THE GARDEN OF MEMORIES

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THE GARDEN OF MEMORIES

BY

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CONTENTS

THE GARDEN OF MEMORIES

PROLOGUE

From the house a broad white stone path runs to the very heart of the garden and there opens out into a wide circle in the middle of which is set a sundial, and here too are placed some great benches of the same white stone; where, when the heat of the sun is not too great, it is pleasant enough to sit and watch the

glory of the flowers.

They are wealthy folk, the Elmacotts, and they love their garden and pride themselves on it and hold that in all Sussex no soil can produce finer flowers and sweeter fruit, and though in this year of grace seventeen hundred and three the house, which is the Manor House of the Parish of Homewood, has no great antiquity, being scarce more than sixty years old, it has about it that completeness, those niceties of detail, the neatness and the order and the well being that are found only in the home which is ruled by a house-proud mistress.

And Madame Elmacott is proud of her house, proud of her garden, proud of the flowers that grow in it and above all proud of her stalwart sons, Master Nat and Master Dick, who are at this time with his Grace of Marlborough in Flanders, fighting their country's battles.

To-day the sun shines on the garden and the flowers stir gently, swaying in the light breeze that also lifts the white dimity at the open windows of the house, whence comes the sweet tinkling of a spinet, the keys of which are touched by the skilled white fingers of Mistress Phyllis Elmacott.

The tall hollyhocks that cast wavering blue shadows on the white stone pathway nod to one another in the breeze, nod, it seems, knowingly, for from the pathway one may see into the pleasant room where the spinet and its fair player are and seeing these may also see the handsome figure of the Captain, who leans upon the spinet, the better to see into those bright eyes that have brought him home to England and Sussex from across the seas, though at this time in the service of his Grace the Captain General there is much to be done and much to be won.

He has but waited to see and share in the victory of Donauwort and then has come hastening home on the wings of love and with the merry peal of marriage bells a-ringing in his ears.

But it is not of these, not of the dashing Captain in his red coat and fair-haired Mistress Elmacott, who thinks him the most perfect and wonderful, as well as the bravest and handsomest of all created beings. It is of the garden and of a lad who sits on the grassy bank at the edge of the lake and watches with eyes, that yet seem scarcely to see, the slim white figure of a maiden wrought of stone. She stands up from the green waters, in the center of the lake and on her sun-kissed shoulder she holds a pitcher, from which the glittering water is flung aloft into, the air to fall with a pleasant tinkling, back into the green pool beneath.

And so silent, so motionless does he sit here, that the swallows that now and again skim the water, the dragon flies in all the glory of their green and crimson, and blue sheen that dart hither and thither take no heed of him, no more heed than if he too were of senseless stone.

In all the colour, in all the glory of the garden, he is the sombre, the one sombre note. His clothes are drab, his shoes are stout and thick and ungainly and clasped with great brass buckles. His hands are the hands of a man who toils for his living, rough and hardened by spade and hoe and rake and scythe, and stained by the good earth of the garden. His eyes that stare so unceasingly on that white stone figure are blue, his face is lean and tanned, his neck too is tanned deeply to the very shoulders where the coarse shirt falls open.

Straight and strong and courageous he is. Has he not listened with bated breath and with quick beating heart to the brave stories told in the bar parlour of the "Fighting Cocks" in Stretton. Cross? Has he not watched the Serjeant who has told these thrilling tales, of every one of which, who should be the hero but the Serjeant himself, in his fine red coat and his crossed belts and his tall hat, that makes him, fine man that he is, seem almost a giant?

He has done well here in Stretton and Homewood and at Bush Corner and in all those other quiet places, has the Serjeant. There are at least a score of fine young Sussex lads, even at this very moment on their way to Harwich, en route for Flanders and glory, who have been wheedled from field and wood and garden and alehouse and stable by the Serjeant's persuasive tongue, his jolly laugh and his generous hand.

And Allan Pringle, sitting here by the green pool, clasping his strong brown chin with his hands, knows that he too would have been of that score, but for one reason—one reason that now, alas, is no more!

It is the first grief he has ever known and it is a bitter one, for what more bitter sorrow can youth feel than for wasted hopes, for broken faith, for misplaced love?

Only Betty and his love for her, only the happiness that she had promised should one day be his, had deafened him to the persuasive eloquence of the Serjeant.

But it is not too late now, others will hearken to the Serjeant and set off for Harwich and he will be among the next. Yes, he will be among the next to go, and pray God that he may never return!

He does not hear a light step on the long stone pathway, for it is scarce heavier than a bird might make. From the house a little maid comes hurrying. Now she stands hesitatingly and looks about her, her finger on her lips, as one a little fearful, a little anxious. Again and yet again, she pauses, as she looks about her, then comes to where beyond the great hedge of clipped yew trees the green waters of the pool reflect the golden, sunshine.

And now she sees him and stands watching, a tender smile on her lips. A dainty slip of a maiden is she, with hair that gleams gold under her cap, the soft rounded arms are bare to the dimpled elbows, save for the thin black lace mittens,

through which her white skin shines.

Though he, the silent, solitary figure sitting beside the pool is but ten paces from her, yet she hesitates, half a score of times, making a timorous step and then pausing before the next, her blue eyes filled, now with mischief and love and now clouded by some fear. And then suddenly she makes a brave little run to him and drops lightly on her knees behind him and lifts her hands and clasps them over his eyes.

"And you—you would leave your Betty? Oh, Allan, you would leave your Betty who loves you and go away to the cruel wars?" she sobs.

He has taken her hands, has taken them strongly in his hold and holding them yet, he turns to her. "Why did you come, why did you come to me, Betty?"

"Because," and the blue eyes are lifted to his filled with an innocence and candour that even he, jealous and despairing though he is, cannot but recognise, "because I do love thee so and cannot let thee go!"

"And why, loving me, Betty, do you suffer the kisses of such a man as Timothy Burnand, a rascally tinker and a thieving poacher, a man whose hand I would not have touch thee, Betty?"

Into her face there flames a great flush, a look of anger, then it dies out and the laughter comes rippling to her lips and into her eyes come back the mischief and the love and a little pride too, for she realises that he is jealous of her, this man she loves and though jealousy be a sin, yet it is not without its sweetness, too, for say what the wiseacres may, jealously is oftentimes a proof of love.

"And you saw—" she cries, "Allan, you—saw—ugh!" She makes a little gesture, a little grimace. "Did you think that I invited, that I welcomed him? Did you think that I bore his kiss with patience? Go and seek him now and look for the red mark upon his face! He came on me unawares and then all suddenly—" she pauses. "Allan," she says pleadingly, "Allan, you will not go, you will not go, my dear, you will not go and leave me?" And sobbing she is in his arms. And so for Allan Pringle the sun shines out again and the flowers are blooming brightly and the little slim maiden of stone from the centre of the pool seems to throw the glittering water higher and yet higher into the air as though in joy that all is well between these two, who hold one another so tightly, who are mingling their tears and their laughter and their kisses, now that the cloud has passed.

* * * * *

There are no flowers in the garden now, for the garden of Homewood Manor and all the world beside lies under a pall of white, for the winter is here, the winter of seventeen hundred and five, which is remembered by all men as a winter of bitter cold, of great frosts and heavy snows.

In a tiny cottage that stands a bare quarter of a mile on the Stretton Road from the Homewood gates, a man is on his knees beside a bed.

And that bed holds all his world, all that the world can give him, all that makes life sweet, and his heart is black and bitter with suffering and despair and cries out against God that he, who was rich only in her and in her love, must lose her now, must spend the rest of his days solitary, and heartbroken.

His eyes are on the sweet white face, on those lips once so red and now so pale, but which even yet have a smile for him, a smile of wonderful tenderness and undying love. He takes no heed of the fretful cry that comes from the cradle, for there is no other in all his world now, but her, she who is so soon to leave him.

"Betty, my Betty, I cannot let thee go! Oh, remember, Betty, once when I would have left thee, you called me back and I came. I am calling, calling to you now, my life, my sweet, I cannot let you go! Stay with me, stay with me, for you are all my life and the world is black without you; stay with me!"

She would lift her thin little hand to caress, to touch his face, but the strength is not hers to do it.

"Allan, take me, hold me in your arms, hold me tightly, my dear, hold me tightly," she says.

And he puts his strong arms about her. God pity him, how light she is, how small, how fragile a thing this, that death is taking from him!

His very soul is in rebellion against fate, he is mad with the suffering, mad with his impotence. He can do nothing save watch her die, watch her fade out of his life; and it must be soon "A matter of hours," the doctor from Stretton had said and that was long ago and now, now it is but a matter of minutes.

"Allan, I wanted, always, to die like this, with your arms about me, your dear eyes the last of earth that I shall see—ah! Allan, it is now——"

"Betty, Betty, I am calling, calling to you, come back, beloved, come back!"

And then he knows that it is useless, she is leaving him, slipping away, no matter how tightly he may hold her. It is good-bye, their last good-bye and the sad word comes perhaps unconsciously to his lips.

And then, is it fancy? Is it some trick of his tortured brain? For as he watches, the dear lips move and it seems to him that the message they whisper to him with her dying breath is this: "It is not good-bye!"

He is holding her against his breast, he is kissing those lips that for the first time give not back kiss for kiss. He is calling to her from his aching, breaking heart, but she has passed beyond the sound of his voice, though the smile on her dead lips is still for him.

And those last words, were they real? Did they pass her lips with her dying breath, were they meant for him in pity and compassion and love?

”It is not good-bye!”

CHAPTER I
IN THE GARDEN OF DREAMS

A girl, a slip of a maid with sunny hair and wonderful blue eyes, stood beside a crumbling old rose-red brick wall. She looked up the long country road and she looked down it, there was no one, not a soul in sight. So she thrust the too of one small and broken boot into a crevice of the wall, made a little spring and caught at the top, then dragged herself up till she sat, flushed and triumphant, on the coping.

She was a village girl and her dress was of print, well washed, well mended, skimpy, too, for her slight figure, slender though it was, for it had been hers for three years, and a dress that is originally made for a maiden of fourteen is apt to be small when worn by a maid of seventeen.

It was a demure and a very sweet face, the eyes big and strangely dreamy, the white skin of her face and neck powdered lightly with tiny golden freckles, her hair a deep red gold.

And wonderful hair it was, wonderfully untidy, too, so rebellious that it spurned all hairpins and fretted and struggled agains ribbons and tapes.

So now, she sat on top of the old rose red wall and looked down on the other side and saw a green tangle of brambles and grass and other things that grew rankly and luxuriously in that deserted place.

It was easier to descend the wall than to climb it, for here was a friendly tree that held out an inviting branch. Sho seized it, with small brown hands and lightly swung herself to the ground and then drew a sigh of relief and pleasure.

It was forbidden ground! Were there not many notices that announced the fact that ”Trespassers Would Be Prosecuted”? But she cared nothing for these, the notice that she dreaded most of all was ”This Desirable Historical Family Mansion, with Seven Hundred and Fifty Acres of Land, to be Sold.”

How she dreaded lest one day someone should come and see and covet this place and buy it and so shut her out forever from its delights and its pleasures. But that someone had not come yet.

So she made her way through the tangle of the growth, and came presently to a great garden, a wonderful garden once, but now a weed-grown place of

desolation.

Always this garden attracted her; to-day it brought a soft, tender light into her eyes as she stood with clasped hands and looked at it! She could see the old broken stone-paved pathway that led through the heart of the garden. She knew where that stone pathway opened out into a great circle in the midst of which was set a sundial, a sundial of stone chipped and green and the gnomon of the dial rusted away so that never again should its shadow fall upon the dial and mark the passing of the brighter hours. And about this circle, she knew, were old stone seats, green now like the pedestal of the dial and through the crevices of the paving grew and flourished and blossomed foxglove and dandelion, hollyhock and groundsell.

It had been a very, very beautiful garden long years ago, when ladies had tapped up and down the stone pathway in their little red-heeled shoes. Ladies who wore wide flounced skirts and powdered hair and cunning little patches on their fair cheeks. The garden with its roses, with its stately hollyhocks, its cloves and sweet-williams, its rosemary and lavender and all the sweet things that grow in English gardens, must have been a very lovely and perfect place then. But to this little maid with the dreamy eyes, it was a very wonderful place now. There was no other place like it in all the world; she had come here by sunshine and by moonlight, for sometimes in the night the garden had seemed to call to her and she had risen from her bed under the thatched roof of her old grandmother's cottage and had come stealing here to watch it, all bathed in the silver light of the moon. Perhaps she loved it best by moonlight, for then strange dreams seemed to come to her, dreams that never came when the sun was shining.

It seemed as if some kindly gentle hand touched lightly on the chords of memory, and then—the weeds and the tall rank grass, the decay of the present, the rioting growth, all were gone and she saw the old garden as it had once been, and she saw folk, strangely dressed folk, whom never in her life could she have met. These came and went, men with strange affected antics and gestures, gestures she might have smiled at, yet never did, and sweet, gracious ladies who moved with stately dignity through the old garden.

But always there was one, a young man whose clothes were plain and lacking all the finery that made the others seem so grand. She knew him for a servant, for one who worked in the garden, for often she would see him stooping over some trim bed, or with keen scythe sweeping the short grass.

They were dreams, only dreams that the old garden seemed to bring to her, when she came when the world was sleeping. Dreams, and yet she seemed to be so curiously awake.

But she never spoke of the old garden to the others, or told of the things that she saw here. Yet they knew she came, her grandmother rated her, "One day, my

maid, caught ee'll be," she said, "and then summoned very likely for trespassing!"

But the Law had no terrors for her, so she came whenever the garden seemed to be calling to her and the high rank grass brushed her thin cotton skirt and wetted the coarse stocking that clad her slim ankle.

For an hour she wandered about the garden, she stood by the sundial and watched the line of the path-way, sadly encroached on now by the weeds and the self-seeded flowers. A tall yew hedge, once clipped into fantastic shapes, but now reclaimed by Nature, shut out what had once been the rose garden, all weed grown now and the roses gone. And beyond the rose garden, the lake in which the great carp swam lazily and over which the birds skimmed! From the lake's centre rose a figure in stone, sadly battered and marred, the figure of a slim girl, a girl that might have been, herself, changed into stone.

She often came to look at this figure rising from the centre of the lake. It held a vase poised on its shoulder, once a fountain had been flung high into the air from this vase, but the fountain had been dead long ago. To-day a rook sat perched on one stone shoulder, but flew away when the living girl came down to the brink.

She had a feeling for this stone maiden, all so lonely in the midst of the desolation. She never came into the garden without coming to the edge of the lake and nodding her little head to the figure who never nodded back.

And so, for an hour she wandered about the garden. She picked none of the flowers that grew so freely here, for she would not dare take them back, mute tale tellers that they would be. So, empty handed as she came, she presently made her way back to the old wall and seeing that no one was in sight, gained the road and went on to the cottage in the village.

Her grandmother was leaning over the gate, an old woman with the face of a russet apple that has been kept till it has wrinkled and mellowed.

"So there you be, Betty Hanson, and seeing the way you hev come it be useless and idle it be, for me to ask you where hev you been tu!"

The girl did not answer.

"You've been in that garden again, spite o' all I du say. Betty Hanson, it hev got to cease, my maid, and cease it will now!"

"Why?" the girl said and there was a frightened look in her eyes.

"Why? for I hev been talking to Mr. Dalabey and he du tell me that there be several parties after the old house, and one rich American he very likely to buy it and if he du, then there be an end to all your philanderings in that there disgraceful old garden, my maid!"

"Buy it! Buy it!" She looked at her grandmother and in the blue eyes there was a look of actual fear. "'Ee don't mean as—as anyone be going to buy—buy it?" She whispered, "'ee be only saying it!"

"A rich American!" The old woman nodded her head, "and going to buy it, he be, and a dratted good job, too!" she added. "Look at your frock now, what a sight it be!"

But she did not look at her frock, her face had gone very pitifully white. She lifted her little brown hands and laid them against her breast and went into the cottage with tragedy and misery in her blue eyes.

"And a dratted good job, too," the old woman said again.

CHAPTER II
A MARRIAGE HAS BEEN ARRANGED

"My dear child, if I were to say that we had arrived at our last shilling, such a statement would not be quite true, for we had reached that unpleasant position some months ago, and I fear that it is on other people's shillings that we are existing at the present moment. Not only is our financial position unsatisfactory, to say the least of it, but, and forgive me for speaking of it, Kathleen, the years are passing and five years ago—well, dear one, you were five years younger than you are to-day!"

"Father, if you think that you can goad me——"

"I never goad, it would be too fatiguing! Besides, Kathleen, as my daughter and a Stanwys, you are not a fool—the Stanwys——"

"Oh, please do not tell me about the Stanwys, father," she said bitterly.

"Would you rather that I spoke about the Homewoods? There is the father, Sir Josiah——"

"Common and vulgar!" the girl said with a note of contempt in her voice.

"But the son—he at least is presentable, have we not agreed that the son is not so bad, and the position——"

"I know of the position; do you think I can forget it for even a moment?"

She rose and went to the window and stared out into the dull London Square.

She was twenty-eight. It is not a great age, yet at twenty-eight the first sweet freshness of youth is on the wane—a woman of twenty-eight realises that she is no longer a girl, her girlhood is behind her. Sometimes she is terribly conscious of it. It is a little tragedy to be eight and twenty, unmarried and unsought. Kathleen Stanwys at twenty-eight was unmarried, nor was she engaged. Society

was a little puzzled by the fact, for she was unusually and exceedingly handsome. She had been a very lovely girl and she was now a radiantly beautiful woman.

Seven years ago she had outshone all rival beauties in the great world of Fashion, but she had made no bid for popularity. She shrank from anything of the nature of publicity and cheap advertisement; rarely if ever had her photograph appeared in the press. She wrapped herself in a mantle of reserve. Ever conscious of the poverty which she was never permitted to forget she had earned the reputation of being cold and haughty and proud. Admirers she had never lacked, but suitors had been few and shy! Young men, well provided with money, had a wholesome fear of Lord Gowerhurst, her father, for he was a very finished specimen of his type.

Smooth tongued, with a charming and plausible manner, cynical, handsome as all the Stanwys are and have been, an accomplished gambler, too accomplished, perhaps his enemies, and he had many, whispered. He was utterly selfish, utterly pitiless. He had never been known to spare a man or a woman either. Woe to him or to her who fell into his toils. With what fine courtesy, with what charm of manner would he relieve some luckless victim, of his last shilling! How sweetly and sympathetically he would speak of his victims' ill fortune, would suggest some future "revenge," and then pocket his winnings with a grace that could have brought but little comfort to the poor wretch whose possessions had passed out of his own into the keeping of this courtly, delightful, aristocratic gentleman.

So, young men well endowed with money, having a wholesome fear of His Lordship, avoided his Lordship's beautiful daughter, and young men without money were of course not to be considered for a moment.

Therefore, at twenty-eight, Kathleen, unappropriated, and a very beautiful woman, stood staring out of the window this fine May morning, into the dull London Square.

My Lord, slender, dressed with exquisite care, was of a tallness and slimness that permitted his tailor to do justice and honour to his craft. Few men could wear their clothes with such perfect grace as his Lordship. His tailor, long suffering man, groaned at the length of the unpaid bill, but realised that as a walking advertisement Lord Gowerhurst was an asset to his business not to be despised. So the lengthy bill grew longer and more formidable, but youngsters, fresh to town, admiring his Lordship's appearance prodigiously, made it their business to discover who was his Lordship's tailor and Mr. Darbey, of Dover Street, saw to it that Lord Gowerhurst never went shabby and possibly, cunning man, made those who could and would pay, contribute unconsciously to the upkeep of Lord Gowerhurst's external appearance.

He came of a handsome family, the women of which had been toasts in

many reigns and through many generations. His forehead was broad and high, crowned by silver hair that curled crisply, his nose was of the type of the eagle's beak, his hands white, well kept, reminiscent of the eagle's claws, a moustache of jetty blackness in admirable contrast to his silvered hair, shaded and beneficently concealed a thin-lipped, hard and somewhat cruel mouth.

My Lord rolled a cigar between his delicate fingers. It was an excellent cigar; years ago Julius Dix and Company had acquired the habit of supplying Lord Gowerhurst with cigars on credit and bad habits are difficult to eradicate. But then his Lordship sent wealthy customers to the quiet but extremely expensive little shop near the Haymarket.

"Our position, Kathleen, is irksome," he said softly, "deucedly irksome. Now and again I have little windfalls, but alas—they grow fewer and farther between as time goes on—at the moment I haven't a bob, you, dear, have not a bob—" he paused and laughed softly. "It recalls the French exercise of my youth. I have not a bob, thou hast not a bob, he has not a bob—" he waved the cigar. "Anyhow, that is the position, and then some kindly breeze of Heaven wafts that stout, prosperous, opulent craft the "Sir Josiah Homewood" on to the horizon of our "sea of troubles," as Shakespeare so aptly puts it!"

He paused, he looked at the slender, upright, girlish back of his daughter.

"So," he went on, "this large, stout, prosperous and richly freighted cargo boat, the Sir Josiah Homewood, rises on the horizon of our eventful lives and——"

"Oh, please," the girl said with a note of impatience in her voice, "leave out all that; I wish to understand exactly—exactly what you propose——"

"Not what I propose, but what Homewood proposes. Really, I rather admire the fellow's presumption. As you know, he has a son, a lad not altogether displeasing, who fortunately but little resembles his father, a fact you may have noticed, Kathleen. Indeed, I might almost say the young fellow is not without his good points; he is prepossessing, a little shy and silent, in which he does not resemble his father. He is well educated, he has Eton and Oxford behind him. By the way, what a time he must have had at Eton, if his parentage ever leaked out, poor devil—however, there it is, the lad is at least presentable—but the father is——"

"Terrible!" the girl said with a shudder.

"Too true, yet it is not proposed you should marry the father. We need money. You, child, need money, and what is more, a prospect, a future. You have nothing and the outlook is not cheering."

"The outlook is hopeless; I have nothing in the world, our family was always hopelessly impoverished, still the little we once had——" Kathleen paused.

"Recriminations, my love, are useless!" his Lordship said.

"There was very little and now that little hath taken unto itself wings and

has flown away——" He stroked his long drooping moustache with his slender hand. "So it behoves us to make our arrangements for the future. Sir Josiah and I have discussed everything."

"You mean myself, you have arranged the deeds of sale, I suppose, how much am I worth?"

"Your value is inestimable. Sir Josiah, worthy Baronet, more daring than I, puts it down in actual figures—" he paused. "I made a note of them. He advances me—" He took some papers from his pocket, "the sum of twelve thousand pounds—advances, mind you, Kathleen, a kindly loan, which I shall, no doubt, find useful——"

"That is your part of the payment," she said bitterly, "go on!"

"He buys a fine house, an estate, he settles it on his son; by the way the lad's name is Allan."

"I know," she said, "go on."

"He settles a fine estate on this Allan, with an income of eight thousand a year, not so bad, eh?"

"And this is all conditional——"

"On your marrying the said Allan Homewood. I think," he said, as he rose from his breakfast table, "I have on the whole not done so badly for you!"

"And yourself," she said; "not so badly!" She smiled bitterly, then shrugged her shapely shoulders. "Very well, I suppose it is only left for me to say thank you very much indeed!"

"Quite so. The alternative, dear child, is this"—his lordship waved his hand—"an elderly unmarried lady residing in, say, a Brighton Boarding House, her face bearing some evidence of a past but long since faded beauty, her title, if she is foolish enough to make use of it, subjecting her to some little annoyance, mingled with a certain amount of servile respect. Not a pretty picture, my love, but a very true one."

"And the alternative is to marry Mr. Allan Homewood?"

"A pleasant alternative, and its acceptance never for a moment in doubt, eh?"

"Never for a moment in doubt," she repeated.

"Then it only remains for me to say Heaven bless you, my child, and to send a wire of acceptance to Sir Josiah. No, on second thought, I'll telephone him from the Club." He paused for a moment to arrange his necktie before the glass over the mantel, then went to the door. At the door. he stood and looked at her for a moment, then went out, a satisfied smile on his thin aristocratic face.

The girl stood there by the window for a long time. She was thinking. She had much to think about. She was twenty-eight and a beautiful woman of twenty-eight has no doubt many memories.

Presently she sighed and turned away from the window. A fine place and eight thousand a year and more when Josiah Homewood was laid with his fathers. Well! things might be worse, and the lad himself, she liked him. He was younger than she was by four years, but what did that matter?

She had seen him once or twice, had liked him vaguely, there was little to dislike about him. He was not handsome, she was glad of that, she hated handsome men, nor was he plain. Again she was glad; she disliked anything that was ugly. He was also, despite his parentage, a gentleman. She liked him for that most of all.

"If he had been vulgar like his father, three times the money would not have been enough," she said to herself.

Still, there were memories, memories that rose up out of the past, the memory of a face, of eager, ardent, worshipping eyes, of a lame, halting speech, words disjointed and broken, eager, pleading, yet hopeless words. "I love you, oh! I love you; don't turn from me. I know I am not worthy, Kathleen, but I love you so!"

She laughed suddenly, she felt ashamed and annoyed to realise that there were tears on her lashes and on her cheeks.

"Folly!" she said aloud. "Folly, and it's all dead and gone ten, years ago, ten years—" she laughed, "a lifetime! He's married to someone else; if he's sensible, he will have married someone with money, for he had none, poor fellow!"

Meanwhile at the Club, where the better part of his day and practically the whole of his night was spent, Lord Gowerhurst had looked up a telephone number and was putting a call through.

"Homewood—yes, Sir Josiah Homewood, is he in? Yes, I do, Gowerhurst—Lord Gowerhurst—You'll put him through—then hurry!"

He waited and then came a voice. It was evidently the voice of a stout man in a state of anxiety.

"Yes, it's me, it's Homewood, my Lord——"

Lord Gowerhurst detected the anxiety, purposely he delayed, he told himself the man was anxious—naturally—"Let him be anxious, let him remain on tenter hooks for a time!" It would do him no harm.

"Is that Sir Josiah Homewood?"

"Yes, yes, Homewood, I'm speaking to Lord Gowerhurst, aren't I?"

"Yes—ah, Homewood, is that you? Well, about that little matter we were discussing yesterday—" his lordship drawled, "the proposition that you placed before me with such engaging frankness, I should not be surprised if you remember——"

"Yea, my Lord, I've not forgotten! Not me!" The voice came chokingly, uncertain, but above all things eager.

"I have discussed it with the person—most concerned!"

"And what does her ladyship——"

"My dear Homewood, no names on the telephone, no names I beg!"

"No, no, of course not, my mistake, my Lord. I wouldn't think of mentioning any names, not for a moment, my Lord. Still what does she—the person—the party, I mean, my Lord, what does she—er—her——"

"I quite understand the—as you say—party—is inclined to give very favourable consideration to the matter. In fact, I may say, my dear Homewood, that the matter is practically settled on the basis you suggested."

Sir Josiah Homewood in his luxurious City office, closed his eyes as in ecstasy! He clung to the telephone receiver and an expression of rapt and perfect contentment stole over his features.

"Then—then it's all right. I may regard it as all right, my—my—Lord—she, the party, I mean——"

"Agrees—" said Lord Gowerhurst shortly. "Briefly, yes she agrees—the matter is settled and now it only remains to complete the contract, you understand, eh?"

"I understand, ha, ha, very good, just so, the Contract, always dealing with contracts I am, but not many like this! Ha, ha, splendid—and now your Lordship and the other party, I mean the other contracting party, will dine at my house in Grosvenor Square to-night."

Gowerhurst frowned. "Oh, very well!" he said ungraciously.

"Half past seven at Grosvenor Square, your Lordship remembers the number?"

"At half past seven, then!" His Lordship said and hung up the receiver.

"And that," my Lord said, "is that! When my time comes, and I am in no hurry for it to come, especially just now, I shall be able to close my eyes on this world, knowing that I have done my duty to my only child, a truly comforting reflection—And now for a brandy with the merest suggestion of soda, and if possible a little game of billiards." And he went up the Club's handsome staircase.

None of the multitudinous clerks in the large and palatial offices of Sir Josiah Homewood, Son and Company, Limited, had ever seen the Managing Director in such a delightful temper, for sometimes his temper was not delightful. This morning he beamed on all and sundry. Young Alfred Cope, who supported a widowed Mother on an insignificant salary, had long been trying to muster up courage to ask for a rise. It seemed to him that this morning, this bright May morning, the opportunity had come, and so opportunity sent him, a shivering, trembling wretch, tapping nervously on the highly polished mahogany door of Sir Josiah's private office.

"Well?" Sir Josiah said. "Well, and what do you want?"

Alfred stumbled lamely into his pitiful story.

Sir Josiah frowned. "How much are you getting paid now?" he demanded.

"Forty-two. Forty-two shillings a week! Bless my heart and soul, princely, princely! Why, when I was a lad such a wage would have been considered handsome, sir, and here you come asking me for more—Why; bless me, let me tell you this, Cope—the City is bristling with clerks, bristling with 'em, you can't move for clerks, sir, and most of 'em out of work! I've only got to hold up my finger, sir, like this—" He thrust a broad, stumpy finger into the air, "and say 'Clerk!' and a hundred would rush at me. I'd be suffocated! Do you understand me, Cope? Simply crushed to death by the rush! If I put an advertisement in the papers, I'd have to hire a policeman to keep the Quee—the Queek—what d'ye call the thing from obstructing the traffic—Forty-two shillings, you ought to go down on your knees, sir, on your knees and thank Heaven that you are earning such a salary! Princely! That's what it is, princely!"

And so on, for ten long, fear laden, wretched minutes, at the end of which the hapless wretch slunk away, thanking God that he had not been dismissed or that his wretched two and forty shillings had not been reduced to thirty or less.

"Forty-two shillings—and wants more," Sir Josiah said to himself, "bless me, what are things coming to?" Then he banished the frown, he beamed all over his round red face.

"Lady Kathleen Homewood," he said to himself, "Lady Kathleen Homewood, my daughter-in-law! Lady Kathleen—ah ha!" He rubbed his hands. "That'll make Cutler sit up! The fellow gives himself airs because his daughter married a fellow who is Governor of some place no one in their senses ever heard of—His Excellency the Governor—Bless my heart! I'm sick to death of His Excellency! Now Cutler will turn green, eh? There's nothing like the real thing, the real old true blue-blooded British aristocracy—can't get over that, eh? No, no fear!"

Usually it takes but two to make a bargain; in this case it required four. Three of the four were agreed, himself first of all, now His Lordship, the Earl of Gowerhurst, and Lady Kathleen Stanwys, his daughter. There was but one other, but that one other was a good boy, a dutiful son; he would do exactly what his father wished.

"Thank God I don't look for opposition from him!" Sir Josiah thought. "Never trod a better lad than mine, bless him! He knows my heart's set on this, knows it he does, and he'll do it to please me! He's not like other young fellows with their fancy tricks. Besides that, the girl's a beauty, apart from her blood and breeding! If she is a little older than he, well, what of that? It's the blood, the birth that is, what tells every time and by George—by George, when I have grandchildren I'll be able to look at 'em and say to myself—'These grandchildren of mine are also the grandchildren of an Earl!' And that's something these days,

eh? That's something!" So he fell to muttering and chuckling to himself, this highly pleased old gentleman, and presently he picked up a pen and all unconsciously scribbled many times on the blotting paper:

"Lady Kathleen Homewood, Lady Kathleen Homewood, my daughter-in-law, Lady Kath——"

"Eh, what's that?"

"I thought I'd remind you that it is past one, Sir Josiah, and you were to lunch with Mr. Cutler and Mr.——"

"Oh, bless my soul, yes, I'd clean forgotten—many thanks—Jarvis—quite right, sensible of you!"

Mr. Jarvis, the head clerk, bowed and would have retired.

"Oh, Jarvis, one moment, here, help me into my coat, there's a good feller! That young feller, young what's his name—Cope—Crope—eh?"

"Cope, sir, yes, sir!"

"What sort of a chap is he, good worker and all that?"

"A very attentive worker and a respectable young man!"

"Supports a widowed mother, I understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Bless me, well, well. I've been having a chat with him—where's my umbrella?—having a chat with him—a man can't support a widowed mother cheaply these days, eh, Jarvis?"

"Very expensive days, sir!"

"Quite so, expensive hobby, too, supporting widowed mothers. Raise his salary to—say Three pound ten, Jarvis, and report to me how he goes on! My hat, do you see my hat? Oh, thanks, I'll be back at two-thirty, Jarvis——"

And Sir Josiah went out.

CHAPTER III

A DESIRABLE FAMILY MANSION

DEAR SIR,

"In reply to your advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph,* I am at the moment in a position to offer you a very fine old historical mansion situated in West Sussex on the Hampshire border. The house has been untenanted for a number of years

and will require considerable attention. In the hands of a man of wealth and taste, it could be restored to its original condition and would form one of the most picturesque and desirable mansions in the Country. It is eminently a place that it is necessary to see and a description of it would take too much time now, for as I have previously mentioned, I am only, at the moment, in a position to offer it as it has already been seen and highly approved by a wealthy American gentleman and it is quite probable that he will close at the bargain price at which the house and estate of seven hundred and fifty acres, including part of a small and picturesque village, is being offered. I would urge on you, therefore, if you care to consider the place, to view it without one moment's delay, as obviously it will be sold to the first who makes a good offer. I may add that the Mansion in question, with its many historical associations, would make a country seat fit for any nobleman in the land. May I finally repeat my urgent advice to view the place at once, as the delay of even an hour may be prejudicial to your obtaining it. Believe me, sir,

Yours truly, DALABEY AND SON."

Over this letter Sir Josiah pondered a little and frowned a little.

"It's rather like having a pistol at one's head! Hanged if it isn't!" he muttered. "But it reads all right, it reads—the goods! Historical Mansion, seven hundred and fifty acres, fit for a nobleman, with part of a village, sounds right—sounds right—" he muttered. He nodded his head. "But this hurry—why it's a confounded nuisance, that's what it is. How can I go? I've got—let me see—har hum—" He muttered to himself and frowned heavily.

He had much important business to see to, that day, a meeting of Directors at twelve, another at two, and there were things to be arranged and discussed that Sir Josiah knew would require his clear brain and intellect. How could, he go journeying down to some remote part of Sussex to view this ancient mansion with its historical associations, desirable as it might be?

Sir Josiah looked up from the letter and glanced across the breakfast table at his son.

Allan was reading. It would have been noteworthy had Allan not been reading. The lad was always reading. His book was propped up against a teacup and he seemed to have forgotten his breakfast.

A good looking, big and broad shouldered young fellow this, with clean cut features and massive jaw and a broad high forehead! Muscle and sinew were there, but there was intelligence and brain power in that noble forehead of his.

Fully six feet stood he in his socks, massive of build, with straight, honest blue eyes and waving hair that was neither dark nor fair. A face that might in its strength seem a little hard, a little fierce, even a little forbidding, but that the mouth atoned for all.

No man with a mouth like this could be other than very human, very tender and kindly, very generous, the mouth of a man who could give much, suffer much and love greatly.

But Sir Josiah saw nothing of all this, he only saw Allan, his son, reading another of those confounded books, for which Sir Josiah had no feeling, except of the deepest disgust.

"Allan!"

"Father?" The young man looked up. "I'm sorry!" he said. "Did you speak to me before?"

"No, I didn't, and breakfast ain't the time, Allan, to be stuffing your head with all that there nonsense!"

Allan smiled. "You had your letters, and as I had my book——"

"You always have your book! I never saw such a fellow for reading—but I'm not saying anything, my boy. No, no, you're a good lad. Few sons please their old fathers as you do me—we're not quarrelling, Allan lad!"

"We never have yet, father, and we never will, I think!"

"I know!" said Sir Josiah. "Ah, Allan, you're doing well, a fine woman, beautiful as a picture, tall and stately, and the daughter of an Earl. Why, boy, you ought to be in the Seventh Heaven of delight and instead you sit there with your nose in a book!"

"She is a fine and a beautiful and I believe a good woman," said Allan, "but her father—" he paused. "I could have wished her a better father!"

"An Earl, an Earl!" cried the old man. "A better father than an Earl! Bless me, Allan—what nonsense! However, you're marrying her not her father; it's all settled, all agreed—" He rubbed his hands, his round red face shone with benevolence and joy. "You're a sensible and dutiful fellow, Allan! You say to yourself, 'My old father wishes it—The girl is good and beautiful and well born, I don't know particularly that I love her—come to that perhaps I don't, but I might go farther and fare worse!' Eh, that's it, isn't it? And you're doing it, boy, because you know it will give pleasure to the old man!"

"I think you have got my reasoning very correctly, father!" Allan said.

"There's no one else?" Sir Josiah said.

"No one else, no—and I like Lady Kathleen. I admire her and I pity her——"

"Pity—pity—bless my soul, boy, pity. Why should you pity her? Isn't she well born, doesn't she move in the best, the very best society? Isn't she the only daughter, only child come to that, of an Earl? Pity her?"

"Just that, I pity her, I am deeply sorry for her. I think she suffers a good deal and can't you understand why?"

"I—I don't know, lad, how should I know what the feelings of a young Society lady are?"

"She is proud and she is poor, there's suffering in that—She is proud and she knows that her father's name is in bad odour. Do you think a sensitive, highly strung girl as she is doesn't feel a thing like that? Yes, I pity her, and if through me her life may be made a little happier, why not? Last night when you and her father were talking money—she and I had much to say to one another. She was very open and very frank to me and I to her. We made no pretence—we know that we do not love one another. She is desperately poor and she is marrying me chiefly—entirely for the money you are going to give us both. I know that you are lending Lord Gowerhurst money, that he has not the slightest intention of every repaying you—Oh, Kathleen and I have been perfectly open and frank with one another—I understand that she cares for no one else. She has the same assurances from me, so there—" Allan laughed sharply, "you have it, the usual thing, a marriage of convenience! How can I pretend that I like it, Father, when I do not? You—you know that I would sooner not—but it is arranged, it is agreed—I do not love her, but thank God I can and do respect her and I feel sorry for her—and so we shall go through with it, Father!" he concluded.

Josiah nodded. "Yes, boy, you will go through with it and one day you'll thank me that I brought it about. I know a good woman when I see one and I tell you she is that—good—good to the core—I'm not clever and not over well educated, Allan, like you are. I don't set up to be a gentleman, but there's one thing I can do, I can sum up my fellow men and women, too, come to that. You'll find Allan, I'm making no mistake when I say Lady Kathleen is as fine and as true a woman as ever stepped. You'll go through with this marriage, Allan, I count on you!"

"I've never failed you yet, Father."

"You never have, never, and never will!" A look of rare tenderness came into the commonplace, even vulgar face. He rose and went to his son and put a large trembling hand on his shoulder.

"No Allan, you've never failed me, not even when you were a little chap! Do you think I don't think of it? Do you think I don't thank God for it, do you think when I hear other men speaking of their sons and of—of the trouble some of 'em bring? Do you think I don't say to myself—'My boy's above that kind of thing, my boy's an honest man and a gentleman!'" He gripped the shoulder under his hand tightly.

"And now read that, read this letter——" he went on in a changed voice. "Read it, Allan!"

Allan took the letter and read it.

"Well, father?"

"It looks like being just the kind of place I'm after!"

"There are bound to be hundreds of others—hundreds!"

"That's just what there aren't. You know how I've advertised, you know how many places I've seen, twenty at least, and I wouldn't be found dead in any one of 'em. No! places like I want aren't to be found every day, and I've got an idea this might be the place. Besides that, these agents write, it's to be bought cheaply. I'm never above making a bargain, Allan. It's in pretty bad condition evidently and I daresay it'll cost some money to put right, but what's that matter if I get it off the purchase price? Now to-day I can't go and you see that this agent writes to say it's urgent. There's an American out for it and I don't like to be beat, Allan, and especially I don't like to be beat by an American. They are keen buyers and clever buyers and what I say is this—if this place is good enough for a rich American—why it might also be good enough for me!"

Allan nodded. "And you will go and see this place and——"

"That's just what I can't do, I've got two Company meetings and important ones they are, and I can't miss 'em. Time's short, it's a bit like having a pistol pointed at one's head; but there you are, you can't help it and so my boy you've just got to put that book of poems, or whatever it is, away and forget it for to-day—you've got to go down—to——" he paused and looked at the letter, "this place, this Little Stretton, Little Stretton——" he repeated. "I seem to know the name, been there before perhaps—motoring or something, however you'll have to go there to-day instead of—me! You're not a fool, Allan, you've got eyes in your head—After all, the place is to be for you when you are married to her Ladyship, and it's right you should be the one to see it, so go down there, boy, see the place, size it up and find out the price. Use your own judgment because you've got it to use. I'll leave it in your hands. I'll make out a cheque for five hundred and sign it and you can leave it as deposit if you decide to buy. Only make up your mind, don't beat about the bush, remember we're not the only ones—and if it's the right place I don't want to lose it!"

"But father—had you not better see it yourself, surely to-morrow——?"

"To-morrow won't do—it must be done to-day—I know, worse luck, you're not a good hand at making a bargain, but I've got to make the best of that! Do your best, if you like the place, if you think it's cheap, if there are possibilities in it—why, Allan, boy, snap it up—don't let anyone get ahead of you! Here's the cheque." Sir Josiah tore a cheque out and made it out for five hundred pounds and signed it "Josiah Homewood."

"And now you'd better look out a train to this place, this Little Stretton——" again he seemed to linger over the name. "Unless, of course," he added, "you'll

go by the car?"

"I'll go by train——" Allan said. In the train he could read his beloved books. The car allowed no such relaxation. "I'll go by train!" he said.

CHAPTER IV
HOW ALLAN CAME TO THE GARDEN

For May it was a very hot day, almost an unnaturally hot day. It was a day that might well have belonged to August.

Allan stepped it from the station, a sign post told him that Little Stretton was yet a mile to go. He took off his hat and henceforth carried it in his hand. He had read his book all the way down in the train and his mind was still lingering on it, on the book rather than on realities. So when he came to where stood an old, a very, very ancient oak, the mere relic of a once noble tree, he looked at it vaguely, and then looked beyond for the little red tiled barn that some fancy told him would be there. And it was there, but it was a very old barn and the roof had fallen in, in places and lichen was growing on the broken tiles.

Allan stared at it, he felt faintly surprised.

"Strange!" he said aloud. "Strange—why——"

He had an idea that the barn was not so old, why it ought to have been almost a new barn, had he not seen——

"Good Heavens!" he said aloud. "I must be dreaming or something——" Then he walked on rapidly. He breasted a hill and descended on the far side, following the twisting, turning road between the hedgerows all sweet with May flowers, and so came at last to a little village of red houses roofed with slabs of old Sussex stone, all green and yellow with lichen, yellow mostly.

Allan stood still and looked at the village that lay almost at his feet.

"I suppose," he said slowly. "I suppose we must, have motored through here once!"

He seemed to know it all so well, the sleepy sloping street with the quaintly irregular houses, the little shops with curved bow windows thrusting out on to the pavement, and the low pitched doorways one gained by climbing perhaps three or more worn stone steps. The Inn, the sign of which swung from a beam that spanned the street. Yes surely he had seen it all before—on some motoring trip perhaps—and yet—and yet in a way it was strangely different, as the barn

had differed from his expectations. For a time with a queer puzzled sensation, he stood, and then he came back to realities. He had journeyed here to see some house agent—what was his name?

Dalabey! yes Dalabey!

"Boy," he called to a dusty white haired urchin playing with a dog. "Boy, which is Mr. Dalabey's, the house agent?"

The boy pointed. "That be Dalabey's up they steps be Dalabey's shop."

So Allan went up the steps and found himself in the office of Dalabey and Son.

Mr. Dalabey, a stout, red haired man, wearing no coat, was talking with a visitor, he looked at Allan.

"My father had a letter about a house, an old house, he asked me——"

"Ah yes, to be sure, the house as Mr. Van Norden be after, well there be nothing settled as yet, sir," Mr. Dalabey said as he reached up for a huge key.

"I'll be ten minutes about," he said, "if you'll wait here while I get finished with this gentleman!"

"Couldn't I go on? If you direct me I might find it."

"Aye, and I'll follow. Well you can't make any mistake, 'tis just beyond the village, you'll see a high red wall, a very old wall it be, follow the wall for maybe a quarter of a mile, then you will come to the gates, well this key don't fit the gates, you'll hev to go a bit further till you come to a green door. This key is the key of the door, if you'll go on I'll get my bicycle and follow you and maybe I'll catch you up before you get there."

"Thanks!" Allan said, he took the key, a ponderous thing and smiled at it for its bigness and clumsiness.

Children in the roadway stared at the young man swinging the ponderous key in his hand, women standing in their doorways nodded to one another.

They knew the key. "Very like he be the rich American who be coming to buy the Manor," they said.

Allan walked on. Yes, certainly they must have motored through this village, he remembered it vaguely, and yet it seemed to him always a little changed. Now was there not, should there not be a Cross standing here where the road widened, in front of the Inn.

He paused and stared about him. There was no Cross, no suggestion of one.

An old man, typically Sussex, grey bearded and bent double by age, clad in a smock and an ancient tall hat, stared at him with rheumy eyes.

"Grandfather," said Allan, "wasn't there a cross here once?"

"Aye, a cross there were and a very fine cross it was tu," said the old man. "I du remember her, when I were a lad, seventy years ago; I du remember that

Cross, seventy years ago knocked down her were in broad daylight, her were and I see it done, I did wi' my two eyes, see it done, I did!" He nodded his hoary head. "'Twere this a way, the doing of it. Village Street be wunnerful steep it be, they was bringing up two great el'ums on a lurry, three strappin' hosses they were a-pulling of the lurry up the hill, then down all on a sudden goes one o' the hosses, and down goes another. T'other hoss rares up her did and crack goes the chain, lurry wi' they two great el'ums goes running back'ard down the bill it did. I say it, as seen it done seventy years ago, seventy and one to be parfectly correct, and bash goes they el'um trunks into the Cross. Bash goes the Cross, down it falls in little pieces. I picked up a piece, I du remember, the bit I've got to this day, it stands on the chimbley shelf, it du. Seventy and one years ago, and me a lad of turned twelve a fine strapping lad tu."

Allan slipped a coin into the old man's willing palm.

Strange he should have thought that a Cross stood there. And yet, why strange? He had seen some other village street like this one, with a Cross set up in it. One often saw Crosses set up in old world villages.

So he went on, swinging the great key in his hand and presently he came to the end of the village, where was the beginning of the old brick wall, a very high brick wall it was, fully ten feet, and the bricks were of that rare rose tint, the like of which have never been made since Anne was Queen, but these seemed to go back far before the time of Anne and here and there the wall was somewhat broken. But nature had done her best to make good the gaps, filling them up with lichen and moss of brilliant green and vivid yellow, a feast of colour for eyes tired of London's sombre streets.

And he knew, because Mr. Dalabey had told him, that a quarter of a mile on, he would come to the gates, wide gates of iron hung on stone pillars and on each stone pillar was set the head of a deer, also carved in stone.

And presently he came to the gates, and the pillars stood all moss covered, surmounted, as he knew they would be, by the sculptured heads of deer; but one had lost its antlers, and the other had its muzzle broken short off.

Allan looked up at them and smiled, and then his smile vanished. Mr. Dalabey had not told him of the deers' heads, and yet—they were here. Curious! he thought.

It was as though he had come on a place that he had visited in a dream, he could not shake off the feeling of familiarity, the knowledge, the certainty that attended his every step. He knew that the green door would be arched at the top and that it would be studded with great nails and bound with iron in many places.

He knew that it would be and it was! He fitted the heavy key in the lock and it turned at last with much rasping and complaining.

The door gave on a paved yard and in the crevices of the great flat topped cobbles grew weeds of all kind that bloomed and flourished untouched.

And now the feeling of familiarity, the knowledge of the place had grown on him, so that he wondered at it no longer. He accepted it, because it was right, because—he refused to consider it at all. He knew!

To the left stood the kitchen part of the house, he glanced towards it, but turned to the right and picked his way across the weed grown yard and came to a small wicket gate, between two tumble down buildings. The wicket gate had fallen into rottenness and lay all in fragments on the ground, but through the opening that was left he passed and found himself in the wild tangle of the great garden.

Through the garden he walked, a man waking, yet in a strange dream. He followed the flagged pathway past the old sundial that had lost its gnomon, beyond the wild yew hedge and so to the lake, from which rose the slim figure of a stone girl and at her he stared long.

He suddenly realised that, he had come here to see her, he had come on purpose, just to see this stone figure of a girl. He would have been disappointed, almost shocked, if she had not been here—and she was here—but the pitcher on her shoulder was empty and the upflung water flashed no longer in the sunlight.

Slowly, very slowly, he turned away, he went back through the rose garden with bowed head, he came to the great circle of stone in the midst of which was set the old sundial, and on a stone seat, warmed by the sun, he sat down.

"Strange!" he said. He said it aloud. "Strange!" he repeated. "I seem to know——" He stretched his arm out and laid it on the back of the old stone seat, and sat there staring at the moss grown sundial pedestal—staring till it seemed to waver, to become all uncertain before his sight.

And then—then he lifted his head and looked about him.

He saw a garden all glowing with flowers, and trim green lawns, the weeds, the desolation and the ruin of centuries had passed as with a breath. The garden was all glowing and blowing as perhaps it had two hundred years ago, and then slowly he turned his head and looked towards the house and saw that doors and windows stood open and that curtains swung from the casements lazily in the breeze. And as he watched a door opened and into the sunshine stepped, somewhat timidly he thought, a little maid, a trim, slim bodied little maid. She wore a flowered cotton gown, short at the ankles and low in the neck, and how the sun seemed to kiss it! And the little face above, a rarely sweet little face, purely oval with ripe red lips and the bluest eyes in the world. So she came hurrying along the wide stone pathway to him, a smile on her red lips and the copper red of her hair all flaming in the sunlight under the dainty mob cap.

But ere she reached him, she stood still suddenly and looked at him with a

pretty frown that was yet half a smile on her little face.

"Allan!" she said. "Allan, be you still angry wi' your Betty now, dear? Will 'ee take back the words 'ee did speak in your anger, Allan? For you should know I would not have let a gawky rogue like Tim Burnand buss me, Allan, if I could 'a helped it. Before I could tell what he was at, he did steal a kiss, and I have rubbed my poor face sore to rub it all away for—for I want no kisses but thine Allan, my—my dear!"

Her voice was very soft and sweet and the tears gathered in her wonderful blue eyes, tears that seemed to wring his heart.

"I—I was overharsh and rough wi' thee, my Betty," he said. "I know 'twas not your fault, but all the fault of Tim Burnand whose bones I'll break for him, may——"

"Nay—swear not!" she said. "Oh Allan, I love thee for thy jealousy, I love thee for it!" Her eyes were laughing and joyous now and her face was all smiles and dimples and so she came to him, daintily, and put her two small hands, little brown hands in queer black lace mittens, on his shoulders and rising on her toes, she kissed him on the eyes.

"And never, never more will 'ee be angry and jealous of your Betty?" she said.

"Never again!" he said. "But because I do love thee so, my maid I could not bear to think that other lips——"

"Have never touched mine, 'twas but my cheek he bussed, and I boxed his ears soundly for him—but hush—I hear my lady calling to me—Listen! Betty! Betty! yes—I did but steal away, seeing you here—just to tell thee——" She paused for breath for a moment "to tell thee, my Allan, how I do love thee! Hark, my lady is calling again!"

"Blow me; sir, if I didn't think you'd been and lost yourself or fell down the old well, which I did ought to have reminded you about, or something!" said a voice.

Allan started up, stared up into the round red and over-heated face of Mr. Dalabey. He looked about him with dazed eyes. Weeds were rioting over the old garden, the grass stood knee high on the lawns, dandelions thrust their golden heads between the paving stones at his feet. He stared at the house and saw it all, sombre and lifeless, a house of the dead. Its windows were broken, desolation and ruin were upon it, and then he looked back at the jolly red face of Mr. Dalabey.

"Fell asleep!" Mr. Dalabey said. "And been dreaming!" he added.

"Yes—dreaming——" Allan said quietly. "Dreaming!"

CHAPTER V
IN WHICH ALLAN BUYS THE MANOR HOUSE

In and out and up and down Mr. Dalabey led Allan over the old house. They pried into dark and dusty corners, they ascended narrow and rickety stairs. It was a wonderful, rambling old place, the years had set their mark on it. The old oaken floors, worn and roughened by a thousand feet, took on many a queer pitch; from the pine panelling the paint had come away in great flakes; scarce a window but had its broken pane and through the pane some impertinent creeper thrust into the room and nodded to them familiarly.

Allan followed the stout, red faced, good humoured man up and down the stairs and in and out the old rooms. A great talker was Mr. Dalabey, a born seller of houses.

"This here be the banquetting hall, a very noble room, sir, very noble, fit for the aristocracy, her be, and a good many of the aristocracy it hev seen, sir, and many a bottle hev been drunk here, sir, I'll wager! Look at the ceiling, sir, some of the finest old plaster work to be met with in the kingdom, wonderful fine plaster work it be, as many gents as be connoisseurs, hev remarked. Greatly took with the plaster work was Mr. Van Norden."

"Yes," Allan said, and "Yes!" For his thoughts were far away, he looked through the broken and dusty windows into the garden with its weeds and its broken pathways and overgrown flower beds, and a strange sense of loss came to him. He felt a little ache at his heart, for the girl who had come to him in that same strange dream and had kissed his eyes and called him "her dear."

How real she had been. He marvelled now at the feeling that had been his at the time, that she was a very part of his life. How sweet and musical her voice, how warm and soft the touch of her red lips and yet it had only been a dream!

"This be one o' the guest rooms and you'll notice the wig cupboard, sir," said Mr. Dalabey; "very remarkable this wig cupboard, you'll see 'em in most of the bedrooms where the quality of them days kep' their wigs. Much took Mr. Van Norden was with they wig cupboards!"

"Yes!" said Allan, and all the time his thoughts were with the maiden of the garden, she who had kissed his eyes and had vanished as she had come, leaving

him with this strange sense of loneliness and longing and hunger, and above all that deep, deep sense of loss.

"And now I think we've pretty well done it, sir, there's the stables, rare fine stables they was once. Seldom less than twenty hosses did they keep in them stables in the Elmacott's days——"

"Whose days?"

"Elmacott, that were the name o' the folk, dead and gone they be now—Sir Nathaniel were the last, a rare wild devil of a man according to history, my old grandfather, a wonderful man he were, would tell me many a story of Sir Nat, as they called him, when I were a boy. Stories my old granddad had from his father before him—well sir," Mr. Dalabey paused, "well, sir, there it be, I've shewn you all there is to see, hiding nothing, a rare lot of money'll be wanted to be spent on it, sir, and there be no disguising the fact, nor have I attempted to disguise it, as you'll bear witness, sir, but there be this Mr. Van Norden keen set on the place and likely for to make up his mind any moment, considering of it he is at this very time, I daresay!"

"Who are the owners?" Allan asked.

"A gentleman of the name of Stimpson be the owner, a distant relative of the Elmacotts by marriage. I do understand, out in Canada he be, born and bred there and never clapped eyes on the place, nor ever likely to. I've got to get the best price I can for the place, seeing he be my client, and the price I've asked Mr. Van Norden——" Dalabey paused. He looked at Allan, he had no great opinion of Allan. "Queer and dreamy like," Mr. Dalabey thought, "not businesslike, one of they sort who goes through the world mooning——"

"And the price?" Allan asked.

"Er—thirty thousand pounds," said Dalabey.

"It's a great deal of money," Allan said, he said it more for the sake of saying something than for any other reason. Had Dalabey said fifty thousand pounds, he would probably have said the same thing.

"Open to an offer I be, but the offer's got to come quick and soon, or Mr. Van Norden——"

"I know, I know!" Allan stood and stared out over the garden. He wondered at its strange fascination for him. Of course it had only been a dream, yet a dream so strangely real, so clear cut, so logical and why—why should it have come to him here in this old garden—why?

Mr. Dalabey was staring at him.

"Gone to sleep he hev seemingly."

"Thirty thousand, sir, and that be no more than forty pounds an acre for good Sussex land by my reckoning, to say nothing of the old house and the buildings and a dozen cottages in the village wi' the alehouse, the Elmacott Arms."

"Yes, yes!" Allan said. "Yes! I am acting for my father. I have his permission to—to settle—the house will cost a great deal to repair, a great deal!"

"I haven't disguised nothing from you and no one can say——"

"I will offer you twenty-five thousand on my father's behalf!"

"Oh sir, oh consider! A fine house her be and wunnerful good land the best in all Sussex and twenty-five thousand b'ain't no more than about thirty pounds an acre, a terribul little money that, sir, for land so good and the historical association and all!"

"Twenty-seven!" Allan said briefly.

"There be Mr. Van Norden a considering of it at this very moment——"

Allan hated bargaining, hated money. His life had been spent in an atmosphere of money. He knew that above and before all he wanted to be rid of this man, he wanted to go back to the old garden and sit there on the sun warmed stone seat and see if his dream would not come back to him.

"Twenty-eight thousand, then, and no more, I have done, take it or leave it!"

"You'll like to see the cottages and the Inn, a wunnerful old Inn her be with historical interest and——"

"No!" said Allan. "No! do you take my offer, yes or no? Tell me now!"

Mr. Balabey stroked his chin. He did not like to do business in this way. True it was profitable business, for Mr. Van Norden was considering the offer at twenty-five thousand.

"Very well, sir, done and done!" said Mr. Dalabey. "Done with you, sir, and I congratulate you on a rare bargain, I do, sir!" He held out his large and moist hand.

Allan took it.

"Now," he said, "I will ask you to do me a favour! I have purchased the place at twenty-eight thousand pounds. I have a cheque for five hundred pounds as deposit in my pocket, if I had a pen——"

"I've got a fountain pen with me, sir," said Dalabey, "always carry one I du!"

"Very well then, we will sit down here—and if you will lend me your pen——?"

They sat down on the old stone seat and Allan filled in the cheque.

"Make it payable to me," Dalabey said. "Thomas J. Dalabey," which Allan did.

"And now," Allan said, "I'd like to look about the old place alone, take the cheque and I will call at your office on my way back, you can then give me the receipt."

"To be sure and so I will, and once more congratulate you I do, and if so be you'll honour me, sir, I'll have a cup of tea ready and waiting for you when you

come back!"

"Thank you!" Allan said. "And now, one thing more, how is the old place called, Mr. Dalabey?"

"Why 'tis Homewood Manor, I thought as I mentioned the name in my letter——"

"No, you did not, though I remember someone else spoke of it to me—Homewood Manor, that is strange!"

"In the Parish of Homewood it be," said Dalabey, "just within, and the next Parish be Little Stretton, but as this——"

"I understand, I quite understand, but all the same it is curious!"

"I don't see how," said Mr. Dalabey, "curious it 'ud be if it were called anything else, sir!"

"Look at the cheque, at the signature!" Allan said.

Mr. Dalabey looked, he uttered an exclamation as he spelled out Josiah Homewood's crabbed handwriting.

"Very odd it be, I swear!" he said. "And very right and proper too, come to that, nothing could be better! Mr. Homewood of Homewood Manor, it sounds good, sir! And now I'll get back and a cup o' tea'll be ready for you in say an hour's time——"

"Say two——" Allan said, "and thank you!"

So Dalabey hurried off to spread the news through Little Stretton. Beaming with joy he was, as he cycled down the road.

"Ah, Mrs. Hanson, there you be, Ma'am!" he shouted, slowing down by the little cottage. "News I've got for 'ee and for that little gel o' thine!"

"News—hev the American——"

"No, ma'am, he hasn't! Why, my maid, what be the matter wi' 'ee?" Dalabey added, for he had caught sight of Betty's blooming face in the window.

And a pretty picture the girl made, her sweet face framed in the clinging greenery and the roses on the point of breaking into bloom, but the sweetest rose of all was there in the window.

"Fair joyous you do look," said Dalabey, "joyous be the word, all bubbling over wi' delight—and yet—you cannot have heard the news of the selling yet?"

"The—the selling—Mr. Dalabey, not—not the selling of—my—of—oh you said—the American hasn't bought——"

"Homewood Manor be sold, sold by I, this very day, Mrs. Hanson, sold by I within the hour!" He rubbed his big red hands, "and a fair price, yes I'll admit, a fair price as things go—but sold it be, sold and done for, but not to the American gentleman—Why, Mrs. Hanson, what be the matter wi' that gel o' thine?"

For Betty had gone white, white as death, and the joy had gone out of her face and her little red lips dragged down pitifully and into her blue eyes had come

tears, tears which all unnoticed trickled down her pale cheeks.

"Fair daft that maid be about that old garden!" said Mrs. Hanson. "And glad I be, Mr. Dalabey, as the place be sold, and put to orders, I hope it'll be, so this maid of mine will go no more roamin' where her haven't no business to be!"

"Ah yes, to be sure, to be sure!" Mr. Dalabey said. "To be sure," he added, "well! sold it be and, strangest of all, to a young gentleman, leastways his father, which be all the same, of the name of Homewood. There, what do 'ee think of that now? Homewood Manor sold to a Homewood, curious, eh? Well, well, I must be getting along!"

"Sold it be and a dratted good job too!" Mrs. Hanson said.

Betty crept away to her attic room under the thatched roof. Sold! Her garden sold and for ever now barred against her! No more rambles in the enchanted garden by moonlight, no more dreams in which she peopled the old garden with all those strange folk, of whom she had seen visions. And He—she would never see Him more, bending over the flower beds at his work. He whose face she had hardly seen, and yet somehow she knew that He meant so much to her. So the little maid crept to her room with bursting heart.

"Sold it be, sold it be," she whispered to herself.

CHAPTER VI

"I HATE HIM—HATE HIM I DU!"

Allan sat on the old stone seat in the warm sunshine. He watched the rioting weeds, the broken sundial, the long pathway of flagged stone leading to the grim desolate house.

He closed his eyes and opened them again, hoping to see that vision he had seen, but it came to him no more. No! there were only the weeds and the decay and the green moss.

So he sat there for a full hour and tried to force that which would not come. He could see her, in fancy, tripping down the flagged path to him, with love and tenderness in her blue eyes, that dainty little figure with the head of flaming gold and the white neck. But it was a vision that could not be forced.

So presently, disheartened and hopeless, he rose and went to the lake and stared hard at the broken stone nymph and watched the great idle fish and the sense of loss grew stronger and yet stronger on him.

Who was she who had come out of the past to kiss his eyes and to tell him that she loved him? Why should such dreams come to him? He had never dreamed in all his life before, but she had been so real, even to the little black lace mittens, black lace mittens such he had never seen on a girl's hands before. Yet he had dreamed of her and the sweet voice of her and the sweet Sussex speech and strangely enough, had he not answered her in that same speech? He remembered it now with a sudden start of surprise.

Yes, he with Eton and Oxford behind him, had spoken as she had spoken, as the old man who had told him about the broken Cross in Little Stretton had spoken.

He turned away, he made his way back through the garden. He wondered at his seeming previous knowledge of it now, for that knowledge was gone, it took him some time to find the gap where the broken wicket gate had been, but he found it and went, blundering and uncertain, across the grass grown stable yard.

He locked the battered green door behind him and thrust the great key into his coat pocket and went along the road, and on the way to the village he passed a little thatched roofed cottage and under that thatched roof a maid was lying on her little bed, face downward, weeping her heart out for the thing that he had done, yet he could not know that. How could he? He saw an old dame standing by the little gate, an upright severe old dame, with white hair and a wrinkled face, and she bobbed him a country curtsey.

To her Allan lifted his hat politely.

"A beautiful day!" he said.

"And that it be, a wunnerful fine day and hot like for May her be, sir and might—might I make bold——" she hesitated.

Allan stopped and looked at her with kindly eyes.

"You were going to ask me something?"

"Cur-us I be, which be a besetting sin!" she admitted. "But Mr. Dalabey he hev passed by just now when my maid and I—my granddarter her be, were here and he told we as he hev sold the old Manor House and I were thinking, sir, seeing the key was sticking out, of your pocket——"

Allan laughed. "Yes," he said, "you are right, I have bought it, for my father, that is——"

"A wunnerful fine place it be!" she said.

"And we shall be near neighbours, eh?"

Again she dropped a curtsey.

"'Tisn't for the like of we to be a neighbour to the like of gentry," she added, "but if any little thing I can du——"

"Be sure I will come and ask you Mrs.——"

”Hanson be my name, sir, as anyone can tell ’ee. Old this cottage be, but there never yet lived in it one whose name was not Hanson. ’Twere Hansons lived here in the days when the Elmacotts lived at the Manor, Hansons hev been servants there, always served the Elmacotts, they did, and if, sir, there be any little thing that we can du——”

”You are very good!” Allan said.

”A dear talkative old soul,” he thought; he held out a friendly hand to her and she blushed at the honour and bobbed him a dozen curtseys as he went his way.

”Betty, Betty, my maid, Betty, come ’ee here, Betty, where be ’ee? Come here!” cried Mrs. Hanson, when Allan had gone.

”Here I be, Grandmother!” Betty came, a pale sorrowful faced little maiden.

”And crying ’ee’ve been, shame on ’ee my maid for to cry because that dirty old place hev been sold and who do ’ee think I have been talkin’ wi’? Why bless ’ee wi’ the young gentleman as hev bought her and a proper young gentleman he be, not above shaking hands wi’ an old body like me and lifting of his hat to I, for all the world like I were a fine lady! Bless ’ee my maid, a fine, upstanding, smart, young gentleman he be, one of the quality too, aye of the quality, my maid, for mark ’ee the real quality are never above shaking hands wi’ a poor body and talking pleasant to the likes o’ we! ’Tis they upstarts and nobodys as looks down on poor folks! When ’ee sees him Betty, ’ee’ll——”

”I never want to see him, never!” the girl cried, ”Never, never, I hope I never shall see him!”

”Bless me what nonsense are ’ee talking now?”

”I never want to see him, for—for if I du, I shall hate him, hate him, aye, I hate him now, I du—hate him terribul bad, I du——”

”For shame and to your room wi’ ’ee till you du come to your senses—I be ashamed o’ you, Betty Hanson, that I be! Hate him indeed, hate him, a fine upstanding——”

”I hate him, I hate him, I hate him!” Betty said, and then once again, with defiance and anger and sorrow too in her blue eyes, ”I hate him, I du, Grandmother!”

Mrs. Hanson lifted a rigid arm, she pointed at the door.

”To your room wi’ ’ee, Betty Hanson,” she said, ”I be ashamed of ’ee, I be,

to your room, you perilous bad maid!"

CHAPTER VII

"HOW WONDERFUL—THE WAY OF THINGS"

"Bless my soul!" Sir Josiah said, "Bless my soul!" He said it several times, there was a look of astonishment on his red round face, "Bless my soul, sir!"

He walked up and down the large and imposing room, his hands behind his back.

"And how about the drains, did you make any enquiry about the drains?

"No!" said Allan.

"No, you wouldn't, nor about the water! Is water laid on, eh, answer me that?"

"I—I don't know, father, I am afraid I—I was a bad representative!"

"It's enough to worry a man's head off," cried his father. "Here do I go trusting you to go and—and—not a thing do you know! Hand over my cheque for five hundred pounds like it was a bagatelle as the saying is. You don't know anythin' about the title deeds, nothing about the drains, nothing about the water, while you admit the state of repair of the house is somethin' disgraceful!"

"Father, I wish you had gone yourself, I told you——"

"Yes, I know, you told me I know, you did—told me you weren't no good at bargaining, and I'm afraid you were right! Here you go and—and—and——" Sir Josiah paused, a little breathlessly.

"Well, what's the place like? Just try my lad and pull yourself together and describe it!"

"Homewood Manor is——"

"What Manor?"

"Homewood—it bears the same name as we do, father!"

Sir Josiah sat down, he sat down abruptly and stared wide eyed at his son.

"Homewood——" he gasped, "Little Stretton—Homewood Manor—well, well if this don't beat anything—anything I've ever heard—Homewood——"

"It is an odd coincidence," said Allan.

"Odd coincidence, it's more—it's more. It is the very hand of Fate, that's what it is, the hand of Fate, you don't understand of course you don't——" he paused. "Allan, did you ever hear the name Pringle?"

"Pringle?" asked Allan, puzzled, "of course I have heard it, but——"

"Heard it, just heard it—eh? That's all, just heard it, mentioned and nothing more, eh?"

"It's a name I have heard, father, that's all!"

"And don't signify anything to you, nothing particular, out of the way, eh?"

"Nothing, father!"

"Bless me, bless me, you never heard me speak of Allan Pringle of The Green Gate Inn in Aldgate?"

Allan shook his head.

"A wonderful man!" said Sir Josiah. "Allan, his name was, the same as yours and Allan was his father before him and his father before him, yes Allans all along the line, till they came to me, only me they called Josiah, Josiah after Josiah Rodwell, my mother's father, hoping to get a bit out of the old man, which they never did, bless me! and never heard of Allan Pringle, you haven't?

"Queer too," Josiah rambled on, "that he should be the kind of man he was, they said of him as he could squeeze gold out of a stone and I b'lieve he could. Coming from the country, a farm hand he was and his father a gardener and his father's father a gardener, grubbing about in the earth, Allan, and yet Allan Pringle came to London, a farmer's boy and makes a little fortune!"

"But who was he?"

"My grandfather, Allan Pringle was. He laid the foundation of our fortune! My father was keen and clever, not up to the old man though. Still he did not do so badly, he left me forty thousand when he died, that's what I've been building on, Allan, and now—now—maybe it's nearer twenty times forty thousand, my boy! That comes of having a head on you—a head which you haven't got and never will have!"

"Then your name is—is Pringle?"

"Was!" said Sir Josiah. "It was my father who took the name of Homewood when he began to get on a bit and wanted to sink the aleshop, called himself Homewood after the place where his father was born and where all the family came from——"

"And it is this very place that to-day——?"

Sir Josiah nodded. "The very place!" he said. "Queer, isn't it, Allan? Very queer! When I heard the name Little Stretton, it set me thinking, but even then I didn't quite catch on. But now, Homewood Manor, why bless me, boy—my grandfather, Allan Pringle's mother, was maid in that very house and my great grandfather, Allan Pringle he was, Allan, the same as you, he and she was sweethearting, her the lady's maid, he the under gardener, and got married, they did. A wonderful pretty young woman, so I've heard and a sad story if what one hears is true, hadn't been married a year when she died when the boy was born, him

as afterwards kept the Green Gate Inn in Aldgate. And now, now after all these years, Allan, here am I, buying the very house, the very house, my boy, where my great-grandfather was under gardener and my great-grandmother was lady's maid. Wonderful, isn't it? Wonderful the way of things, Allan?"

"Wonderful!" Allan said dreamily. "Very wonderful—the way of things—Father——" He turned suddenly on Sir Josiah, "This—this marriage of mine——"

"Well, what about it?"

"It—it must go on—there's no way——"

Sir Josiah stared, his round face grew redder, it turned purple. "Way," he shouted, "to what? Are you going to kick against it now? Are you going to, to turn everything down now? But—but you can't do it—you can't do it! If you do I'll never forgive you, never to my dying day and after and then—think of her ladyship—Lady Kathleen, do you mean you want to back out of it, Allan, now?"

Allan did not answer, he stared out of the window, he did not see the gloomy London Square, he saw a garden, sweet with flowers and down the paved pathway a little maid with sunkissed hair and eyes as blue as the Heavens came tripping towards him.

"Allan, Allan," she said, "my dear, I love you so!"

"Allan you—you can't do it!" Sir Josiah's old voice trembled, he came and put a hand on Allan's shoulder. "It—it isn't as if it was only a promise to me, to me now, it's a promise to her, you can't shame and disgrace her—Lady Kathleen—you can't—by—by Heaven you can't! Allan, it isn't a thing that even I'd do, much less a gentleman like you!"

"I understand, father, I understand that, it—it must go on, I shall not back out of it as you say—it shall go on!"

"Ah!" Sir Josiah said, "ah, a lady, an Earl's daughter, Lady Kathleen Homewood of Homewood Manor, that sounds good, Allan boy, eh? Sounds good, don't it? I can hear myself saying it at the Club—my daughter-in-law, Lady Kathleen Homewood! No, you can't back out of it now, Allan, I'd never forgive you if you did—Besides, why should you? Last night, you weren't against it, Allan——"

"Last night," Allan said, "last night——" he paused. How far away seemed last night! Sir Josiah was watching him anxiously and Allan smiled.

"Yes, I understand, it must go on now, but—last night—was last night!"

CHAPTER VIII

"KATHLEEN—DO YOU REMEMBER?"

My lady sat with her chin in her hand, her dressing gown had slipped over the polished loveliness of her white shoulders, on which the soft dark brown of her hair fell in heavy glistening curls.

She had sat here for many minutes, her thoughts away in the past. Now she stirred, she sighed a little, she roused herself and laughed wearily, then reached out a white hand and took a ring from the dressing table. A magnificent ring, one of immense value, a ring worthy of her and of the man who had put it on her finger, yet she doubted if Allan had bought it. It looked in its ostentatious magnificence more like his father, somehow, and she shivered suddenly and cast the ring aside. And then laughed again a queer, uncertain, trembling little laugh that might have sounded naturally enough from the lips of a maiden of eighteen, but which came a little oddly from the lips of a woman of twenty-eight.

But to-night her eyes were soft and misty. To-night memory was there, tapping at the door of her soul. "You can't shut me out," it seemed to say, "close the door, bolt it, bar it against me, but you can't shut out memory, you never, never can! Fight against me, but I am always here, always ready to come to you—a chance word, a chance gesture, the scent of a flower or a perfume, the music of an old song and though you think you have locked the door against me, see I am back again! Listen, even the ticking of the clock—the little clock on your mantel. Kathleen, do you remember how the clock ticked that night when you—you and he——"

She threw out her hands suddenly, she rose, a tall, queenly young figure.

"The past is past, is dead and will remain dead!" she said, then she crossed the room, and very resolutely she unlocked a drawer, from the drawer took a little steel japanned box, she unlocked it and from it took a packet of letters.

Should she read them before she destroyed them? Should she? No, and yet she hesitated—the strength and resolution of a moment ago were gone, she sat down and toyed with the ribbon that held the papers together.

"Just for the last time," she said, "and then I shall forget them utterly!" So she untied the ribbon and took the letters one by one and read them and the misty look in her eyes seemed to grow more soft and more gentle and there came a sweet womanly tenderness to her lips that the world until now had thought a little hard and contemptuous.

Is there not some little packet of old letters jealously hidden away in your possession? Haven't you treasured just one or two? Open the packet with reverent fingers, touch them gently, for here are holy things!

A child's unformed hand, the unsteady letters yet so neatly and so carefully made. Can't you see him as he makes them? that little chubby fist, that somehow cannot hold the pen in just the way the master says it must be held.

Can't you see the little curly head leaning a little to one side? Slowly he

forms the great round "Os" and fashions the long tailed "Ys" and does his honest best to keep them fair and square upon the pencilled line that even now you can see ruled faintly on the old paper?

A child's letter, a little odd glove, a lock of yellow hair, his hair! Only these, but they bring back memories, don't they? Do you remember—? Ah, can you forget? When you held him so tightly in your arms that day—when he went away for ever. Such a great strong fellow, so brave, so confident of the future! How he looked into that future with clear shining eyes, eyes that were unafraid.

"Dear, it is all right, I shall come back to you, safe and sound!" So he said, and then the waiting, the agony of it, the long suspense, the silence, the hourly prayers to Almighty God that all might be well with him—and then—then the news—that came at last!

And all that you have now is the child's letter—the little glove and the curl of yellow hair.

And there are other letters, yours, Kathleen. I wonder did he think when he wrote them ten long years ago that you would be sitting here to-night reading them over yet once again? I wonder, did he think that those letters of his could bring the tears to your eyes, Kathleen? Did he dream when in his eagerness and his passion and his love for you, as he penned them, never weighing his words, only eager to pour out his soul to you, that you would keep them and cherish them all these years, Kathleen, only to destroy them at last?

The unsteady writing fades and is gone. Your eyes through a mist of tears see a young, ardent, boyish face, you see eyes that plead and are filled with a hope that fights valiantly against despair. Those hastily scrawled, passionate words are as voices that come to you out of the past, voices that remind you of how he loved you once—when you were but eighteen!

There came from the little clock on, the mantel a whirring sound, then it struck One—Two—She lifted her head for a moment, there was a step on the stairs outside, her father come home from the Club, he passed her door.

A mist was before her eyes, the letters were all blurred and indistinct, the writing—she could no longer see, yet, she knew every word written there. How many times had she read them over and over and yet over again!

And what need to read them when, she knew them so well? Would she ever forget them? So many pages, so closely written and yet all that had been said, could have been said in but three words, three short words, "I love you!"

So she sat there with the letters all in a heap in her lap, and her head bowed.

Memory—Memory was monarch of all to-night. Memory ruled and reigned supreme.

That night, do you remember, Kathleen? The night when the raindrops pattered on the glossy leaves of the magnolia that grew beneath your window?

Do you remember how he stood there looking up at you, the light from your lamp on his face? Do you remember? And that day, the day you met him by the end of the lane and put your hand in his and went with him down the long road? Do you remember? And then again——

She moved suddenly, she flung her head back, her face was white and drawn and there was agony in her eyes. She rose suddenly and thrust the letters into the empty grate, she bent over them and struck a match and watched them burn.

And then, when the last was turned to grey and black ash, she went back to the table and took up the great expensive, glittering ring, the ring that represented more money than He had ever owned. And so she turned it over and over between her white fingers and laughed suddenly. But the laughter was not good to hear.

CHAPTER IX
HOW SIR JOSIAH OPENED HIS PURSE

Sir Josiah garaged his two thousand guinea car in the old coach house of "The Fighting Cocks" Inn. He ordered a sumptuous repast in that antique house of call, the best and the oldest wines must be brought up from the cellars for him.

A keen money getter, yet he was at heart a very generous man. The respect, the bobbing curtseys, the doffed hats and smiling faces here at Little Stretton delighted him. He felt just a thrill of regret that he had bought the old place for Allan rather than for himself. He had an idea that he would make a far better and more imposing Lord of the Manor than Allan.

In the City of London he was "somebody," but here in little quiet out of the world Little Stretton, he was "everybody."

Mr. Dalabey fawned on him, he fetched and carried, he was hat in hand. A cunning, artful fellow Mr. Dalabey, he sized Sir Josiah up, he called him "Squire," and Sir Josiah glowed with satisfaction.

"A good feller, that Dalabey, a sensible man!" Sir Josiah said to Allan, "a useful feller!" It puzzled the Baronet that his son refused to accompany him on his many trips to Little Stretton and Homewood. Allan went once, and on that once he was moody and silent. While his father stamped about the house and thrust the blade of his pen-knife into suspicious woodwork, Allen held aloof, he

went out into the old garden by himself and stood staring at the battered nymph, whose slim stone figure was reflected in the dark pool. He sat down, on the old mossy stone seat in the great circle about the sundial and stared at the weeds and decay, and somehow the desolation of the place seemed to creep into his heart. He was glad to get away.

He loved his father, he knew what a fine old fellow he was at heart, what noble and generous impulses he was capable of. But to-day his father's loud self-confident voice, his intense self-satisfaction, his huge importance, Dalabey's servility all irked him. He was intensely glad to leave Homewood behind him and thereafter he always found some excuse that prevented him from accompanying Sir Josiah on his many visits to Homewood.

So the Baronet came and gave his orders to Dalabey and to the builders and decorators and the gardeners, and he spent money like water.

"When I do things, I don't half do things, eh Dalabey?" Sir Josiah enquired.

"No, that you don't, Squire, beg your pardon, Sir Josiah!" said Dalabey. "Never was such a free and open handed gentleman, sir!"

"Your Mr. Van Norden wouldn't have done the thing in such style, eh?" enquired Sir Josiah.

"No, sir, not to be thought of, not for a moment, Squire!"

It meant thousands, yet what did thousands matter to Sir Josiah with his hundreds of thousands? He spent and spent, he was extravagant. Before, as he said himself, one could say "Jack Robinson," he had an army of workpeople slaving at the place, and he walked about the house and garden and saw his men doing his work and drawing his pay, and for the first time in his life he felt himself a really great man.

And once—once his forebears had delved and dug this very soil that was now his own! Once for a few miserable shillings a week had they turned over the sweet brown earth over which he was lord and master.

In Little Stretton, in Homewood, at Bargate and Bushcorner, and all the little villages round about, there were smiling faces and curtseys for him and he was utterly unconscious that one pair of blue eyes grew hard and bitter and one red lipped mouth curled with contempt and dislike, that in one soft little breast a usually tender little heart was filled with hate for him. For this was the mab who had bought "her" garden, and who was spoiling it, spoiling it so that it would never, never again, be as it hud been. With one wave of his thick hand he had banished all those dear ghosts of the past who had been her friends, even more her friends than the honest, red faced rustics who were very much real flesh and blood, and who regarded her with commiserating eyes as a "queer" maid.

Oozing satisfaction and gold, Sir Josiah was beloved of everyone save of this unreasonable little maid, who hated his jolly round red face and loathed the

sound of his loud and domineering voice.

"Get some of them old trees cut down and out of the way, Dalabey, get all this tangle rooted out of it and get that wall pointed, yes that's what it wants—pointing, make it look smart—and Dalabey——"

"Yes, Squire?"

"How about some broken class along the top of the walls? We don't want people climbing over and trespassing, Dalabey!"

"Certainly, Squire, broken glass!"

So on moonlight nights broken glass, securely set in cement, glittered and twinkled like a line of frost along the top of the walls and the little maid looked at it with bursting heart and a terrible sense of loss.

"Very sullen, not to say quiet, my granddarter du be getting," said Mrs. Hanson to Mrs. Colley, her neighbour.

"Maids du get that way," said Mrs. Colley. "'Tis a home of her own her be pining for—gone eighteen your maid be, Mrs. Hanson?"

"Gone eighteen Feb'ry last," said Mrs. Hanson.

"Then time it is her was married and in a home of her own, with, things to look after to keep her hands and her mind full! Marriage be the right and proper and nat'ral thing for young maids of her years——"

"And her not wanting for chances," said Mrs. Hanson; "why she hev but to hold up her finger and there be a dozen ready to run to she!"

Mrs. Colley wagged her head. "And who be they?" she asked jealously, for she had a granddaughter of her own who was as yet unappropriated. "There be Tom Spinner, who du be spending his evenings in the bar of the Three Ploughs, and Bob Domer, a nice ne'er-do-well he, and young Frank Peasgood as du make eyes at every maid he sees. Why I did order him the door myself when he would have come a-courting my 'Lizbeth."

"And there be Abram Lestwick," said Mrs. Hanson, "who be a fine and proper young man, reg'lar to Church, one as walks in fear of the Lord and no beer drinker, nor smoker neither, and a steady worker with a nice cottage of his own, and standing high with Farmer Patcham. Aye, there be Abram Lestwick as would kneel down and kiss the very floor my maid treads on!"

Mrs. Colley sniffed. She had had designs on Abram Lestwick herself for her 'Lizbeth, but Abram had always stolidly passed her inviting door by and never had be given a second glance to sallow faced, black haired, shrewish tempered 'Lizbeth Colley.

"Too mysterious he be and too quiet and sullen like, I count him, for a young man. I like young men as enjoys life, not such as walks about with a book in his pocket and scarce ever takes his eyes from the ground. Fair and square and open I du like young men to be, Mrs. Hanson, and as for your Abram Lestwick, I give

him to you, I du!"

"Very gen'rous you be, givin' what bain't yours to give!" said Mrs. Hanson with spirit; "and thank you kindly, I be sure, Mrs. Colley!"

So they parted, not the best of friends, but into Mrs. Hanson's mind had come an image of Betty settling down with Abram Lestwick as her partner, and that same evening she opened fire on Betty with:

"A very proper young man be Abram Lestwick, a pity 'tis there bain't a few more like he!"

Betty made no answer.

"And very frequent he du pass this cottage, whiles round by Perry's medder be the nearest and nighest way for he."

"Well, what about Abram Lestwick, Grandmother?"

"I du believe, Betty, he hev serious intentions," said the old lady, "and a nice little cottage, well furnished and steady money coming in, not less than thirty-five shillings every week, as would make a maid happy and comfortable."

Betty sprang to her feet, her face flushed, her eyes seemed to dart points of light.

"What do 'ee mean, Grandmother? Be 'ee goading I to marry Abram Lestwick? Do 'ee want to get rid o' I, is that it?"

"Bless me, my maid, what tantrums 'ee do fly into!" cried the astonished old body. "Wherever did 'ee get thy temper from I don't know, a peaceful soul thy mother was and thy father being my own son, was as easy a man as ever trod and here be 'ee, my maid, with a hot temper, of which I be ashamed, and down on your knees and ask God to forgive 'ee and make a better maid of 'ee!"

"I shan't!" said Betty.

Mrs. Hanson rose: "'Tis the first time as ever 'ee said shan't to me, Betty Hanson, and after this I be determined and my mind be made up—marry Abram Lestwick 'ee shall!"

"No, no!"

"Or out through that door do 'ee go, never was there a maid so bad and so ungrateful as 'ee be. Go to your room and consider of things, Betty Hanson, till 'ee be come to a better frame of mind!"

CHAPTER X
CONFIDENCES

When Sir Josiah had enquired of Mr. Dalabey how long it would take to put Homewood into the order in which he desired to see it, Mr. Dalabey had scratched his head.

"Three months, maybe four, and I shouldn't he s'prised, seeing how powerful a lot there du be to du, no I shouldn't be s'prised, Squire, if it warn't five months, aye, all five months I should say it would be!"

"And now, listen to me, Dalabey," said Sir Josiah, "two months I say, and not a minute longer, two mouths I give you and if the last workman isn't out of the house and the last bit of timber and papering and what not in and done with, the garden straight and all the rest of it, then I'll get someone else to do my work for me, Dalabey!"

"Har!" said Dalabey.

"And it's not money I'm stinting you of, my man, get twenty more men at work on the place, I don't care, get as many as you can handle, but two months is the time I give you and then I clear you all out, lock, stock and barrel. So get busy, Dalabey my man, if you wish to remain in my good graces."

Dalabey got busy. He hired more painters and carpenters and joiners, more labourers and gardeners, stone masons and brick layers till Homewood was given over to a small industrial army, of which Dalabey was the indefatigable general.

There was no slacking at Homewood, Dalabey saw to that, he was here, there and everywhere. He himself was doing very well, he had no cause to complain, he charged his own time very handsomely and there were other pickings besides. But he worked, he was honest at least in that, and he made the others work. A week did wonders, a fortnight shewed an amazing change, at the end of the first month Sir Josiah nodded approval.

"Getting to be something like shipshape, Dalabey," he said. "And you got talking to me about five months, here we ain't been five weeks on the job and look you——"

"You be right, Squire, and I were wrong," said Dalabey humbly.

In one thing at least Dalabey was to be highly complimented. He was out to "restore" the old place, to make it look as nearly like it had been in the time of the Elmacotts as possible. He introduced no newfangled ideas and innovations, no modern improvements, except of course the power plant and the dynamo and the huge collection of storage cells which were to light the old house with electricity. Except for the electric lighting outfit, the old house was to look so like its old own and original self that had an eighteenth century Elmacott come to life and walked in through the hall door, he would not have been in the least surprised by anything he saw.

In the garden Dalabey had a very able lieutenant in old Markabee.

"Restore," said Dalabey, "find out all the lines of the old beds and borders

and replace 'em, clean up the stone work, but not too much. You got to remember, Markabee, as time du meller things, an old garden this be and an old garden it hev got to remain, mark that, Markabee. It have got to look like, so be as if a gentleman in powdered wig and silk stockings and maybe a sword at his side were to come strolling down yon path, a-taking snuff out of his box and walking with a lady in hoops, Markabee, and patches and her hair all done high and whitened, as—as you wouldn't take, it to be the Fifth of November, Markabee, you get the hang of my meaning?"

"I du!" said Markabee, and he did his work well.

Inch by inch the old ground was reclaimed, the old yew hedge was clipped and trimmed, till it began to assume a faint suggestion of its once fanciful shape, the grass was scythed and weeded and patched and rolled and mowed. The weeds were torn up from the crevices in the old pathway of stone, but Markabee was artist enough to leave many a flower blooming where perhaps a flower should not have been.

The stonemasons and the rest would have pulled down and replaced the little stone nymph, but Dalabey ordered them off sternly.

"You leave yon maid alone, her be in keeping wi' the old place, her be! Too true some o' they weeds might be cleared off the pond, Markabee, but there be a line beyond which no one must go, so let the stone maid bide!"

So the little nymph was left in her old place, and the sunlight kissed her white stone shoulders, and dappled the slender little stone body with splashes of vivid brightness, and, little by little, the old garden came back to its own again. The weeds were all gone and the flowers bloomed, and the June sunshine and the June showers made the grass green and pleasant to the sight.

Meanwhile Allan stayed away; he was in London and his time was not unpleasantly employed.

He was too healthy and too young to brood over what after all had been merely a dream. It had been wonderfully real and wonderfully tender and beautiful while it had lasted. He had come back to reality with a sense of loss and a heartache for the little maid who had looked at him with such love in her blue eyes, who had put her arms about, his neck and called him her dear and kissed his eyes. Very, very real it had been and for many a day and many a night he could not put it out of his memory.

But this was to-day and there was all the world about him and he was to be married to a girl who was beautiful and good, and for whom he felt a liking and admiration that bordered on real affection.

Most of all he felt sorry for her, why he hardly knew, sometimes when she did not know that he was looking at her, there was a sadness about her eyes, a sad pensive little droop to her lips, which was gone all in a moment if he spoke

to her.

There was a very comfortable understanding between them. They were going to be man and wife very soon, in the natural course of events they would have to live their lives together. They were beginning that life with mutual regard, liking and friendship. Love and passion were entirely absent.

"I am old, Allan," Kathleen said, "much, much older than you dear, in every way, not only in years, but——" she paused.

"In suffering and knowledge!" she might have said, but did not.

"You will never be old, I think," he said, he took her hand. "Kathleen, we understand one another. I—I'm a clumsy fellow, clumsy and slow of speech. I belong to a different world from yours!"

She shook her head.

"I am not going to apologise for my people, for in my heart I am proud of them. They were nothing and nobodies and they have made a place for themselves in the world—I love my father, honour and respect him, though I know, I know that you in your heart cannot like him."

"Your father is kind and generous, mine cynical and selfish, I think that you are richer in this matter than I am, Allan, but——"

It was the first night of a new play. London was still full, the season had not waned, the new play was dull and lifeless, the audience was yawning consumedly. These two had retired to the back of the box which Lord Gowerhurst had quitted just now and found more interest in discussing their own affairs than in following the fortunes of the characters on the boards.

Kathleen was looking wonderfully, regally beautifully to-night, and Allan was looking—what he was—an honest, clean living, stalwart young Englishman, whose dress clothes sat well on his shapely body. Son of the people he might be, but he was not a man to feel shame for.

"I do not disguise anything from myself, Allan, nor from you. I want to feel that you are my friend, that you are the friend I can come to and open my heart and speak to plainly as I might to one who is truly and indeed my friend!"

He pressed her hand by way of answer.

"I've wanted this opportunity to speak to you, it has come unexpectedly, but I shall speak now," she paused. "Our marriage was only a bargain, a very sordid bargain, and it—it hurt me at first, it hurt me a great deal. I—I hated myself, despised myself for agreeing to it, but since then, since I have come to know you better and understand you better, Allan, I think we can make something more of our lives than most others similarly placed might. I do not love you, my dear, and I know that you do not love me—No, don't speak yet, Allan, let me say what I have to say! Years ago there was someone—I was scarcely more than a child and I loved him very, very truly, very deeply. He was poor and so was I, marriage was

impossible. He—went, away, I have never seen him since and I shall never see him again—the night we became engaged—you and I—I burned his letters. It hurt a little, Allan, but I did it, dear, because I want to come to you without a secret on my soul. I want to lay my heart bare to you. I want to look you in the face, to take your hand, knowing that I am keeping nothing back from you, knowing there is no secret that might lead to bitterness and anger and perhaps even to dislike. Though I feel very, very old sometimes, Allan, I know that I am young yet; we are both young, there are many years before us in the natural course of events. All those years we must spend together, so we will be truthful and frank and honest with each other and keeping our own self-respect, dear, we shall keep our respect for one another."

He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"You are a good, sweet, woman, Kathleen!" he said.

She laughed a little, very softly, "And you, Allan, have you nothing to tell me?"

"Nothing!" he said, yet hesitated and smiled to himself.

"I think there is something——" she said, "was there never even for a little while, someone!"

"Yes," he said, "a girl who called me her dear, who looked at me with loving tender blue eyes, who put her arms about my neck and kissed me——"

"Oh Allan, and yet——"

"Wait!" he said, he smiled, he still held her hand. "To me she was the most wonderful, the most lovely thing I ever saw, I loved her with all my heart——"

Kathleen would have drawn her hand away, gently, yet have drawn it away, but he, smiling down at her, would not let the little hand go.

"But she was not real, she was only a dream maiden. I never thought to tell anyone, Kathleen, but will you listen to me?"

"Yes!"

And so, still holding her hand, he told her.

"That was a very wonderful dream, Allan," she said.

"It was a very wonderful dream, and when I looked about me and saw all the weeds and the desolation, then I felt as if I had lost something—as if——"

"I understand!" she said. She was pensive and thoughtful. "What can it mean? Why should such a dream be sent to you? There was some meaning behind it, something—I wish I knew!"

"It was only a dream, and I am trying to forget it, perhaps I have nearly forgotten it—the sense of loss is passing away—not quite——"

She looked at him. "It will never quite pass, I think," she said. "Allan," she hesitated, "Allan, if—if it ever became real, if someone else, someone who awakened your heart ever came into your life——"

"I should remember that you are——"

"No, no, listen, I want you to promise me something, to promise me on your honour, and I know that I can trust that—if such a thing comes to you, if the real love that may come that comes into nearly every man's life does come—Allan, will you tell me, frankly, as one friend to another, will you tell me, dear?"

"I promise," he said, "and you, Kathleen!"

"It—it came—it can never come again—I was only a child, but he was all my world. I have never seen him since and shall never see him again——"

"But if you did—then will you tell me, will you be less frank with me than I with you?"

"No!" she said. "I will tell you, I promise, if—but it never, never will, still, if—if it should—then I promise, always we will be frank with one another!"

"Always!" he said.

Lord Gowerhurst opened the door of the box and closed it very softly behind him.

"Ah!" he said, "quite so; you are wise, the play is not the thing—it is rubbish—I am sorry for the author, I am sorry for the management, but as usual I am sorry most of all for myself. You two young people have something more interesting to discuss. I don't blame you! No, hang me, I don't blame you! Now I'll confess, I met Lumeyer, an excellent fellow, one who knows of good things, he put me on to one 'The Stelling Reef Gold Mine,' shares bound to go up. I've a good mind to have a flutter. By the way, Allan, where's your father? Our worthy and excellent Baronet!"

Allan flushed. He always did when his Lordship spoke of his father. Unintentional it might be, but there was always a suggestion of a sneer in the cultivated voice of the man whose pockets were at this moment supplied with the Baronet's money.

"My father is at Little Stretton to-day and staying over night, he is very busy down there at Homewood, sir, our—my—our future home—he takes a great interest in it and is doing the place up thoroughly!"

"An excellent man, you're lucky to have such a father!"

"I never lose sight of that fact, my lord!" Allan said gravely.

"Quite right, quite right—would to Heaven——" his lordship said tragically, "would to Heaven Kathleen could say the same! She can't, she can't, sir, too deuced honest to tell lies! She is like her sainted Mother! Bless me this drivel doesn't seem to be shaping for a finish. Supposing we clear out, eh? What about a snack of supper at Poligninis?"

Kathleen rose, "I would prefer to go home," she said, "I am tired to-night!" She looked at Allan, her eyes were very bright, very kind and friendly.

"My dear child," said his lordship, "at Poligninis they have some eighty-

seven Heidsick, which I regard practically as my own property. It is never offered to casual customers. Polignini is an excellent fellow who appreciates my taste and keeps it for me," he paused.

"I am tired and I shall go home!" Kathleen said briefly.

"I will see you home!" Allan said.

His lordship shrugged his shoulders. "So be it, I will go to my lonely caravanserie and a frugal meal. I'm an old fellow, an old fellow, I realise that youth must be served!" He waved a white hand. "Youth, youth!" he said. "How lightly we hold it when it is ours, how we even resent it, and how, when it is lost to us forever, do we worship and yearn and long for it. Oh the happy, goutless indigestionless days of our long since fled youth, how precious they were! And how ill spent! Give me my lost youth back again, as I think it was Faust, remarked, and what would I do with it? I am afraid, my dears, I would do with it exactly as I did with it before. We never learn wisdom! Adieu mes enfants, bon repos, my Kathleen! May angels guard thee and bring happy dreams! Allan, dear lad, good night, my respectful compliments to the Baronet, an old man, my dears, and a lonely; I realise that youth is impatient of garrulous though well intentioned age! Good night once again!" He waved his hand and the box door closed on him, he was gone.

Kathleen sighed a little, she looked at Allan with a queer smile on her lips.

"Yes, I think Allan," she said, "you are more fortunate than I, and now, dear, I am tired, I am going home—to bed!"

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH SIR JOSIAH PROVES HIMSELF A GENTLEMAN

St. George's, Hanover Square, had always been at the back of Sir Josiah's mind. His lordship had favoured St. Margaret's, Westminster. July was nearly out, London was emptying, if not emptied of people who really count, which was a great disappointment to Sir Josiah. But Homewood was nearly complete, the old gentleman walked through the transformed and glorious rooms, he looked through sound windows into a garden that was a delight to see with never a weed to mar its perfection. He took Montague Davenham, the celebrated art dealer, down with him to see the place.

"There you are, you ought to have seen it two months ago, you'd never

believe, a ruin it was!" said Sir Josiah. "Fairly hopeless it looked, said I, keep to the old lines! It's an old house and you've got to make it look like an old house, but a well kept one, renew and restore! If you take away a piece of old moulding that's gone rotten, put back a new piece shaped the same, nothing new, that was my instructions, and they have carried 'em out, and now the rest's up to you, Mr. Davenham. I don't pretend to know what I don't know. But I do know this, that if you were to put say bamboo furniture and Japanese fans and umbrellas in this here old room with that ceiling and them panelled walls, why they'd be out of place, you wouldn't go and make a mistake like that! I've got money, I don't deny, and this house has been a bit of a hobby with me. I want to see it looking like it should look, so just take a look round, make up your mind and put the right stuff into it!"

"My dear sir, if every rich man were as wise as you, the world would certainly look a great deal more pleasant than it does. The house will form an admirable setting for furnishings of the right period. I compliment you on the manner in which the work has been done. I couldn't have done it better myself, the garden in particular is delightful, simply delightful!"

"Markabee here, done it, under Dalabey, a useful man. Dalabey, I don't know what I'd done without him, but it's ready for you now. Mr. Davenham, get ahead, get the place fixed up as it should be, the right furniture, the right decorations. Keep the price reasonable, I don't say stint, nor I don't say launch out too wildly. I leave it to you!"

"It is a commission that I accept with a great deal of pleasure. I think and hope that I shall please you and at a not too terrible expenditure!"

"Get ahead with it!" Sir Josiah said.

"Fine feller Davenham!" he said to Allan. "Knows his business; one thing you'll have a house that you needn't be ashamed to shew to anyone, a fit setting, my boy, a fit setting for a very sweet and lovely young lady, bless her heart, and a lucky fellow you are!"

"To have such a father!" Allan said, in all honest sincerity.

"Bless you, bless you, it's been a pleasure, I don't know when I've put myself heart and soul into a thing like I've done into this! I'm almost sorry I've put it in Davenham's hands now, but then he knows what's right and I don't. Now about the wedding, Allan! His lordship and me was talking last night. Something about St. Margaret's, Westminster, he said. 'I beg your pardon, my lord,' I said. 'St. Georges, Hanover Square, if you don't mind.' I've set my heart on it, Allan; I always had an idea I'd like you to be married at Hanover Square; there's something solid about the very name of it, right down respectable!" he paused. "Then, for the reception afterwards, I'm for taking the Whitehall Rooms at——"

"Father, I want to speak to you!" Allan said. "I—I hate to disappoint you,

but in this matter I think the first person to be considered is Kathleen!"

"Bless me, and so it is! What she says goes!"

"She wishes the wedding to be very quiet, very quiet indeed; she wants only our own selves there, my father and hers and no one besides!"

"Why—why, bless me, bless my soul! You don't mean to say——" Sir Josiah's face was almost pitiful.

"She asked me last night, she begged me to side with her and uphold her wishes and I promised. I—I know, father, it's a disappointment to you, but we can't go against her, can we?"

"No, no, we can't go against her, that's right, right enough, no we can't go against her—never think of such a thing, I wouldn't, but I'd a thought that a young girl with all her friends would have liked——"

"It cannot be too quiet for her! And I promised to speak to you about it. Her father is very angry, unnecessarily angry, he spoke to her sharply, almost rudely in my presence last night, in a way——" Allan paused, "that my father would not have spoken to a woman!" he added proudly.

Sir Josiah gripped Allan's hand. "You—you're right, the little girl shall have her way, tell her; give her my love, Allan, and tell her what she says goes. As for his Lordship, his Lordship can—can go to the Dickens——"

Allan smiled. "I think his Lordship has been making for that quarter all his life!"

It was a bitter blow to the Baronet, but he took it like a man. He had counted on a gorgeous spectacle, for which he had been very willing to find the money. He had counted on portraits of the bride and bridegroom and bridegroom's father, to say nothing of the bride's father in the fashionable illustrated papers, as well as the daily illustrated press. He had cut out paragraphs from the *Times* and the *Morning Post.*

"A marriage has been arranged between Mr. Allan Homewood, only son of Sir Josiah Homewood, Bart., of Homewood, Sussex, and the Lady Kathleen Nora Stanwys, only daughter of the Earl of Gowerhurst."

He had cut out these news items and carried them about with him and shewn them to Jobson and Cuttlewell and Smith and Priestly (of Priestly, Nicholson and Coombe), and others of his City cronies. How proud he had been of them, how he had beamed and swelled with pride! He had hinted that he might ask—might possibly—ask Priestley and the rest to witness the ceremony. It had not been an actual promise, but next door to it, made by him in a moment of joyous enthusi-

asm following a good lunch and a bottle of excellent port.

And now the marriage was to be a small quiet affair, it was a blow, but he took it like a man! He sought out Kathleen, he took her hand and held it in his moist palm.

"My dear, Allan's told me, he says you're all for a quiet wedding; well I did reckon on something a bit slap up and stylish and like that, but if you're set on a quiet wedding, my dear——"

"I am, I want it very much, Allan understands," she said.

"Then, bless you, my dear, so it shall be, as quiet as you like! It's for you to say, what you say goes with me, Allan told you, that's right—why tears—my dear? Tears! Bless me, my lady, my dear, don't cry!"

"You are very good to me, now I understand why Allan is—is what he is, the fine man he is! He is like his father!"

"Like—like me—bless my soul, Allan like me, my love! My lady I mean—I'm a common old chap! Allan's a gentleman, I made up my mind I'd do my best for him and I done it—I'm what I am, my King, God bless him, saw fit to make a "Sir" of me, but that don't make a gentleman of me, my dear, and I know it!"

"I am going to be frank with you, truthful," Kathleen said. "I am going to—to hurt you perhaps, and then I am going to try and make amends for it—" She paused. "When my father first spoke of my marriage, my marriage with Allan, I shuddered at the thought of it—not because of Allan, but because of you!"

"I know, I know," he said sadly. "I ain't everyone's money, but——"

"No, listen, I looked down on you. I thought you were vulgar and purse-proud and boastful, and, oh, I thought a thousand evil things of you and pretended to shudder when your name was mentioned!"

"My dear, I know, I know; don't, tell me more—I know!"

"But I am going to tell you more, I am going to tell you this!" She caught his hand and held it. "It isn't what you have given and what you are giving us, it isn't money—oh you know that, don't you? I was wrong, wrong all the time! I know you better now and I like and respect you and I envy Allan his father—yes, envy him his father and so I have told him and—please kiss me because I am going to be your daughter, aren't I? And because I want you to like me and be my friend!"

"God bless me!" he said. "God bless my—oh, my lady, my, my dear—Kiss you? I'd be proud and happy!"

She laughed a little, she held up her face, there were tears on her lashes. "Then kiss me, Allan's father!" she said.

My Lord had counted on an expensive and fashionable wedding, even more than Sir Josiah had. He had specially ordered a frock coat of a peculiar and delicate shade of grey, which would become him handsomely. That he would easily outshine everyone present he knew with certainty. He would give his daughter

away, everyone would remark on his appearance, the exquisite sensibility that would mark his every action. They would not compare him with the Baronet, it was no question of comparison. People would see with their own eyes how immeasurably superior he was to Sir Josiah.

That the limelight would be mainly on himself, His Lordship had decided. He had even rehearsed the part he would play. He would be the tender, loving father, heart-broken and bereaved at losing his darling child, and yet he would bear up bravely, carry himself proudly, with a touch of tender gaiety. His speech at the reception he had written and re-written—and now he was in a furious passion, shaking with rage, he sought out Kathleen and swore viciously at her.

"What devil's tomfoolery is this?" he shouted. "What new pose have we here? What's this confounded rotten, absurd business about, a twopenny ha'penny housemaid's wedding, hey? Haven't I asked, unofficially of course, but asked all the same a hundred people? Haven't Bellendon and the Cathcarts and—and George Royhills and his wife practically delayed their departure from Town for this wedding, and now—now what rotten nonsense have you got in your head now, hey?"

She eyed him steadily. "Please don't swear at me, father?" she said. "There is no need. I asked Allan——"

"Asked Allan, hang and confound Allan! Ain't I anyone? Don't I count? I'm only your father! Haven't I planned this for you, haven't I cherished the idea of making you a rich woman, haven't I——?" He paused, floundering wildly in his fury.

"I asked Allan to humor me, I wanted a very quiet wedding, he was quite willing, as eager as I almost. He spoke to his father and his father has agreed——"

"His father! that confounded old City shark, that common, vulgar old brute, who—who——"

"Whom you are very pleased and glad to take money from, who has treated me with every kindness and respect and gave way at once to my wishes, though they were opposed to his own. Yes, a common old man, but generous and kind and good and—and I could wish, I could wish that my father was as fine a gentleman!" And with a stately curtsey, she left him.

"Well, I'll be damned!" His Lordship said in utter amazement.

CHAPTER XII

THE HANDS OF ABRAM LESTWICK

"You've got my wishes, Abram, you have!" said Mrs. Hanson.

He nodded. "I know," he said gloomily.

Abram Lestwick was of that curious, foreign type that one comes on unexpectedly in our English country villages. He was about thirty-two years of age, five feet nine in height and of a strong wiry build. His complexion was swarthy, the skin sallow and drawn with a strange suggestion of tightness, over the high and prominent cheek bones. The eyes were small, black and very bright and deeply set beneath heavy brows. No razor had ever touched the lower part of his face, which was covered with a thin and straggling growth of coarse black hair, that could scarcely be described as a "beard," for so thinly and far apart did the hairs grow that the contour of a weak chin was clearly visible.

The whole appearance of the man suggested nervous unquiet and restlessness, which particularly found expression in the constant agitation of his hands. He had a restless, nervous habit of fingering things within his reach.

At this moment he was sitting on the one "easy" chair at Mrs. Hanson's little parlour. He had dragged down the antimacassar that usually adorned the chair back and was plucking at the threads and rolling the edge of it into a tight curl. Mrs. Hanson watched his face; she did not look at his hands. There was something hateful about Abram Lestwick's hands, the fingers were long, flexible and thin, save at the ends, where they suddenly thickened out and flattened in a strange, unsightly manner. But it was their restlessness, their never ceasing movement that was so remarkable. Never for a moment were they still.

Mrs. Hanson, favouring the young man, yet knew she hated his hands!

"I feel, I du," she said to herself, "as I want to scream if I set and watch them, but I du know he be a good man and a hard worker, with no love for the alehouse and reg'lar to Church and like to make Betty a good husband, and after all, what du a man's hands matter? So be as he du work with them and earn his living honourable and upright in the state of life which it du please God to call him!"

"I've got your wishes, I hev," he said, "I know that, but what be the use of your wishes to me, Mrs. Hanson, so I haven't got Betty's liking?"

"You mustn't take too much notice of the maid; maids be strange and fickle things, aye and vain they be! The man as praises a maid to her face and tells her she be nice looking be the one as goes best with they!"

"What do 'ee want I to do?" he said sullenly. "I know there beain't a maid to compare wi' Betty, there beain't one as be fit to tie her shoes!" A dull red crept into his checks, his voice shook, his fingers worked more nervously and more rapidly at the destruction of the antimacassar.

"Slow of speech I be," he said thickly, "and difficult it du be for me to find words—there be a thousand things I would say to she—they be here all in my brain, but my tongue won't utter them! I—I try—" he paused, choking, "I try, I

look at she dumblike and stupid and knowing it, aye, curse it, knowing it!" His voice rose, he wrenched at the antimacassar, he tore a piece away; his fingers were hideous to see at this moment and Mrs. Hanson looked resolutely at his face. Yet she was all the time conscious of the havoc his fingers were making.

"Do 'ee think I don't want to tell she? I du! I du, I try to, but my tongue won't do me sarvice. I love her!" He paused. "I love her!" He said it again. "Love her, I mean to tell her, yet like as not her'll laugh at me!" He stood up, he flung the antimacassar to the floor, his hands worked up and down his coat, tearing and fingering at the buttons and the buttonholes.

"There bain't a maid in all the world like she, not a man fit to kiss the grounds she treads on. If a man, a man in this village did look at she wi' harmful eyes, I'd kill him!" He nodded. "Kill him!" He said. "I'd get my hands on his throat and never let go! Sometimes when I think of her I feel that I be going mad like, I see red—red passion before my eyes. I tell 'ee, Mrs. Hanson, ma'am, I've got your wishes, I know, I know! But I must hev that maid; no one else shall, as God hears me, no one else shall!"

He went to the door, swinging his arms violently, his fingers clenched and unclenching.

"I've got your wishes, I hev, I'm glad of them, ma'am. I thank 'ee, I du—your good wishes, Ma'am, and I be obliged greatly, I be—and—please don't mind my tempers! 'Tis thinking of the maid makes me so; a peaceful man I be, and begging your pardon, Ma'am, that I did forget myself, but 'tis thinking of the maid that—that drives me like you see me, Ma'am! But I beg your pardon I du, most politely!"

He was gone and Mrs. Hanson sighed and stooped and picked up from the ground the work of her own busy fingers—and his! She sighed again, looking at the destruction of it.

"A terribul man he be—in his wrath, fit to kill anyone belike!" she said. "All tore it be, all tore and wrenched and broke apart—powerful fingers he must hev! Ill would it go wi' man or maid that angered he and did him hurt!"

Down the road in a tempest of passion went Abram Lestwick, swinging his arms and muttering to himself like a madman, and yet at Farmer Patchams, where he worked, they counted him as a man of an even and equable temper. A foreman, he never cursed and swore at those under him. Little things moved him not; his grim, glum, gloomy face never darkened with rage. A polite tongue he had, though a slow one, a steady man and quiet, and yet he himself knew of the tempest of unbridled passion, the mad tumult that his brain was capable of.

Rarely did his passions master him before others. They had to-night, before Mrs. Hanson, but he had her wishes, he was safe with her.

"If any man did look at she wi' wishful eyes," he repeated, "by God's Heaven

I would kill him!" He clenched at the air with his nervously working hands. "Get my hands on his throat and kill him, grip and crash it till the life were gone out o' he, I would!"

He stopped suddenly, bathed in perspiration, but the fury gone. She stood before him in the gloaming of the evening.

"I be come from your house, Betty," he said, and his voice was mild as a voice may be. "A pleasant half hour I did have along wi' your grandmother, Betty!"

"I hope 'ee enjoyed yourself, Abram," she said with a little contemptuous laugh.

"Aye, I did in a way, for I were talking about 'ee, Betty!"

She frowned.

"Betty!" He felt as if he were suddenly choking, he lifted those working, restless hands of his to his own throat. They made as to tear open his shirt, so that he might breathe the more freely.

"Betty, do 'ee know what I and your grandmother were talking about?"

"I doan't and I bain't curus to hear!" she said. She made to pass him, but he held his ground.

"'Twere about 'ee!"

"Then 'twere nothing good," she said. "My left ear were burning cruel and now I know!"

"Betty," he said, "wait, 'ee shall, 'ee shall I say, wait, there's summut I must say to 'ee!"

"Let me—pass!"

"No, no." He caught her by the arm and held her.

"Betty, I du love 'ee so, I want 'ee to wife! If I don't have 'ee no one else shall, no one, I swear! Look at me, stubborn o' tongue I be—and difficult it be for me to speak the words I want to say, but 'tis all in this: 'I love 'ee better than life, better than death. I love 'ee mad; mad I be, I tell 'ee wi' love for 'ee! My maid, I'd die for 'ee and live for 'ee and kill they as come between us! Betty, Betty, give yourself to me—to—cherish—" He paused, the words of the marriage service came to him uncertainly, "to hold and to keep, to cherish until death us du part. Give yourself to me, for never and you go through the whole world will 'ee find a man as loves 'ee half so well!"

"I bain't a marrying maid!" she said. "And I'll not marry 'ee or anyone else and 'ee last and leastest of all, Abram Lcstwick. I'll never marry 'ee, never, never!"

"And I swear by Heaven 'ee shall!" he cried. His fingers were at work on her arm, she felt and hated the touch of them. Hateful fingers—long and sinuous, with their horrible, spatulated tips, they reminded her of writhing snakes, with their venomous, flattened heads, just that! She tried to break away from him.

"A great coward 'ee be, to so beset a maid. I hate 'ee, I du. Let me be, let me be!"

"I'll never let 'ee be, for I du love 'ee mad, mad," he cried, "and 'ee shall never belong to anyone else, never and——"

And then she broke from him, she lifted her strong young arm and smote him across the face with all her strength. Abram Lestwick fell back apace, his sallow skin went deathly white, he stood and stared at her.

"'Ee, 'ee made me du it!" she panted. "I—I had to du it, Abram, I didn't mean it, I be sorry in my heart, I did strike 'ee!"

But he said nothing, he only looked at her, then without a word turned and walked away down the road and she stood looking after him. Even now she could see the restless, nervous working of his hands.

"I hate—hate and I be afeared o' him tu!" she said. "I be terribul afeared o' him!" She broke down, sobbing and crying. "'Tisn't fair as a maid should be so bothered as I be! I don't want to marry anyone, leastest of all he, for I du hate him most mortally, I du!"

Her grandmother was waiting for her.

"Did 'ee see Abram Lestwick down the road?" she asked.

"Aye, I did see him!"

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Didn't he speak to 'ee, tell 'ee his mind?"

"Yes, he did and—and I hate him!"

"Hate?" said Mrs. Hanson. "Still filled wi' hate, 'ee be, which bain't seemly in a young maid! What wi' your hating first this one and then t'other, fair fed up I be wi' your hates, my maid, and 'tis time to put a stop to all such nonsense! Abram Lestwick hev been wi' me to-night and talking wi' me he hev been, and about you—moreover. And he be willing to marry 'ee and a good match it'll be, my maid, which Mrs. Colley have been angling for for that putty-faced 'Lizbeth o' hers, though Abram would never look twice at she. But 'tis you he be after, an upright, godly young man with thirty-five shillings a week and a cottage and all, and a rare chance for the likes of 'ee, Betty Hanson, wi'out a shillin' to your name!"

"I hate him and I'll never, never marry him; I hate him and am afeared of him as well! And sooner than marry he I'd go and drownd myself in the river, aye, that, I would, and that I will, for marry him I never will!"

"That's what 'ee say, but hark to me, marry him I say 'ee shall and I have told him, he has my wishes!"

A defiant white face, with big glittering eyes faced the wrinkled, angry old face.

"Drownd myself I will gladly and willingly afore I marry he!"

"Go 'ee in!" said Mrs. Hanson. "A perilous bad maid 'ee be and 'shamed of 'ee I be, and asking myself I be all the time—Be this my son Garge's child, or be she a changeling? For such temper no Hanson ever did hev yet—Go 'ee in, but mark this, marry him 'ee shall!"

"Mark this!" Betty cried. "Marry him I never will! I'll drownd myself first! Aye and blithely and gaily—for I du hate and fear him more than any mortal man and they fingers o' his that touched me—ugh! That touched me and—" And then suddenly she broke down in a passion of sobs and ran into the house.

CHAPTER XIII
THE HOMECOMING

Sir Josiah was performing his last friendly offices. Davenham had finished his part of the work and had done it, as the Baronet knew he would, with a complete and thorough knowledge and good taste.

Who, to look about one now, seeing those beautiful rooms with their exquisite furnishing, that garden, a thing of delight and perfect beauty, could reconcile it all with the desolate and derelict wilderness of a place it had been three short months before?

"I'd like that there Van Norden, or whatever his name is, to see it, I would!" Sir Josiah thought. "Hang me, I'd like him to take a stroll around now! Them Americans are smart and wonderful skilful, aye, and what's more a fine nat'ral taste they've got, appreciating fine things and old things more than we do! I say all that and admit all that, but this here Van Norden, he couldn't have beat what I've done in the time, he couldn't! He'd own it, too, for I've yet to meet the American who wasn't frank to admit the truth!"

Sir Josiah here was like a small king in great state. He was to interview potential servants, advertisements appeared in the London and the local papers, inviting cooks and housemaids, parlourmaids, footmen, grooms, scullery maids, still room maids and the like to present themselves at Homewood Manor on a certain day, when all their expenses would be paid by Sir Josiah Homewood, who would engage the most suitable persons. His own man Bletsoe was here to do honour to the occasion.

"How many are there, Bletsoe?"

"Nine young women, three old ones, two fellers and an old man as come about the gardener's place, only I understand as you're keeping that old feller, old Markabee, Sir Josiah!"

"That's right, keeping him on I am, a sensible man and clever at his work, that garden's a credit to him! Old very likely, but I've known men as weren't old, yet fools, Bletsoe!"

"Quite so, sir!" said Bletsoe. "And now about h'interviewing 'em?"

Sir Josiah frowned to hide his nervousness.

"How many old ones did you say, Bletsoe?"

"Three, sir, and one of 'em with a wonderful fine moustache as I ever see!"

"There's the money, take it and settle with them, mark where they come from and look up the fares in the A.B.C., Bletsoe, to see they don't cheat you, then give 'em five shillings over and above. But pay 'em their fares right and correct, not a penny more nor less, and Bletsoe, when I say—ahem! like that, you'll know as that one's no good, you see!"

It was hard work and none too pleasant, but the house had to be staffed. Allan and Lady Kathleen were married, they were spending a brief honeymoon on the East Coast; they would be back here soon to take possession and Allan's father was resolved that when they came they would find everything complete. Had not he himself pried in the store cupboards, which Messrs. Whiteley had obligingly stocked at his request? He had satisfied himself that everything necessary was there, everything, that is, of an unperishable nature.

Salt and tea, sugar and pepper. He had been greatly disturbed in his mind when he found that washing soda had been overlooked and he had ordered a hundredweight forthwith. And now he was engaging servants.

"I am Sir Josiah Homewood, this house belongs to my son, Mr. Allan Homewood, at present away on his honeymoon with his wife, the Lady Kathleen Homewood, daughter to the Earl of Gowerhurst. They are returning in a week and I desire to have everything in readiness for them. What might your age be and what are your references and who were you with last? And why did you leave your last place?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, my age, I respectfully beg to say, I don't see hasn't nothing to do with the matter. As for my references, here they are. I've lived in a Duke's family and there's but little I don't know how to cook, even to peacocks, I have cooked, sir, and——"

"Bless my soul, I didn't know people eat 'em!" said the Baronet.

"Only the best of the quality, sir!"

"Bless me, very well, hum, hah!" He looked through the references, he made notes on a piece of paper. "Please settle with this lady, Bletsoe, and give her, her out of pockets as according to arrangement—a—hem!"

And so the fate of the lady with the moustache was sealed, though she knew it not.

Betty had heard of this reception that Sir Josiah was holding to-day. Girls from Little Stretton, Bush Corner, and even from Gadsover and Lindney, had come to offer themselves for hiring. Betty hesitated, since that evening when she had defied her Grandmother life had not been very happy at Mrs. Hanson's little cottage. Should she go with the rest and offer herself for service in the house? But could she bear it, could she bear to see her own beloved garden again as it was now, not as she remembered it? All the dear trees cut down, or most of them, and hideous new walls put up, and her little stone friend gone from the lake and a great ugly stone fountain erected in her place, for so she had heard. Could she bear to see it all as it was now?

No, she could not, so she hesitated. The other girls went and were engaged or not, as Sir Josiah decided, but Betty did not offer herself.

For three days after that night when she had struck Abram Lestwick in the face, she did not see him, but on the evening of the fourth day he presented himself at the door of her grandmother's cottage.

He said nothing of that last interview. His manner was nervous and hesitating and without passion, his fingers worked incessantly, toying and tearing at everything within his reach. He sat upright on a horsehair-covered chair, and tore little hairs out of the cloth all the evening. At a quarter to ten he rose and took his hat.

"I'll be wishing you good night, Mrs. Hanson, ma'am!" he said.

"Good night, Abram, and always glad to see you," said Mrs. Hanson heartily.

"I thank you, Ma'am, good night, Betty!" he said.

"Go to the door, my maid, and see Abram off the step," said her grandmother.

Betty hesitated, then went, with her red-lipped mouth firmly compressed.

On the step in the summer darkness Abram found his tongue.

"Well?" he said. "When is it to be!"

"When be, what to be?"

"Our wedding?"

"Didn't I tell 'ee?"

"Aye, but 'ee didn't mean it, besides I hev made up my mind; when is it to be?"

"Never!" she said. "Never, never!"

He laughed softly to himself as she closed the door in his face, but to-night there was no passion, no tempest within him. He laughed again as he walked down the road in the velvety blackness.

There were lights in the Old Manor House, unfamiliar sight! He did not ever remember seeing lights there before and strange lights they were, very bright and brilliant, and so many of them. He stood still in the road and stared at the house.

Presently the little arched green door in the wall opened and a woman scuttled out, carrying a bundle suspiciously.

"Who be that? Law! How 'ee did frighten me!" she panted a little with nervousness; perhaps that bundle had no right to be in her arms. "Be it you, Abram Lestwick?" she asked, peering into the darkness.

"Aye!" he said briefly. "It be me all right, Mother Colley. What be 'ee doing here to-night?"

"'Tis the young new Squire, the old man's son, come home wi' his lady wife. I see her for a minute, Abram, and a prettier creature I never set eyes on, so kind and smiling her looks, too, and so mighty fond they du seem to be of one another, arm in arm they was walking. 'Father,' he were saying when I see him, 'Father have done wonders here, Kathleen! You did ought to have seen the place no more than four months ago. Father have worked wonderful, terribul hard for we!' he said."

"Ah!" said Abram.

"Yes," said Mrs. Colley, nodding her head, "and she wonderful sweet and dainty her looked, I tell 'ee, Abram—'Wonderful kind and good he be, Allan,' she says. And, Abram, why don't 'ee ever come in for a kindly cup o' tea to our cottage? My maid 'Lizbeth continooally du ask me! A clever maid her be wi' her fingers and a worker she, not like someone as I could name, some as bain't too right in their mind!"

"Who?"

"I mention no names, Abram, only I say there be a kindly welcome and a cup set for 'ee whenever 'ee do take the fancy and now I must be getting along. A wonderful place they hev made o' it, and oh! the money it hev cost! It fair sets me wondering how there ever du be so much money in the world!"

"And if," Abram thought, "all the money in the world were mine, I would lay it at Betty's feet!" So he went on his way, for the man who rises at four in the morning must to bed betimes.

* * * * *

Allan had been in no hurry for the honeymoon to end. Every day of their companionship added to his liking and respect for Kathleen. Now that she was away from her father, now that she had shaken herself free from the old environment, she seemed to be a different woman. Her laughter was more spontaneous; the

sadness, for which in his heart he had pitied her, was going, if not gone from her eyes. She was a charming companion, her good temper and entire unselfishness were never failing. What more could a man ask?

He had rather dreaded the honeymoon, and now had come to realise that it formed the most pleasant period of his life. But now that it had come to its end, he felt a strange reluctance to go to Homewood.

He was young and healthy minded; for such a man to brood over a dream or a vision was impossible. The effect of that May day dream of his had well nigh worn away, the vision of the girl who had come to him in the old garden and kissed him had grown vague and shadowy. Like most visions, it was slowly passing and presently, unless something happened to revive it, it would pass into oblivion altogether.

But this return to Homewood would and must revive it and bring back that day and all that had happened on that day forcibly to mind once more.

And he asked himself, did he wish to be reminded? Was he not well enough content with life as it was? He was married to a girl for whom he felt a great liking, a growing affection, and a respect, a woman whom he realised was the sweetest and best woman he had ever known.

It was not her beauty alone that attracted him, yet he could scarcely repress a thrill of pride of possession that comes to many men when they realise the envy of others and see the looks of admiration which were no more than Kathleen's well deserved tribute.

So the honeymoon had been a very pleasant and happy time. They were frank with one another, the best of friends. They kissed one another with a quiet, undemonstrative affection that was not feigned. There had not been one breath to mar the perfect serenity of their lives. No foolish trumpery quarrel, but always that complete understanding and good faith that willingness to give and take unselfishly.

Are honeymoons always such a success? When the passionate lovers are united at last and drive away radiant and triumphant, amidst a shower of rice and good wishes, who can tell what pitfalls her pretty little feet may trip into, what obstacles he may go stumbling and floundering over? They believed that they knew and understood one another so well, all unconsciously perhaps they have kept up many pretences, have only permitted one another to see the brighter side.

But there is always the other and darker side, Romeo's temper the first thing in the morning may not be everything that is desirable. When Juliet finds that one of her dresses does not fit her quite so well as it might, she must vent her annoyance on someone—and there is only Romeo!

The good ship of matrimony has scarcely weighed anchor and set sail and

the Captain and the Mate have yet to learn one another's characters, perhaps they have even to decide who the Captain and who the Mate. There are many little things to arrange, little difficulties to adjust. Happy they who can do it all, with kindness and good temper, willing to give freely and yet not asking for too much!

It was in the dusk of the late July evening that Allan and Kathleen came to Homewood.

It was the last day of Sir Josiah's reign, and never a sovereign gave up his sceptre with better grace. How he beamed, how he swelled with visible pride, how he dragged them from room to room to see this and to see that!

"There you are, my boy, what do you think of it? Wouldn't know the place, would you? You'd 'a fallen through this floor three months ago; look at it now!" And the old gentleman jumped up and down to prove the soundness of the joists and boards.

"Well, my dear, and what do you think of it? Pretty, ain't it? Davenham didn't let me down, there's nothing like going to the right man! Davenham ain't cheap, but—" He caught himself up, this was no time to talk of money and money matters. He had spent freely and willingly. Perhaps never before in his life had he spent quite so freely, quite so willingly. There was a heavy bill to meet, but what of that? He could meet it!

He had picked up a good deal from careful observations and from listening to Davenham's learned talk. The names Hepplewhite and Adam, Sheraton and Chippendale tripped glibly from his tongue. True, he confused Hepplewhite and Adam, but what did that matter? Allan and Kathleen did not mind, perhaps did not know, and the old fellow was happy and smiling, though there was just a little ache at his heart, for to-morrow his work would be done, to-morrow he would pack his traps, order the car, tip the servants and say good-bye. His reign would be ended! The villagers would give him their bobs and their smiles and perhaps a cheer, Dalabey would come from his shop and grovel for a moment as he passed and then—then life would of a sudden become strangely empty, strangely without aim and object.

"Can almost see 'em, can't you, Allan, my boy, those old Elmacotts; the place must have looked very like this in their time. Lord, it's a pity we've got into the way of dressing so plain and starchy like we do now! But bless my soul! What would I look like in a flowered waistcoat and powdered wig and silk stockings, eh? Ha, ha, ha! And how well she's looking, how pretty she is, prettier'n ever, Allan, and what a lucky fellow you are!"

"The luckiest in the world and the happiest I think, father!" Allan said very soberly.

The old man nodded, "That's right, that's right, that's what I hoped to hear.

Now, take her and shew her round. It's a pity it's gone so dark, so you can't see the gardens to-night. I tell you, Allan, the gardens are even better than the house. You keep on that old Markabee, he knows his job and you won't get no better man for thirty-seven and six a week, cottage found!"

In the dawn of the summer morning Allan wakened, his sleep had been strangely disturbed. He had dreamed, yet now he was awake the dreams were all vague, half forgotten and meaningless. He rose and went to the open window and looked out into the garden.

He saw it as he had seen it that day in May, in his dream, all trim and fair, the weeds and the desolation gone, the flower beds all gay and bright with bloom, the lawns—and how old Markabee and his men had worked on these lawns! shaved and rolled and weeded.

And though remembering it as he had seen it, with the desolation of years over it all, it all looked unfamiliar to him now and yet wonderfully, strangely familiar.

Then suddenly there came to him with a sense of shock and anxiety a question. What of the little stone nymph who had stood there in the midst of the pool? Had they torn her from her pedestal and banished her from the place she had held for centuries? Why had he never spoken of her? Why had he never asked that she might be protected? Why—why above all did he care? What had become of a little stone image with a broken arm and a battered vase, and the slender little stone body all stained green?

But he did care, and he wanted to know what her fate was. He turned back into the room and saw his wife sleeping there. The sunlight slanted in through the uncurtained window and touched her face, and he stood looking at her.

Sleeping, she seemed, in spite of her eight and twenty years, to be such a child. There was a smile on her lips, her face was pillowed on one white bare arm, her hair fell about her on the pillow.

He stretched out his hand and lifted one heavy lock and held it lightly, letting it slip softly through his fingers till it fell to the pillow again.

And, watching her as she slept, he wondered why his heart did not throb, why a great passionate love for her did not come—yet it did not!

He dressed and went out into the garden. He was early, early even for old Markabee, from whose little cottage even now the smoke was curling, thin and blue, into the morning air.

In spite of the panic of anxiety of a while ago, he had forgotten the little stone maid. The enchantment of the garden was on him, his feet trod the stone pathway, his hands were behind his back, his head bent a little forward, yet he saw everything, the trim, carefully laid out beds, the green grass, the foxglove and the hollyhock thrusting their way to life and air and sun through the crevices in

the old stone path. So he stepped aside to avoid tramping on their loveliness, yet wondered why they should be there.

Was it right? What would my Lady say? And he? Was not he dallying here when he should be at his work?

What thoughts! What strange jumble of thoughts was this?

Hoe and rake, he must get them from the shed; the shed there behind the old red wall. So he turned and came to the place and found no shed, then started and came back to life again and frowned at himself for his folly.

Was there some enchantment that brooded over the place, something that held him in its grip when his feet trod the soil of this old garden?

"Dreams!" he said aloud, and again, "Dreams!" And then laughed at himself and turned back to the broad stone pathway, then suddenly remembered the object of his quest, and hurried on to the lake.

She was there, untouched! and he was conscious of a relief, a sense of gladness—yet why? What did it matter? What would it have mattered had they pulled her down and carried her away and used her to mend some country road with and placed some fine marble fountain with basin all complete in her place? Yet it did matter and he knew that it did!

He turned, conscious of a relief and yet wondering at it and went back along the path to where was the great circle in the middle of which stood the sundial, and he noticed that some artificer had replaced the long lost gnomon, so that once again the shadow might fall and tell the passing of the hours.

And there was the seat on which he had sat that day. Then it had been half lost in a maze of tangle and growth. Now it had been cleaned and even mended a little, the moss and green growth removed.

Allan sat down, as he had sat down that day; he laid his arm along the back of the stone seat, just as then, and as then presently, the reality about him grew faint and uncertain, and he drifted into a light sleep. But in that sleep no dreams came, no vision of a little figure tripping down the stone pathway, no dainty little figure in her flowered gown, with mob cap on her shining head. Instead he opened his eyes and looked into the face of an ancient man, who pulled a scanty lock of hair at him and wished him "Good marning!" in purest Sussex.

"Good morning to you," said Allan and wondered for a moment who the old man might be, then it dawned on him.

"A wunnerful and powerful difference be here," said the old man, "which you will hev noticed, so be as you hev seen the place before!"

"I have seen it before, three months ago, and as you say a wonderful difference is here," said Allan, "and you are——"

"Markabee be my name," the old man said, "gardener I were at Lord Reldewood's place, near Smarden in Kent, though I be Sussex born and bred."

There was interrogation in his still, bright eyes.

"My name is Homewood, Allan Homewood!"

"Then you be the young master, the old master be a proper fine man and a thorough gentleman!"

Allan laughed. "I hope that you will be able to say the same of me, though I warn you, Markabee, I am not such a fine man nor so good a gentleman as my father!"

"That may be, that may be!" said Markabee. "One finds out, one does, for one's self. But I be one as speaks as I du find and I say the old gentleman be a proper fine man, free handed moreover and pleasant of speech!

"Very late in the season, it were," Markabee went on. "May, pretty nigh out, when I du come to this garden. Powerful difficult it were to make much of a show, as I did say to Mr. Dalabey. 'Never mind,' says he, 'du your bestest, Markabee, for you be working for a proper fine gentleman who don't mind a little bit of extry money here and there, so be he gets what he du want!'"

Allan nodded. Not for all the world would he hurt the old fellow's feelings, but he could wish old Markabee safely off to his work in the garden, leaving him here to his dreams in the sunshine.

But not so Markabee. For he was old and had seen many things and many gardens; old and garrulous was he and eager above all to make a good impression on the young master!

"Things I hev seen and changes," he said, "you wouldn't believe, and now—how old might you take me to be, eh, young sir? What aged man would you say I were?" He pulled himself up erect as a grenadier, and his bright old eyes twinkled, while the long whisps of white hair fell about his copper coloured face.

"Now, sir, make a guess, how old might 'ee take me to be, eh?"

"I should say—" said Allan cautiously, "that you might be sixty-five!"

"Ha, ha, ha, that be a good 'un, sixty-five—ha, ha!" He laughed till his voice cracked and he nearly choked. "Two and eighty years hev I seen, two and eighty wi' never a lie, and look at me, fit for a long day's work I be with the best and youngest on 'em! Ask anyone here, young sir, ask what sort of worker be old Markabee, ask 'em to satisfy yourself, sir! Yes, two and eighty summers and winters hev I seen—sixty-five—ha, ha, ha! Sixty-five!" And, chuckling with laughter, he saluted, drew his old body erect and went marching off down the garden with a jaunty air, and yet in his heart a little quavering wonder and anxious fear.

"I wonder, du he think I be too old?"

If spell there had been, old Markabee had broken it. So though he might sit here on the old stone seat, no drowsiness came to him now. He watched a bee, a great velvety bumble bee, with its lustrous black and tan body hurrying, full of business, from flower to flower. The sun was low yet, and cast slanting shadows

all softly blue on the stone pathway. The dew glinted and glistened in the cups of the flowers and in the heart of the starry green leaves of the lupins. He looked along the broad straight pathway to the house and saw it, so strangely like he had seen it that day, the windows open, the dimity curtains moving lightly in the soft breeze. And now came a maid servant, but no mob cap and flowered gown wore she, and her hair was black and her eyes sleepy, nor did she trip daintily, but shuffled in sluggard fashion and let down the new sun blinds outside the windows with a rasping, creaking sound of iron on iron.

No dreams for him this day, nor did he want them? Why seek them, invite them? For dreams would but bring him again to dissatisfaction and would set him yearning and longing and even hoping for that which could never, never come true. Allan rose and seemed to shake himself, though he shook himself more mentally than physically, to lighten himself of these fancies, which were idle and foolish and which he must not encourage nor harbour.

He smiled to himself as he set off for a ramble about the garden, for he saw what he must do. He must prove to old Markabee and to all the rest that he was a man worthy of being his father's son.

"A proper fine man he be and a thorough gentleman," old Markabee had said, and so he was. God bless him for a fine gentleman!

And then suddenly and unexpectedly, for he had wandered far into a part of the garden where he had never been before and where even old Markabee and his merry men had not yet penetrated, he came on a little stream that flowed rapidly and clearly between high banks of thick green growth and at one place was a deep pool where the water swirled and eddied, obstructed for the moment in its course by an abrupt turn in the winding of the stream. About him were the trees and the greenery, an impenetrable leafy screen and the silence; but for the birds there was nothing to interrupt the solitude of the place. So off with his clothes and then a header into the cool green water for a brisk swim. Here, under the shade of the trees, the water ran cold and its coldness sent the blood leaping and throbbing through his veins.

A few minutes and he was out, glowing, dripping, a young giant in his health and strength. Now he had put his clothes on caring nothing that his skin was wet beneath them.

Back through the garden and the sunshine he strode—dreams, what idle things were dreams! Only a fool or a poet might sit there on that old old stone seat trying to conjure up visions of a long dead past. His body was in a glow, he was conscious of a great and voracious appetite. He saw the girl who had pulled the sun blinds down and called to her.

"What's your name?" he said. "Mary or Peggy, or Molly, eh?" he smiled at her.

"Ann is my name, sir!" she said. "Ann!"

"You're not Sussex?"

She tossed her head. "Not me, thank you, sir, I come from the Fulham Road!"

"Then, Ann, where you come from does not matter, but if you love me, get me a cup of tea and—and—well anything—a good big hunk of bread and butter will do, but see that it is big and that there is plenty of butter on it and I'll wait here till you come back, Ann!"

"What a very strange young gent," the girl thought. "If I love him indeed! There's a nice way of talking!" She tossed her head, yet went off to get the tea and the bread and butter.

"If I love him indeed, well of all the impudence!"

CHAPTER XIV

"HIS SON'S WIFE"

"Well, well, my boy, what do you think of it all? How do you think the garden looks?"

"Wonderful!"

"Wonderful, yes, that old Markabee's a treasure; you won't part with him, Allan?"

"Nothing would induce me to, father. I hope he'll stay here another twenty years at least!"

"That'll make him a hundred and two, the old man is very proud of his age, eighty something!"

"Eighty-two and seems a mere boy!" Allan went to his father and put his arms about the old man's shoulders.

"I—I'm not going to try and thank you!" he said.

"Don't, there's nothing to thank me for! I—I did it—I enjoyed doing it, never enjoyed anything so much in my life, put myself into it heart and soul. I'd like Cutler, you know Cutler, his daughter married the Governor of somewhere or other—I'd like him to see this place!"

"Then why not?"

"Bless me—so I may—one day—I might bring him down, but, Allan, I'm not going to interfere with you, not me! Two's company, three's none! I know that!

And—good morning, my dear, and I don't need to ask how you slept! As fresh as a rose you look this morning, as fresh and as handsome too!"

And she did, her cheeks were glowing, her eyes were bright. Fresh from her cold bath, she was a picture of glowing health and beauty. She went to him and put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him.

"And now I want to know what is the meaning of those horrible looking bags and portmanteaux and things I saw on the landing?"

"Why—why bless me—they are mine—I—I didn't mean to leave 'em about, my dear. I'd never have forgiven myself if you'd tripped and fallen over them, but——"

"I don't mean that; what I want to know is: Why are they packed?"

"Because—because there's my things in 'em and I'm off for London. Bletsoe's got his orders and after breakfast I'll start——"

"But supposing I don't mean to let you go?"

"Thank you, my dear, thank you and God bless you! I—I know what you mean, but thank you, my dear, all the same! I—I like to think that you're not in a hurry to push the old fellow out! I'll be glad to remember that!" His eyes shone. "Yes, my love, I'll be glad to remember that, but——"

"How are we going to manage without you?" she asked. "You have been so clever, it's all so wonderful what you have done here. Allan told me what a terrible, terrible state the place was in and how like a fairy, a good fairy, you have touched it with your wand and it—is like it is now! And we can't let our fairy go, can we?"

"But he'll come back, my love, he'll come back!" The old man cried happily. "But you and Allan have got to settle down and I—I know what it is, my dear, when Allan's mother and me were married, settling down is a bit difficult—I think you and Allan are best left to yourselves, and then when you want me, why I'll come, I'll come, you won't have to ask twice. You ought to have the telephone on—" he paused, took out his pocketbook and made a rapid note, "arrange telephone, Homewood," then you'll be able to ring me up and I'll be able to ring you up—now and again, not that I want to be a nuisance or a worry to you—but—but—what's that? What's that? Breakfast, eh?"

"Yes, sir, breakfast!" said the manservant.

Over breakfast they discussed an idea that had come to Kathleen.

"We must have a house warming," she said, "you know the old superstition, there'll be no luck about the house unless we have a warming!"

"To be sure!" said Sir Josiah, a little puzzled, "but I had the fires lighted and kep' going for weeks and——"

"I know!" she laughed. "But I mean a party, a house party, just a few of our nearest and dearest. You, of course, first and before all and my—" she hesitated,

"my father, of course, and then you will have one or two of your own friends, Sir Josiah, won't you? Friends of yours you might like to bring down?"

His eyes shone. "Cutler!" he said. "I'd like to bring him, take the shine out of him, it will too. I'm fed up with Her Excellency, the Governor's wife, that's Cutler's daughter. Why, my love, it'll stifle him, that's what it will do! Why, of course, I'll come! And there'll be a few things, wines and spirits and like that. I'll see about them, see about 'em at once—and now——"

And now the time for parting had come, the time he had dreaded, but it must come; the car was at the door, the bags were put into the car. And the owner of the car dallied, he was in the morning room and Kathleen was with him. She put her hand on his arm and delayed him, she had smiled a signal to Allan to go out and leave them together for a moment or so, and Allan had gone.

"You have been very, very good to us, you have given us this beautiful home, you have given us more—I know—" she said and her eyes were very bright and very kind, as she stood, a queenly young figure, with her slim white hand resting on his arm—"And I want to tell you this—I want to—to earn it all. I want to earn all your kindness and affection. I want to prove myself worthy of it! You have given me all this and you have given me your son and he—he is the best of all! A little while ago I thought that I was an old, old woman; life seemed to hold very, very little for me, my whole life was one long struggle, a struggle between pride and poverty. I suffered—" she paused, "more than I can ever tell. I knew what people said of me and of—" she paused, "of—of me, and now all suddenly I seem to realise that I am not old, but that I am young, and that I am not afraid of the years that lie before me. Our marriage, Allan's and mine, was—was—at first sordid and mercenary, and I hated it, but Allan and I talked about it and we agreed, long ago, that we would make the best, the very, very best possible of our lives and I think we are doing it. I know how you love him and I know how deeply he loves you and so—so I wanted to tell you that Allan's wife will try, with God's help, to be worthy of him and of you, that she will be a good, true and faithful wife to him, helping him when she may help, comforting him if he should need comfort. Perhaps—" she said softly, "I am not a religious woman, I wish I were! But no religious woman could have prayed to her God more fervently, more from her heart than I have prayed from mine that I may never fail in my duty, that I shall be all that he would have me, that I shall be a good, true and faithful wife and friend to the man whose name I bear!"

He did not speak, his lips trembled a little, he put his arms about her and held her very tightly for a moment and then he went out, seeing nothing very clearly, for the mist that was before his eyes.

And as he drove through the little town and out into the white Sussex roads, past the green fields and under the shadow of the Downs, he remembered, not

that his daughter was Lady Kathleen, daughter of the Earl of Gowerhurst, but that she was the sweetest and the best woman he had ever known.

CHAPTER XV.

"WILL YOU TAKE THIS MAN?"

The kindly cup of tea of which Mrs. Colley had spoken to Abram Lestwick must have grown cold or been replaced and renewed many times, but it was not partaken of by him for whom it was so hospitably intended.

Mrs. Colley, a short, little body, with a long, lean, bony face and black hair, dragged back painfully from a protruding and shiny forehead, watched for Abram as eagerly as ever a maid watched for the coming of her lover.

'Lizabeth, sallow faced, black haired like her grandmother, and with the bad teeth possessed by too many country girls, tossed her head.

"I don't go running after no man!" she said. "Abram Lestwick least of all! I say if he doan't want our tea, let him stop away!"

"You fool!" said her grandmother, "and there be that Mrs. Hanson forever dangling after he. Would you be beat, 'Lizabeth, by a pink and white dolly faced hussy like Mrs. Hanson's Betty? I'd have more pride, I would!"

"She be welcome to he!" said 'Lizabeth. "Too quiet and mum mouthed he be to my liking and——"

"There he be!" said Mrs. Colley.

She bounded out of her chair and was across the little sitting room kitchen and down the garden path to the gate all in a moment; a very energetic woman, Mrs. Colley!

"Oh, Abram!" she said a little breathlessly. "Funny me coming out this moment and meeting 'ee promiscus like, but I did see a great slug a-settling on my geraniums and just at this very moment 'Lizabeth be laying the tea and a fresh biscuit she hev baked, all hot from the oven, so du 'ee come in now, Abram, for there be a powerful lot of things I want to speak wi' 'ee about!"

"I be sorry," he said gloomily, "afraid I be I cannot stop!"

"And the tea fresh brewed and on the hob and the water on it not more'n three minutes, Abram, and the biscuit of 'Lizabeth's baking, a currant biscuit, Abram!"

He shook his head. "I wish 'ee good evening, Mrs. Colley," he said, "and

must be getting along!" He lifted his hat to her, a polite man, Abram Lestwick, and went on. Mrs. Colley went back, beaten and angry.

"She hev laid a spell on him, 'tis a good thing for Mother Hanson her bain't living a hundred years ago, or burned for a witch her would be, certain sure! And his coat buttons, I never see such a sight, 'Lizabeth!"

"Drat his coat buttons! What be they to me?"

"Two gone out of the four and two others hanging by threads, and him working his fingers whiles he were talking wi' me, pulling they off, a rare busy time wi' her needle will Abram Lestwick's wife hev! Wonderful restless and nervis he be about the hands, 'Lizabeth!"

"Drat his hands!" said Elizabeth Colley. "He doan't catch me sewing on his buttons for him, no nor for the best man living neither, which Abram Lestwick b'aint!"

Down the road went Abram Lestwick, the weak chin under the straggling growth of black hair looked a shade more resolute this evening, for he had made up his mind.

Was he, Abram Lestwick, the man to stand nonsense from a mere maid who dared oppose his will with her own? No! Was he not Farmer Patcham's foreman and first hand, looked up to and respected? He was!

Had he not a cottage of four rooms of his own? He had! Was he not in receipt of a steady income of thirty-five shillings a week, of which he had no less than forty-three pounds ten saved and standing in the Post Office Savings Bank to his credit? He was!

Very well then!

Down the road strode Abram Lestwick.

"I'll put up wi' no more dilly dallying wi' she!" he said to himself, "I be a strong intentioned man, not a boy like some, to be put off wi' a grimace and a shake o' a head, and such like! And so I'll let her know and I hev her grandmother's good wishes!"

He did not falter, he flung open the little green painted gate of Mrs. Hanson's front garden and trod manfully up the broken stone pathway to the cottage door.

"Why if it bain't Abram!" said Mrs. Hanson, in a tone of surprise, though she had been watching the clock for him this past half hour. Betty, pouring boiling water from the kettle into the brown teapot, started, so that the hot water splashed on her hand, but she uttered no sound. Her face turned white, perhaps it was the pain from the boiling water, perhaps the sound of the man's voice!

"Good evening!" he said.

"Good evening to 'ee, Abram," said Mrs. Hanson. She looked across the room to the girl. "Betty, here be Abram!"

"Aye, I know!"

Abram had taken off his hat, he was twisting it between his restless fingers, plucking at the felt, bending the brim. Mrs. Hanson stared resolutely at his face.

"Wun't 'ee draw a chair and set down, Abram?" she said. "An' put your hat down!"

He nodded, he put his hat down and sat by the table. Betty's face was white and set hard, her small round chin was thrust out obstinately.

Abram looked at her out of the corner of his eyes.

"I du hear good accounts of the new people at the Manor," he said.

"Aye, a sweet and pleasant spoken lady and the daughter of a Lord!" said Mrs. Hanson. "And Mr. Allan Homewood, who I did speak with the very day he came here first, a very nicely spoken gentleman, I'm sure!" She looked at Betty.

Betty sat down, she stared straight before her, she knew that these were but preliminaries, that which they were saying now mattered nothing at all. Her grandmother poured out the tea. Abram took his cup, he twisted it round and round in the saucer.

"I see Mrs. Colley as I passed the door, picking slugs she were! She asked me in to tea, she said there was a fresh biscuit of 'Lizbeth's baking!"

It was meant for conversation, and not as a reflection on the present tea table, which was guiltless of a currant biscuit.

"A wunnerful hand at cooking, 'Lizbeth Colley be!" he said.

Mrs. Hanson shrugged her shoulders, "Hev you ever noticed her teeth, Abram, terribul teeth they be!"

"Terribul!" he agreed; he looked at the girl facing him. He could not see her teeth, for her small rosebud mouth was tightly compressed, but he had seen them and remembered them for the whitest pearls he had ever seen.

"A rare hand at fashioning and managing, 'Lizbeth Colley," he remarked. He paused to drink with his mouth full of bread and butter. It was not a pretty exhibition, but neither Mrs. Hanson nor Betty remarked it. Bread and butter and tea taken at one meal had to mingle, sooner or later; why not sooner than later?

The meal went on, Abram smacked his lips noisily. Mrs. Hanson tried to make conversation.

"A bit of luck for an old man like Markabee getting a permanent job at his time of life! I wonder how long du they think they'll keep he?" she asked.

"Ah!"

"Though I du admit very agile he be for his years!"

It was all idle, it was all eating up time, till the meal should be over. These, as Betty knew, were merely preliminaries, presently the real business would start. Her grandmother had warned her.

"Ahram be here to-night, he be, to hev a direct answer and for 'ee to make

up thy mind and name the day!" said Mrs. Hanson.

"He'll get his direct answer, he will! And as for naming the day, there wun't he no day to name!" said Betty.

"We'll see, my gell!"

"Aye, we'll see!" said Betty.

"I can't think what have come to that maid!" Mrs. Hanson thought. "All contrairy and perilous defiant her be, and once——"

"Help me clear they things!" Mrs. Hanson said.

The meal was over at last. Abram brought out his pipe; he did not light it, he did not even put it between his long, yellowish teeth. He held it in his hand, he twisted it and turned it. He made of the bowl a thimble, which he set on his finger; he picked at the thin silver mount and all the time he watched Betty. And always that weak chin of his under the coarse, sparse black hairs, seemed to grow stronger and more protruberant, more pronounced.

Mrs. Hanson spun out the washing up, but it was over at last and she came back and took her usual seat by the fireplace.

"And now, Abram?" she said.

It was the signal, Betty stiffened up, she clenched her small hands; Abram dropped the pipe and stooped to recover it.

"Mrs. Hanson, Ma'am, and Betty, you both know full well why I be here to-night," he said. "Terribul slow of speech I be—" He dropped the pipe again and went in search of it; groping along the floor, again he recovered it.

"Why not put the pipe down, Abram?" Mrs. Hanson said. "Pipes be terribul easy things to drop!"

He nodded, he put the pipe down on the table and fell to plucking out the horsehairs from the chair seat.

"Terribul slow of speech I be!" he repeated. "But you, Ma'am, Mrs. Hanson, know, I think, why I be here to'night! 'Tis about the maid, Betty, your granddarter, Ma'am!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Hanson.

"What hev your visits to do wi' me?" Betty demanded, a spot of vivid colour in her white cheeks.

"I du love 'ee and want 'ee to marry me!" he said simply.

"That be well spoken, straight and to the point, that be!" said Mrs. Hanson. "No man could speak fairer!"

"Then I will speak straight and to the point tu," Betty said. "I du not love 'ee and will never marry 'ee! I would sooner be dead, and drownd myself I will before I marry 'ee, Abram Lestwick!"

"Ah!" he said, his eyes roved towards Mrs. Hanson. What had she to say to that?

"A perilous bad maid 'ee be!" said Mrs. Hanson.

"So 'ee've told me till I be sick to death o' hearing it. Perilous bad and wicked and ungrateful, I be—an all that's bad! Why do he come here a persecutering me? Why doan't he leave I alone?" the girl cried passionately. "I doan't ask him to—to foller me and worry me—why doan't he go and marry 'Lizbeth Colley, wi' her currant biscuits? A wonderful fashioner and manager she be! He said it, said it and I—I wun't marry him. I'll die—die willing and glad, yes die! Yes, I'll die!"

She leaped to her feet, her face was burning, her eyes brilliant with defiance and anger.

"No one hasn't the right to so persecute a maid like he du persecute I! I doan't want him here. I—I can't bear nor bide 'ee, Abram Lestwick, I can't!"

Her voice faltered. He sat there staring at her, never speaking a word and his silence disconcerted her.

"A perilous—" began Mrs. Hanson.

"Say—say it again, say it again!" Betty panted, "And I'll scream, I'll scream till I be dead. Say it, again!"

"And 'ee be my son Garge's child. Garge as were ever mild and quiet, and I be Garge's mother!" Up rose Mrs. Hanson. "I be Garge's mother and thy grandmother and I be the one to speak, Betty Hanson, and speak I will!" She lifted a strong arm and pointed a long, thick-jointed finger at the girl. "Marry him 'ee shall, and I say it! And wi' a good grace tu, and come to your senses, 'ee shall, my maid, if I break a stick over your back! And I'll hev no more o' these tantrums, no more of them, I say, a perilous bad and wicked maid 'ee be! Hev not Abram done we a great honour? Hev he not——"

"I'll kill myself before I marry him!" the girl said, but she said it without passion, only with an immense certainty in her voice.

Abram blinked, he stared at the ill smelling, newly lighted lamp.

"Listen to me, Betty Hanson. Here be Abram asking 'ee to marry 'ee and asking 'ee to name the day—answer!"

"I hev answered!"

"Answer as I order 'ee!"

"I shan't!"

Mrs. Hanson stalked across the room, she went to a corner by the fireplace, in that corner stood the stout old stick that had supported her husband's declining years. She had always kept that stick in the corner, it was more homely to see it there. She took it now, she came back to Betty.

"Will 'ee marry this good man?"

"No!"

One, two, three, down came the stick, heavily across the slender shoulders.

The girl's eyes filled with tears, born of the smart of the blows, but she kept her white teeth clenched.

"I ask 'ee again, will 'ee name the day?"

"No, never!"

Thud, thud, thud!

Ahram Lestwick leaned forward, he stared at them both. He was tearing the threads out of the fringe of the cheap tablecloth now. He watched Betty's face without emotion. "Dogged abst'nate her be!" he muttered.

"Betty Hanson, my mind be made up! Will 'ee take this man to be your lawful wedded husband, in sickness and in health, for better an' for worser, till death du 'ee part?"

"I wun't, I hate him!"

Thud, thud, thud.

"And I hate 'ee tu!" said Betty suddenly.

"That be enough!" The stick fell. "'Ee've said it, Betty Hanson! Said it! Said it past recall! Hate me, 'ee said it! And to-morrow 'ee go out, go out, my maid, for I live in no house where hate du abide!"

"I'll go and glad, glad!" the girl said.

Abram rose slowly.

"I beg to thank 'ee for a good tea, which I did enjoy, Mrs. Hanson, 'tis time for me to be going!" he turned towards the door. "A very good tea!" he said. "I bain't partial to new baked currant biscuits!" He paused at the door and looked at Betty.

"I'll ask 'ee to name the day some other time, my maid! I be a patient man, a very patient man, I be in no hurry, no hurry at all! And I wish 'ee good night, Mrs. Hanson, and thank 'ee for your good tea once again!"

Betty stared at him, her eyes were wide, filled with terror. She lifted her hands to her face, she gripped her face between them, the sharp little nails dug into the soft, peach-like cheeks, but she felt no pain, was unconscious of what she was doing.

He looked at her and smiled, he backed out and closed the door, but she did not move. She heard his steps outside, her breast was rising and falling and when she spoke, she spoke in gasps, in short breathless sentences.

"Did 'ee see—grandmother, did 'ee see—his hands—his hateful hands? Grandmother, did 'ee see? One day—he'll kill someone wi' they hands, kill 'em—

grandmother, maybe—maybe 'twill be—me!"

CHAPTER XVI
"MY LADY MERCIFUL"

"I am glad Mr. Dalabey spared her," said Kathleen.

She nodded towards the little figure of the nymph standing up from the middle of the lake.

"So am I!" Allan said. "But I've a great respect for Dalabey, he does not look it, but he is an artist. He has a right perception, a sense of fitness. Dalabey is a reader and a thinker, too. Kathleen, you would be surprised by the depth of Dalabey's knowledge, for all that, he says 'I be' and 'Du 'ee?' Which, after all, may be better English than that which you and I speak. You would hardly believe that Dalabey and Ruskin have more than a nodding acquaintance, but so it is! Yes, I'm glad he spared the little stone maid. Do you know the first morning we were here, dear, I worried about her. I rose early and came out to see if she were still here and there she was, a monument to Dalabey's good sense! I've congratulated him since!"

She was listening to him with a smile on her lips. Now she glanced at him, at the tall, big young man by her side—her husband!

"Allan," she said suddenly, "Allan, you seem to be very happy!"

"Happy!" he was startled. "Of course I am happy. Why—why did you say that? I am happy and content. I Have the dearest and best man in the world for father. I have a wife who is friend and comrade——" he pressed her hand. "I have a home, the like of which there is not to be found in all England! Happy—why not, Kathleen?"

She was silent for a moment. He had said the dearest father and his wife—after all his wife was only friend and comrade—only! Why did she feel vaguely dissatisfied, had she not set herself to be just that very thing, that he said she was—friend, comrade, and now he had said it, she felt a little regret.

"And you would not have things different from what they are, Allan?"

"No!" he said. "I'm very, very content, very proud and very happy, Kathleen."

"And the dream," she said, "the dream you told me of, Allan, the pretty girl who came——"

He laughed frankly, almost boyishly, a laugh so clear and so ringing that it, was infectious.

"Because I had a pleasant dream and dreamed a pretty girl was imprudent enough to come and kiss me, shall I moon about disconsolate and unhappy, my mind filled with stupid longing and foolish regrets, eh?"

"But the dream did affect you for a time, Allan?"

"For a time," he said, "it was so clear, so real, so strange, so—so undreamlike that it must affect me! Kathleen, I never think of it now, I've put it out of my mind, I've sat there a score of times on that very seat and no dreams have come, I've smiled at the foolish fancy of it, laughed it all to scorn—and forgotten it——"

"But if it were not—all a dream, if one day she came into your life—that girl——"

He shook his head. "She was a dream and she doesn't exist, she never will and never can—she came and she went—for good!"

"And yet," she persisted, with a woman's strange persistence, "Allan, if—if she came, if you saw her in life, if——"

"Then," he said quietly and looked her full in the eyes, "you have my promise, dear, just as I have yours, but it will never, never be—Kathleen, shall I be truthful, honest, candid with, you? I never want it to be, dear, I am well content! And now come——" he went on gaily, "and we'll talk to old Markabee, that young fellow who refuses to grow old! Come, dear and——"

But she shook her head. "I am going to the village, Allan," she said, "at least, not to the village, but to a little cottage between here and Little Stretton, Mrs. Hanson's cottage."

"Hanson, I remember a kindly talkative old dame who has always a smile and a country bob for us."

"I am afraid she is not as kindly as she looks!" Kathleen said.

"Why, what has the wicked old body been doing?"

"Ill-treating her granddaughter, so I have heard. It was Debly Cassons who told me. She said she was passing Mrs. Hanson's cottage as she came here last evening, and she heard the sound of beating and looking in through the window saw that wicked old woman thrashing the girl with a stick. And there——" Kathleen went on, "the girl was standing accepting the blows without a sound, but later as Debly was going back, she heard someone sobbing as thought her heart was breaking and she found the girl lying on the grass in the little garden crying bitterly. Debly is a kindly old soul and she tried to comfort her and find out what the trouble was, but the girl would not answer, so——"

"So my dear little Lady Bountiful, my Lady Merciful is going to carry comfort to the ill-used child, eh?"

He looked at Kathleen, then stretched out his hand and touched hers.

"Kathleen, you are a good woman," he said sincerely and gently, "I wish I could think that I were worthy of you!"

Kathleen shook her head, she did not speak.

There was a trace of sadness in her eyes as she went back alone to the house. It seemed to her that there was the chance of happiness of a great and wonderful happiness, yet she could not stretch out her hand to grasp it, could not because of memories, years old memories, memories of another face and another voice, memories of a love that had filled her life once. She had loved then, she told herself, as a woman loves but once, as she could never love again.

"Allan's happiness and mine," she said to herself, "is built not on love, but on friendship and respect, perhaps it is the surest, the best foundation," yet while she consoled herself, she sighed a little and the sadness stayed in her eyes.

Very grim and very silent was Mrs. Hanson this morning. Last night that maid, the maid she had brought up from babyhood had told her that she hated her, had said "shan't" to her, had defied her.

Mrs. Hanson had had a strict upbringing herself, she had married Hanson because he was in regular work and was drawing good pay, twelve shillings a week, no less. Her parents had told her to marry Hanson and she had married him. The marriage market has its branches in the smallest of villages and marriages of convenience are not luxuries enjoyed only by the rich and the wellborn.

And she, in her turn, had found a very suitable husband for this wayward maid who, lacking in duty and obedience, definitely refused to accept that husband.

Very well then! Mrs. Hanson had every reason to be hurt and aggrieved.

Betty had risen early—as usual—had cleaned out the little cottage kitchen, had polished the stove till it shone, had made the fire and had prepared the breakfast just as usual, but all the time she was doing it, she knew that she was doing it for the last time.

Last night her grandmother had said to her, "You shall go!"

Her grandmother never changed her mind, never relented, never altered. Betty knew this of long, long experience, besides in any event she would go, she would not stay—no, not even if her grandmother begged her to on her bended knees, and that was not in the least likely. They had their breakfast together in stony silence. After breakfast Mrs. Hanson spoke.

"Wash they things and put them back on the dresser—for the last time!" she added.

Betty had washed the things, she had replaced them on the dresser, on to the snowy white board of the dresser top she had permitted one large hot tear to splash.

Her grandmother sat stiffly upright in her chair by the window with the

huge family Bible open on the little rickety round table before her.

Mrs. Hanson always turned to the Bible for comfort and for advice in times of stress and doubt. She was reading stolidly through the story of Naboth's Vineyard and was deriving much spiritual comfort from it. Very stern and unrelenting she looked sitting primly bolt upright, her hands resting on the book and her spectacles adjusted on the end of her long and pointed nose.

Now and again out of the corner of her eye she glanced at the girl who was slowly putting the finishing touches to her work. In a little while the girl must be gone, Mrs. Hanson was a stern and unrelenting woman.

Where the girl would go to, Mrs. Hanson did not know, she never gave it a thought.

"She did say, she did hate me!" the old woman thought. "Hate—a perilous wicked thing for a young gell to say—and to abide in a house of hatred, I will not! There's the Bible for it—'Better a dinner of yarbs and contentment therewith than a stalled ox in the house——'" Mrs. Hanson looked up, a shadow had fallen across the window, there came a light tapping on the door.

"Bless me and bless my dear soul!" said Mrs. Hanson aloud, "if here b'ain't my Lady Homewood, Betty quick—quickly open the door to Her Ladyship, quick now! Do 'ee hear me speak?"

The door was opened by Betty. Coming from the hot bright sunlight of the outer world into the twilight of the little room, Kathleen could only see a slight, slender figure in an old cotton gown, which figure bobbed a deferential, yet it almost seemed a defiant little curtsey to her.

"This is Mrs. Hanson's cottage?" Kathleen asked.

"Yes, my lady!"

Mrs. Hanson had risen, she bobbed, it was no half hearted curtsey this of hers, she seemed to sink into the floor to her middle and then rose again, tall and lean and agitated.

"Mrs. Hanson I be, my Lady, and proud I be to see your Ladyship here—Betty, a chair for her Ladyship, my maid!"

Betty brought a chair, she flicked it with a duster and placed it that Kathleen might be seated.

And now Kathleen, whose sight had grown accustomed to the dimmer light of the room, could see the child plainly, and seeing her, wondered a little at the loveliness of the little piteous face, the drawn mouth, the big saddened eyes that had so evidently recently shed tears.

Poor pretty little maid! Kathleen remembered what Debly had told her of the child lying out in the grass, sobbing her heart out in the darkness of the night. She looked at the stern puritanical looking old woman and Kathleen, who was hot blooded and generous, felt instinctive dislike of her, which dislike was unjust

and ill placed.

So, having come expressly about this girl with the golden hair and the sweet oval face, Kathleen, being a very diplomatic young woman, spoke of everything and anything else under the sun. She told Mrs. Hanson how often she had admired the neatness and prettiness of the little front garden.

"It is so nice to see gardens so well kept, I am sure yours is a great credit to you, and oh Mrs. Hanson, do please sit down, we can't talk comfortably, can we, if you stand?"

"Oh, my Lady, to sit in your presence!"

"Then you will force me to stand too!" said Kathleen.

So Mrs. Hanson sat down on the very edge of her hard chair and they talked of the garden, that neat little garden with its flower beds, surrounded by nice large flint stones which Betty whitened regularly every Saturday, to make all prim and clean and spotless for the Sunday.

"You have lived here many years?" Kathleen asked.

"A Hanson hev always lived in this cottage, my Lady, from time out o' mind. A Bifley were I born, my mother being a Pringle, and me married to Amos Hanson when I were just turned seventeen."

"Ah yes!" Kathleen said. "And this is your granddaughter?"

"My granddarter her be," said Mrs. Hanson sternly.

"And of course you need her here to help you in this little cottage?" Kathleen hazarded.

"I du not need she, my Lady, and her be going to leave me, her be, this very day!"

"To—to leave—you—you mean the child is going away? Where is she going to?"

Mrs. Hanson did not answer. The girl was still in the room, seemingly busy at the dresser, but Kathleen looking could see the slender shoulders shake and knew what a big fight the little maid was putting up to keep herself from bursting into tears.

What little village tragedy was here? she wondered.

"Is she going to London?" Kathleen asked.

"I du not know, my Lady!"

"But——" Kathleen said.

Mrs. Hanson rose, she was trembling.

"My Lady, that I should hev to tell 'ee a stranger, yet with a face so kind, that emboldened I be—my Lady—this maid, this perilous wicked maid——" the old dame stopped for a moment, quivering and shaking, "this perilous bad, wicked onnatchral maid did say to me—I hate 'ee, I du! Said it my lady wi' her own lips and tongue, she did! And I said tu her 'Betty Hanson, granddarter o' mine, 'ee

may be, but never, never will I abide in a house where hatred du exist, so out of this house du 'ee go for a bad perilous maid on the morrow!' And this be the morrow, my Lady——"

"But she is so young, only a child and surely you would not let her go without, knowing she is going into safety and into the house of friends? She is your granddaughter and you are responsible for her! Do you think that you are acting rightly? Do you think—oh please don't think that I am preaching to you—but she is so young and so pretty and to think of her going—and never even knowing where the poor child is going to!"

"I hev chose for she a good husband, a man wi' thirty-five shillings a week coming in, a cottage too and of quiet ways!"

"But if she does not love him?" Kathleen asked, and, remembering her own marriage, blushed red as a rose.

"Love him indeed, my lady, hev I not chose he for she? A good upstanding, upright man as ever was, to Church reg'lar twice a Sundays, walking in the fear of God, he du, and very respectable wi' never a word to be heard against he—and—and——" Mrs. Hanson paused nervously and exhausted for the moment.

"But she is only a child! Betty, come here, Betty!"

"Betty, du 'ee hear her Ladyship a-speaking to 'ee?" cried the grandmother.

But Betty at the dresser, her back obstinately turned, did not move.

"There, there!" said Mrs. Hanson triumphantly, "'ee can see for yourself, my Lady, how bad and de-fiant and obstinant her du be—Oh Betty, shame on thee!" the old woman added, for Kathleen herself had risen and had gone across the room to the lonely little figure and all suddenly had put a kind arm about those heaving shoulders.

"Betty, Betty child, come and tell me all about it!" she said in that sweet gentle voice of hers that could break down any barrier of anger and defiance. And then Betty, knowing, feeling that here was a friend, broke down suddenly and giving way to the long threatening tears, laid her head against Kathleen's breast and sobbed.

"I hate him, I hate him I du and fear him I du, My—my lady and grandmother be so bent on my marrying he and I, I can't! Oh, I can't bear it, I can't and 'tis breaking my heart, it be, my—my Lady!"

"Hush, little one, don't cry!" Kathleen said.

"Betty, I be mortal ashamed of 'ee, I be!" said Mrs. Hanson. "Mortal ashamed and all put about I be!"

"Please, Mrs. Hanson, let me speak to her!" said Kathleen. She drew Betty towards her chair, she sat down and held the girl's hot little hand and looked into the pretty flushed tear stained face. Poor pretty child!

"How old are you, Betty?" she asked.

"I be—be eighteen, my Lady!"

"And behaving she be like she were but seven!" said Mrs. Hanson. "A perilous bad——" she paused.

"Your grandmother says you must go, Betty!"

"Aye, I du, I du, and when I du say a thing, by that thing I du abide!" said Mrs. Hanson. "Go, I said, and go she shall! A very unrelenting woman I be!"

And then at last came a flash of anger into Kathleen's eyes.

"Yes, a very hard and unrelenting woman, I fear, Mrs. Hanson! Has this child no other friends, no other relations, than you?"

"Never a soul hev she got, and I hev brought she up!"

"And now would turn her out of the house, knowing that she had no one to go to, no one to keep and protect her, for shame, Mrs. Hanson!" cried Kathleen in just indignation. Mrs. Hanson said nothing, she quivered and shook. Perhaps in her heart of hearts she wanted to give way, but she had said it, a stern and unrelenting woman was she, and prided herself on it.

"And where will you go to, Betty, when you leave your grandmother's cottage?"

"Oh my lady, I du not know, indeed I du not! For I hev not thought of it, but I wouldn't mind where I did go, so be it was not to Abram Lestwick, who I du hate and of whom I be in most mortal terror, my—my lady!"

"Then you shall not go to him, you shall come to me, Betty, and you shall be my little maid!" Kathleen said.

"To—to the Manor House, my—my lady?" Betty stammered, "Oh my Lady, to—to the Manor House?"

"Why, of course, child, for I live there!"

"Oh my Lady, I—I couldn't, don't ask me—I couldn't bear to—to go there and see it all—all as it be now—I couldn't my Lady, 'twould break my heart!"

Kathleen looked at her in amazement. "But why, Betty?" she said. "I don't understand!"

"My Lady," interposed Mrs. Hanson, "if so be as I may be allowed to speak——" she paused, quivering with indignation, "'tis but right I should tell 'ee this, that this wayward, obstinate, perilous gel was forever in they old gardens before Mr. Homewood bought the old place, forever she was, spite of all I did say to she. Sometimes of nights I du verily believe she would rise and go stealing off to they gardens, a terribul state they was in too, and coming back wi' her frock all covered wi' green like and sometimes tored by the wall over which she did climb most shameful——"

Kathleen heard, she looked at the girl who stood with bowed head before her.

"Why did you go to the garden, Betty?" she asked softly.

"Because—oh I—I don't know, because—I can't—can't tell 'ee, my Lady, I can't tell 'ee, but it be all changed and altered now wi' great fences put up and—and my stone maid gone and 'twould break my heart, my Lady to go there and not see she, my stone maid, any more!"

"The stone maid is not gone, Betty, and the gardens have not been altered, but only made beautiful and they tell me that they must be just as they were in the old days!"

"I wonder, my Lady, as 'ee have the patience to talk wi' she!" said Mrs. Hanson.

But Kathleen took no notice. "So, Betty, will you come to me and be my little maid?"

"And glad and grateful!" said Mrs. Hanson. "Say it!" she commanded. "Elizabeth Hanson, say it, yes—and glad and grateful I du be, my Lady, to 'ee for your great kindness, and drop my Lady a curtsey, 'ee unmannerly maid, as I be sore ashamed of!"

"If only——" Kathleen thought, "if only the old woman would leave the child alone, poor Betty, I can see why that little spirit of hers was goaded into rebellion at last!"

"I need no thanks!" Kathleen said, "I only want Betty to say that she will come; you will come, child?"

How kind were those eyes that looked into hers, how sweet a smile there was on her Ladyship's beautiful face! It must have melted a heart of stone and Betty's warm passionate little heart was not of stone. So she broke down, sobbing and crying, she would come and glad and grateful she was, and come she would that very day if her Ladyship would but have her.

"Pack your little box, Betty," Kathleen said, "and I will send one of the men presently to fetch it for you and I think and hope you will be happy and—and maybe Betty, you will not find the old garden so changed after all. I will answer for it there are no ugly fences and the stone maid stands where she did in the middle of the lake, Betty, so—go come and see your little friend again!" She held out her kind hand, but Betty did not take it, instead she dropped suddenly onto her knees and kissed that white hand as if it had been the hand of a Queen, and so like a queen was Kathleen to the country maid, a Queen all beautiful, all generous, all kind. Queen! No, an angel from Heaven rather! And when she had gone Betty stood there, all unmindful that her grandmother was here and she spoke her thoughts aloud.

"Very willing and glad I would be," she said slowly, "very willing and glad to die for she, I would!"

Mrs. Hanson sniffed, she had no patience with such outrageous and exaggerated statements.

"Get 'ee off and pack your box," she said sharply, "and think yourself lucky, Betty Hanson, as 'ee hev found another home, and a kind mistress, too kind I be afeared! Too kind and lenient like wi' 'ee and your folly, my maid!"

CHAPTER XVII
HAROLD SCARSDALE RETURNS

Kathleen's face was very thoughtful, a little sad even, as she walked back along the white dusty road. She hardly saw the village folk, who bobbed and curtseyed to her as she passed. She saw only a sweet oval face, a glorious head of glittering hair, a pair of sad, wistful blue eyes.

"So these people do, as their betters!" she thought. "They drive and goad their children into unhappy marriages! My Lord's daughter must be made to marry thirty thousand a year, as little Betty, Mrs. Hanson's granddaughter, is to be forced into marriage with thirty shillings a week! How wrong and what a shame it all is! Money, rank, position and interest! Is there no such thing as love left in the world at all? May not a man choose his mate, a woman choose for herself from among all men, the one she loves? It seems not, in village or in city, in cottage or in palace, and I——" she paused. "I did as I was bidden and I am happier perhaps than I deserve to be!"

Kathleen, unlike other well born young ladies of Society, had had no maid, in the old days she could not afford one. Amy, the parlour maid, had assisted her into the dresses that were so very seldom paid for, and Kathleen had long since adopted the unladylike practice of doing her own hair. So when she came to Homewood she had decided to continue without a maid, though the funds were not lacking now and the dresses were certainly paid for.

Of course little Betty Hanson would not know a tithe of those things that a good and practiced lady's maid should know. She would not be able to do her ladyship's hair in the latest and most becoming style. She would not be able to select gowns suitable for special occasions. She would not be able to massage my lady's white hands and perhaps her face. She would not be able to flatter and fawn and sponge and perhaps rob and lie. No, Betty Hanson was not likely to have any of these desirable accomplishments.

Kathleen had an honest admiration for beauty. She was one of those rare women who can see and appreciate beauty in another woman. She would have

everything about her beautiful if she could. She feared that perhaps to those who were unbeautiful, she was a little unjust. To Ann, the very plain housemaid who came from the Fulham Road, for instance, Kathleen was more than unusually kind and generous, because in her heart of hearts she did not like Ann. And she believed that she did not like Ann because Ann had a sallow, greasy skin, a misshapen nose and small mean eyes, set too closely together and a loose, nondescript kind of mouth.

Ann, as a matter of fact, was a stupid, blundering creature, who forgot to do one half of what she was told and deliberately neglected to do the other half, who generally did everything badly, and had a habit of breaking the most expensive things she could put her clumsy hands on. Once Kathleen, goaded and irritated by Ann's hopeless imbecility had spoken sharply—sharply for her—to the girl and had promptly repented of it and had given Ann five shillings and begged a half day off for her from Mrs. Crozier, the housekeeper.

But that was like Kathleen and that was why the servants adored her.

But Kathleen was a little disturbed in her mind. She found herself wondering, remembering and wondering—what was this about this child haunting the old garden at the Manor House, climbing the high brick wall and entering into that place of desolation and solitude, called thither, who knows by what strange voices? What was this about her going there of nights to wander about the black solitudes of tangle and weed? Surely it was not right, it was not canny. She smiled at the word, the word that she had heard her old Scottish nurse use years and years ago. Yet it was the right word, it was not canny that a young and pretty girl should have so strange a love for solitudes and weed grown gardens.

"Could it—could it have been she?" What mad nonsense, what folly was this? Kathleen wondered at her own thoughts. How could it have been this girl whom Allan had seen there that day? He had said it was a dream, it must have been a dream—this girl was no dream, but living reality. And then Allan had told her that the girl of his dream had been dressed all in some strange, old world costume, how the garden about her had been in bloom and all so trim and neat and tidy, how the old house, a place of desolation, had been bright and gay with its open windows and blowing curtains, and how the girl herself had gone to him and had kissed him and had put her little mittened hands—mittened hands—had little Betty Hanson ever owned a pair of mittens in her life? No, no those things had gone out in Betty's great-grandmother's time, what mad nonsense it all was! So Kathleen laughed merrily and laughed the ideas and the notions all away.

She went to find Mrs. Crozier—Mrs. Crozier, the elderly, kindly autocrat of the house, Mrs. Crozier who had been housekeeper in a far finer and more magnificent mansion than this, no less a place than Dwennington Hall, the seat of the Duke of Grandon.

"Mrs. Crozier, I have engaged a young village girl, Betty Hanson, granddaughter of Mrs. Hanson, who lives in the cottage up the road towards Little Stretton, she is to be my lady's maid. She is only a child and she will feel strange here at first so——"

"I quite understand, my lady, I'll look after the little thing and make her feel quite at home!"

"Thank you, you do so readily understand me, Mrs. Crozier."

"It's easy enough to understand your Ladyship," Mrs. Crozier said. "There is always some kindly thought in your head, my lady, for others—I know Mrs. Hanson slightly, a good and very respectable woman!"

"Will you send one of the men for Betty Hanson's box presently? And oh Mrs. Crozier, about the fourteenth——"

"I'm making all preparations, my lady, Sir Josiah will be coming of course!" Mrs. Crozier smiled, she held Sir Josiah in very high esteem.

"Not a highly educated gentleman, perhaps," Mrs. Crozier had said over a cup of tea to Mrs. Parsmon, the doctor's wife, "but one of the kind, Mrs. Parsmon that I call Nature's gentlemen! That is my opinion of Sir Josiah Homewood!" So when Mrs. Crozier mentioned his name to Sir Josiah's daughter-in-law, she smiled in a very kindly way.

"Sir Josiah will bring a friend, perhaps two, and my father will come of course," Kathleen's voice changed a little, as it always did in some subtle manner when she spoke of her father. Her face seemed to grow a shade colder, then the cloud passed and she was smiling and thanking Mrs. Crozier again, for her intended kindness to Betty Hanson.

"I'll see her in the morning," she said, "let her come up to me after breakfast and I'll have a long talk with her, and O Mrs. Crozier, as she is leaving her grandmother so suddenly, she may need some things, clothes I mean—I know it is not always easy for a young girl to get all the clothes she needs"—there was a sad reminiscent smile on Kathleen's face, "so will you get anything for her she may require and let me know?"

"I will do everything, my lady."

The fourteenth was the date fixed for the house warming, that event that had a little puzzled Sir Josiah. But he quite understood what it meant now, and he was looking forward to it with much the same feeling as a schoolboy has regarding the coming summer holidays.

At the old fashioned chop house in the City, a table was regularly reserved for Sir Josiah, which he sometimes shared with Cutler and sometimes with Jobson or Cuttlewell, or Priestly (of Priestly, Nicholson, and Coombe, those famous contractors). At that same table now, Sir Josiah bragged and boasted of the glories of Homewood, of his daughter-in-law, Lord Gowerhurst's only child. How

he told them of his work at Homewood and of the wonders of the place. "Historical, it is!" he said. "And that feller Davenham, I put him in charge. I know my limitations, Cuttlewell, no man better, when it comes to furnishing in the Period style I'll own I'm beat, but Davenham knows, an expensive man I'll admit, but what's money, what's money?"

What was money indeed! Had not Sir Josiah been in pursuit of it all his life, had he not seemed to worship it? Had not those plump knees of his been for ever bent to the Golden Calf?

"What's money, hey?" he cried. "Ho! William, William! Mr. Cuttlewell will take a glass of that old port with me!"

And William, the antique waiter, of the white side whiskers and the ancient evening dress suit and the large sized, untidy feet, shuffled away to fill the order, for their best and most respected customer.

"I'd like you to see the place, I should, Priestly, my boy! My daughter-in-law, Lady Kathleen, is giving a house warming on the fourteenth. Cutler's running down with me—going to take him down in the car. Hang it, Priestly, you shall come! My daughter-in-law, Lady Kathleen, says all my friends are her friends, and she means it, she's that sort. God bless her! There isn't a truer, sweeter woman on earth and so—so I say God bless her!" The tears came into his eyes, they trickled down his cheek.

Here was honest pride, honest and unfeigned! He lifted his glass of port, he beamed on them and gave them the toast from his heart. "My daughter-in-law, Lady Kathleen Homewood, God bless her!"

They smiled at him, they took it good naturedly, they knew his worth, a sound man Sir Josiah, good for at least a couple or three hundred thousand and very likely for a good deal more. When a man has a credit good for anything from two to four hundred thousand, who will not put up with his little ways, even though it might be a trifle boring for those who had not the pleasure of Lady Kathleen's acquaintance? So Priestly was asked and Cutler and Cuttlewell too, only unfortunately Cuttlewell could not come, but Jobson could and would!

When the expansive moment was past, Sir Josiah felt a little nervous. Had he overstepped the limits? Had he gone too far; would it not be encroaching on Kathleen's goodness? Conscience smote him. That he had bought and paid for the house, that he was sending down cases of wines regardless of cost, that he was ordering at the big London Stores with the most lavish hand and purse in the world, all that mattered nothing at all! But would Kathleen be annoyed? He wrote to her and received a letter that made his cheeks flush like those of a school miss of sixteen.

"Your friends are mine, bring them all, you cannot bring too many, especially if they are like you. Only let me know how many rooms you want, dear,

and believe me to be your affectionate and grateful Kathleen."

"God bless her!" he said. "God bless her!" And that day he added Coombe to the list. What a time they would all have on the fourteenth! How he talked and bragged and boasted, yet strangely enough a change had come over his boasting, it was not of his Lordship the Earl, and her "Ladyship, the Earl's daughter, it was not of the "historical" mansion, and the period rooms and Davenham's whole hearted expenditure in the matter of furnishing the place, it was of "My daughter-in-law, Kathleen."

"Beautiful, ha, ha!" he laughed. "I'll shew you real beauty! You think Lesbia Carter and Sybil Montgomery, those actress girls, are beautiful and so they are, sweetly pretty girls they are, and I don't say one word against 'em, not me! But when you see my daughter Kathleen—Lady Kathleen, then you'll see beauty, then you'll see goodness and sweet gracious womanliness, my boy!"

Cutler and Jobson laughed, they had their little jokes together. "The old boy ought to have married her himself! I'll bet you he's more in love with her than Allan, his son, is!"

"I know Gowerhurst," said Coombe. Coombe was a large man who smoked expensive cigars, with the bands on them, for effect.

"Know him, I should think I do. He owes me a bit now! I'll bet you if he hears I'm going to—what's the name of the place—Homewood—he won't turn up—catch him!"

Lord Gowerhurst had received his invitation. He had not been down to Homewood, he had no love for the country, ancient historical houses and early English gardens did not appeal to him. The house that found the most favour in his sight was his favourite and particular Club, and he preferred the card room there or the billiard room to any garden that ever bloomed. But he must go, he must offer himself up as a sacrifice. Old Homewood would be there of course and his Lordship was not quite easy in his mind about certain speculations into which he had been led. Lumeyer had induced him to put five of the twelve thousand he had obtained from Homewood into the Stelling Reef Gold Mine and his Lordship had heard bad accounts of that same concern. He had tried to sell out and had tried vainly.

Lumeyer, a densely black bearded man, with cherry lips, had told him all would be well, but his Lordship did not believe it. It might conceivably be possible that presently he would need old Homewood's help again.

"Doosid bore and beastly nuisance!" he said. "But I'll have to go, I hate family parties and that kind of thing and Kathleen hasn't mentioned if there's a billiard room. Let me see—the fourteenth will be Friday. I'll leave a telegram with Parsons, the hall porter here, to send on to me the first thing Monday morning, demanding my presence in Town. Kathleen's done well, doosid well, thanks to

me! I don't like the tone of her letter, though, no, hang me, I don't like the tone of her letter! Cold and formal, but that's Kathleen, takes after her mother! Doosid cold and doosid formal, well, well!" He paused. "Whatever happens I'll be able to say I did the best possible for my daughter. A man's got to consider his family, I've considered mine, no one can say to the contrary!"

It was in the dining room during luncheon time at his Club that his Lordship was holding communion with his own thoughts. He started now at the sight of a tall elderly, white haired, soldierly man who came in, followed by a somewhat younger man—it was the younger man who claimed his Lordship's attention.

"Who's that?" he asked himself. "Seen that face before—who the doose is it now? Not a member——"

"Here Paul!"

"Yes, my Lord?"

"Paul, did you see that gentleman come in? Who is he?"

"Sir Andrew Moly——"

"Yes, yes, I don't mean the old one, I mean the younger one with him!"

"Don't know, my Lord, can't say! I haven't seen the gentleman before!"

"Then find out!" The man scuttled off.

"I—I know that face, hang me if I don't—wonder who he is?" His Lordship frowned, he adjusted his eyeglass and gazed across to the little table where Sir Andrew Molyneux and his companion were seated.

"Confoundedly annoying to see a fellow's face and not know who the doose he is!" His Lordship thought. "Hello, Paul, well? Have you found out?"

"Yes, my Lord, I did, I took the liberty of asking Mr. Marsmith. I noticed Mr. Marsmith bow to the gentleman as he came in and I took the liberty——"

"Yes, yes, but who is the fellow?"

"A very important gentleman, Governor of some place as I didn't catch the name of, my Lord, somewhere in America, I should think or the Indies—I don't know my Lord, anyhow he is Sir Harold Scarsdale, a very rich——"

"Bless—my—soul!" his Lordship said. "Thanks, that will do, Paul, that will do!"

Paul went away.

"Harold Scarsdale—bless my soul!" He sat and looked at the younger man.

"Altered, confoundedly altered, looks twenty years older, and it is only ten! Let me see, he can't be a day over thirty-five and the fellow looks forty-five. By George, there was that love affair between him and Kathleen. I remember it well, Old Scarsdale, our Rector at Benningley's son. I remember, by George I do, had a few words with the young fellow, called him a presumptuous puppy if I remember right, so he was, by George! But byegones—eh—byegones can be byegones—Kathleen was too sensible and too cold, yes by George, too cold to

make a fool of herself, turned him down, very rightly and properly, I remember it all, remember catching him in the garden at Bishopsholme, I remember a letter I got hold of, of his, asking Kathleen to run away with him, the young fool. By George if I remember right, I made it warm for him! And he cleared out, left the country, he seems to have done well for himself, knighted, eh? Well, well, things change, the wheel goes round, one man gets carried up, t'others get taken down. I'm t'other," he smiled grimly. "I'm down! I think—I think——" he paused. "I shall recall—why not? A rich man, Paul said so, sensible fellow Paul. He knows I always like to understand the financial position of other folk—I shall certainly, yes certainly, recall our earlier acquaintance!"

His Lordship bided his time. He waited, he had finished his own luncheon some time since, but he timed his retirement from the dining room to synchronise with that of the other two.

"Why, bless my soul, surely I am not mistaken?"

Sir Andrew turned to look at his Lordship, but this expression of astonishment was not for him.

The other man had halted, seemed to draw back, his face stern and grave, a handsome face, seemed to harden a shade as the Earl thrust himself forward.

"I surely am not mistaking my old friend's son, Harold Scarsdale. If I am, then believe me I offer my sincere apologies, but I can hardly make a mistake!"

"My name is Scarsdale, and——"

"Then you don't remember me, bless my soul, you don't remember me, my name is Gowerhurst!"

"I remember your Lordship perfectly!"

"My dear fellow, I am delighted to see you, it quite takes me back. Come, come, we must have a long talk, a long talk together, eh? How's the world been treating you? Well, I hope, if I can be of service to you, command me! By George, Harold, I always had a sneaking affection for you!"

"You managed to hide it very cleverly, my Lord, ten years ago!

"Ha, ha! Had to, you know, had to! Doting father, that sort of thing, couldn't let my little girl make a bad match! Hang it, if I'd been a rich man, ha, ha, I wouldn't have stood in your way, but I wasn't; I was, and am, come to that, doosid poor, and a father's feelings, Harold, my boy, as you'll know when you are a father yourself, unless——"

"I am not married!" said Scarsdale quietly.

"No, no, quite right. Well as I was saying, a father must consider his child. I may have seemed hard, a little hard perhaps, to you that day, I remember it perfectly well, but I liked you, my dear fellow, all the time my heart was bleeding for you, bleeding, sir! I said to myself, can I, dare I? No, by George, I can't and daren't! I can't see my girl scrubbing her own doorstep and—and turning her

dresses and making her own bonnets—I can't think of it! So I nerved myself to be stern, nerved myself, Harold, and all the time my heart bled for you, my dear lad!"

"I remember very well," Scarsdale said quietly, "that you on that occasion called me a cunning, scheming, blackguardly young adventurer, who had dared to presume to look far too high, and you were right, as to the last, my lord, but not as to the first. For I was not cunning or scheming, I—I loved her, worshipped her and forgot everything else——"

"By George! and so you did, so you did! But I was her father, I had to consider ways and means, eh? You'd do the same yourself, you'd have to! But we can't talk here!"

"I am with Sir Andrew Molyneux, an old friend of my father."

"Ah! And your father, dear old fellow, how is he now, eh?"

"He has been dead four years, my Lord, and if you will excuse me——"

"Positively I must see you and have a chat with you over things, Harold. You'll dine with me to-night? Say yes!" Lord Gowerhurst wrung the young man's hand. "Come, come, I can't take no—I positively refuse to take no! Hang it, after all these years old friends and that sort of thing, we can't pass like ships in the confounded night, can we, eh?"

Sir Harold Scarsdale smiled. He had a stern, grave face, but the smile lighted it up.

"To-night then, my Lord, since you wish it, here—at what time?"

"Eight o'clock," his Lordship said briskly, "and I shall look for you, it's been a delight, a sheer delight to see you again!"

CHAPTER XVIII
IN THE DAWN

My dear Kathleen, I am looking forward with keen enjoyment to my coming visit to your charming home. That I have not come before you will easily understand, my love. I am an old fellow and my ways are not your ways. I am sensitive, very sensitive, as I think you know. To have felt myself de trop would have been a cause of pain to me. I felt I could not do it and though my heart was yearning for you and though I have often, a thousand times, pictured your beautiful home, its master and mistress, though I, in my solitary and none too comfortable rooms,

have often visioned to myself your delightful life at Homewood, yet I have never intruded. I have been tempted many times. I have said to myself, I will run down just for the day, then I hesitated. Should I be welcome? I know, I know, my love, that my dear daughter's heart is always affectionately inclined to her doting father, yet in your new life, with your new interests, with your young husband, I have wondered, is there a place, some nook, some corner for the old fellow to stow himself away in?

"But bless me, how I ramble on? I live a very quiet and uneventful life, my appetite is not what it was. I sometimes walk round to the Club and try and peck a morsel for lunch, but I am not my own man. I think I feel my loneliness. Well, well, my dear, I look forward, as I say, to the fourteenth of this month, with great expectation and happiness. Now I shall behold you in your own home. I shall behold my dear daughter, mistress of a good house, dispensing her and her husband's hospitality with the gracious courtesy that is the birthright only of a woman of breeding. Give my kindly remembrance to your husband and believe me, my dear Kathleen, ever your fond and devoted Father, Gowerhurst.

"P.S. I am taking the liberty of bringing an old friend down with me. I know in such a mansion as Homewood, there are many rooms, may I hope that I am not encroaching in asking that one may be reserved for one for whom you once had a kindly feeling."

Kathleen smiled a little and frowned a little over this letter. It was like her father, he wrote as he spoke. But who was the friend? She hardly gave it a thought, there were so many old friends, was there one for whom she had once had a kindly feeling? She doubted it. Her father, in the old days, had commanded her ready affection at all times for any opulent acquaintance from whom he was hopeful of extracting money. This was in all probability another victim. So Kathleen put the letter aside and forgot all about it, except that she asked Mrs. Crozier to have another room prepared.

She told Mrs. Crozier now, lest she might forget it.

"Oh, my lady," said the housekeeper, "there's that little Betty Hanson who came yesterday, she is waiting your ladyship's pleasure."

"I had not forgotten," Kathleen said. "Will you send her up to my room?"

She smiled at Allan. "My new maid," she said, "the one I told you about, the little girl from the cottage down the road, such a pretty little thing, I am sure you will admire her!"

Allan smiled when she had gone out, he wondered if other wives bespoke their husband's admiration for new maids in this way? Then his smile drifted away and he frowned a little, had Kathleen loved him—she would have been more jealous of his admiration—loved him! How good she was, what a sweet, lovely nature hers was, and how utterly unworthy of her was he!

Had she loved him? Yet, why should he wish for her love when he had given her none of his own? None? No, he did not love her, not as a man should love the wife he has married. He liked her, admired her, respected her, above all living women. She shared with his father the whole of his heart, but it was not "the love," not the passion of young manhood, the worshipping, devouring, all selfish and yet all unselfish love that surely she was worthy to awaken in his breast.

"Betty!" Who had said "Betty"? Who had uttered that name? Mrs. Crozier of course, she had told Kathleen that Betty Hanson was here, but the name awakened memories, memories of that dream. "Her" name had been Betty, had she not told him with her red lips, "Thy Betty," she had said, and he had been "her Allan."

Betty, nonsense! This Betty would be a big bouncing, red cheeked, bold eyed, healthy country girl! As for Betty of his dreams, there was no place for her now in his busy life. There was much to be done. He had taken up farming wholeheartedly, not for ever would he live on his father's bounty. He would improve the place, make it almost self-supporting. He would prove to his father and Kathleen that there was something in him and that he was not merely an idler and a dreamer. So he filled his pipe and lighted it and went out to have a long talk with old Custance at One Tree Hill Farm. For Custance, though old, seemed to be the most progressive man in the place and already he and Allan had laid their heads together and had discussed ways and means to wring money from the fertile soil.

Mrs. Crozier had been very kind to the timid and shy girl. She had had Betty to tea with her in her own private room, she had introduced her to the other servants, and had kept a motherly eye on Betty till the time came for Betty to retire to her own small room in the servant's quarters.

And she was here! actually here, sleeping in this old house, which she had seen so often, watched so often by sunlight and moonlight. She remembered it as it had been then, with its broken windows, with the ivy and the creepers growing over it in one great tangle.

But the garden, she had not seen the garden yet! How would it look when she saw it? What terrible changes would there be there? Her dear garden, what harm had they done to it? How strange and altered would it be?

She could not sleep that night, she lay awake on the strange unfamiliar bed, tossing restlessly.

Her ladyship had said, and how sweet and good was her ladyship, she had said that the stone maiden was still there in the old lake, so she would find one familiar friend.

After a long, sleepless, troubled night for Betty, the daylight dawned at last,

and then she rose and dressed very quietly and before the other servants were waking, she crept down the steep stairs to the kitchen.

She did not hesitate for a moment, she seemed to know her way perfectly, yet she had never been inside the house before. The House had always repelled her, its gloom and its silence and its dust had forbidden any desire on her part to explore it. Yet now she made her way unerringly through the great kitchen through the vast and cold scullery, down a long passage till she came to a little door, a door that she knew must be there. And it was there and then she drew a ponderous bolt that had been fashioned by a hand that had been dust for two centuries. She unfastened a huge lock, by a key that required all her strength to turn, and so she opened the door and stepped out into the garden as the rising sun flung its first ray of primrose and gold across the heavens.

Only two steps Betty took, then stood still. The light was dim yet, yet through the grey mists she could see it—not as she had seen it last—yet as she had seen it perhaps in her dreams. It was all so familiar, not as she had dreaded, strange and cold, but it, was as the face of an old friend suddenly grown young again, young and beautiful and sweet.

Her garden—yes it was hers! Changed and yet not changed, even more hers, it seemed to her, now, than had been the weed grown, tangled desert she remembered. Yet she remembered that she had seen it thus in dreams and now, as the sun rose, as the sky was flooded with the glory of the dawn, she saw her garden in all its beauty, in all its reality, as sometimes she had seen it in those strange dreams that had come to her.

Had she not seen it like this when those figures, those strange, beautiful, unreal figures of her imagination had promenaded these old walks, those gracious ladies with their strange old world costumes, their hair dressed so high on their heads, their tiny slim waists, their great bell-like skirts and their little red heeled shoes. Those men in their rich deep skirted coats, their stockinged legs, their swords, their wigs—all those visions that had come to her in dreams, had they not moved and lived in a garden like this, this same garden as it was now, all trim and sweet and gay with flowers?

She felt her heart pounding, throbbing, beating as it had never beat before. She hurried on and on, down the broad stone pathway to the lake and there she saw her little friend, just the same as always, the broken pitcher on her shoulder.

So while the sun rose higher and higher, Betty stood there and nodded solemnly to the little stone figure, who never nodded back. And then, turning to go back to the house before the others should know that she had come here unpermitted, she stopped suddenly and uttered a little choking cry of wonder and amazement. For from here she could see the house, a place of the living, no longer a place of the dead. She could see the curtains fluttering in the breeze at

the many open windows, she could see the signs of life there, the primness and neatness of it all!

And it was all familiar, there was no strangeness to her here, she was looking at that which her eyes had seen before and yet how could it be, since she had not entered this place, since those days before the workmen had come to alter it all? How could it be? and yet it was! And then suddenly she turned and did not know why, and looked at an old stone seat that stood on the edge of the great ring about the sundial. Why had she looked at it? What had she expected to see there? What she saw was an old, old stone seat, grey and brown and green in the shadows, golden white where the sun's rays touched it.

And then, filled with wonder, filled with a strange sense of fear, she ran to the house and so back through the door which she bolted and barred after her, and up the steep stairs to her own little room and to sit on the bed with her hands clasped and her eyes staring into vacancy, a vacancy which yet seemed to hold many things, and one thing she saw very plainly, a man who was young, a man whom she knew instantly as he whom she had seen so often at his work in the old garden. But now she saw his face, and he smiled at her, a lean, strong, sunburned face, with eyes as blue as her own! How often in those strange dreams had she seen him, quaintly dressed in a suit of snuff coloured brown, toiling at his work with spade and hoe. "Allan!" she said suddenly. "Allan!" And then she uttered a cry, she hid her face in her hands and shivered suddenly, for she was conscious of a strange feeling of fear, for here was something she could not understand. "Allan!" Why had she said that name? What had put it into her mind and brought it to her lips?

CHAPTER XIX
THE DREAM MAIDEN

If Allan Homewood, Esquire, should by chance meet his wife's maid or any other servant on the stairs, or in one of the innumerable passages of the old fashioned house, it was scarcely likely that he would give more than a passing glance and more than a passing thought to the domestic. If little Betty Hanson should happen suddenly on the master of the house at a turn in the passageway, what more becoming than she should drop her eyes demurely and go on her way?

So while Allan and Betty Hanson had met perhaps a dozen times or more,

neither had really seen the other.

Allan was vaguely conscious of a small trim figure, and a wealth of golden hair, which figure when he came tapping at the door of his wife's room usually flitted out by another door.

Betty took kindly to her new duties, she was intelligent, she was quick and she was very eager to be of service to her mistress. Because she was eager to learn she learned rapidly. Kathleen was a gentle mistress, who never lost her temper and saw something rather pitiful in the young girl's evident desire to please.

"Poor little thing!" she said, "she is grateful!" So she was more than usually kind to Betty and the girl whose heart was bursting with love and gratitude, would very willingly have lain down and allowed Kathleen to trample on her.

"What do you think of my little maid, Allan? Don't you think the child is pretty?"

"Eh, your maid? Oh yes!" Allan said. "Quite a pretty little thing!" He was thinking of something else, the fourteenth of the month was weighing rather heavily on him and his spirits.

If it had only been his father who was coming, or only Kathleen's, but that both should come, that both should bring friends of their own troubled Allan. He knew that his father's friends were not likely to find much favour with his Lordship. Allan had met most of them, he knew Cutler, a prosy, self sufficient, middle aged bore. Jobson was another of the same type. Coombe was a big man with a loud voice and vulgar aggressive manner. He told interminable stories without wit or point. They were sound men in the City, very likely, but he dreaded their advent here. For his father he felt nothing but pride and affection. He knew the old man's goodness of heart, his generous nature, his simplicity, for these he loved him and honoured him above all men. Let my Lord Gowerhurst sneer at that good honest man if he dared—if he dared—in his, Allan's presence. It was not of his father, but of Cutler, Jobson, Coombe and Company that Allan felt nervous and whom he worried about.

Kathleen had told him that her father was bringing a friend.

"Who?" Allan asked.

"I don't know, Allan, he writes, an old friend of mine—but I doubt it, very few of my father's friends were mine—I am sorry," she said frankly, "that he is coming. I know that you do not like him, Allan, I cannot wonder that you do not!" She sighed and her head drooped a little.

And Allan, looking at her, felt his heart swell with pity, for he knew what that proud spirit of hers had been called on to suffer because of her father, the Earl.

But was it pity only that made his heart swell, that made him take a step towards her, then stand hesitating?

He turned abruptly and went out into the garden. He was puzzled, uneasy, uncertain—Life had seemed so placid, the future as well as the present had seemed so certain, as certain as anything human could be. He and Kathleen understood one another so perfectly, were such firm friends, such tried companions; yet did they understand one another after all? Did he even understand himself?

He flung himself down onto the stone seat facing the sundial. He had never been in love in his life, and therefore told himself that he knew all about it. Love, he believed, came like a tempest, it swept a man off his feet, it robbed him of his appetite. It caused him sleepless nights, it drove him to a thousand and one follies. Such mad, passionate, foolish love had never assailed him. He had a good appetite and he slept well of nights, he did not write poetry, though he was rather fond of reading it, if it were good. So emphatically he could not be in love and certainly not in love with his own wife!

He laughed at the thought, but the laughter was a little uncertain, a little shaky.

"I am," he said aloud, "no more in love with her than she with me. We are the best of friends, our lives together are practically ideal, we have not had one quarrel in all these weeks, we are not likely to have; how could one quarrel with a woman so gracious, so sweet, so good as Kathleen?"

He thrust his hands into his pockets and stretched out his long legs and stared hard at his boots.

In love? certainly not! and most assuredly not with Kathleen, yet supposing she were to leave him, supposing he must suddenly face life without her? He shuddered at the thought.

Then he refused to consider the matter, to-morrow was the fourteenth, to-morrow would come his father, God bless him, with his beaming face, his car probably packed full of little delicacies and little presents, as well as of City friends, whose coming Allan distinctly dreaded, yet his father should not be made aware of that. There would be a royal welcome for Coombe and Cutler and Jobson, for the sake of the dear old man who brought them.

A telegram had been delivered by the red cheeked messenger from the Little Stretton Telegraph office.

It was carried up to My Lady's room, as Mr. Homewood himself was not visible.

Kathleen tore open the envelope, it was from her father.

Womanlike she glanced at the signature "Gowerhurst" first and a faint hope came that it was to say his Lordship would not be able to come, but he was coming.

"Find trains serve badly, can you send a car to meet us three fifteen Longworthy Station. Gowerhurst."

Of course they could and must. Kathleen sighed a little, she glanced through the window and saw Allan sprawling on the old stone seat by the sundial.

"Betty," she said, "take this telegram down to Mr. Homewood and ask him if he will kindly arrange about it."

Nothing was farther from Allan's thoughts, at this moment, than dreams, or memories of dreams. He had put all that nonsense behind him, long since; he had laughed frankly and whole heartedly when the merest memory of that strangely lifelike dream had come into his mind. If it had affected him—and it had—it affected him no longer.

He was thinking particularly of Coombe, if only his father had contented himself with Cutler and Jobson! They were at least quiet and unobtrusive, while Coombe—Allan looked up.

Down the wide flagged pathway a girl was coming to him. About her was the old world garden, all bright and gay with its flowers, and the trim emerald green lawn, all dappled with sunlight and shadows. Behind her was the old house, the casement curtains fluttering in the gentle breeze and the girl herself dainty and light footed.

Why did he start? Why did he catch his breath suddenly? Why did his eyes dilate? She wore no quaint old-world cap on her gleaming little head of golden hair, she wore no flowered gown, high waisted and cut low to show the white neck. No, she wore a very simple, plain black frock with a dainty white apron. But he knew her! He knew her and his heart seemed to stand still as he watched her, wide eyed with amazement. His outflung hand gripped the back of the stone seat.

So she came towards him, then as suddenly stopped, she stood there looking, looking at him with the bluest eyes he had ever seen. He saw a little hand go to her breast as into her childlike face there came a look of wonder and of fear.

"Betty!" he said. "Betty!" And scarcely knew that he had said it.

"Allan, oh Allan, I——" and then flashed into her face a crimson tide of shame, she dropped her eyes, she stood before him, trembling and abashed.

What had possessed her? What madness was this? Allan—she had dared so to call him, him the master of the house—my lady's husband!

So the man sat, gripping the old seat, and the girl stood there, covered with shame and confusion, not daring to lift her eyes, and silence fell on them both.

What strange mad fantasy was this? Should he waken in a moment to hear Dalabey's voice, as once before? But no, she was real at least, this little maid in her black dress and her head crowned with its shining glory.

But she had called him Allan, the name had seemed to come spontaneously from her lips, as he had called her Betty! He felt shaken, life had suddenly become

fantastic to him, nothing seemed very real. It was after all a world of dreams; this too, was a dream. He could almost have welcomed the voice of Dalabey, but it did not come. So she stood there, with bent head and he saw something fluttering in her little hand.

"You—you have brought me a message?" he said, and his voice sounded strangely hoarse and discordant.

"Yes, sir, from—from my Lady!" She dropped him a little curtsey, he could see the flush still in her cheeks, could see that it even stained her white neck and her little ears. He rose and went to her and stretched out his hand. He hoped that she would look up but she did not, never once were the blue eyes lifted to his own. Why had she come, why had she come? He had not wanted her to come, yet she had come into his life after all. She was here, standing before him, not in the picturesque trappings of a byegone century, but in her modern dress, still he knew her well enough.

"Betty, Betty!" Betty who had kissed him, who had told him that she loved him.

He had hoped once that he might meet her in real life. He had pictured her, tried to dream that dream again, yet had never succeeded. And now that at last he saw her, could stretch out his hand and touch her, he knew that it were better that she had not come.

He put out his hand and took the telegram from her, yet did not look at her.

"You are—Betty Hanson, my wife's maid?"

The little head seemed to droop lower, he could see the childish breast heaving under the pretty white apron. She dropped him a curtsey humbly.

"You are Betty!" he said. "And you called me——"

He paused.

"Oh sir, oh sir forgive me. Indeed—indeed I du not know what made me, sir!" Now the blue eyes were lifted to him in pitiful appeal.

"Indeed—oh indeed, sir, I didn't know what I were saying! 'Twasn't as if I myself spoke, 'twas as if—if summut in me made me say it—oh sir—indeed, I couldn't help it! I—I don't know what made me du it!"

How blue her eyes were, how they shone and glittered now with the tears that clung to the sweeping, upturned lashes, how pitiful in its appeal for pardon was the little face! He looked at her with a feeling of pity, and yet not of pity only. It was she! the girl of his dreams, the girl who had come to him and called him "Allan, her Allan," this girl a servant in the house, who had come to him this day in real life and had called him by his name.

What meaning, what strange, unknown, force was behind it all? How could he tell, still less, poor maid, how could she?

"I am not angry, Betty," he said, "indeed, why should I be angry—with you—

for I called you Betty, knowing it to be your name, though I did not recognise you as Betty Hanson, my wife's maid. Don't think of it again, child, and do not let it trouble you! Perhaps you are right, it was not you yourself who spoke——"

"And you bain't angry wi' me, sir?" she asked.

He shook his head and smiled. Angry—angry with her—yet had she not once before asked him that selfsame question? Strangely he remembered clearly and distinctly the very words "Allan, Allan, be you still angry wi' your Betty now?"

Perhaps unconsciously he had muttered them aloud, for he was startled to see the look in her face, the wonder, the and excitement.

"What—what made 'ee say those words?" she gasped. "Oh, what made 'ee say 'em?"

"I don't know, I don't know," he said. "Betty, Betty, child, go back, forget all this, it is nonsense—some foolish dream that you and I seem to have shared. Go back, little maid, to your mistress and your work and forget—-" he paused, "forget that you knew my name to be Allan and that I knew you for Betty! Believe me it is better, far, far better so!" He smiled at her kindly. "Don't think that I am angry, why should I be angry? It seems to me, child, that fate is playing some strange trick with us, that is far, far beyond understanding. We must not try to understand it. Betty, better put it out of your mind and forget it——"

"If—if I could!" she whispered. "Oh if I could!"

"We must, both of us," he said sternly. "We must forget what we should never know!"

How pretty she was—and now that the colour was in her cheeks, how lovely she looked in the sunlight with the old garden all about her! Kathleen was right—a rarely lovely little maid was Mrs. Hanson's granddaughter! And as she was, so had been that other maid, the maid of his dream, the same gleaming, golden hair, the same delicate arched brows—the deep blue eyes—with their wealth of uplifted lashes, the fair oval of her cheeks, and the red lipped dainty little mouth that once had smiled on him so kindly and not smiled only, but had come so willingly to meet his own lips.

"Betty, there are some things that it is not given to us to understand, perhaps now and again in the lives of some mortals the curtain is for a moment lifted. It may have been so with us, lifted and then, allowed to fall again—and when it has been lifted only for a moment, Betty, it is better that we who have been granted a sight beyond it, should forget what we have seen and never let it influence our thoughts or our lives. Can you understand me, Betty?"

She nodded silently, she looked at him with her glorious eyes and in them he saw to his dismay, his terror almost, the same light, the light of the love he had seen shining in the eyes of his dream maiden.

But now she broke the spell, she dropped him a curtsey, she was turning away.

"Be there any answer to my lady's message, sir?" she asked.

"No!" he said. "No, there is no answer!"

He went back to the stone seat and sat there, conscious that life and the world had changed suddenly for him. He dropped his chin onto his hand and sat staring, staring and seeing nothing.

He knew that once he had hoped that she might come and she had come and now he knew he was sorry and yet glad, with a strange gladness.

"Betty!" he said and said it aloud. "Betty——!" And saw her, not as he had seen her but a moment ago, but as he had seen her that first time in her picturesque flowered gown, so quaintly high waisted, the neck cut low to shew her slender white throat, the little mittened hands and the mob cap on her shining head.

But the face, the eyes, the lips, ah! they were the same!

He rose suddenly and seemed to shake himself mentally and physically. This was real life, this was the world all about him. There was no time for folly and for dreams—to-morrow the old house would be filled with visitors. He remembered the telegram suddenly and found it crushed into a ball in his hand. He opened it and smoothed it out and read it.

"It is from my wife's father," he said aloud, and then repeated the words as of some set meaning and for some known purpose, "my wife's father!"

CHAPTER XX
THE ROAD TO HOMEWOOD

Long ago before their marriage, Allan had promised to tell Kathleen if his dream maiden should ever come to him in real life. And she had come, yet he had not told his wife. To-morrow the old house would be filled with guests. Kathleen had much to do and much to think about, why trouble her now with this foolish story? After all the visitors were gone—why then—perhaps—but not now!

Then they would have the old house to themselves, then would be the time for confidences, and such foolish confidences after all, why tax her patience with them now?

As for Betty, it was likely that he would see the child again, yet when he

saw her, what then? He would not speak to her. Yet at the very thought of that fair, flowerlike face, those deep blue eyes, something seemed to stir within him, the blood seemed to run more quickly in his veins, he was conscious of a heart throb, of a subdued excitement.

And now that she was not here before his eyes, he pictured her, not as he had seen her last, but as he had seen her for the first time, in quaint gown and mob cap, with mittened hands.

No! when the visitors were all gone, when her father and his had taken their departure, when they had the house to themselves once again—then he would tell her and ask her opinion and advice. Perhaps she would send the child away, women did such things he knew, he hoped that Kathleen would not. On the whole he did not think she would. Kathleen could not be guilty of anything that was small and mean.

She looked up at him now as he came in with the same frank kindly smile as always.

"You had my father's telegram, Allan?" she said. "Did you arrange about a car?"

"Yes!"

"Allan, it's very, very wrong of me, yet when I saw the message was from my father I almost hoped that it was to say he could not come!"

He did not answer and she went on.

"He has taken so little interest in us and the house, he has not thought it worth his while to run down, even for an hour to see us, all these weeks, while your father——" she paused.

"I wish," he said, "that my father was not bringing so many of his City friends, I am afraid that his Lordship will not approve of them!"

"Your father surely has a right to bring whom he pleases to this house?"

"Yes, dear, but——"

"I wrote to him. I did not tell you at the time, I told him that all his friends were welcome here, Allan, if we can give him any little pleasure; could we deny it to him, after all that he has given to us and done for us? And, oh! I feel so humble when I think of him and his goodness. I remember what I used to think of him, what I used to permit myself to say of him, before I knew him as I know him now. I feel that I can never sufficiently make amends for that!"

All that evening she talked to him of the visitors who were coming. She herself had seen to Sir Josiah's room, she had arranged vases for the flowers that she would not cut until the morning, so that they should be fresh. It was a sense of duty rather than a feeling of love that caused her to put flowers in her own father's room too, for one thing she knew that he would not appreciate them. That night Allan lay wakeful. He thought of Betty and thought of her with a

sense of shame, yet with a strange joy.

Why should it have been as it had? What meaning was behind it all? Was there a meaning that he would ever understand? He remembered what his father had told him of a Pringle—an Allan Pringle who had married a Betty, maid to the then mistress of the house. It had been a sad story, his father had said, the girl had died, poor Betty! He listened to Kathleen's sweet regular breathing, he lifted himself on his arm and watched her sleeping face in the moonlight that came in through the widely opened window.

How good she was, how white and pure she looked lying here in her sleep! He was strangely moved, his mind was filled with a great reverence for her, he bent to her, he touched her cheeks with his lips, so lightly as not to waken her, then he lay down again and slept.

No holiday maker ever set out for a day's pleasuring with keener anticipation than did Sir Josiah this bright September morning. He was to call for Cutler on the way. Coombe was driving his own car and would pick up Jobson, they were to meet at the Chequers at Horley, should they not happen on one another on the road.

There were a thousand and one things to remember, a dozen packages to stow away.

"Mind that there one, Bletsoe, my man, go lightly now!"

"Very good, Sir Josiah!"

"And see Mr. Cutler don't go and put his foot on it," said Sir Josiah, "and let me see, one, two, three, four, that's all right! One moment!" Back into the house he dashed, to reappear with more parcels.

"Reg'lar old Santy Claus," muttered Bletsoe, with a kindly smile, "like a blooming great kid he is, going to 'ave a day's outing!"

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—seven's right, and eight, that's in my pocket; what's the time, Bletsoe?"

"Gone ten, sir!"

"Bless my soul and I promised to be at Cutler's at ten—all right now, Bletsoe, let her go!"

How he had racked his brain, what shops had he not rummaged, what shopmen and shop maidens had he not pestered. He had sent down cases from the wine merchant, stores from Messrs. Whiteley, hundred weights of pâte de foie gras, Strasbourg pies, chocolates and Heaven knew what besides from Messrs. Fortum and Mason's. That lengthy and evidently fragile parcel he had been so careful about was a beautiful and costly vase. Something of the Ming Period or the Chang Dynasty, he was not very sure what, but it cost a great deal. That soft and pliable looking parcel was a silken kimono of rare and wonderful workmanship. Those square parcels were cigars and cigarettes for Allan and Allan's

friends. There he sat, this red faced, jolly old gentleman, with a great cigar in the corner of his mouth and he beamed on the world as his magnificent car whirled him up one street and down another.

And here was Cutler actually ready, standing in his open doorway, Cutler in a new and rather becoming tweed suit, and a soft felt hat, an unfamiliar Cutler, for Sir Josiah had never seen him in anything but a silk hat and a correct black coat in the City.

"Hallo Cutler, here we are, a bit late, mind the parcels! Bletsoe, take Mr. Cutler's suitcase, here we are, my boy, lovely morning, looking forward to a delightful run, picking up Coombe and Jobson at Horley. Get in, get in! Have a cigar, no you prefer a pipe. I don't know that you ain't right!"

And now they were really off and away. How nimbly the big car twisted in and out the traffic, how it dodged cumbersome, road monopolising trams, how it slipped round the unwieldy omnibuses! Then away southward Streatham was passed—here was Croydon with its narrow congested streets, past Purley and Redhill, down the long hill somewhere near the foot of which lies the village of Horley and its well known Inn, where Coombe and Jobson would be waiting.

What a morning, what sunshine, what a breeze!

"Does one good, Cutler. Blows the cobwebs away! Better than all your Doctor's stuffs, my boy!"

"My daughter," said Cutler, "tells me that in Demauritius, of which her husband is Governor, they have some extraordinarily beautiful country and she constantly——"

But Cutler's reminiscences are cut short, here is the Chequers, and here is Coombe with a tankard of beer in his hand. He waves the tankard to Sir Josiah unblushingly and drinks his jolly good health.

"And your jolly good health too, Coombe, my boy, what a morning! What's the time! Eleven—Bless me, we must have dawdled on the way! Beer! the air's good enough for me—like wine, sir, wine—the finest wine in the world!"

"Race you to Crawley for a fiver," says Coombe.

"I—I trust—Sir Josiah," says Jobson, "you will not agree, believe me Coombe needs no inducement at all to be reckless, he nearly ran over an old lady in Streatham a very respectable looking old lady, in Croydon he butted into a tram standard, and it is a mercy we were not all killed, and then at Purley Corner—a butcher's cart——"

But Coombe's beer is finished, Jobson is bundled into the car, Coombe starts her up, climbs over Jobson and tramples on his feet, seizes the wheel and away they go.

For all Coombe's boasting and reckless driving, Sir Josiah and Cutler are in Crawley first. Here they swing away to the right to Horsham and leave the

Brighton road for good. From now on, their road takes them through the heart of Sussex, Sussex of the quaint wayside cottages, with gardens all blooming and fragrant, Sussex of the chalky white roads, the great undulating sweeps of noble hills. Sing of Devon who will, but can Devon shew such cottage gardens, can she shew anything to compare with yonder glorious range of downs? Green downs on which the passing clouds cast moving shadows of purple and blue, and here and there a gleam of purest white, where the sunlight strikes on to the bare white chalk of some cliff or cutting. Where in all the world grows turf so dense, so fine, so short and sweet and perfect as here upon these rolling hills of chalk. Under the hills the trees are all glowing red and bronze and orange. The car wheels swish among the fallen leaves, the children come running out of the cottages and cling to the gates to watch as the cars go whirling by.

But they are going at a more sober pace now, the country is all too lovely under the September sunshine to rattle through in a cloud of chalky dust. Sir Josiah, eager as he is, calls on Bletsoe to go more quietly, and it is luncheon time when they cross the river and run up into Arundel Town, so luncheon they have in the old Inn and walk up the hill to have a look at the castle, the home of the Howards, while the steak is grilling.

And then the last stage of the journey, along the pleasant road to Chichester, Chichester of the old market cross, and here the cars swing to the right towards Midhurst, but the end of the journey is very near now. The Midhurst Road is left behind, up hill and down dale sweeps the narrower bye-way.

"Here we are, this is Little Stretton!" said Sir Josiah. "That's the Fighting Cocks, many a good meal I've had there—hello Dalabey, how are you? Hello Crabb, hello Monson!" He waves his hand, there are smiles and bobs and greetings for him. Dalabey could not bow more profoundly if it had been a Royal Duke, and he could not have felt more honest respect for so exalted a personage than he did for the red faced old fellow who waved to him so pleasantly from the splendid car.

"We're getting near, see that wall, that long wall, that's Homewood, see them—those gates—those are the Homewood gates, they are open, they are expecting us of course! Drive in Bletsoe, drive right in, blow the horn Bletsoe, here we are!"

His face is beaming. It has been a jolly journey, a rare holiday in the September sunshine, but perhaps this is the most pleasant part of it all. Here is Homewood, the gates stand open, they drive through, the hall door stands open too!

And here is Kathleen; she has heard the wheels, she comes hurrying out. No servants shall open the hall door to Sir Josiah and carry Sir Josiah's card to the lady of the house, that would be but a poor welcome. So my Lady Kathleen, all

smiling and dimpling, runs down the steps and springs lightly onto the running board of the car and puts her arms around his neck and kisses him before them all.

"Welcome," she says, "welcome, I've been watching for you for hours!"

Yes, this is the pleasantest part of the whole journey after all!

CHAPTER XXI
AFTER TEN YEARS

Kathleen had looked forward to conducting Sir Josiah and his friends around the house and grounds. But though she knew that he was pleased and happy to have her with them, though he took a delight in her company, yet her presence embarrassed them all a little, even Sir Josiah himself. How could he be the showman when she was near? How could he tell Coombe how much money he had spent on this and that? How crush Cutler with the magnificence of the rooms and dazzle Jobson with the extent and the beauty of the gardens?

Kathleen, with her rare tact and intelligence saw it in a moment. Coombe had allowed his cigar to go out, Jobson looked nervous. Sir Josiah, while he beamed on her, had scarce a word to say. Only Cutler seemed to be at his ease and was telling her about his daughter's establishment in Demauritius, in which island she was the Lady of the Governor.

Kathleen put her hand through Sir Josiah's arm, she drew him aside a little.

"I want you to shew them round, shew them everything, you know so much more about it all than I do! It is all your doing, you knew it as it was, you can describe it so much better than I can, and besides I'm terribly busy," she smiled at him. "You know my father is coming and he's bringing some other guest who I do not know. Allan will be back soon, he is terribly busy these days," she laughed softly. "He is at One Tree Hill Farm with old Mr. Custance; they have great schemes; Allan is going to make his fortune!"

"Bless me!" said Sir Josiah. "Allan is!—well, well!"

"So I must run away," she said. She smiled at him and hurried into the house.

But from the window she watched them with bright eyes, she saw Sir Josiah stretch his hand, pointing this way and that.

"You ought to have seen it, you ought, Coombe. Derelict wasn't the word

for it. Weeds that high, my boy; now look, look at it. Jobson, what do you say to this for a garden, hey? and you, Cutler, you wait till you see the house. It's something to see I promise you, and six months ago, six months ago, my boy, you ought to have seen it, then."

The old man was himself again, that tender, kindly, loving greeting had warmed his heart.

"I'll bet it was her thought, keeping the gates open," he thought to himself. "It's like her to think of little things like that. Things that make just all the difference."

"Tidy place," said Coombe, "good taste, too; shouldn't be surprised if her Ladyship had a good deal to say in the management of this garden."

"Her ladyship has a good deal to say in the management of everything," said Sir Josiah, "and quite right she should. A place like this is a natural environment for her, while for me and my boy Allan, though he's twice—" he paused, "twice the gentleman I am—" he had been going to say, but these were Jobson, Cutler and Coombe, men he kept up his dignity with to a certain extent.

"What's the old boy say to it, hey?" asked Coombe.

"Old boy?"

"The Earl—Gowerhurst—what's he say to it all, hey?"

"Oh he—I don't think he's been down yet, but he's coming, they are expecting him to-day."

"I'll lay he don't know that I'm here," Coombe said. "If he did he wouldn't show up, not he."

"And why not?" asked Sir Josiah. "Why not, Coombe? I'd like to know."

"Money, my boy, money! I've had dealings with his Lordship before. His Lordship knows me well enough; bet you a fiver, Homewood, when the old boy sees me he'll turn green."

"I hope," said Sir Josiah with great dignity, "that here in my daughter-in-law's house there is not going to be any discussion about money matters. No shop, Coombe, no shop. We owe it at least to Lady Kathleen to behave like gentlemen when we are her guests."

Coombe looked at the old gentleman out of the corner of his eyes. "Quite right, Homewood, I should be sorry to be guilty of any disrespect to so charming and kind hearted a young lady I'm sure. The only wonder to me is that such a father should have such a child." Coombe winked broadly at Jobson, a very humorous man, Mr. Coombe, and fond of his little joke.

And now came Allan, who had been delayed by the garrulous but competent Mr. Custance. He gripped his father by the hand and thrust his hand through the old gentleman's arm.

He was kindly and courteous to Coombe, whom he did not like, and to

Jobson and Cutler, whom he esteemed because they were his father's friends.

"You've seen Kathleen, father?"

"Seen her, yes, why bless her she was waiting on the steps to welcome us, that's what I call a welcome, Allan. None of your Society manners with Kathleen, no sending in of cards and being ushered in by servants. There she was, bless her pretty face, watching for us and ran down the steps, she did, and—and well, where have you been, Allan, hey? I hear you are going to make your fortune."

"I'm going to have a good try at earning a bit of money, father, and it can be done; I'll talk to you about it later. Now come in and have a look at the house, Mr. Coombe, I am sure would like something."

"Ha, ha!" said Coombe. "Guessed it at once, Allan, my boy! I've just been wondering how long it would be before someone made the suggestion."

"I am sorry," Allan said reddening.

They went in. Kathleen saw them come, but she was watching for the other visitor, the other guest, whom she told herself, she would not be half so pleased to see as the guest who had already arrived.

She took herself to task and yet she knew that she could not try and cheat herself. Her father was her father. It was Fate—respect for him she had none—that she could not respect him had been one of the greatest sorrows of her life. Affection for him she had but very little. She knew him too well, could read him too easily, understood his thoughts too clearly and she pitied him for his utter selfishness.

She knew, for she had been old enough to know, something of her mother's sufferings before death came, not unwelcomed. He had never been anything to his wife in the presence of others except polite and courteous, then he treated her with his usual charm of manner, on which he prided himself.

He had neglected her, ignored her when alone; he stung her and wounded her with his sneers, his poisoned darts of contempt and contumely. He had never lifted his hand to her, yet he had killed her in the end as surely as the drunken tinker slays the wife of his bosom with a boot heel or the kitchen poker.

And Kathleen knew much of this, not quite all perhaps, but she remembered the suffering of the quiet, pale-faced, cowed woman whom the young girl had surrounded with a worshipping, adoring love.

So she stood watching and listening for the coming of the car. Who the other guest might be, she did not speculate on. It was someone in whom she felt not the slightest interest. In a way she was glad that her father was bringing a friend of his own choice. It would be someone for him to talk to. Coombe, Jobson and Cutler would hardly prove to be associates of whom his lordship would approve. She knew his feelings toward Sir Josiah and she felt a twinge of shame, for in a way she had shared those feelings in the past.

His lordship was in an ill humour. He disliked the country intensely. The only occasions when he found the country at all bearable was, when one of a large house party, there was some shooting to be done in the daytime and unlimited bridge, billiards or baccarat to while away the night. That he would not find these amusements waiting him at Homewood he was fully aware.

During the journey from London Bridge to Longworthy, he was fidgety and faultfinding. The carriage when the window was up was too hot; when it was down the carriage was draughty, the seats were dusty, "a disgrace to the Railway Company." The line, he maintained, was the very worst laid line in the Kingdom. He was jolted to pieces, carriages worse sprung than this he had never ridden in.

"We might have come by car," Scarsdale said.

"I hate cars, nasty draughty things, I dislike the smell of the petrol, the hot oil, the dust, I hate running over children and dogs. I'm deuced unlucky in a car—never go out in one unless there's an accident; ran over a child last time when I was with Lysart, shook my nerves up most confoundedly. By George, Harold, I blame myself, yes, I take blame to myself, I do by Gad!"

"For running over the child?"

"No, I'm thinking of Kathleen's marriage. I was anxious about her, deucedly anxious. Kathleen was getting on, I don't tell everyone, but you know, you the friend of her childhood, that Kathleen isn't so young as she was. Not that she's gone off, not a bit of it. I consider Kathleen more handsome to-day than ever in her life. She comes of the right stock, Harold, the Stanwys wear well, the men and the women. My grandmother, begad, was a toast when she was fifty-five and they say she did not look a day over thirty. She was a Stanwys by birth, Arabella Stanwys, daughter of Francis—but this don't interest you. No, I was speaking of Kathleen. I say that I take blame to myself that I hurried on the wedding, hurried it on. I'll admit it frankly. Thoughts of Kathleen caused me sleepless nights. I'm naturally an affectionate man, a man on whom responsibility weighs heavily. I realised my position, Harold. 'When I am dead and gone, Begad!' I said to myself, 'what of Kathleen? What of my poor, dear child?' You'd have said the same had you been in my place. Then I fell in with Homewood in connection with a Company, common old fellow; you'll dislike him intensely as I do, by gad!"

"And so you married Kathleen to his son?"

"Yes, yes, I felt I had to. The girl's future troubled me, worried me to death, Harold. How was I to know that you'd come back; how the deuce was I to know that you hadn't married and settled down; how was I to know that you——?"

"That I had succeeded in life and was in a position to offer Kathleen a home?" Scarsdale asked.

"That's it, that's it, begad. The very words I was going to say. How could I know all that? I did not, I saw the chance. Allan Homewood isn't a bad fellow,

not a gentleman of course; how could he be with such a father? But quiet and unassuming, decently educated, sensible. I was torn, Harold, torn, I confess now that I thought of you—" the tears came into his lordship's fine eyes, he leaned forward and gripped Scarsdale's hand. "I thought of you, I thought to myself, 'If ever that fine young fellow comes back, what a blow to him, what a blow!' Yet how did I know you were coming back?"

"No, you were not to know." Harold Scarsdale stared out of the window. "I wish, Heaven knows, for many reasons, I had not come back. I might have known that Kathleen could not have waited, yet I watched the papers, I saw no engagement, no marriage announced and I clung to hope, then—" he laughed shortly. "I ought not to be here now, Lord Gowerhurst, it's the weakest, most foolish thing I have ever done, yet you say you wrote and told Kathleen."

"I did, I did, 'pon my honour I did, wrote to her and said I was bringing you down and she wrote and said she'd be delighted to see you."

"Which was very kind and very friendly of her," said Scarsdale with a bitter sneer, "and proves that she doesn't care a hang for me now, and in all probability never did." He laughed again and his lordship, not quite knowing why, laughed too.

Kathleen was waiting, she heard the car wheels, the hoot of the horn as the car swung in through the open gateway. She could do no less to welcome her own father than she had done to welcome Allan's. She hurried out, and descended the steps, there was a smile on her face, her hand was held out, then suddenly she stopped. The smile seemed to set on her face, which had grown rigid, and suddenly very white; the outstretched hand shook and fell to her side.

So for a moment she stood there, wide eyed, conscious of the violent throbbing of her heart.

After—ten years—and so they faced one another again. And the man knew that her father had lied to him and that his coming was all unexpected by her.

But it was only for a moment, just one moment, that was yet enough to betray her to those keen, eager, watchful eyes. Then she came forward, calmly, with an artificial smile on her lips. She took her father's hand, she kissed him, what she said she hardly knew, she touched the other man's hand. She told him that his coming was an unexpected pleasure.

Jardine, the chauffeur, holding open the door of the car saw nothing out of the common. James, the footman, coming down the steps to take the rugs and handbags, little dreamed that here was a meeting between lovers who ten years ago had parted in tears and an agony of heartbroken hopelessness.

For Lady Kathleen was herself again, she was smiling, and if the colour had not yet returned to her cheeks, who was to notice so insignificant a fact? Not James and Jardine, not Lord Gowerhurst certainly.

"And so this is Homewood, eh Kathleen? Quite a nice little place; reminds me a little of—of Clamberwick, Normandyke'a seat in Cumberland, but smaller of course, a great deal smaller. Had some deuced good fishing there I remember. Thought you'd like to see Harold again, hey? By the way he is Sir Harold now, Governor of somewhere or other. The world's treated him decently, yes decently, eh Harold? And quite right too, I like to see a man work his way up in the world."

"I am glad to hear it," Kathleen said. "I am sure that any fortune that has come to Mr. Scar—to Sir Harold Scarsdale, has been fairly and honestly won—and thoroughly deserved."

"Ha, ha, nicely put, very simply and nicely put, eh Scarsdale?" said his lordship. "Give me your arm, my dear, I'm confoundedly cramped, getting to be an old fellow now. One of these days I may ask my daughter to find some corner, some out of-the-way corner by the fire for the old man, eh? Some obscure place where the old man may sit and dream away his last days. It's the fall of the leaf, my dear, the fall of the leaf. As I rode through your beautiful country a while ago, I saw the leaves all strewn on the road and I thought—as with the year, so with me—my leaves are falling, all wrinkled and brown. And yet it seems but yesterday since I put them on so fresh and green, hey, so fresh and green and—and——"

He was talking the arrant nonsense he loved, in the self-pitying style Kathleen knew only too well. She shivered, but not with her usual impatience of the humbug of it. How had he dared—dared to bring this man? How had he dared to make friendly overtures to one whom he had grossly and cruelly insulted ten years ago? And Harold himself? It shocked her to think that he could come here—that he could bring himself to accept her and Allan's hospitality. She had not looked at him since that first quick glance, and short though that had been, it had shewn her the change in him. The boy she had known—and loved—was gone—this man, she felt, she hardly knew. She asked herself even now, had she foolishly made an ideal of that lad, or had she idealised her love for him? she wondered—but it hurt her that he was here now.

Lord Gowerhurst, leaning far more heavily than he need on her arm, entered the house. He betrayed no interest in it. The finely panelled walls, the carefully selected and diligently sought after "Period" furniture, the vista from the windows of the wonderful old English garden in its autumnal glory, interested him not at all. He was talking of himself, which was the most interesting topic he could think of.

"I'm not eating too well, my dear, a bad sign, hey, a bad sign, and my sleep is broken—terribly broken. I never was one of the "fat kine" my love, but I'm growing noticeably thinner. I declare to you that Crombie, my man, is positively shocked at the falling off in my girth and Darbey, my tailor, poor fellow, is getting

quite anxious about me."

Kathleen told herself that she ought to have known, ought to have anticipated it, yet she felt hurt that he took so little interest in her home. He never looked at anything; he sat down in a delightful Hepplewhite chair, a chair that the great Davenham had undertaken a seventy-five mile journey to secure. He sat down in the chair and stared at the very pointed toes of his exquisite boots.

"I'm not my own man, no, my love, I don't wish to pain you, I know how sensitive you are, what a loving heart my child has; I don't wish to rouse one anxiety in your mind, my love, but I feel age, old age creeping on."

Kathleen sat facing him, there was a set smile on her white lips. She heard him and did not realise one word that he was uttering, perhaps she had heard it all so often before that it was not worth listening to now.

"He is here, he is here. Here under this roof, here in this very room." The man who had written her those passionate love letters, letters which she had blistered with her tears, letters which she had destroyed at last with an aching heart and feelings of reverence and solemnity. How often, his voice calling to her, had come up out of the past, "Kathleen, I love you. Kathleen, come with me, risk all, give all, dare all, but come—come with me because I love you so."

And how nearly, how nearly she had said yes. Sometimes she wondered why she had not said yes, for it was in her heart to listen and to go—yet she had not, and now he was here.

Was she glad? No, no, no! Yet was she sorry? How could she answer, how could she tell?

"Darbey, of Dover Street, you remember, my love, my tailor, though Heaven knows I don't patronise the poor fellow one half as much as he deserves. I tell you Darbey was shocked; he said to me, almost with tears in his eyes and his voice shaking with emotion, 'My lord,' he said, 'I'm sorry to tell your lordship that your present measurements shew a falling off of two and a half inches at the waist, it's a serious thing.' He begged and besought me to consult a physician, but I did not. No, no, what does it matter after all? When I look about me and see your charming home—" he had not looked about him in the slightest degree, "then I realise that I have done what I could. I have seen to it that my child is—Don't I hear voices, hey, Kathleen?"

He certainly did, from the adjoining room came Coombe's big bass voice:

"Sir Josiah Homewood is here and he has brought some friends——"

"Friends, eh! bless me, friends of Homewood, very interesting." His lordship laughed a thin, cackling, unpleasant laugh. "My dear Harold, I think I can promise you some amusement, Sir Josiah Homewood is——"

"Is my husband's father," Kathleen said, and her cheeks suddenly blazed with generous colour. "He is also my very dear friend."

"And therefore entitled to the respect and esteem of all men," said Scarsdale quietly.

She turned to him for the first time, looked at him, and saw the many changes in him. She looked for some sign, something that would recall the boy lover of long ago, and it seemed to her that she looked in vain.

"My husband's father has been very kind, very generous and good to us," she said. "There are few for whom I have a greater esteem and a deeper affection than I have for him."

Coombe, putting down his empty glass, looked out of the window and saw the empty car turning towards the Garage. He gripped Jobson's arm.

"The nobility and gentry have now arrived," he whispered. "This is going to be as good as a play, Jobson. Keep your eye on me and watch old Gowerhurst, I'll bet it'll be amusing, you watch out, Jobson, he, he. Watch him turn green. Last time I saw the old boy he tried to borrow a couple of thousand, but no thanks, not taking any, said I. Securities too deuced rotten—rotten as his own confounded reputation. Almost wept to me, the old fellow did, but once bitten—twice shy—he had four hundred out of me once and I'd like to see the colour of my money; a shark, a confounded oily slimy old leech, that's what he is. Button your pockets up, Jobson, my son, when his nobility, the Earl of Gowerhurst, is about the premises."

All this was in an undertone to Jobson, who looked and felt very uncomfortable.

Allan and his father had been talking in a low voice, and now Allan turned.

"I think my wife is with her father in the drawing room; shall we go in?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, let's go in," Sir Josiah said. "It's a long time since I saw his lordship; I trust his lordship is quite well."

"His lordship won't be so jolly well presently," whispered Coombe to Jobson, "it's going to be as good as a play, watch the fun." And Coombe winked at Jobson knowingly.

And now the door of the drawing room opened and Allan, holding his father's arm, came in, followed by Jobson, Cutler and Coombe.

"The old fat common fellow;" thought his lordship, then suddenly remembering that in the very near future he would in all probability require the assistance of the "old fat common fellow," he rose and held out a friendly generous hand.

"Delighted to see you, Homewood. Looking well, positively well, you are, ha, ha, you busy men with interests in life, you're much to be envied."

"Allan," Kathleen touched his arm. "Allan, I want to present you to a—a friend, an old friend whom my father has brought down with him." Her voice

shook, yet so little that Allan, unobservant as he was, noticed nothing.

"Sir Harold Scarsdale. My husband!"

Allan's hand was thrust out, his face lighted with pleasure and frank and friendly welcome.

"I'm delighted to see you, Sir Harold," he said, "it's kind of you to come to such an out-of-the-world place as this."

"I've been out of England for many years, and it's a great pleasure to me to see my own country again and—and my old friends." Scarsdale's voice shook a little. Why had he come, why had he come? Gowerhurst had lied to him vilely, when he had told him that Kathleen was expecting him and had expressed pleasure at the thought of seeing him; what a liar the man was.

And Kathleen, how little she had altered. The years had robbed her of nothing, he remembered her as a sweet faced, lovely girl; he saw her now a radiantly beautiful woman. Yes, the years had been kind to her. How often had he thought of her, pictured her to himself. How had he, many a time, lain awake in the sweltering heat of the tropical nights and tried to picture her, and yet the reality, how immeasurably superior it was to the vision his dreams had conjured up. And while he was thinking these things, he was talking to her husband.

His lordship's calm superiority always made Sir Josiah feel a little nervous, made him realise his own inferior station in life. He was feeling it now, he was conscious of a sensation of undue heat. He had been cool enough five minutes ago in the dining room, now he was visibly perspiring.

"Yes, her Ladyship, Lady Kathleen, was so kind as to ask us to run down, me and a few friends, ha, ha. As your lordship says we busy City men are much to be envied in one way, but when it comes to a holiday—ha, ha." He paused nervously. "We're always glad to get a week-end off, ain't we, Cutler? Let me introduce you, my lord."

His lordship frowned. He was not accustomed to be introduced to common persons like Cutler; Cutler, the common person, should have been presented to him.

"Mr. Cutler, Senior Partner of Cutler, Cutler and Wakethorpe, his daughter is Governor of—of—I forget the name. Jobson, let me introduce Lord Gowerhurst—" Sir Josiah went on, persisting in doing the honours the wrong way about.

Monied men no doubt, rich, opulent men, Lord Gowerhurst thought; just as well to keep in with them, one never knows.

"How de do Mr.—er—Johnson." He held out a finger and Jobson took it and shook it solemnly.

"Coombe," said Sir Josiah, "my friend, Mr. Coombe, my lord."

"Ah! ha!" said Coombe, "I've had the pleasure of meeting his lordship be-

fore; how de do, my lord? Hope I see you well?" He held out a large, red and moist hand.

Now was the moment, the moment for Jobson to hold his sides, the moment to witness the discomfiture of this Peer of the Realm. Did his lordship start? Did he turn pale? Did he tremble and turn green, as Coombe had prophesied?

No, he did not; he looked at Coombe, he put his monocle very slowly and deliberately in his eye and took another look.

"'Pon my soul, Mr.—er—Groom, did you say Groom, Sir Josiah?"

"Coombe," said Sir Josiah.

"I beg your pardon, Mr.—er—Coombe, 'pon my soul, I don't recall the pleasure." Very insolently his lordship looked Mr. Coombe up and down and Mr. Coombe turned red; the joke was not so good as he had thought it would be.

"Langworthy," he said, "you remember Langworthy's business, my Lord?"

"Langworthy, really did I meet you at Hansbar, my friend, Sir George Langworthy's house? I haven't been there, let me see, for three years, and the last time——"

"No, it wasn't there neither," said Coombe angrily. "It was in my City Office I met your lordship and it wasn't Sir George Langworthy, it was quite a different Langworthy."

"Indeed?" said his lordship politely, "indeed?"

Mr. Coombe's hot hand dropped to his side.

"I don't recall your face, 'pon my soul I am afraid I don't. But one sees so many faces, hey? And now—my dear Homewood, tell me all about the wonderful things you have been doing here." And his lordship turned his back on Mr. Coombe with marked deliberation.

Coombe clenched his fists.

"Supercilious beast!" he muttered. "I'll teach him, I ain't done with him yet, not by a long sight, I haven't. You wait, Jobson——"

But Jobson turned and stared out into the garden through the window. He was losing faith in the ability of Coombe to make Peers of the Realm feel unhappy.

CHAPTER XXII

MR. COOMBE WEARS A WHITE TIE

Kathleen had given them tea, she had chatted and laughed, she had concealed ev-

ery feeling and every thought with that skill that is acquired by every intelligent, well educated woman.

How daintily she presided over the tea tray. Her white hand never trembled—was it three lumps or only two that Sir Josiah took? What a kind, friendly glance she flashed at Allan as he took his father's cup from her hand. How should Allan know, how should anyone in that room, save perhaps one, know that every nerve in her delicate body was quivering, that in her heart there was a mingled fear and joy, gladness and sorrow, anxiety for the future, and regret for the past.

"No tea for me, child, the doctor positively forbids it, positively," his lordship said; he sighed. "No one appreciates a cup of tea more than I, but I am obliged to forego it. One has to give up many things, eh Sir Josiah, the falling leaf must not be too roughly dealt with, else perhaps it will fall even before its time. No, no tea for me, my love, but if I might beg a glass of soda water—just a glass of plain soda water—with perhaps the merest, the very merest touch of brandy, hey Allan, just to take the bite off the soda water, so to speak?"

Coombe, sipping tea which he had no love for, eyed his enemy the peer, malevolently. His lordship, he noticed, reversed the programme, it was the merest touch of the soda water to take the bite off the brandy.

"Owes me four hundred and treats me like dirt, hanged if I don't bung a writ into him!" thought Coombe.

He happened to be sitting near to Lord Gowerhurst and presently his lordship adjusted his monocle and stared at Coombe.

"Ah, ha, Mr. Groom, I think that you were telling me just now that we had met at Hansbar, Langworthy's place in Somerset? Have you known the Langworthys long, eh?"

"I didn't say anything of the kind," Coombe growled sullenly. "I said——"

"Oh, yes, I remember, some other Langworthy, quite so."

"I'll bet a shilling," Coombe whispered under his breath, "I'll bet a shilling, my lord, as you remember me a sight better than you pretend you do."

Gowerhurst regarded Coombe's hot red face coldly and critically.

"I never, I never remember anyone I prefer to forget, my dear Mr. Groom," he said. "It's an excellent plan—eh? An excellent plan, saves a great deal of trouble and annoyance, eh?"

And now Kathleen was alone, she had come to her room, she had locked the door on herself. She sat down by the window and put her elbows on the sill and rested her chin on her hands.

He had come back.

It had almost stunned her, its unexpectedness and suddenness. She had not had time to realise what it all meant, all that she could realise was, that he was

here.

She saw herself now, as she had been, a girl of eighteen, a girl deeply, desperately in love; she remembered how she had lain through long, sleepless nights, tossing on her pillow. How willingly in those days she would have gone with him into direst poverty, the deeper the poverty how much more would she have gloried in it. To tramp the roads by his side, to sing in the streets with him, to crouch beside him under some friendly hedge for the night—yes, she would have done that very willingly and yet—yet perhaps common sense, perhaps the hereditary instinct of her kind had kept her from such folly.

But she had loved him. Now, sitting here, she was realising that perhaps she had loved him more—more after he had gone and left her as she believed forever, than she had actually loved him while he was yet with her.

It is often the way, when the beloved object ceases to be real and tangible, when he becomes a memory—with what virtues can we clothe him? In memory we only recall all the good, the best that was in him—memory charitably forgets the numerous little faults, the tiny acts of selfishness, the little outbursts of foolish temper. No, they are all gone. So, because he was the beloved object, memory is eager to idealise him.

Perhaps it had been so with her—yet she had loved him—she had thrilled to the passion in his boyish voice, to the love in his boyish, ardent eyes. A child's love, a school girl's love, her father had said. "My dear child, I'm a man of the world and you are a young Miss who has only just learned to do her back hair up; accept it from me, the person who marries his or her first love lives to regret it. First love is merely a kind of preliminary canter, it's good exercise, provided you don't take it too seriously, but if you do take it seriously why then it is the deuce and all."

She smiled to herself, recalling her father's words. It had been her first love and her only love, it had lived with her for ten years and during those ten years it had seemed to her to have grown stronger, better, purer. It had perhaps made her a little cold to the world about her, yet in reality it had made her heart more tender, had made her more prone to sympathy and tenderness and kindness.

Why had he come, why had he come back? She clenched her hands tightly.

The few short months of her married life with Allan had been quiet and peaceful, uneventful, happy, yes happy! she had always liked him, she liked him better now than she had before he had given his name to her.

She liked him better and yet better every day, she liked him because he confided in her, because he was honest and open with her, because while he lavished no caresses on her, for would not caresses have been humbug and hypocrisy, he gave her a quiet affection and respect that won her heart to him. He had told her of his plans with old Custance, how he would make money and help repay his

father a little of the much that his father had done for them both.

And then he had promised once that if ever—ever love came to him, the love that nearly always comes knocking at a man's heart at some time in his life, he would tell her candidly and truthfully and they would face the fact together. And she for her part had promised that she would tell him if—the lover of long ago should come back into her life.

And he had come, and so she must tell him, as she had promised to do; she must be honest and truthful with Allan, surely he deserved that of her.

There was a tap on the door and Kathleen rose and opened it.

"My lady, 'ee'll be wanting me? I've been waiting for the bell, my lady, but 'ee didn't ring it."

"No, Betty, I didn't ring, but—but come in. Betty, what is the matter?"

"Matter? Oh, my lady, nothing du be the matter wi' I."

"But your face is white, child, and your eyes look red from crying. Is there anything wrong, Betty? Have you seen your grandmother and is she still angry with you?"

"I bain't seen her, my—my lady, and I du not care whether her be still angry wi' me or not—for it be all the same to I."

"You shouldn't say that, child."

"For never, never will I marry Abram, my—my lady, never will I. Sooner would I drownd myself in the river, which I would du gaily, aye gaily, my lady, than—than marry Abram who I never could abide."

Kathleen smiled. "There need be no talk of that now, Betty, surely?"

"No, my lady, but I can't help thinking about it, specially when I du see Abram loitering about the green gate, my lady, and know he du be waiting for I."

"Then I will see that he is not permitted to loiter there, as you dislike him so much, Betty."

"I hate him, I du, I hate him mortally, my lady, I du. Oh, my lady, his hands du be terribul, terribul; if 'ee did see 'em they would make you shudder like they do I."

"But perhaps you dislike this poor Abram so much, Betty, because there is someone else?" Kathleen asked. "Is that the truth, my little maid?"

"Oh, my lady, I—I doan't know, I doan't know. No, no, there bain't anyone else, no one else—I promise, I swear, my lady, there bain't, there couldn't be! How could there be?"

Kathleen took her hand, she held it, it was very hot, this small hand of the girl's.

"Betty, child," she said, "you are not well this evening, your hand is hot and—" she lifted her hand to Betty's forehead, that cool, white, slender hand of hers, and let it rest there for a moment.

"And your head is hot, too, child, you had better go to bed and presently I will ring and ask that something is taken to you. No, Betty, don't wait, I can manage quite well to-night; go to bed, child, and go to sleep and forget all your troubles, and if you don't want Abram, why then, Betty, you shall not have Abram and no one shall force you to." She pushed the silken fair hair back from the girl's forehead; she smiled af her.

"Now to bed, Betty, and to sleep and forget all your little troubles, child, and to-morrow come to me with a smile on your lips as I would have you."

"Oh—my lady, if—if I could only dare—dare tell—'ee," Betty cried passionately. She caught Kathleen's hand and held it with both her own. "If only I could dare——"

"Dare what? Betty, tell me, child, if there is anything——?"

"No, no, I can't, I be mad to speak of it even—I think I be going mad altogether, my lady, sometimes I du think I bain't like other maids wi' such foolish strange notions that I get. I can't—can't tell 'ee, my lady, doan't ask me, for I can't—I can't." And then Betty flung the kind hand away and rushed to the door, fumbled for a moment with the lock, and then opened the door, fled.

"And so," Kathleen said, "we all have our troubles, our fears and our loves, Betty and I and all Eve's daughters."

She dressed herself, it was no hardship or novelty to her.

She looked at herself in the glass without vanity, but rather with a curious interest.

"I'm twenty-eight," she said, "in a few months I shall be twenty-nine—yet I have no wrinkles and there are no silver threads yet—I wonder—I wonder does he think me much changed? He is changed, greatly changed, yet I knew him, of course I knew him; I should have known him among ten thousand, I should have known him had he come in rags and poverty, just as I knew him, now he has come to me in his prosperity and health and strength."

She went down the stairs, she went into the drawing room and found, as she had almost feared she would find, that he was there alone. He came forward eagerly to greet her.

"Kathleen, are you angry with me?"

"Why should I be angry, Harold?"

"For coming."

"It would have been better, kinder to me if—if you had stayed away."

"And kinder to myself," he said bitterly. "Kathleen, do—do you think that this does not mean suffering to me?"

"Why did you come?"

"Your father told me you—you knew and approved, that you would be glad to welcome me."

She did not answer.

"But now I know that that was untrue; you did not know that I was coming——"

"I did not know," she said. "No, I did not know."

"Kathleen, Kathleen, you waited so long, all—all those years and yet not quite long enough; another few months, if only you had waited another few months, Kathleen."

She turned to him suddenly, her face bright, her cheeks flushed.

"You—you have seen him, my husband, you have taken his hand, you—you are here, his guest—our honoured guest—the past is dead and gone; I waited—ten years—" her voice broke for a moment, "then I looked at your letters for the last time and—and burned them all, and when I saw their black ashes in the grate, I knew that from that moment my new life began, a life that could not, must not, hold memories of a past. It was Fate and we—we must accept it; I have accepted it—so we—you and I—we meet again—as friends—" She held out her hand to him, she smiled at him.

He took her hand and held it tightly, he looked into her eyes, then he groaned, he bent his head and kissed the hand before he let it go, and then from beyond the door there came the sound of voices, Coombe's loud and dominant, argumentative.

"Not wear a white tie with a dinner jacket, Jobson? I tell you I'll wear any tie I like—and if people don't like it, they can do the other thing. A black tie makes me look like a waiter, by George, and I won't wear 'em. And if I want to wear a pink or a sky blue tie, why hang it, I'll wear it. And if it isn't the fashion, well I'll make the fashion like that fellow Beau—Beau Brummagem, or whatever his confounded name was."

All unknowingly Coombe had struck the right note, he had done Kathleen a service. A dead and gone love, burned love-letters, ten long years of waiting, of hoping and praying and nothing to reward the faithfulness and the loyalty—what mattered all that? Away with melancholy thoughts, away with sadness and regrets—poor Romance must fly for the moment and hide her diminished head before the advance of a stout gentleman in evening dress, wearing a white tie. Kathleen smiled. Honest Mr. Coombe little knew how grateful his hostess felt to him at that moment.

CHAPTER XXIII

"I BELONG TO THEE"

Lord Gowerhurst justly prided himself on the "Stanwys manner" which he had to perfection. If he were formal he carried his formality with grace, he was studiously polite, he was courteous, urbane—and a wet blanket.

He crushed utterly those four jolly City gentlemen, who would have been ten times happier if his lordship and his manner had not been there. Sir Josiah, seated on the right hand of his daughter-in-law, perspired freely from sheer nervousness, mingled with a kind of admiration and awe. Jobson and Cutler were noticeably ill at ease, and consumed by anxiety lest they might say or do the wrong thing. Mr. Coombe was resentful and would have been sarcastic had he dared.

That man, sitting facing Mr. Coombe, fingering the stem of his wineglass with his delicate white fingers, monopolising the conversation with his confounded drawling aristocratic voice and his infernal air of superiority, who was he? Was not he the same man who one day had come cringing into his, Coombe's, office hoping to raise a loan of two thousand on some rotten securities; was not he the same man who had well nigh wept when the loan had not materialised?

"And there he sits," thought Coombe, "there he sits, treating us all as if we were dirt, looking down on us, the rotten, humbugging, insolvent old—old—beast."

No one could find fault with the dinner, indeed his lordship gracefully congratulated his daughter on the excellence of her chef. Good Mrs. Crozier had watched over everything and had seen to everything, and a lady of her experience was scarcely likely to allow a dinner to go to table that would not be a credit to the household over which she ruled.

The wines, too, were above reproach, Sir Josiah had spared no expense in this matter, but there was something wrong with the atmosphere, yes the atmosphere was all wrong. Sir Josiah could not find one word to say. Even Cutler was unable to introduce an observation concerning the island of Demauritius, its Governor and the Governor's wife, his daughter. Jobson was frankly and noticeably unhappy, and in his agitation had splashed his white shirt front with gravy. Coombe was oppressed, angry and bitter, trying hard to find something to say that would take the wind out of the sails of that drawling, dandified, supercilious aristocrat on the other side of the table.

Kathleen had her own thoughts and the subject of them was sitting beside her on her left, facing Sir Josiah. She could feel his eyes on her now and again, she tried to laugh and to talk frankly and freely, but she was conscious of a weight, of a fear, of joy, she hardly knew what.

And Allan, too, his thoughts had strayed away from that unhappy dining table. They were out in the garden, not in the garden as it was now, all shrouded in the soft darkness of the summer night, but in a garden filled with sunshine, sunshine that touched and glorified a little head of gold, that lighted up a sweet, oval face and glistened on eyes as blue as the skies.

Why, why, why? He asked himself and could scarce frame the question. How much less the answer to it. Better that she should go, but poor child, how unfair to her. Yet he could not go; how could he? And to live here, under the same roof, to see her, perhaps every day, to have that strange memory, which was yet no memory, recalled every time he saw her. How could it be, how could he be loyal to Kathleen? Why should that girl, that child whom he had seen but once, mean so much to him? How were their lives connected; what could some unknown past have held, a past that affected their present and their future so greatly?

Coombe had grasped the opportunity. There had come a lull, Coombe seized on it, he began a story in a loud voice. It was about a deal in some shares. Coombe, in his eagerness to talk, grew involved, he floundered. He appealed to Sir Josiah, Sir Josiah who frowned, remembering that he had instructed Coombe that there was to be no "shop." Coombe saw the frown and got more mixed than before, Sir Josiah had let him down. He turned to Jobson, but Jobson had no help to offer.

"Anyhow, there it was, Munston bought seven thousand and fifty and Lockyer I forget how many, and the bottom fell out of the market see, ha, ha."

"Now that is very interesting, very interesting indeed, Mr.—er—Groom—my dear Allan, you and I are not business men, Mr. Groom here is a business man, it is quite interesting to hear these stories, eh? Of course we don't understand 'em, Allan, because, as I say, we are not business men. I have no doubt but that it is an excellent story, but I don't understand it, no, be gad, I don't see the point. It's the same with golfing stories, they may be deuced funny, but when you don't understand them, well you don't, and that's all there is to say to it. Which reminds me of Normandyke—you remember the Duke of Normandyke, my love? His place at Clamberwick was recalled to me by this little place of yours. Of course your home, elegant though it is, is a mere cottage in comparison; Clamberwick is one of the great houses—" and so on and so on, belittling his daughter's house with cheerful patronage and intense superiority, till the colour flamed into Kathleen's cheeks, born of the generous indignation in her heart. She slipped her hand under the table and her cool white fingers closed round Sir Josiah's thick old hand, and pressed it in silent sympathy, love and gratitude.

"I understand, my dear, I understand," the old gentleman whispered. "This Clamberwick may be a great place, my dear, and beyond an old fellow like me,

but I'd give you ten such places if I could, and you'd be fit to reign over the lot of 'em."

"I—I wouldn't exchange Homewood for all the Clamberwicks in the world. You made it for us and gave it to us, and I love it for its own and the giver's sake."

She would not tell Allan to-night, she watched Allan. He looked, she thought, a little unhappy, this house party was weighing on his mind. No, she would not tell him to-night, she would wait till after they were all gone. She would keep her promise, of course, and when Harold Scarsdale had gone, when they had bidden one another farewell, and it would be for the last time, she would tell him that it must be for the last time, and as he was a gentleman he would understand and so—so when she told Allan, she would be able to tell him that she had seen the man again, that he had come and gone, and this time forever.

She felt easier, lighter and happier now she had made up her mind. She went to the drawing room and played and sang. Scarsdale, beside the piano, watched her, he turned her music. Now and again he spoke to her, reminding her of some song that called up the past.

"Won't you sing one of them to me, Kathleen?"

"No, no, not to-night, please don't ask me, I—I don't want to think of the past. I told you—there is no past—I burned it with the old letters—it is ashes now." Her lips trembled as she looked up at him and smiled at him. "It is better so, is it not? You know it is. So to-night I shall sing the new songs, the old ones belong to the past and are dead with it."

"If I could only think as you think, or do you think as you speak, Kathleen, do you believe what you say?"

"Yes, I believe it, I know it, it is true."

His lordship, having made a very good dinner, had selected the easiest chair in the room and settled himself down comfortably. Sir Josiah and his friends drifted to the smoking room and their cigars and their talk.

His lordship, taking his ease in his chair, had fallen into a sweet, refreshing slumber, for which he would have to pay presently when bed-time came. Kathleen was singing at the piano with this old friend of hers. Allan looked at them both. He did not quite know what to make of this old friend of Kathleen's, this man Scarsdale. He had not summed him up yet; on the whole he thought he did not much like him. To-night Allan felt in no mood to join his father and his friends, had Sir Josiah been alone it would have been different. Kathleen was interested in her friend. His lordship was asleep, Allan crossed the room quietly, opened a French window, and passed out into the garden.

When a man is face to face with a problem, he must wrestle with it, find an answer to it and act on his own finding. A man who thrusts the thing behind him and leaves it all in the hands of Fate is little better than a coward, and Allan

Homewood was no coward.

In this garden he had dreamed a dream and in that dream there had come to him the sweetest little maid on whom the sun had ever shone, and though his eyes had never beheld her before, yet he knew that she came to him as no stranger, but rather as some sweet vision or memory out of a past, which past had never been, in this life at least, and when the dream had gone he had awakened with a feeling of loss that had stayed with him for many days till at last he had managed to banish that feeling.

And now, now a living girl, the very maid of his dreams, had come to him and he had looked at her and known her for the same, and all the old tenderness, the love for her had come welling up in his heart again. And she, strangely, seemed to know him even as he knew her. Had she not called him Allan? Had she not looked at him with that same strange light in her blue eyes as had shone in those of the little maid of his dreams?

"What does it mean?" he whispered. "And what am I to do? Send her away? That would be cruel and unkind, poor little soul." Where had she to go to; why banish her for no fault of her own? And yet how impossible for him to go. But to meet her every day, to see those blue eyes of hers with their strange expression, half pleading, half fearful—to know, for he did know, and must know that this little maid for some strange reason loved him, as he must love her. What should he do? Would Kathleen help him when he told her as tell her he must—yes, he would rely on her sane judgment, on her generous nature, on her sweet womanliness. She would know how to act; he would place it all in Kathleen's hands and all would be well.

He felt relieved to think that he had arrived at some definite conclusion. Kathleen would—he paused suddenly and lifted his head.

From the soft darkness there came to him a sound, the sound of sobbing, as of some child weeping bitterly in its loneliness. It touched him, for he was tender hearted to a fault. Who was it? He went on quickly, yet softly, so as not to frighten or disturb the child. And then he found her, crouching on the stone seat, near the sundial, the slender body bent, the little hands clasped over her face. He knew her at once, he saw the sheen of her hair in the dim light and stood still for a moment, yet the piteous sobbing, the heaving of the shoulders hurt him and he stretched out his hand and touched her gently.

"Betty," he said, "Betty, why are you here and crying, child?"

She did not start, she lifted her head slowly, her hands dropped, he could see her face dimly, white in the starlight.

"Why do I find you here alone, Betty, and weeping?" he asked gently. "Are you in some trouble or suffering?"

She shook her head in silence.

"Then why?"

"Oh, I doan't know, I doan't know," she cried suddenly, she flung out her arms with a gesture of despair. "I doan't understand it all, and it du frighten me, it du. Oh, I be terribul frightened of it all, I be, frightened and yet—glad." She looked up at him. He could see the oval face more clearly now, the shining eyes and the trembling red lips.

He took both her hands suddenly and held them tightly.

"Betty, what does it all mean? Can you tell me, for I do not understand?"

"Nor du I understand," she said. "Oh, tell me, Allan, tell me, did 'ee know me when—Oh, sir—forgive." She broke off suddenly and her head dropped.

"Tell me, what were you going to ask?"

She lifted her head again.

"Did 'ee know me as I knew 'ee, yesterday when I came here and—and found 'ee here, Allan?"

"Yes, I knew you, I knew you, Betty. Once before in a dream you came to me here in this same place and I cannot understand why it should have been so. No, I cannot understand."

"And it du frighten me terribul, terribul, it du. How did I know your name were Allan? How dared—dared I call 'ee Allan, seeing you be my lady's husband and my master, and yet I could not help myself, the name did come from my lips wi'out my knowing it."

"And you never saw me before?"

"Aye, many, many times."

He was startled. "You knew me, Betty, you had seen me before, but when, where?"

"Here, here in this place, in this garden, but 'ee was so different then. Grandmother was angry wi' me for coming, she said I were a bad maid to come here into this old garden, all weed grown and ramy-shackle that it were, but I came often—often—and then I used to see—'ee here, Allan, oh sir." She paused.

"Go on," he said. "Go on, Betty." And still held her quivering hands.

"But 'twas not as a fine gentleman as I did see 'ee," she went on, seeming to gain a little in confidence, though her voice was still tremulous, "'ee wore a queer old hat and brown clothes and—and stockings, and heavy shoes wi' brass buckles to 'em, sir, and for the most part 'ee was working in the garden, digging sometimes, sometimes at work wi' hoe or rake, but always working, bending over the flower beds 'ee were, and never, never did I see your face, sir, yet when I did see your face, I knew it for 'ee."

"Go on, go on."

"There's nothing more to tell 'ee, sir, only that I, contrairywise, came here to the old garden and climbed the wall, I did, and sometimes I did come here of

nights when the moon was shining and it was then I see 'ee, sir, working here, bending over your work—and I knew—knew—" she paused.

"You knew——?"

"I knew as—as oh I—I can't tell 'ee, sir, I daren't tell 'ee."

"Tell me, Betty," he whispered, "tell me," and perhaps did not know how much tenderness he had put into his voice.

"I knew as 'ee meant summut to me, sir, as—as somehow it seemed as if 'ee belonged to me and I to thee."

She dropped her eyes, her hands seemed to flutter in his and he said nothing, could not, for he did not know what to say, but he realised that she had put into words that which was in his own mind, in his own knowledge, just as he had meant something to her so had she meant something to him. He had known that in some strange way they belonged to each other.

He spoke, to break the silence that had fallen rather than for any other reason.

"You were unhappy with your grandmother?"

"Terribul, terribul unhappy I were wi' she, sir, for her willed me to marry Abram."

"Abram?" he asked.

"Abram, aye, Abram Lestwick, sir, whom I du hate and de-test most terribul."

"But who is he?"

"Grandmother willed me to marry him, sir, but I would not and she be very wrathful wi' I."

"Poor little soul," he said gently. "Betty, it seems to me that strange and perhaps foolish dreams have—have come to both of us here in this old garden, and we must put those dreams out of our minds, and face life, child, as it really is. Just now you reminded me that I am your lady's husband and I am, and proud and happy that so good and sweet a woman should be my wife——"

"Good and sweet her be, there bain't none like she; I would die for her willing, I would."

"And I think I too, Betty, and so—so—" he paused to listen—out of the darkness there came voices.

"Wonderful air, isn't it? I don't know any air like this. Get a smell of the sea in it, don't you, Cutler, my boy?"

Allan dropped the little hands. He felt suddenly ashamed, felt as though he were about, to be detected in some wrong-doing, and yet, Heaven above knew, that there had not been one wrong thought in his brain.

He would have told her to go, but it was unnecessary. Very quickly and suddenly she snatched at one of his hands, he felt it pressed for a moment against

burning lips and then she had gone. He heard the soft rustling of her gown among the bushes, the light tap of her little shoes, and then the heavier stolid tread of his father's honest feet.

Allan dropped onto the stone bench, and there, a minute later Sir Josiah found him.

"Why, who's here, Allan, Allan, my boy—is it you?"

"Yes, father, come here to dream in the old garden. Won't you and Mr. Cutler sit here and finish your cigars?"

He scarcely knew what he was saying. He was glad that they had come, and yet perhaps sorry too.

CHAPTER XXIV
IN WHICH LORD GOWERHURST RISES EARLY

His lordship had had a bad night. He had gone to sleep after his dinner, a foolish thing to do. He had tossed and turned restlessly in a strange bed and he loathed strange beds. Then after what had seemed to be interminable hours of sleeplessness and misery, he had fallen asleep to be awakened in apparently a few minutes by a feathered chorus in the beech tree, just outside his window.

What a noise they made, what a commotion with their piping and their shrill chattering. His Lordship sat up and solemnly cursed all birds.

A cock saluted the dawn in the customary manner; another, apparently some little distance away, took up the challenge. Lord Gowerhurst heard the crowing receding farther and farther till it was lost in the distance, then it came back, seemingly step by step to the original cock that was somewhere in his immediate neighbourhood. And all the time the birds kept up their incessant twittering and chattering and piping till the poor gentleman's nerves were on edge.

He rose, he thrust one bony leg from the bed, then the other. He went to the window, he shook his fist at the birds.

"Shoo! go away you beasts!" he shouted. "Go away, shoo!"

He slammed the window down and went back to bed, but it was useless. He put his head under the clothes, but he could still hear the babel of sounds. As the sun rose higher so did the sounds increase; there came the barking of dogs, the lowing of cattle from the green pastures, a hen had laid an egg somewhere

and was proclaiming the fact triumphantly. Her husband shouted his joy, the other cocks took up the chorus. It was Bedlam and Babel let loose.

Added to the other sounds of animal and bird life came presently fresh contributions. A sleepy-eyed servant banged a pail down somewhere, doors were being opened and shut with unnecessary vigour.

"London, give me London. It's the only place in the world fit to sleep in, as for this country, this—" His lordship sat up and exploded with wrath and profanity.

He would stay in bed no longer, bed was purgatory; it was but six. He had never risen at six in the morning in his life. Frequently he had retired at this hour. He rang for hot water to shave.

At his chambers in Maybury Street, Webster, his landlord, valeted him. Webster shaved him every morning and dressed him with the same care as a young mother bestows on her darling. But Webster was employed during the day at his lordship's club, so had not been able to come.

The old gentleman's hand shook very severely this morning, he cut himself twice. He was entirely unhappy and in the blackest of ill humours when he went downstairs.

Early as it was, everyone seemed to be up. Sir Josiah, rosy and cheerful, came in from the garden, looking ridiculous with a great armful of flowers.

"Good morning, my lord, nice and early, eh? Lovely morning, nothing like getting up when the dew's on the grass, eh?" Then came Cutler, followed by Coombe, offensive in white flannel trousers; Kathleen, looking as fresh as the morning itself, came to him and kissed him. She saw his humour, she knew it of old, the morning was never his lordship's best time.

Happy he who can rise in the morning in a spirit of kindliness and good humour, who commences the day as he means to live through it, in good will and amity with all. Thrice happy they who live with such a man.

Kathleen knew her father.

"Would you like to have breakfast served you alone quietly in my own little room, dear?" she asked.

"Would I what? Hang it! do you want to get rid of me? Am I not good enough to sit down to breakfast with your absurd friends? Has that gentleman in the white trousers been attending a tennis party? It is somewhat early for tennis parties, is it not? Barely seven yet—is Homewood going to decorate a Church or is he merely masquerading as a Jack in the Green? Where's Scarsdale? Not down yet? I don't blame him, I never heard such an infernal din in my life—cocks crowing, birds shouting, dogs barking and—and cut my face twice, begad, twice—which means a deuced uncomfortable day for me and—and—and your father is to be poked away into a little back room and have his meals by himself, is he? I'm

hurt, Kathleen, positively hurt; had you told me that my society was distasteful to you, had you only told me that you were asking me out of politeness, begad, out of compliment, why then I should have stayed away. I feel it, I am an old fellow and oversensitive perhaps, little things, little unkindnesses wound me, as perhaps a few years ago they would not. As one grows older one——"

"Come into breakfast, father," she said, and slipped her hand under his arm.

Scarsdale came down a little late. He held Kathleen's hand for a moment, looked her in the eyes and sat down.

"I slept badly," he said quietly, "in fact I could not sleep at all, it was strange to me to realise that the same roof that sheltered you—" he paused.

"Tea or coffee?" Kathleen asked brightly.

His lordship was like a bear with a very sore head, the Stanwys manner was not in evidence. He growled and cursed under his breath. He flung poisoned darts of wit, sneers and jibes at Coombe and they glanced harmless enough from that gentleman's toughened hide, but they went home when he turned his battery on Sir Josiah.

"Poisonous old devil he is," Coombe muttered to himself as he put away a huge breakfast.

CHAPTER XXV
BESIDE THE LAKE

They had all gone out together, Sir Josiah and his Lordship in Sir Josiah's car, Mr. Coombe and Mr. Cutler and Mr. Jobson with a large quantity of golf sticks in Allan's car, and Allan himself had gone over to One Tree Farm to discuss intensive culture, scientific pedigree poultry and pig raising and farm business generally; and Kathleen found herself for the first time alone with Harold Scarsdale.

She had tried to avoid this, yet in some fashion she had known that it must come sooner or later. She had suggested that he should go out with the others, but he had quietly declined. And so if it must be, well it must be. If she and Harold Scarsdale must come to a definite understanding, why not sooner than later? She was a coward to shun it.

From her bedroom window she saw him sauntering up and down the broad paved pathway. That he was waiting for her, confident that she would come to him, she knew, and she knew that she must go.

"Betty!"

"Yes, my Lady?"

"Sir Harold Scarsdale is in the garden; will you go down to him and tell him that I will join him soon? There he is, Betty, you can see him from here."

"I see him, my Lady, and I'll go and tell him." Betty turned away.

"Betty!"

"My Lady?"

"Betty, are you unhappy, child?"

"Unhappy, oh, my lady, I be very happy here, indeed—indeed I be—very happy I be, my lady."

"You look white and troubled, child," Kathleen said. "Is—is that man, is your grandmother—troubling you?"

"No, my Lady, I've not seen Grandmother since I came here."

"And Lestwick?"

"Abram du hang about waiting for I, my Lady, Polly Ransom have told me that Abram du continually be hanging about the green door, my Lady, but I doan't go out and so I du never see he."

"I will speak to Mr. Homewood about it and ask him to interview this Lestwick and tell him to keep away from here, for I will not have you worried and troubled, Betty. Now run down, child, and tell Sir Harold."

Scarsdale paced up and down in the warm sunlight, waiting, as years ago he had waited in another garden for the coming of his beloved.

And presently she would come to him, he did not doubt that. He turned now at the sound of a light step, but it was not she, he knew that—who, who loves, does not know the step of the beloved one? Is it not different from all other footfalls in the world, as different as 'her' voice is different from all other voices. A man usually knows the step of the woman he loves, but a woman always knows the step of her man. Scarsdale, turning slowly, knew full well that it was not Kathleen. A stern, silent man was he, misjudged by many who thought him cold and even heartless. Men found but little pleasure in his society, women none, for he had neither heart nor admiration to give them. He had looked at beautiful women and had failed to see their beauty, because only one face was beautiful in his sight. But this little maid tripping to him so demurely in the sunlight was pretty enough to win an unaccustomed smile to his lips.

What a pretty child she was, a fit handmaiden for Her!

"You want me?" he asked, and his voice was a little more gentle than usual.

She dropped him a curtsey, "My Lady sent me to say that she would be here in the garden very soon, sir."

"Thank you." He stood looking at her, at the pretty, downcast face. He looked after her when she had turned back towards the house. A pretty lit-

tle country girl with a sweet voice, he thought, and then, even before she had whisked out of sight behind a door, he had forgotten her and his thoughts had gone back to the one to whom they were constant.

She was coming, and when she came what should he say to her? Just as ten years ago he had watched and waited for her in another garden, his heart filled with love for her, so he was watching and waiting now and his love was the same, no—not the same, for, even he, was conscious of its change. But it was no less, it was even more, it was greater, it burned with a stronger flame, a greater passion.

And after ten years—did many men love for ten long years, were many men as constant as he had been? Would not that constancy count for something with her? Surely, surely it must, for women prized constancy in a man above all other things.

So the smile still lingered on his lips, as he turned and slowly made his way along the sun warmed path. What should he say to her when she came, what had he said to her in the old days when he had poured out his heart to her? A thousand things, a million things, and yet all were summed up in three words, "I love you."

He had given her everything, a man's love, a man's constancy. His heart had not beaten one throb the faster for any woman but her. His eyes had found no pleasure in looking on any other woman's face. Could man give more than he had given? What could he ask in return? Everything—and he knew that he must ask everything of her.

Kathleen was conscious of a trepidation, of a nervousness unusual to her. A strange shyness had come to her, an unwillingness to meet him; yet she must and because she must she was here. She had asked herself—Was he the same, had the years altered him? And she had answered her own questions with No and Yes: he was not the same, the years had altered him. She scarcely knew this silent, almost morose man. He came to her with his tanned, lean face, his deep sombre eyes, as almost a stranger, just now and again for a fleeting moment she saw something in his face, heard something in his voice that brought back memories of the boy she had known and loved. Yet they were but fleeting.

The ardent, outspoken, honest, loving boy had changed into the quiet, self-contained man. The man had infinitely more self-control than the boy. Yet she had seen those eyes of his lighten up, had seen the spark of fire gleam in them and she knew that it was not the same flame that had burned so brightly in the boyish eyes.

He met her and looked at her with a smile on his face, but he did not speak and she spoke because she knew that the silence must be broken.

"I saw you from my window, you have been admiring the—our garden," she said.

"I do not think that I have given the garden a thought."

"Yet is it not beautiful enough? And to think that a few months ago it was little more than a jungle and now——"

"It is beautiful, yet I knew another infinitely more beautiful to me than this. You knew that garden too, Kathleen, our garden at Bishopsholme, the garden where I used to wait for you, where I first told you——" his voice quavered and trembled and her eyes, downcast, dared not lift themselves to his face.

"Where I first told you how I loved you—I have seen that garden in my dreams a thousand times, I have had cool visions of it in the sweltering heat of the tropical nights. I have seen it—and you—always you—and yet my memory never did you justice Kathleen. To-day you are more beautiful, more sweetly gracious, more lovable——"

"Hush!" she said.

"Why should I be silent when silence would be but pretence? Ten years ago I loved you with all my heart and soul, for ten years my love has been constant, my dreams and my memories of you were sweeter to me than the living realty of other women—I cared nothing for them, my heart was all yours."

"Harold!" she said. "Harold!" She put her hand on his arm. "The past is dead and it must lie dead and—and forgotten——"

"Forgotten! You tell me to forget when I have lived on memories, when the visions of you that my brain has conjured up have been the only real, the only beautiful things in my life: have I not heard your voice speaking to me in the stillness of those hot nights, have I not felt your cool hand on my brow when fever assailed me? You, even though thousands of miles parted us, were with me always. You were by my side in daylight and in darkness, my other self, my better, purer, sweeter self, and now after ten years when all that I had of you, all that I had in the world was memory of you, you tell me to forget——"

"Because you must," she said softly, "because—oh because you must."

"And did you forget? Could you have forgotten at the word of command?" he said. His cheeks were flushed under their tan, his eyes were gleaming and his words came quick and fast. "Could you have forgotten so easily? No, you too were faithful, you waited, Kathleen. You told me so yourself. You waited—hoping, dear, did you not, hoping that I should come back to you as, God willing, I meant always to come back. You knew as I knew that it was the great love, the one and only love of our two lives. It came to you, dear, when you were little more than a child, to me when I was but a boy, but it will last through my life and yours—yours too, and knowing this, you tell me to forget."

"Listen," she said. "Listen—this is my home, you are my friend, my husband's guest——"

"Does that matter, does anything in this world matter save that I have come

back to you, that you and I love one another now as we did then and that after years of separation, years of heart sickness and longing, we are, thank God, together again. Does anything matter but that? You are married, you married the man for his money—his father's money—your father told me this—I am not speaking in anger, dear, nor contempt, I am only stating what I know to be a fact. You gave him no love, how could you, when you had none to give, for your heart was always mine."

"Oh hush, hush! Before you say any more, Harold, listen, for you must listen to me now. My father told you only the truth, I married for money, for a home, for a future—I had given up hope, I had waited so long, my youth was passing. I looked ahead, I saw old age and loneliness and oh—perhaps I was a coward, but I was afraid—afraid—Perhaps you had forgotten, perhaps you no longer lived—remember, remember that for ten years I heard no word of you: I know now that in not writing one word to me you were faithfully keeping the word of honour that my father forced you to give. Yet I did not think you had died, Harold, for if you were dead I think—I think I should have known—you were only a boy, I told myself, and the love of a boy changes, absence so often means forgetfulness. There are other women younger and more beautiful than I—No, no, let me speak, I know now that I was wrong—I know that I was wrong—yet how could I know it then? I was twenty-eight, twenty-eight and what had I to look forward to? Nothing! nothing in the world—my father had nothing to give me, I was useless, I could not work, I knew of no trade—I had been brought up in idleness, a useless creature—and the future—it meant—starvation, not merely genteel poverty, it meant worse, it meant——"

"I know, and you married for money—for a home—have I blamed you, have I shewn anger, Kathleen? No, dear, I pitied you. You married this man for his money only——"

"Not wholly, I liked him, respected him——"

"Liked him, respected him——" he smiled grimly. "But I had your heart?"

"Yes——" she said, "then."

"And now—now still now—always!"

"It is not fair, it is cruel, it is unlike you to ask me," she said, "it is too late to ask me now——"

"It is not too late. Was not your sin against me, against your love greater when you married him than any you might commit against him now?"

"I am his wife, I have promised to be faithful and true to him."

"You promised to be faithful and true to me; do you remember our parting at Bishopsholme, you promised then when I held you in my arms, when the tears were in your dear eyes—you promised always to love me, always to be faithful and true, all your life long—you promised me then with tears, beloved."

"And I performed—I waited for ten years. Never passed a day that I did not waking think of you, that I did not when I lay down to sleep ask God's blessing on you and then Fate was too strong——"

"It was Fate that brought me here to-day."

"So that we could meet as friends, take one another by the hand and——"

"As friends—you and I——" his voice quivered with scorn and bitterness—"Friends!"

They had come to the little lake, the pool where stood the stone nymph and where in the deep green water the great carp swam lazily. She was remembering how she and Allan had stood here days ago and had spoken of this little stone maiden.

"Kathleen, true love, love that is loyal and lasting and good and true is the holiest, the best and most enduring thing in this world, it stands far, far above a mere ceremony. It is Heavensent. You dare not sin against that love, dear, for Heaven itself put it in your heart. I have been faithful all those years, I have loved you. I have dreamed of you, spoken to you in my thoughts, and now I have come back, I have come to you for—my reward, Kathleen."

She turned slowly and looked at him, her face had grown white.

"Harold, I do not understand."

"You must, oh you must, you do understand, Kathleen, don't shrink from me—you see before you the man who loves you better than he loves his life, better I think, than he loves his soul. Marriage—what is marriage, such a marriage as yours, a marriage of convenience, a marriage of accommodation, a marriage tainted by money. Can you set up such a marriage as yours against my steadfast love? You cannot, you shall not, Kathleen, you belong to me—you became mine when you gave me your heart—when you let me hold you in my arms, when my lips first kissed yours. That—that gave you to me—I ask for my own now and you—you are my own—I have come for you—I want you, God knows I need you. I shall never let you go now never, never again in this world!"

She looked at him and saw that which was unfamiliar to her, looked at him and seemed to see the face of a stranger, of a man she had never known, that face was flushed, those eyes were bright, his hands stretched out to her trembled with the passion that moved him.

"What are you asking me?"

"To come with me, to leave all this, for your love's sake, for my love's sake, to let love rise triumphant above every earthly consideration, I have come for you, I shall not go without you."

And then she turned from him, she turned to look at the little statue that had stood there, reflected in the green waters through all those centuries. The stone maiden who would stand here perhaps when the grave had closed over her,

and looking at the little statue, rather than at him, she spoke quietly.

"I loved you," she said, "I loved you all those years because I believed you to be all that I would have had you be. I loved you for your respect for me, for your honour, your purity and for your reverence. In those days you never offended me by word or look, I was safe with you as with a brother—and because I knew that with you, I was so protected, so safe, so secure, I loved you, I think I worshipped you and so I remembered you as good and honourable and innocent and true—and—and now you come back to me——" her voice broke a little, "and I know that the love I believed in, trusted in so, has degenerated into what is nothing but a selfish passion. Here under my husband's roof, you hold out your hand to me, you bid me come, you bid me leave honour, happiness and peace of heart, you bid me leave self-respect, all—all behind me."

"Kathleen—Kathleen!"

"Had I been free and had you come in rags, a beggar, with nothing in your hands, had you called to me to go with you—I would have gone gladly, proudly gone. But you waited, Harold, and you waited too long, and now you dishonour your love, you trample it into the dust at your feet. I idealised you and the idol that I set up and which I in my blindness and foolishness worshipped, is fallen and shattered, broken beyond repair, and so——" She turned to him for the first time and held out her hand, "and so we have come to the parting of the ways, Harold, the last parting. It is good-bye between us, good-bye for always."

"If your love had been as strong as mine, had lived as mine had lived, you would not say this to me now."

"It lived till a little while ago, till we came here just now and stood beside the lake—it lived till then—and then—you killed it, Harold, you killed it here."

"These are words, mere words!"

"Yet true words, it died here after I had kept it warm, after I had cherished it in my heart, after I had regarded it as the best, the sweetest, purest, noblest thing that could ever come into my life, and here you taught me that I was wrong, you degraded it, you made me see that it was not the pure and holy thing I had believed it. You shewed me that it was mean and cruel and selfish. You asked me for—for your reward, yet did not consider what the cost of that reward must be to me. You would have made me an outcast, my name a word of shame, you, who ten years ago never wronged me in word or thought. You would take me from here into the wilderness, thinking that if I could but hide my face from others I might find happiness. Did you give a thought to my soul, to my conscience, where could I have hidden from that?"

He did not answer, he stood looking at her, his brown hands clenched. Smouldering passion was in his breast, the passion of desire, the passion of anger. Yet he could be honest with himself and knew that she was speaking the truth,

and had never a word to say in contradiction.

"Just now," she said, "just now you killed my love, you drove it from my heart—it belonged to the man I thought so fine, so splendid, so noble and when I found him ignoble, selfish, self-seeking, it died; it had to die, Harold, and being dead will never live again!" She held out her hand to him, there was a smile on her white face, a rather pitiful smile, for only she and her God knew what she had suffered here in this garden of sunshine.

"We must part here, dear, part—you and I who were lovers, part as lovers for ever, yet we shall meet again in a few hours, I the hostess, you my guest and friend. But I part here from the man I once loved and bidding him good-bye ask that God may bless him always."

"Once!" he said softly. "Once, Kathleen, I once loved? Once?"

"Once!" she said, and bravely looked into his eyes.

Moments of silence passed while he stood looking at her. His face seemed to have grown older, it was haggard, there were lines of pain upon it.

This place, she knew, would hold for ever a memory of pain and suffering for her, here she would see his face in memory as she saw it now. Never would she see these green waters lying motionless under the deep shadows of the yews, but that into her memory would come his face as she saw it. now, all haggard and stricken, the face of one who has seen the gate to happiness opened for an instant and then finds himself shut out in the darkness and the cold for evermore.

Suddenly he fell to his knees, he lifted the soft and dainty fabric of her dress and touched it with his lips and then, rising, turned and strode away, leaving her by the water alone.

CHAPTER XXVI
ON OTHER SHOULDERS

When he had knelt and kissed the hem of her garment, Scarsdale had meant it as an act of renunciation, as an acceptance of Kathleen's decision. He could not hope to fight against it. The truth of what she had said appealed to him. True he could take her away back to his own little domain at the farthest end of the earth. He could take her to a place where no one should know of her and his past. But he could not take her away from her own thoughts, the upbraiding of her own conscience. His love for her was a strange mixture of passion and

reverence. Sometimes it was the one that was uppermost, at another time the other. Now it was reverence, respect for her purity that filled his heart. He put his passion away, for ever, he told himself. He would go back whence he came. He would take back with him his dreams and his memories and nothing else.

To-day was Saturday, his visit here would end on Monday. He would have ended it to-day, yet he felt that he might appear a coward in her sight if he ran away, besides, why should he cheat himself of these last few hours of her? She was nothing to him, never could be anything, but he could still watch her, still listen to her voice, still garner up in his brain memories of her on which he would draw presently when he had gone back to the old lonely, hopeless life.

No, he would not run away.

He found from one of the men servants, old Markabee it was, in which direction lay the golf course, to which Messrs. Coombe, Cutler and Jobson had repaired.

"Fower miles it be, fower good miles, sir," said Markabee, "through Stretton you du go, then turns to the left and——" And so on, Scarsdale listened to the directions and followed them and an hour later stood on the course and watched Mr. Coombe making wild and ineffective swipes at a small ball perched on a mound.

Mr. Coombe, bathed in perspiration, appealed to him.

"Never tried this game before, I haven't," he said, "and don't know as I'm going to spend sleepless nights before I try it again. I daresay it's all right for those who like it—play it yourself perhaps, Sir Harold?"

Scarsdale shook his head. "There's not much golf where I come from," he said briefly.

"No, too hot I reckon—well for my part, give me a quiet game of bowls. Innocent mirth I don't find fault with, but I object to making myself a sort of circus for a lot of grinning urchins, who ought to be at school or somewhere." He came and stood beside Scarsdale. At any other time Scarsdale might have avoided Mr. Coombe, to-day he welcomed him. Even Coombe was a better companion than his own thoughts.

"A decent feller," Coombe thought, "no airs about him, a bit silent, I don't expect he gets much society where he comes from."

Thereafter Mr. Combe left Cutler and Jobson to their golf and attached himself to Scarsdale, and for long after the boastful Coombe would tell in City chop houses how he and his friend Sir Harold Scarsdale played golf together on Stretton Links.

"Walk," said Coombe, "why of course I'll walk, nothing like walking to get a man's weight down."

"I gather you don't do much walking, Mr. Coombe."

"Me?" said Coombe. "You should see me, all over the City I am, in one office out another up and down the stairs."

They lunched, the four of them, at a little Inn, lunched on bread and cheese and good English ale. Coombe called the pretty little maid who waited on them his dear. He chucked her under her dimpled chin and asked her how many sweethearts she had—a gay dog, Mr. Coombe, playful and ponderous, with no more vice in him than is in an honest British bulldog.

"Pretty girl," said Coombe; "I always said London wants beating for pretty girls. You see more pretty girls in ten minutes in the streets of London than you do in a day's journeying anywhere else. But next to London comes Sussex, I've seen 'em handsome enough in Kent and passable in Devonshire, but Sussex girls beat the best. There's a girl at Homewood, Lady Kathleen's maid I think she is, as pretty as a picture—Jobson and I saw her last night, didn't we, Jobson?"

Jobson blushed furiously.

"You did call my attention to a young woman, now I come to think of it, Coombe."

"Call his attention—ha, ha!" roared Coombe. "He didn't want much attention called, believe me Scarsdale, and mind you she was worth looking at, the daintiest little bit I've seen for a long while, I can tell you—neat, trim little body, hair as gold—as gold as that sunlight yonder, a demure little face, my word—ask Jobson, hey Jobson?"

"The young woman was certainly prepossessing," said Jobson primly, "and I suppose there's no harm in a man admiring a pretty face and God forbid because I see a pretty face and admire it that any other—thoughts—any other ideas—should enter my head—and—and I don't like your manner, Coombe, it suggests things I do not like—sir, and if you must, have your joke—as you call it, I would be infinitely obliged to you if you would find another subject to joke about than myself."

"Bless my soul!" said Coombe. "Bless my soul, Jobson, what are you going off the deep end for now? I said you saw a pretty girl and admired her and so did I, begad! I'd be a blind fool if I did not! And if you think I'm saying one word against you or the girl either, Jobson, why then—then—hang it then——"

"If you meant no offence, Coombe, then none is taken," said Jobson.

They were good honest fellows, decent, clean minded men and if their talk was mainly of money and of money getting, what did it matter? Scarsdale found no fault with them, he even felt a kind of liking for Mr. Coombe. Coombe was so big, so noisy, so inoffensively vulgar.

"Yes, I say and I ain't ashamed to say, that though I am fifty-nine I can admire a pretty face. Yes, fifty-nine," Coombe swelled out his chest and looked around, expecting that someone would question his age, but no one did. "Though

I am fifty-nine, I can still, thank God, admire the beauties of Nature, whether it's a noble landscape, or a sweeping view of the sea or—or a woman's face. I wouldn't be fit to be blessed with my sight if I couldn't admire a pretty face—and that's why, my dear, I admire you," he added as the little serving maid came in with more bread and cheese. "And why I hope that some fine young fellow will come along with his pocket full of money and marry you and make you a good husband."

"How 'ee du talk, sir!" the little maid said, blushing and curtseying; "a rare comic gentleman 'ee du be, sir."

"And——" went on Mr. Coombe when the girl had gone out again, "what I think is the most beautiful thing to see, gentlemen, the finest and noblest of God's created creatures, is a true bred, real English lady. It isn't only her looks, it's her sweet graciousness, her kindness and her friendliness and the dainty way she has of speaking, so's you feel at home and feel as she likes you and that's she's your friend and would do you a kindness if she could. There aren't many of 'em about, leastways it hasn't been my lot to meet 'em—but I've met one now—and—and"—Mr. Coombe paused, he rose, he held up his tankard, "Beer isn't good enough nor would the finest champagne ever vinted be good enough, but it isn't the stuff we drink her health in, it's the feeling, it's the respect, the admiration we feel, gentlemen, that does her honour and perhaps does honour to us too. And so I ask you to drink the health of the finest lady I ever met, the loveliest and best—and I tell you when I look at Lady Kathleen, it makes me proud to remember I'm an Englishman!"

"Hear, hear!" said Cutler and Jobson. "If old Homewood were here, Coombe, he'd love you for that," said Cutler.

Coombe might have been a hundred times more vulgar than he was, louder, commoner, more boisterous, but Scarsdale from that moment on would never see any harm in Coombe. A good fellow, an honest man. What mattered it that he wore white trousers and canvas strapped shoes, a soft felt hat to the golf course, that he perspired freely and that he bellowed like the bull of Bashan, what did it all matter? His heart was in the right place; and so mentally Scarsdale shook Coombe by his jolly big moist hand and thanked him in his heart for his tribute of reverence and respect to the One Woman in all Scarsdale's world.

Back to the golf course went Mr. Cutler and Mr. Jobson, each eager to do "something in so many," so Coombe vaguely understood, but here outside the Inn on a seat in the sunshine, it was pleasant enough to stay and Coombe and Scarsdale sat and smoked their pipes and watched the chickens and the white ducks in the roadway and thought their own thoughts.

"Yes," said Coombe, "if I ever saw a pretty girl, it was that one! Betty her name is, because I asked her, and she is Lady Kathleen's maid and all I've got to say is that her ladyship must be the purest and sweetest soul living or she

wouldn't have a lovely young thing like that in the same house as her own young husband!"

Scarsdale started. "Why—what do you mean, Mr. Coombe? Is Homewood the type of man who would——"

"Heaven forbid it, there isn't a cleaner, better lad living than Allan Homewood. But there's a certain prayer as runs—'Lead us not into temptation,' Sir Harold and knowing what I know——" Mr. Coombe paused.

"And what do you know?"

"I know that Lady Kathleen Homewood is a sweet and lovely young lady, though how she came to have such a father—at any rate I know there isn't a finer lady in this land than her, and I know that Allan Homewood is a lad who if I had had a daughter of my own I'd have liked to have seen her married to, but for all that it was old Homewood who made the marriage, his money that did it, and though they like one another and respect one another, as all the world can see, why—why—do you see, Sir Harold, it isn't the same as if it had been a love match and they had married for love, do you take me?"

"I understand you quite well and because it was not a love match——"

"Well, Sir Harold, because Allan ain't in love with Lady Kathleen, it's just possible, isn't it, he might, I say—might—fall in love with someone else, as is natural! Young blood, Sir Harold, young blood—you know. It's natural for a man to seek his own mate and that's why I don't hold with loveless marriages. Depend on it the man, and very often the woman too, will find he needs the love his marriage didn't bring him and he'll look for it, or if he don't look for it, Sir Harold, why then it may come to him all the same."

"And you think that Mr. Allan Homewood might possibly fall in love with his wife's little maid, eh?"

"God forbid I should think anything of the kind," said Mr. Coombe. "I never said it and I don't want to think it, but I do say if I was my Lady Kathleen's father, which I am not, I'd say to her, 'My dear, that little maid of yours is too pretty by half, and it would be best that you got rid of her!'"

"And Lady Kathleen would tell you that she was quite capable of conducting her own business without interference, Mr. Coombe!"

"Which would serve me right for a meddling, interfering old fool!" said Mr. Coombe.

He knocked out his pipe and then presently the warm sunshine, the drowsy hum of the hees hovering about the old straw skeps on their bench in the little orchard across the road, the good English ale, all had their effect. Mr. Coombe's heavy head nodded. He jerked himself awake, then nodded again, and so fell asleep. And Harold Scarsdale, an empty pipe between his teeth, sat with folded arms and stared before him, seeing nothing, but thinking deeply and his thoughts

were: "After all—after all might there not even now be some hope for him? Must the years be all lonely?"

She, God's blessings on her, would not come to him in shame—her shame—and his, yet might she not come if the burden of shame should fall on other shoulders?

So Mr. Coombe snored in the pleasant sunshine and Harold Scarsdale widely awake, dreamed of a future that might even yet be.

CHAPTER XXVII
THE CONQUEROR

A girl was leaning against the old rose red wall, she was sobbing pitifully.

"'Ee du be cruel, for—for ever pestering I!" she moaned. "Why doan't 'ee leave me in peace, Abram?"

The man stood stolidly watching her, her tears moved him not at all.

"Every night 'ee du be hanging about here, I know it, for Polly Ransom told me and getting I a bad name 'ee be!"

"Polly Ransom be a mischief making hussey!" the man said.

"She did but tell I the truth, Abram, for 'ee du be here all hours watching for I, so I daren't show my face beyond the walls."

"Who should I be watching and waiting for, if it be not 'ee, Betty? 'Ee be my promised wife, 'ee be!"

"I bain't!" she said. "I bain't, and I du hate 'ee!"

He laughed hoarsely.

"Slow—slow I be, slow o' speech and slow to make up my mind, yet when I du speak, then the words I hev said be spoken and can never be recalled, and when I du make up my mind, it be just the same, I never change, I never alter, I chose 'ee, Betty Hanson, from all other maids! I've set my heart on 'ee, my maid, and nothing on God's earth'll make me alter, nothing!"

They were words that might have been spoken with passion, yet he spoke without passion, with a cool, deadly certainty that frightened the girl infinitely more than blustering rage. Only his fingers betrayed his nervousness, they were plucking at each other for lack of something else to pluck at.

"A patient man I be, wunnerful, terribul patient," he went on slowly. "Night after night hev I come here, watching this door, knowing full well that sooner or

later 'ee must pass it. Night, after night hev I gone away and said to myself, 'Tomorrer,' and see 'ee've come, just as I 'lowed 'ee would——" he paused. "When'll the day be, Betty Hanson?"

"The day?"

"The day for our wedding, surely?"

"Never, never," she said, "never!" She clasped her hands over her heaving breast, "Never, Abram Lestwick! My funeral day will come afore my marriage day wi' 'ee!"

He nodded his head slowly. He had found a button, a button hanging by a mere thread; he twisted and tore at it till it came off, then he fingered the button, rolling it between finger and thumb, passing it restlessly from one hand to the other till at last he dropped it. He stooped and fumbled in the dust hunting for it as though it were something of great account. The girl clasped her face between her two hands and looked at him, terror in her eyes.

"Abram, Abram!"

He had not found the thing, he straightened himself up, but his yes still roved the ground.

"Why du 'ee pester I so?"

"I don't pester 'ee, my maid, I but come to look after my own!"

"I bain't your own!"

"'Ee be chose by I, willed to me by your grandmother, so 'ee du belong to I! and one day I will hev 'ee, Betty Hanson——"

"Never!"

He stood staring at her, forgetting the button. About them was the dusk of the night. His restless eyes roved up and down the long straight road, not a soul was there to be seen. And then the slow passion that sometimes came to him moved him. He had been patient, truly he had said he was patient, patient and slow, yet as sure as death itself—why should he wait? He took a step towards her, the girl shrank back, the green door was behind her, she might have lifted the latch and escaped, but a strange feeling of impotence, of helplessness was on her, she could only stare at the man with distended eyes.

"'Ee do belong to I!" he said. And he said it again and then again, and each time he took a slow step toward her.

"No, no, Abram——" her voice rose shrill with terror, for his arms were suddenly about her, his hateful hands were on her, she could feel his hot breath on her cheek.

"Let—let I go, for God's sake—Abram—let I go!"

But he did not answer, he dragged her towards him, her face closer to his, his breath was on her lips now, his eyes shone brilliantly, their dull, lifelessness was gone, the madness of his pent-up passion was on him.

"Let I—let I go—for—for God's sake let I——"

And then the green door behind her opened suddenly, Abram Lestwick lifted his head, he looked at the newcomer, the man who stood in the opening of the wall.

The girl was sobbing, struggling pitifully in his grip, yet he never let her go, he held her tightly, staring at the man, and it seemed waiting for him to pass.

"Let I go—let I go—for God's mercy, let I go!"

Allan Homewood knew the voice, he knew the shimmer of her gold hair, he knew that writhing little figure. He put his hand on her arm, he drew her back, Lestwick released her, yet did not stir.

"She be my promised wife," he said quietly, "my promised wife her be!"

"No, no!" the girl sobbed. "Never have I given him a promise of mine—never, never! Doan't let—doan't let him touch me! Oh I be frightened—frightened!"

Allan thrust her back gently. Strangely enough in some ways he and this other man were alike, alike and yet so vastly different, slow to anger was each, yet when that anger was aroused, it was deadly and terrible. It was roused now, that pitiful cry, that white face, those tearful, terrified eyes, those little clinging hands that were stretched out to him, craving his protection. What he said he did not know, the words came hot and furious. He called the other man cur and villain, he ordered him away, he lifted clenched fists in threatening.

But Abram Lestwick stood staring, like one surprised at the interference of this man. What right had he, what was it to him? He knew the man, knew him for Allan Homewood, Esquire, of the gentry, so what right had he to interfere between a man and his promised wife.

"You hear me, you coward, you hear me? I order you to go and never to come back; if you torment and threaten this child, I'll thrash you, yes man, thrash you till I cannot stand over you!"

"And me——" Abram Lestwick said, blinking his eyes at Allan, "me—what would I be doing?"

There came slowly into his dull mind a dim suspicion. This man was young, he lived beneath the same roof as Betty, Betty was beautiful, the most beautiful maid in all Sussex, in all the world! This man had seen her, admired her, loved her, what man could help it? But she belonged to him, Abram Lestwick.

"What be that maid to 'ee," he said, "what be her to 'ee?" A dull red came into his face, his eyes shone evilly.

The girl crouched back against the wall, still clasping her soft cheeks between her hands. She was watching them, waiting, wondering, conscious of a thrill of pride—these two men—were going to fight—for her.

She had no fear of the battle to come, and the bloodshed there might be,

she was eager for it. She wanted to see Allan Homewood—Allan kill this man whom she hated and feared so, rid her of him for ever. Why—why did not they begin, what were they waiting for? Why this long silence?

"What be her to 'ee?" Lestwick asked again, and then the smouldering passion burst into flame, foul words, fouler suggestions came to his lips. He ground his teeth together, he quivered from head to foot. In his madness and passion he fumbled with those restless hands of his with his clothing—and Allan misunderstood.

And so the fight began and the girl drew a long shuddering breath and watched. She saw them strike at one another, saw Abram Lestwick reel, staggering back with blood on his face, and she exulted, she wanted to scream her joy and gladness aloud. Oh! this man of hers, this Allan who belonged to her, whom she loved so madly, so passionately, what a man, what a man he was, how big and strong and broad, how fine to love a man like this!

"Kill him, kill him, kill him!" she prayed voicelessly, "Oh kill him!"

They had fought away from the wall, they were near to the middle of the chalk white road.

In the dim light she could see only Lestwick's face, Allan's broad back was towards her and Lestwick's face was all blood smeared and his eyes shone with an unholy light.

"Kill him!" she whispered, "oh kill him!"

She uttered a choking cry of joy, she saw Lestwick fling up his arms and spin round and then fall, fall crashing into the roadway, she watched him for a breathless moment as he lay there motionless. Then her breath came back to her, the blood coursed in her veins again, for the man had moved, he was rising slowly, painfully, but rising. He stood up, shaken and unsteady and his face was no sight for a maid to see, but she rivetted her eyes on it.

"Will you go now? Ah! you damned villain!"

Lestwick's fingers were again busy with his clothes and yet again Allan misunderstood. He thought the man was fumbling for a knife to draw on him and so gave him no time.

Another blow staggered Lestwick, but he did not go down, the fury in his face was an ill thing to see, his teeth were bared and snapping like the teeth of a mad dog. He tried to close with Allan, disregarding the blows that fell on him, tried to close and to get those long green teeth of his into the other man's soft flesh. And the girl knew it and screamed a warning.

"Mind—mind as he doan't bite 'ee, mind as he doan't bite 'ee. Ah God, save us, he be mad!" She stooped, she fumbled in the dust, she found what she sought for, a flint, a jagged, heavy flint. There was hell fire in Lestwick's eyes, the passionate rage of a maniac. This she saw as she flung the stone. She flung

it straight at that hideous, convulsed face.

It struck Lestwick on the forehead, it broke the skin and the blood gushed out. He turned, he looked at her, noting it was her hand that had flung it. He laughed a curiously strange mocking laugh and then he collapsed, seemed to crumple before her eyes and fall a limp heap in the roadway.

"What did you do, Betty, Betty what have you done?"

She was sobbing and laughing at once. "He—he meant to kill 'ee, meant to—to get they teeth o' his in your throat, Allan, oh I knew it, I knew it! Did—did 'ee see his face, Allan, did 'ee see his face and his eyes? And oh they—they hands o' his!"

"Go into the house quietly, say nothing to anyone, bring water quickly, understand, not a word to a soul, bring water here at once!"

He went down on his knees beside the man, he lifted the sorely battered head, the hideous blood stained face. Yet it was not hideous now, the passion was smoothed away, the eyes and mouth were closed.

She was back with the water in but a few seconds.

"Be he dead?"

"No!"

Minutes passed, between them they bathed away the blood, they cleaned the wound, the jagged wound in his forehead. Allan bound it with his own white handkerchief and then the man opened his eyes, now they were dull and brooding. He lifted his hand and passed it across his mouth, as a man does in sheer nervousness.

"I—I be all right!" he said, and his voice was low and monotonous—"I be quite all right, a strong man I be—'tis time I were going home——"

"Yes, it's time you went home," Allan said, he ran his hands over the man's clothing, not yet trusting him, misdoubting Lestwick's strange passionless calm. He was searching for the knife that twice he had believed the man would have drawn on him, but there was no knife there.

"What be 'ee looking for?" Lestwick asked.

"Your knife!"

"I bain't got a knife, cruel treacherous, dangerous things knives be—I'll be getting home——"

Allan helped him to his feet, the man stood dazed, swaying a little, then he seemed to take hold on himself.

"A very passionate man I be," he said, "terribul wrathful in moments of anger——" He looked at Allan with that strange sullen expression of his.

"I beg your pardon if I did say or du anything as I should not—'tis my anger as du master I—I wish 'ee good night!"

He turned and walked slowly and unsteadily down the road. Betty caught

at Allan's arm, and they stood there, the girl clinging to the man, watching him go. Once Abram turned his head and looked back, he saw them there together, the girl and the man, holding to one another, the dusky red came into his cheek, he breathed hard, then went on his way, mumbling to himself.

"A knife—he did think I had a knife—what du, I need with a knife—bain't I got my hands——?" He held them out before him and looked at them, as the fingers writhed and clenched and unclenched. "Terribul powerful my hands be, but I did not get them on him—no, not then, not then——"

Betty had broken down and was sobbing and moaning, clinging to Allan's arm.

"Betty, hush, hush child, hush dear, he is gone—there is nothing to fear!"

"But he will come back. Oh, Allan, I did mean to kill he——"

"Hush!" he said again.

"For he meant to kill 'ee and—and Allan he will think about it and brood about it, and one day he will surely kill 'ee, unless 'ee du watch he terribul, terribul close, he will kill 'ee!"

He laughed softly. "I am not afraid of him, Betty, hush dear, hush, don't cry!"

For she was sobbing bitterly and pressing her face against his arm, clinging to him as in fear, or love, or both.

"Hush!" he said. "Come, come, child, come!" But his hands were quivering and his heart seemed to be beating faster than usual, "Come!" he said again.

"Oh Allan, Allan, if he did hurt 'ee, I would want to die!" she moaned. "For I du; I du love 'ee—oh! I love 'ee terribul, terribul bad, I du!"

"Betty," he said, "hush, you must not! hush! come!" He drew her through the little arched green door into the yard. He himself was shaking now, trembling, afraid for her, afraid for himself, for his honour. She said she loved him and she clung to him, this passionate maiden. What mad folly it all was, what mad folly, God preserve them all!

"Betty go back, go into the house!" he said.

"No, no, don't let me leave 'ee, Allan, let me bide wi' 'ee for a time!"

He felt her tears on his hand, the hand she had taken and was holding tight pressed to her face.

"Let me bide wi' 'ee, Allan, Allan, don't 'ee send me away yet!"

She was sobbing unrestrainedly, crying aloud as a child does, and he feared lest any servant should come into the yard and hearing her, find them here together. Nor could he send her back into the house for others to see, all tears and shaken as she was. But stay here he could not and would not.

"Come," he said, he held her hand tightly, he took her through the little gateway into the garden. Here at least they would be safe and secure.

"A—a—cowardly maid I be," she moaned, "oh a coward I be, but I du feel safe wi' 'ee, Allan, don't—don't leave me! Oh sir, I—I du forget——"

"That does not matter now," he said, "Betty, try and compose yourself. I understand, you have been frightened, poor child, and upset, but—but that man will not trouble you again!"

"You doan't know he," she said quietly; "Allan if I—I did think that I must marry he, I would go and drownd myself in the pond, the pond where my stone maid be!"

"You are not going to drown yourself, Betty," he said. "You are going to live for many happy years!"

"How—how can I?"

"There are other men, better men than this poor fellow Lestwick!"

"Oh Allan, du 'ee pity him?"

"Yes, for loving you vainly, child!"

They had taken a roundabout pathway under the dense shadow of the tall yews and now they had come suddenly on the little lake, from which the slender white figure rose.

"There her be, there be my stone maid—and one day, one day I will go to her, I think Allan!"

"Hush!" he said. "If you talk in this way I shall leave you! Betty, Betty, be brave, brave dear, for your own sake! For—for mine!" his voice broke a little, he looked down at her, her lovely little face was upturned to his.

And oh the temptation of that moment, the temptation of those red lips, those eyes all filled with the soft light of her love, the love that she felt no shame to admit. His for the taking—his he seemed to know, even before they had ever met—his in some past life, his now and through all time—his in the life yet to come.

There came to him suddenly a great, an irresistible desire, a passionate love of her, the desire to put his arms about her, to hold her to him tightly, tightly, to crush his lips to hers, and she, he knew, would not struggle, would not deny him.

And because he was young, because the lifeblood ran hot, in his veins, because she was so near to him, so alluring, so loving, so beautiful, God help him, how could he resist?

"Betty, Betty, why do you say you love me?"

"Du 'ee not know, Allan, why I love 'ee?" she said. "Oh you du!" She put her hands against his breast, she looked up into his face, her eyes smiled at his, her lips invited. He bent to her, she could feel the heavy, the wild beating of his heart under her little hands, and there came to her a sense of joy, of triumph.

A cloud drifted across the moon, it blotted out for a moment that glowing, inviting little face. It was gone, leaving but an indistinct shape of whiteness.

His father! his wife!—his old father's pride in him, Kathleen's faith in him—Was he to prove himself unworthy? Was he to fall at this first temptation?

"Allan, my Allan!" she said, and her voice came to him, soft as a caress from out of the darkness. She had thought him won, had believed him hers, and she was waiting joyously, expectantly for the kiss, the kiss that never came.

"Allan, my son," he seemed to hear the old voice say, that proud and tender old voice. "Allan my husband!" Her voice now, calling him back to a sense of honour, to a sense of duty and right and he heard the voices, listened to them, heeded them. He pushed the girl away gently.

"Betty, we must go back to the house, child—they will miss me and wonder, you too, you may be wanted, you have dried your tears—go back, go back."

"Allan!" she said and her voice was like a cry of pain. He gripped her little hands and held them tightly, then he let them go.

"Go back!" he said, and his voice was harsh and stern, yet it was the voice of his better self—the conqueror!

CHAPTER XXVIII
THE WATCHER

A man seated in the shadows watched them part, for the moon had come out again, watched them part as he had watched them come, as he had watched them standing there together on the edge of the pool. To him, the watcher, it had seemed that the girl was in the man's arms, her face uplifted to his—he had seen the moonlight on her face and had seen the dull glimmer of her hair.

And the man—yes, he thought that he made no mistake—about the man! So Mr. Coombe was right, clever, farseeing, sensible Mr. Coombe—God's blessings on Mr. Coombe for his few idle words that meant so much to this man watching here in the shadows.

He did not move. He scarcely breathed, as the girl passed him, alone on her way to the house. He heard her sobbing softly to herself as she went, saw the little head bent as in shame.

And to the watcher it seemed that she went in shame and he was glad—Heaven knew how glad he was!

Yet he must make no mistake, he must not trust to intuition, to mere suspicion. He must know beyond the shadow of a doubt that this man was Allan

Homewood—'Her' husband.

Scarsdale rose, the man was still standing by the edge of the pool, the girl had gone some while. Scarsdale walking softly on the turf, skirted the hedge and came out on the broad flagged pathway. He walked leisurely towards the pool and seemed to see the other man for the first time.

"Hello!" he said. "Who is here?"

"I——" Allan turned to him.

"You—oh Homewood, is that you, my host?"

So it was true. He felt a sudden liking for this man, he felt he loved him for his weakness and his sin, for would not that weakness, that sin give him that which he wanted most? They talked of the night, of the old garden, of the sweet soft English country air. Scarsdale spoke of the damp night heat of that country which had been the prison of his body and soul.

He was a good talker when he pleased and to-night he wished to please. He wanted this man's liking—he exerted himself to gain it and yet felt a deep contempt of himself while he strove.

He spoke of fights with savages, of fights against disease and death, of perils that made the blood run cold. Yet he did not boast or brag. Dimly Allan realised that the man who was speaking was the hero of these adventures, but Scarsdale never said so.

"You were long away from England, Scarsdale?"

"A thousand years!" Scarsdale said, he laughed softly, "according to the calendar; ten years, to me a thousand! Thank God to be back!" He drew a deep breath.

"Will you go back again?"

"It depends, I do not know, I may, yet I hope not!"

"Perhaps you have come to seek a wife?"

"Yes!"

"But could you take her to this place of which you have been telling me?"

"God forbid!"

"So it depends on your success with the lady whether you remain in England or go back?"

"Yes, it depends on that!"

"You and Kathleen are old friends?"

"I knew her when she was a child, I hoped that she would not have forgotten me!"

"And she did not, Kathleen would not, she never forgets!"

Strange that Allan should say this, here beside the pool where he and Kathleen had stood but a few hours ago. "Kathleen never forgets!" The words sounded to Scarsdale like an ill omen, he shivered a little. Then he smiled at his own

thoughts and his thoughts were—"The shame shall be this man's, not hers. Her freedom shall come to her without a breath of scandal to touch her fair name—but she shall be free—and those ten years of waiting, ten years of constancy, ten years of love must find their reward——"

They sat down on the stone seat beside the sundial, the stillness and darkness of the garden about them, the perfume of the flowers in the air. A place to sit and dream in. Many windows were lighted in the old house, sending out friendly warm yellow rays of light into the night. From the house came the distant sound of music, a woman's voice, deep, rich and beautiful, even more beautiful mellowed by the distance.

She was singing and both men were silent, listening.

Thank God, thank God presently he could go in and take her hand and face her, look into her eyes, with no memory of guilt and of shame to stand between them to mar the perfect understanding and the deep friendship that was so sweet to both of them.

Thank God! Thank God that he had mastered the temptation, the passion of just now! It had gone utterly. Yet he felt a great tenderness, a great love for the little maid who would have given herself as she had given her love to him.

And now Scarsdale was talking, exerting himself to talk in his low, deep, strong, man's voice. He was trying to win this other man's liking and friendship, for he had an object in view. On Monday, at the latest Tuesday, this little house party would break up, they would all go their separate ways and he wanted to stay, as a few hours ago realising defeat and failure, he had wanted to go. Now with a new hope in his breast he wished to remain.

What they talked of mattered little, of everyday things, of commonplaces, but Scarsdale worked steadily towards the object he had in view.

"After ten years—I went away a mere boy, I knew but a few people, my father, who is dead since then, others who have passed out of my life. I come back to England a stranger among strangers. To me London is a desert, I walk its streets, looking vainly for a familiar face; I know no one, no one who passes knows me!"

"But you found Lord Gowerhurst?"

"Yes, he remembered me——"

"You and he were good friends?"

"No, as a boy I disliked him, may I say it to you?"

"But Kathleen and you were friends?"

"A—a boy and girl friendship—she has grown into a sweet and lovely woman—I shall think of this place, of her, of you and of your happiness, of the tranquil calm of this when I am back out there again—even when I am back in that London that I do not know and that knows me not!"

"Is there haste for you to return to London?"

"Haste—every hour I remain out of it I feel I am gaining something!"

"Then why hurry back?" asked Allan in his hospitable generosity. "Why go back? Lord Gowerhurst is eager for his Club, his billiards, his cards, his manservant. My father and his friends have their businesses, but you—why go back?"

Scarsdale murmured something about imposing himself—Allan laughed.

"Stay and believe me we shall be glad—Kathleen will be glad to hear that you are staying awhile with us—come, you will stay, eh?"

"It would give me more pleasure than you can know!" Scarsdale said.

Allan laughed, for him there was no double meaning in the other man's words.

He had gained his point, his host had asked him to remain on indefinitely, for days, weeks even, there would be no time limit now.

"It is good of you, Homewood—you don't realise how I appreciate it—my opportunities of seeing home life, such as this, are not many!"

"But the lady you hope to marry?" Allan asked.

Scarsdale rose.

"She is not for me—yet——" he said steadily. "Thank you again, Homewood, may I tell your wife that you have asked me to remain?"

"She will be as pleased as I am!" Allan said simply.

Scarsdale turned to the house, he left Allan sitting there and Allan rested his chin on his hands. He was not deeply religious. He had prayed, as men do, by fits and starts, in moments of anxiety, in moments of relief and gratitude. But his heart was offering up thanksgiving now. He had been delivered from temptation. He thanked God for it, for his own sake and for hers, that child's, for his father's sake, for Kathleen's.

But temptation might assail him again, would—and he, knowing his own weakness now, knowing how nearly he had succumbed to it, must do that thing that even brave men may do and yet still keep their honour. He must avoid it, he must shun it, even flee from it if necessary—but how?

Betty or he must go and how could he when this was his home, when all his interests were here? How could he go, how could be explained his reason for flight? No, it must be she who must go!

"I must think, I must plan, I must consider her, yes, consider her in every

way, but she must go."

CHAPTER XXIX
WHY ABRAM LESTWICK STAYED FROM CHURCH

Mrs. Colley wagged her ancient head, she looked at her granddaughter and smiled, shewing toothless gums.

"Du 'ee notice now as Abram bain't in Church this morning, my gell?"

'Lizbeth Colley frowned, "Abram Lestwick's comings and goings du not interest I," she said in a low voice.

The service was in progress. There sat Mrs. Hanson, prim and stiffly upright, the place beside her that had for so long been Betty's was still vacant. There was Miss Dowell, tall, angular and lantern jawed, gifted with a harsh and nasal voice that rose above all other voices when the hymns were being sung, beyond her, her niece little Mary Tiffley, who minded Miss Dowell's shop, ran her unimportant errands, cleaned her house and stye, windows and floors, a useful, hard working little maid Mary, a good wife in the making for some man who would probably work her even harder than did her Aunt Emily. And beyond Mary, that vacant space towards which Mrs. Colley's small bright eyes had been attracted.

Abram Lestwick, regular and devout worshipper, always occupied this place. He had knelt beside Mary Tiffley, had shared his torn and tattered hymn book with her, had thundered the responses in her little ears and it is doubtful if he had ever looked at the round childish pretty face.

Mary Tiffley, Polly Ransom, Ann Geach, what were they to him, he to them? What mattered it to Abram Lestwick that they were pleasant to look on, that they were fine, healthy country maids, any one of whom would make some man a good wife? He did not consider them, they did not exist for him. He could not have told from memory whether Mary Tiffley had fair hair or dark. He had sat next to her in Church; he had bellowed the same hymns with her for five years, since she was a child of twelve, she had grown up beside him and he had not noticed it.

"Aunt Emily, Mister Lestwick bain't in Church this marning," whispered Mary.

"I see him bain't," said Miss Dowell. "Mind your devotions now and don't 'ee getting looking about 'ee."

"Mortal glad I du be," Mary thought, "that he bain't here, for his fingers do fidget I something terribul, they du."

Everyone in Church noted the fact that Abram Lestwick was not there. Compared with the women, there were noticeably few men in Church, Abram was always a distinguished figure and they missed him.

Presently the sermon, which they knew by heart, was drawing towards its natural conclusion. When the Rector arrived at—"And so it behooves us to bear these things in mind. Let us put covetousness out of our heart, let us be content with that which we have, no matter how poor or how lowly be our lots in life. Let us accept God's goodness with thankful hearts asking for no more than it pleaseth Him to give—and——"

They knew from long experience that the sermon would conclude in exactly two minutes from this point and now there was a general movement, a rustling of Sunday dresses, a shuffling of young feet, eager to be out scampering on the grass, or on the good high road.

There was that movement in the little Church that takes place in a railway carriage when the long, long journey is nearing its end, when the station is almost gained.

Mrs. Colley stepped out briskly and smartly into the sunshine.

"A spryer woman I be than Mrs. Hanson, aye, a spryer and a nimbler I be, so as one 'ud take I for being ten years younger, though we were at school together. See how stiff du be her walk, how she du lean on her umber-rella. 'Lizbeth, take notice how her hand du shake remarkable! Good marning to 'ee, Mrs. Hanson, and 'tis a lovely fine day."

"'Tis:" said Mrs. Hanson briefly.

"A fine marning and a good sarmint," said Mrs. Colley.

"'Tis my favrit sarmint," said Mrs. Hanson, "I were always partial to Nabob's vineyard."

"Miss Dowell du be ageing terribul," said Mrs. Colley.

Mrs. Hanson sniffed. She felt that she was ageing herself, she missed the maid, though she would not admit it to herself. Perilous bad was that maid and disobedient, and she, Mrs. Hanson, was a stern, unbending, unyielding woman.

"Miss Dowell's Mary be growing to a fine maid!" said Mrs. Hanson. She was approaching the vacant space in the pew as it were, step by step.

"I have never noticed she, pertickler, I remember her mother, one of they empty heads as I never could abide."

"I noticed," said Mrs. Colley, "I noticed Mrs. Hanson as——"

"So did I!" said Mrs. Hanson, "Abram Lestwick were not in Church, I noticed it tu."

"'Tis the first time——"

"'Tis his own business and 'tis not yours nor mine."

Mrs. Colley bridled. "I du notice a great change in Abram, and if what I du hear be half true, that maid of yours hev played Abram a bad trick, leaving him in the lurk like and going and getting sarvice in the big house."

"I will thank 'ee, Mrs. Colley, not to interfere wi' me and my affairs. My grand-darter had her own rights to get any place as she did chose, and whoever hev been saying ill things o' she—I would hev took it friendly and neighbourly, seeing me and you went to school together as young things, I—I say I would hev took it neighbourly and friendly if you had up and spoke for the maid."

"And how did 'ee know as I didn't?" demanded Mrs. Colley shrilly.

"Because I du know your tongue, Ann Colley and knowed it of old I du, and it's a tongue as would sooner speak ill things of your neighbours than good things and—and I wish 'ee good marning, Mrs. Colley, and my bes' respects to 'ee!" And shaking her old umbrella, Mrs. Hanson marched on, a tall gaunt figure of a woman.

It had worried her too, that Abram was not in Church, she disliked changes; she had come to look for Abram in his place every pleasant Sunday morning, and every unpleasant one too for the matter of that. But fine or dirty the weather, Abram had never failed till to-day.

"There be something wrong," Mrs. Hanson thought. "I mislike it, Abram not being in his place, I missed his voice in that 'ymn which we did have to-day and which he was always partial to."

Not for days had she spoken to Abram. He passed the cottage regularly, he touched his hat politely when he saw Mrs. Hanson, for he was a polite man. But he had never crossed the threshold since Betty had got her place in the big house.

But Mrs. Hanson had heard things from others than Ann Colley. She had heard how Abram patiently and stolidly spent two hours every night staring at the arched green doorway in the wall of Homewood, through which doorway he knew must come Betty sooner or later.

Mrs. Hanson sat down to her Sunday dinner, it was a frugal meal of cold boiled bacon, a cold potato and a piece of bread. Mrs. Hanson was a strict Sabbatarian. Many and many a time when Betty had dared to remonstrate about the Sunday fare, Mrs. Hanson had said to her.

"Remember my maid, as you du keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days shalt 'ee labour and do your work, and not a potato will I have cooked in house of mine on the Seventh day, which be the day of the Lord, thy God, nor baked nor biled meats will I hev."

"But 'ee du bile the kettle, Grandmother, for to make a cup of tea on Sundays same as other days!" Betty had said.

"That be a different thing, tea one must hev; the Lord would not hev sent we tea if He had not meant we to bile a kittle to make it with."

"Nor potatoes," Betty thought, "if they were not to be cooked. After all, why was it a sin to boil water in a saucepan and no sin to boil it in a kettle."

So Mrs. Hanson sat down to cold bacon. Primly and stiffly she sat and mumbled the bacon between her hard gums, but she was not thinking of the carnal pleasure of feasting, her thoughts were of Abram Lestwick.

Strange that he was not at Church, strange that he should have missed on such a fine Sunday after all these years!

"Something must ail he," thought Mrs. Hanson and was surprised that the idea had not occurred to her before.

Mrs. Hanson finished her meal, she washed her plate in cold water, she set it on the dresser. She put on her bonnet again, she took her umbrella and locked the cottage door behind her.

Abram's cottage was three-quarters of a mile away and Mrs. Hanson was feeling her age to-day. But she walked the distance, she reached the cottage and tapped on the door.

"Come in!"

Mrs. Hanson went in. Abram, dressed with his usual care, was seated in a stiff chair, drawn up to a round table. On the table, which was covered with a red flannel table cloth, was a large Bible. Abram was reading from the Bible, following the lines as he read them with his long, flat tipped finger.

Abram's face was battered and scarred, there was a deep gash on the forehead, there were livid marks under his right eye, on his left cheek, and a contused wound on his upper lip.

Mrs. Hanson looked at him, but she said nothing.

"I wish you good marning, Mrs. Hanson, and beg of you to be seated," said Abram.

Mrs. Hanson sat down.

In higher circles educated and polite people are apt to remark on any facial disturbance of a temporary disfiguring nature that may have befallen their friends. In Mrs. Hanson's circle it would have been considered bad form.

"It were remarked in Church, this marning, Abram, as 'ee was not present."

"I were not!" he lifted his head and looked at her, the light shone in from the window and illuminated his battered countenance.

"So being an old friend——"

"And very considerate of 'ee, Mrs. Hanson," he said. "I will finish my chapter," he added.

She sat there waiting, she watched him as with the forefinger of his right hand, which appeared to her to be abnormally long and curiously flattened at the

end, he traced a line across the page, stopping at every word, which though he uttered it not aloud, he evidently formed by muscular exertion of his jaws. His left hand not being engaged with the book was twisting and tearing the edge of the red flannel table cloth.

Mrs. Hanson shut her eyes, she could hear Abram's stertorous breathing, then she heard a movement. He had evidently finished, he closed the book solemnly.

"I hev finished my chapter," he said; "spiritual comfort be a very great blessing, Mrs. Hanson."

"Ah!" she said. "We had Nabob's vineyard for the sarmint to-day, Abram, and 'ymn seventy-two, as I know 'ee be partial to."

He nodded.

She wondered if he would tell her about his face, not for all the world would she transgress the unwritten laws of politeness and ask for an explanation. The reason, however, why he had not been present at Church was obvious.

"Last night," he said after a long pause, "last night I see the maid——"

"Betty?"

"There be but one maid for me, Mrs. Hanson, and it be onnecessary for me to give a name to she when I say the Maid 'ee will understand."

"Aye!" she said.

"Her still keeps contrairywise," said Abram.

"Her will give way," said Mrs. Hanson, "maids du!"

Abram's right hand was trying to tear scraps from the worn leather of the corner of the book, his left was still engaged with the tablecloth.

He was looking at Mrs. Hanson, it seemed as if he was trying to make up his mind to say something, several times he opened his mouth and as many times closed it again in silence.

"Well Abram, I must be getting along," she said it to urge him to speech.

"I would beg of 'ee to take a cup of tea wi' me," he said, "but Sunday be a day of fasting and repentance and prayer, Mrs. Hanson, Ma'am! And moreover the fire hev gone out, Mrs. Hanson——" Again he hesitated. "Mrs. Hanson, hev 'ee ever met Mr. Homewood——"

"The barron-ite one," she asked, "or the young one as be master?"

"The young one."

"Aye, I hev met he and spoke to he and a very pleasant spoken gentleman he be."

"Oh he be a very pleasant spoken gentleman—a very pleasant spoken one, I du know!" A spasm seemed to pass across the man's face, his fingers clenched suddenly, she heard his long nails rasp over the leather cover of the book. Looking she could see a series of deep scratches they had furrowed in the stout leather.

"Why Abram bain't 'ee well to-day?"

"I be very well, I thank 'ee, Mrs. Hanson, I be enjoying unusual good health, I thank 'ee. I did not come to Church this marning because—because in the dark last night—I did stumble and fell as 'ee may have noticed, Mrs. Hanson."

That he was lying, that it was no stumble, no fall, she knew. Had it something to do with Betty and why had he asked her if she knew Allan Homewood?

"And as 'ee said 'ee must be getting along——" he suggested. She rose to her feet, it was a hint, a broad one and she took it.

"Aye! I must be getting along, Abram," she said.

He saw her to the door, he went to the gate and opened it for her.

"I thank 'ee most politely for coming and calling, and I wish 'ee good day, Mrs. Hanson!"

He stood watching the tall upright figure down the road.

"Her be ageing," he said to himself, "ageing her be."

He went back into the cottage and closed the door after him. He took the Bible and placed it on the small round table in the window, on the Bible he laid an antimacassar, on that a small glass case containing some flowers contrived in wool.

Then he stood still, he lifted his hands so that they were between him and the light, he looked at them as though examining them curiously.

"A very pleasant spoken gentleman he be!" And then he laughed curiously.

CHAPTER XXX
THE RELIGION OF SIR JOSIAH

From Kathleen's window the garden glowing in the white sunshine was a feast of vivid colour. To-day old Markabee, in clean smock and respectable though ancient high hat, had wended his way to the village church, in obedience to the persistent clanging of the unmusical bell. But the bell was silent now, its noisy clamour was stilled and the peace and calm of the day of rest brooded over the place.

Kathleen sat, her chin resting on her hands, her eyes fixed on the old garden, yet seeing nothing of it.

To her within the last few hours had come knowledge, a wonderful knowledge, knowledge that brought with it a strange fear and yet a great joy. She knew

that she was to fulfil her woman's destiny. At first she had been inclined to question that knowledge, to doubt it, then she had waived doubts aside. It was to be! and why should it not be? She asked herself, was she glad? Was she sorry? She could find no answer at first, just at first her one thought was "fear." But it passed quickly and in its place came pride—pride and joy.

Glad—yes, she was glad—her eyes were bright with the joy that had come to her, there was a smile on her lips, and yet about that smile there was a shade of melancholy and sadness and a little too of the wistfulness of hunger. For strangely, of the one knowledge, had been born another.

She had come to understand something which she had been faintly conscious of for a long while past, something that she had thought of perhaps yesterday when she had stood beside the pool, listening to Harold Scarsdale.

That other knowledge that she had gained made her understand now why that parting with Scarsdale had cost her so little anguish, so small a heartache. She had pitied him, yet not herself, and then she had not known why this should be, yet she knew it now.

And so, after ten years dreaming, she had awakened to find that the dream was but a dream after all.

Presently into the garden came two who walked side by side, the one tall and upright and strong, the other a hale and hearty man, yet lacking the spring of youth in his sure steps. She watched them and there came into her eyes a new light, a light born of wonderful tenderness, into her fair cheeks came a faint colour.

She saw the younger put his arm about the elder's shoulder. How they loved one another, those two, father and son.

"I want to tell him, I want him to know and yet—yet I dare not tell him!" she thought. "Still, oh I want him to know! I wonder, will he be glad and proud, proud as I am? Or will he—be sorry?" Her head sank a little. "He would be proud and glad if he loved me——"

"Allan!" she said softly, "Allan!"

It seemed almost as if from her brain there fled a message to his, for he turned, he looked up at her and smiled.

And the sunshine was on his brown honest face and in his clear eyes. He could only see the smile she had for him, he could not read at this distance the message in her eyes, a new message, one that they had never sent to him before, a message of a newly found yet great and sure and strong love.

And now, as she watched him, she knew why yesterday she had been able to turn that leaf, in the book of her life with scarce a heartache.

She knew the truth now, she had idealised the child's love, she had lived on the ideal, had tended it and cared for it and worshipped it and had made it

the most beautiful and wonderful thing in her life. She had built for herself a great and wonderful palace and had found that its foundations were laid on the shifting sands, and so the dream palace had crumbled and fallen into utter ruin, the dream had ended, and with clear eyes she beheld the truth.

This morning Scarsdale had told her quietly that he had been asked to stay by Allan. He had watched her curiously while he told her, had wondered if she would shew anger or annoyance, and she had shewn neither.

She was only the gracious hostess who expressed her pleasure at his continued stay.

"When our other friends are gone, I am afraid you will find it very dull, unless you are interested in those things that Allan is interested in—this modern, scientific farming." She smiled at him, there was no self-consciousness.

Yesterday might never have been, all the years, all their memories might never have been. This man was her guest, her husband's friend—his guest from this moment, nothing more. She was not playing a part, she was not cheating herself. Yesterday she had told him that as lovers they had parted forever, as mere friends they would probably meet many times, and so it was.

Harold Scarsdale represented nothing to her now; he was even less her friend henceforth than her husband's.

He had wondered at the far-away look in her eyes, at the almost mechanical way in which she had accepted his news. How could he guess how utterly and completely her thoughts were filled with this knowledge, the greatest, most wonderful that ever comes into a woman's life?

And so she sat here by her window and watched the figures of the two men, both dear to her, but one grown suddenly so wonderfully, so inexpressibly dear that the strength and depth of her love almost made her afraid.

In spite of the smile he had given Kathleen a while ago, there was this morning a cloud on Allan's brow, a weight of care on his heart. He was worried and anxious, he wanted to do what was right, he wanted to act justly and honourably, and he knew that he was afraid—afraid for himself, afraid of a man's weakness, afraid of temptation that he would willingly flee if he could.

Long ago he had promised to be open and honest with Kathleen, had promised to tell her if that which had been so unreal, so intangible, should by any chance become real, and it had and yet he hesitated to tell her. It had been so easy to promise then, so difficult to perform. But he wanted advice, he wanted help and to whom could he turn if not to her?

There was his father.

He looked down at the kindly old face. But would his father understand? He doubted it. What patience would Sir Josiah, man of affairs, business man and materialist, have with dreams and visions and such-like rubbish? Yet Allan had

a boyish, and because it was boyish, an honest longing to take someone into his confidence, to unburden his mind, to ask advice, to share his thoughts with some other and if not Kathleen, who better, who more natural than his father?

And so he made up his mind to speak, but hesitated. Twice he commenced, twice he branched off lamely into something else.

"What's the matter, Allan lad?" Sir Josiah asked.

"Matter, father?"

"Aye, matter, my son! I know you better than you think I do perhaps. You've got something worrying you and that's a fact. Now what is it? Is it Gowerhurst, has his lordship been saying anything or—or wanting anything, hey?"

"Lord Gowerhurst has——"

"Allan, look here," Josiah took his son's arm and pressed it closely. "I know his lordship, he's a gentleman, a man of position, a man of rank and title and like that—but he's hard up and when a man's pushed, well I suppose he ain't too particular, can't afford to be; it just crossed my mind that his lordship might—I say might have asked you, Allan, to lend him a helping hand."

"No, no!"

"Well then I'm wrong, but it might happen, and if I turned out to be right I wouldn't like you to have to say no to Kathleen's father, boy, I wouldn't like that—and it might hurt her, our—our little girl—eh, if she knew."

"Our little girl," what a wealth of tenderness and love in those three words! It was never "her ladyship" now, it was just that: "our little girl." Allan felt something sting in his eyes for a moment, his hand rested more heavily on his father's shoulder.

"No, I wouldn't like to hurt her in any way, even that way, Allan, so—so if his lordship should—and it seems to me very likely that his lordship may—why do you see, Allan, you can draw on me. Of course he won't never pay back, that's not to be looked for nor expected and one thing he wouldn't expect to get a wonderful lot out of you—so if he does ask you must say Yes—up to five hundred, Allan, and then let me know quietly, and there you are, there you are, my boy!"

"I wonder if there is another man in all the world like my father?" Allan said.

"Bless you, heaps and heaps and a sight better. But there's one thing, Allan, there's never a father in this world as knows and loves his son as I know and love mine and so—so boy—out with it, out with it now and here."

They had come to a shady place, under the tall yews. Here was an inviting seat and on the seat Sir Josiah settled himself and drew Allan down beside him.

"Out with it—with what, father?" Allan asked lamely.

"Why out with what's worrying you, my boy; do you think I didn't see it, do you think when I saw you first thing this morning and took just one look at

you I didn't see it there—there in your face and eyes? Why bless you, of course I did; it ain't money, Allan?"

"No, no!"

"I knew that, then what is it? Not—not trouble, nothing amiss with—between you and her?"

"No, thank God!"

"Thank God!" the old man said. "And so—so it isn't that and therefore it can't be anything bad—so I'm waiting, Allan, waiting, dear lad, tell me."

"Father, if I did you could not understand."

"I'd try, Allan," the old man said simply.

"Then, by Heaven I will tell you, father, and you shall try and understand, though—though if you do, you will be more clever than I, for I cannot understand." Allan lifted his hand to his head for a moment.

"Do you remember something that you told me once about—an ancestor of ours—whose name was the same as mine—a labourer here—a gardener, who married his mistress' serving maid?"

"And whose son went to London and took over the Green Gates in Aldgate—why of course I do!"

"Well," said Allan quietly, "that's it——"

Sir Josiah looked at him. "God bless my soul!" he said, and if ever there were mystification on a man's face, it was on his.

"Father, do you believe that the soul can outlast and outlive not one earthly body, but many, ten, a hundred, a thousand, that when the body perishes as all things earthly must perish, the soul can and does find another dwelling place? Ah! I don't make myself clear." He broke off, seeing the mystification deepen in the old man's face. "I am afraid I never can. Think this out, father, a man dies, the body perishes, but the soul, the ego, the spirit lives on. It finds another body, which it animates for good or for evil, it completes another life, and then all happens over again. Each time the body dies, the soul passes through oblivion and returns to earth——"

"Here, here, Allan!" cried the old man. "Here, bless my soul, didn't you ought to see someone?"

Allan smiled ruefully.

"Have you never heard of re-incarnation, the re-incarnation of the soul, father?"

"No, I can't say as I ever have and I don't know as I ever want to. I've only got one life and though I mayn't succeed in many little things none too well, I'm trying to do the best I can with it. Looking back—" the old man went on, "looking back, Allan, I can say and thank God as I can say it that I can't remember ever having done a dirty act or ever having played a mean trick on a man or a woman

in my life. I accepted my body like it was, a loan from God; I've used it and kept it clean and when the time comes for me to hand it back to Him, why then I want to feel as I can hand it back in good condition and good order—fair wear and tear excepted, Allan, and that's how I look at things. I don't pretend to know, there's some as does, yet they are only men, the same as me and you, dear lad, and they don't know—no one knows—and it's as well for us, maybe, we don't! It's a beautiful world and a wonderful world and God lent it to us the same as He lent us our bodies to use properly, to admire and to make the most of and enjoy. Beyond that, I don't seek to know anything, but when my time comes, I want to be able to think to myself a prayer, that goes somehow this way—'God, this is the body You lent to me, I'm done with it and now I'm giving it back; I've tried to keep it clean and honest, I've treated it as if it was something belonging to You more than to me—and that I was in honour bound obliged to deal with carefully. If there's a Heaven and You know best, I hope you'll find a place in it for my soul, because in keeping my body clean, oh Lord, I've kept my soul clean along with it!' That's how I look at things, Allan, I ain't good at talk of this sort. Maybe you'll think I've got funny ideas, so I have, but don't tell me nothing about this re-incarnation of yours; I don't hold with it, boy, I don't believe in it; if it's true, and it may be, mind you, it may be, it isn't for us to know if it's true or not. If it was right, we should know, then God would find some way of telling us."

"Perhaps He has!" Allan thought, but he said no more. No, he could not tell his father, for his father would never understand!

CHAPTER XXXI

"A VERY WORTHY MAN"

Allan's conscience smote him sorely. He had misjudged and dealt hardly with Abram Lestwick. He had thought, had honestly believed, that the man had intended drawing a knife on him and in his fury and anger had punished his victim unmercifully.

Later, when he had gone carefully over Lestwick's clothing and had found no traces of weapons hidden there, he had known his suspicion had been unjust. It weighed on his mind, he went over the incident again and again. He wondered if he had seriously hurt the man. He felt anxious and ill at ease, as must every just man when he is conscious of an unintentional act of injustice.

It troubled him the more because he knew that he did not like Lestwick, that to a certain extent he shared Betty's antipathy for the man.

Little Betty to spend all her days with Abram Lestwick! That could not and should never be.

Yet in this Allan felt himself in the wrong and there was but one course open to him. To seek Lestwick out, to admit frankly that he had erred, to ask the man's forgiveness and to make amends, if amends were possible.

And yet Allan decided that in a way the man deserved all that he had got, he had pestered and worried Betty, he had waylaid her, to obtrude his hateful love on the frightened, shrinking maid.

"Hang him!" Allan muttered between his teeth. "If he ever does it again I—" he clenched his hands and felt very bitter for a moment towards Abram Lestwick, then the bitterness was gone. He himself had done wrong, had misjudged and therefore only one course was possible to Allan Homewood.

Lord Gowerhurst having found another bedroom, where he was not likely to be disturbed by sounds of bird life, had decided to stay on for a day or two. The country would do him no harm, he would be all the better by the change. His appetite was getting to be really quite satisfactory, though even at the very worst of time, Lord Gowerhurst was no mean performer with the knife and fork.

He had also made the discovery that Allan's butler, the staid, deferential and respectable Mr. Howard, had at some time in his career been a valet and could still shave with some dexterity and was moreover a very polite and capable man, so his lordship took possession of Howard and another room and declared his intention of staying till Tuesday or Wednesday.

Sir Josiah and Mr. Coombe and the rest were not averse to one day more of holiday. The newly installed telephone enabled them to get into touch with their City offices, with the result that the little house party would not definitely break up till Wednesday.

So Allan, with the weight of his injustice to Abram Lestwick on his conscience, set out this Monday morning to do penance.

He knew that Lestwick was employed by Patcham at the Moat Farm. Betty had told him. The Moat Farm formed part of the Homewood Estate and Patcham was his tenant; what more natural than he should call on so worthy a tenant and talk crops and soil and manures and such like with him? And then how easily and naturally would slip out a word or two about Abram Lestwick. Was he a good man? an honest worker? and if he should prove to be these and deserving, Allan must see what he could do for the man to make up for the injustice of his treatment of him.

Kathleen followed him out of the breakfast room this morning. Lord Gowerhurst was not yet risen and Mr. Coombe had expanded under the influence of

His Lordship's absence. Mr. Coombe was telling stories of high finance. That his stories were interminably long and without any point and of no particular interest, did not matter. Coombe was a sound man, Sir Josiah honoured him, Cutler and Jobson admired him. Sir Harold Scarsdale took no notice of him, so was not bored by his stories. Scarsdale was thinking naturally of Kathleen. He thought of little else, her manner troubled him. He could not, frankly he could not understand her. She was smilingly polite, courteous and considerate, she was friendly and sweet to him, and it made him realise that he represented nothing at all to her. But she was playing a part, and playing it well, he argued with himself. A woman, and a woman like Kathleen, could not apparently without effort or sense of loss tear out an image that has been enshrined in her heart for ten long years. It puzzled him, worried him, even angered him, but he told himself he must be patient. His was now the waiting game, and he believed that he had but to wait long enough and all that he desired on this earth would be his.

So Kathleen followed Allan out into the wide hall and found his cap and selected his stick for him and did just those little things that a tender, thoughtful, loving woman always does and meanwhile she looked at him with a strange wistfulness, a curious pleading in her eyes, eyes that told of a hunger and longing in her soul. But he, man-like, was blind to it, yet not insensible of her goodness and her thought for him.

To-day she felt a strange unwillingness to let him go, she did what she had never done before. She slipped her hand through his arm and walked with him down the wide pathway to the gate, the sunshine in her hair and on her face. Sir Josiah, bored by Coombe's unending story, yet too polite to shew it, watched them from the window, a smile on his face. It was good to see them like this—such friends, such comrades!

She wanted to tell him—not of Scarsdale, for that had sunk into insignificance now—now that there was something so much greater, so much more wonderful for him to know. But not yet, not yet—not out here in the sunshine with perhaps someone watching them from the window. Presently—presently when they should be quite alone!

So at the gate she paused, she looked at him.

"And once I thought I loved—Harold!" she thought. "Once I thought so and now I know—I love——"

"Don't you want me to go out this morning, dear?"

"Oh, yes, yes, you're going to old Custance to talk——"

"No, I'm going to the Moat Farm to see Patcham, it's time I called on him. But if you would rather I stayed——

"No!" she said. "Go! Good-bye, Allan!" she added softly.

They would have parted with a touch of the hand as they always did. They

kissed on rising and on retiring, but at no other time of the day. Yet to-day she clung to his hand for a moment, her heart was filled with tenderness for him, longing and a desire to keep him that she was too unselfish to pander to.

"Why dear——"

There was something about her that he could not understand to-day, something in the tight hold of her hand, in the unwonted colour in her cheeks, the wonderful brightness in her eyes.

"It is nothing, dear, go—good-bye!" she said, yet as she spoke she lifted his hand and held it against her soft cheek, just for a moment and then would have turned, yet before she did, he caught her suddenly—why he did not know—it was a moment of passion irresistible, something that came so swiftly that he could not question it, could not understand it. He caught her and held her and kissed her and then quickly let her go and without a word went striding forth, conscious of a feeling of shame, as though he had offered her insult.

And she stood looking after him, her hands pressed against her breast, her eyes wide. Not once did he turn; had he done so perhaps he might have seen, might have understood the longing in her eyes, the hunger for the love that he never dreamed she needed.

Allan walked on quickly. A woman in moments of mental stress can find relief in tears, a man more usually in violent movement.

He was a little shaken, a little unnerved, greatly surprised at himself. Why had he done that, why had his heart leaped suddenly at the touch of her soft cheek on his hand, why had he—done what he had done? Yet, having done it, regretted nothing. It seemed to him that from that moment Kathleen held a new interest for him. He had regarded her as friend and companion—from this moment on he knew that she meant more than this to him.

Farmer John Patcham received him courteously, with a deference and respect that had nothing whatever of servility about it.

"'Tis a fine marning," he said, "and I be just going to have my usual lunch, Mr. Homewood, a very plain and simple lunch it be, just a glass of ale and a plum-heavy, very partial I be to plum-heavies and there's no one in all Sussex makes 'em better than my wife, so if you'll join me——"

Allan did. They sat in the somewhat stuffy little parlour, the window of which remained hermetically sealed, summer and winter, and drank good brown beer and ate those Sussex cakes that for some reason have never achieved the fame of the cakes of Banbury or the Buns of Bath.

And over their cakes and ale they talked and Allan surprised the farmer somewhat by the depth and advancement of his knowledge.

"You been getting your head laid alongside old Custance now I'll be bound," he said, "wunnerful advanced man Custance be, as sets great store on book larn-

ing to be sure. But if so be you be minded to try hop raising in this part of Sussex, Mr. Homewood, I say give it up! 'Tis the soil, sir, 'tis the soil! Hops be all right for Kent and the Midlands, but—" and so on and so on, from hops to manures, chemical and otherwise, to tithes and land taxes, to red cows and brindled cows and the swine of Berkshire and of Yorkshire, on all of which subjects Mr. Patcham laid down the law and smote the rickety round table with a heavy hand, to drive his points home.

"Flints," said Patcham, "flints be the cussedest things, wunnerful how flints du crop up. Clean a field, pick it, hand-pick it of flints, clear out every flint there du be and in three months what du 'ee find? Flints, sir, bushels of 'em, tons of 'em! In some counties it du be fuzz and Sussex has its share of fuzz, come to that, but flints—I were but saying to Abram last Saturday—no, 'twere Friday——"

"Abram—that is Abram Lestwick, isn't it?" Allan asked. "He works for you?"

"Aye, Abram be my right hand man, straight he be, straight as an arrer, honest as the day be Abram, not a drinking man, quiet and respectable like in his manners, never an angry word or a cross look do 'ee get from Abram Lestwick. Lucky I be to have such a man!"

"Ah!" Allan said.

"No one ever did see Abram lose his temper——"

"I have," thought Allan, "but it was pardonable."

"Soft spoken and gentle, but a wunnerful hand with the men, reg'lar to Church and walking in the fear of the Lord du be Abram Lestwick, and wi' sheep never a man to compare wi' he—whether it be lambing time or shearing, a born shepherd be Abram!"

"And a good reliable man?"

"There ain't one to come nigh nor near to him," said Farmer Patcham, "a good wage du I pay he and worth it every penny he be—thirty-five shillings and a cottage to hisself, no less. And what the maids be about, beats I and the Missus too, a hard man to fault," went on Patcham, "a very hard man to fault, sir, and you'll believe me. My Missus and the maids here du complain a bit about they hands of his, restless hands as you may have noticed, sir, but what's that, all said and done? And now, maybe, you'll take a look round the farm?"

Allan took a look round the farm and saw a back view of Abram in the rick yard, but Abram never turned and apparently did not notice the visitor.

"A good man," Patcham said, "a reliable, trustworthy, honest, sober man, likely to make his way in the world. No frequenter of the ale-house and a regular churchgoer, a man with rare and wonderful knowledge of the soil and of sheep. Hi, Abram, Abram, my lad, come 'ee here! Here be Mr. Homewood a-hearing all about 'ee from me!"

Very slowly Abram turned his discoloured face, his attitude was of intense humility, he seemed to cower, his furtive hands wandered up and down the edge of his waistcoat, yet never once did he look into Allan's face.

"Why, Abram lad, 'ee've been in the wars, surely!" cried Patcham. "What hev come to your face, lad?"

"An accident," Abram mumbled, "a blundering fellow, I be in the dark, Mister Patcham!"

Patcham smiled. "Had it been any other than 'ee, Abram, I would say it were through fighting."

Allan looked at his victim, he felt a strange pity, mingled with an invincible repugnance. The man looked so inoffensive, so humble, even servile and yet—Allan's attention was directed to those strangely restless hands; he found that they attracted and held his eyes. He remembered how Betty had cried out in fear and horror of those same hands. Poor little Betty, never, never, Allan resolved, should those hands touch the child, if he could prevent it!

"I would like to speak to Lestwick, Mr. Patcham," he said, "if I have your permission?"

"Oh, aye, of course, why not?" said the farmer, looking a little surprised. "Do 'ee mean alone, sir?"

"Yes, alone!"

Patcham eyed Allan a little resentfully, a little suspiciously. "I hope," he began, "I hope, Mr. Homewood, as 'ee've got no idea o' trying to get Abram away from me? I've spoke out for he and spoken as I did find, but——"

Allan smiled. "Have no fear, I want to speak to Lestwick on an entirely different matter."

Patcham's face cleared as he walked away. "Now I du wonder what he can have to say to Abram?" he thought.

And now the two were left together and Allan, looking at the abject, servile creature before him, felt suddenly tongue-tied. He was conscious of a feeling of hot shame. Those unsightly marks, those livid bruises were his work, the work of his fists. How desperately he must have punished the man in his rage.

"Lestwick—I have something to say to you, an apology to make, I wish to ask your pardon."

The wandering eyes were lifted for a moment to Allan's face, then dropped again, the hands were at their nervous work.

"I misjudged you and in my anger treated you roughly, for which I am deeply sorry," said Allan, eager to make his amends and be done with it, for he could not but be conscious of his great and growing repugnance and repulsion for the man.

He waited, but Abram said nothing, he stood there mute, his eyes seeming

to search the ground about him.

"You misled me—when we—when you and I—on Saturday night, when we fought, I mean—I say you misled me, I thought you had a knife and thinking so I struck you hardly. I am sorry for it, I made a mistake and I wish to ask your forgiveness for what I did."

And still the man did not answer; why did he not speak? What was he waiting for, was it——?

A smile came into Allan's face, it was a smile of contempt. He might have guessed it, there was only one plaster for such a wound as Abram's. He took out his pocket-book and from it a five pound note.

"I hope you will accept this," he said, "and with it my apology."

Abram looked up, his eyes wandered from Allan's face to the outstretched hand that held the note. He seemed to hesitate, a convulsion passed across his features, then he stretched out his hand suddenly and took the note. He did not snatch it, for Abram was ever a polite man, he took it gently and looked at it and then—then he tore it, slowly across and across and yet again, tore it into small strips that he flung to the ground and stamped into the soft earth with his foot.

"I thank 'ee, Mr. Homewood," he said in his low, passionless voice, "I du thank 'ee most politely, I du, sir, for your good intentions toward I—I thank 'ee, sir, most politely!" And then he turned away and went slowly to his work in the rick yard.

Allan stood lost in wonder, he watched the man go, he glanced down at the ragged scraps of what had once been a valuable piece of paper, trodden into the earth.

So be it! He had done all that he could do, the man had apparently refused to accept his apology. Sudden anger came to him.

"Lestwick!" he called sharply. "Lestwick!"

Lestwick stopped, but did not turn.

"I have this to say to you, my man," Allan said hotly, "I injured you, under a wrong impression, for which I have expressed regret, but I believe, on my soul, that you really deserved all you got. You have annoyed and terrorised a girl who has no feeling save of fear and dislike of you. In future you will leave her alone; if I find you hanging about my house, waiting to waylay Betty Hanson, then I'll deal with you again, as I dealt with you on Saturday night. Remember that, my man, it's no idle threat!"

Lestwick made no answer, he did not turn, he stood still, as though waiting patiently for Allan to complete his remarks, and then when silence fell, Lestwick went slowly on his way.

Allan made his way homeward, with a feeling of anger in his breast. He had done all that a man might do, and he had been repulsed. No wonder that

Betty, poor little Betty, felt horror and loathing for the man.

"Is he sane, is he normal?" Allan questioned himself. "There is something—about him—" he shuddered. "I can't understand it, I never loathed a human being in my life, as I loathe that man, but Betty——"

What could he do about Betty, how unravel the tangle, how straighten out that very winding path of the child's life? She loved him, had she not said it a hundred times with tears and with pleading? Yet was it the real love? The one passion of a life-time? He doubted it, for Allan Homewood held himself in no high esteem and could not think of himself as one for whom any woman would care deeply. No, it could not be that, it must be the strange tie that united them, that lifting of the curtain that had revealed to them both a glimpse into some strange past that was not of this life.

What, did she want of him? What did she expect, ask of him? But whatever it was, how impossible it all was!

To-day he had kissed Kathleen, his wife, as never before had he kissed her and remembering this, a softer, more tender look came into his face.

What was Kathleen thinking now? Had he surprised, even frightened her, was she hurt or angry, or could she understand and forgive that sudden wave of passion that had come to him? Love and passion for her—his own wife! His cheeks flushed a little, it seemed to him that all his little world was in strange and dire confusion.

Mrs. Hanson, standing at her own gate, tall, erect, and brown of face, beady of eyes, bobbed to him an exaggerated respectful curtsey.

Allan lifted his hat to her.

"Good morning!"

"And good morning to 'ee, sir," she said and treated him to another curtsey.

"I hope my maid du be conducting herself in a seemly manner and giving satisfaction to my lady, sir?"

"Yes!" Allan said; he felt confused before those keen bright eyes.

"A strange, wilful maid her be in many ways, sir, yet her heart be so good as gold."

"She is wonderfully pretty, your granddaughter, Mrs. Hanson!"

"Beauty be but a snare and likewise is but skin deep. I set no stores by such, 'tis the heart as tells, sir."

"But her heart is good, I am sure." He was talking for the mere sake of talking, for an idea bad come into his brain, a little dim and vague as yet, but yet an idea that possibly might mean a way to safety for them all.

"Good-hearted her may be, but most terribul obstinate and stubborn, a perilous obstinate maid, terribul contrairy and self willed her du be in many ways——"

"In—in what ways?"

"In marrying," said Mrs. Hanson, "I hev chose for she a good honest man as du walk upright in the sight of the Lord, a man as du keep hisself to hisself and du keep holy the Sabbath day, reading in the Bible and not with an eye to every maid, though there be many wishful of attracting his attention. Wonderful partial he be to my Betty tu, wonderful partial and keen and eager for she."

"And the man?"

"There bain't a better in all Sussex and yet that perilous obstinate maid will hev none of he!"

"Because she may dislike the man!"

"Dis-like, what hev that to do with it, sir? Why should Betty dis-like Abram Lestwick—a man earning his thirty-five shillings a week and with a cottage to himself and all keen set as he be—–?"

"I have seen the man and can understand her dislike for him. He lays in wait for her, outside the gates; she is afraid to venture out of nights because of this man, whom she fears and hates. And you, can you not understand the child's aversion for such a man as Lestwick, Mrs. Hanson?"

"That I cannot and will not! A proper man be Abram and rare grateful and glad any maid should be attracting the like of he!"

"Betty is neither glad nor grateful, she goes in fear of him, hates him and is terrified by the very thought of him—it would be death—do you understand, death to the girl to force her into a marriage so shocking! Why are you so keen for it? Why do you seek to drive her against her own natural inclinations, why—why?" Allan cried hotly.

She eyed him with cold disfavour. What business was all this of his, of young Mr. Homewood of Homewood Manor House? She would have looked on him with some suspicion, yet there was something so open in his face, his anger was so honest, that she could not, even if she would, suspect him of an interest in pretty Betty, that reflected no credit on him.

"Abram hev thirty-five shillings a week and—–"

"And for thirty-five shillings a week you would force this child to marry a man she hates, you would wreck and ruin her life, you would drive her perhaps—God knows—to death—to suicide! Can't you understand that it is not mere dislike she feels for him, it is hate and terror! Thirty-five shillings a week!" He laughed aloud in scorn, he flung his head back, his face was flushed, his eyes bright, and Mrs. Hanson stared at him in wonderment and with something of anger too.

"Listen to me," Allan said and his voice was more gentle and quiet, he looked into the keen, hard, old face. "Listen to me, Mrs. Hanson, you are Betty's grandmother. I believe you are her only living relative. If you think so highly of thirty-five shillings a week and of a cottage—I will make you an offer—" He paused, "I

will undertake to pay to you as Betty's guardian, a sum that will equal the amount of Abram Lestwick's wages. I will find a cottage for you—not here—not near here even—and you shall have it rent free, so that Betty may live with you and that you shall not torment her further about this man Lestwick. Do you understand? I will give to you and to Betty all that Abram Lestwick could give, the money and the cottage! And you and the girl shall go away from here—away for good. She is young and she is beautiful, she will surely find many eager to marry her, and she shall choose and pick among them for herself. Do you understand, do I make myself plain?"

"Plain—aye, plain!" she said; under the black bodice the thin old breast rose and fell, she gripped the rails of the gate and stared into his face.

"And why—why are 'ee willing to do this, give this to Betty Hanson, Mr. Homewood?"

"To save her from marriage with a man I dislike and distrust, as much as she does—for that reason and that reason alone!"

"'Ee be mighty generous, Mr. Homewood!" Her hard voice quivered with suspicion, and yet—yet she looked him full in the eyes and he looked back at her and there was no shame, no confusion, nothing of the look of one who has something on his conscience.

"I—I do not understand—" she said slowly, "I do not understand!"

"No, I do not suppose you do understand. Shall we leave it at that? My offer holds good, accept it and make a happy home for the child—but not here."

"'Ee du seem mighty set on it not being here!" she said thoughtfully. "Mighty set 'ee du be. Does the maid know your intentions to she, sir?"

"No, I had no such intentions just now, the thought has only just come into my mind."

She nodded slowly. He had said that she could not understand and he was right. Whoever heard the like before? Thirty-five shillings a week and a cottage and all—all for nothing! Whoever heard the like before? Certainly not Mrs. Hanson.

"All bewildered I be," she said and said it aloud, though it was not intended for his ears. "All bewildered and wonder struck I du be!"

"Do you agree, answer me, do you agree to this? Tell me, Mrs. Hanson?"

"But the maid—you du say, sir, she hev not heard?"

"She has not heard, but if you agree, you can tell her yourself, tell her this evening and then you shall give me her and your answer."

"If the maid is willing," she said slowly, "though all the same I be partial to Abram."

"Her terror of him should have some weight with you. Take her away from this place to where she will never see him again, you will?"

She looked at him. "Send the maid to me to-night and I will talk of it wi' she."

She stood at the gate, staring down the road after him.

"Thirty-five shillings a week and a cottage—far away from here for Betty and for me and for nothing, for nothing! Very bewildered and wonderstruck I be!"

And Allan, hurrying homeward, was thinking—if this might be the solution, how easy it was after all, freedom for Betty from Abram Lestwick—a new life for the little maid among new faces—where soon—soon she would forget her dreams in the old garden and him.

And then, when all was done and Betty and her grandmother gone for good, he would tell Kathleen; it would be easy to tell her then and Kathleen would understand.

CHAPTER XXXII
THE AWAKENING

Bright eyes, the brightest he believed he had ever seen, greeted Allan. Eyes so kind, so bright and so tender that he knew before ever a word had been spoken that he had not offended, that Kathleen was not angry with him, not hurt.

He felt a great wave of relief and then the feeling passed and gave place to wonder, because in some subtle way Kathleen had changed. To others she was still the Kathleen he knew and loved and respected, but to him she had become another being, her eyes were misty and soft and tender, for him, there was a rich, rare colour in her cheeks. He felt his own heart respond. As they were passing into lunch he touched her hand—why?

There was no reason for it, it was just the impulse of the moment, yet he felt that he must do it, so he did and she turned and looked at him and it seemed to him that the colour deepened in her cheeks and the look in her eyes was more tender than ever.

And the touch of that little hand of hers made his heart leap. This was no mere friendship, this was no mere liking, no symptom of respect. He wondered at himself, wondered at its meaning and as a result he failed to hear Lord Gowerhurst, who was addressing himself particularly to Allan.

As a matter of fact Lord Gowerhurst, departing on the morrow, found him-

self woefully short of money. He was not in the cue to approach Sir Josiah and a timely loan of a comparatively small sum from Allan, a mere fifty or even twenty-five, would be agreeable to his lordship. Later on Sir Josiah's money bags must be properly besieged, with all due form and with a regard to detail for which there was no time at the moment.

"If, therefore, you could give me ah—ten minutes—some time most convenient to yourself, my dear Allan—" said his lordship with unwonted humility.

"Of course, delighted!" Allan murmured, and was thinking of Kathleen all the time.

Had he ever appreciated her properly? Had he ever realised the exquisite beauty of her face, a beauty that was spiritual, was of expression rather than of mere form and mould of feature. How sweetly gracious she was, how charming, not even the loquacious and boresome Coombe aroused irritability in her—how his old father worshipped her—what a strange, yet perfect understanding there seemed to be between them, the old City man of business, of plebeian origin and this young and gracious well born lady. Yet they were so obviously and so certainly friends, good, close, true friends, with a mutual understanding and a mutual love for one another.

So Allan did not make the most agreeable of companions at that meal and his lordship felt uneasy.

"I wonder if the fellow suspects I'm going to ask a small loan, a mere trifle till I get back to town? Confound it, it's deuced unpleasant for a man in my position to—er—place himself under an obligation to a mere stripling like this! I can't ask Scarsdale, there's something deuced standoffish about the fellow; I almost wish I hadn't taken Scarsdale up again, I've got an idea that Scarsdale lets bygones rankle. By George, though, I did give him a dressing down in those days, and by George he deserved it—asked for it—begad, and got it too!"

Just for a moment Allan had an opportunity for a word with Kathleen when lunch was over.

"You—you are not angry with me?"

"Angry?"

Was she a woman of twenty-nine almost, or only a maiden of nineteen that suddenly her eyes dropped before his, that suddenly a deep rich colour came flaming her face.

"Kathleen—Kathleen!" He caught her hand, he was suddenly in a strange tremble, and then in on them burst Mr. Coombe.

"Wistaria, not westeria, Jobson, my boy, if you'd done the gardening I've done at Tulse Hill—I—I beg pardon!" stammered Mr. Coombe, taken aback.

Kathleen smiled. "You are quite right, Mr. Coombe, it is wistaria!" she said.

"I've got one over my house at Tulse Hill," said Mr. Coombe, "with a stem,

if you'll believe me, as thick as my body!" Which was an exaggeration, as Mr. Coombe's body was of no ordinary thickness.

Allan turned away.

"Oh, I forgot—" he said, and his eyes and Kathleen's met. "I saw Mrs. Hanson at her gate as I passed and she says if you can spare her granddaughter this evening, Kathleen, she would be glad."

"I will send Betty," Kathleen said, "though the old woman was not very kind to her, still she is old and alone. Yes, I will see that Betty goes!"

His lordship secured his quiet ten minutes with Allan.

"Most foolish and stupid of me, forgot to bring my cheque book, I can't think what possessed me—I assure you, Allan, I was astounded at my oversight. Of course one can draw a cheque on a sheet of note paper, but my Bank don't like it—no, they don't like it, sir—and so—so——"

"I shall be only too pleased to be of service to you," said Allan promptly, so promptly that his lordship was a little taken aback.

Yet Allan seemed so ready, so willing—it would be a shameful waste of opportunity to make the amount so small as he had originally intended.

"If—if—er—a couple of hundred wouldn't put you to inconvenience——"

"With pleasure," Allan said. "I'll send Howard over to Stretton in the car, he'll be able to get to the Bank just in time."

Never in the whole course of his experience, and it had been large, had his lordship had such a request granted with such alacrity and willingness.

"My dear Allan, 'pon my soul now, 'pon my soul, it is very good of you—I take a pleasure, sir, a pleasure in being under an obligation to you, even though it is only a temporary one. You're a good fellow, Allan, a deuced generous, open-handed good fellow and—and I honour you, sir, and your father too, and it's a pleasure and a relief to me, be Gad, to think that my girl has entered your family—a family of—of gentlemen, be gad!"

"Poor old chap!" Allan thought. "It must be hard for a man in his position and of his rank to have to lower himself and demean himself to borrow money—" He sighed, and then smiled in wonder at himself that he should feel so kindly towards Lord Gowerhurst, for whom he had previously felt nothing but aversion and contempt.

But then Lord Gowerhurst was Kathleen's father and for some reason to-day that made just all the difference in the world to Allan. So, having lent Lord Gowerhurst two hundred pounds, Allan resolved that he would say nothing to his own father about it.

Custance claimed Allan that afternoon and when Custance had done with him there was barely time to reach home and dress for dinner, so he did not see Kathleen till they met at the dinner table. And to-night she was looking her

loveliest and her best. Even Coombe remarked her heightened colour and tried to pay her a clumsy compliment on her looks and meeting Lord Gowerhurst's cold stare when half way through his speech, faltered and broke down and burst into profuse perspiration.

But Kathleen smiled on him and thanked him and told him in a little confidential whisper, that highly pleased Coombe, that she was getting to be an old, old woman. In less than eighteen months she would be thirty years of age, and though she had not found a grey hair as yet, no doubt she soon would.

"Old, my dear—" said Mr. Coombe, and then blushed crimson, "I beg your pardon——"

"You have nothing to beg my pardon for—Sir Josiah's friends are mine—and if one of them is kind enough to call me my dear, it only proves that he likes me and I like to be liked, Mr. Coombe, by my friends!"

"And so you are, so you are, and as for getting old, never, you'll never be old, you'll be young to the last day of your life, if you live to be eighty, and please God you will!" And Mr. Coombe turned deliberately and stared Lord Gowerhurst full in the face with an expression that said as plain as words—"If you don't like the way I am behaving and if you don't like my paying compliments to your daughter—then you can go to the deuce and go as soon as you like, my Lord, and be hanged to you!"

Among that company of gentlemen Harold Scarsdale was inconspicuous. That he was better bred than Mr. Coombe and Mr. Jobson was obvious, that he could talk a good deal better than any of them Allan at least knew, but it pleased Scarsdale to hold his tongue and keep himself much in the background. From that background he watched Kathleen and the more he watched the less did he seem to understand her.

He remembered the passion of the old days, he remembered that scene by the lake only two short days ago, how during those two days had she changed. She greeted him with a friendly smile, she held out her hand to him, she wished him good morning and good night and talked to him of trivial, every day things, listening with interest to the few remarks he made and that was all.

But she was a woman and he knew little of women, but had read much and so had obtained a false impression. She was clever, she was hiding her feelings and doing it successfully. When the time came, and it would come, then she would fling all pretence to the winds, she would be his, he would open his arms to her, the ten years of hunger would be ended.

To-night he sat in his corner and listened to everyone and said little, but he was watchful and presently he saw Allan go out and, waiting for a time, Scarsdale too rose and sauntered to the window and stepped out into the garden.

Allan, however, had not gone to the garden. He remembered that Betty

was going to her grandmother's to-night.

She would be sure to leave the old woman's cottage by nine. He counted on that. He wanted to see her, he wanted to see how she had taken what her grandmother would say to her, he wanted to know that Betty would realise how sensible the arrangement was and how it would be for her own good and happiness in the long run. She was young, a mere child, in some far away little village she would begin a new life, unmolested by Abram Lestwick, the terror of his presence and his pretensions removed for ever from her mind. And far away amid new surroundings, she would surely forget in time—perhaps not at once—yet in time, all those strange happenings and that strange tie that had drawn Betty and himself so closely together.

Allan was not vain, he did not for one moment believe that it was his own personality that had attracted Betty, or that he himself—the man he was now, had ever awakened any feelings of tenderness and love in that little heart.

It was the glamour, the strange mystery, the unsolvable mystery, those visions that she—and he too—had seen, that dimly uncertain memory of 'something' that had been, in the buried and unknown past; it was that that had appealed to her as of course it had appealed to him.

So Allan lighted his pipe and strolled away down the dusky road and strangely enough had not gone ten paces before he was thinking of Kathleen, rather than of her he had come to meet.

* * * * *

Mrs. Hanson sat upright on her stiff old chair, her hands were folded primly on her narrow lap, her eyes were fixed in an unwavering stare on the closed door.

She was expecting Betty, she had been expecting the girl for the past hour. For an hour Mrs. Hanson had sat there listening for coming footsteps but hearing only the steady persistent 'tick-tock' of the long cased clock.

During that hour Mrs. Hanson had been thinking, she had been asking of herself questions, and as the minutes passed the stern old face grew graver and grimmer.

Why should he be willing to give to Betty and herself such a mort of money. Why should he be wishful of sending Betty to some far off place. Why should Mr. Allan Homewood interest himself in the very least with the future of Betty Hanson at all?

Questions that Mrs. Hanson could not answer satisfactorily.

"A very pleasant and outspoken young gentleman he du seem—and yet——" Mrs. Hanson shook her head. "And yet——"

But the long expected footsteps were sounding, there came a tapping on

the door. That in itself was unfamiliar. In the old days Betty lifted the latch and came in.

Betty came to-night as a visitor, and Mrs. Hanson realised the difference.

"Come in," she said, and rose stiffly to receive her visitor. Betty came in nervously; she looked at her grandmother, hesitated and then came forward and offered a soft cheek.

"You will hev had your tea?"

"Yes grandmother."

"Will you be seated?"

Betty sat down, her nervousness increasing.

Mrs. Hanson stared at the childish pretty face, it was the face of most perfect innocence, yet Mrs. Hanson looked with eyes of suspicion.

"The weather be holding up," she remarked, she was a woman who never came straight to the matter in hand, as Betty well knew.

"Grandmother 'ee sent for I?"

It was like carrying the war into the enemy's camp.

"True I did send for 'ee," Mrs. Hanson frowned.

"I hev had from young Mr. Allan Homewood an offer with which I be greatly surprised."

"From—from——" the colour deepened in the pretty cheeks, a fact that Mrs. Hanson's keen eyes did not miss.

"And why pray should 'ee blush at the mention of the gentleman's name."

"I bean't blushing, grandmother."

"And now 'ee be lying as well, Betty Hanson."

Betty hung her head.

"Very distrustful and uneasy I be in my mind, very distrustful. Betty Hanson, look me in the eye and answer me this: what be there between 'ee and Mr. Allan Homewood?"

"Oh! oh grandmother—there——" Betty was silent, she pressed her hands against her breast. "Be-between I and Mr. Homewood grandmother, what—what should there be?"

"There should be nothing Miss, but there be! there be, I see it. What be he to thee?"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing. Oh grandmother, why do 'ee worry I so? I wish—I wish—I hadn't come!"

"If so be as your mind were at rest and your conscience clear, Betty Hanson, 'ee wouldn't hev said that! Now answer, answer me and speak the truth for I be your dead father's mother and your only living relative I be. What be Mr. Allan Homewood to 'ee?"

"Nothing," the girl whispered, "he bain't nothing to I—nothing, and if any-

one hev told 'ee contrairywise he be a liar!"

"The truth I will hev! nor shall 'ee leave this place——"

Mrs. Hanson rose, she crossed the room to the door and turned the ponderous key. "The truth will I hev before I shall allow 'ee to depart, what be Mr. Allan Homewood of Homewood Manor House, to 'ee, Betty Hanson?"

Betty did not answer. She sat with bowed head, she wrung and twisted her hands.

"I—I did see he—of nights of moonlight—nights in—in the old garden," she whispered.

Mrs. Hanson bristled, she sat upright: "'Ee did see him of nights in the old garden! Oh! shame on 'ee shame——

"So this be the meaning of your perilous bad conduct, slipping away out of the cottage of nights to—to meet—a man, a man! Terribul deceitful and deceiving 'ee've been all this while, terribul and shameful and perilous Betty Hanson."

"'Twasn't a man I went to see," Betty cried, "Grandmother 'twere no man."

"No man and 'ee said with your own lips——"

"Grandmother, 'ee can never, never understand—it—were a—a ghost——"

Mrs. Hanson fell back on her chair, her black eyes blazed in indignation.

"'Ee've said enough, either 'ee be daft or the greatest liar as I ever did hear on, a Ghost! 'ee wicked deceitful maid, a ghost indeed!"

"Grandmother, 'ee could never, never understand. I'll try and make 'ee, but I know——" Betty shook her head, "'ee never will. 'Twasn't Allan——"

"Allan," Mrs. Hanson lifted her two hands.

"'Twasn't Allan, I did see in the old garden, but a ghost I see him and others, fine ladies and gentlemen all in strange clothing, Grandmother, and Allan he were for ever digging, he in his old brown suit wi' the brass buckles to his shoes and——"

"Betty Hanson, stop, stop, this minit; not another word will I sit here and listen to, I hev made up my mind.

"This day, this man, this Allan, as 'ee do so shamelessly call him, made an offer to me. A fine offer that I did greatly mistrust. 'Tis this—take the child—away he said, take her far away, don't worrit her wi' Abram Lestwick, and I will allow 'ee and her tu, the thirty-five shillings a week, the same as Abram's money and a cottage all for nothin' so as 'ee du take she far away from Homewood."

"Oh! oh! he said that?"

"Aye he did, my maid, which du mean as he be tired of 'ee, tired, 'ee hear me, tired as men du tire of women like 'ee."

Betty lifted her head slowly, she looked at the grandmother and her pretty face blazed with sudden anger. She rose:

"Grandmother, 'ee be a wicked woman, a bad despiteful wicked woman.

What 'ee hev said, shames 'ee more, more than it does me, shames 'ee, and—and——" she broke down suddenly, she sank back sobbing on to the chair, she rocked to and fro. "'Ee could never, never understand 'twasn't Allan, yet 'twas Allan and I know he were something to I, something very, very dear and precious he were to I. But oh! oh! 'ee could never understand."

"I du understand this," Mrs. Hanson said, "I do understand that 'ee shall marry Abram Lestwick. An honest and upright man, and 'ee shall never take money from him as 'ee du most shamelessly call Allan, never, nor I. Money taken from he would choke me, 'twould spring up like the tares and choke me."

Mrs. Hanson pointed a bony finger at the girl.

"'Ee shall marry Abram Lestwick a good man and honest, 'ee shall become his wife. I hev said it, and I say it again and I shall listen to no more of this nonsense, and as for Mr. Allan Homewood for all he be a frank and outspoken gentleman and lib'ral wi' his money, I would take shame to myself to accept of anything from he, nor allow 'ee to do likewise. Marry Abram Lestwick 'ee shall——"

"I never will," Betty leaped up, her face convulsed, "I never will, I bain't your grand-darter any more, I bean't nothing to 'ee, I wunt listen to 'ee! I wunt! I be free, free—and——" she turned and darted to the door, she wrenched at the heavy old key and turned it, just as Mrs. Hanson rose and came stiffly to prevent her.

But Betty, younger and more active succeeded, she tore the door open and in the open doorway turned:

"I bain't your grand-darter anymore! I be free of 'ee, I wunt marry Abram Lestwick, I—I'll be—damned if I du."

"Stop!" Mrs. Hanson said in a voice of thunder, but Betty did not, she turned and fled into the night and the old woman unable to pursue stood there shaking and quivering with honest indignation.

"De-fiant her be, perilous defiant and hev soiled her lips wi' foul and unseemly words, her henceforth be no granddarter of mine. From this moment I du renounce she."

Sobbing, panting, her little heart labouring, down the road sped Betty, and then suddenly she saw him coming, slowly towards her, and to him she ran with eager outstretched hands and a little cry of joy.

"O Allan, Allan be 'ee come to meet I? O Allan, I be all upset and put about, I be——"

"Betty—why Betty child, what is it, what has—come," he added as she clung to his hand sobbing like a broken hearted child.

"Be kind to me, be kind to me, for I be all broken hearted," she pressed her tear-stained face against his sleeve.

"Allan, I be all broken hearted. Her be harsh and cruel wi' me, and said—said things—things—Oh!" she pressed her face tightly to his sleeve, to hide the hot flush of shame that came to her.

"Hush little girl, hush," he said, "don't cry, did your grandmother tell you what I suggested about—about you and her going away—?"

"She told me—she told me, and she said she wouldn't hev it, she said that I must marry Abram."

"You never shall, Betty, don't cry, I swear before Heaven you never shall, trust me, rely on me in this, for rather than that, I would kill the man, kill him with my two hands. Betty, you hear me?"

"Aye I hear 'ee; say it again Allan, say it over again, say as 'ee would kill he, rather than I should marry he."

"I mean it, and it shall never be, and your grandmother then will not agree to my plan. Well, it does not matter, you will be perhaps happier without her, I shall find some place where neither your grandmother nor Abram Lestwick will trouble you, with people who will be good and kind to you and will make your life happy. Your future shall be protected, too."

"Let me stay. Let me stay here, and bide with 'ee, don't, don't send me away from 'ee Allan, don't 'ee send me away."

"Hush," he said. "Hush," he was bitterly disappointed, he had thought all arranged, and now—but her pitiful crying wrung his heart, poor little maid, poor dear little soul, he put his arm about her and tried to soothe and quiet her.

"Betty, Betty, don't cry, don't cry, it hurts me to hear you cry and child, try and understand how—how impossible it all is. There is no other way, you yourself will see it and understand it presently."

"Don't send me away from 'ee for I shall die, I shall die if 'ee do." She was nestling close to him, holding his hand in both her own, pressing it against her wet cheek.

Supposing someone should happen down the road and what more likely—oh no, this would never do.

"Come, Betty! Come, be brave, we must talk of this."

Not far away was the little green gate, and he drew her towards it and in the deep shadows of the wall a man flattened himself against the brickwork and held his breath as they passed him so closely, that he might have stretched out his hand and touched them as they went, a man who was shaking strangely with passion and whose eyes gleamed from the dark shadows. And then the little green door opened and took them and Abram Lestwick stepped into the roadway.

"Pleasant spoken," he said. "Aye, pleasant spoken he be. Pleasant spoken!" He repeated the words a score of times, he went to the green door and his hands worked with it. He fingered the heavy old nail heads with which it was studded.

”Very, very pleasant spoken he be—robbing me of she—robbing—robbing——.” He scratched at the paint with his nails, then muttering to himself, turned away and went down the road.

Allan led Betty into the garden, he led her along the path between the tall yews and as they walked he spoke to her. It was difficult, yet it must be done. His heart yearned to her in pity—the spell of her, the fascination of her was on him, but he fought against it—her childlike weeping set him longing to take her in his arms, to comfort her, hold her, kiss her tears away, for the weeping of women and of children always affected him greatly.

”Betty, don’t cry, Betty listen to me. Be reasonable, be sensible my dear, listen——.”

”O Allan, oh sir, that you—that you of all should turn against thy Betty.”

His Betty—what memories the words awakened, memories of this same garden, of a little maid in quaint mob cap, with pretty mittened hands and eyes all ashine with love—for him—Thy Betty, that maid had said as she, by his side, had said it but a moment ago—His Betty!

Perhaps the devil walked with them that night along the path under the dark yews, perhaps he tapped Allan on the shoulder and whispered in his ear.

Allan turned to her suddenly, he gripped her wrists, he tore her hands away from her face, his voice was harsh, as unlike his own voice as voice could be.

”Listen, you—you must—this—this cannot go on. What the past held, God knows—yet whatever it held, it cannot and shall not influence the future. I have a wife, I am bound in honour to her, in honour to you, Betty. Hush, leave off crying, you hear me?”

She was frightened by the stern authority in his voice and left off her whimpering.

”What I am doing, what I want to do is for your own sake, and for mine because you are young and well nigh friendless and very beautiful, because I too am young and—and afraid, yes afraid—Betty.”

”Oh Allan, of—of me?”

”Yes of you, and for you Betty, I want you to be happy and, dear, I want happiness myself. This old garden, the garden here about us has meant so much to us both, better dear that you should go and never see it again, for then in time you will forget, and the love you speak of is not real, it cannot be real, it is born of dreams Betty and like a dream it will pass.”

”Why—why when I du love——”

”You know why, because I have a wife, because I love her and honour her and would sooner cut off my hand than cause her one moment of shame, of pain or unhappiness.”

He bent nearer to her, he could see her face glimmering white so near to

his, so tempting, yet he was not tempted.

"It means her happiness, do you know why—because—and God knows that I speak without vanity, but very humbly, because I believe that she loves me—how could I hurt her through you, would you hurt her?"

"I would die for her!" She wrenched her hands free from his, she stood before him.

"I—I will think of all as 'ee have said to I, sir, and I—I will try and bring myself to thy way of thinking and I—I will try and bring myself to—oh no, no! I can't, I can't!" She broke down, sobbing wildly, then suddenly gained control of herself. "I will not—not trouble thee any more, sir."

"Betty, listen," he put his hands on her shoulders and held her. "Take time, take time, think this over, to-day is Monday, in three days, not before three days, you will make up your mind, Betty, come to me—here in this place—in three days—on Thursday night at this hour, come and tell me then, child, that you will be wise and sensible."

"I—I will come to 'ee here in three days——" she said slowly, "and then I will tell 'ee, sir, what I shall do,—in three days—good night!" She turned away, standing there he heard her go and heard a strange little moaning noise coming back to him from out the darkness as she went.

So, after waiting a time, he too turned towards the house and passed down the wide flagged pathway, and the man on the stone bench by the sundial let him pass unchallenged.

CHAPTER XXXIII
BY THE LAKE

Lord Gowerhurst made an affecting little speech, for the time of parting had come. Sir Josiah's big car, all spick and span, with the respectable Bletsoe at the wheel, was waiting outside the hall door, so too was Mr. Coombe's automobile, which seemed to require some of its owner's attention at the last moment, for Mr. Coombe was only visible as to his legs and feet, the rest of him being out of sight under his car.

"This visit, a trifling thing perhaps to you, my love, has been to me like an oasis, a green and fragrant oasis be-gad, an the desert of my life! I am leaving my dear, dear daughter——" his lordship turned his fine eyes upwards and his voice

shook with noble emotion. "I am leaving my dear, dear daughter surrounded by love and happiness, I am leaving her in her pretty little home——." He spoke of the place as though it were a cottage, to impress Messrs. Cutler and Jobson with the idea of his own magnificence—"and I——" he sighed, "I go back to my quiet humdrum life, my poor chambers, my loneliness! Often and often as I sit alone in my rooms, I shall picture you and this home of yours to myself. I am an old man, an old man my dear, and my time—may not be long——." He sighed deeply, there were tears in those fine eyes of his. Kathleen was very patient, she knew her father's love for these tender, meaningless speeches, she bore with them as she bore with him, with a sweet untiring patience.

But he had done at last, he had taken his place in Sir Josiah's car, Sir Josiah was seated beside him, Mr. Coombe's arrangements and re-arrangements were complete, his oil-smeared countenance was beaming, "All aboard!" he cried. "All aboard! You're coming with me this time, Cutler, eh? We'll shew 'em the way, my boy!"

"Good-bye, Allan, my lad, good-bye and thank 'ee, thank 'ee for a very happy time and good-bye, Lady Kathleen, and thank you too for a time as I shan't forget in a hurry!"

Jobson tried to make a little speech, but broke down through nervousness.

But Kathleen saved him all embarrassment. "It's been splendid having you and when you are gone I shall miss you all terribly, terribly, and you must all promise to come again soon, very soon, Mr. Jobson, and you Mr. Coombe, and you Mr. Cutler!"

"Just ask me, my Lady, just give me the chance, that's all!" shouted Mr. Coombe—"Don't forget my telephone number, City double three double five one four——"

"I think, sir," said Bletsoe, "as we'd best let Mr. Coombe get away with his little lot first, we won't want their dust all the time, nor yet have him trying to pass us every two minutes."

"Quite right!" said Sir Josiah. "Yes, by all means allow Mr. Coombe to get away!"

"I shall feel no personal grief if Mr. Coombe gets entirely away!" said his lordship. He did not like motoring, but the lift that Sir Josiah had offered him had been accepted. It meant that he would not have to purchase a ticket to Town.

"Good-bye father, good-bye dear Sir Josiah!"

Kathleen had clambered on to the running board of the car like any young girl for a last kiss. His lordship disapproved of exhibitions of affection before menials, he waved a white hand.

"Good-bye, dear child!" But Sir Josiah was not to be deprived of his kiss.

"It's all right, Bletsoe!" he said at last with a sigh, "I think Mr. Coombe has

got well away."

They had stayed late, would have stayed later, but for his lordship's anxiety to be back in town. As it was, the sun was near its setting, the sweet mellow glow of the evening was on the earth, and the distances were purple against the red and yellow sky.

They stood in the roadway, waving, Allan and Kathleen and Scarsdale. She could have wished that he had gone with them and mentally took herself to task for her lack of hospitality.

And now the white dust whirled up by the stout tyres of Sir Josiah's car, blotted it out. It was gone and Kathleen slipped her hand through Allan's arm.

Scarsdale saw it. It was done so spontaneously, it seemed so natural that it angered him, his face stiffened. She had married the fellow for money, for nothing else, why did she find it necessary to make such pretence with him? It was mere acting, he knew that, yet he felt she over-acted the part and she fell a little in his estimation, though his love for her and desire of her was no less than before.

A man with bent head trudged past them down the road, he lifted his hand to his hat and touched it as he went, yet never gave them a glance. His hand, having reached his hat, remained with it for some moments, his fingers fumbling at the brim, then he was gone.

"Who was that?" Kathleen asked.

Allan hesitated for a moment.

"A man named Lestwick—he is——"

"Oh I know, so that is the man, Allan! I can understand that child's feeling, I don't like him, I don't like him, there is something about him——"

Kathleen's eyes followed the black figure down the road. "I don't know why," she said, "it may be unjust and probably is, but I—I seemed to feel a chill, a sense of dislike, of distaste as he passed us by!"

"Poor wretch, he is to be pitied since Kathleen dislikes him!" Scarsdale said and a note of irony and sarcasm crept into his voice, which she detected in a moment and her cheeks flushed a little.

"I am sorry," she said gently, "I may be mistaken, I hope I am, one is often mistaken in one's likes and dislikes, it is not well to trust too much to instinct!"

"What did she mean?" Scarsdale wondered, but he said nothing and they went back into the house, the house that seemed strangely deserted and silent.

When the friends, whose pleasant voices have sounded in the rooms, have gone their ways, like them much or little as we may, there is always a sense of loneliness and desertion about the place. Who can tell if the hospitable door will ever open to them again? Noisy Mr. Coombe and embarrassed Mr. Jobson—we have no great affection for them perhaps, yet because they were here a while ago

and the place seems empty without them, we can spare them a passing regret, we can admit to ourselves that we miss them just a little.

"You will find it a little dull now, I am afraid Harold," Kathleen said.

"I shall not find it dull here!"

"Dull——" when she was near, perhaps that was what his words meant to convey, but Allan, who heard them, noticed no double meaning, no particular tenderness underlying the words.

"Allan must neglect Mr. Custance a little now and give you more of his time."

"If you say that then you will make me feel that I am not wanted. I should hate to think that you regard me as a person who must be entertained. If I thought that my presence here, Homewood, made the very smallest difference to your arrangements, then I should want to leave you at once!"

"And I hope that you won't think of leaving for a long while to come," said Allan heartily.

"But you must—must give him a little more time, Allan," Kathleen said presently. "He is your guest——"

"But your old friend, dear, you and he have far more to talk about than he and I could have! You have the past to dig in!" He smiled.

The past—how little he knew! Her heart smote her. She ought to have told him and yet, after all, how little was there to tell? The man she had loved had come back and she had discovered that she had lived in a fool's paradise, that she had not loved the man, but rather had loved her love for him, had idealised it and had made of it the sweetest, holiest and best thing in her life. And now at last with eyes open and clear, she could see that her gold had been tinsel after all, her flowers so fresh and glorious and beautiful had been but poor counterfeits of paper or coloured rag, the hero so noble, so brave, so unselfish and splendid, whose image she had enshrined in her heart was after all but a very ordinary man, very weak and selfish and lacking all those fine qualities with which in her heart she had endowed her childhood's knight.

And now the guests were gone, all but Harold Scarsdale—and how she wished that he too had gone with the others—She and Allan were alone and the time had come to tell him that wonderful news!

And because the time had come, there came to Kathleen a thousand fears. There came too a strange sense of modesty, a shrinking that would not be there if only he loved her. If only he loved her—would he be glad, glad and proud, or would he be sorry and disappointed, worst of all perhaps he would be indifferent! And that would be the hardest, the cruelest thing of all to bear.

Yet she must tell him.

To-night, yes to-night, and yet when to-night came she—coward-like—put

it off.

"To-morrow," she said, "I will tell him in the sunshine in the garden, so that I may watch his face and know—know without spoken words what his thoughts and feelings are——"

So to-night she lay sleepless beside him, torturing herself with those fears that come to a woman who loves, torturing herself till at last her nerves were all unstrung and she could lie here no longer. So she rose softly, not to waken him, and went to the window and stared out into the glory of the brilliant night.

Somewhere far away was her father, probably playing cards in his Club or billiards. How idle were those fine sentimental touching speeches of his, how little she believed in them! She drew her thoughts away from her father, they followed old Sir Josiah instead.

How fine and good and noble he was, how sincere and honest! And what he was, she knew that Allan was too, generous and honourable, kind of heart, true—true as steel! What wonder then that she should love him, that her love for him should awaken—

Her thoughts were interrupted, from the dark shadows in the garden below there came in the stillness of the night a little moaning, sobbing cry. Kathleen was startled.

She was a woman and therefore not without superstition, what good, honest, tender woman has not some trace of superstition in her mind? Just for a moment Kathleen held her breath and listened intently. Again she heard the sound and at the same time a light footfall and then, watching, she saw a little figure come creeping from out the shadows into the white path of the moon.

Betty—she knew the child in an instant—Betty out at this hour, Betty in some sore trouble, crying to herself! She had a mind to call softly to the girl, yet did not, for fear of waking him. So she sat for a moment or so and watched the girl go slowly down the paved pathway and then Kathleen made up her mind. She rose, she thrust her white feet into slippers, she threw a dressing gown on and went creeping down the silent stairs.

Softly she drew back a bolt and turned a key and opened a door that gave on to the garden.

The radiant light of the moon flooded the place, all save under the tall yews, where the shadows lay blackly. But of the girl she could see nothing, yet had noted the way she had gone.

Like a ghost herself, a very lovely spirit all in white, her little woollen slippers making never a sound on the old flagged pavement, she sped on her way.

The moaning sobbing cry had awakened every sympathy in her heart, she was filled with womanly tenderness and pity. "Poor child, poor pretty child!" she thought and so hurried on, looking eagerly for the little lonely figure. Then

presently Kathleen paused, she stood still, she had meant to call softly to Betty, yet did not, for she heard the moaning and crying near at hand now.

"Afraid—oh afraid—terribul, terribul afraid I be!" the broken voice whispered. "But I must. Oh, I must, I hev made up my mind to it and I must!"

Half a dozen noiseless steps and Kathleen saw her. The girl stood on the brink of the pool, her hands clasped over her breast.

"Afraid, oh terribul, terribul afraid I be!" she whispered and repeated the words again and again. Then she thrust out one bare foot and touched the inky water with it and drew back with a low cry of fear.

"But I must, I must, 'tis all there be left for I to du now! I must, for he does not want me and I can't, oh I can't du what he wishes me, so I must!—I—I be coming to 'ee my little stone maid, perhaps 'ee always knowed as I would come to 'ee one day—I be coming now, I be coming now! It seems as 'ee always meant something to me, little stone maid standing there, seems to me now as 'ee always called to me to come and I be coming now—now——" She stretched out her hands and suddenly uttered a stifled shriek for she felt strong tender arms about her, felt herself dragged back from the water's edge and then all in a moment she was sobbing out her breaking heart on Kathleen's breast.

For many minutes Kathleen let the girl weep on unrestrainedly, for she knew it for the better way. Let her shed her tears, since she could, and when they were passed the little troubled heart would be all the easier for them.

So with Kathleen's arms about her, Betty wept softly, clinging to the other woman as to one to whom she looked for love and help and protection and did not look in vain.

And then, little by little, Kathleen drew her away from the pool, drew her presently to the stone bench beside the sundial and made her sit beside her.

"Why Betty, why were you going to do that—that wicked thing?" Kathleen whispered. "No, child, keep your face against my breast, tell me while I hold you! You are safe with me, little Betty, you know that, child, don't you?"

"Oh safe—safe wi' 'ee, safe wi' 'ee!" the girl moaned.

"Why did you wish to do that?"

"There were nothing left for I to du. Oh I didn't want to, for I were afraid, most terribul afraid—I were, but—but it seemed I must, 'twas as if the little stone maid were calling to I, just—just as she used to call to I of moonlight nights when I were in my grandmother's cottage, but—but 'twas different then—then I had not seen him, only—only in my dreams!"

"Seen him?" Kathleen asked softly.

"Allan!" the girl said simply and for the moment seemed to forget that it was Allan's wife who held her in her arms.

"Allan?"

"I did see him here, here in the old garden, long, long before he came here to live, many times I saw him digging at they flower beds, him all in brown wi' queer brass buckles to his shoes, and his hat all dragged down over his face, strange that I scarce did ever see his face, and yet—yet I knew him and when I came to him here in the garden while he sat on this very bench I knew—oh my lady, what be I saying, what be I saying?"

But Kathleen did not answer. It had come to her with a sudden shock, a feeling of desolation, of hopelessness. Allan, her husband, and this little maid, this Betty and the old garden! She remembered the dream of which he had told her, that night in a London theatre. It was but a dream then, a picture out of the past and nothing more and since then it had become reality and yet he had not told her as he had promised!

"And I du love him so—so cruel!" the girl sobbed.

Never once while she listened to this confession did Kathleen's arms relax their hold on the sobbing girl, yet Kathleen's heart was being tortured and wounded by every word.

Allan, her husband, whom she had regarded as the soul of honour—could it be—Allan into whose ears she had intended to pour this wonderful secret, this secret of a little life yet to be, which belonged to him and to her!

"Oh my lady, I be so terribul unhappy!" Betty whimpered, "So terribul unhappy for I did think he loved me as I loved him!"

"And—did he not—love you?" Kathleen whispered and wondered at her own voice, for it trembled so strangely, it was so filled with eagerness, with fear and yet with hope.

"He was mine—mine!" the girl said passionately. "For 'twas he I saw here in this old garden many, many times—and I knew him, my lady, and yet—yet when I would have felt his kisses on my lips, he held away from me—and oh I be all broken hearted, I be, and now he be set against me and wishful of my going away for ever, but I can't, I can't, I would sooner die! And that night here—here my lady, in the garden, he was all stern and angry wi' I! He told me that I must go, that it would be for my good and that I should be happy and—and he told me my lady as he was afraid of I, afraid—they were his very words!"

"Thank God he was afraid!" Kathleen thought. "Thank God for his fears, for they did him honour. Oh I was wrong, he is all I thought him, all I believed him, even better, stronger, braver, thank God!"

"And he told me," Betty went on in her low sobbing voice, "that I were to come to him here in the garden in three nights, 'twere Monday then and tomorrow night I be to see him here and tell him what I will do—if—if I will go far, far away and be wise and sensible—but I can't—I can't 'twould break my heart!"

"It will not dear," Kathleen said. "It will not, Betty!" Her arm tightened

about the girl, she was such a child, did not her very confession prove it? "It seems very hard to bear now Betty, but you must be brave and good and sensible, it will be far, far better that you do not see Allan, my husband, again, for it is not for your happiness to see him. I do not understand, Betty, nor do I think that even you and he understand, it is all so strange—so—so unusual! But I shall send you away——" she paused. It was so easy to say "I will send you away," yet where could she send the child? For a moment she pondered and then it came to her like a flash of inspiration.

"You shall go away Betty quietly and no one need know of your going and to-morrow I will tell him that you are gone and that you and he will not meet again. You will be happy, very happy with those to whom I shall send you. Will you trust me, Betty?"

"Trust 'ee——." The girl caught her hand and kissed it passionately. "And—and bain't I to see him again, never?"

"It will be better not, Betty!"

Betty leaned against her sobbing—"I du love him——" she sobbed, "and it will be terribul to go and never see him again!"

"Had you thrown yourself into the water to-night you would never have seen him again and you would have caused him grief and sorrow, Betty, so—so dear it is better you should go quietly, and live and be happy, for you will be happy, child and you will forget! You are only a child, Betty, and—and I—I know what a child's love means, it is seldom the real love—it will pass, for such love does pass, I know, Betty! And then—then one day the real love, the love of all your life will come to you and you will look back on these memories and smile at them and when that day comes, Betty——" Kathleen's voice shook a little, "then—then, child, go down on your knees and thank God that you gave your child's love to a good and noble man, a man who respected it—and you—and—and was afraid—dear!"

And Betty, if she did not understand, was comforted by the kind voice and nestled closer to Kathleen. She dried her tears and presently had forgotten them and was smiling, and the little tragedy was past.

CHAPTER XXXIV
THE GOING OF BETTY

"I want, dear Sir Josiah, to feel that the child is happy and well cared for, her life here has not been a very happy one, her grandmother was trying to force her into marriage with a man she hated, a man I myself feel instinctive mistrust of. I send her to you because I know of no one so kind, so good, so generous. I know that you will do all you can for her. I do not wish her, and I do not think she herself wishes ever to come back to Homewood again. She will be happier away from the place and so, dear kind friend, to whom I seem to turn instinctively in any moment of doubt and anxiety, I leave her in your hands, knowing that all you may do for her will be right and for the child's own good."

Kathleen had written the letter to Sir Josiah, she herself had helped to pack Betty's little box, she had taken the dependable and uncommunicative Howard into her confidence.

"Your ladyship desires me to see the young woman and her box safe to Sir Josiah's London house?"

"That is what I wish, Howard, and I wish her going to be kept secret, I don't want others to know, it may be difficult, but——"

"It can quite easily be arranged, my lady, no difficulty at all. I'll have the closed cab from the village and if your ladyship will be so good as to inform the young person she is to walk quietly out of the house and to take the Bursdon Road, I will direct the driver to take that way, my lady, and pick her up and take her on to Bursdon station and catch the three thirty-five for London. It will be right if the young person was to start at say half past two. As for her box, my lady, I'll manage it, so that no one sees it—anything else, my lady?"

"Nothing, Howard, and I thank you very much, you are very, very helpful," Kathleen said.

Just before the half hour after two, Betty sobbing as though her heart was breaking, was in Kathleen's room.

"Oh my lady, it be cruel hard to have to go and leave it all, when I du love it so and——" she paused and sobbed aloud with many a catch of the breath, as a child does.

Yet Kathleen felt as she kissed and comforted the girl that tears so easily shed might be just as easily dried, and to prove that she was right, in a little while Betty began to dry her eyes and shew interest in her destination.

"To think that I be actually going to London, my lady, a terribul long way it be and I always wishful of seeing it, though I never—never——" and then a fresh torrent of tears and sighs and cries, tears which Kathleen wiped away.

"You will be very happy, Betty, and life will be full of interest for you. London is a wonderful place, you cannot think how marvellous the shops are. Streets and streets of them, Betty—and the people and the cars and carriages——"

Betty listened, wide eyed, forgetting her grief again.

"And there be theayters, my lady."

"Many of them and you shall go and see them, Betty."

The girl was actually smiling now and then suddenly, remembering her sorrow, she began to cry again. But Kathleen felt no fears. The girl was genuine and sincere enough, transparently honest, but she was not of those who die of broken hearts.

"Now you will be a good brave girl, you know dear that you must go because it will be kinder to—to him—to me and to yourself. You are going to someone whom I love very much and who will be kind to you, not only because I have asked him to be and for your own sake too, but because he is kindness itself. You know, Betty, that you must go, don't you? You know, child, that it is not possible that you could stay on here, and—and Betty, you are going somewhere where you will never see Abram Lestwick, you will be safe from him."

Betty nodded, she even smiled. "Terribul put about and angry will Abram be when he finds I be gone and grandmother, her too."

There was mischief and even enjoyment in her smile and Kathleen's heart felt eased and at peace. She wanted to play no hard and cruel part in this little drama, she did not want the girl to go broken hearted and unhappy.

"And now—now Betty, it is time," she said, "time, dear, for you to go, you—you quite understand?"

"Oh—oh my lady!" And once more Betty was all tears, the tears rained down her face and suddenly she rushed to Kathleen who held out her arms to her.

"Good-bye, my dear, good-bye and God bless you and bring you to happiness." Kathleen strained her in her arms, held her tightly for a moment and then let her go and her own eyes were not dry.

Presently Betty, in her neat little black gown, opened the arched green gate for the last time, and of habit peered up and down the road, half fearfully, lest someone might be there waiting for her. But there was no sign of Abram Lestwick. In the distance she could see the blue smoke curling from the chimney of her grandmother's cottage and at the sight the tears were gone and the pretty face grew a trifle hard, even a little bitter.

"And now we shall see if I be going to marry Abram Lestwick, grandmother," she thought, "terribul obstinate I be, yes and contrairy and a perilous bad maid, but Abram will hev to look for someone else—'Lizbeth Colley, who due bake such wonderful fine currant biscuits."

She laughed softly a little laugh of triumph, mingled with grief and then—then she stepped out into the white roadway and pulled the gate after her. She looked along the high wall of old red brick, over which she had clambered—bad, perilous bad maid that she was—many a time. The wall was topped now with

glittering glass and seeing it the tears all came back with a rush and sobs broke from the labouring, childish breast.

"Broken hearted I be——" she wailed, "broken hearted and wishful of dying—oh—oh never never to see him again, never!" She looked back along the road and could see her grandmother's cottage. She pictured to herself her grandmother, that stern, unbending woman, sitting in her stiff, high backed chair—waiting—waiting for her, waiting to have her will with her.

And the thought of the old woman sitting there waiting and waiting all in vain banished the tears from the bright eyes.

"She said that I was bad and that I must go and—and so I be going for good—going to London. Powerful 'quisitive I be to see what London looks like, bigger than Stretton it be, wi' streets of shops and theayters and oh!" Her eyes shone, the grief was forgotten, she was hurrying on her way down the road now. The red wall had ceased to be and it seemed as though the enchantment of the old garden that it protected was lifted, for the girl was smiling and her eyes were bright with anticipation as she hastened on her way, and never once did she look behind her now.

"A child's love!" Kathleen thought, "a child's love, very real, very wonderful, with such power to bring grief or joy and yet after all only a child's love—mine lasted for ten long years and—and then it passed—Little Betty's, how long will hers last? Ten days, ten hours perhaps—not longer—poor, pretty, shallow little Betty, yet so lovable—and he, my darling, my Allan was afraid—afraid of her for a time—yes thank God afraid—and told her so nobly and bravely." She smiled at her thoughts and Scarsdale, looking at her, wondered what made her smile.

"What are you thinking of Kathleen?" he said.

"Of my husband," she said gently.

Scarsdale turned away, he looked out into the garden. Should he stay, was there still room for hope? Was she acting a part as he believed and hoped, or did it mean that she had ceased to care, that what she had told him there beside the pool was true, that her love for him had died? Yet it might not be dead, only slumbering for a while, when she found, as she would find, that Homewood was untrue to her, that of nights he was meeting a girl, a servant maid in the garden, that he loved that girl, what then? Would she not come back to him, eager for his love and sympathy and protection? He hoped so and believed so.

"I will wait a while yet," he thought.

They missed the guests of the past few days, these three, as they sat down to dinner in the dining room. They missed Sir Josiah, they missed noisy genial Mr. Coombe, even they missed his lordship, for on these three a silence had fallen and each was busy with his own thoughts.

To-night Betty would tell him, thought Allan, she would tell him that she

had decided to be, as he had said, sensible and wise.

"To-night," Kathleen thought, "to-night she would tell him all."

And Scarsdale's thoughts were the same. Would she come to him if she might come in honour, if the dishonour fell on other shoulders? He believed it and hoped it and would hope it till the last.

Kathleen watched Allan that evening, watched him and saw the worried anxious look on his face. She knew that he was planning to meet Betty, yet surely never a lover went to meet his love with such a look on his face as Allan's wore this night? No, he did not love her, he was anxious and troubled about her, about the girl herself and her future and presently he should know that all was well, that Betty was gone and would be happy and cared for.

So when the darkness had fallen completely, she rose and went up to her own room and changed from the light dinner dress she had been wearing into a plain dark frock.

"Will he be glad and proud, or will he be sorry?" she asked herself. Glad and proud—please God he would be glad and proud! And if it brought gladness and pride to him, what then? might it not bring love also, the love she hungered for, the love her heart craved?

The moon was late rising to-night. There was no light save the dim faint light of the stars. Somewhere among the tall trees an owl was making its plaintive cry. Kathleen shivered a little at the sound, it seemed almost like an ill omen. She knew where he would be waiting and then presently in the deep dark shadows under the high old yew hedge she found him.

He heard the light footfall, he heard the rustle of her dress and made no doubt that it was Betty, for who else would come to him here in this place?

"Betty!" he said.

She did not answer him, she stood still, then hesitatingly came forward towards him. But he offered her no greeting, he did not hold out his hands to her. He seemed even to turn away from her.

"Listen," he said, and did not even look towards her. "I have given you time to think, to realise that what I hope to arrange for you is all—all for your good. What I said to you that night was true—Betty we do not and we should not know what the past held for us, that we do know, something of it has only brought us unhappiness and heartache. But the past is past, Betty, it belonged to another life, another generation and we who stand here to-night have to deal only with the present and even more with the future."

Kathleen stood listening, her hands pressed against her breast. Was she wrong to listen to him, knowing that his words were meant for other ears? If he but turned to her now he might see, dim though the light, that it was not the little country girl that he was talking to.

Yet he did not look at her once, but rather at the ground, or away into the blue black distance.

"You have told me that you loved me, you have asked me for my love, forgetting or not knowing, dear, that I could not give you that love with honour. Could I feel such love for you it would but dishonour you, dishonour myself—and—and her, Betty, her." His voice shook for a moment.

"Once you came to me in a strange vision, a vision out of the long buried past. I was heartwhole then—and it seemed to me that some tie, some link forged in another life, another existence held us together, that vision was very wonderful and very sweet to me, it lived in my memory for many and many a long day and then—then it faded, Betty, it faded—and the link that was forged in the past was snapped and broken." He was silent for a moment and then went on in a lower voice.

"It ended because something came into my life to end it, a greater love, something that was not born of visions and fancies and fancied memories. That love, Betty, is the most wonderful, the most beautiful thing that has ever come to me. It meant my salvation, dear, and yours, it meant protection for you and for me. For loving her, loving her——" his voice rose, "loving my own wife with all my soul——."

"Allan, my Allan!"

He turned to her with a choking cry, he peered into her face through the darkness, and then he took her hands and held them, drawing her closer to him till he had clasped her hands against his breast, and all the time he looked into the face that was uplifted to his.

"Kathleen!"

"Who needs you, even as you—you love her, Allan, who has come to tell you, dear, that she knows all and honours you and respects you and loves you with all her heart and soul and is—is proud of you—proud! I sent her away, dear, not in anger, but in love. Poor child, I sent her away all tears that—that I think will soon be dried and to-night I came here to tell you this—to tell you this and—and——" She drew even closer to him and he put his arms about her and held her tightly, "to tell you, my husband——" and her voice was so soft, so low that he could hear, yet only just hear—"to tell you that God is sending into our lives something to make us happier and perhaps better, something that will belong to us both, something for us to share and to love alike, something that will draw us nearer, closer together and hold us together all our lives. Allan, my husband, why don't you speak to me? Allan, are you glad or sorry, dear? Oh Allan!"

For suddenly, even while he still held her in his arms, he slipped down on his knees before her and tried to tell her of the pride, the joy and the gladness that he felt and yet could tell her nothing, save that he loved her.

Beautiful and wonderful, wonderful above all women, more angel than woman to him, now as always.

"You are giving so much, so much, my Kathleen, but you cannot give me all your heart, for I know that in the past there was someone——."

"Someone who came back," she said, "who came back, Allan, and when I saw him and listened to him again, I knew, oh I knew that, my love was never love at all—I think it was less love than a religion with me. Allan, don't you understand? He is nothing to me—no more than any other stranger, any guest who might sleep beneath our roof, for the love, the great love of my life I give, my husband, to you—now and always!"

And then the pent up love and longing, the hunger of the time of waiting found expression. She stooped to him, she put her arms about him, she drew his head to her breast and held him closely, a radiant joy in her heart, knowing him to be what he was, worthy, well worthy of all her love, knowing him to be simple and brave, strong and tender, and even though brave, still afraid, afraid of temptation and his man's weakness.

So she held him and blessed him and her heart was filled with a great love and gratitude.

Faint though the starlight was, yet the watcher away among the shadows could see them indistinctly and seeing them fell naturally into error. For how should he dream that it was husband and wife he spied on? He watched them presently move slowly away, the man with his arm about the woman, she with her head against his shoulder, and the man waiting in the darkness smiled, wondering how long would this last, how long before Kathleen knew?

He watched them till they were gone, swallowed up in the soft darkness, and then he moved, he turned slowly towards the house. The vigil was over, but he frowned in thought. How should Kathleen know, how could she be made aware of this? And then—he heard a sound, the soft pad of a foot behind him and had no time to turn for even as he would have swung round, something leaped upon him and clung to him. A hand gifted with a curious strength sought for and found his throat, and finding it gripped and gripped.

He fought, struggling madly, he tried to tear away that terrible hold, yet it was like trying to unbend bars of steel. He fought at those gripping, clinging fingers till his brain grew dazed, till the dark night swam about him. He could feel on his neck the hot quick breathing of his enemy.

A hoarse scream, a shriek that ended in a choking, gasping sob broke from the strangling throat, a scream of agony and of terror. For he, brave man though he was, felt a mad, horrible fear of the silent, the unseen thing that was seeking to rob him of his life.

Kathleen threw up her head. "Allan, Allan darling, did you hear? Hush,

listen, what was that?"

"Only a screech owl beloved, and oh my Kathleen, to hear you call me——" he paused and was silent, for there came a repetition of the sound, but this time fainter, the strangling cry of a man in agony, hoarse despairing, spent and gasping, ending in sudden silence, followed by the sound of a fall.

"Kathleen go, run to the house, there is something wrong—send help!" And then he turned and dashed into the darkness, in the direction whence came the sound. Scarsdale was down, he lay face downward on the stone paving and with his last strength, his last effort was seeking to unlock those fingers from his throat, but his movements were weakening, the man was done, as near to death as a man can be and yet still live, and on his back there crouched a figure, the figure of a small mean man, whose wondrous strength was all contained in those hooked fingers that were choking the life out of the jerking, labouring body.

"Pleasant spoken 'ee be—aye wonderful pleasant spoken 'ee du be!" The creature was chuckling, was laughing, his eyes seemed to burn with strange fires.

"Wonderful pleasant spoken 'ee be—but never again, never again will 'ee cheat a man of his maid, never again! Stole her from me, lied her away from me!—Oh wonderful pleasant spoken 'ee be——"

It was death that was come on him now, and he knew it, the death he had defied—for so long—in savage places. Strange that it should come to him here at last in this peaceful old garden. Death—the world was swimming about him—he seemed to see Kathleen's face, the fighting hands were grown powerless and never for a moment did that grip on his throat relax.

"Oh wonderful, powerful pleasant spoken 'ee be——" chuckled the voice.

And then the man was torn from his victim, dragged from him and flung violently to the stone pavement. Kathleen had run screaming to the house, the servants were alarmed, Howard, prompt and efficient, came hurrying with lighted lamp; others followed, Kathleen with them.

"It's Scarsdale—been attacked—he's fainted—lift him, some of you, carry him in—stop that man, stop him!"

For Abram Lestwick had risen, he stood there for a moment, then turned to fly, but suddenly stood still, as the lamp-light stone for a moment on Allan's face. Lestwick peered at him. His hands rose to his own throat, fumbled with it, tore at his collar till they tore it loose.

"Bless I if it bain't Abram Lestwick!" said a voice, the voice belonged to old Markabee, "Abram Lestwick it du be!"

"Aye, it be me!" Lestwick said, he spoke dully, still fumbling at his throat, his eyes wandered from the figure of the man they were lifting, to Allan's face clear in the lamp-light, eyes from which all the fire and passion had died out.

He had made a mistake, his slow brain was grasping the fact—a mistake—why should he have made a mistake? Surely it had been the right man, had he not climbed the wall and waited and seen a man with a woman and that woman Betty—who else could it have been? And then—then—

"A terribul strong intentioned man I be!" Abram muttered. "Terribul passionate and quick——" His eyes roved round restlessly, he still worked at his frayed and torn collar. "I must be going, time be getting on, very late it be growing, I've stayed too long!" He would have turned, but old Markabee faced him resolutely.

"Stir from here, 'ee don't, Abram Lestwick, after what 'ee hev done!"

One sweep of his arm would have felled Markabee and left the way clear for him to depart, yet Abram Lestwick never thought of that—he stood still, silent, submissive.

His dull brain refused to answer the question that he would have put to it. A mistake—how had he come to make a mistake—another man—what other man could it be? Had he not seen his enemy standing erect, unhurt, the lamplight on his face?

"It be past, all past my understanding——" Abram Lestwick muttered. "All misty and dizzy it du seem to I—all misty and dizzy!"

They had carried the victim into the house, now they came back for Lestwick, they took him and bound his hands behind his back, those terrible, those death dealing hands, and he submitted without a word, without a struggle.

Sullenly and with bent head, he shambled along between his captors. They took him into the house, into the light, he stood with bent head, then slowly lifted it, his restless eyes roamed the room, they fell on Kathleen's white face for a moment, then strayed away again.

The man was muttering to himself, they bent near to listen, yet could make but little of it.

"Wonderful pleasant spoken he be——" he said, and said it again and yet again, a score of times.

Old Markabee, tremulous, but staunch, gripping a Dutch hoe, stood on guard. "I du remember," he said, "aye I du remember his mother, my Lady, and it be the same wi' Abram as it were wi' she—strange she were always, terribul strange and they du say aye I have heard it said as her did die in the madhouse!"

Kathleen drew back, but the horror died out of her face and in its place there came pity, a great pity for this stricken wretch, the dull eyes rested for a moment on her face, then sank to the ground, his fingers were picking at the rope that bound his wrists together, but not with any intention of picking himself free,

just for the sake of picking and fraying and tearing the cords, that was all.

CHAPTER XXXV
"I SHALL RETURN"

"Kathleen—Kathleen——"

"Yes, Harold, here beside you." She touched his cheek with her fingers. "You are easier now, better?"

"With you beside me, yes." He lifted his hand slowly to the bandaged throat.

"It was—Homewood—Allan Homewood who—saved—who dragged that man off me?"

"Yes, it was Allan, we heard your cry for help, he and I, we were together in the garden and——"

"You—you and he—you and he in the garden?"

"We had been talking in the yew walk, we were returning to the house and then we heard——"

He said nothing, his face twisted a little, as with pain, then it passed.

"The man, Abram Lestwick was mad, quite mad, Harold. He made no effort to get away, he was docile and quiet, dazed and stupid. They took him before the magistrates the next day, but the doctors certified at once, he will not have his liberty again, poor creature, they say he is a homicidal maniac. Yet why—why should he have come creeping into the garden that night, why should he have attacked you, Harold, you a stranger to him?"

But it seemed that he was not listening, as though what she said had no interest for him. He lay looking at her, thinking—It was she—she in the garden with Homewood that night, she walking with Homewood, his arm about her.

He saw it all again, in memory, as he had seen it that night in reality, the man and the woman walking as lovers walk, the man's arm about the woman, her head against his shoulder—and it was Homewood and Kathleen, the husband and the wife—and he had thought—

"The doctor tells me that I shall mend soon, that I shall soon be my own man again, Kathleen, and then," he smiled, "then I shall go back."

"Need you?"

He did not answer the question. "You know why I came, what hopes I had. It was folly and the hopes are over and ended and dead—so I shall go back alone

as I came. There is nothing to remain for—nothing." His hand sought hers and she put hers into it. He held it for a time and then let it go.

"So I shall go back," he said again, and said it quietly and with a fixity of purpose that she knew would never be changed.

Her eyes, filled with pity, looked down on him. Yet she knew, better that he went back, better that in the years to come they should never meet again.

Her heart ached for him, but not for herself. And then the door opened and Allan came softly to the bedside and looked down at the invalid and standing beside Kathleen his arm went round her and he never knew what suffering it meant to the man lying there.

"Kathleen has told you about Lestwick, Scarsdale? The poor wretch is hopelessly insane. There was no reason for his act, there could be none. It has all been horrible, you can imagine what our feelings have been that you, our guest, our friend——" very kind was Allan's smile as he looked down on the man who would have been his enemy, "should have to bear this. But thank God it is no worse than it is. You will be a well man again soon, Scarsdale, and then you will stay on and rest here, Kathleen will be your nurse——"

"You are good, but I shall leave you as soon as I may, for I am going back to the place I came from, Homewood, going back soon."

"Going back? I remember that you told me once you hoped——"

Scarsdale smiled faintly. "I hoped—but that is over, I had hope, but not now. There is nothing to hold me to England. I am a stranger in a strange land, I shall be better out there among the people who know me."

"Are you sure—sure that there is no hope for you, Scarsdale?"

Again Scarsdale smiled. "There never was," he said. "Yet I did not realise it, would not understand it—but there was never any hope for me, so—so I shall go, thanking my good friends for their care of me, thanking them and blessing them——" As he spoke he looked up at Kathleen and Allan watching saw the yearning, the hunger, the love that the lips could not utter, and then suddenly he understood that this was the man!

Yet, even understanding, he stooped and touched the other's hand.

"Remember, if you will stay, my wife and I will be glad—we would have you stay as long as you can—Scarsdale."

They turned away, went out of the room together, and then when the door had closed on them, he turned to her.

"Kathleen, I remember that night you told me that you had met the man again—it was he."

"He came back," she said, "he came back and I knew it meant nothing to me. It was a dream, as yours was dear, and it passed, as yours did, my Allan and so—so——" she held up her arms and put them about his neck and lifted her face

to his.

"I meant to tell you—at first and then—then I forgot, yes forgot, Allan—because of something of which I wanted to tell you far, far more."

"I know," he said, he put his arms about her and held her closely. "Something that has made me the happiest and proudest man in all the world, beloved."

* * * * *

A winter and a spring had passed and the garden at Homewood was blooming with a loveliness that it had not been able to attain last summer. Old Markabee, bearing the weight of yet one more year on his round shoulders, was snipping at the ivy covered wall.

"A pernicious thing be ivy, sir," he said, "a terribul pernicious thing, eating away the very wall as du support it, tearing it away bit by bit, ruining it, sir, it du—with them terribul little clinging fingers it hev got, workin' and workin' till the old wall be crumbled quite and ready to fall, a most terribul pernicious thing ivy be."

"Yes, yes to be sure, but hush my good man, not—not so loudly if you please——"

Markabee turned contritely, "I bain't gone and woke he wi' my chatter?" he asked.

"No, no, he is still sound asleep."

Sir Josiah rose from the stone bench, he peered under the holland awning over the perambulator.

His reign was but short and presently nurse would come and demand of him, her charge. It was a great favour that she did him, leaving him here in charge of the slumbering infant, there was no one else nurse would trust, but she knew that she might Sir Josiah.

"You may look at him, Markabee, if you like, did you ever see a healthier looking child?"

Markabee poked his brown face under the awning, holding his breath the while. Not till he was safely away did he trust himself with speech.

"A wunnerful child he be," he said. "And so powerful strong he du look."

"Would you say, Markabee?" Sir Josiah enquired anxiously, "is the child like his mother or his father?"

"A bit like both," said Markabee. "And wi' a look, aye now I du see it quite plain, a look of his grandfather tu, he hev got."

"You don't say so!" said Sir Josiah. "You don't say so—well bless my heart!" His round red face beamed and Markabee, cunning old sinner, chuckled behind his hand.

"That ought to be good enough for half a suvereign for I," he thought.

And now came nurse to take possession of her charge.

"He hasn't awakened, Sir Josiah, has he?" she said.

"Bless you my dear, no, not moved, he hasn't," Sir Josiah said.

She smiled. "I always feel I can trust you with him at any rate, Sir Josiah."

"A good woman that, a sensible woman, couldn't have found a better," Sir Josiah said as nurse wheeled the baby carriage away. "And you were saying just now, Markabee?"

"I were saying a terribul pernicious thing is this ivy working with its little fingers on they old walls as du support it, tearing and tearing, wonderful like the fingers of Abram Lestwick's, I du remember."

"Ah poor fellow!" said Sir Josiah.

"Mad!" said Markabee, "like his mother were afore him—mad—and mad in love moreover."

"Indeed!"

"Wi' the prettiest maid in these parts, old Mother Hanson's grand-darter, sir."

"Little Betty Hanson?" said Sir Josiah—"whom my daughter-in-law Lady Kathleen sent to me months and months ago, and to think that poor mad fellow loved her. But she's married now, Markabee, and married well—married to a young fellow who works for me, a lad named Cope! I'm paying him six pounds a week, Markabee, and he's worth it, a hard working honest lad. I had tea with them in their little house and a prettier little hostess you never saw. But if you'll believe me, Markabee, an arrant little flirt, with those pretty eyes of hers——"

"Her mother were the same," said Markabee. "All wimmen more or less be the same—specially when they du have fine eyes as Betty had."

"Why I don't know that you aren't right Markabee, and yet not all, not all women Markabee, there is one——"

Sir Josiah looked up and saw the one of whom he spoke. She was coming slowly towards them along the flagged pathway, her husband's arm about her, her head against his shoulder and as they came slowly in the sunshine, they halted now and again, for not yet, had all her strength come back to her, though thank God, it was coming. She was still a little pale, still a little languid in her movements. But in her eyes there was a great and wonderful happiness and a deep tenderness and unutterable love. Love for this man beside her, this man to whom she clung, this man, who was friend, lover, husband all in one. Was ever woman so blessed as she?

Sir Josiah stood watching them, knowing that these two had found a happiness that was almost beyond his understanding.

And then he would have turned and gone quietly away, but Kathleen called

to him.

"Won't you come here and sit with us in the sunshine dear? Don't go, don't go!"

He came back with a happy pleased look on his old face.

"I didn't think you and Allan would want the old man," he said, "I thought you two—together——"

"We want you always, when you are here our little world is all complete," she said softly. "I have those whom I love and those who love me," she lifted her hand and held it against his cheek.

And so on the sunwarmed old stone bench they sat, and there was no sound save the steady 'clip clip' of old Markabee's shears and the rustle of the falling glossy green leaves from the ivied wall.

About them, was the sunshine and the glory of the flowers in bloom, the little pool lay shimmering like molten gold, and from its midst rose the slim white figure of the stone maiden, for ever holding the broken pitcher on her sun kissed shoulder.

THE END

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