exculpate me, even in the eyes of the tenderest of parents; but I cannot mend it, and there would be no time to write another, if even I were inclined. Then we creep down-stairs, the old hereditary clock croaking, rather than clicking, as its pendulum records the wane of time.

I feel as in a dream. The rays of the rising sun are gilding the lawn and the tree-tops when we issue through the glass door of the dining-room, where, on the previous night, I bade my last adieu to home and parents, rank and social station.

My hand is seized by Spenser, who is waiting impatiently. It is placed under his arm, and Jennings follows. Through a wicket gate we reach the avenue which leads to the lodge, where all is still in silence; but I notice that the gates are unlocked, and that egress is quietly achieved. How, I cannot guess; bribery, I suppose.

A plain brougham is waiting a little distance off. Into this Herbert places me. Jennings

THE SECRET MARRIAGE.

follows, and I see my lover ascend the box by the driver.

At this moment a whining is heard. It is my pet dog; quite forgotten in the agitation of the moment, Rowley has followed me. He has to be taken in; and then we are off, unrecognized, unopposed. Will it continue?

A two hour's drive, and the carriage stopped before the Norman porch of a small, graystone country church.

It is now eight o'clock. Leaving Rowley in the carriage, we descend, and, followed by Jennings, Herbert, taking my arm, leads me into the vestry, where a gentleman, attended by, I suppose, the clerk, is already waiting for us.

Jennings is by my side, and while Herbert introduces me to the Rev. James Cullenford, a tall, clerical, kind-looking person, she takes off my ulster and hat, and throws over me a large lace veil, which envelops me from head to foot, and with my gray silk I look not so unlike a bride as I had feared I should.

Herbert's great coat off, he also is in light clothes. The church doors are closed. The clerk and the old woman who is pew-owner act as witnesses; Jennings, as bridesmaid, in a neat, dark silk and white ribbons; and in ten minutes more I am Herbert's wife.

My husband's kiss—the first he has taken from my lips—the clergyman's congratulations, Jennings's tears, tell me this fact, or else I should deem it a dream.

Then comes the signing. Herbert signs first, and I follow him. He places a piece of paper above the line where I write my name—to guide my hand, he explains.

When all is done, I see him fee the clerk and clergyman; and judging from the multitude of curtseys which she drops, the old pew-opener is settled for life in regard to money matters.

Jennings is about to envelop me in my traveling wraps, when the vestry door opens, and an old gentleman enters. Not that he is attired as a gentleman; his dress is little better than that of a butler in every-day attire, but his air and manner would convince the veriest tyro that he is a gentleman. He is gray-haired, not very tall, but thin, and his face beams with benevolence.

My husband—how strange that word seems!—darts forward, seemingly amazed.

"My—" He stops and wrings the hands of the old man, who comes up to me.

"Your oldest friend, Bertie, you would say," he replies, "come to look on your fair young bride, and give her an old man's blessing, since she has no father here to do so. From a nook behind the pillar there I saw you wedded, my dear boy. And you, fair girl, will not disdain to bestow a kiss on one who has known your husband from his cradle; is it not so, Bertie?"

My husband bowed assent reverently.

He approached, and kissed me on the temple.

"I may never see you again," he said. "I have, therefore, brought you this small keepsake, to remind you that I have beheld you once and blessed you. Good-by, Bertie! Adieu, dear Bertie's wife!"

As he said these words, he placed a small parcel in my hand, and bowing to the clergyman, left the vestry, my husband flying after him.

He was not absent many minutes, though.

I was all ready for traveling when he returned, and taking his place beside me in the brougham, Jennings sitting beside the driver, we were carried rapidly to the small country station of Thornhill, and in another quarter of an hour were traveling to London as fast as the genii of steam could convey us.

"How much better is this, my dearest," said my husband, as we glided slowly into the Paddington station, "than a ladder of ropes, Gretna Green, and a blacksmith! Besides, it saves time and a scandal!"

CHAPTER X.

HAPPY.

We were driven to a small private hotel in the neighborhood of Russell Square, Herbert

proposing that the next day we should leave London for Paris, there to pass our honeymoon. I knew so little of London localities that I heard with pleasure we were less likely to be discovered in this middle-class Belgravia than if we had sojourned at a hotel of higher pretensions.

"But there is no fear of pursuit, my darling," said Herbert. "Your father is too proud to bring back a runaway daughter."

His words gave me a keener pang than he could have surmised, or he would not have spoken, I thought, so lightly. To pass the matter off, I reverted to the episode of the old gentleman who in so courtly and strange a manner gave me his blessing.

"How came he to know about our marriage," I asked, "and what was his name?"

My husband seemed slightly embarrassed.

"His name?" he said. "Oh, the same as mine; in fact, he is a distant relative, and, as he truly said, the oldest friend I have."

I was not ill-pleased to hear that this grand-mannered old man was connected with Herbert by blood, for he was so undeniably what we understand by the word gentleman that I needed no other assurance to convince me that I had wedded a man of gentle birth.

"By the by," said Herbert, suddenly, "he gave you a wedding present, did he not, my Cecilia? What was it, pray?"

"Good heavens!" I replied. "In my surprise and agitation I know not what I did with it. I was so terrified that I expected to see Lord and Lady Creswyke enter the church."

"Perhaps," said my husband, "you gave it to your maid."

"Jennings?" I replied. "No, certainly not. I was about to examine the parcel when you hurried us away. Oh, now I remember; it is in the pocket of my ulster. Ring, Herbert, for Jennings, and inquire."

And, fortunately, I proved not to be mistaken; the parcel, wrapped up in satin cream-laid paper, tied with a silken ribbon, was reposing snugly enough in one of those receptacles called pockets on modern garments. And doubtless nothing short of the care which surrounded me could have prevented my pocket from being picked, in which case the thief would have been well rewarded for his pains, for, on opening the parcel, a morocco casket, containing a brooch, earrings and necklace of the finest diamonds which I had ever seen, though my mother's were esteemed something extraordinary in the way of jewels. I was perfectly petrified.

"You little know how delighted I am, my love," he said, "at my relative's liberality. I think it a good omen that you should have received this really handsome gift."

"But he looked so poor," said I. "How could he afford it?"

"Some people, you know, dearest, are hoarders. Mr. Spenser—that is his name—must not be judged by his coat."

"I would not do so for the world," I said, fearing I had touched my husband's feelings in a sensitive point. "But how came he to find us out?"

"I fear Cullenford must have been talking."

I was indignant.

"How very ungentlemanlike! However, Herbert, perhaps this relative may assist you in some unlooked-for manner. I will put his diamonds carefully away, and if you need money you can use them; they must be worth a good deal. By the way, let me tell you I am richer than I had supposed. I have full five-and-thirty pounds in my purse. I assure you I was always taught to be careful of money. Therefore, I shall need none for clothes from you."

He kissed me fondly.

"Leave all to me, dearest. You will want for nothing, if you but continue to trust me."

We arrived in Paris on the third day after our union in the little church of Thornhill; and before I had even time to think of my wants in the way of dress, stores of wearing apparel were sent in, which I declared would last me

my life. Existence in Paris is so perfectly delightful that I should have been supremely happy had it not been for two things which greatly troubled me. One was, that though I had written again to my parents, giving my address, no notice whatever had been taken by them of my letters. I was treated with disdainful silence and contempt. The other was that I dreaded Herbert, in his devotion to me, was spending far more money than his means warranted.

From his residence at Creswyke Hall he knew my tastes and habits perfectly, and left no means untried to supply them as liberally as I had found them at home. It was in vain that I remonstrated.

"We are here for our bridal holiday," he said, "and we will have it out. Then hard work and economy must be the order of the day."

I could only murmur that the latter should be left to my care, and proposed as a first step to send Jennings home. He would not hear of it.

"I shall be from home a great deal, my darling," he said. "That my Cecilia must learn to bear; and you must have some one with you whom you can trust. Besides, Jennings would hardly thank you. She has her intended residing in London—my predecessor you know"—archly—"and no doubt cherishes the idea of seeing him frequently. I hear Richards is thriving in the club establishment where your father placed him. By-and-by they will be able to set up a hotel, or something of that sort."

I had married in haste, certainly, at the last; but I had not, according to the adage, repented at leisure. Every day I found new reason to justify my choice. Every hour of social intercourse showed me that I had wedded a man of high education, taste, and great natural talent.

What a pride it was to me to discover that he had taken high honors at Oxford, and that those magic letters after his name, representative of his degrees in that University, would—nay, had—already given him literary employment.

It was on this I learned our future resources were to depend. He wrote, I found, on great public and political questions—was an essayist of already no mean reputation, but known in the world of authorship only by initials. He contributed to quarterlies and scientific reviews; and yet Herbert Spenser, in that close domestic life we now led together was as simple and as unpretending as when he stood behind my chair at Creswyke Hall.

Our gay Paris life came to its end, and I was not sorry, for I had had enough of it, and was longing for a simple English, middle-class home.

Such a one was found for me by Herbert in a very unpretending neighborhood.

A Belgravian lady would have been shocked at the sound, and would no doubt have shuddered at the locality.

It was in Doughty street, W.

We had three furnished rooms in this street a drawing-room, a large chamber (opening out of the drawing-room), and a room up-stairs for Jennings, and which occasionally served me for a dressing-room and work-room; for I had no dresses but those my waiting-maid made for me, and I developed an unknown talent for making and trimming my own hats and bonnets, quite unsuspected hitherto.

Our apartments were but plainly furnished; but Jennings and I, with the help of a few yards of bright-colored chintz, and two or three pair of lace curtains, with a china jar or two, and some plaster busts picked up cheaply enough in the neighborhood of Holborn, a few engravings procured in a similar way, with some wire-stands filled with flowers, made such a paradise of these commonplace rooms, that when, after taking possession of them in the morning, Herbert returned to dinner in the evening, his surprise and delight were unbounded.

Next day, a handsome pianoforte was sent in,

a rocking-chair, and a writing-table; and, lo! we had made a home of love and peace which no castle could have supplied.

Herbert declared he had found work; and when we had settled how much would weekly supply our needs, including the luxuries of books, flowers, and music, I am certain there was no household more flourishing than ours.

My husband left home at ten or eleven in the morning, and returned at six to dine.

Sometimes—but rarely, though—we visited the opera, for which Mr. Spenser said he could often procure a private box through his literary friends, so that my pleasure was unalloyed by the fear of expense. Sometimes a good play varied the amusements. Sometimes—and that mostly—home music, reading, or chess, in which my husband was a great adept, afforded us all we required for recreation.

Often, if pressed for time, Herbert wrote, and I copied for him.

Happy days!—the elysium of youth, love, and hope! unclouded save by one sad memory—my parents.

But even here I was saved from suspense. Mrs. Hessian, our housekeeper at Creswycke, kept Herbert well informed as to the health and well-being of the dear, unforgotten inhabitants of my former home. My parents were well, and in excellent spirits; the Duke of Carruthers a constant visitor, and Lord and Lady Creswycke as frequently his guests at Carruthers Castle. Of the Marquis of Tremaine not a word was said. But my mind was relieved of all fear that I had broken my parents' hearts; and the thought that I had been so readily forgotten at home knit my heart still more closely to him whom alone now I had to love and cherish.

I was not, however, without some curiosity regarding the noble suitor, whose tardy presentation I had evaded by giving up my home, and trusting myself to entirely new experiences.

And soon I found that a very Liberal journal was full of the sayings and doings of the Marquis of Tremaine. Now he was chairman at a philanthropic meeting; then was heralded as the promoter of some valuable charity, for which he got subscriptions and laid the foundation-stone. He was the friend of reforms, the ruthless sweeper-away of abuses, from those sanctioned and upheld by his own order down to the mediocracy of money and vested interests. He was the friend of the poor man, whose right to live and enjoy himself he so strenuously maintained, that a stranger would have surmised that, in spite of his nobility, he must have risen from the ranks himself.

I mused greatly over this discovery of mine; and at last, overwhelmed by these proofs of his popularity among not merely his political friends, but by the constrained and involuntary homage of his political adversaries, owned I must have been prejudiced against him in a most absurd manner.

I acknowledged this one evening, when my husband—whose time was now so much taken up by parliamentary debating (for he owned that he held an appointment of some value to his income in parliamentary reporting) that he was but seldom at home till very late—was busily employed in correcting some proof-sheets.

He half laughed when I made this confession.

"Do you repent, Cecy?" he said. "It was a sacrifice, I know, my dear love, to give up the prospect of being a marchioness and queen of the fashionable and philanthropic world, instead of humdrumming here in Doughty street with a fellow like myself—a 'hewer of wood and a drawer of water' compared to the brilliant Tremaine; but I told you that, in the slang of the day, Tremaine is not half a bad fellow."

"I do not repent at all," I answered. "I am much happier as a poor man's wife than I could have been with that cold-hearted philanthropist, who was certainly in no hurry to come and claim me for a bride. I am always under the impression that he quarreled with

the Duke of Carruthers on my account, and that at last expediency alone forced him to find his way to Creswycke Hall."

My husband looked up from his papers.

"You forget, my love, how you resolutely declared you would not see him, nor accept him if he offered."

"How do you know that?" said I, sharply. "It was before your charming performance in masquerade, that I said those things. I said it from pique, I believe. No woman likes to be slighted. Besides, I wished to choose for myself. If I repented of anything, my dear Herbert, it is for not boxing your ears for supposing me such a whimsical, fickle personage. But now I have a question that I have long desired to ask. How and where did you first see me, that you dared enter into such a mad scheme as that by which you saved my life and won my heart?"

He laid down his pen.

"This, Cecy, is scarcely the time for my confession; but, come, I am weary of work, and, after all, you have a right to ask. Do you recollect, my love, when you were about sixteen, a certain picnic got up by Lord Creswycke for your special behoof, to which all your young girl friends were invited?"

"That I do," I replied. "Mamma invited the young Marquis, I remember, but he sent an excuse."

"Just after dinner was over," said my husband, sitting down beside me, and stealing his arm around my waist, "an artist, who was sketching with a young friend or pupil, for he was both, met with an accident. A branch of the tree beneath which he sat fell on him, and, grazing his forehead, rendered him for a time senseless."

"I perfectly remember. We thought the poor man was dead."

"A group of lovely girls surrounded the wounded artist and his boyish friend, but none offered the slightest aid, unless staring helplessly at the hurt stranger was such, except one, the loveliest of all those fair, helpless, fine young ladies. She flew for water; she stanched the blood from the bruised temples, and then brought wine to revive him. The boy who supported his friend's head, and who chafed the hands which seemed to him still in death, asked some one near who the young lady was, who seemed to him a ministering angel of goodness. The answer was, 'Miss Cecilia Creswycke.' When his poor wounded friend revived, and Miss Creswycke had prevailed on her mother to place their carriage at his disposal to convey him to his inn, the boy, infatuated and charmed no less with the kind heart and energy of Cecilia Creswycke than with her beauty, had registered a silent vow that, in the years to come, she, and no other woman, should be his wife."

"How intensely romantic! I remember the artist quite well. Of you, if you were his youthful friend, I have not the slightest recollection."

"Yet the boy, who, by the way, even then thought himself, I believe, a man, fulfilled his vow, and" (pressing my lips fondly) "is now your husband."

"So that was the motive! But how did Hessian get you into our house?"

"She had at one time been my nurse."

"How? I always understood from mamma that she had originally been in the service of the late Duchess of Carruthers."

"Before she served the Duchess she had been in the employment of my mother."

"I never hear you speak of your parents, my dear Herbert. Is it painful to ask you about them?"

"Not very; but I would rather not say much. My father was the younger son of a good family; but he was thrown in the society of a farmer's daughter while reading with a tutor who was in orders in the neighborhood of the young girl. She was not educated then. In after years, when I was old enough to form a judgment, I thought, as I still think, that she was the most thoroughly educated woman I had ever known. I have not altered that opinion

now. I mean my mother, who had a powerful incentive, formed her mind by reading and intense study. My father aided her. His tutor became also hers. He did more, this clergyman. He connived at their secret attachment, married them, and lost thereby his patronage, which lay in the hands of my father's father; lost also his curacy, and became a ruined man. My father was cast off, and for years resided with his father-in-law, the farmer, aiding and helping the latter in the management of his farm. My father, who, as I have said, was a younger son, ultimately, through the death of his three brothers, succeeded to his father's estate, and my mother and he lived happily enough for some years; then she died, just when I was at an age to know and estimate her value. It was possibly because at the precise time I met you, Cecilia, having then not long lost her, I traced in you a likeness to that dear dead mother, believing that in her youth she must have exactly resembled you, that I was attracted so strongly as to register a rash vow I thank Heaven I have been permitted to fulfill!"

He paused a few moments, and then said, "Of subsequent family misfortunes do you wish me, my dear, to speak? I own I would rather not."

I threw myself into his arms.

"I know one thing—I am not, never was, worthy of you. I am an angel! My dear Herbert, I was proud and ambitious, disdainful and—"

But I was not allowed to proceed. My lips were closed with kisses from the husband who had not yet ceased to be my lover.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MISSES SCHWEITZER.

I HAVE said nothing as yet about the owners of our Doughty street lodgings, for, paradoxically speaking, they were two persons, and yet only one.

Sisters, and single ladies of uncertain age (except the certainty that they were no longer very youthful), the Misses Schweitzer were supposed to rule the house; whereas, in reality, it was only the elder sister who was the presiding genius.

It was a day or two after our arrival there that I first made her acquaintance, just at the very moment when Jennings and myself were measuring out chintz and sewing rings on our lace curtains, which were to go inside the heavy scarlet damask ones which adorned the four windows of our drawing-room (for, being a corner house we encroached into the next street).

The maid-servant, who, with a young man ditto that slept out of the house, and seemed to be a general factotum and jack-of-all-trades, comprised the entire establishment, came in to say that Miss Ethelinda would be glad to wait on me if I was at leisure; and, as I was never likely to be more so, when I fully understood that the lady with so high-flown a name was my landlady, or one of them, at least, I answered that I should be very glad to have a little chat with her.

Accordingly, five minutes afterward, a rustle of silk, and a knock at the door heralded her approach.

Miss Schweitzer was in appearance by no means unworthy her romantic name. She might have been nearly forty, but without the least approach to making up, or pretension of any kind, except that she was handsomely dressed—and I never saw her anything else—she looked young for that age. Her complexion was dark, her features strongly marked, and, till you knew her well, prim, the lips being firmly set.

Directly she opened those lips to speak, I knew she was a woman both kind-hearted and cultivated.

"The rooms suit you, I hope, Mrs. Spenser?" she said.

"Perfectly," I replied, "thank you; but I am in want of amusement, and, to make these strange chairs and tables look a little more resembling the home I have left, gives me that. Besides, I want to surprise Mr. Spenser. I

hope you will forgive me the liberty I am taking. Everything here is convenient; only—”

“More useful than ornamental,” she said, with a smile. “Only Rosalberta said to me, ‘Perhaps they don’t like the rooms, and the parlors might suit them better,’ but, as I said, there was the street-door, and more noise and draught than up here; but no doubt the rooms will look twice as well.”

“Rosalberta!” I said, bewildered by this second romantic name.

“My youngest sister,” she replied. “She never interferes with the house, only advises; and she has so much common sense, which is a very rare thing, that I almost always take her advice. Pray, however, do what you like with the rooms. The thing of importance, now, is what will you have for dinner?”

Now, this was a difficult question, and a matter about which I was quite inexperienced, and Jennings was very little better. I knew how much money I had to spend, but did not know if I was expected to take a basket, and go to market, or what to provide. I looked embarrassed.

Miss Ethelinda soon relieved me.

“Just give me an idea of the style in which you mean to live,” she said, “and I will save you all the trouble, and spare you all the expense I can. I am a landlady, it is true, but, for all that, not an ogre.”

“We must live plainly,” I said, “but well. Beef and mutton, I suppose, and that kind of thing; that was what Mr. Spenser said. But if I were to go to the shops, I should not know what to buy.”

“A baron of beef, perhaps,” Miss Schweitzer said, smiling. “Will a joint and pudding, with a salad now and then, be the thing?”

“That will just do!” I said, clapping my hands. “Don’t you think so, Jennings?”

Jennings said, “Remarkably well, she thought.”

“And next day,” said Miss Ethelinda, “the joint can be warmed up, and cutlets will make out the dinner.”

“How nice! You seem to know all about it.”

“It would be droll if I did not; Many of my lodgers ask me to board them; and, as I do not want to live on them, I cater as cheaply as I can. I shall enter each day’s money expended on food in a little book, and you can pay me every week. Your groceries your maid can purchase for you. In a week you will be able to estimate the average sum of your expenses, and I recommend you to keep a book of your outlay in housekeeping. I shall not cheat you; but it is possible that, seeing your inexperience, the tradespeople will not be able to resist that temptation.”

“You are a gem of a landlady!” I said, laughing. “Does your sister approve these philanthropic dealings of yours with the lodgers?”

“Who—Rosalberta?” said she. “Poor child! She lets me do exactly as I please. She has such an opinion of me that I cannot do wrong in her eyes. Well, it is pleasant to know there is some one who believes in you. Good-morning, Mrs. Spenser! I shall begin to-day with roast beef, and a nice little pudding of my own invention.”

I took such a liking to Ethelinda Schweitzer—her sister was but an echo of her, though well-meaning enough—that when Herbert was late, I used to descend to the basement of the house, where they had quite a roomy suite of apartments, and listen to the histories of former lodgers; and, indeed, some of their present ones.

I often thought if the sisters had known my history, what a nine days’ wonder it would have been for them! There was an elder sister, it seemed, who also kept a boarding-house at the West End.

These three sisters, I heard—for Rosalberta was just as communicative as her sister, and did nothing but work at her needle and gos ip—were the children of a lady, who, being the sole child of a wealthy pawnbroker,

at his death inherited his money, and who, when her own mistress, married a young Swiss, then a promising tenor at the Italian opera.

She had had sense enough to get her money settled on herself; but his influence over her, and his extravagance, by degrees reduced her income. Then the tenor’s voice broke, and instead of being able to repay his wife’s advances, he had to study the cornet, on which instrument he was sufficiently proficient to get pretty well employed in the orchestras of the London theaters.

Indolent, however, by temperament, Mr. Schweitzer worked only by fits and starts till his wife’s death, by which he succeeded to a small annuity, and on that retired to his native Switzerland.

The three girls were left each a small independence, and thus Ethelinda had decided to purchase a house, and increase her income by letting lodgings.

My husband was well pleased that in his absence I had these ladies to converse with, for ladies they were, in mind and accomplishments, though they did let lodgings.

It was Ethelinda who often accompanied me to the opera, when Herbert could not spare time to go with me, or who took me to see the latest new play.

She knew, in virtue of her father, many artists and literary men, and could generally get a box or an opera stall when so minded.

“More estimable and respectable,” said my husband, one day, “than very many of the fashionable London women.” We were discussing the Misses Schweitzer. “With most of them, what can you converse upon unless it be Ritualism, or Worth’s last new costume? Give me the women who earn their own living earnestly and reputably. It is they who deserve rights”—which I declared to be a reflection on my helplessness, and an undeserved satire.

“But then,” said I, slyly, “you are an outrageous Radical.”

CHAPTER XII.

A BIRTH AND A DEATH.

TIME passed quickly in these halcyon days. I had but one grief—the estrangement of my parents, and that I could not but acknowledge I had merited.

My sorrow, it is true, was soothed by the tenderness and devotion of my husband; and then, as the months glided away, I awoke to the knowledge that I, too, should one day become a mother, and this discovery made my reflections against myself more bitter.

I had now, like *Desdemona*, a divided duty, but I sighed for reconciliation, and could only hope that my baby might prevail where I had failed.

Meanwhile, when Herbert had leisure, we went for a few days into the country; and, taking lodgings at some primitive farm-house, spent days in wandering about the lanes and meadows or hills and valleys, and enjoyed our holidays like two children escaped from school—I sketching, and my husband reading by my side, ever and anon criticising my art-pretensions.

“Not bad that, my little wife. On my word, Cecilia, I don’t see why you should not goin for high art. You might become famous, and here is your humble servant ready to write any number of critiques on your pictures. No mean advantage, allow me to observe.”

“Do mind your ‘Horace,’ or your ‘Tennyson,’ or whatever you are making a pretense to read. I fear my existence is too idle and luxurious, Herbert. I wish I could, indeed, be useful enough to earn money.”

“You are eminently useful, my dearest, in being so powerful an incentive to my earning money. I believe that naturally I am a very idle fellow; and, if I had not you to look after, might become a perfect Bohemian. But I fear, my darling, this prosaic kind of life of ours is boring you. Shall I bring home some friends for change? How would you like to be

introduced to the Marquis of Tremaine, for example?”

“Are you so intimate?”

“I could be if I chose. I often see him; and, without vanity, he is very well disposed toward me. We need but little to become very intimate.”

“All things considered, I decline,” is my reply. “But do tell me,” I continue, “what is the man like?”

“Like? Like a man.”

“A good-looking one?”

“Humph! I can not quite say. He has two legs, and arms, and eyes, a nose, and a mouth—the last does him credit. I have seen him occasionally eating his dinner, or his lunch, whichever it is men get to eat, at the Westminster Government Manufactory.”

“Irreverent being!” I exclaim; “do not scoff at your betters. Lord Tremaine helps to make the laws of his country. You only report them.”

“Cecilia, I have an uncomfortable kind of feeling that if you really knew this Tremaine, you would fall over head and ears in love with him.”

“Your flattering opinion of me, my dear Herbert, must have greatly increased since our marriage. How quickly the enthusiastic lover merges into the suspicious husband; but even your jests would be a barrier to such an introduction, supposing it were feasible.”

I was slightly piqued, and henceforth determined to introduce Lord Tremaine’s name no more.

About this time my health began to be affected, and there were no more pleasant walks or play-going for me. Country excursions, too, were quite put aside.

But Ethelinda was as good a doctor as if she had taken a degree. Ill as I was at times, I should have been worse but for her ever-ready prescriptions, though certainly she had her crotches.

Herbalism was one of them, homœopathy was another; and her last, but not least, predilection was for spiritualism. Nothing would prevent her from attending lectures and *seances* innumerable.

She had a fine faith in spirit-rapping, which always occurred to her at a certain hour of the night.

This belief she had adopted, Rosalberta declared, ever since a medium had resided in their house. The medium had since married, from which time, it appeared, her spiritualism had deserted her.

Said medium was now in America, but Ethelinda declared that it was impossible to doubt her sincerity or the reality of her powers. When we used to discuss these things by my landlady’s fireside corner, and I expressed my wonder that a person of her good common sense could believe in what I called useless nonsense and positive profanity, she would put an end to it by saying, “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy,” and so silence, but certainly not convince, me. This seeming to me Miss Schweitzer’s only weak point, I forbore teasing her about it. I respected her so much that I could respect even her prejudices. Once, when I asked her to tell me of what good Spiritualism could be, even if it made a standing in the world, she replied “that it would alter and totally revolutionize the world; that society and human nature would be on a different footing altogether.”

I might not credit the reality of the manifestations she was so fond of visiting, but of her own sincerity and conviction I never for a moment entertained a doubt. Acting on her advice, I maintained my cheerfulness in the best way I could till the period arrived when my baby was born. After his birth my strength of endurance had wholly collapsed, and for weeks I lay between life and death. It was then that Miss Schweitzer’s admirable talent for nursing came into full play. I had, of course, a regular nurse, but Ethelinda supervised her, and saw that she did her duty. My life hung so entirely on the perfect quiet

in which I was kept that even Herbert was almost excluded from my room, and dared only look at me from a distance lest I should see and recognize him. Good nursing, my doctor said, at last had, under Heaven, alone preserved my life. Yet, when I was able to see, hear, and understand, I thought when I saw my darling baby, he was cheaply purchased even at the expense of such an illness. When I was able to converse with his father, my first thought was to inquire about my parents.

"Had he written?"

"He had."

"What was their answer?"

"None; but at the time he had written they had gone to the south of France. Lady Creswyke was not quite well, Mrs. Hesing had written him word. I was not to fret; something assured him all would be right if I would but have patience."

"Do you forget, love," I said to my husband, "that you are father to a young baron-presumptive? It may possibly be but an empty title, but a title it will be."

"I must first lose you, my Cecilia!" was my husband's answer; "and that I would not do to be the father of all the barons in Christendom."

Then came my convalescence, and my son's christening; and at last I was fairly well, and able, to my great delight, to nurse him; when, one morning, when Herbert's letters came to him, one with a deep black border claimed my notice.

"Good heavens, Herbert!" I exclaim; "tell me what has occurred! My father—my mother—it is one of them, I know! Oh, to die and not forgive me! I must die, too!"

But he had opened his letter, and I was struck with the look of deep, stern grief on his face.

He stood reading it, and then looking far off, as if the past or the future were facing him.

My sobs and wailing aroused him at last.

"Hush, hush, my love—my wife! It is not your parents, rest satisfied. It is—"

"Oh, Heaven!—whom?"

"He who told you he was my oldest friend—he might have said my best! I have none left now but you, Cecilia!"

"And our boy!" I said, throwing myself into his arms.

"Ay! When we ourselves are parents we feel and know! But I must leave you, my love. I must go down into the country. Possibly I shall be absent a week—I will not be longer. You can write, my darling."

He penciled an address.

I saw it was to the care of the Rev. James Cullenford, Thornhill, the clergyman who had married us.

In an hour Herbert had departed.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPIRITS WERE RIGHT.

WHEN I had time, after Herbert was gone, to sit down and reflect, I felt more than ever that my husband had held back some facts from me in his domestic history.

That he was grieved exceedingly and heartstricken by the death of this old gentleman, whom he had represented, or at least inferred, to be a distant relative, was so plain that common sense told me Mr. Spenser, as he designated him, was closely allied to Herbert. I felt positive that he was the surviving parent of my husband.

Yet a man who could give costly diamonds as a wedding gift could hardly be a poor man. How, then, was it that his son had to work so hard for a living?

As I could not settle the question at all to my satisfaction, and baby being asleep, I took myself down-stairs to Ethelinda Schweitzer's sanctum.

"You need not send up any more six o'clock dinners," I said, "till Mr. Spenser's return. Lunch will do very well at two o'clock for Jennings and myself."

"For how long?" said Miss Schweitzer.

"A week, I suppose," I replied. "My husband has been summoned into the country by the death of a relative."

"Ah!" said Ethelinda, laying down her work, and digging her needle into the pin-cushion as if she were sharpening that little tool; "and when he comes back, my dear Mrs. Spenser, you will not eat many more dinners in Doughty street, I fear."

In the course of my intimacy with Ethelinda I had told her my own history, partly because I liked and trusted her, and partly because I desired to ascertain if Jennings had been silent, which I found, to my great pleasure, she had.

"What put our leaving into your head?" I now asked.

"The spirits!" said Ethelinda, in her grand, serious manner.

"The spirits!" said I, laughing. "When?"

"Last night," said Miss Schweitzer. "I had a manifestation, while Rosalberta was out buying groceries, which, you know, we always get in on Fridays, and it was revealed to me that I should soon lose the presence of friends I prized. You will forgive me calling you friends," she said, "for I have never had any one in our house for whom I entertained such a real friendship."

"Never," echoed Rosalberta, kindly.

"I got up, and shook hands heartily with both of them.

"I am only too glad to tell you both," said I, "that I found prized friends here, where I had looked only for strangers. Besides," to Ethelinda "are you not my boy's godmother? And even if I were received at home again, how could I forget that you must both come to Creswyke Hall for a holiday, when your own house wants painting, or the lodgings are empty. But how I talk! You are as likely to be sent for as I, the prodigal daughter of my father's house."

I burst into tears as I spoke, for, by this time, I had deemed my exile was to be perpetual. I soon overcame this weakness, however.

"I cannot miss this opportunity," said I, "of saying how much I thank you, and how much I owe to your society. My mind was rusting, and you aroused it. I have to thank you that I can now speak French and German without being ashamed of myself; that I am a musician, whereas before I was only an amateur, and but a poor one; to say nothing of domestic economy, at which I have been, I hope, an apt scholar."

"Certainly, my dear," from Ethelinda. "I would trust you with my own housekeeping."

"Which is no mean praise from you," I answered. "In short, I have gained nothing but good from you; and, beyond my sincere esteem and friendship, what have I had to return it with?"

"My dear, your youthful presence and gayety, which has been as if a heap of birds and flowers were all over this dull old house; your darling baby, which has been an endless source of delight to me and Rosalberta—hasn't it, Rose?"

Rose gives an emphatic affirmative; and presently, the handy young man coming in to say that cutlets are required for the parlors directly, Ethelinda has to leave her work and our conversation to see that they are properly prepared.

My kind hostess! how sorry I should be to leave her, yet how glad to see the dear faces at home! However, she need not fear, for if I went for a visit, I must return to London. We must preserve our independence. No; dear Doughty street will not be deserted, in spite of the spirits.

Meanwhile, I receive daily letters from Herbert, the merit of which appears to me to consist in saying a great deal, and revealing nothing.

"My relative's funeral is fixed for the end of the week. His affairs need urgent attention. There is only myself to do this. Lawyers are tiresome to a degree, etc. I have heard all the news of Creswyke Hall. Your parents are in the best of health. Rest

satisfied with that. When I come home it will be time enough for details. Give several kisses to our darling for his father, and accept thousands for yourself, from

YOUR DEVOTED
HERBERT."

And with such missives I am forced to be content, till the week has lengthened into a fortnight, at the end of which a cab drives up to the door.

The whole house is in a commotion, and I am, at length, clasped once more in my husband's arms. He looks worn and somewhat haggard; certainly much thinner than when we parted.

"How ill you look!" is my uncomplimentary commentary. "I never saw you look so bad!"

"So would you look, possibly," he replies, "had you gone through as much business as I have had to achieve."

"But on whose account?" I ask, bewildered.

"My love, would it worry you much to learn that my—my friend's death has brought us an addition to our income?"

"For your sake I should be glad. I am very well contented as I am. You don't mean, I hope, to quit Doughty street? Ethelinda Schweitzer has predicted the fact. She has had especial information from the spirits. She will break her heart. Now tell me all about it."

But Herbert seems embarrassed. He has had a handsome legacy left him—in fact, left sole executor, and—So he stammers and makes such a mess of his explanation that I rise, and placing my hand on his lips, effectually shut them.

"Tell me no more, my love," I say, gravely. "I want to know nothing that you desire to hide from me when it suits you. Doubtless I shall know all these secrets. At present, do eat your dinner; and if you must talk, talk to baby."

He affects to laugh, but evidently looks on my words as a relief, and says no more.

Next day, he is out—engaged, he says, on urgent business. And thus two or three more days pass over.

I had dressed myself in black, out of compliment to my husband; but on his return, after giving a glance at my black dress, he expressed so decided a wish that I should assume the deepest mourning possible, that, in acceding to his desire, I was more than ever confirmed in my belief that he had lost a father.

"I suppose," I said to him, one day, at breakfast, "you have seen the papers during your absence."

"Scarcely," was the reply. "Why? What is the news?"

"Do you not know, then, the Duke of Carruthers is dead?" See; I kept the announcement for you. It is here. 'On the 27th May, the Duke of Carruthers, at Carruthers Castle.' So that the Marquis of Tremaine is now Duke of Carruthers."

"He is indeed!" said my husband, with something like a moan. "Are you grieved, Cecy, that you lost the chance of being a Duchess?"

"You silly fellow! I would not be one on any account!"

"But suppose you could not help it?"

"I can suppose nothing so absurd."

Ethelinda's handy young man here knocked at the door, and brought in the letters. One—two for Mr. Spenser; one, in the broadest of mourning, for Mrs. Spenser, bringing, as the phrase goes, the heart of that person right into her mouth.

Another minute, and it was opened and read.

"Herbert! oh, Herbert!—help me!—support me!" He rushed to me. "Oh, my love—my love, read that! I am forgiven—and you! Nay, I can hardly see! Read it out! Oh, Heaven, have mercy on me!"

It ran thus:

"MY DARLING CECILIA—

"I am not much of a scribe at any time. It will be enough, therefore, if I say, as soon as you receive this, come to your mother and myself. All is forgotten and will be forgiven. Do not delay."

"Your loving father,

"PHILIP CRESWYKE."

"Bring your husband and your baby."

"What can it mean?" I ask, hysterically.

"It means exactly what it says, I presume," said my husband, smiling. "So rally, my dear Cecilia, and let us obey the command with as little delay as may be. Let me see! The train leaves at two. You see, Ethelinda's 'spirits' were right, after all! We are leaving Doughty street."

"But to return, I suppose?" I say.

"Doubtful, my love—at least, for some time, I suspect. I trust the spirits will provide Miss Schweitzer with other lodgers. We cannot expect her to keep these."

And at one o'clock we are all ready to depart, Jennings and myself with tears in our eyes, and Ethelinda and Rosalberta in the deepest gloom.

I cry "Farewell!" as I get into a cab. I add, "Only for a time;" but Ethelinda shakes her head, and says:

"Who was right? You won't laugh any more at the spirits."

The express which whirls us to Oakshire does not go, I verily believe, so fast as my heart beats.

Its vibrations come so thick and fast, as we drive up to the door of Creswyke Hall, that, to this day, I have little recollection of how I got into that well-remembered home of my girlish days.

I only know that on the threshold of the breakfast-room I was enfolded in the arms of my father; that my mother wept over me, and kissed me a thousand times; and that my boy was nearly crushed altogether, so great were the raptures of his grandparents concerning him.

In the midst of our confusion, I remember, too, that I was not a little confounded by seeing my father and my husband shake hands cordially, like very old and intimate friends, and that Herbert kissed mamma familiarly on her brow and cheek.

I had expected, of course, that he would have been received kindly, but with a certain degree of stiffness. Here, however, was nothing but the heartiest cordiality. Jennings and the baby having departed for the housekeeper's room, I looked on so utterly amazed that at last my father, sinking into his arm-chair by the fire, burst into such a torrent of laughter (in which my mother eventually joined almost as boisterously), that I feared an insanity of joy had seized them both.

I felt grave enough, but grew still graver, as I found my husband could not at last forbear joining in this mirth, though far more quietly. At last my father checked his merriment, with an obvious effort, wiping his eyes, which had literally overflowed with his glee.

"On my word," he said, with a sudden gravity almost as absurd as his laughter, "we ought to be ashamed of ourselves—my dear old friend Carruthers so recently in his grave; but at times he laughed almost as much as I have just done. And, Celia, you will laugh, too, one of these days, when you tell this jest to your own children."

"Perhaps," said Herbert, "Cecilia may not, after all, think there is any jest in the matter."

"But she must—she must!" reiterated my father. "Come here, my dear girl! So you ran away from father and mother, did you, with a stranger, on whom you looked as a servant, but who—the graceless dog!—persuaded you that he was a gentleman?"

"He is a gentleman," I said, indignantly; and, at that moment, devoutly wishing I had never returned to Creswyke Hall to be thus humiliated.

"So he is, my dear—no thanks to you," said Lord Creswyke. "How easy it was, too, to run away the doors left open, all the inmates of the Hall asleep, deaf, dumb, till you, my dear, had got clear off! And what a convenient clergyman you found, my pet! And what a splendid present tumbled into your lap from the skies, as it were, on your wedding morning! But, oh, Celia! what a pity you took all that trouble! Why couldn't you have

been comfortably married, with eight bridesmaids, wedding cake, and bouquets, and your father's and mother's blessing and consent?"

I burst into tears.

"Nay, my dear lord," from Herbert, who came and took me into his arms; "you are too hard on her."

"Seeing," said my parent, unheeding his remonstrance, "that you took the trouble, after all, to marry after this strange fashion, the very man whom your parents—nay, friends on both sides—desired you above all earthly things to—"

"What!" I said, starting to my feet—"what! Father! mother! my husband! Who—who are you?" turning to Herbert.

"Why, my little runaway," almost shrieked Lord Creswyke, in his eagerness lest my husband should forestall him, "if, like a properly educated young lady, as I fondly believed, Cecilia, you had been well versed in your 'Peerage,' you would not need to ask such a question, but might have outwitted the best-laid plot ever invented. Who was he? Why, Herbert Spenser, when you married him, my dear, known usually as the Marquis of Tremaine; but, at the present time, by the recent and much-regretted death of my old friend, his father, Duke of Carruthers. Well, as you would not listen to reason, and refused even to see the poor fellow, and give yourself a chance of liking him, we just laid a trap for you, my dear, romantic daughter, and you fell into it nicely. We made all things smooth for you; even your maid, Jennings, was commanded to do any thing you asked of her."

I am bound to acknowledge my color rose terribly high in my burning cheeks as I listened to all this.

"Can it be possible you could act such a part?"—to my husband.

"Can you forgive my deception, Cecilia?" he said, holding me still in his arms. "I half fear not; but our boy will plead for me. Yet my story was true. I first saw you in the manner I related. I registered a vow—a rash one, perhaps; but I have fulfilled it. I had the full concurrence of your parents and my own father. Hessian, though no relative, had been my nurse. My poor father witnessed our stolen wedding. Besides the housekeeper, only old Sampson knew who I was, and he was a faithful and trusted servant. I gained the dearest wish of my life, to be loved as a man, not wedded as a duke in perspective."

"Oh, you abominable traitor!" I replied. "As if I would have so married you if you had been the heir to fifty dukedoms!"

Need I say more? I think not.

I pretended to be very angry for some time, but secretly, perhaps, was not quite so angry as I affected to be.

I knew how dearly I was beloved. I was a happy wife and mother—a grateful and loving daughter.

I could listen at last with tolerable equanimity when my father, who loved to tease me, would now and then hail me as "A Duchess in Spite of Herself."

THE END.

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