THREE MONTHS LATER.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THREE MONTHS LATER.

It was hot weather—Sydney hot weather—and people with money and leisure were going or gone to the mountains, to New Zealand, to Tasmania, anywhere to get away from it. Mrs. Delavel still lingered in her own house, partly because she disliked the comparative disorder of other places and had no taste for wandering, partly because Lord Boyton had returned from the Melbourne Cup to stay with Mrs. Blundell till after Christmas.

Sue was wholly in her mother's hands. Her father did not neglect her, but neither did he claim her for his separate enjoyment, as he had been in the habit of doing. If he went to the camp he went alone; and it was generally supposed, when the after-dinner readings were over and he was not to be found upon the premises, that it was the club which so frequently allured him from the domestic hearth. Five times in the week he would finish the evening somewhere other than on the verandah or in the garden where Sue had been wont to finish it with him; and the late hours that he kept became a serious grievance to the mistress of the house, who saw in them not only a further proof of those propensities which had made him the black sheep of his family and deprived him of so many of the distinctions of his rank, but a deliberate device for slighting and wounding her. In the ordinary household intercourse he was considerate and amiable, gentle to his wife and affectionate to his daughter; but he was dull and abstracted, performing his little duties and courtesies perfunctorily, without putting a spark of spirit into them. Annie did not notice this difference from his usual bright interest in the details of his life, but Sue saw and understood it. She felt a little hurt at being set aside now, after having been so close a confidante; and she felt a little hurt by his apparent forgetfulness of her own not unimportant affairs; but she did not feel resentment. She sheltered him and aided him with all her native tact and magnanimity, chiefly and most effectually by drawing off her mother's attention from him and concentrating it upon herself.

In these days she was a pattern young lady. Day after day she put on smart gowns and bonnets, took her place in the
carriage by Mrs. Delavel's side, and devoted long afternoons
to those uncongenial social duties which were the object and
the end of the elder woman's existence. She sipped tea and
smiled, and made inane remarks upon the weather and the
current events of interest to upper circles, all in so natural
and proper a manner that even her fastidious parent was
satisfied—satisfied that the child on whom so many hopes
were set was turning out a true lady after all. Balls had
been going on of late, and afternoon dances on the warships
in the harbour; and at these Miss Delavel had danced
prodigiously, and received a great deal of attention. For
though, unfortunately (as Annie was frequently heard to
remark), the taint of trade, for the first time in the history of
the family, rested upon her, and though she was entirely out
of that sphere to which by divine right she belonged, still she
was an interesting girl, full of frank vivacity and naturalness
(and men do like naturalness, though women don't seem to
believe it), and she was also an heiress—a fact which, the
taint of trade notwithstanding, enhanced her attractions in
the eyes of almost everybody. And in these mixed assemblies,
where a chaperon of Annie's rank had need of all her vigil­
ance, there was usually some presentable and unobjectionable
person to whom a mother could trust her child with an easy
mind, and concerning whom she could permit herself to indulge
in matrimonial speculations. Indeed, some dozens of young
men had, one at a time, enjoyed Mrs. Delavel's special favour
as potential sons-in-law, most of them being aristocratic young
A.D.C.'s or titled globe-trotters like Lord Boyton. Just now
Lord Boyton was the object of her maternal solicitude, and he
was to be met with everywhere. If he was not able to come
to a party in the first instance, the party was put off until he
could; and thus our old friend, taking her daughter to mis­
cellaneous entertainments, seldom missed the happiness of
seeing his chubby face amongst the guests. Lord Boyton, for
his part, paid marked attention to Sue. Being mostly in
doubt as to the social eligibility of his Australian acquaint­
ances, he felt a sense of safety in the family of a man who was
unquestionably a Delavel of Dunstanborough. That was one
reason. Another was that she marked herself out from other
young ladies by treating him with cool indifference. He was
not accustomed to cool indifference, and it exercised over him
the fascination of novel things—filled him with curiosity and
surprise, and a haunting anxiety to find out the meaning of it.
THREE MONTHS LATER.

Thus he attached himself to her whenever he saw a chance, and laid himself out to be agreeable—laid himself out so very plainly that it was noticed and talked of; and a strong desire to keep her mother in a good temper induced Sue to treat him with more toleration than she had shown at the beginning of the acquaintance.

This led to his becoming troublesome. Annie gave him a standing invitation—"Drop in when ever you feel inclined"—with a cordial smile and pressure of the hand, and he took it quite literally, so that the house was hardly ever free of him. He lounged a great deal in the soft armchairs, displaying the sole of his shoe and a liberal portion of his socks and he talked incessantly, taking the lead in conversation as by prescriptive right. Occasionally his tendency to over-indulgence in the pleasures of the table led to his saying things that would have been better left unsaid. After luncheon or dinner, when his unquenchable thirst had been temporarily allayed, he would become noisy and overpowering or familiar to a degree that caused Sue to quake with apprehension as to how much further he was going to relax himself; or else he would suddenly fall asleep and snore. To all which little manifestations of a lordly temperament Annie turned the same smiling and approving face.

"Poor, dear fellow," she would say, "it is pleasant to see how thoroughly at home he is with us. He evidently feels that we are his natural friends—the only people he can associate with on his own level."

"I hope not," Richard would remark. "I'm not proud, my dear, as you know, but I do hope we are a little above Lord Boyton's level."

At which Mrs. Delavel, with a smile and a sigh, would express her patient acquiescence in the fate that invariably befell her friends and her opinions at his hands.

But the master of the house bore this new domestic infliction with surprising equanimity. Probably it was a comfort to him to have something to bear; it lightened his marital conscience of a fraction of its load. If anything, he bore it too well. Knowing that Sue was in no danger, he ignored Lord Boyton's presence and behaviour as he might have done that of a gambolling kitten. High-bred gentleman as he was, he could, as Annie often told him, be as rude as any ploughman; and in this case he justly merited the reproach she was not slow to cast at him of showing discourtesy to a
guest under his own roof. But it was negative discourtesy—not the positive kind that would certainly have been exhibited under other conditions of his mind. He took his armchair and his magazine or newspaper, and entertained himself in silence as if there had been no guest. Only sometimes, when it grew late, or the guest was in that state which would have been advanced intoxication in a meaner mortal, he jumped up with a peremptory face and a sharp opening and shutting of his watch, that had the effect of immediately scaring the noble globe-trotter from the premises. Then he would look at his wife and say mildly, "Well, my dear, doesn't your young man pall upon you yet?"

And Annie would reply, with calmness and dignity, that, on the contrary, the more she saw of him the more she esteemed and admired him.

Thus poor Sue became a victim to Lord Boyton. In a perfectly ladylike way Mrs. Delavel flung her daughter at his head, and the girl had to submit, or to revolt in a manner that would have been more unpleasant than submitting. That he was extremely amiable and an excellent tennis player somewhat mitigated the irksomeness of his constant company; but there were times—as when she was left to entertain him single-handed while her mother invented business elsewhere, or when she found herself stranded with him in the dark on a garden terrace after dinner—that her weariness of the sight and sound of him changed to a much more active sentiment. There were times when she felt that she could not stand him any longer—that revolt was justifiable and necessary—that she must rid herself of him somehow, whatever the consequences might be.

One morning, very soon after breakfast and her father's departure for his office, she was going upstairs, and saw the approach of the young man from the landing window. On the spur of the moment, and impelled by a sense of desperation, she ran into her bedroom, snatched up a hat, plunged headlong downstairs, out of the house, and down the garden to the boathouse, and put herself beyond his reach on the harbour waters. It was a thing she had never done before, and a thing calculated to set Mrs. Delavel's every separate hair on end when she heard of it; but in fact this impetuous young person did not stop to think of that, or of anything except getting away from her persecutor. The small boat chanced to be lying on the water ready for use, and the opportunity was too tempting
THREE MONTHS LATER.

Three months later. She was accustomed to rowing her father about the bay, while he lolled at his ease and criticised her style, and was as capable with the oars as he was; and to cast off the little craft, to shut the boat-house doors, and to spin out into the open, was only to do what she did half-a-dozen times a week in fair weather.

But when she had done it without her father, when she found herself alone in the midst of the shipping, rather embarrassed for want of the usual steering apparatus—when she looked back at her home, "bosomed high in tufted trees" above the terraced garden, and thought of her exploit in its conventional aspect—she was a little inclined to that sober reflection which is so much more useful before rash action than afterwards. However, it did not occur to her to turn back. "I will row quietly down to the camp," she said to herself, "and leave the boat there, and return by the steamer." Thus she proposed to enjoy her liberty for the whole morning, with as little outrage to her mother's feelings as was compatible with doing so.

She rowed down to the camp accordingly, glancing over her shoulder continually as she went, an object of much curiosity to a great many people; and she was very glad when she reached her destination. The little strip of planking that formed the landing-stage of the camp was hidden from camp view by a screen of bushes; and she shipped her oars, tied up the boat, and went ashore unobserved by the Bo'sun, who was usually on the lookout.

"I am afraid that old fellow is playing the truant again," she thought. "He will do it once too often, and father will pack him off. And we shall never get such another." With all his faults, she was as much attached to the Bo'sun as he was to her. And then she remembered how hungry she was after her severe exertions, and how tiresome it would be if he had gone off without leaving anything to eat behind him.

She skirted the low fence within which tents and gardens and neat paths were enclosed on all but the seaward side, and went direct to the kitchen. This little shed was tidy, with its black pots on the hob, and its slab walls hung with cooking utensils; but the fire was out, and no Bo'sun was there. "Perhaps he has been drinking," she thought; and she looked round the yard and peeped into his tent, expecting to find him—as he had been found more than once before to-day—sleeping off the effects of a clandestine debauch. But there was no
A MARKED MAN.

sign of him, drunk or sober. Evidently he had left his post. She stood still a minute, not much liking her solitary sensations amongst such associations of life and companionship—a solitariness that would not have oppressed her at all in the open bush; and then she lifted up her fresh young voice and called loudly—

"Bo'sun! Bo'sun, ahoy!"

While the echoes still quivered in the hills above her her cry was answered. She had not expected an answer, and certainly not such an answer. In the big tent there was a noise like a chair falling on the boarded and matted floor, and a man rushed out of it—a tall, fair-bearded man, in his shirt sleeves, whose face at the sight of her—as likewise her face at the sight of him—was a picture of astonishment and consternation. It was Noel Rutledge, who was keeping house while the Bo'sun went to town to buy groceries. And he was the only living creature within a mile of her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A CAMP MEETING.

They said "Good morning" to each other, with flushed faces that struggled to smile, but were not allowed to do so; and then proceeded to explain the circumstances that had led to their unexpected meeting.

"Your father was so kind as to ask me to make use of the camp sometimes," said the young man, "and I have taken him at his word, you see." He did not say that Mr. Delavel had warmly repeated that invitation since the day when she heard him make it, and had even joined his guest at the camp on several occasions. "I was writing in the tent when I heard you call. The Bo'sun has gone into Sydney." He looked quickly around. "Is your father not with you?"

"No," said Sue, "I am alone. Of course, I did not know—I thought I should find the Bo'sun, as usual—I did not tell my father I was coming—he never told me you were here."

She was exceedingly embarrassed for such a self-possessed young lady, but it was not because she felt any awkwardness in her unchaperoned condition. She was as free from con-
ventional prudery, and as indifferent to social prejudices, as a daughter of Annie Morrison's could possibly be, and if this young man had been any other young man she would have thought no more of finding herself alone with him at the camp than of casting herself forth alone upon the public waters of the harbour, as she had just done. It was the too sudden and excessive gratification of her long-frustrated wish to see this one particular young man which upset her self-command. Mr. Rutledge was himself keenly conscious of giving occasion to Mrs. Grundy, but it was not for him to mention it. And, after rowing from Darling Point to Middle Harbour in the hot hours of a November morning, the strongest woman would need a rest before making fresh exertions. Sue was strong enough, but bore evident traces of having taxed her powers heavily.

"Why, you must be quite done," he said, when she had confessed her exploit.

"I am rather tired," she admitted, stretching the aching muscles of her young arms; "and hungry, too," she added with a laugh.

"Hungry? Oh, you must let me get you something. Come and sit down for a bit—come into the tent and rest while I go and rummage the Bo'sun's stores. There's some bread, I know, and some salt junk, and a currant cake; and I think I can find a tin of sardines."

"Get me some cake," said Sue; "a good big piece."

"Yes; and what will you have to drink? I suppose you don't like whisky and water?"

"No, not at all."

"That's all we have, except tea. I'll make you a cup of tea."

"You can't; the fire is out."

"I'll light it in two minutes."

"I don't believe you know how."

"Oh, don't I? You wait and see."

All their embarrassment melted away in the consideration of these prosaic matters, giving place to a secret exhilaration, which almost rose to exultation, such as might warm the hearts of truant schoolboys on the spree. They went to the kitchen together to make the fire and collect materials for lunch, she resisting his persuasions to rest while he waited upon her; and they had never been so intimate as they were in the fun she made of his domestic incapacities, and in his simple manifesta-
tions of his hospitable zeal. There was a charm in the situation
that youth and human nature had no resource but to yield to
—especially when the human nature was so unsophisticated
as in them. There were homely suggestions in it that were
delicious and irresistible. When he bungled over his fire-
making, and she swept him aside with playful contemptuous-
ness, and even went so far as to call him a duffer, she did
more than she knew to precipitate the accident that presently
befell her.

While the kettle boiled she ran into her own little tent to
wash her face and hands, and look at herself in the glass.
She was not much given, as a rule, to looking in the glass,
and perhaps this was the first occasion on which she did so
with any particular anxiety as to the result. She took off her
hat, and took down her pretty hair and twisted the long
braids into a careful knot; and then she touched up the natural
rings on her forehead, which stood her in place of the fuzzy
mass made by heated curling tongs that ninety-nine out of
every hundred young women were wearing; and she "settled"
her white gown, which had considerably lost its freshness,
pulling down the bodice and shaking out the skirt; and she
turned her head from side to side while she studied her
features from different points of view—all as the vainest of
vain coquettes might do. She returned to the large tent,
carrying her hat, and found Mr. Rutledge setting out the tea
and cake, himself newly washed and brushed, and clothed in
immaculate tweeds; and he thought as he looked at her that
he had never before realised how pretty she was, and she
thought as she looked at him that she had never done justice
to his good looks till now. And each felt at this moment
the forecast shadow of the near event—the meshes of fate
winding closer and closer about them. Out in the kitchen
they were like flies buzzing at the edge of the web—they
could escape it if they liked; but here they perceived that
the subtle threads were drawing them very strongly. Sue
began suddenly to wish she had not lingered so long, and
Noel Rutledge began to tell himself sternly that he must
on no account betray her father’s trust in him by taking
advantage of the position in which she had inadvertently
placed herself.

The back of the table was piled with sheets of manuscript—
the work on which he had been engaged when she interrupted
him—pens and ink, books and newspapers; the front part
was spread with her frugal meal. As she entered he drew up
the largest and easiest of the basket chairs.
"Oh," she said hastily, "I don't think I have time to sit
down. I must be getting home again."
"But you must drink your tea," he urged, "and you may
as well do it sitting as standing. And you have not rested
yourself at all—you must rest for a few minutes."
Of course, she had to sit down; it would have been absurd
to do otherwise. And when she took her seat he put a pillow
at her back, and brought a little box for her to set her feet on,
and a chair on which she could place her cup without having
to reach or lift. "Last time you made tea for me," he said;
"this time I will make it for you." And he proceeded to
pour it from the brown pot with anything but a steady hand.
She watched him with a fast-beating heart, and tried to think
of some harmless subject to talk about, but could not for the
life of her.

The stillness that was the evidence of their isolation was
intense—almost aggressive. Not a breath of wind stirred the
trees and bushes, and the harbour waters were so tranquil
that the little wavelets on the threshold of the camp were a
mere fringe of bubbles, and the sound of the surf outside the
Heads a whisper no louder than that of a summer breeze.
The sense of their solitude and proximity was like a spell upon
them, and every moment of silence strengthened it.

Sue took her tea and sipped it, and munched her currant
cake. She forgot that she was hungry, and only desired to
dispose of her lunch as quickly as possible. Mr. Rutledge
stood by the table, propping himself against the edge, and
looked down at her. The inevitableness of the impending
crisis became apparent to him, good resolutions notwith­
standing. Human nature is human nature, and when a
man very much in love finds himself thus confronted with
his opportunity—and such an opportunity!—and sees that
his beloved also appreciates the situation, what is he to
do? He has, indeed, no choice. There is but one thing he
can do.

The girl made her little modest effort to avert the cata­
strophe by jumping up before she had nearly satisfied her
healthy appetite, shaking the crumbs from her dress, and de­
claiming again that she must set forth immediately. But it
availed nothing. Before she could get out of the tent—
neither understood exactly how it happened at the last—she
was caught in his arms, as she had almost known she must be from the moment of walking in. For an instant she struggled and thought she would be angry with him for thus taking advantage of her defencelessness and imprudence, but the next instant her own arms were round his neck and her willing mouth lifted to receive the unspeakable first kiss. There was no coyness about Susan Delavel, and no pretences. Whatever she did she did thoroughly, and in moments of strong feeling, she paid no heed to manners.

When Noel Rutledge felt the sudden relaxation of her protesting muscles, and then the warm, responsive impulse, wholehearted as his own, his rapture was something that can be better imagined than described. The world was all forgotten—fathers and mothers and social distinctions, pride and prudence and poverty, and practical considerations of every sort, and he was as contented with his lot as any mere man could be. He gave vent to his feelings in a long, tremulous, deep-chested croon, like the croon of a mother over a lost and recovered child. "Oh-h!" he murmured, when the hammerbeat of his heart and the singing blood in his ears would let him speak, "I wondered if it could be true! It seemed too good to believe in."

"Yes," she whispered back. "I was afraid it was somebody else—not me."

Half-an-hour later, and while poor Mrs. Delavel was still hunting house and garden for her daughter at Darling Point, working herself into a paroxysm of silent wrath that would take her the best part of the week to get out of, Sue was still at the camp in her lover's company. She had some more tea and some more cake, and he knelt by her chair and fed her; and when she was not eating and drinking she was having that rest which she had refused to take at an earlier stage of the proceedings—supporting her weary frame upon his arm and shoulder. The Bo'sun had not come back; the desert island solitude was unbroken. They talked of their position and prospects, and took no count of time or of Mrs. Grundy.

Now that it was too late the young man blamed himself for what he had done, though exhibiting no appearance of remorse. "Your father will despise me," said he, "and every one who hears of it will cry shame on me—situated as I am—and as you are."
"Who cares what people say?" retorted Sue. "It is nobody's business but our own. And my father is not like ordinary fathers."

"He is not, indeed—any more than you are like ordinary daughters. But still I think he will jib at this. Being a father, he must think of your welfare a little."

"Exactly. That is what he will do. He knows that you are my welfare."

"How does he know?"

"I told him."

"When?"

"When we left the camp the other night."

"O!"—and there was an eloquent pause in the conversation.

"But, mother," continued Sue, when it was presently resumed, "mother will never allow me to have you—never! So don't expect it."

"O Sue! Never? And why?"

"For a thousand reasons."

"Tell me some of them, love."

"I can't; you must find them out. But she will be implacable."

"For a while, perhaps—we must hope for the best. I shall not ask for you till I am better qualified to take care of you than I am now?"

"What are you going to do to qualify yourself?" she asked rather gloomily.

"I must go away and work, and make a position. Didn't you know it was for your sake I wanted to get more money, when you were so angry with me the other day for being mercenary? Your father thinks I should get on better anywhere than here, where I have incurred so much unpopularity. I think so too. And I should have gone away at the first if it had not been for you."

"And you would go now? And without even letting them know of our engagement?"

"Good heavens, no! They shall know of that before they are a couple of hours older. I shall take you home now and tell them."

"Both of them?"

"Certainly."

"Hadn't you better see father first? I will tell him, shall I? And he will walk over here and see you. And
we can break it to mother after. If it came upon her all at once, I'm afraid it would be too great a shock."

He shook his head, with his slow, easy smile—with that indolent and indifferent manner which covered so much unsuspected determination. "Best get it all over and start fair," he said quietly.

"Very well," she responded at once, recognising the master spirit. "I am not afraid if you are not."

"If I haven't to be afraid of you, there's nothing left to fear, so far as I'm concerned."

"Ignorance is bliss," she retorted lightly. "You'll be more humble-minded when you come home again."

"I don't think so. I take it that, whatever the result of my interview with your mother, you won't go back on me?"

"Certainly not."

"You'll wait for me—you'll want me to wait for you—however long it may be."

"I shall want whatever you want," she answered simply.

"Just so. Well, on that basis, I can face all that comes."

"Except one thing," she continued earnestly. "I don't want you to go away. What do we want with more money? I shall have plenty. And if you are so—so vulgar—as to make a fuss about sharing with me, as I should share with you if you had it, I shall be too, too disgusted with you."

"I am afraid I am vulgar, dear."

"Then let me be poor with you"—looking at him with her candid and truthful eyes. "I shall like that best—far, far best. But in any case don't go and leave me just as I have got you."

"I won't, love,—I won't; at any rate, not yet. When we have time to think things over we may find some other alternative. Heaven knows that I wouldn't go for anything less than to try to make the time of waiting shorter."

"Whether short or long, I can never go away," she said earnestly. "I must stay with my father, or very near him, as long as he lives."

He had risen from his knees beside her, and she had risen from her chair. Standing by the table they took a long embrace and kiss, and then they went out into the sunshine to the boat. He fixed the tiller in its place, took the oars in his hands, and rowed her home to her mother.
He took the little boat along with powerful sweeping strokes—his Oxford strokes—while she held the tiller ropes round her waist, and steered it with the precision of long practice; and the voyage was made in half the time it had taken in the morning. His eyes dwelt on her face for the most part; hers on the course ahead of them and the obstacles it was her business to avoid. But now and then she answered his look frankly with one that, while it seemed not to disturb the tranquil intentness of her expression, suffused it with a radiance of satisfaction that left him in no doubt as to her state of mind.

The nearer they approached to Darling Point the more silent and serious they grew, the more impressed with the gravity of their immediate undertaking.

"Is your father likely to be at home, do you think?" the young man asked.

"Certain," answered Sue. "When he finds that I am out of bounds and in disgrace, he will stay till I come back to see me through it. But, as I told you before, it is not father you have to do with." She added—smiling suddenly, after a little thoughtful pause—"You don't happen to have ancestors, do you, Mr. Rutledge?"

"I've got another name," he said, "besides Rutledge."

"But do you?"

"Well, I suppose I've about the same number as other people. Why?"

"If you had ancestors that Burke and the Heralds' College could answer for—"

"Oh, I've none of that sort, that I know of. My father was a doctor; my grandfather was an auctioneer. That's as far as the records go."

"What a pity!"

"Do you think it's a pity?" he asked quickly, resting a moment on his oars.

She smiled at the absurdity of the question.

"I! It doesn't affect me. Your grandfather might have been a chimney-sweep—for the matter of that, you might be
one yourself—for all I should care about it. But if you had
had a pedigree it might have weighed with mother.”
“I wish I’d thought of that before. I might have found
one by hunting for it. My grandfather, the auctioneer—he
was in a large way of business—wrote books. And my father
had a big practice in London. He was once President of
the Royal College of Surgeons. Will that weigh anything
at all!”

She shook her head. “I’m afraid not.”

He rowed in silence for a minute; then he announced
suddenly that his mother’s father was a bishop.
“That’s better,” Sue hopefully responded. “What bishop?”

He told her what bishop, and her face fell again. It was,
alas! a bishop who was himself without a pedigree—a nobody
whatever outside his bishopric; nothing but a scholar and a
schoolmaster, who, like the auctioneer, had written books.

“She knows them all,” sighed Sue, “and where they all
came from, and what their arms are, and whom they inter-
married with—everything.”

“I suppose her own family is a very old one?” he ventured
to remark.

“Very,” replied Sue, promptly and in all good faith. “The
Morrisons came over with the Conqueror.”

“Well,” said the young man, making a little grimace
expressive of the hopelessness of his case, “I must just stand
upon my own merits, such as they are.” The poorness of his
merits, however, seemed to strike him with fresh force, and
he fell into a grave and self-reproachful mood. With every
appearance of right and reason, he assured his sweetheart that
he had committed an unpardonable crime in asking her to
marry him, and that nothing her mother could say to him
would approach the measure of his deserts.

Sue listened to these arguments with quiet complacency,
steadily watching the boat’s course, and apparently giving all
her attention to business. But when he had done she turned
to him with a look that took all reality out of his words.

“Look here,” she said, with a clear directness and self-
restraint of manner that was very odd in a young girl who
had just been immersed in all the sensations of a sudden
betrothal, “let us understand each other about this matter.
If I know anything of you—as I hope I do—you don’t mean
all that nonsense. And if you know anything of me—as I
also hope you do—you know what utter nonsense I think it;
just pure conventionalism, and nothing more nor less. You are the only man I have ever met who wouldn't have been certain to put a stop to all my ways of living—all the ways I want to live—the moment I had married him. Whatever others may think—and in the long run it doesn't matter what they think—I am satisfied. I don't want you to be in any way different from what you are. If you were rich—well, if you were rich I wouldn't have you. For then I should know you were not worthy of me."

He smiled at the characteristic conclusion of this speech, but his heart swelled within him. "What I was thinking of," he said, "was that by marrying me a stop would be put to a good many of your ways of living."

"I know. But what of that? I dare say I am absurd and ridiculous, but the fact is I really don't care for money—beyond a modest competence—not one little bit. I should be equally happy without it—happier, for I should be more in my own hands, more free to do things, less weighed down."

"You have not tried it, dear."

"Yes, I knew you would bring out that stupid platitude. Everybody does. I have not tried it, of course. But I know what is in me and what isn't—what I really want and what I don't care a straw for." They were passing a great ship that had just slipped her moorings, homeward bound, and was rocking the little boat in the wash she made, and Sue paused for a few moments. When they came to quiet water she went on talking. "I'll tell you what I think of that money question," she said. "It is what my father thinks too—only he gets a little slack sometimes—he is pre-occupied, his energies have been drained in different ways, and he has to consider others. We believe that the time is coming when people will be ashamed to be rich—I mean rich for merely their own purposes. It will be vulgar, it will be selfish, it will be mean; people will look down on the rich person instead of up, as they do now. And wealth will go out of fashion amongst well-bred people, and all that gross kind of luxury; and life will be more simple and sincere, more intelligent and refined; and the poor man will cease from the land then, without any bloody revolutions—if he will only be patient in the meanwhile. You are laughing at me and thinking me a visionary," she exclaimed, laughing a little herself as she met his sympathetic eyes.

He declared that he was not laughing; that it simply made him glow to listen to her.
"Well," she said, "what people in general will feel some day, I feel now. I should be ashamed—I am ashamed—to be rich when so many are poor. If ever I have money—I suppose I shall have it some day—a long day yet, I trust!—I shall take enough for myself and those belonging to me, but not more than enough. I don't mean that I shall use the rest to found institutions—I hate institutions—but I shall sprinkle help round me wherever I go. I don't care what political economists say—selfish, hide-bound creatures! I will not be governed by them. I will just pay my debt to the world direct, without employing middle-men, and above all things else I will stop hunger and physical pain whenever I see it—as far as my means will go. There are plenty to attend to minds and souls. I'll go no further than bodies. Bodies are the chief thing, and they are always neglected. Well," she concluded as she steered towards the boathouse at Darling Point, "no husband in the world would let me do all that except you. But you will."

"Yes," he said, with solemnity, "I will."

"I don't want to be nursed up, and choked and smothered. I want to develop myself. I want to work. I want to live. The hope of my life has been that I might have something to do in it—something real and not sham. I want to use myself—don't you understand? But I know you understand. That is why you are so—so peculiarly appropriate."

"To me," said Noel Rutledge, drawing in his oars, "to me work and life are synonymous terms. Some people, I know, only think that part of life worth living which is rescued from work, but I think the other part the best. I never want to be pensioned off while I have strength for active service."

"Exactly. I knew you were like that, and therefore"—They were within the boathouse. Noel had landed, and she was stepping on shore after him. Therefore the sentence remained uncompleted.

They stayed in the boathouse for about ten minutes; then, with a natural trepidation, heroically disguised, they ascended the garden to the house. One bit of the way was up a steep path and a flight of winding sandstone stairs overarched with a creeper-covered trellis and tall ferns on either side, a place that went by the inappropriate name of the North-West Passage. Here it was dark in the sunniest noonday, and no sooner had the darkness enveloped our lovers than the man's arm found its way round the girl's waist as a matter of course.
“Let me help you up,” he said; and she allowed him to help her up, though she had the strength and the elasticity of a young antelope, and could have helped him quite as well. And thus they dawdled along the path, crawlingly mounted the rock-hewn steps, and, turning a corner, came suddenly upon her father, who was standing quietly at the mouth of the green tunnel waiting for them.

“Good morning, Rutledge,” he said gravely. “You have brought the truant back.”

“Good morning, Delavel. Yes, I have.” His arm had been withdrawn from his sweetheart’s waist like a flash of lightning. “I—I’m afraid you’ll blame me very much.”

Sue ran up to her father, and flung herself upon his breast—an unusual demonstration in broad daylight, and in the presence of a third person, which told its tale. “It is my fault,” she whispered hurriedly. “I went to the camp without knowing he was there. I stayed a little while, not thinking. He has come to tell you and mother.”

“What, already!” the father ejaculated with dismay. Then he thought with satisfaction of the suitor’s impecuniosity, and the length of time that must elapse before he could claim her, and he felt easier—easy enough to smile in a rather grim fashion, and even to shake hands with his visitor.

“Are you going up to call on Mrs. Delavel, Rutledge?” he asked, with a curious look at the intrepid young man.

“Yes—if I have your permission,” was the quick reply.

“Oh! You have my full permission, certainly.”

“You know what I have come for, Delavel?”—very earnestly.

“I guess,” was the laconic response.

“Have I—have we—your consent? I am not asking for anything in the present, of course—until I am better worthy of her than I am now. But may I”—

Richard waved his hand upwards in an airy manner. “Go and talk to my wife about it,” he said, chuckling for a moment in what struck Sue as a surprisingly heartless fashion, totally at variance with his sympathetic behaviour on board the steamer the other night. And Sukey, my dear, did you leave the boat where it can be got at?”

“Oh father! you are not going away! You are not going to leave us!” cried Sue, aghast and reproachful. “I counted on you to help us with mother.”

“Be content if I don’t hinder you,” he replied. “That’s
as much as you can reasonably ask of me. Isn't it, Rutledge?"

"Quite," said the young man, "and more."

So the lovers went up and the father went down. This time the father was suffering from a paroxysm of that jealousy which had torn the daughter's heart when she first recognised that he loved another as well if not better than he loved her. He was pleased to think of the bad quarter of an hour that his rival in Sukey's affections was going to have, and that was the only pleasure he enjoyed that afternoon.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE COURT OF FINAL APPEAL.

Mrs. Delavel sat in her drawing-room, knitting. She looked the picture of luxurious tranquillity in the depths of her soft chair, with palms and flowers and artistic elegancies all around her; but the face she lifted at the sound of the opening door did not impose upon her daughter. It was calm and comely, the face of a dignified, reasonable, well-bred matron—quite reassuring to Mr. Rutledge, who had the ordinary man's dulness of perception in such matters; but Sue saw what she had expected to see in the steady brown eyes and firmly shut mouth—the rock-like, ice-like displeasure against which their appeals would break, like waves against granite cliffs, in vain. "Though it would have been all the same," she said to herself, "whatever the mood in which we found her."

Across the pretty, spacious room the girl marched straight to her mother's chair, and her lover followed her half-way and paused, waiting for the lady of the house to look at him, that he might make his bow. He was a pleasant figure to look at, tall and broad, with his wholesome, kindly face; but Mrs. Delavel carefully excluded him from her cold gaze. She fixed her eyes upon Sue, divining a more than usually serious escapade; and a dim sense of its nature caused her cheek to redden and her nostrils to dilate.

"Mother," said Sue, with the courage of desperation, "here is Mr. Rutledge—father's friend, Mr. Rutledge. He has come to see you—he wants to speak to you."
THE COURT OF FINAL APPEAL.

Then Annie had to recognise Mr. Rutledge's presence, and he bowed with amazing self-possession. "I don't think I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Rutledge," she said with a stiff and ghastly smile. She had known the clergyman of that name—had even discussed burning questions of ritual with him in the days when he was fairly respectable; it was the renegade in the tweed suit whose acquaintance she desired to repudiate. Certainly no lover, courting maternal favours, ever found himself in a more unpromising or uncomfortable position, and his constitutional imperturbability never stood him in better stead. It enabled him to maintain his dignity and his grasp of the situation, which were great advantages to him.

"I have come to tell you, Mrs. Delavel, that your daughter has promised to marry me," he said, seeing the futility, under the circumstances, of beating about the bush; "to marry me some day—when I have prepared a suitable home for her. I know I am not worthy of her, I am ashamed to ask for your consent—indeed, I know I shall not get it; but it is right to let you know at once what has happened, and to tell you—to tell you that I will strain every nerve to make myself worthy of her; not only that, but to work myself into a position that shall not discredit her choice in the eyes of her family. As for her, she is not ashamed of me as I am. And—and a man can do a woman no higher honour than to love her with all his heart and soul. But I know how ineligible I am, as I stand in every way except in being her choice—she has chosen me as I have chosen her, otherwise I should have nothing to say—and I will leave no stone unturned to better my position for her sake. I will do all that is within the power of human effort to do. I won't ask for her until I have qualified myself to take proper care of her; and I don't wish her to feel bound by anything that has happened to-day. She is young—there may be a long waiting—she may think better of it."—

Here Sue, who had been standing apart breathlessly watching and listening, took a step to his side and slipped her hand in his; and Mrs. Delavel, who had allowed him to run to this length because she was too stunned to speak, suddenly found her voice.

"Susan," she said in a cold fury, "go to your room, if you please."

Susan didn't want to go; she wanted to stay and see the matter out. "Mother," she pleaded, "it concerns me more than any one,"
But Mrs. Delavel sternly pointed to the door. The girl looked at her fellow-culprit; he returned the look with an almost imperceptible nod; they squeezed each other's hands violently for a moment, and then she walked out of the room, leaving him in sole charge of their joint interests. She did not, however, go upstairs; she went to sit in the garden—in a cunningly-contrived nook amongst the trees, whence she could see, without being visible from the road herself, the gate through which her lover would pass presently when his trial was over. Her intention was to lie in wait for him, with a little store of oil and wine for the wounds he would have received; to assure him of her fidelity through all vicissitudes—her determination to be his, some day or other, no matter how circumstances might fight against them.

She sat for what seemed an hour, but was perhaps twenty minutes, and imagined the dreadful battle going on within the house. Her mother was not a scolding woman—all the blood of all the Delavels could not have made her more of a lady in that respect—but she would be more overwhelming than any termagant of the back slums in her polite implacability. Sue was not without a dim pity for that poor mother—with whom all mothers must sympathise—but she was, naturally, most concerned for her lover's tender feelings. And how cruelly would these be outraged! His poverty and his ill repute would be impressed on him as they never were before; he would be told that he had taken a dishonourable advantage of a girl's innocence and ignorance of the world—had entrapped her by secret stratagems for the sake of her fortune; he would be denounced as a wicked atheist and soul-destroyer, bound to effect the eternal ruin of his victim should she be delivered into his hands; and all that unpretending high-mindedness and unworldliness which made his rare and excellent quality would be as utterly unrecognised as the girlish aspirations of which they were the correlative. He would be spurned with courteous words, but still with contempt and contumely, and the door of hope would be shut against him as fast as any one human hand could shut it.

In the midst of these painful and exciting reflections she heard the click of the front gate, and, looking round in alarm, beheld the checked suit, the pot hat, the eyeglass of Lord Boyton. He wore his clothes loose and his hat on the back of his head, which showed his stout form and his chubby face to the best advantage. His eyeglass flashed in the sun; he
walked with an assured step that betokened him quite sober; he was making for the house with an air of purpose that filled Miss Delavel with dismay. Her first impulse on seeing him was to hide herself; her second to intercept him before he could reach the drawing-room and disturb the important business going on there; her third to make a straight appeal to him as a man and a brother to help and not hinder her in her time of difficulty.

She called him by name as he was passing, and he paused, turned, and hastened to join her in her green nook, evidently as much surprised as pleased by the unexpected invitation. After welcoming him with astounding cordiality, she led him away from that now inconvenient spot, giving up the chance of seeing her lover for that day; and she descended the garden to a bench on a midway terrace, hidden from view of the house windows, and there took a seat and made room for her companion beside her. He interpreted these signs of goodwill as a swell young lord was bound to do. He asked her where she had been hiding all the morning; he declared he had found himself unable to get through the day without seeing her; he reproached her with snubbing him; he showed such a dangerous tendency to put his arm round her waist, and otherwise to assume repentance and responsiveness, that she was fain to plunge at once into plain statements.

"Lord Boyton," she said, "did you ever love anybody very, very much indeed?"

The question naturally staggered him. His amiable countenance became overspread with blushes and perplexity. "Well, I dare say I have admired a lot of girls," he admitted, in a doubtful and apologetic manner. "In a sort of way, you know. But until I met you"—

"Oh, nonsense!" she interrupted. "Don't be silly. I want you to talk seriously—not to pay absurd compliments."

"But I assure you, Sue—may I call you Sue?"

"No, you may not." She made a hasty gesture to fend him off. "Just listen to me. I was going to tell you that I—that I love somebody. And I am rather in trouble. And—and I thought you might perhaps help me a little." Then, with a most engaging candour and frankness, she sketched a delicate outline of the situation, while he sat and listened, looking rather sulky and a good deal taken aback. "I was in hopes it might have been me," he said, when she had told her little story.
"Oh no, I am sure you never hoped anything of the kind. You never had the least reason to hope it. Come now, did I ever give you any reason?"

"Your mother did. Your mother has been encouraging me like anything."

"Mother has been very kind to you. That's because you are a stranger, and she likes you."

"She said only this very morning"—

"Well, never mind what she said. You see she didn't know I had already made my choice; and look how unsuitable it would have been! You must marry a great lady, of course, as lords are expected to do."

"I'm sure I have never seen a great lady who'd do me more credit than you would," he protested.

"Thank you," she responded; "that's very handsome of you; but you are mistaken, all the same. I should be the most dismal failure imaginable. Don't talk of any such nonsense; be what I want you to be—be my good friend, won't you?"

She laid her warm brown hand on his; and the action and her frank appeal stirred all the gentleman in him.

"Tell me what I can do," he said, lifting her hand to his lips. "Do you want me to plead that fellow's cause with your father and mother? If so, you must tell me what to say, and I'll do my best, though it will be a hard job, I can tell you."

"Oh no," she said, smiling; "I don't want you to do that. What I want is"—But when she tried to explain it she could not find words.

"Look here," he said, with a discernment that was very creditable to him. "Your mother asked me to dine here tonight; do you want me to come?"

"Yes," replied Sue promptly.

"And to play tennis with you to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"And go on as if nothing had happened?"

"Yes."

"All right," he said heartily. "You may depend on me."

"It would be so much easier for me," said Sue, "if you wouldn't desert us suddenly, just at this particular moment"—

"I know. I won't desert you. I'll stick to you and see you through it," said Lord Boyton valiantly. He quite understood the part he was to perform—that of a buffer between Miss Delavel and the impact of her mother's wrath, and he
very shortly came to the conclusion that it was much better fun to be the young lady's confidential friend than her unfavoured lover. In fact, he had not particularly cared to be her lover; he would not have thought of it if she had not snubbed him.

Sue did not see her parents until dinner time. She went into the drawing-room two minutes before the gong sounded and found her father standing on the hearth-rug, as he would stand to warm his coat-tails in winter, the sole occupant of the apartment. He was looking towards the door when she opened it, and he held out his hand. She flew across the room, and the next moment was clasped in his arms. He did not utter a word of congratulation, and she did not think of asking for his good wishes. It was quite unnecessary. When she spoke it was to whisper, "How is she?"

"She's in an awful way," he whispered back. "You'll have to be patient, old girl. But never mind; you've got plenty of time before you—you can afford to wait. It will be good for him, too; give him his opportunity to work."

"How did she treat him?"

"I don't know. I can only guess."

"What is she going to do about it?"

"She's going to take you straight off to New Zealand for the whole summer. And if that doesn't cure you she's going to take you to Europe."

"I won't go."

"I think you'll find you'll have to go."

"Without you?"

"I'm afraid so."

"O father! I couldn't!"

"Well, don't make a fuss, old girl. You'll gain nothing by that, and you might lose something. Just take things as they come."

Like lovers surprised in a clandestine meeting, they suddenly separated at the sound of approaching voices. The door opened to admit Lord Boyton and his hostess, whom he had met in the hall as she descended from her room. Mrs. Delavel was endeavouring to unbend to her fascinating guest, but not succeeding very well, though better than could have been expected. Lord Boyton was in the highest spirits. He beamed upon Sue through his eyeglass in a familiar and encouraging manner that puzzled her father extremely.

"Good evening, Miss Delavel," he said, cordially shaking
hands with her, as if he had not seen her before—which, Sue thought, was rather overdoing it. "Awfully sorry to find you out when I called this morning. I thought we might have had a little tennis perhaps. But we'll have a game to-morrow, shall we? May I come over after breakfast to-morrow?"

"Certainly, if you wish," said Sue.

Annie would not speak to her daughter, or look at her. She was truly in "an awful way," as the girl could see; all the accustomed symptoms of displeasure were intensified to the point of rage and violence—or what would have been rage and violence in a less perfectly-mannered person. On the surface she smiled graciously and assumed a polite interest in various topics introduced by her guest; but her nostrils were all a-quiver, and her white breast, that was like a soft satin cushion, rose and fell, and her lips were compressed over her shut teeth, by reason of the inward commotion of her mind which had not yet had time to settle. The host was dull and silent; the daughter of the house was silent also, and looking just a shade haughty and mutinous. In short, the atmosphere of the dinner-table was such as to spoil the appetite and damp the spirits of the most case-hardened globe-trotter. But Lord Boyton was not damped in any way. He surpassed himself in the exuberance of his conversation and good-humour, insomuch that his host felt grateful for his presence for the first time, while thinking that the young cub was more of a cub than ever. "Any one but a born fool would see that something was the matter," thought Richard; "but that young ass sees nothing." Which was a mistake and an injustice on Richard's part.

Lord Boyton had an idea of his own, which he thought a great improvement upon Sue's. He would continue to delude Mrs. Delavel with the belief that he was a candidate for her daughter's hand, and Sue's changed attitude to him would give colour to the assertion he intended to make, that she would get over her fancy for the vagabond she had taken up with, and allow herself to be won by the worthier suitor in course of time, if judiciously left to her own devices and his. This plan might—who could tell?—be really as successful as it pretended it would be; but if not, it would make things pleasant for him and easy for the poor girl for a good while to come. So when Mrs. Delavel, in a would-be careless tone, announced that she would be off to New Zealand in a few days, he was quite equal to the occasion.
"Will you?" he exclaimed. "Well, it's getting time to go somewhere, I suppose. I had some thoughts of New Zealand myself. We might join forces, eh? I might help Mr. Delavel with the luggage and things. I'm a capital courier."

"I'm afraid my husband's business will compel him to remain in Sydney," said Annie, who had quite determined this time to have her daughter wholly in her own hands.

"Then you'll want me all the more. Eh, Miss Sue? I could look after you and keep you out of mischief, eh?" He was half-way through his dinner by this time, and his not abundant wits were beginning to fail him a little, or he would not have ventured upon this pleasantry, which disconcerted himself as much as it did the rest of the party as soon as he had uttered it.

"I think," said Mrs. Delavel, with a stern, portentous smile, "that I shall be able to keep my daughter out of mischief." Then she added, not wishing to throw cold water on his really welcome proposal, "But we shall be very glad to have you to take care of us, all the same."

"It might end in your having to take care of him," remarked Richard. Which seemed extremely likely.

After his little slip, Lord Boyton made really heroic efforts to keep sober, or, at any rate, not to get more drunk than he already was; for he felt the responsibility of his position as Sue's champion and protector, and was most anxious to serve her faithfully. It was touching to see, when the bottle came to his elbow, his wistful look at it, his momentary waver­ing, and the noble air with which he said, "No, thanks," and let it pass. And during the rest of the dinner he devoted himself to the task of pleasing his hostess with a determination that deserved the highest praise. He chattered about the duchesses and countesses of his acquaintance, calling them by their Christian names; related anecdotes of the Prince of Wales and of Roger of Dunstanborough; described the goings-on of the professional beauties, and roundly asserted that not one of them could hold a candle to Miss Sue—which latter was an impudent statement, because Sue was not a beauty at all. And Mrs. Delavel thawed under this treatment—while it lasted—in a wonderful manner; she seemed for the moment to forget her maternal cares.

After dinner Lord Boyton remarked that it was a jolly night, and asked Sue to take a turn in the garden with him. Greatly to the surprise of both her father and mother, the
girl rose at once and allowed herself to be led away into the darkness. As soon as the pair were out of earshot of their elders, Lord Boyton began to praise himself and to seek to be praised. “I know how to manage Mrs. Delavel,” said he, with that fine taste for which he was remarkable. “She’s awfully fond of me—I can do anything with her. You see if I don’t bring her round in no time.”

“You’ll overdo it,” said Sue, “to a dead certainty.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOW LORD BOYTON OVERDID IT.

When Sue went up to her room that night she found Hannah sitting there, like a patient maid waiting to undress her mistress—an office that was never required of her. The old woman sat under one of the shaded lamps, with her spectacles over her nose. She had been sewing, but her work had fallen to the floor. Her head lay on the back of her chair; her cap was awry. At the moment of Sue’s entrance she was in the land of dreams. The first creak of the door, however, roused her to wakefulness and activity.

“Well,” she said, by way of greeting, “and what is it that you’ve been up to now?”

“Who told you I’d been up to anything?” retorted Sue.

“Oh, you needn’t pretend. I know that much, at any rate.”

“How do you know? Has mother been telling you?”

“Your mother hasn’t told me a word—except that I’m not to let you out of my sight for a moment when she’s not with you.”

Sue’s face grew fiery red. She stood rooted to the floor, glaring at the old woman with indignant eyes.

“There,” said Hannah, “you needn’t look at me as if you’d eat me. I can’t help it, can I?”

“I’m ashamed of you, Hannah,” the girl burst out, when she could find words in which to express her sense of the treatment to which she was being subjected. “If anybody had told me that you would descend to such work I wouldn’t have believed them.”
"Well, I don't like the job, I can tell you, and I told your mother so. In fact, I told her plump and plain that I wouldn't do it. But she said if I didn't somebody else should, and I thought you'd rather it was me than a common servant." Hannah, of course, was not a common servant.

Sue was silent for a minute, battling with her rage and mortification. She saw the injustice of being angry with Hannah, yet she still regarded the old woman resentfully—as the innocent policeman always is regarded by the enemy of the Government which he represents. "And how long is this to last?" inquired the young lady haughtily.

"Till you go to New Zealand next week."

"And what is mother afraid I should do in the meantime? What is the danger to be guarded against?"

"I suppose she's afraid you should want to meet somebody."

"Meet whom?"

"I don't know. A sweetheart, most likely."

"Does she suppose I've got a sweetheart hidden in my bedroom? Am I to be watched by night as well as by day? Are you to sit here while I undress myself, for instance?"

"No, my dear," said Hannah, gathering up her work. "I won't intrude on you any longer. I'll sit outside the door until your mother comes up." She went out a little huffily, for her feelings were hurt by her young lady's tone, and shut the door behind her. Sue heard her drag a chair on the landing, and knew by certain rustlings and coughings that Hannah meant to be faithful to her trust, however much she might dislike it.

In a few minutes Mrs. Delavel's trailing skirts were audible on the stairs. Sue was standing before her dressing-table, taking down her pretty hair; and she paused, hearing her mother's hand on the door, and turned to receive her. She had not spoken to the culprit since the latter was ordered out of the drawing-room at the beginning of the momentous interview. Sue braced herself for a painful discussion of that event, supposing it was the object of this visit.

But Mrs. Delavel had not come to talk. Her displeasure was too hard set to flow in words at present. What she did was to walk with stately composure across the threshold, draw the key from the inner side of the door, and, leaving the room again without regarding her daughter any more than if she had been a piece of furniture, reclose the door, reinsert the key, and shoot the lock on the outside.
Sue's first impulse, on realising the measure of the indignity put upon her, was to fly across the room and rattle the door handle furiously. "Mother!" she cried sharply; and then, changing her tone, "Father! father! father!"

Mr. Delavel, however, was mooning in the garden with his pipe, thinking of his little girl's troubles, but out of reach of the sound of her cries. His wife calmly disregarded them; Sue could hear the rustle of the maternal skirts along the softly-carpeted corridor, dying away in the distance. Hannah had already been despatched to her bed at the farther end of the house. And in a moment the girl's paroxysm of rage—the unthinking impulse of a wild creature suddenly realising captivity—passed. "No, I won't drag him into it, poor daddy!" she said to herself. "And what does it matter! It can't alter things. It can't hurt me now." She walked restlessly round and round the room for a few minutes, until she had regained her lost self-control; then she undressed herself; then she sat down in her nightgown and wrote a long letter to her lover—a process that soothed her spirit wonderfully; and she went to bed at last in a state of simmering happiness such as she had never known in her life before, and had the most beautiful dreams, though settled sleep was impossible.

It was Hannah who unlocked her door in the morning. Hannah had served her mistress with the early cup of tea, and was now put on guard again till breakfast-time. She came to the bedside with Sue's little tray, and was surprised at the tranquil smile which greeted her. "Well, I'm glad to see you're all right," said the old woman sourly; but her sourness was not for Sue. She patted the soft shoulder uplifted from the pillow, and smoothed the rumpled hair. "I should like to know what's the matter, that you're treated like a convict," said she questioningly. "It isn't for nothing that your mother puts you under lock and key—and you a grown woman. I quite expected you'd have made a rope of your bedclothes and let yourself down out of the window, and gone off while we were all asleep."

"With my sweetheart? Thank you for the hint, Hannah. I'll do that to-night if I'm locked up again; and, by the way, I've got a letter for him. Will you post it for me as soon as you go downstairs?"

"Where is it?" asked Hannah eagerly.

"Oh, you want to see the address," said Sue, who had it
under her pillow. "I won't show it to you unless you promise to post it for me."

"Well, I can't promise that. I've got orders not to post letters for you; and what's more, to see that nobody else does."

"I suppose you can't prevent my father from posting letters for me if he chooses?"

"I can't; but your mother will, unless I'm much mistaken."

"Very well; I'll give it to Lord Boyton. He's a free agent, at any rate. And now what am I to do, Hannah?"—for by this time Sue had emptied her cup of tea and eaten her wafer of bread and butter. "Am I to get up, or am I to stay in bed?"

"To get up, of course. And if you'll promise not to stir out till breakfast time I'll leave you to yourself till then."

"How good of you! Do you mean I'm not to stir out of the house, or not out of my room? Because I should like to have a bath, if I might be indulged so far, though if I'm risking handcuffs and leg-irons by walking down the corridor to the bathroom I'd better go dirty, unpleasant as that would be?"

"Don't you be silly now," said Hannah testily. "Go and have your bath, of course. And then stay in your room till the gong sounds for breakfast. You're not to go downstairs and talk to your father, remember; that happened last night, but it's not to happen again."

"Hannah," cried Sue passionately, "you're an old wretch!"

"I can't help it," said Hannah. "I must obey orders, and if you don't like it, you've only yourself to blame."

Sue, angry as she was, felt herself upon her parole, and also went in great dread of having a "common servant" put over her in Hannah's place, so she kept in her room till breakfast time. She did not even go down at the summons of the gong, but sat on the edge of her bed till she was specially sent for after fish and omelette were cold. She walked into the breakfast-room with a severely composed air, and saluted her father only. "Good morning, father dear."

"Good morning, Sukey."

They did not dare to look at each other while they exchanged these formal greetings; but Richard managed, by touching the toe of his daughter's slipper under the table, to communicate to her the fact that his heart was in the right place, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary. Mrs. Delavel poured out Sue's coffee, but otherwise took no sort of notice.
of her; and Sue did not speak to her mother—a circumstance which pained the poor girl very much afterwards whenever she remembered it.

It was a perfectly silent meal. The master of the house propped his newspaper against the slop-basin and absorbed himself in matters outside the domestic circle as far as possible; and immediately after breakfast he made haste off to business, without a word to anybody. Sue and her mother were left alone, and the silence continued. They usually spent the morning in the breakfast-room, which was a cheerful apartment, having a substantial table near the window, which commanded a lovely open prospect of the bay. It is not, we may observe in passing, the easiness of chairs and sofas that makes the comfort of a room; or not that only. It is the convenience and sufficiency of its table space. Because the modern drawing-room is so ill-furnished in this respect, however charming in all others, its occupants can rarely make life interesting and active therein; a table large enough to spread one's elbows on in the neighbourhood of the hearth, or in the light of a big window, according to the season of the year, would just make all the difference. It was because of that table in the Delavel breakfast-room that Sue and her mother lingered there of a morning, for they had choice of several sitting-rooms beside. Here they scattered their needlework, their books and newspapers, their drawing or writing materials, with a sense of ample accommodation that was restful and satisfying to mind as well as body, and which they did not seem to be able to find in the same degree elsewhere.

On this particular morning Sue would have been very glad to exchange her favourite corner in the angle of that pleasant window for any other in the house where she could have been alone, but she would not leave the room without permission, and was too proud to ask for it. She sat down with her hands before her, and a meek air of waiting for orders. Mrs. Delavel also sat down and glanced over the newspaper while the breakfast things were being removed. As the tray was going out she spoke for the first time. "Tell the cook to come to me."

It was her custom to visit the cook in her own quarters every morning at this hour; to-day the cook was summoned to the breakfast-room for consultation and instructions. This, of course, was in order that Sue should not be left unguarded,
The interview was a long one, and the girl turned to the table, on which stood her work-basket, and began to sew by way of relieving the irksomeness of her position. As she sewed she listened and longed for the sound of the door bell and the announcement of Lord Boyton's arrival. Never—up to yesterday—had she dreamed of the possibility of welcoming him as she was ready to do now.

And he came early, as if he knew how badly she wanted him. He came at the very nick of time, just as the cook was retiring to her kitchen, with the bill of fare for dinner in her hand. He entered with a beaming face, wearing his flannels and canvas shoes, and Mrs. Delavel smiled and was gracious to him, according to established habit. Sue sprang to her feet and threw down her work, and held out her hand with unprecedented cordiality; she felt almost ready to kiss him for so opportunely coming to her relief.

"I'm afraid I'm rather early," said he; "but I thought it would be better to have our game before it got too hot, don't you know."

"Oh, much better," said Sue. "We'll go now. I'll just get my hat." She broke off and looked at her mother, with a quick change in her face. "Mother, may I be allowed to go upstairs to fetch my hat?" she asked stiffly.

Mrs. Delavel's answer was to touch the button of the bell, and to order the maid who thereupon appeared to tell Hannah she was wanted. Hannah came, looking very surly, and her mistress said to her, in her calm tones, "Hannah, Miss Sue wants to get her hat. Will you go with her, if you please?"

The girl left the room with flaming cheeks and swelling breast, leaving Lord Boyton to stare after her with his mouth open. Half-way up the stairs she turned to her sour-faced nurse, and said in a deep, thrilling voice, "Hannah, I feel as if I could choke you."

"I dare say you do," responded Hannah, taking no offence. "And I don't wonder at it. If she's going to do this before folks, I'll have no more of it. I'll get the master to interfere. There's reason in all things."

And then she flung her arms round the old woman's neck and kissed her. "Never mind, Hannah, I'm happy," she cried, with a little sound in her throat, half laugh and half sob. "I'm happy, in spite of her!" Which was perhaps the hardest thing she ever said of her mother in her life.

"What makes you happy?" inquired Hannah.
"I'll tell you all about it some time," said Sue.

She ran downstairs with her hat on and her racket in her hand, watched by Hannah from the corridor above; and she believed she was going to enjoy a little liberty in the companionship of her confidential friend. She had her letter that he was to post in her pocket; she had her head full of information that she meant to pour into his sympathetic ears as soon as they reached the tennis-ground. Mrs. Delavel hated to be out of doors in the heat, unless in pursuance of her social avocations; she was never on the tennis-ground to admire and applaud the splendid battles that went on there almost daily between her husband and daughter in the cool weather; she had never yet thought it necessary to chaperon the latter person when Lord Boyton enticed her thither for a game. With him, at any rate, if with no one else, Sue expected to be considered safe.

But she was disappointed. On reaching the lower hall she found her friend awaiting her with a disconcerted expression on his face, and beside him her mother in her garden hat, neckerchief, and gloves. Not a word was said. The two young people exchanged a blank look, and then, with all the spring gone out of them, trailed out of the cool vestibule into the burning sunshine, Lord Boyton walking beside his hostess, and holding a white umbrella over her, Sue bringing up the rear, and slashing the heads off the flowers with the edge of her racket as she passed.

The tennis-court, cut out of the sandstone cliff, surrounded with high trellises to keep the balls from bounding into the sea, lay half-way down the garden. It was a tennis-court of the most luxurious pattern, perfect to play on and pretty to look at, with its trellis screen covered with flowering creepers, and its charming arbour in the corner, and its comfortable seats all round; but neither Lord Boyton nor Sue found any pleasure in it on this occasion. Mrs. Delavel sat under her umbrella, on a level with the net, and watched them so closely that they could not exchange a word in private, nor was there any opportunity for passing the letter from one pocket to the other. Under these circumstances Sue wielded her racket with an off-hand recklessness, and Lord Boyton swung his to and fro with a languid carelessness that betokened an utter want of interest in the game on either side; and after half-an-hour of disgraceful play they tacitly agreed to make a failure of it.
“Lord, how hot it is!” exclaimed the young nobleman, who got hot very easily. “Too hot for tennis. We'll have to wait till we get to New Zealand, eh?” Then after a short silence, he continued, “Look here, Miss Sue, let me take you out on the water—that's the only cool place. Let's get the boat out, and have a quiet row down the harbour, eh? Mrs. Delavel, you don't like the water, I know, but you can sit on the terrace and watch us, and you'll see what good care I'll take of her. We won't go out of your sight, and when you wave your handkerchief we'll turn back. Eh? You can trust her to my care, I know.”

“Certainly I can,” said Mrs. Delavel sweetly. “But who told you I did not like the water? I like it very much, and if you feel inclined for a row I will go with you with pleasure. I couldn't let you take my daughter alone, of course—not because I could not trust you with her, but because it would not be proper.”

This was not at all what Lord Boyton wanted. However, he could not gracefully go back on his proposal; and Sue, who saw herself doomed to strict captivity, thought it would at least be more tolerable on the water than in the house, and was anxious to keep her friend beside her as long as possible. So they repaired to the boathouse, and the girl, with her quick, strong hands, got the boat ready while the young man made a show of doing it.

“We'll bring it round to the steps for you, mother,” she said; for it was as unseemly for Mrs. Delavel to get into the boat in the boathouse as to get into her carriage in the stableyard.

But this little dodge failed, of course. “Thank you,” she replied coolly; “I prefer to get in here.” And she stepped in as she spoke, assisted by Lord Boyton, and sat down in the stern, fairly in the middle of the curved seat.

“I think I shall have to sit there, mother, to steer,” said Sue politely.

“I think,” replied Mrs. Delavel icily, “that I am as competent to steer as you are.”

“Oh, certainly,” rejoined her daughter. “Only you are not used to it, and I thought perhaps you wouldn't care for the trouble.”

Mrs. Delavel calmly drew the ropes round her waist, without deigning further remark. Lord Boyton took the oars, and Sue sat down on one side, with nothing to do but to watch their performances.
They had not gone far before the expert young boatwoman perceived that helm and oars were in the hands of arrant bunglers. Mrs. Delavel had never steered a boat before, in spite of having lived by the sea all her life, and, like others in the same position, imagined that no practice was necessary—that anybody could do such a simple thing as that. She gently tugged at one rope, then at the other, with the result that the boat turned exactly towards the point to be avoided instead of from it; and she did so with an unruffled air of dignified ease, as of one who knew her business perfectly. Once, when they were in imminent danger of colliding with a ferry-boat, Sue instinctively made a snatch at the rope, and was rewarded with a rebuff that determined her to interfere no more, but to let them muddle on as they liked. And presently Mrs. Delavel, aware of her inefficiency, though scorning to own to it, gave up pulling one way or the other, and contented herself with holding the rudder level with the keel, and leaving the whole responsibility of guidance to Lord Boyton.

The performances of that young man were little better than her own. He had always been too fat and lazy for this kind of exercise, and his style was the style of the conceited amateur anxious to show off before ladies. He spread his legs and arms, and splashed and tugged, and panted, jerking the boat from side to side, and generally making a most ungraceful exhibition of himself, while fondly imagining that he was doing splendidly. As Sue watched him, too kindly disposed towards him to hurt his feelings by criticism, she could not help comparing this mode of progression with the flying sweep of the boat through the water yesterday, and picturing the man who sent it along so quietly and so powerfully with his clean-cutting, regular, almost silent strokes. What a ludicrous contrast to that noble and capable person was this self-sufficient little podgy lord, whom the world of great folks flattered and coddled, but who was such a duffer and ignoramus after all?

She was thinking this when she suddenly became aware of their too close proximity to a mail steamer which she had been watching for some time. The little boat was taking a course of its own towards Bradley's Head; the big ship was coming up at right angles to it on the way to its berth at Circular Quay; and while Sue's attention was wandering for a moment to thoughts of her lover, Lord Boyton was contem-
plating the feat which was to make that day memorable in the annals of Sydney Harbour. At first he thought he would; then he thought he wouldn't; then again he thought he would—just to show the ladies how clever he was. He who hesitates is lost, and if he had not hesitated he might have done it easily; but because he hesitated he was just half a minute and a dozen yards or so short of the time and space that was necessary to enable him to cross the bows of the Orient liner in safety.

Sue awoke to a perception of the catastrophe too late to prevent it. "Look out!" she cried sharply. "Look out! Oh—you idiot!"

Further expostulation was rendered impossible by the sudden pouring of salt water down her throat.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BROKEN BONDS.

RICHARD was sitting in his office, talking to Noel Rutledge. "What I want you to do now," he said, "is to come into this business; to have duties and a salary at once, a partnership by-and-by, and my place when I am gone. You need not protest and make objections—you're under no obligations to me; I'm thinking of her interests, not yours. I have no son, moreover. I'd like to make a son of her husband, if I could—for I suppose you'll be her husband some day, though it will be a long day yet, by all appearances"——

And just at this point a clerk knocked hastily and loudly at the door, and at the same moment opened it to usher in the bearer of ill news.

"Please, sir, your boat has been run down in the harbour, with Mrs. Delavel in it, and the young lady, and a gentleman who was rowing them. He got foul of the mail steamer—the Orient boat that's just come in. And they're all on board her now—she stopped to pick them up—and they're trying to bring Miss Delavel round. The other two are all right, but she's not sensible yet. They think the ship struck her, for she didn't rise, and they were some time before they could find her. They're just hauling the steamer up to her berth. Will
you come at once, please, sir? The captain sent me to tell you.'

Richard, who had sprung to his feet, stood fiercely staring during this breathless recital; then he snatched up his hat and ran down to the quay like a man pursued by a pack of wolves. Noel Rutledge ran beside him. The people in the street ran after them, calling to each other to ask what was the matter, but the two men did not exchange a word. The father dumbly ground his teeth; the lover prayed involuntary, inarticulate prayers. It was a dreadful moment for them both.

The ship, when they reached her, was still in process of being hauled in to her place. There was a river of water between the black wall of her side and the coping of the wharf too wide to be bridged by any gangway at present; but the crowds of people on her decks were within speaking distance of the crowds on the shore. Richard hailed the captain on the bridge.

"How is she?" he shouted, in a hoarse, thick voice, that made all the bystanders turn to look at him.

"Your daughter is all right," was the answer from some one on the deck below.

The father's breast heaved with a bursting sigh of relief; his hard eyes softened and filled. He turned to his companion with a little laugh. "Why do they make fools of us like this?" he cried in an unsteady voice. "You see it's all right."

"God be thanked!" ejaculated Noel fervently. And then Richard remembered that his wife was in the accident too.

"And Mrs. Delavel?" he called questioningly.

There was a moment's pause, and then the captain called back, "Wait a moment, Mr. Delavel. We'll have the gangway out directly, and you can come aboard and hear all about it."

The crowd on the wharf whispered together, and cast looks at the tall grey man which were by no means congratulatory, but he did not heed them. His precious Sue—the only one who had been in any real danger, as he was told—had "come round," and he had no further anxiety.

The captain received him on deck with a grave face. "Well, Mr. Delavel, this is a sad business," said he, as he shook hands. "But I can honestly tell you it wasn't our fault."

"Oh, I know that," replied Richard; "I know whose fault it was. I'd like to wring his neck, the damned young fool."
"Well, he is a fool," said the captain; "I never saw a bigger one, that I know of. He tried to cross our bows when we were already right on to him—when a child must have seen it was impossible. However, you can let him alone. He's properly punished for his stupidity. He's crying downstairs like a baby—you never saw such a pitiable object."

"Well, there's no great harm done, fortunately. It's a lucky thing there were no sharks around. My girl is all right!"

"Oh yes; she came up like a cork. She's a plucky young lady that; it would take a good deal to drown her, I fancy."

"And she wasn't stunned? She didn't get a blow?"

"No; nothing but a ducking, which she didn't seem to mind a bit."

"Where is she?" Richard looked eagerly around, and was vaguely surprised at the expression of the scores of faces watching him, and at the fact that passengers were not scampering off the ship in their usual hurry.

"The ladies have just taken her down to put dry clothes on her," said the captain. "I insisted on her getting dry. We had a deal of trouble to persuade her; she wanted to wait to see you first; but she'd been dripping on the deck for the best part of an hour, and I didn't see that it would do anybody any good for her to get an illness. So I told the doctor to make her go down."

"I should think so. Why did he allow her to wait so long? Though I should have thought her own sense—By the way, where is Mrs. Delavel?" He asked this question in an abrupt, sharp tone, that betokened a dawning sense of the situation. All at once he understood that something serious had happened, and that he had not heard the story correctly. "The messenger told me my wife was in the boat, but that she and Lord Boyton were safe—that only my daughter was insensible when she was taken from the water."

"He made a mistake. It was your wife—not your daughter—who was insensible. In fact, Mr. Delavel, I've got very bad news for you. I was in hopes somebody had told you, but I see you don't know it." He stood with his back to the door of his own cabin, holding the handle in one hand while with the other he waved all spectators to a distance; and, looking at him, Richard knew what he was going to say. "We must have struck her when we struck the boat—she's got a wound on the side of her head; she did not come up like the others
—and there was a little difficulty in finding her. The short and long of it is, Mr. Delavel—well, you understand, don't you? We tried for over half-an-hour to restore her, though the doctor said the moment she was brought up that it was no good. He thinks she was killed by the blow before she went into the water at all."

Richard felt stunned, and looked so; and the captain broke off suddenly, with the idea of summoning the doctor or the brandy bottle. But after a brief silence, during which a hundred pairs of pitiful eyes were fixed on him, the stricken man pulled himself together, and hid away his emotions from the public gaze. He took a step or two towards the closed door, and said quietly, "Is she in there?"

"Yes, she is in here. But—but."

At a sign from the other the captain desisted from remonstrance, turned and opened the door, followed his visitor into the cabin, and then stood aside and blew his nose for three minutes without stopping. He thought of his own wife, with whom he spent a blissful honeymoon twice a year, and of whom he dreamt a lover's dreams at such times as duty gave him sufficient sleep for the purpose, and imagined himself in the position of this other husband, widowed in a moment—so cruelly, so unnecessarily. It seemed to him too terrible for words. He was obliged to blow his nose a good while before he could face his crew and passengers becomingly.

Richard walked into the little room, where he had often smoked his pipe with the skipper and talked of ships and cargoes. He had always seen it so smart and trim, in its handsome simplicity of arrangement, with all its polished drawers and cupboards; but now its ship-shape neatness was gone, and she who in life had been the spirit of order had brought the disorder into it. She lay on a sofa beside the littered table, her body in its wet garments, wrapped in a blanket, her head loosely bandaged in blood-streaked linen, her hair lank and dripping, lying in masses over the sodden pillow, the salt water trickling from the loose ends still. Her glazed eyes and her drawn blue lips were partly open—there had been no time to think of appearances—to soften the hideous change in the face that had been so fair but an hour ago. Nothing was left of the beauty of the living woman, and the beauty of death, that is so much talked of, but so seldom seen outside the poetic imagination, had not replaced it yet.

Her husband looked at her shudderingly, and hid his face,
and grieved for her with his whole heart. He only thought
of what he had lost, not at all of what he had gained.
Memory brought him the picture of her as he saw her that
day, so long ago, when she was nearly drowned at Dunstan-
borough, and he carried her ashore in his arms—the pretty
gentle girl who had clung to him and depended on him, whose
innocent life had been his to guard and cherish; and it was
terrible to him to think that he had not known her danger
now and been at hand to save her from it. Her beauty and
sweetness and the comfort she had been to him were new dis-
coversies at this moment; all the bitterness and emptiness and
loneliness that she had made him suffer were forgotten. All
her faults were blotted out. And he had sinned against her
so much and so long, and he could make no atonement for it
now, nor ask for her forgiveness.

Sue came in a few minutes later, and drew him away from
that dreadful sofa, and made him sit on another one, and lay
his head on her young breast. And when the captain went
out to leave them together, and she began to speak of what
had happened, her first words were those which we so rarely
utter until it is too late—“Oh, poor mother! If only I had
not vexed her.”

Poor mother! Poor wife! Poor thing! All Sydney
spoke of Mrs. Delavel that day in those pitiful terms. But
she was not poor. She had had her good things in this world,
and she had passed through the great trial with hardly a pang.
Oh no, she was not—she never had been—poor. They are
poor who, like Don Quixote, hunger for better bread than is
made of wheat; who cherish an impossible ideal of life—think
from time to time they have reached it—taste the divine bliss
of fulfilment for a moment, and fall back, cheated, to an ever-
deepening consciousness of starvation and failure. She had
known no honest want; her narrow nature had had a full
measure of satisfaction—had, indeed, received more than it
had asked for, more than it could understand or value. She
had been rich and fortunate, as things go in this world, and
not poor. Yet the hearts of her child and husband, and of
all her friends and acquaintances, bled with pity for her fate,
and, in the case of the two former, not with pity only, but
with passionate unreasonable remorse,
CHAPTER XXXIX.

NATURE UNADORNED.

On the evening of the funeral Mrs. Blundell came to talk to Sue about Lord Boyton, who was on the verge of delirium tremens with grief: and the girl put on her hat and went to Mrs. Blundell's house to administer what comfort she could to that poor young man.

"I won't be long, dear," she whispered to her father, who was standing at the library window, gazing blankly out. The drawing-room where she had received her visitor was lighted up, but this room was in semi-darkness; he had been alone there since he returned from burying his wife, and no one had liked to disturb him. "I would not leave you for anything else. But I can't bear to think of that poor boy!"

"Nor can I," replied Richard grimly. "But go, my dear, go; I am glad for you to have something to do—some one to be with. I don't feel as if I could talk even to you to-night, Sukey. I'm best alone, old girl. I thought—I thought I'd go out to the camp presently, if you don't mind. The house feels so close. I should sleep, perhaps, at the camp. You wouldn't think it unkind of me, would you?"

She told him she wouldn't think it unkind of him, though it hurt her a little that he should want to get rid of her in these first hours of their common desolation. Then he took her in his arms and kissed her solemnly—a kiss that stilled the momentary pain—and she went off with Mrs. Blundell, and saw him no more till breakfast time.

As soon as she was gone he left the house and descended the garden to the boatshed, got out a small outrigger—rather a dangerous craft for night use in those shark-haunted waters—and put off for his lair in Middle Harbour. It was warm and still, but the freshness of the sea was in the air; and it was delicious to him after the muffled chambers of death and mourning, the atmosphere of inquests and funerals that he had left behind. The mists of twilight were clearing off, and the dark outlines of the shore growing sharp on the delicate sky, where the thinnest thread of a new moon was palely shining. He pushed his peaked cap to the back of his head, and lifted his face, and opened his heart to the influences of the sweet free night. This was what he wanted—to be alone
with nature, whose genuine child he was—alone with that mystery of comfort to which we give the name of God.

As he skimmed along in his arrowy little boat, leaving wharves and houses behind him and drawing nearer and nearer to the illimitable sea, there dawned on him a sense of new beginnings that he had not allowed himself to recognise till now. In this great space of lonely night, face to face with his natural self, he dared to feel that he could go to the camp now without any fear of consequences. He was conscious of his liberty, though his thoughts were shapeless, and his whole mind set to the gravest key—conscious that his life was given back into his own hands, and that he was a young man to all intents and purposes still.

The camp was wrapped in the shadow of the hills; only the lantern at the top of the flagstaff, replacing the flag which had hung at half-mast all day, marked its site amongst the trees. Without a glance at the glow-worm light, Richard guided his course across the waters of the cove straight to the invisible landing-stage. This was his real home, and he could have found his way to it in the blackest night. As he drew alongside he saw a movement among the bushes. "That you, Bo'sun?" he called, in a low voice.

"Ay, ay, sir," the old man answered, and hurried to take the boat and fasten it.

"I'm going to sleep here to-night, Bo'sun, but I don't want anything. You can turn in when you like."

"All's ready for you, sir. I expected you'd be coming to-night. Is—beg pardon, sir—is the young lady bearing up pretty well?"

"Yes, thank you. She always bears up."

The old fellow was full of sympathy that he did not know how to express in an acceptable manner. "They let that young gentleman off too light, sir," was the way he put it. "They ought to have tried him for what he done."

"Oh, he's punished enough. Don't talk of it, my man. I've come here to be quiet for a little while."

"All right, sir."

The Bo'sun said no more, but went to light the lamp in the tent and to get something in the way of supper ready—food and drink being the natural assuagement of grief which he felt it incumbent on him to offer, whether it were accepted or not; and his master took a walk along the sands for an hour or two to be out of his way.
Pacing up and down that narrow strip of solitary beach, with the boom of the Pacific billows in his ears and the free sky over his head—lying afterwards in his little bed within the open tent door, not sleeping for a moment, but keenly awake and alive in every nerve—Richard Delavel did what he had come there on purpose to do. He looked around upon his life, took his bearings frankly, and set the course for the rest of that journey which had hitherto given him so little choice of road.

A few nights later, at Darling Point, the housekeeper got up from her bed, slipped on a skirt and shawl, and descended the stairs to the library, where lights were still burning, though the clocks had just struck three. She did not knock at the door, strange to say, though she knew her master was within; she opened it with an air of authority and boldly confronted him.

"Mr. Delavel," she said, in the tone of a mother re­monstrating with a wayward child, "why don't you go to bed? Sue is as restless as you are, listening for you to come upstairs. Though she won't say a word about it to me, I know the child is fretting dreadfully at the way you go on, and no wonder. You might think of her a little."

As she spoke, Richard, who was pacing one long strip of carpet to and fro, turned and paused in front of her, and she looked at him curiously. "Poor man," Mrs. Blundell was saying to the crowd of eager gossips that thronged her drawing-room for authentic information; "poor man, he doesn't seem as if he could bear the house now that she is gone. The servants say he walks about all night instead of going to bed, like a person out of his mind. And I don't wonder at it. A more perfect wife never breathed, and he was simply devoted to her. She had not a wish that he did not gratify." Which statement from the mouth of the deceased lady's dearest friend was generally accepted and endorsed. Because, being rich and highly placed, the husband was naturally credited with the solid virtues of respectability, in despite of his intellectual oddities. A black sheep was not recognised in one who had done so well in the world, whose establishment was so handsomely appointed, whose birth was so noble, whose chosen partner had been such an extremely distinguished person. But a black sheep he was all the same, as old Hannah could have testified—
only Hannah was such a miracle of discretion and conscientiousness that it was of no use to ask her questions. As in the case of the woolly quadruped, the unconventional colour was engrained in his constitution. He did not make himself black out of _malice prepense_; he was born so; he could not help it. No broken man was he as he faced his old servant, who had been his friend almost since he was a boy. There was a virile vigour in his tall frame, a fiery spirit shining in his deep-set eyes, such as few young men could boast of. He was all awake to his finger tips, with quick blood running in his veins, though it was past three o'clock in the morning, and he had not had a proper night's rest for a week.

"Why don't I go to bed?" he said, repeating her words. "Because bed won't hold me, Hannah. I want a strait-jacket to keep me down."

"I think you do want one indeed, sir," she returned, setting down her candle and proceeding to shut the windows, which were open to moths and mosquitos as well as to the sweet night air blowing up from the sea.

"I must go, Hannah—I must go," he went on, taking a restless turn round the room. "I have been hesitating about the day on account of Sue, but I was just making up my mind when you came in. I must go at once—I can't stand it any longer. I don't know where she is. I can't be certain whether she's alive or dead, even. I _must_ go and find her."

"Not yet, sir, surely," said Hannah, "when that poor dear is hardly cold in her grave. Why, the whole place would cry shame on you."

"And do you suppose I care a brass farthing about that?"

"Well, perhaps you don't. But you'd care about breaking your daughter's heart, at any rate."

"Yes—if that were in question. But it isn't."

"You don't know. She's thought a deal about her mother since she lost her—more than any one'd think for."

"I understand that, Hannah. I know what she feels, and I will not shock her if I can help it. The worst thing will be leaving her—and leave her I must. I can't ask her to go with me this time."

"No, I should think not! And it's to be hoped she won't guess what you've gone for. It would shock her so as she would never get over it. And," continued Hannah, looking into her master's glowing eyes, "if Miss Constance is the
woman I used to take her for, she'd be just as shocked—and more."

"No, Hannah, no. She'll be above all that. It would never occur to her to be shocked. She knows better—all these years have taught her better than to be so trivial. Do you know how old she is, Hannah? She is forty-four. Think of it—forty-four! And she was only a girl like Sue when—when—oh, it seems like yesterday! I can see her now, stooping over me, with the tears in those beautiful eyes, when I was too ill to speak and answer her. I can hear the very tones of her voice—that sweet voice that was so full of truth. She used to know my thoughts before I spoke them, and feel everything that I felt as if we had one heart and mind between us. And now—now! We have lost all the best of life, and have only a fag end left. Good God! how have I borne it? And you ask me to wait!"

"Don't say 'lost,' Mr. Delavel," said the old woman solemnly. "Life has not been lost to them that's done their duty. And your duty you've done, though you do talk so wild."

"I made a contract, Hannah, and I fulfilled it—yes, I can say that. To the best of my power I fulfilled it. But now I am free—now I may think of having a little happiness for myself—at last, at last, before I die. I'm nearly fifty, Hannah; I can't afford to waste the little time that's left."

"There's better things than being happy in this world," said Hannah.

"Is there? I don't think so."

"There's a world to come, where, if we do what's right, all we suffer here will be made up to us," she added, "if you'll only believe it, my dear."

"But I don't believe it, Hannah. I can't believe it. And if I did it wouldn't make a bit of difference. Who cares about another world? Nobody wants it in place of this one, however much he may pretend—because it is the custom to pretend. I don't, anyhow—I don't. I'd give all my chances of happiness in another world to be young again in this—to be able to set the clock back for about eight-and-twenty years. To live over again, and to have her to live with me, would be heaven enough for me."

"Oh, for pity's sake, don't talk like that," Hannah sternly remonstrated. "It's tempting God to send a judgment on you."
“Tempting God!” he repeated, in the same tone of reckless passion. “If there is a God—of the kind you are thinking of—you may depend on it He knows more about it than you do, and sees the whole matter in quite a different light. He wouldn’t require me to pretend to Him that I am sorry that poor soul is dead, when the sense that I am free is turning my brain with joy. He wouldn’t wish me to leave her to pine on now, after all the trouble and solitude of these twenty-five years—just because it would look like a disrespect to one who can know nothing of it, who cannot be hurt by it, to do otherwise—just because it would offend the senseless prejudices of shallow people to whom it can be of no possible concern.”

“Well, I can’t talk to you,” said Hannah, whose old voice began to shake. “You don’t seem like yourself—I don’t know you as you are now.”

“Because I am myself—my real self; that’s why. I have been wearing a disguise so long that you don’t know me without it.”

“I wish you had worn it for ever, sir, before you’d shown yourself so hard and heartless.”

“Hard and heartless? Did you say heartless, Hannah? My good woman, if I were heartless I should be sleeping in my bed at this moment, a dull and solemn mourner of the most correct pattern.”

“To be glad that she is dead, dear soul, that never did you any harm,” cried Hannah, with deep indignation. “Well, husbands are queer things, as I’ve known to my own cost. But I never thought to hear you say such a thing as that.”

“I say it because I feel it,” he replied. “I am aware that it is in very bad taste, but that doesn’t make it the less true. Do you suppose people are never glad when their relatives die? They are, very often—they can’t help it—only they pretend they are not, because it seems so shocking. I don’t pretend—at least, I need not pretend to you. The fault is not always—not all—on the side of the survivors, Hannah. I don’t think I am any worse than those who pretend a grief that they don’t feel. I was never unkind to her—never in my life, that I can remember. I did not kill her—I would have kept her alive as long as I possibly could. I think—that if I could have saved her by the sacrifice of my own life, I should have done it without a single moment’s hesitation.”
"I am sure you would," said Hannah.

"But," he continued with that unwonted fire blazing in his eyes, "since dead she is, I am glad—I am, I am! I am glad as a man who has been kept in prison is glad to be let out. It is not my fault—I would be sorry if I could. Some day, Hannah—some day, when we have been dust for a few hundred years—perhaps for a few score only—people will wake up to see how stupid it is to drive a man to be glad when his wife is dead. They are finding out so many things—they will find out that too in time.

Hannah took up her candle quietly, as if accepting the situation. "What do you think of doing, sir?" she asked, in the formal tone of one awaiting orders.

"I think of going on Saturday," he replied promptly. "That is, I mean to go on Saturday without fail, if I am alive and able. I shall tell Sue that I am going on a journey—she need not know the particulars, and you will take care of her till I return. You and she can manage everything. I—we—shall not come home much before the end of the year, I suppose, out of respect for the feelings of the moral public—or the feelings of the child, rather. When I find Constance I shall marry her then and there, but I shall not tell anybody—not even you, and I shall keep her somewhere where there will be nobody to gossip about us until a sufficient interval has expired."

"You are making very sure," said Hannah. "How do you know you'll find her?"

"I'll find her, if she's above ground," he replied.

"She's probably married, with a dozen children round her."

"No. She is free, as I am."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind how. I do know it."

"You won't find her at forty-four like what she was when she was twenty. She'll be old and changed—grown plain, perhaps."

"She'll never be plain to me. And she may be as old as Methuselah, toothless and tottering on a pair of crutches—I don't care. She'll always be my own Constance Bethune while there's a bit of her left."

"May be years have changed her in other ways besides looks. She mayn't care for you now; there's been time enough for her to grow out of it, and that's what most folks would do."

"May be the sun won't rise to-morrow, Hannah; we can't
HIS MISFORTUNE, NOT HIS FAULT.

Sue came to breakfast looking as if she, too, had slept little, though the temperature of Sydney at this season of the year could account for faded cheeks and languid limbs to anybody's satisfaction. She wore a white gown of thinnest lawn, with a few black bows about it. Her father was attired in white also, with a black necktie loosely knotted over his shirt front. The barbarities of crape and woollen stuffs, with the thermometer registering ninety in the shade, were not for these free-born creatures, who paid no heed to custom unless they saw good reason for it.

The breakfast-room was deeply shaded with drawn blinds; the snowy table, with its bright equipment, glimmered indistinctly in the dusk. Father and daughter kissed each other in silence and sat down to their meal side by side, the girl in the mistress's place behind the silver kettle, the man on her right hand; and it was some minutes before they could see each other clearly. It was not, however, necessary that they should see each other in order to be made aware of the variations in their respective minds and moods. If they had both been blind they would still have understood each other better than other people could understand them. For nearly all the week Sue had felt in her heart what her father was thinking of, and this morning when he spoke his thought for the first time she was not at all taken by surprise.

"Sukey," he said suddenly, as with a great effort, "I am going away from you for a little while."

The colour rushed into her face, and a trembling seized her. Though she had known it was coming, it was as bad to bear as
if she had not known. The sense of shame and disappointment in him that had first visited her on the Observatory Hill made the blood tingle in her veins, for she knew very well what he wanted to go away for. The outrage upon conventional decency was nothing to her; the outrage upon the austere susceptibilities of youth and virgin womanhood was great and sore. "To America?" she inquired, in a low, cold, husky voice.

"No; to London."

"When?"

"On Saturday—by the P. and O." Neither spoke for a full minute, and then he continued, "Do you think you will much mind being left, you and Hannah? I shall give you full command, full liberty in everything, my dear—trusting only to your honour to carry out certain wishes that I'll tell you about presently. You are not afraid of so much responsibility, are you?"

"There is no question of my feeling in the matter," she answered, in a voice that suggested her mother's. "I am your daughter; it is my business to submit to whatever you choose to put upon me."

"I am putting nothing upon you, Sue. I am hurting nobody. I have to go away. It is a greater wrench than you think to leave you, but I must. I can't help it. And you would not like to go with me." After a pause he added wistfully, "Would you?"

"Father, you would not ask me," she replied with proud severity.

"No—no." He saw that she understood. He read her mind like an open book. "But I want you to be as happy as possible while I am away. Will you tell me what arrangements you would like best? Will you go to New Zealand with Hannah for the summer, to begin with?"

"Oh," she cried with a shudder, "don't talk about New Zealand now!"

"To Tasmania, then? You ought to have a change of some sort."

"What does it matter where I am? My health is perfect—I don't want change. I am as well here as anywhere else, if—if this must be." She dashed away a passionate tear, and straightened herself. "You ask me what arrangements I would like best," she continued, with a touch of defiance. "Let me marry Mr. Rutledge before you go, and then you can wash your hands of me altogether."
“I have not the slightest intention of washing my hands of you for a long time to come. And I don’t intend you to marry Mr. Rutledge till you know a great deal more of him, and of life generally, than you do now.”

“I am of age, father.”

“I know it, my dear. That makes no difference.”

He got up from the table, with a grave and patient air that rebuked her rebellious spirit, justly rebellious as it was; she remained sitting and silent, and allowed him to have a long conversation with Hannah in the hall, and then to take his hat and leave the house, without exchanging another word or look with him.

When he had gone she dashed up to her room, flung herself on her bed, and abandoned herself to a perfect hurricane of grief. Hannah heard her sobs, and knew what they meant, and when the old woman went in to scold and sympathise she took quite a different tone in reference to the cause of trouble from that which she had used to her master a few hours ago. Now she defended him with an outspoken vigour that would have astonished him considerably had he heard her. And for the purposes of his justification she entered upon that history of the past which had been such a well-kept secret.

“If you’d known all that I know,” she said, with evident pride in her superior position, “you’d not have been so hard on him, you’d not be so took aback as you are, my dear.” And then, as the violence of Sue’s opposition to her reasonable remonstrances abated, she began the story. And the girl could not help listening to it.

“It was all done, past being undone, before you were born. It was a pity, God knows, but I won’t have him blamed for it. I saw it all from first to last, and if it was my dying breath I’d say he didn’t do wrong, nor she either. I used to live close by her when she was a girl; and when he was only a boy, though a married man—which we didn’t know then, and nobody would have thought it to look at him—he was in her mother’s house ill. He had inflammation of the lungs, and we never thought he’d get over it. Mrs. Bethune was so crippled she couldn’t stir about, and they had only one young servant; Miss Constance did nearly everything for him, and what wasn’t fit for her to do I did. My good-for-nothing husband had gone off and left me, and I was waiting for him to come back—more fool me!—and I had plenty of time on my hands; I used to sit up o’ nights to let her rest, and I’d
A MARKED MAN.

keep dropping in all day to see if I could help her. No mother ever slaved for a sick child more than she did for him. 'He shan't die,' she said to me, and she shut her teeth just same as I've seen him do many a time; 'I won't let him die,' says she. And she'd kneel by his bedside and give him drops of brandy and water on a feather for hours without stopping, when the poor boy was lying like a log with his eyes gone back into his head, and even the doctor said it was no use."

"Anybody would have done it," said Sue.

"But anybody didn't," replied Hannah, with a slight tightening of the lips; "and that's where the mischief was. Not a word would I say against that dear creature that's gone, Lord knows, but all the same she left him to shift for himself when 'twas her place to have been at his side and helped him. How she and him came together in the first instance—well, they were boy and girl, I suppose, with nobody to advise them. It was before he'd fairly grown up to know things for himself, and certainly she couldn't have cared much for him"—

"Don't!" groaned Sue; "I can't bear to think of it. You're as bad as he is, Hannah—you think nothing is sacred."

"My dear, justice is justice. It's for his sake I speak so plain. She stayed at home to keep herself comfortable, and let him struggle as he might, and let strangers do for him what she should have done. That's where it was. And that's why things went wrong. He wanted her to come with him, and she wouldn't come; and when he fell sick she should have been there to nurse him, and she wasn't. And so others had to do it, and others got the reward. 'Twas only natural. He was not like most men—he was always grateful and thankful; and he was a born good husband—about the only one I ever came across. He'd have poured himself out at her feet; he'd have paid her a thousand times over. But she gave him away to Miss Constance, as one may say, and it was natural he should love the person he owed his life to; he'd have done it if she'd been an ordinary woman, instead of as sweet a young creature as ever a young man set eyes on. From the moment he got his senses back he was so that his heart's blood wasn't good enough for her. I remember, when he began to look about him, how he'd watch the door when she was out of the room, and how his poor hollow eyes would light up as soon as she came in again—and no wonder! She had a face that the very larrikins in the street would turn to stare at. And she kind o' took to him from the first, just as he did to her. She'd
His Misfortune, Not His Fault.

Sue wept silently, and the old woman babbled on.

"They didn't know what they were doing till it was done. I remember when he first began to feel that he ought to tell her his secret; he got restless and sleepless, and was all thrown back, and we couldn't think why when he was getting on so well. Indeed, I don't know when she first knew it; it was a long time, because I suppose he felt that telling her would be like giving her a hint, which she was the last person in the world to want, dear soul, so proud and good as she was. He tried to hold himself back from loving her; instead—to pretend he only felt brotherly affection for her; and that, of course, only made bad worse. Then poor young Bethune died, and the old lady seemed to lean on him; and then he got a situation, and it seemed natural that he should go on lodging where he had already made his home—it gave him opportunities to pay back some of the kindnesses they had shown him. And so—and so—well, it had to be, I suppose."

Still Sue said nothing, and the conversation flowed on.

"It was I who helped her to get away in her uncle's ship without him knowing it. Ay, my poor girl, how she cried that night when we were packing her things. He was at his own little house that he had just taken—the house you were born in, my dear—a bit of a place with four rooms and a lean-to kitchen. 'Mrs. Brett,' says she—I can see her now, with the tears running down her sweet face—'Mrs. Brett, if I go away he will settle down, but if I stay where he can find me he will have no chance. He'll never do wrong,' says she, 'if I don't tempt him, and if there was no other way of preventing that I'd drown myself in the harbour this very night,' says she. Oh, she took things hard, just as he did; there was no shilly-shally about her. And so she went away like a thief in the night, and when he came to look for her and found her gone he was like a man possessed. He was like a devil. It was the only time I was ever really afraid of him. And what a lie I told him to please her, that was the soul of truth. He asked me if I knew anything about her going, and I said no. I said no, and I stuck to it; but I knew all about it, and I went to live with him as his servant because she begged and prayed me to do what I could for him—to look after him and help him, and be all the comfort to him I could. And all
the years I've been with him I've known what's been in his heart. I've never said a word to him—or hardly ever—not he to me; he has never let on to anybody; your poor mother never guessed—she wasn't one of the noticing sort, the precious dear, which was lucky for her; and he was always careful over her not to let her feel anything wanting; but he couldn't hide the truth from me. I could see that he never got over thinking of Miss Bethune. And I shouldn't wonder if she never got over the loss of him either. There never were two people who were so much to each other as they were—they'd have died and welcome to do each other the least little bit of good. And yet I dare say,” concluded the shrewd old woman, shaking herself out of her sentimental mood, “I dare say, if it had been so that they could have kept together, they'd have cared no more about each other than folks usually do.”

CHAPTER XLI.

THE NEW DEPARTURE.

MEANWHILE Richard repaired to Pitt Street, summoned Noel Rutledge, now an officer of the establishment, to his private room, and for the third time made the announcement that he was going away. The news was no surprise to the young man; he thought it natural that the bereaved little family should desire to detach themselves from the sad associations of their home, and also to get out of the summer heat, which was what everybody did who could afford to do it. But when he heard that one of the pair was to go and the other to be left behind, and what an extent of time and distance might separate them, he could scarcely believe his ears.

“Don’t stare at me like that, man,” said Richard irritably. “I am quite in my right senses, I assure you.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Noel. “I can’t help being surprised. At such a time—and never having been parted from her”——

“I dare say she will explain it to you if you ask her,” the other interrupted. “But please don’t ask me—take it for granted that I have good reasons for what I do,”
"I shouldn't dream of asking you, or her either."

"Well, sit down," said Richard, with sudden gentleness, laying his hand on the shoulder of his friend. "Sit down and let me tell you how you can help me while I am away."

"Only tell me what I can do," responded Noel, "and I'll do it, whatever it may be."

So they sat down and talked things over.

"I am obliged to leave my daughter behind," Mr. Delavel said, "because I am going upon business that she is best out of. She would hate a lady chaperon, so I'm not going to inflict one on her; my old housekeeper will be an excellent duenna, and Sue can be trusted with her liberty, though her poor mother didn't think so. I shall instruct them to write to me by every mail, as I shall write to them, and if time is of importance they must telegraph. While in any immediate difficulty, that they find more than they can manage by themselves, they may apply to you, Rutledge. And when I say that, you will understand what enormous confidence I place in you—in your honour as a man, in your discretion and judgment, in the sincerity of your regard for Sue's best welfare."

"I am more proud and touched than I can say," replied Rutledge earnestly. "But don't you think, Mr. Delavel, considering all things—considering that you are going so far, and are likely to be absent a long time—considering Sue's youth, and the accidents and discomforts that may befall lone women who have no man to fall back on."

"The gardener will sleep in the house," interrupted Richard. "He has been with us fifteen years, and is the most faithful servant in the world, with pluck enough for an army—if it's burglars you are thinking of."

"Burglars—and other things; female gossips, for instance. Don't you think, Delavel, there's a better way of settling things—a way that would leave you with an easier mind about her?"

"No," said Richard quietly; "I confess I don't see any better way."

"If—if"—Mr. Rutledge blushed and hesitated—"if you had not consented to our engagement I wouldn't have dared to make the suggestion. But you have accepted me as your son-in-law. In principle it is the same thing whether we are engaged or married."

"My good fellow, it isn't at all the same thing," was Richard's
prompt reply. He leaned forward with his arms on the table, and looked with stern gravity at his companion, "I knew," he continued, "that that bright idea would occur to you, and I've no doubt Sue would approve of it if you submitted it to her; but I want you to give me your word of honour that you will let the marriage alone till I come back again—no matter what she says or does—no matter how expedient it may appear to you. I'll tell you what it is, my boy—I have such a horror and dread of making things irrevocable, until every possible test has been stood, that I'd rather—I'd rather anything should happen to her than she should do it, even though I honestly believe that you are the right man. I'll take every possible precaution against harm touching her while she's alone, but if burglars and scandal-mongers do their worst, it will still be better for her than that she should run the risks of a hasty marriage. I know what I am talking about, Rutledge; it's not for the sake of thwarting you. I'll put no hindrance in the way of your seeing all you can of her. You won't go to the house, of course, because we must consider les convenances to a certain extent—unless, as I said, there should be some urgent and unforeseen necessity for it—but Hannah will let you meet sometimes, and you can write every day if you want to. You can take a look at the place before you turn in of a night, and if she puts a lamp in the window to show you all's well it might ease your mind, and there's no harm done. In all this I trust you to take care of her—not to let her get gossiped about—not to make too free yourself, nor to let her be reckless. It is a great charge, Rutledge, a delicate and difficult one, and I leave you unfettered—it shows what I think of you. Only in this one thing I want a solemn promise from you—that you will not marry her till I come back; unless, of course, I die abroad and am not able to come back."

It was not without a struggle that Rutledge consented to bind himself, but he gave the required promise subject to certain contingencies that were never likely to arise. He took over his trust with a due sense of its sacred and serious character and an intelligent recognition of all that it involved, insomuch that Richard, when he went home to his lunch, felt that he had safeguarded his daughter as far as human means could do it. Another man would have told him that he had ingeniously contrived to expose her to the only danger that was worth taking into account.

There were but two days in which to make all preparations
for his journey. On Thursday morning he announced his intended departure; on Saturday morning he left Sydney by sea. He went by sea because it was his habit to travel that way, and for business reasons; also because up to the last moment he expected his daughter to go as far as Melbourne with him.

All those two days Hannah bustled about, packing his clothes, taking his orders, making elaborate arrangements for the new domestic administration. But Sue did nothing to help her father—she could not. The testimony that her old nurse had advanced in condonation of his offences had its effect in reconciling her to them later on, but at this time she only thought of it as an aggravation of the insult to her mother's memory—the mother to whom all had bowed in life, but whom no one considered now that she was dead and no longer able to resent insults for herself. Annie's child had the natural instincts of a child; moreover, she had the natural feelings of a pure young girl, not yet acquainted with the more tragic joys and woes of human life. That her father should go away some day in search of "that woman"—for thus did Sue now designate her once admired friend—she had prepared herself to expect; but that he should bury the companion of so many years as if she were no more to him than a dog, and rush off immediately, with such undisguised exultation in his freedom, to the arms of another, no matter whom, was a thing gross and low to the delicate-minded, inexperienced creature—a degradation of the idol whom it was so necessary to her to respect. "He thinks nothing of either mother or me, or of what is right, or of what is becoming—of nothing but the gratification of his own selfish desires—just like any common man." That was how she viewed it.

And so, instead of giving him help and sympathy, she left him to his confederate, Hannah, and spent her time alone in bitter meditation, or in wandering miserably about the house, collecting her mother's little personal belongings, the photographs of her that were scattered about, all the sacred relics of her late presence and sovereignty, and carrying them to her own room, which she made a sort of shrine for their safe keeping from the dishonour to which they were subjected elsewhere.

Saturday morning and the time for parting came before she had fully realised what was happening. She did not offer to accompany her father to Melbourne; she did not even offer
to go down to the ship to see him off. She shrank from showing herself in public, and from doing anything to countenance his proceedings. When his cab came to the gate, and Hannah called her to say good-bye to him, she went downstairs with a tight feeling in her throat and her heart ready to burst with grief, but still passionately resentful—unable to forgive him even at this melting moment. She walked into the library where he awaited her, and instead of rushing into his arms, came to a standstill just within the door and stood there like a statue.

"Well, my dear, I'm off," he said. "As you didn't seem to want to hear anything about it, I've given full directions to Hannah. Sukey—Sukey, old girl—do you feel as if you could give me a kiss before I go?"

She still stood by the door without moving, except to put her handkerchief to her eyes and heave a strangled sob. She really didn't feel as if she could kiss him under the circumstances, even though he was going away. After waiting some minutes, he gave a quick, short sigh, opened his watch and shut it with a loud snap.

"Have you anything to say to me?" he inquired, in a still gentle but quite changed voice. "Do you want to ask me anything, Sue? The ship sails in half-an-hour."

Then she put down her handkerchief and looked at him with wet, indignant eyes. "What am I to say to people when they inquire for you?" she burst out. "Am I to tell them you have gone away to be married again?"

He did not answer at once, but stood looking at her. She felt the pettiness of her speech the moment she had uttered it, and dropped her eyes to the floor, blushing furiously. "You may tell them that if you like," he said quietly; "it won't hurt me. I no more care what you say to people, or what people say to you—as far as I myself am concerned—than if I were living in another planet."

Then she sobbed aloud, and somehow found herself in his arms. But she only stood and wept while he embraced and kissed her; she did not return his caresses.

"Old girl, I am sorry for you—I feel for you from my very soul," he murmured, as he held her to him, "but I know it is hopeless to try to make you understand that—or, indeed, anything. You are too young. You will know more some day. Don't cry, my darling. Kiss me, Sukey."

But still she did not kiss him. She allowed him to lift her
chin and press his lips again and again to her mouth, her brow, her cheek, her silky hair, yielding passively, but making no response. And suddenly she found herself alone, lying on the library sofa with her face buried in the cushions; she heard the sound of the cab wheels die away in the distance; her opportunity was gone.

And then she realised what had happened—realised it to the full—as we generally do when it is too late. She ran upstairs like a wild creature, and stood for an hour on the topmost balcony of the house, indifferent to the luncheon gong and Hannah's threats of sunstroke, and watched the departure of the mail steamer in a condition of speechless despair. It was a beautiful sight to see the manoeuvring of the ship as she came out into the fairway and rounded to her course, a beautiful picture, set in that exquisite framework of wooded shore and sapphire sky and sea; but it wrought upon the poor girl to such an extent that she could hardly forbear to shriek aloud. The relentless monster calmly bearing off her father before her eyes—her father, from whom she had never parted before, and had now parted in coldness—the sight drove her to desperation.

And he was quite as miserable as she was. "Shall I let the ship go?" he asked himself, as he was rattled through the streets. "Shall I take the train next week instead, on the chance of her relenting? Why—why—why must we always be torn two ways like this?" But by the time he reached the wharf and the ship he had made up his mind again that he must go, and that he would make no change in his manner of going.

It was a beautiful night at sea, and he walked the deck in the moonlight when common passengers had to lie abed. His dissatisfaction and restlessness would not let him sleep. He could not plan his plans and dream his dreams for thinking of his "old girl" and her solitary wretchedness. "But she'll come," he said to himself confidently; "she'll never let me go away like this. I shall see her on Tuesday morning at the latest."

He arrived in Melbourne on Monday, drove at once to the office of his firm, and plunged into business with an ardour that astonished his subordinates, who said they never saw a man bear his grief so gallantly. He succeeded in adjusting all his more important affairs by eleven o'clock on Tuesday, and then, claiming an hour of privacy in which to write letters,
sat with his watch open on the table before him and listened for his daughter's step.

At exactly twenty-five minutes after eleven he heard her voice in the outer office, asking if he was in his room; and a moment later she flung herself unreservedly into his arms, and cried, "O father! father!" in a tone that assured him of forgiveness for all his sins.

"What, Sukey—what, have you come to see me off after all?" he exclaimed, with a shake in his voice and a moisture in his eyes. "Ah, Hannah, you're looking after her—that's right. Just take her to Menzies' and order a good lunch—I'll join you there in ten minutes. And look here, if you haven't got enough clothes and things for a week or two, go and buy some more. You shall go as far as Adelaide with me, Sukey."

And so she did. She went on to Adelaide with him, transshipping into an in-coming mail-boat at that port; and after two days of quiet walks and talks on deck—talks like the old talks that were the habit of her life—she parted from him in a spirit as tender and loving as heart of father could desire. It was weak of her, perhaps, but it made her feel happy afterwards—and him too.

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CHAPTER XLII.

"WE."

It was in August of the next year that Richard Delavel returned to his house, having accomplished the purpose for which he left it. He would have made a further concession to popular prejudice had not Sue written in May to ask him when he was coming back. She had never been directly told that he had married Mrs. Ellicott, nor even that he had found her; but she readily divined the circumstance from the tone of his letters and the fact that for several weeks together they were dated from the same place—Mustapha Supérieur, on the flowery heights above the Bay of Algiers.

"It has been like paradise," he wrote to his daughter in April. "It has been the divinest spring-time. Oh, such
evenings, Sukey!—when the last flush of the sun is gone from the Djurdjura ranges, and the twilight comes, and the moon shines through the vine trellises; and such dawns as you never saw when we come round to the sun again—I watched the light grow in the sky behind those cloudy peaks this morning until the dazzle blinded me, and I thought of you, old girl, and wished you were here to see it with me. But I know how it would have been—you would have looked at the mountains and the sea, and the white houses shining, and you would have said a Sydney harbour sunrise was just as good, if not a great deal better. Well, perhaps. At any rate, the days that follow would be preferable now. It is getting too hot for the invalids here. A hammock in the garden, or a long chair on the terrace of an evening—that's all. No more clambering up and down the walled lanes at all hours of the afternoon; and as for that blazing staircase of a town, that was so delightful to rummage in when the weather was fit for it—of course that's out of the question. I must look for a cool place in Switzerland—the Alps will be beautiful before the tourists come—but I shall find nothing like the air of the camp, Sukey, the delicious air that will blow off the sea for the next few months. I shall pine for the camp as the summer comes on."

Sue knew very well for whom the heat was dreaded, for whom the long chair was placed on the terrace and the hammock under the trees—not for his own robust and hardy frame; and his allusion to the camp was perfectly understood. If he pined for the camp, she pined for the day that would restore him to his place, having by this time tolerably accustomed herself to the new condition of things. She wanted him back, at any price, as soon as she saw a chance of getting him. So she wrote, as a postscript to her last May letter, "When are you coming home?"

He replied by telegram, "Immediately," though he had not intended to return for months. He understood her question to mean that she wanted him, that she accepted the stepmother, and that she cared for Mrs. Grundy no more than he did. "We return immediately," he wired on the day of receiving her letter; and he named day and route. And the news, which presently leaked out and flooded the place, causing pain and grief to all proper people, brought joy unspeakable to the heart of the one person to whom, if to anybody, it should have been unwelcome.
That evening, when it was quite dark, she put on a fur cloak and stole down the terraced garden to the sea wall at the bottom, and leaned upon the low stone balustrade like Juliet upon her balcony. In two minutes a little boat came stealing alongside and made fast to one of the short pillars; and Romeo stood up, planted a foot on the basement wall, and leaped over to his lady's side.

Let not the discreet reader suppose that this was a constant, or even a frequent occurrence; it only happened just once in a way, under the compulsion of a mutual longing for close quarters that was more than poor human nature could resist. Noel Rutledge, who lived at the camp when he was at home, had early established a habit of rowing or sailing up to Darling Point, "bescreen'd in night," to have a look at the house that sheltered his beloved, to satisfy himself that all was quiet and safe; and, thinking it might give her a sense of security, had informed her of what he did, and suggested that she should make some signal if it should happen at any time that she needed his help. And the way she acted upon this advice was not to set a lamp in a window, but to descend the bosky garden and lean upon the white bulwark that divided her from him—the mask of night upon her face, certainly, so that a casual observer could not tell her from the kitchen maid, but her dim shape unmistakable to the eyes of love. The first time she did this he rowed up to the wall and inquired, "What is it, dear?" in accents of alarm. She said, "Oh, nothing; I only wanted to know if you were there." And it was seldom that she had any better excuse for calling him. When the moon was bright he would draw near, but not too near, and whisper across the water, "All right?" And she would whisper back, "Yes." And perhaps she would remark that it was warm, or cold, or that she and Hannah were going somewhere to-morrow; and he would warn her not to catch a chill being out so late; and they would exchange a soft good night, and he would slowly draw away, and the mystic night would swallow him. But when there was no moon he dared to run his little boat up to the wall, and if he found her there—feeling her presence rather than seeing it—he would steady himself with a hand on one of the pillars of the balustrade, and have several minutes' conversation with her. From that he went the length of tying up his little craft, so that he could stand upright and kiss his sweetheart over the top of the wall as she leaned down to him; and that
naturally led to his getting over the obstruction—on a night when it chanced to be pitch dark and stormy, and the wind was blowing her hair into his face, and she clung to him and told him she could not bear to think of him out on the black harbour waters alone in his cockleshell of a boat in such wild weather. There was no question of unlocking the gate at the landing steps; he was over the wall in the twinkling of an eye, and the welcome he got on the other side was such that he was constrained to repeat the exploit on a subsequent occasion, conscientious scruples notwithstanding. He was but a man, and "the woman tempted him." By this time Sue had got far past the A B C of her experience in love; she was learning with a thoroughness that left nothing to be desired.

On this particular evening, after receiving her father's telegram, she had an excellent excuse for inviting her lover into the garden, and invited him accordingly. "Come over for a moment," she said, as he tied his boat to the balustrade; "I have something very important to tell you."

So he leaped over, as a matter of course. It was quite dark on the little strip of lawn, and the flowery banks overhanging it enclosed them in the solitude of a desert island. They were as invisible and inaudible from the lamp-spangled water as from the star-strewn sky. Therefore they put the important something aside for a few minutes.

When by-and-by they sank upon the bench on which Sue and her father used to sit in earlier days, she communicated her piece of news.

"And he says, 'we,' Noel; 'we return immediately.' I have been studying his letters closely for weeks to find that little word, and he has been so careful not to use it. As if I didn't know that it was 'we' as well as he did! It has been 'we' from the day he went to Algiers, when he did not write for a fortnight, and then sent me a note about as long as an invitation to dinner."

"And you were so jealous—poor little girl!"

"I am jealous now," said Sue. "It never goes out of my head that he is mine no longer. And he used to be all mine. I was everything in the world to him."

"Well, I am all yours instead, and you are everything in the world to me—and always will be."

"Oh, I wonder shall I? This sort of thing shakes one's confidence in the fairest prospect."

"Then we won't look forward—we'll be content with the
present. Sue, when he comes back and finds how matters are between us, he will be satisfied that I am the right man, and he will let me have you."

"Oh yes; he'll let you have me fast enough when he comes back. I should think you need not have much fear of that. She will be all in all, and I shall be de trop and a nuisance to both of them. He'll be thankful to any one who'll take me off his hands and out of his way."

"I thought so," said Noel. "You have not got over it."

"But I have, quite—quite; it's only just now and then, when I think of it, that I feel a lingering nastiness for a moment. Only for a moment, really. My poor old daddy—that I should grudge him his bit of happiness! It's a happiness that he hasn't been within miles of before, all the years he's lived. He would never grudge me mine, bless him!"

"You are two such intensely human creatures you can't help yourselves," said Noel, smiling. "If he hadn't his own consolation, he would find it hard to look on at yours and be shut out—I believe he will find it hard as it is. That day when he met us in the north-west passage—do you remember?—for the first moment he could not bear it. But, oh dear me, in this world, where we have such a short life and such a lot of trouble in it, if only there were more of us with such generosity and fellowfeelingness!"

"He is generous," said Sue, colouring; "but I am just a mean, selfish, jealous wretch. However, I'm not going to be nasty now—oh, I will not be nasty any more. I have had a struggle to submit to it, but I have got over that—yes, I really have got over it this time. I am so glad he is coming home—I am glad to have him happy. It is his right. Noel"—with solemn emphasis—"I am convinced that the marriage system is altogether a mistake—an anachronism—a clumsy contrivance for keeping society together that we ought to have improved upon long ago."

"I have been expecting to hear you say that," he returned, with a quiet laugh. "I have such work to bring you up to the reasonable point, and I no sooner get you there than you at once rush off away from me, ever so much farther than I can follow you."

"But don't you think so, Noel?"

"No, I don't."

"Oh, I am sure you do. Look at my poor mother, thrown away upon a man who could never find any comfort in her,
though he tried his best. To another husband—say a good, quiet-minded clergyman, or an English squire of the old school—what a treasure she would have been! What a happy life she would have had! And look at my father, pining like that for all those years, everything spoiled and wasted. And all because of a little error of judgment when they were boy and girl, before they were old enough to know what was good for them. Oh, I have been thinking about it seriously, and I am sure it is all wrong—I don't care what you say."

She was in the full swing of a new idea, a new revolt, and scorned the cold suggestions of his more settled mind; but this attitude, to which he was well accustomed, never prevented him from putting his gentle check upon her intellectual imprudences—a check to which she yielded more or less, in spite of feminine protests.

"It will be all wrong when the time comes for it to be all wrong," he said; "but so far it has been as right as possible—in my humble opinion." And when she flew out at him for his disloyalty to the doctrine of universal liberty, which was his professed religion, he only patted her on the shoulder and said that people generally got their liberty as they got fit to use it. "You are not historical, you headlong reformers, and you always want to destroy the old house before the new one is built—to break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers instead of taking it to pieces gently, so as to have all of it that is good and beautiful to use over again," he proceeded, at such times as she would allow him to speak.

"You are such a compromiser," she complained, "and you never used to compromise. I hate you to be so cautious—just like common people."

"Oh, it isn't caution. I am quite ready to take my part in the bustle of preparation when the time for changes comes."

"And hasn't it come? Or, if it hasn't, can't we make it come?" She rapidly adduced the unanswerable stock arguments in support of the right of men and women to that freedom in the management of their conjugal affairs which they claimed and received in matters of so much less importance—showing that she really had an intelligent grasp of the subject; and she asked him how he had the face to tell her that a system which denied this right and ignored all the laws of nature and of common justice was a good system, and suitable to such an enlightened age as they were supposed to live in?
She was for ever flaring up in this way at something wrong in the established order—and he loved her for it; but she could never make him indignant and impatient as she was. It was not in his sober nature. And now he respectfully but firmly refused to admit that marriage—marriage as it stood—was not a good thing.

"It is a form of slavery," said Sue. "And slavery never was a good thing yet that I know of."

"Oh, yes. In your light, superficial way you can only think of it as a horror to shudder at—a thing altogether abominable—that's of course; but, like our marriage system, it was an enormously good thing, quite the best thing possible, before the time came when in the natural course it had to make way for a still better. What an advance in civilisation to save one's captured enemy and make him useful, instead of battering his brains out with a spiked club! And feudalism, too, that you rant and rave against—what a noble institution was that as compared with the systems it superseded! What an enlightened sense of duty and order it showed, as against that of the slave days! It was entirely the right thing in the right place—only its place was then and not now. And so with the Church, that I am sorry to say, my dear, you sometimes scoff and sneer at—which is all the same as sneering at one's mother when she has grown old and past work. The Church, as we know it, has had its day—its grand and splendid day, which will be done justice to by-and-by when this struggle is past—much ampler justice than we do it now. We are outgrowing the Church, in which our social arrangements are more or less included, as we have outgrown slavery and feudalism, and"—suddenly he paused, and the ring of spiritual passion that Sue loved to hear came into his voice at last—"and we are awaiting the next development. Not ready for it, Sue, but waiting—growing—preparing for it—clearing the ground a little just about our feet. What will the next thing be, I wonder? Oh, how much I should like to know!"

"And don't you know? Can't you see at all?" she questioned wistfully.

"Can't I see?" he echoed, with a little laugh. "My dear, only think of the time things take! Why, the Reformation, which was a trifle to this, was a matter of some three hundred years a-doing."

"Everything seems to have time with us," she mournfully
rejoined. "All these tremendous things go on to completion, and we are hustled away before we have hardly made a beginning."

"We may go on too," said Noel. "We can't tell."

"Ah, we—not you and I, Noel!" And she put her arm round him.

"We must not think of it," he murmured, clasping her to his breast. "It unnerves us."

They were always dropping out of their lovers' talk into sudden solemnities of this sort.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

THE GOAL.

Romeo wrenched himself from the enchanted garden and dropped over the wall into his boat, kissed his lady's stooping face and outstretched hands, and drew away into the darkness with lightly-dipping oars that made no splash in the still water. As he rowed down the harbour to his quiet home a smile played upon his face, and peace and contentment filled his heart. Never at any time had he been a discontented or restless man; in all his battles and perturbations he had seen his way and maintained a steadfast soul; not fighting with necessity, like Richard and Sue, whom he resembled in so many things. He was tougher and steadier, less exigent and self-conscious than they were; there was no "wild drop" in the wholesome current of his blood to make living the tragical matter that it was to them. But still he had found life difficult. Now the easy time had come, the happy time for which he had paid in advance, the holiday that was the due reward of the patient labours of his youth. His worldly affairs were improving daily. All things being equal, press work was more congenial to him than his new profession, but having adopted the latter for sufficient reasons, he had cheerfully adjusted himself to its requirements, and never thought of hankering after anything else. So, with his calm but effective energies concentrated upon his proper business, he naturally succeeded in it, to his own satisfaction and that of
the office generally. And he had cleared his character wonderfully by becoming incorporated with the great "concern" in Pitt Street, and the affianced husband of Miss Delavel—if he had cared about that. A great many people were ready to recognise him in the street and to let bygones be bygones now. Mentally and spiritually he was tranquil and cheerful. He had passed through the torturing transition time between the first doubt and the last conclusion, and, recognising that the Power which created him had made him responsible for himself, rested in the quiet determination to be worthy of his manhood as far as in him lay—to do his little part well, to whatever mysterious unseen end. There were things that "unnerved" him, but these he would not think of. It was the part of a man to accept the fate he could not alter with dignity and fortitude, with courage and cheerfulness; and it was also his part to make the best of what he had and not throw away the possible in futile reachings after the impossible. A good many of us understand this quite well, but very few of us can act up to it, chiefly because our physical brains and stomachs are not in the requisite state of health. Richard could not do it, with his thin-skinned susceptibilities, nor Sue, with the hereditary passion in her blood; but nature had given Noel Rutledge the temper of the philosopher, who is born and not made. He took things as they came, and did not quarrel with destiny, which seemed to him a feeble sort of thing to do. In Richard's place he would never have pined for an impossible woman for twenty-five years, "spoiling and wasting" everything, as Sue rightly described it; to his mind a man had no business to let himself spoil, whatever happened; and his secret judgment upon the late proceedings of his friend was more nearly that of the commonplace world than his lady-love supposed. In which the reader will perceive that he lacked some fine qualities if he was over-rich in others, which is the way of things in this world. But he was happy in his limitations as well as in his large-eyed wisdom; they were so many protections to his spiritual tranquillity and his peace of mind.

He rowed down the harbour in a windy darkness that suggested a dirty night at sea, and smiled as he thought of the fireside rest that would soon take the place of such lonely journeyings. The girl whom he loved—but whom, if he could not have had her, he would have managed to do without—was
every day more dear and charming to him, with her beautiful crude generosities and enthuasms, her unsophisticated human nature, that held such a splendid store of material to make life out of; and his habitual patience had been tried by the conditions of present intercourse as nothing had ever tried it before. Now his probation was nearly at an end, and the prospect before him held all that man could wish for.

The Bo'sun's lantern stood on the landing plank to light him home. It was never hoisted on the flagstaff now at night, nor did the bit of bunting flutter there by day; the old man hauled down the flag when the vessel that carried his master passed out through the Heads, rolled it up, and stowed it away in his sea chest. "When they signal the ship that brings him back," he said to Noel, whom he saw looking at the bare pole, "then I'll run it up again." And Noel said "All right," for he thought it a very proper notion.

The Bo'sun made a further distinction between his master and his master's locum tenens by leaving the latter to tie up his own boat, and in a general way Noel was not waited upon with enthusiasm, though his simple wants were attended to. Had this come to Sue's knowledge she would have swooped down upon her humble admirer and given him as sound a rating as he had received from any skipper of his acquaintance, but of course she knew nothing about it, and Noel cared nothing. His nightly presence at the camp was an unaccustomed check upon his servant's liberty and propensities which he did not expect to be welcomed, and he was satisfied with the usual reward of virtue for having much improved the Bo'sun's health by keeping him from the rum bottle.

This young man did not use the camp to mope and dream in, except as he dreamed in his healthy sleep. He did not pace the lonely shore of a night, struggling with the problems of life and human action. No sooner did he set foot on land than he called for his supper, which, being brought to him, he devoured with an appetite that any growing schoolboy might have envied. Then he lit his pipe and took the last new book from his pocket, and enjoyed his hour of intellectual exercise just as much as if there had been no exciting interview in the garden at Darling Point—the memory of which, however, glowed all through him with the effect of wine. By-and-by he found himself beginning to doze, and then he jumped from his chair and undressed and put himself to bed; and from the moment he laid his head on the pillow until the sun was
up next morning he slept that sleep which comes neither to the just nor to the unjust unless their nerves and digestions are in perfect order. There was a howling gale outside the Heads, and the breakers crashed against the rocks like cannons firing. The blustering wind shook the canvas of his tent, and even ruffled the bedclothes about his face, and a fine salt spray, blown straight from the ocean over the racing ripples of the Sound, bedewed his placid forehead and his ruddy beard until they shone wet in the gleam of the South Head light when it travelled directly over them. But none of these things disturbed his rest. His comfortable, soft snore was audible through the night, quiet and even as a ticking clock.

A happy man, indeed!

Sue did not rest so well as this. She had to wake at intervals to listen to the storm, and the sound filled her imagination with a vision of staggering ships that she could not choose but dwell on. She even rose from her bed and went out upon the balcony, with a fur cloak over her nightgown, to realise the blackness of darkness beyond the lamplit harbour, and the velocity of the gale that lonely mariners had to cope with. Ships naturally represented to her one of the most important interests in life, and the abstract sea had a solemn fascination that drew her as with a spell of enchantment. In wild moods like this it roused an inarticulate passion in her young soul—that intensity of exalted feeling which we describe as inspiration when we speak of some of its results. Wagner's Ride of the Walkyries would fitly express the whirl of formless emotions that strove in her heaving breast as she stood out for a moment in the night and the storm, with the wind shrieking past her at the rate of eighty miles an hour. The vital current in body and soul was fresh and strong, the forces of womanhood in their full power, and the richness of her experience at this moment of life present to her quick consciousness, and realised as we seldom realise good things until we have to part from them.

She strained her eyes to pierce the darkness in the direction of the camp; she could have seen nothing of it in the broadest day, but she thought she knew the exact spot of blackness which indicated its site; and she pictured her lover awake as she was to the voices of the night which put into such eloquent music the feelings and fancies of her heart.
How should he sleep out there, at the very gateway of the sea, with wind and waves both thundering in his ears, and his heart surcharged with happiness until its fulness was a positive ache? She thought of him watching as she was, uplifted in soul, withdrawn from vulgar earth: and she longed to be with him that they might share the solemn hour together. She leaned over the railing of the balcony with an impulse to reach towards him. "Ah, my dear," she called aloud in her impassioned young voice to that vision of him that she imagined, "my spirit is with you, though my body is here. And in a little while we shall keep these sacred vigils together."

But when that time came, she found, not only that he could sleep and snore in the sanctuaries of life, but that she could too. And if she was happy in her maiden ideal to the contrary, she was happier in the possession of a nature which enabled her to adjust herself to the inevitable real without loss of any quality of character that was worth keeping.

And the father, of whom she thought so much to-night, when not absorbed in contemplation of an approaching honeymoon at the camp—how was it with him?

He had found his mate. He had reached his goal. The hunger of his craving nature, "all the longings of his body and soul," were assuaged at last. But love like his, which had been a tragedy from the beginning, was bound to be a tragedy to the end. It was what it was because he had suffered for it so heavily; the measure of his satisfaction was in proportion to the time he had waited for it. It was in the nature of things that a bliss so exceptional should come too late, or, if not quite too late, late enough to make a tantalising agony of its brief possession.

Of course Mrs. Ellicott had not gone to winter in Algeria merely for pleasure and to kill time. A woman imbued with so deep a sense of the responsibility of life, and so much in need of active occupation to defend her higher from her lower self, had other haunts and pursuits, and it was in these others that her lover had sought her in the first instance. But when he heard of her at last, he heard that she had been long ill—ever since she had left Australia—and that the doctors had sent her to a warm climate in a last effort to save her life. Thither went Richard after her, on the wings of love and terror, and when he found her—she was asleep, and woke up to see him kneeling at her bedside—she was considered to be
actually dying. He was able to justify the haste in which he had rushed to seek her, straight from poor Annie's new-made grave, by his conviction that had he waited a week longer he would have had his pilgrimage in vain. It was his coming in the nick of time, he believed, that saved that precious life.

"You used to say when I was ill, 'He shan't die—I won't let him die;' and you kept me alive by sheer strength of love and will—kept me that I might see this day. 0 Constance! you must live for me! I can't lose you now—I can't—I won't. It would be too awful a thing to happen even in this cruel world." Thus he wrestled with death for possession of his beloved, as Hercules for the body of Alcestis in Leighton's picture; and though the doctors pronounced her shattered with rheumatic fever, and with a failing heart that could never recover itself, the fact was that Mrs. Ellicott began to rally from the moment that her old lover appeared upon the scene. It was a more serious and obscure disease than any the doctors knew of that had been sapping her vital powers, and for this he brought the remedy.

The first thing he did, while she was still hovering between life and death, was to make her his legal wife by the simplest and briefest process, in order to clothe himself with authority that nobody should be able to dispute or share. Then he took her into his own hands, and never left her again for an hour night or day. Money he poured out like water of course. The best physicians in the world were called to her bedside, and all the sick-room luxuries that science had thought of; and when she was able to be moved from a not very spacious lodging he selected the best house he could find, asked to see its tenant, and offered that gentleman terms to go out of it which even a British nobleman, taking bad times into consideration, could not bring himself to refuse. Thither she was tenderly carried, further up the heights than she had yet been, where she had terraced gardens and fountain courts and Mediterranean views that were a dream of beauty; and there the honeymoon was spent, and the bridegroom said it was "like Paradise."

Like Paradise! when one was too weak to walk without assistance, and the other grey-haired, haggard, strained with a constant fear that his treasure would slip through his fingers before he had fully grasped it. Little like Paradise would those young folks at Sydney have thought it! In his Arab villa at El-Biar, and in his present home in Switzerland,
Richard in all his raptures had never tasted rest. While Noel slumbered at the camp like a new-born infant, and Sue watched the storm with a sense that she herself was safe from all perils and dangers whatsoever, the man who had "gone through the whole campaign" was finding no peace in victory—so far. The stress of fierce and overwhelming anxiety, the agonising force of his wild man's passion, the terrible consciousness of the many years gone and the few years left—a mingling of bliss and anguish that words cannot describe—fevered his brain and consumed his strength; and he found the satisfaction of his heart's desire quite as hard to bear as its long frustration.

Yet, doubtless, the finest flavour of life—call it happiness or not—was his.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

"Well, since it is to be, we may as well make the best of it," said Hannah to Sue, when the contents of the telegram were disclosed. This pretended resignation did not disguise the real cheerfulness with which the old woman looked forward to the installation of the new missus—a complacency that, in a confidential housekeeper who had virtually controlled the establishment, spoke volumes in the lady's praise. Almost from the first—from the night of her interview with her master, when duty and decorum required her to oppose it—Hannah had accepted the inevitable with more than a good grace; but she had endeavoured to dissemble the fact, because to expose it would have been to hurt Sue's feelings deeply. Now the girl's relief and satisfaction at the prospect of getting her father back so soon, and the extravagantly generous frame of mind, that was a reaction from the grudging one she had cherished until she was ashamed of it, disposed her to be cheerful also and to fall in with Hannah's most hospitable designs.

"I'm sure your father'd wish us to have the place nice for her to come to," said Hannah tentatively. "And he'll grudge no money we like to spend in doing things up for her."
"Certainly we'll have the place nice," said Sue. "There is only one condition I must make, Hannah—that it is not my mother's room we do up for her."

"Of course not. Who'd think of such a thing? She must have the big room over the drawing-room. The blue room next it will make a beautiful dressing-room if we get a door knocked through in the recess where the washstand is. Come upstairs and look. If we're going to do things properly, it's as well not to lose time in setting about it."

"You seem to have thought it all out already," said Sue, with a returning pang of jealousy.

"Oh, well, there's been nothing to do but think," replied Hannah; "and of course I knew she'd be coming some time."

On the morning following the receipt of the telegram and her interview with her lover—a delicious morning, with a bright rough sea and only a breezy reminiscence of the gale—Sue cast herself into the business of preparation for the prodigal's return with her customary whole-heartedness.

"We'll have in the bricklayers to make the doorway into the blue room at once," she said to her factotum, bustling round as if they had two days instead of two months before them. "I don't know whether father would approve of our knocking the house about under ordinary circumstances, but he'll forgive anything that's done for her. And then we'll have the painters, Hannah, and they shall paint the walls of her room in beautiful colours—or we'll hang them with Morris chintz, or leather paper, or some art stuff; and we'll take out the old furniture and put new in. She shall have the easiest sofa at the window and the softest armchair by the fire, and Eastern carpets—the best that money can buy—and pictures; and a great big writing-table full of drawers, and a Japanese screen all over gold embroidery—the prettiest things that money can buy, Hannah. We'll go and hunt for them while the bricklayers and painters are at work."

"She won't care for grandeur," remarked Hannah, who had an intimate acquaintance with the new mistress's tastes.

"I dare say not. But my father will want her to have the best of everything, and I wish to please him."

"Well, my dear, you'll please him more than you've any idea of if you only do the half of what you talk about."

Sue was not a person to do things by halves. Having determined to treat the interloper handsomely, she gave effect to her intentions in the noblest manner. When the travellers
arrived at Auckland—having come via America, Honolulu, and New Zealand to avoid the Red Sea heat and for other reasons of their own—and her father wrote to request that the large spare room might be got ready for Mrs. Delavel, and the things out of his dressing-room put into the adjoining chamber; when he further ventured to hope that Sue would give her stepmother a kind welcome for his sake, and because she was rather delicate, and would be tired after her travels, the young housekeeper was able to smile serenely at his unnecessary anxiety.

"They will be here in four days," she said to Hannah, "and they will see that we didn't wait to be told what we ought to do."

On the day the ship was expected she went boldly to the office in Pitt Street and asked to see Mr. Rutledge, feeling practically liberated from the restraints to which her orphaned condition had subjected her. "Oh, isn't it nice?" she exclaimed, as she sank into a chair in her father's room. "Noel, dear, don't scold me for coming; everybody knows the reason, and it is so lovely to be free! Hannah and I have shaken each other off—she hasn't a thought to give me now, and I feel it such a relief to be rid of her, the dear old thing! I should like to walk about the streets with you, Noel, all day, till the ship comes in."

"I'll walk about the streets with you, if you like, with the greatest pleasure," he answered, closing the door for a minute that he might kiss her blooming face, which was evidently impatient to be kissed. "But"

"No buts, Noel. Come along. Let us enjoy the novel sensation of lawful companionship in the most public places we can find. I have the carriage in town, ready to be called the moment we know the ship is coming. And it may be here any minute. Let us go out and wait for it—and talk."

They went out accordingly and roamed the streets, for Noel considered that his first business was to attend to her, in the absence of Hannah—and they had a delightful day. Wandering to and fro, on the look-out for the steamer's signal, whilst seeking lunch and tea and pleasant places to sit down in occasionally, they had long hours on their hands, which would have wearied anybody but themselves. They felt no fatigue, however; their legs ached, but they did not know it. Between the little bursts of vague impatience, when they looked
at their watches and wondered how much longer "she" would be, they absorbed themselves in conversation about matters that thrust all lesser matters out of mind.

"Now, Sue," said Noel, as twilight gathered and the street lamps began to shine, "I should have got the message at the office as soon as anybody, and there would have been plenty of time for me to send to Darling Point and get you and the carriage before the steamer was hauled in." The steamer had entered the Heads when he spoke, and they were standing on the wharf in a crowd of people. Hannah had been apprised of the travellers' approach, and the Darling Point carriage, full of down cushions and 'possum rugs, was waiting close by. Nothing would induce Sue to sit in it, of course.

"I hate a carriage," she declared, "and I love to be hustled in a crowd—with you. I like the contact of my fellow-creatures, Noel—I like the streets, and the common people—to be in the thick of it like this. It feels as if we were really out in the world together, you and I. Oh, how horrid it would be to be married to a rich man, and be condemned for life to sit perched up over people's heads, out of everything that is genuine and interesting! But I was never meant to marry a rich man."

"Clearly not," said Noel, pressing the arm that clung to his tightly to his side. "Still, even a poor man doesn't like to see his wife's toes trodden on by hob-nailed boots, and tobacco smoke puffed into her face. Come the other side of me, dear."

"Oh, you must get rid of those prejudices," she retorted, while allowing herself to be gently pushed to windward of a democratic pipe. "A woman is a man's equal, and able to meet what comes just as well as he does. The day is past when she needs to be taken care of by her husband or anybody."

"No, it isn't. Not a bit of it."

"Oh yes, Noel. Now don't be an antiquated Philistine if you can help it. You know as well as I do—"

"Here she comes," he interrupted softly; and nipped in the bud an eloquent exposition of Miss Delavel's latest "views."

The steamer came along through the fast gathering darkness like a pillar of fire, ringed round and round with electric lights; and for half-an-hour Sue watched it in silence with a
THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

quickly beating heart, thinking only of the meeting so close at hand. It was the very ship that had taken poor Mrs. Ellicott away not so very long ago, when it seemed so certain that they would never see her again. Sue remembered the miserable day, and gave credit to the pair who, for the sake of doing right and to protect each other, made their sacrifice so much heavier than it need have been. The memory disposed her to be very sympathetic now, though she was her mother's daughter. As the great vessel was slowly warped up to its place, towering high over the heads of the crowd on shore, she looked up and saw her father leaning on the rail of the upper deck, and a slender fur-clad figure at his side. The clear radiance in which they stood fell upon the girl's face, and they recognised each other, and each waved an impressive hand.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" she murmured in an impassioned exultant whisper, trembling from head to foot.

"Were you addressing me?" inquired Noel calmly.

"You? no, indeed! Oh! to think of having him back again—my own dear." Her voice shook, and her bright uplifted eyes shone with sudden tears.

"He isn't your own," said Noel, "now."

"What do I care? Let him be anybody's, so long as I have a bit of him. Come—come; they are putting out the gangways. Never mind the crushing. I'm too substantial to be crushed."

Her lover steadied her with his calm demeanour, so that she recovered her self-possession by the time she gained the deck. There her father met her, eager and excited too, though holding himself in check; he had his wife sheltered in a corner, and was evidently waiting to see how she would be received. Taking in the two figures at a glance, the girl held out both hands to her stepmother, drew her into her arms, and kissed her with ungrudging heartiness, first on one pale cheek and then on the other. "I am glad father has brought you home," she said; and when he heard the words Richard said to himself that he would make up to Sukey for that. He was not kissed himself in the electric-lighted crowd, but he felt no loss on that account. "Well, daddy!" was enough for him, and "Well, old girl!" was enough for her, in conjunction with a hand-clasp that nearly wrung their fingers out of joint.

"Bring her away to the carriage, father dear," said the
happy girl, who knew how generously she was behaving, and enjoyed her own generosity as much as anybody. "Let's get her home out of the cold. Noel will look after the luggage for you."

Noel was introduced to Mrs. Delavel, and they all talked about the voyage and the late arrival of the ship for a few minutes; then the precious person was escorted down the gangway and through the seething crowd, half-a-dozen arms being thrust out to protect her, and was tenderly placed in the carriage and tucked up in fur rugs as if they were bedclothes and she was in bed. This being done, and Sue seated at her side, the two men disappeared for some minutes, and when they returned stood talking on the pavement for several minutes more. Taking advantage of the opportunity, the two women exchanged a confidential word.

"My dear," said Mrs. Delavel—the street lights illuminated her face, and it looked very thin and worn—"I can't thank you for your welcome. It overpowers me."

"You have nothing to thank me for," returned Sue, colouring deeply. "You have a right to be welcomed."

"Oh no; one has no right to anything of that sort. And I—I have given you a great deal of pain, I know. I feel it acutely, though I may not seem to have felt it."

"You could not help that."

"No. I have not been able to help anything."

"I am sure of it. He would not let you—he would sweep all before him. I don't blame you—oh no. You had to think of him first, as he thought of you first. You were very brave and good when you saw you had to be—once—before—you know when; but now, of course, there was nothing—only a prejudice that didn't matter, and my feelings. I did feel it."

"It would be strange if you didn't, poor child."

"But that is over now. I don't care so long as he is happy. He ought to have been happy as he was—all those many years with all he had—but if he couldn't be, why, I suppose he couldn't. He's happy now, at any rate."

"You have put the crown on his happiness," said Mrs. Delavel gently. "I was afraid you would not have felt able to welcome him—or, rather, to welcome me in this way, and that would have hurt him. But you are his child all over—high-minded and unselfish like him."

"Oh," said Sue honestly. "I can't deny that I've had a hard fight not to be jealous and nasty. You see I used to be
everything to him. You would feel it if you were in my place, wouldn't you?"
"I should, indeed."
"And my mother," whispered Sue; "how can I forsake her, now that she has nobody"—
"Hush, dear, hush—I know." Constance put out her hand from under the fur wrap, and Sue seized it and held it. They could say no more, but they had come to a perfect reconciliation.
"Well, good night, old fellow—I'll see you in the morning," cried Richard from the crowded pavement; and he jumped into the carriage and sat down in front of his wife and daughter. "Home!" he shouted to the coachman, and he repeated the word lovingly under his breath. "Home at last, Sukey! Old girl," and he leaned forward on her knees, and took her disengaged hand and kneaded it between his strong palms, "old girl, this is something like coming home."
"You are welcome back, father," she responded, quick tears rising at the sound of that thrill in his voice. You are dearly welcome—both of you," she added, after a moment's pause.

CHAPTER XLV.

"EVENING COLOURED WITH THE DYING SUN."

As they drove through the lighted streets father and daughter chatted of those common everyday affairs that make such useful conversation in the tragic crises of life—little matters of domestic interest and current gossip that were of no sort of importance, except to give them the pleasure of hearing each other's voice again. Mrs. Delavel sat in her corner and listened to them with enjoyment, but without breaking into the dialogue. Every now and then her husband leaned forward and touched her knee and asked her if she was tired, or if she felt rested, or if she was cold or warm, and if she liked the night air, or would prefer to have the carriage closed. He talked about all sorts of things, but his attention was occupied with her.
"What, isn't she well?" asked Sue at last, struck by this excessive solicitude.

"She says she's well," he answered, "but she isn't well enough to satisfy me."

"You would never be satisfied," Mrs. Delavel interposed.

"Wouldn't I? Nothing keeps me from being satisfied now but the want of a touch of colour in your face and a shade more substance in you generally. With that, I should be the most perfectly satisfied creature that breathes the breath of life, either in this world or any other."

"Oh, we'll soon get her all right," said Sue cheerfully. "She just wants rest."

"You are going to rest now, Constance," her husband said, smoothing the fur on her knee. "That is to be the business of your life from this hour."

"And we'll take her out on the water to get an appetite," said the practical Sue. "We'll give her a long day at the camp, father, and mutton chops for dinner. That will set her up. Do you know that old Bo'sun got drunk and burned down the big tent, father? He did; but Noel had it put up again, and I don't think the old fellow has ever been drunk since. It was such a shock to him."

And here the carriage turned out of the noisy, bright shop streets into a dim and quiet one that soon became a silent road, bordered on either hand with gardens that did not hide all their beauty in the darkness—gardens over the shrubs and lawns of which the travellers looked out and looked down upon the bosom of the harbour waters faintly shining under the stars. Richard leaned over to his wife and said in a joyful whisper, "You are nearly home now."

The gates stood wide open to welcome them; so did the hall door; and the hall within was full of lights and of flowers in tubs and Oriental jars and bowls, looking like a Belgravian vestibule on the night of a great reception. And as the carriage dashed up old Hannah came out, in a new black silk dress and a new white cap, to receive her master and mistress.

"Well, Hannah, I've got her," the former said simply, in a tone that conveyed a great deal to her ears.

"Is that you, Mrs. Brett?" said the bride in her clear voice, which vibrated a little, as she descended into the old woman's outstretched arms. "You have not quite forgotten me, I hope?"

"No, Miss Constance," replied Hannah vigorously, "that
I haven't. You're not one of them that is easy forgotten." And, a little to Sue's surprise, the two women—both dignified and undemonstrative, each in her way—fervently kissed each other. "It's you that's been forgetting me," continued Hannah reproachfully. "Coming and living here for weeks and months, and never letting me know—me, that used to know everything. How could you?"

"I did not know you were here," said Mrs. Delavel earnestly. "Nobody told me. I never imagined you were with him still."

"I've never left him from that day to this," said Hannah, in a proud tone of triumph.

"Come, let her in—let her in," Richard broke in impatiently. "She must not stand about in the cold, talking. You can talk presently. Come in, love—come in to your home and resting-place." He put his arm round her and took her up the steps and into the hall. The other servants were gathered here, waiting to be introduced to their new mistress, and to one and all she extended her hand and spoke a word or two, while he held her by the elbow as if anxious to push her quickly through this business and on to her room, where she might rest. He greeted the old faces with a hurried, kindly, absent-minded nod. Mrs. Delavel is tired," he said to each in turn; "she'll talk to you to-morrow. Come, Constance, don't stand about, dear; come upstairs and get your things off. I suppose you've got a good fire in her room, Hannah?"

"Father, don't insult us," said Sue. "We've got her everything she wants. Come up and see for yourself, if you have any doubts about it."

Sue held out her hand to her stepmother and led her up the brilliantly-lighted stairs to the beautiful room upon which so much time and pains had been spent, and flung open the door proudly. It was a vision of comfort for a winter night and travel-tired eyes, if ever there was one; infinite thought and carefulness, a moderate amount of taste, and a great amount of money had achieved a success that left nothing to be desired. It is not everybody—it is not, in fact, one person in twenty—who can, or does, so arrange comfortable furniture as to get the comfort out of it. She had managed this, partly because she was free from the bondage of fashion, partly from that natural instinct of benevolent sympathy and hospitality which makes a hostess do things right without knowing it; which shows her how to group guests for her dinner parties,
for instance—another apparently simple matter, in which nineteen women out of twenty fail. The bridal-chamber had an air of spacious luxury, combined with an air of homely cosiness that made it seem to breathe welcome from every article in it. There was a bright log fire on the hearth, and, beside the capacious soft armchair and within the gorgeous screen a little dainty tea-table, with the teapot standing ready and the kettle boiling. An inner bathroom resounded with the bubble of hot water, and the dressing-room opposite revealed its substantial masculine appointments through its open door. Wax candles shed a soft light on a toilet-table fit for a queen or a *primâ donna* of the stage; flowers stood there, single blooms and buds mixed with delicate ferns, the choicest of the choice. Daintinesses of every description met the suffused dark eyes of the bride and the bright keen glance of the bridegroom as they crossed the threshold together.

"There!" said Sue. And she waved her hand around.

The subsequent five minutes crowned her with the full reward of her labours. Her father pretended to ask her how she dared to transform the house in that fashion when his back was turned, but ended by catching her to his breast and hugging her vehemently; and his wife wandered round the room to inspect and admire her pretty things, with a smiling appreciation that left nothing to be desired, but with a secret pang at her heart as she thought how precarious was her tenure of this paradise of love.

She was placed in the soft armchair, and tenderly divested of her bonnet and wraps.

"There's one thing I haven't got for you," said Sue, "and that's a maid. I didn't know whether you'd bring one with you."

"She doesn't want a maid," said Richard promptly. "I am her maid." And he knelt down on the Persian hearthrug and began to unbutton his wife's boots. It was an occupation that Sue did not like to see her father engaged in, and she attempted to take it from him; but he put her aside. "I always do it for her," he said simply. "I do everything for her." And he drew off the boots as a doctor would draw bandages from a wounded limb, and gently chafed the slender, black-stockinged feet, first one and then the other, between his palms.

It was too pathetic for ridicule. When her wraps were off and she sat in the broad light of fire and lamps and
candles, it was clear that Constance had changed a good deal since Sue had seen her last. She was pale and thin then, but she was paler and thinner now. Her always refined face was refined beyond the requirements of beauty; the delicate nose had become more transparent, the large eyes larger and more lustrous and pensive; the tell-tale line of jaw and throat, which marks the passage of a woman's years when nothing else will do it, was sharper. She had aged more than she should have done in so short an interval. And when Sue noted this, and then saw with what passionate solicitude her father looked at the fading creature on whose frail life he had staked his all, the last remnant of "nastiness" vanished from her heart. She forgot even to feel embarrassed or de trop. She slipped away as soon as she had made the tea—her father stood over her while she did it, to see that she did it right—and he seemed not to notice her departure. He sat on the arm of his wife's chair and held the saucer while she sipped from the cup, and between her sips drew her head to his side, on which she leaned with an air of great weariness and ineffable repose. But though the girl felt more "out of it" than she had expected to feel, which was saying much, she no longer felt aggrieved. If it was a small thing to them whether she went or stayed, there were new aspects of the situation that made it a small thing to herself also.

On her way to her room she met Hannah marching along the corridor to offer her services to the new mistress, and she warned the old woman not to expect to be let in.

"I shall be let in," replied Hannah, in a tone of pride.
"Many's the time I've helped to dress her when she was a girl. She'd rather have me to wait on her than anybody."
"No, Hannah, she'd rather have her husband, and he won't let anybody else touch her. It's my belief he sews her tuckers in."

Hannah took this for spite, and marched on to her goal. However, she was kindly thanked through the closed door by her master, and told that she might come back in half-an-hour, when Mrs. Delavel was dressed. Sue intercepted her nurse's retreat in order to say, "I told you so," and then hurried over her own toilet that she might be in the drawing-room when that half-hour was up.

She was standing there, in front of a roaring fire, surveying the festive garnishings around her, when her father came in alone and shut the door behind him. Oh, rapturous moment!
She was in his arms, crushing his shirt front and the flowers on her breast, kissing him with all the passion of her heart, sobbing with the inexpressible ecstasy of having him all to herself, if only for a few minutes, again. And his caresses were as warm and eager as her own. He called her his dear old girl, his good old Sukey; he asked her how she had got on without him; he talked about Noel Rutledge; he was the same unequalled father that he used to be in the days when his daughter was to all intents and purposes his whole family.

And then, presently, she noticed that he became inattentive and fidgety. His eyes were fixed on the door; his ears were strained to catch the rustle of a dress on the stairs.

"Sukey," he said, "if you see me behaving like a fool, don't mind, old girl. I can't help it. When she's out of my sight I always have a sort of feeling that I may never see her again. It's force of habit, I suppose. I think I'll just go up and fetch her."

But at that moment they heard the sound of voices in the hall. Hannah threw open the drawing-room door, and Mrs. Delavel entered. She wore a trailing tea-gown, soft in colour and texture, falling from her throat in long folds—a graceful dress that gave full effect to her natural dignity of carriage and to the lines of a figure that had once been perfect. Her face had a tinge of clear colour from her warm bath, and the excitement of dressing, and coming forth to take her place as the mistress of the house. Her eyes were bright with repressed emotion, and she carried her noble head with an air that betokened a temporary victory over her fatigues. She was a beautiful woman still, even though she was forty-four.

In her character of hostess Sue stepped forward into the room, took her stepmother's hand, and led her up to the fireside. The husband stood on the hearthrug watching them, gloating on the slender figure, beside which the girl looked like a stalwart dairy-maid in her exuberance of youth and health. As she approached him he held out his arms.

"Well, how do you feel?" he inquired eagerly. "Not too tired, after all this? I think you ought to stay on the sofa and have your dinner brought to you—eh?"

She laughed and said no; then reflecting a moment, said yes—she would. For she knew it would please Hannah to
wait on her, and please Sue to have a tete-a-tete meal with her father.

The decision made Richard anxious. "I'm afraid you are very tired," he said. "I ought to have made you go straight to bed. However, you must go directly after dinner."

"I will," said Constance. "In the meantime, I am as well as I am happy, if you will only believe it." It was an assertion that he required of her a hundred times a day, and she would have given it if she had been dying.

Dinner was announced, and she was tucked up on the sofa, a table was swept bare of its flowers and ornaments and wheeled up to her side, and Hannah was summoned. Father and daughter went to the dining-room hand in hand, and sat down by themselves at the gorgeous dinner-table. There was, of course, a dinner of an elaborate and choice description for this festive day, but Richard glanced over the menu merely to select such delicacies as were suitable for his invalid wife, and showed no manner of interest in it on his own account. He ate little, but talked much, sending the servants from the room when their attendance was not actually necessary, and all his talk was on one subject.

"You think her looking ill, don't you, Sukey? You see a great change in her—I saw you did when we were upstairs. But that's because she's had a bad illness and hasn't quite recovered yet. She gets better every day—she will soon be all right if she's taken care of. What wine is that? The black seal, out of the corner bin? Sure? You got it out yourself? All right, she can have that. Do you remember that day when we saw her off to America, Sukey? Oh, my God, it makes me shudder now when I think of that day! Well, she was broken-hearted—like me—only she was not so strong as I was; and when she got to 'Frisco she was laid up with a fever—my darling!" He made a little quick moan under his breath. "She had rheumatic fever—but it doesn't matter what they called it, it was just that she couldn't keep up the effort of living any longer. And it left her heart weak, it left her shattered. When I found her she was dying as fast as she could—she was gone so far that I wonder I ever brought her back. But I think she's all right now—oh, I'm sure she is all right now. I wish her children had lived. I can make up for everything else, but I can't make up for them; and yet I know I should have been jealous of them—I couldn't have borne to have them in the way. You"—he
looked at her wistfully—"you'll help me to keep her from missing them too much, Sukey?"

"I'll do all I can, father," she gently answered.

"My dear old girl! And she thinks a lot of you, Sukey—I know you can be no end of comfort to her in all sorts of ways. After all, a woman wants another woman; a man can't be everything."

"I think you are pretty well everything," said Sue.

"Well, yes; I'm quite sure a man was never more to a woman than I am to her, and I doubt if there's another living who's as much."

"And you, father, dear?" inquired Sue. "You are as happy as you imagined you would be?"

"Happy!" He drew a long breath and was silent for a few seconds, as if words failed him. "I daren't say how happy I am, Sukey—I'm afraid of tempting Fate—and if I could you wouldn't understand what I meant by it."

"You always say I can't understand, as if I didn't know what love was!"

"You are too young to know that sort—things have gone too well with you. What's that line of Browning's?—'Twas not the morn blush widening into day'—that's your case—'but evening coloured with the dying sun, while darkness is quick hastening.' The morning glow is all fresh and new—it has to warm the earth, to dry the dews of night, to quicken dormant forces that wake up slowly; but the evening glow has in it all the fire, the growth, the fruition of the day. One must have gone through it all—one has to have suffered and wanted, and taken one's full experience of life—one has to be growing old and getting towards the end of things"—He paused, for a fresh course was being served, and gave his attention to preparing a plate of tit-bits for his wife.

All through dinner he was jumping up at intervals to see that she had what she liked and an appetite to eat it; and, as she did not wish for sweets, he would not look at them, while the dessert was spread in vain. As soon as coffee was brought—which he dissuaded her from taking, lest it should keep her from sleep—he told her she must go to bed, and as he gave her his hand to lift her from the sofa, he studied her all over with a searching gaze, which told plainly how insecure he felt in the happiness he had boasted of.

"What can I do to make you look a little stronger?" he cried; and there was an indescribable yearning tenderness in
his voice, and in the eyes that gazed into hers, and in the hands that he passed over her hollow shoulders. "What can I give you to fatten you, Constance?"

"What can you give me to make me young again?" she answered, gently mocking him. "No, Dick"—shaking her head—"my complaint is past cure. I am an old woman, dear—that's what ails me—only you will perversely shut your eyes to it."

He wrapped her in his arms with a sudden, savage energy, held her head hard down on his breast, and laid his cheek upon it, with a low long deep groan that shook the heart of his daughter when she heard it. In that irrepressible cry all the solemn strength of his passion and suffering was expressed—the anguish of frustration that love had been to him from the beginning, and seemed likely to be to the end.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"LIKE A BASKING HOUND."

Like Balzac, Richard Delavel had had no flowering spring-time in his life, no warm and fruitful summer, but entered upon an autumn which seemed to promise compensation for all his past privations. It was the most perfect happiness, on both sides, his and his wife's—when it was apparent that she still continued to improve in health—that mortal creatures can attain to, so long as they were together and able to forget their ever-haunting fear and dread of losing it. When they were obliged to separate for a few minutes or hours, the restless anxiety with which they awaited each other's reappearance, and the celerity with which they despatched whatever business had called them apart, was a source of amusement to the young spectator—that is to say, it amused her then; it does not amuse her now. She had the inclination of a young person to look upon them as old people who made themselves slightly ridiculous by forgetting that they were old—keeping up fashions that were inappropriate to their time of life; but she has come to understand it better now, as one grows, by experience in such things, to understand a fine picture that was once nothing but paint and canvas.
When they were together their content was absolute; and they were together at all times when they were not driven by the direst necessity to separate. If he went to the office, which he did very irregularly in these days, either she went too, or he was back at Darling Point before there had been time to miss him. In the middle of the morning he would break in upon his family, just as they had settled to their tête-à-tête with books or work-baskets, and look round the room with an eagerness that suggested a fear lest Sue might have murdered her stepmother and buried her body during his absence. His evident relief when he saw her peacefully sitting in her soft chair, enjoying a woman's gossip with her young companion, exposed him to many gibes from the latter person, who, however, could never make him feel ashamed of himself. He would give them a bright-eyed greeting and sit down between them, and fan his heated face with a newspaper, and say he really must superannuate himself, because he had become useless as a man of business. He would make the poorest excuses. "I could think of nothing but you two sitting here"

"You one, you mean," Sue would interpose.

"And really it isn't necessary for me to slave at the office now that I've got Rutledge to represent me. Sukey, my dear, your young man works in a manner that would surprise you. He has evidently found his vocation in ships."

Sue would say she was glad to hear it. And then he would get a book and read to them till lunch time.

On one of these occasions—it was hot weather, and they were spread on long chairs in the hall, which, being open to the roof, was the coolest place—he happened to see Sydney Dobell's poems lying about. He read "Home, wounded," and asked Sue whether she remembered reading it to him at the camp "in the dark ages" long ago.

"My soul lies out like a basking hound."

When he came to that line he shut the book, and laid his head back, and closed his eyes. "I know what that feels like now," he said.

No longer did he shut himself into his library when he was at home, and keep his man's interests to himself. Not a letter did he receive or write without showing it to his wife; whatever business he had on hand, great or small,
he told her all about it. They were companions in everything—the truest mates that ever had, as he said, one heart and mind between them. Intellectually they were equals; spiritually they were sympathetic in every respect; in person, in temper, in all that made them the exceptional people that they were, the one seemed the natural and necessary complement of the other. The way her father sat in his armchair, when he could see her in the armchair opposite, was something quite new in Sue's experience of him. He basked in peace. Peace, indeed, was no word for it. His very soul was satisfied. All his old restlessness was "laid," like the devils of Scripture that Hannah had been wont to liken it to, and at the same time all the dulness that had so often oppressed his heart and brain was gone. Once again he read philosophy and science aloud in the evenings, but the air that took his fine voice now was electric with intelligent sympathies. How they understood each other! —"to the finest fibre of their being," as Jane Eyre says. At certain passages that struck him he would look up, and she would be certain to look up at the same moment—certain to have been struck, too, and by the same thought as he. And then when they talked—and such brilliant talk it was—the manner in which they evolved each other's ideas, and shaped them to beauty and meaning, was an education to Sue. She had never known what her father had in him before.

But sometimes she felt her position of mere onlooker at all this love and happiness to be intolerable, and sometimes—for she had plenty of human nature in her—she said so. One day she broke down and wept, and told her father she couldn't bear it any longer, and if he would not let her marry and go and live at the camp with Noel (a subject that he obstinately refused to listen to for several months) she would have to run away and do it without his permission. The Darling Point house was no sort of a home for her, she said, however perfect it might be for other people.

Richard was dreadfully shocked and remorseful. "Old girl, I can't tell you how hard I try to help it," he said, "but I can't—I can't!"

"Father, dear, I don't want you to help it," she replied, remorseful in her turn. "Do you think I would want you to help it? Am I that sort of person? But—but, oh! do let me be married, and feel that I have somebody of my own!"
It was five months after his return, and he began to feel that he had held out long enough. It happened to be about the right time of year for the P. and O. voyage to Europe, and part of his plan was to despatch his daughter thither for her wedding journey. She was full of schemes for a working life; she wanted no bridal tour, she said, and her heart was set on living at the camp, where she and her husband would be unmolested by the idle world of fashion, which would surround and absorb them if they established themselves in a brick house. She detested that world; she didn't intend to have anything to do with it. It had scorned and persecuted the best man that ever lived when he was most in need of kindness, and she would not allow him to be patronised by it now that his circumstances had changed. If he showed an inclination to allow it himself—and sometimes he did—he flew at him with a red-hot indignation that was fine to see. As for money, she would not have it, simply. "Father, if you weigh us down with a big income at the first set-off you will cripple us," she said, with a tragic earnestness that neither of the men dared to laugh at.

"Don't you think Noel might manage to bear the weight of responsibility represented by a couple of thousand or so?" Richard asked her gravely.

"No, father, a couple of thousand is far too much. She reminded him of that great maxim of human conduct which Constance had long ago impressed upon her mind, and which she and Noel intended to follow in the subsequent ordering of their lives—"Take all, but pay;" and pointed out that it would be no kindness to load them with debt, which was what the giving them a fortune would amount to.

"You'll have to have it some day, Sukey."

"I don't see why, father."

"Oh, yes. I am not going to upset my affairs and give myself a lot of trouble just to make things easy for you."

"Well, if you leave your money to me, I shall make ducks and drakes of it. I just warn you beforehand."

"All right. I'm sure I don't care if Noel doesn't."

The suggestion of a carriage—to which for years she had been as much accustomed as to a bonnet—was enough to put her into a fever of revolt. Rich or poor, nothing, she passionately declared, should ever induce her to have a carriage of her own. Industrial and economic points of view were humbly put before her, but she would not glance at them for a
moment. She was strong enough to walk and ride in the 'bus, like other people; a carriage, in that case, was merely a piece of vulgar luxury and ostentation, and as such was indefensible. "No, it is not affectation," she pleaded, fancying that the sympathies of her male auditors did not run to the required length. "It is not mere red-republicanism; it's just that I want to pay for all I have, and that is a thing I could not possibly pay for."

"If you could take out some of the poor folks in your carriage—invalids, crippled children, old ladies who were too infirm to walk—girls who thought riding in a carriage the height of earthly bliss—you wouldn't mind having one then?" said Constance, smiling.

"That would make a difference," replied Sue. "That would be paying for it. But I should have to find those people first. And even then," she added, after a pause, "I shouldn't like to patronise them; and they wouldn't, if they were worth anything, like to be under such an obligation to me—except the children, of course."

"The children are the first consideration," said Mrs. Delavel. And Richard looked at his daughter to warn her not to talk of children before the childless mother.

So what Sue wanted was to marry the man of her heart and live at the camp with him, far from the madding crowd of carriage people; there to fashion a system of life that should satisfy her conscience and her peculiar tastes. But when all had been said for and against this scheme Richard coolly closed the discussion by informing her that he wanted the camp for his own purposes. She immediately proposed to found another, but the proposal was set aside in favour of his own plan for the completion of her education by foreign travel before she settled down. About this he had made up his mind, and no arguments were allowed to unmake it.

He had never returned to his native place to show his family how prosperous he had become—had never taken his daughter out of sight of the Southern Cross. His native place had lost its attraction for him when his mother died, and while his father lived and the edict of banishment was not formally revoked, he had maintained an unshaken determination not to set foot on British soil. Keppel, his favourite brother, had committed suicide; Katherine, his favourite sister, had married his enemy, Delavel Pole; Roger, when he came to his kingdom, took over the paternal animosity or in-
difference to the black sheep as a part of his inheritance—or so Richard concluded from the fact that his elder brother made no sign of remembering his existence. And these things, and his own ever-growing sense of alienation from the traditions of his aristocratic race, took from him, as the years went by, all interest in his home and all desire to revisit it. A Delavel who had married a girl of the people and taken to trade, who had identified himself with a locality that was infinitely more unfashionable than Clapham or Camden Town, was not expected to turn up again, he used to say; and, for himself, he honestly declared that a return to the solemn state and rigid conservatism of the ancestral house would bore him more hideously than words could express. But he wanted Sue to see the world; moreover, he wanted her to see Dunstanborough—a desire that poor Annie in her lifetime had steadily discouraged, while constantly whetting her daughter’s curiosity with the most gorgeous descriptions of the magnificence of the family seat. So when, after Sue’s outburst of tears and pathetic appeal for somebody of her own, the marriage was decided upon, the grand tour, which in these days is only limited by the boundaries of our planet, was put into the programme as a preliminary to the self-denying, world-serving life that the young folks had set before them.

"Go and see everything first," said Richard. "You'll never have such a chance again as you've got now. Go while you're young and learn what the world is made of—it will make all the difference in your social efficiency by-and-by. Take her round, Noel, and show her what's doing, and don't think of money or office work or anything for a year at least—only of making the old girl happy and giving her things to think about. Sukey, you know I don't say it because I want to get rid of you."

"Oh yes, father; if you'd wanted to get rid of me you'd have done it before now. And if you think it right for us to go and give ourselves up to pure idleness and pleasure for all that time, why, I suppose we must do it."

"It won't be idleness," he rejoined promptly. "It will be the most profitable of all employment—for the present."

In the early part of February the wedding took place. It was a simple wedding, and a private one, because our bride and bridegroom, holding advanced opinions, considered the public function a coarse and barbarous business, that should
be out of date with delicate-minded people, educated to appreciate the sacredness of the occasion. They simply went out for a walk single and came back married; and, having had lunch at Darling Point, got out the boat, rowed themselves down to the camp, and there lived for a fortnight like Adam and Eve in Paradise, without even the Bo'sun to spy upon them. Noel made the fires, and Sue cooked the chops, and they rambled and boated and read choice books and reclined on the sand to watch the ships go by, and were supremely happy.

They returned to Darling Point for another fortnight, and then they started off on the grand tour. And the splendid raw material in Mrs. Rutledge's mind underwent a useful process of manufacture during the subsequent two years.

CHAPTER XLVII.

TWO YEARS AFTERWARDS.

Two years afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Rutledge returned to Australia—the latter greatly matured by her experiences, as we have said—and found the elder members of the family still in the same world together, and still cherishing a hope that they would be allowed to remain there for a considerable time to come.

The travellers came overland all the way from Adelaide, in order, since they were coming home, to get home as quickly as possible. Whether that journey was a bad thing for Sue, whose health at this juncture was such as to require more care than usual, was a question much debated in Hannah's sitting-room next day; but at the time she felt it no more than she was accustomed to feel such things, which was not at all, provided she had a bed of some sort for the night hours. The racket of express trains, which when long continued reduces an ordinary woman to the condition of an old rag, found no weak place in her admirable constitution—an inheritance to be put to the credit of the ill-starred marriage of which she was the result, the blending of the fiery, nervous, finely-cultivated Delavel strain with that of the tough and
solid yeoman race representing her maternal ancestry. She slept in her tight berth, shaken by the jar of revolving wheels, as she had slept in several gales of wind at sea, like an insensate infant, waking each morning with nerves and digestion undisturbed.

Her father was at the station to meet her on the hot morning of her arrival, as glad to get her back now as she had been to get him back two years and a half before. In defiance of etiquette, she stepped out of the train straight into his arms, and kissed him on the platform before all who cared to remark upon her behaviour. Noel was in danger of being overlooked, in spite of his great stature and noticeable handsomeness, but his time came in a few minutes, and he used the interval to collect his baggage, which the others had no thought for. The dressing-bags and odds and ends were tossed in the carriage, and they were soon bowling through the poor streets, which by some law, municipal or divine, environ all important railway stations, towards the statelier city and the lovely shores of Darling Point.

"I need not ask how Constance is," said Sue, looking at her father's keen-featured face, which was full of life and brightness. "You wouldn't leave her like this if she wasn't all right—at least, you wouldn't have done it two years ago."

"I wouldn't do it now," said Richard, with a quick smile. "But she's pretty well—as well as she ever is, I think. You can't expect a disembodied spirit to grow fat. She made me come, and wanted to come herself, but of course I wouldn't hear of it in weather like this. She has to keep very quiet in summer time."

"I wonder you haven't taken her out of Sydney before now."

"This year," said Richard, "she wished to stay at home. She thinks, and so do I, that heat affects her less than travelling. Do what you will, you must get shaken up more or less, and that seems to try her heart, which is the weak place, you know. Remember that when you meet her, and don't be boisterous, old girl. She's all right while she's quiet. I make her lie on the sofa—I've invented a new sofa for her—when it's hot, and I row her down to the camp when it's cool, or I take her for a drive. Do you notice that we've got another carriage, Sukey? Indiarubber tires, you see; they don't jar her so much. And it's hung in a new way."
"Well, I am glad she is all right," said Sue. "Since that's the case, I don't mind saying that I never thought, when you brought her home that night, she was going to live and keep well all this time."

"All this time!" he repeated. "Sukey, the time has flown like the wind—it has been no time—it has simply raced away. It seems but a month ago since you and Noel left."

"Evidently you haven't missed us," she said, laughing. "You didn't find time hang heavy on your hands for want of me."

"Have you found time hang heavy?"

"Often and often. There are moments when I would have given my ears for the square of magic carpet, to be transported home again for a little while."

"Leaving Noel?"

"If necessary. He is just as dear as dear can be"—throwing a bright glance at her husband, who sat before her—"but he couldn't keep me from wanting you."

"You've never had to feel the want of him yet," said Richard. "However, I'm not prepared to say that I haven't had a hankering for you now and again, old girl. Habit is strong, and we'd got so thoroughly used to one another somehow. I'm glad Noel doesn't mind bringing you home for a bit. We needn't hurry about looking for a house, Noel; it's too hot for that work. It will be time enough when winter comes, won't it?"

Noel looked with a little anxiety at his wife, and declared himself quite ready to postpone everything for the sake of giving her immediate rest and quiet; and furthermore intimated that all domestic arrangements were absolutely under her control.

"Well done!" cried Richard, with a heartiness that would have set at rest any doubts as to the security of her hold upon his affections, had she entertained doubts, which she didn't for a moment. "Then we four won't part again, Sukey. If you must have a house of your own presently, we'll buy out the people next door."

"We should have to part if Dunstanborough came to you," said Sue gravely. "I suppose you understand, father, what the death of Uncle Roger's poor boy means for you?"

"It means nothing, Sukey. Roger's life is as good as mine, and if not, it's all the same. Dunstanborough may come to me, but I shall never go to it."
"Why not, father? There's a dreadful whisper going about that Uncle Roger's illness is cancer."

"God forbid! I don't believe it."

"If it should be so—if you should inherit while you are still comparatively young and strong—there is such a lot that you might do to improve the place and reform abuses!" (By this time Sue had strong views on the land question, which she burned to put into practice.) "It would be such a chance for helping things on—it would be such a position of power and influence—as surely no man qualified as you are ever had before! You would go into Parliament—you would fight with the leaders, the pioneers—you would set such an example as no country gentleman ever set before, with all your money to back you. It is the poor people who have hitherto preached the rights of humanity, and because they are poor their motives are discredited; all of them put together have not the moral weight—the power to affect public opinion and fashion and custom—that one rich man would have, doing what you could do, if you were Mr. Delavel of Dunstanborough, which, I can see, is like being a king in a small way. Poor Uncle Roger has done nothing for anybody but himself—none of them do—and it's enough to make one's heart bleed to see the things that go on. I must tell you all about it by-and-by. But you—well, you wouldn't have to complain that you were unable to pay back to the world the value of what the world gave you, if it gave you such an opportunity as that."

He smiled at her unabated enthusiasm, and shook his head.

"I shall never take it, Sukey."

"Why not, father?"

"Because, my dear, Constance could not stand the climate."

That settled it, of course. She had nothing more to say. The idea which crossed her mind so often—that, Constance being possibly laid in an untimely grave, he could remain "comparatively young and strong" to pursue the business of life without her—never by any chance crossed his.

The carriage turned out of the hot streets into the familiar, shady road to which the mansions of the wealthy and exclusive presented their front gates, and in a few minutes Sue was welcomed by her stepmother on the doorstep of her home. Constance was looking, she thought, a little more shadowy than when she saw her last; but her complexion was beautiful in its transparent purity and softness, her eyes bright, her whole face suffused with inward happiness. She wore a loose
gown of thin white silk, tied at the waist with a silk girdle, and a little fine lace about her throat. She was forty-six, but her last years had not aged her; they had made her look young. This so struck Sue that she remarked on it at once, and sent her father who had been waiting for the verdict in a nervous agony of apprehension, into raptures of delight. Mrs. Delavel made her own anxious inspection of her stepdaughter, and was also reassured. Tanned with sea-wind and sun, flushed with heat and excitement, dirty, sticky, tousled, with her girlish trimness all gone for the present, it was still evident to the most casual observer that the state of Sue's general health left nothing to be desired. It was quite evident to Hannah when she came into the hall to greet her nursling, but Hannah would on no account acknowledge it. She was filled with indignation at the iniquity of husbands who could allow their wives to be knocked about in ships and trains at a time when nature plainly ordered them to stay quietly at home.

"You ought to have come either a good deal sooner or a good deal later," she muttered with a severe face, "and you would have done if there'd been a woman to manage things."

"She is her own manager," said Noel, who overheard the remark. "She insists on doing what she likes, Hannah."

"Don't tell me," retorted the old woman, who had never considered him good enough for her child. "It's a husband's place to prevent his wife from doing what she likes."

At which there was a little merry laughter, and Noel bade Sue remark that Hannah was on his side, and that her words were the words of wisdom.

"And now, my darling, come to your room and get undressed and cooled and rested," said Mrs. Delavel, taking her step-daughter by the hand, with a motherly tenderness that poor Annie would have been unable to feel or show. "You must get a little comfortable before you can eat anything to enjoy it."

"You ought not to go upstairs, Constance," Richard hastily interposed.

"Just this once, Dick," she answered. "I will go slowly."

"Then let me help you," he rejoined. And he almost carried her to the first landing, with an arm round her waist, leading Sue with his other hand.

"How does she get to her room usually?" the latter inquired. "A lift?"
“I don’t live upstairs now,” Mrs. Delavel explained. “He thought stairs were not good for me, so he had a new bedroom and dressing-rooms built below. O Sue! he does spoil me in such a preposterous manner!”

“Well,” said Sue gently, “it pleases him, and it is evidently good for you.”

She found herself installed in that very chamber over the drawing-room which she had herself prepared for Constance on her home-coming as a bride, and the other rooms on the same floor, all beautifully furnished—in simpler but finer taste than she had displayed when the matter was in her hands, and with equal comfort—were placed at her disposal.

“You will have your independent home presently,” said Constance, “but in the meantime—and indeed always, wherever you may be—you and Noel must feel this your home too. Here is your sitting-room, dear—your bedroom that used to be—and there is a den for your husband, and a room for your maid, if you care to have one—and a nursery. I have made your mother’s room a nursery for her grand-children, darling—you don’t mind that? It seemed a good use to put it to, and it is so large and airy. Hannah took care of everything that came out of it. But don’t trouble to look round now. You must undress and have a bath, and rest.”

“Constance,” said Sue, with a little moisture in her bright eyes, “father strictly enjoined me not to be boisterous and hug you, because he said you couldn’t stand it, and you don’t look as if you could; but will you please understand that I would crush you to a jelly if I dared.”

In the afternoon the two women, stretched on two couches in Mrs. Delavel’s room downstairs, had that woman’s talk for which they longed, while the men chatted over their pipes in the smoking-room.

“Now, I want to know,” said Sue, “what you meant by that private postscript, in which you begged me to come home as soon as I could. What did you want me to come home for? It always seemed to me that, however valuable my company, my room was just a little more so, if anything.”

“I was not so well as usual,” said Constance, “and I was afraid of something happening to me—and your father with nobody to fall back upon. Indeed, I have been in a fidget all the time, more or less. Imagine what it would have been if I had died suddenly, and you on the other side of the world—only servants with him!”
"We won't imagine anything so dreadful," Sue replied. "If I had known you were feeling like that, I would have come home long ago. But you are not really nervous about yourself, are you? It's only father's fuss?"

"It is always a nervous thing to have a heart like mine," said Mrs. Delavel. "It may, and I trust will, hold out as long as I want it; but on the other hand it may, the doctors say, stop suddenly at any time. And the dread of leaving him alone—without you—has been a perfect torment to me. At last I felt I must try to hasten you back. I did not know when I wrote that you were not quite in a condition to be hurried—and you have hurried. I hope it hasn't hurt you. The voyage would be beneficial, as you are such a good sailor, but you should not have taken those two immense railway journeys, with only the one day in Melbourne between them. Hannah is quite right about that."

"I'm none the worse. Nothing hurts me. I only wish I could give you some of my strength. But tell me, Constance, honestly, you don't—putting your heart aside, and hearts don't seem to matter much, as long as you're careful—feel as if things were going wrong with you, do you? Oh, you really mustn't, you know. Father could not stand it."

"I don't now," replied Constance. "I frightened myself while you were away, but now you are back I am at ease." She rose from her sofa with a happy, girlish air. "I feel to-day as if I had taken a fresh lease of life, now that that weight is off me. I dare say I shall be a tough old woman yet. And here is Hannah with the tea. Call the gentlemen, Hannah; they will like to come and have some with us."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"WHILE DARKNESS IS QUICK HASTENING."

It was a happy little family that sat down to dinner that night. Sue was rested and refreshed, and her stepmother, who had an unsuspected fund of brightness and humour at the back of her seriousness, in a mood of positive gaiety, which was all that was needed to inspire their male com-
companions with the spirit appropriate to such an occasion. How often the younger members of the party recalled the pleasant scene; the pretty festive table—the graceful woman who presided over it, looking as they had hardly ever seen her look before, with such a shining exhilaration in her soft, dark eyes—the keen-faced host, still in the strength and beauty of his manhood, to whom she seemed to have given the elixir of life. They were all young together in that delightful hour, taking no thought for the morrow, and not seeing the shadow under which they laughed and joked.

Sue and her father were the chief contributors to the conversation, which never flagged for a moment. They were too full of news and too eager to impart and receive it to think of their digestions. She had to tell him about Dunstanborough, the reality of which had so far transcended her colonial ideas of such a place; to describe its present aspect, and what was changed and what was unchanged. Though he had thought little about it for so many years, he was keenly affected by the associations her eager tale revived, and his interest in it was wonderfully enhanced by the fact that Constance had seen his home (having made a pious pilgrimage thither in the year that Sue was born), and had as correct a memory of its features and surroundings as he had. She had thoroughly explored the green woods and quaint gardens, as a casual tourist graciously permitted to "do" the show-place of the county, and been conducted over the stately, ancient rooms by that same dear, fat old house-keeper who had nursed him as a baby and sent him hampers of cakes and pastry when he was a boy at school; therefore she was in a position to sympathise with his disgust at the news that most of those old rooms had been modernised beyond recognition, and that the moat which had girdled the grey walls for centuries had been drained and filled and converted into gravel paths and flower beds.

"But I think that was a very wise thing of Roger to do," she said. "My instincts as a nurse prevent me from seeing any beauty in stagnant water under your bedroom windows, however beautiful it may look in the eyes of the thoughtless."

"It was fed from springs, Constance."

"It had scum and duckweed on the top of it, Dick, and it was certainly dangerous to health, my dear. Roger was quite right to do away with it."

"Father would have done away with it himself," said Sue,
“before letting you sleep under the ancestral roof, if the place had been his. And yet,” she added, “poor Uncle Roger, with all his sanitary precautions, has not been able to keep sickness away. That poor boy! Just turning seventeen, father—just finishing at Eton; and he was so like the old photograph of you at that age. We saw them all at church when we first went to Dunstanborough, the time when we just poked about by ourselves, and nobody knew us. Such a handsome family they were, in their huge chancel pew, raised a foot or two above the common people, so that everybody could see them.”

“You couldn’t see us in my day,” said Richard. “We had blue curtains all round us.”

“Oh, there’s nothing of that sort now. Open benches, with carved ends—everything modern and orthodox. The only difference in the squire’s pew is its shape and size, and its carpet and cushions. And there was Uncle Roger, stout and proud looking, with his nose in the air—he was not ill then; and his magnificent wife and his three beautiful daughters, and that dear boy who died only a few weeks after. I did nothing but stare at them all church time. It was Christmas Day, and the church was decorated—you never saw such decorations! They said the ladies at the Hall and a lot of people staying there did them. And Mr. Delavel-Pole walked up the aisle in a cope and things, all the colours of the rainbow, with a boy carrying a cross four feet high before him.”

“The same old Max!” ejaculated Richard. “And what does he look like, Sukey? Have years softened his asperities at all? Is he rotund and sleek and double-chinned? He ought to be.”

“No, he has a severe, ascetic look. He is spare and bony and hatchet-faced. A very unsympathetic sort of man, apparently. And he gave us a nasty, hard, dogmatical sermon, all about the authority of the Church—nothing but the Church, the Church, from beginning to end, till one got sick of the very word—not a bit of human feeling in it, not a thought that was of any use to anybody.”

“Dear old boy! I know his style. And to think of Kitty, who used to be such a merry little soul, taking up with the likes of him! It must have been that she never saw anybody else. How does she seem to have stood it, Sukey? Is she spare and bony too?”
"Aunt Katherine," replied Sue, "is rosy and plump, and has every appearance of enjoying life. Report credits her with having the upper hand of Mr. Delavel-Pole, and she is certainly a powerful person in the parish. You should have seen the sharp watch she kept on the Sunday-school children; they shook in their shoes under that eagle eye of hers, poor mites!"

"Ugh! He's spoilt her. And what about Barbara? If any one had told me one of my sisters was to marry that hypocritical prig, I should have been sure it was Barbara. She seemed cut out to be the ogress of a Sunday-school. And she's an old maid, after all, poor old girl!"

"Yes, and a very sour old maid too, poor thing. The gossip of the village has it that she loved Mr. Delavel-Pole, and was broken-hearted when he married her sister, and would never look at another man."

"Good Lord!"

"Certain it is that she and Aunt Katherine are not on speaking terms. If they meet on the road they cut each other dead. I was very friendly with Aunt Katherine when we went to visit them last year, after Uncle Roger found us out. She used to want me to tell her about Australia, and took a lot of interest in things; but Aunt Barbara would never have anything to say to me. She regularly turned up her nose at me, as if I'd been a black gin or a convict. Aunt Barbara," said Sue judicially, "seems to me to be a Delavel all over."

"She always was," said Richard, "true blue to the backbone. It would be just like her to turn up her nose at you. I wish she'd married her precious Max—they'd have been a pair. And little Kitty might have had a chance. However, I'm glad Kitty has the upper hand of him. She had a spirit of her own, I remember, and wouldn't allow herself to be sat upon. Well,"—after a pause and with a twinkle in his eye—"and how's your other Aunt, Aunt Rhoda? Rhody they used to call her in the old days. I hope she's well and thriving. I hope you went to see her when you were paying family visits, eh? She was a sensitive person, was Rhody—very apt to feel hurt if she was neglected by her relations."

Sue's face grew crimson, and after a moment's hesitation she broke into an embarrassed laugh. Her father had left her to find out for herself how the case stood with respect to
her maternal antecedents, and the discovery had been a considerable shock to her. She had a vivid recollection of the Morrison family as they appeared in their pew in the nave of Dunstanborough Church on that Christmas Day of which she had been speaking—Aunt Rhoda coarse and red faced, a mountain of flesh, with coarse-looking girls and boys beside her, the girls wearing fly-away hats turned up at the side, and silver lockets and chains round their necks; and Uncle John grey and bent-backed, dull-eyed and stolid, physically and intellectually on a level with his own farm labourers—and of her feelings when she realised the discrepancy between the facts as she saw them and the fiction that poor Annie had imposed upon her. She also thought of that visit to the farm which she dutifully paid—how her aunt had commenced the interview with cake and wine, and honeyed words and obsequiousness—had then proceeded to wound the filial susceptibilities of her niece by professing Christian forgiveness towards one whose pride, that would not allow her to acknowledge her own flesh and blood, had been brought low, even to the dust; and ended by unpacking the whole store of bitter grudges that the dead woman had provoked and spreading them before the indignant eyes of her living representative. It was a grotesque and painful memory.

"Never mind," said Richard, with mischievous enjoyment of her confusion; "you shall tell me all about her by-and-by. There's a tale to be unfolded, I can clearly perceive. Eh, Noel?"

"We got on with the uncle better than with the aunt," said Mr. Rutledge, with becoming gravity. "We made a point of seeing Mr. John Morrison a second time."

"You did, did you? And you told him all he would naturally want to know?"

"Everything."

"That's right. That's what I wished. And"—gravely—"you think he was satisfied, Noel?"

"Yes. But he's a crabbed old stick. Times are hard for farmers nowadays, and I think his struggle to make ends meet has soured him."

"I expect it's Rhody has soured him. But to do her justice, she was a capital business woman. I thought she'd have managed somehow to put money into her husband's purse."

Then the talk fell upon the hopeless state of the agricul-
atural interest, and how the Dunstanborough property, with its mortgages and dower charges, would have been bankrupt over and over again had it not been for the new watering-place; and Sue rushed into the burning land question with her characteristic ardour, and then into a moralising account of her uncle's splendid establishment, and the impressions she received from her sojourn therein. Her description of the rigid state and ceremony to which she and her husband were subjected, and how like fishes out of water they felt, was very graphic and amusing; and the picture she drew of Uncle Roger in his pride and power and his human helplessness—the Lord of Dunstanborough, who had all the good things of life apparently, but could not save his only son from the common destroyer nor himself from the clutch of malignant disease—was a pathetic one that drove the smiles from all their faces for a minute or two.

It was Lord Boyton who introduced the Australian Delavels, in her person, to the chief of the family—poor Lord Boyton, who had flown home a broken-hearted little man after man-slaughtering Richard's wife, and had not been heard of since. He was sent for to Dunstanborough in the autumn following the death of the heir, when the head of the house was mournfully considering how to open communication with the next in succession—sent for to report what he knew of that now important person; and it oddly happened that he ran across the Rutledges the day after leaving Roger's house, where he had been giving a glowing description of the charms of Richard's daughter.

The unexpected meeting was a great joy to himself, apart from the family amenities to which it gave rise. When his old friend met him with such cordiality and kindness—when he found that she was married to the man of her choice—when he heard, moreover, that her father had married also—his load of self-reproach was wonderfully lightened. And as for Sue and Noel, the fortnight they had spent with him in his Irish castle was one of the pleasantest episodes in the history of their travels. She had to tell her father all about it, and make him take the enhanced interest in Lord Boyton that she now felt.

"He hasn't twenty thousand a year, father, nor a quarter of twenty thousand, nor anything like it," she said enthusiastically.

"My dear, I never for a moment supposed he had," said Richard.
"And he has married a girl as poor as himself, and not an heiress, who would have helped him out of debt and difficulties," she continued, in a glowing tone of eulogy. "I always did say there was a lot of good in the dear little fellow, and there he proved it beyond a doubt."

"Perhaps the heiresses wouldn't have him."

"Nonsense. Of course they would. You don't know the social value of a title at home, evidently."

"No doubt the present lady had the title in view. She can hardly have taken him on his own merits. A nasty little drunken beast"

"Father, he is nothing of the kind. He is struggling to cure himself of his bad habits for her sake, and that alone is proof that they love each other. She is a dear, bright, sweet-tempered creature, who must have had lovers by the score—isn’t she, Noel?—and she chose him and he chose her; and it’s just delightful to see how happy they are in their dilapidated old castle, with their crowd of slipshod servants. He really doesn’t know which way to turn for money to live on. I was so pleased."

It was a summer night, and there was a full moon, and everybody who knows Sydney harbour knows how it looks under those circumstances. Our four friends, on rising simultaneously from the dinner-table, stepped out of the open windows to gaze upon the enchanting scene, and to breathe the salt air blowing freshly from the sea. They did not go down the stairs and winding pathways, because Constance was not allowed to climb, but gathered on the upper terrace, and from that altitude, as from a watch-tower, looked through a frame of rustling foliage upon the lovely distance of shimmering water and shadowy shore.

"Oh," cried Sue, with tears in her eyes, "there is no place like home, and no home like this home!" She was leaning on her husband’s arm, but her father stood on the other side of her, and she laid her cheek on his coat sleeve in the old caressing fashion. "I certainly am the happiest person on the face of the earth to-night," she declared, with the emphasis of strong emotion—"the very happiest, without exception."

"Oh, I think you must make one exception," said Noel, laughing.

"Two—three," said Constance.

"Absit omen!" cried Richard, putting up his hand. "Don’t talk so loud, lest that old hag with the shears should hear you."
CHAPTER XLIX.

THE WAGES OF LOVE.

Before they separated, Sue asked her father a laughing question. "And what have you been doing all the time? I have been giving you a full account of our adventures, but you have told us nothing."

"There is nothing to tell," he answered. They were dawdling in the hall, lighting their bedroom candles; as the yellow flame rayed upward over his face she noticed that he was a little greyer, but otherwise as alert and bright and handsome as ever. "Constance and I have been standing stock still, simply."

"Haven't you done anything?"

"Not a mortal thing. We didn't want to."

"Fancy two people doing nothing for two whole years!" exclaimed Constance, who was drooping on his arm, looking rather white and weary, though smiling still. "O Dick! its dreadful! We ought to be ashamed of ourselves."

"It seems to me," said Sue, "that though we've talked so much about paying back, we've done nothing but run into debt the whole time. There is not one of us that has earned his salt, so far. Noel dear, now that we are home again, we must bestir ourselves, and set these idle people an example."

"She has done her work," said Richard, covering with his own his wife's beautiful hand, which looked very white and slender on his coat sleeve. "I'd like to have as good a record to show. And she shall do no more. She wants to rest now, and she has honestly earned her rest."

"But you haven't."

"Perhaps not. But I am going to take it, because if I don't rest she won't. I can't be bothered with your schemes, Sukey. You must work them by yourself."

"But I haven't the money for my schemes. You have. All that money lies on my mind, father—when you think what it might do!"

"Take it, then, and do what you like with it."

"Oh no; it is yours, and the responsibility is yours."

"Well, go to bed, old girl—go and talk about it to Noel. Here's Constance looking as white as a ghost—she's had a
heavy day of it, and she must go and settle to sleep as quickly as possible. Good night, child, good night. It's good to have you back again. But you mustn't be too severe on us poor old folks, who have never had a real holiday till now."

When her father had kissed her, with all the old lover-like warmth, Constance followed with a maternal embrace that was not less cordially responded to. "You see how it is," said the elder woman. "You will have to pay back for him as well as for yourself. Remember it when the time comes and the money and everything is yours—that he left liabilities behind him; and be his steward and deputy, and discharge them in his name."

She said it lightly, with a smile; but her stepdaughter understood that she meant it very seriously, and answered her with another close and silent kiss. Then they said good night all round, and separated. Sue climbed the stairs with a lagging step, hanging to her husband's arm, and Constance was conducted to her spacious ground-floor chamber by her inseparable companion, who was still the only maid she had or wanted.

As for poor Annie—if we look facts plainly in the face, a proceeding quite contrary to civilised custom—the place that had known her literally knew her no more. Her twenty-five years of domestic sovereignty simply went for nothing. What else could be expected in the case of a husband who had regarded himself as her captured bond-slave from the first, and in the case of a child who had taken the part of that conventionally unfaithful spouse against her? In her lifetime she had had but the letter of their allegiance, and not the living spirit; and now that she had been a few years dead, though they kindly and tenderly remembered her from time to time, they did not mourn for her any more. This to the general reader will prove, not that Annie was in fault, but that she had a bad husband and a bad child; and indeed no excuse is offered for them, except that they are here set down as they really were, and not as they appeared or as they ought to have been—which is a cruel process to which we are never subjected in the world of real life, and which therefore does them a certain injustice. In the world of real life a legal mother who conforms to rule is never allowed to be judged on her intrinsic merits, never required to reap what she has sown, like the poor folks who are not hedged with the divinity of a like status. She is to be revered by her intelligent grown up
family, whether she be hard or tender, selfish or unselfish, noble or ignoble; and if they don't revere her they are never to own it, even to themselves. This is all right, of course—everybody feels it so—but at the same time it is not quite sincere or natural; and Sue, like her father, was terribly prone to lean to nature rather than to the supreme authority which regulates our affairs. Faith was once defined by a Hindoo Christian convert to his missionary teacher as "believing what you know to be untrue;" and the people who can perform that feat can, no doubt, love those whom they know they cannot love; but our two poor friends were morally too simple and clumsy to do either. And it is still a question whether, in the general process of examination and judgment to which all our institutions are being brought, the conventional mother may not have to justify her claim to filial duty and honour which she has done little or nothing to deserve.

At any rate, the melancholy fact remains that Sue did not miss her mother very much, and had no sense at all of wanting her.

She went to bed feeling as happy as she had recklessly described herself when her father warned her that she was tempting fate, but she was much more fatigued than she supposed or allowed, and inclined to be wakeful and restless. Her bedroom arrangements, devised by the thoughtful stepmother, were such as to make sleep easy even on a Sydney midsummer night. Four brass poles, fastened to the floor, held a gauzy canopy about twelve feet square over her head, and from the light rods connecting them hung the airiest film of mosquito curtain, enclosing her as in a large transparent tent. Within this she reposed in spacious comfort, with that room to breathe which she always needed for body and soul alike, and without the windows stood wide open to the night breeze. She could see the moonlight on the water as she lay, without lifting her head from the pillow—she could feel the wandering airs that came up from the sea—through the light veil that protected her from the tormentors. After the cramped quarters she had occupied in ships and trains, the space and softness and delicate purity all about her were delicious. She talked to her husband for a long time, in spite of his gentle remonstrances, until the sound of his breathing indicated that he could no longer take part in conversation. Then she looked at the harbour lights, watched the revolutions of the South Head beacon, thought about her schemes, little
and big (how she and Noel could begin to pay back for “value received” during the last two years, where she should look for a monthly nurse, and so on), and instead of growing drowsy as the night wore on became more acutely wide awake and active minded every moment. Her admirable nervous system was a little strained by the excitement of the day, following upon a long railway journey.

Towards three o’clock in the morning, when feeling the first symptoms of approaching slumber, she was startled by the sound of a banging door downstairs, a hurry of feet, a bell ringing loudly, and her father’s voice calling to somebody in a voice that made her heart stand still. She knew in a moment what that wild shout meant, ringing through the silent house in the dead of night; only one cause could account for it. Springing to a sitting posture, she shook her husband violently, and, as the cry was rapidly repeated, he too heard it, and came to full consciousness of its meaning with a bound.

“Run, Noel, run! Constance is ill, and father is calling us,” she cried. And she got out of bed and groped tremblingly for the candle.

He promptly put her back again, and implored her, if she loved him, to stay there—not to come downstairs unless he sent for her. Then he snatched at his dressing-gown and ran, as she bade him, closing her chamber door behind him. He was almost overpoweringly tempted to turn the key, but did not, knowing the uselessness of brute force to prevent her from injuring herself if persuasion would not do it. He could excuse Richard for not thinking of his daughter when he made that terrifying noise, but it was natural that his own first anxiety should be on her account, lest the rude shock should upset her.

Of course Sue found it impossible to obey him. When she was left alone she lit the candle at the little table that stood within the gauze tent, and put on her slippers and dressing-gown, her heart thumping, her hands shaking, her ears strained to catch every sound downstairs. The whole house seemed alive in half a minute. The servants were calling to one another and running hither and thither; the front door banged, and the front gate; all the signs of a dreadful catastrophe were audible. She felt it would be maddening to remain alone and idle when she might be of more use than anybody, and that at any rate she must learn the worst. So
she blew out the candle, lifted the tent curtain, and by the
light of the moon made her way downstairs, where gas was
flaring in all directions.

The door of her stepmother's room was open, and all the
windows thrown up. At the farther end, in the recess of a
large window that overlooked the bay, was a little group ofour people—her father, Noel, Hannah, and poor Constance,
who was fighting through the last hard two minutes of her life,
trying to breathe, while something clutched at her breast and
strangled her. She was sitting in a large armchair, just as
she had been lifted from her bed, gasping for air, but other­
wise making no sound, while her husband held her up in his
arms and howled—no other word could describe the noise he
made—howled like a wild beast tortured, not loudly, but with
a concentrated force of savage anguish that was indescribably
dreadful. He was trying to get her to drink some brandy—
a supply of which he always kept in a cupboard near her bed
—while Noel held the glass, and Hannah wildly flourished a
bottle of smelling salts; all their efforts being obviously futile.
The poor woman was past help; she could neither speak nor
swallow. She looked up at her husband with a pathetic help­
lessness and consciousness of their mutual agony; and he
clasped her and cried over her with that terrible howling cry,
as if he and not she were in the throes of a cruel death. It
was a scene that haunted Sue for many a long day, like a
frightful nightmare.

But it was only for a minute. As she ran through the long
room towards them, Noel and Hannah calling to her to go
back, she saw the end of the struggle. Constance lifted her
arms to her faithful mate—a sudden, desperate sort of gesture
—and he caught her up bodily, carried her a step or two, rock­
ing her as he went, as one sees a mother rock a child in a
paroxysm of pain, and then laid her on a sofa—that sofa which
he had had made on purpose for her, to be better than all
other sofas—where she had lain in the afternoon, and pro­
phesied that she was going to be a tough old woman after all.
As he laid her down she gently sank out of his arms, sank back
upon the pillows, limp and still; her delicate head rolled a
little to one side, and there rested as if she slept; her pretty
hands fell open, palm uppermost. They smoothed her white
gown over her placid form, and Richard, looking at her, ceased
to howl, for he saw that she had ceased to suffer.
It was not yet daylight when the doctors, who had come too late, were shown out of the house. Mr. Delavel spoke to them quietly and rationally, and thanked them for the useless efforts they had made to reverse the decree of fate; then he desired the servants to return to bed, kissed his daughter, and went back to his dead companion, locking the door behind him.

"Now, come upstairs," said Noel to his wife, wearily. "We can do no more for him."

"And don't come down again," added Hannah, "for it'll do you harm, and do him no good. As for comforting him, you'd comfort him as much as that fly buzzing round that candle. He'll stay there with her to the last minute, and he won't want anybody else. It's my belief he won't let us lay a finger on her now she's dead any more than he would when she was living. Ah, dear me, it was only yesterday that I wanted to brush her hair, and he wouldn't let me. He said he liked to brush it for her himself. Well, I don't know what he'll do, I'm sure."

"It will kill him," said Sue.

CHAPTER L.

THE WILD BEAST'S LAIR.

Sue lay on a sofa in her own chamber, shattered out of all self-control by the shock she had gone through, and it became clearly apparent to her husband as he looked at her that the tragedy of the day was not yet over.

"Look here," he said, holding her hands, and gazing at her with an appeal in his eyes that no words could express, "this is the greatest call on your courage that you have ever had, or probably ever will have. If things go well with you now there will be consolation for all of us—the only possible consolation for him—not to speak of me. I can't help you, my dearest, but you can help us—him and me, and yourself too—beyond all measure if you can brace yourself up to be calm and steady till the crisis is past. You were never like common women, Sue, to give way when others depended on you. And
you will not let your safety be threatened by dangers that you can keep off by being brave and resolute—will you?"

At once she sat up and rallied whatever heroic spirit she had in her, controlling the sobs that had been shaking her frame. She promised him she would try not to give way, and bade him have no anxiety on her account. Then she whispered to him that she was afraid she was not well, and would like to speak to Hannah.

Hannah, being summoned, was constrained to recognise the fact that troubles seldom come singly in this world. She discovered, not at all to her surprise, that Sue was kept from going to her father by something more than an anxious husband's wish; that out of the great deep which had just absorbed one precious life, another might come to the mourning household before the day was over; and the knowledge roused her in a wonderful way. No bereavement, however terrible and overwhelming, can dull that strongest woman-instinct, that mother nature, that deep sex sympathy to which the girl's circumstances appealed; and in a moment Hannah had dashed away her tears and concentrated all her solicitude upon the heroine of the great experience that was so near at hand. The grief-muddled brain cleared as by magic; the trembling fingers became quick and capable; all that could be done to meet the sudden emergency she thought of, and did without fuss or delay—producing from various mysterious sources the necessaries for the occasion, which could not be disinterred in time from the European luggage. When the official person who had been summoned, and of whom she was bitterly jealous, arrived to take command, there was nothing for her to do but to look round and signify her august approval, and then retire for lunch and gossip to the servants' hall.

Noel came upstairs towards noon, and found the two old women making a slight commotion, and Sue in the thick of her struggle to be courageous and calm.

"Don't mind me," she said with a wan smile, when she beheld his anxious face. "Tell me how he is."

"Well," said Noel, when after much questioning an answer was got out of him, "he has great pluck. He's very quiet—quite himself, and talking rationally. He is concerned about you. He will be coming to see you presently. But not, I think, until she is gone."

"When will that be?"
"To-morrow evening. I wanted to attend to all that for him, but he won't let me. He'd rather do it himself. He said I was not to leave you. And he wants us to keep Hannah—he says she would be a comfort to you just now; but I think we'll send Hannah downstairs. It's not right that he should be without somebody he can speak to."

"Oh yes, we'll send Hannah down at once."

She rose to call Hannah, who had left them tête-à-tête, when he checked her, and drew a letter from his pocket. "Here, he sent you this," said he.

"What, a letter! He was able to write me a letter!" She took it with trembling hands, as if afraid of it, and tore it open. Yes, it was in his own bold handwriting, and just like the letters she had had from him before.

"DEAR SUKEY,—Don't grieve about what has happened. She's out of pain—it only lasted two or three minutes—and I was never more thankful in my life than when I saw the end of it. Noel tells me you are not well to-day, and he thinks more troubles are at hand. Keep up your heart, old girl, and don't fret about me. I've been expecting this any time for three years past, and was quite prepared for it. Don't let it upset you, my old girl. If anything can comfort me it will be to hear you are all right."

Sue laid it down with a moan. "That is just a sham," she said; "a pretence, to try and impose on me. As if he could impose on me, knowing all I know! He has done it to ease my mind—to help me through. Oh, my poor, poor old daddy!" She broke into wild sobs, that went perilously near to being shrieks, for about a minute, and then resolutely calmed herself and smiled in Spartan fashion at her distressed husband. "However, if he can be as brave as that for my sake, it's the least I can do to be brave too," said she. "Don't you worry yourself about me, Noel dear; I shall be as right as possible."

And so she was. For a long afternoon she bore her sorrows and sufferings without complaint, drawing more comfort from her own heroic mood even than she gave to those about her. To have something to do was the first need of body and soul under the circumstances, and she could not complain that her task was a light or unimportant one. Until the shades of evening fell she upheld herself for the sake of upholding the
men she loved; and then nature forced her to rest, and forced her also to feel conscious of a simmering happiness in the depths of her heart, under all the weight of black disaster that overshadowed her.

As the dinner table was being laid—that function which seems so much more important than life or death—Noel, with a full heart, crept stealthily downstairs; and Richard came out of the room where his dead wife was lying to receive the information that Sue had a daughter, and that mother and child were "doing well." He was quite composed and quiet, but his son-in-law did not dare to look at him.

"Give her my love," he said. "It's better for her not to see me now, but tell her I'll come soon. Tell her not to worry about me. And take care of her, Noel—take care of her while you can."

"No fear of my not doing that," said Mr. Rutledge.

And then Richard congratulated him personally, asked a question or two about the child, said good night and locked himself up again.

To be brave under the circumstances of that tragical day was not Sue's hardest task, though it seemed so. The day that followed, when she lay still in her bed, with the sweetest baby that ever was seen cuddled up to her breast, was an infinitely greater trial to her. It was the day of the funeral, and it was sultry and stormy, with tempests of rain driving upon the windows; and to have to lie in her utter powerlessness and think of what her father was undergoing made consciousness a torture that pain and effort would have relieved. She was kept in ignorance of the funeral arrangements, but, though she was sure he would evade the ghastly customs of his kind as far as the law would allow him, she knew there were cruel necessities that he would have to bend to—necessities that he had calmly accepted in the case of poor Annie, to whom established customs only were appropriate, but which would seem to him to put a sort of public indignity upon the sacred person of her successor, the beloved woman on whom the wind of the vulgar world had hardly been allowed to blow. He could not carry her in his arms to the boat and row her down to the camp by the light of the summer moon, and dig her grave in the sea-shore scrub, and lay her where no one should know of her resting-place but himself; he would have to see that precious body treated like common bodies, and to expose his anguish to the gaze of the streets. And the day
was wild and wet; at the hour when she would be taken from him the rain would be driving into his stern, set face; and when he came back to his empty rooms at night—oh, what a vision of desolation and loneliness rose in his daughter's mind as the night drew on! And she could not be there to remind him, with her arms enfolding his down-beaten head, that he had still one little shred of something left, poor and trifling as it might be.

The next and few following days were still worse to bear. She was all the time watching and listening for her father to come to her, and he did not come, and no one could or would give her any clear account of him. The nurse and Hannah and Noel himself all answered her appeals for truthful information in that palpably insincere, would-be soothing manner which is so maddening to helpless invalids; and then it was dragged out of Hannah that her master had gone to the camp immediately after the funeral, and had not been heard of since.

"Why couldn't you have told me so at once?" moaned Sue, who had a touch of fever as the result of their well-meant tactics. "Of course I knew he would go to the camp. It is the natural place for him to go to."

But she was disappointed that he had gone without seeing her first, and she soon began to worry herself as to what he was doing there. She begged Noel to go and see, and several times he implored her to excuse him on the ground that he could not bear to intrude on the suffering man who had gone away from them all to be alone with his grief; but at last he yielded to her importunities, and one morning set forth in Richard's outrigger to Middle Harbour.

He was gone all day, and when he came home at night he was very reticent and grave. After questioning him till she nearly lost her temper, Sue got out of him by degrees that her father was not very well. "It's just a bad cold," said Noel, with that affectation of ease and cheerfulness which he supposed to be good for the nerves that it set quivering with irritation. "He must have got a chill at the funeral—he was wetted to the skin as he stood by her grave; and of course he hasn't been taking care of himself, and it has settled on him."

"A chill!" echoed Sue. "Yes, I should think so! It's a chill in his soul—in all the currents of his life—that he'll never shake off in this world."
"And I thought it would be better for him not to be alone any longer, being so seedy," Noel continued, "so I’ve sent Hannah down to look after him."

"You’ve sent Hannah down! To the camp? Oh, he’ll never bear to have her there, Noel, even though she is Hannah. A woman servant at the camp? What a preposterous notion!"

"Well, of course he can send her back if he likes."

"And so he will fast enough." She was silent for a little, and then a vague suspicion of the truth came into her mind, and she looked at her husband earnestly. "Noel, you don’t mean that you have sent down Hannah because he is too ill to come back to the house?"

"Oh no," he replied carelessly, and thereby perpetrated the first downright lie of his life. He hoped it was not a lie, but said to himself that if it was he couldn’t help it. "He prefers to stop at the camp now."

"Ah," said Sue, only half-satisfied, "the camp is to him what his lair is to a wild beast; he always goes there when he is hurt. But I’m sure he’d rather be at home at Darling Point than at the camp with servants waiting on him."

The days passed, and Hannah did not return, and Noel was absent from morning till night. He said he had to attend to business—another lie, in intention if not in fact, committed for the sake of the sick wife who was not thought to be yet in a condition to bear the truth. But presently his business kept him out at night too, and then she divined the sort of business it was—that it had no connection with Pitt Street. The truth was "broken" to her at last, as, in spite of all drawbacks, her naturally fine health came rapidly back to her, and she learned that her father had not lost his cold; that it was rather worse—indeed, much worse; that doctors had visited him at the camp, where several servants were now installed in addition to Hannah; that, in short his condition was considered critical, though of course there was always hope while there was life.

Then Sue took matters into her own hands, and defied husband and nurse to prevent her. She put on a hat and cloak, wrapped her fortnight-old baby in a shawl, and bade Noel straightway get out the boat and take them with all speed to Middle Harbour. The nurse mutinied, and would have resigned her office on the spot, or been discharged for impertinence, had not Noel interceded and propitiated her;
he made no protest on his own account, but only set himself to minimise the risks of the expedition as far as human means could do it.

In the strange way that things happen in this world a messenger arrived with a telegram a few minutes before they set off; and when the telegram, addressed to Richard Delavel, Esq., was opened by his son-in-law, who had authority to conduct his business correspondence, it was found to be dated from London, and to be a communication from the legal advisers of the great Delavel house. The message ran thus:—"Roger Delavel dead. Return immediately."

CHAPTER LI.

THE BO'SUN HAULS DOWN THE LANTERN.

The heat of the day was over, the hard glare mellowed to that lovely peach-pink mist, that impalpable veil of evening colour, which neither pen nor paint-brush can describe—sunset-tinted exhalations of the city and the sea—through which the harbour shores loomed faintly like a land of dreams. The air was still, but sensibly freshening from the south; the bay was smooth and shining as a sheet of glass, just delicately breathed on by the twilight haze; everything was hushed and tranquil, like Wordsworth's sonnet—quiet as a nun, yet with suggestions of eternal motion in the background, where the great Pacific billows rose and fell. On how many summer nights like this had Sue and her father stolen away from the dinner table to cool and rest themselves on the water after a hot day; paddling as far as the camp, perhaps, and sitting there for a while to smoke and meditate, to talk over "Mill on Liberty" or "John Morley on Compromise," returning by the light of stars or moon to fall into inevitable disgrace for being out so late. Memories of those happy hours crowded upon her as she watched her husband getting out the boat—their boat—she standing idly by with her baby in her arms. Husband and baby, that so soon push father and mother from their place, had not dethroned the beloved one, of whom she was less flesh of his flesh than
spirit of his spirit, and they could not console her at this moment, when she realised that boat and camp would soon be his and hers no more.

She took her accustomed seat and the familiar tiller ropes, the stout nurse and the child on one side of her being balanced with sundry bags and bundles on the other; and Noel, in white flannels, well open at the throat, pushed off from the landing steps, planted his feet firmly, and bent himself to the task of getting over the distance between house and camp in as short a time as an Oxford-trained oarsman could do it. The clean sweep and dip of the blades, the speed and power of his noiseless stroke, were beautiful to see, and even in her sorrowful preoccupation Sue could not help being proud of a husband who could row so well; it was too dusk to see the straining of his unpractised muscles and the beads of perspiration that trickled down his face.

Fast as he rowed, it was almost dark when they swept into the little cove, where the white tents sheltered under the hill. Though the curve of the beach was defined by the tiny thread of surf sent across the Sound from the ocean breakers, and the open water still reflected the fading sky, the wooded heights and the bosky shore were all one velvety blue shadow, in which nothing was distinguishable but the Bo'sun's lantern on the top of the flagstaff, except when the beam from the lighthouse, like a policeman's bull's-eye, was turned upon that quarter for a second or two. They almost touched the jetty behind the bushes before they saw the two figures standing there—the poor old sailor, who was the unconsidered scullery-maid of the camp, evidently stupid with rum or grief or want of sleep, waiting to take the boat; and Hannah, pushing before him, craning over the water to see who was coming.

"That you, Miss Sue?" she called, as the dip of the oars ceased and the boat drew near. And on Sue answering that it was she, Hannah uttered an ejaculation of thankfulness in a tragic tone that was anything but reassuring.

The nurse, disappointed of her coadjutor's support, here firmly intimated that Mrs. Rutledge would not have come if she had been able to prevent it, and disclaimed all responsibility for the consequences of such an imprudent step; but nobody heeded her or the dictates of prudence—except Noel, who hurried her away to show her her quarters, and what she could do for the comfort of her special charges during the night. They carried off the bags and bundles, and Sue
lingered a moment with the baby, to speak with Hannah alone behind the hedge. She upbraided the old woman for not summoning her before. "I could have come, Hannah, long ago," she cried; "and he must have wanted me!"

"No, my dear, no," said Hannah. "Everything has been done for him that mortal creatures could do, and all his anxiety has been to keep you from knowing. But now—well, it's no use hiding it from you, for you'll see it for yourself—now it's nearly over, and 'twould be too cruel to keep you from him."

When she heard that, Sue broke into wild words of rebellion and despair. She could not part from him—she could not bear it! Why should he die, who was so strong and healthy, when other people got over it?

Hannah said it was God's will, in a solemn, reproving voice; then she took the question from a much lower standpoint. "He's dying because she's dead—because he can't live without her. If she'd been here to nurse him, like she was when he had the same complaint before, no doubt he'd have got over it. But now there's no chance for him—I felt from the first there was no chance. Oh, dear me, I wish he'd never set eyes on her, that I do! It's pitiful to see him die so lonely, with no hope, human or divine, to cheer him—no comfort, except that she's gone first, and is spared the pain of seeing him suffer. He thinks of nothing but her, and he ought to be thinking of other things. He bears it all quietly enough, because he's a man, and he'd be ashamed to rave and cry, but he isn't resigned a bit—he isn't in any state to die, my dear, and that's a fact."

"My darling," murmured Sue passionately. "Not fit to die, when he's lived as he has lived! He never made pretences in his life—he's not likely to begin to make them in his last hours."

"I don't want him to pretend, Heaven knows, but I want to see him thinking about his Maker that he's going to meet, and not casting himself away for a poor, sinful, earthly creature like himself. But there, it's no use—nothing will turn him. Seems as if things had gone crooked from the beginning, and were never going to be straightened up, not even on his deathbed. He's dying like a heathen; and not like a Christian man—and I can't bear to see it."

"What are names?" protested Sue. "There are good heathen and bad Christians—good men and bad men. He is
a good man—that's enough for me. If he's a bad man— with wild incoherence of speech, though with perfect clearness of thought—"he's better than any of the good ones that I have ever known."

Hannah passed over the protest, which did not seem to her to touch the point. A death-bed, in her view, as in that of many worthy people, was like examinations at the end of the school term; on its report depended whether the candidate for immortal honours "passed," or whether all his preparation was to go for nothing. To be a black sheep in life was one thing; to fly in the face of sacred use and etiquette in the hour of death was quite another. It was the difference between a boy playing pranks in the school-yard and turning somersaults in class under the eye of the head-master.

"There's Mr. Pilkington has been here again and again, and as long as he'd breath to speak, your father refused to let him come near him. 'Keep that snivelling idiot away from me,' he said—and those were his very words; 'Keep that snivelling idiot away from me; I've enough to bear without that.'"

"So he has, indeed," said Sue, "and I won't have Mr. Pilkington worrying him. What does he know of the needs and trials of a man like my father? Why, my baby might as well set up to teach him!"

"Give it to me," said Hannah, putting out her arms. "The precious lamb, it's a sad start in life she's having. And go in and see him, my dear, and try if you can't make him think of the things a man in his position ought to think of. You could always do more with him than anybody—except her. Do, while he's got sense and reason left, get him to understand that there's a God above who has sent him these afflictions to bring him to Himself, and a world to come where it'll all be made up for if he'll only repent and believe."

"O Hannah!" cried Sue, "I'm afraid you have been worrying him!"

"I wish I could have worried him," Hannah replied. "But it was just speaking to the empty air; he never so much as heard me." And, weeping in the shelter of the darkness tears that in her hard old eyes were much more impressive than ordinary tears, she took the baby from the mother, and carried it to one of the small tents, whence its little voice, piping shrilly through the airy silence, was heard at intervals all night.
Sue gave it up without another word, and entered the camp by a different path. What a changed camp it was from the dear place she had always known!—the neat footways and flower-beds that had been the Bo'sun's pride, all crowded with strange litter, lights and figures flitting about, the whole place humming with subdued life. And, oh, what a changed face on the pillow of the bed in the big tent, from the keen-eyed, wide awake, spirit-lighted face that had been used to lie there in unmolested solitude in the bygone summer nights!

The worst of his sufferings were over, though he was still in a dull agony of semi-suffocation, too weak to cough air into his choked-up chest, and rapidly nearing the stage of insensibility which would practically be the extinction of life. His hands were already cold, there was a film over his bright eyes and a dragging rattle in his throat; his breathing was terrible. Sue felt for one wild moment not only that the sight of him in this extremity was more than reason could bear, but that to live through future years with the memory of it would be utterly unendurable. She flung herself down at his bedside, spread her arms over him, and uttered the only word that could express her love and grief—"Father! father! father!"

It woke him up in a way that astonished the doctors, who had not expected to hear him talk again.

"What, Sukey, my old girl"—He had no voice left, and could only articulate a syllable at a time, but she understood him. She made a sign to his attendants, obedient to a sign from him, to withdraw from the bed and leave them together. And then they passed through an experience the nature of which was known only to themselves, and is not to be described in these pages.

By-and-by, when they had accustomed themselves a little to the tragedy of the situation, Sue did make a poor attempt to carry out Hannah's injunctions. "Can't you see any glimpse—any hope at all—of anything to come after, father?"

"No, Sukey," he said; "I can't."

"No one can tell, father! It is all so much beyond us! You remember Arnold's paper in the Fornightly? You may find her again, after all."

"Ah," he responded, in a groaning whisper, "if I could—if I could! But I don't want an angel or a spirit—I want her. And she's gone, Sukey—and I'm going—and it's all over. And”—looking at her with a look that broke her heart—"we've only had three years out of fifty!"
This, it became apparent, was the one thought absorbing him—that life was over for him and her, and that they had only had three years out of fifty. It did indeed strike even his daughter, so like himself as he had made her, that it was dreadful to be overwhelmed in such an hour with an aspect and result of life that was comparatively so ignoble. To have the faculty to discern the proportions of things, to stand as he stood now with the Infinite around him, and to concern himself only with this local detail—it showed how, in the moral as in the physical world, thwarted nature was but another name for disease. The cruelty of the fate that had tantalised him was too fresh to be forgiven; it shadowed his spirit and intellect as the oncoming night obliterated the fair features of shore and sea.

"I haven't been what I ought to have been," he admitted—his nearest approach to thinking of "the things a man in his position ought to think of"—and he struggled desperately to make his old "girl" understand him, dragging out his toneless syllables, bit by bit, with an effort that he could not have made for anybody but her. "I haven't done what I ought to have done with the opportunities I've had. I should have paid back more. I know she felt that—I felt her feeling it. But I was crippled for want of her, Sukey—crippled, crippled—that was the reason. And when I got her at last, to lose her in three years—only three years out of fifty!"

He fell into a stupor of exhaustion after this long speech, and the doctors came forward to attend to him. Sue passionately appealed to them to make another effort to save his life, for she said he talked so sensibly, he was so perfectly aware of what he was saying, that she could not think he was so far gone as they supposed. It was only the accumulations in his chest that he could not cough up which were choking him; couldn't they perform tracheotomy or something, to give him room to breathe—to give him one more chance?

Of course they said they couldn't, and stated reasons why they couldn't, but it was impossible for her all at once to relinquish the thread of hope she had despairingly clutched at. "Father," she cried, in the sweet wild voice that stirred him to consciousness as long as anything could stir him, "listen—I want to tell you something. Uncle Roger is dead, father—the telegram came to-day—and now Dunstanborough is yours. Won't you, oh, won't you try to live—you have got strength yet, and if you make a struggle for it, if you make
an effort to cough and rouse yourself, you may yet pull through—and we will go home, my darling, to your own old home, and do all that splendid work that is waiting for us. Do you understand? You could pay back all then—it's what she would beg and pray for, father, if she were here."

He was drifting farther and farther away from the sound of her voice, but was arrested for a moment by this potent pronoun. "She couldn't stand the climate," he whispered huskily. And then a gleam of intelligence, touched with the spectre of a smile, came into his suffering face, and he said—"Max will have it; Max stands next."

"And would you let him take Dunstanborough, and keep everything back? It will be worse than Uncle Roger—it will be like the dark ages again—O father! father!" She laid her head on the bed and sobbed. It was no use. He did not care for Dunstanborough; he did not care to live; he did not hear what she was saying; the deep waters that had engulfed him were closing over his head. It is seldom that last words are so apropos to the occasion as novels and deathbed gossip imply, and these happened to be the last that poor Richard Delavel had the power to utter—"Max stands next."

Perhaps he gave a kind thought to his old enemy in this supreme and final moment of conscious existence, but it is more than likely that he didn't.

His eyes, that had dreamily followed the movements of his daughter, slowly settled to a blank fixedness as her image faded from them; his breathing grew slower and slower. Lying just within the tent door, to get all the freshness of the air from the sea, he was bathed every minute in the radiance of the electric beam; it quenched the lamplight as it passed, and revealed the subtle changes in the dying face with the distinctness of day. Noel Rutledge watched for a little while, and then lifted his wife from her knees and bore her out of the tent and through the garden to the beach, where he sat down under the bushes and folded her in his arms. There was no moon, but the night was beautiful. The little waves rippled at their feet; the great breakers filled the air with the sound of a distant organ. The spacious silence was unspeakable.

"Oh, what does it all mean?" wailed Sue, in an anguish of bewilderment, overwhelmed by the terrible mysteries with which she was confronted. Her husband had no answer for
that question. They could only cling to one another as they had never clung before.

The hours of the night passed, and at three o'clock in the morning they heard the flapping of ropes over their heads and the tinkle of the tin lantern against the flagstaff. The little yellow smudge that had been enough to show them the path between beach and tent was effaced, and when the lighthouse turned its ray upon the ships at sea the camp was lost in darkness.

"What are you doing, Bo'sun?" said Noel, rising to his feet. "It isn't sunrise yet."

"Sunrise or sunset," the old man answered solemnly, "it's not wanted there any more." And, when he had hauled down the lantern, he hauled down the running rope, leaving the pole bare.

They left him fumbling, and returned to the tent. Looking down on the bed as the electric beam passed over it, they saw that Richard Delavel had ceased to suffer. The life that had so ill-satisfied him was at an end.

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