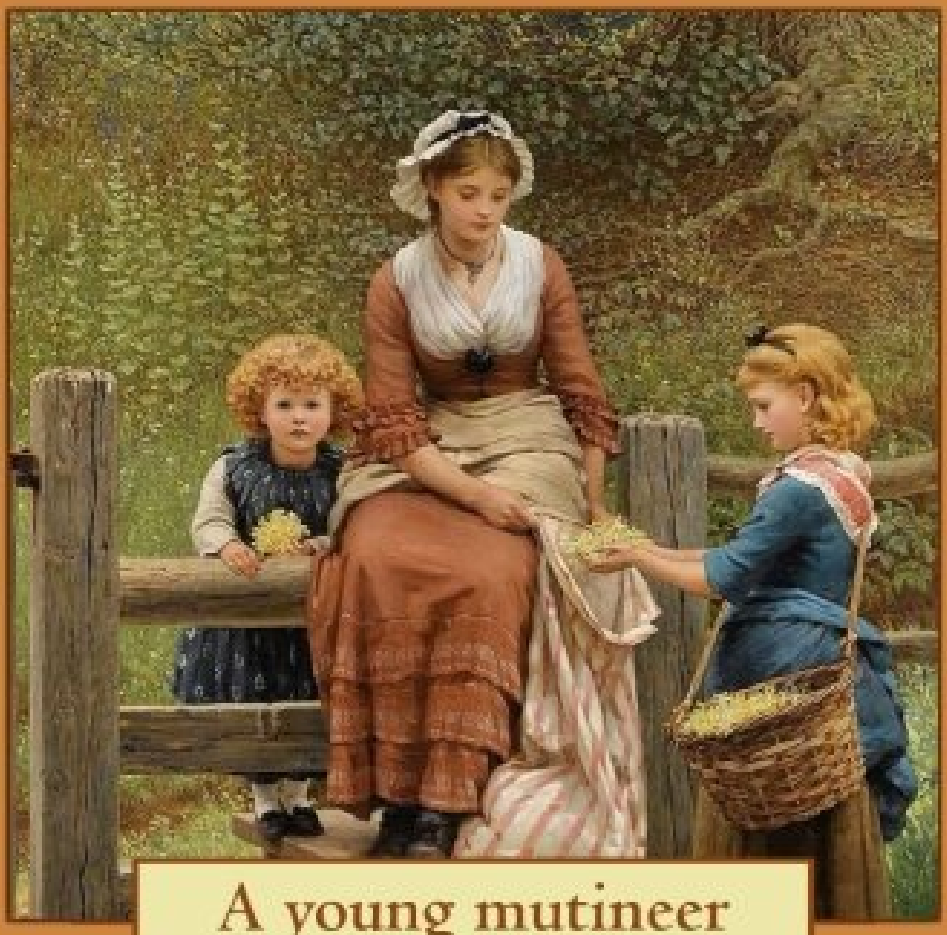


A young mutineer (1905) by L. T. Meade

L. T. Meade

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A YOUNG MUTINEER ***

Transcriber's Note:

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A Young Mutineer



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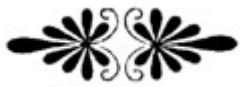
Frontispiece

A Young Mutineer

BY

MRS. L. T. MEADE

AUTHOR OF "A GIRL IN TEN THOUSAND," "A RING OF RUBIES," "GIRLS
ETC.



NEW YORK
STITT PUBLISHING COMPANY
1905

TO
MY LITTLE GIRL HOPE

THE REAL JUDY

October 23, 1893

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A YOUNG MUTINEER.

CHAPTER I

AN OLD-FASHIONED LITTLE PAIR.

Sun and shower—sun and shower—
Now rough, now smooth, is the winding way;
Thorn and flower—thorn and flower—
Which will you gather? Who can say?
Wayward hearts, there's a world for your winning,
Sorrow and laughter, love or woe:
Who can tell in the day's beginning
The paths that your wandering feet shall go?

—MARY MACLEOD.

The village choir were practicing in the church—their voices, somewhat harsh and uncultivated, were sending forth volumes of sound into the summer air. The church doors were thrown open, and a young man dressed in cricketing-flannels was leaning against the porch. He was tall, and square-shouldered, with closely-cropped dark hair, and a keen, intelligent face.

When the music became very loud and discordant he moved impatiently, but as the human voices ceased and the sweet notes of the voluntary sounded in full melody on the little organ, a look of relief

swept like a soothing hand over his forehead.

The gates of the Rectory were within a stone's throw of the church. Up the avenue three people might have been seen advancing. Two were children, one an adult. The grown member of this little group was tall and slight; she wore spectacles, and although not specially gifted with wisdom, possessed a particularly wise appearance. The two little girls, who were her pupils, walked somewhat sedately by her side. As they passed the church the governess looked neither to right nor left, but the eldest girl fixed her keen and somewhat hungry eyes with a questioning gaze on the young man who stood in the porch. He nodded back to her a glance full of intelligence, which he further emphasized by a quick and somewhat audacious wink from his left eye. The little girl walked on loftily; she thought that Jasper Quentyns, who was more or less a stranger in the neighborhood, had taken a distinct liberty.

"What's the matter, Judy?" asked the smallest of the girls.

"Nothing," replied Judy quickly. She turned to her governess as she spoke. "Miss Mills, I was very good at my lessons to-day, wasn't I?"

"Yes, Judy."

"You are not going to forget what you promised me?"

"I am afraid I do forget; what was it?"

"You said if I were really good I might stop at the church on my way back and go home with Hilda. I have been good, so I may go home with Hilda, may I not?"

"Yes, child, of course, if I promised, but we are only just on our walk now. It is a fine autumnal day, and I want to get to the woods to pick some bracken and heather, for your Aunt Marjorie has asked me to fill all the vases for dinner to-night. There are not half enough flowers in the garden, so I must go to the woods, whatever happens. Your sister will have left the church when we return, Judy."

"No, she won't," replied Judy. "The practice will be twice as long as usual to-day because of the Harvest Festival on Sunday."

"Well, if she is there you can go in and wait for her, as you have been a good girl. Now let us talk of something else."

"I have nothing else to talk about," answered Judy, somewhat sulkily.

The bright expression which gave her small eager face its charm, left it; she fell back a pace or two, and Miss Mills walked on alone in front.

Judy was not popular with her governess. Miss Mills was tired of her constant remarks about Hilda. She had a good deal to think of to-day, and she was pleased to let her two pupils amuse themselves.

Judy's hungry and unsatisfied eyes softened and grew happy when their gaze fell upon Babs. Babs was only six, and she had a power of interesting everyone with whom she came in contact. Her wise, fat face, somewhat solemn in expression, was the essence of good-humor. Her blue eyes were as serene as an unruffled summer pool. She could say heaps of old-fashioned, quaint things. She had strong likes and dislikes, but she was never known to be cross.

She adored Judy, but Judy only liked her, for all Judy's passionate love was already disposed of. It centered itself round her eldest sister, Hilda.

The day was a late one in September. The air was still very balmy and even warm, and Miss Mills soon found herself sufficiently tired to be glad to take advantage of a stile which led right through the field into the woods to rest herself. She sat comfortably on the top of the stile, and looking down the road saw that her little pupils were disporting themselves happily; they were not in the slightest danger, and she was in no hurry to call them to her side.

"Children are the most fagging creatures in Christendom," she said to herself; "for my part I can't understand anyone going into raptures over them. For one nice child there are twenty disagreeable ones. I have nothing to say against Babs, of course; but Judy, she is about the most spoilt creature I ever came across, and of course it is all Hilda's fault. I must speak to Mr. Merton, I really must, if this goes on. Hilda and Judy ought to be parted, but of course Hilda won't leave home unless, unless—ah, I wonder if there is *any* chance of that. Too good news to be true. Too good luck for Mr. Quentyns anyhow. I shouldn't be surprised if he is trying to get Hilda all this time, but—he is scarcely likely to succeed. Poor Judy! what a blow anything of that kind would be to her; but of course there is not the least chance of it."

Miss Mills took off her hat as she spoke, and allowed the summer air to play with her somewhat thin fringe and to cool her heated cheeks.

"I hate children," she soliloquized. "I did hope that my time of servitude was nearly over, but when men prove so unfaithful!" Here a very angry gleam flashed

out of her eyes; she put her hand into her pocket, and taking out a letter, read it slowly and carefully. Her expression was not pleasant while she perused the words on the closely written page.

She had just returned the letter to its envelope when a gay voice sounded in her ears. A girl was seen walking across the field and approaching the stile. She was a fair-haired, pretty girl, dressed in the height of the fashion. She had a merry laugh, and a merry voice, and two very bright blue eyes.

"How do you do, Miss Mills?" she called to her. "I am going to see Hilda. Can you tell me if she is at home?"

"How do you do, Miss Anstruther?" replied Miss Mills; "I did not know you had returned."

"Yes, we all came home yesterday. I am longing to see Hilda, I have such heaps of things to tell her. Is she at the Rectory?"

"At the present moment she is very busily employed trying to train the most unmelodious choir in Great Britain," replied Miss Mills. "The Harvest Festival takes place on Sunday, and in consequence she has more than usual to do."

"Ah, you need not tell me; I am not going to venture within sound of that choir. I shall go down to the Rectory and wait until her duties are ended. There is not the least hurry. Good-by, Miss Mills. Are the children well?"

"You can see for yourself," replied Miss Mills; "they are coming up the road side by side."

"Old-fashioned little pair," replied Miss Anstruther,

with a laugh. "I'll just run down the road and give them a kiss each, and then go on to the Rectory."

Miss Mills did not say anything further. Miss Anstruther mounted the stile, called out to the children to announce her approach, kissed them when they met, received an earnest gaze from Judy and an indifferent one from Babs, and went on her way.

"Do you like her, Judy?" asked Babs, when the pretty girl had left them.

"Oh, yes!" replied Judy in a careless tone; "she is well enough. I don't love her, if that's what you mean, Babs."

"Of course it isn't what I mean," replied Babs. "How many rooms have you got in your heart, Judy?"

"One big room quite full," replied Judy with emphasis.

"I know—it's full of Hilda."

"It is."

"I have got a good many rooms in my heart," said Babs. "Mr. Love is in some of them, and Mr. Like is in others. Have you no room in your heart for Mr. Like, Judy?"

"No."

"Then poor Miss Mills does not live in your heart at all?"

"No. Oh, dear! what a long walk she's going to take us to-day. If I had known that this morning, I wouldn't have taken so much pains over my

arithmetic. I shan't have a scrap of time with Hilda. It is too bad. I am sure Miss Mills does it to worry me. She never can bear us to be together."

"Poor Judy!" replied Babs. "I shan't let Miss Mills live in my heart at all if she vexes you; but oh, dear; oh, dear! Just look, do look! Do you see that monstrous spider over there, the one with the sun shining on his web?"

"Yes."

"Don't you love spiders?"

"Of course. I love all animals. I have a separate heart for animals."

Babs looked intensely interested.

"I love all animals too," she said, "every single one, all kinds—*even* pigs. Don't you love pigs, Judy?"

"Of course I do."

"I wonder if Miss Mills does? There she is, reading her letter. She has read it twenty times already to-day, so she must know it by heart now. Let's run up and ask her if she loves pigs."

Judy quickened her steps, and the two little girls presently reached the stile.

"Miss Mills," said Babs, in her clear voice, "we want to know something very badly. Do you love pigs?"

"Do I love pigs?" asked Miss Mills with a start. "You ridiculous child, what nonsense you are talking!"

"But do you?" repeated Babs. "It is most important for Judy and me to know; for we love them, poor things—we think they're awfully nice."

Miss Mills laughed in the kind of manner which always irritated Judy.

"I am sorry not to be able to join your very peculiar hero-worship, my dears," she said. "I can't say that I am attached to the pig."

"Then it is very wrong of you," said Judy, her eyes flashing, "when you think of all the poor pig does for you."

"Of all the poor pig does for me! What next?"

"You wouldn't be the woman you are but for the pig," said Judy. "Don't you eat him every day of your life for breakfast? You wouldn't be as strong as you are but for the poor pig, and the least you can do is to love him. I don't suppose he likes being killed to oblige you."

Judy's great eyes were flashing, and her little sensitive mouth was quivering.

Miss Mills gave her a non-comprehending glance. She could not in the least fathom the child's queer passionate nature. Injustice of all sorts preyed upon Judy; she could make herself morbid on almost any theme, and a gloomy picture now filled her little soul. The animals were giving up their lives for the human race, and the human race did not even give them affection in return.

"Is that letter very funny?" asked Babs.

"It is not funny, but it is interesting to me."

"Do you love the person who wrote it to you?"

Miss Mills let the sheet of closely-written paper fall upon her lap; her eyes gazed into the child's serene

and wise little face. Something impelled her to say words which she knew could not be understood.

"I hate the person who wrote that letter more than anyone else in all the world," she exclaimed.

There was a passionate ring in her thin voice. The emotion which filled her voice and shone out of her eyes gave pathos to her commonplace face. Babs began to pull a flower to pieces. She had never conjugated the verb to hate, and did not know in the least what it meant; but Judy looked at her governess with new interest.

"Why do you get letters from the person you hate so much?" she asked.

"Don't ask any more questions," replied Miss Mills. She folded up the sheet of paper, slipped it into its envelope, replaced the envelope in her pocket, and started to her feet. "Let us continue our walk," she said. "We shall reach the woods in five minutes if we are quick."

"But," said Judy, as they went down the path across the field, "I *should* like to know, Miss Mills, why you get letters from a person you hate."

"When little girls ask troublesome questions they must not expect them to be answered," responded Miss Mills.

Judy was silent. The faint, passing interest she had experienced died out of her face, and the rather sulky, unsatisfied expression returned to it.

Miss Mills, whose heart was very full of something, spoke again, more to herself than to the children.

"If there is one bigger mistake than another," she

said, "it is the mistake of being fond of any one. Oh, how silly girls are when they get engaged to be married!"

"What's that?" asked Babs.

"I know," said Judy, who was again all curiosity and interest. "I'll tell you another time about it, Babs. Miss Hicks in the village was engaged, and she had a wedding in the summer. I'll tell you all about it, Babs, if you ask me when we are going to bed to-night. Please, Miss Mills, why is it dreadful to be engaged to be married?"

"Your troubles begin then," said Miss Mills. "Oh, don't talk to me about it, children. May you never understand what I am suffering! Oh, the fickleness of some people! The promises that are made only to be broken! You trust a person, and you are ever so happy; and then you find that you have made a great, big mistake, and you are miserable."

"Is that you, Miss Mills? Are you the miserable person?" asked Judy.

"No, no, child! I didn't say it was me. I wasn't talking of anyone in particular, and I shouldn't even have said what I did. Forget it, Judy—forget it, Babs. Come, let us collect the ferns."

"Suppose we find some white heather," said Babs eagerly.

"And much that's worth, too," replied Miss Mills. "I found a piece last summer. I gave——" She sighed, and the corners of her mouth drooped. She looked as if she were going to cry.

CHAPTER II.

THE PEOPLE WHO GET MARRIED.

Thou wert mine—all mine!...
—Where has summer fled?
Sun forgets to shine,
Clouds are overhead;
Blows a chilling blast,
Tells my frightened heart
That the hour at last
Comes when we must part.
Hurrying moments, stay,
Leave us yet alone!—
All the world grows gray,
Love, when thou art flown.

Judy's soul swelled within her when she heard the music still sending volumes of sound out of the little church. Miss Mills had not spoken all the way home. Babs had chattered without a moment's intermission. Her conversation had been entirely about birds and beasts and creeping things. Judy had replied with rather less interest than usual. She was so anxious to hurry home, so fearful of being too late. Now it was all right. Hilda was still in the church, and, delightful—more than delightful—the discordant notes of the choir had ceased, and only the delicious sounds of the organ were borne on the breeze.

"Hilda is in the church," said Judy, pulling her governess by her sleeve. "Good-by, Miss Mills; good-by, Babs."

She rushed away, scarcely heeding her governess's voice as it called after her to be sure to be back at the Rectory in time for tea.

The church doors were still open, but the young man in the cricketing-flannels, who had stood in the porch when Judy had started on her walk, was no longer to be seen. The little girl stole into the quiet church on tip-toe, crept up to her sister Hilda's side, and lying down on the floor, laid her head on her sister's white dress.

Judy's lips kissed the hem of the dress two or three times; then she lay quiet, a sweet expression round her lips, a tranquil, satisfied light in her eyes. Here she was at rest, her eager, craving heart was full and satisfied.

"You dear little monkey!" said Hilda, pausing for a moment in her really magnificent rendering of one of Bach's most passionate fugues. She touched the child's head lightly with her hand as she spoke.

"Oh, don't stop, Hilda; go on. I am so happy," whispered Judy back.

Hilda smiled, and immediately resumed the music which thrilled through and through Judy's soul.

Hilda was eighteen, and the full glory and bloom of this perfect age surrounded her; it shone in her dark red-brown hair, and gleamed in her brown eyes, and smiled on her lips and even echoed from her sweet voice. Hilda would always be lovely to look at, but she had the tender radiance of early spring about

her now. Judy was not the only person who thought her the fairest creature in the world.

While she was playing, and the influence of the music was more and more filling her face, there came a shadow across the church door. The shadow lengthened and grew longer, and the young man, whose smile Judy had ignored, came softly across the church and up to Hilda's side.

"Go on playing," he said, nodding to her. "I have been waiting and listening. I can wait and listen a little longer if you will allow me to sit in the church."

"I shall have done in a moment," said Hilda. "I just want to choose something for the final voluntary." She took up a book of lighter music as she spoke, and selecting some of Haydn's sweet and gracious melodies, began to play.

Judy stirred restlessly. Jasper Quentyns came closer, so close that his shadow fell partly over the child as she lay on the ground, and quite shut away the evening sunlight as it streamed over Hilda's figure. Jasper was a musician himself, and he made comments which were listened to attentively.

Hilda played the notes as he directed her. She brought added volume into certain passages, she rendered the light staccato notes with precision.

"Oh, you are spoiling the playing," said Judy suddenly. She started up, knitting her black brows and glaring angrily at Jasper Quentyns.

"You don't mean to say you are here all the time, you little puss," he exclaimed. "I thought you and Miss Mills and Babs were miles away by now. Why, what's the matter, child? Why do you frown at me as

if I were an ogre?"

Hilda put her arm round Judy's waist. The contact of Hilda's arm was like balm to the child; she smiled and held out her hand penitently.

"Of course I don't think you are an ogre," she said, "but I do wish you would let Hilda play her music her own way."

"Oh, don't talk nonsense, Judy," said Hilda; "you quite forget that Mr. Quentyns knows a great deal more about music than I do."

"He doesn't play half nor quarter as well as you, for all that," replied Judy, with emphasis.

Hilda bent forward and kissed her little sister on her forehead.

"We won't have any more music at present," she said, "it is time for us to return to the house. You are going to dine at the Rectory this evening, are you not, Mr. Quentyns?"

"If you will have me."

"Of course we shall all be delighted to have you."

"Hilda," said Judy, "do you know that Mildred Anstruther is down at the house waiting to see you?"

A faint shadow of disappointment flitted across Hilda Merton's face—an additional wave of color mounted to Jasper Quentyns' brow. He looked at Hilda to see if she had noticed it; Hilda turned from him and began to arrange her music.

"Come," she said, "we mustn't keep Mildred waiting."

"What has she come for?" asked Jasper, as the three walked down the shady avenue.

"You know you are glad to see her," replied Hilda suddenly.

Something in her tone caused Jasper to laugh and raise his brows in mock surprise. Judy looked eagerly from one face to the other. Her heart began to beat with fierce dislike to Jasper. What right had he to interfere with Hilda's music, and above all things, what right, pray, had he to bring that tone, into Hilda's beloved voice?

Judy clasped her sister's arm with a tight pressure. In a few minutes they reached the old-fashioned and cozy Rectory.

The Rector was pacing about in the pleasant evening sunshine, and Mildred Anstruther was walking by his side and chatting to him.

"Oh, here you are," said Mildred, running up to her friend and greeting her with affection; "and you have come too, Mr. Quentyns?—this is a delightful surprise."

"You had better run into the house now, Judy," said Hilda. "Yes, darling, go at once."

"May I come down after dinner to-night, Hilda?"

"You look rather pale, Judy, and as we are having friends to dinner it may be best for you to go to bed early," said another voice. It proceeded from the comfortable, good-natured mouth of Aunt Marjorie.

"No, no, Aunt Maggie, you won't send me to bed. Hilda, you'll plead for me, won't you?" gasped Judy.

"I think she may come down just for half an hour, auntie," said Hilda, smiling.

"Well, child, it must be as you please; of course we all know who spoils Judy."

"Of course we all know who loves Judy," said Hilda. "Now are you satisfied, my sweet? Run away; be the best of good children. Eat a hearty tea; don't think of any trouble. Oh, Judy! what a frown you have between your brows; let me kiss it away. I'll find you in the drawing room after dinner."

"And you'll come and talk to me if only for one minute. Promise, promise, Hilda!"

"Of course I promise; now run off."

Judy went slowly away. She thought the grown people very unkind to dismiss her. She was interested in all people who were grown up; she had not a great deal of sympathy with children—she felt that she did not quite belong to them. The depths of her thoughts, the intense pathos of her unsatisfied affections were incomprehensible to most children. Hilda understood her perfectly, and even Aunt Marjorie and her father were more agreeable companions than Miss Mills and Babs.

There was no help for it, however. Judy was a schoolroom child, and back to the schoolroom and to Miss Mills' dull society she must go. Swinging her hat on her arm she walked slowly down the long, cool stone passage which led from the principal hall to the schoolroom regions. A maidservant of the name of Susan hurried past her with the tray which contained the schoolroom tea in her hands.

"You must be quick, Miss Judy, I am bringing in

the tea," she said.

Judy frowned. She did not think it at all necessary for Susan to remind her of her rather disagreeable duties. Instead of hurrying to the schoolroom she stood still and looked out of one of the windows. The words Miss Mills had uttered as they walked across the fields to the wood kept returning to her memory. In some curious, undefined, uncomfortable way she connected them with her sister Hilda. What did they mean? Why was it dreadful to be engaged to be married? Why were some people so fickle, and why were promises broken? Judy had never seen Miss Mills so excited before.

"She looked quite interesting when she spoke in that voice," said Judy to herself. "What did she mean? what could she mean? She said it was dreadful to be married, and dreadful to be engaged. I think I'll go and ask Mrs. Sutton. I don't care if I am a bit late for tea. The worst Miss Mills will do is to give me some poetry to learn, and I like learning poetry. Yes, I'll go and see Mrs. Sutton. She was married twice, so she must have been engaged twice. She must know all—all about it. She's a much better judge than Miss Mills, who never was married at all."

Judy opened a baize door, which shut behind her with a bang. She went down a few steps, and a moment later was standing in a comfortably furnished sitting room which belonged to the housekeeper, Mrs. Sutton.

Mrs. Sutton was a stout, portly old lady. She had twinkling good-humored eyes, a mouth which smiled whenever she looked at a child, and a constant habit of putting her hand into her pocket and taking out a lollipop. This lollipop found its way straight into the

receptive mouth of any small creature of the human race who came in her way.

"Is that you, Miss Judy?" she said now, turning round and setting down her own cup of strong tea. "Come along, my pet, and give me a kiss. What do you say to this?" She held a pink sugar-stick between her finger and thumb. "I suppose you'll want another for Miss Babs, bless her!"

"Yes, thank you, Sutton," replied Judy. "Will you lay them on the table, please, and I'll take them when I am going away. Sutton, I want to talk to you about a *very* private matter."

"Well, darling—bless your dear heart, your secrets are safe enough with me."

"Oh, it isn't exactly a secret, Sutton—it is something I want to know. Is it a dreadful thing to be engaged to be married?"

"Bless us and save us!" said Mrs. Sutton. She flopped down again on her seat, and her red face grew purple. "Are you quite well, Miss Judy? You haven't been reading naughty books now, that you shouldn't open? What could put such thoughts into the head of a little miss like you?"

"Please answer me, Sutton, it is most important. Is it dreadful to be engaged to be married? and are people fickle? and are promises broken?"

"But, my dear——"

"Will you answer me, dear, kind Sutton?"

"Well, Miss Judy, well—anything to please you, dearie—it all depends."

"What does it depend on?"

"Taken from the female point of view, it depends on the sort the young man is; but, my darling, it's many and many a long day before you need worrit yourself with such matters."

"But I want to know," persisted Judy. "People do get married. You were married twice yourself, Sutton; you told me so once."

"So I was dear, and both my wedding gowns are in a trunk upstairs. My first was a figured sateen, a buff-colored ground with red flowers thrown over it. My second was a gray poplin. I was supposed to do very well with my second marriage, Miss Judy."

"Then you were twice engaged, and twice married," said Judy. "I don't want to hear about the wedding gowns, Sutton. I am rather in a hurry. I want you to tell me about the other things. What were they like—the being engaged, and the being married? Was the person fickle, and did he break his promise?"

For some reason or other Mrs. Sutton's face became so deeply flushed that she looked quite angry.

"I'll tell you what it is, Miss Judy," she said, "someone is putting thoughts into your head what oughtn't to do it. You are a motherless child, and there's someone filling your head with arrant nonsense. What do you know about engagements and—and disappointments, and dreams what proves but early mists of the morning? what do you know of fickleness and broken promises? There, child, you won't get any of that bad sort of knowledge out of

me. Now you run away, dearie. There's someone been talking about what they oughtn't to, and you has no call to listen, my pet. There's some weddings happy, and there's some that aint, and that's all I can say. Run away now, Miss Judy."

CHAPTER III.

A QUESTION AND AN ANSWER.

When some belovèd voice that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence against which you dare not cry
Aches round you like a strong disease and new—
What hope? what help? what music will undo
That silence to your sense?

—E. Barrett Browning.

Hilda Merton stood in a rather irresolute fashion in her bedroom. Several people were coming to dine at the Rectory to-night, and she, as the young mistress of the establishment, ought to be in the drawing room even now, waiting to receive her guests. The Rector was a very wealthy man, and all those luxuries surrounded Hilda which are the portion of those who are gently nurtured and well-born. Her maid had left the room, the young girl's simple white dress was arranged to perfection, her lovely hair was

coiled becomingly around her shapely head. She was standing before her looking-glass, putting the final touches to her toilet.

For some reason they took a long time to put. Hilda gazed into the reflection of her own pretty face as if she saw it not. Her brown eyes looked through the mirrored eyes in the glass with an almost abstracted expression. Suddenly a smile flitted across her face.

"I'll do it," she exclaimed. "I'll wear his white rose. He may think what he pleases. I—I do love him with all my heart and soul."

She blushed as she uttered these last words, and looked in a half-frightened way across the room, as if by chance someone might have overheard her.

The next moment the white rose was snugly peeping out from among the coils of her rich hair. Her dress was fastened at the throat with a pearl brooch. She was in simple white from top to toe.

"How late you are, Hilda," said Aunt Marjorie. "I was getting quite nervous. You know I hate to be alone in the drawing room when our visitors come; and really, my love, what a simple dress—nothing but a washing muslin. Did not you hear your father say that the Dean and Mrs. Sparks were coming to dinner to-night?"

"Of course I did, Aunt Marjorie. The cook also knows that the Dean is coming to dine. Now don't fret, there's a dear. I look nice, don't I? that's the main thing."

"Yes, Hilda, you look beautiful," said Aunt Marjorie solemnly; "but after all, when you have a new pink

chiffon and—and——"

"Hush, auntie dear, I see the Dean stepping out of his brougham."

The other guests followed the Dean and Mrs. Sparks almost immediately. Dinner was announced, and the party withdrew to the dining room.

Hilda, in her white dress with her happy sunshiny face, was the principal object of attraction at this dinner. There were two or three young men present, and they looked at her a good deal. Jasper Quentyns favored her with one quick glance; he was sitting at the far end of the table, and a very pretty girl was placed at his side. He saw the rose in Hilda's hair, and his heart beat quickly; his spirits rose several degrees, and he became so delightful and communicative to his neighbor that she thought him quite the pleasantest and handsomest man she had ever met.

Quentyns did not glance again at Hilda. He was satisfied, for he felt pretty sure that a certain question which he meant to ask would be answered in the way he wished.

The dinner came to an end, and the ladies withdrew into the drawing room. Two little figures in white dresses were waiting to receive them. Babs trotted everywhere, and was universally admired, petted, and praised. Judy stood in the shadow behind one of the curtains and watched Hilda.

"Come out, Judy, and be sociable," said her sister.

"I don't want to talk. I am so happy here, Hilda," she replied.

"I do like spiders when they are very, very fat," sounded Babs' voice across the room.

"Oh, you droll little creature!" exclaimed a lady who sat near; "why, I should fly from a spider any distance."

"Perhaps you like earwigs better," said Babs.

"Earwigs, they are horrors; oh, you quaint, quaint little soul."

Babs did not care to be called a quaint little soul. She trotted across the room and stood by Judy's side.

"There's nobody at all funny here," she said in a whisper. "I wish I had my Kitty Tiddliwinks to play with; I don't care for fine ladies."

"It is time for you to go to bed, Babs," said Judy.

"No, it isn't. I am not going before you go. You always talk as if I were a baby, and I aren't. Judy, you might tell me now what it is to be engaged to be married."

"No, I can't tell you now," said Judy; "the gentlemen are coming in, and we mustn't talk and interrupt. If you won't go to bed you must stay quiet. You know if Aunt Marjorie sees you she'll send you off at once; now they are going to sing; ah, that'll be jolly. You stay quiet, Babs, and listen."

Four young men surrounded the piano. Jasper Quentyns was one; Hilda played the accompaniment. The four voices did ample justice to the beautiful glee—"Men were deceivers ever." The well-known words were applauded vigorously, the applause rose to an encore. Judy listened as if fascinated.

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never.
Then sigh not so,
But let them go ..."

"Yes, that's the right thing to do," said Judy, turning round and fixing her bright eyes on Babs.

"How funny you look," said Babs; "*you* ought to go to bed."

"Come, Barbara, what is this about?" said Aunt Marjorie's voice. "You up still—what can Miss Mills be thinking of? Now, little girls, it is nine o'clock, and you must both go away. Good-night, Babs dear; good-night, Judy."

"Mayn't I say good-night to Hilda?" whispered Judy.

"No, she's busy; run away this moment. Judy, if you question me I shall have to appeal to your father. Now, my loves, go."

The little girls left the room, Babs complacently enough, Judy unwillingly. Babs was sleepy, and was very glad to lay her little head on her white pillow; but sleep was very far away from Judy's eyes.

The little girls' bedroom was over a portion of the drawing room. They could hear the waves of the music and the light conversation and the gay laughter as they lay in their cots. The sounds soon mingled with Babs' dreams, but Judy felt more restless and less sleepy each moment.

Miss Mills had entire care of the children. She dressed them and undressed them as well as taught them. She had left them now for the night. Miss Mills at this moment was writing an indignant letter in reply to the one which had so excited her feelings this morning. Her schoolroom was far away. Judy knew that she was safe. If she got out of bed, no one would hear her. In her little white night-dress she stole across the moonlit floor and crept up to the window. She softly unfastened the hasp and flung the window open. She could see down into the garden, and could almost hear the words spoken in the drawing room. Two figures had stepped out of the conservatory and side by side were walking across the silvered lawn.

Judy's heart beat with great thumps—one of these people was her sister Hilda, the other was Jasper Quentyns. They walked side by side, keeping close to one another. Their movements were very slow, they were talking almost in whispers. Hilda's head only reached to Jasper's shoulder; he was bending down over her. Presently he took her hand. Judy felt as if she should scream.

"He's a horrid, horrid, wicked man," she said under her breath; "he's a deceiver. 'Men were deceivers ever.' I know what he is. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do? Oh, Hilda, oh, Hilda, darling, you shan't go through the misery of being engaged and then being married. Oh, oh, what shall I do to save you, Hilda?"

Quentyns and Hilda were standing still. They had moved out of the line of light which streamed from the drawing room, and were standing under the shadow of a great beech tree. Judy felt that she could

almost hear their words. From where she leant out of the window she could certainly see their actions. Quentyns stooped suddenly and kissed Hilda on her forehead; Hilda looked up at him and laid both her hands in his. He folded them in a firm pressure, and again stooping, kissed her twice.

Upstairs in the nursery, misery was filling one little heart to the brim. A sob caught Judy's breath—she felt as if she should choke. She dared not look any more, but drawing down the blind, crept back into bed and covered her head with the bed-clothes.

In the drawing room the guests stopped on, and never missed the two who had stolen away across the moonlit lawn. One girl, it is true, might have been noticed to cast some anxious glances toward the open window, and the companion who talked to her could not help observing that she scarcely replied to his remarks, and was not fully alive to his witticisms; but the rest of the little world jogged on its way merrily enough, unconscious of the Paradise which was so close to them in the Rectory garden, and of the Purgatory which one little soul was enduring upstairs.

"Hilda," said Quentyns, when they had stood for some time under the beech tree, and had said many things each to the other, and felt a great deal more than could ever be put into words. "Hilda," said Quentyns, and all the poetry of the lovely summer evening seemed to have got into his eyes and filled his voice, "I give you all, remember, all that a man can give. I give you the love of my entire heart. My present is yours, my future is to be yours. I live for you, Hilda—I shall always live for you. Think what that means."

"I can quite understand it," replied Hilda, "for I also live for you. I am yours, Jasper, for now and always."

"And I am a very jealous man," said Quentyns. "When I give all, I like to get all."

Hilda laughed.

"How solemnly you speak," she said, stepping back a pace, and an almost imperceptible jar coming into her voice. Then she came close again. "The fault you will have to find with me is this, Jasper," she said, looking fully at him with her sweet eyes; "I shall love you, if anything, too well. No one can ever come between us, unless it is dear little Judy."

"Judy! Don't you think you make too much fuss about that child? She is such a morbid little piece of humanity."

"Not a bit of it. You don't quite understand her. She and I are much more than ordinary sisters to each other. I feel as if I were in a certain sense Judy's mother. When mother died she left Judy to me. Little darling! No one ever had a more faithful or a nobler heart. You must get fond of her too, for my sake; won't you, Jasper?"

"I'll do anything for your sake, you know that, Hilda. But don't let us talk of Judy any more just now—let us——"

"Mr. Quentyns, is that your voice I hear?" called Aunt Marjorie, from the drawing room. "And, Hilda, ought you to be out with the dew falling so heavily?"

CHAPTER IV.

CHANGES.

Sing on! we sing in the glorious weather
Till one steps over the tiny strand,
So narrow in sooth, that still together
On either brink we go hand in hand.

The beck grows wider, the hands must sever,
On either margin our songs all done;
We move apart, while she singeth ever,
Taking the course of the stooping sun.

—JEAN INGELOW.

About a week after Hilda Merton's engagement, just when her friends were full of the event, and congratulations began to pour in on all sides, there came a very unexpected blow to the inmates of the peaceful and pretty Rectory.

The parish of Little Staunton was large and scattered; it stretched away at one side down to the sea, at another it communicated with great open moors and tracts of the outlying lands of the New Forest. It was but sparsely peopled, and those parishioners who lived in small cottages by the sea, and who earned their living as fishermen, were most of them very poor. Mr. Merton, however, was one of the ideal sort of rectors, who helped his flock with temporal as well as spiritual benefits. The stipend which he received from the church was not a large

one, and every penny of it was devoted to the necessities of his poor parishioners.

There came an awful morning, therefore, when a short announcement in the local paper, and a long letter from Mr. Merton's lawyer, acquainted him with the fact that the Downshire County Bank had stopped payment. In plain language, Mr. Merton, from being a wealthy man, became suddenly a very poor one.

Aunt Marjorie cried when she heard the news; Hilda's face turned very pale, and Judy and Babs, who were both in the room at the time, felt that sort of wonder and perplexity which children do experience when they know something is dreadfully wrong, but cannot in the least understand what it is.

In the course of the morning Hilda went to her father in his study.

Her face was very white as she opened the door, some of the young soft lines of her early youth seemed to have left it; her beautiful brown eyes looked in a heavy sort of fashion out at the world from their dark surroundings. She came up to her father, and put her hand on his shoulder. He was bending over his desk, busily writing.

"What is the matter, Hilda?" he asked, glancing up at her with a quick start, and an endeavor to make his voice sound as usual.

"I—I have come, father, to say that if you like, I—I will give up my engagement to Jasper Quentyns."

Mr. Merton rose from his seat and put his arm round her neck.

"My dear child," he said, "it is my comfort to-day to know that you, at least, are provided for. Quentyns is fairly well off. If he will take you without any fortune, there is certainly no reason why you should not go to him."

"Money can't make any difference to Jasper," said Hilda, just a little proudly, although her lips trembled; "but I—it seems wrong that I should be so happy when the rest of you are so miserable."

"Tut, tut!" said the Rector. "I shall get over this in time. I own that just now the blow is so severe that I can scarcely quite realize it. When I opened my eyes this morning, I was pleasantly conscious that I was the possessor of a private income of quite two thousand a year; I felt this fact in the comforts that surrounded me, and the ease which filled my life. Except that small stipend which is represented by my living, and which I have always hitherto devoted to the poor of the flock, I am now reduced to nothing a year. My poor must divide my money with me in future, that is all; I don't intend to be miserable when I get accustomed to the change, Hilda. I must dismiss most of the servants, and give up the carriage and horses, and live as a poor man instead of a rich one; but I owe no man anything, my dear, and I have not the least doubt there is a certain zest in poverty which will make the new order of things agreeable enough when once I get used to it."

The tears gathered slowly in Hilda's eyes.

"I don't feel as if I could quite bear it," she said, with a sob.

The Rector, who was always rather absent-minded, and had a dreamy way of looking far ahead even

when he was most roused, scarcely noticed Hilda's tears. He talked on in a monotonous sort of voice:

"I have not the least doubt that poverty has its alleviations. I have heard it more than once remarked that the hand-to-mouth existence is the most stimulating in the world. I should not be surprised, Hilda, if my sermons took a turn for the better after this visitation. I have preached to my flock, year in, year out, that the mysterious ways of Providence are undoubtedly the best—I have got to act up to my preaching now, that is all."

The Rector sat down again and continued to write a very unbusiness-like letter to his lawyer; Hilda stood and looked at him with a frown between her brows, and then went slowly out of the room.

Aunt Marjorie, who had cried herself nearly sick, and whose eyes between their swollen lids were scarcely visible, came to meet her as she walked across the hall.

"Oh, my darling," she said, with a fresh sob, "how can I bear to look at you when I think of all your young life blighted in a moment! Oh, those wicked Bank Directors. They deserve hanging! yes, I should hang them one and all. And so you have been with my poor brother? I would not venture near him. How is he taking it, Hilda? Is he quite off his head, poor, dear man?"

"How do you think my father would take a blow of this kind?" said Hilda. "Come into the drawing room, Auntie. Oh, Auntie dear, do try to stop crying. You don't know what father is. Of course I can't pretend to understand him, but he is quite noble—he is splendid; he makes me believe in religion. A man

must be very, very good to talk as father has just done."

"Poor Samuel!" said Aunt Marjorie. "I knew that he would take this blow either as a saint or as an idiot—I don't know which is the most trying. You see, Hilda, my love, your father has never had anything to do with the petty details of housekeeping. This parish brings in exactly three hundred and fifty pounds a year; how are we to pay the wages of nine servants, and how are the gardeners to be paid, and the little girls' governess, and—and how is this beautiful house to be kept up on a pittance of that sort? Oh, dear; oh, dear! Your father will just say to me, 'I know, Marjorie, that you will do your best,' and then he'll forget that there is such a thing as money; but I shall never be able to forget it, Hilda. Oh, dear; oh, dear! I do think saintly men are awful trials."

"But you said just now you thought he would be off his head. You ought to be very thankful, Aunt Maggie, that he is taking things as he is. Of course the servants must go away, and the establishment must be put on an altogether new footing. You'll have to walk instead of ride in future, but I don't suppose Judy and Babs will much care, and I——"

"Oh, yes," said Aunt Marjorie, "you will be in your new house in London, new-fangled with your position, and highly pleased and proud to put Mrs. before your name, and you'll forget all about us. Of course I am pleased for you, but you're just as bad as your father when you talk in that cool fashion about dismissing the servants, and when you expect an old lady like me to tramp all over the place on my feet."

"I told father that if he wished I would break off

my engagement."

Aunt Marjorie dried her eyes when her niece made this speech, and looked at her fixedly.

"I do think," she said, "that you're a greater fool even than poor Samuel. Is not your engagement to a nice, gentlemanly, clever man like Jasper Quentyns the one ray of brightness in this desolate day? You, child, at least are provided for."

"I wonder if you think that I care about being provided for at this juncture?" answered Hilda, knitting her brows once again in angry perplexity.

She went away to her own room, and sitting before her desk, wrote a long letter to her lover.

Quentyns had been called to the Bar, and was already beginning to receive "briefs."

His income was by no means large, however, and although he undoubtedly loved Hilda for her own sake, he might not have proposed an immediate marriage had he not believed that his pretty bride would not come to him penniless.

Hilda sat with her pen in her hand, looking down at the blank sheet of paper.

By the same post which had brought the lawyer's dreadful letter there had come two closely-written sheets from Jasper. He wanted Hilda to marry him in the autumn, and he had already begun house-hunting.

"We might find it best to take a small flat for a year," he had written, "but if you would rather have a house, darling, say so. Some people don't approve of flats. They say they are not so wholesome. One

misses the air of the staircase, and there is a certain monotony in living altogether on one floor which may not be quite conducive to health. On the other hand flats are compact, and one knows almost at a glance what one's expenses are likely to be. I have been consulting Rivers—you know how often I have talked to you of my friend Archie Rivers—and he thinks on the whole that a flat would be advisable; we avoid rates and taxes and all those sort of worries, and if we like to shut up house for a week, and run down to the Rectory, why there we are, you know; for the house-porter sees to our rooms, and we run no risk from burglars. But what do you say yourself, darling, for that is the main point?"

Hilda had read this letter with a beating heart and a certain pleasant sense of exhilaration at breakfast that morning, but then this was before the blow came—before Aunt Marjorie's shriek had sounded through the room, and before Hilda had caught a glimpse of her father's face with the gray tint spreading all over it, before she had heard his tremulous words:

"Yes, Marjorie! God help us! We are ruined."

Hilda read the letter now with very different feelings; somehow or other all the rose light had gone out of it. She was a very inexperienced girl as far as money matters were concerned. Until to-day money seemed to have little part or lot in her life; it had never stirred her nature to its depths, it had kindly supplied her with necessities and luxuries; it had gilded everything, but she had never known where the gilt came from. When she engaged herself to Jasper, he told her that, for the present at least, he was a comparatively poor man; he had three

hundred a year of his own. This he assured her was a mere bagatelle, but as he was almost certain to earn as much more in his profession, and as Hilda had money, he thought they might marry if she did not mind living very prudently. Of course Hilda did not mind—she knew nothing at all of the money part. The whole thing meant love and poetry to her, and she disliked the word money coming into it.

To-day, however, things looked different. For the first time she got a glimpse of Tragedy. How mean of it, how horrible of it to come in this guise! She pressed her hand to her forehead, and wondered what her lover could mean when he talked of rates and taxes, and asked her to decide between a flat and a house.

"I don't know what to say," she murmured to herself. "Perhaps we shall not be married at all at present. Perhaps Jasper will say we can't afford it. Perhaps I ought to answer his question about the flat —but I don't know what to say. I thought we might have had a cottage somewhere in one of the suburbs —with a little garden, and that I might have kept fowls, and have had heaps and heaps of flowers. Surely fowls would be economical, but I am sure I can't say. I really don't know anything whatever about the matter."

"Why are you talking in that funny way half-aloud to yourself, Hilda?" asked a little voice with a sad inflection in it.

Hilda slightly turned her head and saw that Judy had softly opened the door of her bedroom, and was standing in the entrance.

Judy had an uncertain manner about her which

was rather new to her character, and her face had a somewhat haggard look, unnatural and not pleasant to see in so young a child.

"Oh, pet, is that you?" said Hilda. "Come and give me a kiss—I am just longing for you—you're the person of all others to consult. Come along and sit down by me. Now, now—you don't want to strangle me, do you?"

For Judy had rushed upon her sister like a little whirlwind, her strong childish arms were flung with almost ferocious tightness round Hilda's neck, the skirt of her short frock had swept Jasper's letter to the floor, and even upset an ink-pot in its voluminous sweep.

"Oh, oh!" said Hilda, "I must wipe up this mess. There, Judy, keep back for a moment; it will get upon the carpet, and spoil it if we are not as quick as possible. Hand me that sheet of blotting-paper, dear. There now, that is better—I have stopped the stream from descending too far. Why, Judith, my dear, you have tears in your eyes. You don't suppose I care about the ink being spilt when I get a hug like that from you."

"I wasn't crying about the ink," said Judy; "what's ink! The tears came because I am so joyful."

"You joyful? and to-day?" said Hilda. "You know what has happened, don't you, Judy?"

"We are poor instead of rich," said Judy; "what's that? Oh, I am so happy—I am so awfully happy that I scarcely know what to do."

"What a queer little soul you are! Now, now, am I to be swept up in another embrace?"

"Oh, yes, let me, let me—I haven't kissed you like this since you, you—you got *engaged*."

"In what a spiteful way you say that last word, Judy; now I come to think of it, we *have* scarcely kissed each other since. But whose fault was that? Not mine, I am sure. I was quite hungry for one of your kisses, jewel, and now that I have got it I feel ever so much better. Sit down by me, and let us talk. Judy, you are a very wise little darling, aren't you?"

"I don't know. If you think so, you darling, I suppose I am."

"I do think so. I have had a letter from Jasper. I want to talk over something he says in it with you. Judy dear, he is such a noble fellow."

Judy shut up her firm lips until they looked like a straight line across her face.

"He's such a noble fellow," repeated Hilda. "I can't tell you how glad you ought to be to have the prospect of calling a man like Jasper your brother; he'll be a great help to you, Judy, by and by."

"No, he won't—I don't want him to be," said Judy viciously.

"Why, I declare, I do believe the dear is jealous; but now to go on. Jasper has written to me on a most important subject. Now, if I consult you about it you won't ever, ever tell, will you?"

"No, of course I won't. Was it about that you were muttering to yourself when I came into the room?"

"You funny puss; yes, I was talking the matter over to myself. Jasper is looking out for a house for us."

"He isn't. It's awfully cheeky of him."

"My dear Judy, it would be much more cheeky to ask me to go and live in the street with him. We must have some residence after we are married—mustn't we? Well, darling, now you must listen very attentively; he has asked me whether it would be best for us to live in a little house of our own——"

"Why a little house? he ought to take you to a palace."

"Don't interrupt; we shall be poor people, quite a poor couple, Jasper and I. Now, Judy, just try and get as wise as a Solon. He wants to know whether I would rather live in a little house or a flat."

"What's a flat, Hilda?"

"I don't quite know myself; but I believe a flat consists of several rooms on one floor shut away from the rest of the house by a separate hall door. Jasper rather approves of a flat, because he says there won't be any rates and taxes. It's very silly, but though I am a grown-up girl, I don't exactly know what rates and taxes are—do you?"

"No, but I can ask Miss Mills."

"I don't expect she'd know anything about them; it seems so stupid to have to write back and tell Jasper that I don't understand what he means."

"Aunt Marjorie would know," said Judy.

"I shouldn't like to consult her, pet. I think I'd better leave it to Jasper to decide."

Judy looked very wise and interested now.

"Why don't you say you'd rather go into a little house?" she said; "it sounds much more interesting. A flat is an ugly name, and I am quite sure it must be an ugly place."

"That is true," said Hilda, pausing and looking straight before her with her pretty brows knit. "Oh, dear, oh, dear! I wonder what is right. And a little house might have a garden too, mightn't it, Judy?"

"Of course, and a fowl-house and a cote for your pigeons."

"To be sure; and when you come to see me, you should have a strip of garden to dig in all for yourself."

"Oh, should I really come to see you, Hilda? Miss Mills said that you wouldn't want me—that you wouldn't be bothered with me."

"That I wouldn't be bothered with you? Why, I shall wish to have you with me quite half the time. Now, now, am I to be strangled again? Please, Judy, abstain from embracing, and tell me whether we are to have a flat or a cottage."

"Of course you are to have a cottage, with the garden and the fowl-house."

"I declare I think I'll take your advice, you little dear. I'll write and tell Jasper that I'd much rather have a cottage. Now, who is that knocking at the door? Run, Judy, and see what's wanted."

Judy returned in a moment with a telegram.

Hilda tore it open with fingers that slightly trembled.

"Oh, how joyful, how joyful!" she exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Judy.

"Jasper is coming—my dear, dear Jasper. See what he says—'Have heard the bad news—my deepest sympathy—expect me this evening.' Then I needn't write after all. Judy, Judy, I agree with you; I feel quite happy, even though it is the dreadful day when the blow has been struck."

Judy did not say anything, she rose languidly to her feet.

"Where are you going?" asked Hilda.

"For a walk."

"Why so?"

"Miss Mills said that even though we were poor I was to take the fresh air," replied the child in a prim little voice, out of which all the spirit had gone.

She kissed Hilda, but no longer in a rapturous, tempestuous fashion, and walked soberly out of the room.

CHAPTER V.

IN A GARDEN.

I go like one in a dream, unbidden my feet know th
To that garden where love stood in blossom with th
hawthorn of May.

—

Aunt Marjorie had cried until she could cry no longer. Hers was a slighter nature than either Mr. Merton's or Hilda's. In consequence, perhaps, she was able to realize the blow which had come upon them more vividly and more quickly than either her brother or niece.

Aunt Marjorie had taken a great pride in the pretty, well-ordered house. She was a capable, a kind, and a considerate mistress. Her servants worked well under her guidance. She was set in authority over them; they liked her rule, and acknowledged it with cheerful and willing service.

No one could give such perfect little dinner-parties as Aunt Marjorie. She had a knack of finding out each of her guests' particular weaknesses with regard to the dinner-table. She was no diplomatist, and her conversation was considered prosy; but with Mr. Merton to act the perfect host and to lead the conversation into the newest intellectual channels, with Hilda to look sweet and gracious and beautiful, and with Aunt Marjorie to provide the dinner, nothing could have been a greater success than the little party which took place on an average once a week at the sociable Rectory.

Now all these things were at an end. The servants must go; the large house—which had been added to from time to time by the Rector until it had lost all

similitude to the ordinary small and cozy Rectory—the great house must remain either partly shut up or only half cleaned. There must be no more dinner-parties, and no nice carriage for Aunt Marjorie to return calls in. The vineries and conservatories must remain unheated during the winter; the gardeners must depart. Weeds must grow instead of flowers.

Alack, and alas! Aunt Marjorie felt like a shipwrecked mariner, as she sat now in the lovely drawing room and looked out over the summer scene.

With her mind's eye she was gazing at something totally different—she was seeing the beautiful place as it would look in six months' time; she saw with disgust the rank and obnoxious weeds, the empty grate, the dust-covered ornaments.

"It is worse for us than it would be for ordinary people," she said half aloud. "If we were just ordinary people, we could leave here and go into a tiny cottage where our surroundings would be in keeping with our means; but of course the Rector must live in the Rectory—at least I suppose so. Dear, dear! how sudden this visitation has been—truly may it be said that 'all flesh is grass.'"

Aunt Marjorie had a way of quoting sentences which did not at all apply to the occasion; these quotations always pleased her, however, and a slow smile now played round her lips.

The drawing-room door was opened noisily, and a fat little figure rushed across the room and sprang into her arms.

"Is that you, Babs?" she said. She cuddled the child

in a close embrace, and kissed her smooth, cool cheek many times.

"Yes, of course it's me," said Babs, in her matter-of-fact voice. "Your eyes are quite red, Auntie. Have you been crying?"

"We have had dreadful trouble, my darling—poor Auntie feels very miserable—it is about father. Your dear father has lost all his money, my child."

"Miss Mills told me that half an hour ago," said Babs; "that's why I wanted to see you, Auntie. I has got half a sovereign in the Savings Bank. I'll give it to father if he wants it."

"You're a little darling," said Aunt Marjorie, kissing her again.

"There's Judy going across the garden," said Babs. "Look at her, she has her shoulders hunched up to her ears. She's not a bit of good; she won't play with me nor nothing."

"That child doesn't look at all well," said Aunt Marjorie.

She started to her feet, putting Babs on the floor. A new anxiety and a new interest absorbed her mind.

"Judy, Judy," she called; "come here, child. I have noticed for the last week," she said, speaking her thoughts aloud, "that Judy has black lines under her eyes, and a dragged sort of look about her. What can it mean?"

"She cries such a lot," said Babs in her untroubled voice. "I hear her when she's in bed at night. I thought she had she-cups, but it wasn't, it was sobs."

"*She-cups*—what do you mean, child? Judy, come here, darling."

"She-cups," repeated Babs. "Some people call them he-cups; but I don't when a girl has them."

Judy came slowly up to the window.

"Where were you going, my pet?" asked Aunt Marjorie.

"Only for a walk," she answered.

"A walk all by yourself? How pale you are, dearie. Have you a headache?"

"No, Auntie."

Aunt Marjorie pulled Judy forward. She felt her forehead and looked at her tongue, and put her in such a position that she could gaze down into her throat.

Not being able to detect anything the matter, she thought it best to scold her niece a little.

"Little girls oughtn't to walk slowly and to be dismal," she said. "It is very wrong and ungrateful of them. They ought to run about and skip and laugh. Work while you work, and play while you play. That was the motto when I was a little girl. Now, Judy, love, go out with Babs and have a good romp. You had better both of you go to the hay-field, for it might distract your poor father to hear your two merry voices. Run, my dears, run; make yourselves scarce."

"Come, Babs," said Judy. She held out her hand to her little sister, and the two went away together.

"Do you know, Judy," said Babs, the moment they were out of Aunt Marjorie's hearing, "that I saw a quarter of an hour ago a great big spider in the garden catching a wasp. He rolled the poor wasp round and round with his web until he made him into a ball."

"And did you leave that poor wasp to die?" asked Judy, keen interest and keen anger coming into her voice.

"No, I didn't," said Babs. "I took him away from the spider. I wouldn't be kite so cruel as to let the poor thing die; but I s'pect he'll die all the same, for he can't get out of the ball that he's in."

"Poor darling!" said Judy. "Let's go and find him and try to get the web off him. Do you know where he is, Babs?"

"I put him on an ivy leaf on the ground," said Babs, "under the yew-tree down there. I can find him in a minute."

"Well, let's go and save him as quickly as possible."

The two children rushed with eagerness and vigor down the slops.

Aunt Marjorie could see them as they disappeared out of sight.

She turned to weep and bewail herself once more, and Judy and Babs began industriously to look for the wasp.

They were busily engaged on their hands and knees searching all over the ground for the identical ivy leaf where Babs had placed the rescued insect, when a voice sounded in their ears, and Judy raised

her head to see pretty Mildred Anstruther standing by her side.

Mildred was one of the belles of the county; her hair was as bright as a sunbeam, her eyes as blue as a summer sky, her full lips were red, her cheeks had the bloom of the peach upon them. Mildred was a well-grown girl, with a largely and yet gracefully developed figure.

In addition to her personal charms she had a considerable fortune. It went without saying, therefore, that she was greatly admired.

Mildred had often been the talk of Little Staunton; her numerous flirtations had caused head-shakings and dismal croaks from many of the old maids of the neighborhood. The sterner sex had owned to heart-burnings in connection with her, for Mildred could flirt and receive any amount of attention without giving her heart in return. She was wont to laugh at love affairs, and had often told Hilda that the prince to whom alone she would give her affections was scarcely likely to appear.

"The time when gods used to walk upon the earth is over, my dear Hilda," she used to say. "When I find the perfect man, I will marry him, but not before."

Mildred, who was twenty-six years of age, had therefore the youngest and smoothest of faces; care had never touched her life, and wrinkles were unlikely to visit her.

For some reason, however, she looked careworn now, and Judy, with a child's quick perception, noticed it.

She was fond of Mildred, and she put up her lips

for a kiss.

"What's the matter, Milly?" she asked; "have you a cold?"

"No, my love; on principle I never allow myself to have anything so silly; but I am shocked, Judy—shocked at what I have read in the morning papers."

"Oh, about our money," replied Judy in an unconcerned voice. "Have you found that wasp, Babs? Are you looking on *all* the ivy leaves?"

"I picked an ivy leaf, and put it down just here," replied Babs, "and I put the wasp in it most carefully; the wind must have caught it and blown it away."

"Oh, dear; oh, dear! the poor creature, what will become of it?" answered Judy. She was down on her hands and knees again, poking and examining, but poking and examining in vain.

"It's very rude of you, Judy, not to pay me the least attention," said Mildred. "I have come over on purpose to see you, and there you are squatting on the ground, pushing all that rubbish about. You have no manners, and I'll tell Hilda so; and, Babs, what are you about not to give me a hug?"



"i have come on purpose to see you, ju

Babs raised a somewhat grimy little face.

"We can't find the poor wasp," she said. "He was rolled up in the spider's web, and I put him on an ivy leaf, and now he's gone."

"You had better go on looking for him, Babs," said Judy, "and I'll talk to Milly." She rose as she spoke and placed her dirty little hand on Miss Anstruther's arm. "So you heard about our money, Milly?" she said. "Aunt Marjorie is in an awful state, she has cried and cried and cried; but the rest of us don't care."

"You don't care? Oh, you queer, queer people! You don't mean to tell me, little Judy, that Hilda doesn't care?"

"Hilda cares the least of all," replied Judy; "she has got Jasper."

Judy's face clouded over as she spoke.

"I wonder what *he'll* say to this business," remarked Miss Anstruther, half to herself; "he's not at all well off—it ought to make a tremendous difference to him."

"He certainly isn't to be pitied," said Judy; "he's going to get Hilda."

"And what about Hilda's money?" laughed Miss Anstruther. Her face wore an expression which was almost disagreeable, her big blue eyes looked dark as they gazed at the child.

Judy's own little face turned pale. She didn't understand Miss Anstruther, but something impelled her to say with great fierceness:

"I hate Jasper!"

Miss Anstruther stooped down and kissed her.

"You are a queer, passionate little thing, Judy," she said, "but it's a very good thing for Hilda to be engaged to a nice sensible fellow like Jasper Quentyns, and of course it is more important now than ever for her. He'll be disappointed, of course, but I dare say they can get along somehow. Ah, there's Aunt Marjorie coming out of the house. I must run and speak to her, poor dear; how troubled she looks! and no wonder."

Mildred ran off, and Judy stood where she had left her, in the center of the lawn, quivering all over.

What did Milly mean by saying that Jasper would be disappointed—Jasper, who was going to get Hilda —Hilda herself? What could anyone want more than the sun? what could any man desire more than the queen of all queens, the rose of all roses?

Thoughts like these flitted through little Judy's mind in confused fashion. Hilda was to be married to Jasper, and the Rectory of Little Staunton would know her no more. That indeed was a sorrow to make everyone turn sick and pale, but the loss of the money was not worth a moment's consideration.

Judy wandered about, too restless and unhappy to settle to her play. Babs shouted in the distance that the wasp was not to be seen. Even the fate of the poor wasp scarcely interested Judy at present. She was watching for Mildred to reappear that she might join her in the avenue and ask why she dared to say those words about Jasper.

"Well, Judy," said Miss Anstruther by and by, "here

I am, back at last. I saw Aunt Marjorie, but I didn't see the Rector, and I didn't see Hilda. Aunt Marjorie tells me that Jasper Quentyns is coming down to-night, so I suppose he's going to take everything all right."

"What do you mean, Milly?" asked Judy.

"Why do you look at me in that fierce way, you small atom?" answered Mildred, stopping in her walk and looking at the child with an amused smile on her face.

"Because I don't understand you," said Judy.

"It is scarcely likely you should, my darling. Let me see, how old are you—nine? Well, you'll know something of what I mean when you're nineteen. Now I must go."

"No, stop a bit, Milly. I don't understand you, but I hate hints. Miss Mills hints things sometimes, and oh, how I detest her when she does! and you're hinting now, and it is something against Hilda."

"Against Hilda? Oh, good gracious, child, what an awful cram!"

"It isn't a cram, it is true. I can't explain it, but I know you're hinting something against darling Hilda. Why should you say that Jasper will be disappointed? Isn't she going away with him some day? and aren't they going to live in—in a horrid—a horrid *flat* together, and she won't even have a garden, nor fowls, nor flowers? And you say Jasper will be disappointed. Everything is going when Hilda goes, and you speak as if Jasper wasn't the very luckiest person in all the wide world. *I* know what it means; yes, I know. Oh, Milly, I'm so unhappy. Oh,

Milly, what *shall* I do when Hilda goes away?"

Mildred was impulsive and kind-hearted, notwithstanding the very decided fit of jealousy which was now over her. She put her arm round Judy and tried to comfort her.

"You poor little thing," she said, "you poor little jealous, miserable mite. How could you think you were going to keep your Hilda always? There, Judy, there, darling, I really am sorry for you—I really am, but you know Hilda is pretty and sweet, and someone wants her to make another home beautiful. There, I'll say something to comfort you—I'll eat all the words I have already uttered, and tell you emphatically from my heart of hearts that Hilda is too good for Jasper Quentyns."

"Judy, Judy, Judy! I have found the wasp," shouted Babs.

Judy dried her eyes hastily, kissed Mildred, and ran across the lawn to her little sister.

"What a queer child Judy Merton is," said Mildred to herself. "What tempestuous little creatures some children are. How passionately she spoke about Hilda, and now her whole heart and soul are devoted to the rescuing of a miserable insect. Yes, of course Jasper is not good enough for Hilda. He has plenty of faults, he is not the prince I have been looking for, and yet—and yet——"

Her heart beat quickly, the color rushed into her face, she felt her firm lips tremble, and knew that her eyes were shining with unusual brilliance. Someone was coming along the path to meet her. A man with the sunlight shining all over him—an athletic figure,

who walked with the swift bounding step of youth. He was Jasper Quentyns.

"Hullo!" he called, catching sight of her. "I was fortunate in getting an earlier train than I had hoped for, and here I am two hours before I was expected. How is Hilda? Have you been at the house? Are they all fearfully cut up?"

"How do you do, Mr. Quentyns?" replied Mildred. "Yes, I have been at the house, and I have seen Judy and Aunt Marjorie. Judy seems to me to be in a very excitable and feverish state of mind."

"She's rather spoilt, isn't she?" said Quentyns.

"Oh, well, she's Hilda's special darling, the first in her heart by many degrees—after—after somebody else."

"But how could a child like Judy know anything about money loss?"

"It isn't the money that's troubling her at the present moment, it's a poor wasp. Now pray don't look so bewildered, and do try and forget about Judy. Aunt Marjorie is taking her trouble in a thoroughly practical and Aunt Marjorie style. I have not seen Hilda, nor have I seen the Rector."

"It will be an awful blow to them all," said Quentyns.

"Yes," replied Miss Anstruther, looking him straight in the eyes, "an awful blow. And you feel it far more than Hilda," she soliloquized, as she walked back to her own home.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

Where shall I find a white rose blowing?
Out in the garden where all sweets be.
But out in my garden the snow was snowing
And never a white rose opened for me,
Naught but snow and a wind were blowing
And snowing.

—CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI.

Notwithstanding Mildred Anstruther's inward prognostications, there came no hitch to Hilda Merton's engagement. Quentyns behaved as the best and most honorable of men. He was all that was tender and loving to Hilda, and he immediately took that position toward Mr. Merton which a son might have held. Quentyns was a good business man, and in the catastrophe which overwhelmed the Rectory, he proved himself invaluable.

On one point, however, he was very firm. His marriage with Hilda must not be delayed. No persuasive speeches on her part, no longing looks out of Judy's hungry eyes, no murmurs on the part of Aunt Marjorie, would induce him to put off the time of the wedding by a single day.

He used great tact in this matter, for Quentyns was the soul of tact, and it quite seemed to the family, and even to Hilda herself, that *she* had suggested the eighth of January as the most suitable day in the whole year for a wedding—it seemed to the whole

family, and even to Hilda herself, that *she* was the one who desired to go, whereas in her heart of hearts, in that innermost heart which she scarcely ventured to probe at all just now, she would have gladly shared Aunt Marjorie's discomforts and sat by her father's side while he composed those sermons which were to teach his flock, with a sure note of truth running through them, that the blessed man is the man whom the Lord God chasteneth.

The wedding-day was fixed, and notwithstanding poverty and its attendant shadows, preparations for the great event went on merrily enough.

A check for Hilda's trousseau was sent to her by a rich aunt in India, and the pleasant excitement which even the quietest wedding always causes began to pervade the Rectory.

When the day was finally arranged, Aunt Marjorie ceased to murmur and cry. She talked a great deal now of Hilda's coming responsibilities, and spent all her leisure moments copying out receipts which she thought might be useful to her niece in her new position as wife and housekeeper.

"You have never yet told me where you are going to live, Hilda," she said, on the New Year's Day which preceded the wedding.

"I am not quite sure myself," replied Hilda. "Jasper has seen a great many suburban houses which he does not quite like, and a great many flats which he considers absolutely perfect. He says there is no special hurry about choosing a house, for after we have returned from our wedding tour we are to stay with some of his relations in town, and during that time we can make up our minds as to what kind of

home we will have."

"Very prudent of Jasper," said Aunt Marjorie. "He really is an excellent fellow—so wonderfully thoughtful for such a young man. Of course he has far too much sense to think of selecting a house for you himself. As to a flat, you will of course not dream of going into one—a house is better in all respects, more airy and more interesting."

"I should like a house best," said Hilda, "but Jasper, of course, is the one really to decide."

"Now, there you are wrong, my love. *You* are undoubtedly the right person to make the final choice. I am old-fashioned in my ideas, Hilda, and I think the wife ought to be in subjection to her husband, for we have Scripture for it, but I don't believe St. Paul meant that rule to extend to domestic matters. In domestic matters the wife *ought* to have the casting vote. Be sure, my dear Hilda, you don't yield to Jasper in domestic affairs—you will rue it if you do—and be quite sure that in selecting a house you have a wide entrance-hall, a spacious staircase, and a large drawing room."

"But, Auntie, such a house will be beyond our means."

"Tut, tut, my love—the rent *may* be a few pounds more, but what of that? A large entrance-hall is really essential; and as it is easier to keep large rooms and wide staircases clean than small ones, your servants will have less to do and you will save the extra rent in that way. Now here is your great-grandmother's receipt for plum-pudding—two dozen eggs, three pounds raisins, one pound citron. Hilda, I particularly want to give you a hint about the *spice*

for this pudding; ah, and I must speak also about this white soup—it is simply made, and at the same time delicious—the stock from two fowls—one pint single cream—your father is particularly fond of it. Yes, Susan, what is the matter?"

"A parcel for Miss Hilda, ma'am," said the neat parlor-maid. "It has come by 'Carter Patterson'; and will you put your name here, please, Miss Hilda."

Hilda signed her name obediently, and a square wooden box was brought in. It was opened by Aunt Marjorie herself with great solemnity. Judy and Babs came and looked on, and there were great expressions of rapture when an exquisite afternoon tea-service of Crown Derby was exhibited to view.

Wedding presents were pouring in from all quarters. Hilda put this one away with the others, and calmly continued her occupation of adding up some parochial accounts for her father. She was a very careful accountant, and had the makings in her of a good business woman when she had gained a little experience.

Aunt Marjorie sat and mumbled little disjointed remarks with regard to her niece's future state and subjection. She gave her many hints as to when she was to yield to her husband and when she was to firmly uphold her own will.

Had Hilda followed out Aunt Marjorie's precepts, or even been greatly influenced by them, she and Jasper would have had a very unhappy future, but she had a gentle and respectful way of listening to the old lady without taking in a great deal that she said. Her thoughts were divided now between Jasper and Judy. Her heart felt torn at the thought of

leaving her little sister, and she had an instinctive feeling, which she had never yet put into words, that Judy and Jasper were antagonistic to each other, and, what is more, would always remain so.

Judy had seen the Crown Derby service unpacked, and then, in the sober fashion which more or less characterized all her actions of late, she left the room.

She went up to the bedroom which she and Babs shared together, and sitting down by the window, rested her chubby cheek against her hand.

Babs was kneeling down in a distant corner, pulling a doll's bedstead to pieces for the express purpose of putting it together again.

"My doll Lily has been very naughty to-day," she said, "and I am going to put her to bed. She wouldn't half say her lessons this morning, and she deserves to be well punished. What are you thinking of, Judy, and why do you pucker up your forehead? It makes you look so cross."

"Never mind about my forehead. I have a lot of things to think of just now. I can't be always laughing and talking like you."

Babs paused in the act of putting a sheet on her doll's bed to gaze at Judy with great intentness.

"You might tell me what's the matter with you," she said, after a moment of silence; "you are not a bit interesting lately; you're always thinking and always frowning, unless at night when you are sobbing."

"Oh, don't!" said Judy. "Don't you see what it is, Babs—can't you guess?—it is only a week off now."

"What's only a week off?"

"Hilda's wedding. Oh, dear; oh, dear! I wish I were dead; I do wish I were dead."

Babs did not think this remark of poor Judy's worth replying to. She gravely finished making her doll's bed, tucked Lily up comfortably, and coming over to the window, knelt down, placed her elbows on the ledge, and looked out at the snowy landscape.

"Hasn't Hilda got lots and lots of presents?" she said, after a pause.

"Yes. I don't want to see them, though."

"Everyone is giving her a present," continued Babs, in her calm voice, "even Miss Mills and the servants. Susan told me that the schoolchildren were collecting money to buy her something, and—may I tell you a 'mendous big secret, Judy?"

Judy ceased to frown, and looked at Babs with a faint dawning of interest in her eyes.

"I has got a present for her too," said Babs, beginning to dance about. "I am not going to give it till the day of the wedding. I buyed it my own self, and it's *quite* beautiful. What are you going to give her, Judy?"

"Nothing. I haven't any money."

"I have half a sovereign in the Savings Bank, but I can't take it out until after I am seven. I wish I could, for I could lend it to you to give Hilda a wedding present."

"I wish you could," said Judy. "I'd like awfully to give her something. You might tell me what you

have got, Babs."

"It's some darning-cotton," said Babs in a whisper. "I buyed it last week with twopence-halfpenny; you remember the day I went with Mrs. Sutton to town. She said it was a very useful thing, for Hilda will want to mend Jasper's socks, and if she hasn't darning-cotton handy maybe he'll scold her."

"He wouldn't dare to," said Judy, with a frown; "she *shan't* mend his horrid socks. Why did you get such a nasty wedding present, Babs?"

A flush of delicate color spread all over Babs' little fair face. She winked her blue eyes hard to keep back the tears which Judy's scathing remarks were bringing to the surface, and said, after a pause:

"It's not a horrid present, it's lovely; and anyhow"—her voice becoming energetic as this happy mode of revenge occurred to her—"it is better than yours, for you has got nothing at all."

"Oh, I'll have something when the day comes," replied Judy, in a would-be careless tone.

"But you hasn't any money."

"Money isn't everything. I'll manage, you'll see."

From this moment Judy's whole heart and soul were absorbed in one fierce desire to give Hilda a present which should be better and sweeter and more full of love than anybody else's.

After two or three days of anxious thought and nights of troubled dreams, she made up her mind what her present should be. It should consist of holly berries and ivy, and these holly berries and that ivy should be picked by Judy's own fingers, and should

be made into a bouquet by Judy herself; and the very center of this bouquet should contain a love-note—a little twisted note, into which Judy would pour some of her soul. It should be given to Hilda at the very last moment when she was starting for church; and though she was all in white from top to toe—all in pure white, with a bouquet of white flowers in her hand—yet she should carry Judy's bouquet, with its thorns and its crimson berries, as a token of her little sister's faithful love.

"She shall carry it to church with her," said Judy, with inward passion. "I'll make her promise beforehand, and I know she won't break her word to me. It will be a little bit of me she'll have with her, even when she is giving herself to that horrid Jasper."

The little girl quite cheered up when this idea came to her. She became helpful and pleasant once more, and allowed Babs to chatter to her about the insect world, which had now practically gone to sleep; and about the delights of the time when their chrysalides, which they had put away so carefully in the butterfly-case, should burst out into living and beautiful things.

The day before the wedding came, and the whole house was in pleasant bustle and confusion. Nearly all the presents had arrived by this time. The school children had come up to the Rectory in a body to present Hilda with a very large and gaudily decorated photographic album; the Rectory servants had given the bride-elect a cuckoo-clock; Miss Mills had blushed as she presented her with a birth-day book bound in white vellum; "Carter Patterson's" people were tired of coming up the avenue with box

after box; and Aunt Marjorie was tired of counting on her fingers the names of the different friends who were sure to remember such an important event as Hilda Merton's wedding.

But for Aunt Marjorie, Hilda would have given herself to Jasper in a very quiet and unobtrusive fashion. But this idea of a wedding was such intense grief to the old lady that Hilda and Jasper, rather against their wills, abandoned it, and Hilda was content to screen her lovely face behind a white veil, and to go to church decked as a bride should.

"It is positively economical to get a proper wedding dress," said Aunt Marjorie; "you'll want it for the parties you'll go to during your first season in town, Hilda. Of course Lady Malvern, Jasper's aunt, will present you, and the dress with a little alteration will do very well to go to the Drawing Room in. I shall desire the dressmaker to make the train quite half a yard extra, on purpose."

Aunt Marjorie had her way, and was sufficiently happy in her present life to forget the dull days which must follow, and to cease to think of the deserted house when Hilda, and wealth, and luxury, went away.

It was the evening before the wedding-day, when Babs came solemnly into the room where her sister was sitting, and presented her with her wedding gift.

"It's darning-cotton," said Babs, in her gentle, full, satisfied fashion. "Sutton said it would be useful, and that Jasper wouldn't scold you if you had it handy."

"What treason are you talking, Babs?" asked Quentyns, who was standing by Hilda's side.

He stooped down, and mounted her on his shoulder.

"Sutton says that husbands always scold their wives," said Babs.

"Nonsense, child! Sutton doesn't speak the truth. I would far rather scold myself than Hilda."

"Well, at any rate here's the cotton. I spent all my money on it except the ten shillings in the Savings Bank; and, Hilda, you *will* use it when Jasper's socks get into holes."

"Of course I will, you dear little darling," said Hilda. "I think it is a perfectly sweet present. Give it to me; I was just packing my work-basket, and in it shall go this minute. I'll think of you every time I use a thread of this cotton, Babs."

"Babs, Miss Mills says it is quite time for you to go to bed," said Judy, who was standing at the back of Hilda's chair, softly touching her bright head from time to time with the tips of her little fingers.

Quentyns laughed when Judy spoke in her solemn voice.

"And what about Judy's time for going to bed?" he asked.

"Oh, I am much older than Babs, and Hilda said ——"

"Yes, Jasper; I said Judy should have a little talk with me all by myself to-night," said Hilda, putting back her hand and drawing her little sister forward. "Here's a tiny bit of my chair for you to sit upon, Judy dearest."

"Then I'll take Babs upstairs," said Jasper. "Put your arms tightly round my neck, you quaint monkey, and I'll race up to your room with you."

"Hilda," said Judy, the moment the door had closed behind the two, "I haven't given you my present yet."

"My darling," said Hilda, "when we love as you and I love each other, presents mean nothing—nothing at all. I know you have no money, dearest little Judy and I think it was so sweet of you not to ask for any. Your present to me is your thoughtfulness; no gift could be sweeter."

"Hilda, may I rest my head against your shoulder?"

"Of course, darling. Now aren't we cozy?"

"We are; I feel warm now, and—and happy. I won't be able to sit like this for a long time again."

"Yes you will, for you're coming to stay with us; as soon as ever we get into our house, or our flat, or wherever we shall live, you are to come. One of the very first rooms I shall furnish will be your little bedroom, my Judy."

"And then I can sit close to you every night. But oh, Hilda, *he'll* be there, he won't like it."

"Yes, he will; he'll like anything that I like. There is an old proverb that I must repeat for your benefit —'Love me, love my dog.' That means that those whom I love you ought to love."

"Ought I? Very well, I'll try to love—Jasper. Anything that you say I'll try to do. Hilda, why does loving a person give pain? I have an ache in my heart—a big ache. There now, what a horrid girl I

am! I am making your eyes fill with tears. You shan't be unhappy just when you're going to be made into a beautiful white bride. Sutton says it is unlucky for a bride to cry. You shan't cry, Hilda, you shan't—you mustn't."

"But I can't help crying, Judy, when I think that you are unhappy, and when you speak of your love to me as a pain."

"I'll never speak of it again. I'll be happy—I won't fret—no, I won't fret at all, and I won't cry even once," said the child, making a valiant effort to bring a smile to her face. "Hilda, will you promise me something very, very solemnly?"

"If it is in my power I certainly will, my pet."

"You have not got my wedding present yet, Hilda; but it is coming. Promise me——"

"What, darling?"

"Promise to take it to church with you to-morrow—I'll give it to you just before church—it will be full of me—my very heart will be in it—take it to church with you, Hilda, and hold it in your hand when you're giving yourself to Jasper—promise—promise."

"How excited you are, my dearest! If it makes you really happy to know that I shall hold something of yours in my hand when I am being married, I will certainly do so."

"Oh, it does make me happy, it does!"

CHAPTER VII.

A WEDDING PRESENT.

But my lover will not prize
All the glory that he rides in,
When he gazes in my face:
He will say: "O Love, thine eyes
Build the shrine my soul abides in,
And I kneel here for thy grace!"

—E. BARRETT BROWNING.

There was a holly tree not far from the church with berries so red and leaves so green and shining that it was generally denuded of its beauties to decorate the most important parts of the church.

Judy knew this holly tree well. It had been much crippled in shape and color for the Christmas decorations, but one perfect branch had been left where the berries still grew in full rich clusters—this special branch had not been noticed by the gardener when he was cutting the holly for Christmas, and Judy determined that from it she would pick the crimson berries which were to constitute Hilda's wedding present.

"Barnes," she said to the old gardener the day before, "you mustn't allow anyone to touch my bough of holly."

"Well, Miss Judy, you're a queer child; what bough of holly do you mean?"

"The bough on the round tree near the church. I want it most particular badly; you won't let anyone pick it—will you, Barnes?"

"No, that I won't," said Barnes, good-naturedly; and Judy, quite satisfied and happy in her mind, ran away.

On the wedding morning, just when the day broke, she got softly, very softly out of bed. Babs was having happy dreams at the moment, for smiles were flitting across her face and her lips were moving. Judy, heavy-eyed and pale, rose from her broken slumbers and proceeded to dress herself. She must go out now to fetch her holly bough. She could dress herself nicely; and putting on a warm jacket she ran downstairs and let herself out into the foggy, frosty air. She was warmly clad as to her head and throat, but she had not considered it necessary to put on her out-door boots. The boots took a long time to lace, and as she did not expect to be absent from the house more than ten or twelve minutes, she did not think it worth while to go to this trouble.

She ran swiftly now, her heart beating with a certain pleasurable excitement. It was so nice to be able to make a beautiful, quaint wedding present out of the red berries and the glistening leaves and the little note full of love hiding away in their depths. How delighted Hilda would be by and by to open that note and to read some of Judy's innermost thoughts.

"Even though she has Jasper, she loves me," thought the child. "She will know *something* of what I think of her, the darling, when she has read my note."

The little letter, written on a tiny pink sheet of paper, was put away all ready in Judy's drawer; she had but to cut the bough of holly and her unique wedding present would be almost ready. She reached the tree, having to go to it through long grass heavy with hoar frost. Her stockings and feet were already very wet, but she thought nothing of this fact in her excitement. She had a small knife in her pocket which she proceeded to take out in order to cut the bough away—it grew low down and she had to pull the grass aside to look for it.

Alack, and alas! where was it, who had taken it? Had wicked, wicked Barnes been faithless? There was a torn gash on the trunk of the tree, and no long bough red with berries was anywhere to be seen.

Poor little Judy could not help uttering a cry of anguish. Hot anger against Barnes swelled up in her heart. Miss Mills was in reality the culprit. Knowing nothing of Judy's desire, she had cut the bough late the night before for some window decoration.

"I won't go back to the house until I get some holly," thought the child. She wiped away her fast-falling tears and set her sharp little wits to work. This was the most scarce time in the whole winter for holly berries, the greater number of them having been used for church and Christmas decorations; but Judy, whose keen eyes noticed Nature in all her aspects, suddenly remembered that on the borders of a lake nearly a mile away grew another holly tree—a small and unremarkable bush which might yet contain sufficient bright berries for her purpose. Without an instant's hesitation she determined to walk that mile and reach that tree. She must go quickly if she would be back before anyone noticed

her. She was particularly anxious that her gift should not be seen in advance. Running, racing, and scrambling she effected her purpose, reached the tree, secured some berries and leaves, and returned to the house wet through and very tired.

Babs was rubbing her eyes and stretching her limbs in her snug bed in the nursery when her sister came back.

"Oh, Judy, what have you been doing?" she exclaimed, sitting up and staring in round-eyed astonishment.

"Hush, Babs," said Judy, "don't speak for a moment —don't say a single word until I have locked the door."

"But you oughtn't to lock the door. Miss Mills doesn't wish it."

"I am going to disobey her."

"But you'll be punished."

"I don't care."

The key was turned in the lock, and Judy, going over to Babs' bed, exhibited her spoils.

"See," she said, "here's my wedding present."

"Did you go to fetch those holly berries this morning?" asked Babs.

"Yes, I did, and I had to go a long way for them too; that horrid, wicked old Barnes had cut away my bough, and I had to go all the way to the lake."

"Your feet do look so sloppy and wet."

"So they are, they are soaking; I forgot to put on my boots."

"Oh, won't you catch an awful cold! won't Miss Mills be angry!"

"Never mind; I'll change my stockings and shoes after I have arranged my present."

"It's such a funny wedding present," said Babs. "Do you think Hilda will like it?"

"She'll do more than like it: she'll love it. Don't talk to me any more—I'm too busy to answer you."

Babs fidgeted and mumbled to herself. Judy stood with her back to her. She used her little fingers deftly —her taste as to arrangement and color was perfect. The sharp thorns pricked her poor little fingers, but she was rather glad than otherwise to suffer in Hilda's cause. The wedding present was complete, no sign of the note could be seen in the midst of the green leaves and crimson berries. Judy unlocked the door and tumbled back into bed. Miss Mills knew nothing of her escapade, for Babs was far too stanch to betray her.

Just as Hilda in a cloud of white was stepping into the carriage to go to church that morning, a little figure, also in cloudy white with wide-open greeny-gray eyes, under which heavy dark marks were already visible, rushed up to her and thrust something into her hand.

"Your—your wedding present, Hilda," gasped Judy. The strong colors of the red and green made almost a blot upon Hilda's fairness. Her father, who was accompanying her to church, interposed.

"Stand back, my dear, stand back, Judy," he said. "Hilda, you had better leave those berries in the hall; you're surely not going to take them to church."

"Your promise, Hilda, your faithful promise," said Judy in an imploring voice.

Hilda looked at the child; she remembered her words of the night before, and holding the prickly little bunch firmly, said in a gentle voice:

"I particularly want to take Judy's present to church with me, father."

"As you like, my love, of course; but it is not at all in keeping with that lovely bouquet of hot-house white flowers sent to you by Lady Dellacœur."

"Then, if so, Lady Dellacœur's flowers shall stay at home," said Hilda. She tossed the splendid bouquet on the hall table, and with Judy's holly berries in her hand, sprang into the carriage.

"Isn't she a darling?" said Judy, turning with eyes that glowed in their happiness to Miss Mills.

"A goose, I call her," muttered Miss Mills; but Judy neither heard nor heeded her words.

The little church was nearly full of spectators, and one and all did not fail to remark Judy's wedding present. A bride in white from top to toe—a lovely bride in the tenderest bloom of youth, to carry a bouquet of strong dark green and crimson—had anything so incongruous ever been seen before? But Hilda held the flowers tightly, and Judy's hungry heart was satisfied.

"Good-by, my darling," said Hilda to her little sister a couple of hours later; "good-by, Judy; my first

letter shall be to you, and I will carefully keep your dear wedding present."

"Hilda, Hilda, there's a little note inside of it, in the heart of it; you'll read it, won't you, and you won't show it to Jasper?"

"If you wish me not, I won't, dearest. How hot your lips are, Judy, and how flushed your face."

"I am just a wee bit shivery," said Judy, "but it's nothing, nothing at all. I'll promise you not to fret, Hilda. Good-by, dear, dear, darling Hilda."

"Good-by, my sweetest little treasure, good-by."

Hilda got into the carriage; her husband took his place by her side. Mildred Anstruther tossed a great shower of rice after them, Miss Mills and Babs hurled slippers down the avenue, Judy was nowhere to be seen.

"Hilda," said Quentyns, as they were driving to the station, "why did you have such a very funny bouquet in church? You showed me Lady Dellacœur's flowers last night. Why didn't you wear them, darling? Those harsh holly berries and leaves weren't in your usual taste."

"But you're not angry with me for carrying that little bouquet, Jasper, are you?"

"My darling, could I be angry with you for anything?"

"The little bunch of holly was Judy's wedding present," said Hilda, tears dimming her eyes; "I promised her that I would wear them. Sweet little darling, my heart aches at leaving her."

Quentyns took Hilda's hand and held it firmly within his own. He said some sympathetic words, for Hilda's slightest grief was grief to him, but in his heart he could not help murmuring:

"That tiresome, morbid child. Poor darling Hilda, I must show her very gently and gradually how terribly she is spoiling Judy."

CHAPTER VIII.

HONEYMOON.

The night is in her hair
And giveth shade for shade,
And the pale moonlight on her forehead white
Like a spirit's hand is laid;
Her lips part with a smile
Instead of speakings done:
I ween, she thinketh of a voice,
Albeit uttering none.

—Mrs. Barrett Browning.

A month later Mrs. Quentyns was sitting in one of the largest hotels at Rome waiting for her husband to come in. The day was so balmy and genial that it was almost impossible for Hilda to believe that the time of year was early February. Dressed in dark-

green velvet, with a creamy feather boa lying by her side, Hilda sat amidst all her unaccustomed surroundings, her eyes looking straight down the lofty room and her thoughts far away. The bride was thinking of her English home—she was an intensely happy bride—she loved her husband devotedly—she looked forward to a good and blessed life by his side, but still (and to her credit be it spoken) she could not forget old times. In the Rectory gardens now the crocuses and snowdrops were putting out their first dark-green leaves, and showing their tender petals to the faint winter sunshine. Judy and Babs, wrapped in furs from top to toe, were taking their afternoon walk—Babs was looking in vain for insect life in the hedges, and Judy was opening her big eyes wide to see the first green bud that ventured to put out its little tip to be greeted by the winter cold. Aunt Marjorie was learning to make use of her legs, and was glowing with warmth of body and vexation of spirit. The Rector was tranquilly writing a sermon which, notwithstanding its polished diction, should yet show the workings of a new spirit which would move his congregation on Sunday.

Hilda seemed to see the whole picture—but her mind's eye rested longest on the figure of the tall, rather overgrown child, whose eyes always wore too hungry an expression for perfect happiness.

"Little darling," murmured Hilda, "how I wish I had her with me here—she'd appreciate things so wonderfully. It is the greatest treat in the world to take Judy to see a really good picture—how her eyes shine in her dear face when she looks at it. My sweet little Judy, Jasper does not care for me to talk much to you, but I love you with all my heart and soul; it is the one drawback to my perfect happiness that I

must be parted from you."

Hilda rose as she spoke, and going over to a table on which her traveling-bag stood, opened it, pressed the spring on a certain lock, and taking out a little crumpled, stained letter, read the words written on it.

> "My darling Hilda [wrote the poor little scribe], this is to say that I love you better than anyone else in the world. I'll always go on loving you best of all. Please take a thousand million kisses, and never forget Judy.
>
> "P. S.—I'll pray for you every day and every night. I hope you will be very happy. I won't fret if you don't. This letter is packed with love.
>
> "JUDY."

A step was heard along the passage; Hilda folded up the letter, slipped it back into its hiding place, and ran down the long room to meet her husband.

"Well, my darling," he exclaimed; "the English mail has just come in, and here's a budget for you."

"And a budget for you too, Jasper. What a heap of letters!"

"Yes, and one of them is from Rivers. He rather wants me in London: there's a good case coming on at the Law Courts; he says I shall be counsel for it if

I'm in town. What do you say to coming back to London on Saturday, Hilda?"

"You know I shall be only too delighted; I am just pining to be home again. Do you think we could go down to the Rectory? I should so like to spend Sunday there."

"My darling, what are you thinking of? I want to be in London, not in Hampshire. Now that I have got you, sweetheart, I must neglect no chance of work."

Hilda's face turned slightly pale.

"Of course, darling," she said, looking up sweetly at her tall husband; "but where are we to go on Saturday night? You spoke of going home."

"And so we are going home, my love—or rather we are going toward home; but as we have not taken a house yet, we must spend a week with the Malverns when first we get to England. I will send a line to my aunt, and tell her to expect us on Saturday."

Hilda said nothing more. She smothered the ghost of a sigh, and sitting down by the wood fire, which, notwithstanding the genial weather, was acceptable enough in their lofty room, began to open her letters. The Rectory budget was of course first attended to. It contained several inclosures—one from her father, which was short and principally occupied over a review of the last new theological book he had been reading, one from Aunt Marjorie, and one from Miss Mills.

"None from Judy," said Hilda, in a voice of surprise; "she has only written to me once since we were married."

She spoke aloud, and looked up at her husband for sympathy. He was reading a letter of his own, and its contents seemed to amuse him, for he broke into a hearty laugh.

"What is it, Jasper?" asked Hilda. "What is amusing you?"

"Something Rivers has said, my love. I'll tell you presently. Capital fellow he is; if I get this brief I shall be in tremendous luck."

Hilda opened Aunt Marjorie's letter and began to read. The old lady was a somewhat rambling correspondent. Her letters were always closely written and voluminous. Hilda had to strain her young eyes to decipher all the sentences.

> "I must say I dislike poverty [wrote Aunt Marjorie]; you are well out of it, Hilda. It is my private conviction that your father has absolutely forgotten that his income has jumped down in a single day from three thousand three hundred and fifty pounds a year to the three hundred and fifty without the odd thousands; he goes on just as he has always done, and is perfectly happy. Dean Sharp sent him his last book a week ago, and he has done nothing but read it and talk of it ever since—his conversation in consequence is most tiresome. I miss you awfully, my love. I never could stand theology, even when I was

surrounded by comforts, and now when I have to stint the fires and suffer from cold feet, you may imagine how unpleasant it is to me. My dear Hilda, I am afraid I shall not be able to keep Miss Mills, she seems to get sillier every day; it is my private conviction that she has a love affair on, but she's as mum as possible about it. Poor Sutton cried in a most heartrending way when she left; she said when leaving, 'I'll never get another mistress like you, ma'am, for you never interfere, even to the clearing of the jellies.' I am glad she appreciates me, I didn't think she did while she was living with us. The new cook can't attempt anything in the way of soup, so I have given it up for dinner; but your father never appears to miss it. The garden is looking horrible, so many weeds about. The Anstruthers have all gone up to London—taken a house for the season at an enormous price. How those people do squander money; may they never know what it is for it to take to itself wings!

"By the way, Judy has not been well; she caught cold or something the day of your wedding, and was laid up with a nasty little feverish attack and cough. We had to send

for Dr. Harvey, who said she had a chill, and was a good deal run down. She's up again now, but looks like a ghost with her big eyes. She certainly is a most peculiar child—I don't pretend to understand her. She crept into the room a minute ago, and I told her I was writing to you, and asked her if she had any message. She got pink all over just as if she were going to cry, and then said:

"'Tell Hilda that I am not fretting a bit, that I am as happy as possible. Give her my dear love and heaps of kisses' (my dear Hilda, you must take them for granted, for I am not going to put crosses all over the letter).

"Then she ran out of the room as if she had nothing further to say—really a most queer child. Babs is a little treasure and the comfort of my life.

"Your affectionate old
Aunt,
"MARJORIE."

"Jasper!" said Hilda, in a choked sort of voice. "Jasper!"

"What is it, my darling? Why, how queer you look, your face is quite white!"

"It is about Judy; she's not well!" said Hilda. "I ought to go to her, I ought not to delay. Couldn't we catch the night mail?"

"Good gracious!" said Quentyns, alarmed by Hilda's manner. "What is wrong with the child? If it is anything infectious——"

"No, no, it is nothing of that sort; but in any case, whatever it is, I ought to go to her—I ought not to delay. May I telegraph to say we are starting at once?"

"My darling, how excitable you are! What can be wrong with the child?"

"Oh, Jasper, you don't understand—Aunt Marjorie says——Here, read this bit."

"I can't read that crabbed, crossed writing, Hilda."

"Well, I'll read it aloud to you; see where it begins —'Judy has not been well——'"

Hilda read the whole passage, a lump in her throat almost choking her voice. When she had finished, Quentyns put his arms round her and drew her to his heart.

"Why, you poor little, foolish, nervous creature," he said, "there's nothing wrong with Judy now; she was ill, but she's much better. My darling Hilda—my love, you must really not disturb yourself about a trifling mishap of this sort."

"It isn't a trifle, Jasper. Oh, I know Judy—I know how she looks and what she feels. Oh, do, do let me go back to her, darling."

"You read that letter in such a perturbed sort of

voice that I can scarcely follow its meanings," said Quentyns. "Here, give it to me, and let me see for myself what it is all about. Why will old ladies write such villainous hands? Where does the passage begin, Hilda? Sit down, darling, quiet yourself. Now let me see, here it is—'Judy has not been well——'"

Hilda's hands had shaken with nervousness while she read her aunt's letter aloud, but Quentyns held the sheet of thin paper steadily. As the sentences fell from his lips, his full tones seemed to put new meaning into them—the ghostly terrors died out of Hilda's heart. When her husband laid down the sheet of paper, and turned to her with a triumphant smile, she could not help smiling back at him in return.

"There," he said, "did not I tell you there was nothing wrong with Judy now? What a little goose you are!"

"I suppose I am; and if you really, really think—if you are quite sure that she's all right——"

"Of course, I am absolutely certain; doesn't Aunt Marjorie say so? The fact is, Hilda, you make too great a fuss about that little sister of yours—I feel almost jealous of her."

CHAPTER IX.

STARVED.

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss?

—E. Barrett Browning.

In the first pleasant spring-time of that same year, Mrs. Anstruther, a very gay and fashionable-looking woman of between forty and fifty years of age, turned on a certain morning to her daughter and made a remark:

"Don't forget that we must pay some calls this afternoon, Mildred."

Mildred was standing by the window of their beautiful drawing room. The window-boxes had just been filled with lovely spring flowers; she was bending over them and with deft fingers arranging the blossoms and making certain small alterations, which had the effect of grouping the different masses of color more artistically than the gardener had done.

"Yes, mother," she said, half turning her handsome head and glancing back at her parent. "We are to make calls. I am quite agreeable."

"I wish you would take an interest, Mildred; it is so unpleasant going about with people who are only just 'quite agreeable.' Now, when I was a young girl ——"

"Oh, please, mother, don't! The times have completely changed since you were young; enthusiasm has gone out of fashion. I am nothing if I

am not fashionable! Of course, if calls have to be made, I shall make them. I'll put on my most becoming bonnet, and my prettiest costume, and I'll sit in the carriage by your side, and enter the houses of those friends who happen to be at home, and I'll smile and look agreeable, and people will say, 'What an amiable woman Miss Anstruther is!' I'll do the correct thing of *course*, only I suppose it is not necessary for my heart to go pitter-patter over it. By the way, have you made out a list of the unfortunates who are to be victimized by our presence this afternoon?"

Mrs. Anstruther sighed, and gazed in some discontent at her daughter.

"It is so disagreeable not to understand people," she said. "I don't profess to understand you, Mildred. If you will give me my visiting-book I can soon tell you the places where we ought to go. And oh, by the way, should we not call on Hilda Quentyns? she has taken a house somewhere in West Kensington."

"You don't mean to tell me that the Quentyns are in town?" said Mildred, turning sharply round and gazing at her mother.

"Of course; they have been in London for some time. I met Lady Malvern yesterday, and she gave me Hilda's address. She seems to have gone to live in a very poky place. See, I have entered the name in my address-book—10, Philippa Road, West Kensington."

"Then of course we'll go to her—that will be *really* nice," said Mildred with enthusiasm. "We might go to Hilda first and spend some little time with her."

"But Mrs. Milward's 'at home' begins quite early. I

should not like to miss that."

"Who cares for Mrs. Milward! Look here, mother, suppose *you* pay the calls and let me go and see Hilda. I have a good deal I want to talk over with her; for one thing, I want to say something about Judy."

"Poor, queer little Judy," said Mrs. Anstruther with a laugh. "What can you possibly have to say about her?"

"I don't think Judy is at all well," said Mildred. "There is such a thing as dying of heart-hunger. If ever a child suffered from that old-fashioned complaint, it is that poor mite at Little Staunton Rectory."

"My dear Mildred, you get more absurd every day. Judy lives in a most comfortable home, for notwithstanding their poverty, old Aunt Marjorie manages to keep everything going in really respectable style. The child has a loving father, a devoted aunt, a dear little sister, and an excellent governess, and you talk of her dying of heart-hunger! It is absurd."

"Nevertheless," said Mildred,—she stopped abruptly, her bright eyes looked across the room and out through the open window,—"nevertheless," she said, giving her foot an impatient tap, "I should like to see Hilda. I should like to have a long talk with her. I have heard nothing about her since her wedding, so by your leave, mother, I'll drive over to West Kensington immediately after lunch and send the victoria back for you."

Mrs. Anstruther, who was always more or less like

wax in the hands of her strong-minded daughter, was obliged somewhat unwillingly to submit to this arrangement; and Mildred, charmingly dressed and looking young and lovely, was bowled rapidly away in the direction of Hilda Quentyns' humble home soon after two o'clock.

"It will be pleasant to take the poor old dear by surprise," said Mildred to herself. "There was a time when I felt jealous of her good fortune in having secured Jasper Quentyns, but, thank goodness, I have quite got over the assaults of the green-eyed monster now. Ah, here we are. What a queer little street!—what frightfully new and yet picturesque houses! They look like dove-cotes. I wonder if this pair of turtle-doves coo in their nest all day long."

The footman jumped down and rang the doorbell. In a moment a neatly-dressed but very young looking servant stood in the open doorway.

"Yes, Mrs. Quentyns was at home," she said, and Mildred entered Hilda's pretty house.

She went into the drawing room, and stood somewhat impatiently waiting for her hostess to appear. The little room was furnished with an eye to artistic effect, the walls were decorated with good taste. The furniture was new, as well as pretty. One beautiful photogravure from Burne Jones' "Wheel of Fortune" was hung over the mantelpiece. Hilda and Quentyns, faithfully represented by an Italian photographer, stood side by side in a little frame on one of the brackets. Mildred felt herself drawing one or two heavy sighs.

"I don't know what there is about this little room, but I like it," she murmured; "nay, more, I love it. I

can fancy good people inhabiting it. I am quite certain that Love has not yet flown out of the window. I am quite sure, too, of another thing, that even if Poverty does come in at this door, Love will remain. Oh, silly Hilda, what have you to do with the 'Wheel of Fortune'? your position is assured; you dwell safely enthroned in the heart of a good man. Oh, happy Hilda!"

The door was opened, and Hilda Quentyns smiling, with roses on her cheeks and words of delighted welcome on her lips, rushed into the room.

"How sweet of you to call, Mildred," she exclaimed. "I was just wondering if you would take any notice of me."

"You dear creature," said Mildred, kissing Hilda and patting her on the shoulder. "Two hours ago I heard for the first time that you were in London. I ate my lunch and ordered the victoria, and put on my prettiest bonnet and drove over to see you as fast as ever the horses would bring me. I could not well pay my respects to Mrs. Quentyns in a shorter time."

"I am very glad to see you," said Hilda.

"How childish you look," replied Mildred, gazing at her in a rather dissatisfied way; "you have no responsibilities at all now, your Jasper takes the weight of everything, and you live in perpetual sunshine. Is the state of bliss as blissful as we have always been led to imagine, Hilda, or are the fairy tales untrue, and does the prince only exist in one's imagination?"

"Oh, no, he is real, quite real," said Hilda. "I am as happy as it is possible for a human being to be.

Jasper—but I won't talk of him—you know what I really think of him. Now let me show you my house. Isn't it a sweet little home? Wasn't it good of Jasper to come here? He wanted a flat, but when he saw that my heart was set on a little house, he took this. Don't you like our taste in furniture, Milly? Oh, Milly dear, I *am* glad to see you. It is nice to look at one of the dear home-faces again."

"Come and show me your house," said Mildred; "I am going to stay a long time—all the afternoon, if possible."

"I am more than glad; you must remain to dinner. I will telegraph to Jasper to come home early."

"I don't mind if I do," said Mildred. "I have no very special engagements for this evening, and even if I had I should be disposed to break them. It is not often one gets the chance of spending an hour in a nest with two turtle-doves."

"Come, come," said Hilda, "that sounds as if you were laughing at us. Now you shall see the house, and then we'll have tea together, and you must tell me all about the old place."

The turtle-doves' nest was a very minute abode. There was only one story, and the bed-rooms in consequence were small and few.

"Aren't we delightfully economical?" said Hilda, throwing open the door of her own room. "Is not this wee chamber the perfection of snugness? and this is Jasper's dressing room, and here is such a dear little bath-room; and this is the spare-room (we have not furnished it yet, but Jasper says we can't afford to have many visitors, so I'm not making any special

haste). And this is our servants'-room; I did not think when we lived at Little Staunton that two servants could fit into such a tiny closet, but these London girls seem quite to like it. Now, Mildred, come downstairs. You have looked over this thimbleful of a house, and I hope it has pleased you. Come downstairs and let us talk. I am starving for news."

"Well, my dear, begin catechising to your heart's content," said Mildred. She threw herself back into the easiest of the easy-chairs as she spoke, and toasted her feet before Hilda's cheerful fire. "What do you want to know first, Mrs. Quentyns?"

"How long is it since you left home—when did you see them all?"

"I was at home a fortnight ago, and I spent the greater part of one afternoon at the Rectory."

"Oh, did you? Is it awfully changed?"

"No; the house is *in statu quo*. It looks just as handsome and stately and unconcerned as of old. Aunt Marjorie says it is full of dust, but I did not notice any. Aunt Marjorie has got quite a new wrinkle between her brows, and she complains a great deal of the young cook, but my private opinion is that that unfortunate cook is your aunt's salvation, for she gives her something else to think of besides the one perpetual grievance."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Hilda, a little impatiently, "poor dear Aunt Maggie; and what about the others? How is my father?"

"He looks thin, and his hair is decidedly silvered; but his eyes just beamed at me with kindness. He never spoke once about the change in his

circumstances, and on Sunday he preached a sermon which set me crying."

"Dear Mildred, I think father's sermons were always beautiful. How I should like to hear him once again!"

"So you will, of course, very soon; they're all expecting you down. Why don't you go?"

The faintest shadow of a cloud flitted across Hilda's face.

"Jasper is so busy," she said.

"Well, go without him. I am quite convinced you would do them a sight of good."

"Jasper does not like me to leave him," said Hilda; "we both intend to run down to the Rectory for a flying visit soon, but he is so busy just at present that he cannot fix a day. Go on, Milly, tell me about the others. What of Babs?"

"I saw her squatting down on the middle of the floor with a blind kitten just three days old in her lap. The kitten squalled frightfully, and Babs kept on calling it 'poor, *pretty* darling.' I thought badly of the kitten's future prospects, but well of its nurse's; she looked particularly flourishing."

"And Judy?" said Hilda, "she wasn't well a little time ago, but Aunt Marjorie has said nothing about her health lately. Has she quite, quite recovered? Did she look ill? Did you see much of her?"

"She was sitting in the ingle-nook, reading a book."

"Reading a book!" said Hilda; "but Judy does not like reading. Was the day wet when you called at the

Rectory?"

"No; the sun was shining all the time."

"Why wasn't she out scampering and running all the time, and hunting for grubs?"

"She had a cough, not much, just a little hack, and Aunt Marjorie thought she had better stay indoors."

"Then she is *not* quite well!"

"Aunt Marjorie says she is, and that the hack is nothing at all. By the way, Hilda, if your husband won't spare you to go down to the Rectory, why don't you have that child here on a visit? Nothing in the world would do her so much good as a sight of your face."

"Oh, I know, I know; my little Judy, my treasure! But the spare-room is not ready, and Jasper is so prudent, he won't go in debt for even a shilling's-worth. He has spent all his available money on the house furnishing, and says the spare-room must wait for a month or so. As soon as ever it is furnished, Judy is to be the first guest."

"Can't you hire a little bedstead of some sort?" said Mildred, "and put it up in that room, and send for the child. What does Judy care about furnished rooms!"

"You think she looks really ill, do you, Mildred?"

"I will be candid with you, Hilda. I did not like her look—she suffers. It is sad to read suffering in a child's eyes. When I got a peep into Judy's eyes I could see that her soul was drooping for want of nourishment. She is without that particular thing which is essential to her."

"And what is that?"

"Your love. Do send for her, Hilda. Never mind whether the spare-room is furnished or not."

Hilda sat and fidgeted with her gold chain. Her face, which had been full of smiles and dimples, was now pale with emotion, her eyes were full of trouble.

"Why are you so irresolute?" asked Mildred impatiently.

"Oh, I—I don't know. I am not quite my own mistress. I—I must think."

The servant entered the room with a letter on a little salver. Hilda took it up.

"Why, this is from Judy," she exclaimed. "Perhaps she's much better already. Do you mind my reading it, Mildred?"

"Read it, certainly. I shall like to know how the dear queer mite is getting on."

Hilda opened her letter, and, taking out a tiny pink sheet, read a few words written on it.

"MY DEAR HILDA:

"I am writing you a little letter. I hope you are quite well. I don't fret, and I hope you don't. I think of you and never forget you. I give you a kiss for now and for to-night, and for every other night, and a million, thousand kisses for always.

"Your loving

"JUDY."

"Here are my kisses."

A whole lot of crosses and round o's followed.

"Here is my tex for us both. 'The Lord wach between me and thee.'

"JUDY."

Hilda's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"There is something else in the envelope," she exclaimed. "I think a scrawl from Aunt Marjorie. I had a volume from her yesterday. I wonder what she wants to write about again."

"MY DARLING HILDA:

"Now don't be frightened, my dear, but I have something to tell you which I think you ought to know. Our dear little Judy fainted in a rather alarming way in church yesterday. Of course we sent for the doctor, and he says she is very weak, and must stay in bed for a day or two. He says we need not be alarmed, but that her strength is a good deal run down, and that she must have been fretting about something. It just shows how little doctors know, for I *never* saw the child sweeter, or more gentle, or

more easily amused. You know what a troublesome little creature she used to be, always flashing about and upsetting things, and bringing all kinds of obnoxious insects into the house; but she has been just like a lamb since your wedding, sitting contentedly by my side, looking over her fairy story-books, and assuring me she wasn't fretting in the least about you, and that she was perfectly happy. Babs did say that she heard her crying now and then at night, but I fancy the child must have been mistaken, for Judy certainly would not conceal any trouble from me. I will write to you again about her to-morrow. She directed this envelope to you herself yesterday morning before church, so I am slipping my letter into it. Don't be frightened, dear, we are taking all possible care of her.

"Your affectionate
"AUNT MARJORIE."

"There," said Hilda, looking up with a queer, terrified expression in her eyes, "I knew how it would be. I married Jasper to please myself, and I have killed Judy. Judy's heart is broken. Oh, what shall I do, Milly, what shall I do?"

"Let me read Aunt Marjorie's letter," said Mildred.

Her quick, practical eyes glanced rapidly over the

old lady's illegible writing.

"I don't think you have killed her, Hilda," said Miss Anstruther then, "but she is simply fading away for want of the love which was her life. Go back to her; go back at once, and she will revive. Come, there is not a moment to be lost. I'll run out and send a telegram to Little Staunton. I'll tell them to expect you this evening. Where's an A B C? Have you got one?"

"I think there is one on the wagon in the dining room. I'll fetch it."

Hilda ran out of the room; she brought back the time-table in a moment. Her face was white; her hands shook so that she could scarcely turn the leaves.

"Let me find the place," said Mildred. "There, let me see. Oh, what a pity, you have lost the four o'clock train, and there isn't another until seven. Never mind, say you will take that one. You'll arrive at Bickley at twenty minutes to ten, and soon after ten you'll be at the Rectory. I'll run at once and send off the telegram, for the sooner Judy's heart is relieved the better."

Mildred rushed to the davenport, filled in a telegraph-form, and brought it to Hilda to read.

"There, is that right?" she exclaimed. "Put your name to it if you are satisfied."

Hilda dashed the tears, which were still blinding her eyes, away.

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed, "that will do. Take it at once, this moment, before—before I have time to

change my mind."

Mildred had written, "Tell Judy to expect me at ten to-night." Hilda added her name, and Mildred prepared to leave the room.

"Good-by, Hilda," she said. "I won't come back, for you will need all your time to pack, and to leave things in order for your Jasper. Good-by, dear. Of course, you could not *think* of changing your mind, it would be wicked, cruel; yes, it would be terribly cruel. Good-by, Hilda, good-by."

Mildred seated herself in the victoria and desired her coachman to drive to the nearest telegraph-office.

"I have made a discovery," she said, under her breath. "Jasper Quentyns was not the prince; no, *my* prince has not yet shown his shining face above the horizon. Doubtless he will never come; but better that than to think he has arrived and wake to find him common clay. Hilda is absolutely *afraid* of her husband. No, Hilda, I would not be in your shoes for a good deal."

CHAPTER X.

WAITING.

The days are clear,

Day after day,
When April's here,
That leads to May,
And June
Must follow soon.
Stay, June, stay!
If only we could stop the moon
And June!

It was an April day, but the weather was still cold at Little Staunton, and Aunt Marjorie thought it well to have a nice bright fire burning in Judy's bedroom.

Judy was sitting up in bed, her hair was combed back from her face, she wore a pink dressing-gown, the black shadows under her eyes were not so marked as yesterday, her firm little lips had an expression of extreme and touching patience. Judy's movements were somewhat languid, and her voice when she spoke had lost its high, glad pitch.

Aunt Marjorie kept coming in and out of the room. Miss Mills fussed with the fire, went to the window to look out over the landscape and to make the same remark many times.

"How late the spring is this year," said the governess, in her dreary monotone.

Babs stood with her back to Judy, sorting a cabinet full of curiosities. There was no shadow of any sorrow on Babs' serene face—her full contented voice prattled on interminably.

A drawing-board lay on Judy's bed, a sheet of drawing-paper, two or three pencils, and a thick piece of india-rubber lay by her side. For over an

hour she had been drawing industriously. A pink color came into her cheeks as she worked, and Aunt Marjorie said to herself:

"The child is all right—she just needed a little rest—she'll soon be as well as possible. I'll go downstairs now, and write to Hilda about her."

Miss Mills also thought that Judy looked better. Miss Mills was still guilty of keeping up a somewhat one-sided correspondence with the person whom she so cordially hated—she had not heard from him for nearly a month, and thought that the present would be a good opportunity to write another letter to remind him of her existence. So, glancing at Judy as she went, she also left the room.

The door was shut carefully, and the two little sisters were alone. When this happened, Judy threw down her pencils and gave utterance to a faint, quickly-smothered sigh.

"Why do you do it so softly?" said Babs, not troubling herself to turn her face, but still keeping her stout back to her sister.

"Do what so softly?" asked Judy.

"Those groans to yourself. Aunt Marjorie won't believe that you ever groan, and I *know* you do. She said you was as happy as the day is long, and I said you *wasn't*. You know you do sob at night, or you have she-cups or something."

"Look here," said Judy, "it's very, very, *very* unkind of you, Babs, to tell Aunt Marjorie what I do at night. I didn't think you'd be so awfully mean. I am ill now, and Aunt Maggie would do anything for me, and I'll ask her to put you to sleep in Miss Mills' room, if

ever you tell what I do at night again."

"I'll never tell if you don't wish me to," said Babs, in her easy tones. "You may sob so that you may be heard down in the drawing room and I won't tell. Look here, Judy, I have found your old knife."

"What old knife?"

"The one you saved that animal with last autumn, don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes, yes—the *dear* little earwig. Do let me see the knife, Babs; I thought I had lost it."

"No, it was in the back of your cabinet, just under all the peacock's feathers. Wasn't the earwig glad when you saved her?"

"Yes," said Judy, smiling, "didn't she run home fast to her family? She was sticking in the wood and couldn't get out, poor darling, but my dear little knife cut the wood away and then she ran home. Oh, didn't she go fast!"

"Yes, didn't she?" said Babs, laughing. "I think earwigs are such *sweet* little animals, don't you, Judy?"

"Insects, you mean," said Judy. "Oh, yes, I love them special because most people hate the poor dears."

"What are you drawing, Judy? What a queer, queer picture!"

"I'm going to call it 'Where the nasty fairies live,'" said Judy, "but I haven't finished it. Babs, how long is it since Hilda went away?"

"Weeks, and weeks, and weeks," replied Babs. "I has almost forgotten how long."

"Years and years, you mean," said Judy.

The little pink flush of excitement faded out of her cheeks, her eyes looked hollow, the shadow under them grew darker than ever.

There came a rush along the passage, and Aunt Marjorie, puffing with the haste she had used, but trying to walk slowly and to speak calmly, entered the room.

"Judy, my darling," she said, "I have very good news for you."

"For me," said Judy, flushing and paling almost in the same moment.

"Yes, my dear little pet, very nice news. Your darling Hilda is coming."

"Aunt Maggie!"

"Yes, here's a telegram from her. She says in it, '*Tell Judy to expect me at ten to-night*.' Why, my darling, how white you are! Babs, run and fetch me those smelling-salts. Now, Judy, just one whiff. Ah, now you're better."

"Yes, auntie, much, much, *much* better. I am only awfully happy."

Judy smiled, and the tears rushed to her eyes; her little thin hand trembled, she tried to push her drawing materials away.

"Please may I have the telegram?" she asked.

"Of course you may, my darling. Oh, and here

comes kind Miss Mills with your chicken-broth. Just the thing to set you up. Drink it off, dear. Miss Mills, our sweet Hilda is coming to-night. I have just had a telegram, she'll be here about ten."

"Who's to meet her?" asked Miss Mills. "You forget that there are no horses in the stables now, and no carriage in the coach-house."

"I did forget," said Aunt Marjorie. "I must send a message to Stephens to take a fly to the station."

"I'll go and tell him as soon as ever tea is over," answered Miss Mills. "Ah, Judy! You'll soon be well now, Judy, won't you?"

"I am well already," said Judy. "What delicious chicken-broth! Auntie dear, stoop down, I want to whisper something to you."

"Yes, my dearie, what is it?"

"I needn't be asleep when Hilda comes, need I? You will let me sit up in bed, won't you? I'll promise to be so quiet, I won't make a sound to disturb Babs, but I should love to be awake and waiting for darling Hilda. Please, please, auntie, say I may."

"My darling—until ten o'clock! so awfully late. Judy dear, you're getting quite feverish—you must calm yourself, my pet. Well, then, well, *anything* to soothe you. We'll see how you keep, dearie. If you don't get at all excited, I—I'll see what I shall do. Now I must leave you, darling, to go and get Hilda's room ready. I wonder if Jasper is coming with her, she doesn't say anything about him."

Aunt Marjorie trotted out of the room, Miss Mills started on her walk to the village, and Judy began to

speak eagerly to Babs.

"I am quite well," she said; "you'll never hear me sob again at night. I am quite the happiest girl in the world. Oh, think of kissing Hilda again; and I didn't fret, no, I didn't—not really. Babs, don't you think you might make the room look pretty? You might get out all the animals and put them on the chimney-piece."

"I'll be very glad to do that," replied Babs. "I often wanted to look at the darlings, but it was no fun when you didn't wish to play with them." She opened a little box as she spoke, and taking out china dogs, cats, cocks and hens, ducks, giraffes, elephants, monkeys, and many other varieties of the animal world, bestowed them with what taste she could manage on the mantelpiece. "Don't they look sweet!" she exclaimed. "I suppose you're not strong enough to have a game, Judy? If you could bray like the donkey, I'd be the roaring bull."

"To-morrow, perhaps, I can," said Judy, in a weak voice; "but the room is not half ready yet. I want you to pin some of my drawings and some of my texes on the wall. You'll find them in my own box if you open it."

"Yes, yes," said Babs in delight. "I do like making the room pretty for Hilda, and you ordering me. You may purtend if you like that I am your little servant."

"Very well; you're putting that picture upside down, Babs."

"Oh, how funny! Is that right?"

"No, it's awfully crooked."

For the next half-hour Babs labored hard, and Judy superintended, giving sharp criticisms and ordering the arrangements of the chamber with much peremptoriness.

"Now we must have flowers," she exclaimed. "You must go out to the garden, and pick all the violets you can get."

"But it's very late to go out," said Babs, "and Miss Mills will be angry."

"As if that mattered! Who cares who is angry when Hilda is coming? The worst Miss Mills can do is to punish you, and you won't mind that when you think about Hilda. I know where there are violets, white and blue, on that south bank after you pass the shrubbery; you know the bank where the bees burrow, and where we catch ladybirds in the summer; run, Babs, do run at once and pick all you can find."

Judy's room was decorated to perfection. Judy herself lay in her white bed, with pink roses on her cheeks, and eyes like two faintly shining stars, and smiles coming and going on her lips, and eager words dropping now and then from her impatient little tongue.

"What is the hour now, Aunt Marjorie? Is it really only half-past nine?"

"It is five-and-twenty to ten, Judy, and Miss Mills has gone in the fly to the station, and your Hilda will be back, if the train is punctual, by ten o'clock. How wonderfully well you look, my darling. I did right after all to let you sit up in bed to wait for your dear sister."

"Yes, I am quite well, only—I hope Jasper won't come too."

"Oh, fie! my pet. You know you ought not to say that treasonable sort of thing—Jasper is Jasper, one of the family, and we must welcome him as such—but between ourselves, just for no one else to hear in all the wide world, I do hope also that our dear little Hilda will come here by herself."

Judy threw her thin arms round Aunt Marjorie's neck and gave her a silent hug.

"I'll never breathe what you said," she whispered back in her emphatic voice.

Babs slept peacefully in her cot at the other end of the room. The white and blue violets lay in a tiny bowl on the little table by Judy's bed. The rumble of wheels was heard in the avenue. Aunt Marjorie started to her feet, and the color flew from Judy's face.

"It cannot be Hilda yet," exclaimed the aunt. "No, of course, it is the doctor. He will say that you are better to-night, Judy."

The medical man entered the room, felt the pulse of his little patient, looked into her eyes, and gave utterance to a few cheerful words.

"The child is much better, isn't she?" asked Aunt Marjorie, following him out of the room.

"Hum! I am not so sure; her pulse is weak and quick, and for some reason she is extremely excited. What is she sitting up in bed for? she ought to have been in the land of dreams a long time ago."

"Don't you know, Dr. Harvey; didn't we tell you,

my niece, Mrs. Quentyns, is expected to-night? and Judy is sitting up to see her."

"Suspense is very bad for my little patient. What time is Mrs. Quentyns expected to arrive?"

"About ten. Judy is especially attached to her sister, and if I had insisted on her trying to go to sleep, she would have tossed about and worked herself into a fever."

"She is very nearly in one now, and I don't particularly like the look of excitement in her eyes. I hope Mrs. Quentyns will be punctual. As soon as ever she comes, the child must settle to sleep. Give her a dose of that bromide mixture immediately after. I'll come and see her the first thing in the morning."

CHAPTER XI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

But she is far away
Now; nor the hours of night, grown hoar,
Bring, yet to me, long gazing, from the door,
The wind-stirred robe of roseate gray,
And rose-cream of the hour that leads the day,
When we shall meet once more.

—D. G. ROSSETTI.

Hilda Quentyns, Judy's idol, was not the strongest of characters. She was very sweet and amiable, intensely true and affectionate to those to whom she gave her heart, but she was somewhat timorous and somewhat easily led.

Long ago, when Babs was a baby, Hilda's mother had died. Since then Judy had been her special care.

Now with trembling hands she packed her portmanteau, gave the young cook and parlor-maid directions what to do in her absence, and then sitting down before her davenport, prepared to write an explanatory letter to her husband.

She thought it quite probable that Jasper would be angry with her for rushing off like this, but for once she intended to brave his displeasure.

In her heart of hearts she knew exactly the state Judy was in. The ardent soul was wearing out the delicate little frame. That suffering which Judy would not speak of, which she was too brave to show sign or whisper of, was making her body ill. If Hilda went to her darling, the suffering would cease. Love would shine all round Judy's starved heart, and she would soon be well and strong again.

"Yes, it is my manifest duty to go to her," whispered the wife to herself. "I will go to Little Staunton and nurse her for a few days, and when she is better she must come to London and live with me. Jasper won't like it—I know he won't like it, but he has really nothing to complain of, for I told him from the very first what Judy was to me. Yes, I must go, but I wish—I do wish that the train for Little Staunton left Waterloo at six instead of seven. I should be well on my journey before Jasper came

back. Oh, Jasper, my darling, why do I say words of this sort, as if I were—as if I could be—afraid of you!"

Hilda dipped her pen into the ink and wrote the first words of her letter.

"MY DEAREST HUSBAND:

"When you read this you will be surprised—"

A rather crooked dash of her pen finished this sentence—she was startled by a quick double knock at the front door. A moment later Susan, the neat maidservant, brought in a telegram on a salver.

"The boy is waiting to know if there is any answer," she said.

Hilda tore open the yellow envelope; her eyes rested on the following words:

"Rivers will dine with us. Have everything nice, and expect me home at 6.30.

"JASPER."

Mrs. Quentyns' first sensation was one of relief.

"It is all right," she exclaimed, looking up at the servant, who was startled at her mistress's pale cheeks. "I thought my little sister, Miss Judy, was

worse, but the telegram is from your master, Susan. Tell the boy there is no answer, and send cook to me without a moment's delay."

Susan left the room, and Hilda slipped the telegram into her pocket. She still felt only a sense of relief, and the first faint qualms as to what Jasper would think of her sudden departure had not begun to visit her. A knock was heard at the drawing-room door.

"Come in, come in," said the young mistress. "Oh, cook," exclaimed Hilda, "I have just had a telegram from your master. He is bringing a gentleman home to dine. A rather particular gentleman, and we want a specially nice dinner. I—I forget what I ordered this morning."

The fat cook bestowed a pitying glance upon Hilda.

"The boiled chicken was to be fricasseed, mum," she said, "and you ordered me to open one of the tins of oxtail soup; there were to be apple fritters afterward, and a cheese savory—that is all."

"Yes, yes," said Hilda, putting her hand to her head, "that dinner would have done very well for Mr. Quentyns and me, but we must make some alterations now. You had better run round to the fishmonger's, cook, and go to the butcher's, and order ——"

Hilda rushed to her davenport, scribbled some hasty directions on a piece of paper, and handed them to the servant.

"You must go this moment," she said, "it is six o'clock now; and please call at the green-grocer's on

your way back, and get a pound of bananas and some Tangerine oranges. I will see that the wine is all right, and speak to Susan about the table while you are out. Run, cook, run, at once—things must look their *very* best, and be served in the best possible manner for dinner to-night."

The cook muttered something unintelligible, and by no means too well pleased with her errand, departed.

Hilda called Susan, and going into the dining room helped her to decorate the table; then after impressing upon the neat little parlor-maid the necessity of doing what she could to help cook in this sudden emergency, she ran upstairs to put on her bonnet and jacket, for the time had almost arrived when she must start on her journey. She had just come downstairs when the click of the latch-key was heard, and Jasper, in excellent spirits, entered the house.

"Well, my love," he said, going up to his wife and kissing her; "oh, you have been out!—did you get my telegram? I told Rivers we should not dine until half-past seven, in order to give you plenty of time to prepare. Perhaps you have been ordering some things for dinner, Hilda; that is right, and just what I should have expected of you. I am particularly anxious that Rivers should see that I have got the sweetest, prettiest, and best little wife and housekeeper in the world."

For some reason which she could not explain, even to herself, Hilda felt her tongue tied. She returned her husband's kiss, and when he entered the tiny dining room she followed him.

"Very nice, very nice," he exclaimed, looking with approval at the dinner-table, which was charmingly decorated with pink Liberty silk and white flowers. "But what is this?" he added suddenly, "there are only two places laid. One for you and one for me. We must ring for Susan at once—I think Rivers would rather sit at the side, away from the fire."

"I—Jasper, I want to tell you something."

"What is it? how pale you are, darling!"

"I want to tell you something," repeated Hilda; "I—I am not going to dine with you to-night."

"What do you mean, my dear girl—are you ill? what can be the matter?"

"I am not ill, but Judy is—I am going down to Little Staunton. I have telegraphed to them to expect me by the train due at 9.40, and it is time for me to go. Is that you, Susan? Please would you order a hansom at once?"

Susan instantly left the room, closing the door behind her.

For nearly half a minute Quentyns was silent, a great wave of color had rushed over his face, and it was with difficulty he could keep back some annoyed and some sarcastic words. He was a man who prided himself on having great self-control, and before he uttered his first sentence he felt that he had recovered it.

"You're trembling, dear," he said gently, "and you —you absolutely look as if you were *afraid* of me. Come into the drawing room, love, and tell me what is wrong with Judy. My *bête noire*, Judy! what has

been her last transgression?"

"Jasper, don't, don't," said Hilda, in a voice of pain. "Judy is really ill this time—she fainted in church on Sunday; she is in bed now, and the doctor says she is very weak."

"I suppose so, or she would not have fainted. I used constantly to faint when I was a child—the slightest thing sent me off. I was not kept in bed afterward, for children were not cockered up and fussed over when I was young. My faint was generally traced to over-eating. If you must go down to see Judy, I don't wish to prevent you, Hilda, but why go to-night?"

"Oh, Jasper, I must—I must run away this instant too, for I hear the cab—I telegraphed to say I would go."

Jasper put on a new stubborn look which Hilda had never seen before.

"I don't wish to coerce you," he said, in a cold voice, "you're perfectly free to act as you think right in the matter. I can go down with you by an early train in the morning, or you can go by yourself now, and put me to extreme inconvenience. You're at liberty to choose."

"Don't speak like that, Jasper, you pain me so dreadfully."

"I fail to see how I am paining you, I am giving you a free choice. You can be with Judy before noon to-morrow, or you can go immediately."

"I sent a telegram to her to expect me; it is so bad for sick children to be kept waiting."

"So it seems. Yes, Susan, tell the cab to wait."

Susan left the room, and heavy tears gathered in Hilda's eyes.

"Can I send another telegram?" she asked weakly.

"I don't believe you can, the telegraph office will be closed at Little Staunton. Never mind, Hilda, you had better go; I am disappointed, annoyed, of course, but what of that? What is a husband to a sick sister? Go, my dear, or you will miss your train!"

"No, I won't go," said Hilda; "you have made it impossible for me to go. I'll stay and entertain your guest, and Judy will suffer. Yes; don't kiss me just now, Jasper; I think you are cruel, but I'll stay."

Hilda went over to the bell and rang it.

Susan answered the summons.

"Give the cabman this shilling," said Mrs. Quentyns, "and tell him that he is not required."

"You have done quite right, my love," said Quentyns, "and when you have got over your first little feeling of annoyance you will see the matter in the same light that I do. I'll telegraph to Little Staunton early in the morning to tell them to expect us by the 11.35 train. Of course Judy would have been asleep hours before you reached her to-night, so it does not really matter in the least. Now come upstairs and put on your very prettiest dress, that soft pink *chiffon*, in which you look as like a rosebud as a living woman can. I have capital news for you, Hilda, my love; Rivers certainly is a brick; he has got me to act as counsel in——"

Quentyns talked on in his satisfied, joyous tones. He had won the victory, and could afford to be very

gracious and generous. Hilda felt as if a band of iron had closed round her heart. She was too gentle and sweet in her nature to be long angry with her husband. Her face was a little paler than usual, however, and her eyes had a weary look in them.

Rivers, who was a very keen observer of human nature, noticed the silent depression which hung over her, but Hilda's husband failed to observe it.

"I can easily manage her," he muttered to himself; "it would have been beyond all reason to have had her absent from our first little dinner just because a child had fainted. Pshaw!—I can see that Hilda is going to be painfully fanciful; it all comes from having lived so long in the wilds of the country. Well, I'll take her down to Little Staunton to-morrow, and be specially good to her, but she must get over these absurdities about Judy, or life will not be worth living."

The dinner was a success, and Hilda looked lovely. A certain dreamy and far-away expression in her eyes added the final touch to her beauty. When the men sat together over their wine, Rivers spoke of her in tones of rapture.

"You're the luckiest fellow in Christendom, Jasper," he said; and Jasper Quentyns, who looked up to Tom Rivers as the first of men, felt almost unduly elated.

"The lines had fallen unto him in pleasant places," so he muttered, and he forgot all about a sick and troublesome child, who at this very instant was counting the moments as they flew by, in her tired and weary eagerness to clasp her arms round Hilda's neck. Hilda, too, in the drawing room, was shedding silent tears, but what did that matter? for Jasper

knew nothing about them.

Jasper and Hilda were both musical, and Tom Rivers liked nothing better than to listen to their voices as they sang duet after duet together. The songs they sung were full of noble sentiment. Their voices mingled until they almost sounded like one rich and perfect note, as they sang of love which is undying and self-sacrifice which is ennobling. Quentyns felt a glow of elation filling his breast as his eyes rested on his lovely wife, and the tormentings of Hilda's conscience were soothed, and she too partly forgot Judy.

Breakfast was served at an early hour next morning at Philippa Terrace, and Quentyns and his wife started for Little Staunton in time to catch the early train.

They arrived at the small way-side station not more than twenty minutes beyond the appointed time, and were met by Miss Mills, who was driving the village pony cart herself.

The governess addressed Hilda in a calm voice, but her inward excitement was very manifest. Jasper had talked cheerfully all the way down to Little Staunton, but Hilda had been almost silent. She felt oppressed —she dreaded she knew not what. Now, when she looked into Miss Mills' face, she felt her own turn pale.

"No, don't speak," she said, in a hoarse whisper. "I *know* you have bad news, but don't tell me now, not until we get home."

"Get in," said Miss Mills, "I won't be long driving you to the Rectory. It is rather important for you to

be there, and as the trap only holds two, perhaps Mr. Quentyns won't mind walking."

"Not at all," said Jasper, in his pleasant, calm voice. "Can you make room for our portmanteau at your feet, Miss Mills? Ah, yes, that will do nicely. By the way, how are you all? has Judy quite recovered from her faint?"

When Quentyns asked this question Miss Mills bent suddenly forward under the pretense of trying to arrange the portmanteau.

"We won't be any time getting to the Rectory," she said, turning to Hilda; she touched the pony with her whip as she spoke and they started forward.

"It was such a pity you didn't come last night," said the governess, as they entered the Rectory gates.

"I—I could not help it," murmured poor Hilda. With one hand she was tightly grasping the edge of the little basket-carriage.

"Stop, there is father," she exclaimed suddenly. "Let me go to him. I—I can bear him to tell me if there is anything wrong."

In an instant she reached the Rector's side. Her arms were round his neck, her head on his shoulder, and she was sobbing her heart out on his breast.

"My dearest Hilda, my darling!" exclaimed her father. "What is the meaning of all this? Why are you so dreadfully unhappy, my child?"

"Tell me, father, I can bear it from you. Is she—is she dead?"

"Is who dead?"

"Ju—Judy."

"No; what has put that into your head? But your little sister is very ill, Hilda. I am not so much alarmed about her as your Aunt Marjorie is, but I confess her state puzzles me. I saw Dr. Harvey to-day, and I don't think he is satisfied either. It seems that for some reason the child was over-excited last night—there was difficulty in getting her off to sleep, and she cried in a very distressing and painful way. I was obliged to sit with her myself. I held her hand, poor little darling, and had a prayer with her, and—toward morning she dropped off into a sleep."

"And," continued Hilda, "she was better when she awoke, wasn't she? Do say she was, father. You showed her Jasper's telegram the very instant she awoke, and of course she got much better immediately."

"My dear Hilda, the strange thing about Judy has yet to be told; she has not awakened—she is still asleep, and this prolonged and unnatural sleep disturbs Dr. Harvey a good deal."

"I had better go to her at once, father. I think the doctor *must* be mistaken in thinking sleep bad. When Judy sees me sitting by her bedside she will soon cheer up and get like her old self. I'll run to her now, father: I don't feel half so much alarmed since you tell me that she is only asleep."

The Rector gave vent to a troubled sigh; Hilda put wings to her feet, and with the lightness and grace of a bird sped toward the house.

"Hilda, Hilda!" called her husband. He had taken a short cut across some fields, and was now entering

the Rectory domain. He thought it would be quite the correct thing for his wife to wait for him. Surely she would like to enter her family circle with him by her side. "Hilda, stop!" he cried, and he hurried his own footsteps.

But if Hilda heard she did not heed. She rushed on, and soon disappeared from view inside the deep portico of the old house.

Two or three moments later she was sitting without her hat and jacket, and with a pair of noiseless house-slippers on her feet, by Judy's bedside.

All the preparations which had been made with such care and pains by Babs the night before were still making the nursery look pretty. The little china animals sat in many funny groups on the mantelpiece. The white and blue violets lay in a large bowl on a table by Judy's side. One of the little sleeper's hands was thrown outside the counterpane. Hilda touched it, and found that it burned with a queer, uncomfortable dry heat.

"But how quietly she is sleeping," said Mrs. Quentyns, looking up with tears in her eyes at Aunt Marjorie; "why are you so solemn and sad?—surely this sleep must be good for her."

"My dear, Dr. Harvey calls Judy's state more stupor than sleep. He says the most extraordinary things about the child ... that she has been over-excited and subjected to a severe mental strain, and he fears mischief to the brain. But surely he must be wrong, for nothing *could* exceed the quiet of our life at the Rectory since the money has gone and you have left us, and no one could have been less excited in her

ways than Judy has been since your marriage. I can't make out what Dr. Harvey means."

"I think I partly understand," said Hilda; her voice had a choking sound. "Don't talk so loud, Aunt Marjorie," she said impatiently; "you will wake her—you will disturb her."

"But that is what we wish," interrupted the old lady. "The doctor says we must do everything in our power to rouse her. Ah, and here he comes; he will speak for himself."

"I am glad to see you, Mrs. Quentyns," said Dr. Harvey. "Your not coming last night when the child expected you was a grave mistake, but better late than never."

He stopped speaking then, and bent over the little sleeper.

"Draw up the blind," he said to Aunt Marjorie, "let us have all the light we can. Now don't be frightened, Mrs. Quentyns—I am not going to hurt the child, but I must examine her eyes."

Hilda felt as if she could scarcely restrain a stifled scream as the doctor lifted first one lid and then the other, and looked into the dark depths of the sweet eyes.

"The child has got a shock," he said then. "I feared it when I called early this morning. I don't say for a moment that she will not get better, but her state is very precarious. I should like you to nurse her altogether, Mrs. Quentyns; much depends on her seeing you by her side when she wakes."

"I shall never leave her again," said Hilda, in a

stifled tone.

The doctor's practiced ear caught the suppressed hysteria in her voice.

"Come, come," he said cheerily, "you have nothing to blame yourself for. The little one has evidently felt your absence in a remarkable manner."

"Really, doctor, you are quite mistaken," began Aunt Marjorie. "What I principally noticed about Judy was her great quietness and docility since Hilda left. She scarcely spoke of her sister, and seemed content to sit by my side and read fairy stories. She used to be such a very excitable, troublesome sort of child. If you ask me frankly, I think Hilda's absence did her good."

The doctor looked from the old lady to the young.

"I must adhere to my first opinion," he said. "The child has missed her sister. Now that you have come, Mrs. Quentyns, we will hope for the best."

He went out of the room as he spoke, and Aunt Marjorie followed him.

Hilda dropped on her knees by Judy's cot.

"Oh, my God, forgive me," she cried, in a broken anguished prayer. "I did wrong to leave my little Judy. Oh, God, only spare her life, and I will vow to you that *whatever* happens she shall never leave me in the time to come. Whatever happens," repeated Hilda, in a choking voice of great agony. Then she rose and took her place beside the child's bed.

A couple of hours passed by. The door was softly opened, and Quentyns stole into the room. He had been very much shocked by the doctor's account of

the child, and his face and tone expressed real sympathy as he came up to Hilda.

"Poor little Judy!" he said, bending over her. "What a queer excitable little mite it is."

Hilda beat her foot impatiently.

"Well, my darling," continued Quentyns, not noticing his wife's suppressed agitation, "she will soon be all right now you have come. Lunch is ready, Hilda, and you must be weak for want of food. Come, dearest, let me take you down to the dining room."

"Oh, no, Jasper! I can't leave Judy; and please, please don't talk so loud."

"The doctor does not wish her to be kept *too* quiet, Hilda; and surely, my dear, you are not going to starve yourself!"

"Aunt Marjorie will send me something to the dressing room; I can't be away from Judy even for one minute. There is no saying when she will awake, and I must be with her when she does."

Quentyns smothered an impatient exclamation. After a pause he said gently:

"As you please, dear; I will bring something up myself to the dressing room for you," and he stole on tip-toe out of the room.

Nothing could be more patient than his manner, and Hilda reproached herself for the feeling of irritation which his presence gave her.

There came a sigh from the bed—the faintest of sounds; Mrs. Quentyns turned her head quickly, and

saw to her rapture that Judy's big greeny-gray eyes were wide open and fixed earnestly on her face. There was no surprise in the pretty eyes, nor any additional color in the pale little face.

"Hilda," said Judy, "I *thought* it was only a bad dream—you never went away, did you?"

"I am never going to leave you again, Judy," replied her sister; "never, never, as long as we both live. I vow—I promise—nothing shall part us, nothing except death."

Hilda flung herself on her knees by the child's bed, and burst into hysterical sobs.

CHAPTER XII.

HILDA'S ENGAGEMENT RING.

My heart is heavy for scorn,
Mine eyes with impatient tears,
But heaven looks blue through the cherry-blooms,
And preaches away my fears.

—Emily Pfeiffer.

Contrary to the doctor's fears, and in accordance with Hilda's hopes, Judy grew better. A weight had been lifted from her heart—her starved affections

were nourished and soothed once more. Hilda scarcely ever left her room, and Hilda's presence was perpetual sunshine to the child.

No one could possibly have behaved better than Quentyns did during this trying time. A certain feeling of compunction had visited him when he discovered how real Judy's illness was. He was assailed by a momentary pricking of his conscience, but as the little girl quickly grew better, and was soon pronounced by the doctor to be quite out of danger, it was but natural that an active man of the world like Quentyns should wish to return to town, should find the quiet Rectory simply unendurable, and also that he should wish to take his young wife with him.

The Quentyns arrived at Staunton Rectory on a certain Wednesday, and on the following Sunday evening Quentyns thought the time had arrived for him to speak to Hilda about their return to town. He had not seen much of her during the days which had intervened, and he was obliged now to send Babs with a message to Judy's room to ask his wife to come to him.

Hilda was reading aloud to Judy when Babs entered the room, and said in her important, calm way:

"Jasper wants you, Hilda, and you are to go to him this minute."

Hilda could read beautifully, and Judy had lain in a dream of rapture, listening to the beloved voice as it told the old story of Christian and his pilgrimage. Now the wistful, distressed look crept back into her face.

"Never mind, dear," said Hilda, bending forward and kissing the child. "I shall not be long away."

Quentyns was waiting for his wife in the large conservatory which opened into the drawing room. It was nearly empty of flowers and plants now, but was still a pleasant place to lounge about in.

"Well, my love," he said in his pleasant tone. "Why, how pale you look, Hilda. I am not going to scold you, darling—oh, no, not for the world; but I haven't got too much of your society during these last few days. I don't blame you, and I am not jealous; but if you *could* spare me half an hour now, there are one or two things I want to talk over with you."

"Of course I can spare you half an hour, Jasper, or an hour for that matter, if you want it," replied Hilda cheerfully. "Judy is much, much better to-night, and I am feeling quite happy about her."

Hilda slipped her hand through her husband's arm as she spoke; he gave the little hand an affectionate squeeze and drew his wife close to his side.

"I am glad Judy is better," he said. "What I have to propose will be quite convenient then, Hilda. I want to go back to town by the first train in the morning. I have heard from Rivers, and——What is it, my love? You really do look very pale. You are overdoing yourself, and I cannot allow it. Now that Judy is better you must rest. I shall get Dr. Pettifer to look you up and give you a tonic when we get back to town."

"Stop, Jasper," said Hilda suddenly. "I am not tired nor worn out in any way. I look pale now because my heart beats—because——Jasper, I cannot go to

town with you to-morrow. I know you must go; of course, I quite understand that; but I am not going—not until Judy is well enough to be moved."

Quentyns did not reply for several seconds, then he said in a gentle tone, which did not betray an atom of his true feeling:

"I half expected you to say something of this sort, Hilda; I cannot pretend that I am not sorry. The fine weather is coming on; the London season will soon be at its height. I do not mean for a moment to imply that we can avail ourselves of what is termed a season in town, but for a poor and struggling man it is essential that he should leave no stone unturned to introduce himself to those persons who can and will help him. The influential sort of people who can materially assist me in my career are now in London, Hilda. You, my darling, are an excuse for many valuable introductions. You see, therefore, that not alone from an affectionate point of view you ought now to be with me. But," continued Jasper, looking straight ahead of him, and fixing his fine, intelligent eyes on the distant landscape, "I waive all that. I understand that you do not wish to leave Judy until she is fit to be moved to the seaside. If she maintains the progress she is now making, Dr. Harvey will probably allow Aunt Marjorie to take her away at the end of the week. I shall have you home on Saturday at the latest, Hilda."

"Yes," said Hilda. "I hope so, but—but, Jasper, you still fail to understand me. When Judy goes away, she is not going to the seaside—she is coming with me to London—to Philippa Terrace. It is a promise, and I—I won't—I can't go back from it. I stand or fall by my promise, Jasper—I wish to say so now once

for all."

"You stand or fall by your promise!" repeated Quentyns. "What an extraordinary remark. One would suppose, my darling, that I was an ogre or the worst sort of tyrant. I always told you that Judy should come to stay with us for a few weeks when we had a room to receive her in. If matters progress as satisfactorily as I hope, we shall have a snug, prettily furnished, little spare room by the end of the present season. I promise you, Hilda, that Judy shall be its first tenant."

Hilda laid her hand with a sort of trembling, nervous impatience, on her husband's arm.

"I have made a mistake—I have been a coward," she said. "Even now, Jasper, you don't a bit understand me. Long ago, when mother died, she left Judy in my charge. I ought never to have married and left her. Judy is not an ordinary child, and she suffered. When I went away her heart was starved. She could not live with a starved heart. In my absence, my little Judy nearly died. She is better now —she is recovering because I am with her. I am never going to leave her again while she lives."

"Hilda, what nonsense you talk," said Quentyns, with temper in his tone. "If Judy lives to grow up, she will marry like other girls—and will leave you of her own accord."

"If she does," replied Hilda, "that alters the case, but until she leaves me by her own wish or marries, she is in my charge. I will not be parted from her, Jasper. I shall not return to Philippa Terrace until I can bring her with me."

"Is that really your final decision?" said Quentyns—he turned round now and looked at his wife; his face was very cold, its expression carefully veiled. He was intensely anxious not to show even a trace of ill-temper. His words were guarded. "Is that your final decision, Hilda?" he said, and there was a fine withering sort of sarcasm in his voice. "Do you mean seriously to desert the husband you married not three months ago for the sake of a child's whim? Is that the way you keep your marriage vow?"

"No, no, Jasper! I want to be true to you both. I made two vows, and I want to keep them both. Help me, Jasper; I am not a bit a strong-minded girl, I am just very loving. My heart is full of love to you and to Judy. Help me to do this—help me to love you both, to serve you both. Go back to town to-morrow and furnish the spare room, and I will bring Judy back with me on Friday or Saturday."

"I said I should not run in debt. I have no more money to spend on furniture at present. You don't really care for me, Hilda, or you would never speak as you do. But, once for all, I will not be drawn into a path which simply means ruin for the sake of any woman, and for the ridiculous fancies of any child. I will buy no furniture until I can pay for it. That ends the matter, my dear. If you are determined to stay at the Rectory for the summer, they will all, I am sure, be charmed to have you, and I will try and run down as often as I can. I need not say that I think you are making a most grave mistake, but a willful woman must e'en have her way, I suppose. Ah, and here comes the Rector, he has just returned from evening service."

Quentyns went toward the door of the

conservatory, which he flung open. Mr. Merton was just entering his drawing room.

"One moment, Jasper—one moment," said Hilda; she rushed after her husband, her face was like death, her eyes were blazing with passion.

"Your cruel words make anything possible," she said. "I made two vows before God, and I will keep them both. There, this was costly, I presume. You spent money on it—sell it again, and buy the furniture that you will not go in debt for."

She thrust her engagement ring into Quentyns' hand and rushed away.

CHAPTER XIII.

JUDY'S ROOM.

An ear that waits to catch
A hand upon the latch.

—DORA GREENWELL.

"Here is a letter from Jasper, Hilda darling," said Aunt Marjorie, coming into Judy's bedroom two or three days after the events mentioned in the last chapter. "I know the hand-writing, dear. How strong and manly it looks. I do love a manly hand, don't

you?"

Hilda did not reply. She rose from her seat by Judy's side, and taking her husband's letter, walked to the window, and, standing with her back to the light, opened it eagerly. Her face was a little pale and worn, and her eyes had tired lines under them. No one had noticed any change in her, however. Judy was fast recovering—each day her spirits rose, her appetite improved, her strength grew greater. She was to be taken into Hilda's old boudoir to-day, and Babs was importantly moving the beloved china animals, arranging flowers, and getting the room ready for the great event.

Aunt Marjorie, after her usual fashion, fussed over Judy while Hilda read her letter. It was brief, but somehow it gave the young wife unexpected hope and pleasure:

"MY DEAREST WIFE:

"Pray forgive me for not writing sooner, but I have been exceedingly busy since I returned to town, and have dined each night with Rivers at his club. I send a hasty line now to say that you can bring Judy back to Philippa Terrace whenever she is strong enough to be moved, as I have given Shoolbred full directions with regard to furnishing the spare room, and have just had a letter from him to say the goods will be delivered to-day.

"Pray don't tire yourself more
than is necessary. And believe me,

Your affectionate
husband,
"JASPER QUENTYNS."

"Judy," said Hilda—she turned eagerly, the old lovely color mantling her cheeks, and the brightness of hope filling her eyes. "Isn't Jasper good, Judy? I have just heard from him—he says the furniture is coming in for your room to-day. We can go back to town as soon as ever Dr. Harvey thinks you strong enough to be moved, my pet."

"Which won't be this week," interrupted Aunt Marjorie. "It would be the sheerest madness. Has Jasper proposed such a thing, Hilda? If so, I can only say how like a man. In about a fortnight, this dear child may be the better for change of air.... I have no doubt too that Dr. Harvey will be pleased to have a London opinion about her. There may be a weakness of the heart's action. I never am easy about people who faint off suddenly. Now, Judy, why do you flush up? you know you oughtn't to listen when Auntie talks to Hilda about you. Go on reading your pretty story book, my love. Yes, Hilda, I should like the child to see a first-class physician. You know your mother's heart was not strong. He will doubtless order cod-liver oil, but for my part I prefer cream."

"I know something better than cream for Judy—don't I, my pet?" said Hilda, turning to her little sister with her bright smile.

"And so do I," replied Judy. "Oh, Hilda, to think of living with you in your own little house! Oh, Hilda,

I'm *too* happy—I am so happy that my heart aches. It aches with pleasure."

Judy's thin arms were flung round her sister's neck. Her lips pressed Hilda's soft young cheek, her eyes looked into Hilda's. It seemed to them both at that moment that soul answered to soul.

"Now what nonsense this is," said Aunt Marjorie in her fussy tones. "Judy, I hope Hilda is not going to encourage you in silly sentimental talk of that kind. You say your heart aches with pleasure. Really, my dear, I have no patience to listen to you. I should like to know what a child like you knows about heart-aches—you, who have been brought up in what I may call the very lap of luxury. For, Hilda, I have made it the object of my life ever since poverty came to us, to prevent even the slightest shadow of its wings touching the children. They have had their excellent governess, and their warm schoolroom and snug bedroom. I cut down one of my own fur cloaks to give them really nice winter jackets, and I took special care that the schoolroom table should be as liberal as ever. It is impossible, therefore, for me to understand Judy's silly words about her heart aching."

Aunt Marjorie left the room, and Judy still softly rubbed her cheek against Hilda's.

"But my heart did ache," she said after a pause—"it aches with joy now, and it did ache—oh, it kept crying, it felt starved without you, Hilda."

"I understand—yes, I understand," replied Hilda.

"You don't mind what Aunt Marjorie says then?"

"Not about you, my own little love."

"Hilda, I did really try very, very hard not to fret."

"The effort was too much for you, my Judy; but never mind, the pain and the parting are all over now. Isn't it kind of your new brother—isn't it kind of dear, dear Jasper—to get the nice little room furnished and ready for you, darling?"

"Yes, Hilda. Has he gone in debt for the furniture? You told me long ago that the room would have been furnished and that I should have come to you, but there was no money left, and Jasper would not go in debt. Has he really gone in debt now, just to please me?"

"No, my love, no—we have managed. You must not ask inquisitive questions. All is right now, and we shall be very happy together."

Dr. Harvey was highly pleased, when he heard that his little patient was going to London with her sister. He was a man with plenty of observation, and he could read between the lines much better than poor obtuse old Aunt Marjorie.

"You are the right physician for your little sister, Mrs. Quentyns," he said. "I prophesy that Miss Judy will become perfectly strong and well in a short time under your care. Yes, there will be nothing to prevent her traveling to town on Saturday next, if you really wish it. The weather is extraordinarily mild for the time of year, and a change will do Judy more good than anything else."

Hilda wrote a joyful letter to her husband that day.

"You are to expect us both on Saturday," she said. "Oh, Jasper, how happy your letter has made me. How good—how really good you are. Please forgive

me if I was a little hasty with you the other evening. I know you will never regret, darling husband, helping me to keep both my vows—the vow I made to you, and the vow I made mother. No one ever had a more loving wife than I shall prove to you, and no one ever had a dearer little sister than you will find my Judy when you really know her."

"Her Judy, indeed!" murmured Quentyns, when he read his wife's letter at his breakfast-table on the following morning. "Tiresome little piece—she'll never be *my* Judy, however much she may be Hilda's. Well, I suppose I must make the best of a bad job, but if I had known beforehand that that wretched sentimental child was to be tacked on to us, I'd have thought twice.... No, I wouldn't though, I love Hilda well enough to bear some inconvenience for her sake; but if she thinks this step will really add to our happiness, she'll soon find her mistake. Fancy her asking me to sell her engagement ring! I can never get over that. Things can't be quite the same again—it's impossible. Well, well, more than one friend has told me I'd wake from my dream of bliss some day. I have, with a vengeance—it has been something of a shock too. Heigho! I am not going to *look* like defeat, anyhow. Of course, too, I'll be just the same to Hilda outwardly. Ah, there's Susan—I'd better speak to her and get her to tell cook. This is Thursday—they'll be here in two days."

"Susan," as the neat parlor-maid entered the room, "I have had a letter from your mistress. She is coming home on Saturday, and will bring little Miss Merton with her. Have the things come from Shoolbred's yet?"

"The furniture, sir, for the spare room? Yes, it

arrived yesterday, and the man is coming to lay down the carpet and put up the curtains this morning."

"Well, Susan, you get the room ready, and have the bed well aired, and tell me if there's anything more wanted—the child has been ill, and she'll require every comfort. Mrs. Quentyns will wish the room to look as nice as possible. I know nothing about these matters—see to it, Susan, will you?"

"Yes, sir; you may depend on me and cook to do everything right——"

"And tell cook about your mistress. Let me see, they'll be home between five and six on Saturday evening. I shan't dine at home to-night, and if a telegram comes for me, I want you to wire to my city address. This is it."

Quentyns left the house, and Susan and the cook spent a busy day in dusting, polishing, sweeping, and cleaning.

The little spare room looked very sweet and bright with the simple tasty furniture which Quentyns had chosen. The small bed was inviting in its white draperies. The furniture, painted in artistic greens, had a cool and young effect. The room looked like a child's room, and Susan and cook were in ecstasies over its appearance.

"Master *'ave* taste and no mistake," said cook. "But why don't he come and look for 'isself at all we have done, Susan? So natty as everything looks, and the furniture master's taste and all. Won't missis be pleased! But why don't he come and say what he thinks of how we has put the things, Susan?"

"Never you mind," said Susan. "Master knows as the arranging of furniture is woman's province—there's no fussing in him, and that's what I likes him for."

Saturday arrived in due time, and the little house in Philippa Terrace was in apple-pie order.

As Quentyns was leaving for town that morning, Susan waylaid him.

"What hour shall I tell my missis that we may expect you home, sir?" she asked. "Mrs. Quentyns and the little lady will be here by six, and the very first thing my missis will ask is, when you are coming in."

"Say," began Quentyns—he paused. "I'll write a line," he said; "you can give it to your mistress. I shan't be in to dinner to-night, and cook had better prepare tea for Mrs. Quentyns and Miss Merton, with fish or chops or something of that sort. I'll write a line—I'm glad you reminded me, Susan."

Quentyns went into his tiny little study, and wrote a few hasty words.

> "DEAR HILDA: I have some important work to get through to-night, and shall not be back early. I have the latch-key, so no one need sit up. I shall dine at the club with Rivers. Go to bed early if you are tired.
>
> "Your Affectionate
> Husband."

This letter was handed to Hilda on her arrival. She was too excited and too interested in getting Judy into the house, and showing her all the pleasant arrangements made for her comfort, to read it at first; but when her tired little sister was safe in bed, and Hilda had seen her enjoying a cup of tea, with some toast and a new-laid country egg, then she took Jasper's note out of her pocket.

She was in her own room, and she hesitated for a moment before she opened it. She had a kind of premonition that there was pain in it. Her home-coming had made her happy, and even while she was opening the envelope of Jasper's letter she was listening for the click of his latch-key in the hall-door lock.

He was always home in good time on Saturdays, and surely he would make extra haste to-night in order to give his wife and his little sister a hearty welcome.

Hilda's was the most forgiving nature in the world. During that scene in the conservatory at Little Staunton she had lost her temper with her husband, but she felt quite sure now that her hasty words must be forgotten. As she forgave absolutely, so would he. Why had he written to her therefore? Why was he not here? She pulled the note out of its envelope, and read the few words that it contained.

It is not too much to say that her heart sank down, down, very low indeed in her breast. She became conscious for the first time in her life of that heart-hunger, that absolute starved sort of ache which had so nearly wrecked Judy's little life. This was the first pang of pain, but the ache was to go on and become worse presently.

Hilda was a very patient sort of woman, however, and it did not occur to her to cry out or make a fuss. She read the note twice, then put it into her pocket and went downstairs.

"Tell cook that I don't want any dinner," she said to Susan; "I will have my tea upstairs with Miss Judy. Tell her not to get dinner, as Mr. Quentyns is obliged to be out this evening."

"Hilda," called Judy's weak little voice from out of her luxurious white bed; "Hilda, do come here a minute."

Hilda went immediately into the room.

"I am so happy and so sleepy," said Judy. "I'm like a bird in a nest—oh, I am so snug. Jasper will be coming in presently, won't he, Hilda? and you'll want to be with him. I shan't need you at all to-night, Hilda darling; I'm going to sleep very soon, and I just sent for you now to say that you mustn't come up to me after dinner—you must stay with Jasper and let him amuse you. I am sure you want lots of amusement after all the dull nursing you have had. Go and put on your pretty dinner dress now, Hilda, and then come and look at me and say good-night. I am so awfully happy, and I just want one kiss from you before I go to sleep."

"But you don't want to go to sleep yet, little puss," said Hilda, in her most cheerful tone; "at least I hope you don't until I have had my tea. I want to have my tea with you, darling, so I hope you don't mind putting up with my company for a little longer."

"As if I could mind—you know better. But, Hilda, if you have tea now you won't be hungry for your

dinner."

Judy puckered her dark brows with anxiety.

"I'm not going to have dinner."

"You aren't—not really! then what will Jasper say?"

"I've had a little letter from Jasper, darling; he is obliged to be out late on business, and won't dine at home to-night. Ah, here comes Susan with another new-laid egg for me, and some fresh toast. Now I am going to have a delightful little supper in your company, Judy, and then I shall settle you for the night."

Hilda talked faster than was her wont; there was an additional rose-color in her pretty cheeks, and a brighter light than usual in her soft brown eyes. She laughed and jested and made merry over her egg and toast.

"How pretty you look!" said Judy, with a heart-whole sigh of admiration and content.

She saw nothing wrong, and Hilda kissed her and left the room a few minutes later.

She was still wearing her heavy traveling-dress, but after a moment's reflection she went into her bedroom, and quickly changed it for a pale silk dress of the softest shade of rose. This dress was a special favorite of her husband's; he used to liken her to a rosebud in it, and said that no color more truly matched the soft tender bloom of her young face.

Hilda put on the rose silk now, arranged her dark hair picturesquely, and going downstairs to the little drawing room, occupied herself for an hour or more

in giving it some of those delicate touches which make the difference between the mistress of the house being at home and away.

It was a very warm evening for the time of year, but Hilda had a fire lit in the grate. The shaded lamp shed a softened golden glow in its accustomed corner of the room, and Jasper's favorite chair was placed ready for his reception; then Hilda sank down into her own easy-chair, and taking up a book, tried to read.

Susan came presently into the room.

"Oh, Susan," said her mistress, "I was about to ring for you. It has struck ten o'clock; you and cook are to go to bed, please; I will wait up for Mr. Quentyns."

"If you please, ma'am," said Susan.

She stopped and hesitated.

"Yes, Susan?" answered Mrs. Quentyns, in a gentle interrogative tone.

"If you please, ma'am, master has been very late coming home when you was in the country—not till past midnight most nights."

"Thank you, Susan; but Mr. Quentyns will probably be in earlier to-night, and I wish to remain up. Go to bed, and tell cook to do the same. Oh, and please, I should like Miss Judy to have a cup of tea brought to her room at eight to-morrow morning. Good-night, Susan."

The parlor-maid withdrew.

"And don't she look beautiful as a pictur," she muttered under her breath. "Pore young lady, I doubt

if she's pleased with master though. Him staying away and all on the first night as she comes back. I wouldn't set up for him ef I were her—no, that I wouldn't; I wouldn't make so little of myself; but she's proud, too, is Mrs. Quentyns, and she don't let on; no, not a bit. Well, I respect her for that, but I misdoubt me if all is right atween that pair."

Susan went upstairs to confide her suspicions to cook. They talked in low whispers together, and wondered what the mystery could be which was keeping Quentyns from his pretty wife's side.

In the meantime, in the silent house the moments for the one anxious watcher went slowly by. Her novel was not interesting—she let it fall on her knees, and looking at the little clock on the mantelpiece, counted the moments until eleven should strike. She quite expected that Jasper would be home at eleven. It did not enter for a moment into her calculations that he could be absent on this first night of her return beyond that hour. When the eleven musical strokes sounded on the little clock, and were echoed in many deeper booms from without, she got up, and opening the drawing-room door, stepped out into the little hall.

Footsteps kept passing and passing in the street. Cabs kept rolling up to other doors and rolling away again. Jasper must surely arrive at any moment.

Hilda softly opened the hall door, and standing on the steps, looked up and down the gas-lit street. If Jasper were walking home he would see her. The lamp light from within threw her slim figure into strong relief. A man passing by stopped for an instant to look at her.

Hilda shut the hall door hastily in fear and distress. The man had looked as if he might say something rude. She returned to her little drawing room, and sitting down by the dying fire stared fixedly into its embers until her eyes were full of tears.

Between twelve and one Quentyns let himself softly into the house with his latch-key. He was immediately attracted by the light in the drawing room, the door of which was slightly ajar. He came into the room at once, to find Hilda lying back in her easy-chair, fast asleep. She was looking pale—all her pretty roses had fled. Quentyns' first impulse was to fold her in his arms in an embrace of absolute love and reconciliation.

What a pity it is that we don't oftener yield to our first impulses, for they are as a rule whispered to us by our good angels.

Quentyns bent forward, and lightly, very lightly, touched the sleeper's soft hair with his big hand. That touch was a caress, but it startled Hilda, who woke up with a cry.

"Oh, Jasper," she said, looking at him with alarm in her eyes, "you—you are home! I didn't mean to go to sleep, and—what is it, Jasper?"

"Kiss me, Hilda; I am glad you have returned," said Quentyns. "But another night, if I should happen to be late, you must not sit up for me—I hate being waited for."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LITTLE RIFT.

No backward path; ah! no returning;
No second crossing that ripple's flow:
Come to me now for the mist is burning:
Come ere it darkens; Ah, no; ah, no!

JEAN INGELOW.

Jasper Quentyns was quite certain that he was behaving admirably under circumstances of a specially trying nature.

Judy's advent in the house gave him no small annoyance. Hilda's behavior about Judy, her fit of sudden passion, above all the relinquishing of her engagement ring, had cut him to the quick. He was proud, sensitive, and jealous; when, therefore, he could smile at Judy and chat in light and pleasant tones to his wife, when he could remark on the furniture in the spare room, and make many suggestions for the comfort of the little sister-in-law whom he detested, he was under the impression that his conduct was not only exemplary but Christian.

It was true that he went out a good deal in the evenings, not taking Hilda with him as had been his original intention, but leaving her at home to enjoy the society of the child who had brought the first cloud into his home.

"I am going to dine out to-night, Hilda," he would say. "A man I know particularly well has asked me.

Afterward he and I may go to the theater together. You won't mind of course being left, as you have Judy with you?"

"Oh, no, dear!" she replied, on the first of these occasions; and when Jasper came to say something of this sort two or three times a week, Hilda's invariable gentle answer was always that she did not mind.

Jasper was kind—kindness itself, and if she did feel just a trifle afraid of him, and if she could not help knowing all over her heart that the sun did not shine now for her, that there was a cloud between her husband and herself, which she could neither brush away nor penetrate, she made no outward sign of being anything different from the cheery and affectionate Hilda of old. There were subjects now, however, which she shrank from touching on in Jasper's presence. One of them was her engagement ring, another the furniture in Judy's room. That ring she had been told by more than one connoisseur was worth at least fifty pounds, and Hilda was certain that the simple furniture which made Judy's little room so bower-like and youthful could not have cost anything approaching that sum. Still Jasper said nothing about giving her change out of the money which he had spent, and Hilda feared to broach the subject of the ring to him. Another topic which by a sort of instinct she refrained from was Judy herself. When Jasper was in the house Hilda was always glad when Judy retired to her own room. When the gay little voice, happy now, and clear and sweet as a lark's, was heard singing snatches of gay songs all over the house, if Jasper were there, Hilda would carefully close the door of the room he was sitting in.

"Not now, Judy darling," she would say, when the child bounded eagerly into their presence. "Jasper is just going out—when he is out I will attend to you. Go on with your drawing in the dining room until I come to you, Judy."

Judy would go away at once obedient and happy, but Hilda's face would flush with anxiety, and her eyes would not meet her husband's. So between each of these young people there was that wall of reserve which is the sad beginning of love's departure; but Hilda, being the weaker of the two and having less to occupy her thoughts, suffered more than Jasper.

On a certain evening when Judy had been a happy resident of No. 10 Philippa Terrace for over a month, Quentyns was about to leave his office and to return home, when his friend Tom Rivers entered his room.

"Have you any engagement for to-night, Quentyns?" he asked abruptly.

"None," said Jasper, visible relief on his face, for he was beginning to dislike the evenings which he spent with a wife who always had a sense of constraint over her, and with the knowledge that Judy's presence was only tolerated when he was by. "I am at your service, Tom," said Jasper. "Do you want me to go anywhere with you?"

Rivers was a great deal older than Quentyns, he was a very clever and practical man of the world. He looked now full at Jasper. He had not failed to observe the eager relief on his friend's face when he asked if he had any engagement. To a certain extent Jasper had made Rivers his confidant. He had told him that Hilda's little sister, who had been so ill and had given them all such a fright, was staying now at

Philippa Terrace.

Rivers shrewdly guessed that Hilda's little sister was scarcely a welcome guest, as far as Quentyns was concerned. Rivers had taken a fancy to pretty Mrs. Quentyns. With a quick mental survey he saw again the picture of the young wife on the night when he had dined at Philippa Terrace.

"She did not look perfectly happy," he thought. "I hope Quentyns is good to her. I seldom saw a more charming face than hers, but with such eyes, so full of expression, so full of that sort of dumb, dog-like affectionateness, she must, she will suffer horribly if there comes a cloud between her husband and herself. Quentyns is the best of fellows, but he can be dogged and obstinate—I hope to goodness there's nothing up in that pretty little home of theirs."

Aloud Rivers said abruptly, "I had thought of asking you to dine at the club with me, and then we might have gone to see Irving in *Henry VIII.*,—a friend has given me two stalls,—but on second thoughts I can dispose of those tickets. What I should really like best is to come home with you, Quentyns, and have the pleasure of another chat with your wife. I want to hear you both sing too—I seldom heard two voices better suited to go together. May I invite myself to dinner to-night, Jasper?"

"Oh, certainly," said Jasper, after a moment's awkward hesitation. "I'll just wire to Hilda, if you don't mind."

"Not at all," said Rivers; "but remember, I am coming to take pot-luck."

Jasper ran off to the nearest telegraph office.

Rivers saw that his proposal was anything but welcome, but for that very reason he was determined to carry it out.

An hour later he found himself standing in the pretty drawing room in Philippa Terrace, talking to the most charming little girl he had ever had the pleasure of meeting.

Quentyns had run up at once to his room, and Hilda had not yet put in an appearance, but Judy, who was sitting on a sofa reading "Sylvie and Bruno," jumped up at once and came forward in her shy but self-possessed little way to meet her sister's guest.

"How do you do?" she said. "Where would you like to sit?"

"I prefer standing, thank you," said Rivers. He smiled at Judy and held out his hand. "So you are the young mutineer," he said suddenly.

Judy's big eyes looked up at him in surprise—she was dressed in a green silk frock, with a broad golden-brown sash round her waist. Her dress was cut rather low in the neck, and she had several rows of golden-brown beads round her throat. The quaint dress suited the quaint but earnest little face.

"What do you mean by calling me such a queer name?" said Judy.

"I am a great friend of your brother-in-law's," said Rivers, now dropping into a chair and drawing the child toward him, "and he has told me all about you —you mutinied when Mrs. Quentyns went away—it was very wrong of you, very wrong indeed."

"You can't judge anything about it," said Judy, the

sensitive color coming into her face; "you are on Jasper's side, so you can't know."

"Of course I'm on Jasper's side, he's an excellent fellow, and a great friend of mine."

"I don't like him," said Judy; "it isn't to be expected I should."

"Of course not, you wouldn't be a mutineer if you did."

"I wish you wouldn't call me by that horrid name," said Judy. "I can't quite understand what it means, but I'm sure it's disagreeable."

"A mutineer is always a disagreeable person," continued Rivers, looking with his pleasant eyes full at the child. "He is in a state of rebellion, you know. People aren't nice when they rebel against the inevitable."

"What's the inevitable?" asked Judy.

"The inevitable!" repeated Rivers. "The inevitable," he continued gravely, "is what has to be met because it cannot be avoided. The inevitable stands directly in a person's path; he can't go round it, he can't jump over it, he has just to meet it bravely and make the best friend he possibly can of it."

"Oh," said Judy, "that sounds like a fairy tale. Babs and I love fairy tales, particularly the old, old ones—the Jack the Giant Killer sort—you understand?"

"Jack the Giant Killer had lots of inevitables to meet," pursued Rivers.

"Yes, of course," said Judy; "now I know what you mean as far as dear Jack was concerned, but I don't

know what you mean about me."

"Well, you see, Miss Judy—you don't mind my calling Jasper's little sister Miss Judy?"

"Oh, don't talk of him," said Judy, a frown between her brows.

"But I must if I'm to explain my meaning to you, for he's the inevitable."

"Now what *do* you mean?—you're the most puzzling sort of grown-up person I ever met!"

"And you're the most intelligent sort of little person I ever met. Now let me explain matters to you. Your sister is very pretty, isn't she?"

"Pretty?" said Judy meditatively—"pretty is such a common sort of word—if you call flowers pretty, Hilda is, I suppose, but she's much, much more than pretty."

"I understand. I'm quite sure I understand you perfectly. And your sister is good too, and sweet?"

"Oh, yes!" Judy's eyes filled with tears, she blinked her eyelashes and looked out of the window.

"Well, now," said Rivers, and his voice was quite tender, for Judy's manner and attitude touched him wonderfully. "Well, now, you see it was inevitable that some man should love a woman like your sister, and want to make her his wife, and wish to take her altogether to himself. It was inevitable, also, that a woman with a gentle heart like Mrs. Quentyns should love this man in return and want to devote her life to him."

"Don't!" said Judy, suddenly; "I understand you

now, I don't want you to say another word." She crossed over to the window and stood there with her back to Rivers, looking gravely out.

Hilda came down in her rose-colored silk, and Rivers did not wonder that Judy thought of the flowers when she looked at her.

Hilda was unfeignedly glad to see him, and they had a pleasanter evening than any since Judy's advent in Philippa Terrace. Rivers paid a great deal of attention to the smallest and youngest member of the party, and not only completely won Hilda's heart by so doing, but induced Quentyns to look at his little sister-in-law with new eyes, and to discover for the first time, that under certain conditions that wistful little face could be both lovely and charming.

"Remember about the inevitable," said Rivers, as he bade the child good-night.

"What did Mr. Rivers mean, Judy?" said Hilda. "Oh, Judy, what flushed cheeks!—I did wrong to let you sit up, but you seemed so happy—you seemed to take such a fancy to Mr. Rivers."

"He was disagreeable to me—very disagreeable," said Judy, "but I liked him."

"And what did he mean by reminding you of the inevitable?" continued Hilda.

"It was in that way he was disagreeable," replied Judy. "I can't explain, Hilda darling; good-night—I am going to bed now."

That evening, in their own room, Hilda came suddenly to her husband's side.

"Jasper, don't you think you might forget about it

now?" she said timidly.

"Forget about what, Hilda?" He had been genial and pleasant until she began to speak; now his face stiffened in every outline, and the look came over it which always took poor Hilda's courage away.

"We were so happy to-night," she began in a faltering voice—"we had quite the best evening we have had since——" here she hesitated.

"Since Judy came," pursued Jasper. "Yes, that goes without saying, there were four of us—even the dearest friends are dull when there are three, and of course Rivers is capital company, he's quite the best fellow all round I ever met."

"Oh, yes!" said Hilda, a little impatiently, "but I don't want to talk of him. Jasper dear, let us forget, let us—oh, let us be as we were before."

Tears choked her voice, she turned her head away.

"I am so tired," she said suddenly; "I am the sort of girl who wants sunshine, I am so tired of being without it."

"When you talk in that metaphorical style I fail to understand you," said Quentyns. "There's not the least cloud between us that I am aware of, and if you are not in the sunshine, Hilda, I am afraid it is your own fault. I have done everything in my power to meet your wishes. You profess great love for me, and great love for your sister, and now you have us both, what can you possibly want besides?"

"Only your forgiveness, your complete and full forgiveness."

"I have nothing to forgive, my dear. You do your

best—no one can do better than their best."

"No," said poor Hilda, with a sigh. She did not add any more.

"I trust you are not going to turn into a fanciful sort of woman," said Quentyns, half an hour later. "If there's a person in the world who irritates me it's a woman with whims, a woman who has a grievance."

"Oh, no, Jasper! I won't have a grievance," she replied humbly.

CHAPTER XV.

THREE IS TRUMPERY.

The crown must be won for Heaven, dear,
In the battle-field of life:
My child, though thy foes are strong and tried,
He loveth the weak and small;
The Angels of Heaven are on thy side,
And God is over all!

—ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

Judy's life was sunshine, and therefore Judy got quickly well; she was like the birds and the flowers—give her sunshine enough, and she would sing like the birds and bloom like the flowers. Hilda was her

sun, and now she was always basking herself in the beloved presence. Her cup of happiness was full, and such contentment reigned in her little heart that no moment was dull to her, and time never hung heavy on her hands.

Hilda was just as sweet and loving as of old, and really, now that she lived in the house with him, Jasper, her *bête noire*, the awful big brother-in-law who had come and stolen her treasure away, seemed to make but little difference in her life; it was almost nicer being with Hilda in London than being with Hilda at the old Rectory—she seemed to get more undivided attention from her sister than when that sister was the Rector's right hand in his busy life, and when Judy had to learn lessons with Babs, and walk with stupid, non-comprehending Miss Mills.

Now Judy learned rapidly, for Hilda was her teacher; and how delightful that lunch was which was also Judy's early dinner, when she and her sister sat *tête-à-tête*, and talked always, always of old times.

If visitors dropped in at tea-time Judy could afford, in her generous happiness, to give them a little of her fascinating Hilda's attention, for so often now there were heavenly evenings to follow, when that *bête noire* the brother-in-law was not coming home, and the two sisters could be alone.

Judy loved the cozy sort of tea-dinners which began those evenings, and then the long talk afterward in the lengthening twilight, when she sat on a stool at Hilda's feet, with her head pressed up against Hilda's arm, and her happy heart beating close to the other heart, which was all her world.

On those evenings too Hilda came upstairs and

tucked her up in her white bed, and said, *Now I lay me down to sleep* to her, just as she used in the old nursery at home, after mother died.

It was an understood thing, although no words had passed between the two—it was an understood thing, that on the evenings when Jasper was at home, Hilda should not come upstairs to Judy. This seemed a perfectly fair and just arrangement, they were both in full accord on the subject; but Judy could not help loving those days when she might have her sister all to herself the best.

On the morning after Rivers had dined in Philippa Terrace, as Jasper was preparing to go out as usual, Hilda ran into the little hall to give him a last word; she left the door of the dining room ajar, which was not her invariable custom, and Judy, sitting at the breakfast table, found herself in the position of an eavesdropper.

"You are coming back to dinner to-night?" asked the wife.

Jasper had been visited with some slight qualms of compunction that morning, as he noticed how much paler Hilda's face was than when first he had married her, so he put his arm round her neck now, and looking at her with something of his old tenderness, said gently:

"Do you really wish it?"

"Jasper, how can you doubt?" she replied. "All the moments you are away from me are long and wearisome."

"Long and wearisome," repeated Judy softly to herself in the breakfast parlor. Some of the color fled

out of her face now; she lost her appetite for the bread-and-butter and marmalade which she was eating.

"You don't find three trumpery," pursued Jasper. Then he added with a little sigh, "I wish I didn't; but I'll come home, Hilda, if you wish it. Good-by, my dear. Stay, stop a moment; suppose I take you to the play to-night. Judy won't mind going to bed a little earlier than usual."

Just at that moment Hilda started and looked round; she heard a slight noise, and wondered if Susan were coming upstairs. The sound which disturbed her was made by Judy, who, awaking suddenly to the knowledge that she was an eavesdropper, had risen from the breakfast table and had gently closed the dining-room door.

"Of course Judy doesn't mind being left," said Hilda in a joyful tone. "I should love to go out somewhere with you, Jasper. I really do want a little bit of change."

"Very well, my love; I'll take tickets for something amusing, and be home to dinner at six."

Quentyns went out, and Hilda danced back to the dining room. Her husband had been kind, with something of the old tender kindness, and her heart leaped up like a flower answering to the sun.

Judy was standing by the window looking out.

"Isn't it a lovely day, pet?" said Hilda, coming up to her. "Suppose we give ourselves a holiday, and go to the Academy together. I have not been there yet this year, and you have never been in all your life, puss. You know how you love pictures; fancy room after

room full of pictures—all sorts, good, bad, and indifferent; all colors in them; all sorts of subjects depicted on the canvases. There's a treat for my little artist—shall I give it her?"

"Yes, Hilda, I'd like to go with you very much."

"Are you tired, dear, your face is so grave?"

"No, darling, I'm not at all tired."

"Well, we'll give ourselves a holiday. Run up and put on your pretty green cloak, and that big black hat with the green velvet. I want you to look as picturesque as possible. I want to be proud of you."

Judy suddenly flew to Hilda, clasped her arms round her neck, gave her a passionate hug, and then rushed out of the room.

"What's the matter with the child?" thought the elder sister for a brief moment, "she was so bright yesterday, and even this morning, but now she's dull, although she tries to hide it. I wonder if I ought to give her some more of her tonic. Well, well, whether Judy is grave or gay, I cannot help feeling very happy at the thought of going out with Jasper once more."

Hilda gave all directions with regard to the nice little dinner which was to precede the play. She found a story book which Judy had not yet read, and left it in the drawing room ready for her entertainment when she was away; then, dressed also in her best, she went out with her little sister, and, calling a hansom from the nearest stand, drove to Burlington House.

As usual the great exhibition was crowded with all

sorts and conditions of men—the fashionable, the studious, the artistic, the ignorant, were all to be found there. Judy had a passion for art. She was an artist by nature, down to the tips of her sensitive little fingers. No sooner did she find herself in the midst of all the pictures, than whatever cloud made her a little graver than usual took to itself wings and flew away.

Her pertinent remarks, her eager criticism, shrewd, observant, often strangely to the point, aroused the attention of some of the bystanders; they smiled as the pretty child and the beautiful girl walked slowly by together. Judy's intelligent face was commented on; the pathetic, eager, wistful eyes seemed to make their way to more than one heart. Hilda, thinking of her evening with Jasper, was quite her old self, and people thought what a happy pair the two were.

In the third room they suddenly came face to face with Rivers.

"What a bit of luck!" he said, going up at once to them. "Now, Mrs. Quentyns, I shall insist upon taking you to lunch somewhere. Miss Judy, how are you? what do you think of our national picture fair?"

"Some of the pictures are lovely," she replied.

"Some!" he retorted, raising his brows. "You don't mean to say you are setting yourself up as a critic."

"Judy is an artist by nature," said Hilda for her. "Hark to her remarks with regard to the two dogs in that picture."

"They are meant to move, but they are perfectly still," said Judy; "if I drew them, I'd"—she puckered her brows—"oh, I'd see that they were gamboling

about."

A young man, who was standing not far off, turned away with a red face—he happened to be the unfortunate artist. Bitter hatred of Judy filled his heart, for some of the people who were standing near tittered aloud, and remarked for the first time that the dogs were wooden.

Rivers walked with Mrs. Quentyns and Judy through the different rooms: he was an art connoisseur himself, and even dabbled in paint in a dilettante sort of fashion. He drew Judy on to make remarks, laughed and quizzed her for some ideas which he considered in advance of the times, for others which were altogether too antiquated for him to pass unchallenged.

"Oh, how Stanmore would like to hear you," he remarked, naming one of the pet artists of the New Art school. "Why, Judy, you are a democrat; we should have no Academy if we listened to you, you little rebel; but then, I forgot, of course you are a mutineer—you are true to your character through everything."

Hilda scarcely listened as the young man and the child chatted and laughed together, her heart was dwelling altogether in the future. She fancied herself even now driving to the play by her husband's side; she saw the pretty dress she meant to wear; in her mind was reflected as in a picture the image of her fair self, and the image also of the man who was still in her heart lover as well as husband. No matter for the present cloud, he was still her lover. She wondered if he would give her another tender glance, and if, as they sat side by side when the curtain was up and the actors were moving about on

the stage, he would touch her hand with his, and show her in that way that she was forgiven.

"If he would only understand that I must keep both my vows," she murmured, "if I could only get him to really comprehend that much, much as I love my Judy, I would rather be alone with him—that is, I would rather be alone with him, if it makes him unhappy to have my sweet little Judy in the house. But how happy she is since I brought her home; how gay her voice sounds now."

"I said you were a mutineer," laughed Rivers. "I know by your manner that you will never put up with the inevitable."

"Don't!" said Judy; Hilda was looking at a lovely landscape, a friend she knew came up and spoke to her. "Don't!" said Judy, turning and looking full at the young man; her eyes were grave, her childish face grew suddenly white and drawn. "Perhaps I am going to give up being a mutineer," she murmured.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LITTLE GIRL AND A LITTLE CROSS.

Love that hath us in the net,
Can he pass, and we forget?
Many suns arise and set,
Many a chance the years beget.

Love the gift is love the debt.
Even so.

Love is hurt with jar and fret.
Love is made a vague regret.
Eyes with idle tears are wet.
Idle habit links us yet,
What is love? for we forget:
Ah, no! no!

—TENNYSON.

Mrs. Quentyns and Judy enjoyed their lunch with Rivers. They went into the Park afterward for a short time, and then Hilda, remembering that the hours were flying, and that she must be dressed and ready to receive her husband before six that evening, bade the young man a hasty good-by, and drove home with Judy.

"I am so glad you are going to the play," said the little girl. "Why don't you often go—why don't you constantly go out in the evening?"

"If I did, Judy, what a dull time you'd have."

"You're quite mistaken, Hilda; I shouldn't be dull at all. You don't know how I like story-books, and Susan is such a nice girl. She has got brothers and sisters at home, and she tells me about them when you are out. I am never lonely; I couldn't possibly be sad in the same house with you. If I saw you once or twice a day it would be enough for me—it would really."

"My dear little pet," laughed Hilda, "how solemnly you are talking, what a frightfully earnest tone has

got into your voice, and how you are puckering your poor little forehead. I have only one thing to say in reply to your generous wish to leave me so much by myself, namely, that I should find it extremely inconvenient and extremely lonely to have you in the house and only see you twice a day."

"But suppose I weren't with you at all, Hilda—suppose I were still at the Rectory."

"That would be different," said Hilda, in a light tone; "you would be in your natural home, and I——"

"But you *would* be lonely if I were away from you, Hilda; do say you'd be fearfully lonely!"

The passion in Judy's voice was unnoticed by Hilda.

"I'd miss you, of course, my pet," she said; "but I do declare that stupid driver is taking us wrong. Oh, if he goes up that way it will be such a round that I shall be late for Jasper's dinner. Poke your parasol through the little window in the roof, Judy, and stop him, do."

Judy obeyed, the driver received his directions in due course, and a moment or two later Hilda and Judy were standing in the little hall at Philippa Terrace. Quentyns came suddenly forward.

"Why, Jasper, you have come back already," said the wife. "It isn't five yet, but I—I can dress in no time. Have you got the tickets?—where are we going?"

"Come into the drawing room, Hilda, I want to say a word to you," said Quentyns.

"Run upstairs and take your things off, Judy," said

Hilda. She followed her husband into the little drawing room and shut the door. "Well?" she said. Her voice was still gay, but a little, just a little, of the old fear was creeping back into her heart.

"I am ever so sorry, Hilda, to disappoint you," said Quentyns, "but when I went to town this morning I absolutely forgot an engagement I made a week ago. I have to go down with two or three men to Richmond. We are to dine at the Star and Garter, and afterward Philip Danvers has asked me to go home with him. The Danvers are charming people—have a beautiful house on the river, and everything in the best possible style. I should rather like to cultivate them. It is never a good plan to throw over friends who may be influential; still, if you really wish it, Hilda, I'll come home to-night and make some sort of excuse to Danvers—wire to him that I am ill, or something of the kind. Of course it is too late for me to get tickets for the play, but if you would like me to stay at home, I'll—I'll do it—so there!"

Hilda's face, which had been white, was now flushed.

"Why didn't you tell me this morning?" she said. "Why did you forget? I spent a day of hope, and now —now——" Her eyes filled with sudden tears, she bit her lips and turned away.

Her action, which seemed almost pettish, annoyed Quentyns.

"You needn't cry," he said. "I never supposed you could be so childish. Do you think I forgot on purpose? I was looking forward to my time at Richmond, but it slipped my memory that this was the day. You needn't cry, however, for if you have

suddenly taken such a frantic desire for my society, it is at your service. I shall go out and wire to Danvers, and be back again in half an hour."

After all, Mrs. Quentyns had plenty of self-control. The annoyance and distress in her voice had altogether left it when she spoke again.

"Of course you must go, Jasper," she said. "You don't suppose for a quarter of an instant that I should stand in your way. Let me go up with you and help you to put the things you want into a bag, and you will want some tea before you start. I'll ring and tell Susan to prepare it. Now come along, dear; I'm glad of course that you are having this pleasure."

As Hilda ran upstairs her manner was once more quite cheerful. Quentyns, however, whose conscience was smiting him, although he didn't know it, could not help acting more or less like a bear with a sore head.

"I shouldn't have accepted the invitation," he said, "upon my word I shouldn't, did I not know that you would have Judy to keep you company. You know I haven't that passion for children you have, and——"

The door was closed behind the two.

"Don't say any more," said Hilda, in a frightened sort of voice. "I told you I was glad that you were to have the pleasure. Now which bag will you take? Will the small Gladstone be large enough?"

Ten minutes later Quentyns had left the house in a hansom, and Hilda went up to Judy's room.

"Come downstairs, darling," she said, "we are to have another long evening all to ourselves. What a

good thing I've got my sweet little sister to stay at home with me. Judy, this was to be a festive night, and I had quite a festive dinner prepared. Suppose we keep the occasion, although we are only to be by ourselves. You shall dine with me to-night, Judy, and we'll both dress for dinner. You shall wear white, for you look so sweet in white, and I'll do the same."

"Have you got the old India muslin dress that you used to wear at the Rectory before—before there was a Jasper?" said Judy, in a queer, steady kind of little voice. "If you have that old India muslin that father loved and Aunt Marjorie loved, and that Babs and I used always to say you looked like an angel in, will you put it on to-night, Hilda?—will you wear that dress once again?"

"What a queer thing!" replied Hilda. "I never threw the old muslin away. I think I can poke it out of some depths somewhere; and it is so soft that, if I shake it out and hang it up for about half an hour, it will be quite presentable. Yon funny Judy, why do you wish to see me in that dress?"

"You were all mine when you wore that dress last," said Judy.

"I am always yours, my dearest. But don't let us talk sentiment; let us make ourselves smart, and let us come downstairs and be happy. We'll imagine that we are at a very gay party; heaps and heaps of other people in the room, but we two, as is sometimes the case, are more or less alone in the crowd. We are so completely one that other people scarcely affect us. We can talk together, and whisper old secrets about the garden, and Babs, and the animals, and the organ in the church, and the funny chorister-boy who would never sing in tune; we can talk of all these

things, although there are throngs and throngs around us, for in a crowd those who love each other often find the best sort of solitude. Come down, Judy, come down, and let's be happy!"

"How flushed you are, Hilda; are you well?"

"Yes; I never felt better."

"You look awfully pretty; you look quite lovely."

"What a dear little flatterer you are! Does it really matter whether I look pretty or not? Aunt Marjorie would scold you, child, for praising my looks to my face; she would say you were encouraging vanity."

"And I should tell her to her face that I was not," answered Judy stoutly. "It's right to look beautiful; it's copying the flowers. Now run and put on your India muslin dress, Hilda."

Hilda left the room, and half an hour later the two sisters met in the little drawing room. There were fresh flowers in the vases; and a great bowl of primroses, which Aunt Marjorie had sent from the Rectory, was placed on the little table in the square bay-window.

Judy in her white dress stood near the flowers. She took up one, and in an absent sort of fashion pulled it to pieces. Susan announced dinner, and the sisters dined together in great state, and with apparent enjoyment. Hilda joked about everything, and Judy, catching up her spirit, did likewise.

"Let us imagine, just for to-night, that I am grown-up," she said; "treat me as if I were your grown sister —not your little sister—Hilda."

Hilda felt in the humor to comply with any request

Judy made.

"We will have our coffee in the drawing room," she said. "Black coffee for me, please, Susan, but bring in a little jug of cream for Miss Judy's. Now, dearest," turning to the child, "don't forget that the play is going on; we have dined out with numbers, oh, numbers of guests, and now we are in the large assembly-room, alone in the crowd, happy because we are together."

Judy had thrown herself back into a deep arm-chair in the little drawing room while Hilda was speaking; her eyes had a sort of starry radiance about them, her cheeks were slightly flushed, her cloudy soft brown hair was thrown back from her white brow.

Hilda moved about the room; she was restless notwithstanding the enforced calm she was putting upon herself. Judy smiled when Hilda spoke, but in her heart certain words kept repeating themselves—they had repeated themselves like a sort of mournful echo in that poor little heart all day.

"All the moments you are away from me are long and wearisome," Hilda had said to her husband. "All the moments."

And then he had said to her:

"You don't find three trumpery. I wish I didn't!"

"So I'm the trumpery," thought Judy to herself. "I'm three. And all the moments while Hilda is away from Jasper are long and wearisome. Poor Hilda! poor darling! how well she hid it all from me; how good, how very good she has been to me; but I'm glad I know. It was a lucky, a very lucky thing that the

door of the breakfast room was left slightly open this morning, and so I was able to hear Jasper's words."

"How silent you are, dearest," said Hilda, looking at the child.

"I beg your pardon," said Judy, jumping up. "I was thinking."

"Think aloud then, sweet. Let me share your pretty thoughts."

"But they are not pretty, Hilda; and I think I'd rather no one shared them. Now let us talk about old times—about the dear old times before there was a Jasper."

"Judy," said Hilda, "there is just one thing I should like to say to you. Even if it gives you pain, I ought to remind you, my darling, that Jasper is my husband; that I love him. Oh! Judy, Judy, my heart aches with love to him. My heart aches because I love my husband so much."

Judy clenched her hands; a great wave of crimson swept over her face. Hilda had hidden her own face in her hands, and did not notice the child's agitation. Presently the little sister's hand softly touched her forehead.

"And you're lonely to-night, poor Hilda, because your Jasper is away?"

"Yes, Judy, it's true. I'm afraid even to tell you how lonely I am."

"And you've been trying to seem cheerful, just to please me."

"And to please myself too," said Hilda, starting up

and wiping the tears from her eyes. "There, we won't talk about it any more; we'll go on pretending that we are having an awfully jolly time."

"You're very brave, Hilda," said Judy; "and when people are brave, things generally come right. Now, may I sit on your knee, just as if I were a baby instead of a tall girl with long legs? *I* wouldn't make you unhappy, Hilda darling. When there's an inevitable I must face it; I must, and you will see that I will. Jack the Giant Killer shan't beat *me* over difficulties when I've made up my mind."

"Judy, your face is flushed, and your eyes are too bright; that strong coffee was bad for you, you won't sleep to-night."

"I dare say I shan't sleep; but now let us talk of old times."

"Only for a few moments, dear; you look so excited that I shall not rest until I see you safely in bed."

Judy laughed, and declared stoutly that she never felt better.

Half an hour afterward she went up to her pretty little bedroom, Hilda promising to follow her in about a quarter of an hour, if she possibly could.

When the elder sister entered the room, she found Judy standing by her bed in her frilled night-dress.

"You will get cold, love—do get into bed," said Hilda.

"I want to say my prayers to you, Hilda, if you don't mind," said Judy, "just as I used when I was a very little girl."

"Of course, darling, if you wish it."

Hilda sat down, and the little sister knelt at her knee.

The old baby prayers were said aloud; but suddenly, in the midst of them, Judy bent her head and murmured something which Hilda could not hear.

She jumped up a moment later and put her arms round her sister's neck.

"You won't be lonely long, Hilda," she said. "It will be all right; you'll see it will be as right as possible. I am glad you are fond of Jasper. I am really, really, awfully glad."

"Good-night, my darling," said Hilda, kissing her. She went out of the room with tears in her eyes.

"Poor little Judy, how little she knows," thought the elder sister; "how very little she knows what a cloud there is between Jasper and me. Oh, if it goes on much longer, I think my heart will break!"

In the meantime, in her pretty white bed, Judy was murmuring an old text to herself:

"He that taketh not up his cross and followeth after Me, cannot be My disciple."

Once, long ago, the Rector had explained this text, or rather given a shadow of its meaning to the child.

"Followeth after Me," she murmured; and a vision came to her of One who, in the great cause of Love, had taken up His cross, even to death.

She wiped the tears from her eyes, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

JUDY'S SECRET.

Be strong to *hope*, oh, Heart!
Though day is bright,
The stars can only shine
In the dark night.
Be strong, oh, Heart of mine,
Look towards the light!

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

The next morning Judy was down specially early to breakfast.

Her cheeks were slightly more flushed than usual, and her eyes, to anyone who watched them closely, had a determined, almost hard, expression in them. Hilda, however, was too much occupied with her own sad thoughts to take any special notice of the child.

"You look well, Judy," she said, giving a quick glance at her. "Now come to breakfast, dear, I've a good deal to do afterward."

"Are you going out, Hilda?" asked Judy.

"No, I'm going to be busy all the morning over my accounts; they've got into the most disgraceful muddle, and I want to put them straight. I shall be in the drawing room, for I keep all my household books in the davenport there. I mean to give you a holiday, Judy, but perhaps you won't mind reading some of your history to yourself, and doing a few sums this morning."

"Of course not," said Judy brightly. "Shall I make you some toast, Hilda? This in the toast-rack is so

soft and flabby—do let me, Hilda."

"If you like, dear, you may. It is lucky there is a fire, but I must tell cook to discontinue them, the weather is getting so warm."

Judy was an adept at making toast, and it was an old fashion at the Rectory that Hilda's toast should be made by her, on those blissful red-letter days when the elder sister had tea with the little ones in the nursery.

Judy wondered as she delicately browned that toast, and scorched her own little cheeks, if Hilda would remember the old days, and the toast which she used to make her; but Mrs. Quentyns seemed to be in a sort of brown study that morning, and thanked the child absently when the crisp hot toast was put on her plate.

"Jasper will be home quite early to-day, won't he, Hilda?" inquired Judy.

"I don't know, Judy—yes, I suppose so."

"I'm sure he'll be home early," repeated Judy with confidence; "perhaps he'll take you to the play to-night, and perhaps you'll be awfully happy."

"Oh, don't talk about it, Judy," said Hilda, in a weary voice; "we must all make up our minds to face the fact that there's a great deal *more* than mere happiness in the world. What is happiness? It's only a small part of life."

"I don't think it is going to be a small part of your life, Hilda; but now I'm not going to idle you any more, for you want to get to your accounts."

Judy ran out of the room. As she was going slowly

upstairs, she paused once to say softly to herself:

"It's all happening beautifully; I ought to be glad. Of course I am glad. '*He that taketh not up his cross.*' I'm glad that text keeps running in my head, it makes me so nice and strong."

Susan was doing out Judy's room when the little girl ran into it. Judy was fond of Susan, and Susan of her, and the girl stopped her work now to listen to the child's eager words.

"Susan, do you think Mrs. Quentyns would let you come out with me for a little this morning, for about an hour or an hour and a half?"

"Well, miss," said Susan, "it aint Monday, which is the day to get ready for the laundry, nor yet Wednesday, when I turns out the drawing room, nor Friday, which is silver day—there's nothing special for Thursday; I should think I could go with you, Miss Judy, and it will be a treat to take you about. Is it Mme. Tussand's you has a hankerin' for, Miss?"

"No, no, Susan, I'm not going to any exhibition; it's a secret—I'll tell you when we're out."

"The Doré Gallery, perhaps?" suggested Susan.

"No, it's nothing of that sort; I'll tell you when we're out."

"Very well, miss, I'm proud to be at your service whatever it is."

"I'll run down now and ask my sister if you may come with me, Susan."

Judy threw her arms round Hilda as she was coming up from the kitchen premises.

"Hilda, the day is so fine!"

"No, Judy, you mustn't tempt me to go out. I really have to get those accounts straight, they quite weigh on my mind."

"So you shall, Hilda darling; but I was wondering if after I've read my history and done my sums, and a little bit of writing I want to get through, if you'd let Susan—if you'd let Susan take me out."

"Susan!" repeated Hilda, "but I can go with you myself this afternoon."

"I know, only I do so want a run on this fine morning, and Susan says it's not laundry day, nor drawing-room day, nor silver day; it's Thursday, which is nothing special; she can come, may she, Hilda?—do say yes."

"It's not like you, Judy," said Hilda, "to be in this impatient state. I would rather you did not propose plans to the servants without first consulting me, darling, it rather puts them out of their place; but as you have done it, and as you are the best of dear little girls, I suppose I must say 'yes' on this occasion. If Susan hurries with her work, she may take you out: but of course you won't be very long, will you?"

To this question Judy made no reply. She gave Hilda a tight clasp and a fierce kiss, and rushed away.

"Susan, you're to hurry with your work, for you may come," she shouted, almost boisterously, to the parlor-maid, and then she ran down to the dining room and shut the door behind her.

"It's happening beautifully," she murmured again;

"how lucky that I never spent godmother's sovereign. And now to write my letter to Hilda. I'm not going to waste my time crying, there'll be time enough for that by and by—that's if I want to cry, perhaps I shan't. When I think of how very happy Hilda will be, perhaps my heart will sing. But now for the letter —Hilda mustn't find it too soon; I'll put it under her pin-cushion, then perhaps she won't see it for some hours after I've gone, but now I must write it."

Judy took out her own little blotting-book, placed a sheet of paper before her, and began laboriously, with little fingers which rapidly got ink-stained, to put a few words on the paper.

"DARLING HILDA,

"You'll be s'prised when you get this. I'm going home. I'm quite well now, and I'm not going to fret, but I'm going to be *really* happy. Good-by, Hilda; I love you awfully.

"Your
"JUDY."

This little note was put into an envelope, and sealed with some precious red wax, and before she left the house Judy found an opportunity to put it under Hilda's pin-cushion.

"It doesn't tell her a bit what I think, nor what I feel," murmured the poor child. "But it's best for her just to suppose that I *want* to go home. She'll be happy all the sooner if she thinks that."

Susan was rather elated at escaping housework,

and at being allowed to go out so early in the morning. She was especially fond of Judy, and would do anything in the world for her. Now, therefore, principally on Judy's account, but also in the hope that the baker might happen to see her as she passed his shop, she put on her very smartest hat and her very best jacket, and patiently waited in the front hall for Judy's appearance.

Hilda came out of the drawing room to see the two as they went off.

"You had better take an omnibus, and get out at Kensington Gardens," she said to the maid. "I shall expect you back in time to get lunch ready, Susan. Judy pet, give me a kiss before you go."

Judy had lost her roses now, her face was pale, and there were dark shadows under her big eyes. Her little voice, however, had a very stout, determined tone about it.

"Good-by, Hilda," she said; "one kiss—two, three kisses, Hilda; it is good of you to let us out,—and we are going to be so jolly. Good-by, darling Hilda."

"Good-by, Judy," said Hilda.

She kissed the child, but in a pre-occupied manner —the cloud which weighed on her heart was oppressing her, and dulling her usually keen perceptions where Judy was concerned.

"It's all the better," thought the little girl, "it's easier to say good-by when she's not extra loving."

Hilda went back to her accounts, and Judy and Susan walked down the terrace, and turning the corner were lost to view.

They had gone on a little way, and Susan was about to hail a passing omnibus, when Judy suddenly put her hand on the servant's arm.

"Susan," she said, "I am going to tell you the secret now. You'll be *sure* to keep it?"

"Well, of course, miss, I'll do my best—I hope I aint one of the blabbing sort."

"I don't think you are, Susan—you look as if a person could trust you. I'm going to trust you with a most important thing."

"Very well, miss—I'll be proud I'm sure; but hadn't we better stop that 'bus—there's the conductor looking at us."

"Does that 'bus go in the direction of Waterloo Station?" asked Judy.

"Waterloo—bless you, Miss Judy—I don't know whether it do or not. I don't s'pose so for a quarter of a minute. Waterloo is miles from here—that I do know. But it's nothing to us where Waterloo is, miss, it's to Kensington Gardens we're going, and the 'bus has gone on now, so there's no good our worrying ourselves about it. Another will pass us in a minute. There are plenty half empty at this hour of the day."

"I wish you would stop talking, Susan, and let me explain what I mean," said Judy, almost fretfully. "It's to Waterloo I want to go, not to Kensington Gardens. Do you hear me—do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I suppose you're joking me, Miss Judy. My missis said we were to go to Kensington Gardens."

"Please, Susan, stop for a minute. I want to say

something very important. *I am going home.* That's the secret. I am going home to Aunt Marjorie and to father, and my little sister Babs, and the way home is by Waterloo, so I must get there. Now do you understand? That's the secret—I am going home to-day."

Judy's face was so pale, and her words so intensely earnest, that Susan saw at last that the secret was no joking matter, but something real and hard to bear.

"Now I wonder what the little dear is up to," she said under her breath.

"You know, Miss Judy, pet," she replied aloud in as soothing a voice as she could command, "that you don't really mean to run away like that,—for it is running away to go back to your home, and never say a word to Mrs. Quentyns, and she so wrapped up in you, and your room furnished so prettily and all."

Judy had to gulp down a sob before she answered Susan.

"I didn't expect you to understand me," she said with a dignity which made a deep impression on the maid. "I'm not running away, and I'm doing right not wrong. You don't suppose it's always very pleasant to do right, but sometimes one can't think about what's pleasant. I wouldn't have asked you to help me at all, Susan, but I don't know how to get to Waterloo Station. Of course I came from there with my sister, but I didn't notice the road we took, nor anything about it. I know we were a long time in a cab, so I suppose the station is a good way from Philippa Terrace. What you have got to do now, Susan, is to obey me, and not to ask any questions. I really know what I'm about, and I promise that you shan't get

into any trouble."

But to Judy's surprise Susan was firm.

"I won't have hand nor part in the matter," she said; "I was told to take you to Kensington Gardens, miss, and it's there we've got to go, or we'll turn round and go back to Philippa Terrace."

For a moment or two Judy felt afraid that all her plans were in jeopardy. She might of course call a cab on her own account, and trust the driver to take her safely to her destination; but brave as she was, she had scarcely courage for this extreme step; besides, the driver of the hansom might take it into his head to listen to Susan's strong objections, and even if he did obey Judy, Susan would go back to Philippa Terrace, and tell Hilda everything, and then Hilda would follow Judy to Waterloo, and prevent her going home at all.

The strongest feeling in the child's mind was a desire to be safe back in the Rectory before Hilda knew anything about her determination.

"Then she can't do anything," thought Judy. "She'll have nothing for it but to make herself quite happy with Jasper again."

Suddenly an idea came to her.

"I won't argue with you any more, Susan," she said. "I suppose you *think* you are doing right, and if you do, of course I can't expect you to act in any other way. If you knew everything that is in my heart, I am quite sure you would help me; but as you don't, I must think of something else. You know Mr. Rivers, don't you—the gentleman who dined at Philippa Terrace two nights ago?"

"Yes, miss, of course."

"My sister and I took lunch with him yesterday," continued Judy. "He is a very nice gentleman; he's a great friend of Mr. Quentyns."

"Oh, yes, miss, I'm aware," replied the maid.

"He lives in chambers," continued Judy. "I don't in the least know what chambers means; but he asked me to go and see him some day and have lunch with him. He wrote his address on a piece of paper and gave it to me, and I have it in my purse. My sister said I might certainly lunch with Mr. Rivers. Now, Susan, I intend to go to him to-day. So please call a hansom, and I shall drive there at once. You can come or not as you please. If you prefer it you can go home; but of course I'd rather you came with me."

Susan deliberated. Certainly Miss Judy was in a very queer condition, and it would be as much as her place was worth to take her to Waterloo; but to drive with her to the chambers of that nice gentleman who was, she knew, one of her master's greatest friends, seemed a shifting of responsibility which was quite a way out of the dilemma, for not for worlds would Susan do anything really to hurt the child's feelings.

"All right, miss," she said after a pause; "even that seems queer enough, but Mr. Rivers can explain matters himself to my missis. Here's a nice 'ansom with a steady horse. Stop, driver, please, stop! Draw up here by the lamp-post. Now, miss, shall I get in first and give you a hand?"

"No, Susan; I can get into a hansom without anyone helping me."

"Drive to No. 10 Johnson's Court, Lincoln's Inn

Fields," said Judy, in a clear voice to the man; and then she and Susan found themselves bowling away farther and farther from West Kensington, from Judy's pretty bedroom, from Hilda and her love.

In an incredibly short space of time they arrived at their destination; the driver pulled up his horse at No. 10 Johnson's Court, with an *esprit* which Judy would have much admired had her thoughts been less pre-occupied.

She jumped out with alacrity, declining Susan's assistance, and asked the man what his fare was. He named a sum which Susan took into her head to consider exorbitant, and which she loudly objected to Judy's paying; but the little girl gave it without a moment's hesitation, and the next instant was running up the stairs to Rivers' chambers.

What might have happened had that gentleman been out no one can say; Judy's heroic impulse might after all have come to nothing, and Jasper might still have had to complain of that three, which means trumpery, invading his house; but it so happened that Rivers was in, and, busy man that he was, comparatively disengaged. When Judy inquired for him he was standing in his clerk's room, giving some directions. At the sound of her voice he looked up, and with a start and smile of delight came forward to welcome her.

"I am very glad to see you," he said; "how kind of you to remember your promise."

Then, seeing by her face that Judy's poor little heart was very full, he took her into his private room, and desired Susan to wait in the clerk's room.

"Now, Jack the Giant Killer, what is it?" said Rivers; "what's the matter?"

"I told you," said Judy; "I told you yesterday, that *perhaps* I was going to stop being a mutineer. Well, I have stopped. I thought you'd like to know."

"So I do, Judy," said Rivers. "I am proud to be acquainted with a little girl who has such immense control over herself. I should like to hear how you have contrived to get out of the state of rebellion into the state of submission. I know of course that you have been killing a giant, but I am interested in the process."

"I'm killing the giant by going home," said Judy, standing very erect by Rivers' table, and pushing back her shady hat from her white forehead. "I am going home, back to Little Staunton Rectory. I see what you mean, that it's better—better for Jasper and Hilda, to be without—without *me*. I pretended not to understand you the other night, but I don't pretend any longer now; and yesterday evening, when Hilda and I were all alone, for Jasper had gone away down to Richmond, I—I made up my mind. Hilda doesn't know anything about it."

"Sit down, Judy," said Rivers. "I cannot tell you how I respect you."



"i'd rather stand, please."

"I'd rather stand, please," said Judy. "Hilda doesn't know," she continued, "and she *mustn't* know until I am safe back at Little Staunton Rectory. Susan—you know Susan, she's Hilda's parlor-maid; well, Susan came out with me this morning, and I coaxed her very hard to take me to Waterloo, but she refused. I don't quite know how to get there by myself, so now I want to know if you will take me?"

"Certainly I will," said Rivers. "What is more, I'll go with you to the Rectory. I have nothing special to do to-day, and it will be quite a pleasure to spend a little time in your company. Do you know anything about the trains, and what is the name of the station we have to go to?"

Judy named the one nearest to the Rectory.

"You had better sit down for a moment," pursued Rivers. "I have an 'A B C' here, so I can tell you in a moment which is the best train to take. Now, what is the matter?"

"Only, Mr. Rivers, Hilda must not know anything—anything about it until I am safe home. Can this be managed?"

"I have very little doubt that it can. I shall go out now and speak to Susan and send her away. Thank you, Judy, for coming to me; I would do anything for you, because you are brave, and I respect and admire all brave people."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GIANT-KILLER.

And the Prince, seeing that it was of no use to remonstrate, and retired.

—THE GOLDEN BRANCH.

Susan came home and told her mistress that Judy was spending the day with Mr. Rivers.

"What an extraordinary thing for the child to do!" said Hilda.

"She said, ma'am, that Mr. Rivers asked her to lunch, and that you knew about it."

"Yes; but why did she not say something to me when she was going out? It is so unlike Miss Judy to keep a thing of that sort to herself."

Susan made no reply. She was no longer responsible, and was only too anxious not to betray the child.

"Mr. Rivers says he'll take the best care of her, ma'am," she said, after a pause.

"Well, go and take off your hat, Susan, and lay the lunch," said Hilda, feeling still more puzzled, but not caring to pursue her inquiries any further.

She had a sense of aggrievement and a feeling of added loneliness as she sat down to her solitary lunch. She missed Judy, and wondered at her sudden want of confidence; but soon the deeper trouble which Jasper's conduct had caused returned to

trouble her, and she forgot her little sister in the sadness of her thoughts.

She spent a long and very lonely afternoon indoors, for she had not the heart to go out, and besides, she expected Judy home every minute.

She thought it likely that Rivers would take her somewhere after lunch, but surely he would bring her back to Philippa Terrace in time for tea. Hilda ordered some cakes which she knew were special favorites of Judy's to be ready for this meal; and then she sat in her pretty little drawing room, and tried to divert her thoughts over the pages of the latest novel which had arrived from Mudie's.

It was either not specially interesting, or Hilda found it difficult to concentrate her attention. She flung the book on her knee, and sat absorbed in what Judy and Babs called a brown study. She was startled out of her meditations by Susan bringing in the tea-tray and the little kettle and spirit-lamp.

"Did Mr. Rivers say when he would bring Miss Judy home?" she asked of the maid.

Susan colored and hesitated slightly in her reply.

"No, ma'am; he said nothing at all about coming home," she answered.

Hilda noticed her hesitation, but did not wish to question her further. After the servant left the room, however, she began for the first time to feel both impatient and uneasy with regard to her little sister.

"If Judy is not here by six o'clock," she said to herself, "I will go to Lincoln's Inn Fields in search of her. How extraordinarily impatient she was to go out

this morning; and how very odd of her to insist on going to Mr. Rivers', and to say nothing at all to me about it; and then how queer—how more than queer—her not having yet returned. My sweet little Judy, the most thoughtful child who ever breathed—it is unlike her to cause me anxiety of this sort."

Hilda did not care for the social little meal which was generally so lively when Judy was present. Immediately afterward she ran upstairs to put on her bonnet and jacket; and as she was going out, left a message with Susan.

"If Miss Judy and Mr. Rivers come," she said, "please say that I have gone to Lincoln's Inn Fields, as I felt anxious about the child being so long away."

"Yes, ma'am," said the servant.

"Whistle for a hansom for me, please, Susan."

Susan did so; and half an hour afterward Hilda was making inquiries at Rivers' chambers with regard to his whereabouts. The clerks there could give her no definite information. Mr. Rivers had gone out with a little lady soon after twelve o'clock, and had told them not to expect him back that day.

"I shall find Judy at Philippa Terrace when I go home," thought Mrs. Quentyns. "It was thoughtless of her not to tell me how long she would be out—it was wonderfully unlike her. Still, of course, she will be at home now."

But when Hilda returned no Judy was there to greet her; but her husband's face was seen looking somewhat impatiently out at the drawing-room window. He came at once to help his wife out of the cab, and entered the house with her.

"Where were you?" he asked. "It is nearly time for dinner."

"I won't be a moment getting dressed, Jasper; but —but—I am anxious about Judy."

Quentyns had meant to be specially nice and kind to Hilda after his evening's pleasure, but he felt it impossible now to keep the glib, sarcastic words back.

"I might have known when I saw that fretful look on your face, that Judy was the cause. Now, what is her latest transgression?"

"Oh, there is a telegraph-boy," said Hilda eagerly. "What—what—oh, *is* there anything wrong?"

She rushed to the hall-door herself, before Jasper could prevent her. Susan, coming into the hall to answer the imperative double knock, was sent back to the kitchen regions, in a cross voice, by her master.

"Really, Hilda," began Quentyns, "your impetuosity is most undignified. I must say that these kinds of scenes are——Now, what is the matter, my love—tears again. A coming home of this sort is not the most cheerful sort of thing, you must allow."

"Oh, Jasper, Jasper, I'm not even listening to you," said poor Hilda. "What can be the matter? what can be wrong? Here's a telegram from Mr. Rivers. He says—see what he says.

"'Little Staunton Rectory. Have brought Judy home. Will call and see you soon after ten this evening. Rivers.'"

"Rivers!" repeated Jasper.

His voice grew thoughtful; he did not like Rivers, of all men, to be mixed up in his domestic affairs. Rivers, at least, must keep him on a pedestal, and know nothing of his weaknesses—of that infirmity of temper which he struggled against, and yet, in Judy's presence, could not conquer. He forgot all about Judy herself in his wonder as to how Rivers had got mixed up in the matter.

Hilda had seated herself on the sofa, and still holding the open telegram in her hand, was trying furtively to wipe away her fast-falling tears.

"I wish you'd stop crying, Hilda," said her husband. "There's nothing to alarm you in this telegram—nothing whatever. If Judy is with a man like Tom Rivers, she's as safe as child can be."

"But she has gone home, Jasper; she has gone home to the Rectory, without even telling me."

"Well, my dear, it's impossible for me to explain away the vagaries of that most eccentric child. I presume, however, that Rivers has a key to the mystery, and as he says he will call here after ten o'clock, we shall know all about it then. No amount of discussion can explain it in advance. So, Hilda, perhaps you will go upstairs and get ready for dinner. I'm frightfully hungry."

Hilda rose wearily and left the room at once.

"I think I can guess something—just something of what it means," she said to herself. "My little Judy—my brave little Judy!"

Judy's letter was lying hidden all this time under the large pin-cushion on Hilda's dressing table, but as it was not seen, its contents, which would have

explained a good deal, were of course not known.

The dinner which followed this unhappy beginning of the evening was as dismal and constrained as if poor "trumpery" were still present.

Quentyns, like most men who work hard all day, was particular about this meal, and to-night of all nights cook had not sent up the soup to his satisfaction, nor the *entrée* seasoned to his taste. It was all one to Hilda just now what she ate, but Quentyns pushed his plate impatiently away, and kept on referring to the excellent dinner he had had the night before at the Star and Garter. He spoke of his evening as delightful, and of the house of the new friend where he had slept as altogether irreproachable.

Hilda felt that he was talking at her all the time, but she had not the heart to reply to him. The dismal little meal came to a mournful end, and the two went into the drawing room to wait for Rivers' arrival.

Hilda took up a handkerchief she was embroidering for Judy, and took special pleasure in putting in new and exquisite stitches as her thoughts centered themselves in dull wonder and pain round the child. Quentyns became absorbed in the contents of a novel. He read for half an hour—he was by no means in a good humor, and now and then his eyes were raised to look over the top of the book at his wife. There was a patient sort of suffering about her which irritated him a good bit, as he could see no possible reason to account for it. He asked her one or two questions, which she answered in an abstracted manner.

No, he certainly had not bargained for this sort of

thing when he married. Hilda was not only pretty, but she could be, when she liked, sufficiently intellectual to satisfy his requirements. He was fastidious and had peculiar views with regard to women. He hated the so-called clever women, but at the same time he despised the stupid ones. To please him a woman must have tact—she must quickly understand his many moods. She must sympathize when he demanded sympathy, and when he showed by his manner that he wished to be left alone, she must respect his desires. Hitherto, Hilda had abundantly fulfilled his expectations. If Judy had not been in the house, all that he had ever dreamed of in his married life would have come to pass. But to-night, although Judy was not there to intermeddle, Quentyns felt that, for all the good his wife was doing him, he might as well be a bachelor at his club.

"My dear," he said with some impatience, and forgetting himself not a little, "do you know that you have made precisely the same remark now five times? I did not quarrel with its brilliancy the first time I heard it, but on the fifth occasion I will own that it gave me a certain sense of *ennui*. As I see that your thoughts are miles away, I'll just run round to the club for a bit and find out if there is anything going on."

Hilda raised her eyes in some surprise. A certain expression in them seemed to expostulate with Jasper, but her lips said nothing; and just at that moment a hansom was heard to bowl up rapidly and stop with a quick jerk at the door. A moment later Rivers entered the drawing room. He came up at once to Hilda with the air of a man who has a message to deliver.

"Judy hopes you got her note long ere this, Mrs. Quentyns."

"Her note—no; I have not received any," replied Hilda.

"She wrote to you this morning, and put the note under the pin-cushion in your room."

"How romantic and Judy-like!" said Quentyns suddenly. "Quite the correct thing, according to the old-fashioned novels. When the heroine elopes she always leaves a note under the pin-cushion."

"How do you do, Jasper? I did not notice you until this moment," said Rivers. He gave the other man a sharp glance, which suddenly made him feel queer and small. "The only thing old-fashioned that I notice about Judy," he said, "is her noble unselfishness. She has gone home because—because—I think you can both guess why; an explanation would only be disagreeable. She begged me to tell you, Mrs. Quentyns, that she meant to be really *perfectly* happy at home, and she hoped you and Jasper would follow her example here. Poor little Giant Killer! she slew an enormous giant to-day, and there are few people I respect as I do that dear little soul. I saw her safely to the Rectory, as, when she came to me, I thought it best to humor what was more a noble inspiration than a child's whim. I will say good-night now."

Hilda scarcely said a word while Rivers was speaking. When he left the room, however, she stood still for an instant, listening intently. Jasper had gone out to see his friend into his hansom. Would he come back? He did for a moment.

"Don't sit up for me, Hilda," he said; and there was

a tone in his voice which caused her heart to sink down low, very low indeed.

She heard the door slam behind him, and then she knew that she was alone. The servants had gone to bed—to all intents and purposes she was absolutely alone in the silent house.

So Judy's sacrifice was in vain. Judy had thought, by absolutely sacrificing herself, that she could bring this husband and wife together. It was not to be.

Hilda fell on her knees and buried her burning face in the sofa cushions.

"Oh, Judy, little Judy!" she sobbed. "Oh, Judy, what shall I do? My pain is greater than I can bear."

She knelt in this position for a long time. Her little sister's face was distinctly seen in her mental vision; Judy seemed surrounded by a sort of halo—but what of Jasper? Had all the love which united these two hearts vanished like a dream? Was he never coming back to her? Would he always misunderstand her? Oh, if she thought that, she would not stay with him —she would go back to the Rectory and to Judy, and forget her golden dream and turn back again to the old life. For three months she would have been a wife. She would forget that time. She would own to Jasper that she had made a mistake. She would be Hilda Merton once more. Alas! alas! that could not be. Vows and ceremonies tied her. She had stood beside the altar and given herself away. There was no going back on that step. Jasper was not the Jasper of her dreams. He must have a small mind not to understand Judy, and she had married him because she thought his mind so big and his heart so great. After all, Judy was far greater than Jasper.

"My little Judy," she murmured again, and then she sank down a pitiable, weak, inconsolable figure on the hearth-rug close to the expiring fire. She thought over the scenes of the last night and longed to have them back again.

"If Judy's arms were round me, I should not feel so lonely," she murmured. "Oh, Jasper, how can you turn from me? How can you fail to understand that my heart at least is big enough to love both Judy and you?"

The lamp burnt dimly and the fire went completely out. Hilda presently fell asleep in the darkness, and now a moonbeam shining into the drawing room and falling across her tired face made it look white and unearthly, almost like the face of a dead girl. It was in this attitude that Quentyns found her when he came back somewhere between one and two o'clock.

His conscience was reproaching him, for Rivers, an old friend, had not failed to give him a little spice of his mind; but he was just in that irritable condition where repentance is almost impossible, and when self-abasement only leads a man into further wrong-doing.

When he saw Hilda's tired face, he said to himself with a sort of laugh:

"If I don't encourage this sort of thing, I shall doubtless be more and more of a tyrant in the eyes of my good wife and that precious fastidious child and Rivers. Well, well, I cannot see the beauty of voluntary martyrdom. If Hilda weren't quite such a goose, she would have gone to bed two hours ago, instead of falling asleep here to the utter disregard of

her health and personal appearance."

So Quentyns, looking cross and uninterested, shook his wife not too gently; spoke in a commonplace tone, out of which he purposely excluded every scrap of emotion, and asked her how much longer she wanted to sit up.

Hilda stumbled to her feet without a word. She went upstairs and to bed, but although her husband quickly slept, she lay awake until the morning.

She came down to breakfast, looking tired and fagged. There were black lines under her eyes, and when Quentyns asked her what was the matter, she not only owned to a headache, but burst into tears.

When a man is thoroughly cross, nothing irritates him more than tears on the part of his wife, and Quentyns now so far forgot himself as to rise hastily from the breakfast table and leave the room, slamming the door behind him. He put in his head a moment later to nod to his wife and say good-by.

"If I'm late, don't wait dinner for me," he said, and then he left the house. Hilda had plenty of time to wipe her tears away in the deserted breakfast room. The pain at her heart was almost greater than she could bear. Her gentle nature was stirred by what she considered gross injustice on the part of her husband.

"He does not care for me any more," she muttered. "I thought him great and brave and good. I know he is clever; I suppose he is great, and perhaps even good; but I am too small and too little for him—I fail to understand him, and he does not love me any more. Oh, if only little Judy had stayed with me I

should not feel as broken-hearted as I do at present. if only little Judy had stayed with me, I should loneliness of my life?"

At this moment Hilda's dismal meditations were interrupted by the sound of carriage wheels, which not only came rattling down the little street, but stopped at the hall door. She started up in a fright, pushed back her disordered hair from her flushed face, and the next moment found herself in the voluminous embrace of Jasper's aunt, Lady Malvern.

"My dear," exclaimed that good lady, "I must apologize for not looking you up sooner, but I have been particularly busy; for Cynthia, my eldest girl, has just got engaged and we are to have a wedding in the autumn and all kinds of fuss; but I have not forgotten you, Hilda, and I have just come to carry you off for the day. It is a lovely day, and we are all going to drive to Richmond to picnic in the park. Run upstairs, my love, and put on your hat and gloves. I mean to carry you off immediately."

"But Jasper has just gone to town—he will be so sorry to have missed you," said Hilda.

"Well, I suppose I can endure life even though I have missed Jasper," said Lady Malvern with a laugh. "In any case I want you, and so does Cynthia. Cynthia has taken a great fancy to you, Hilda; so run away and get ready. I will send a wire to your husband to come down and join us later on. There now, will that content you, you poor, devoted little soul?"

Hilda smiled and a faint color came into her cheeks.

"Run up to your room, my dear," said good-natured Lady Malvern. "Be as quick as ever you can getting into the prettiest costume you have, for we are to be quite a gay party, I can tell you. Now run off, dear, run off, and pray don't keep me waiting a moment longer than you can help."

Lady Malvern was the sort of person who never could bear anyone to say "no" to her, and Hilda at first unwillingly, but presently with a sort of elation and even defiance which was altogether foreign to her gentle nature, prepared to make herself smart for her unexpected gayety. She went upstairs, pulled out one of her prettiest trousseau dresses, and, with hands that trembled, began to array herself in it.

Meanwhile Lady Malvern sat perfectly still in the tiny little dining room, with a somewhat troubled look on her good-tempered face.

"Now, what has Jasper been doing?" she said to herself. "That sweet child doesn't look happy. Marks of tears round her eyes, flushed cheeks—very low spirits. Dear, dear! this will never do. Not more than three months from the wedding-day."

Lady Malvern had seen very little of her nephew since his marriage. She knew nothing, therefore, about Judy; but she was just that fussy, good-natured, hearty sort of body who could not bear anyone with whom she came in contact to be miserable.

"I must set this right somehow or other," she said to herself. "Jasper doesn't understand Hilda, and Hilda is wretched, and thinks, poor dear little goose, that the sun will never shine again, and that life is practically over for her. She does not know, how

could she, poor darling, how many rubs married people have to live through, and how jolly and comfortable they are notwithstanding them. Well, well, I am glad I called. I must set things right between this pair, whatever happens."

Lady Malvern little guessed, however, that she personally was to have very little to do with smoothing the rumpled rose-leaves in Hilda's and Jasper's lives.

When Mrs. Quentyns returned to the little dining room the flush on her cheeks and the softened look in her sweet eyes but added to her beauty, and when she found herself bowling away through the pleasant spring air in her kind friend's company, in spite of herself, her spirits could not help rising.

Lady Malvern had a house in Hans Place, and there Cynthia and two younger girls were waiting for them.

The day was a perfect one, very warm and summery for the time of year, and the young people all agreed that it was by no means too early in the season to enjoy themselves even in this *al fresco* fashion.

They were to end with tea at the "Star and Garter," and they all started off now for this day's pleasure in the highest spirits.

Hilda was quite young enough to enjoy such a proceeding immensely. As space divided her from her little home in Philippa Terrace her spirits rose, and now, if Judy had only been by her side, she would have felt perfectly happy.

By the time they reached Richmond Park all trace

of tears and sorrow had left her charming face, and she was one of the brightest and gayest of the company.

No one could make herself more useful than Hilda, and when her husband appeared on the scene, he was a good deal astonished to see her flying lightly about, ordering and directing the arrangements of the picnic dinner. Her gay laughter floated to his ears on the summer breeze, her cheeks were bright, her eyes shining. In short, she looked like that charming Hilda who had won his heart in the old Rectory garden not a year ago.

Hilda was busily helping to concoct a salmon mayonnaise, when, raising her eyes, she met her husband's gaze. He smiled back at her a look of approval and love, and her heart rose considerably.

There were other people present besides Jasper who thought Mrs. Quentyns a very beautiful young woman. There were others waiting to show her the most polite and gracious attentions, and these facts considerably enhanced her value in her husband's eyes. In short, he began to fall in love with his wife over again, and Judy for the time being was forgotten by this pair.

The day passed all too quickly, and at last the moment arrived when the little party must turn their steps homeward.

"You must both come home and have supper with us," said Lady Malvern to her nephew and his wife. "Oh, yes, I shall take no denial; and now, Jasper, will you drive Cynthia and her sister back to town? I mean Hilda to accompany me."

Jasper was all smiles and good-humor. He was willing to accede to any arrangement which could add to the pleasures of the day, and Hilda, in whose heart a faint hope had lingered that she and her husband might have gone home together, followed Lady Malvern to her carriage with a little sigh. The whole party was soon driving home. Lady Malvern and Hilda had a small victoria to themselves. As soon as ever they left the rest of the party, the older woman turned and gave a full glance at the girl by her side.

"Hilda," she said suddenly, "you look better than you did this morning."

"Oh, I feel better," she replied. "You have done me lots of good," she continued, raising her eyes with an affectionate light in them to Lady Malvern's kind face.

"I am delighted to have helped you, my love," replied the elder lady; "and now, Hilda, I want to say something. You have been married very little over three months. It is a very common illusion with girls to imagine that married life is a time of perpetual bliss."

Hilda opened her lips to say something, but Lady Malvern interrupted.

"My dear," she said, "you must hear me out. Married life is not a bed of roses, and the first year which a young couple spend together is generally the hardest of all."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Quentyns. "Why the first year?"

"Because, my dear, the glamour is gradually being

removed. The girl is finding that the hero whom she married is a right good fellow, but still that he is human; that he has his faults and his aggravations; that he needs to be humored and consulted and petted, and to have his smallnesses—yes, my dear, mark the word, his smallnesses—attended to. The husband is making similar discoveries with regard to the lovely angel whom he took to his arms. She, too, is mortal—affectionate, of course, and sweet and womanly, and ten thousand times better than a real angel would be to him, but still with her faults, her tempers, and her fads. The young couple discover these things in each other during the first two or three months of married life. All their future happiness depends on how they both act, under the influence of these discoveries. They have got to learn that, though they are made one by the priest, they are both of them distinct individualities. If they are to be happy together, they must both give and take. I know a married couple who are now the happiest, prosiest, most attached old pair in the world, who went through no end of storms during their first eventful year. But they learned a lesson and profited by it. The wife does not now think her husband the greatest hero that ever set foot on this earth, and the husband does not call his wife an angel; but I think, if their love were analyzed, it would be found greater, deeper, and more tender than that early glamour which was love, but was not equal to the love tried by fire which comes later in life. Now, my dear, you will forgive my little lecture. If you had need of it, ponder my words; if not, forgive an old woman for worrying you. Hilda, what a sweet, pretty little house you have! I always knew that my nephew Jasper had good taste. I am so truly glad that you have the same."

While Lady Malvern was speaking, Hilda pulled down her veil, and struggled hard to keep the tears from her brown eyes. She could not quite manage this, however, and Lady Malvern, giving her a half-glance, saw that her eyelashes were wet.

She did not add any more in words, but she made up her mind to help the young girl by every means in her power.

They drove on rapidly. The horses were fresh, and they were getting over the ground with great rapidity, when a quickly approaching train startled one of the horses. At the same time a man on a bicycle darted round the corner, and before he could help himself, knocked against the carriage. The double shock was enough for the affrighted horses. They plunged, reared, and became unmanageable, and the next moment the little victoria was overturned, and Lady Malvern and Mrs. Quentyns were flung with some violence on the pavement. Lady Malvern was not severely hurt, and she sprang almost immediately to her feet, but the fright and fall had stunned Hilda, who lay white and still on the ground without any attempt at movement. The usual crowd of course collected, and it was on this scene that Quentyns, in high good-humor, and forgetting for the time being that there was a crumpled rose-leaf in the world, suddenly came with some more of the picnic party. As a matter of course, they all drew up. Quentyns was driving a high dog-cart. He sprang to the ground and ran into the midst of the crowd. Then for the first time he realized what had happened. His young wife, looking as if she were dead, was lying in Lady Malvern's arms. Lady Malvern was seated on a doorstep. Some men were hastily coming forward with a shutter.

"My God!" exclaimed Quentyns; "is she dead?"

"No, my dear boy, no—only stunned," said Lady Malvern. "Here, take her into your own arms, Jasper. You are stronger than I. Let her see your face first when she opens her eyes. No medicine will be so reviving as that."

Here a woman came up and spoke to Lady Malvern.

"I shall be only too pleased to have the young lady brought into my house, madam," she said. "A very good doctor lives just round the corner, and he can be summoned at once."

"Yes, yes; send for him immediately," said Quentyns.

He strode into the house with his light burden. Hilda was laid upon a sofa, and in a few moments the doctor arrived. He felt her all over and said that no bones were broken, and that no severe injury of any kind had occurred, but both fall and shock had been very severe. He counseled her being left undisturbed in her present condition until the morning.

"Then I will go home," said Lady Malvern. "You will look after her yourself, Jasper?"

"Need you ask?" he replied. He followed his aunt to the door as he spoke.

"Hilda had a narrow escape of her life," said Lady Malvern, looking full at her nephew as she spoke. "How sudden and awful it all was! There were we chatting together, and thinking no more of danger than if such a thing did not exist, when all in an

instant came that awful bolt from the blue. I shall never forget the swinging of the carriage and the way the horses looked when they plunged and kicked about, or the white piteous face of your sweet little Hilda, who would not scream nor show any outward sign of terror. I thought it was all over with both of us—I did really, Jasper. I cannot tell you how thankful we ought to be that things are no worse."

"You are sure then that Hilda is not in danger?" queried the young man in a tremulous voice.

"No, no; what did you hear the doctor say, you silly boy? Perhaps the best thing that could have happened to Hilda was this accident, dreadful as it was for the moment. Perhaps—well, Jasper, I think you must know what I mean."

"Has Hilda been talking about me?" asked Jasper, a wave of red mounting to his brow.

"Talking about you?" replied his aunt, now thoroughly angry; "only in the way that Hilda can talk of those whom she loves best on earth. Jasper, you are the luckiest man in the world, and if you don't contrive to make that sweet child the happiest woman, I for one will have nothing to do with you again."

"No fear, no fear, if she loves me in that way," murmured Jasper.

He turned abruptly on his heel and went back to the room where his wife lay. He was a very proud, reserved man, and even in moments of the deepest agitation would scarcely reveal his real sentiments. But that moment, when he had looked at his wife's white face and had thought that she was dead, had

shaken his whole nature to its very depths. He made a discovery then that nothing in all the world was of any real value to him compared with Hilda's love.

"I have acted like a brute to her," he murmured. "Rivers was right. She's too good for me—she's fifty times too good for me. My God, how white she looks as she lies there! Suppose the doctor is wrong. Why doesn't she speak or move? Why do they make so little of this continued unconsciousness? I think I'll go for some further advice. Oh, my darling, my darling, if you are dead, if your sweet life has been taken, I shall never forgive myself—never!"

But just then there was a faint stir of the heavily fringed lids which lay against Hilda's white cheeks. The next moment the sweet brown eyes were opened wide, and Hilda looked into her husband's face.

"What has happened?" she asked drowsily. "I don't remember anything. Where are we?"

"Together, Hilda," he replied; "together. Does anything else really matter?"

"Oh, no, no!" she said, with a catch in her voice.

Next day Mrs. Quentyns was so far convalescent as to be able to return to the little house in Philippa Terrace. Jasper, of course, accompanied her. They had found a good deal to say to each other, between the moment when she had opened her eyes the night before and now. Both had some things to confess—both had some words of forgiveness to crave from the other. So complete now had been the interchange of soul and of love between this pair that it seemed

impossible that anything could ever separate such warm hearts again.

"And it has been all Judy's doing," said Jasper as they sat that evening in the little drawing room.

"What do you mean?" asked his wife.

"Why," he answered, "if Judy had not brought matters to a crisis by going away, we might have drifted further and further apart. But now we must have her back again, Hilda. She has fulfilled her mission, dear little soul, and now she must have her reward."

"No," said Hilda, in a firm voice. "Judy shall have her reward, but not by coming back. She did right to go. I could never, never have sent her away, but she did right to go."

"Do you mean to tell me, Hilda, that you could be perfectly happy to live without her?"

"With you," she said, laying her hand on his arm, and looking into his face with her sweet eyes shining through tears.

He put his arms round her and kissed her many times.

"Jasper," said Hilda after a few minutes, "I think the first wrong step that I took—the first beginning of that unhappy time—was when I lost my temper down at Little Staunton and gave up my engagement ring."

"No wonder you lost your temper when I was such a brute about everything," said Quentyns. "It was my fault."

"No, no; it was mine."

"Have you missed the ring, Hilda?"

"Missed it?" she held up her slender finger. "My heart has been empty without it," she said.

"Then let me put it on again for you."

"Can you? Is—isn't it sold?"

"Of course not. Do you think that I could sell that ring?"

"But—but the furniture in Judy's room?"

"When I saw that you must have Judy with you, Hilda, I went into debt for the furniture. Oh, never mind all that now, my darling—the debt is paid in full a week ago, and I have the receipt in my pocket. Now I am going upstairs to fetch the ring."

CHAPTER XIX.

GOOD OMENS.

And so the shadows fall apart,
And so the west winds play;
And all the windows of my heart
I open to the day.

—WHITTIER.

Mildred Anstruther was paying a visit at the Rectory on the day that Rivers and Judy walked in. Rivers was a very striking-looking man, and all the Rectory people were so devoured with curiosity about him, and so interested in all he said and did—in his reasons for coming down to Little Staunton, and in his remarks about the Quentyns—that Judy's own return to the family circle passed into utter insignificance. She was there—they had none of them expected her, and as she chose to come back, she was welcome of course.

It was a lovely day, and the whole party were out in the garden, when Rivers and his little charge entered their midst.

Judy wore her green cloak and pretty black shady hat. There was a new sort of picturesqueness about her, which Aunt Marjorie noticed in an abstracted way; she put it down to "the polish which even a short residence in the metropolis always gives;" she had not the faintest idea that it was due to the dignity which a noble action can inspire.

Judy greeted everyone quite in her old manner, and was rather glad that she was not fussed over, but taken quite as a matter-of-course.

Aunt Marjorie was too anxious about the cream for Rivers' tea to give serious thoughts to anyone else just then. But when the young man had departed to catch the return train to London, then a few questions were asked of Judy.

"I thought you were going to live with Hilda," said Mildred, looking curiously at the child.

Mildred was standing a little apart from the others,

and Judy, whose face was pale, for the suffering of her self-sacrifice was still causing her heart to ache horribly, looked full at her, and said in a low voice:

"That turned out to be a mistake, so I've come home."

"You brave little darling!" said Mildred, understanding everything like a flash; she stooped and kissed Judy on her forehead.

Babs came rushing into the midst of the group.

"Judy, Judy, I want you," she cried.

"What is it?" asked Judy.

"There's a butterfly coming out of a chrysalis in the butterfly-case; come quick—he's moving his tail backward and forward—he'll soon be out; come quick and see him."

The dull look left Judy's eyes; they sparkled with a sudden, swift, childish joy.

She took Babs' hand, and they rushed away, right round to the back of the house where the butterfly-case stood.

"Let's take him out, poor darling," she said; "let's put him on a leaf, and watch him as he gets out of his prison."

Her eyes grew brighter and brighter; she bent low to watch the resurrection which was going on.

After all the chrysalis and the butterfly were emblems. They were good omens to Judy that love and hope were not dead.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A YOUNG MUTINEER ***

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