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SUGGESTION

BY

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"THE CONFESSIONS OF A WOMAN," "THE BLOSSOM AND THE FRUIT,"
"LORD VANECOURT'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

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NEW YORK

LOVELL, GESTEFLD & COMPANY

125 EAST 23D STREET

(1892)

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SUGGESTION.

EXTRACT FROM MISS MARGERY HAWTHORNE'S
DIARY.

“THE last entry made in this dear little book is the record of my engagement to Rex. How happy I was that night! I felt I must write down all about it before I went to bed. I wonder whether I am really the lovable creature Rex thinks I am, or whether it's his fancy? How can I ever know! It doesn't matter, so long as he fancies it, for that is enough for me. How I love him! It makes my heart stop beating and then jump on again only to think of him. I didn't know it was possible to love anybody so much. And what a dear good fellow he is! He says such lovely things—I couldn't write them down here, it would make me feel hot, but it is so delightful to remember them—things that make me feel as if I were the only

woman in all the world worth looking at, and certainly the very sweetest that ever lived. He can't mean it all of course, that's impossible, because I know I'm not. It's just his way. But oh! I do hope he means some of all he says, for it makes me feel so proud and happy to fancy anyone can think of me like that.

“However, I didn't sit down to-night to write about Rex, though it's very hard to write or even think about anything or anybody else. But this little locked book of mine is a real diary—what I call a diary that is—not a record of every-day doings but of special-day doings. When any extraordinary event happens to me, I like to write down all about it here before I forget what it felt like. I wish it was something about Rex I had to write down to-night, but there's no such luck, for he wasn't here this evening. All I have to record is an odd new experience which I don't want to forget.

“We had two or three intimate friends here at dinner; one was Oliver Heriot. He's oddly like Rex sometimes, and yet so different! I can't

say I like him, though I have seen so much more of him than of his brother, Rex having been in America so long. But Oliver seems to me lazy and selfish, while Rex is the most unselfish fellow that ever lived. Of course I may be wrong, but that's how I feel. And in this little book, when I do take the trouble to write in it, I may as well tell the truth.

“ We got up a game of willing and wishing in the drawing-room after dinner, as somebody had been reading an article in one of the magazines about hypnotism, and we all began wondering whether there was anything in it or whether it was all nonsense. Of course papa laughed at us and said it was all nonsense certainly ; and of course he was longing to try it on me and see if he could get the best of me. So after dinner we began like silly creatures. Papa wouldn't rest satisfied unless I was the first one sent out of the room and be the first one to see if he could make me do what he wanted when I came back. But of course he couldn't, though he walked me about with his hands on my shoulders for ever so long, and everybody

sat round and laughed at us. I didn't feel anything at all. Papa got quite cross and said I was no good; so somebody else was sent out. But there was no success with anybody till I went out again and Oliver Heriot tried with me.

“When I went into the room I felt quite certain he could not do anything with me, and that the whole thing was nonsense. Then he came and put his hands on my shoulders; after a minute he took them away, and coming in front of me stood and stared in my eyes. And then without knowing I did it—and that's what annoys me so!—I did the most foolish thing, a thing I never supposed anybody could have made me do. Right before all those people I went up to Rex's photograph, and actually fell on my knees before it and then kissed it. Could anything be more utterly foolish? I don't wonder everyone laughed at me! It makes me furious to think of it!

“But how is it I didn't know I had done it till I *had* done it? That's what puzzles me so—I don't want to forget that. If I try any more experiments I'll write down all about them as they

happen. For it's very strange to do a thing like that without being even aware of the least thought in one's mind about doing it.

“I was furious with Oliver for making me do such a silly thing. Still, it was Rex's portrait and nobody else's!—that's one comfort.”

CHAPTER I.

Two young men were sitting smoking over a bright fire blazing in a harness-room. This room was as cheerful, as warm and as pleasant as any in the mansion known as Heriot Hall, to which the stables belonged; and with these two young men it had always been a favorite lounge. But on this occasion there was a certain feeling of awkwardness which had never existed before. This arose from the fact that hitherto these brothers, the two young Heriots, had been equally free of their father's house; but now Rex Heriot came out from the billiard-room, while Oliver entered the stable-yard from the drive. And both knew that Oliver could not go into the house; furthermore that his father would be infuriated if he were found to be in the stables. Yet his favorite mare stood there in her stall; and the two hunters he had ridden last winter. His rooms in the house

were still littered with his especial belongings, his guns were on their accustomed racks; his setter lay basking in the heat of the fire. But Oliver himself was an outsider.

He had come home from Paris a week ago, and after dinner on the first evening of his arrival, had an interview with his father which ended in his leaving the house again the same night and going to sleep at the village inn. By which means it immediately became known to all the neighbors and the whole countryside, before noon the next day, that "Old Heriot" and his son Oliver had quarrelled.

Rex was treated to his father's view on the matter, in full, and in instalments, which made it more irritating if possible than the punishment would have been otherwise. As he strolled into the harness-room, Oliver, who was there first, thought he had never seen the handsome face so tired and worn-looking.

These two brothers in some respects were as much alike as if they were twins. When one met them walking in the road side by side, or watched

them enter a drawing room together, the likeness between them was quite remarkable, although Oliver was two or three years older than Rex. Their movements and gestures were very much alike ; both tall, broad-shouldered, well-built men, with fine features, bright hair, blonde moustaches and keen gray-blue eyes. In appearance they almost reproduced each other ; in character, those who knew them well, thought them complements.

“ You look bored, old man,” said Oliver. “ I suppose the governor’s been going on at you all the time ? ”

“ Yes ; ” said Rex, and paused ; then added with emphasis, “ without intermission.”

“ I’m sorry for you,” said Oliver in a tone of sympathy ; then with a dark look on his face, “ you pay pretty dear for your post of favorite.”

It was said with a sneer ; and an onlooker would have expected Reginald to retaliate. But he made no answer. He leaned against the mantel-piece and took a cigar out of his case, with a languid air of a man who was too used to his companion to take any notice of him.

Rex had inherited his mother's temperament; gentle, cheerful, good-humored. His father's irascibility and Oliver's peculiar temper, simply wore him out, perplexed and worried him, so that he allowed them to say all the disagreeable things and answer themselves. This quiescent attitude irritated Oliver beyond everything; for by it Rex had become master of the situation. Always his father's favorite, long since his right hand in business matters, Rex was now his father's heir.

Since his stormy interview of a week ago with Oliver, Mr. Heriot had made a will leaving all his enormous possessions absolutely to Rex. His lawyer had come down from London on purpose to draw up this document, which he had carried back and had deposited safely in the Heriot strong-box.

"Now, thank Heaven," piously ejaculated old Heriot about a dozen times a day, "my money won't be gambled away over the card-table, spent in pot-houses, and flung in the gutter. Mark my words, cutting off that young blackleg with a shilling is no loss to him; for if he were as rich

as the Duke of Westminster he'd be down to the shilling all the same in a year or two."

The fortunes and positions of these two young men, were, it will be seen, considerably changed since they had last lounged away the afternoon in the harness-room talking of the dogs and horses. Little else had they in common to talk of, for they had not the same tastes. But they had always been good friends, having that idle, indifferent sort of almost physical affection for each other which healthy, happy young people who have lived much together generally acquire. Oliver was an excellent story-teller, and knew how to adapt himself to his audience ; many a merry hour they had spent in this room, laughing over his anecdotes.

To-day there was a constraint and a gloom which had never existed between them before. And their faces almost lost all likeness from dissimilarity of expression. Rex, who, by sheer inoffensiveness of character, had walked into the most desirable position possible, looked like a victim. Oliver, the outcast, had an air of resolution about

him which became him well. The dark shade that crossed his face sometimes and the smouldering fire in his eyes, Rex simply put down to temper—that Heriot temper that he was so tired of!

“Well,” said Oliver after a moment’s silence, “the old man has got somebody to abuse now to his heart’s content so long as he lives, I suppose. That ought to make him happy. Hang it all, if I can see the difference between the way he’s made money and the way I’ve lost it; we’re both gamblers; only he is successful and I’m not.”

“Quite a sufficient distinction for him,” observed Rex.

“And for me too,” said Oliver bitterly. “Well, you’ve got all the luck now.”

“And you’ve had it,” said Rex, quietly, but quickly.

“True,” agreed Oliver. For he had been his mother’s favorite. Mr. Heriot in his earlier will, had, he thought, favored Rex too much in some respects, though practically he had divided his possessions pretty fairly between his two sons. But he had long been aware of the difference in character

between them, and consequently had not left Oliver much ready money. Mrs. Heriot had a fortune of her own and showed her partiality—as she thought, her justice,—by leaving it to Oliver. She had died about a year since; that year had been cheerfully occupied by Oliver in making away with the fortune in question.

“Quite true,” he repeated; “but at all events, I’ve done you an uncommonly good turn. You can’t deny *that*.”

“That’s as we look at it,” said Rex. “I’d a great deal rather, for my part, that you would make it up with the old man. Life isn’t worth living as things are at present.”

“Make it up with the old man!” echoed Oliver. “My dear boy, how’s it to be done?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Rex wearily, “unless you like to turn over a new leaf. But, of course, even so, he wouldn’t believe in you.”

“Not he!” said Oliver.

“What I mean is, no gain to me can compensate for all the row. I can’t stand living at home as things are. I think I shall get him to send me

out to California again. I'd rather be by myself out there, than in such a pandemonium as you two manage to create."

"Really?" said Oliver, with an air of innocent inquiry, "and what about Margery Hawthorn?"

"Well, what about her?" demanded Rex, turning round on him, and taking his cigar from his mouth.

"Will she like it?"

"Is that anything to you?"

"Dear me, no; only a general interest in the subject. By the way, that brings me round to the very question I wanted to see you about. I dined at Hawthorndene last night, and Sir Charles made me an offer. You needn't look so amazed; though I don't wonder. However, this is the whole of it. He had heard, like everyone else, of all the row here. He asked me if it was true what was said, that I was over head and ears in debt and hadn't a halfpenny left. I owned up it was true. Well, he asked me if I'd like to go and be his steward *pro tem*, till something else turns up. It's uncommonly kind of the old fellow; but he

always liked me. It'll be turning over a new leaf with a vengeance, it seems to me, if I do all his dirty work for him. But I don't quite see what else to do, for I literally haven't the money now to pay for my bed at the inn. And it would suit me awfully well to lie quiet for a bit."

Rex had looked keenly at his brother from time to time during this speech ; but he made no reply when it was over. He stood against the mantelshelf, quietly smoking. Presently Oliver looked up.

"Well, what do you think, Rex?"

"Why, take it, of course."

Oliver rose and stretched himself. After a moment he spoke again.

"I wanted to act fair and square, old man ; that's why I came in to speak to you about it. As far as I'm concerned of course I've no choice, being penniless. Sir Charles makes it comfortable for me ; he is going to shut up the steward's house, or let it ; and I am to live at Hawthorndene. I suppose you've no objection?"

"I!" exclaimed Rex.

Oliver laughed. "That's all right," he said. "But you must remember I am myself an admirer of Miss Margery Hawthorn's, and have been your rival. I did not know if you would care for me to live in the same house with her."

"You are not my rival now," said Rex quietly. "What objection could I possibly have? You and Margery are very good friends?"

The inherent nobility of the man came out as he said this; and never had the difference between the brothers been so apparent as at this moment.

"Of course we are," said Oliver easily. "That's all right, and I'll settle it at once. It's a queer position, to go into harness next door, as it were."

"I wonder what the old man will think of it," said Rex. "If you stick to it, it may reconcile him in time."

Oliver made no answer. At that moment old Mr. Heriot's loud voice was heard in the stable-yard. Rex immediately went out to him; anything to prevent his meeting Oliver and making the air black by another scene.

Oliver waited, listening; he heard their voices

growing fainter ; then he went to the window and looked after them. When they had vanished he turned round to the fire with a laugh.

“ Oh, my brother ! ” he said aloud, “ what a fool you are ! ”

CHAPTER II.

MARGERY HAWTHORN was sitting, ready dressed for dinner, by the drawing-room fire that same evening. She had ensconced herself in a low rocking-chair, her favorite seat. She was a restless creature, unable to keep herself still for a moment together; and the rocking-chair made a sort of excuse for the continual vibration of her whole frame. Margery was a great favorite, and attracted everyone to her; there was something in this constant activity of hers which was fascinating in itself. It was impossible to take your eyes off her; the delicately pretty hands, with their birdlike flutter, were a sufficient study in themselves to an observant person.

She was a true brunette, her hair and eyes both of the intense blue-black one sees in the sky on moonless nights; her face a pointed oval, dimpled

with laughter, flashing with the keen intelligence of the black eyes, fresh and beautiful with the clearness of the olive skin. An eager, clever, brilliant, delightful young woman ; with all kinds of burning possibilities and potentialities not yet evolved.

As she sat here alone, swinging herself backwards and forwards, and tapping one foot impatiently on the ground, she whistled a little now and again—just a bar of melody—and the whistle was very soft and rich and pleasant. But it only came with a more violent impulsion of the chair, and seemed to betoken a passing crisis of restlessness or irritation of thought.

Through the door, which stood open, presently entered, almost without sound, a lounging, handsome figure. It was that of Oliver Heriot.

“There’s something ominous, to me, in the sound of that whistle,” he observed, in a low voice. “I’ve noticed before that dire events follow the exhibition of that accomplishment of yours, Miss Margery. Pray, what has gone wrong?”

Margery laughed ; a bright, infectious laugh.

“Why, what should have gone wrong?” she

said. "You are absurd. But then you always are."

She turned away and took up an open book that lay on a table beside her. Oliver very contentedly sat down on a couch close by, and appeared to fall into a profound reverie. Suddenly Margery threw down her book and faced round on him.

"You are trying to make me think of something," she exclaimed. "I can feel you are! Oh, do leave this horrid hypnotizing alone. I wish all those ridiculous Psychic Research people were at the bottom of the sea!"

Margery was an impetuous young woman, as may be seen. She got up from her chair and began to walk restlessly up and down the room.

"It was Mrs. Carruthers who annoyed me," she said suddenly; "that new American woman who has come to live at the old Hall. I called on her this afternoon. She is awfully pretty—the prettiest girl I have seen in my life. Now, I didn't mean to say anything about her!" she exclaimed in a different tone, stopping suddenly in her promenade. "Oliver Heriot, tell me the truth, have you been making me tell you?"

“I wanted to know what put you out,” answered Oliver languidly from his sofa.

“Oh, you wretch! This willing and wishing is all very well as a game, but it’s simply *hateful* to have you go on like this at all sorts of times; leave it alone, Oliver! It worries me. I had determined not to say anything about Mrs. Carruthers, and then I go and say just what I didn’t mean to say without even knowing I have said it till afterwards! Why, it’s maddening! Go away, and leave me alone. You won’t, of course—well, I’ll go. Why doesn’t papa come! It’s just dinner time. She is perfectly lovely, white-skinned, making one think of a lily, with masses of chestnut hair and extraordinary great eyes that seem to me to be red rather than brown, they are so rich. And such little tapering hands. They look so wicked! But *she* looks as innocent as a baby. Anybody must love her, she’s so pretty. I’m certain she has met Rex somewhere, she is very white, but she seemed to grow whiter when she heard his name—and her eyes look so strange, though she laughed the next minute. Oh! oh!”

She stood perfectly still in the middle of the drawing-room, shaking her pretty clenched fists impotently in the air. She seemed consumed with sudden rage. Then quickly controlling herself she turned coldly to Oliver, who had risen to his feet with a look of triumph lurking in his eyes.

“Oliver Heriot,” she said, very earnestly, “you know my father is the only friend you have left in the world, at this moment. I swear, if you go on using this horrible power of yours over me, that I will speak to him at once, and make him throw you over and forbid you the house. He will do it, if I speak to him.”

Oliver knew that was quite true, and he knew that he could not afford to run any risks. He had brought himself down to the financial level when a comfortable dinner in a friend's house is a luxury to be appreciated. And, moreover, he had a game to play. It was but vaguely outlined as yet; but it was there. He hesitated a moment in his reply to Margery, only because he was not quite certain how best to influence her. A few moments ago he would simply have said—either aloud, or only

in thought—"That's all very well, but you can't—you can't resist me, so don't try." But Margery was just now very angry, all in arms, and in full possession of her faculties. He could not exercise any control over her while her mind was directed against him, only when her attention wandered away. He had found this out with the quickness of a fairly good poker player. He therefore proceeded to distract her attention.

"Why, Margery," he said in a business-like, straightforward voice, "it isn't like you to turn frightened and waste your good gifts. You know very well that if you would let me hypnotize you properly and make you clairvoyant there wouldn't be any secrets for you any longer. You would know all about Mrs. Carruthers and everything else you wanted to know. If you've got a sixth sense why not use it?"

At this moment Sir Charles Hawthorn walked into the room, and dinner was announced. The three went across the wide fire-lit hall, to the dining-room. Margery, having had no time to make any answer, was thinking over what Oliver

had said. It was hard for her to decide, in cold blood; a longing for power and knowledge rushed upon her. She combated it, and almost had conquered, when the memory of Mrs. Carruthers' pale exquisite face came back to her, and she saw again the change of color that Reginald Heriot's name had brought on it. Oh, how she loved Rex! Could anyone ever come between them! Her heart throbbed and her vivid face flushed. She raised her eyes and looked at Oliver. He might be useful to her, yet! Oliver felt the look, but did not answer it.

“Well, my boy,” said Sir Charles as soon as the servants had left the room, “have you decided to take my offer?”

“Yes, sir,” said Oliver, “I have, and am very glad of it.”

“And so am I;” echoed Sir Charles heartily. “You're just the boy for me—lots of go in you—no funk. But you must turn over a new leaf, my lad; that you must, if only to do me credit.”

Margery said nothing, and was very silent until she left the table. The chief reason why Sir

Charles liked Oliver Heriot was that the younger man understood *camaraderie* to perfection. He knew just how to make himself agreeable to the person he was with. It was an easy task for him to please Sir Charles, who liked as a companion a man who could tell a racy story, and listen to one; and who was willing to sit for a couple of hours over the dinner-table while his host drank port. For Sir Charles was of the old school and liked a sound wine and plenty of it. Oliver, who was of a wonderfully easy-going nature in trifles, could humor him in this way without getting bored. He would sip his Burgundy, tell a story now and then, and adroitly start Sir Charles upon story-telling on his own account, all the while thinking of something else. To-night he had plenty to think of.

When at last they went upstairs they found Margery in her rocking-chair by the fire, swinging and apparently dreaming. She looked very happy and content. A letter was crushed in her left hand. It was from Reginald Heriot. He had not ridden over to see her to-day, as was his custom

every day; and so had sent a groom over with this note. Evidently it was a very sweet one, to have made Margery look so beautiful.

“I want to see Mrs. Carruthers,” said Oliver, coming to stand, man-like, between Margery and the fire. “Won’t you ask her here and give me the chance?”

“Why, of course,” said Margery, smiling blissfully. “We’ll give a dinner party and ask everybody to meet her. All the world is longing to know the American girl, who is said to be fabulously rich and fabulously lovely. She certainly is lovely. I wonder where she keeps her husband?”

“Why, in California, of course,” said Oliver, quite at a hazard.

He was surprised at the effect his words produced. Margery sat up straight and statue-like, staring fixedly at him.

“She said something about California,” she murmured to herself—“I remember now. Mr. Carruthers *is* there.”

“Then no doubt she has met Rex when he was out there,” said Oliver cheerfully.

Sir Charles, who was in excellent spirits that evening, interrupted them at this point in the conversation, and tried to get Margery to sing for him. But she was abstracted with her own thoughts, and left Oliver to amuse him.

CHAPTER III.

THE very next morning Miss Margery Hawthorn wrote the invitations for her dinner party. Of course the Heriots were invited. Margery liked bringing things to a head, and getting to close quarters with any little trouble that threatened her. She wanted to see, at once, what effect Mrs. Carruthers would have upon Reginald. This fair American was the most beautiful woman Margery had ever seen, and she had a miserable conviction that any man would inevitably prefer her to her own dark self. How swarthy her face seemed as she looked at it, thinking of Mrs. Carruthers' marvellous waxen pallor; how large her strong, well-shaped hands appeared, contrasted with Mrs. Carruthers'—so small that the brilliants with which they were laden seemed altogether too cumbrous. Margery was irritated by the sense of this little creature's perfection, while at the same time she was fascinated by it.

Rex came over in the afternoon, as usual, and the lovers had a happy hour alone in the drawing-room, Sir Charles and Oliver being out, riding over the farm land. Margery told Rex about Mrs. Carruthers, of whose arrival at the old Hall he had of course already heard—for a rich American creates some excitement in a quiet country place—and boldly eased her mind by asking him if he had ever met her.

“I fancied she knew your name,” said Margery by way of explanation.

“I don’t know *hers*,” said Rex; “tell me, what is she like?”

“Exquisitely beautiful,” said Margery, “red-brown eyes, chestnut hair, a tiny waist——”

“I don’t like small waists,” interpolated Rex.

“Wonderful little hands, red lips, white teeth——”

“Oh, come,” said Rex, “hundreds of American girls answer to this description. I don’t suppose I’ve ever seen her.”

And in two minutes Mrs. Carruthers was entirely forgotten by both of them.

When Oliver came into the drawing-room before dinner he saw at a glance that Margery was well content with the world at large. He was himself in a lazy and quiescent humor, having really done a good deal of work under Sir Charles's eye. So he made himself placidly agreeable, and left Margery to dream her happy dreams undisturbed. That evening was one of the quiet and pleasant ones so often spent in country houses; music, and chat about nothings, and light laughter filled up the short time between dinner and bed time.

The next day was one of those which seem to carry misery in the very air.

The first person who was cast into the depths was Oliver Heriot. The morning letters brought a dark gloom on his face which nothing lifted. He tried to rouse himself for Sir Charles's amusement; but each effort was followed by a more profound reaction into dark thought and disgusted reverie. In fact, his position, was an exceedingly unpleasant one at the moment. Only those unfortunate people who have ever been in serious need

of a large sum of money will quite appreciate this young man's emotions. But these unfortunates are so numerous that perhaps it is unnecessary to enter into any further description at present.

He had nothing left to sell but his horses. Those must go, of course. But they would only bring in a fraction of what he needed. As he sat at the table he now and again glanced across at Margery; she was buried in a correspondence which seemed to amuse her for she was laughing to herself. What a bright creature she looked.

"The old man likes me better than he likes Rex," said Oliver to himself. "He'd help me out of this hole. And she's an heiress. Why can't I make *her* like me better than Rex? And yet I can't! Well, I suppose I have gone the wrong way to work. With the influence I can get over her in some things I ought to be able to succeed. I must think it out."

He had to go over accounts and leases with Sir Charles that morning; he got through pretty creditably, and congratulated himself on being a

very fair actor, when it was done; for he had hardly understood anything. His stewardship with Sir Charles was a mere temporary makeshift—it gave him somewhere to live in good quarters, till he had hit on a new plan. But he could not give his mind to it in earnest, when his own affairs were worrying him. He had, however, long since found out that much may be done by attending to appearances. The fact that he seemed to listen intelligently was usually enough for Sir Charles.

Margery went riding in the morning; but in the afternoon stayed at home for Rex. Oliver had idled an hour away by the morning-room fire after lunch with her, and had told her what Rex had said to him about going to California again to get out of the quarrels at home.

“Has he said anything to you about it?” he asked.

“No, indeed,” answered Margery, much surprised.

“I asked him what you would say to it, and he seemed rather wild with me for doing so.”

Margery told Rex of this when he came and asked him what it meant.

“Oh, nothing,” he said lightly. “That day I did feel I couldn’t bear the life any longer. But the governor has not talked quite so much, since, and I daresay I can stand it. I wouldn’t go unless you would go with me—and it’s not the place for a honeymoon, to my fancy.”

The talk after this was not much worth recording. The afternoon, cold and keen outside, was warm and flower-scented in the pleasant drawing-room of Hawthorndene; and these two sat by the wood fire, letting the time slide by in that delightful oblivion that comes to us only when we are with those we love. Margery was in her accustomed rocking-chair, and Rex was lounging in a low deep chair by her side, when the door was opened and a servant announced—

“Mrs. Carruthers.”

Margery rose quickly, as she always moved like a bird; but Rex drew himself slowly out of the depths of his comfortable chair. Thus it was that when Margery had greeted her visitor, Rex had

only just turned to them, and Margery was free to look from one to the other.

She caught a glance of intelligence pass between them, a look of recognition. It was so perfectly clear to her that she expected Mrs. Carruthers to put out her hand and claim Rex as an old acquaintance. But no; she stood there, a dream of loveliness, her fairness made the more exquisite by the dark furs she wore, a smile on her lips, her eyes innocent, inquiring, with the most candid expression in their warm depths. And Rex? Margery turned sharply to him. He was looking down now, and stood passive and quiet, wearing the correct expression of the un-introduced Englishman.

Margery recovered her *savoir faire* in a moment, and introduced them. Rex bowed without looking up. Margery found herself, a moment later, sitting rocking again, and talking away with rather a feverish gayety and perhaps too easy a manner, to Mrs. Carruthers. That lady was quite self-possessed herself, but in a very different way. She was one who never showed excitement

or embarrassment; her widely opened eyes so beautiful, with the large black pupils and red lights round them, had always a surprised and innocent air. She seldom lowered her gaze, which was very direct, and her natural way of talking was dilatory; she had nothing which could be called an American accent, but she had the peculiar intonation to a certain degree, and the drawl greatly softened. But there was something about her speech which was quite her own—a certain breathlessness, as of suppressed excitement, as exhaustion after excitement. This little mannerism she never lost, so that it was really very difficult to tell when she was excited and when she was not. Now, as she sat talking to Margery, or, rather, answering her, in her pretty hesitating way, she might have been suffering acute embarrassment from Rex's presence; Margery, however, had observed her with sufficient closeness already to know that she really showed no sign of it.

Rex assumed the indolent, bored, indifferent manner which he wore sometimes, and which rather

became his handsome face than otherwise. Mrs. Carruthers certainly did not seem to awaken any interest in him. She excused herself for her informal call by her cleverly expressed wish to know more of Margery, whom she invited to lunch with her on the morrow; she evidently proposed to become an intimate and make a friend of her. Margery accepted with enthusiasm. Mrs. Carruthers then asked Rex; but he excused himself. Margery, watching like a lynx, saw Mrs. Carruthers throw a quick, inquiring glance at him, when he refused; but he did not answer it. Afternoon tea came in, and two other callers, and presently Oliver; and in the atmosphere of gay talk and laughter, Margery began to wonder whether she had been fanciful—whether she had simply imagined what had never happened. For Mrs. Carruthers was as merry as possible, with a child-like gayety that won all hearts; and Rex grew more like himself. Mrs. Carruthers was the first visitor to go, and everyone seemed sorry to lose her. She knew the art of taking leave just when she had interested everyone. How she interested

people it would be hard to say, for she had never been known to say a clever or a witty thing. But she was always a social success.

Oliver went out to the hall door with her. She was driving a pair of very fine horses, and there was quite a little fuss over handing her in, talking about the horses, and seeing her start. The other callers also said good-bye and came out on to the steps, standing there to watch her go, before they got into their own carriages. That was one of Mrs. Carruthers' personal peculiarities; people followed her about to look at her, not always because they admired her, but rather because they were in some way fascinated by her. Not everyone thought her pretty; but even those who did not would stand to look at her, or walk a little way to watch her pass.

Rex showed no inclination to follow her, however; he stood by the drawing-room fire, close to Margery, but not speaking. He seemed lost in some not very agreeable vein of thought. Margery tried to read his thoughts in his face, but she could not. No—his mind was a sealed book to her.

“I know he is thinking of Mrs. Carruthers,” she said to herself; “but *what* is he thinking?” At last in despair she broke the silence.

“Isn’t she lovely?” she demanded. Rex did not pretend not to understand.

“What, Mrs. Carruthers?” he said coolly, and slowly. “She is the kind of woman that would be called lovely by most people, but *I* don’t think her so. I don’t think she’s particularly good form, either. She evidently means to make a friend of you if she can manage it. Are you going to reciprocate?”

“What else can I do?” said Margery.

Rex shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. Then, a moment later—just as Mrs. Carruthers’ phaeton drove past the window—he said good-bye, and just as Oliver came into the room again, was leaving it. Margery hardly answered him; she stood motionless; he did not seem to notice her manner but went straight out. Oliver turned back and went with him to the door, talking about the sending of his horses from Heriot House to London to be sold. Rex promised to see them off; but so

absent did he seem that Oliver repeated some directions over to him a second time.

Margery stood just where she had been when Rex said good-bye to her; she looked up and watched him ride by. She was standing like that when Oliver returned, her eyes still on the window.

“Rex has gone very early,” said Oliver; “I can’t imagine what has taken him home at this time.”

He approached Margery as he spoke and looked fixedly at her. At first it seemed as if she would not take any notice of him; but presently she turned her head and her eyes met his. After a moment she replied, in a dull voice,

“He passes the gate of the old Hall, as you very well know. He is going to spend an hour with Mrs. Carruthers on his way home.”

“Did he tell you so?” asked Oliver with a sneer.

She made no answer to this.

“So you’re jealous?” he said.

She still made no answer. But Oliver had

caught her eyes with his, as it were, and it seemed as if she could not turn them away. She made a desperate effort to resist his influence, and for a long while remained stubbornly silent. But suddenly her endurance gave way and she broke out into a wild passion.

“I’d give worlds—worlds—to know what they’ve been to each other—they’ve met before, I am certain of it—though they tried to hide it from me—Oh, what would I not give to know if he’s gone to her now!”

CHAPTER IV.

“I EXPECT that would be easy enough if you’d let me mesmerize you,” said Oliver coolly.

She looked at him very earnestly. A battle was raging in her heart. After a moment’s pause she passed him by and went away, out of the room without a word.

“She’ll ask me to-morrow,” thought Oliver with a smile on his face, “or if not to-morrow, the very next time the Carruthers drives her wild with jealousy. I’ll back her to do it, if anyone can ; she’s just the sort of woman. But Rex himself? I’m puzzled there. She’s not the sort of woman for him.”

Margery went away by herself to try and think. She was suffering acutely ; torn hither and thither, and, for the first time in her life, experiencing the agony of jealousy. There is no pain or torture like this, for it pervades the whole body ; it is physical pain, mental pain, emotional pain, all

in one. Had Rex loved that little fair creature and lost her? Did he love her still? Was he with her now, listening to that peculiar, lingering voice, looking into those marvellous eyes, so fascinatingly full of color and light and shade? If so, what chance was there for her, Margery? She must go away, hide herself, never see them again.—But what did she base all this on! A glance—a look! Oh, but that glance was conclusive. It was no use, she herself had seen it. They were old friends, these two, and understood each other. And in the first instant of meeting they had helped each other to deceive her—had acted for her benefit. She had never imagined Rex could deceive; it had seemed so unlike him as to appear impossible. If he would do it in one thing he would do it in others.

Then her mind went to Oliver—and to her own curious faculties, discovered by the merest accident, during those drawing-room experiments which they had amused themselves with. Sir Charles had thought it immense fun for Margery to be shut out of the room, and then, when she

was admitted, for her to do any foolish thing which he and Oliver had agreed upon. It amused him, too, to find that neither he nor Oliver were impressionable in this way. He was not given to the unfortunate habit of thinking, and it never occurred to him that there could be any further development from these trivial amusements. He would have been vastly surprised if he had been told that it simply meant that Oliver Heriot could put thoughts into his daughter's mind and make her fancy them her own.

Margery, however, who was very shrewd, perfectly understood the situation, and to a certain extent understood its dangers. But she did not realize that they were already upon her; that Oliver had now put the thought into her mind that she should ask him to mesmerize her and make her clairvoyant. The suggestion was working now as she walked about her room. She was intensely impatient of delay, and she was particularly daring and fearless. Cautious people might have called her reckless.

She never thought of being afraid of Oliver's

influence over her, or of the exercise of her own faculties. Her only doubt was whether she ought to use these to spy upon Rex. This doubt would have finally held her back, it is certain, from making the experiment at all, but for the recollection, which stung cruelly whenever it came into her mind, of Rex's readiness to deceive her.

"I must know the truth!" she exclaimed at last, speaking out loud in her excitement, and she opened her door and hurried downstairs. Oliver was still in the drawing-room alone, looking over some papers he had drawn from his pocket-book, a gloomy cloud on his forehead. He hastily put them away when she entered.

"Come," she said, walking up to her favorite rocking-chair, and sitting down in it, "try your 'prentice hand, Mr. Mesmerizer, and see if you can make me see visions and dream dreams." She spoke with an affectation of gayety which did not deceive Oliver. He saw at once she was in earnest.

"Do you mean it?" he said.

"Of course I do," she replied. "But remember

I only want one thing—I want to see Rex, to see where he is, and what he is doing. Be quick! It's too late for any more callers and we shan't be disturbed for half an hour."

She leaned back in her chair and looked at him. Without any more words, Oliver came and stood over her, and fixed his eyes on hers. In a very few minutes her eyes turned upwards, showing the white underneath between the half-closed lids, as in very deep sleep. Oliver quietly made a few passes over her head and face.

When he first discovered that he had this power over her, he had amused himself by going to a mesmerizing entertainment, in order to see how the thing was done by professionals. But he found, as he expected, that he scarcely needed to make any exertion. She was an exceedingly good subject, and she had of her own accord given up her will to his. She was almost immediately in a deep sleep. As soon as he felt assured this was so, he began to speak to her.

"Try now and follow Rex," he said. "Tell me if you can see him?"

“ I can see him galloping down the drive,” she said, in a voice which rather startled Oliver, for it was not quite her own, “ he is riding very fast. I see, he is following a carriage ; he has overtaken it. The carriage stops ; there is a very pretty lady in it who speaks to him ; but it is only for a moment——”

“ Can’t you hear what they say ? ” asked Oliver. She remained very still for a little while, then she said “ Yes.”

“ Tell me what they say,” commanded Oliver.

“ He only said to her, ‘ When can I call, Mrs. Carruthers ? ’ and she answered, ‘ Not to-morrow, I suppose ? ’ and he said, ‘ Yes, I should like to come in the morning, if you will excuse my being so informal. ’ ‘ Very well,’ she replies, ‘ about eleven ! ’ Oh, I understand ! It is because Margery will be there later ! oh how Margery will suffer over this ! ’ ”

Her face altered from the expressionlessness of sleep or deep trance, to an expression of acute distress. Tears forced themselves between her half closed lids and rolled, unheeded, down her

cheeks. Oliver was so completely surprised at her way of speaking that for a moment or two he stood silently gazing at her. Then at last he roused himself, remembering that she would probably not speak again unless he questioned her.

“Why do you talk of Margery as some one else?” he said. “You are Margery.”

She shook her head. “No,” she answered, “Margery is the other. I am sorry, very sorry for her, she is suffering so much.”

Sir Charles's voice was to be heard in the hall at this moment; he was coming towards the drawing-room. Oliver, who felt he was in deep waters that he did not himself yet understand, did not at all wish Sir Charles to share in the situation. He hastily exclaimed: “Wake!—Wake!” and made some upward passes, such as he had seen mesmerists use in rousing their subjects. Almost immediately Margery opened her eyes; and when Sir Charles entered the room there was nothing unusual to attract his attention, except that the fire wanted stirring. He was one of those cheery people who like a blaze, so he immediately started

with vigor upon the coals, soon making a leaping pyramid of flame which lit up all the room, grown dim with the twilight. He was full of some grievance about the stables and a new groom, and plunged at once into the history, relating it to Oliver with much spirit and noise. Suddenly he stopped short and then ejaculated—"God bless my soul! Margery, my dear, my child, what's the matter?"

Oliver turned and looked at her. She was leaning forward in her chair, rocking herself to and fro like one in mortal pain. Tears fell fast, unnoticed, from her eyes. When her father spoke to her she burst out sobbing; then checking herself by a violent effort she got up and fled from the room.

Lost in amazement Sir Charles turned round upon Oliver.

"What's wrong!" he exclaimed. "Do *you* know anything about it, sir?"

"Not I," answered Oliver instantly, "I can't imagine what's happened."

"Then it's that brother of yours. A lover's

quarrel, I suppose. I won't have my child made unhappy! I never saw her cry in all her life before. I'll forbid him the house if he makes her cry. I'll go and see if she will speak to me."

He followed Margery, leaving Oliver to the not very agreeable society of his own extremely confused and bewildered thoughts. He relieved his feelings as soon as he was alone, by a prolonged whistle; a form of melody which has a surprisingly soothing effect on most men at critical moments. Then he sat down and proceeded to think.

After a few moments of profound thought he got up hurriedly and went to the library of the house—a dark little room at the back, for Sir Charles was no reader, and saw no use in giving up a room to books he never opened; but, nevertheless, lined with volumes on the walls, and crowded with them on the tables, for Margery was a great reader on all sorts of subjects. Oliver went to a certain obscure corner where, on a shelf, all together, stood a number of green paper-bound books. He searched among them till he found

the one he wanted, and then sat down to read it with close attention. It was a volume of Psychic Research reports, and the page he opened it at was on "French Experiments on Strata of Personality"

CHAPTER V.

HE had not been able to read more than a few pages when he was interrupted by Sir Charles, who came in very disconsolately, evidently in need of someone to speak to. He never liked being alone, and particularly disliked it when anything worried him or put him out. So he came straight to Oliver with his troubles, like a grown-up child.

“She is in such a state of distress she really cannot explain herself,” he said; “but it’s evidently something wrong about Rex. It seems to me that she has got a fit of jealousy. But who of and why? What is it all about? Do you really know nothing about the matter?”

Oliver shook his head, meantime turning over the pages of the book in his hand, in search of ideas upon the subject that absorbed him. Suddenly, it seemed to him he had hit upon the explanation of Mar-

gery's present exceedingly distressed state. He had intensified the idea already in her mind; possibly, if he had chosen he could have left her, on awaking, quite oblivious of what she had seen in her state of morbid consciousness. Instead of that he, acting unscientifically, and thinking about it himself, had left it burned into her mind.

"It really seems as if it depends on me now, whether she is to be jealous of Rex or not," he thought; "upon my word that opens a queer vista of possibilities. I think I'll go out and see if that sick mare has had her mash"—this last he said aloud, prompted by a keen desire to escape from Sir Charles's presence.

"I wonder if it would be right!" he thought. "I wonder if it is all some devil's work?" As this struck him he stood still and stared up at the starlit sky. He had got out of the house and was standing on the broad gravel terrace in front of it. One large window upstairs was brightly lit up. It was the window of Margery's room. He looked from the stars to the light of her lamp, and back again. But no direct inspiration or

guidance came to him either way. He was left to puzzle the matter out for himself, and attend to his own casuistry.

Oliver Heriot's was one of those complex natures which find life full of pleasure, but also full of pain and difficulty. He would give a great deal of thought as to his course of action under given circumstances, and yet, after all, act entirely upon impulse. His love of pleasure and excitement was intense, and when roused was completely master of him; desire pulled him hither and thither, and made a mere puppet of him. His conduct was too often that of the ordinary rake and profligate, apparently unaffected by any considerations of heart or conscience. But this was not by any means his real character; after the event he would be smitten with remorse, and indeed before it. His mind was sufficiently intelligent to show him beforehand, only too plainly for his own peace of mind, that what he was about to do was not right and would distress his conscience afterwards. What he lacked was the resolution to obey either heart or conscience when the moment

of temptation came. Against his better knowledge he committed his follies and faults.

But Oliver had more than the sense of right and wrong, which indeed most of us possess in a more or less positive form. He had the religious mind, and he experienced not only remorse but fear. He believed that from those starlit skies an eye watched him and observed his doings, and, in due time, would punish him for such of them as were wrong. He had none of the consolations of the modern unbeliever who walks daringly into the dark abyss of the future, fearless of it because convinced that there is nothing there either to fear or to hope for. Such a condition was unimaginable to him. When he did wrong he did it like a child who trembles with the knowledge of a safe and certain rod in pickle. To a man of this mode of thought, or perhaps it would be more correct to say of feeling, it is only natural that the mysterious powers we call hypnotism and mesmerism should not appear as forces of supernature, lending themselves to scientific research, but as the gifts either of God or of the devil. It seemed to him, as it would

seem to most of us, that there was really something rather satanic about this power of his which he could exercise over Margery. For the time being he used her will, not she.

Realizing it almost in these words, as he suddenly did, brought a strange thrill upon him. Using her will!—that described his power very well. He could use it. To what end should he use it? How could Margery benefit him? He was not at all in love with her; not in the least—otherwise the question would have been a very easy one to answer. But, impressionable as Oliver was in many ways, he had never suffered love, and did not know what it meant. He knew what pleasure was, though, very well; and knew that unless some kind streak of fate brought relief to him, pleasure would be his no more, for a very long time to come.

The mare had had her warm mash a good hour before Oliver visited her. He did so at last, for the sake of appearances, after a good brisk walk in the shrubberies; then he went back to the house

for the inevitable brandy-and-soda and cigar with Sir Charles before bed.

Sir Charles was very much out of sorts that evening, for he was devoted to Margery, and when anything went wrong with her it altered everything for him. Oliver found it an uncommonly dull séance, and sincerely wished himself in London or Paris, where a cab would quickly bring him into the haunts of what he called civilization. To be amused was his prime need ; and he was at present in such a very tight place in his affairs that he could not even present himself in those agreeable places where amusement was to be found. Something must be done !—but what ?

Yesterday he had not an idea. Now he thought obscurely of Margery, what might she not do for him ! He went to bed and determined to sleep on his chaotic thoughts, in the hope of forming some clearer plan for the morrow.

The breakfast-table at Hawthorndene was generally very gay. Sir Charles in the most boisterous spirits, and Margery, with that fresh morning face and mien which are one of the great beauties of

the young and healthy. But on this next morning the meal had none of its usual brightness. Margery was quiet, but very pale and evidently very nervous. Sir Charles simply followed her humor, and kept watching her as a dog watches his master when he thinks there is something wrong and cannot guess what it is. Oliver was disgusted to find he was no nearer a solution of his problem than overnight, and his anxieties would give him no rest. It is quite surprising how acute pecuniary difficulties sharpen the wits and keep the brains at work. A man who is a comparative dullard one day, discovers a hitherto hidden talent the next. But even more surprising is the way in which an intolerable need of money alters the moral sense. Oliver found himself quietly considering what Margery possessed that would be worth his having. Her check-book did not present sufficient temptation; although she was an heiress, she now only commanded a fairly good allowance. Herself—well, yes, she was worth having, and he meant to make a very steady try for that. But that might take time—almost certainly would.

And an alleviation for the moment was what he wanted.

Yesterday morning he would never have supposed he could coolly weigh these things in his mind and speak so plainly to himself. But then he had had his fits of remorse overnight, beforehand, under the stars. It was broad daylight now, and money or the want of it seemed more real than right or wrong.

Margery only gave him a very cold good-morning, did not speak to him afterwards, and scarcely lifted her eyelids. Was she afraid of him? or was she angry with him? Well, he concluded, it mattered very little. If he used his power resolutely he could alter her mood as he chose. Could this be so? he asked himself, in fits of doubt. Was it possible that one human being could have so much influence over another? and that other such a determined person as Margery Hawthorn? for undeniably that young lady had twice his own resolution. Glancing up at her pale, set face in the strong morning sunshine, he thought to himself over and over again that he must be wrong in his memory,—

that she could never have been influenced by him as she had been. This was not the plastic, weak-willed creature which popular imagination pictures the easily mesmerized subject.

Oliver knew nothing of the deeper and more unintelligible part of the mystery, although it was even now taking place before his eyes. Margery herself knew nothing of it, though she herself was actually conducting it. As she sat at the table, listless preoccupied, she was all the while literally hypnotizing herself and placing herself under Oliver's dominance. She tried to put the whole thing out of her mind, but it was impossible to do so, for her intense love for Rex and her desperate jealousy of him, conquered her more reasonable thoughts. The eyes of her mind were fixed on Rex so steadily that she was unable to bring any other subject within view. We must all have experienced the peculiar effect, when one is greatly troubled about some particular thing or person, of being really unable to think of anything else. The attempt is only a pretence; and we find the old image back again in less than an instant of time

because it has never been displaced at all. So it was with Margery this morning. She had but one vision—Rex in Mrs. Carruthers' drawing-room; but one thought—what has he to say to her? Her intense longing to answer this last question, and her complete belief that Oliver could enable her to do so, practically placed her in his hands without his having to make any effort, if he could but have understood this. But he did not, nor did he imagine that but for this absorbed and prepared state of her own mind he would have had no such tremendous power over her as he soon found to be in his hands. He imagined all the mystery to be in himself, and trembled, when he thought of it, as to whence his gift came. This confusion between cause and effect is very common in matters of every day—still more so in these matters which we do not fully understand. It is so natural to fancy all the power and the mystery lie in oneself!

Oliver's sense of this filled him with an exciting feeling of responsibility. He was a born gambler and he felt as if he had learned a new game and was not quite certain yet of his own skill in

playing it. What card should he put down next? He could not determine.

But, as so very often happens for us in life, his card was played for him.

They were always late people at breakfast, and to-day they sat later than usual. The whole reason was in Margery, who had been behind her time at the table and did not seem disposed to leave it. The others, for very different reasons, hung about, watching her. At last Sir Charles lit a cigar and went off to the stables. He took Oliver with him perforce. Oliver had intended to remain with Margery and speak to her, but could find no excuse. In a very preoccupied manner he followed Sir Charles, and joined as well as he could in the stable-talk.

Presently he caught sight of a figure which attracted his attention; a slight, darkly-clad figure, leaning on the gate between the stable-yard and the flower garden. It was Margery. She was looking towards him. He immediately threw away the cigar he was smoking and went to her, determined to trust to the inspiration of the moment for

what he should do and say. Her face was quite drawn and white from mental distress. She had put on a straw garden hat, and drawn a dark shawl over her shoulders. She looked prettier than ever with this new pathetic, anxious look upon her usually gay face.

“Don’t you know,” she said in the dull, constrained voice which he had heard her use before under strong excitement, “don’t you know it’s past eleven! I can’t help it, Oliver—I can’t help it! I never meant to speak to you of this again—but, oh, when the time comes and I know he is with her I can’t bear it—I can’t bear it!”

“You’ve no reason to be so distressed as this,” said Oliver; “you don’t know that you have any cause to be jealous!”

She suddenly broke into sobs, and the gate she leaned against shook with the violence of her passion.

“It is no use to talk to me!” she exclaimed wildly, “I am ashamed of myself that I have let you see all my misery so plainly, and that you should know about it! But I cannot help it!”

'Tis no use. And I must know—I must know the truth. Do what you did yesterday, Oliver, so that I can hear what they are saying to each other! It is like playing the spy—I know it—I am ashamed of it—but I can't help it. Come!"

She opened the gate herself for him to pass through. His conscience pricked him. The thing was so easy, so given into his hands, that he, in his turn, was ashamed.

"I don't know if it's right, Margery," he said in a hesitating voice.

"I don't care if it's right or wrong," she blazed out in sudden violence. "I have made up my mind to know the truth. I cannot bear this suspense and anxiety any longer. Why should I? I have a right to know the truth!"

This was the one idea in her mind at the moment and it seemed quite useless to try to bring any other aspect of the affair before her. She turned and walked hurriedly down one of the garden paths and Oliver followed her more slowly.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. CARRUTHERS was one of those rare flowers of womanhood that are produced in perfection in southern America ; essentially exotic in every characteristic. She was delicate and fragile to the last degree, yet full of a subtle vitality which was almost like hardiness. She did not like rising early, and found it hard to present herself, in the English manner, fully dressed in the forenoon. But when she did this, she did it to perfection ; there was no dull languor in her face as with a sickly Englishwoman. She was fresh as a white hot-house rose, the pallor of her face having a perfectly healthy appearance—whether the result of art or nature none could tell, and who cared?—there was nothing to show delicacy but the deep blue-green circles under her eyes which might have been the work of art, so deep were they—but these certainly were not.

Just like this, an exquisite smile on her soft

mouth, bringing into play two dainty dimples, and a roguish gleam of fun in her eyes—a picture of happy beauty—was Amy Carruthers, as she sat in the dark morning-room in the old Hall when Rex Heriot was shown in.

“How beautiful you look,” he said, immediately, and without thought, as one might have said it to a child.

“I am glad you think so!” she answered, with her merry laugh, which only appeared mechanical, like a canary’s roulade, after one had heard it a good many times, and with the glance from her great eyes which she had never yet found any man resist.

“It’s no matter of thinking,” he replied. “It’s so patent a fact. You are a marvel—you have done wonderfully!” he went on, a tone of honest admiration in his voice.

“I had no idea of meeting you in England,” said Mrs. Carruthers, with the simple, graceful manner of a lady addressing an old acquaintance. “I was very much surprised to find you really a neighbor.”

“I suppose so,” said Rex rather dryly. Then, with a certain abruptness he went on, “What are you going to do?”

“Going to do?” she echoed.

“Are you going into society?”

“Why, of course. Why not?”

“Why not, indeed! You’ll be an acquisition here, where society is usually as slow as a Sunday school. But who have you with you? Where’s Carruthers?”

“In New York. He’s coming over.”

“And who *is* Carruthers?” There was a faint insolence in this question or rather in the way in which it was asked, which would very much have surprised Margery. It would scarcely have seemed to her to be Rex who was speaking. But it was, and though the thinly-disguised rudeness gave his face a disagreeable look, it lent a curious handsomeness to it at the same time. Mrs. Carruthers darted a very dangerous glance at him; a glance in which she seemed to be taking his measure and questioning his intent. She an-

swered with a perfect nonchalance, and as if in reply to the most friendly speech.

“Oh, you know him quite well; you met him in California.”

“What! Carruthers, the millionaire? You don’t mean it?”

“Why not?”

“Such a gentlemanly fellow—neat as a new pin——” Suddenly a dark flush rose in Rex’s face. “I beg your pardon!” he said.

“Oh, you needn’t,” said Amy Carruthers, with the sweetest of smiles. “I know my husband is awfully particular—but—I satisfy him. Isn’t that enough?”

“I should say so. How did you come to meet him?”

“Does all that interest you? Surely not! Mr. Heriot, isn’t it a good plan to live for the present moment? Isn’t it a rather philosophical idea? I’m very stupid, I know, but I fancy somebody very clever recommended that.”

“You’re quite right, Mrs. Carruthers,” said Rex, looking down with evident embarrassment, “and

I assure you I'm the last man in the world to wish to destroy the pleasantness of the present moment. You're quite safe in that, so far as I'm concerned. But I want you to do just one little thing for me."

"And what is that? You know I'm one of the most good-tempered people in the world, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! I know you are; really that's one of your most delightful qualities. Well! you've heard, I suppose, even in the short time you have been here, that I am engaged to Miss Hawthorn."

"Of course; and it shows your good taste!"

"You like her?"

"Indeed yes."

"That is not what I mean. Do you like her, or do you think she will be useful to you? Come, tell me the truth!"

Oh, how foolish a man is when he tries to force the hand of such a woman as this!

"I like and admire her immensely, and I own I think she will be useful to me, for everyone seems fond of her, and of course I want to find good

friends—kind friends, charitable hearts ; I am sure she is good, kind, and charitable. English people are not all this, as a rule, and I am frightened amongst them—with all of them but her !”

It was said with the most exquisitely pitiful air. Rex, looking at her lovely face, accepted all she said. It never occurred to him that it was not society, but himself, whom she desired to disarm through Margery ; that the instant she had heard she was engaged to him she had resolved to win the girl’s heart as quickly as possible. Instead of letting him suspect this she at once seized upon his own good nature. A gentler expression came upon his face, for her perfect manner appealed to him, and he felt sorry for her.

“Oh, yes,” he said, “Margery is good-hearted. What I wanted to say sounds almost too brutal.”

“Say it !” As she spoke she rose and moved to the window, and then turned abruptly and came towards him. Her figure was shown to perfection in the soft morning robe she wore, and no man living could have looked at her with-

out admiration as she moved in the sunlight. Her face was very sad and her great dark eyes were full of tears. She paused a little way from him, and fixed these softened eyes on his.

“Say it! It doesn’t matter if it’s brutal. I’ve been used to brutality—in the past.”

“Don’t speak like that! It’s unbearable!”

His thought, as he watched her, was, “How much of all this does she mean? But a fellow can’t be hard on such a soft little thing.”

Hers was—“How long will it take to make him fall in love with me?”

She laughed, lightly enough, and sat down again in her chair. “Please don’t hesitate any longer—I hate delay!”

“Oh, well!” he answered, rather shamefacedly, “it’s only this—I wish you wouldn’t make a special friend of Miss Hawthorn. There—I’ve got it out.”

She lowered her eyes, and seemed plunged in profound thought. It lasted but a minute or two.

“I’ll do just as you wish!” she said earnestly. “I’ll make her dislike me if I can. But whether

or no, I swear to you she'll never regret having known me."

"That's all right," said Rex with an air of honest relief, for her serious tone convinced him of her genuineness. "I'm sure you'll keep your word."

"Why, of course," she said, with an exquisitely pathetic gesture. "Am I not entirely at your mercy?"

Rex, like an Englishman, answered her rather roughly. "Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "As if I would injure a woman!"

She looked up at him—only for a second, a quick, shrewd glance—and then looked down again as she spoke.

"No," she said, "I know you would not do that—you are a gentleman. But you won't prejudice Miss Hawthorn against me, will you?—Of course, I don't mean openly, but by ever so little a slight? For I will keep my word; and I cannot tell you what a priceless boon it is to me to speak to such a true lady as she is. You know, Mr. Heriot, we don't get stamped for life—at least, I

hope not. You, for instance, you don't find you must kill a man every day, do you?"

Rex started as if he had been shot, and turned white to the lips. But he said nothing; only looked at her. She met his gaze and smiled.

"We all of us find it convenient at times," she said very softly, "to forget both what has happened to ourselves and to others in the past. Isn't it so? Will you stay to lunch? And then you need not feel any anxiety about Miss Hawthorn—for to-day at least."

"Thanks—no—I don't think I can," said Rex. "You see, she—well, she wouldn't know how I came to be here in the morning. No, I think I'd better not. Thank you all the same. I'll trust her to you. Good-bye—I must be going, or else I shall meet her at the door, which would be rather more foolish than if I stayed."

"Why, yes, so it would," said Mrs. Carruthers, with her bird laugh, throwing off all her pathetic manner in a moment. "Well, if you must go, go; but come again very soon. Why not come in the afternoon? No one will be any the wiser."

Do! We shall be a party of ladies unless some callers take pity on us. Did I tell you Miss Carruthers is here? She is awfully dull. There's no society at all in England, according to her; but then of course she hasn't seen much yet. You'll like her if you like a downright American girl."

"If I can manage it I will come in the afternoon," said Rex; and so took his departure.

He had not been gone ten minutes—during which interval Mrs. Carruthers had remained quite still, in a profound reverie—when Margery Hawthorn, was announced, and entered the room. She came in very nervously, and looked round with a quick, apprehensive glance. Apparently she was disappointed in something. With an evident effort she controlled herself, and replied to Mrs. Carruthers' greeting.

"I believe I am very early," she said. "It is such a lovely morning I could not stay indoors."

"Don't apologize!" exclaimed Mrs. Carruthers, with her beautiful smile. "You know how glad I am to see you. It is so good of you to come in this informal way. It is the sort of kindness that

a stranger like myself appreciates to the full. I can't tell you how happy it makes me feel. It's lonely here at first, you know, without my husband. I hope he'll be over very soon, though. Sit down here by the fire and get warm. I am going to give you a glass of wine, for you are as white as a sheet."

It was quite true. Margery was not herself; her rich color had left her, her bright face was drawn and haggard. She scarcely seemed able to speak. The necessity for some kind of speech opened her lips at last.

"I believe I am not very well," she said. "Yes, I will have some wine. I think it must be the cold."

And all the while she was looking round the room with the same anxious, eager look that had been on her face from the first moment when she entered.

She was so convinced that Rex was in the room that she still looked round it for him. His figure was so clearly photographed before her mind's eye, standing here amid these surroundings—which

till this moment she had never seen in reality before—that it seemed as if her failure to see him now must be an optical delusion. Where was he? With a mighty effort she controlled herself, when the question was actually on her tongue.

Amy Carruthers was quite shrewd enough to be perfectly aware that Margery's distress was mental, and had nothing to do with cold, or any other physical circumstance. But she was completely at a loss as to what it could be due to, having no clew of any sort. Like Sir Charles, she imagined it must be the result of a lovers' quarrel, but she was puzzled at having seen no signs of this in Rex himself. She flattered herself he would never have been able to conceal it from her.

She brought Margery a glass of port wine herself, and watched her drink it, talking the while about the cold, and the necessity for taking care of oneself. The wine and the fire together did bring back a certain amount of color to Margery's face, and she began to look a little more natural. For physical comfort or discomfort tells more strongly on people when suffering emotionally than under

any other conditions. And Margery had reached that extreme point of mental misery and anxiety which is really a state of exhaustion; even a faint ray of physical warmth and comfort cheered and restored her a little. The effect simply was to make her remember that this woman who was apparently so kind to her, was in reality her arch-enemy—her rival—a much worse word! Her rival, yes, and perhaps even more, a safe and assured one, while she herself, Margery, who had given her whole innocent, untried heart to Rex, was to suffer these tortures of uncertainty and doubt.

They were both completely in the dark, and could only watch and wait.

Both being possessed of great mechanical ease of manner, a fairly good presentment of conversation was carried on about mere trifles until, to the great relief of both, a distraction was caused by Miss Carruthers coming into the room.

Margery had never formed a serious attachment to any woman in her life as yet; but her heart went out to Hetty Carruthers the moment she saw

her. The interest aroused was mutual; and sprang into an affection which never altered, but served as a support and compact through all the troubles that lay before these two. The candid and honest hearts, the fresh and unsophisticated natures, recognized and trusted each other on the instant.

The two feelings immediately roused by Hetty Carruthers' entrance into any English drawing-room were, first, profound admiration, and afterwards immense amusement. She was just what Mrs. Carruthers had said, a true American girl; but of the most marked type and the most attractive order. Her beauty was extraordinary, in its own way. If Mrs. Carruthers was like a hot-house flower this girl was like a field rose. Her perfectly shaped face had always a vivid flush on it that looked as if she had just been burnt by the sun or the fire; her blue eyes were like drops of water with the sun shining on them; her head was crowned by a quantity of rather rough bronze hair that was too thick ever to be forced into the fashion, but which escaped from its pins and fell in loose untidiness. And her figure!—thin to a fault,

quite undeveloped, but splendidly shaped, and so supple she could throw herself about like a Moorish dancing girl—and indeed, found it hard to keep her movements sufficiently conventional.

Carruthers the millionaire was one of mushroom growth, and his sister had spent all her life hitherto in climbing apple trees, riding half-wild ponies bare-backed, cooking, and making butter—in all the work and play of a country farm. He had brought her away from home now to acquire the polish which had long since been rubbed into himself. At present an amused look came on every face the moment this beautiful creature opened her mouth; and Amy Carruthers was continually requesting her to keep it shut as much as possible. The consequence was Hetty felt like a child at school, and longed for someone to whom she could speak freely and pour out all her heart.

In five minutes she had made Margery feel almost like herself again, for she had made her laugh; and the mere fact of laughing will, for the moment, throw off the deepest despair.

Mrs. Carruthers left them alone a little while;

she was not particularly anxious as to what Hetty said to Margery, and did not feel it necessary to stay on guard as she would have done had there been a man or a severely critical matron present.

“You look awful nice,” said Hetty drawing her chair up to the fire and looking at Margery intently. “I declare I ain’t seen anyone look as nice and straight as you do since I came to this country. Say, now Amy’s away a minute, do tell—you live here, don’t you?”

“Yes,” said Margery; “quite near.”

“What, all the time? Well, look here, I don’t see how you hold on if there ain’t any nice fellers round. Oh, but I forgot, Amy says you don’t call ’em fellers over here. Is that so? You don’t? Well, then what *do* you call ’em, anyway? Men? Yes? Well, I s’pose I’ll learn in time. But ’tain’t easy. Well, don’t they grow in this country? I ain’t seen one since I came over. Ain’t there any real nice ones, that takes the girls round and gives ’em parties? I don’t seem to understand things over here. Why, I’m only a girl, and never been anywhere, but I’ve lots of fellers home—they’re

always carrying on with some fun or other. I don't seem to understand being so awful dull as we are here. We don't ever have a real good time at all, and I don't b'lieve we're ever *going* to. It's always dressing and sitting up, just like prayer meeting. Say, is it like that *all* the time over here? I only wish Joseph had left me at home—I don't want to see Europe. I don't think the whole show's worth a cent. I only wish I was back home. But there, it does seem awful nice to see anyone laugh nat'ral, like you do. You'll have to be good to me and tell me what I'm to say to the fellers, for I declare Amy's made me that scared I daren't hardly open my mouth. Well, I declare there's the lunch bell, and I *am* glad—I'm just as starved as anybody can be and live. I do believe it's being so awful moped makes me so hungry. I hope you eat, so I won't be ashamed, for Amy only pecks up little bits. Nobody could live on what she eats, and I believe she has lots up in her dressing-room. 'Tain't manners, I guess, to eat when folks is 'round."

One great advantage about Hetty Carruthers'

style of conversation was that she never wanted any answer. She took her cue from the expression of the person she was talking to, and went on with her monologue.

With the sound of the church bell came Mrs. Carruthers ; and with her entrance came the wave of despair and doubt again upon Margery's spirit, which Hetty's bright presence had momentarily lifted.

These three lunched alone, sitting in a little group at the end of a great oval dining-table loaded with silver, and waited on by most gorgeous footmen. The establishment was on a very splendid scale. Before the Carruthers took it, the Hall had been a rather dark and dreary example of a historic county show-house. They had filled in the substantial framework with all kinds of grandeur and glitter which it amused Margery to observe. The mingled effect seemed to her odd, and yet it was attractive. Some of the rooms they had entirely re-furnished, as, for instance, the morning-room. It was no wonder when Margery came in that she grew pale, even if

anxiety had not caused her to do so. For in her hypnotic vision she had seen Rex standing there by the plush-covered gilt-dressed chair from which he had risen, with a gold and white harp-shaped screen behind him. These were the first objects her eyes fell upon, and it startled her, for when she had called on Mrs. Carruthers she had been received in the drawing-room, and she knew nothing about the morning-room or how it was furnished. The circumstance gave her a strangely eerie and unnatural feeling. From this eeriness, and from her excited and miserable state, she was distracted by Hetty Carruthers' quaintness and what seemed to her the almost theatrical pomp and circumstance with which the house was filled. To her country-bred eyes, everything about Mrs. Carruthers was surprising, from the Paris gown she wore, to the chair she sat in—just as French as the dress. For Mrs. Carruthers was one of that class of Americans who do not believe anything can be bought except in Paris, and who thinks everything bought there must be correct, especially if there is enough gilding about it.

When Amy Carruthers chose she could be the most fascinating little creature imaginable, and hard it was for man or woman to resist her. Hetty, who, though simple, was shrewd, knew her well enough to be able to discern the difference between the charm of her ordinary society manner and the subtle fascination which she occasionally put forth. She was using this to-day, and for Margery's benefit. Hetty was so surprised at this and so much taken up with thinking what the reason could be, that she scarcely spoke. This was a great relief of Mrs. Carruthers, who had learned so to dread the plain Yankeeisms of her sister-in-law that she was only too thankful if she preserved silence.

Margery was won, slowly, but surely. Before lunch was over she had arrived at that mental state in which she felt that if Rex had ever loved this woman—if he did love her now!—he had every excuse. But Mrs. Carruthers was acting in the dark. She could not guess that Margery had already been made so jealous that her admiration for her would only intensify the feeling. She had

no means of guessing at this, Margery's knowledge, such as it was, having been gained abnormally.

The experience of the morning had been one of agony to her. Sir Charles had caught sight of herself and Oliver, as they were going into the garden, and followed them. He had no particular reason for doing this except a gregarious instinct, and a desire to be with Margery, about whom he felt so anxious. He walked by her side, talking, and smoking. Margery had to simulate some kind of interest in the conversation, because she felt that if she showed her distress of mind he would become so anxious that he would not leave her alone at all. This went on for an hour, till at last Margery went into the house, saying she was tired.

"Come with me, Oliver," she said, desperately. "There's something I want you to do for me."

"Which means, the old fellow may go back to the stables by himself," said Sir Charles good-humoredly, "all right, Madge. Did you say you were going out to lunch?"

“Yes, papa, to Mrs. Carruthers’.”

“Pretty little woman, that! Well, I hope she’ll cheer you up, and you’ll be just yourself again by dinner time.”

Margery walked straight into the house, silently. Oliver followed her, thinking all the while.

She went into the drawing-room and flung herself into her rocking-chair.

“Make haste!” she exclaimed. “Send me off! I want to see where Rex is!”

Oliver came and stood by her; and showed some fruits of his reading. He simply looked at her and said, “Sleep!”

He was rewarded by her almost immediately passing into the hypnotic state without any trouble.

“Do you see Rex?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered; and then she described Rex as she saw him, standing in front of the harp-shaped gold and white screen, in the morning-room of the old Hall, a strange look of embarrassment on his face.

She had hardly described this picture when

Oliver heard Sir Charles's voice speaking to a servant in the hall.

"Where's Miss Margery?"

"In the drawing-room, sir."

Oliver said an ugly word under his breath; and then very emphatically, in Margery's ear, he said,

"You will sleep this afternoon at five o'clock. Now, WAKE!"

She opened her eyes; looked at him; started from her chair.

"Order the ponies out!" she exclaimed. "I am going to the old Hall, instantly."

Sir Charles was already in the room. "'Tis too soon, Madge," he said, "you needn't go yet. I want to speak to you about that woman at the lodge."

"Oh, bother the woman at the lodge. Oliver, tell them I want the ponies at once. Don't lose a moment or I'll never forgive you."

The two men were left looking at each other.

"I swear *I* can't make her out," said Sir Charles. "Madge was never like this! It's all that infernal brother of yours, I know. Go and order her

ponies, there's a good boy, or else there'll be a worse row."

Oliver went off, glad enough to get away at any price.

"I must get this thing in hand somehow," he said to himself. "It seems to me that circumstances are having the best of it at present, and I'm out in the cold."

The ponies were ready in double quick time, and so was Margery. She drove off without a word to anybody. We have seen just how they arrived rather too soon for lunch, at the old Hall.

CHAPTER VII.

MARGERY'S own sitting-room at Hawthorndene was a pretty little room at the back of the house on the first floor. It was furnished with pink and white chintz; water-colors and photographs covered the walls; there were hanging shelves filled with paper-backed novels, and some very easy chairs. The only serious article of furniture in the room was a writing-table in the window, over which the sun streamed for half the day. Margery loved sunshine; and at this table she wrote all her letters, her notes of invitation, and kept her accounts.

It was not regarded as a sanctum in any particular sense; anyone walked into it and talked to Margery when she was there, or went in for books in her absence. It was especially hers only in the matter of the writing-table, which no one ever used but herself.

Thinking about Margery, and a sort of vague feeling that he might pick up some idea from her surroundings, led Oliver into this room soon after she was gone.

Whistling, his hands in his pockets, the picture of an idle man, he lounged in and looked at the books on the shelves. A new French novel caught his eye. He took it down and looked at it. It did not interest him. He put it back and looked round at the writing-table. There something caught his eye which interested him at once. A nice little roll of crisp banknotes, lying half hidden under some other papers. How much was there? He went at once and counted the notes, putting them back afterwards just as they were. A hundred pounds. He walked away downstairs, thinking what a relief it would be to get off to town and see what a night of poker would do for him! Why not? This money wasn't much, but 'twould serve. And again, why not? If he won he swore to himself he would go no further in the exercise of his power over Margery. He felt that in that case it would be as if a higher power had inter-

ferred to save him from acts the rightness of which appeared so doubtful. If he lost it would make no difference. His own position could not be worse than it now was; and his power over Margery would be just the same. On the whole it was worth doing. It would be a pastime, a distraction.

The two men lunched alone together, and Sir Charles, who was always uneasy when Margery was away from him, asked what time the pony-carriage was to go for her.

“She did not fix a time,” said Oliver.

“I think I’ll have out the phaeton and drive over for her myself,” said Sir Charles. “I’m sure she is not at all well to-day.”

This was about three o’clock. Oliver was getting very uneasy himself, for he was exceedingly anxious that she should be back before five. He had no idea what the result of his experiment would be, whether she would sleep at the hour he had fixed, or no.

He felt that it would be very necessary for him to be on the spot at the time, and still more neces-

sary to be alone with her if possible. For he was resolved, come what might, to keep his power over her a secret between themselves. If Sir Charles once got scent of it, all its value to him would be gone, and he had not yet even judged its value.

He wondered what had made him fix five o'clock; but it is a very useless thing to wonder afterwards about any action done in a great hurry. He had thought, hastily, of the fact that Sir Charles was generally out riding at that hour; and that had been a sufficient reason, at the moment, for fixing it.

Of course she would be home before five—yet who could tell! He urged Sir Charles to fetch her early, saying he had thought her looking very ill. This was quite enough to set the old gentleman off in a fume and double quick-time. At the last moment Oliver insinuated that he had to a certain extent lost his heart to the lovely American, and was immediately ordered to go also. This he was anxious to do; for it struck him that if Sir Charles found Margery all right, he might himself yield to the fascination of the lovely

American and stay to five o'clock tea. What a fatal hour to have fixed!

"I must manage these things better in future," he said to himself.

However, that was not the immediate question. The immediate question was how to make sure of this afternoon and its opportunities.

He knew he could rely on Margery herself for getting home before the time when she should sleep, if she knew about it. But he had suggested it to her while she was in the morbid state, and in all probability she knew nothing about it now.

He got into the carriage with Sir Charles and drove off with him. He determined to be on the spot and act as best he might. He was a pretty fair poker player—not so good as he fancied himself, of course—no one ever is—but good enough to have learned some of the valuable lessons of that game.

And thus it was that Hetty Carruthers, sitting by the drawing-room fire, and feeling "awful dull" because her sister-in-law was in the room and she was afraid to talk as much as she would like to

Margery, was amazed and unaffectedly pleased by quite a bevy of good-looking men early in the afternoon.

For Hetty was an admirer of the strong sex, and liked old men and young men equally well, so long as they were what she would call "nice."

Rex arrived first. She was eaten up with admiration for him. But she did not dare to talk to him, seeing, as she could not but see, at once, that he was a favorite with both the others. Margery tried to disguise her passion, her jealousy and her uneasiness; but she was unused to concealment, and the attempt was a bad one. She could not take her eyes off him, try hard though she did to rivet them on the fire or turn them to Hetty's beautiful flushed face. She was miserably aware of his being imperceptibly and delicately appropriated by Mrs. Carruthers, who caressed him with her words and maintained—or so it seemed to Margery—a manner which conveyed the idea that there was a mysterious understanding between them. Rex did not appear to resent this—perhaps he was not aware of it—but he was to a

certain extent ill at ease, and concealed the fact rather badly, as well-bred Englishmen generally do.

Soon, to Hetty's surprise, his double appeared; another edition of himself, only better looking. For to her mind Oliver was far the handsomer man of the two. The two faces had totally different expressions, and it was Oliver's which pleased her best. But she lost her heart completely to Sir Charles, whose breezy manner delighted her in that drawing-room where everyone was always, as it seemed to her, so stiff and artificial.

To her disgust nobody took any notice of her, except for a casual glance of admiration at her beautiful face. She was not used to playing wallflower in this way, for at home her wild gayety made her a great favorite with "the fellers." The person really to blame for this was Mrs. Carruthers, who was rude enough not to introduce her. This was a plan she had adopted of late when she wanted to make sure that Hetty's Yankeeisms should not disgrace her. As for the men who were present, as it happened, they were all

too much occupied with Margery, each for totally different reasons from the others, to give more than a casual thought to the beautiful silent girl who sat by the fire.

Oliver looked uneasily at his watch now and again. The afternoon was slipping away! At last he determined to risk delay no longer. He approached Margery and spoke to her in a very low voice. She started, and flushed nervously.

“At five o’clock!” she said, “what time is it now? Oh, I must get home. I’ll tell papa I want to go.”

Mrs. Carruthers was devoting all her attention to Rex, apparently; but she was one of those people who can see without appearing to see. She noted the low-voiced speeches, the start and the flush. She was quite convinced now of what she had suspected all the afternoon, that there was some little mystery among these people which she had not yet got to the bottom of. It baffled her, and none of the interpretations which rose to her mind quite satisfied her intelligence—for in her limited way, she was a very shrewd little woman.

This did not seem to her to have quite the atmosphere of the ordinary intrigue—a girl engaged to one brother and in love with the other—yet what else could it be?

Just as Margery turned to go hastily to her father, Hetty Carruthers' nasal tones fell on the air and silenced all other voices.

“What's your name?”

She addressed herself to Sir Charles, who happened to be standing near her, disengaged. Quite tired of her enforced solitude she had determined to enter into conversation with somebody or other, and took this mode of breaking the ice. Sir Charles looked at her in amazement for a moment and then a twinkle came into his eyes. He replied quite gravely. “Why, my dear young lady, it's so ugly I should be afraid to tell you; but I'll ask Mrs. Carruthers to.”

“Oh, don't trouble her,” said Hetty, “it ain't of no account. Most English names seem to me awful ugly.”

She had no opportunity for any further confidences, as Margery came up at this moment, looking

very white ; the flush had died all away again in an instant. "Papa," she said, "I want to go home ; I'm so tired. Do you mind coming now ?"

"Indeed no !" exclaimed Sir Charles, "not if you are tired."

"I'm so sorry," said Mrs. Carruthers, who was biting her lips and looking daggers at Hetty. "I'll ring for your carriage."

Oliver, chiefly to distract attention from Margery, and partly for his own amusement, asked Mrs. Carruthers to introduce him to Hetty. She did so perforce, and then left her unlucky sister-in-law to her fate while she returned to Rex and tried to interest him again. But he was watching Margery, and paid little attention to his hostess's beautiful eyes, and pretty words. She was puzzled and disgusted, for she was used to feel her power, under all circumstances ; but she had the gift of never showing vexation, and her laugh rang just as merrily through the room as if it sprang from pleasure.

EXTRACT FROM MARGERY HAWTHORN'S DIARY.

“I must tell someone or something what has happened to-night; and there's no one but my diary that I can speak to—that I *dare* speak to. For I am thoroughly frightened.

“Oh! Rex, Rex, do you love that woman? I believe you do; and in believing this I feel I have lost my one only friend in all the world. For I don't trust you, Rex, any longer. Oh, how awful it is to write that down; but it's true, true! And yet I love you more than ever. What is to become of me! For I want someone to speak to, oh, so badly, as I never did in all my life before. Even if it would be any good to talk to papa I should be afraid to now, because I'm so puzzled.

“It is twelve o'clock. I don't feel as if I should ever sleep again, but should sit here always by myself, thinking. By myself, thinking! Oh, how dreadful that seems! But I don't know what else can come.

“ Oliver Heriot has gone up to town quite suddenly, by the night train. He told papa he had been telegraphed for about his horses. I knew it was a lie, but my tongue was tied and I felt I must be silent.

“ The last time I wrote anything in this book was on that night when Oliver first made me do something without my knowing it. That was only a little thing, though it made me very angry. What he made me do to-night was serious, not that it matters very much ; only it seems to me, if I can be made to do a thing like that without knowing it, I may be made to do anything—anything ! It is a frightful idea.

“ I had a hundred pounds in notes on my writing-table to-day, which I intended to pay away to-morrow. After dinner this evening I fetched them out of my room, took them into the drawing-room, gave them to Oliver, and told him to use them for me in London. I did this before papa—and yet I did not know that I did it !

“ Oliver went off to catch the late train and I went back to my room to write some letters—missed the

money, had a vague idea that I had carried it downstairs—went back to the drawing-room and said to papa, ‘What did I do with that money?’ ‘What money?’ he said. ‘Do you mean the notes you gave Oliver? My dear girl, there’s something wrong with you to-day, you’re so forgetful.’ That frightened me, and I said no more. I did not know what to say. For there certainly *was* something wrong with me! It was borne into my mind, by degrees, like a faded memory gradually being restored to life, that I really *had* given that money to Oliver—and without knowing that I did it. This seems incredible and yet it’s quite true. I do wish I had someone I could talk to about it! The very idea that such a situation is possible frightens me. Why, he could make me do anything, except love him—that never—no, that I do not believe any person imaginable could do! I feel I hate him when I think of the influence he has over me. But I suppose I brought it all on myself. I never should have put myself under his influence as I did. Yet how could a poor girl help it, who was as madly jealous as I was, and knew there was

such a wonderful way of finding out the truth? Oh! Rex, Rex, it is too dreadful to think of. No other trouble matters by the side of that! I feel a sort of horrible conviction that you have never really cared for me one bit. I suppose she jilted you, that lovely little creature, for someone richer. Well, she has enough money now!—I wonder if she's happy—No, 'tis sure she isn't—she wants my Rex again. Well, how can she help it? Anyone must love Rex—I can't help loving him the same, through everything. How I wish Oliver were back again, so that I could see what Rex is doing! I shall never, never dare to tell Rex a word about this, all my life! it would seem so horribly mean to have spied upon him as I have. I can't help it—it's done! But I wish I'd never done it. I should be ever so much happier!—I should have no secret to haunt me all my life; and if Rex is deceiving me I should not know it. It is much better to be ignorant and happy. I wish I had the will to swear to myself I would never use this means to find out anything again. But I can't—I know if I took the vow I should break it. I am

no heroine; I'm only a foolish girl desperately in love, desperately jealous.

“I don't think any woman ought to be as pretty as she is. It isn't right, to my mind. And yet, how I would love to be as pretty! Then Rex would really care for me.”

Oliver came back on the afternoon of the second day, looking rather sullen. He walked into the drawing-room at tea-time, and found Sir Charles and his daughter together there: Margery sitting brooding in her rocking-chair, pretending to read a book which she certainly was not paying any attention to. Oliver asked for some tea, and she gave it him. It would have amused or interested anyone who understood the whole position to see the covert glances with which these two studied each other.

Oliver drank the tea with that unmistakable “breakfast” air, which even Margery's unsophisticated eyes detected. Evidently he had been up all night. Evidently he was not in as cheerful a humor as when he went away.

His study of Margery was encouraging to him-

self, from his own peculiar point of view at the moment. "Fretting horribly!" was his mental comment, "I can do what I like with her. How she dislikes me! *That* doesn't matter, though—I can soon conquer that."

He ensconced himself in a deep arm-chair before the fire with just Rex's manner and in just his attitude. This curious physical resemblance to his brother was one of Oliver's characteristics which annoyed Margery. For though they had always been good friends she had never really liked Oliver; and it harassed her to have him remind her so often of the man she worshipped. To-day in particular it irritated her, for reflection over recent incidents had brought not only a dislike but a sort of fear of Oliver into her mind.

The furtive, uncertain gleam in his eyes seemed to her much more noticeable than ever. Once she caught him scrutinizing her, and this gleam startled and disgusted her. But in spite of her disgust she was conscious also that his eyes had a power over her.

Sir Charles was delighted to see him back, for

he seriously missed his company when he was away. He had vainly tried to interest Margery in his usual stable-talk, and now gladly overflowed with it to Oliver. It was not at all necessary for the other two, who were both thinking hard, to talk, as Sir Charles did it all for them. Oliver used his happy knack of appearing to understand all that was said to him, while in reality not hearing a word of it.

He had spent the previous evening and the greater part of the night in some pleasant little chambers in St. James's. A few calls in the day had enabled him to gather together enough choice spirits to make up a poker party, all of them with plenty of money, for Oliver had spent his mother's fortune in excellent company, among men much richer than himself. The acquaintance of men with plentifully lined pocket-books was all that was left to him of his past glories. It was hard to go among them with so little in his own pocket; but he had paid the full price for learning to play poker, and quite believed that he was skilled enough now to gain some of it back again.

But before the night was half worn away he had lost his nerve and lost all he had. He was too nervous then to stop, but went on playing, just as a drunkard who has had enough must yet go on drinking. The consequence was that he left behind him several I.O.U.'s. and returned to Hawthordene somewhat gloomier than he left it.

“ Shall I marry Margery Hawthorn ? ” he was saying to himself as he sat by the fire. “ Can I marry her if I make up my mind to it ? The old boy could set me on my legs again. ”

Sitting there between them he turned it over in his mind. “ Should he ” almost overshadowed “ could he. ” It was hard to say whether, when the prize was won, it would really be worth the having. He did not mean Margery herself by the prize ; she did not weigh with him in any way ; he simply meant her belongings, her money, her position.

“ It's hateful to think of settling down so soon, ” he thought to himself, “ for that's what it would mean. The old boy would look after me like anything if I belonged to his precious Margery. And

belong I should!—that would be the confounded nuisance. The old man would feel he'd bought me when he'd paid my debts. To live here always—with an affectionate wife and a talkative father-in-law. I don't think I can manage it."

He leaned forward at this juncture of thought, his elbows on his knees, and stared into the fire.

Margery looked at him, wondering. If she could have read his thoughts!

But, though she was a hypnotic subject, she was not a thought-reader.

To the thought-reader, if such a person really exists, life ought to be greatly simplified. To the hypnotic subject, who certainly does exist, it becomes considerably more complicated than to other persons.

Margery would have been horrified indeed if she had been able to read Oliver's thoughts; but she would have been saved a world of trouble later on.

However, as fate would have it, she did not possess this faculty.

"You don't look as if you'd been to bed last

night," said Sir Charles, noticing Oliver's mood at last; "and dear me, now I think of it, you seem uncommonly fagged. Cards again, sir? Well, well! It's no use, I know; it's in your very blood. Did you execute Margery's commissions? You're not the kind of young man I should intrust a hundred pounds to," he added playfully; offering for Oliver's consideration an illustration of truth being spoken in jest.

"Oh, yes," said Oliver throwing himself back in his chair. "I executed them all right. I'll give you the accounts directly," he said to her.

Margery bowed her head—not really in answer, though it passed very well for a sign of assent. She looked at her hands, which, clenched over the arms of her chair moved to and fro ceaselessly and would have told all about her mental irritation to a shrewd observer. But she was always restless, and her father thought nothing about it except that she was not as well as usual.

He still attributed this to a lovers' quarrel. Rex had not been over to-day at all; a very unusual circumstance. What had passed between them

yesterday? He had asked Margery the question and she said "Nothing—nothing unusual at all." Yet she had not spoken with conviction, because she knew in her heart that she had foolishly let Rex see she was jealous of Mrs. Carruthers, and then had got angry with him because he had simply laughed. The laugh had not pleased her—there was something in its tone which she had not understood—and which she interpreted to mean annoyance—as it did, only not of the kind she imagined.

Yes, thought-reading would make life much easier for most of us, though no doubt it would be very inconvenient sometimes.

To a certain extent it exists, of course; only it seems almost impossible to calculate on it.

Oliver at that moment had a flash of it. He saw, almost visibly, the thought in Margery's mind.

"I would give all the money I am ever likely to possess just to feel for one hour as if Rex was all my own."

He gave a quick glance at her; got up from his chair and stood with his back to the fire in the

attitude of a man who is suddenly possessed by an idea.

“It would pay me better to let her marry Rex. She hasn't a notion how much he cares for her! I shall have a full hand if I can keep her under my influence. She'll have the Heriot and the Hawthorn funds both at her command. Rex is such a fool I'm sure to be able to manage him through her.”

“What villainy are you plotting, Oliver?” exclaimed Sir Charles, the most malapropos of men. “You look like the hero of a shilling shocker.”

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was a kind of lull or calm in the three households during the next few days. The kind of lull that comes before a great storm. Everyone seemed to feel something ominous about it. The state really arose from the fact that everyone was in a perplexed condition, and unable to confide his or her perplexities to any other person. Sir Charles did the most talking; and he simply harped on the same theme forever—What was the matter with Margery, and who was in fault? He asked these questions perpetually of Oliver, who shook his head and said nothing. That young man thought incessantly; but kept his thoughts strictly to himself.

The calm was broken by Margery's dinner-party, which brought once more into juxtaposition the various elements of the storm.

When Margery issued her invitations she had not seen Hetty Carruthers, having only paid a formal call at the old Hall, on which occasion Hetty was carefully suppressed. But Mrs. Carruthers, having taken up Margery with so much warmth and forced the acquaintance into an informal friendship, was compelled to bring Hetty on the scene; and so, the day after the lunch at the old Hall, an invitation for the dinner-party reached that young lady.

“How’ll I ever fix myself so’s to stop tidy a whole evening?” she asked Mrs. Carruthers in despair; “and what’ll I do if anybody speaks to me and asks me how I like Europe, same as they always do, seems to me? Ain’t there any other thing to say to an American gal, that these stiff sort of folks must always ask me the same question? And whatever I answer them they seem scared, or else they all set to and laugh. I’m sure *I* don’t know what they find to laugh at.”

“Well, don’t go,” suggested Mrs. Carruthers, coldly.

“Wal, I don’t know ’bout that,” said Hetty

dryly, "strikes me I'd be duller all by my lone here. No, I guess I'll go, and I'll try and stay fixed just as long as I can."

So she wrote her note of acceptance, rather to Mrs. Carruthers' disgust. She was vaguely and subtly annoyed by Hetty, beyond and above her vexed vanity, whenever the girl's quaint speech and candor provoked a laugh. Another and more precious vanity was offended by the idea—which she would not have put into words for worlds—that Hetty was really very much admired, and actually sometimes distracted attention from herself.

There was yet another lady belonging to the old Hall *ménage*, who was invited by Margery, though she had never seen her. This was Hetty's great-aunt, who had been pressed into the service by Mr. Carruthers when his wife insisted on coming over to Europe without him, and packed off as a chaperon. She was, however, too infirm to be anything but a decorative figure when Mrs. Carruthers gave an important entertainment. The old lady was just what Hetty would have

become if left at home in her natural surroundings all her life. She was pleased to be dressed up now and again in satin and lace and diamonds, glories which had only been words to her when she was young; and was willing enough in return to sit up for an hour or two in the drawing-room. But she was not equal to going out, especially in cold weather. So she lay like a queen, or some other great personage, in her stately bed, and the two young women came dutifully to show themselves when they were dressed. She was well content with her fate. A cheery, small-minded old maid, with narrow interests and a kindly heart, belonging to the withered-apple type of ancient womanhood. She fully appreciated the luxury and wealth that had come to her so late in the day, just so far as she could apprehend their possibilities. To tell the truth, when she was younger she would have cared as little for it as did Hetty. It pleased Hetty to be beautifully dressed, of course; but still she felt she paid heavily for the privilege, at the cost of having to sit up quietly at a splendid dinner-table instead of having a good time after

her own heart. She liked a farm-house kitchen better than any drawing-room. The old lady's tastes were much the same ; but years had toned her down, and she was well content to be waited on, and pass her time in marvelling at "little Joseph" (as she always called the millionaire,) having effected such a miraculous change in the fortunes of the family.

The bed in which old Aunt Hetty lay was an historic couch and had been slept in by kings and queens ; her coverlet was a wonder of lace and needlework. She had ceased puzzling over these things ; but still in her heart she thought the great oak bedstead a musty sort of affair, not to be compared to a brightly painted modern construction of iron ; and it seemed to her that the lace and needlework would have been more in place on one of the drawing-room tables which, to her horror, were unclad and littered always with books and newspapers. Her great-nephew's young wife—such a child to look at—so gentle and winning in her ways—was adamant in some things ; and the old lady perfectly understood, very soon after her chaperonage com-

menced, what she might comment on and what she might not.

“Every blessed thing’s topsy-turvy now,” she used to say to Hetty sometimes in moments of confidence. “Young gals like Amy used to give in to their elders, but all that’s over and done. We ain’t listened to any more ; we’re just figures set up to look at. However, ’tain’t no business of mine, so long as Joseph’s satisfied. And she is a sweet pretty creature I *will* say, and just as sweet in herself, too, as if she was made of honey.”

“Good-night, auntie !” said Mrs. Carruthers affectionately, her face lit by her lovely smile of childlike innocence and freshness ; and leaning over the bed she pressed her red lips on the old lady’s withered cheek. How her little white teeth sparkled between those red lips, and her bright eyes gleamed like stars ! A small half-moon of brilliants glittered in her closely-braided bronze hair ; but she wore no other ornaments, and her dress, which had cost some fabulous sum, was a marvel of simplicity, sheathing her delicate figure as a glove sheathes the hand, and with as little pretension. Hetty, with

the vivid flush on her cheeks and some vivid geranium petals in her elaborately coiled hair, looked like a strong tiger-lily beside this fragile creature.

“You’re two bonny gals,” said the old lady, lost in genuine admiration, “and fixed real cunning. I wonder what kind of games ye’ll have to-night.”

“Games, auntie!” laughed Mrs. Carruthers; “people don’t play games now at grown-up parties.”

“Oh, but they do,” put in Hetty rather eagerly. “I heard that nice old Sir Charles talking about some queer kind of game, they’d been playing at; I b’lieve he called it ‘willing and wishing!’ Seems like we used to play with the piano, ‘hot and cold;’ but you do this one only with thinking; seemed to make me kind o’ scared; don’t know why.”

“Because you’re a silly child,” said Aunt Hetty, “that’s why.” And she looked at this girl who was like the re-incarnation of her own youth with an admiration Amy could never win from her. She did not pretend to understand Amy, who was essentially a nineteenth century creature, mysterious, full of worldly and cultured intuitions.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Hetty reflectively, “but it strikes me, if there’s anything in that willing and wishing, the devil himself must be at the back of it.”

“Don’t talk so violently, dear Hetty,” said Mrs. Carruthers with a frown. “Come, we must go, or we shall be really too late.”

She swept away downstairs, her aristocratic little head held high with an air of conscious rectitude ; and Hetty humbly followed her.

At Hawthorndene they entered the drawing-room like a pair of goddesses, all light and splendor. The other women seemed small and dowdy beside them excepting Margery, who held her own magnificently. She was like night, or the genius of a storm, with her dark coloring, and her restless excitability of manner.

The pick of the county had been asked to meet Mrs. Carruthers, and very pleased and proud it was to do so. Obscurity of origin is nowadays regarded as only natural in a very rich person, especially if American, and such trifles are readily forgiven in the old country when there is beauty

and charm backed by enormous wealth. So it was no wonder if Mrs. Carruthers, with her wonderful beauty and the reputation of being a millionairess, became immediately a favorite.

The dinner-table talk was not very brilliant, in spite of the social eminence of the guests; the crops, horses, hunting, and a poor attempt at politics being the range of subjects touched upon. Mrs. Carruthers talked of the hunting-breakfasts and shooting-parties she intended to give at the old Hall, which made her conversation appear very interesting to the others. A promise of pleasure makes talk seem more brilliant than any flashes of wit. She announced her intention of giving shooting-parties especially for ladies.

“You’re a good shot yourself then, Mrs. Carruthers, I conclude,” said Sir Charles.

“Oh, yes,” she said, looking up with her beautiful smile, “I’m a dead shot.”

She had raised her eyes with the accustomed practised sweep of the long lashes, intending her glance for Sir Charles; but before it reached him it rested on Rex’s face, who sat opposite her. He

was looking straight at her, with a most curious expression; he seemed very pale. Her lips remained parted and fixed in their smile till it grew forced and unnatural; her eyes remained on his face. She conquered herself in a moment, and looked down. Rex flushed a little and turned rather nervously to speak to his neighbor. He did not notice Margery's studious gaze; she had watched the whole trifling incident; and it did not seem trifling to her.

If she could have spoken to anyone—above all if she could have spoken to Rex—but it was impossible, she brooded over her own jealous thoughts. As for Rex she had lost her confidence in him. Yet she loved him even more than when she had it. For now she was maddened by the dread of losing him altogether.

Nothing could shake her conviction that he had loved Mrs. Carruthers, and that his heart would inevitably go back to her. What memories of the past evidently existed between them! To see Rex flush and grow nervous like a girl was to her very strange.

Oliver roused himself that evening, and was in an excellent humor; he shone as the best talker at the table. County society did not amuse him, but still he liked to shine; and any society amused him better than none. He was essentially gregarious and a distraction-lover. Anything that pleased or amused him immediately brought out his better side and showed him to advantage. A good dinner, good wine, pretty and well-dressed women, and the sound of his own voice, were enough to bring out his charming society manners, and he had another stimulant to-night—an occasional shy, liquid glance from Hetty's eloquent eyes. She was the first woman the beauty of whose face had ever interested him, and he was distinctly pleased to read her artlessly candid admiration for himself in every glance she gave him. There is no doubt that to natures like Oliver's, incapable of a sentimental passion, the possibilities of feeling are just as strong, though they are merely æsthetic and physical. Perhaps they are even stronger, being certainly much more temporary. To Oliver's pleasure-loving tempera-

ment there was something exciting in Hetty's atmosphere ; in her radiant health, which gave her such an Atalanta-like carriage ; in her vigorous vitality, which seemed to impart some of itself to those she spoke to or looked at ; in her immense and quaint simplicity of manner and speech.

As for Hetty, she had already fallen in love at first sight. All the " nice fellers " at home, who were thinking occasionally of her, were entirely forgotten.

Old Mr. Heriot was not at the dinner. He had been asked, of course ; but he had refused because he would have had to meet his son Oliver. And he was considerably annoyed with Sir Charles for having befriended the black sheep. However, as he said, that was no affair of his. But nothing would induce him to sit at the same table with Oliver, or, as he said, to enter Hawthorndene while he was there.

When the men were left alone in the dining-room Rex went round to his brother, and under the cover of a slightly quarrelsome political discussion

among the others, said a few words to him on their own affairs.

“ I can't get the governor to change his views the fraction of an inch,” he said. “ He's as obstinate as a mule. I believe you've simply finished the game with him. Are you being very much pressed ? ”

“ Confound it all; yes ! ” said Oliver. “ But what's the good of talking ! I know you can't help me. By the way, do you know anything about Carruthers ? ”

“ About him ? ” repeated Rex with a quick and rather suspicious look.

“ Oh, I mean his money. I suppose it's real.”

“ Oh, yes. Carruthers is a big name from New York to San Francisco.”

“ Do you know if that's his only sister ? ”

“ I don't know anything about his family. What's that ? ”

It was the sound of a horse galloping furiously up the avenue. There was something ominous about it. Everyone stopped talking. A moment later a servant came into the room and spoke to

Rex. Sir Charles started up and went to him. The atmosphere of death and dismay was perceptible instantly.

Mr. Heriot had had a fit. A doctor was with him now. He was not expected to live a quarter of an hour.

Sir Charles went himself to the stables and saddled a horse for Rex himself before the groom had realized what was wanted. Then came a frightfully embarrassing moment, as Rex rode off, in his evening dress, just as he was. Should Oliver go? All the men were out in the hall, at the open door, and Oliver in the midst of them, startled and perplexed. Sir Charles and a groom came round with a dog-cart. Sir Charles hurried in and put on an overcoat. "Come, lad," he said to Oliver as he passed him. This decided him. He got into the dog-cart and they drove off together.

The ladies were all down in the hall by this time; the low-toned questions and answers were chiefly about Oliver, for everyone knew his position. Had he really gone? Well, it was only

right. The thought of death so close by quieted and hushed the party, as it always does. Wraps and cloaks were fetched, the carriages ordered round. Margery, looking rather white and nervous, stood in the hall to say good-bye to her guests. Hetty, acting on the impulse of the moment, gave her a warm kiss; the touch of her flushed, bright face was very pleasant to Margery.

“Don't she look pale?” said Hetty to her sister-in-law as they got into the carriage.

“Oh, she's one of those clever people that can look pale at the right time. It's a very good thing for her. She'll have an immensely rich husband now. Of course they'll get married as soon as the mourning's over. But what on earth possessed you to make eyes all the evening at the disinherited brother? It'll be just like you to go and fall in love with some handsome fellow without a cent.”

CHAPTER X.

MR. HERIOT was dead when Rex reached the house, quick though he was; so there was no chance of any reconciliation with Oliver.

Rex was at once the richest man in the county, and one of the richest in England; while Oliver remained one of the very poorest, his possessions being all on the wrong side—debts.

He was frightfully embittered by the way things had fallen out. He began to cherish the idea so beloved by unfortunate men, that fate had a spite against him.

He was convinced that if he could have seen his father before his death he would never have been left absolutely penniless. It was too unjust!

But it had happened. These incredible things, which it seems never could happen to ourselves, do occur, and we have to face them.

Oliver's creditors, far and wide, learned the

facts of the situation immediately by that occult process common to creditors, and which seems to have all the necessary mysteriousness of a psychological miracle about it.

Of course these gentlemen had always been under the impression that the two brothers would be left equal shares in their father's great fortune. Oliver had wandered through Europe with plenty of money to spend, and with the reputation of great expectations. What joy is possible under such circumstances! In fact, he had his day—a day, at all events. But, with the quick blood of youth still in him and a passion for pleasure, he felt that he wanted not only another day, but many another. In the meantime his existence was distinctly unpleasant, and he began to acquire the furtive and uneasy feeling of a man who is always liable to meet someone he does not want to see as soon as he goes outside the house-door.

It is a curious fact that men who feel very fairly generous when they are comparatively poor, alter strangely in this respect if they become very rich. This is one of the odd changes produced

by wealth and its "responsibilities." Rex did not seem at all anxious to alleviate his brother's discomforts, now that everything was in his hands. His father's cloak appeared to have descended on him in more ways than one. With the authority of possessions there seemed to have come to him the dislike for seeing possessions squandered. The solidity of the man of property had come upon him, and Oliver found him as hard to deal with as he had ever found his father. That was how Oliver looked at it. He ignored, or was unable to apprehend, that his brother was in love; that he was able now to give a princely fortune to the girl he loved—a fortune which had been left him freely. While his father lived he had tried to intercede for Oliver; but now he asked himself why he should take anything away from Margery and her possible children for a hopeless spendthrift, whose only use for a fortune was to gamble it away? And Oliver did not know of one circumstance which influenced Rex more than anything else. His father had preserved letters and papers which Oliver thought were destroyed; they

showed him to be not only a gambler, but a cheat. Rex had found them, and they had disgusted him as profoundly as they had his father. So matters remained in a very uncomfortable state. Mr. Heriot's sudden death cast a gloom over the neighboring society, and there were no dinners or dances given for a while. Mrs. Carruthers, who disliked anything disagreeable, found this state of things too dull, and carried off Hetty and her aunt to Brighton, where the two beautiful Americans and their wonderful toilettes were a ceaseless source of delight to the promenaders. Two months dragged by dully. Oliver passed most of his time cursing his fate. He had no plan evolved with which to improve it. He had no money with which to follow Hetty to Brighton, and moreover he preferred to remain near Margery and retain his hold upon her. With Mrs. Carruthers' absence Margery's object in putting herself under his influence was gone; and she seemed to forget that she had ever done so. She was happier than she had been for a long while. Rex was constantly with her and was making all

the plans and arrangements for their marriage to take place as soon as possible. Sometimes she fancied she must have been mistaken about Mrs. Carruthers, her happiness seemed so near, and Rex so well content. So that this time, which was very dull to Oliver, was an almost glad one for Margery; perhaps the gladdest she was ever to know, now the first early freshness and complete confidence of her love was over. That is a joy which can never be restored—a joy possible only to youth and inexperience.

Oliver tried experiments upon Margery at intervals, anxiously testing whether he could influence her without her wishing it. He found his power over her was complete. It appeared as though she had given her will over to him in her jealous despair, and yet to be unaware that she had done so. He found he could make her do small things, such as moving from one part of the room to another, or changing her chair, without her connecting the movement in any way whatever with him; and it always seemed to him that she forgot the action as soon as it was done, and seemed sur-

prised to find herself in a new place. He was afraid to test this lest she should suspect him; for he knew very well that she disliked and distrusted him, and would never put herself in his power without an overpowering reason. But she had done this, once and for all!

One evening he made her go through quite a series of experiments, until at last Sir Charles said to her, "My dear child, how restless you are!"

"Am I?" she said, apparently quite oblivious of the fact that she had not stayed in one place for more than a quarter of an hour since dinner was over.

He decided on making a crucial test. "Take that flower from your dress," he said to her mentally, "and bring it to me. Say to me 'keep it—I've a fancy you should.'"

He had been a long ride over the farms that day and had professed to be very tired in order to keep Sir Charles from talking to him. He was lounging in a great arm-chair by the fire, with a book open on his knees, and his eyes shut.

A moment later and he felt something on his hand.

“Keep it,” said Margery’s voice, “I’ve a fancy you should.”

His heart beat fast at this proof of his power. He kept his eyes shut and shammed sleep.

“Well, upon my word, Madge!” he heard Sir Charles exclaim, with a great roar of laughter. “You are grown very mysterious and sentimental. But what’s the use of giving stephanotis to a man that’s asleep! Merciful powers, but the boys now are dull dogs! Fancy a girl giving me flowers when I was his age and my sleeping through it! Not exactly. Shall I wake him up?”

Margery was standing on the hearthrug, her hand at her forehead. When her father advanced towards Oliver with the evident intention of moving him to a sense of his luck, she put out her hand and stopped him.

“Don’t, father!” she said, “I can’t think why I did it!”

She snatched the spray of stephanotis from where it lay on Oliver’s hand, and flung it into

the red-hot fire. There the poor frail thing was consumed in an instant, as some poor frail souls are by the furnace of this world.

“My dear little girl,” said Sir Charles, “you are very odd and capricious. I declare I shall be glad when you are married.”

“And so shall I, papa!” said Margery, with a strange long sigh that had something of the unutterable Lady Macbeth weariness in it.

All this while Oliver was apparently sound asleep. He did not move for an hour at least. But his brain was at work.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was Christmas Eve; mild and muggy of course, as it always is nowadays. How the climate of England has altered since Dickens worked! It is to be hoped that future historians of the world and its experiences will look to fiction for some of their facts, not only about human nature but also about the globe on which that same human nature has its trivial joy. Fiction writers are strangely accurate, simply because they have no creed, no cause, no object to serve by perversion of the truth or even the glossing of it over. They record that which they see, as effectively as they may.

It was very mild and very muggy. Rex Heriot sat alone in his father's sanctum, at a table covered with papers and blue documents tied with pink tape. Such is the fate of the propertied man who has a conscience.

He was tired of it, and bored. For he was just as pleasure-loving as his brother Oliver, only he

had a different kind of conscience. The house was dull, and this room was just as good as any other. When would Margery be here, with her brightness and her gay charm which would transform all things for him? and the baby footsteps that might come later? and all the glow and cheerfulness of home life dear to the Englishman?

The house was there, and the money: everything but the mysterious charm itself. And that was all contained in Margery.

Well, he must wait a little while. Meantime, could he give her any pleasure, do anything for her?

He looked round the room. Suddenly he started to his feet, took up a great bunch of keys and hastily looked them over.

It was so long since there had been anyone to wear them that he had forgotten the Heriot jewels. They were all locked in a safe in the wall in this room. What a Christmas gift for Margery the brilliants would be! White Indian diamonds, of grand size. He dimly remembered his mother wearing them once, when he was a little boy, not long before her early death.

He soon had the safe open and dragged out the various trays and drawers, sweeping the papers on his table back in order to place them there. He opened and shut the cases quickly till he came to the diamonds. Madge might look the others over when she liked—they were all hers to do what she chose with and amuse herself with. But the diamonds were a gift any man would be proud to make to his bride; they were of enormous value and very beautiful.

There they lay, gleaming and glorious, white and ghost-like.

He would take them to her to-morrow morning.

The idea that they would give her pleasure sent him to his solitary dinner in a quite cheerful spirit.

He knew it would surprise her for him to come in the morning; all the better. He would drive over and go to church with them. So thinking he smoked his pipe and plunged into a novel. He had found an excuse for going to see Margery earlier than he was expected; quite a sufficient reason for feeling better.

So, the next morning, carrying a rather shabby

red leather case, rather too big to go into a pocket, Rex was ushered into the Hawthorndene breakfast-room, where Margery, ready dressed for church, was pouring out tea for the lazy members of this easy-going household. Everyone was late, and seemed rather proud of it than otherwise.

Rex accepted a cup of tea, sat down at the table, and for a little while enjoyed the glances of curiosity directed at the shabby case, which he placed on the table in front of him.

“Don’t you remember it?” he said to Oliver. “Then your memory is not much better than mine. I declare, till last night, when I was wishing I had a Christmas present to bring Margery, my mother’s diamonds had passed out of my mind. They’re worth looking at, though!”

So saying, he opened the case and displayed its treasures.

Oliver leaned across and looked at them with narrowed, critical eyes.

“Yes,” he said quietly, “you are to be envied, Margery. All brilliants and perfect stones. Worth a small fortune.”

He relapsed into the discussion of tea and kidneys, and appeared to feel no further interest in the stones, which, however excited the liveliest admiration in Sir Charles and his daughter.

And Oliver, sitting quietly at the table, was thinking to himself: "Those were the mother's; they ought to be mine; she'd have given them to me like a shot if she'd known how I should come to want money. And how infernally unjust the governor would be!—that prig Rex coming in for everything, and my being left without a single farthing. What a shame! What a burning shame!"

He turned it over in his mind, this view of the matter, till at last it appeared proven to him, not only that the diamonds ought to be his, but that they actually were his, and this presentation of them to Margery as a Christmas gift some kind of masquerade, or a subterfuge of the enemy. It is in this light that he now regarded Rex, though he did not allow it openly to himself as yet.

Margery's eyes were as brilliant as the precious stones she carried when she ran upstairs to lock

them away in her own jewel-box. "He loves me," her heart kept singing, "he loves me!—or he would not have come over early like this to bring them!" And it was of his love she thought; it was the sense of that which made her glad—not, as with Marguerite, the jewels themselves.

Oliver remained at home alone, smoking and reading, while Margery walked away to church between her father and her lover. She looked brilliant. All her jealousy was forgotten, all her fears and doubts, and the bitter want of confidence which had so hurt her a very little while ago. She was so young that this was but natural; for was he not with her? And had he not brought her the most precious things he possessed? He had given them to her as to his wife. Very soon she would be his wife, and then all jealousy and fear and anxiety would be over forever.

Alas, poor Margery!

Rex came back from church with them, and stayed to lunch, and stayed on all day. Everyone was in the gayest humor, including Oliver, who

seemed to have quite recovered from his silent fit of the early morning.

When Margery went to dress for dinner Rex asked her to wear the diamonds. "I will," she said.

She dressed herself all in white and then lit up her beauty by putting on the jewels. It is extraordinary how brilliants illumine and bring out the beauty of a woman's face. It seems as if they had been created for that special purpose. They lend a lustre to her eyes and intensify the coloring of her lips and cheeks.

Margery had never looked so royally handsome as she did to-night when she entered the drawing-room. The necklace of large single stones had a grand pendant that burned like a star on her neck ; such a pendant as one sometimes sees in the possession of an old family, and seldom indeed in a jeweller's. Rex uttered an exclamation of delight as she walked into the glow of the fire.

"How they become you!" he said. As she stood there, the firelight gleaming on her, a quick movement of the head loosened the fastening of

the necklace, and it fell into the white wool of the hearthrug at her feet.

Rex started forward, stooped and felt for it.

“The clasp is an old one,” he said, examining it the thing gleamed like a live snake in his hands,—“it must be attended to, will you put it on again?”

“Try,” she said; “perhaps I did not fasten it properly.”

He put it on again for her, and she went down to dinner in her glory. But at table the same thing happened. One of the quick, bird-like movements of her head released the clasp, and the necklace slid down into her lap.

She took it up and laid it on the table in front of her. As she raised her eyes she met Oliver’s full upon her.

“Didn’t you say you were going to town tomorrow, Oliver?” she said immediately. “Will you take it with you and get the clasp attended to?”

She took it up and handed it to him. His face was imperturbable. He held the necklace in his hands and looked at it reflectively.

“My mother was proud of this,” he said.

“And so is Margery!” said Sir Charles.

“You’d better take it to Hunter & Roskell,” said Rex, “they had it last, and stones get changed sometimes.”

“I’ll take care of it,” said Oliver. “Will you give me the case after dinner, Margery, so that I can put it away and lock it up till I go, or will you keep it till then?”

“I’ll give you the case,” said Margery; and then spoke of something else. He put the necklace down on the white cloth, and touched it from time to time, looking at the different stones as if admiring their beauty or recalling a past which they reminded him of. In reality he was appraising their value. He believed he knew something about diamonds and could not easily be deceived in them. And he was about right. He could judge of a diamond or a horse with any professional expert. It is strange how these great sights are apportioned to some men and denied to others. He was the only person at the table who really knew the value of that necklace.

CHAPTER XII.

A PERIOD of pleasure and excitement set in now for Margery and for those immediately about her. The cloud produced by Mr. Heriot's death was rolling off, and people were beginning to think of the coming wedding. Margery began to discuss the bride's-maid question with the young ladies of the neighborhood at afternoon tea-time. None of these young ladies interested her; they were all very insipid; still, there were seven of them who must be asked unless the fiercest jealousies were to be created.

Margery decided that the seven should be asked; but decided also that her chief bride's-maid should be Hetty Carruthers, whether this preference created heart-burnings or no. She had never liked a girl yet as she liked Hetty. In fact she appreciated force of character and genuineness—not very common qualities in young Englishwomen.

She felt that Hetty possessed them, and even now, when Rex had almost made her forget her awful jealousy by his present devotion, yet she felt a longing to have this fresh, true-faced girl near her. Determined not to deny herself this pleasure, she wrote to Hetty at Brighton about it.

Hetty replied by return of post, accepting with delight. In a postscript to her quaint little letter she mentioned the fact that "Mr. Heriot" was in Brighton, and had just been to call.

"She must mean Oliver!" exclaimed Margery. "Then *that's* why he's never been back since he went to town!"

"I thought he was sweet on her," said Sir Charles, "and it shows his good sense. The Heriots have a very pretty taste in young women, I must say. At the same time I don't understand my steward running about the country in this style without my permission. I'm afraid he's a hopeless young scapegrace, and I must just give him notice."

"Well, I cannot imagine what use he can be to you, papa, I confess," said Margery, who was very fairly practical-minded.

“ Oh, well, he has been, and he can be, if he will. And it's so confoundedly dull after dinner. What I'm to do when you're gone, I can't think. Oliver must stop with me, however useless he is. And I must make the lazy dog work, that's all.”

This, however, was easier said than done. Oliver had some friends down at Brighton who invited him. His nights were spent at cards; his mornings in bed; his afternoons with Hetty. Mrs. Carruthers disapproved of him distinctly as a suitor for Hetty, for she knew very well that he was entirely penniless, and she had heard of his reputation as a gambler. This last accounted, to her mind, for his apparent affluence of the moment. He had dropped back into his old habits of living as if he had limitless gold mines to coin money from. Having seen many of the ups and downs of life, and knowing better than she would have cared to acknowledge now what the “down” side of it is like, she concluded that he had been winning money at cards and was now spending it in the endeavor to dazzle and fascinate Hetty. As for Hetty herself there was no use in talking to her on

the subject. She had given her heart away and could not take it back. She was of the type that loves once. There are not very many women, perhaps, of this type, but there are a very great many more than men think. They love not only once and for all, but entirely; the very faults of those they love are dear to them. These are the generous souls of the world, sorely to be pitied when they are flung into the actual struggle of life—as all are, sooner or later.

Hetty was as happy as she could be, in these bright cold days at Brighton. She looked exquisitely lovely in her excitement and happiness. Oliver was unremitting in his attentions, and there was no mistaking their meaning. But one day it all came suddenly to an end, died without either warning or explanation. He was not on the promenade—he did not call—the next day the same. Mrs. Carruthers said nothing about it to Hetty, but her curiosity was very much aroused, and at last she managed to make some adroit inquiries of a man who was a slight acquaintance of Oliver's. She soon learned that he had spent the first day on

which they missed him over a card-table in a room in which the blinds remained down and the gas lit for forty-eight hours. The fever had seized him, and so long as the other players would sit at the table he would not leave it. When he did, it was to go straight to the station and take the train. "For," as his friend explained, "he was regularly cleaned out—couldn't pay his hotel bill—and they say he left some tidy I.O.U.'s behind him. He's a perfect devil when the fit's on him—would stake his soul if it were worth anything."

Mrs. Carruthers pondered these things in her mind, but said very little. She decided to speak to Rex when she got back home, and if she could not settle the matter with his aid, to send for her husband. This last may be considered the greatest act of self-sacrifice possible to an American woman who is having a good time in Europe; so that it is evident that somewhere in Mrs. Carruthers' mental machinery she kept a conscience. So she did. She did not regard it as in any sense her duty to live all the year round with her husband, to keep his house for him or order his

dinners; but she did consider it a positive duty to see that, while under her wing, his sister did not marry a spendthrift and gambler. "Whatever would Joe say to me!" was constantly in her mind just now. And she shortened the stay at Brighton, in order to get back and see what she could do in the matter herself, before proceeding to the extreme measure of sending for Mr. Carruthers.

Hetty was quite delighted to go home, for she was very sure that Oliver had gone back to Hawthorndene; and in this she was quite right.

He arrived there late in the afternoon, and entered the house in the furtive manner which came upon him sometimes; a manner which is instinctively assumed by people who don't wish to be questioned, and which develops by subtle stages into the rapid glance round, on entering a room, and the covert glance back when in the street which characterize the man who has definitely sunk into the shady side of life.

Oliver felt like a man just risen out of a fever, and wanted to recover himself a little before he met Sir Charles or Margery. So he went straight to

his own room and there rang for brandy. A plentiful supply of this tonic stopped the shaking of his hands in a little while ; and after an elaborate toilette he looked in the glass and saw once more the handsome Oliver Heriot he was accustomed to see reflected there.

Sufficiently restored for this, he was also sufficiently restored to feel disgust with himself and some pricks of conscience, which were a good deal sharper than he liked. His disposition was one which involved attacks of conscience which came in their regular course, like neuralgia or recurrent fever. He would go through a definite line of reasoning about some unjustifiable action, in this way : he would see it as an opportunity ; he would feel a profound confidence that if he took the opportunity he would be successful and fortunate, and be able to get everything right again immediately, so that no wrong would have been done. His conscience peacefully slept all this while and let him go on rejoicing ; but when, later, he found himself unsuccessful and unfortunate and unable to get things right, then it woke up and gave him

stabs that were as sharp as if given by a dagger.

Why had he not repaid Margery the hundred pounds he owed her while he had plenty of money; it would have looked so much better to have done it. He was horribly annoyed with himself for not having done this while he could, so as to have given himself a gentlemanly and honest feeling, however superficial it might be, and it was a bad stroke of policy, too, not to have done it, for it would have given her more confidence in him. And he knew he had lost that, when she was in her normal state, although he could control her abnormal self.

He went into the drawing-room just before dinner, and found Margery there, with Rex, and Sir Charles. She was dressed in black, and looked wonderfully handsome, with the Heriot diamonds gleaming in her hair and on her neck.

“Have they done the clasp properly?” asked Oliver.

“Yes, it seems quite strong now. I am wearing the necklace to test it, but I think it is quite safe. What a long time they kept it.”

“Did they?” said Oliver indifferently; “when did it come?”

“Yesterday only. A man brought it down in the afternoon.”

“I believe they had to make an entirely new clasp; they said something of the kind,” replied Oliver.

“You took it to some place I don’t know,” said Rex. “I hope none of the stones have been changed! They do such rascally things sometimes.”

“Oh, dear no,” said Oliver, with a laugh. “That man’s the biggest swell out.”

Dinner interrupted this conversation. Oliver became very silent for a while; but he drank much more wine than usual, and at last it had its effect on him and he succeeded in talking to Sir Charles with some animation. These two were left to a *tête-à-tête* after dinner, the lovers going off to the drawing-room together.

“It’s been confoundedly dull while you’ve been away,” said Sir Charles with a sigh; “you mustn’t leave me in the lurch like that just now. It’s an

awful thing to play a bad third all the time. Still I like to see my little girl look happy and like herself again. What will you drink?"

Oliver went to the side-board and fetched the brandy decanter.

EXTRACT FROM MARGERY HAWTHORN'S DIARY.

"I HAVE been so happy, and now it all seems dashed to the ground—all my happiness at once.

"I notice that I never open this book or write a word in it except when I am too miserable to speak to anyone.

"If I live to be an old woman it will be strange to look back through it and read of nothing but the most wretched days of the past.

"If I live to be an old woman! What a strange thought. If I do, will it be as Rex's wife? What a strange question, when we are to be married in three weeks exactly.

"But what may not happen in three weeks? What may I not learn in that time?"

“To-day I rode over to Heriot House with papa, to look at some alterations in the grounds Rex is having made. We were all on horseback together in the park, discussing the question of what trees had to be cut down, or rather Rex and papa were discussing that, while I was opposing any trees being cut down at all. I can't bear to see trees cut down till they are quite old.

“While we were talking a man-servant came riding up and gave Rex a note. He read it and then excused himself to us and went into the house to write an answer. When he came back he said nothing about the note. This was all right, of course, and I should never have given it another moment's thought if I had not recognized the man's livery. The note was from Mrs. Carruthers. She has come back. I was so happy while she was away!

“Before we came home papa said to Rex, ‘I suppose we shall see you at dinner to-night?’ and Rex said no, not to-night, he had an engagement.

“I know he is going to dine with Mrs. Carruthers. Why didn't he say so, then, simply, as

he would have done if he had been going to dine at one of the other houses in the neighborhood?

“Oh! the thought of it is like a hand at my throat! I feel as if I am being strangled, as if I am suffocating, dying!

“I can't write any more now.”

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was the day after Oliver's return when, for the first time for a long while, Rex did not dine at Hawthorndene.

Margery did not come into the drawing-room till the minute before dinner. Oliver saw at once the look on her face which he understood; a suppressed look of pain, and a strange glitter in her eyes.

He knew at once that the demon of jealousy was in her again.

He only drank two or three glasses of claret at dinner. "I must keep cool," he said to himself.

Margery was very silent all dinner-time. Just as she rose to go she spoke to Sir Charles.

"Papa," she said, "you must lend me Oliver for half an hour. I won't keep him away from you longer than that. He has been very lazy lately, you know; and so have I. Oliver, do you

mind helping me with my accounts? If I don't get it done to-night I never shall."

"Why, no," growled Sir Charles. "When Rex is about I don't believe you do anything."

Margery went to the door. She paused a moment before going out. Oliver had risen to open it for her.

"Come up to my sitting-room in a few moments," she said.

"I will come," he answered.

He went back and sat down at the table, and began to talk indifferently of other subjects. He looked at his full claret glass and pushed it away. He was a drunkard and knew it. As yet the stings of memory were not so sharp but that he could sometimes resist stimulant and act without it. And he knew that his power over Margery was the power over will. He felt, rather than knew, that wine affected his resolution.

He distracted Sir Charles's attention by a couple of clever stories which amused him, and left him laughing over his wine, while he went upstairs to Margery's sitting-room. This room was seldom or

never used in the evening, so the servants did not light it up. Margery had lit a pair of candles, and had put them on her writing-table. She sat there, before some formidable looking account-books.

When Oliver came in she looked up with an air of relief.

“I thought papa would come with you,” she said. “And I know the very sight of accounts is enough to scare him away. Shut the door!—and come now and send me to sleep. I want to know exactly what Rex is doing at this moment, and what he does for the next half hour.”

Oliver thought it best to simply obey her. He had no plan of his own formed and he expected by obeying her to certainly get some clew as to the actual situation.

And he did.

Within five minutes Margery was in the drawing-room of the old Hall.

Hetty and her old aunt were there; no one else.

Margery seemed to be groping about, looking for something; and she said no word in answer to

Oliver's questions—till at last she suddenly exclaimed—

“Flowers! They are in the conservatory, standing among the flowers.”

“Tell me what they are saying,” said Oliver.

“They are talking of you,” said Margery.

“Of me!” exclaimed Oliver, starting. This was quite unexpected. “Tell me what they say.”

“‘Your brother is evidently paying attention to Hetty. This is what I wanted to speak to you about.’

“‘To Hetty! Impossible. He is not the man to care for any girl.’

“‘Why not?’

“‘Well—I think not. I am not obliged to give my reason for saying so, am I?’

“‘Yes; I think you are, since he is serious about Hetty, and I am responsible for her.’

“‘You?’

“‘Certainly. You know it, if you think a moment. We are not in California now; we are in England. I am Mrs. Joseph Carruthers, and I have Joseph's sister in my charge.’

“‘ You would not long be Mrs. Joseph Carruthers if——

“‘ Excuse me ; I intend to do my duty. You can see what Hetty Carruthers is. Do you think your brother is a man whom Joseph Carruthers would approve of as her husband ?’

“‘ No ; he is a scoundrel, a gambler and a rake. What do you want of me ?’

“‘ I want you to put a stop to it, otherwise I must send for Mr. Carruthers.’

“‘ Which you don’t want to do, with me in the neighborhood, till you know what my intentions are ?’

“‘ I don’t intend to consider myself in this matter. Mr. Heriot you are very unjust to me. I am thinking of Hetty. You know very well, if you will be cool for a moment, that I have my duty to do to her and to Joseph, quite apart from other matters ; and we are none of us bad all through, you know. I intend to do that duty.’

“‘ Yes, I believe you will. You are just one of those women that are such an odd mixture ! But I suppose no one is bad all through. I suppose

Oliver isn't, though sometimes I think he must be. Of course he doesn't care for Hetty; she may please him, but it's her money he really cares for.'

“‘She will be enormously rich.’

“‘She shall not be sacrificed to him then, if I can help it. I know more about him than I did while my father lived, since I have had access to all his papers. Oliver shall never have a penny from me, if he is starving, and he shall never marry any decent woman if I can prevent it, let alone a lovely girl like Miss Carruthers.’

“‘Now I know I can rely upon you. Oh, if you would only forget the past; a chivalrous, generous nature like yours should do so. Can you not feel some little friendship for me?—appreciate to some extent the struggle I am making? We must go back into the drawing-room or the others will think it so curious. But do think more kindly of me, Mr. Heriot.’”

Margery ceased speaking, and sat still as a statue. Oliver stood by her, almost motionless too, but palpitating with conflicting emotion, of which rage was the strongest.

Presently a cold devil seemed to enter him. He looked down at Margery's face, and spoke to himself.

““ She shall marry him, and kill him for me, and I will step into his place. I'll take everything he has, even Margery herself! I hate him—listen!” He bent over Margery.

“ They are old lovers and they were talking of this love. You have not heard them speak of anything else. *Wake!*”

CHAPTER XIII.

“THEY are old lovers and they were talking of their love !”

He had blotted everything else out of her mind, but had left this sentence to burn there. It seemed to be written within her in letters of flame, scorching her brain and racking her heart.

She gave him a strange, wild look when her eyes opened.

“If that’s true !” she said, “I won’t marry him.”

Oliver was startled. Had he gone too far? It was such an impetuous creature, this.

“Oh, you must,” he said, without staying to calculate his answer. “Don’t let her take him from you ! You are much stronger than she is, because, however much she cared for him, she preferred another man.”

“Only for money,” answered Margery.

“Well, you know how far such a sentiment as that would go with a Quixotic fellow like Rex. Do you really care for him?”

“Do I care !”

“Don’t throw him away then. Keep him. She can never take him from you while you care for him.”

He was experimenting in this conversation. He did not know whether he really had any influence over her when in her normal state. He had never tried to talk her into any given view of a subject. But he saw very quickly that he could do almost anything with her ; that her mind was practically swayed by his. This was only natural, considering how complete his control over her was in the hypnotic state. She did not seem inclined to answer or oppose anything he said, but to absorb and dwell upon the idea suggested by him. This was what he wanted. He was afraid of saying too much, for she seemed in such an easily influenced humor, and he had learned that at such times it was very possible to overshoot the mark. He suggested that it would be as well to go down to the drawing-

room, or else Sir Charles would be coming up to look for them.

“Yes,” said Margery wearily, “we had better go.”

She rose and led the way downstairs. In the drawing-room she sank into her accustomed chair and began to rock herself restlessly to and fro. Sir Charles had been studying the evening papers, and immediately began to read something which amused him, aloud to Oliver. This absorbed his attention, and he did not notice Margery’s downcast looks at the moment. This was a relief to both the others, who were equally anxious to keep Sir Charles in ignorance of the real events going on around him, and indeed he was. How little we know of each other’s lives—even of those we are nearest to, and who are dearest to us!

Oliver, studying her face from time to time, concluded that he had really gone too far, and determined to take the first opportunity of lightening the load he had left on her. It would not suit him now for her to throw Rex over. He had resolved that he would use her as his tool in the best way possible,

and he believed she would be of more use to him as his brother's wife than in any other capacity. There was little use in remaining in the drawing-room with these two while Sir Charles simply read aloud the newspaper; and Oliver wanted to think coolly. So he got up and lit a cigar and went out to smoke it on the terrace.

“Papa,” said Margery, the minute they were alone—deliberately interrupting him in the middle of a sentence—“I want to speak to you. Listen to me. I have been wanting to speak to you for ever so long; now my mind is made up. Put that paper down and listen to me.”

“My dear child, I am listening. But what on earth is the matter? Are you in trouble?”

Margery got up and began to walk about the room.

“I don't want to be married yet!” she exclaimed passionately. “I don't feel sure of Rex; I think I'm too young to be married.”

“A lovers' quarrel,” said Sir Charles, rubbing up his hair ruefully. “I thought so. Come, my dear, Rex is one of the best fellows in the world.

How has he put you out? He can't have meant it, I'm sure of that."

"Oh, no," said Margery, in the most utterly despondent tone of voice; still walking restlessly about and flinging her hands to and fro with an excitable action peculiar to her.

"Well, well, if he didn't mean it, dear child—Boys will be boys, you know—what has he done?"

"That's not the point," said Margery impatiently. "How can I go into that? I want you to help me."

"As if you couldn't rely on your old governor! You know I'm your slave, child. I've been miserable about you lately. But we old folks all know what lovers' quarrels are, and that they have to be put up with. You take things too seriously, my dear. Of course you can't help it—young people always do. But now tell me the whole truth about the matter. It's only some trifle, I'm sure; I've no doubt I can set it all right in a trice if you'll tell me about it."

"No, I can't do that," exclaimed Margery excitedly, "I can't do that! But I want you to

find some excuse for me to put off the marriage.”

“Are you jealous of him, then?” said Sir Charles, resolving at last to exhibit the great penetration and tact on which he prided himself. “Is it that pretty American girl, with the Yankee twang? Don’t be foolish, Madge; he don’t care a button about her. I know it’s almost impossible to take one’s eyes off her, she’s such a beauty; but, by Jove, the moment she opens her mouth any man would sheer off.”

“What, Hetty!” exclaimed Margery. “What are you talking about, papa? I never said I was jealous. I say I want to put the marriage off.”

“Well, there can be only one reason for that,” said this intelligent old gentleman, “and that’s jealousy. Don’t be hasty, my dear. Rex is an honest fellow, and if he fancied another girl more than you he’d own up to it, I’m certain. He’s not such a fool as to marry you unless he loves you.”

“Honest!” echoed Margery, in a low voice, but with a world of meaning in the way she uttered the word.

“ Yes, child, honest, and you’ve no right to insinuate anything else unless you’re quite certain;” said Sir Charles hotly. “ And it’s a hard matter for a girl like you, who knows nothing of the world, to *be* certain, let me tell you.”

“ I *am* certain,” said Margery passionately; “ I have means of knowing that you can’t guess at, even. I tell you I will *not* marry him! I will not!”

She spoke in sudden passion, as if any semblance of a calm discussion of the subject was no longer possible to her. She was standing in the middle of the room, her hand on the back of a chair.

As she spoke, Oliver pushed open the door and entered. He had heard her voice raised, and hurried in. Her last words fell on his ears like a pistol shot. He stood still and gazed at her. In a second he realized that this was the effect of his own words, which were still burning in her brain. Could he arrest this thought in its progress, before it became translated into action? His movement of the door had attracted her attention, and she looked up at him. He caught her gaze and held

her eyes with his. Raising his right hand and flinging it out towards her, he ejaculated the word "sleep" under his breath, but with as much force as if he had spoken aloud. Her eyelids quivered—her eyes lost their hold—and the lids drooped. She swayed slightly to and fro.

"She is fainting!" cried out Sir Charles, who, during this moment, had been simply gazing at her, lost in amazement at her last words. He rushed to her and took her in his arms.

"Poor little girl," he said tenderly; "she is altogether over-excited. What can have upset her so? I'll be glad when she's married!"

He let her sink into the chair by which she had been standing. She was not fainting, but she was evidently unconscious, and her eyelids drooped heavily on her cheeks. A strange look came on her face as of one who sees a vision. Oliver came and leaned over her, as she lay back in the chair, her head falling a little on one side like that of a drooping flower.

"What is the matter with her?" exclaimed Sir Charles in the greatest distress.

“I should get her some brandy,” said Oliver. He trusted to Sir Charles’s distress to prevent it being noticed that he did not offer to fetch the brandy, and to the old man’s quick impulsiveness to make him go for it himself. He was quite right in his calculations. Sir Charles rushed off instantly to the dining-room.

Oliver stooped over Margery and breathed on her forehead, then he stood upright and placed the tips of the fingers of his right hand just in the middle of her brow.

“You will marry Rex,” he said; “whatever happens to make you uneasy; nevertheless you will marry him as soon as he wishes.”

There was a second’s pause and then she slowly repeated his words.

“I shall marry Rex,” she said in a tone as if she were learning a lesson by rote, “whatever happens to make me uneasy; nevertheless I shall marry him as soon as he wishes.”

“Wake!” said Oliver, and made a few upward passes over her face and forehead. Sir Charles was returning, and Oliver watched her anxiously.

She opened her eyes, quiveringly, and closed them again ; then opened them wide. Sir Charles was in the room now, carrying a glass.

“ Have I fainted ? ” she said, looking from one to the other. “ Surely I haven't fainted ? I must have been asleep. ”

“ You've been very queer, my poor child, ” said Sir Charles ; “ drink this off, and you'll be better. ”

She took the glass and drank its contents mechanically. A flush began to rise in her cheeks and her eyes brightened a little.

“ I'm so glad to see you better ! ” said Sir Charles. “ I am *so* glad, Madge. You *are* better ? That's right. Now, tell me, you've only been over-excited about some nonsense, isn't it so ? You didn't mean anything of what you said about not marrying Rex ? ”

“ I shall marry Rex, ” said Margery very slowly and deliberately. “ Whatever happens, I shall marry him. ”

Oliver turned away and went over to the hearth. He stood there, looking into the fire. He did not want his face to be seen, for he fancied it was not

as entirely expressionless as he would wish. He could scarcely believe in his own power; he could hardly credit what he had this moment seen happen before his eyes. The phenomena of hypnotism and mesmerism are so miraculous in appearance that they often seem incredible to those who are the actual performers; little wonder then if outsiders, or, to speak more accurately, those who have never experimented, look upon them with doubt and dismay. Oliver was full of triumph; but a dreadful tremor disturbed this triumph. Was it the devil that made this girl's mind a mere instrument for him? It appeared impossible that it could be anything else or anything less!

Sir Charles was enchanted with Margery's changed mood.

—“I thought it was only nonsense!” he exclaimed. “But why did you talk like that? Well, well I won't ask you. You are ill and worn out, I'm sure. Don't try to talk now, but rest this evening, and we'll have a talk to-morrow. Isn't that best?”

“Yes, that's best,” said Margery, in a very

tired, indifferent voice. She was looking fixedly at Oliver, and seemed unable to take her eyes from him. He was standing with his back to her. Presently she arose and approached him, holding out her hands.

“What do you want me to do?” she asked. “Haven’t I said enough?”

Oliver started and turned round. He feared he had not waked her fully, and that she was still partly hypnotized. Sir Charles stared in amazement. Her tone was so very earnest that it was impossible to think her words were anything less than tragic. They all stood like this a moment, Oliver being quite unable to decide how to answer her. Sir Charles broke the spell.

“She’s not right yet, and she takes you for Rex,” he said, “that’s what it is. She’s got Rex on the brain. Madge, my dear, go to bed and sleep all this excitement off. I’ll bring you a night-cap myself. You must forget all this nonsense and stick to your good resolutions. Sleep on them, and make them firmer.”

He led her out of the room, she yielding from

what looked like indifference, but which Oliver much feared was a remainder of the hypnotic state. He felt sure he had not thoroughly awakened her. But there was nothing to be done. He stood by the fire, biting the end of his moustaches, and thinking over the situation in considerable perplexity. It is impossible for the hypnotized to conceal his or her servitude to the hypnotizer so long as the sleep lasts in any degree. It would not be safe for Sir Charles to see him with her unless she was entirely awake. The idea that she confused him with Rex in her over-excited state was brilliant, and Oliver thanked Sir Charles for it profoundly; but it could not be expected to continue as a satisfactory explanation. However, he had got her into the right frame of mind, that was one thing.

His deep rage against Rex filled all his mind and destroyed for the moment any feeling of doubt as to the righteousness of his actions. All he wanted was to *act*—to get the marriage over, and feel that Rex's cherished bride was a mere tool in his hands, a slave for him to order

about. What a triumphant feeling it would be! How that prig should be punished! Yes, indeed—punished, and made to pay. Success is an intoxicant; and Oliver was elated with the feeling that he knew one or two things more than his brother, and could hope to outwit him. With most of us wrong-doing is the result of impulse, when the mind is heated by anger or desire, and all better feelings are driven out by these passions. Oliver had been swayed to and fro hitherto; he had continually hesitated over what he was doing, with the fear of hell-fire before his eyes. But now this fear seemed gone; as a matter of fact it was only that he was more violently enraged than he had ever been in his life, and the strength of his passion drove out the fear of consequences for a much longer space of time than had ever happened before. A black hatred for Rex absorbed all his being, and he yielded to it as he might have yielded to any less devilish passion, feeling its force as one feels the fury of a runaway horse, and leaving every thought of fear or of punishment till this

should be over. It was deeply planted—right down in the deep recesses of his nature. He was one of those persons who readily feel themselves ill-used; if it is not their friends who ill-use them it is their enemies, or else it is fate or circumstances. Oliver was not driven to quarrel with abstractions; he had felt ill-used by his father, and still more so by Rex. This cause of injustice done him had only to blossom out into the fierce hatred and longing for revenge which he now felt; and it had the firm foothold of a permanent sense of injury.

That night brought him no sleep—a very unusual thing for him. Like most profligates he habitually slept well. But this night was the first of a long series; insomnia made its initial visit to him. He saw something which seemed like a crime, at the end of a vista of strange experiences, all of which fed his longing for triumph. His mind was intoxicated with the visions in which his figure always stood erect, while all others fell before him or crouched at his feet. He felt like a gambler with a full hand.

The delirium was on him; he must pass down that vista and taste every delight it had to offer him, till he reached the very end with all its triumph and horror.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARGERIE slept heavily all that night, waking late the next day. She was very quiet, and animated by a fixed resolution—that which she had last expressed. She seemed to have no idea in her mind but that of her wedding, and to be entirely absorbed in planning the arrangements and making everything as smooth and easy as possible. Sir Charles was relieved beyond words to find her in this delightful—and, as it seemed to him, thoroughly sane and sensible humor. Oliver did not see her till lunch-time, when he very carefully watched and studied her. Everything appeared to have faded from her mind except the one absorbing thought of her approaching marriage. This pleased him nearly as much as it pleased Sir Charles, though from very different reasons. Rex, when he came in early in the afternoon, was also well satisfied to find her in this calm

mood. She had seemed to him very variable and capricious of late, and, though she had struggled hard to conceal her emotions from him, he had been convinced that something was disturbing her. That was all over, so he concluded—some girlish capriciousness—and Margery was herself, only quieter and of more set purpose than was usual with her.

Oliver felt sure that the impression he had left on her mind was strong enough to work itself out to the end without any further interference from him, and he determined to leave well alone. He would have had to exercise greater self-control than he found himself capable of at the moment to do otherwise; for as soon as Rex's voice was heard in the house he was seized with a murderous rage. He could not trust himself near him. The words Rex had used of him to Mrs. Carruthers came instantly back, singing through his head, and he felt the insane desire to go and throttle him, which with passionate men is the result of receiving an insult—especially a well-deserved one. But that would not do. He could not

afford any hasty or reckless retaliation. He left the house and walked aimlessly away through the fields, only determined to get safely out of reach.

But at last he awoke to the fact that he was walking nowhere, in a very objectless manner. He would have sold his soul had there been market for it, to go off to some pleasant haunts in town. But want of money inexorably prevented him. What should he do then? He remembered Hetty, who had been for some time out of his mind. There was quite a serious motive in his mind for winning her, now that Rex had vowed he should not. And besides, she would be rich; she might be of great use if his other plans should fail in any way.

So he turned and took another path which led him to the old Hall, and presented himself there as an early afternoon caller. Mrs. Carruthers was just going out herself, and no doubt would have managed to have made him believe that Hetty was not at home had not that young lady appeared at the hall door. She came, with her old aunt leaning on her arm, to see Mrs. Carruthers drive off. This

was one of the ceremonies of the day, which always had to be duly witnessed. Mrs. Carruthers delighted in creating a sensation, even if it was only in old Aunt Hetty's simple mind. She loved to drive her spirited horses herself in their American harness, which made the yokels stare; and she dressed herself for it in the most perfectly correct manner, and yet one that made her seem like a tropical bird among barn fowls when she met a chaise full of country ladies in the lanes. What an unceasing wonder she was to these good creatures, some of whom really seemed to think her hardly human. Her hands were so very much smaller than any others in the county, and yet she drove a pair of horses such as one would only expect a very masculine woman to manage; and who ever wore such wonderful little shoes, and skirts so wonderfully furbelowed, before in country lanes? So perfectly was she equipped that it was indeed quite an occasion to have the chance of seeing her get into her carriage. Oliver assisted at the ceremony with all possible homage; for he knew he was not much in favor with this imperi-

ous little lady, and that spite of all the sweetness of her smiles she would very easily find an excuse to cut him out of her visiting list. He was no more deceived in her than she was in him. He knew quite well that she was one with whom sweetness was second nature; that she would smile even when sticking the knife in, should she ever decide to commit a murder in that disagreeable way.

She drove off at last, and Oliver went in with the others to the library fire. Aunt Hetty ensconced herself in her favorite chair and dozed; and Oliver managed to get through the afternoon pleasantly enough. The young Hetty was lovely to look at, excited and flushed beyond her wont with the pleasure of his presence and the freedom from Mrs. Carruthers' repression. She talked more readily than he had ever heard her, and succeeded in amusing him more effectually than any woman ever had done. He reflected that life really would not be altogether impossible with such a quaint, beautiful creature, provided she had plenty of money. But would the others ever

let him have her and her money? "That little Mrs. Carruthers," as he mentally called her, was an almost hopeless obstacle. Could he not get at that secret which lay between her and Rex, and intimidate her.

If Hetty could have seen his mind! Every moment that he passed with her she was falling more hopelessly in love. He was entirely free from the stiffness, the reserved manner, which chilled and frightened her with most Englishmen; and to her ears his voice and speech were marvellously soft and melodious. He literally charmed her; and when Mrs. Carruthers came back again late in the afternoon she found the trio still sitting over the library fire, holding a blind man's holiday. Other callers had been, but they had been told Mrs. Carruthers was out; so Oliver had had it all his own way, and had made the running in good earnest. Never had Hetty looked such a vision of beauty as when Mrs. Carruthers came into the room—such a wonderful cosmetic is pleasure. Mrs. Carruthers saw it instantly, and understood the meaning of this beauty only too

well. She came among them, to warm her hands at the fire, in the sweetest, most childlike manner, and with the frankest air imaginable. Oliver, studying her with sharpened wits, felt sure she would write to her husband by the next mail. How spiteful she made him feel with her smile that made one think of bon-bons! He determined, from that moment, that he would assume the footing of accepted lover as quickly as possible.

And so he did; it afforded him a passable pastime while Hawthorndene was given up to wedding preparations, and he was unable to vary the monotony from sheer want of cash. He managed Mrs. Carruthers so cleverly that she could not actually turn him out; he gave her no excuse. He won Hetty absolutely, so that the girl worshipped him with her whole ingenuous heart, and thought the sun only shone when he was present. But he never actually proposed to her—he was “hedging”—and he wanted to see Margery married, and find out how great his power over her would be, before he showed his hand with Hetty.

CHAPTER XV.

THE wedding-day came. Margery's quiet and earnest mood had lasted uninterruptedly. Nothing had occurred to rouse her from it, and Oliver had carefully avoided doing so. Its intensity had gradually faded, so that she became simply her natural self; what she was before Mrs. Carruthers had appeared on the scene, or any abnormal powers had been developed in her. The misery she had endured had left its mark, both on her mind, and on her face, but these were lost sight of in her immediate happiness. It was Margery Hawthorn in her natural state, gay, merry, warm-hearted, trusting, who dressed herself in her white wedding dress.

Everything was perfect, from the weather to the bride's bouquet.

The little village church was massed with flowers and filled with the country people, so that it

seemed quite transformed. Mrs. Carruthers came in late in a wonderful costume, the like of which had never been seen in the neighborhood before, and looking like a flower; she absorbed the attention of most persons present. But the bride and bridegroom were much too happy to care in the least whether other people thought them the centre of attraction, or not. Hetty, with her piquant beauty, left the seven staid young ladies who acted as bride's-maids with her completely in the shadow; they seemed to have been invented only as a setting for her. Oliver, who was best man, and secretly a little sulky over the boredom of it, feasted his eyes on her. The only other object which seemed to have much interest for him was the necklace on Margery's neck. She wore the Heriot diamonds, and wonderfully well they became her.

Among the guests in the church were two strangers whom everyone stared at in surprise. They were evidently Jews, and wore diamonds worthy of a Rothschild. They came in very late, sat down quietly, and watched the service to the

end. They ensconced themselves in the porch to watch the wedding party go out, and when Oliver came by with Hetty on his arm one of them gently touched him on the arm. Oliver had not noticed them before, and he turned ashen pale.

“ I’ll come up to town to-morrow, and see you,” he murmured, and hurried Hetty out of the porch and into the carriage.

The two men quietly walked away down the road, each lighting a cigar. They went to the Heriot Arms and there demanded lunch. In the course of that lunch they learned a great deal. It was Mr. Rex, not Mr. Oliver, who had married the heiress of Hawthorndene. Certainly, down here in the neighborhood there had never been any doubt or confusion about that; though it was true that at one time Mr. Oliver was thought to be sweet on Miss Margery. But that was before Mr. Rex came home from California. Since then he’d had it all his own way. And the beautiful young lady, the first bride’s-maid? Ah, she was a great match, very rich, much richer than Miss Hawthorn. People said she was secretly engaged

to Mr. Oliver, but that she would never be allowed to marry him.

EXTRACT FROM MRS. REGINALD HERIOT'S
DIARY.

“ My little book, I have something pleasant to record in you, for the first time. Yes, the first time ! Every page hitherto written has been the record of perplexity or distress—or what seemed like despair. Now I am so happy I cannot believe in ever feeling any distress again.

“ Why did I ever doubt Rex's love for me ? How could I ever doubt it ? It seems to enwrap me now like a warm soft cloud that veils me from every possibility of trouble or of doubt.

“ What a beautiful world this is ! The sands gleam like silver in the sunshine to-day and the sea seems to be a vast turquoise. How perfectly still it is ! There is the faint sense of life, of vibration in it that makes its stillness the more fascinating. It is just like my heart—silent from

intensity of content, but beating all the while, and ready to flame out into excitement at a touch.

“ Why was I ever unhappy, or jealous, or doubting? Because I was not with Rex, I suppose. Now I shall never be unhappy again. The fullness of content I feel is so profound that it must last always; I can never exhaust it. I fancy I am like one favored being in a dry land where there is no water—one who is given the secret of a magic well full of sweetness. People seem to grow old and tired in this world, but that is because they have no magic well like mine to drink from—a deep well of perfect love and trust and mutual confidence.

“ What a wonderful honeymoon mine has been.—why do I say has been! It is only half over. But I find it hard to believe that week after week can follow on, so full of gay contentment. They say the bride is happy whom the sun shines on. It shone on my wedding-day—it has shone ever since; there has not been one drop of rain or one cloud. Surely never was a bride so fortunate. All day long we have been out in our little boat,

dreaming the hours away between the blue sea and the blue sky, separated by the atmosphere of love and sunshine from all the cruel world. Well, when the rain comes—or when we have to be among other people again—still I am confident this atmosphere will be round us always. We shall always be in the sunshine of love now. My soul, my very soul, seems to have become a part of the man I love. I can never feel any shadow between us again. My Rex, why didn't I trust you always! That's what puzzles me. I suppose it was the intensity of my love made me jealous. Now I love you too well for such folly, and added intensity has given me perfect confidence.

“To-day Rex has left me for the first time, to go up to town to see his solicitors about something or other. I thought I should suffer when I was left alone for the first time, and so I did, for a few minutes. It was like a stab at my heart—a knife stuck into me—to see him go off by the train and leave me. But that was only for a few minutes; it left me directly, and I fell into one long dream

of memory—of his smile, of his tenderness, of his love—Ah, Rex! my dear Rex!—and I am dwelling deeply in it still. I could sit and dream and dream and remember for months and years, and yet be happy. But that would never be unless I lost him, and I shall never lose him; for when he dies I shall die at the same moment, and nothing but death can part us!

“There, there he is! There he is! crossing the sands. Why is he back so quickly? Could he not bear to be away from me? I must fly to meet him. Good-bye, little book, till I am sad or alone again.”

Margery Heriot hurried down the staircase of the pretty cottage in which she was spending her happy honeymoon, and went quickly into the wide porch, wreathed with a great mass of clustering ivy. The place was a perfect nook of fairyland, surrounded by green grass and trees and shrubs, yet standing close upon the sand and sea. Rex had seen it by chance one day and determined to stay in its deep restfulness as long as Mar-

gery was content, and was not Margery content? She stood framed in the porch like a goddess, and her chief charm was not that of beauty so much as supreme happiness. But she was very beautiful at this time, her vivid face full of glow, her expressive eyes speaking sweet thoughts.

The man she had come to meet quickly approached the house. As he neared it, suddenly Margery's face changed. "My God!" she exclaimed.

It was Oliver.

She had almost forgotten his existence. She didn't want to see him. She moved back, thinking to retreat into the cottage and deny herself to him, for he seemed to bring some of the old distress with him.

But already he stood in the porch, and his gaze had caught hers. She stared blankly back at him.

"You don't seem very pleased to see me," he observed, in a dry tone. "You're in the 'Edwin and Angelina' condition yet then? You don't want either a friend or an enemy. That's nice for you; but mayn't I stay a minute or two?"

Margery sank down on the bench in the porch, under the shadow of the heavy drooping ivy.

“Why, of course I’m pleased to see you,” she said, trying to recover herself; “only you startled me. I thought you were Rex. Really, I took you for him as you crossed the sands, and I couldn’t think what had brought him back so suddenly. He’s gone up to town,” she added, by way of explanation.

“Oh, I know that,” he answered; and then, after a pause, “Don’t you think it’s chilly here? Mayn’t we go in?”

“Why, of course,” said Margery, rising. She led the way into the drawing-room, which seemed so little and so low after the great rooms at Hawthorndene; but how she loved it and its quaint homeliness! The tables were crowded with flowers, which were a passion with her. On her writing-table lay her diary; but it was closed and locked. That was the one confidante who knew more of her than Rex, as yet. She had not come to the hour when she would give it him to read; she was intending to do it; but she did not want the idea of her jealousy to bring any cloud on their content.

And as it was all a thing of the past she thought it might wait.

A fire burned on the hearth, looking bright and pleasant. Margery sat down beside it, in a low chair, and said nothing, leaving Oliver to commence the conversation. He began to talk, in a desultory way, about Sir Charles and the doings at Hawthorndene. Margery sat idly looking at the fire. Suddenly she felt his hand on her forehead, and heard the dreadful word "Sleep!" in her ears. A profound wave of stupor swept suddenly over her brain. She struggled against it—cried out inarticulately—tried to rise, but Oliver's hand was passing over her face; he reiterated the word of command. Her arms fell powerless at her sides, and her eyelids drooped as though weighed down by mill-stones.

TWO DAYS LATER.

EXTRACT FROM MRS. REGINALD HERIOT'S
DIARY.

"I HAVE to open this book, for I must write down my feelings, since I cannot speak them.

“Once again I write to record terror, and perplexity, and almost despair.

“It was not Rex whom I met at the door, but that other, so terribly like him that he deceives even my loving eyes at a little distance.

“He made me sleep. I could not resist. He changed me, made me another creature, a different woman.

“He wanted money, and I had to get it for him. When I woke I knew nothing else than that, and that I was not to let Rex know he had been here. I could not disobey him or even question him. I was spellbound.

“He went immediately, and left me alone. I was not really alone though; it seemed as if his spirit was by my side, compelling me to act.

“That money must be got, and sent to him. It had to be done. I had no power to dispute the fact. Nor have I now. I have to do it, and I do not know how. I did not know then, except by an awful plan which filled my soul with horror; but I had to do it. There was no help for it. There was no other way.

“Rex was not to be back till the following day. I took the next train to town and went straight to the bank, where I had left the Heriot diamonds with my mother’s jewels. My mother’s pretty things were valuable, but not sufficiently so; if I sacrificed them all they would not bring what Oliver demanded. I knew that I must steal, that I must deceive Rex, but it did not trouble me. I only knew I had to do it, and I went to work like one in a dream, helplessly obeying my orders.

“I took out the diamonds and went straight to our family jewellers in Bond Street, where I know one of the partners very well. I thought it would be easier to tell him what I wanted than a stranger, and besides he knew the value of the stones very well, having re-set them once for Mrs. Heriot. I should have to humiliate myself to him to get him to preserve secrecy; but I must bear that. I felt at all events I could trust him.

“Never shall I forget the blow he dealt me! Shall I ever recover from it?

“I saw him in his own private room and tremblingly told him that I had a dreadful necessity to

realize on the diamonds; that I preferred only to have an advance on them, as I must redeem them when I could and restore them safely. Oh, how my pride suffered as I talked to this man! He seemed to look at me so strangely from time to time.

“He took the jewels from me and turned them over in his hands. Suddenly he rose, and excusing himself left the room for a few moments, carrying them with him. Presently he brought them back, put them on the table and looked at me more strangely than ever.

“‘I am very sorry,’ he said in a low, very distinct voice. ‘I don’t know if you are aware of it, but I am afraid I cannot help you. These are not the Heriot diamonds. These are paste.’

“I started up as if electrified, and stood trembling all over. At last I found my voice.

“‘It’s too late to go back to the bank,’ I said. ‘Will you keep them for me? and will you keep all this secret? for my sake, for my father’s? for my husband’s? I must think what to do!’

“He promised, and I left him and came home, in a hopeless daze.

“Of course I understood what had happened. And I understood what a devil Oliver Heriot is. An incarnate devil he must be! Yet I cannot resist his will. I know I have to obey him—I know I have to get that money for him. What am I to do?

“Oh, where is my happiness flown? Rex will be back soon—thank Heaven, he has been delayed. I don’t want him to come—I don’t want him to come! Is not that horrible!”

CHAPTER XVI.

MARGERY was sitting alone in her room writing in her diary. She laid down her pen at last, unable to write more, for the thoughts in her mind seemed too horrible for words. That she did not want Rex to return—that she dared not face him—that she did not know how to face him—filled her with dismay. Could she be held responsible for the disappearance of the Heriot diamonds? Was it in any way her doing or her fault? Impossible! no one demurred at Oliver's taking them to town—no one would have dreamed of doing so; for though a profligate, he was a Heriot, and had never been known to do anything actually dishonest. She felt grateful for one thing only in the whole affair—that she had given the diamonds into Oliver's charge in Rex's presence. Why she did so she could not tell; she wondered at it now; and when it occurred to her that Oliver had perhaps used his influence

over her to make her do it, she laughed at herself for such a far-fetched notion. She was quite unable to measure, or even to guess at, the extent of his power over her. The inexplicable impulses which came to her sometimes, and which she felt absolutely compelled to obey—these she imagined sprang from the impulsiveness and variability of her own nature. It distressed and perplexed her to try and find out where her own will ceased to act, and she tried to prevent herself from thinking of the subject.

But it was impossible! Why was she bowed down now with the overpowering sense that she had to find this money for Oliver? Why, when he had absolutely no kind of claim on her? Her mind tried to struggle from the spell that was on it, to free itself from the shackles that held it, but the effort was useless. She was as incapable of removing the idea that oppressed her from her mind, as a person who is drugged is incapable of physical movement.

She sat at the table, still, lost in thought, or rather in the desperate attempt to think. She had a few hours yet before Rex's return to determine what to

do. Her longing was to tell him everything, to show him her diary, to get him to help her. If she had done this, all the rest of her life would have been changed. If she had given up her will to Rex as she had given it to Oliver, his power over her would have been much the stronger because of the affection between them. But it was not to be. Sitting there alone with her thoughts it seemed to her that she entered into some sort of sleep, though her eyes were open; it seemed to her that she felt a touch on her forehead, and that *something* stood beside her! No—not something—it was no indefinite presence; though invisible, it was no unknown shadow—it was Oliver.

She felt him as plainly as though he were physically present; but the distress was infinitely greater. A chill passed through all her frame, the dread chill of the supernatural, and the cold from it benumbed her mind and heart and made her a helpless subject, without power to think or feel for herself. She only knew she had to obey the awful power that controlled her.

So ignorant are we of the powers we wield, that

Oliver was simply trying an experiment, and was unable to ascertain whether he was successful. He resolved to put it to the test, and left her with an absolute command, which she had to obey at once, and whether she did so or not would prove to him whether she had understood his voice—whether he had indeed conquered matters and was able to influence her as easily from a distance as when he actually touched her and breathed on her.

He found it was so. His success exceeded his wildest expectations.

“Before I sleep,” said Margery to herself when the cold chill began to leave her a little, “I must write to Oliver and tell him I will get that money for him immediately.”

She could not rest till this was done ; when the note—which consisted simply of those words—was written, she put on a cloak and went out to post it, late though it was.

When she came back she lay down on a couch in the drawing-room, wrapped in her cloak. She could not bring herself to go back to her own room. She felt a horror of it. She had the hopeless fear

upon her which always affects those who believe themselves haunted. All other thoughts were driven out of her mind by the one dread of feeling that cold touch again—of becoming aware of that unearthly presence beside her! Not even the miserable consciousness that she had no idea how to get this money had the power to dispel the overmastering dread that made her quiver. The thought that she had no means of satisfying the demand upon her came back into her mind at intervals, but each time she said wildly to herself that some way would come—some inspiration. It would have to be done—there was no escape. She had to find the way for herself; that she knew. She could never tell Rex anything—never! That was firmly fixed in her mind and she had it before her mental eyes always as a positive certainty. She would be lost, ruined, unhappy forever, if she took Rex into her confidence in any particular. Oliver had taken good care in his ghostly visitation, to leave this impression thoroughly implanted. He had reiterated and reiterated the words “You will be lost, ruined, unhappy forever if you tell Rex any-

thing whatever about me." Her precious happiness! How she loved Rex Heriot! Her poor faithful heart beat for him only; she lived for him only. She would suffer anything, bear anything, do anything, so that the joy she found with her husband should never be disturbed. A quivering martyr, she lay there through the long hours of the night, resolved only upon any sacrifice that might be necessary to retain her happiness.

In the morning, when the housemaid came to open the drawing-room shutters she found the lamps still burning, and Mrs. Heriot lying on the couch in a restless, broken sleep, wrapped in her fur cloak. The girl was frightened and went for the other servants. When Margery opened her eyes intelligently she found herself in a flower-scented room lit with sunshine; the servants were grouped round her—the cook was pouring raw brandy down her throat, the only specific she had any respect for personally; the first few drops had had a miraculous effect;—in the doorway stood Rex, aghast, amazed. He was wrapped up in a long ulster, with a travelling cap firmly wedged on

to his head, just as he had come out of the night train. At the sight of him all the loving woman in Margery was alive, and for the moment everything else was forgotten ; it seemed as though she had come out of a nightmare to the fresh sweetness of natural life. She sprang from the sofa, rushed to him and flung her arms round his neck. What a moment of supreme joy that was when she hid her face on his shoulder and forgot everything in the world, everything she had ever felt or thought except her love for him, her confidence in him ! This, at least, was a man, a noble creature to confide in and to trust. It was like salve on a wound, the very sense of his nobility and his strong presence.

He held her in his arms and stroked the dark hair that had come unloosed and lay all tossed upon her shoulders.

“ Has she been ill ? ” he said.

“ I didn't know she was ill, sir, ” said the housemaid. “ Not till I found her here this morning. ”

Rex said nothing more, but lifted Margery in his arms and carried her upstairs into her own room. He was a great strong fellow, and though Margery

was by no means ethereal, it was very easy for him to do this. He enjoyed the sense of power it gave him. He locked the door when he had laid her on her bed, and throwing off his ulster, set himself to wait upon her with all the delicacy and tenderness of a true nurse. Strong men who have the capacity for protection are usually very tender; and so it was with Rex. The combination of these characteristics was partly what made him so lovable. Margery clung to him with the desperate feeling that he was the only being who could save her, and yet knew that she could never ask him to do so. Perhaps this consciousness, the continual consciousness of the spell upon her, made her cling to him even the more. He petted and nursed her, thinking that she would grow calm and become like herself; but instead of that she seemed to become more acutely distressed every moment. It was so—her love for him made her position the more terrible. She said nothing, only lay in his arms, white, breathing with difficulty, speechless and dry-eyed. Always in her mind was the one thought—the money. How was it to be got?

With Rex's arms around her and his love so close, yet he might have been at the other side of the Atlantic for any good he could be to her. The confidence between them was gone—shattered! In reality they were as strangers, living lives so different that neither could ever hope again to understand the other.

At last she grew, to outward appearance, calmer; and Rex left her for a little while to make his toilet. He returned, fresh as a daisy, and had breakfast brought to Margery's room, cajoling her to take a little, while he made a genuine meal. Margery lay and watched him and wondered at moments which was the reality—this healthy, wholesome figure of the daylight, or that uncanny and evil one of the night. Could both be? So strangely alike too!—it seemed incredible. But it was only too true. The two images co-existed in her brain like the types of good and evil. Presently Rex began talking of what had kept him in town. He had been signing settlements, and his will, which, he explained to her, left everything absolutely to herself and her heirs. Not a farthing

to Oliver!—his only near relation. And then he went on to say that it was chiefly Oliver who had kept him in town. He said that Oliver was in a worse scrape than ever and would soon be “chucked” by his own set at the place he was going. Some of his creditors had been led to believe that it was he who was to marry Margery, and that his debts would be paid on his marriage; but that was a trifling circumstance compared to the debts of honor he had contracted in the frantic endeavor to right himself.

“He’s been trying to get over me in every conceivable way,” said Rex, “personally, through the solicitors, even through mutual friends. But to hand over two or three thousand pounds to a hopeless gambler would be altogether too idiotic. It wouldn’t do him a particle of good. I’m sorry for him; he’ll soon have every front door shut on him. But it’s his own fault. There, I won’t talk of him any more. I don’t know why I should trouble you about it when, you’re so ill. Why, you are whiter than ever!”

Margery was afraid to be alone for a moment,

and would not let Rex leave her. She was in a state of hopeless procrastination, unable to decide how to act, unable to invent any plan. She could not endure her distress of mind unless she had Rex by her side, holding her hand, giving her the sense of comfort by his presence. Late in the day, having gathered a little courage, she told him of her hurried journey to town, of her having taken the diamonds from the bank to her jewellers. She told him it was because she wanted some money for herself in a hurry, more money than she had at her own account; that she had intended to borrow on them, but had been advised not to do so.

Having started on this story she was obliged to be circumstantial. She told him her idea was to borrow the money till she could sell one of her own farms and replace it. Her dread was that if she ceased speaking he would ask her a question she would not be able to answer without hesitation, and so she went on with her tale, trying to disarm him of all points. She said she lost the money in a foolish speculation, and begged him

not to ask her any questions, because she was worried over it and did not want to have to go into it.

“So this is what made you so ill!” said Rex. “Well, you are rich enough to indulge in foolish speculations; but still, this is rather a large order. However, if you would really rather not talk about it I won’t bother you at present. Only I hope to Heaven *you* haven’t taken to gambling. Forgive me, dear, I didn’t mean anything; but you know stock exchange speculation is simply gambling under another name; and I suppose that is where you’re money’s gone. Now, do you want me to get the money for you? Shall I write to town now? I must have you look yourself again at any cost! But, Madge, be a sensible girl and tell me all about it, and let me settle it all for you.”

“Don’t ask me!” she said.

“All right,” answered Rex. Be it remembered, it was still their honeymoon.

And so it was settled. He wrote to her solicitors, and Margery, worn out by the mental excite-

ment, fell off into a sudden sleep of exhaustion. Rex took the opportunity to go out of the room for a little while, and having written his letter took it to the post himself.

Margery imagined that she had made herself safe at all points. She would not have felt it necessary to tell Rex of her journey to London but for the servants. She thought now she had dealt with everything they knew. She forgot that servants always know everything, and generally a great deal more than has ever happened. At all events they are to be trusted to know all that *has* happened. Margery supposed that no one had seen Oliver come or go. But the cook, an observant lady, had been looking out of a side window when he arrived ; had taken him for Rex, and was much surprised at his absence later on. She was anxious to get at the bottom of this mystery, so she managed to waylay Rex on his return from the post, in order to express her deep sympathy with Mrs. Heriot, and to ask if she could not do something for her.

“I’m afraid you must have thought us very

neglectful, sir, to let the mistress be downstairs ill all night; but we none of us knew she was ill. But she's never been the same, sir, since that afternoon you came back so sudden and went away again so soon—you'll remember, sir, three days ago. She has been upset ever since."

"What on earth are you talking about?" said Rex staring at the woman in unfeigned amazement.

"Well, sir," said the woman coughing apologetically, "I saw you come in myself or else perhaps none of us would have known it."

"Saw me come in?" repeated Rex, in a profound surprise. "Well, just tell me what you did see."

She explained to him how she was looking out of a side-window and saw him walking over the sand to the house; how Margery had come to meet him and they had gone into the drawing-room and talked for some time, and then he had gone away back to the station. "And very much surprised I was, sir," said she, "for I was just going off myself to get in the things for your dinner."

“ Thanks,” said Rex rather absently. “ Well—that’s all right. I was surprised at your amount of information, that was all, not having seen any of the servants myself.”

He walked a little away from the house as if to get more air; and then stood still suddenly and uttered one word aloud—

“ Oliver ! ”

He stood like a statue, thinking. There was only one possible conclusion to draw. Oliver had spoken very significantly to him before he went to live at Hawthorndene, on that day when they met in the harness room at Heriot Hall. Every word of Oliver’s came back to his mind now. No doubt he had been supplanted in Margery’s heart. There could be no other explanation.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN hour later Rex went into the house again, and went slowly up the stairs to Margery's room. She was asleep. He stood and looked at her a moment, and then sat wearily down in a chair near her.

“She seemed to love me so well!” he said to himself. “What an actress! How wicked women are.”

He did not form any plan of action except that he intended to spare her. His was not a vindictive jealousy, but a suffering one. The conviction that the happiness of his life was gone entered into him like a deep wound. So far as Margery was concerned, pain and grief were the only feelings he was conscious of.

Now and again a flash of bitterness lit up his soul; it was when, in the weary revolution of thought, the image of Oliver came before his

mental vision. A spasm of hatred and rage passed through him then which, when it had gone, filled him with horror. It was unlike anything he had hitherto experienced. True, the Heriot temper lurked deep down in him somewhere; once or twice in his life he had been carried away by blind fury. It was always in self-defence. The evil in him was not active. When once it was roused it was terrible, and terrified even himself. He felt he could kill Oliver. When he thought of him, his hands opened and closed again as they lay on his knees. There is no hatred like that between blood relations when once it is roused. And these two were so near—and so like!—so terribly like when the same side of the character predominated. That likeness, that nearness, made the hatred so much more horribly intense.

That Margery loved him! was ready to sacrifice herself for him!—It seemed to Rex it would have been so much easier to bear this if the man her heart had gone to had been utterly unlike him, his opposite, instead of this man he despised so, yet who was so near and so like himself. Of

course we always think if a pain were different from what it actually happens to be, it would be easier to bear. To Rex, however, the position he was in seemed unique in its hatefulness.

Oliver was like him ; yes, so like him as to be mistaken for him. But he was the worst side, the ugly side, of himself---a side so ugly that he hated and despised it.

But Margery preferred it. She loved it as she could not love himself. Probably the comfort she found in his presence, the clinging that seemed so like love, was merely because of his likeness to Oliver !

No doubt she had loved Oliver long ago, before Rex came back from California. She had accepted himself because he was the heir ; Oliver had probably driven her into the marriage in order that she should be able to supply him with funds.

Was Oliver actually her lover ?

Oh, the awful pangs of jealousy ! The mental and physical agony ! Rex had never tasted them till that moment. Poor Margery had already suffered them out to the bitter end for him. But

he experienced them as something new, something unexpected, horrible, undeserved, almost unimaginable. But true!—Yes, true. His head drooped as the bitterness of it entered his soul.

Hitherto he had always been able to hold his head high. He had been the favorite son, the trusted one, the honest steward, the one his father had leaned on, the one Margery had preferred.

And now that he felt she no longer preferred him all that pride which had been his pleasure was gone at one blow. He had not guessed till now how much he cared for her, how absolutely she was the centre of his life. His pride was wounded in its tenderest place. Nowhere else could he have been hurt so sorely. He had loved her so well, so utterly, in such confidence! And all the while she had been deceiving him, marrying him only for money, preferring this scoundrel to himself. His hands opened and closed again.

Then came the revulsion—the reaction.

Could there be any mistake? Had she done it out of pity? Perhaps she could explain it all to him very simply if he asked her to.

He leaned forward and looked at her again. She slept deeply and quietly, from profound exhaustion. There were deep marks of suffering on her face which, as Rex studied them, seemed to him new. At all events they had never been so deep before. What was there that could make her suffer, except her own guilt? Nothing. There could be nothing else.

It was not too late yet to send a telegram to Margery's solicitors, countermanding the orders given in his letter. The idea of doing this came to him with a sense of relief. He would spare her as well as he could, but he would punish the scoundrel who had stolen her love from him. He would protect her from the consequences of her foolish love, despite herself.

Fired by this sudden thought, he hastily went out of the room, out of the house, and walked to the post-office. In a few minutes he had framed and sent a message.

This relieved him. He told himself he was relieved because he had served Margery's interests. But underneath this superficial feeling was a keen

glow of satisfaction at having frustrated Oliver's plans.

That night, and the next day, seemed very strange to these two. Margery was timid, anxious, silent, Rex was absorbed and absent; he kept away from her as much as possible. Margery imagined he was annoyed with her for her secrecy. This she had expected; she was not surprised, but took it as a deserved punishment. She was helpless, powerless; she had no will to save herself from this punishment. All she could do was to bear it patiently. There were none of the accustomed smiles on her face; its bright vivacity was gone. A haggardness had fallen upon it, and the drawn lines showed the sharpness of her suffering. The terrible thing to her was that Rex's absenting himself from her so much seemed to throw her back upon Oliver; that dreaded shade was always at her side, terrifying her, controlling her will, controlling her thoughts. When Rex held her hand in his she lost this terror for the moment through the sheer comfort of wholesome human companionship. But now this comfort was

denied her; and she was too humble to ask for it.

Two days passed like this. Rex never referred to the subject of the money again, nor did Margery; she had not the courage to. But she grew more and more uneasy at Rex's silence. What did it mean? What had he done? Why had he not received an answer from the solicitors and spoken of it to her, as a matter of course?

At last driven by the controlling force that was upon her she asked him what he had done.

"Countermanded the order," he said briefly. "Second thoughts are best; you are able to give your own orders, and I can't do anything for you in a matter about which you won't give me your confidence."

She sank back in her chair, her eyes wide open, and fixed upon him.

What should she do?

Of course she could write herself, realize upon some of her own property, and hand the money over to Oliver. That was easily done now; but by doing it, without explanation, she de-

stroyed the confidence between them, and their happiness together, forever and ever.

She saw that very plainly. She was unable to free her will from the control upon it; but where Rex was concerned her intelligence could not be blinded absolutely. She was sacrificing her whole life. The horrible consciousness of this paralyzed her, as she sat silently looking at her husband. He had turned away from her, and was lighting a cigar. When it was lit he went out.

No caress, no look—a blank. Well, it was deserved. She cowered before this consciousness. A good woman, suffering a punishment she believes to be deserved, suffers as nothing else can that lives. For in her there is the innate sense of rectitude highly developed; and it is cultivated by tradition and training to the utmost point. There is no half-way house for a noble woman; no mode of excuse which will serve her as an aid in the hour of darkness. She has been taught the pure code of ethics, which is considered unnecessary for men; nobility and truth in all things. God help her if she fails in any particular!

Margery had failed. She knew it. Her punishment was already upon her in that knowledge. How it hurt! Rex, for whom she would have given her heart's blood, knew that she had some secret she dared not tell him! She recognized that he probably thought it would be much worse than it was. But never for one second, never during one flash of thought did she guess what he did think.

She was more stupefied by the sense of her own impotence than anything else. Her will was so crushed—she was in a state of such mortal terror that she had no idea how to act.

Surely if she gave Oliver all he wanted he would cease to trouble her, and she would begin to repair her errors! She would never put herself in his power again. She would recover her strength and defy him. Her native courage gave her this hope.

Alas, poor Margery! How little does the ordinary world know of the mysterious powers which rule its life. She did not realize that her strength and her courage were no longer her own, but

belonged to the man who controlled them. They existed for him, and for his purposes.

Sitting in her chair, she sat turning over in her mind what she could do. She planned a letter to her solicitors, and looked across the room at her writing-table. But she had no volition which would enable her to go to it. The table seemed to be miles off, and her limbs made of adamant.

Why was this so? She did not know; she imagined she must be exhausted, ill, tired out. But in reality her will was subservient to another will. She was not in a condition to control her own body. She had to wait for orders which must emanate from another brain.

It seemed as if at last the order came. She got up and moved across to the table, sat down and took the pen in her hand. An unutterable horror came upon her at the same moment—a sense that some one was standing by her side, controlling her. Could it be so? She laid her pen down—but instantly took it up again. She commenced a letter, filling in the date very carefully.

While she was writing it, and writing in a half

consciousness, scarcely thinking of what she was doing, Rex came in at the door. He went up to her and looked over her shoulder. She started back violently, but already he had seen what was written.

“What!” he said, “four thousand of your money for that spendthrift devil! Not exactly. Why, it was only two thousand last night! At this rate you will give him all you possess in a week. No, Margery, you shall not do it. I am your husband, and I will save you.”

He snatched the letter from the table and flung it in the fire. In a second it had vanished. Margery looked at him with wide eyes and parted lips. She said nothing.

A frightful impulse had come upon her, when he did this, that froze the blood in her veins and paralyzed every feeling in her body, every thought in her brain. It was—

“Kill him! Kill him!”

Kill him! Her darling, the love of her life, the being she lived for,—Rex! Kill him! Why? What for? Why should she kill him? She

could not tell, but she believed she had to do it. Suddenly this vista of horror opened itself before her and she saw she had to walk down it. In thought—yes, only in thought, of course—no one, no power could make her do it in reality. But why should she be compelled even to think of it? To face the horror for a second? Why? She protested wildly within herself, even while the thought remained written as it were in her brain.

Her Rex! What a horrible thought, that of seeing him dead! Her Rex, whom she loved so dearly!

She steadied herself and rose from the table. It was impossible even to look at this man whom she loved so dearly with this criminal, cruel feeling upon her!

Presently this passed off a little. The impression faded from her mind, the agony of her brain lessened. She turned and looked at him.

He was standing by the fire, smoking a cigar caught viciously between his teeth. If she had seen him then she would have known that he looked now as he had looked when he was talking

to Oliver in the harness-room at Heriot Hall, long since; on that day when Oliver told him he intended to go and live at Hawthorndene, and warned him of the results.

It was the same look now: weary, disgusted.

It was new to Margery; something she had never seen before.

To Rex it was as if Margery was not present; as if he had to deal with Oliver. Disgust and anger entirely blotted out the affection and tenderness which were strong in him for Margery.

But as Margery recovered herself a little, so did he. As she returned to her natural feeling, so he became drawn towards her by them.

A sudden impulse took her across the room to him, her hands stretched out.

“Rex,” she said, “forgive me. Oh, if you knew how I love you! Forgive me the past, and the future. Whatever has happened, whatever may happen! forgive me, for I love you!”

Never had she looked more beautiful than in this sudden moment of love which came in the midst of her misery; never had her voice sounded

so seductive. He caught her to him and kissed her passionately, all the weariness and disgust fading quickly from his face.

In this glad moment Oliver was utterly forgotten. To each of them it was as if he had never lived.

It is this oblivion which makes the supreme pleasure of love. For a little while the waters of Lethe wash over the soul, leaving it cleaned and refreshed almost as though new-born.

The incident of the letter was not mentioned between them. Rex took it as a concluded episode; he believed her heart had rushed back to him again. And he was too happy in the reconciliation to analyze further. To Margery it seemed as if the first joy of her honeymoon had come back. She knew it would go again—that this reprieve was only for a moment, and the knowledge of this made her cling to it the more desperately while she had it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE next morning when Margery opened her eyes in the daylight it seemed to her that she had escaped from a terrible nightmare—that she was emerging from it. She felt tired, faded, worn, as though years had passed over her head in the last few days; but she fancied she was free again and safe in the love between Rex and herself.

But this was only the lull before the crisis of the storm. On that day came the hardest struggle she had yet encountered.

After breakfast Rex went out, but she stayed at home alone, for she felt exhausted and disinclined for any exertion. She sat by the fire in the drawing-room and opened a novel, without, however, being able to keep her attention on it for more than a few minutes. She never turned a page, for before she had read to the bottom of the first one the book fell into her lap and her head fell back on the cushions she was leaning against.

It appeared to her that a voice close beside her said loudly and distinctly "Sleep!"

The wave of drowsiness swept over her so suddenly and deeply that it was as if she had fallen into a stupor. And then her lips began to move and broken sentences to come from them. She was answering an invisible question.

"No—I have not done it—I have left it—Rex told me to—I have done as he told me—I cannot do as you told me—It would displease him—It would make him angry—I cannot do it——"

The stupor became more profound, and her whole body took on an appearance of inertness that was like death. Her lips ceased to move; she fell into a depth of unconsciousness in which it was impossible for her body to record or recognize. It was as if her spirit had actually left her body. For quite a long time she remained like this; then faint signs of returning life appeared. She began instantly to cry out, as if she were engaged in a desperate battle of words with someone, "I cannot—I will not! It is impossible!—I cannot."

Suddenly she opened her eyes, and looked round

the room in utter bewilderment. By degrees she began to realize where she was.

“How awful,” she said in a low voice of horror, to herself. “How absolutely awful!”

She sat as if paralyzed by some frightful vision that was before her eyes; sat as if turned to stone, until she heard Rex's step at the doorway. Then she started up and escaped from the room, rushing past him and away upstairs. Rex looked after her in amazement; then slowly followed her. The door of her room was locked, and she would not answer him. He turned and went downstairs again, a heavy gloom on his face.

“Some new development!” he thought to himself. And their happiness which seemed to have returned appeared to him to have taken wing for good and all. The recurrent mysteries must kill it out, so he thought, sadly.

He went into the drawing-room and sat down in a deep chair, in his favorite lounging attitude, and fell to staring into the fire. His thoughts were not very clearly formed, but they were very painful.

After some time he heard Margery's footstep on the stairs. She came down very slowly. She walked into the room with a singular reluctant air, as if she was forcing herself into his presence by a sheer effort of will. She came near the fire, but stood with her head turned away, looking out of the window.

"Rex," she said, "I've a fancy to go home. Do you mind?"

He started with surprise. Sitting forward in his chair he looked at her very earnestly.

"When do you want to go?" he asked at last.

"Oh!" she said, with a sort of desperate sigh, "at once if it were possible. Something terrible will happen if I don't!"

"What, to-day?—now?"

"Yes," she answered.

He again paused a moment or two before speaking, then he said, very sadly—

"I suppose it is of no use asking you to explain this to me. I conclude that scoundrel has communicated with you in some way while I have

been gone. Has he been here?" with sudden rage; "can I find him anywhere?"

"No," she said stonily, "he has not been here;" and the very iciness of her manner carried conviction with it. The rage died away as suddenly as it came, and utter sadness took its place again.

"I am ready," he said dully. "Perhaps you will speak to your father, if you will not to me. You must speak to someone. I'll give the orders at once."

Rex was an accustomed traveller, and one of the practical kind, ready for forced marches or any emergency. He made no trouble about a hasty return, but simply went out and sent two telegrams, one to the housekeeper at Heriot Hall, and one to Sir Charles. He was glad of the idea of returning, for something in Margery's manner had thoroughly alarmed him.

She avoided him all the rest of the time, making the preparations an excuse for keeping out of his way. When she had to be with him she never looked him in the face, and preserved an impene-

trable stoniness of manner except for an occasional spasm of extreme nervousness. It was as if she had been changed into another person.

“Something awful must have happened,” thought Rex, over and over again; “what has that brute threatened, to terrify her so?”

If he could but dimly have guessed the truth! If he could have imagined that she was in the state in which a faithful dog is when madness is coming upon it, and its love makes it run from its master lest it should bite him.

“Kill him!—kill him,”—these dreadful words filled her mind, and an insane desire to spring at him—to strangle him—came upon her whenever she was near him.

She was afraid to be alone with him, lest she should do some terrible thing. Her one sane idea was to get home, to be near friends who would protect her from herself or from whatever it was that was controlling and possessing herself, and be able to speak to someone. She did not yet know who she could speak to, but she knew it would help her only to have the possibility within reach.

In her stupor a vision had been shown to her. *She had seen herself taking the life of the man she loved in his sleep.*

Was it possible she could be made to do a horrible crime without knowing she did it, as she had done lesser things? The idea that this might be possible haunted and terrified her. Worse still, she was conscious of the growing desire *to do it*. It was as if two beings were in her body, contending furiously, dragging her hither and thither, first one way and then the other. It was an awful condition and she felt that it would be impossible to maintain it; in time she must yield!

Late that night they got home to Heriot Hall. As much preparation as could be made in so short a time had been made. There was a bright fire, some supper, and best of all, Sir Charles waiting for them. He was so delighted to see Margery again that he noticed little; and helped by his bluff heartiness, Margery managed to put on something of her ordinary manner. She made him tell her about everything and everybody, and sit over the supper-table late into the night. Her one

horror was the idea of being left alone with Rex ; and she turned over all sorts of wild expedients in her mind. Could she insist on going home with her father, representing it as a mere mad-brained freak ? No, that was impossible ; it would puzzle him too much and wound Rex too deeply. Besides, it grew so late that Rex insisted on Sir Charles staying ; and he agreed readily enough. After all, that was something. Sir Charles liked sitting up, and she could sit and talk to him till she fell asleep in her chair. Rex let her do as she liked, observing her feverish efforts at conversation with anxiety and dismay.

The one person who was mentioned by none of the three was Oliver. His name seemed to be avoided by mutual consent. At last, however, Sir Charles spoke of him inadvertently. He was talking of his favorite subject, his horses. " Gray-beard's dead lame," he said ; " I hope they'll look after him ; Oliver's no good—in fact 'twas Oliver lamed him this very afternoon, damn him. I beg your pardon, Rex, I hadn't meant to mention the matter, but it slipped out."

“Oliver lamed him!” said Rex in surprise, “but he’s a good rider.”

“When he’s sober he is,” said Sir Charles in a tone of deep disgust, “but he was drunk this afternoon and half mad. I never saw him in such a state before. How the men could let him go out on the horse I can’t think.”

Rex said nothing in answer to this. Margery sat listening with a blanched face.

“You’re tired, child,” said Sir Charles, noticing her pallor, “why don’t you go to bed?”

“I will directly,” she said, “but I want to hear about Oliver. I never knew him to drink like that.”

Rex looked up surprised at the coolness of her tone, and scrutinized her keenly. “What an actress she is!” he again thought to himself in wonder. Was it possible for a woman to speak in such an indifferent tone of the man who controlled her heart and her affections? That was what Rex asked himself in a profound amazement. How impossible it was to know people, he reflected; how utterly different Margery was from what he had always believed her to be.

“Ch, there’s nothing more to tell you,” said Sir Charles, trying to pass over the subject lightly. “I didn’t intend to refer to it this first night I’ve got you back, but I’ll own I’ve been uneasy about the boy lately. He’s been very strange, as if he’d something on his mind; I suppose it’s these money difficulties of his. But the last two days he has been like a wild creature, as queer as possible, and mad drunk by the evening. I declare he has put me in mind of a man who has committed a murder or means to, and who’s not able to think of anything else.”

Rex got up and went across to Margery. “She has fainted,” he said.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEITHER Sir Charles nor Rex went to bed that night at all, for Margery was very ill and they were too anxious to leave her. They hovered about her room till the morning came, watching and waiting.

In the daylight she looked pale and wan, like some stricken creature. She had no power to rouse herself, or move from where she lay; she was full of dread of the next attack that would come upon her, when she would again be possessed by this horrible madness. For that was what it seemed to her to be when she thought of it in calmer moments. She was calm now, but utterly exhausted.

Her craving was never to be alone; and her ceaseless desire was to speak out to someone. It was impossible to speak to her father, she found, when she tried to. He was of so utterly prosaic a

temperament that she felt he would never understand anything she attempted to tell him, and the words died on her lips as they were formed.

Who was there? It is only when real trouble comes that we realize fully how few friends we have. For a friend must not only be willing, but sympathetic and, above all, intelligent. When all these things are required it is quite wonderful how the list of one's friends narrows down.

Who was there? Suddenly the memory of a fresh, sweet, honest face came before her. Hetty!

She raised herself directly, and begged Rex to let her write a note and to send a carriage with it.

"I know she will come," she said, "I am sure she will come."

"What's made you take such a sudden fancy?" asked Sir Charles.

"I don't know," said Margery wearily. "But I think she'll make me feel better, she is so bright."

It is strange how in deep and awful trouble the longing for someone's face, the craving for one particular human presence, sets in, and nothing

else seems to relieve the pain. So it was with Margery now. She longed for the sight of Hetty Carruthers' fresh face as in a fever one longs for water. And when Hetty came she appeared to bring a new atmosphere into the room—something bright and fresh like a sea-breeze.

“Why, you're sick!” she said. “That's too bad. I'm so glad I was home and could just come right away. Well, what's wrong that you look so strange, anyway?”

“I don't know,” answered Margery. “Come and sit near if you don't mind, and let me look at you. You seem so fresh.”

“Why surely! But say, 'taint encouraging to look at you, anyhow, you ain't happy. I'm certain of it, just as sure as I'm alive.”

“No, I'm not,” said Margery seeing it was useless to fence with such a direct and positive person.

“I guess I oughtn't to speak out so straight, but tain't in me to go into things elegant. I wish you didn't seem so white. What's wrong, anyway. Will ye speak?”

“Not yet,” said Margery, “talk to me about yourself and all you have been doing.”

Of course, led on by degrees, Hetty very soon began to talk about Oliver. She worshipped him, and could neither see or imagine any flaw in her idol. As she talked on, Margery grew more and more silent, thinking deeply and hopelessly. It was terrible to her to find this girl's pure heart had gone out so completely in such a direction. What could be done? What would be the end of it? She was oppressed by the anxious thoughts that crowded in upon her, and hardly listened to much of Hetty's quaint talk. That young lady soon found this out and tried a new mode of distraction.

“'Tis such a lovely day,” she said, “do get up and come out. I know ye feel sick, and as if you'd lie just there till the end of time. But you'll feel real set up if you'll come out in the air. Do now—to please me.”

Who could resist that lovely flushed face and those soft dark blue eyes! No one who had either a sense of lovableness or a sense of loveliness.

Hetty appealed to both, and Margery possessed both strongly. It was a deep pleasure to her to feel the soft touch of those kind arms about her, the contact of Hetty's sweet face against her own. It rested and refreshed her. She felt as if it were possible to rouse herself in order to please this beautiful creature. And so, before long, these two came out upon the terrace in front of the Hall and walked up and down in the sun, arm in arm. Margery began to feel as if she had really escaped from the nightmare she had passed through, and the two were talking together with a gayety which seemed as natural to one as to the other—when suddenly the whole world changed to them both. To one it was as if a light from Heaven came; to the other a blackness as of hell.

A man on horseback was riding up the avenue, and the two girls recognized him at the same moment with these opposite feelings.

It was Oliver Heriot. He rode up to the Hall door; a servant came out for his horse, and in a moment he was by Margery's side. She scarcely spoke to him; she would not raise her eyes. She

was filled with a horror and terror she was ashamed of. Hetty talked for both, and seemed as gay as possible. She was troubled, nevertheless, by Margery's unexpected coldness and silence, and also by something which puzzled even her love-blinded eyes about Oliver. He had the look, unmistakable to anyone who has seen it once before, of the man who has shaken his nerve with heavy drinking over night, and has "pulled himself together" in the morning with some difficulty. To Hetty it seemed as if he were ill, or affected strangely by some trouble that weighed upon his mind. Margery, however, was not at all deceived, and her disgust deepened momentarily. And this disgust produced a curious result; her own natural strength partly returned to her, and her fear of him died away. She raised her eyes at last and looked him full in the face, and when her eyes met his, his fell first. What elasticity and hope came to her as she realized this! It was a joy like that of one who might hope to be born again.

But this only lasted a little while, for Oliver

was rapidly becoming more himself with the healthful effects of the ride and the fresh air, and the sense of the necessity for action. He saw that Margery was escaping from him, and he cursed himself for having destroyed his power so foolishly.

He resolved in future to bear the pangs of conscience rather than take an oblivion which cost so dear. Resolutions of this kind are usually registered with great fervor; but the cause which destroys the original rectitude is powerful enough to destroy the repentant one. This is a fact which was as yet unknown to Oliver, and had to be ascertained by experience. At the moment he felt capable of bringing back all his original manhood and its power.

The gong sounded for lunch, and the three went into the house together. Sir Charles and Rex were in the dining-room. The meeting between the brothers was extremely cold, and the situation threatened to be very embarrassing, and would have been so but for Sir Charles, who came to the rescue with a flood of cheerful small-talk. He

and Hetty were great friends, and they managed to keep the ball going. She did her best, and was delightful. Nevertheless she was very uneasy, for she became more and more definitely conscious that there was something wrong. Rex was the only one who actually made no effort to appear at ease. He sat gloomily at the table, but eat nothing. Oliver, on the contrary, simulated his natural manner with great success. His whole attention was in reality given to recovering his power over Margery; and he thought little and cared less about the way his brother received him, or whether he was welcome in the house or no.

Immediately lunch was over Rex left the others and disappeared. Margery went into the library, where a large fire was burning, and sat down in a low chair beside it. She scarcely noticed whether the others followed her. A deep stupor was settling in upon her, which she struggled against in vain. She felt it was Oliver's presence which caused it, and she would have given worlds to have had the courage and resolution to tell him to leave the house. But during

lunch, while she had sat opposite him, his eyes upon her, all her courage and resolution had faded. His supremacy was complete for the moment, and it was as useless for her to make any effort against it as it is useless to struggle in the horrors of a nightmare.

She did not hear or notice what was said, or what was going on around her, though the others had all followed her and grouped themselves about the fire. They formed a very merry party, too; whether the gayety was natural or imposed, nevertheless it was there. And yet everyone was full of a strange uneasiness which each fancied was all his or her own. Oliver's aim was by some means or other to get Margery alone, and he was determined not to leave her till he had done so, and had made the impression on her mind that he intended to make.

For now, in his present phase of feeling, all remorse was gone from him, and he was conscious of nothing but his hatred of Rex, and his resolution to stand in his shoes. Sitting at the lunch-table with him, had excited and intensified these feelings

to the last degree. If Rex had found it possible to address a friendly word to him, or, still more, to hold out the least hope of help, this hatred between them would never have reached so awful a pitch. But Rex was smarting and suffering under a non-existent wrong, and his sense of injury made the situation hopeless and horrible.

Here in the old house, Oliver felt he ought to be at home; he looked on Rex as an absolute usurper because he had all. What was easier than to get him out of the way? Everything was left to Margery; with his power over her it would be very easy to make her marry him. Whether she liked or loathed him mattered nothing to him, so long as she enabled him to step into Rex's shoes. And he thought it over coolly, and decided on his course of action even while he talked to Hetty, and met her lovely eyes with the love in them very ill concealed. For Hetty was too frank to be able to hide anything, and Oliver knew that she was his for the asking. But to him she only amounted to a second string to his bow. He devoted himself to keeping her in her present state

of mind, as he thought she might be worth fighting for if he failed in his great plan.

But he had no intention of failing in it. He was in the confident humor, when all things are not only possible but certain.

About four o'clock some visitors arrived; Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers.

Margery dully and absently responded to Mrs. Carruthers' affectionate and anxious inquiries about her. She had all the appearance and manner of one who is really ill, so that both she and Oliver felt that the strange secret which existed between them was perfectly safe.

Mr. Carruthers was a tall, dark, severe-looking man, with the most perfect manners, and only a faint reminder of the Yankee quaintness of speech and tone which was so marked in Hetty. It was hard to believe him to be her brother, they were so different in appearance, until one came to talk to him, and know him. Then the same generous nature and honest spirit made themselves felt. Business and its associations had dried out of him the fresh raciness which made Hetty so charm-

ing ; but underneath, the nature was the same. Margery felt this instinctively. She liked him at once, and found it pleasant to talk to him even in her dulled and abnormal state. His pride and delight in his beautiful young wife made itself visible immediately ; he could not hide his strong feelings any more than could Hetty. These two were both born to love and worship and to suffer everything from those they loved and worshipped.

Fortunately for Joseph Carruthers he had chosen a woman who looked upon life as an art and who certainly would not make him suffer if she could possibly avoid it, for suffering appeared to her to be unæsthetic.

The Carruthers stayed about an hour, and when they went carried Hetty off with them. She would have been left with Margery if Oliver had not been there, but the Carruthers were much too well aware of the state of her feelings to leave her, under the circumstances. Oliver gave a sigh of relief when they had gone. He looked at Sir Charles thoughtfully, considering how to get rid of him.

A silence came upon the little company, for

Sir Charles was still too angry with Oliver to speak civilly to him, except under social pressure ; and Margery felt it no longer necessary to exert herself. It was a sort of luxury to yield herself up to the stupor which hung over her, after fighting it for so long.

Oliver planted himself in front of the fire and showed no intention of moving. He considered himself to be, at all events, more at home than Sir Charles was, and he determined to stay him out. That was his only course. He thought it might serve, as he did not believe that Rex would come into the room while he was there.

So it turned out: Sir Charles, annoyed by his persistency, went off in rather a bad temper.

Oliver immediately turned to Margery. She was already so much under his influence as to be almost asleep, and it was only necessary for him to raise his hand and look into her eyes to make her pass into the deepest hypnotic trance.

“Do you understand?” he said, “you have to kill him.”

“I will not,” she said, in a strange, sharp tone.

“You will!” he commanded, and repeated it several times.

“I cannot!” she said in the same tone, but more faintly.

“*You can!*”

Her head fell on one side; she seemed to be dead, so deep was the stupor he had flung her into.

“Go up to his dressing-room,” he said, “and change the position of the two little blue bottles which stand just inside the door of the bureau. Do you understand? Do you know them?”

“No.”

“Do you see them now?”

“No.”

“You can now? You see the bureau?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me if they are there. They always used to be.”

“Yes, they are there.”

“Go up, the moment you wake, and change their places. Put the one that is to the right to the left, and *vice versa*. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Obey me, then. Wake!”

She was in so deep a trance that it seemed as if he would never wake her. At last, however, she was sufficiently roused to be able to move, and then immediately got up from her chair and left the room. Oliver watched her go, and went into the hall to see her pass up the stairs. Then he turned into the dining-room, which was empty, but very pleasant and cheerful, with a bright fire, the table laid ready for dinner and decorated with flowers. He went to the sideboard, and took out a decanter. He went over to the fire and stood by it, putting the decanter on the mantelpiece and continually filling a wineglass he held. His mind was in such a fearful state that he had lost the ordinary use of his senses, and positively did not know he was drinking raw brandy.

CHAPTER XX.

IT was about half-past six when Rex came out of his study, where he had shut himself up all the afternoon, and went up to his dressing-room.

It was one of his customs to be very punctual in dressing for dinner, as he always took a dose of medicine before it. Ever since his stay in California this had become a habit, as a slight fever he had contracted there occasionally returned upon him unless he took these precautions.

To-day he walked upstairs with his eyes upon the ground, and his hands in his pockets, in the attitude peculiar to an Englishman when despondent. Life seemed very dark, very hopeless to him.

How strange fortune is! A young man with every personal attribute necessary to make him liked, with abundant fortune, and all the world

before him, he felt like a criminal at the stake, without hope.

He had never loved any woman but Margery. He was one of those men who love but once and love completely. To lose her meant losing all that he understood as life or happiness. Money and position were nothing without her. And the peculiar, intense sting always burned within him, that it would have been easier to lose her to any other man than the one who had stolen her.

His head drooped, he walked slowly to his room, carrying out his mechanical habits without taking any interest in them; his mind all the while set on the darkness which lay before him.

He went into his dressing-room, closed the door, and then, walking to the window, stood looking out of it a little while. He gazed at the familiar trees, and the lines of the park as they melted away in the twilight, seeing them as old friends, which in some faint way soothed the turmoil of his mind. Here at least there was no change; while he lived the trees and the park would all remain as they were. They could not deceive or betray him.

Presently he turned and crossed the room to his bureau. Inside the upper door was a little ledge on which stood a medicine case, with a little blue bottle on each side of it. He took up the left one, poured out a dose and raised it to his lips. Before his lips touched it he was stupefied with amazement; two warm, soft arms were round his neck. He had not heard a sound, and he could scarcely believe his senses. The gas was burning low; he put out his hand and turned it up full, setting down the glass untasted in order to do this.

Margery was clinging to him like some desperate creature, her face hidden, her arms locked round him. He looked down at her in amazement. What did this mean? He tried to unclasp her hands, but in vain. For some minutes they stood like this, two hearts beating in agony, and without any intelligence, one of the other.

At last she lifted her head slowly and showed her face. He saw a face that he had never seen before; it seemed like that of a stranger, so drawn and white, and agony-stamped was it.

“You have not drank it?” she said in a whisper.

“Drank what? The medicine?—No, I’m just going to take it.”

“No—don’t touch it. Come away with me out of this room. Come—please—yes, I insist! I shall die here. O what I have suffered!”

She dragged him to the door, he so utterly perplexed that he knew not whether to resist her or obey. He yielded, however, for she seemed frantic with anxiety to get out of the room. She held fast to him till they were outside the door, which she shut tight behind her.

“My God!” she exclaimed; “what a nightmare I have lived through! What a horror! But it’s over for some strange reason. Come with me, Rex; I must find Oliver.”

He followed her, perfectly puzzled, but saying nothing, for it seemed useless to ask her questions, in her excited, unnatural state. And yet, unnatural as her excitement was, there was something more like the old Margery about her; and a faint wild hope rose in his heart.

They went downstairs, Margery leading the way. She went into the library, looked round, and came out again; then into the drawing-room. From there she came out again into the hall, and met the butler, who, when he saw her, turned back to shut the dining-room door.

“Do you know where Mr. Oliver is?” she said.

“No, ma’am, I don’t,” he answered, and looked at Rex with a very odd expression. He remained standing by the door he had shut.

“He’s in there,” said Margery suddenly; and pushing past the man she opened the door and went in.

Oliver sat in a chair by the fire, a straight dining-room chair. His head was propped against the mantelpiece for he was quite unable to hold it up.

“Bring her away, sir, please,” said the servant to Rex. “Mr. Oliver has had a drop too much, and he wouldn’t like to be seen in such a state.”

“Come away, Margery,” said Rex.

But instead of obeying him she walked straight up to Oliver and stood looking at him. Her figure seemed taller, her air more confident, than it had

ever been. The distress was vanishing from her face, and triumph took its place by degrees. She would not move, though Rex came and tried to lead her away.

“No,” she said. “I want to talk to you here, and now. I want to tell you a story. Have patience and listen to me. This man, who has tried to curse my life and make of me a criminal, and who very nearly succeeded!—Yes, very nearly succeeded. This man is helpless now and idiotic from his own folly, and I will use the opportunity. I am myself, now that he is a beast; let me speak while I have the power, and then you will know all, and be able to save me. Oh, Rex, it is an evil conscience that has driven him to this!”

Rex had sent the servant away when she began to speak, and shut the door. They were alone. Standing in front of Oliver, looking down upon him, her hands clasped tight, as if to hold her excitement in check, Margery began at the beginning and told him all the story that has been related here, so far as she understood it and could tell it.

Rex listened, in momentarily deepening amazement,

sometimes incredulous, actually not believing what she said.

“I will give you my diary to read,” she said at last. “It is upstairs in my room; come with me and leave this creature for the servants to take care of.”

She led the way again, and he followed her, so perplexed as to have no word to say. In the hall they found Sir Charles and the butler hovering about.

“What’s wrong?” said Sir Charles. “Is it Oliver?”

“Yes,” said Rex, seizing the opportunity of getting rid of him. “Do go and see what’s to be done. Perhaps the servants can get him up to his old room, and we’ll let him sleep it off there. Margery wants me.”

Margery had gone on upstairs, and Rex, having said this, hastily followed her.

“Is it possible,” he exclaimed, directly he entered the room, “that all this misery has risen out of your jealousy of Mrs. Carruthers! It doesn’t seem credible! Great Heavens! The mystery

between us was nothing but this: I had seen her in California, when she served drinks in a mining saloon. She is the daughter of a convict. How she got where she is I can't imagine, but she always said it was by fair means, and begged me not to let people know what she had been."

"But she had a hold over you," said Margery in a very low voice.

"Oh, that!" answered Rex uneasily. "Well, I had better explain everything, as this is a day of explanations. I never wanted you to know it, for I don't like thinking about it myself. There was a row in the saloon she served in, one night, and I shot a man—a man I liked too! But he was mad with drink, and I had to do it, or die myself. She knew very well I'm not the sort to like the incident talked about at home here, where we're not accustomed to free fights. I'd almost succeeded in forgetting it, till she revived the unpleasant memory."

CHAPTER XXI.

FRIGHTENED at his own thoughts, Oliver had been drowning them steadily all the afternoon, till he had finally drowned his intelligence altogether. The effects of the last few days were on him still, and as a matter of fact the hour or two in which he had recovered his influence over Margery were only a rift in the cloud. She was certain of her deliverance if she could only have known it. The agonies of conscience which he suffered made life unendurable to him unless he deadened them; the horrible idea of the future punishment which he firmly believed he was laying up for himself, came like the sharp sting of a physical pain the moment the necessity for action ceased. Then he must deaden his terror, and took any possible mode of doing so. He had adopted a very simple mode of effecting what he wanted, and had done it in such a manner that he did not

believe any person could ever be blamed for it. Rex Heriot would be dead from a purely accidental cause, having taken a dose of carbolic acid by mistake for his usual medicine. How simple and easy it was! If it should fail, if Margery should have fallen into the hypnotic sleep again, and not carried out her orders, or if she should struggle against them and delay, he felt quite safe, because he was convinced his power over her was strong enough to keep her under his control, and prevent her speaking to anyone but himself. He had been so successful in keeping her under control hitherto that he never doubted his power for a moment; and went on pouring brandy down his throat to keep up his courage and keep off the horrors, forgetting, or never guessing, that he was destroying his will power absolutely. As his courage increased, his confidence of success became greater, until at last he began to listen every moment for the alarm through the house which would mean that Rex had drunk the fatal draught. Each time he thought of this the first feeling was exultation, and he told himself how he would step into

his brother's shoes and have his turn at the good things of earth. But each time this exultation was followed by a fit of horror, and he went again to the only remedy he knew of. Thus, by the time Margery came into the room he was in a state of quarrelsome stupor, and only demanded fiercely to be let alone when anyone wished him to move. He stared stupidly at her in a senseless amazement, while she talked to Rex. Right in Oliver's presence she told everything, and he had so destroyed his brains that he had not the power to interfere. But it slowly entered his dulled mind that this had happened; and when Sir Charles came into the room he was just struggling to his feet.

"I'll go," he was saying thickly; "she's played the devil with me. I'll go."

His efforts were rather unsuccessful; but still he managed to get out of the room. Sir Charles stood by and let him pass.

"What will he do?" he said to the old butler. "He oughtn't to go out alone."

"He's so mad with me already, Sir Charles, for trying to get him out of here before Mrs. Rex

came down, that I daren't interfere any more."

"Where is Rex?" said Sir Charles. "I'll get him to come. I can't take the responsibility."

Sir Charles went upstairs and summoned Rex, who came out to him, with a very white face full of emotion. Sir Charles could hear Margery sobbing. She had broken down at last.

"We can do nothing with Oliver," said Sir Charles.—"Hark, he has gone out of the house. He's not fit to be about alone; besides it's a disgrace, and the servants are afraid of him. Come with me."

"Stay with Margery," said Rex, a sudden fierce sternness coming into his face. He went quickly downstairs, and out at the door.

Oliver had gone across to the stables, with staggering strides. It was easy for Rex to pick him up. He did so, passed him, turned and looked at him and then went into the harness-room. Oliver called to a groom to bring him his horse; and then followed Rex to the door of the harness-room. Here, where the happiest days of their boyhood had been spent, the two stood, face to face. Rex

had taken down a horsewhip and was coming to the door as Oliver entered. The two faces were terrible from the hatred that was in them both; but Oliver's was disfigured and brutalized by the condition he was in. Rex raised the whip for a second and felt all the hungry fury of longing to lash this detestable image of himself into shame; but the expression of the face before him filled him with contempt too great for even such a deed.

"I'll wait," he said, throwing the whip down, "till you're sober and can understand the lesson I mean to give you."

"Yes, wait," sneered Oliver, "that's all you're good for. It is like a coward to threaten and draw back."

His horse was brought into the yard at that moment and he stepped back through the doorway. He had just sense enough to know that he was in no condition to meet a man of his own strength. Mad as he was, he was not mad enough for that. But he had said too much, in his rage. Rex stooped, picked up the horsewhip and in an

instant had caught him by the collar and was dealing him blow after blow. Instantly, and as if by magic, the yard was full of men, gazing at the horrible scene. It only lasted a minute. Oliver wrenched himself free, flung Rex back with all his force and sprang on to his horse. He was spurred, and he dug the spurs into the animal's sides so that it sprang forward and scattered the servants right and left. A moment later and it could be heard thundering down the avenue like a creature possessed.

Rex walked across the yard to the house silent, white, looking very strange. The men kept back from him and went away whispering together. On the steps of the house Rex found Sir Charles.

“He's on Black Bess,” Sir Charles exclaimed, the moment he caught sight of him. “He'll lame her as he lamed Graybeard. It's cruel work. What made you let him go?”

Rex walked into the house without answering. Margery was standing in the hall, white and trembling.

“Rex! what has happened?” she exclaimed.

“Why do you look like that? What have you done to him?”

“Lashed him like the hound he is,” answered Rex, “or rather, as we beat the dogs that are twenty thousand times as good as such men.”

Sir Charles had come into the ball, and at this he uttered an exclamation of amazement. So far no confidence had passed beyond Rex and Margery.

“What does he mean?” said Sir Charles to his daughter.

“I don’t know, father,” she said. “Don’t ask—let it be. They have quarrelled terribly, that is all.”

“Shall I go home now, Madge?” said Sir Charles, “or would you rather I stayed with you?”

“I think you’d like to go, wouldn’t you?” she said.

“Only because of Black Bess. I know he’ll ill-use her. But we can send a groom to see to that if you want me.”

“No,” she said, “I will go to Rex. He has shut himself in the study, but I will get him to let me

in. You go, papa ; I know you are anxious to get home. Come as soon as you can.”

Sir Charles was soon gone, for his heart was at the moment with his favorite mare.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN hour later and Heriot Hall was roused from a deep silence into which it had fallen by a tremendous knocking at the front door. There had been no dinner, and the servants had given up all hopes of there being any. There was the peculiar atmosphere in the house which is produced by sickness or acute trouble. The servants were all together in the housekeeper's room, talking over the different scenes of the day in low voices. Rex and Margery were still shut in the study. There was scarcely a sound in the house. Upon this silence the loud knocking fell with the most startling effect. The impression of some fresh misfortune was produced by it instantly.

Rex came out of the study just as the hall door was opened, and saw Sir Charles standing on the doorstep. One glance at him was enough to show that something had happened.

“What is it?” said Rex.

“Dead,” said Sir Charles, “both dead.”

“Who? what?” exclaimed Rex.

“Horse and man both—Oliver and Black Bess. He must have been possessed by a devil! Tell the men to come with lights and carry him to the house.”

By the time they reached the spot—a dark place in a lane, where there was a sudden and very steep hill—there were a number of people there, carrying lanterns and torches. The news spread abroad like wildfire, and the village turned out in a body to see if it was true. True indeed; poor Black Bess, a shapeless mass at the bottom of the hill, and Oliver crushed beneath her.

A dark, solemn procession came up the hill some time later, with Oliver’s body in its midst, laid on an improvised stretcher. Sir Charles lingered behind to see the body of the poor mare laid decently, and arranged for its burial on the morrow, then walked up to the Hall alone, in the dark, thinking very seriously.

“No doubt it’s best!” he said to himself, “no

doubt it's best. I was fond of the boy, and I shall miss him; but he was going to the bad too fast. It's long since he had an hour of happiness, and it's long before he would have had one. And he's brought trouble to my Madge; that I'm sure of. For her sake he's well out of the way."

And Sir Charles was perhaps the best friend Oliver had in the world!

How little we guess how little we are missed.

But there was one heart yet to suffer; and strangely enough it was one that Oliver valued not at all.

Mr. Carruthers came to the Hall later in the evening to know if what he had heard was true. Oliver's body lay in the dining-room, and was sufficient answer in itself. He went quickly home again, after a few words with Rex and Sir Charles.

Hetty was waiting for him, all the lovely color gone from her face, and a wild agony in her beautiful blue eyes.

"It's true, Hetty," said her brother.

"Oh, how am I to bear it!" she exclaimed.

EXTRACT FROM MRS. REX HERIOT'S DIARY.

“ I hope this is the last entry I shall ever make in this terrible little book ! It holds the history of a horror ; and surely I have suffered enough in the course of that history, and shall not be condemned by fate to bear more of the same kind ! Nothing else could stand beside it or be written of in the same pages. No every-day troubles or any trials of ordinary life could be thought of at the same time as this experience.

“ To think of that poor soul gone straight into Eternity in the midst of his sin !

“ The one thought with all of us is Hetty. I think now that she will live, but for a long time we feared she would not. A little color is coming back to the pale face now, a little life into the sad eyes.

“ We have all agreed to tell her nothing more of Oliver's real character and history than she already knew. It is better and much happier for her only to mourn him as one dead, not to have to see her

idol shattered and broken to pieces before her eyes. I am glad, very glad, for her sake that she never knew him to be what he was. She will always think of him tenderly instead of with horror.

“I cannot yet quite shake off the horror. I think it will be more or less with me all my life.

“In those awful hours I passed in Rex’s dressing-room, I saw the deed done over and over again, so plainly that I suffered all the agony of its actually being done. Oh, Rex, I never knew till then how I loved you! And in that dark hour I learned what it is to kill the thing one loves, to add the agony of grief to the remorse for sin. I do not know how I kept my sanity. Even now I constantly wake shuddering and trembling at night, thinking it is all true and no mere dream of horror, as it mercifully was.

“But how nearly it was true! If remorse had not driven him to drink and broken his will it would have been true. Oh, how horrible!

“I can sit and ponder for hours at a time trying to disentangle the mystery of the thing. Whose

was the guilt? Whose would have been the guilt?—his or mine? I who did the deeds or he who suggested them? Alas! I think he knew the guilt was his, or he would not have died that awful death.”

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