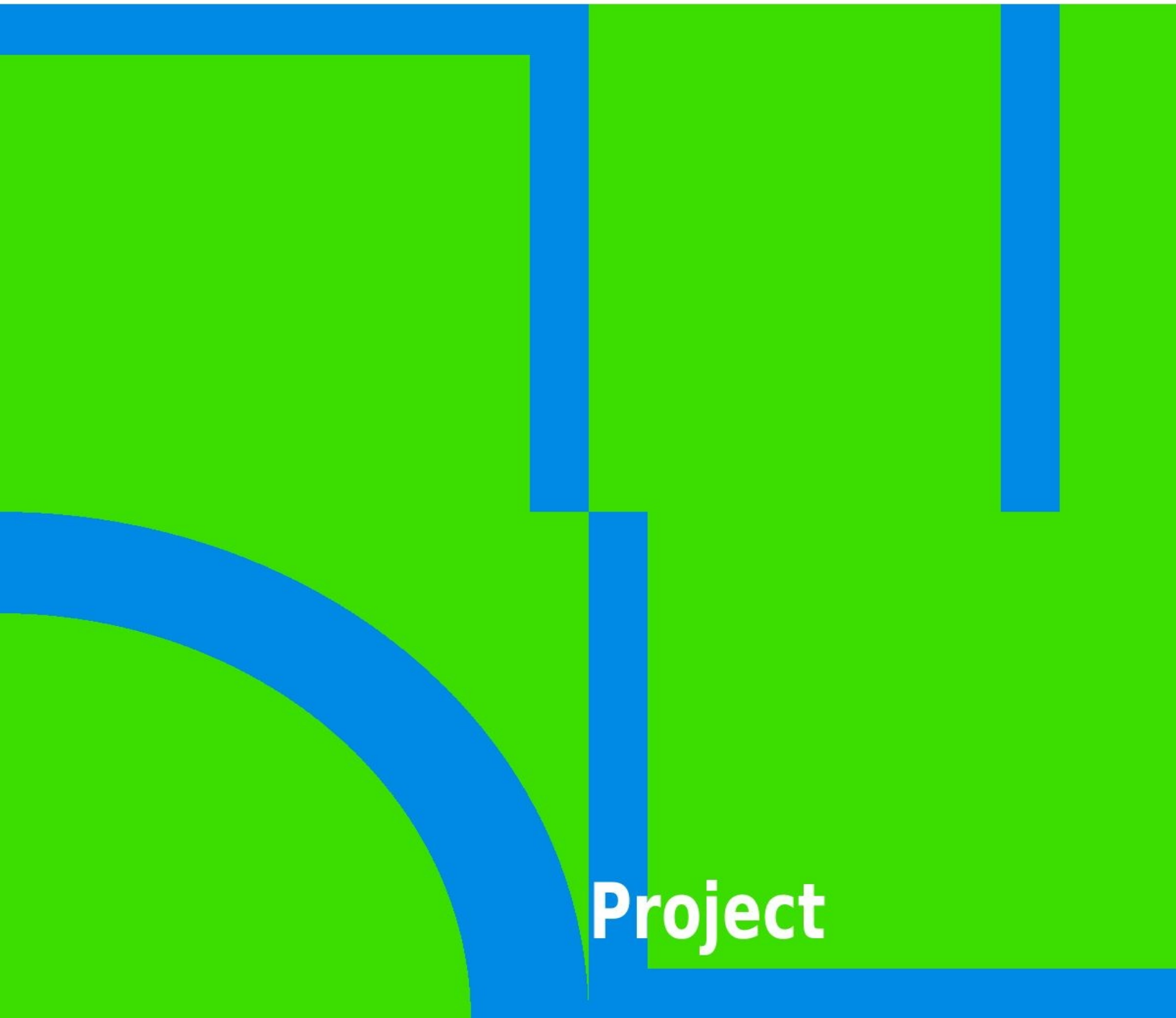
Philippa

Mrs. Molesworth



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Mrs Molesworth

"Philippa"

Chapter One.

Good-Byes.

Autumn—scarcely late autumn yet—and the day had been mild. But as the afternoon wore on towards evening, there came the chilliness and early gloom inevitable at the fall of the year—accompanied, to those who are sensitive to such things, by the indescribable touch of melancholy never present in the same way at other seasons.

Philippa Raynsworth shivered slightly, though half-unconscious that she did so, and turned towards the shelter of the friendly porch just at her side. As she moved, a hand was laid on her shoulder.

“Come in, you silly girl,” said its owner. “Do you want to catch cold?”

Philippa had been watching the gradual disappearance of a carriage down the long drive, till a turn in the road suddenly hid it altogether. Others had been watching it too, but she was standing somewhat aloof—she had no special interest in the departing guests; she had never seen them till to-day, and might very probably never see them again. But something nevertheless had impressed her—the kind of day, the approach of the gloaming, the evening scents from the garden, the little shy breeze that murmured and grew silent again—there was a plaintive harmony in it all, and even the prosaic, measured sound of the horses’ feet, growing fainter and fainter, and the carriage receding from sight while the “good-byes” still seemed hovering about, all fitted in. She did not seek to define what it reminded her of, or what feelings it awakened in her. It was just a scene—a passing impression, or possibly a lasting one. There is never any accounting for the permanence of certain spots in our experience—why some entirely trivial incident or sensation should remain indented on our memory for ever; while others which we would fain recall, some which it seems extraordinary that we should ever be able to forget, fade as if they had never been—who can say?

“I was just coming in,” Philippa replied, with a slight sense of feeling ashamed of herself. She hated any approach to what she called “affectation,” and she glanced quickly to where the little group had stood

but a moment before. It had dispersed. There was no one to be seen but her cousin Maida and herself, and with a sense of relief Philippa stopped again.

“Wait a moment, Maida,” she said. “There is really no danger of catching cold, and it is nice out here. It will feel hot and *indoors* in the drawing-room, with the tea still about and the talking. Let us stay here just for a moment and watch the evening creeping in. *You* understand the feeling I mean, I’m sure?”

Miss Lermont did not at once reply. She was older than Philippa—a great deal older she would have said herself, and in some ways it would have been true, though not in all. She had suffered much in her life, which, after all, had not been a very long one, for she was barely thirty; she had suffered more, probably, than any one realised, and—even a harder trial—she knew that she would have to suffer a great deal more still, if she lived. All this, the remembrance of suffering past, and to some extent still present, and the anticipation, in itself an additional present suffering, of what was yet to come, had made her old before her time. Yet it had kept her young, too, by its intensification of her power of sympathy. It is not all sufferers who acquire this peculiar sympathy, nor is it the only good gift to be gained by passing through the fire. But Maida Lermont’s sympathy was remarkable. It was not solely or even principally for physical suffering, though to all but the few who knew her well, physical suffering only had been *her* fire.

“She has a happy nature,” most people would say of her, “though, of course, she has had a great deal to bear. I really don’t think any one so constitutionally cheerful is as much to be pitied as nervous patients or *very* sensitive people. There are, no doubt, some who feel pain much more than others. And then the Lermonts are rich. She has everything she wants.”

How little they knew! Maida was *not* “constitutionally cheerful”—the worst side, by far the worst, of her suffering had been to her, her vivid consciousness of the wreck it might make of her altogether—mind, heart, and soul.

But she had conquered, and more than conquered. She had emerged

from her trial not only chastened, but marvellously lifted and widened. Intellect and spirit had risen to a higher place, and the rare and delightful power of her sympathy knew no limits. It unlocked doors to her as if she were the possessor of a magic key. Philippa was right when she turned to her cousin with the words “you understand.”

“Yes,” she said, after her momentary delay—a delay spent in gazing before her with her young cousin’s words in her ears. “Yes—it is fascinating to get inside nature, as it were, sometimes—to feel it all. I love to watch the evening coming, as you say, and I love to watch the dawn creeping up—even more, I think. That has fallen to my lot oftener than to yours, I hope, Philippa.” She smiled as she spoke, so her cousin was not afraid to laugh softly.

“I am generally fast asleep at that time, I must confess. But even if I were awake, I should not care for it as much as for evening. And to-day it all seemed of a piece. You know it is my last evening here—and I heard you all saying good-bye to those people who have just gone, and Lady Mary’s voice sounded so silvery when she called back ‘good-night’ for the last time. Don’t you think, Maida, that there is *always* something pathetic, if we stopped to think about it, in farewells, even if we expect to meet again quite soon? One never can be *sure* that a good-bye may not be a real good-bye.”

“Yes, I have often felt that. And the real good-byes, as you call them, are so seldom known to be such. Last times are not often thought to be last times—strangely seldom, indeed.”

“And yet there must be a last time to *everything*,” said Philippa, “even to the most commonplace little details of life.”

They were silent for a moment or two.

Then said Miss Lermont:

“I hope you will come back to us soon again, dear; I should like you to see more of the neighbourhood and the neighbours.”

“I like what I *have* seen of both,” said Philippa. “Lady Mary is a dear little thing.”

“All the Bertrands are pleasant, kindly people,” Maida replied. “They are happy people, and allow that they are so. It is refreshing nowadays when so many are either peculiarly unhappy, or determined to think themselves so. By-the-by, what a very silent man that friend of Captain Bertrand’s is. Mr Gresham, I mean.”

“I scarcely spoke to him,” said Philippa, adding, with a laugh, “but he certainly scarcely spoke to me, so I have no reason for disagreeing with you.”

“Very silent people are almost worse than very talkative ones,” said Maida. “I suppose you are a very lively party at home, now, with Evelyn and the children.”

“Fairly so. Evey fusses a little, but she is always sweet, and we love having them. We shall miss them terribly when Duke comes home and they go to him, though I suppose it would be selfish not to be glad when he does. *I* shall miss them almost the most of all.”

“They keep you pretty busy, I daresay.”

“Ye-es, but not too busy. I am so thankful not to be one of those poor girls who can’t find anything to do. There is no doubt about what *I* have to do. But things are much clearer than they were, now that papa is better. And when Charlie is at home for good, they will be easier still.”

“We shall have you crying for work to do then,” said Maida, smiling.

But Philippa shook her head.

“I don’t think so,” she said.

Miss Lermont turned to go in.

“Come, Philippa; we really shall catch, cold if we stay out here longer,” and Philippa followed her into the house.

“How few people understand each other!” thought the elder woman, as she went across the hall and down the wide passage to the drawing-room. “Nobody, to see her as she commonly is, would think that Philippa

had those undertones in her character—that tenderness and sensitiveness that come out now and then. She seems just a very charming girl—bright and energetic, and full of humour."

And two minutes later, when Maida was resting on her sofa again, and heard Philippa's voice in spite of her reluctance to return to the "talking," one of the liveliest in the family party, and noticed her quick tactful readiness to suit herself to whatever was going on, the contrast with the dreamy girl who had stood gazing at the darkening sky outside, responsive to every whisper of Nature's evening prayer, struck her even more.

"She is very interesting," thought Miss Lermont. "I care for her increasingly every day."

It was Philippa's first visit to Dorriford. The relationship was not a very near one—only that of second cousins on the parents' side. And the Lermonts were very rich, and almost unavoidably self-engrossed, though not selfish. For they were a large family party, though Maida, the second daughter, was now the only unmarried one left at home. But a constant succession of incursions from married sons and daughters, unexpected swoopings down or turnings up of younger brothers from India, or grandchildren "for the holidays," kept the house in a state of never-ending, active hospitality. It was accident—a chance meeting, that is to say, which had brought about renewed intercourse between the Lermonts and Philippa's family, resulting in a week's visit on the young girl's part.

It was to a great extent a new experience to her. Her family "lines" were cast in very different places to luxurious Dorriford; her life, though happily far from an intellectually narrow one, had been passed amidst the restrictions of small means and many cares; her work, almost indeed before she had left childhood behind her, had been "cut out" for her distinctly enough.

The next morning brought her own farewells to Dorriford and its inmates.

"I have enjoyed myself so much," she said, with her usual heartiness, to Mrs Lermont, when it came to saying good-bye. "It really has been a treat to me, and it will be a treat to them all at home to hear about it."

“Well, then, dear, I hope you will soon come to see us again,” said her hostess, kindly. “*We* have enjoyed having you, I assure you.”

“Thank you for saying so,” Philippa replied. “But as for coming again *soon*,” and she shook her head. “Some time or other I shall hope to do so, but not soon, I fear.”

“They cannot well spare you, I daresay. But after all, they could surely always do without you for a week. So you must pay us more frequent visits, if they cannot be long ones.”

“If it were nearer,” said Philippa, “there is nothing I should enjoy more. But you see, dear Mrs Lermont,” she went on naïvely, “it isn’t only the ‘sparing’ me. I am not so tremendously important as all that. It is also that we can’t afford much travelling about.” Mrs Lermont looked uncomfortable.

“How I wish I had spoken of it before!” she thought. “She will perhaps be hurt at it now that she has said that herself. I wish I had taken Maida’s advice.”

She glanced round; there was no one within hearing. She half-nervously slipped her hand into her pocket.

“Philippa, my dear,” she began, “you must *promise* me not to mind what I am going to say. I—I know—of course it is only natural I should—relations as you are—that you have to consider such things, and I—I had prepared this.” She held out a small envelope addressed to “Miss Raynsworth.”

“You will accept it, dear to please me? And I want you to remember that whenever you can come to us, the cost of the journey must not enter into your consideration. That must be *my* affair. If there were no other reason, the pleasure that having you here gives Maida, makes me beg you to let this be understood.”

The old lady spoke nervously, and a pink flush rose to her face. But the moment the tone of Philippa’s voice in reply reached her, she felt relieved.

“How *very* good of you, dear Mrs Lermont!” she exclaimed, heartily. “I never thought of such a thing; if I had—” She stopped and coloured a little, but without a touch of hurt feeling. “I was going to say,” she went on, laughingly, “that if I *had* dreamt of such kindness, I would not have alluded to the expense. But you had thought of it before I said anything about it, hadn’t you? And of course you know we are not at all rich. ‘Mind,’” as Mrs Lermont murmured something; “no, of course, I don’t mind, except that I think you are very, very kind, and I am sure they will all think so at home too.”

She kissed her cousin again, and the old lady patted her affectionately on the shoulder as she did so.

“Then it is a bargain,” she said. “Whenever they can spare you—remember.”

Philippa nodded in reply, though she had not time to speak, for just then came one of her cousins’ voices from the hall, bidding her hurry up if she did not mean to miss the train.

“She is a thoroughly nice, sensible girl,” said Mrs Lermont to her daughter, when Maida entered the drawing-room that morning an hour or two later.

“Yes,” Maida replied. “She is all that and more. I like her extremely. But I do not know that life will be to her quite what one would feel inclined to predict, judging her as she seems now.”

“How do you mean?” said her mother. “I should say she will get on very well, and meet troubles pretty philosophically when they come. She is not spoilt, and there is nothing fantastic or in the least morbid about her.”

“N-no,” Miss Lermont agreed. “But she is more inexperienced than she thinks, and though not spoilt in the ordinary sense of the word, she has not really had much to try her. And her nature is deeper than you would think—deeper than she knows herself.”

“Possibly so,” Mrs Lermont replied. “But though you are certainly not morbid, Maida, I think you *are* a trifle fantastic—about other people, never about yourself. You study them so, and I think you put your own

ideas into your pictures of them. Now *I* should say that Philippa Raynsworth is just the sort of girl to go through life in a comfortable—and by that I don't mean selfish—satisfactory sort of way, without anything much out of the commonplace. She has plenty of energy, and, above all, any amount of common-sense." Maida laughed. This sort of discussion was not very uncommon between the mother and daughter; they were much together, owing to Mrs Lermont's increasing lameness and Maida's chronic delicacy, and often alone. And they understood each other well, though in many ways they were very different.

"Perhaps you are right, mother," the daughter said, "Perhaps I do work up people in my imagination till they grow quite unlike what they really are. People, some especially, interest me so," she went on, thoughtfully. "I feel very grateful to my fellow-creatures; thinking them over helps to make my life much pleasanter than it might otherwise be."

Mrs Lermont glanced at her half anxiously. It was so seldom that Maida alluded to the restrictions and deprivations of her lot.

"I am sure, dear, you always think of them in the kindest possible way; you may be critical, but you are certainly not cynical," and she glanced at her daughter affectionately. Mrs Lermont was an affectionate mother to all her children, but her daughter Maida had the power of drawing out a strain of tenderness of which one would scarcely have suspected the existence in her. Miss Lermont smiled back.

"I am glad you think so, mother," she said; "all the same, I often feel I should be on my guard lest the interest of dissecting others' characters should lead me too far. As for Philippa, I shall be only too glad, poor child, if her life is a happy and uncomplicated one." And the subject for the time was dropped, though Maida's memory, above all where her affections were concerned, was curiously retentive. From that time her young cousin had her own place in what Maida sometimes to herself called her invisible picture-gallery; there were many touches still wanting to the completion of the portrait, some which no one could have predicted.

Philippa herself, tranquilly seated in the corner of her second-class railway compartment, would have been not a little astonished could she have overheard what her cousins were saying about her—*herself* was

not, as a rule, the subject of her cogitations.

It was a long journey to Marlby, the nearest station to Philippa's home; long, comparatively speaking, that is to say, for the length of journeys, like the measure of many other things, is but a relative matter, and the young girl had travelled so little in her short life that the eight hours across country seemed to her no trifling matter. She enjoyed it thoroughly; even the waitings at junctions and changing of trains, at which many would have murmured, added to the pleasurable excitement of the whole. There was something exhilarating in the mere fact of passing through places whose names were unfamiliar to her.

"What a pretty name!" she said to herself, at one station where some minutes had to be spent for no apparent reason, as nobody got out or got in, and neither express nor luggage train passing by solved the enigma —"'Merle-in-the-Wold!' and what a pretty country it seems about here! I don't remember noticing it on my way coming. I wonder how long it will be before I pass by here again. They won't be so afraid about me at home after this, when they see how well I have managed—catching trains and everything quite rightly, and not losing my luggage, or anything stupid like that—though, I suppose, I'd better not shout till I'm out of the wood. I should feel rather small if my things don't turn up at Marlby."

But these misgivings did not trouble her long; she was absorbed by the picturesque beauty of the country around, which was shown to its greatest advantage by the lovely autumn weather.

"There is really some advantage in living in an uninteresting part of the world as we do," Philippa went on thinking; "it makes one doubly enjoy scenery like this. I wonder I never heard of it before. I wonder what those turrets can be over there among the trees; they must belong to some beautiful old house. Dear me, what delightful lives some fortunate people must have, though, I suppose, there are often drawbacks—for instance, in Maida Lermont's case! I wouldn't change with her for anything, except that she's so very, very good. It is so nice to be strong, and able to enjoy any lucky chance which comes in one's way, like this visit to Dorriford. I shall have to be content now with quiet home life for a good while."

But home, quiet and monotonous as it might be, was essentially home to

Philippa. Her spirits rose still higher as she knew herself to be nearing it, and she had never looked brighter than when she sprang out of the lumbering old fly which had brought her and her belongings from Marlby station, and eagerly questioned the servant at the door as to which members of the family were in.

“Mamma is, you say, but not my father—and Mrs Headfort and the children? Everybody is quite well, I suppose?”

“All quite well, Miss Philippa,” replied Dorcas, the elderly handmaid who had once been Philippa’s nurse. “Your mamma and Miss Evelyn—Mrs Headfort, I should say—are in the drawing-room. I don’t think they expected you quite so soon. My master has gone to meet the young gentlemen on their way back from school. I don’t suppose they’ll be in for some time.”

“All the better,” said Philippa, “so far as the boys are concerned, that is to say. I do want to have a good talk with mamma and Evey first.”

“Yes, of course, Miss Philippa, you must have plenty to tell, and something to hear too, maybe;” this rather mysteriously.

“What can you mean?” said Philippa, stopping short on her way; but Dorcas only shook her head and smiled.

“Philippa already! How nice!” were the words that greeted her as she opened the drawing-room door. “Darling, how well you’re looking!”—and —“Evey, dear, ring for tea at once, the poor child must be famishing,” from her mother.

Certainly there could be no two opinions as to the warmth of the young girl’s welcome home.

“It is nice to be back again,” said Philippa, throwing herself on to a low chair beside her mother, “and with such lots to tell you. They have all been so kind, and I have so enjoyed it; but, by-the-by, before I begin, what does Dorcas mean by her mysterious hints about some news I had to hear?”

“Dorcas is an old goose,” said Mrs Headfort, “and,” (Page 21 missing)

tively. “And as if I didn’t realise only too fully how terrible it is, Duke writes pages and pages of warnings and instructions and directions, and heaven knows what! down to the minutest detail. If he had known more about the fashions, he would have told me exactly how my dresses were to be made, and my hair done—”

“He might have saved himself the trouble as to the last item,” said Philippa, consolingly. “You never have been and never will be able to do your hair decently, Evelyn.”

Mrs Headfort’s pretty face grew still more dejected in expression.

“I really don’t think you need be such a Job’s comforter, Philippa,” she said, reproachfully, “just when mamma and I have been longing so for you to come home. Duke *didn’t* write about my hair, so you needn’t talk about it. What he did write was bad enough, and the worst of all is—”

“What?” said Philippa.

Chapter Two.

“What?” said Philippa.

“He says,” replied Mrs Headfort, glancing round her—“dear me, where is his letter? I would like to read it to you. I must have left it up-stairs.”

“Never mind,” said her sister, with a touch of impatience. Evelyn’s belongings were rather apt to be left up-stairs or down-stairs, or anywhere, where their owner happened not to be at the moment. “Never mind about it, you can read it to me afterwards; just tell me the gist of it just now.”

“If you mean by that the most perplexing part of it, I was just going to tell it you when you interrupted. Duke says I *must* take a maid. He says his cousins would never get over it—be too scandalised for words, if I arrived without one. Such a state of things could never occur to them, even though they knew how poor we are!”

“Naturally enough,” said Philippa, “even if Duke hadn’t spoken of it, I am sure we should have thought of it ourselves. And I don’t see any such tremendous difficulty about it.”

“I might have managed it in another way,” said Mrs Headfort, “if they had invited Bonny, for then I could have taken nurse, and—well, without saying what wasn’t true—let it be supposed that I didn’t want to bring two servants. And nurse would really have done all I need fairly well.”

“But they haven’t asked Bonny? And I suppose you can’t volunteer to take him?”

“Oh, dear, no,” Evelyn replied, gazing vaguely around her again, as if by some magic her husband’s letter could have found its way down to the table beside her. “That’s just what Duke says. Bonny, you see, Philippa, is the crux. Bonny must not be obtruded. Duke lays great stress upon that, and, of course, my own sense would have told me so if he hadn’t. Oh, no, of course I can’t take nurse and Bonny, even if you and mamma could have accepted the responsibility of Vanda without nurse.”

“Of course that would have been all right with Dorcas,” said Mrs Raynsworth. “I have suggested Evelyn’s taking Dorcas, Philippa, but—”

“It would *never* do,” said Evelyn, hastily. “I’m sure you’ll say so, too, Philippa. That’s one reason I’m so glad you’ve come back. Do tell mamma it would never do.”

“Honestly, I don’t think it would,” said Philippa. “To begin with, one’s never sure of her rheumatism not getting bad—and then, though she’s the dearest old thing in the world, the wildest flight of imagination couldn’t transform her into a maid.”

“I was sure you would say so,” said Mrs Headfort. “You see, mamma dear, everything is so different from all those years ago when she was your maid.”

“Dorcas herself is different, certainly,” Mrs Raynsworth agreed, “and no wonder when you think of all she has done for us, and made herself into for our sakes,” and she sighed a little. “But otherwise, maids when I was young, I assure you, had to be quite as competent as nowadays.”

“Of course,” said Philippa, detecting the tiniest touch of annoyance in her mother’s tone, “Evelyn didn’t mean it quite that way. But still Dorcas certainly wouldn’t do. It would be very disagreeable for her at her age to be thrown into a household of that kind, and perhaps made fun of by smart servants.”

“And besides that,” said Mrs Headfort, “I don’t see how you could do without her here; and she is so clever about the children, it is a satisfaction to know you have her to consult if anything was wrong with either of them while I’m away. I mean,” she went on, with a half-unconscious apology for her maternal egotism, “for your sake, too, mamma, it lessens the responsibility.”

Mrs Raynsworth did not at once reply; she was thinking over things.

“There is Fanny,” she said; “she is a quick girl; she might be better than no one.”

“I scarcely think so,” said Philippa, “and she is inclined to be a chatterbox.

She would entertain the servants'-hall at Wyverston with all the details of our life here, and, of course, it would be terribly undignified to tell her to hold her tongue, as if we had anything to be ashamed of. It would seem to her that we wanted her to be untruthful—oh, no, it would never do!"

"There's nothing to do that I can see," said Evelyn, "except for me to go alone. There is just a chance of Dorcas hearing of some one—a girl in the village—who was coming home between two places, or something of that kind. Failing that, I see nothing for it."

"I think a perfect stranger would be worse than anything," said Philippa, "she would be so utterly unused to your ways, and yet—I thoroughly agree with what Duke says about it!"

"Oh, dear," said Mrs Headfort, throwing herself back in her chair. "What a bother it all is! I almost wish the Wyverston people had continued to forget us. And yet I should be so proud and pleased if any good came of it for Duke, as it were, you know, through me, I mean, if I could make a good impression on them;" and her face flushed a little.

"How could she fail to do so?" thought her younger sister to herself, glancing at Evelyn with fond admiration.

Mrs Headfort looked very pretty, the slight additional colour brightening up her fair complexion advantageously. She *was* very pretty, and her beauty was of the kind that bears criticising—looking into minutely—for her features were all delicate and regular, her expression sweet though far from insipid, making a charming whole, though, as a rule, perhaps somewhat wanting in colour.

"Don't let us talk about this tiresome maid question any more just now," the elder sister continued. "I've lots to tell you and ask you about my clothes, Philippa. You must have seen all sorts of beautiful dresses at Dorriford, though I'm afraid there's too little time for me to profit by any hints. And, by-the-by, I've not let you tell anything about Dorriford yet, rushing at you with my affairs."

"It is so very interesting about your going to Wyverston," said Philippa. "It has almost made me forget what I had to tell you. Nothing really exciting, perhaps! But it was all so new to me, and they were so kind. I did enjoy it

thoroughly."

Some details of her visit followed—about the people she had met, and descriptions of the place itself—the latter made more distinct by questions from her mother, who had stayed there once in her young days long ago.

"And they say—Mrs Lermont and Maida especially—that I must go back there before long. And oh! mamma," she went on, "about the money! Wasn't it kind of Mrs Lermont?" and she related what had passed between herself and her hostess just before she left Dorriford.

"It was very kind, very kind and thoughtful," said Mrs Raynsworth, cordially.

"I've got ever so much money over," Philippa continued. "The whole of Mrs Lermont's present, of course, and some of what you gave me, mamma."

"You may give me back the remains of mine," said her mother, "but you must certainly keep what your cousin gave you for yourself, however you do another time. You father must certainly pay it this once."

As she said the words, the door opened and Mr Raynsworth came in. He was tall and thin, fair like his elder daughter, and with the slight bend in his shoulders inevitable in one of his scholarly habits. He smiled brightly as he caught sight of Philippa, who started up to meet him.

"Well, my dear little secretary," he said, affectionately. "Safe back again. You're not sorry to be home, I hope."

"No, indeed," said the girl, "though I've been very happy. It was quite time for me to come home, as Evelyn is going to start off so soon. You would have been left with nobody at all!"

"I haven't been much good to him," said Mrs Headfort, deprecatingly.

"Oh, yes, my dear," said her father, with amiable condescension, "you've been very good, very good indeed. You did your best, and who can do more?"

Mrs Headfort smiled. She knew she was much less clever than her sister, but the knowledge never roused in her the faintest sensation of jealousy.

“And *à propos* of my secretaries,” continued Mr Raynsworth, “it’s going to be an *embarras de richesses*. There’s a letter from Charlie by the second post”—he held out an envelope as he spoke—“to say that he may be coming next week instead of a fortnight later.” Philippa’s face fell a little. Fond as she was of her elder brother, it went somewhat against the grain with her to think of so soon giving up the post of amanuensis to her father, which she had filled for the last two years.

“So,” Mr Raynsworth went on, “so far as *I* was concerned, my dear, you might have paid a longer visit at Dorriford.”

“Or you might come with me to Wyverston! How I wish you were coming!” said Mrs Headfort, quick to perceive the slight disappointment in her sister’s face called forth by her father’s speech, though it had been made in all innocence.

“I wish I could go with you,” said Philippa. “I shall have nothing to do when you’re away.”

“Oh, yes, dear, you will,” said her mother; “Charlie will be wanting you all day long, to begin with.”

“And I want you dreadfully *now*,” said Evelyn. “I am longing to show you my clothes and what I’m arranging about them—several things I couldn’t fix about till you came back.”

“I’m quite ready,” said Philippa. “I’m not the least tired,” and she rose to accompany her sister up-stairs, but again the door opened, and this time two pairs of arms were thrown round her with exclamations of delight.

“Oh, Hugh—Leonard! one at a time, please,” she exclaimed, laughingly.

“We’re so glad you’re back,” said the boys together, “and we’ve such heaps of things to tell you—and to show you,” added Leonard. “Are you too tired to come out to-night? I’ve got the other guinea-pig I was hoping for—one of the feathery kind, you know; he is such a beauty. Do come—”

He got hold of his sister’s sleeve and began tugging at her, while Hugh on her other side was evidently bursting with some equally important communication he was longing to make to her.

Evelyn interposed, partly through selfish motives, partly, it is to be hoped, through pity for her sister.

“You mustn’t drag Philippa out to-night, boys,” she said. “It would be inhuman! Don’t you see she has had her hat on all day; you forget she’s been travelling since the morning. I’ve been selfish enough myself in keeping you here all this time talking—come up-stairs with me, Philippa,” and she passed her hand through her sister’s arm.

“I am really not tired,” said Philippa. “Perhaps I can come out later to see the guinea-pig, Leonard;” but she did not resist Mrs Headfort’s persuasive touch. The latter glanced at her once or twice as they slowly made their way up-stairs. Philippa’s face had an absent, grave expression, which made her sister feel somewhat self-reproachful.

“You *are* tired, Philippa, whatever you say, and it is greatly my fault. It is horrid to be rushed at the moment one arrives, with a lot of home worries.”

“They are not worries in the first place,” said Philippa, rousing herself; “I am feeling nothing but the greatest interest in your plans. I am only thinking it all over.”

“I hope you include my clothes in the ‘it,’ then! There are some patterns I must decide about before the post goes out. Will you come to my room as soon as you’ve taken off your things?”

“I must just peep in at the children for a moment,” said Philippa, “but I’ll come down again directly.”

The nursery was next door to her own room, a floor higher. For on Mrs Headfort’s return from India with her two babies more than a year ago, Philippa had given up to her sister the room which had been her own since Evelyn’s marriage.

Joyful sounds from above reached Mrs Headfort’s ears as she turned in

to her own quarters—“Auntie Phil!”—“Aty, turn back!”

“How those children do adore her!” thought their mother. “I’m afraid they won’t let her go, and I really must settle about these tiresome clothes!”

But barely five minutes had passed before Philippa appeared again, divested of her travelling things, bright and interested.

“How did you manage to escape from the nursery?” said Mrs Headfort, admiringly.

Philippa laughed.

“I told them I *must* come down to you; children have a great respect for ‘must’ Oh, how pretty!” she went on, as she caught sight of an evening-dress lying on the bed; “you don’t mean to say that’s your old heliotrope! How capitally you’ve managed it!”

“I am so glad you like it,” said Evelyn, in a tone of great gratification. “I took it to Warder’s as soon as I heard about this terrible visit. It is really the only thing that’s quite ready. I must get one completely new evening-dress. Mamma and I thought white or cream would be best.”

“Yes,” Philippa agreed, “anything in colour gets so quickly, known, and white always suits you.”

“And, of course,” said Mrs Headfort, “I want something I can wear for a long time, and one can always alter a white dress. There are so many things to consider, you see, Philippa. Duke wouldn’t want them to think me extravagant, and yet, on the other side, I must on no account be dowdy.” She gave a deep sigh. “Men have no idea how difficult things are for women!”

“It is difficult,” Philippa agreed, “but your having no maid still seems to me the worst of it. Its hateful to depend on a housemaid’s good offices, and even morning-dresses are so difficult to manage by one’s self nowadays.”

“Yes indeed,” said Evelyn; “I shall never know if I look nice or not; it isn’t as if they were people I knew well—or knew at all. Oh, dear me, how I

wish they had waited to ask me till Duke came home! But now you must help me to decide on one of these patterns, or I shall miss the post."

The next half-hour passed quickly in discussions of the details of her sister's trousseau, as Philippa laughingly called it; and if the younger girl in her secret heart found the minutiae rather wearisome, she kept her feelings to herself, and was more than rewarded by Evelyn's increased good spirits and cheerfulness.

"You don't know what a comfort it is to have Philippa back again," she said to her mother that evening at dinner; "I am beginning to feel ever so much happier about Wyverston. I shall be able to write quite comfortably to poor old Duke by next mail."

Mrs Raynsworth glanced affectionately at her younger daughter. Personally these two resembled each other very closely, nor did the resemblance stop with their outward appearance. There was decision and firmness in both faces, both even more strongly marked in Philippa's case than in her mother's, for young as the girl still was, she gave one an impression of extreme reliability, and of late years somewhat failing health and the mellowing influence of time had softened the character of Mrs Raynsworth's whole personality. Her married life, though far from an unhappy one, had been by no means free from the undue share of practical cares which almost inevitably falls to the wife of a scholar. And that Mr Raynsworth was a scholar, in the fullest sense of the word, there could be no two opinions. It was from him Philippa inherited the intellectual side of her character, balanced by her mother's practical good sense, and other more ordinary though not the less desirable feminine qualities.

In his secret heart there were times when Mr Raynsworth sighed over the girl's eager interest in social amusements and the daily life of those about her.

"She almost has it in her to be a really learned woman," he would say to himself, and in other surroundings it is possible that his ideal for her might have been realised. But as things were, Philippa would have choked in a study had the bulk of her time been spent poring over books. Her lessons with her father over, or, in later years, the work she did for

him, and that with real appreciation, completed for the time being, she would fly off to arrange flowers in the drawing-room, or even to discuss the fashion of a new dress, with as keen enjoyment as if she had never touched a Greek or Latin book in her life.

Personally she was like her mother. Dark-haired, brown-eyed, and of a make and bearing suggestive of unusual vigour; while by one of those curious inconsistencies which abound in family likenesses, Evelyn Headfort resembled her father in appearance and temperament, and though by careful education her brain-powers had been made the most of, they were not above the average.

One gift she possessed—the source of infinite pleasure to those about her—that of a very beautiful voice, and if Philippa's generous nature had been capable of even a passing touch of jealousy of her sister, it would have shown in this direction.

"It is strange," she would say, sometimes, "that one can adore music as I feel I do, and yet have no power of expressing it one's self."

And even as a little child her sweetest dreams and fancies were shaped and coloured by the longing to find herself in possession of the marvellous gift of music, a gift which she sometimes felt inclined to reproach her sister for not sufficiently prizing. For musical as she undoubtedly was, Evelyn was neither poetical nor imaginative, however difficult it might be to credit this when one gazed at her delicate, almost ethereal features and lovely, dreamy blue eyes.

"One can't have everything," she would reply, prosaically enough, to her sister. "You're a hundred, thousand times cleverer than I, and quite as capable or more so, and, to *my* mind, quite as nice-looking. You really needn't grudge me my voice. I only care about it because all of you do."

But for the dissimilarity between them—possibly, indeed, to some extent in consequence of it—never were two sisters more heartily attached to each other. Never was a home less disturbed by the friction of opposing tastes or unrestrained moods than theirs. There was, no doubt, dormant intensity of feeling, depths of devotion and capacity for suffering in the younger girl's nature not yet gauged—potentialities which, it is to be

questioned, if any of those about her could have understood even had she been sufficiently conscious of them herself to attempt to express them, or egotistical enough to wish to do so. But though possibly there was less power of sympathy with her deepest self than she had any idea of, there had been nothing in her life or surroundings to stunt or thwart her individuality. Nay, rather very much the reverse—calm and stillness are excellent guardians of character in certain stages of its development.

Chapter Three.

“So Unlike Her.”

The next few days were fully occupied with Evelyn’s preparations for her visit. And here, perhaps, it may be well to explain why so apparently unimportant a matter as young Mrs Headfort’s spending a few days with her husband’s relations should have been looked upon by herself and her own family as an event of such moment.

It was now nearly four years since Evelyn Raynsworth’s marriage to Captain Headfort, and during that time two deaths had taken place in the immediate family of his cousin—the head of the house and master of Wyverston—which had greatly altered the young man’s position as a Headfort, with regard to the future. For the deaths had been those of Mr Headfort’s two sons, and though the large estates were not entailed, the family feeling of respect for the male line was proverbially strong. Marmaduke was an only son, and had been early left an orphan; the care of him in childhood and youth devolving upon relatives on his mother’s side, elderly people now dead. They had done their duty by the boy in a conscientious, unemotional fashion, and had left him a small addition to his own little patrimony: all, indeed, that they had it in their power to dispose of. So, though Captain Headfort’s childhood had been a somewhat loveless one, he remembered his uncle and aunt with gratitude—never so warm, perhaps, as when, at eight-and-twenty, he fell in love with Mr Raynsworth’s charming daughter—as but for this opportune legacy he would scarcely have thought it possible to marry. It had never occurred to him in his wildest dreams, that a day might come when he should be looked upon as the probable heir to the large estates belonging to the head of his family, of which he considered himself a very unimportant member; he was not even disappointed or hurt when no special notice was taken of his marriage, beyond a somewhat formal letter of good wishes and a wedding present of the orthodox type. There had scarcely, indeed, been time for an invitation to visit Wyverston, as the marriage took place immediately before he and his bride left for India; but the news of the death of his two cousins, little more than a year after his own marriage, and the birth of his own son had inevitably altered the

aspect of things, even to a man uncalculating and single-minded as was Evelyn's husband.

"There is actually no one of the name to succeed except myself and Bonny," he said to his wife, when the first shock of natural concern for his cousins' untimely fate had somewhat subsided, "for though Louis was married, he had only two daughters, and poor cousin Marmaduke is now quite an old man."

"It is very sad," said Evelyn, "very sad, indeed. Shall you write to them, Duke?"

He hesitated.

"I really can't say," he replied; "I know them so little. And, under these circumstances, don't you see, I rather shrink from reminding them of my existence just now."

"I don't see that you can help writing," said Evelyn. "The *not* doing so would be only too marked. And it isn't as if the property were entailed; it is all *actually* nothing more to you than to any one else."

So Captain Headfort wrote—a short, manly letter of honest sympathy—a letter which, however, in the months that followed, he often more than half regretted, though he was too generous to say so to Evelyn. For it brought forth no response, not even a formal acknowledgment.

"No doubt," he thought to himself, "they looked upon it as a piece of officiousness. However, it was done for the best, and I'll think no more about it."

Two years later saw Evelyn obliged to return to England with her children, for her health had suffered to some extent from the climate, and little Marmaduke—Bonny, as he was called—was growing thin and pale. She had been with her own people for several months, when at last the coming of the little-looked-for invitation to visit Wyverston was announced to her by her husband, as has been related. Nothing could have been more unexpected, Captain Headfort having had no communication till now with his cousins. He was even at a loss to explain their knowing of his wife's return home. And naturally he was anxious to respond cordially

to this friendly overture; anxious, perhaps, above all, that no considerations of misplaced economy should prevent Evelyn's making her début among his relatives with befitting dignity.

Hence the sensation in the Raynsworths' family circle concerning an event, on the surface, so simple and commonplace. And no one, perhaps, of all the family party had taken the matter so deeply to heart as Philippa. It was never out of her head during the few days which succeeded her return home, and by night her dreams were haunted by absurd complications and variations of the theme.

As to Duke's wife herself, the younger sister had no misgivings whatever.

"Evelyn may be shy," she thought, "but she is never awkward. She can always be stately if occasion calls for it. And her clothes will be all right; indeed, she looks nice in anything, though I do wish she had some one to help her to put them on. Yes, it is the going without a maid that spoils it all. I don't know *what* can be done!"

For the previous day had destroyed the last hope of a temporary maid being procurable, and Evelyn, with the touch of *laisser-aller* inherent in her, and which her life in India had not tended to decrease, had made up her mind to face Wyverston unattended.

"If only you keep quite well, it won't matter so much," said Mrs Raynsworth.

"I shall take care not to let the Headforts know, if I don't," said Evelyn. "I should hate them to think that Duke had married a limp, delicate sort of a girl, and, unluckily, I always look much more so than I am."

"But you are not really strong yet," said her mother. "And if you do anything foolish out of a kind of bravado, you may really lay yourself up, and think how disagreeable that would be!"

Philippa, who was present, glanced at her sister. She was certainly looking more fragile than usual. The excitement, and, to a certain extent, fatigue of the last few days were telling upon her, and a feeling of additional anxiety came upon the younger girl.

“I shall really not be a bit surprised at anything that happens,” she said, in a tone of annoyance. “You are quite right, mamma, and I wish you would frighten Evelyn well. She is sometimes as silly about herself as if she were no older than Vanda,” and the laugh with which Mrs Headfort treated this remonstrance was by no means reassuring.

This conversation took place on Tuesday—Friday was the day fixed for Evelyn’s journey. Late on Thursday evening Mrs Raynsworth and her eldest daughter were sitting alone in the drawing-room, or, to be more exact, Evelyn was lying on a couch while her mother sat beside her.

“Don’t look so worried, mamma dear,” said the younger woman. “I really am better; I don’t think there is actually much the matter with me; I have just overtired myself a little. I shall be all right once I start to-morrow.”

“It is your going alone,” said Mrs Raynsworth, despondently.

Evelyn stroked her mother’s hand.

“How funny you are!” she said; “you didn’t mind it half so much at first as Philippa did, and now she says nothing more about it, and you have begun to worry yourself. But as for Philippa, where can she be? I’ve scarcely seen her to-day.”

“She was out for some time this afternoon,” said Mrs Raynsworth. “I was rather surprised at it, for she knows I am uneasy about you.”

As she spoke, the door opened and her younger daughter entered.

“Where have you been?” said Mrs Headfort; “with papa?”

“No,” Philippa replied, “I’ve been up in my own room.”

“You might have stayed with me the last evening,” her sister continued, with a touch of reproach. “And I must go to bed immediately—poor mamma’s unhappy about my looking so ill.”

Philippa glanced at her critically.

“I don’t wonder,” she said; “you certainly are not looking well. Yes, I think

the best thing you can do is to go to bed. Let me see, what time do you leave to-morrow?”

“Not till eleven—that’s to say, eleven from this house. The train goes at twelve.”

Philippa’s face grew grave.

“Don’t think it horrid of me,” she began, “but I can’t possibly be here to say good-bye to you at eleven, or to go to the station with you. I *must* be at Marlby before then, to-morrow morning.”

“Well, if you’re to be there, why not come to the station to see me off?” said Evelyn. “I shall think it rather horrid of you if you don’t!”

“I am very sorry,” Philippa replied, “very sorry to seem horrid, but I can’t even see you off.”

“How strange you are, Philippa!” exclaimed Mrs Raynsworth. “You shouldn’t have made any pressing engagement for to-morrow morning. You seemed so anxious about Evelyn!”

“So I am, mamma,” Philippa replied, “but the mere fact of my seeing her off wouldn’t do her much good.”

But Mrs Raynsworth still looked annoyed. She was feeling really anxious and concerned about her elder daughter, and was in consequence less calm than usual.

“Evelyn,” said Philippa, “do come up to bed. I’ll stay with you while you undress.”

Mrs Headfort got up slowly.

“Philippa is queer this evening,” she thought to herself. “She’s not very nice to mamma.”

“I will come down again in a few minutes,” said Philippa, as they left the room. “I only want to make sure of Evelyn taking her medicine, and to prevent her going into the nursery again to-night.—What will you do

without me to look after you," she added, turning to her sister.

"There will be no nursery for me to wander into," said Evelyn, with a sigh, "when I feel dull or lonely, as there is here."

Philippa turned quickly.

"But you never do feel dull or lonely—at least not *lonely*, here with mamma and me, surely?" she said, with a touch of reproach.

"Oh, well, no, not in the same way, of course. But there must be times when I feel lonely without Duke, even though I love so being at home with all of you. It wouldn't be natural if I didn't miss him."

"No, I suppose not," said Philippa, half absently, for in her own mind she was thinking, "How strange it must be to care for anybody *more* than for one's own people! I cannot picture it to myself at all."

The few minutes she had spoken of to her mother turned out thirty at least, for more than half an hour had passed before her younger daughter rejoined Mrs Raynsworth in the drawing-room. And even then Philippa seemed so carried away and preoccupied that her mother felt again slightly irritated by her manner.

"Are you very tired this evening, Philippa?" she said at last; "or is there anything the matter? You don't seem like yourself."

Philippa gave a little start.

"I'm quite well—not the least tired, I mean," she said, quickly. "I am thinking about Evelyn; there is nothing else the matter."

"You mean about her going to-morrow alone?" said Mrs Raynsworth; "I am not at all happy about it myself. She looks so fragile, poor little thing. She is not nearly as strong as you, Philippa, in any way. But it is always a satisfaction to me to see how fond you are of each other; she clings to you so. And to tell you the truth, before she and the children came to us, I had some misgiving as to how it would be, for you were practically a child when she married, and those two or three years made all the difference. You had come to be so thoroughly the daughter at home—helping your

father and me. I have perhaps never said to you before in so many words that I have been very pleased, very gratified by your whole tone towards and about Evey. You have been unselfish and self-forgetting all through."

The young girl's eyes glistened with pleasure. It was not often that Mrs Raynsworth—as a rule a somewhat silent and undemonstrative woman—expressed herself so unreservedly.

"Dear mamma," said Philippa, "there isn't *anything* I wouldn't do for Evelyn. And I am so glad, so particularly glad, that you understand it. Thank you so much for what you've said. Now, I think I will go to bed if you don't mind," and she kissed her mother warmly.

"She must be tired, though she won't own to it," thought Mrs Raynsworth as Philippa left the room. "It is generally so difficult to get her to go to bed early," and again the feeling came over her of there being something slightly unusual about her younger daughter that evening.

She would have been still more perplexed and surprised could she have seen Philippa an hour or two later in her own room. For long after the whole household was asleep, the girl was busily sewing at various articles of her attire, altering them and modifying them with the help of some small purchases she had made that afternoon. And when at last all was completed to her satisfaction, she drew out a small light trunk, already partially packed, which she proceeded to fill.

"I think that will do," she said to herself, as she stood up and surveyed it with satisfaction. "With this and a hand-bag, and the things I'll manage to get into Evelyn's roll of rugs, I am sure I shall have all I need. Now I've only to write my letter of explanation to mamma. Dorcas must give it to her when it is quite certainly too late to overtake me."

And half an hour later she was in bed and fast asleep, her mother's words having removed any misgivings she had felt as to what she was about to do.

Mrs Headfort looked a little better the next morning, thanks to a good night's rest; thanks also, perhaps, to the not unnatural excitement she was feeling about her journey and its results. Between her anticipations and her regret at leaving her children, she was sufficiently distracted not

to notice that Philippa had slipped away in some mysterious fashion quite an hour before the time fixed for her own departure. It was actually not till she was standing at the hall door, waiting till the luggage should be safely established on the top of the fly before getting in herself, that she suddenly exclaimed:

“Where can Philippa be, mamma? I haven’t seen her since breakfast.”

Mrs Raynsworth glanced round with an air of annoyance.

“I have no idea,” she said. “She is certainly not with your father. What was it she was saying last night about not going to the station with you?”

“Oh, just that she couldn’t go; she has some mysterious engagement. But she might at least have said good-bye first.”

“It is so unlike her,” replied the mother. “And somehow I didn’t take it in, otherwise I would have got ready to see you off myself.”

“Oh, I don’t mind that part of it in the least,” said Evelyn. “It’s not as if it were a big crowded station. But tell Philippa, all the same, that I don’t understand her going off like that. Now, good-bye, dear mamma, and don’t worry about me. I shall be all right if I get good news of the children, and you or Phil will write every day, I’m sure—a mere word would be enough.”

“Yes, dear, of course we shall,” replied Mrs Raynsworth, reassuringly, though her face had a more anxious expression than usual. “I won’t ask *you* to write every day,” she went on, “for I know how tiresome it is to feel bound to do so when one is staying with people. Only let us know of your arrival as soon as you can, and say how you are.”

She stood watching the fly as it made its way down the short drive, waving her hand in response to Evelyn’s last smile and nod. Then she went slowly back into the house.

“I couldn’t have said anything to disturb Evelyn just as she was starting,” she thought to herself, “but I really do think Philippa is behaving most extraordinarily. I hope these very independent ways of hers are not the result of her visit to Dorriford. I wonder, by-the-by, if Dorcas knows where

she is gone."

But, strange to say, Dorcas was not to be found in any of her usual haunts, though one of the under-servants said she had seen her not five minutes before, up-stairs in Miss Philippa's room. Tired and somewhat depressed, though she scarcely knew why, Mrs Raynsworth sat down in the drawing-room with a vague intention of writing a letter or otherwise employing herself usefully, but contrary to her usual habits, more than an hour passed before she exerted herself to do anything but gaze dreamily out of the window, where the now fast-falling leaves were whirling about fantastically in the breeze.

"I feel as if I were waiting for something, though for what I don't know," she thought, and it was with a start of surprise that the clock, striking one, caught her ear. "Dear me, how idle I have been—one o'clock! Evelyn must be well on her way by this. I wonder when Philippa intends to come in?"

Just then the door opened and Dorcas appeared. She carried a salver in her hand, and on it lay a letter.

"If you please, ma'am," the old servant began, "Miss Philippa wished me to give you this at one o'clock, but not before. I don't know what it's about, I don't, indeed," she added, anxiously, "but I do hope there's nothing wrong."

Her words were well intended, but they only served to sharpen the uneasiness which Mrs Raynsworth was already feeling. Her face grew pale, and her heart beat painfully fast as she took hold of the envelope.

"A letter, and from Philippa!" she exclaimed; "what can it mean? No, don't go away, Dorcas," though the old servant had shown no sign of doing so. "If—if there is anything wrong,"—though what could have been wrong she would have been at a loss to say—"I must keep calm. Don't go till I see what it is." And with trembling fingers she opened the letter.

For Philippa *had* been preoccupied and unlike herself the night before, and even this very morning, there was no denying.

Chapter Four.

Fellow-Travellers.

In the meantime all had progressed smoothly with Mrs Headfort.

The train was already in the station when she and her boxes found themselves on the platform, for Marlby was a terminus in its small way. It lay about an hour off the main line, and as express trains do not *always* wait the arrival of small local ones, departures from Marlby for the junction were characterised by most praiseworthy punctuality, any wafting that might occur being pretty sure to take place at Wrexhill junction itself.

But to-day the express proved worthy of its name, barely five minutes having been passed at the big station before Evelyn found herself re-established in her favourite corner of a first-class compartment, otherwise empty, of the train.

“Now I shall feel settled,” she said to herself, with satisfaction, “no more changes till I get almost to my journey’s end. I do hope nobody will get in. I wish I could go to sleep and then I should feel fresh on arriving, and I never like to shut my eyes with strangers in the carriage—for one thing, one looks so silly; I’ve often laughed at other people. I wish the train would start—oh, dear,”—as at that moment the door opened to admit a new-comer—“what a bother!” and as she made this mental ejaculation the train began to move.

“How rash of her!” thought Mrs Headfort, glancing at the intruder, whose back for the moment was turned towards her.

She was a tall, slender woman, neatly but simply dressed in black, young too, as far as Mrs Headfort’s present chances of observation could decide. “She looks like a maid—she must have got in first-class by mistake sorely,” but at this point in her reflections the black-robed figure turned, calmly seating herself opposite Evelyn, and lifting the thick veil she wore, disclosed to the gazer’s astonished eyes the face of her sister Philippa!

Mrs Headfort grew pale—more than pale indeed, perfectly white—and uttered a faint scream. For the moment, in the confusion of ideas always engendered by the utterly unexpected, she really felt as if she had seen a ghost. It was impossible for her at once to grasp the fact that before her was indeed her sister, a flesh-and-blood Philippa. She could scarcely have been more amazed had the figure in front of her proceeded to dissolve into thin air and disappear! And the effect on the girl herself of her sister's agitation was for an instant paralysing. Any enjoyment she had anticipated in this *coup d'état*, any thought of "fun" completely faded. She felt so terrified and startled at the effect upon Evelyn of what she had imagined would cause at the most but a start of surprise, and probably some vehement remonstrance, that she was utterly unable to speak. Only, when at length—or what seemed at length, for in reality not twenty seconds had passed since the new-comer had revealed herself—Evelyn's pale lips murmured with a gasp, "Philippa!" did her own power of utterance return to her.

"Evey, Evey," she exclaimed, "don't look like that I never thought you would be so frightened. I—I thought that on the whole you'd be pleased."

The distress in Philippa's face touched her sister. She tried to smile, and the effort brought some colour back again to her pale face.

"It was silly of me," she said at last, "but I don't understand! Did you mean to come with me to Wrexhill? Oh, no, I forgot, we have passed it; we shall not stop again till Crowminster, ever so far away. Philippa, what are you thinking of?" and again her face grew very troubled.

"Of course I know we don't stop for ever so long," said Philippa, trying to speak easily. "I looked it all out in the railway guide; that was why I wouldn't let you know I was in the train till after we had passed the junction. It's too late to send me back now, Evey; the trains don't match in the least I should have hours to wait at Crowminster, and again at the junction. I shouldn't get home till who knows when, and what is still more to the purpose," she added, but in a lower voice, "I wouldn't go back if you told me to—nothing in the world would make me go back."

The sense of her last words did not reach her sister's brain. She sat staring at Philippa with more and more widely opening eyes.

“Why are you dressed like that?” she exclaimed, gradually taking in the fact of her sister’s unusual get-up. “Is it some trick you are playing, Philippa—some silly, practical joke? I *cannot* understand you, just now, especially, when I wanted to be calm and as easy-minded as possible for this visit!”

The reproach in her tone roused Philippa’s indignation.

“Trick—practical joke!” she repeated. “How can you say such a thing? What do you take me for?” and her voice faltered. “You are very stupid, Evelyn,” she went on, more lightly. “You surely must understand what I mean to do. I am no longer Philippa Raynsworth, I am Mrs Headfort’s maid—a very good, trustworthy girl, though rather young and not very experienced. So I hope, ma’am, I have made things clear.”

Evelyn gasped.

“Phil!” was all she could find breath to say for a moment. “Yes, indeed,” she went on, “I have been fearfully dense and stupid. I might have suspected something from your manner the last day or two, and when you so suddenly gave in about my going alone. But, oh, Phil, you are perfectly mad; such a thing cannot possibly be allowed. Just think if it were found out! What *would* Duke say?”

“Duke shall never hear of it!” Philippa replied, composedly. “It is my secret, Evelyn; I throw myself upon your honour never to tell *anybody*—do you hear—anybody without my leave. You must *promise*.”

“But papa and mamma?” said Evelyn, bewilderedly. “Papa and mamma,” repeated Philippa again, forgetting good manners in her excitement. “*They* know, of course. I mean,”—catching the increasing amazement on her sister’s face—“I mean they will know by this time. I left a letter for Dorcas to give mamma as soon as it was quite too late to stop me. In her heart I do believe mamma will be thankful to know I am with you, to take care of you, my poor little sweet, with your troubled white face. Oh, darling, do cheer up and see the bright side of it. *Its going to be*—nothing would make me give it up—do understand that, and let yourself be comfortable. Think how beautifully I can do your hair, and dress you, and everything, and what nice talks we can have when you are tired and

come up to your room for a little rest. I can be ever so much more use to you even for talking and consulting, than if I were going with you as your sister. And think, if you feel ill or very depressed, how glad you will be to know I am at hand. And how glad mamma will be—why, I can write to her every day and keep her mind at rest."

Evelyn's face relaxed a little.

"But, Phil," she began, and by the tone of her voice, in spite of the remonstrating, "but," Philippa knew the battle was won, "but, Phil, the life for you—among the *servants*—you, my sister! Oh, no, it—"

"It will be such a chance for studying one part of the other side of things as falls to very few," she interrupted. "Just what I shall enjoy. Why, if ever I come to write stories, as papa says I may do some day, think how valuable it will be to me to have actually made one at the 'second table' myself. It will be something like a night-in-a-casual-ward experience."

Evelyn shuddered.

"Don't say such things, Philippa, it makes it worse and worse. At least the servants will be *clean*."

"It is to be hoped so," said her sister, coolly.

"But the men-servants," continued Mrs Headfort; "fancy you sitting down between the butler and the valet! Oh, Philippa, when papa hears of it I believe he will come off by the first train to fetch you himself."

"He will do nothing of the kind," returned Philippa. "He will shrug his shoulders and say it will be a good lesson for me, and in his heart he will enjoy the humour of it. You can certainly trust me to keep all the butlers and valets in the world in their place, even though I'm only a lady's-maid," and she drew up her head proudly. "But seriously, Evey," she went on, "I'm sure there will be nothing of the kind required at Wyverston; you may be pretty certain the servants will be a most decorous, old-fashioned set. I shall not be expected to do more than 'speak when I'm spoken to' and 'mend *your* clothes' if you tear them."

Philippa knew what she was about. She went on talking in the same

strain till she succeeded in making Evelyn smile and even laugh, taking care to treat the whole affair as irrevocable—a *fait accompli*—knowing Mrs Headfort's mind to be so constituted that taking her acceptance for granted was in nine cases out of ten to insure it.

An hour and more passed, Evelyn's intended opposition to the extraordinary drama arranged by Philippa, growing, half unconsciously to herself, feebler and fainter. She was feeling very tired, too, as the result of the agitation she had gone through, and in such conditions it came naturally to her to cling with childlike appeal to those around her. And Philippa's stronger personality made her a very rock of support to poor Evey.

Suddenly a thought struck her.

"Phil," she said, "how is it you are travelling in here? Did you take a first-class ticket?"

Miss Raynsworth shook her head.

"Oh, no," she replied; "I am going to get out at Crowminster. There is a second-class compartment next door. I don't suppose there will be any difficulty about my having come this bit of the way with you, but if there should be, I can pay the difference. It is much better for me not to stay with you: we shall get into our rôle more quickly if we start at once. I will look in at every station to see if you want anything. We must be getting near Crowminster now."

Evelyn did not speak for a moment or two.

"There is just one little thing to be settled," Philippa went on, with a touch of hesitation. "What will you call me, Evey?"

Evey glanced at her.

"Oh, Phil," she exclaimed, "it is altogether impossible. I shall never be able to keep it up."

"Nonsense," said her sister, with a touch of asperity. "*You* will have no keeping up, as you call it, to do, and as for my part of it, you can safely

leave that to me."

"I shall never be able to call you anything but Phil," said Mrs Headfort, plaintively.

"I've thought of that," replied the young girl. "We had better choose a name which would not clash—I mean, so that if you *did* call me 'Phil' by mistake, people would either not notice it or think you had interrupted yourself. What do you say to 'Phillis'? It would do very well, I think?"

"I daresay it would," said Mrs Headfort, with a curious kind of resignation in her voice.

"Of course it is a *perfect* name for a maid," said Philippa, "if people didn't always use surnames. But you can truthfully say, if any one remarks upon it, that you've known me all my life, though I've only lately entered your service."

"I cannot go into any explanations of the kind, whatever people say, I warn you, Philippa. I haven't the nerve for it. Even if my *words* were true, I should feel as if I were telling stories."

"Oh, well, say nothing, then," her sister replied, tranquilly. "On the whole it will be as well, or perhaps better. But now, Evey, we are getting near Crowminster, and I must go back to my own carriage. There's only just one thing more I want to prepare you for.—Shut your eyes for a minute."

Evey meekly obeyed; she was past the stage of any attempt at restiveness by this time.

"Now," said Philippa, and Evelyn, looking up, gave a slight exclamation.

"Who would have thought it would change you so? Where in the world did you get them?"

The "it" and the "them" referred to a pair of bluish-tinted spectacles which Philippa had composedly donned.

"Aren't they splendid?" she said. "Don't you remember them? They're a pair mamma had that summer ages ago, when she went to Switzerland

with papa, to shade her eyes from the glare. Of course they're only plain glass, and very dark blue ones wouldn't have done; they look so like a disguise. At least, in all the sensational stories, they are always used for that. And real spectacles would have dazed me, for my sight's as keen as —"

"A hawk's!" said Mrs Headfort, with a spark of reviving vivacity. "But, oh, Phil, the train is slackening. I wish you could have stayed with me."

"It is much better not," said Philippa, philosophically. "Very much better not. We should have gone on talking and forgetting the new state of things. My being in another compartment is the first act in the play—it will help us to realise it. And now, ma'am," she continued, rising as she spoke, for by this time the train had stopped, "I had better leave you. I will come to see if you desire me for anything at the next station we stop at."

Without the undue effort or constraint, which would have accompanied any complete change of tone for a prolonged period, she had managed slightly to modify her usual inflection of voice and manner of speaking. It was slower and more monotonous than its wont, with a slight suggestion of choosing her words, as might be done by an intelligent girl of a lower class with enough education to make her aspire to perfect correctness.

"All right, Phillis," Mrs Headfort replied, with a somewhat pitiful and not very successful attempt at following her sister's lead. "No," she continued, with a sudden change of tone, "don't speak to me. I can't stand it! I will do my best to brace myself up to it, but it won't be easy. Perhaps it *is* better for you to leave me alone."

Philippa did not reply, except by a smile and a nod, feeling, to tell the truth, far less easy-minded than she looked. She was becoming conscious that till now she had not sufficiently taken into account Evelyn's peculiar unfitness for acting a part of any kind; all she had directed her attention to having been the mere obtaining of her sister's consent to her scheme.

"Yet, after all," she thought to herself, as she stepped into the second-class compartment next door, "after all, all she will have to do will be very easy; there will be no acting involved. We shall hardly ever be seen

together, and if her manner is constrained and peculiar, it will only be thought to be her way with servants. It isn't as if we were going among people who had ever seen her before."

With these reflections she did her best to quell her misgivings, and feeling that it would be better not to let her mind dwell too long on her own concerns, she looked about her for a little diversion.

There were two or three other occupants of the compartment, and her glance fell almost immediately on one of them who at once riveted her attention. This was a long-nosed, melancholy-eyed dachshund, whom Philippa's judgment, experienced in matters pertaining to his family, straightway mentally labelled as a "perfect beauty." In other words, as consistently and entirely ugly as the strictest connoisseur could demand.

Philippa loved dogs, and in general her amiable feelings towards them were reciprocated. She had a very tender association with dachshunds, the tragic death of one such pet having been literally the sorest grief of her childhood, and as she gazed on her four-footed fellow-traveller, whose soft eyes gazed back at her in return from the seat exactly opposite hers, where he was comfortably established in a corner, it was perhaps well for her that the blue-tinted spectacles hid the tears which involuntarily dimmed their surface.

Never since that terrible day—now, what the young girl would have called "so many, many years ago," when the broken-hearted child had sobbed itself to sleep for the loss of her darling—never had she seen another dog so exactly like "Valentine."

"Oh, you dear, dear dog," she said, under her breath, "I feel as if you must know me."

The words were quite inaudible, but some doggie instinct must have carried their meaning to the brain of poor Valentine's double, for with something between a smile and a sigh—literally speaking, a yawn of regret at the interruption of his comfortable repose—the dachshund, at the cost of considerable self-denial, slowly lifted himself, and with something between a spring and a stretch, landed his lengthy person on Philippa's knee. Thence he lifted his reddy-brown eyes, gleaming with

mingled pathos and humour, to her face for approval.

“You dear little man, good doggie,” exclaimed Miss Raynsworth, too delighted to remember her rôle, “how sweet of you to come to me! How did you find out I wanted you?”

Suddenly a voice interrupted her. Till this moment, absorbed by the dog, his owner had not attracted her attention. She was vaguely conscious of two elderly women at the other end of the carriage, and a man of some kind on the same side as the dachs, but that was all.

Now, glancing up quickly at the preliminary “I beg your pardon,” she became aware of a pair of eyes, reddy-brown eyes, which might have been the dog’s own transferred to a human face, looking at her with an expression in which, however, there was nothing pathetic, only kindly and good-humoured surprise.

“I beg your pardon,” their owner repeated; “I never saw Solomon take such liberties before.—Down, Solomon; down, sir.”

But Solomon demurred.

“She likes having me,” he said, as plainly as dog language can speak, with a deprecatory wag of his tail, and Philippa passed her arm round him.

“I love him,” she said, eagerly; “he is so like—one I had,” her voice dropping a little. “Do let him stay with me. ‘Solomon’—what a nice name!”

Solomon wagged his tail more energetically. For him the situation was quite agreeably clear; not so for his master. As Philippa glanced again at the young man the expression of surprise, almost of perplexity, on his face came home to her, bringing with it the remembrance of her assumed personality. The colour rushed into her face as she realised how imperfect was her preparation for carrying out her part.

“The very first time I have had to speak to any one,” she thought to herself, “I have completely forgotten it all! Dear me, how shall I ever get on? It was all your fault, Solomon,” giving him an affectionate little hug.

Solomon’s master, meanwhile, was increasingly perplexed. The discrepancy between the young girl’s easy manner and well-bred tone of voice, and the rigorous simplicity of her dress, which even his masculine eyes perceived to be not that of a lady, struck him more and more.

“What was there to make her get so red about?” he said to himself, and he was turning away, out of pity for her embarrassment, when she again addressed him.

“I am so fond of dogs, sir,” she said, slowly. “I am quite accustomed to taking care of them.”

“Certainly, if you like to be troubled with him,” the young man replied, somewhat inconsequently. He spoke with perfect civility, yet there was an impalpable change in his tone at once perceptible to Philippa’s quick ears —her last sentences had succeeded in their object. Yet the consciousness of this was accompanied to her by an altogether unreasonable touch of annoyance.

“He is quite satisfied already that I am a servant,” she reflected. “Really, if beauty is but skin deep, social distinctions, or the outward signs of them, are far less so,” and again the blood mounted to her cheeks, this time, however, without attracting the notice of her fellow-traveller, who had now opened a magazine and was absorbed in its contents.

Chapter Five.

“Solomon.”

Philippa sat quietly in her corner, one arm thrown comfortably round Solomon’s plump little person, perfectly to that philosopher’s content. Among the various preparations for her journey, it had not occurred to the young girl to provide herself with any literature. Her eyes were consequently at leisure to occupy themselves with anything of interest that might come in their way. But the country through which the train was just then passing was flat and monotonous; she soon grew tired of staring out of the window, and she dared not amuse herself with Solomon for fear of attracting his master’s attention.

Furthermore, the dachs, by this time was contentedly asleep.

Philippa’s eyes strayed to the end of the carriage. One of the elderly ladies had already followed Solomon’s example; her sister, for sisters they unmistakably were, returned Philippa’s slight glance in her direction with a somewhat severe look of doubtful approval.

“What a forward girl!” she had been saying to herself, and Philippa almost felt the words.

She only smiled to herself, however.

“I am really going through excellent training already,” she thought, and again she turned to the window.

A moment or two later, however, some instinct, possibly merely a sensation of suppressed restlessness, led her to glance at Solomon’s master, and this time she was able to do so unobserved, for maiden-lady number two had also closed her eyes in peaceful repose.

“How ugly he is!” was Miss Raynsworth’s first idea, and the adjective was in some sense justified, for the charm of the young man’s face doubtless lay in his pleasant eyes, at present lowered so as he read. But there is ugliness and ugliness, and in the face under Miss Raynsworth’s scrutiny,

in spite of its somewhat rugged features, there was nothing in the very slightest degree repellent or hard. The mouth was excellent, the rest of the features in no way remarkable, and yet not commonplace or in any sense weak, and a good mouth means a great deal. On the whole the face was interesting, and the longer Philippa observed him the more inclined she felt to modify her first somewhat wholesale opinion.

“I wonder how old he is,” she said to herself; “he might be almost any age between twenty-four and thirty-four.”

Then as he turned a leaf of his magazine, she hastily glanced away for fear of detection. There was another motive, besides that of an ever ready interest in her fellow-creatures, strongly developed in the girl; the face before her reminded her of some other that she had seen lately, though when or where she could not for some time recall. She glanced up furtively, and at last it flashed upon her, so much to her satisfaction, that she could scarcely suppress an exclamation of triumph.

“I know whom he is like, and yet they are as different as possible; it is that Mr Gresham whom I saw at Dorriford, that very silent man. And yet he was *so* handsome, and this man is just the opposite. What curious things likenesses are!”

At this point in her reflections she must have got a little drowsy, for which Solomon’s gentle, monotonous breathing close to her ear may possibly to some extent have been accountable. Whether this was the case or not, she knew nothing more till she was roused by the slackening of the train, quickly followed by preparations on the part of the two elderly ladies for leaving the carriage, which they did with their various rugs and bags as soon as it drew up at a large important station, one of the two or three at which the express stopped on its northward route.

Solomon yawned and looked about him, then fixed his gaze inquiringly on his master as if to ask: “Do *we* get out here too?” But to this inarticulate question the young man vouchsafed no reply, and Solomon settled himself down again.

“Are you not getting tired of having him?” he said to Philippa, when he had courteously helped the old ladies and their belongings on to the

platform.

“Oh, no, no, thank you, sir,” she replied, “not at all; but,” getting up from her seat, “I must go to see if my lady wants anything. She is in the next carriage.”

“You had better be quick,” said her fellow-traveller, warningly; “we are going on again almost immediately, and I fancy we are a little behind time.”

Philippa managed, however, to peep in next door where Evelyn was still alone, apparently very comfortable and rather sleepy.

“I am all right, thank you, quite right,” she volunteered, before her sister had time to make any inquiry. “I think I must have been asleep a little, but I don’t mind when there is nobody in the carriage.”

“The best thing you could have done,” said Philippa, approvingly. “I don’t think we stop again now till Great Malden, where we change, you know, for the local line,” and nodding cheerfully she turned away, but not till some last words from Evelyn reached her.

“It is nice to know you’re next door, Phil.”

The girl sprang up into her own compartment just as the train began to move. Her former fellow-traveller, who was near the door, caught her arm to help her in.

“You really should be more careful,” he said; “there is nothing so risky as waiting till the last moment.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Philippa, feeling guilty; “it was careless of me.”

She ensconced herself in her corner again, but with a sensation of annoyance, which even Solomon’s unmistakable satisfaction at her reappearance did not allay.

“How stupid I am,” she thought to herself, “always doing something or other to attract notice when I should be quite unobserved!” and her face, as she sat staring out of the window, had lost its former cheerful

expression.

So, at least, it seemed to Solomon's master, as in spite of himself he glanced at her more than once.

"There's something uncommon about the girl," he thought to himself, "hyper-sensitive, I should say, for her position—possibly she was born in a better one. I don't see that there was anything to hurt her feelings in what I said just now."

But he was essentially kind-hearted, and the worried look on the girl's countenance, and the absent way in which she returned the little dog's friendly demonstrations, made him feel sorry for her.

"Perhaps her mistress is down upon her, poor girl," he thought; "some women must be terribly tyrannical to their servants."

They travelled on in silence, however, for a considerable time. By degrees the aspect of the country through which they were passing changed for the better—a little exclamation of pleasure escaped Philippa involuntarily as a charming view burst upon them. It was that of a small lake, its shores beautifully wooded, with rising ground on the farther side.

"Oh, how pretty!" she said, quickly, though instantly checking herself as she remembered that she was not alone. Rather to her surprise her fellow-traveller responded to her exclamation.

"Yes," he said, "the part of the country we are coming to now is worth looking at, if you've never been here before. It's rather like the prettiest part of Nethershire."

"Oh," said Philippa, impulsively, interested at once; "isn't Merle-in-the-Wold in Nethershire? I passed that way last week—it was charming."

Again the change in her tone and way of speaking struck her companion curiously. There was a coincidence, too, in the name she had just mentioned.

"Yes," he replied; "it is that part I was thinking of; I know it well."

But already Philippa had had time to repent her impulsiveness, and a slight feeling of alarm added to her discomfort—alarm at her own indiscretion.

“I shall be telling where my own home is next,” she thought to herself; “I really am too foolish for words.”

It was too late, however, to do away with the impression her inconsistency had produced. The young man went on speaking.

“Have you seen the ruins of the old abbey at Merle-in-the-Wold?” he said.

“Oh, no, sir, I have never stayed there,” Philippa replied, but she felt that she was not playing her part as she should. For something in his manner, quiet as it was, convinced her that her companion’s curiosity was aroused.

“Oh, I thought that you knew that part of Nethershire?” he said, more for the sake of saying something to cause her to reply than from any definite motive in the inquiry.

“N-no,” said Philippa, “I have only passed that way. I never heard of the ruins.”—“How I wish I had a book!” she thought to herself; “though he is perfectly nice, he is evidently trying to make me out I am afraid to speak, and I am afraid not to speak. I wish to goodness he hadn’t had a dog with him, though you *are* such a darling,” this last with reference to Solomon, who, seeming to read her thoughts, poked his long nose affectionately right up into her face.

Something in her manner made the young man conscious that his speaking to her caused her annoyance, and he turned his attention again to his magazine, greatly to Philippa’s relief.

“I suppose it is really a very good thing,” she thought again, “that I have had this experiment. I had no idea I should be so utterly silly and without presence of mind; I really must drill myself!”

For the present, however, there was no further opportunity of doing so, her fellow-traveller leaving her and his dog to their own devices for the rest of the time that had to pass till they reached Great Malden. At this

station the sisters were to leave the main line for a branch one, by which an hour's much slower travelling would bring them to their journey's end.

As they entered the large station, Philippa collected her few belongings preparatory to getting out and rejoining Mrs Headfort.

"Good-bye, poor doggie," she said, softly, as she patted Solomon's sleek head; and, short as their acquaintance had been, a curious feeling of sadness stole over her as she caught sight of the unmistakable regret in the dachs' wistful eyes. His master read on till after Philippa had left the compartment, apparently unconscious of the farewell and of the girl's departure.

Evelyn, by this time more or less in a fluster as to catching the other train without leaving her luggage behind her, or similar catastrophes, welcomed her sister joyfully.

"Really," she said, when she found herself once more comfortably established for the third and last time with nothing missing or left behind, "really, Phil, what a splendid courier you are! I have got quite out of things with India, and leading such a stay-at-home life since I came back, and you never seem to lose your head in the least," she concluded, admiringly.

"I have always been stronger than you, you know, Evey," said Philippa, glancing affectionately at her sister, whose pretty face had just now the added charm of a soft flush of excitement. "And really," she added, "there has been nothing whatever just now to lose one's head about. To all appearance this little train might have been peacefully waiting for us all day, and, now we are here, it shows no signs of intending to move." Then, with a sudden change of tone—"Oh, I declare," she exclaimed, as at that moment a dog, catching sight of her as she stood at the door of Mrs Headfort's carriage, rushed up and sprang at her with the liveliest delight.

It was Solomon.

"Down, down, good doggie, be quiet," said Philippa, hastily, afraid of startling Evelyn. But that small piece of mischief was already accomplished. Mrs Headfort jumped up in alarm.

“Phil, Phil,” she cried, “do send him away! A strange dog dashing at you like that; he must be mad!”

“Nonsense,” said Philippa: “look at him; he’s a perfect dear—just like Valentine; as gentle as he can be. Don’t be so silly, Evey.”

But as she said the last words, looking round, to her horror, she caught sight of Solomon’s owner standing, as might have been expected under the circumstances, but a few paces off.

Could he have heard her! Philippa trembled at the thought.

“And I, who had imagined he was safely whizzing off northwards in the express!” she reflected.

Nerving herself she turned round so as to face him. His expression of countenance was entirely imperturbable; it told her nothing. Coolly whistling the dog off, he walked along the platform to the farther end of the train—whether to get into it, or to pass the time while waiting for some other, Philippa could not discover—Solomon obediently, though reluctantly, following him.

“The dog’s gone,” said Miss Raynsworth, turning to her sister with a touch of sharpness in her voice. “He was all right, I assure you. He knew me again, because he travelled in the same compartment with me from Crowminster.”

“Well, you might have said so,” said her sister, half ashamed of her fright. “I wish you’d get into your carriage, Philippa; we are sure to start immediately.”

“I’m going,” the girl replied. “But *isn’t* he like Valentine, Evey?”

She moved away, however, without waiting for a reply.

The rest of the journey passed without incident. She spent the time in taking herself to task for having again lapsed into her ordinary tone to Evelyn, too confident of not being overheard, and in mentally drilling herself for the future.

“It was all Solomon’s fault,” she said to herself, “both just now and in the other train. I do hope he and his master are safely off in a different direction. But even if they are in the train, there is no reason why they should be going on to Wyverston station. I shall look out every time we stop on the chance of seeing: them.”

She had plenty of opportunities for so doing. Never had a train gone on its way more deliberately, or come to a standstill more frequently. But on none of the small platforms alongside of which they drew up did Philippa perceive the pair of travellers for whom she was on the outlook. Her hopes began to rise.

“I really think,” she said to herself, “that they can’t have come by this train. I daresay I am silly, but the very idea of that man’s being in the neighbourhood makes me nervous. I am so certain he was curious about me.”

This satisfaction at her fellow-travellers’ disappearance proved, however, premature. A station or two before that of the sisters’ destination, lo and behold! on a deserted-looking roadside platform, there stood, having evidently just emerged from the train, the dachshund and his master!

Quick as thought, Philippa, who had been glancing out half carelessly, drew back, retiring to the farther end of her solitary compartment. It might have been fancy, but she felt certain that Solomon was looking out for her. There was an indescribable air of alertness about him, even his long nose was elevated, and one of his pendent ears unmistakably cocked. Philippa felt almost guilty.

“Poor darling,” she thought, “I hate disappointing him, but I dare not risk it. I devoutly hope the pair are not in the habit of country strolls anywhere near Wyverston, for we can’t be far from there now.”

But in what direction they bent their steps, or whether any conveyance was waiting for them, she had no means of discovering. Before the train slowly moved on again they must have left the station; no trace of them remained, not even a little heap of luggage awaiting deliberate removal by a country porter.

Chapter Six.

“Miss Ray.”

In the interest of their near approach to their journey’s end, Philippa put her recent fellow-travellers out of her mind. The afternoon was drawing in as she stepped out on to the platform at Wyverston; a fresh, invigorating breeze met her, bringing with it what she could almost have fancied a faint scent of the sea.

“We are not very far from the coast, I know,” she thought to herself, “but I had no idea it was such hilly country. It must be very bleak in winter,” and the thought made her hasten to her sister to ensure her wrapping up before leaving the shelter of her comfortable compartment.

Mrs Headfort was looking out for her.

“Evey,” began Philippa hastily, but in an instant corrected herself. “You must let me undo the rugs, ma’am,” she said in the quiet tone of voice she had adopted to suit her new personality. “It is ever so much colder here than at home.”

“Naturally,” said Evelyn; “we have been coming north all the way. Yes, I suppose we had better get out my fur cloak.”

There was no time to do so in the carriage, however. But when all their belongings were safely collected on the platform, Philippa hastened to extricate the garment in question. She had laid the bundle of rugs on the top of a portmanteau, imagining it to be one of their own boxes; but as she strapped up the roll again, the letters “M.V.G.” on the surface beneath caught her eyes, and glancing round she noticed a gun-case on which was painted in white letters the name “M.V. Gresham.”

“How odd!” she thought; “whose things can these be? No other passenger has got out. And what a strange coincidence that I had said to myself that Solomon’s master somehow reminded me of Mr Gresham at Dorriford!”

“This luggage is not ours,” she went on aloud, to the attendant porter; “has it been put out by mistake?”

“It’s all right, miss,” said a young footman, whom she now observed for the first time; “it’s to go up in the cart along of your lady’s. Mr Gresham—I should say Mr Michael—always gets out at Linley and walks up across the moor.”

Philippa’s heart for a moment seemed to stand still. She saw it all in a flash. The young man, her fellow-traveller, some relation no doubt of his namesake at Dorriford, was evidently an *habitué* of Wyverston—an expected guest there like her sister Evelyn!

She bit her lips with vexation and dismay. “To think what a fool I have made of myself! Was there ever anything so unlucky?” and her inward feelings gave a stiffness to her manner scarcely judicious under the circumstances, as she turned to the civil-spoken young servant, hardly more than a boy in years.

“Will you see to those things then,” she said, as she turned with the cloak to wrap it round her sister, already shivering with the fresh air, which to Philippa’s stronger frame seemed pleasantly bracing.

“The maid’s far high-and-mightier than the lady,” thought the young fellow to himself, as Evelyn thanked him with her usual pretty graciousness as he arranged a fur carriage-rug round her when she was seated in the brougham. And this first impression was not improbably communicated to his fellow-servants at the Hall.

“Phil,” said Evelyn, eagerly, as they drove off, “I’ve quite made up my mind already that I don’t at all want Duke to succeed to Wyverston. It’s far too bleak and cold. It would kill me; I don’t know how I shall stand even my week here.”

Philippa could not help laughing.

“You really are too absurd, Evey,” she said, “in the way you jump at conclusions. I shouldn’t wonder if the bracing air were to do you a great deal of good, and the house is pretty sure to be warm and comfortable. But there, now, you are tempting me again to forget whom I am. You

really mustn't do it, Evelyn; it makes it so much harder to get into it again each time."

"We can't sit looking at each other without speaking, and when we are alone together it would be a perfect absurdity to keep up the farce. Why, you said yourself what a comfort it would be to have a good talk now and then," remonstrated Mrs Headfort.

"We shall have to be very guarded about it," said Philippa, gravely, "very guarded indeed. To tell you the truth, I do not think I realised how very difficult *I* should find it to act my part consistently."

"Why, you have scarcely begun it yet," said her sister. "You have had no opportunity of testing yourself."

Philippa did not reply at once, then she said more lightly:

"All the more reason for beginning it now in good earnest. Don't let us talk about anything personal just at present; I wish we were in an open carriage, this sort of country is so new to me, such a contrast with home. I like the feeling of the air, a mixture of moor and sea."

"I think it's awfully chilly and bleak-looking," said Evelyn, with a little shiver. "But I always have a sort of cold feeling on arriving at a strange place. It may go off after a little."

"It is only nervousness," said Philippa, encouragingly.

"No, no," said Evelyn, "it is worse than that. If you weren't here, I should be most terribly homesick already. You don't know what I suffered, Phil, after I was married, when we went out to India, even though Duke was always so kind. And now, since I came back, I have learnt to lean on *you* so! I am afraid I am rather contemptibly weak."

"Poor little Evey," said her sister, tenderly. "You mustn't say that of yourself; I understand you perfectly. Physical strength has a great deal to do with moral strength, after all. But, oh, dear! we are falling back worse than ever! Now, I am not going to say another word till we get to the house."

Evelyn was not attracted by the rather wild scenery through which they were passing. She leant back in her corner and shut her eyes, which her sister did not regret, as anything was better than going on talking as they had been doing. To her the look of the country was full of interest, and from its very novelty invigorating.

“I hope I shall sometimes be able to go a good walk by myself,” she thought. “If only I could make friends with some nice dog who would come with me—dogs generally like me—but, oh, dear! that reminds me of Solomon, he is *sure* to be there; how shall I be able to keep out of his way? Dogs are so acute. What ill-fate made me get into that unlucky compartment!”

Her reflections and misgivings, however, were brought to an end more quickly than she had expected. They had got over the four miles between the railway station and Wyverston Hall with greater rapidity than she had realised, and she almost started as they suddenly, or so it seemed to her, turned in at lodge gates, exchanging the hard high-road for the pleasant smoothness of a well-kept drive. It had grown much darker, too, for the avenue at Wyverston was bordered by massive trees of too sturdy growth to suffer much from the exposed situation. What manner of trees they were, just now it was impossible to tell—only the faint fragrance of the falling leaves, and their rustle under the wheels passing over them, told that autumn winds were already at work.

Sensitive to every natural influence, however trivial, Philippa peered out into the dusk with a curious sense of enjoyment.

“There is something ever so much more romantic about it than about my arrival at Dorriford,” she thought. “I really feel as if I were on the brink of something tremendously interesting. I wonder what? I daresay it’s all excitement! I have often had these presentiments before, without their leading to anything. Certainly the thought of tea in the servants’-hall, or possibly in the housekeeper’s room—let me devoutly hope it will be the latter—is enough to damp any attractive anticipations,” and suddenly there came over her a strong yearning to be where she was, in her own character—an instinctive revolt from the position she had placed herself in, however praiseworthy the motive. And as she sat there in silence, these mingled sensations culminated in a vague fear, almost amounting

to terror, of what might be before her, of the unknown risks to which she might be exposing herself by the extraordinary step she had taken—risks outside herself, in no way connected with the completeness or incompleteness with which she might carry out her part.

But want of courage was by no means a characteristic of the girl, and with the practical good sense which contrasted curiously with the dash of recklessness in her temperament, she now told herself that, after all, there was no real ground for these mental tremors.

“I am actually mistress of the situation,” she thought. “It *does* depend upon myself, and I am not afraid of breaking down once I am really started, for I have plenty of imagination. Rather too much, in some ways—if we had been arriving on a bright summer afternoon, with the sun shining and no feeling of mystery and gloom, I should have been quite in high spirits. After all, considering everything, I daresay it is safer for me to be rather depressed.”

Very grave she was, very grave, indeed, as she stood behind Mrs Headfort in the hall a moment or two later. She was intensely eager to judge of the nature of Evelyn’s reception by her new relatives, but for the present she had small opportunity for observing anything. No member of the family was visible—only an irreproachable, grey-haired butler was informing her sister that the ladies were in the drawing-room, ere he turned to show her the way thither, and Evelyn, as she followed him, glanced back for an instant with a half-piteous, half-humorous expression which made Philippa feel as if she must either laugh or cry—which, she could not have decided.

To neither inclination, of course, did she yield; she did not even speak, as, in her turn, she followed a younger man-servant who civilly offered to show her the way to the housekeeper’s room, a new question presenting itself to her mind at the words. What sort of person would the housekeeper turn out to be? A great deal might hang upon this—everything almost, in fact; and as the vision of some housekeepers she had seen, stout and self-satisfied, innately vulgar in their very civility and obsequiousness to their superiors, rose before her mind’s eye, again it came home to Miss Raynsworth that she had been far from realising what she was undertaking.

A door in the somewhat dimly-lighted passage was thrown open, and as the footman stood aside to let her pass in, a pleasant, gentle voice met her ears.

“Good-evening,” it said, quietly; “you must have had rather a cold journey. You have just arrived with Mrs Marmaduke Headfort, have you not? Take a seat by the fire,” and as Philippa murmured her thanks and glanced round her at the neat, comfortable little room, Mrs Shepton, for such was her name, went on with increasing kindliness of tone, as she saw that the girl seemed young, and suspected that she was timid.—“It is long past tea-time, of course, but I have ordered a little for you. I thought you would be glad of it.”

“I shall be very glad of it, indeed,” said Philippa, looking up gratefully, and speaking in the slow, careful way she had determined to adopt, and in the housekeeper’s face she read nothing to modify the first instinct of confidence and satisfaction drawn forth by the tone of her voice.

Mrs Shepton was an elderly woman, with a pleasant though somewhat careworn face. She had “known trouble” in her time, and many details of her sad, though by no means uncommon little history were confided to Philippa’s sympathising ears before her stay at Wyverston came to an end. And with some natures sorrow elevates as well as softens; though not in any conventional sense superior to her class, the good housekeeper was one whom no true woman, of whatever position, need have hesitated to call a friend. And Philippa’s instincts were quick and keen.

“She is nice, and good, and kind,” she decided at once. “It will make the greatest possible difference to me to have to do with such a woman. I feel as if she were a superior sort of Dorcas.”

The sweet expression on the girl’s face went straight to Mrs Shepton’s heart.

“There’s nothing like a cup of tea to refresh one after travelling,” she said in her homely way—there were occasions on which the housekeeper could be correctly dignified and “stand-off” even to the most superior of ladies’ maids—but just now her one thought was to set this shy young

creature at her ease. “You have come from Mrs Marmaduke’s home, I suppose?” she went on, as she handed the tea to Philippa. “I don’t remember rightly where it is, but it’s at several hours’ distance from here, I know.”

“It is in —shire, close to Marlby,” Philippa replied. “We left the house about eleven o’clock this morning.”

“Have you been long with your lady?” pursued Mrs Shepton. “You look so young. You couldn’t have been out in India with her, surely?”

“Oh, no, I was scarcely grown-up then. I have only just entered Mrs Headfort’s service, but,” she added, after an instant’s consideration, “she has known me a long time.”

Mrs Shepton nodded, approvingly.

“Been in the young lady’s Sunday-school class, I daresay,” she thought to herself, and aloud she added, though without any suggestion of inquisitiveness, “That is very nice; your mother must be pleased for you not to be with strangers, that is to say if—” for the seriousness of the girl’s face, and her absolutely black attire, hinted at the possibility of her having recently lost some near relation.

Philippa understood the hesitation and answered at once, speaking more quickly and brightly than hitherto.

“Oh, yes, I have a mother, and father too!”

“I am glad to hear it,” rejoined Mrs Shepton, “but, by-the-by, my dear,”—the expression denoting that the new-comer had made a marvellously rapid stride in her good graces—“you’ve not yet told me your name!”

For the first time, strange to say, it struck Philippa that this—her surname, that is to say—was as yet an unknown quantity. She was fortunately not one of those people who change colour on small provocation.

“Mrs Headfort calls me Phillis,” she said, slowly.

The housekeeper looked rather surprised.

“Phillis,” she repeated; “that is a first name. I suppose it’s with her having known you so long; but it was your surname I meant. It wouldn’t do for the servants here to call you by your first name. Of course in a big house like this we have to be very particular.”

“Of course,” said Philippa, rather coldly. Then recollecting herself—“My last name,” she said, “is ‘Ray’—‘Phillis Ray,’” and she smiled slightly in spite of herself.

“Then ‘Miss Ray’ you must be to every one here but myself,” said Mrs Shepton. “There are not so many visitors among us just now as sometimes. There’s only Mrs Worthing’s maid—a very experienced person, much older than you; and Mr Gresham’s valet, Mr Furze, a quiet young man, and of course he’s so often here with his master that he’s scarcely like a stranger. But when we are by ourselves as just now, my dear, I should like to call you Phillis; I had a sister once of that name—long ago.”

“Yes, please do,” said Philippa, heartily.—“Mr Gresham, did you say,” she continued. “Is that a gentleman with a dog? I saw the name on some luggage at the station, which must have belonged to him. They travelled part of the way in our train—in the carriage I was in—second-class, but I didn’t see any valet.”

There was a touch of curiosity in her tone, which rather surprised and possibly disappointed the housekeeper.

“The Mr Gresham I alluded to,” she said, somewhat stiffly, “has been staying here some time. The young gentleman who came down to-day is Mr Michael, his cousin. You must excuse me, my dear, if I remind you not to speak of your lady as Mrs Headfort, but as Mrs Marmaduke,” she went on. “She is, of course, Mrs Headfort next to my lady, but still—”

“Certainly,” interrupted Philippa, heartily, “I will be careful about it. Thank you for reminding me, Mrs Shepton. And indeed,” she continued, “I should be very much obliged to you if you will tell me—me myself—of anything you think I require advice about. I am not very experienced, as you can see;” and in her own mind she thought, “this is an excellent precaution to take. It will prevent any gossip about me which might not

otherwise come to my ears. For I am sure this good woman is thoroughly to be trusted. And if the Mr Gresham here really proves to be the one I met at Dorriford, I must be doubly on the alert. It is really too strange a coincidence."

Philippa's last words quite gained Mrs Shepton's heart, and made her slight sensation of disapproval of the young girl's apparent lapse into gossip concerning any of the visitors at Wyverston disappear. Her eyes had the kindliest light in them as she replied:

"It will please me very much indeed, my dear, if you will look upon me while you're here as if I were in a mother's place to you; and now, I daresay, I had better take you to your room—the sooner you take your things off the better, as the dressing-gong will be sounding soon. Take care," as Philippa wavered a little on first getting up; "are you so very short-sighted?"

"Oh, no," said Philippa, "I wear spectacles as a precaution;" the truth being that her unaccustomedness to the glasses, and the reflection of the firelight upon them, had dazzled her a little.

"Oh," said Mrs Shepton, tranquilly. "It is best to err on the safe side if your eyes are at all weakly. But I should have been sorry if you had really feeble sight, it stands so much in a maid's way."

So saying, she opened the door of the room and led the way along the passage to a staircase at the farther end.

Chapter Seven.

A Successful Début.

In all large country-houses of a certain importance, there is more or less resemblance in the internal aspect of things. And this Philippa felt conscious of as she followed Mrs Shepton up-stairs—across landings, down passages, and up-stairs again.

“I could fancy myself back at Dorriford,” she said to herself, with mingled sensations. “It is barely a week since I left it. What *would* Maida Lermont think if she could see me now? What would I have thought myself, if I had had a vision of the present state of things? Yet Dorriford is as different as possible from this place—all bright and fresh there, and this old house seems to *breathe* stiffness and formality. I am sure Evey will be frightened if they put her into one of the state bedrooms. I do hope my room won’t be far from hers.”

She was learning prudence, however, and said nothing till surer of her ground. And her reticence was rewarded. For just as, with some dismay, she caught sight of another staircase, evidently leading to some very upper regions indeed, the housekeeper stopped short, turning down a small and almost dark passage on the floor where they were.

“Our own maidservants’ rooms are up that staircase,” said the housekeeper, “and also two or three for visitors’ ladies’ maids. But there is a little room close beside Mrs Marmaduke’s, which my lady thought would be best for you. It opens into her dressing-room by another door—this is therefore a sort of back-way to her rooms. My ladies thought she might feel strange, this being her first visit, and with her not being very strong, as I understand.”

The good woman did not add that the suggestion had in great measure emanated from herself, however readily it had been adopted by her mistress.

“Oh, I *am* glad, said Philippa, eagerly. I don’t mind anything as long as I am near her,” for as Mrs Shepton opened the door of the small apartment

intended for Mrs Marmaduke Headfort's maid, she murmured something, almost in a tone of apology, about its very restricted size.

The housekeeper glanced at her with kindly approval, not unmixed, however, perhaps, with a little amusement. Philippa had spoken impulsively and more in her own character than she realised.

"How devoted she is to her lady," thought the elder woman. "She will be laughed at for it, I daresay, by other servants, and perhaps it may be well for her not to express it quite so warmly. But it reflects credit on them both. Mrs Marmaduke must be a sweet young lady. It will be very nice if my ladies take a fancy to her, and then some day, perhaps, we shall be having the dear little boy here."

For the premature death of the two sons of the house, and the failure of an heir to Wyverston, had been felt scarcely less acutely by the attached old servants than by the Headforts themselves. And Mrs Shepton had been full of eager interest in the overtures at last, though somewhat tardily made, to her master's cousin, now the next in succession.

Philippa's modest luggage was already standing unstrapped in her room. It was evident that all the arrangements at Wyverston were punctual and orderly.

"Through here are Mrs Marmaduke's rooms," said Mrs Shepton. "I daresay you will have time to get some unpacking done before she comes up to dress. And you must be sure to tell me of anything she wants, or anything not quite to her mind. There are two bells, you see," and she went on to explain where they rang to; "it is just as well to have one to up-stairs, even though you are close at hand. For this part of the house is rather shut out from the rest, as you see; it is a sort of little wing apart, and there is another to match it on the north side. My lady chose these south rooms, as so much warmer."

They were very good rooms, rendered more cheerful than they would otherwise have been by bright fires. For as Philippa had anticipated, they were very stately and somewhat gloomy.

"I am quite certain Evey would have been awfully afraid of sleeping here alone," she thought, but aloud she thanked the housekeeper for all her

care and consideration.

“And where shall I go, when Mrs Marmaduke is dressed and gone down to dinner?” she inquired, half timidly.

Mrs Shepton considered. She felt quite a motherly interest in Phillis Ray.

“You will be busy for some time arranging all your lady’s things,” she said. “I will send up to fetch you in time for supper; it would be pleasanter for you than coming down to the room by yourself.”

“The room?” Philippa repeated, in some perplexity.

“Our room, of course, I mean,” said the housekeeper, smiling. “Supper is at half-past nine. Our second-housemaid is a very nice girl, rather young, perhaps, for the post, but a superior girl in many ways. Her name is Bell—Isabella Bell, a curious first name to choose, isn’t it? The head-housemaid is quite an elderly woman, who has been here for many years. My ladies think very highly of her, and,”—with the slightest touch of hesitation—“she expects to be treated very respectfully by the younger ones.”

Philippa laughed slightly.

“Thank you for warning me, Mrs Shepton,” she said.

As she spoke she was already taking off her bonnet and cloak, and again the housekeeper felt approval of her evident alertness.

“I will leave you now,” she said; “you will need all your time to get things ready,” and so saying, she went away.

As soon as she had the room to herself, Philippa sat down on the little bed with a deep sigh of relief.

“How nice it is to be myself again, even for a moment,” she thought. “How shall I ever be able to endure the not being it for a whole week or more? But how thankful I am that the housekeeper is such a nice, good woman; how *very* thankful! At the worst, at the very worst, if any really terrible complications arise, I almost think I might confide in her; I am sure she

has nice feelings in every way."

This was something to fall back upon, and indeed she required it; for the realisation of the presence in the house, of a man whom she was almost sure was the same as the "silent Mr Gresham" whom she had met at Dorriford, was undoubtedly appalling.

"I mustn't frighten Evey about it," she considered, "but I must find out about him from her without betraying why. His being here and having seen me before, might not, after all, have mattered much; he saw so little of me, and when we were walking about the garden I could scarcely get him to speak. I wonder if he thought me very young? *I* noticed him, as anybody must have done, because he is so extremely good-looking! But *the* thing that frightens me is the stupid way in which I drew the other Mr Gresham's attention upon me in the train. One could not have invented anything so unlucky," but here the sound of an opening door startled her. "I must be quick," she thought, with a glance in the looking-glass, and a hasty touch at her somewhat ruffled hair, "or I shall have nothing ready for Evey." It was not her sister, however, only a housemaid with hot water, as Philippa saw, as she made her way through the dressing-room. A civil "good-evening," however, was all that the servant stopped to say, being evidently in a hurry.

"Now," thought Philippa, "comes a part of my rôle that I shall really enjoy. It will be charming to make Evelyn look her prettiest, and I know she will wear exactly what I tell her. I do love nice clothes," and with great satisfaction she proceeded to lift out her sister's carefully chosen "trousseau" for the occasion.

She had just finished laying out on the bed the dress she had mentally fixed upon as the most suitable for this first evening—a sort of début it seemed to Philippa, and far from an unimportant one, when again the door opened, this time to admit Evelyn herself, followed, or rather, strictly speaking, preceded by the eldest of the unmarried daughters of the house.

"I do hope you will find everything as you like it, and do ask for anything you want," said Miss Headfort, as she ushered in the young guest. "Dinner is at eight, so you have nearly an hour still; time to rest a little

before dressing."

The voice was a pleasantly modulated one, and its tone was undoubtedly cordial. From the other side of the room, Philippa glanced round with curiosity to catch sight of the speaker. She was a tall, rather slight woman, in figure and bearing looking perhaps younger than her age, which was quite forty. But her face was not young; there were lines of sorrow upon it, and her dark eyes, though really sweet in expression when one came to see them closely, were wanting in vivacity and light.

"Why," thought Philippa to herself, "she looks a hundred times more melancholy than Maida, and yet her life *cannot* have been as hard—except, of course, for the brothers' deaths,"—with a little pang of self-reproach at her momentary forgetfulness, "but I do think she seems nice and kind to Evey," and this agreeable impression was confirmed by the sound of her sister's voice in reply.

"Thank you; I am sure I shall be as comfortable as possible," said Evelyn. "Will you call for me on your way down-stairs?" she added, with the touch of appeal which to her sister's discerning ears told at once of her having "taken to" this new relative.

"Certainly, if you like," was the reply, and the little touch Miss Headfort gave to Evelyn's shoulder as she left the room told of evident gratification.

For a moment or two after the door closed, Philippa remained stooping over a trunk without speaking. It was not till Evelyn flung herself on the sofa and called out to her half petulantly, that she thought it safe to reply.

"Why don't you speak, Phil?" she said. "You surely don't intend to keep up the farce when we are safely alone by ourselves?"

"It would really be better to do so," replied Philippa, cautiously, glancing round at both doors before she finally emerged from the shelter of the big trunk, "but, of course, I won't do anything to worry you, Evey. I suppose there is no fear of any one coming to this room before Miss Headfort returns?"

She crossed the floor to the sofa where her sister lay, as she spoke.

Evelyn in her turn glanced round half-nervously.

“You will make me too fidgety for anything,” she said. “No, I don’t think it is the least likely that any one will come; the housemaid has brought the hot water, I see, and the trunks are all up. And even if any one did come, they would knock at the door—oh, bother, there are two doors! I hate a room with two doors. I never know which to be most frightened of in the night.”

“This one,” said Philippa, indicating it as she spoke, “leads into a dressing-room, and out of that again, the little room where I sleep. It was very thoughtful of them to put me so near you, but if you would rather lock the doors between us at night, *I* have no objection.”

She spoke laughingly, but underneath the jesting tone there was a touch of slightly hurt feeling. She had been longing so to see her sister again, even after the one half-hour’s separation; she was so intensely anxious to know what had passed in the drawing-room, and now here was Evelyn, not even affectionate, the very reverse of clinging!

“Nonsense,” said her sister; “of course I’m only too delighted to have you close by. I would like to look at the rooms,” and she half sat up as if with the purpose of doing so, but sank down again. “Oh, I am tired,” she said, wearily. “Get a footstool, Philippa, if there is one, and come and sit on the floor beside me, the way we do at home. Oh, don’t you wish we were at home again? It’s all so strange and—”

“No,” interrupted Philippa, her warm heart going out again with a rush of tenderness the very instant any appeal was made to it. “No, you’re not to say ‘lonely’ just when I am here on purpose to prevent you feeling so.”

She had espied a footstool by this time and drew it forward as her sister wished.

“Now,” she said, “we can talk comfortably for a few minutes; unless, indeed, it would be better for you not to talk at all, and rest entirely till you have to dress.”

Evelyn lay back with closed eyes; she certainly was looking very pale now, but what else could have been expected?

“I *am* glad I came,” thought her sister, conscious that a momentary feeling almost of jealousy of the new cousin had passed through her. “I *am* glad I came, and if she does get on well with these people, even to the extent of not seeming to need me, I *won’t* mind. I shall know it is only on the surface. What she would have done without me, practically speaking, I really don’t know! She is about as fit just now to look out her things and dress herself, as a mouse to draw a train. And what *would* her hair be like? It’s in a perfect chaos of fluff, and I am certain that the Headforts wear theirs perfectly smooth and have no fringes.”

She smiled at the thought, and as she did so, Evelyn opened her eyes.

“What are you laughing at?” she inquired, languidly, and as her sister told her, she, too, smiled.

“Yes,” she replied, “you are quite right. They have all three got dark hair, as smooth as—oh, I can’t trouble to find a comparison—‘as smoove as smoove’ as Bonny says—dear Bonny! But I do think they mean to be nice, really nice and cordial, Phil, especially Felicia, the one you saw just now; she is the eldest. Perhaps I’d better not talk much—”

“You had better talk in a lower voice,” said Philippa; “it is less tiring, and safer too. All I want to know just now is that you do think you will be able to get on with them without much effort.”

“Ye-es, I do think so,” answered Evelyn. “I must try to be a little more dignified than I am at home, and that is rather a strain.”

“You can be beautifully dignified when you choose,” said Philippa, encouragingly.

“It is not on the daughters’ account I must be so,” continued Evelyn. “I think *they* would like me the better if I seemed rather childish; there is no affectation of being younger than they are, about either of them. But it is Mrs Headfort; she associates me, I feel instinctively, with the wife of the possible future master of Wyverston, who, she thinks, no doubt, should be as stately as herself.”

“I only hope she *does* associate with you that personage,” said Philippa, brightly; “it would certainly incline us to like her all the better. I think,” she

went on thoughtfully, “there is something beautiful and elevating in that sort of regard for one’s family, if not carried too far. Some people call it only an extended form of selfishness, but at least it is not a low kind. And, after all, doing one’s best for those nearest us is not selfishness; it is simply right.”

“There is something almost beautiful about Mrs Headfort herself,” said Evelyn, “though there is something wanting, too, in her face. It is a little hard, and yet certainly not unfeeling; she has evidently *felt* tremendously.”

“But troubles do harden some people,” said Philippa, “though often more on the surface than lower down. They get afraid of ever loosening their armour, as it were, for fear of breaking down.”

“How wise you are, Phil!” said Evelyn, admiringly. “I never thought of things in that way when I was your age. I shouldn’t wonder,” she went on, reflectively, as if she had made a great discovery, “if it were partly Mrs Headfort’s hair that makes her look hard. It is quite dark, did I tell you? And when people get old, I think grey or white hair is so much prettier. I do hope mine will get white—mamma’s is so nice,” and she put up her hand to her own wavy locks as if to feel if the desired transformation had already taken place.

“Now, Evelyn,” said Philippa, seriously, “leave off chattering. You may go to sleep for twenty minutes still; I will undertake to get you perfectly ready in the time that remains. I have got out nearly everything you will want, and you are to wear exactly what I have chosen.”

Evelyn smiled submissively.

“I must just say one thing, Phil,” she began again, “and that is for your satisfaction. I do believe the Headforts would have been perfectly aghast if I had come without a maid. And that reminds me—how do you think you are going to bear it? Will it be endurable?”

“Much better than endurable,” said Philippa, “but I will tell you about it afterwards. The housekeeper is a dear old woman. And on your side you must notice everything, to amuse me. I shall want to know all about the other people staying in the house.”

Then she resolutely turned away, and busied herself afresh with completing the preparations for her sister's evening toilet.

At the appointed time came Miss Headfort's tap at the door, and in response to Evelyn's "come in," the eldest daughter of the house made her appearance. Philippa looked at her with considerable interest—a double interest, indeed; she was both curious to have a better view of Miss Headfort herself, and also most anxious to observe the effect upon her of the charming personality before her. Mingled with her sisterly pride in Evelyn, there was now what one may almost call the pride of the artist in his handiwork, and for both there was good cause.

Evelyn had left herself entirely to her sister's mercies, and the result was such that even Felicia Headfort's melancholy eyes lighted up with pleasure at the sight of her cousin's wife, whose lovely fairness was shown to great advantage by the pale, blush-rose tint of her dress. Her naturally beautiful hair owed much also to Philippa's careful manipulation, all the more deft and clever in that there was not the slightest appearance of studied art about it—the little bow of pink velvet to match her dress really looking as if it had flown down of itself to nestle among the wavy coils. Evelyn's stock of jewellery was limited; for this important occasion she wore the one good ornament which her Duke had, with much unsuspected self-denial, gathered together enough money to procure for her—a string of fair-sized pearls.

"My dear," said Miss Headfort, impulsively, "your dress is quite charming, and you do not look the least tired now. You will quite bewitch my father, I am sure." Evelyn smiled.

"How nice you look yourself," she said to her cousin, gently stroking the sleeve of Felicia's soft, grey velvet bodice, for though far more than the orthodox term of black attire for the loss of their two brothers had passed, the Headfort sisters had not yet—if indeed they ever would discard it—worn anything but half-mourning.

Miss Headfort looked very handsome in her velvet and rich old lace; handsomer than Philippa had expected from her former glimpse of her. And the two figures together harmonised from their very dissimilarity. The sight was gratifying to the girl's sensitive perceptions of beauty; but as

she stood there in the background in her plain, black dress and disfiguring spectacles, unnoticed, and in a sense unthought of, even by her sister, it would be untrue to human nature, to girl nature especially, to say that no shadow of mortification passed over her as she again realised, and this time more fully than hitherto, the abnormal position she had placed herself in.

But almost simultaneously her vigorous resolution of character, greatly assisted in the present case by her vivid sense of humour, reasserted itself. There was a considerable amount of triumph, too, in the success of her plan.

“I do believe,” she thought, “that I shall be able to carry it through perfectly to the—no, I won’t say ‘bitter end’—but till the curtain drops for ever, I hope, for I am quite sure I shall have had enough of my rôle by then, as ‘Phillis Ray, lady’s-maid.’ Though but for her, goodness only knows what Mrs Marmaduke Headfort would have been looking like at the present moment—as to her headgear above all!”

A glance of affectionate gratitude from Evelyn as she followed her conductress out of the room, added to Philippa’s self-congratulation. Still more so, a word or two from Miss Headfort which caught her ears as, suddenly discovering that her sister’s fan was still reposing on the dressing-table, she ran after her with it, a few steps down the passage —“very clever maid yours seems to be; she must—” But the rest of the sentence was deferred, as Evelyn turned to take the fan held out to her.

“Poor Phil,” thought Mrs Marmaduke, as she entered the drawing-room, with a curious mingling of pride in her sister, and regret almost amounting to irritation at the state of things she had brought about, “I really can’t bear to think of her up there alone! For I do feel as if it were all going to be very nice, and that, but for her, I could really enjoy myself. So I must just try not to think of her for the time. I am sure it is what she would wish.”

And acting on this comfortable determination, she was able to respond with unembarrassed graciousness to the cordial, though somewhat formal, greeting of her host, who came forward to meet them as soon as he caught sight of his elder daughter’s entrance into the room.

And, as Felicia had predicted, the charm of Evelyn's half-appealing yet dignified manner, added to her extreme prettiness, did its work. From that moment the old man's subjugation was complete.

That it was so, was from the first a source of satisfaction to his wife and daughters. For they were not only good, high-principled women—they were personally unselfish, and superior to all petty, feminine jealousies, and with much latent tenderness of nature, unsuspected by those who only judged them by the surface stiffness of manner.

Christine, the second Miss Headfort, though some years younger than her sister, scarcely appeared so. She was less handsome in features, but so much brighter in complexion and colouring that at first sight she was the most striking; but in spite of Wyverston Manor and its traditions, there was a touch of the "advanced woman" about her, which showed itself unpleasingly in a rather obtrusive "superiority" to her dress and general appearance.

"I am plain-looking," she was wont to inform her friends, with a certain pride, "and no longer young, and I am not going to pretend to be otherwise. And I am splendidly strong, and intend to keep my health at all costs, so I do not care in the least about my complexion or my figure. I go out in all weathers, and ignore the existence of whalebone and steel."

But she was a very agreeable woman, nevertheless—her bark infinitely worse than her bite—full of real kindness of heart. And if a trifle dictatorial in her way of showing this, and perhaps irritatingly convinced that a Miss Headfort of Wyverston could "do no wrong," it was easy to forgive and even forget those foibles in one so ready to put herself aside whenever called upon to do so for the sake of others; so genuinely compassionate to the suffering or oppressed. She loved all animals, and was loved by them in return; she would have loved little children had she known more about them; thus with her, too, Evelyn's fragile and almost childlike appearance only prepossessed her in the young wife's favour.

Chapter Eight.

A Morning Ramble.

The party this evening was not a very large one; still, a comparatively small number of people is enough to be somewhat confusing to a new-comer, to whom they are all absolute strangers. More especially when the new-comer in question is in such a position as was Evelyn Headfort on this occasion in the Wyverston drawing-room, where, as a recognised member of the family, to whom honour was due, it behoved her host and hostess to introduce with considerable formality all the other guests.

To all appearance she stood this little ordeal well, considerably to Mrs Headfort's satisfaction.

"Though she looks so young," thought the elder woman, "she has plenty of self-possession as well as charming manners."

But inwardly Evelyn had been feeling considerable trepidation, and it was not without some relief that she found herself and the man allotted to her safely on their way to the dining-room. *His* name her memory had retained, though she was in a state of mystification as to those of most of the others. She glanced up at her cavalier. She was not peculiarly small, but he seemed to tower above her, and had to bend his head to catch some little commonplace remark which she felt it due to herself to volunteer, "for fear," as she afterwards confessed to Philippa, "he should have thought me shy."

"Certainly," was the reply; "quite so," but that was all, and Evelyn's little feeler, which she had sent out in hopes of its breaking the ice, had no effect beyond that of making her wish she had left the sentence unsaid.

Seated at table, however, where she found herself, to her alarm, at her host's left hand, she hazarded a second observation—anything, the silliest speech in the world was better than for her new relations to think her in any sense unequal to the occasion.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr Gresham, for such was his name; and as he

bent slightly towards her, she was struck for the first time by his really remarkable good looks, enhanced by a gentleness of expression which tended to reassure her. She laughed and coloured slightly as she repeated her very commonplace, little observation.

“I was only saying that it feels ever so much colder here than farther south!” she said.

“You’ve come from the south,” he responded, with some appearance of interest. “Have you travelled f r to-day?”

“Oh, no, not really very far,” she replied. “After all, one can’t travel very far in England; but any cross-country journey makes you feel as if you had—it wastes so much time, though we fitted in our trains pretty well.”

“Is your husband with you?” her companion rejoined, in reality for the sake of drawing her out, for he knew perfectly well that Duke Headfort was still in India, and likely to be there for some time. For, as the housekeeper had mentioned to Philippa, the elder Mr Gresham was a very frequent visitor at Wyverston, and intimately acquainted with the ins and outs of the Headfort family affairs.

Evelyn started slightly.

“I shouldn’t have said ‘we,’” she thought to herself. “Oh, no,” she said, aloud, “I’m quite alone here, and it is my first visit to this part of the country. It is considered very—well, I don’t exactly know what to say—not picturesque, I suppose, but not commonplace?”

“Far from commonplace. It is bleak in some directions—bleak and bare; but the moors are very fine, and at some seasons their colouring is wonderful. And the stretch of the Wildering Hills to the west is very imposing. You will think it so, I have no doubt, as you come from—” He stopped, and went on again:

“Did I not understand you to say that you live in a flat country?”

“Well, yes,” said Evelyn, though she did not remember having volunteered any information of the kind. ”—shire *is* flat, certainly, and where we live there is no beauty except good trees. My sister,” she

continued, feeling as if she were talking very inanely, and with a nervous dread of letting the conversation drop, “was staying lately in Westshire. She was delighted with it. She said part of the route coming back was as pretty as—as Switzerland.”—“How idiotic that sounds!” she said to herself.

But her companion appeared rather to appreciate her remarks.

“Westshire,” he repeated. “Yes, some parts of Westshire are charmingly picturesque. May I ask what part of the country your sister was staying in?”

“I don’t know what part it was that she thought so pretty,” said Evelyn, gratified by his interest. “The place she was staying at was Dorriford. It belongs to the Lermonts—cousins of ours.”

“Oh, indeed,” said Mr Gresham, thawing more and more; “I know Dorriford—at least I was there the other day. I drove over with some friends in the neighbourhood. Your sister’s name is?” and he glanced at her questioningly.

“Raynsworth,” said Evelyn, quickly.

“Exactly,” rejoined her companion. “I remember her perfectly. But you are not like each other—Strikingly unlike, even; for Miss Raynsworth is dark—dark and tall. I remember.”

An appalling misgiving seized Evelyn. He “remembered her perfectly;” perhaps, by no means improbably, suggested her sisterly pride, he had been struck by Philippa’s somewhat uncommon style of beauty. Why, in heaven’s name, had she drawn the conversation round to Philippa at all, the very last topic she should have chosen to talk about while at Wyverston? And fearful lest Mr Gresham’s watchful eyes should detect the least trace of confusion, she forced herself to smile and to say lightly:

“What a coincidence! I must remember to mention it to my sister when I go home.” Then, somewhat at random, she plunged suddenly into some of her Indian reminiscences—a subject she usually avoided as hackneyed and commonplace.

Mr Gresham seemed somewhat perplexed, though he listened courteously, but without his former interest.

“I have never been in India,” he said, with a touch of languor, “and I don’t think I want to go. Were you born there? I’ve often noticed that people who were born there have a sort of liking for the place,” as if the great empire of the east were some insignificant village.

“Oh, no,” said Evelyn, “we are all quite English, and I don’t think I do like India. I am not very fond of travelling. I fear I am the lazy one of the family.”

“Your sister certainly struck me as very vigorous,” began Mr Gresham again; “the Lermonts were talking of wonderful expeditions they had been making while she was with them.”

“Oh, why did I say I had a sister,” thought Evelyn, in desperation, “and why did I ever give in to this mad escapade of Philippa’s? I feel certain it is going to land us in some dreadful hobble,” and unconsciously to herself her expression grew so tragic that Mr Gresham began to wonder what in the world was the matter.

Just then, to Evelyn’s enormous relief, came a happy interruption. A voice from the opposite side of the table, which was not a very wide one, addressed her by name.

Evelyn looked up in surprise, forgetting for the moment that as all the guests had been introduced to her, the owner of the voice had every reason to know who she was.

“I hope, Mrs Headfort,” he said, “that my dog did not really frighten you to-day? He is very demonstratively affectionate when he takes a fancy, and he had made great friends with—with your maid.”

”‘Out of the frying-pan into the fire,’” thought the unfortunate Evelyn; “this time I must brave it out.”

“Is your dog a dachs?” she said, quickly. “Oh, yes, I remember seeing him; he tried to jump into the carriage, but I wasn’t really frightened, only startled for a moment. Is he with you here? You must introduce him

formally, if so. I love dachshunds—our favourite dog was a dachs. He died—some years ago. We can hardly bear to talk of it even now."

A perplexed look stole over Michael Gresham's face at her words. Was he dreaming? or going through one of those strange experiences familiar to us all, in which it seems as if we were living for a second time through some event, or train of events, often of the most trivial, which has already happened?

No; the conviction he now felt that words almost similar to those Mrs Headfort had just uttered had quite recently been addressed to him, was too strong, too unmistakable to have anything of fancy about it.

"By Jove," he thought, "it was the girl in the railway carriage—her maid—who told me the very same thing about a dachshund she had had. I can't make it out. They didn't seem to be talking like mistress and maid when Solomon jumped at them, though I didn't hear clearly what they were saying. There was something inconsistent about the girl from the first. Well, it's no business of mine." Then, conscious that Evelyn's eyes were still directed towards him, he threw off his hesitation and answered lightly:

"I hope the association will not be too painful to prevent your making friends with my Solomon. Not that I don't sympathise in the loss of a dog—it's a terrible thing."

"Don't let my cousin get on to dogs, Mrs Headfort, his own dogs especially," interrupted the elder Gresham; "he'll go on for hours about that Solomon of his, I warn you."

Evelyn smiled gently. In her heart she was not very devoted to dogs. Bonny and Vanda were much more adorable pets. Nor was she anxious in any way to grow more familiar with the dachshund's master.

"He must be rather a stupid young man," she thought, as she glanced across the table at Michael's somewhat rugged face. "His cousin evidently thinks him so, and all the better for us if he is not observant. And, oh! how plain-looking he is compared to this one!"

For the moment, however, she had not much opportunity of admiring her neighbour's clear-cut features. For her host, having done his duty so far

by the elderly dowager on his right hand, now felt free to turn his attention to his cousin's pretty young wife. A kindly question or two about her "Duke" and his doings—even more, some allusion to the incomparable Bonny, set Evelyn perfectly at her ease. The conversation which ensued, though of the liveliest interest to herself and not without charm for the squire himself, naturally left her orthodox companion somewhat out in the cold. For on his other side was placed a certain Miss Worthing, a person whom he would have characterised as a "bread-and-butter miss," whose timid attempt at breaking the silence met with but faint success, for all the answers that Mr Gresham condescended to make to her were monosyllabic and discouraging in the extreme.

It was not this first evening that young Mrs Headfort discovered how much honour had been done her by her companion's animation, though as she rose to follow in the file of women on their way to the drawing-room, it did strike her that Mr Gresham's face looked bored in the extreme.

"How I do wish he could know Philippa and she him!" she thought. "She would be just the person to shake him out of that silent *hauteur*, and I do believe he was struck by her at Dorriford. If only she were here in her proper character!"

The rest of the evening seemed somewhat long. Evelyn was beginning to feel very tired, for she had really exerted herself to the utmost. Fortunately it was not the Wyverston habit to keep late hours, and it was with a feeling of inexpressible relief that she accepted Felicia's hint that she must not hesitate to say good-night, even before the two or three guests from the neighbourhood had taken their departure.

"They will be going immediately," Miss Headfort added; "and," on second thoughts, "if you like to come away quietly with me, I will explain it to mamma afterwards, and say good-night for you."

Evelyn thankfully took advantage of this offer, but begged her cousin to let her go up-stairs alone.

"I can find my way quite well, and I know I shall have everything I want in my room."

“Very well,” said Felicia, kindly. “I think I can trust your maid, from what you say of her, to look after you properly. And our dear old Shepton really does love to make people comfortable, especially if they are relations.”

Nothing could have been more gratifying. And how delightful not to have to wait till she could write home for sympathy in her satisfaction!

“Oh, Phil,” she exclaimed, as she carefully shut the door of her room where her sister was already awaiting her. “Oh, Phil, darling, I am awfully sleepy, I can scarcely keep my eyes open, but I am longing to tell you how well I have got on. Everything has been as nice as possible.”

“I am so glad,” said Philippa, warmly. “But, Evelyn dear, you must not talk to-night. Even I am feeling very tired. I believe I had fallen asleep while I was sitting here waiting for you.”

And Philippa, who could be resolute in little things as well as in big, carried her point. Half an hour later both sisters were in bed and asleep, and though Philippa did not know it, her care of Evelyn had saved herself from a disturbed and perhaps sleepless night. For Mrs Headfort could certainly not have narrated the events of the evening in any detail without repeating her conversation with both the Greshams, and thereby awakening much graver anxiety in Philippa’s mind than what she had felt herself.

As it was, Philippa slept soundly, her dreams being no more than an amusing jumble of the experiences of the day before. When she awoke, it was from a peculiarly absurd one, in which Solomon was seated at the end of the housekeeper’s table, doing the honour in Mrs Shepton’s place, with Philippa’s own spectacles on his nose, assuring her that his master was the same Mr Gresham whom she had met at Dorriford, and that it was only the fact of his travelling second-class which had made her imagine him less good-looking than before.

But though her dreams had been thus concerned with the realities of the preceding day, Miss Raynsworth felt strangely confused when she first awoke. It was daylight, though not yet very clear, for the morning was cloudy—so cloudy, indeed, that in most parts of the country one would have imagined it must be raining. The girl’s eyes strayed round the little

room, and for a moment or two she could not imagine where she was. Gradually things took shape in her memory, and she half started up in affright.

“It must be late,” she thought, “and of all things I must be ready early in the morning.”

But her fears were exaggerated; she took her watch to the window and found that it was only half-past six. There was plenty of time to get ready for her own breakfast at eight, and to carry in Evelyn’s early cup of tea.

She peeped cautiously through the door of her sister’s room, as soon as she was dressed, and was pleased to see her still sleeping peacefully.

“She must not get up to breakfast if she is very tired,” thought Philippa. “Mrs Shepton was sure they would not mind her staying in bed, especially this first morning. But if I am to judge her by myself, I rather think she will wake feeling quite rested and invigorated; the air here must be wonderfully bracing.”

She had returned to her own little room, and sat down beside the window which she had already thrown open. It was not cold, though a fresh breeze, to Philippa’s fancy laden with the scents of the surrounding moors, blew on her face gently.

“Only a quarter past seven,” she said to herself. “I know what I’ll do. I will go down-stairs and have a little run, or walk, I suppose—it would never do for a maid to be seen running—before the breakfast-bell rings. I can keep away from the front of the house, for fear of possibly meeting any one who might notice me.” With the impulsiveness so curiously mingled with her habit of careful consideration, this was no sooner said than done. Two minutes later the slight, black-clad figure of young Mrs Headfort’s maid might have been seen making its way through some of the paths thickly strewn with fir “needles,” among the woods, which at one side of the house almost extended to the walls.

“Yes,” she thought. “It is quite charming here, though perhaps in time one would get tired of the monotony of these fir-trees. If only I were free, and not obliged to be in to breakfast till half-past nine, how I would enjoy a rush across the moor beyond! I do hope I shall have some chance of a

solitary ramble now and then while I am here. For one thing I will *not* do, and that is, go out walks with the other ladies' maids who are staying in the house, who, ten to one, would be inviting the valets to accompany them. All I should want would be a—"

At that instant, as if in reply to her uncompleted sentence, came the rush and scamper of a long-bodied, four-footed creature across the crackly ground.

"Solomon!" exclaimed Philippa, with mingled joy and dismay. "My dear boy, where have you come from? And how did you know I was here?" for that he did recognise her and was full of delight at the meeting, was only too evident! He jumped up on her, he pawed her, he snuffed her, ending by trotting off a few paces and looking back wistfully with unmistakable invitation in his affectionate eyes.

Half thoughtlessly Philippa followed him.

"Where do you want to go to?" she said, laughingly. "Do you think I don't know the way back to the house?—And, by-the-by, I must be quick," she added, "or I shall be too late for breakfast."

But as this misgiving struck her she came to a sudden standstill.

Chapter Nine.

Mingled Feelings.

For there before her, as might most naturally have been expected, stood Solomon's master, Mr Gresham the younger. He was clad in a rough shooting-suit, which, even in that moment of annoyance, struck Philippa as becoming him better than his more civilised attire of the day before.

"He is ugly," she thought, "but far from insignificant. That square, sturdy sort of figure has something manly about it," and as at that moment a slight involuntary smile parted his lips, and she caught sight of two rows of perfect teeth, another item in his favour was added to her estimate of the outer man of Michael Gresham.

So swiftly, however, did these impressions pass through her, that almost before she realised them she felt conscious of the vivid colour rushing to her face.

What was he smiling at?—or rather, what was he staring at, now that the smile had faded? Was there anything extraordinary in her appearance? Mechanically she raised her hand to her hair, which had indeed got blown out of the prim neatness which was an important part of her present personification, but it was not the touch of the truant locks which startled her fingers as they touched her face.

"Oh, dear," she ejaculated, "my spectacles!" For in the exuberance of her enjoyment of the fresh morning air, and her sense of momentary freedom from notice, she had drawn them off and slipped them into her pocket.

It was too late now to undo the mischief, if any, that had been done by their absence. Drawing herself together she glanced up almost defiantly at the young man standing motionless before her, and when she caught sight of the expression of his face, which from that of surprise had darkened into gravity, almost approaching disapproval, it was all she could do to keep silent.

"What business is it of yours whether I wear spectacles or not? What

have you to do with me in any possible way, I should like to know?" were the words she would have given worlds to utter in the excess of her annoyance at this new *contretemps*, heightened by her disgust of herself for the blushes which still remained in angry glow upon her cheeks.

Not the least discomposed of the trio was poor Solomon. In his doggy way he had meant to act the friendly part of reintroducing to each other the two who had seemed not uncongenial companions the day before, and now, though no words had passed the lips of either his dearly beloved master or the new and charming friend who had made him so comfortable in the train, he was conscious that something was amiss—very much amiss, indeed. He stood there glancing from one to the other almost, as Philippa afterwards thought to herself, as if there had been tears in his eyes, so profound was his look of distress and mortification. She was on the point of stooping to restore his spirits by a little caress—she could not resist wishing to do so—when with a sudden gruff "Come along, Solomon," the young man turned on his heel, slightly raising his cap as he did so, and strode off in another direction.

"I must go, I'm very sorry, but I *must* go! I don't know what's making him so cross this morning!" said Solomon's wistful gaze, as obediently, but most dejectedly, he trotted away—even his tail a different member of society from what it had been a few moments previously.

"Horrid, detestable man," thought Philippa to herself, feeling more than half inclined to cry, partly from anger, partly from anxiety, a good deal from pity for Solomon.

She replaced the unlucky spectacles and soberly made her way back to the house, her little fit of elation completely over, feeling, indeed, as if all the mischievous imps in creation had conspired to thwart and embarrass her. To her relief, the being late for breakfast was not added to her other misfortunes, for by the big stable-clock, which she glanced at as she hurried in, she saw that it still wanted ten minutes to the hour, and when the bell rang she was ready to leave her room and come down-stairs in orthodox propriety.

Mrs Shepton welcomed her with a kindly "Good-morning," placing her as near herself as was compatible with the etiquette of precedence so

vigorously exacted in such formal society.

The meal passed in silence, for this was one of the rules at Wyverston Manor—talking only being allowed at certain repasts. And here it may be as well to say that the girl's experiences of the manners and customs of the servants'-hall fell short of what her imagination had pictured. Thanks to Mrs Shepton's good management, the household was really to a great extent a model one, and so far at least as the upper servants were concerned, Philippa came across nothing of a coarse or jarring nature. The extreme reserve of her own manner she did not attempt to relax, for she thought she saw that the housekeeper approved of it, though she endeavoured to temper it by gentleness and courtesy on all occasions.

"Do tell me," she said, to Mrs Shepton, a day or two after her arrival, "do you like the way I behave? I was never in the same position before—among a number of others, you know, in a large house like this. There is no need for me to get intimate with any one, is there? Being here only for such a short time; and yet I would not like to seem to hold myself aloof in any stiff and unusual way."

Mrs Shepton's own voice had a trifle of stiffness in it as she replied:

"You have no need, my dear, to be either familiar or stand-off; our upper servants are all of a superior class, and, indeed, the younger ones too are most respectably connected."

Philippa in an instant saw her mistake.

"Oh, pray," she said, eagerly, "pray don't think I was hinting at anything of that kind. I mean,"—and she could not help reddening as she spoke—"any sort of 'giving myself airs' as it is called. I really want your advice and opinion as to my behaviour."

The housekeeper softened in a moment.

"Any one could see," she said, "that you have been brought up in a superior way. It is not giving yourself airs to be what you have naturally come to be, and no one of this house will like you the less for the advantages it's plain you've had—" She hesitated and stopped. The good woman was as little of a gossip as it was possible for one in her position

to be, but she had begun to look for some kind of confidence on the young girl's part, some allusion to her home and childhood, to her parents and bringing up, in return for what she herself had already related to "Phillis Ray" of her own past history. For something about Philippa had almost at once appealed to her sympathy, and this want of response was just a trifle disappointing. Mrs Shepton glanced at her again. Philippa's eyes were cast down; indeed, the spectacles at all times made it rather difficult to judge of their expression. More than once the housekeeper had been on the point of begging her to lay them aside for a little, that she might see "how she looked without them." Just now, however, it was impossible not to notice by her whole attitude and bearing that she was somewhat anxious and depressed, and the elder woman's kind heart was touched; there might be reasons why the girl *could* not tell her more.

"I think, perhaps," she went on after the little pause of half expectation, "as you wish me to speak frankly, that you might join rather more in the conversation—at supper especially. There's that maid of Mrs Worthing's—I don't know her well, she's never been here before—has not looked at you very pleasantly sometimes, and it doesn't do in this world to make enemies if you can help it."

Philippa started slightly.

"Do you mean the one they call Miss Bailey?" she said. "I really have scarcely noticed her. I—"

"That's just it," interrupted Mrs Shepton; "not being noticed offends some people more than anything you could say to them."

Philippa looked grave.

"Thank you for warning me," she said. "I will try to be more am—more friendly to Miss Bailey in future."

But unfortunately the mischief was already done.

"Mrs Shepton," Philippa began again, after a moment's pause, lifting her head impulsively, "Mrs Shepton, I know what you are thinking—that I might tell you more about myself, and I cannot tell you how much I wish I

could. But there are reasons which make it quite impossible—I can tell you one of them—it would displease my—Mrs Marmaduke, exceedingly, if I explained to you how I came to enter her service."

"Say no more, my dear," interposed the housekeeper, cordially. "Saying what you have shows your confidence in me, and that is enough. I have seen too much of life, and in my position one comes across stranger stories than you would believe, not to know that the most candid and straightforward people are sometimes forced, by no fault of their own, into positions where they can't be outspoken."

"Yes," said Philippa, feeling rather guilty, though to the housekeeper her tone only sounded sad, "yes; that must be the case sometimes. I—honestly, I may say for myself that I am naturally *very* frank. I would give anything at the present moment, dear Mrs Shepton, to tell you all about myself and my friends." She raised her charming eyes to the kind woman's face—charming they were, and not only so in respect of their undeniable beauty, but also, and in perhaps still greater measure, from their candid and true expression. And in spite of the intervening spectacles, Mrs Shepton read them aright.

"I will not distrust her in any way," she thought, "whether I ever come to understand her or not.—There is just one thing I should like to say," she began again, after a little pause, "something I should like you to promise me—if you are in any trouble or difficulty while you are here, something, perhaps, that you would not like to worry your lady about, don't be afraid of telling me. I will give you the best advice I can."

"Thank you," said Philippa, heartily. "I will certainly promise you what you so kindly ask, and I suppose it is possible, with my being so inexperienced, that I might make mistakes. But you don't think, I hope," she continued, with a touch of anxiety, "that Mrs Worthing's maid has taken a dislike to me? I should not like to get anybody's ill-will."

That she had some reason for fear was evident, and it added to the housekeeper's sympathy for her, little as she could understand it.

Her reply was not altogether reassuring; she was too honest to make it so.

”‘Ill-will’ is a strong word,” she said, “but I can’t say that I think Miss Bailey likes you; that was why I gave you the little warning about seeming so stand-off,” “I will be very careful,” said Philippa.

And as the days went on, Miss Raynsworth felt more and more glad to have had this conversation with the housekeeper, for, as she realised increasingly the complications to which by her rash action she was exposing herself and her sister, she grew conscious of many little awkwardnesses which she had never thought of or in the least foreseen, and which might have aroused the suspicion of a commoner-minded woman than the good old housekeeper. Among these was the fact of her apparently receiving no letters, the importance of which she perhaps exaggerated, from Bailey’s drawing attention to it once or twice when the servants’-hall correspondence was distributed at table. In reality the letters she had received, under cover to Evelyn, had enormously added to her anxiety and caused her the greatest distress—distress which was all the more hard to bear as she had to endure it alone, for her parents charged her on no account to upset Evelyn, under the circumstances of her present surroundings especially, by telling her of their very grave displeasure.

“I cannot conceive,” wrote her mother, “how you ventured to do such a thing, so utterly to set at nought all your father and I *could* not but feel at a daughter of ours placing herself in such a position. Your father was on the point at first of setting off, at all costs, to bring you back again, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that I persuaded him to give up doing so, by reminding him on whom the ‘costs’ in this case would fall—I mean poor Evelyn and her husband. Such an *esclandre* would certainly have been utterly fatal to the Headforts thinking well of Duke’s wife or her family. We are very annoyed with Evelyn herself, too, for not *insisting* on your returning the moment she found you were in the train, and to prevent her doing so you must have made an unjustifiable use of your greater strength of character and determination to carry out your own way. I shall say as little as possible to your sister till you are both home again. I am counting every day—indeed every hour, till this visit is over, and I only pray that no terribly disastrous consequences may follow on what you have done.”

It *was* hard to bear, feeling conscious, as she did, that at least three-

fourths of her motives had been purely unselfish, and only now did Philippa allow to herself that a certain love of adventure—a touch of the reckless impulsiveness and defiance of conventionality which Maida Lermont, though vaguely, had been conscious of in her young cousin—only now did it dawn upon the girl that these less worthy incentives had gone far to make up the remaining balance.

“I have never meant to be wild or headstrong,” she said to herself. “I have always thought I was almost too practical and unimpulsive. I planned all this so carefully and even cautiously. I never dreamt of papa and mamma taking it up so severely; I don’t think they ever have been really angry with me before in my life. And after all,” with a touch of half-humorous defiance, as she dashed away the tears which she dared not indulge in, for fear of her sister’s discovering them, “after all, I do *not* know what Evelyn would have done without me. I am perfectly certain she would not have got on so well; most assuredly she would not have *looked* as she has done!”

For Philippa’s rule over her sister had been a very stringent one. Mrs Marmaduke Headfort was not allowed to overtire herself by walking too far or driving too long, by sitting up too late, or spasmodically getting up too early, all of which vagaries she was addicted to when her own mistress. Her tonic was never forgotten, nor her stated hours of resting curtailed. In consequence of all these precautions, Evelyn looked and felt wonderfully invigorated. The credit of this was attributed by her well-pleased hosts, and in part by herself, to the bracing air of Wyverston, and Philippa was too unselfish and generous to feel annoyed at this, though she secretly hugged herself with satisfaction as to what she knew had been her own share in this good state of things.

“I don’t think mamma *can* be so vexed with me when I tell her about it,” she thought. “She does know that Evelyn is not fit to take care of herself.”

There was really, for the moment, no crumpled rose-leaf in young Mrs Headfort’s path. To her facile nature, in spite of her capacity for “fussing,” it came easy to accept things as she found them. Long before the first week was at an end she had got used to the anomalous position in which her sister, and, to a certain extent through her sister, she herself were placed. Beyond this, she even allowed herself the gratification of claiming

Philippa's admiration for her strong-minded behaviour.

"I really think I have managed beautifully," she said. "I have not worried about you at all, Phil, and I have determined not to be homesick for Bonny and Vanda, though," with a sudden realisation of what she owed to her sister, "I'm quite sure my good spirits are principally owing to your being here."

And Philippa felt rewarded.

By this time Miss Raynsworth had begun to breathe more freely. No further *contretemps* had as yet occurred. She had been most careful to keep out of the way of the guests in the house, more especially the two Greshams, for, after hearing from Evelyn of her conversation on the night of her arrival with the elder of the cousins, she could no longer deceive herself as to his identity with the handsome, silent man whose personality had somehow impressed her at Dorriford, and she was even more afraid of coming across *him* than of again meeting Solomon's master.

To poor Solomon himself she had more than once been obliged to be positively cruel, for whenever she caught sight of his tan-coloured person she was seized with terror lest her other travelling companion should be near at hand. In those days it is to be feared that the dachshund's belief in the stability of woman's friendship received some severe shocks. One afternoon in particular he happened to run against Miss Raynsworth in one of the back passages not far from Mrs Shepton's room, and the girl, thinking herself for once safe from dangerous observation, stooped down and patted him affectionately. No sooner had she done so than she bitterly regretted it, for coming towards her, but a few paces off, she descried his master's familiar figure. The dog by this time was in a state of frantic delight; at all costs she must get rid of him.

"Down, down," she said, in a cruelly repressive tone, which poor Solomon would have understood even without the stern "Come here, sir," from Michael Gresham which followed; and as she hurried along the passage she could not resist glancing back over her shoulder in pity for her four-footed admirer. Mr Gresham was not to be seen—what had become of him?—but Solomon was sitting on the mat outside the housekeeper's room, looking profoundly miserable and feeling doubly deserted—by his

master as well as by his friend. For Michael had shut the door in the dog's face.

"Poor old boy," thought Philippa. "I wonder why he has settled himself there."

For she knew that Mrs Shepton was not specially addicted to dogs. She liked them, she said, in "their proper place;" in other words, when they were entirely out of her sight and with no opportunity of jumping on sofas, eating rugs, or going to sleep on her best eiderdown quilts.

Chapter Ten.

“Merle-in-the-Wold.”

Miss Raynsworth would have been considerably surprised had she known the reason of Solomon’s encampment in his present quarters.

“I have left my dog outside,” his master was at that moment saying to the housekeeper, “so I hope you’ll be pleased with me, ‘Mrs Shepton, ma’am!’” using the rather absurd title which had clung to his old friend since the days when she had been his nurse.

Mrs Shepton smiled indulgently. “Now, Master Michael, what would any one think to hear you still speaking to me like that?” she said, forgetting that her own way of addressing the young man was now equally inappropriate, “and I don’t like you to think that I would be unkind to a poor dumb creature, especially one you are fond of. Dogs are all very well in their proper place! But when it comes to finding one in a young gentleman’s bed with its head on the pillow and the clothes tucked under its shin, as I have seen you have Toby many and many a time in the old days at Allerton—well, no, I can’t say but what that was going too far.”

Michael Gresham laughed.

“I remember,” he said, “especially once when Bernie and I stole one of old Aunt Serena’s caps—a nightcap I suppose it must have been—and tied it neatly on to Toby’s head with the frills sticking out beautifully all round.”

“I don’t remember Master *Bernard* ever doing anything of the kind,” said Mrs Shepton, with a marked accent on the name. “If there was ever any mischief afoot, it wasn’t often it had to be laid at *his* door.”

“Not *often*, perhaps,” said Michael, “though I wouldn’t say never. If there was a scrape to be got into, it was, I allow, pretty sure to be I who found myself in it. But we stuck to each other very faithfully in those days. Poor old Bernie!” and he gave a little sigh. “After all, it isn’t his fault if all the plums have fallen to his share, and I’m sure I don’t grudge them to him,

though I would not object to a few for myself sometimes."

A shade of distress crossed Mrs Shepton's face.

"They will come, my dear," she said, affectionately patting the young man's hand. "Never fear; they will come, all in good time, and none the less sweet that you have had to wait for them, and work for them too."

"Oh, bless you, don't think I mind the working," he said, lightly. "Life would be unbearable without it. Don't think I was grumbling, Mrs Shepton, ma'am, but," and he rose to his feet, as an unmistakable sound of scratching and whining on the other side of the door made itself heard, "some one *is* grumbling, and that's Solomon. May I let him in?"

"Of course, dearie; I'll let him in myself. No," as the young man was moving towards the door, "let me do it; I should like him to see I was friendly."

In another moment Solomon was inside, pawing and jumping on the housekeeper, who did her best to hide any sign of apprehension for her black silk skirt. "You see he is fond of me," she said, with a touch of rather tremulous triumph in her tone.

"Moderately so," Mr Gresham replied, eyeing the pair with considerable amusement, "but not as fond of you as he is of a young person who travelled down in our carriage the other day—third class—I always come third, you know. By-the-by, I wanted to ask you about her. She is Mrs Marmaduke Headfort's maid, I believe." Mrs Shepton looked considerably surprised.

"Yes, sir?" she said, interrogatively.

"Now, don't be stupid," said Michael, with some irritation. "You know very well I'm not likely to begin gossiping! But there is something unusual about this girl, and I cannot help feeling sorry for her. I had meant to speak of her to you before. What do you think of her?"

The housekeeper's brow had cleared, but now a look of perplexity came over her face.

“To tell you the truth, Master Michael, I really don’t know,” she said. “I wouldn’t say as much to any one but yourself, and I would not for worlds betray her confidence—”

“Has she given you her confidence, then?” interrupted the young man.

“She has and she hasn’t! She has allowed that there is something about her present position that she cannot explain, and as far as things here go she has put herself in my hands, saying how inexperienced she is, and begging me to advise her if I see it necessary. But beyond that, I know no more than you do. Perhaps,”—with a touch of curiosity—“not as much, if you entered into conversation with her on the journey?” Michael laughed slightly.

“Oh, dear, no,” he said, “she would have snubbed me at once if I had said anything but the merest commonplace—and even that was only brought about by Solomon’s making such friends with her, which threw her a little off her dignity once or twice. She is a *lady*, nurse, I am perfectly certain of it, and that is why I am so sorry for her. The impression she made upon me,” he continued, slowly, “was that she is acting a part.” Mrs Shepton looked rather startled.

“I don’t like you to say that, Master Michael,” she replied, quickly. “I have felt from the first that I could trust her—and now that I know her better, and she has, as it were, thrown herself upon me, I couldn’t bear to go back from doing so.”

“You misunderstand me,” said Mr Gresham, with some annoyance. “Do you suppose I think she’s a burglar in disguise? People are forced into seeming what they are not sometimes, by no fault of their own.” Almost her own words to Philippa! The housekeeper in her turn hastened to exonerate herself.

“I took up your words wrongly,” she said. “I think I feel just as you do, Master Michael, about the poor girl. I am doing all I can to be a friend to her.”

“I’m very glad of that,” said Michael, heartily. “That was just what I had in my mind—to ask you to be good to her.”

He spoke with his usual perfect simplicity, and as his old friend glanced at him she said to herself: “Just the same kind heart as always! Well, if others don’t, there’s one that does you justice, and that’s your old nurse, my dear.”

Aloud she said nothing in reply to his last words, and Michael, too, sat silent. He was stroking Solomon’s soft back half absently, and pondering something in his mind, which the sight of his dachshund had recalled to his memory. Should he, or should he not say anything to Mrs Shepton of the curiously similar way in which both mistress and maid had alluded to a former “Solomon of their own.”

“Have you seen anything of Mrs Marmaduke?” he said at last, tentatively.

“Miss Christine brought her in here for a few minutes yesterday,” answered Mrs Shepton. “Of course I had seen her before, several times, but not to speak to. She is a sweet-looking young lady, very, and so devoted to her little children. I am very pleased, indeed, that the family seems to be taking to her so much; Miss Headfort has quite cheered up over it.”

The tone of her words decided Michael to say no more. He could scarcely have related the little incident without a suggestion of something not altogether to the young wife’s advantage, though in what way he himself would have been utterly at a loss to define. And the faintest suggestion of such a kind would have been most unfair to young Mrs Headfort, for if her maid had a secret—a secret of which she herself even was cognisant, it would be most unjustifiable to lay to the young lady’s account any supposition of underhand dealing or subterfuge.

“I think she is—Mrs Marmaduke, I mean—a nice little woman, and certainly very pretty. I should not say she was particularly clever, but I daresay that doesn’t matter much in a woman if her looks are all right,” he said, with a slight superciliousness not lost on his hearer.

“Now, Master Michael, I am not going to have you beginning in that way,” she said, remonstratingly. “If a young lady is pretty, that’s no reason why she shouldn’t have other gifts as well. You would not like me to say Mr Gresham had nothing but his good looks?”

Again there was just a shade of bitterness in the young man's voice as he replied:

"Nobody could say such a thing of Bernard. He has got—well, what is there he hasn't got?"

Michael's old nurse seemed rather nonplussed.

"It was a stupid remark of mine, Master Michael," she answered. "And I daresay it will make it no better if I say that whatever Mr Bernard has, and is, there are some ways in which I could never feel that he comes up to you."

"Mrs Shepton, ma'am, you're a silly old woman. I must be going. If I stay much longer you will be persuading me that my features are the most regular you have ever seen."

"Nay, nay, my dear. I know what I mean, though I can't put it in words. 'All is not gold that glitters,'" she added, sententiously.

The proverb seemed scarcely relevant, but Michael understood the feeling that suggested the quotation, and there was affection as well as amusement in the smile with which he looked back at his old friend, as, followed by Solomon, he left the room.

The elder Mr Gresham had that day been the subject of discussion in another quarter as well. He had been almost from the first very gracious to Evelyn, and this naturally pleased her the more as she gradually came to see that Mr Gresham did not always give himself much trouble about those with whom he might be thrown in contact. The attractiveness of his appearance and the invariable gentleness of his manner had in themselves an undoubted charm, which often made his coldness and indifference the more irritating to those who could not flatter themselves that they had aroused in him the slightest interest in their persons or their conversation.

"I do wish you could see him, Phil," Evelyn was saying to her sister at the very time that Mr Michael Gresham was paying his visit to Mrs Shepton. "He is really so charming. Felicia and Christine tell me they have never seen him make friends so quickly, and I think they are very pleased at it.

Every one thinks so much of his opinion."

"Then it is no wonder if he is a little spoilt," said Philippa.

"But I don't think he *is* spoilt," returned Evelyn, eagerly. "He is so gentle and considerate, such a contrast to his cousin—I never saw such a 'brusque' man as *he* is; and if it is affectation, he has no right to be affected! He is so ugly, and of course his position is different in every way."

"Then it is no wonder if he is a little spoilt," said Philippa.

"But I don't think he *is* spoilt," returned Evelyn, eagerly. "He is so gentle and considerate, such a contrast to his cousin—I never saw such a 'brusque' man as *he* is; and if it is affectation, he has no right to be affected! He is so ugly, and of course his position is different in every way."

"I should scarcely think he was really affected," said Philippa; "he is just rather rough. But certainly," she went on, "the elder cousin is quite unusually good-looking."

Evelyn gave a little laugh.

"What is amusing you?" said Philippa, rather sharply.

"Oh, nothing," said Evelyn.

"When people answer 'nothing' in that way, it always means something," said Philippa, sententiously. "You laughed at what I said, and I want to know why?"

"I didn't—at least, not exactly. I was only thinking—now don't be cross—how absurd it is! You admiring Mr Gresham, allowing, at any rate, that he made some impression upon you—for you are very critical, you know, Philippa—and he on his side entertaining me, whenever he can get round to the subject with his appreciation of your beauty and charms."

Philippa reddened, and not altogether with gratification.

“That sort of thing is very common, Evelyn; I don’t like it. Besides which, it is incredible that the man should remember me so distinctly. We only met for one afternoon, and what chiefly impressed me about him was his unusual dearth of conversation. It forced me to talk, I remember—you know the hateful feeling of being *tête-à-tête* with any one, and we were *tête-à-tête* for some little time, in dead silence. No, Evelyn, he has found out one of your weak points, you unsuspicious little goose, not your *weakest*, but he couldn’t praise up Bonny and Vanda, as he has never seen them. You shouldn’t be so open to flattery.”

“But, indeed, it isn’t flattery,” said Evelyn; “he would be incapable of anything so coarse, and you should have a higher opinion of *my* taste and perception too. All he says is in the very nicest way, really showing that he saw you to be—well, something out of the common, which you certainly are.”

“All the same,” said Philippa, “I wish you would leave off talking about me while you are here, at all. It is very unwise.”

“I don’t think so,” said Evelyn. “When I’m talking about you to Mr Gresham, I feel quite comfortable! I quite forget about you being here, and think of you as if you were at home. Of course,” looking a little ashamed of herself, “I have said once or twice: ‘How I do wish she were here!’ thinking of you as your proper self, you know.”

Philippa looked very grave. She did not like the idea of any such prevarication on her sister’s part, and was on the point of saying so, till a moment’s reflection reminded her that she had scarcely a right to do so. So she contented herself with remarking quietly that in future she begged her sister to avoid all mention of her name.

“I cannot promise anything of the kind,” said Evelyn. “Mr Gresham has got interested in you now, and I am—” She stopped short.

“Well, what?” asked Philippa.

Evelyn blushed a little.

“Interested in his interest, I suppose,” she admitted, with a little laugh. “I cannot help wondering,” she went on, “when or where, or how, you and

he may meet again. I am sure you would have so much in common," and it did not require much flight of imagination on the younger sister's part to see whither Evelyn's thoughts were tending.

She was both touched and annoyed, the practical effect of this conversation being to make her wish more devoutly than ever that their time at Wyverston were over. Other feelings were strongly influencing her in this wish. For utterly unreasonable as she knew it to be, she was conscious of a curious resentment against Michael Gresham, whom she had not been able to avoid meeting—thanks generally to Solomon now and then, either on the moor or nearer home, for tacitly accepting her present personality, even while in a sense grateful to him for doing so. For that he had guessed some part of her secret, guessed, at least, that she *had* a secret, she felt perfectly sure, and the consciousness of this irritated her and reacted in curiously contradictory and capricious ways.

Fortunately, as she told herself, though here, too, her inconsistency came in, she had never come across the elder of the two cousins. Evelyn's dissertations made her doubly careful as regarded him, yet she had a worrying curiosity to see him again, if only she could do so, herself unseen. And but for an additional reason for precaution which reached her a day or two later through her sister, she might have been tempted to some more or less reckless step for the gratification of this same curiosity, absurd and contemptible though she called it to herself.

This new danger lay in the discovery of the fact that should fate lead to the two Greshams laying their heads together about "Miss Raynsworth," her identity with Michael's fellow-traveller would be by no means unlikely to suggest itself.

Evelyn was full of her last piece of interesting information concerning Mr Bernard Gresham when she came up to bed a night or two after the conversation already recorded.

"Philippa," she exclaimed, as soon as they were safely shut in for the night, "I have found out ever so much more about my charming Mr Gresham. His home is in Nethershire—a place called Merle-in-the-Wold—isn't that a fascinating name? I am sure I have heard of it before. Didn't *you* speak of it, by-the-by? I said to him I was sure I had heard it

mentioned quite lately, as such a lovely part of the country."

"Oh, Evelyn," said Philippa, aghast, "do be careful. Yes, no doubt I spoke of it. I passed that way on my return from Dorriford. But what might not come of it, if you had mentioned me in connection with it?" "Nothing," says Evelyn, sensibly enough. "He knows my sister was at Dorriford, there is no secret about *that*, and he probably knows that you would pass Merle-in-the-Wold on your way to Marlby. You are getting morbid and stupid, Phil, about being found out. And no one heard what we were talking about, except—oh, Mr Gresham has all but asked us to pay him a visit, I, of course, as your chaperon, though he would have a married sister and her husband there, too. Phil," clasping her hands, "we *must* go. It would be too lovely—we two together."

"And what about a maid?" said Philippa, grimly.

"Oh, I don't exactly know; I must plan something when we go home. I am sure I could think of some arrangement if I had a little time. I almost think I will send away the under-nurse—she is a stupid little thing, and though her wages are small, Dorcas says her appetite is enormous. I could get a nice *young* maid, who would not object to help a little with the children, for a few pounds a year more. I am sure Duke would not mind, and very likely her eating less would make up the difference. You see, I shall have to be planning all about a house in a very few months now, Phil. And if the old people here really take us up, Duke will be so delighted that he will agree to anything."

She was chattering on, when a word in her former speech recurred to Philippa.

"Wait a moment, Evey," she said. "You did not finish what you were saying before. You said no one heard what you and Mr Gresham were talking about, 'except?' Except whom—one of the Headforts?"

"No—what does it matter? I was only going to say except that stupid Michael Gresham—he was staring at a book, as far as I remember. I don't suppose he did hear what we were saying. And, do listen, Phil—don't you see, as I was saying, once Duke has the position—almost, one may say, the *recognised* position of heir, there will be things that we *must*

do, out of respect for the family even, like my having a—”

But the latter part of Evelyn’s speech had conveyed little meaning to her sister’s brain, so startled was she by the careless announcement that if any one had overheard what Evelyn and Mr Gresham had been talking about, it had been his cousin.

Had he done so, or had he not? Who could say? And what possibility was there of discovering the facts of the case?

Philippa trembled as she realised the consequences of Michael Gresham’s having taken in the whole bearings of her sister’s chatter. No special power of discernment would be required, nothing but the simplest, most everyday faculty on his part of putting two and two together, to satisfy him as to the identity of Mrs Marmaduke Headfort’s sister and the girl he had travelled with. And her trepidation was by no means selfish; she forgot about the disagreeables which would certainly ensue to herself if the strange little plot were to be disclosed, in realising the injurious effect it would certainly have upon Evelyn and her belongings.

“Oh, Evey!” she began, impulsively, but checked herself before saying more. What right had she to blame Evelyn, whose words would have been perfectly harmless but for her own unnecessary communication to Michael Gresham in the train? Still more, what could be less expedient than now, when the mischief was done, to startle and alarm her sister, and effectually destroy her ease and unconstraint during the few days they must still pass at Wyverston?

“No,” she decided in her own mind. “I must think it over by myself, and I must face it by myself. I have got Evelyn into the danger, and I must get her out of it at all costs. No one must ever be able to blame *her* in the least.”

But, oh! if she could but think that Michael had not caught the sense of Evelyn’s words—Evelyn called him “stupid;” but that he certainly could not be in the real sense of the word, for she had heard, even in the servants’-hall, allusions to the position he had gained for himself in his profession, but “unobservant?” Could she hope that his perceptions were

not very keen? Many clever men were dull and slow in ordinary life, and by all accounts he did not shine in society. But even this flattering unction failed her as she recalled the keen, “interested” expression of his somewhat deep-set eyes, and the half-sarcastic, half-humorous lines of the whole physiognomy that first morning of meeting him in the wood—the unlucky morning when she had forgotten her spectacles, and in the exhilaration of the fresh air and novel surroundings had been far less on her guard than she now was.

All this train of thought passed through her mind far more rapidly than it takes to describe the process, so rapidly that she had made up her mind to silence as regarded Evelyn, before her sister had fully taken in the scant attention which Philippa was bestowing on her words.

“Philippa,” she exclaimed, at last catching sight of the girl’s grave face, “what are you thinking about? You are always very good at cheering me up when I am in low spirits, but I must say that when I am feeling bright and hopeful, and with good reason, you are *not* very sympathising. Don’t you care to hear about my plans?”

“Of course I do,” said Philippa, compelling herself to speak lightly, “but we have oceans of time before us to talk over everything in, and you have *not* too much time for a good night; it is getting very late, and if we go on talking you will never get to sleep.”

Evelyn was well-trained by this time; she made but faint resistance to her sister’s ultimatum.

Of the two it was certainly Philippa who found the greater difficulty in getting to sleep that night, and long before the dawn broke, she was wide awake again, revolving in her own mind the whole tormenting question of what to do, and how to do it.

“Or, after all,” said she to herself, “might it not be safer to leave things alone, and do nothing?”

Chapter Eleven.

A Cold Nose.

Things if left alone often do shape themselves.

Philippa had come to no decision as to the best course to pursue, when further revelations from Evelyn intensified her alarm.

“Philippa,” she began, the very next afternoon. “I don’t understand that Michael Gresham, and I almost think I dislike him as much as I like his cousin. Of course I have always thought him rough and abrupt, but that he is to every one, more or less. But now there is something in his manner to me almost indescribable—well, not exactly offensive, that is too strong a word, but approaching it—a sort of tacit disapproval, that I really cannot stand from a young man like that, who has nothing whatever to do with me. I would not stand it if he were my brother; I feel as if I should have an open quarrel with him before long if it goes on!”

Philippa felt cold with apprehension.

“Don’t talk of such a thing, *Evey*,” she said; “your first visit here, and the Greshams such old friends of these people! Nothing could be more disagreeable. You don’t mean to say that he has ever been actually rude to you?”

“No, nothing actually tangible. But he looks at me, especially when I am talking to his cousin, in a sort of hard, questioning way, as if he would like to pull me up for everything I was saying. At luncheon to-day Mr Gresham alluded again to the visit we are to pay him. He was asking about when I expect Duke back, and he turned to Michael with some remark about the shooting—I forget what, exactly—in connection with our going there, and the horrid young man scarcely answered. He was as gruff as anything.”

“But that was more rude to his cousin than to you,” said Philippa.

Evelyn shook her head.

“No, it had to do with me. I think Mr Gresham noticed it, in fact I am sure he did, for afterwards I saw them together as I was crossing the hall, and I think I heard Mr Gresham calling him a bear, or a boor, I’m not sure which.”

There was no time for more just then, as Evelyn was going out for a drive with Mrs Headfort, and the summons came, before her sister had time to do more than repeat one little word of warning, as Mrs Marmaduke flew off. But once she found herself alone, while mechanically occupying herself in arranging Evelyn’s things with her usual deft carefulness, the poor girl’s thoughts were by no means to be envied. Things *were* coming to a crisis, thanks to her sister’s innocent indiscretion and that—yes, she could join with Evelyn in calling him “that horrid young man”—that horrid young man’s impertinent interference; for that he was about to interfere she felt convinced, though as yet he could scarcely be said to have done so.

“And if,” thought Philippa, “he thinks it his duty—officious people always think things their duty—to warn his cousins that we are acting a part and deceiving others, who knows what may come of it? Poor Evey will in one sense suffer more than I, and it will be *all* my doing! I may have ruined everything for them by my recklessness and self-will.”

She sat down beside the window in a state very nearly bordering on despair. She dared not let herself cry, though to one of her temperament the very rarity of her tears made them the greater relief.

“What can I do?” she repeated, and wild ideas chased each other through her brain as to the possibility of telegraphing to her mother to summon them home at once, or of an appeal, however repugnant to every feeling, to Michael Gresham to—nay, what could she say to him, without giving him her full confidence? and that, she scarcely felt that it would be possible to do. Of all men she had ever met, as far as she could judge, he seemed the last in any way likely to understand or to sympathise with the motives which had led her to act as she had done. Indeed, no *man*, she said to herself, could enter into all the feelings, some of them so apparently trivial and frivolous, which had actuated her.

“And a man like him least of all,” she thought. “One can see that he

prides himself on excessive honesty and straightforwardness. No doubt he could be very good at saying disagreeable things from the best of motives, and he could be quite incapable of entering into shades of feeling, he is so rough. Now if it had been his cousin who was in question —oh, it would have been quite different! He must be so refined and delicate in perception."

She gave a deep sigh. Her eyes turned mechanically to the window, and she gazed out half vacantly. The afternoon was very still, and the grey sky in any other part of the world would almost certainly have prognosticated rain. But Philippa was learning her bearings better by now in this northern country, where the greyness often meant nothing special as regarded the weather.

The wind had been high the night before, and the trees almost looked as if winter had already come, the paths being thickly strewn with their discarded vesture.

A little shiver passed through the girl.

"It does look dreary," she thought, for her window overlooked some of the back premises, where no gardener's broom had as yet tidied up the traces of the wind's undoing. One corner of the great stable-yard was visible, and as Philippa still looked out, the silence was broken by a sound she loved to hear, the eager barking of a huge watch-dog, whom she had already made friends with in her rambles about the place.

"I hope they are going to loose him," she thought, with interest, craning her neck to see what was happening.

Just at that moment she caught sight of Mrs Shepton's slight and still erect figure, as she made her way back to the house, and a sudden suggestion flashed into the girl's mind.

"I believe it is the only thing to do," she said to herself. "She may be able to ask him what I cannot and will not ask for myself," for by this time Philippa had learnt something of the relations existing between Michael Gresham and the housekeeper, though the latter had been scrupulously careful to avoid anything approaching to gossip about the young man whom she was still so devoted to.

Without giving herself time to reconsider what she was about to do, Philippa, pale with suppressed nervousness, hurried down-stairs in hopes of catching Mrs Shepton on her entrance to the house. In this she succeeded, for in answer to her tap at the door of the housekeeper's room, its owner's voice replied, "Come in."

"Are you alone?" said Philippa, glancing round, "and can you spare me a few minutes? Mrs Shepton, I am in such trouble, and I promised you to ask your advice, if need arose."

The housekeeper glanced at her anxiously. The girl had been greatly in her thoughts the last few days, though she had not seen much of her, for it had seemed to her that she was looking ill and careworn, unless, indeed, her own eyes had been sharpened by the younger Mr Gresham's communications.

"Sit down, my dear," she said, kindly.

Philippa obeyed her at once. Indeed, now that she was within the shelter of the kind woman's own little sanctum, and felt the protection of her motherly tone and words, a reaction, not unnaturally, from the constraint she had been putting upon herself, set in. She trembled so that she could scarcely have stood a moment longer, and when she began to speak, her voice entirely failed her and she burst into tears.

Mrs Shepton felt positively alarmed, but she spoke calmly.

"Try to be composed, my dear," she said, still more kindly than before, "otherwise you will not be able to tell me what is wrong. Will you have a glass of water? I have some here which is as cold as ice."

The girl made a little sign in the affirmative, and when she had drunk the water, she was able to some extent to check her sobs.

"Now tell me," said Mrs Shepton, "tell me all about it. Have you had bad news? No, it can't be that, for I have seen you twice since the letters came, and you did not seem upset. Is Mrs Marmaduke vexed with you for anything? You must not take it so to heart, if it is that; I am sure she is a kind—"

But before she got further in these suggestions of consolation, something in their nature suddenly struck her as strangely discrepant with the whole look and even attitude of the young girl before her. The disguising spectacles were discarded—the handkerchief with which Philippa was brushing away her tears was of the finest cambric, with a monogram beautifully worked in one corner—the whole pose of the figure, even in its abandonment of distress, was full of grace and refinement. It did not require Philippa's shake of the head, accompanied involuntarily by a faint little smile, to bring home to the housekeeper that Michael Gresham had been right in the opinion he had expressed as to the social status of his fellow-traveller, and which, on first hearing it, had struck his old friend as scarcely warranted.

For Philippa was now completely herself, in the sense, that is to say, of having thrown off all attempt at appearing other than she really was, even while less self-controlled, more thoroughly unstrung than she had ever been before in her life.

Yet there was something almost queenly in her bearing, as at last, resolutely choking down the sobs which still would rise, she sat straight up in her chair and looked Mrs Shepton clearly in the face.

"I am going to tell you everything," she began. "I know you will be kind, however startled and even shocked you may feel. Mrs Shepton, my real name is Philippa Raynsworth, I am Mrs Marmaduke Headfort's sister."

For a moment or two the housekeeper was too confused to take in distinctly the meaning of the words which reached her ears.

"Sister," she repeated vaguely, while some romantic notion of "foster-sister," "adopted sister," or the like, floated through her brain. "You don't mean really—"

"Yes, I do," interrupted her visitor. "I am her actual, full sister. You know her name was Raynsworth before she married?"

Mrs Shepton nodded, waiting breathlessly for further revelations.

"I will tell you how it all came about," the girl went on, "But first of all you must promise me to believe that it was no one's doing but my own. My

father and mother are as vexed with me as they can possibly be, and Evelyn—it has been very trying for her," she was going to have added, but the words remained unsaid, as with a faint smile of amusement, which even in the midst of her distress she could not altogether suppress, she recalled the comfortable philosophy with which, once she had accepted it as a *fait accompli*, her sister had resigned herself to her new lady's-maid. "It has been," she went on, "I see now, a great risk to run for Mrs Marmaduke; if Mrs Headfort and her daughters suspected that we have been deceiving them, I do not know what harm might come of it."

She glanced up tentatively at Mrs Shepton, but there was nothing reassuring in the housekeeper's grave face.

"I can't say—" she began. "No, Miss—" and again she hesitated—"I can't say how it might be. They are *very* straightforward ladies—practical jokes, or wagers, or things of that sort that some people would think nothing of, they would judge very sharply."

"But you misunderstand," said Philippa, eagerly; "it is nothing of that sort at all. You will sympathise with my motives when you hear them, I know, however you may blame me for what I have done. Now, please, listen, and I will tell all exactly. To begin with, we are not at all rich, and lately, with my sister's return home with the two children—all three far from strong—and other things, which will get easier before long, just lately we have had to be very careful and economical."

Then with this preface she related to the housekeeper how the idea of accompanying her sister had first taken shape in her mind, and how one thing after another had combined to make it seem both desirable and feasible, with but infinitesimal risk of the secret ever being disclosed. And by the softening expression of the kind woman's face, she saw that her sympathy was enlisted.

Then came the recital of the really extraordinary coincidences which had aroused her misgivings in the direction of the two Greshams, especially the younger.

"It is he I am so afraid of," she said, in conclusion; "though he has never seen me before and could not identify me as his cousin could, I dread

him far more. Hitherto, I have managed to keep out of Mr Bernard Gresham's way, and we have only two or three days more here. But what I have just told you of this very morning, makes me almost certain that Mr Michael Gresham has guessed the whole, or very nearly the whole, and what is still worse, that in time we shall have a very severe judge—even now he may be speaking about it to his cousin or to the Headforts, probably thinking it his 'duty' to do so," with a rather sarcastic emphasis on the word.

"Not to his cousin," said Mrs Shepton. "I know enough to reassure you as to that. There is no great confidence between them."

"They must be so very different," said Philippa.

"*Very* different indeed," said the housekeeper. "Nor," she went on after this little parenthesis, "do I think it likely that Mr Michael will have said anything to my ladies as yet. The first person," with a touch of importance, "he would come to about it, would, I think, be myself."

An expression of great relief overspread Philippa's face.

"Do you really think so?" she said. "That would be the very best thing for me. You see, you could now tell him you know the whole—that I have confided it to you, but," with a sudden change of tone, as another aspect of the affair struck her, "do you mean, Mrs Shepton, that he has already talked me over with you?" And as the housekeeper did not negative the inference to be drawn from her former words, the girl's face grew scarlet. "What did he say or think?" she said. "It does seem so dreadfully lowering! As if I were a sort of adventuress! Was he afraid of my letting burglars into the house? I think he must be a most—officious young man!"

In her turn the housekeeper reddened a little, but she kept her self-control.

"My dear young lady," she began, with a slight effort. "You must not think me officious for what I cannot help reminding you of—that all the disagreeables which you have to bear, or may have to bear as to this affair, are of your own causing, and," with a very slight tremble in her voice, "even from what you know of me, I think you might trust me not to

talk over any girl—whatever her position—in any way that could possibly be objected to—least of all with a young gentleman, even if he were the kindest and best in the world."

"Which indeed," she added to herself almost inaudibly, "Master Michael is."

Her words brought to Philippa a quick rush of regret for her hasty words, as she recalled the affectionate relations which existed between her old friend and the younger Gresham.

"Please forgive me," she said, penitently. "You have been very, very good to me, Mrs Shepton, and you are very good to me now, in listening and sympathising, instead of at once saying you must tell it all to Mrs Headfort, for fear of any possible blame to yourself hereafter, as many selfish people would have done. Please forgive me, and oh, do tell me what I had better do."

She clasped her hands in entreaty, and the charm of her appeal went home to the housekeeper's heart.

"My dear young lady," she began again, then hesitated. "I do wish to advise you for the best, but it is very difficult. I have never heard of such a thing. I don't think I have ever even read of anything like it in a story-book," and for the first time the humorous side of the situation struck her. But the faint smile which this drew forth soon faded. "I wish I were quite sure of what is right to do. I cannot bear concealing anything that happens in this house from my masters, and yet—it is not as if your parents did not know of it, and *they*, as I understand, have thought it forced upon them to keep the secret."

For, in spite of the deception Philippa had been practising, her innate truthfulness had impressed itself upon Mrs Shepton. Not for one moment did she doubt the absolute accuracy of every word in the girl's narration. "I should like," she continued, "as far as I may say so without presumption, to say just what your own mamma would say if she were here and knew what things have come to."

At the mention of her mother's name, Philippa's overstrung nerves gave way again completely. She buried her face in her hands and burst into

fresh tears.

“Oh, Mrs Shepton,” she cried, “don’t speak of mamma; I can’t bear it. She has never, never before in all my life been really angry with me. I would do anything, humble myself in any way, rather than bring further trouble upon her and papa.”

But for the moment there came no reply from the housekeeper, who had started to her feet at the sound of a knock at the door, which in her agitation had not reached Philippa’s ears.

Nor had the intruder waited for the usual response, so confident was he of his welcome, and before Mrs Shepton could take any precaution on Miss Raynsworth’s account, Michael Gresham was in the room, staring with amazement at the scene before him—amazement increased by the sense of the last words she had uttered.

And not Michael alone—indeed *his* presence was first revealed to the weeping girl by the touch of a cold nose on the hand still covering her face as she bent forward in her chair. For Solomon’s ready sympathy was not restrained by any fear of intrusion; something was the matter with a some one he was attached to, and he must at once see to it, and offer all the comfort in his power.

Chapter Twelve.

An Appeal.

“Solomon!” exclaimed Philippa, looking up with a start, “how have you—” But the rest of the words died on her lips, for there before her stood Solomon’s master, his eyes fixed on her in astonishment, not unmingled with concern, which latter detail, however, at the moment escaped her notice.

Alarmed and indignant at what seemed to her an unjustifiable intrusion, Philippa sprang to her feet, making a futile effort to remove the traces of her tears. She was brushing past the young man with the one idea of escaping from the room, when the housekeeper, recovering from her own first start of annoyance, stopped her.

“My dear,” she began, “my dear young lady—as—as Mr Michael *is* here, will you not wait a moment? Perhaps it may be the best opportunity of—”

“I don’t know what you mean, Mrs Shepton,” replied the girl, haughtily. “I would not have come to see you if I had thought any one else—”

“I beg your pardon,” exclaimed Michael, recollecting himself, as he realised that he was the culprit.—“I will come back again, nurse,” he added to his old friend.

But now it was on him that the housekeeper’s detaining hand was laid.

“Stay a moment, Master Michael,” she began; and acting on a sudden impulse, she again appealed to Philippa. “Will you give me leave,” she said, “to consult Mr Michael about—about this difficulty, as we have reason to think that he knows so much already? May it not be better to tell him all?”

Philippa turned upon her with flaming cheeks, too angry now to care whether the young man saw her tear-stained face and swollen eyes or not.

“Mrs Shepton,” she said, indignantly, “you leave me no choice. What you have said now is equivalent to telling everything! Say what you like, I don’t care, but I cannot stay to hear it. And remember if—if Mr Gresham agrees to what I know you mean to ask him, he will do so for your sake, not for mine.—*I* make no appeal to you,” she ended, coldly, glancing at the young man, as she determinedly crossed the room and disappeared, closing the door behind her.

The two she had left looked at each other in consternation. Then Michael gave a short laugh.

“What a whirlwind of a girl!” he ejaculated. “What does it all mean, Mrs Shepton, ma’am? I suppose you must tell me now, and I suppose I’ve got to listen. But why is your young friend so furious with *me*—whatever have *I* done?” and in his tone, beneath its lightness, Mrs Shepton perceived a considerable spice of indignation.

The housekeeper, though sharing his indignation, looked ready to cry.

“What have you done, sir?” she repeated. “Nothing, of course nothing, except that you have been very kind and considerate about a self-willed, headstrong young lady—for a young lady she is, as you suspected from the first. And never in all my life have I heard of such a wild scheme as she has planned and carried out. If she had fallen into some hands, a nice scandal there would have been! But yet,” she went on, her voice softening, “I am so sorry for her too, for her motives were good and most unselfish. And when she goes home, she will have to face her parents’ great displeasure.”

Michael Gresham raised his eyebrows.

“I am glad to hear that,” he said. “I was beginning to wonder what sort of people they could be to countenance such a proceeding, for this very moment I had come to tell you what I had grown sure of, that this most eccentric young lady’s-maid is no other than Mrs Marmaduke’s own sister—Miss Raynsworth.” And he hastily recapitulated the various twos and twos which had offered themselves to be made fours of, without any special efforts at detection or very great exercise of acuteness on his part.

Mrs Shepton looked considerably relieved, for the having acted on her impulse had already begun to frighten her a little.

“I shall be glad to tell Miss Raynsworth that you had found it all out,” she said, “when she has calmed down a little, and then she will not be vexed with me. She was sure you suspected something, and that was what brought it all out to-day. She is terribly frightened, and no wonder! And yet her pride makes her angry at the very idea of appealing to any one—to you, Mr Michael—to keep her secret, you see?”

“Yes, naturally; but what I *don’t* see is why I should be expected to do so. A girl who can behave so wildly, and in defiance of her parents, should be pulled up for it, and the sooner the better, I should say.”

His tone was hard; all the softness and geniality seemed to have melted out of his face. Mrs Shepton looked distressed. She began to feel as if by her appeal to him she had let the genii out of the bottle—not that she, good woman, would have thus expressed it—there was a look in her “boy’s” face which she had encountered more than once before in his progress from babyhood to manhood, and which meant a good deal beyond what she was able to cope with.

“Master Michael, my dear,” she began, sitting down as she spoke, and motioning him to a seat beside her, “you don’t understand. Wait till you hear the whole, and all that the poor, dear young lady had in her mind;” and trying not to seem too eager in her defence of Philippa, for she was not without experience in the “little ways” of the sterner sex, the housekeeper related with considerable detail all that she had learnt from Miss Raynsworth as to the home life of her family, her sisterly devotion and not unreasonable anxiety about Evelyn at the present crisis, all—down even to the little difficulties which had attended the efforts to find a suitable attendant to accompany Mrs Marmaduke Headfort to Wyverston. She drew, too, a touching picture of Philippa’s anguish of mind on receiving the sternly disapproving letter from her parents.

“Poor dear, I couldn’t but feel for her, however rash and foolish she may have been, when she looked up at me so piteous-like through her tears, and said, ‘Don’t speak of mamma; she has never been really angry with me before in my life.’ It quite went to my heart, Master Michael, but of

course that's a woman's way of looking at it, I know," she added, diplomatically.

Michael emitted an indefinite sound, something between a "humph," and a "pshaw," but the lines of his face had softened; there was a touch of amusement, too, in his eyes as he glanced up.

"She is a very silly girl," he said, at last, "and a very bad actress, though I don't know that I like her any the less for that.—Eh, Solomon, what do you say to it, old boy? *You* saw through her from the first, didn't you?—Solomon is very fastidious in his friendships, you know, Mrs Shepton, ma'am, and he took to her at once, as I have told you."

His old nurse's spirits rose. Master Michael wouldn't speak like that, she thought, if he was going to be hard and unsympathising, but she was wise enough not to show her elation.

"Of course, sir," she agreed, "*silly* is no word for it! It was perfectly wild, but the wilder it was, the more mischief may come of it if we cannot help her. That is what she is now so wretched about; she thought of how it might turn our ladies, here, indeed, the whole family, against poor Captain Marmaduke and his wife, little as either deserves it," for Mrs Shepton had not forgotten to exculpate Evelyn from all concerted share in the mad freak.

Michael's face darkened a little.

"I don't understand that young woman altogether," he said; "either she is a better actress than her sister, or extraordinarily childish."

"She is quite straightforward," said the housekeeper, "but her sister has not allowed her to take it up deeply. She knows nothing of the angry letter from their home, or of all this trouble just now. And she has not nearly the strength of character of her sister, I am sure. Miss Raynsworth tells me that Mrs Marmaduke really forgets about it from time to time! And it must be so, or she would never have been so incautious. Why, it's mainly thanks to her that there's all this now."

The smiles which had been lurking somewhere in the corners of Michael's physiognomy now made itself visible, and broadened as he

caught sight of the dubious expression it called forth on his old friend's face.

"I can't help thinking," he began, half apologetically, "of the scene there might be here if it all came out. I mean nothing disrespectful to this family, nurse, when I say that they are not remarkable for their sense of humour. Christine, perhaps, has the most of it, of a rather blunt kind, but Mrs Headfort's face would grow so long that it would never shorten again, and Felicia would certainly faint and be more melancholy than ever, if they once discovered the trick that had been played upon them."

"Indeed, yes, sir," Mrs Shepton replied, gravely, too decorous to join in his smile. "It would be no laughing matter."

"But what have *I* to do with it," said Michael, reverting to the earlier part of their conversation. "What do you—or she—want me to do, or not to do?"

"Oh, that is quite easy to explain, sir," replied the housekeeper, briskly. "It is *not* to do that we ask of you. Just to keep her secret, in short, for the two or three days that remain."

Michael again raised his eyebrow's.

"And after that—shall I be at liberty to tell anybody who cares to hear? It is rather like giving the burglars time to escape; does Miss Raynsworth intend leaving the country?"

But Mrs Shepton did not smile. On the contrary, she shook her head.

"It is no joking matter, sir," she repeated, dolefully; "it is not, indeed. I wish I saw a clear end to it, that I do. No, Master Michael—of course I did not mean what you say. She will depend on you *never* to betray her, I feel sure. I only mentioned the two or three days she will still be here, because once they are over, it is not likely the poor young lady or her troubles will ever come into your mind again—there would be no difficulty in keeping her secret after that."

From behind her own spectacles the old woman eyed the young man with a somewhat curious expression. But he was looking down; his face was perfectly composed, almost stolid. Only his old nurse knew that

when he “put on that face,” it was often more as a mask than as indicating indifference.

“I don’t know,” he said at last, with a slightly cynical lightness of tone. “I have not the very least doubt that she will keep out of my way—she took a dislike to me from the very first, even in the train; a case of natural antipathy, probably. But fate has a nasty little trick of meddlesomeness in these cases sometimes; just because she would prefer giving me the widest berth possible, your young lady, my good Mrs Shepton, may find herself hurled in my way some day when she least expects it. It is by no means improbable; once Duke Headfort is back again, he and his wife will naturally see something of the people here, and Bernard and I are often about Wyverston.”

“But Miss Raynsworth is not Captain Marmaduke’s wife—I am quite sure *she* will not want to come here again, sir,” said Mrs Shepton.

“Well, no; perhaps not. But there are other possibilities—Mrs Duke and my cousin have struck up a great friendship—I told you, you know, that I heard them planning a visit in which the sister was to be included. And I don’t see why I should stay away from Merle at the best of the shooting for any silly girl in the world. Do you?”

“Nobody asked such a thing,” said the housekeeper, feeling for once rather cross with her adored nursling. “Miss Raynsworth would never dream of it—once you have given your promise, her mind, so far as you are concerned, will be quite at rest, Master Michael, I can assure you.”

“I daresay,” said Michael, grimly, “once I *have* given my promise.”

He was in a very teasing mood.

But his words failed this time in their effect.

“My dear Master Michael,” said the housekeeper, with a smile, “you are talking for talking’s sake, just to get a ‘rise out of me,’ as you used to say. Of course I know it is all right, and I can assure poor Miss Raynsworth that the matter will be perfectly safe in your hands.”

Mr Gresham did not reply. He had transferred his teasing to Solomon,

from whom he at last succeeded in extracting a growl, which made Mrs Shepton start. Though if the truth were told, the dachs only growled out of amiable condescension, understanding that his doing so would gratify his master, whose childishness really amused him sometimes.

“All the same,” continued the old woman, when Solomon had subsided again, “I shall be more thankful than I can tell you, when the two ladies are safely off. It makes me that nervous, sir, you’d scarcely believe it. And unless I can persuade Miss Raynsworth to stay in her room with a bad headache this evening, there’s sure to be gossip in the hall; any one with half an eye could see she is quite upset; her poor eyes alone—”

Michael looked up quickly, and this time his old friend had no need to rebuke him for levity.

“Do you mean—” he began. “Are the—all of the servants not—not respectful and civil to her?”

Mrs Shepton bristled slightly.

“*Civil*, sir; of course they are that, at any rate when *I* am by, and I don’t think she ever comes much across them at other times. But ‘respectful’—if you mean behaving to her as if she were not one of themselves!—is the very last thing to wish for under the circumstances.”

“Of course, of course—I was forgetting,” said the young man.

“You may be sure *I* would allow no disrespect to any young girl, above all, a stranger. And as far as our own servants are concerned I think it has been quite pleasant, though even I cannot stop talk among themselves. And the visitors’ servants I know still less about; I had to give Miss—Miss Ray is the name she calls herself—a warning the other day, to be a little more chatty and friendly. There’s a maid of Mrs Worthing’s that I felt uneasy about. She’s a sharp sort of person and inclined to be spiteful to any one younger and better-looking than herself.”

“She takes after her mistress, then. I can’t stand Mrs Worthing,” said Michael, boyishly. “The daughter is a harmless little thing—wax in her mother’s hands, but Mrs Worthing is a bundle of worldliness, just the sort of woman to beware of.”

He had more in his mind than he thought it well to discuss, even with his trusted old friend. It would have required no great acumen to discover the great attraction of Wyverston at the present time to the lady in question, for Bernard Gresham was universally recognised as one of the most desirable *partis* of the day. And that, not only by reason of his wealth and social position, but on the higher grounds also of his personal character and refinement of taste. And what Michael had overheard of Evelyn's conversation with his cousin, even one or two remarks accidentally dropped by his cousin himself, had shown that the Miss Raynsworth of Dorriford had made an impression on him, little as he had seen of her.

"Yes," added Michael aloud, after a little pause, "you are quite right, nurse. Don't let the Worthings—mistress or maid—get the slightest scent of any mystery. And impress upon the young lady at all costs to keep out of Bernard's way."

So saying, he got up and turned to leave the room. "You may depend upon me," he said, with a slight nod, and without waiting to hear the housekeeper's fervent thanks, he called to Solomon, who by this time had fallen comfortably asleep by the fire, and the two went off together.

When Evelyn came in from her drive, somewhat to her surprise, no "Phillis" was awaiting her as usual in her room. She had shut and locked the door carefully, for by this time she had in some ways acquired caution, and then hurrying through the dressing-room, she made her way to the small apartment appropriated to her sister, though scarcely expecting to find her there.

"I believe she has gone out for a stroll," she said to herself. "Phil is always so fond of mooning about in the dusk, and I do so want to see her."

But her conjecture proved unfounded, for there on the little bed, with a shawl thrown over her, lay Philippa fast asleep. Evelyn stole up beside her, and stooped down to see her face.

"Poor dear," she thought, "she is looking very pale, and there are dark rings round her eyes; I wonder if there is anything the matter! Anyway I won't wake her. I must wait till later to tell her of this new complication."

So if young Mrs Headfort looked a degree less trim than usual when she made her appearance among the circle gathered in the hall for afternoon tea, it was not to be marvelled at. On her way thither, at the corner of the first passage, she almost ran into the arms of the housekeeper. Evelyn started; she was in rather a nervous mood, and it was not often one came across Mrs Shepton in the upper storeys. To her relief the housekeeper was the first to speak.

“I beg your pardon, ma’am,” she said, “I’m afraid I startled you. I did not know you had come in, and I was on my way to your—maid’s room. She did not come down to tea, and I know her head was aching this afternoon. I thought perhaps she would like a cup of tea up-stairs.”

“Thank you,” said Evelyn, with incautious fervour. “Thank you so very much. She is lying on her bed fast asleep, and she does not look at all well! But I must go down to tea. If you *could* stay beside her a few minutes I should be most grateful. She may wake; if she does, please tell her that I can manage quite well for myself to-night.”

The new-comer glanced at the young lady approvingly; even the flush which involuntarily rose to Evelyn’s face, much to her own annoyance, for they were standing close to an already lighted lamp, increased Mrs Shepton’s good opinion of Mrs Marmaduke.

“I will certainly say so, ma’am,” she replied, quickly.

“I have a quarter of an hour to spare, and I will see to her. Perhaps the best thing would be for her to go to bed properly. A good night’s sleep will put her quite right, I daresay.”

And Evelyn, her mind more at rest about her sister, hurried off, congratulating herself on the lucky chance which had brought them in contact with such a kindly “unsuspicious” person as the Wyverston housekeeper.

Chapter Thirteen.

Herself Again.

More “good luck” was in store for young Mrs Headfort that afternoon. And when she went up-stairs again to dress for dinner, and found her sister—In bed indeed, but on the alert to jump up to see to Evelyn’s toilet—she rejoiced that Philippa’s having been asleep before had delayed her relating the new cause of alarm that bad arisen, till she could at the same time tell of its happy dispersal.

This was what had happened.

Allusion had been made to Mrs Marmaduke’s approaching departure, and in her thoughtless fashion she had grumbled somewhat at the long journey, “all by myself in a corner of a railway carriage.” And thereupon, not unnaturally, Mr Gresham, the elder, had offered to escort her a considerable part of the way; as far indeed as the junction, where, as will be remembered, she had, on her journey north, been startled by the unexpected apparition of her volunteer lady’s-maid.

“It is really on my way,” said the master of Merle, with the graciousness of manner which, when he chose to exert it, was almost irresistible, “and as I must be home by the end of this week, a day sooner or later is immaterial. There are two routes, you see,” he continued, “and your way only takes about an hour longer. So pray let me look after you as far at least as Wrexhill.”

Evelyn was aghast; for a moment or two, realising her own folly, she could not speak. Bernard Gresham saw her annoyance, and attributed it, fortunately, to a cause very foreign to the real one. He imagined that she was vexed at not being able to invite him to accompany her to her father’s house and spend a night there by way of breaking his journey. And with what he believed to be consummate tact, he hastened to set her mind at rest. For though few invitations would have suited him better, he knew that the Raynsworths were far from rich, and thus readily explained Mrs Marmaduke’s not suggesting what in many cases would have seemed a very simple arrangement.

Little did he suspect what was really passing through poor Mrs Marmaduke's mind, and it was with some surprise that he noticed the still troubled expression on her face, even after he had, as he imagined, reassured her, by remarking that he must go straight through from Wrexhill, however late it was, as a new purchase of a valuable young horse was to travel by this train; a horse which he wished to keep his own eye on both at the start and on arrival at its destination.

Evelyn scarcely heard what he said. She murmured confusedly something in the way of thanks, and then hastily changed the subject till she could fly up-stairs and consult her sister as to how to steer clear of this new and most uncalled-for complication.

But up-stairs she found Philippa fast asleep and looking so ill that to awake her would have been cruelty of which, with all her thoughtlessness, Evelyn Headfort was entirely incapable.

So it was not to be wondered at that when the young lady got down to the hall where most of the household were already assembled for tea, she glanced round her in trepidation, earnestly hoping that her favourite Mr Gresham might not be one of the company.

"He is sure to begin again about the journey," she thought, "and I do not know what to say or what excuse to give. And I must fix the day; Mrs Headfort, kind as she is, does not, I can see, like people to hang on indefinitely, and it is an undignified thing to do. I wonder what Phil would advise. I am really ashamed to tell her what a fool I was."

Her hopes were not realised. Both the Greshams were among the group standing round the tea-table, where Christine Headfort was handing cups. Nor did a letter, which had come by the afternoon post, and which her hostess begged her to read at once, help to cheer her.

"I must go—*decidedly*—on Thursday," she exclaimed, impulsively again, as soon as she had run her eye down the few lines it contained.

"No bad news, I hope?" said Mrs Headfort, senior, kindly.

"N-no, not exactly. It is only that—you see, I made my mother *promise* to tell me precisely how the children were," she replied, sure of the elder

lady's sympathy, "and she says Bonny has a cold and rather a suspicious cough; and baby is not looking *quite* well either. Whooping-cough is about, and the doctor says he cannot be quite sure as to Bonny till Thursday. I had already spoken of Thursday to mamma, and she says she is so glad I shall be back by then."

"I quite understand," said Mrs Headfort, "and sorry as we shall be to lose you, my dear Evelyn, I agree with you that you should be on the spot. When my children were young I never left them if they were the least ill, not even to my mother's care. And it was thanks to that, I do believe, that they all grew up so strong, even Geoff," with a moment's pathetic forgetfulness, instantly followed by a deep sigh. "Yes," she continued, pulling herself together with the self-control habitual to her, "there is nothing like a mother's watchfulness."

"I felt sure you would understand," said Evelyn, "So I will decide for Thursday."

"Thursday," repeated a voice beside her; "you are speaking of your journey, Mrs Headfort, are you not?" It was Bernard Gresham, who had overheard her last words.

"I can manage Thursday, I feel sure, so you may feel quite happy about Mrs Marmaduke," he went on, turning to Mrs Headfort the elder.

His words awoke no responsive smile on Evelyn's face, and but a faint one on that of his hostess, who, truth to tell, was somewhat too "old-fashioned" in her notions, altogether to approve of this masculine chaperonage for Duke Headfort's charming and girlish wife. And Evelyn rose still some degrees higher in her estimation from her slack eagerness to avail herself of the young man's proposal.

"To be so pretty and attractive, and yet so very discreet, is really greatly to her credit," thought the old lady.

Another member of the group had noticed young Mrs Headfort's hesitation—noticed and thoroughly understood it, in a way which would have greatly astonished her.

"What's that you're saying, Bernard?" said his cousin, stepping forward.

“Going on Thursday? What about the big shoot that day? They’re counting on you. The squire won’t be pleased, will he, Mrs Headfort?”

“Indeed, no,” said their hostess, quickly, “very much the reverse, I am afraid.” Her husband was not present.

Mr Gresham glanced at Michael.

“You can take my place,” he said; “you can drop your work for a day, it will make you something less of a ‘dull boy’;” for the younger Gresham had been “grinding” pretty steadily during his stay at Wyverston.

“Sorry to disoblige you,” said Michael, drily, “but my work has nothing to do with it, my work *here*, that is to say. I must be in London on Thursday morning; I go up by the night express to-morrow. There is no getting out of it,” and he turned away determinedly.

When Michael “looked like that,” his cousin, as well as Mrs Shepton, knew by past experience that there was no more to be said.

“Surly boor,” he muttered under his breath, though the next instant there was a smile on his face, as he addressed his hostess.

“Do you really think it would annoy the squire?” he inquired.

“I am quite sure it would, as you ask me, Bernard,” Mrs Headfort replied, decidedly, “and Evelyn would be the last—”

“Oh, dear, yes,” interrupted Mrs Marmaduke, eagerly. “I would not for worlds, Mr Gresham, have you risk such a thing for my sake. I shall be all right—just as right as on my journey here.”

In face of the want of enthusiasm with which his proposal had been received, there was nothing to be done but for Mr Gresham to withdraw it, and this he did from a mixture of motives. Few things would have distressed him more than to show want of consideration for the now son-less old squire; furthermore, if Bernard Gresham had a special personal foible, it was the fear of looking ridiculous, and he prided himself greatly on his tact.

So with a little bow of unruffled composure he accepted Evelyn's fiat.

"Some other time, perhaps, I may be more fortunate," he murmured, and mentally contrasting him with his cousin, by no means to the latter's advantage, Evelyn thanked him with graceful cordiality.

All this was what she now had to relate to her sister.

"Did you ever hear of such a lucky escape, by the skin of our teeth?" she concluded, with exuberant self-congratulation; and Philippa, lying there pale and fagged-looking after her rare fit of violent crying, could not but agree with her.

"I don't know," she said, wearily, "I don't know what we *should* have done if he had travelled with us in the same train. It would have been worse now for it all to have been found out than even at the beginning, now when we are within forty-eight hours of being safe at home! Oh dear, dear! I am sure I shall never want to leave it again. I wish I had not gone to Dorriford; somehow that seems to have begun it all. The meeting Mr Gresham there!"

"You are too depressing," said Evelyn, impatiently, "instead of being delighted that I managed to get out of it so beautifully."

"I don't quite see that you *did* get out of it," said Philippa, rather maliciously; "as far as I understand, it seems to have been Michael Gresham who came to the rescue."

"No thanks to him," said Evelyn; "it was very horrid and interfering of him. I do believe he is jealous of his cousin. And I was forgetting to tell you that afterwards I believe he was conscious of having seemed very disagreeable, for he came and sat down beside me and began talking far more nicely than he has ever done yet, rather as if he wanted to 'make up,' you know."

"I don't quite know why you have taken a dislike to him," said Philippa, listlessly. "I should think he's nice in some ways, kind-hearted perhaps, or else his dog wouldn't be so fond of him."

"I don't know how you can judge," said Evelyn; "you have only seen him

in the train."

Philippa did not reply. She was up again by this time, and busying herself as usual with the preparations of Evelyn's evening attire, and before her sister left her, a promise had been extracted that the girl would not sit up till Evelyn's reappearance that night.

The next day passed without event of any moment. It seemed long and wearisome to Philippa, for in her increased terror of discovery she almost exaggerated her precautions, and scarcely ventured to leave her own room. Late in the afternoon she was sitting by the open window of her sister's apartment, which looked out on the front of the house, when the sound of wheels caught her attention, and glancing out she saw a dog-cart coming round from the stables.

It was hidden from view for a few minutes as it stood under the large porch, but the sound of voices and laughter reached her ears, telling their own tale, as she distinguished, "good-bye, old fellow," "too bad of you," and the like. And in another minute the cart drove off, though not so rapidly as to prevent her perceiving that one of its occupants was Michael Gresham; and leaning forward slightly she caught sight of Solomon's little brown person comfortably ensconced on the seat beside his master. Just at that moment the young man looked up. That he saw her there could be no question, for he instinctively lifted his hand to his cap, and Philippa, crimsoning, drew back hastily behind the window-curtains.

"It was rather nice of him," she said to herself, "though rash. I do hope no one saw it. Poor old Solomon, I wonder if I shall ever stroke his smooth little back again!"

What would she have thought had she known that the departure of both master and dog had been hastened by some forty-eight hours or so, as the only means Michael could see of putting a stop to his cousin's disastrous proposal of escorting Mrs Marmaduke Headfort on her homeward way?

There are—there must be such things as "brainwaves." What had made Michael look up at the first-storey windows as he drove away from Wyverston?

Philippa, as she got up from her seat by the window and began some preparations for Evelyn's packing, was conscious of some intermingling of feelings with regard to her former fellow-traveller's departure. It was, in a sense, a relief to know that the only person who, besides the kindly old housekeeper, was in possession of her secret, had left the place; a salve to her wounded dignity to be no longer in dread of coming across the man to whom circumstances had forced her to appeal so unwillingly. Yet, with Michael Gresham there went a certain sense of protection and security. Somehow or other she was instinctively assured that however he might blame her, he would have stood by her in any worse complication, had such arisen, and would have exerted himself to the utmost to ward off more serious trouble.

"I am happier than I can express to know that we shall so soon be away from this place," she said to herself over and over again that evening. "To think that it is not now days but *hours* only that have to pass before we are safe on our way home—dear home, dearest home! I do not care how angry my darling mother is; I do not care how shocked father looks; I have deserved it for my headstrong presumption; I only care for the delight of being safe with them again. And I *don't* think anything worse can happen now, so very near our going, and good Mrs Shepton so on the alert." Her hopes were fulfilled. Nothing more to startle or alarm the sisters occurred. And if there were any remarks in the servants'-hall about "Miss Ray's" headache, which again incapacitated her from coming down to supper or joining in the more or less harmless gossip which went on at that sociable meal, remarks friendly or the reverse, Philippa did not hear them. Their early start the next morning was a reason too for Mrs Marmaduke's coming up to bed betimes, and when she congratulated her sister on her cleverness in having the boxes all but ready to lock, Philippa turned to her with a radiant face.

"Oh, Evey," she exclaimed, "I *am* so thankful to be going home!"

"I am sure you are, you poor dear," said Evelyn, tenderly. "It must have been unutterably dull for you, poked up here by yourself, except when you were forced to—Pah! I can't think of it—*you*, my beautiful Phil, sitting at table with a crew of *servants*—common servants."

"They were not all common," said her sister. "Some, on the contrary, were

very uncommon. I have told you about the dear old housekeeper. No, as regards that part of it all, I have been really very lucky."

"Don't talk of it all the same," said Evelyn. "I do not know, honestly I don't, how I should have got on here without you, but yet I cannot endure to think of it. I don't think I *could* have stood it, even when every one was so nice and I was really enjoying myself, if I had not resolutely *determined* to put you out of my mind for the time."

"You are very fortunate in possessing any power of the kind," said Philippa, with some amusement at her sister's emphasising of her own strength of will.

"Yes," said Evelyn, "it is an excellent thing to possess."

"It is the thought of being at home again and rid of all this acting and planning and watching, that I am so happy about," Philippa went on. "I do really and truly feel as if I never shall want to leave mamma again. I don't mind if she—"

It was perhaps as well that Evelyn here interrupted her.

"Nonsense, dear," she said. "You will get quite different again. You mustn't give way to such morbid feelings, for *my* sake even, you must not, or else I should always have a wretched self-reproach that somehow I had spoilt your girlhood—though of course it was not my doing. But I suppose I *might* have been resolute and insisted on your returning, or even taken you back myself and telegraphed to them here that I was delayed."

"I would not have gone back," said Philippa, stoutly.

"Well, then, if it wasn't my fault, don't punish me for it by saying dreadful things. You shall come to Merle-in-the-Wold whenever we get Mr Gresham's invitation, and enjoy yourself with Duke and me."

"I would not mind *so* much if Duke were with us," said Philippa, doubtfully.

"Of course not; there would be nothing to mind. And *some* day, you may come back here—who knows?" But at this Philippa shook her head.

“I cannot imagine such a thing; it has grown into a sort of nightmare to me,” she replied, and in her heart she devoutly hoped that circumstances would combine to delay the invitation to Merle-in-the-Wold indefinitely. But at nineteen, feelings change.

With every mile on the homeward road the next day the girl’s spirits rose. And not even the constraint and unusual seriousness of her mother’s manner as she met the travellers at the station, whither she had expressly come to meet them, could prevent the relief and delight of knowing herself at home again.

“I have brought one of your hate and ordinary jackets for you to change at once,” Mrs Raynsworth said eagerly. “They are in the waiting-room in a small bag with my name on. Run and put them on while I look after the luggage with Evelyn. I could not risk the servants seeing you in that masquerade.”

The word stung Philippa. But she knew she had deserved it, and she felt touched by her mother’s thoughtfulness. Two minutes later she stood on the platform with the others, looking for all the world like the everyday Philippa, though a trifle paler and thinner than her wont, who had come to meet her sister on her arrival.

Evelyn glanced at her approvingly. But by tacit consent no allusion was made to the transformation, or the circumstances that had led to it, during the drive home of the mother and daughters in the Marlby fly; and the elder sister, who, whatever in the way of thoughtfulness she was deficient in, was certainly not wanting in tact, above all, where those dear to her were concerned, managed to ward off any painful sense of constraint by her graphic accounts of her visit and its undoubted success, intermingled with her delight at “coming home” again, home to her mother and the darling children.

“Bonny’s cough is better, you say, dear mamma? Oh, then it *can’t* be going to be whooping-cough. Indeed I have never felt really anxious about it. I don’t see how he *could* have caught it, with all the care you have taken of him. I shall have nothing but good news to send to poor old Duke by this mail. And don’t you think I am looking better? I feel quite different.”

“Yes, dear, I think the bracing air up there must have done you good,” Mrs Raynsworth replied, more brightly than she had yet spoken.

“It is only poor, dear Phil who is looking pale,” Evelyn went on, leaning forward to kiss her sister as she spoke. They were close to their own gate by this time. “Mother, dearest,” she added, coaxingly, “I *can’t* tell you all she has been to me, nor how *beautifully* she managed everything. You—you and father aren’t angry with her? It was all out of devotion, and after all, my allowing it puts quite half the blame on to me. For that morning, when she came into the railway carriage, I was feeling so ill and weak and frightened. I was, in spite of all, so *thankful* to see her, that at the bottom of my heart I could not send her away. Mamma, dear, *don’t* be vexed with her.”

The tears were coursing each other down Philippa’s pale cheeks by this time—some were trembling too on Evelyn’s pretty eyelashes. Mrs Raynsworth was already softened. The sight of the two, the one so bright and invigorated, the other so timid and evidently apprehensive of what was in store for her, had already done its work.

“My poor, dear child,” she said, gently, as she held out her hand to her younger daughter; and Philippa felt herself forgiven. “I can only hope,” she said, “earnestly hope that no harm will ever come of it. I am quite sure I need not warn you never to do such a thing again.”

Philippa shook her head; she could not speak.

“We need never allude to it,” Mrs Raynsworth added. “Only Dorcas knows, and she will take care that no one ever hears of it. I cannot imagine,”—for after all it was impossible not to feel some curiosity as to how the extraordinary little drama had been carried out—“I cannot imagine how you managed it. But I daresay we had better try to forget about it and never mention it again. Your father—”

“Oh! there he is,” exclaimed Evelyn, “coming down the drive to meet us. And, yes, he has got Bonny with him. How sweet of him! Phil, do look at them—”

Chapter Fourteen.

Charley's plan.

But as for "never mentioning it again?"

Before Philippa fell asleep that night, her mother was in possession of every detail of all that had happened since they parted. More, for more of coarse than Evelyn knew, or ever would know. The younger sister was not one to do things by halves, and when she gave her confidence it was completely given. She had confided in her mother all her life, and the longing to do so now, even at the risk of causing Mrs Raynsworth increased pain and mortification, was irresistible.

And it was far better so.

The fact which, naturally, was the most difficult for the mother to bear with equanimity was that of the necessity which Philippa had felt herself under of appealing to Michael Gresham.

"I could not have done it myself," she said; "it came on, you see, mamma, through his knowing the housekeeper so well. Though what would have happened if he had *not* been told, I really do not like to think."

"He suspected something, then, you think?" said Mrs Raynsworth, uneasily.

"Suspected," Philippa exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, mamma, for repeating your words. Far more than that, he *knew* there was something not straightforward about us. And the worst of it was that he thought poor Evey so double and insincere. Oh, mamma, I *was* mad to do it."

Self-blame disarms any kindly judge. Mrs Raynsworth could say nothing more to add to her daughter's keen regret. On the contrary, she gently stroked her hand. They were sitting by themselves in Philippa's own room after Evelyn had gone to bed.

"We can only hope," she said again, "and, I think we *may* do so, that no

harm will ever come of it. I am very grateful, truly grateful, to that good Mrs Shepton, and I should like her to know it."

"I can write to her," said Philippa, eagerly. "I should like her to see that I have told you everything, and I can say it all without—without mentioning names, or anything that would matter if by any accident the letter were seen. Oh, yes, as far as the housekeeper is concerned, I have no misgiving or sore feeling. It is that—that Mr Gresham I have such a horror of ever meeting again."

"The one that Evelyn liked so much—who has asked you both—Evelyn and Duke at least," (Mrs Raynsworth interrupted herself hastily, recalling certain injunctions in the confidences her elder daughter had already found time to give her as to the "impression" Philippa had made on Bernard Gresham at Dorriford), "I should say, to stay with him at his place, the place with the queer name?"

"No, I don't mean *Mr* Gresham," the girl replied; "but, mamma, you need not hesitate. I know he spoke of me to Evelyn and said something about her bringing me—me in my proper character, of course," with a somewhat rueful smile. "And, if it had not been for all this, I daresay I should have liked to go. Evelyn says he is charming. But it is not *he* I am afraid of meeting again; he suspects nothing; as I told you, mamma, by some lucky chance he never caught sight of me once at Wyverston, and at the end, you know, when there was that risk of his travelling with us, I strongly suspect his cousin put a stop to it on purpose."

"That was kind of him," said her mother. "It shows you can trust him."

"Oh, yes, he is a gentleman, of course, and Mrs Shepton says he is very kind-hearted and everything good. But, oh, mamma, I have a perfect horror of ever seeing him again; I felt so—so *degraded*, when I had, as it were, to throw myself on his mercy. You cannot think what it felt like," and she shivered slightly.

Mrs Raynsworth did not at once answer. She seemed to be thinking deeply. Then she said:

"Philippa, my child, it will not do any good, or undo what cannot be undone, for you to allow yourself to grow morbid about it. Put it out of

your mind as far as it is possible for you; you owe it to us all to do so, now that there is nothing more to explain, and that all is forgiven. Promise me that you will try to do this." Philippa sighed deeply.

"Yes, mamma, I will try. I know it is the least I can do when you—papa and you—are so very, very good to me," her voice trembled a little. "I will try. But do promise me, dear mamma, that if the question comes up of my going to Merle-in-the-Wold with Evelyn and Duke—they are sure to go some time or other—you will help me to get out of it? *That* is not morbid."

No, under the circumstances, Mrs Raynsworth could scarcely call it so, as nothing was more probable, almost certain, than that Michael Gresham would be one of the party at his cousin's. Under the circumstances, however, she much doubted if Evelyn's zeal for a visit to Merle would hold good, though this opinion she kept to herself.

"I will promise never to urge you to do anything as painful to you as this idea seems at present," Mrs Raynsworth replied. "And perhaps," with a little sigh—for unworldly though the mother was, it could scarcely be that Evelyn's glowing description of the master of Merle, and the evident "admiration at first sight" which her sister had aroused in him, had made no impression on the maternal imagination—"perhaps your instinctive dread of meeting the younger Gresham again is well founded."

"I am sure of it," said Philippa, in a tone of relief. "And, oh, mamma, there is one thing we—I—should be glad of, and that is that Charley did not come here while we were away. Of course," (as had been the case) "his last letter—the last before we left—showed it was unlikely; but everything unlikely seems to have happened to me! And I could not bear him to know what I did—he would be furious."

"Yes," Mrs Raynsworth agreed, "I am afraid he would be. And I see no reason why he should ever hear of it. We took care not to let Hugh; and Leonard know where you had gone. I just told them that you had gone away again unexpectedly for a few days. I believe they had some vague idea that you had been summoned back to Dorriford."

And after that first evening, though with no definite *parti pris* on the subject, Philippa's eccentric escapade was practically buried.

Circumstances greatly helped to bring this about. For the very next morning came the looked-for news of Charley's definite return—a return "for good," as his people had got into the way of calling it. He was to stay at home, indefinitely at least, working at the special branch of literature which he had made his own, and in which his father's advice and experience were of great value to him, and acting at the same time as Mr Raynsworth's secretary, thus relieving his younger sister from the somewhat onerous duties of the last year or two.

"Tell poor old Phil," he wrote, "that she is to have a regular right-down good holiday at last, to be idle and frivolous, and taken up about her clothes like other girls. She's not had fun enough in her life, and it's time she had some now. With Evey being at home, surely we can plan something of a change for Phil? We must talk it over when I get back. I have a few pounds by me that I have managed to get together, and I am determined to spend them on her."

Philippa's eyes glistened when her mother read aloud her brother's letter, but though she smiled, her face was a little sad.

"I know what would be best," said Evelyn, "if only we were sure of Duke's coming next month! I am to let Mr Gresham know whenever it is quite settled; then he will invite us to Merle, and on the way there, at least we will *make* it the way there, Duke, and Phil, and I will stay a few days in London, and I shall choose two or three of the prettiest dresses you ever saw, for you, Phil." But Philippa did not respond to the proposal.

"I count that I have had my holiday," she said. "I enjoyed the visit to Dorriford exceedingly, and I shall enjoy having Charley more than anything. Don't ask me to leave home again. Mamma," with an appeal in her voice that was new to the self-reliant Philippa, "you won't, will you?"

"Nobody will want you to do anything you don't like, my dear child," her mother replied, reassuringly. "That would be a strange use to make of poor Charley's thoughtfulness."

And Philippa's face grew calm again; she could depend upon "mamma."

"Besides," said Evelyn, "you needn't work yourself up about a thing that may not come to pass for ever so long. Duke *may* not get home till next

year. And I think it's not very nice of you, Phil, to be so lugubrious about a plan I only thought of for your sake. You might understand that I would like to do something to—to make up a little, as it were, for all you went through for me."

Evelyn's voice grew tremulous, and her pretty eyes were dewy as she finished speaking. In a moment Philippa was kneeling beside her—her arms flung round her sister in a close embrace.

"Evey dear, you might understand," she whispered. "Mamma does. I have got nervous about it all. But don't think me ungrateful. I shall be quite right again soon, and it will be so nice to have Charley at home. He will cheer us up; he always does, and I am sure Duke *will* get back before Christmas, at the very latest."

Evelyn kissed her in return, and the little cloud melted. Still Philippa felt very glad when her brother's arrival brought a diversion and a still stronger certainty that the Wyverston travesty would henceforth be allowed to sleep in peace.

How *very* rarely, how "almost never," do things turn out as we have pictured them to ourselves? How the misfortunes which we foresee and prepare to face disappear; how wholly unexpected difficulties and complications weave themselves about our unwary feet till we scarcely dare to risk a step! "If we had but known," "if I had had any idea of this happening," "ifs" without end, and better disregarded.

The unexpected came to Philippa Raynsworth this winter, though not altogether in painful guise, and she found, as so many of us do, that she had expended fears and misgivings in quite unnecessary directions.

Charles Raynsworth was the eldest of the family, and the only plain member of it. He had none of Philippa's graceful stateliness, nor Evelyn's charm of manner and appearance, some traces and promise of all of which were to be found in the two younger boys—handsome Hugh and blue-eyed Leonard. But no one of the five brothers and sisters was more loved and trusted by the other four than the insignificant-looking head of the party. For the insignificance began and ended with his outward appearance; he was far above the average in every other direction;

intellectually gifted and possessing, in addition to undoubted talent, the "genius" of perseverance and steady application; honest and straightforward like all his family, unselfish and with a power of sympathy unusual in a man. No wonder that "Charley's" home-coming was the best of good news.

And for a day or two the pleasure of all being together again shed a rosy hue over everything. Charley was in such request that he had scarcely time to think. If he were not closeted with his father in the study, he was button-holed by his mother in the drawing-room; if he were not in the thick of the boys' pets—feathered, guinea-pigs, and all the rest of them—admiring, advising, and doing his best to make sense of Hugh and Leonard both talking at once, he was pretty sure to be in the nursery, with Bonny riding on his shoulder, or listening to Evelyn's maternal raptures over baby Vanda's attempts at conversation. It was not till he had been some days at home that he one morning waylaid his mother and drew her out to the front of the house for a stroll up and down the gravel drive.

"You are not busy, are you, mother?" he said. "You have got your cook-interviewing and all that sort of thing over for the day, haven't you? I want a talk with you without being interrupted, as we always are in the drawing-room, and in the afternoon it is even worse. Next week I must buckle to work regularly; but for these two or three days I have been giving myself time to settle down."

It was a mild day—"mild for November," as one so often hears people say when that maligned daughter of the year is with us, forgetting how very often the early days of the month are altogether charming.

"Shall I get you a shawl?" Charles Raynsworth went on, but his mother negatived the proposal.

"I am not the least cold," she said, "and if we keep at this side of the house it is always sheltered. What is it, dear, that you want to talk about? Nothing wrong?" and a slight furrow of anxiety made itself seen between her eyebrows. For the moment, unreasonable though it was, a fear startled her that possibly—*could* it be?—was Charley going to tell her that Philippa's escapade had come to his ears?

But her son's first words reassured her.

"Don't look so startled and anxious, mother," he said, eagerly. "No, of course it's nothing wrong. I only want to take the bull by the horns, so as to prevent anything wrong coming to pass. Mother, I don't think my father is looking well—one notices looks, you see, dropping in among you all from the outside, as it were. And once the idea struck me it made me watch him; no, he is not what he was last year, I am quite sure of it. He is overdone. I can see that he has been working too hard."

Mrs Raynsworth drew a long breath. This was not what she had feared, but it startled her. She grew rather pale.

"Charley!" she said.

"Don't looked so appalled, mother," he said, reassuringly. "I have not the least fear of there being anything seriously wrong; if I *had* had, of course I should have done something else—spoken to a doctor or to my father himself before frightening you. But I am perfectly sure it is overwork only; he should have a holiday—a holiday and a change. And that brings me to the second head of my discourse. Phil isn't looking well, either. I believe the two of them have been buried in that study far too much and for far too long together. I should have been here at home some months ago, but it was impossible, so there is no use going back upon that. What I want now—"

But Mrs Raynsworth interrupted him.

"I daresay you are right about your father," she said; "but as to Philippa, I don't know; she has had some change this autumn. There was the visit to Dorriford, you know, which she enjoyed very much, and—"

But in his turn Charles interrupted, fortunately so, perhaps, for Mrs Raynsworth was beginning to feel very guilty.

"A week," he said, "a week or ten days at most—what's that? Oh, no, she needs much more thorough change than that sort of thing. She has grown nervous, mother, that is what I have noticed, for it is so unlike her. She changes colour for nothing and starts if one opens the door suddenly. No, I am sure I am right about them both, and this is what I

want you to help me to manage. Father and Phil should go abroad together this winter for three or four months. They would enjoy it thoroughly. Phil has never been out of England, and father can take her over some of the old ground he knows so well. It would be new life to him. Phil is so intelligent, you see, and would enter into all that interested him," and Charley's commonplace greenish-grey eyes lighted up with eagerness till they looked almost beautiful. He was nearly breathless, as he stopped short in the path and stood facing his mother.

She could not but be infected to some extent by his enthusiasm, but Mrs Raynsworth was eminently practical.

"My dearest boy!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I agree with you; nothing could be more delightful for both your father and Philippa," and as she named her younger daughter there flashed through her mind the special benefit to the girl of such a complete change of life and surroundings at the present time; "nothing," she repeated, "could be better. But, Charley, you forget—the ways and means!—and your father's work. We should never persuade him to leave it."

"He need not do so; at least, I mean to say, it need not suffer," said the young man. "I have gone into all that part of it already since I came, without my father's finding it out. He can quite well leave his work at its present stage to me—he said so himself. And the time I would give it need be no more than I could give to him if he were here. I can quite fit it in with my own work. The only thing father must do is to defer starting on his new book for a few weeks, and all the better if he does so. He would gather some fresh material if he was in Italy, and—"

"But—but—Charley—there is the money part of it."

Charley's fair, freckled face flushed.

"*That's* all right," he said. "You know, mother, I wrote that I had saved a few pounds—saved and made, I should have said. Well, to cut a long story short, the few pounds have turned out more than I expected. I have a hundred, a clear hundred, mother, ready for this scheme of mine. And a hundred pounds will go a long way with two people like my father and Phil; he knowing the ground so well, and she so economical and

managing as I know she is. Besides, once my father made up his mind to go, he would no doubt put something to the hundred."

Mrs Raynsworth, well as she knew her son, was greatly touched.

"My dearest boy," she said again, "I cannot tell you how good I think it of you to have planned such a thing. But I fear your father would never consent to take your money—your own earnings."

Charley laid his hand on his mother's arm and drew her forward again. It felt rather chilly standing still.

"My dearest mother," he said, as they resumed their stroll, "leave that to me. How can you think such a thing, when you remember all my father and you have done for me? Stinting yourselves, and even, indirectly, my sisters too a little, to give me the best of educations. It is all thanks to that that I am now where I am, certain of earning my own livelihood at the very worst, and with every reasonable prospect of greater success. Leave it to me, my dear mother; only promise me to back me up when I have broached the idea with both my father and Phil."

The promise was given and acted upon. For the more Mrs Raynsworth thought over her son's idea the more it commended itself to her. And the verdict of the doctor—an old friend who knew him well—whom Mr Raynsworth appealed to with the expectation of his pronouncing the proposed holiday, however agreeable, by no means a necessity, decided the turning of the scale. The benefit to Philippa herself was not made prominent, though in her heart the mother was almost as glad of the proposed scheme for her daughter's sake as for her husbands. But Charley was not without his reward. The glow of pleasure which overspread the girl's face at the first mention of the plan made her brother determine that it should be carried out, and Philippa's misgivings that it would be "selfish" and wrong to leave home for so long, and that "mamma" should profit by Charley's generosity rather than herself, were overruled by her father's assurance that no one except her brother could be as useful to him as his already well-trained little secretary.

Circumstances in other directions too added their influence. Captain Headfort telegraphed his arrival by the next mail but one, and under the

new aspect of things it became much easier to arrange for his making his headquarters at Greenleaves—the Raynsworths' home—with his family for the first few months of the year, during which his eventual plans were to be decided.

"I *could* not have gone away with any sort of comfort, Phil dear, you see," said her mother. "And as it is, I shall really enjoy the time at home with Charley and Duke, and helping Evelyn to settle what to do, and with *no* anxiety about your father on my mind. I think everything has fitted in beautifully."

And on the whole, Evelyn's sentiments agreed with her mother's, though she could not help sighing in private when alone with Mrs Raynsworth over the downfall of her castle-in-the-air.

"I shall not care to go to Mr Gresham's in the least without Phil, even if he asks us now," she said, disconsolately. "I suppose I must write to tell him that Duke is really coming, as I promised I would. And, of course, I will tell him that my sister is going abroad. But ten to one before the winter is over we shall hear he is going to be married; men are just like that, even when they do fall in love at first sight, as I shall always firmly believe he did."

"Still, anything is better than for Philippa to get out of health in any serious way, or to lose her spirits and nerve," said Mrs Raynsworth. "And there is no doubt, Evey, that that wild affair has had a strange effect upon her; it seems to have been almost a shock to her to realise *how* wild and rash it was, and how disastrous its consequences might have been. I doubt very much, Evey, if she would have agreed to go to Mr Gresham's."

"It would have been very absurd of her to have been afraid of it," said Evelyn, impatiently. "He never saw her at Wyverston, she allows that herself. And as for the other one—Michael Gresham—I don't suppose his cousin has him very much at Merle; they did not seem very specially friendly. Besides, he only saw her in the railway, and with those horrid spectacles on. One does not remember every person one meets in a railway carriage. Phil will get quite morbid if she is so fanciful."

“That is why I am so glad for her to have this complete change,” said Mrs Raynsworth, quietly.

Chapter Fifteen.

Maida at Fault.

So, after all, the hobgoblin of a visit to Merle melted into thin air, as often happens with the things we dread the most. Not that, in this case, there was do element of disappointment to Philippa mingled with the very relief she was so grateful for. She had a distinct curiosity about Evelyn's hero, and a decided wish to see him again, and when, some two months or so later, a letter with the date of "Merle-in-the-Wold," reached her in her wanderings with her father, she felt it undoubtedly regrettable that she could not, without misgiving, look forward to joining the Headforts in their next visit there, as her sister alluded to.

"You cannot think what a *perfect* place this is," wrote Evelyn. "Duke was not very eager to come, so soon after arriving and before he had settled down at all, he said. He *is* such an old bachelor; he has fallen back into all his fussy methodical ways with being two years away from scatter-brained me. But now he is quite as much in love with it all as I am, and is talking of looking out for a little house somewhere hereabouts, if he decides on leaving his regiment. And he likes Mr Gresham very much; at least he says, as everybody must, what a charming host he is, though I don't know that he appreciates him *quite* as much as I do. But he likes talking to him about Wyverston and the Headforts. And oh, by-the-by, the old squire has written *so* cordially to Duke, as soon as he heard of his arrival. We are to go up there for a week whenever the worst of the winter is over, etc, etc."

And in a postscript she had scribbled: "Michael Gresham is not here, and his cousin says very little about him. I always told you that I was sure they were not so very intimate. Mr Gresham has just begged me to say that the next time we come he hopes *you* will accompany us, though he scarcely dares flatter himself that you can remember him."

Philippa smiled a little as she read the last words.

"Well, perhaps," she said to herself, "perhaps I may go there some time or other without any misgiving. It will be curious if I never come across

Solomon's master again. He *was* kind, after all, though rather gruff about it. And I am sure he is to be relied upon. But the *feeling* of being there with him, knowing that he knew, and that he knew I knew he knew! Oh, it would be insufferable."

She made a gesture as if to shake off the very thought of such a thing. But her nerves and spirits were fast recovering themselves. Charley's plan had been a grand success. Mr Raynsworth and his daughter had enjoyed themselves to their heart's content—nor had they been idle. Philippa had taken her part in all her father's researches and explorings, for the new book he had in view dealt largely with the history of the old Italian towns which they had been staying at, one after the other, since leaving home.

Three months fled only too quickly. At the expiration of that time, just as they were deciding, not without reluctance, that they must turn homewards—for with all the good management in the world money develops very slippery qualities in travelling!—a letter from Cannes somewhat altered their plans. It was from Miss Lermont, with whom, since her visit to Dorriford, Philippa had kept up a regular correspondence, so that Maida was quite *au courant* of her young relative's whereabouts.

The Lermonts had been spending the winter, or a part of it, in the south, and now, by her father's and mother's request, she wrote to beg Mr Raynsworth and his daughter to join them in their villa for two or three weeks.

"I do not see why we should not do so," said Mr Raynsworth, "I should like to see something more of the Lermonts, and the quiet time would enable me to arrange my papers and notes a little better than it has been possible to do so far. They seem all right at home—eh, Philippa?—and you would like a week or two with Maida?"

"Very much, very much indeed," his daughter replied.

So it came to pass that it was not at Dorriford, but in the sunny south that Philippa met again the friend she had already learnt to prize.

"You are changed, Philippa," said her cousin, the first morning when they

were strolling about in the pretty garden of the Lermonts' villa. "Changed somehow, though I scarcely can say how."

"Am I?" said the girl, "and yet it is only six months, barely that indeed, since you saw me last."

But she *was* changed, and the consciousness of it made her colour deepen, even though she knew how much more cause for her remark Maida would have had, had they met before Philippa's winter in Italy.

"I know, that is what makes me notice it the more. One expects to see change at your age after an interval of a year or two—I counted you scarcely grown-up when you came to us last year. But in six months! No, I can't quite make it out."

"What is it?" said Philippa, lightly. "Am I fatter, or thinner, or paler, or what?"

Miss Lermont looked at her scrutinisingly, which did not tend to increase the young girl's composure.

"No," said the elder woman at last, "it is not in that sort of way so much—though you *are* thinner, rather thinner, and perhaps a little paler. Nevertheless you have grown still—prettier," checking herself in the use of a more imposing adjective. "I am not afraid of telling you so, as I know you are not the *least* conceited. But you have changed otherwise. You are not *quite* as bright and self-reliant as you were—you look anxious every now and then, and sometimes you are rather absent. Tell me, my dear child, have you fallen in love with any one?"

It was the greatest relief to Philippa that Maida's kindly cross-questioning should have turned in this direction. For even if she herself had thought it well to take Miss Lermont into her confidence as to her adventures, she was not free to do so, Mrs Raynsworth having bound her down to tell no one the story without first consulting herself. The laugh, therefore, with which the young girl prefaced her reply was quite natural and unconstrained.

"No indeed," she said, "I can't fancy myself falling in love with any one unless I were very sure that the person in question had first fallen very

thoroughly in love with me. And—I can scarcely picture such a state of things as that."

"Naturally," said Miss Lermont. "I don't think any girl—not a girl such as you are, at least, dear Philippa—*can* picture it till it comes to pass."

Philippa hesitated.

"I mean more than that," she said. "I do not feel as if I were the sort of girl a man is likely to care for in that way. I am not—oh, not yielding, and appealing, and all that sort of thing. There is something of a boy about me. Long ago, when I was a tiny girl, the nurses used to tell me I had no 'pretty ways.'" Maida could not help smiling at Philippa's self-deprecation. But as the girl looked down at her—Miss Lermont was by this time established in her invalid-chair, her cousin standing beside her—with a certain wistfulness in her expression, it struck the elder woman still more strongly that Philippa *was* changed, softened and somewhat saddened. Her present estimate of herself was far less correct now than a few months ago. "You forget," Maida replied, "that tastes differ as to human beings' attraction for each other, luckily for the peace of society, more widely than in any other direction. It is not every man, by any means, whose ideal woman is of the type which *you* evidently think the most winning. But all the same, my dear child, you are much more—'womanly,' shall I say?—less self-confident and gentler than you were at Dorriford. *Something* has changed you. Don't you feel conscious of it yourself?"

"Growing older perhaps," said Philippa, trying to speak lightly. But it was impossible for her to be anything but genuine with Maida. "No," she continued, with a sudden alteration of voice, "I will not talk nonsense. I know that I have changed; you are very quick and discriminating to have found it out, and I wish I could tell you all about it. But I cannot, not at present at any rate. So don't let us talk any more about it. I do want to enjoy this delightful place and weather and *you* to the very utmost."

She sat down beside her cousin and looked at her with what she meant to be a perfectly happy smile. But somewhat to Maida's surprise the pretty mouth was quivering a little, and there was a suspicious glistening in the deep brown eyes.

“My dear child!” Maida exclaimed, impulsively, her anxiety increasing. “Can you not—”

“No, dear,” Philippa replied to the uncompleted inquiry, “I cannot explain anything. But there is nothing to be anxious about—really nothing.”

“Only tell me,” Miss Lermont persisted, “this trouble, whatever it is, or—”

“It is quite over,” said Philippa.

“Or has been, then—have you had to keep it altogether to yourself? Have you been unable to confide in any one?”

“Oh, no,” Philippa replied. “They all—at least Evey and papa and mamma—knew about it, and *mamma* knows everything, yes, *everything*. And if she had known I was to be with you, here, I daresay she would have wished me to tell you; at least I think she would have done, but—but—I am not quite sure. After all, it isn’t anything very dreadful, only it opened my eyes to my own self-will and presumption, and I don’t feel as if I ever could trust myself again.”

“Poor dear,” said Maida, tenderly. “Remember it is not the ‘thinking we stand’ that keeps us from falls. I am quite happy now I know that your mother knows it all, and whether you ever tell me the whole or not is a matter of no consequence. Put it out of your head, dear, and let us enjoy this treat—for a treat it is to *me*.”

“And most certainly to me, too,” said her cousin, affectionately. “I had no idea Cannes was so charming, Maida.”

“It has been an exceptionally good winter, even for Cannes,” said Miss Lermont. “Lots of people we know have been here. Almost too many sometimes, as I am so stupidly easily knocked up and mother has bustle enough at home all the year round. Now, the visitors are dropping off a little, but we know a good many of the so-called residents. That is to say, the people who have permanent houses here which they inhabit for four or five months of the year. By-the-by, Philippa, did you not see the Bertrams when you were at Dorriford?”

“Yes,” Philippa replied, “I did. But they are not here?”

There was the slightest possible—so slight that at the time Miss Lermont thought her ears must have misled her—inflection of anxiety in the girl's tone as she made the inquiry.

"Here—yes indeed, very much here," Maida replied. "Captain Bertram and Lady Mary, and all the five children, and an army of governesses, and nurses, and maids, and horses, and grooms. They are very rich, you know. And they have had friends visiting them or coming to be near them, all the time, several of whom we knew, so that has helped to extend our acquaintance here. Oh, yes, by-the-by, that Mr Gresham, 'the silent man,' as we called him, is staying with them now. He has just arrived; do you remember him one day at Dorriford? I had forgotten about it, but he asked me when he called with Lady Mary, if I had heard from you lately, and—"

Philippa interrupted her.

"Evelyn and Duke have been staying with him," she said, speaking with studied deliberateness; "that must have reminded him of me, as Evey is far too fond of talking about me."

She did not turn away as she spoke, and her whole manner was peculiarly calm, but to Miss Lermont's amazement the colour surged up into her cheeks, leaving them again as suddenly—she herself apparently unconscious, or determined to appear unconscious, that it was so.

Maida felt completely taken aback. She was not of an inquisitive frame of mind, and was eminently unsuspicious when she had once learnt to give her confidence. But she was very observant by nature, and as has been already mentioned, in her peculiar, semi-invalid life, the post of spectator had often fallen to her, and she had come to feel great interest in the affairs of her neighbours—interest which in an inferior class of mind might have degenerated into love of gossip. And aware of this danger, Miss Lermont was specially careful to keep her concern for "other people's business" well within bounds, even where conscious that real affection and sympathy prompted her.

So for a moment or two she hesitated before putting to Philippa the question that most naturally rose to her lips. Then an instant's reflection

showed her that the refraining from so simple an inquiry would of itself suggest some possibly annoying suspicion.

“Have you never seen him again, then? Somehow his manner seemed to imply that he knew more of you than that one afternoon’s introduction, when he did *not* distinguish himself by either ‘feast of reason or flow of soul.’”

Before Philippa replied, her cousin *felt* that she hesitated. Yet nothing could be more straightforward than her reply when it came.

“I have never met Mr Gresham since that day at Dorriford,” and the substitution of the vaguer participle for the more definite “seen,” did not catch Miss Lermont’s attention. Yet her perplexity increased.

“She *did* change colour when she heard his name and she *was* uneasy when she heard of the Bertrams being here,” thought Maida. “Yet I know she is not only truthful, but candid. The very way she told me there was something she *could* not tell, shows it. Can it be merely that her sister has got it into her head that Mr Gresham would be a good *parti*, which I suppose he would be, for her sister, and that some hints of hers have annoyed Philippa? She *is* almost morbidly sensitive, I know. I suppose it must be that.”

But feeling the girl’s eyes fixed upon her, she hastened to reply to her last words.

“You are pretty sure to meet him *here*” she said. “There is scarcely a day on which we do not see or hear something of the Bertrams. So we shall have an opportunity of finding out if our silent friend can talk when he chooses to do so.”

“But you have had an opportunity of that already, have you not?” said Philippa. “Did you not say you had seen Mr Gresham since his arrival?”

“Yes, the day before yesterday, but only for a few minutes. He did talk, I must allow. He found time, as I said, to ask if I had heard from you lately. He *may* have said something of Evelyn and her husband having been with him, but if so, I did not pay attention. He is certainly a very handsome man, and the Bertrams think everything of him. I suppose he

is made a great deal of, and if he is a little affected and spoilt, it is excusable."

"Did he strike you as affected?" said Philippa. Now that she had got over the first start of hearing Mr Gresham's name, she had pulled herself together and regained her composure. After all, it was not *Michael*; and when she recalled that quite recently she had been contemplating the possibility of accompanying the Headforts before very long on another visit to Merle, she realised the inconsistency of shrinking from meeting her sister's late host in the present easy and informal circumstances. "I don't think I can take Evelyn's account of him quite without a grain of salt. She seems so fascinated by him."

"And your brother-in-law?" said Maida. "I always like to hear a man's opinion of a man, as well as a woman's."

"Oh, yes, Duke likes him very much, I think," said Philippa. "He would not appreciate his charm of manner as Evelyn does, very possibly. Duke is a regular man, something of a boy about him, don't you know, a little too rough and ready, perhaps. Then Evelyn knows Mr Gresham better. She saw a good deal of him at—at Wyverston," and Philippa suddenly stooped to pick an innocent daisy looking up in her face from the grass at her feet, only to fling it down again impatiently, poor daisy!

Why had she mentioned Wyverston, she asked herself; why trench quite unnecessarily on ground where she could not be open and communicative with her friend, as she loved to be?

"I am a perfect idiot," she thought, and again the expression on her face struck Miss Lermont as unusual.

"At Wyverston," she repeated. "*The* Headforts' place. Oh, yes, I remember your telling me in your very first letter from home about Evelyn's going there. But you never said anything more—as to how the visit went off and if she enjoyed it. You were not very well about that time, if I remember rightly. I think your mother wrote and said so?"

"I don't think there was much the matter with me," said Philippa, "but mamma was a little anxious. They will think me looking brilliantly well when I go home after this splendid holiday, I am sure. You were asking

about Evey's visit? Yes, she enjoyed it very much, and it was a great success. She took to the Headforts and they to her wonderfully."

"Then," began Miss Lermont, "but don't answer if it is indiscreet of me to ask, do you think the old man is going to recognise your brother-in-law as his heir and—to treat him accordingly?"

"We don't quite know," said Philippa, "and after all, as Duke says, there is no hurry *to* know. The squire is not a very old man, and he must be wiry to have lived through the shocks he has had. He knows nothing almost of Duke except by hearsay, though there is nothing but good to hear of him. All he has said has been to express a wish that Duke should give up India and settle down at home, and he worded it as if he meant to help him to do so. Of course we shall know more after they have met."

"Will that be soon?" asked Miss Lermont.

"Yes, I believe Evey and he are going north very shortly after we get back," said Philippa. "And they are taking the boy, Bonny, with them. The Wyverston people have specially invited him."

"I think that all looks very promising," said Maida. "You would be very glad for your sister not to have to go abroad again, would you not?"

"*Very*," said Philippa, heartily. "It would be the greatest comfort in the world; even if they had to go to live in the north, it would seem delightful after India."

"Is Wyverston a pretty place?" said Maida, but she checked herself almost as she said the words. "Of course you have never been there, so how could you know."

"Evelyn thought it a fine place, a good comfortable old house, though with nothing very striking about it, except, perhaps, the contrast with the great lonely moorland, on one side at least, round about it. There is something very impressive about moorland—so grim and yet pathetic," said Philippa, half dreamily. Her eyes seemed to be gazing on the scene she suggested; and it was so. At that moment, instead of the sunny terrace, with the orange trees in their green tubs, and down below, the blue Mediterranean gleaming sapphire-like in the sun, with overhead the

deep, all but cloudless sky, she was picturing to herself the cold grey morning aspect of the far-stretching lands on the east of Wyverston. She felt the very wind on her cheek, the breeze “with a flavour of the sea,” as the Headforts were fond of saying; she saw the tops of the trees in the pine woods to the left, and then emerging from their shade she seemed again to catch sight of the long smooth body of poor Solomon, ready to wriggle with pleasure at her approach. And Solomon’s master in his rough tweed suit and honest, kindly face—yes, it *was* an honesty kindly face—not far behind! What a pity—what a pity that he had come to think so poorly of her; there was something about the man that made her feel he would have been a good and steady friend. She could have learnt to like him. If ever—but here she was startled back into the present by Maida Lermont’s rallying tones.

“*Philippa*,” it said, “for the third time of asking! The thought of the moors up there in that bleak north seems to have bewitched you. Has Evelyn such graphic powers of description, for you have never been there yourself? What are you dreaming about? I spoke to you three times without your hearing me.”

Philippa turned to her cousin.

“I *was* dreaming about the moors; the moors and the pine woods,” she said simply. “It is not necessary to have seen places to think about them, is it I often feel as if I knew all about scenes and countries I have even *heard* but little of; do you not feel so, sometimes? When I was little I used to fancy I must have seen places in my dreams—in real dreams, I mean, not daydreams.”

“Yes,” Maida agreed. “I think I have had the same fancy. And what is almost as curious is the way in which the slightest association brings back scenes that we had practically forgotten. A word, or a touch in a picture, or very often with me a scent or smell, is like magic. I find myself recalling certain events, or remembering minutely certain scenes and perhaps people that I had not thought of for years and years. It does seem as if what we are so often told must be true—that we do not *really* forget anything. But I think, dear, we must be going in; the sun gets very hot on this terrace. We shall drive a little later, and there is some plan about meeting the Bertrams—going there to afternoon tea, I think. So we

shall probably see Evelyn’s hero.”

Chapter Sixteen.

Sunshiny Days.

The Bertrams were the most hospitable people in the world. Wherever you came across them, in London, or at their own rambling country-house, in a villa at Cannes, or on board a dahabeeyah on the Nile, it was all one. They were always delighted to see you, and uneasy till you promised to stay with them indefinitely, or, at least, to come to luncheon or dinner as long as you were within hail.

And all this in spite of a constant amount of things to see to, none of which were neglected by her, and very far from robust health on little Lady Mary's part! Her Irish ancestry explained a good deal, said some, "Irish people are *so* hospitable, you know," As if the virtue in question was an inherited quality for which no credit was due to the possessor. "Her kind heart," for sorely no kinder heart ever beat, had something to say to it, said those who knew and loved her as she deserved, among whom Maida Lermont was certainly to be reckoned.

Yet, notwithstanding the prepossessions in their favour which Philippa could not but feel, when it came to the actual moment of her following Mrs Lermont and her daughter into the pretty drawing-room where Lady Mary was fluttering about among her guests and her children, the girl could not but be conscious of an exceeding wish that Egypt, or Algeria, or any other of their various haunts, had this winter attracted the Bertrams elsewhere.

For control herself as she would, the thought of meeting Mr Gresham again, without even the support of Evelyn's presence, made her nervous.

"Supposing—just *supposing*" she said to herself, "that he *did* see me at Wyverston, or that his cousin by some inadvertence had given the least hint of any secret."

It was a mistake to allow her imagination to dwell on such possibilities; but the effect on herself personally was scarcely to be regretted. For there was a certain timidity and wistfulness in her manner which had not

been there before, and which, in the eyes of one of those present at least, added greatly to her charm.

“She is even lovelier than I thought,” said Bernard Gresham to himself, “and she has lost that touch of the girl-of-the-day self-confidence which jarred a little.”

For the first time they had met, that autumn afternoon at Dorriford, Philippa in her cheerful inexperience had taken it for granted that the handsome silent man was probably “rather shy,” and had exerted herself to “draw him out” in consequence.

Two or three other women entered the room almost at the same moment as the Lermonts and their young cousin. And the names were not clearly announced. But Mr Gresham from the farther side of the room “spotted” Miss Raynsworth at once, and managed cleverly to place himself in her way as she turned, with some little uncertainty of bearing, from shaking hands with her hostess. He was far too much a man, not only of the world, but of drawing-rooms, to run any risk of making her or himself conspicuous, yet he was resolved at once to take the place which he intended to hold while the fates left Philippa in his vicinity—that of a former acquaintance. So he would ask for no fresh introduction, but stepped forward with quiet matter-of-fact ease to greet her.

“How do you do, Miss Raynsworth?” he said. “You arrived yesterday? I knew you were coming, as I had a letter from Mrs Marmaduke Headfort two or three days ago.”

He brought in Evelyn’s name purposely, being in his heart slightly doubtful of the girl’s immediate recognition of him, little dreaming of the familiarity to her of his whole personality among the guests she had so often watched from Evelyn’s window at Wyverston! But even without that, she would have known him again.

She looked up with her pretty, half-startled eyes, a slight pink rising to her cheeks, as she held out her hand.

“You have heard from Evelyn more recently than I have done, then,” she said. “Were they all well? Did she give you any ‘family’”—with a smile —“news?”

Mr Gresham was inwardly triumphant. How well he had managed this first introductory move! Nothing could have happened better than the whole combination of events. Here, at Cannes, a few days would be worth weeks elsewhere; the life was so much less formal, the opportunities of meeting so much more frequent and less observed. He would have ample time in which to judge further of this girl, whose strong individuality, whose “uncommonness” had even at first sight so attracted him, *ferré à glace* though he believed himself, and that not altogether without reason, in such matters.

So he at once stepped on to the platform which his own tact, and Philippa’s simplicity, and circumstances, the accidental isolation in which she momentarily found herself for one, had erected.

“News,” he said, pleasantly; “oh, dear, yes, any amount. The actual reason of my being honoured with a letter just now was that Mrs Headfort thought it would interest me, which it certainly does, extremely, to hear that she and Duke are going up to Wyverston next week.”

Philippa’s eyes sparkled.

“Are they really?” she said. “I had not heard of it. At least I knew that they were to go some time or other, but I fancied not till I—father and I, I should say—were home again.”

She was so interested that all her constraint and self-consciousness disappeared. Nothing could have suited Mr Gresham better. His superior information from Greenleaves put him in the position of being applied to by Miss Raynsworth, and set her and himself at once on friendly and almost confidential relations.

He glanced round. They were still both standing, and near Lady Mary, who was eagerly talking to Miss Lermont, and not noticing any one else’s movements. There were no seats close at hand, but some tempting wicker lounges stood just outside on the balcony, on to which opened the long low windows.

“Won’t you come outside?” said Mr Gresham. “It is crowded in here; and then I can glance through what Mrs Headfort says.”

So within five minutes of the dreaded entrance into Lady Mary's drawing-room, Philippa found herself seated most comfortably beside the very man whose presence had been the cause of her nervous misgiving.

No one could have reproached Mr Gresham with "silence." He exerted himself to the utmost, without seeming to do so in the least; he talked, though not too much; he made the girl forget everything (little as he suspected that there was anything for her to forget) except the present pleasant intercourse. For he believed that all the opportunity he wished to obtain for himself depended upon this first *tête-à-tête*, and, however he might hereafter judge it expedient to alter or modify his tactics, he had no doubt as to the advisability of his present exertions.

Maida Lermont, from the couch which was quickly provided for her in a corner of the room, started with surprise when she heard her young cousin's peculiarly pretty and musical laugh ring out, as some half-hour or so later, Philippa, followed by Mr Gresham, made her way back into the drawing-room, and looking round for her special friend, drew forward a low chair to Miss Lermont's side.

"She used to laugh like that at Dorriford," thought Maida, "but it is the first time I have heard it here. And it is Mr Gresham who has made her look so bright and happy? Yet she has only seen him once before, and I am sure she was rather nervous about meeting him—I cannot make it out."

But if—and this possibility she would doubtless, if taxed with it, have indignantly denied—*if* any shadow of misgiving as to Philippa's ingenuousness momentarily crossed her mind, it was dispelled the instant the sweet face approached her own, as the girl said, in a somewhat low voice:

"Isn't it nice! Mr Gresham has given me such good news of them all at home, especially about Duke and Evey; they are going—but no, I must wait to tell you all about it afterwards," and here Mr Gresham, who had half heard, half guessed the drift of her words, interposed with the gentle considerateness which marked his bearing to the invalid Miss Lermont:

"Shall I get you a cup of tea, or an ice, or whatever you would like best?" he said. "I can easily bring it here—it is all in the next room."

“Thank you, thank you very much,” Maida replied. “Yes, I should like some tea and a sandwich very much.—And you, Philippa, you have had nothing?”

“I will go and get something for myself when Mr Gresham brings your tea,” said Philippa, and the young man noted her words approvingly. This was not the sort of girl, he thought, to care to have a man—or “*the* man” would probably have more accurately described his thought—dragging about after her in any conspicuous way. No, there was no doubt of it, she was a type apart. And he smiled to himself, half apologetically, at the idea that, after all his several years’ experience of society, and the caution with which he had steered his way amidst manoeuvring mammas and scarcely less sophisticated daughters, he might be about to fall a victim to the common malady—to find himself, if he did not take care, as genuinely in love as any Henry Hawkins of the people!

But the very candour with which he realised the possibility, showed that so far he had himself well in hand. And well in hand he intended to keep himself. For it would be a complete mistake to suppose that this was in any sense a case of “love at first sight.” Mr Gresham had long vaguely intended to marry, if—a great “*if*”—he came across the woman who completely satisfied his fastidious taste, and seemed likely to prove the realisation of his ideal. An ideal, not perhaps of the very loftiest, but admirable enough so far as it went. “She” must be endowed with all the orthodox and specially feminine virtues and graces; she must be refined and “unworldly”—to insure, indeed, the last qualification, he was prepared to sacrifice some amount of conventional “style” or “fashion;” that indescribable touch of finish which tells of a certain position in the world of the day. The very words employed to define it, testifying to its variability and intangible characteristics.

He did not wish for any great preponderance of brains or culture. There were times when Miss Raynsworth struck him as having been too severely educated for his standard. Femininity was his *sine quâ non*. So long as a little Greek and Latin, some notion of mathematics even, did not unduly harden or stiffen a woman, he would not exactly object to them, though any approach to obtrusive learning he strongly deprecated. But Philippa was too unaffected, too self-forgetful, to jar him by any such putting forward of her acquirements—acquirements which, in contrast

with the real learning of her father and brother, seemed to her, as indeed they were, but the merest sips of the “spring.” And above all, he was so sure of her perfect propriety—there was no slightest taint of “fastness” or “loudness,” or any such horror, in this irreproachable girl, no love of eccentricity or Bohemianism, no possibility of mad escapades turning up in which she had taken a part!

“No,” thought the master of Merle, “there could be no risk—no risk whatever in it. Of course, people would be surprised at the marriage, but what do I care for that! Everybody knows,” and he smiled half cynically; “everybody knows that my possibilities of choice have not been restricted.”

And this was certainly true.

Nor would it be fair to accuse the young man of fatuity, inasmuch as he was little troubled by any misgiving as to his personal acceptability to Miss Raynsworth, should he decide to go through with his suit. He had every possible grounds for believing in it; he knew himself to be attractive and good-looking far beyond the average; he believed himself also to be affectionate and endowed with all the qualifications for making a good husband (though he did not add, “to a wife who would see everything through his eyes and have no will but his”); and so far—for this *résumé* of Mr Gresham’s views of the whole situation is somewhat ante-dated—that is to say, as the day drew near for Philippa and her father to leave Cannes, he had no reason to doubt that the young girl liked his society, and was in a fair way to feeling still more attracted by him.

This fortnight in the beautiful south was propitious in the extreme to pleasant projects. The weather was faultless, and not as hot as is sometimes the case, even early in the spring. The circle of residents and visitors, to whom the Lermonts had come temporarily to belong, seemed specially anxious to make the last weeks of their southern sojourn agreeable. Scarcely a day passed without some plan being set on foot for diversion or amusement in which even Maida could take part, and few, if any, guessed how many of these were really skilfully initiated by Mr Gresham, who was well aware that it would have been of little use to try to decoy Philippa away from her cousin.

So there was no question of balls or large evening parties for the girl. Such would have been quite out of her father's line; nor could she have expected Mrs Lermont, quietly congratulating herself that such exertions for herself were over, to have begun again the arduous duties of chaperon. One exception only in this direction was made, and that was in the case of a large private dance on the very eve of the Raynsworths' departure, at which kind Lady Mary Bertram set her heart on Philippa's appearing. But before this there had been gaieties, or what seemed such to the young girl, in constant succession, and such as she had little dreamt of taking part in when she left home.

Her letters to Evelyn described fully all that was going on, and Evelyn's spirits rose high.

"Nothing could be better," she said to her mother, just as she herself was starting with her husband for Wyverston. "Now, mamma, was I *not* sensible when I made you get and send her those two new dresses, as soon as we heard of the Cannes visit?"

And Mrs Raynsworth could not but agree with her. "I don't suppose it could ever have occurred to Mrs Lermont to give her the pretty blue evening-dress Phil is so pleased with, *unless* she had arrived with one or two decent things. It would have been just like her and papa to say they had nothing but travelling clothes with them, and could go nowhere and see nobody. I cannot tell you how delighted I am for the poor dear to have some fun at last. And," she added to herself, "to see something of Bernard Gresham," though she dared not say this, in so many words, to her mother!

Picnics were among the favourite amusements of the moment at Cannes, and picnics on the luxurious scale that these were carried out were new to Philippa, whose only experience of out-of-doors entertainments was a holiday tea-drinking in the Marlby woods, when one old donkey carried on his back the whole material part of the repast. After two or three of these expeditions she found, it is true, that they began to pall a little. Still, it was always a pleasure to be with Maida, especially in the charming surroundings of lovely scenery and weather; and, more, probably, than she would have allowed herself to own, never did Mr Gresham show to greater advantage than on these occasions. His tact was wonderful;

without making her or himself in the least conspicuous he yet succeeded in giving her the feeling that she was never forgotten, that her amusement and enjoyment were his first consideration, and that once satisfied that these were insured, his own pleasure was complete. *No* girl, certainly no girl of Philippa's sensitive and responsive nature, could have been unconscious of this subtle and delicate consideration; to her, singularly free from vanity in any form, unspoilt and unselfish, there was something almost intoxicating in this refinement of homage.

Spots of interest, either by reason of their own beauty, or sometimes from historic association, now and then indeed combining both, were usually chosen for the scene of the picnics.

One of the last to which the Lermonts and their guests were bidden was given by Mr Gresham himself, and he had bestowed much thought and consideration upon its locality.

Nor were his labours unrewarded. It proved to be one of the most successful parties of the season, and but for an incident which momentarily affected Philippa unpleasantly by recalling events which the last fortnight, with its sunshine and distractions, had almost ended by banishing from her memory altogether, the day would have been one of unalloyed enjoyment.

The picnic was to be at an old château a few miles off. An old "manor-house," with remains of the domestic fortification necessary in those turbulent medieval times, would perhaps better describe it. For it had never been large, and now one part of it had fallen into picturesque ruin, while the remainder had been not unskilfully restored, more strictly speaking, perhaps, kept in repair, without any jarring modern innovations such as the French *positif* way of looking at such things often introduces.

The château had not descended to the rank only of a farm-house, for its owners, the bearers of a name which would at once serve to identify the original home of the family, still visited it from time to time. And during most of the year, with good-nature, not unmingled very probably with legitimate pride in the old, old home, they allowed any who cared to do so, to visit it, and wander all over the demesne and the château itself with perfect freedom.

It lay, however, somewhat off the usual routes of pleasure-seekers, and was less known than it deserved to be. Maida Lermont had never seen it, and though her eyes lighted up with pleasure at the idea of a visit, some doubts were expressed by her mother as to whether the distance and the reported roughness of the roads would not make it too fatiguing for her.

“Oh, mamma,” she exclaimed, speaking for once with almost the disappointment of a child in her voice, “*please* don’t say so. The Château de C— is one of the places I have longed to see ever since we came.”

Philippa glanced at her affectionately. Maida’s “humanness” was one of the characteristics that attracted her young relation to her so much. She never, notwithstanding the long discipline of her life, affected to be above or apart from the natural tastes and interests of those about her.

“*I* won’t go, if you don’t,” whispered Miss Raynsworth, stooping over Maida.

But Bernard Gresham caught the words; a slight frown, showed itself on his face. He was pleased—more than pleased indeed—to gratify Miss Lermont, whom he cordially liked and admired, but for Philippa to suggest giving up the expedition for Maida’s sake, when she must in her heart have known that he had planned it all for *her*, was most annoying. And for the first time he mentally accused Miss Raynsworth of affectation.

“She shall see her mistake,” he said to himself, “if she takes that line with me. I shall throw up the whole affair if there is any risk of her not coming, I should have the Worthings thinking, or the mother pretending to think, I had got it up for them—how I do detest that woman! ‘So kind of you to look us up at once; you know we were only here *en passant*,’ when I didn’t know they were here at all, and cared less.” But a moment after, the sound of Philippa’s sweet voice speaking in half-appealing, half-coaxing tones to her hostess, made him glance round from the window whither he had turned to hide his annoyance; and Mrs Worthing and her iniquities faded from his mind as if they had never existed.

“I really think, Mrs Lermont,” he said, “that the risk of over-fatigue for your daughter can be guarded against I shall look out for a specially easy carriage, and we can take our time about it and drive slowly if Miss

Lermont prefers. We shall not be at all a large party, and nearly all, people who know each other well—the Denvers and Maxtons and one or two more—the only strangers a mother and daughter who have just arrived, whom I suppose I *must* invite, friends of the Wyverston Headforts, by-the-by," he added, turning to Philippa.

But for once the name of Wyverston foiled to catch her attention, so engrossed was she in the question of Maida's joining the picnic.

"Yes," she said, speaking with reference to the first part of Mr Gresham's speech, of which he felt instinctively that she greatly approved, "yes, dear Mrs Lermont, I really am *sure* it would do Maida no harm. We should all take such care of her, and you would be there yourself."

"Of course," said Mr Gresham, cordially, "I am counting on you and Mr Lermont, and Mr Raynsworth; I think the touch of antiquarian interest about the château may be a lure to him, may it not?" with a glance at Philippa.

"I have no doubt it would be," she replied. "But I will *make* him come whether he cares about the fifteenth-century tower still standing or not," said Philippa, laughingly.

"Miss Raynsworth, Miss Raynsworth," said Mr Gresham, "you have been 'reading up,' and you will come out with your learning to shame us all."

"That would be so like Philippa!" said Maida, touching the girl's shoulder affectionately. "But, mother, we are waiting for your decision," for Mrs Lermont had not spoken again.

"Silence gives consent," said Philippa, and as her hostess only smiled, so her reply was interpreted.

Chapter Seventeen.

“Rencontres.”

Morning broke over a cloudless sky the day of the expedition to the Château de C—, the last but two of the Raynsworths’ sojourn at Cannes.

Philippa woke with that vague sensation of something pleasant to come, which in youth at least—and let us hope in a modified degree in later years too—is almost as familiar as its converse, that sad awaking from temporary forgetfulness when the memory struggles in spite of itself to remember “what it is that is wrong.”

There was only one touch of “wrongness” to cloud the girl’s happy anticipations, and that was the knowledge that this delightful holiday time was so nearly at an end.

“But I am not going to think about that—not to-day, at least,” she said to herself as she dressed. “I am going for once to live entirely in the present.”

And these laudable resolutions she repeated in her light-heartedness to her host for the moment, Mr Gresham, some four or five hours later, when, already arrived at their destination, for, to avoid the heat of the day, they had made an early start, at his request, she was spying the land, otherwise the grounds of the old house, with him in search of the best place for *déjeûner*.

He commended her resolution warmly.

“And after all,” he continued, “in many cases—or some, at least—pleasant times—I am more honoured than I can express by your considering to-day one of them—are only the precursors of others as agreeable. Let us hope that it may be so in our case. I am determined to get the Marmadukes over to Merle again before long, and this time I trust you will be able to accompany them.”

“I should like it very much indeed, thank you,” said Philippa, “if—” but her

sentence was never finished.

Almost as the “if” formed itself on her lips, a sudden pallor crept over her face, and she started slightly.

Mr Gresham looked up in surprise.

“Have you twisted your ankle?” he was beginning to ask, when he caught sight of one or two of the servants who had followed in a *char-à-banc*, and who were now busily unpacking the provisions, just emerging from the courtyard, as he and Philippa passed the entrance. And one of these, a middle-aged woman, unexceptionable in appearance as a superior maid, to his surprise stopped short, as if about to accost his companion.

“Miss Ray!” she exclaimed; “you here!” were the words that he thought he heard. And the two first, seeming so like the beginning of Philippa’s name, would probably not have struck him curiously—the woman might have been a former servant of the family’s for all he knew—but for the familiarity of the ejaculation that followed, a familiarity so unmistakable that he instinctively glanced *past* his companion as if in search of the person to whom they were addressed, so impossible did it seem to him that the woman was speaking to Miss Raynsworth.

But there was no one else behind or near themselves. And again he saw that Philippa’s face was still very pale, though she walked on rather more quickly than before, taking not the very slightest notice of the person who had spoken. And she on her side, after throwing a curious glance in Miss Raynsworth’s direction, in like manner passed on with her two or three companions.

“Did that woman speak to you? What did she say? Is she insane?” said Mr Gresham, in a tone of annoyance.

Philippa turned to him with a slight smile, but her lips were quivering a little.

“She—she certainly startled me,” she said. “I am afraid you will think I have no nerves at all. It is absurd to be so easily startled.”

“But she said your name, or something like it,” persisted Mr Gresham.

“What could she have been thinking of?”

“I—I don’t think she said my name,” replied Philippa. “She must have—have taken me for some one else.”

Her companion felt strangely annoyed. There was something about Miss Raynsworth’s manner that he could not define. In spite of her having been so visibly startled, she did not seem “natural,” scarcely, in a sense, surprised at this curious incident, almost as if she were too absent-minded to have taken it in! Then a new and more agreeable explanation of her nervousness occurred to him. What had they been talking about just at the moment they met the woman? Yes, Miss Raynsworth was in the act of answering what he had said about her coming to Merle, perhaps that was it; perhaps, and the thought touched him with a certain tenderness, at that moment it had flashed upon her for the first time that he was beginning to care for her specially; that it was not every girl he would show himself so anxious to meet again; no wonder it was rather bewildering and startling. She was so unsophisticated, so free from vanity and that detestable *aplomb* of young women in society! Mr Gresham felt satisfied that he had hit the right nail on the head.

So though he muttered something about “impertinence,” “how could any one make such an extraordinary mistake,” his annoyance at the incident gradually subsided. Only for a moment or two it was in danger of reviving, as Philippa, shaking off her dreaminess with an effort, looked up quietly and inquired with perfect calm:

“Who was that person? Do you know her by sight?”

“I have an idea that she is Mrs Worthing’s maid,” he said. He wished Philippa had let the thing drop; its vulgarity spoilt the idyllic charm of the scene, and the day, and his new thoughts about herself. “I remember her teasing me to let the woman come—she was so useful at helping on these occasions, and so on. And she was walking with Lady Mary’s servants. But what does it matter? I shall take care that you are not annoyed again. How *could* she have imagined you any one but yourself?” with a rather forced laugh.

“Oh,” said the girl, reassuringly, “at the first glance one does not notice—

dress, and that kind of thing. My *face* must have reminded her of some one she knew. Do not say anything about it to any one, I beg of you; it would be making the maid of far too much consequence, I assure you. And if her mistress is a friend of yours, it might—might possibly lead to some annoyance."

"You are far too good-natured," he replied. "However, I daresay you are right. It would be making the woman of too much consequence to speak of it to Mrs Worthing. Not that the Worthings are special friends of mine. I had to ask them, though we should have been more the sort of party I wished without them. But I agree with Michael about Mrs Worthing."

Another shock for Philippa; somehow this was the first time that his cousin's name had been mentioned to her by Mr Gresham. And after all, what did it matter? She must get accustomed to hearing Michael Gresham spoken of, even perhaps to meeting him if—if her present companion were to become a permanent friend. It was only unlucky just now, startling, to have that name brought on the *tapis* when she was already upset and discomposed. And to-day, when she had meant to be so happy!

But she must not be so weak-minded. And with this determination—impelled too, half unconsciously, by the strange fascination of a subject she would fain avoid—she looked up at Mr Gresham inquiringly.

"Michael?" she repeated.

He smiled.

"Oh, I forgot," he said. "You don't know the family archangel? I have got into the habit of imagining that you know all that your sister does about—about myself and my home interests. Not that old Michael is exactly a part of my home, except by old association. He is my cousin. We were brought up together, more or less, but there is not any very great amount of common ground for us to meet on. He is—ah, well, a very good fellow in his own way, but rather a bear—doesn't shine in society—in fact, it and he know very little about each other."

"Why so?" asked Philippa. She was nervously anxious not to seem to avoid the subject of the younger Gresham, and even more so to prove to

herself that she had completely mastered her uneasiness. And she was not free from curiosity about Michael, both as to himself and as to the light in which Bernard regarded him. “Are you joking,” she went on, “when you call him ‘the family archangel,’ or do you really mean that he is very, remarkably good?”

“Honestly,” said Mr Gresham, “I don’t quite know. Good things are not necessarily the most agreeable, are they? Rather the other way sometimes. Oh, yes, Michael’s very good, a model of steadiness and industry and all the rest of it, but not distinguished by suavity and charm of manner. He lives so out of things, you see.”

“Is he a misanthrope, then?” asked Miss Raynsworth, her curiosity increasing.

Mr Gresham hesitated. He was a very truthful man, and prided himself intellectually as well as morally on his accuracy. And Philippa’s question revived some old memories. Michael a misanthrope! Who would ever have associated such a word with the bright-faced schoolboy of not so very many years back, or the young fellow going up to college with everything this world can give him in the present and the future? And then the change; the shock of finding on his death that the father he had so honoured had for years deceived him and his too confiding mother, the clouded name, the broken-hearted widow, who had no strength to rally even for her boy’s sake; the transference to Bernard, the son of a younger brother, of the inheritance which, but for his father’s misdoings, would at least in some part have been his! No, by nature assuredly Michael was no misanthrope, but if circumstances had conspired to make him one, would it have been a thing to wonder at?

But all this the elder cousin had no wish to explain to the girl beside him. Still he was loyal, and his face had grown graver as at last he turned to reply:

“No,” he said, “it wouldn’t be fair to call him that. He’s had—he’s had troubles enough to sour him, and he’s not soured. And—oh, well, to give him his due, he has been a bit of a hero in his time.”

Philippa looked up quickly. She had never liked Mr Gresham so much as

at this moment. And some instinct told him so.

“I cannot tell you all about it,” he said. “He would not wish it, even though you do not know him. But I can give you some idea of it. He gave up great advantages for himself for the sake of clearing the name of one whom he had little reason to sacrifice himself for. *I* think it was quixotry, and so do many others, except—well, yes, there was another element in it, the peace of mind of one very dear to him. He was very young; I doubt if he realised the grind of a life he was bringing upon himself.”

“Has he to work so hard, then?” the girl inquired. “If so, I scarcely see that he can be reproached with keeping ‘out of things,’ as you say he does.”

There was a touch of reproach in her tone now, which her companion did not approve of.

“Oh, as to that,” he said, airily, “it’s a matter of temperament, and personal idiosyncrasy. Many very busy men find time to mix in society. But Michael’s a bear; there are only two individuals in the world that I would care to assert that he loves—individuals, not people, for one is a dog.”

“And the other?” said Philippa.

“The other is an old woman,” said Mr Gresham. Miss Raynsworth said nothing, but probably she thought the more. Something in her companion’s manner gave her the impression that he did not wish to prolong the conversation in its present direction. And just then an exclamation impulsively escaped her. They had turned a corner sharply, in their progress round what had once been the ramparts of the little fortress, and below them lay a charming view—for the château stood on high ground, though the ascent to it was so gradual that one hardly realised its importance.

“How lovely!” she exclaimed.

“Yes,” Mr Gresham agreed, “this is one of the attractions of the place. I wanted to surprise you—it bursts on one so suddenly,” and he began to point out to her the landmarks of interest to be more or less identified from where they stood.

“Don’t you think,” he added, in conclusion, “that this smooth bit of grass here would be our best dining-room? The view would give people something to talk about and quarrel over—no two would agree as to what places can be seen and what not, if other topics of conversation fall flat.”

So the stretch of old turf—as much moss as grass, perhaps, but none the less charming on that account—was decided upon for the luncheon. And after all, the day turned out a pleasant and amusing one for Philippa, in spite of the shock of the unlucky “rencontre.” In the interest of talking about Michael Gresham; apart from all personal feelings in connection with him, she had forgotten her nervous dread of him. More than once during the day, his cousin’s remarks about him, vague as they had been, recurred to her memory.

“I wonder what it was he did, or sacrificed, to make Mr Gresham speak of him as ‘a bit of a hero,’” she thought.

He was once alluded to in her hearing in the course of the day, and that was by Mrs Worthing, whom Philippa recognised as one of the visitors whom she had often caught sight of from her watch-tower at Wyverston. Mrs Worthing was the type of woman whom one is pretty sure to meet in any “society,” using the word in the narrowly conventional sense. She was of indefinite age and appearance, well-dressed and well-bred, an affectionate though somewhat tyrannical mother, to an, for these days, unusually submissive daughter. There was a papa Worthing too, who appeared in orthodox fashion on orthodox occasions, such as his wife’s dinner-parties and receptions, but he was a very busy man, and, apart from his own line, uninteresting. So when “the Worthings” were alluded to, it could be taken for granted that the mother and daughter only were meant.

Aline Worthing was undoubtedly pretty, and, so far, her blue eyes were without the hard metallic light which was often to be seen in her mother’s. But she was by no means a clever or original girl. Mrs Worthing, of better birth than her husband, came from the north, not far from Wyverston, and old family associations had been kept up to some extent between the Headforts and herself. It was at Wyverston that she had first met the Greshams.

She spoke graciously to Miss Raynsworth when the young girl was introduced to her, a certain reflection of the Headfort lustre being associated with Mrs Marmaduke's sister. But there was a touch of condescension, not to say patronage, mingled with the graciousness, which made Philippa doubly glad that her meetings with the mistress, as well as the maid, were not likely to recur.

"I have met your sister, I believe," said Mrs Worthing. "We were staying at Wyverston when she came there last autumn; her first visit there, you remember," she went on, turning to Mr Gresham. "It must have been quite an ordeal for her, without her husband too."

"First visits to new relations must always be something of an ordeal for a bride," said Maida, quickly and rather thoughtlessly, for she detected the covert impertinence.

"Ah, but you see, it was not exactly that," continued Mrs Worthing. "You could scarcely call Mrs Marmaduke Headfort a *bride*—she has two or three children. And, but for my poor, dear friend's terrible sorrows, the connection is not a very near one—only second cousin-ship or something of that kind."

"My brother-in-law's father was Mr Headfort's nephew," said Philippa, quietly, determined not to be suppressed.

Mrs Worthing held up her hands in smiling deprecation.

"Oh, dear, dear," she said, "that is beyond me. It reminds one of 'Dick's father and John's son.'—Aline—where is Aline?—can you unravel it? Aline is so good at riddles."

"And I maintain," said Maida, smiling too, and absolutely ignoring Mrs Worthing's latter remarks, "that my cousin was certainly in the *position* of a bride; possibly you are not aware, Mrs Worthing, that the Marmaduke Headforts went out to India immediately they were married, and Evelyn only came home comparatively recently."

"Your cousin?" repeated Mrs Worthing. "Dear me! I am all at sea. I did not know you were connected with the Headforts."

“Nor are we,” said Mrs Lermont, “but Mr *Raynsworth* here,” with a pleasant glance in his direction, “is my husband’s cousin.”

“We are getting quite into a genealogical tree,” said Mrs Worthing, “and I *am* so stupid at that sort of thing. I never know who people are or to whom they are related or anything like that. And I don’t care. *I* like people for what they *are*, in themselves, you know. Mr Worthing says I am a regular Socialist—like *your* cousin, Mr Gresham—that dear eccentric Michael and his dog.”

“I must set you right on two points, I fear, Mrs Worthing,” said Bernard, gravely. “Michael is not a Socialist, and his dog is not my cousin.”

Everybody laughed—even Aline Worthing. Her mother did not like it, but she pretended to think it an excellent joke. And Mr Gresham saw with gratification that the Lermont connection had “told.”

“We shall have no more bald impertinence from her,” he said to himself, “but she won’t love Philippa any the better for having been the indirect cause of a snub. I had a presentiment that these people’s coming would somehow or other spoil the day. Even that madwoman of a maid of theirs daring to think of accosting Miss Raynsworth in that extraordinary way!” and his face darkened with annoyance as he recalled the incident which somehow still hovered uncomfortably about his memory.

Maida Lermont, ever alert and ever kind, noticed the touch of constraint in the air.

“What about the dog, Mr Gresham?” she said, brightly, “the dog whom you will not acknowledge as a member of your family? I should like to hear more about him—dogs always interest me, and I know few whose relationship *I* should not consider an honour. Is your cousin’s dog specially ugly or evil-minded or vulgar?”

“Vulgar,” ejaculated Aline Worthing; “how funny you are, Miss Lermont! Who ever heard of a *dog* being vulgar?”

Philippa’s eyes gleamed and she opened her lips impulsively as if about to say something. How she longed to “speak up” for dear Solomon!

Mr Gresham ignored Miss Worthing's remark.

"Ugly," he repeated, meditatively. "Yes, his ugliness is his beauty. I don't mind that. He, the animal in question, Solomon by name, is a thorough-bred dachshund. 'Evil-minded or vulgar'—no, Solomon must be acquitted of those charges. And to begin with, I never said I should not consider it an honour to be his blood-relation, if you remember. I only stated the fact—that I was *not* his cousin."

He looked up lazily, and again everybody laughed. And Mrs Worthing, whose good-humour had returned by this time, proceeded to amuse them all by various anecdotes illustrative of the eccentricity of the dachs and his master.

"They are quite inseparable," she added. "Last year at Wyverston you never saw one without the other. We used to meet them coming home from long rambles over the moors, the dog generally a few paces in front of the man, both looking so solemn and—so ugly."

"Mrs Worthing," said Mr Gresham, drily, "you must pardon my reminding you that the animal's master is my cousin."

No one was quite sure if he was annoyed or not, but Mrs Worthing laughed. She was not without some gift of repartee.

"Then," she said, "you must allow *me* to remark that the family likeness is not striking."

And Philippa fancied that the implied compliment was not altogether distasteful to her host.

Aline Worthing was sitting hear her. From time to time she had made feeble efforts to catch Miss Raynsworth's attention—there was something about Philippa which attracted the weaker girl—but hitherto without success. She now tried again.

"Do *you* think Mr Michael Gresham so very ugly?" she said, in a low voice. "Mamma is always saying so. I don't think I do—there is something rather nice about his face. But, oh,"—as she caught sight of the astonishment, which an acuter observer might have described as not

unmingled with alarm on her hearer's face—"I forgot, you were not at Wyverston. I suppose you don't know the other Mr Gresham?"

"It was my sister who was staying there last year," said Philippa, evasively.

"Yes, I know. Mrs Marmaduke Headfort. She is very pretty, though not the least like you," said the girl, simply, her thoughts already diverted from the consideration of Michael's personal appearance; "But it is so odd," she continued, "I have such a feeling that I have seen you before. And to-day, as soon as that visit to Wyverston was spoken of, I seemed to have seen you there. I suppose it is through knowing that Evelyn Headfort—she let me call her Evelyn—is your sister."

"Perhaps so," said Philippa. Then anxious at all costs to set this troublesome little person's little mind at rest, she went on. "Perhaps Evelyn spoke about me to you. She is rather fond of doing so."

"Yes, I daresay it was that," said Aline. "She did talk about you. I remember somebody said that she and I might be taken for sisters, and that made her say that her sister and she were not at all alike."

"Oh, Evey," thought Philippa, "rash is no word for you!" But aloud she said kindly, for something in the childish creature touched her: "Yes, you are both so fair, and your hair and eyes are just about the same colour."

Aline smiled with pleasure. And there was no flattery in what Philippa had said. She was certainly a very pretty little thing, though without a touch of Evelyn's charm of mind and originality.

And for the rest of the day she attached herself so steadily to Miss Raynsworth that Mr Gresham wished more devoutly than ever that he had restricted his party to its original limits.

Chapter Eighteen.

A Torn Frill.

The ball to which allusion has already been made, as the one gaiety of its kind that proved attainable for Philippa Raynsworth during her visit to Cannes, though a private one, was given at a hotel. And that hotel was the temporary residence of Mrs and Miss Worthing.

It came about, therefore, naturally enough that they were among the guests, though they had not previously been acquainted with the givers of the dance. For kind Lady Mary Bertram thought it would be “too bad” for a young creature like Aline Worthing to be actually on the spot, listening to the inspiring strains, which would probably prevent her going to sleep, without taking part in the entertainment. So she arranged that there should be an introduction, followed by a card of invitation.

Philippa had heard of the circumstance, but without paying special attention to it. The evening was not destined, however, to pass without her having reason to wish more fervently even than heretofore that the mother and daughter had selected some other route for their journey home from Italy, than that which had brought them to their present halting-place.

She had looked forward to the ball with considerable interest and a fair amount of girlish excitement, which Miss Lermont was glad to see. It was only natural and right that Philippa should enjoy herself and should wish to do so. And this dance was almost a début for her. In the Raynsworths’ very quiet life, occasions of the kind were rare, and since Philippa had been really grown-up, for various local reasons the neighbourhood of Greenleaves had been peculiarly dull.

Maida herself superintended her cousin’s toilet, and the result fully rewarded her. Philippa had never looked better, and her total absence of self-consciousness greatly added to the charm of her appearance. She was frankly pleased with her dress, and delighted that her kind friends approved of the whole effect, and then she thought no more about it.

“Of course I do not expect to dance very much,” she said to Maida, “and I hope Lady Mary will not trouble herself about partners for me. It is not as if we had been here all the winter and knew everybody there is to know; it is not even as if we lived in the ‘world’ at home, like the Worthings. Miss Worthing says they have found ever so many old friends and acquaintances here. But I shall enjoy it quite as much if I dance very little; it will be all so new to me, you see.”

She did not allow, even to her inmost self, that the knowledge of Mr Gresham’s presence, the certainty that he would not suffer the evening to pass without spending as much of it as good taste would permit by her side, had something to do with this foreseeing philosophy of hers. And Miss Lermont was the very last person to hint at such a thing.

“I daresay you will have quite as much dancing as you care about, dear,” she said, quietly, “I am sure you dance well; you have the look of it, and your partners will find that out quickly. Besides,” with a smile, “you must allow something for the charm of novelty. Those other girls who have been here all the winter have not *that* advantage over you.”

Philippa laughed.

“There will be the charm of novelty for me, assuredly,” she said.

And then, as the Bertrams’ carriage was announced, she kissed her cousin affectionately, promising to relate all her adventures in full the next morning.

“I am sure she will enjoy herself,” said Maida to Mr Raynsworth, as he came back from putting his daughter into the carriage.

“I have no doubt of it,” he said. “In fact she has enjoyed everything here. And it is all greatly due to you, Maida. I have never seen Philippa so bright and light-hearted in her life. And I am most thankful for it. She deserves to be happy.”

“Yes,” Miss Lermont agreed, warmly. “She does indeed.”

And Philippa did “enjoy herself.” To her the whole scene was almost one of enchantment, and she threw herself into it with no misgiving.

Personally, though in her inexperience she did not realise this, she was a great success, and she had certainly no reason to test the truth of her prediction that she would be equally happy if she danced little or much.

Mr Gresham was her most frequent partner; but from their previous acquaintance this seemed only natural. And he in no way obtruded the fact. He had no desire to make any gossip about himself or his affairs prematurely, and till he had entirely and completely decided that in Miss Raynsworth he had at last found his ideal, he would have considered any behaviour calling for such comment decidedly ill-judged and in bad taste.

Nevertheless he managed to appropriate to himself a good deal of the girl's time and attention. And the result of the ball at the Hôtel —, at which Philippa's bearing and the admiration she excited fulfilled his best anticipations, was such as to make him all but own to himself that in Miss Raynsworth he had found something very nearly approaching perfection.

The evening did not, however, pass, as has been said, without a sting of annoyance to poor Philippa. Among the maids deputed to attend to the ladies in the cloak-room was Mrs Worthing's "Bailey."

On arrival, the room being crowded and the attendants busy, Philippa did not notice the maid's presence. But later in the evening a slight accident happened to her dress, a frill of which was torn. Aline Worthing was standing near her at the time, and good-naturedly offered to go with her to have it mended, and without the least misgiving, Miss Raynsworth thanked her, and went with her to the cloak-room, now comparatively deserted.

"Bailey must be here; our maid, I mean," said Aline, glancing round. She was a little near-sighted. And at the name, Philippa's heart for a moment seemed to stand still.

"Oh, pray don't trouble to find your maid," she said, eagerly. "Any one can do what is required; a few pins indeed are all that is necessary."

But Miss Worthing, in the sort of enthusiasm she had conceived for her new friend, was not satisfied with half measures.

"Bailey! Bailey!" she called, as she caught sight of her attendant at the

other end of the room; “come quick. I want you to mend Miss Raynsworth’s skirt!”

The woman hastened towards the two girls; but as she drew near them a curious change came over her face, which had hitherto expressed only good-natured readiness to attend to her young lady’s summons. It grew hard and almost repellent in expression, with a look in the eyes of something so nearly approaching insolence that it made Philippa shudder. Yet Bailey was not a bad or vindictive woman. She was simply one of her class; perhaps specially prone, as Mrs Shepton had warned Philippa, to jealousy of any one younger or better-looking than herself, and, as a not unnatural result of this, to suspicion.

She smiled slightly as she addressed Aline, but the smile was not a pleasant one, and she seemed to avoid looking at Philippa, as if she wished to obtrude her ignoring of her.

“Yes, ma’am,” she said; “what is it I can do? Have you torn your dress?” and she glanced at Aline’s draperies with a kind of affectation of concern.

“No, no,” said the girl, impatiently, “didn’t you hear what I said? It is Miss Raynsworth’s dress that is torn, not mine. Get a needle and thread and mend it as quickly as you can.”

“Miss—Miss *Ray’s* dress?” said Bailey, slowly; “no, Miss Aline, I did not understand that Miss Ray was a friend of yours.”

And now, almost as if indifferent whether Miss Worthing noticed her extraordinary manner or not, she stared hard at Philippa, with the same half-impertinent, half-contemptuous smile on her face.

Philippa grew white; Aline grew red with shame.

“Bailey,” she said, indignantly, “what is the matter with you? Are you going out of your mind? Or have you been asleep and don’t know what you are saying?”

The maid in her turn reddened a little. She was evidently not accustomed to be spoken to so sharply, and it mortified her.

“I did not understand,” she muttered, confusedly, and she drew a thimble and needle-case out of her pocket. “If you will show me—” she began.

But Philippa by this time had quite recovered her self-possession. Every nerve in her body tingled with proud indignation. Whether wisely or unwisely, she felt that there was but one course possible for her to pursue.

“She shall not dare to think that I am afraid of her,” she said to herself.

And she fixed her eyes undauntedly on Bailey with a gesture of repelling her now offered services.

“No,” she said, icily. “I am much obliged to you, Miss Worthing, but I should much prefer one of the other maids mending my skirt,” and she turned away and walked slowly across the room to where one of the French chamber-maids was standing, looking rather astonished at the little scene, though she had no idea what it was all about. And just for a moment Bailey felt staggered. *Could* she have made a mistake as to the identity of this young lady and Phillis Ray, the maid, whom she had met and disliked at Wyverston? The very idea frightened her; what *would* her mistress say to her if “Miss Aline” told of her rudeness? Bailey’s imagination was well stocked with sensational fiction; she had read of extraordinary likenesses, leading to still more extraordinary mistakes. But no, a moment’s reflection satisfied her again. There were other coincidences—here, at Cannes, this girl was figuring as Miss Raynsworth, sister to Mrs Marmaduke Headfort (for Bailey knew all the small talk and gossip of the place already); there, at Wyverston, she had been the same lady’s *maid*. There was some mystery, some secret, and Bailey’s sensational novels came in handy again, as suggesting reasons and clues by the score. She had *not* made a mistake.

All this passed through her mind so rapidly that she was quite prepared with an answer when Aline, waiting an instant till Philippa was out of earshot, turned upon her again hotly.

“Bailey,” she said, “I am utterly ashamed of you. I do not know what has come over you, but I warn you I shall tell mamma all about it.”

Somewhat to her surprise, Bailey did not seem impressed by what she

said. Aline was in general very mild and gentle, and Bailey was an old servant. Miss Worthing would not have dared to speak so strongly to her, had she not herself for once been really angry, and she was half prepared for something rude in reply. But the maid answered calmly enough:

“Of course, miss, you must tell your mamma what you like. But I shall have something to tell her too—something that will surprise her more than anything you tell her of *my* behaviour. And I take blame to myself that I have not spoken out before; so particular as your mamma has always been about you.”

“What do you mean, Bailey? Say what you mean, or I will go straight into the ball-room and bring mamma here,” said Aline, beginning to be vaguely frightened as well as angry.

“As you like, Miss Aline,” returned the maid, curtly; “but—”

Aline, glancing round, saw at this moment Philippa, her skirt repaired, coming slowly towards her. Something in Miss Raynsworth’s cool and stately bearing at once reassured the younger girl, and afraid of the *possibility* of repeated insolence on Bailey’s part, she hurried forward to meet her companion.

“Thank you so much for waiting for me,” said Philippa. “I hope you will not have missed all this dance.”

“Oh, no; I don’t mind,” said Aline, confusedly. “Miss Raynsworth,” she went on, “I don’t know what to say. I don’t know how to apologise to you for Bailey’s insolence. I don’t know what has come over her, unless she is going out of her mind. She was never like that before. I shall tell mamma about it at once.”

“Oh, pray don’t,” said Philippa. “Do not spoil the evening by anything disagreeable. Wait till you are in your own rooms afterwards. It is really making too much of it to say anything to Mrs Worthing at all, but still I can understand your feeling about it.”

It would be worse than useless she well knew to persuade the girl not to tell her mother, even could she herself have condescended to do so. For

she now felt little doubt that Bailey would communicate her suspicions, whatever form they had taken, to her mistress; and any check from herself as to Aline's account of the strange occurrence would only lower her position.

"I can't understand *her*" repeated Aline. "She really looked at you as if she hated you, Miss Raynsworth. Can she be confusing you with some one else? Now I come to think of it, she spoke of you as 'Miss Ray,' did she not?"

"Yes," said Philippa, "I think she did. I daresay she did take me for—for another person."

"There *are* very strange likenesses sometimes between people who have nothing to do with each other," said Aline, looking perplexed.

But by this time they were entering the ball-room, and Mr Gresham, who had been waiting about the door for Philippa's return, came forward to claim a dance, and at the same time Captain Bertram asked Aline to make up a Lancers set with him. So the two girls were separated. Nor did they meet again, except for a hurried good-bye at the end.

Poor Philippa, she would gladly have been left by herself for a few moments, to recover her composure and think over the disagreeable shock she had just received. For the brave front she had put upon it was only in appearance; in reality she was miserably upset.

"You are looking very pale, Miss Raynsworth," said Mr Gresham. "Are you tired? Pray don't dance if you would rather sit quietly and rest."

"No, thank you," Philippa replied. "I would rather dance," which, under the circumstances—"sitting out" only meaning a *tête-à-tête* with her partner—was certainly true. "I am really not tired," she went on, "though I have been dancing so energetically as to tear my dress, you saw?"

"That was that clumsy Delmaine's fault," he replied. "I saw how it happened. I was waiting to catch you as you came back from the cloak-room. It is all right now, I suppose?" with a glance at her skirts. It would have annoyed him to find himself entangled in his partner's torn flounces before the whole ball-room!

“Oh, yes,” she replied. “I got it mended by one of the maids in the cloak-room.”

The word—or was it an unconscious intuition of what was passing in the girl’s mind?—caught Mr Gresham’s ear.

“Oh, by-the-by,” he said, “I wanted to ask you something. Do give me leave to speak to Mrs Worthing about that insolent maid of hers. I really think she must be insane. I cannot forget about it, and I do not think such a thing should be allowed to pass.”

Philippa smiled—had Mr Gresham been more discriminating, her smile would have struck him as a very bitter one.

“Oh, dear,” she said, “I wonder at your remembering about that absurd thing. Surely it should be treated as beneath contempt.”

Mr Gresham looked dissatisfied.

“You might understand,” he said, speaking in a lower tone of voice, and with something of reproach, “You might understand how inexpressibly annoying it was to me for anything of the kind to happen to *you*; above all, when you were in the position of my guest.”

He glanced at her with a kind of delicate inquiry in her eyes, and the accent on the pronoun made Philippa’s cheeks flush.

“Don’t mind about it, I beg of you,” she said, earnestly. “Promise me you will not mention it to Mrs Worthing. I scarcely know her at all, and—and—she might not be nice about it. You have been so kind,” she went on; “you have done so much to add to the pleasure of my time here, that I should hate to think it could be associated with anything disagreeable. Please promise me,” she repeated, in conclusion.

He smiled.

“I am afraid I should find it difficult not to promise you anything you liked to ask,” he said. “Well, then, we will let the matter drop. I am so glad, so delighted that you have enjoyed your visit here; and if I have in the very least added to your amusement, as you so kindly say, I need scarcely

assure you that I am repaid a thousandfold."

Then he went on to speak, in his most attractive way, of meeting again in England; of Evelyn and her husband; of "Charley," whom he had heard of and would be so pleased to meet; exerting himself so tactfully to talk of the things which he knew interested her the most, that Philippa forgot the painful shock she had experienced, or only recalled it to make light of her own exaggerated fears.

"After all," she said to herself, "at the very worst I did nothing wrong, nothing really to feel ashamed of. And if—if I were ever to get to know Mr Gresham better—really very well indeed, I could make him understand it all. Even that rough, surly Michael was kind about it, and Bernard is infinitely gentler and less harsh judging than he. No; I need not be unhappy." And that night when she passed Maida's room, of which the door was slightly ajar, and heard Miss Lermont's voice saying, softly:

"Philippa, dear, is that you? Have you enjoyed yourself?" she answered brightly, as she went in for a moment:

"Enjoyed myself? I should think so. I have never been so happy in my life."

The words and tone gave Miss Lermont much subject for thought. Was this to be the girl's fate, then? Was she destined to be one of the favoured few to whom the good things of life come almost before life has really begun? Was it to be a case of "true love running smooth," one of the exceptions to prove the rule? It looked like it. And in the eyes of the world—and that not of the thoroughly "worldly" world either—such a marriage for Philippa Raynsworth would be not only brilliant, but excellent in every possible way.

"Yet," thought Maida to herself, "yet, *is* he really good enough for her?"

Forty-eight hours after the ball saw Mr Raynsworth and his daughter started on their journey home.

Chapter Nineteen.

Good News.

“Well, mother,” said Evelyn Headfort, one morning, a fortnight or so after the return of the two wanderers to Greenleaves, “I hope you are satisfied *now* that it was not my fancy about Mr Gresham? I have not said anything hitherto about it. I thought I would wait till you could judge for yourself; but I am sure you have had time to hear everything Phil has to tell by this.”

“But,” began Mrs Raynsworth, “if there were anything of that kind to tell, Philippa would be more likely to tell nothing.”

She smiled a little at her own rather “Irish” way of expressing herself.

“Of course, mother dear,” said Evelyn, with a touch of impatience. “Of course I know that. What I mean is, that you can *judge*. I don’t dream for a moment that she is the sort of girl to tell even *you* of the conquests she has made. But to me—and I don’t suppose Philippa has said as much to me as to you. I have been so busy, you see, getting ready for Wyverston,” for the Marmaduke Headforts were on the eve of starting for a visit to the north, “and Duke wanting me every two minutes—but even judging by what she has said to *me*, I feel no doubt about it whatever. It is in her own hands. He fell in love with her that first afternoon at Dorriford. I shall always say so.”

“Well, time will show,” replied Mrs Raynsworth. She seemed slightly nervous, or rather disinclined to discuss the subject. But Evelyn, though a little disappointed, was not suspicious of there being any other reason for her mother’s reticence than Mrs Raynsworth’s extreme, perhaps exaggerated delicacy.

“I don’t know about that,” she replied. “There are ways and means of *preventing* ‘time’s showing.’ It does not do to be a fatalist in such matters, any more than in any others, mamma. If Phil chooses to—well, to discourage its going any further, either actively or tacitly, nothing is easier than for a girl to discourage a man; no one will ever believe there was

anything in it! At least no one would ever be sure that there had been. I do not call that ‘time’s showing;’ *I* should call it girl’s perversity.”

Mrs Raynsworth hesitated.

“I think you can trust Philippa,” she said. “There is not a touch of a flirt or coquette about her. If she had real grounds for believing that any man she felt *she* could care for, cared for her, she would behave with simplicity and straightforwardness, I am sure.”

“Perhaps she would,” rejoined Mrs Headfort, “but how about what you call ‘real grounds?’ Short of putting it into so many words, I doubt if she ever *would* believe it, and till she did, she would be tacitly discouraging without meaning it, and then the ‘so many words’ would never come! It is a vicious circle, when you have to deal with any one so fantastic as Phil.” And to herself she added, “And I do believe mamma rather encourages it in her. They are both too impracticable.”

Poor Evelyn, she was feeling put out. For she had, to tell the truth, been putting considerable restraint on herself not to cross-question her sister. And she had only refrained from doing so in the hope of being rewarded by a good comfortable “talk over” of the whole affair with her mother before leaving for Wyverston.

And Mrs Raynsworth understood her perfectly, and was sorry for her disappointment. But there was another motive for her own uncommunicativeness. Philippa had told her *all* that had happened—the last annoying “rencontre” with the maid, Bailey, as well as the first. And the mother’s heart was sore—sorer than she would for worlds have allowed Philippa to suspect. Was this miserable piece of girlish folly never to be forgotten? Was it to cloud her daughter’s life and prospects always? For Mrs Raynsworth knew the world and society much better than might have been supposed from her present quiet and almost isolated life. Her youth had been spent in a very different *milieu* from the simple though refined home which was all that her scholarly husband was able to give her. And she knew how the least breath of anything against a girl—any, even harmless, piece of fun or thoughtlessness may be magnified or distorted—above all, where there is any element of spite or jealousy present—into grotesque, but none the less fatally damaging

proportions.

“I almost wish,” thought Philippa’s mother, “that I had not made her promise never to tell the story without first consulting me. Had she been free to confide in Maida Lermont, for instance, Maida might have found some way of telling it to Mr Gresham, simply and unexaggeratedly; *if*, that is to say, Maida has noticed anything on his side of what Evey suspects. Maida is very clever and tactful—could I write to her?” But this idea was dismissed as soon as it suggested itself. It was too repellent to all Mrs Raynsworth’s instincts—as if her child, her noble Philippa, needed “explaining,” apologising for!—not to speak of the, to such a woman as herself, inexpressible indelicacy of presupposing any special interest in her daughter, before the man in question had unmistakably declared it!

“No,” she decided, “I can do nothing. I could *speak* to Maida, possibly to her mother. But writing anything of the kind, putting it on paper, I cannot.”

Perhaps she was wrong. A great many things in this often crooked life of ours might be put straight if people were less timorous of speaking out, of their doing so being misunderstood. But for many, life-long suffering, death of every hope, seem preferable to even the shadow of indelicacy. And of such were Philippa and her mother.

And then again came a species of reaction to Mrs Raynsworth, much as had been the case that last evening at Cannes with Philippa.

“I am surely after all exaggerating it,” thought she, “I am letting myself get morbid; at the very worst there is nothing to be really ashamed of in what the foolish child did, and in the *motives* which led to her doing it there is much to be proud of. Any man who was worthy of Philippa, who could rise above conventional notions of propriety where higher feelings called for doing so, *would* understand and would scarcely blame her, though as we—as her father and I do—he might regret, bitterly regret, that she had been so rash. No; I will not let myself be unhappy about it, for there is no real reason, and Philippa would find out if I were so. Her intuitions are so quick and accurate. And, above all, *she* must not be allowed to grow morbid about it.”

It would have been an unspeakable comfort to the mother to have

confided the whole story, with its sequence of anxieties and misgivings, to her eldest son. But this she had deliberately decided not to do. Charley was so proud of Philippa; he loved to guard her from every touch of roughness or coarseness, as if she were too good for common life at all; it might be exaggerated, but it was very sweet and tender all the same, and his mother could not face the thought of his pain and indignation did he ever come to know what his sister had done, and the detestable gossip and comments that even now might result from it. No, Charley must never know.

And the unselfish determination to keep her uneasiness to herself made Mrs Raynsworth even more consistently cheerful than usual, so that Philippa felt herself justified in dismissing her misgivings, and now and then, though rarely, for the girl knew the complexities of her own character and its weaknesses, when few would have suspected them—just now and then she allowed herself a little day-dreaming, of radiant, rose-coloured possibilities, whose beauty any more definite picturing would, to such a nature as hers, have destroyed.

And some weeks passed, happily and peacefully. Evelyn and her husband stayed nearly a month at Wyverston, and Philippa enjoyed to the full her mother and elder brother's society. Little Vanda was no trouble now, for she was fast outgrowing her delicacy, and the weather was lovely. And the letters from Wyverston were cheering in the extreme; nothing could be more satisfactory, wrote Evelyn, than the progressing friendship between the squire and her husband.

"They all like him, I can see," she wrote, "and who could help it? Duke is so good and so simple and single-minded. I feel almost certain something will be arranged before we leave this, so that we need never go back to that dreadful India again."

"Is not that good news?" said Mrs Raynsworth, looking up from the letter which she had been reading aloud.

"Excellent," said Philippa, heartily. "I wonder where their home will be. Does Evey say," she went on, rather thoughtlessly, for Charles was present, and the subject of her sister's maid was always a somewhat nervous one, "does she say how Berthe is getting on?" Berthe was a

French maid whom Miss Lermont had found for Mrs Marmaduke Headfort.

“Very well, indeed,” said her mother, consulting the letter afresh. “Ah, yes, here it is: ‘Berthe is shaping very satisfactorily. There have been several inquiries as to why I had parted with—’ Oh, yes, nothing of consequence,” Mrs Raynsworth went on, confusedly; “let me see, what more does Evey say? ‘I am so extremely glad that Berthe neither speaks nor understands English at present. It prevents all possibility of gossip, and—’”

“Gossip,” interrupted Charley; “what can Evey mean? She—we—have no reason to fear servants’ gossip. Surely,” and he flushed a little, “surely Evelyn is not vulgar-minded enough to be afraid of her maid’s talking of the simple way we live—of our not being rich?”

“Charley!” said Philippa. “How can you dream of such a thing? Of course not; but Duke’s position among his relations is a rather delicate one. There might be plenty of gossip about it.”

She felt herself crimson as she spoke; she hated herself for the species of subterfuge she was condescending to, and afterwards she felt that it had been scarcely necessary. Charley was not of a suspicious nature.

Her suggestion of a natural reason for her sister’s fear of gossip seemed to serve its purpose. Charley gave a kind of grunt of semi-apology to the absent Evelyn, and no more was said.

But later in the day, when Philippa and her mother were by themselves, Mrs Raynsworth alluded again to the letter.

“There are one or two things Evelyn asked me to tell you, Philippa,” she said. “One was that, as I knew she intended to do, she managed to pay a private visit to that good Mrs Shepton, and to give her the little present I sent her. And she says she had a ‘charming talk with her,’ and feels so much happier now that Mrs Shepton knows more about how it all happened.”

“I am sure *I* was candid enough about it,” said Philippa. “I scarcely see what more there was for Evey to tell.”

“Not much, I daresay. But I think too that it is satisfactory and only fair to you yourself, under the circumstances, that what you told should have been, as it were, endorsed by a member of your family. And who so well able to do it as Evelyn? I know for *her* own sake, she was anxious to show Mrs Shepton that she had not joined you in *planning* the thing, though she had not resoluteness enough to stop it. And *I* am glad for the housekeeper to know very distinctly what your father and I felt and do feel about it.”

There was a touch of coldness in Mrs Raynsworth’s tone, and a slight inference of reproach which her daughter’s tender conscience felt to be not entirely undeserved. She had not answered as gently as she might have done to her mother.

“Oh, mamma,” she exclaimed. “Of course I know you are always right and wise, but somehow any allusion to that—that time at Wyverston makes me nervous and cross.”

Mrs Raynsworth patted her gently. Philippa had crept up close to her. Evelyn’s letter was still lying open before her.

“There is a long postscript, I see, mamma,” she said. “You did not read it aloud, did you? Is it anything private?”

Mrs Raynsworth hesitated.

“It is and it isn’t,” she replied. “But of course Evelyn would leave it to my discretion to tell *you* or not. She does ask me not to speak of it to your father or Charley, as Duke wants to tell them himself, once it is settled. Did you know, Philippa—no, I am sure you did not—that the Headforts have considerable property in —shire, not far from that place of Mr Gresham’s, Merle-in-the-Wold?”

Philippa looked up with interest.

“No, indeed,” she said. “I had no idea of it.”

“Nor had Evelyn; it is natural enough, however, that she should not have heard of it, for it is not what agents call a ‘residential estate.’ There was no house. But quite lately the old squire has bought more land there, and

on it there *is* a small house, a sort of good farm-house, which might easily be converted into a very charming little place. And with the increased size of the property he wants some one there to look after it. *This* is what he is talking about to Duke; his idea is for Duke to leave the army and settle down there. They are talking it over busily, Evey says. Of course, Duke is sorry to give up his profession, but then, as the squire truly says, there is the future to think of—his children and—" Here Mrs Raynsworth consulted the letter. "'He says, too,' Evey writes, 'that if Duke's future is to be that of a country proprietor, the sooner he learns some details of the business the better. That is the way he puts it, you see—half jokingly. But he is too kind and good to mislead us. And in many ways —shire would suit us better at present than farther north. I shall get quite strong in time, no doubt, but India has tried me, and Vanda is not too robust either. Phil will remember what a lovely part of the country it is near Merle-in-the-Wold.' Ah, yes," Mrs Raynsworth went on, "that shows that she meant to tell you. She adds also something about Mr Gresham's being such a pleasant neighbour."

"It does sound delightful," said Philippa, with sparkling eyes. "I do hope it will be soon decided about I shall have to try to forget about it, or I shall be able to think of nothing else."

"It is not likely that we shall be kept very long in suspense," said her mother, "for Evelyn and Duke will be back in a week, and by that time they are sure to know."

Even a week, however, seems to extend itself magically, if one—especially if "one" is young and eager—has any great reason for wishing it over. But the first glance at her sister and brother-in-law's bright faces as the familiar old Marlby fly drew up at the Greenleaves door told that all was right, and Philippa's heart rebounded with joy.

"Isn't it too lovely, Phil?" whispered Evelyn already, as they were crossing the hall. "Mamma has told you what we have been hoping, hasn't she? I told her she might, though Duke wanted to tell papa and Charley himself."

"And is it really settled, then?" asked Phil; "if so, it *is* almost too lovely as you say."

“Yes, it is settled, quite settled. Duke wrote about retiring before we left Wyverston. That is the only melancholy bit of it, for he has been so happy in his regiment, and he loves his work. It was better for him to do it there—on the spot, as it were—when the *family* feeling could keep him up to knowing it was right. Poor old Duke! The squire did so understand and liked him the better for it, I could see. And I was glad for them all to feel that there *is* sacrifice even in his accepting the position of future head of the house. And—but I must wait till afterwards to tell you everything. I think I shall have to talk for a week without stopping, once Duke lets me.”

They were in the drawing-room by this time, where all the others were waiting to receive the travellers. For the Raynsworths were “old-fashioned” enough to be a very united family. The comings and goings of any among them were of interest to the others; their joys and sorrows were common to all, and Duke Headfort, from his somewhat lonely and isolated position before his marriage, seemed at Greenleaves, for the first time, to learn what home life and home affections are.

And even now, when his own kinsfolk had so unexpectedly made those friendly overtures to him, and his future position bade fair to be a prominent and prosperous one, Captain Headfort was far too steady and loyal to change.

“*Whatever* the squire does for me, and however kind and cousinly they all are,” he said to his wife, “I can never but know that the *first* reason is that I am a Headfort. They thought little and cared less about me till fate, in a sense, forced them to do so. And I don’t in the least blame them. It was only natural, and I am grateful to them now for the kind and hearty way in which they are acting. For at best it must be terribly bitter to them to see a stranger in their son’s place. But they can never be to me what your people are, Evey. Your dear people, who welcomed me as a son and a brother, as cordially as if I had been a duke or a millionaire.”

“Far more than if you had been either one or the other,” said Evelyn, adding, with a smile: “but then, you know, Duke, it was partly for my sake, because I had fallen in love with you.”

“Well, what is done for your sake only doubles its value in my eyes,” he said.

It can readily be imagined, in such circumstances, how *very* good the good news the young husband and wife brought back seemed to the little circle at home. Almost indeed at first it sounded “too good to be true,” and it was not till Captain Headfort, with the practical matter-of-fact grasp of things which was a part of his character, went on to give details about going down to see the place and settle what had to be done, and how soon they could take up their residence there, and so on, that they all began to breathe more freely and feel that it was *real*.

“You must come with us, Phil, when we go to spy the land,” said Evelyn. “We shall be ever so much the better for your advice and taste.”

And this time Philippa brought forward no excuses for not falling in with her sister’s wishes, though Brierly—Evelyn’s new home—was within a drive of Merle-in-the-Wold.

Chapter Twenty.

A Visitor in a Hansom.

A day or two after the Headforts' return to Greenleaves, Philippa got a letter from Maida Lermont. The Dorriford people were now at *home* again, but they had travelled back by slow stages, and this was only the second time that any direct news of them had come since Mr Raynsworth and his daughter had left Cannes.

Miss Lermont wrote cheerfully. She was feeling so well, she said, far better than "this time last *year*," and she was looking forward to seeing her cousin before long, though how or when exactly she could not say—it was more "a sort of presentiment." She gave a few details, with the graphic interest of touch peculiar to her, of their journey homewards and certain new sights and experiences it had offered. And then at the close came a mention of the name which, almost unconsciously to herself, Philippa had been looking for all through the letter.

"I hear from the Bertrams that Mr Gresham has been down at Merle, but only for a short time," she wrote. "They will be seeing him in town next week when they go up. He has been very busy about something or other, I forget what—oh, yes, I know—some electioneering through an unexpected vacancy." And at the *very* end she added: "I forgot to give you Aline Worthing's love, though I faithfully promised her to do so. They left Cannes the same day you did, but by a different route, so I did not see them again there, but we came across them in Paris."

These two fragments of gossip did not detract from the generally pleasurable feeling which Miss Lermont's letter left on her cousin's mind. She was glad to know that Mr Gresham had been "unusually busy," for—a girl's fancy is an unmanageable thing—in spite of her strong self-control, Philippa, at the bottom of her heart, knew that she was not always mistress of her own thoughts. And now that several weeks had elapsed since her return and his, for he had told her he meant to be soon in England again, and he had made no sign, not even a letter to Evelyn, certain painful possibilities had now and then suggested themselves. Had the woman, Bailey, who, for some reason or other, seemed to have

become her enemy, had Bailey done or said something? Had she retailed her discovery to Mrs Worthing, and had Mrs Worthing—a faint sick feeling came over Philippa at this stage of her conjectures, and she went no further with them, for what sort of interpretation a coarse, vulgar mind might give to what she had done, she was at a loss to imagine.

“She would probably say I had done it for a wager, or some hateful practical joke—just the kind of thing *he* would abhor,” she thought.

So in addition to the satisfaction of learning that Mr Gresham had been unusually occupied, was that of hearing that the Worthings had left Cannes so quickly.

“They cannot have met again,” thought Philippa to herself. And her heart grew lighter at once.

“If only,” she went on thinking, “if *only* I knew him well enough, or—or had any reason for telling him all about it—the whole story—*what* a relief it would be! And even Michael Gresham, rough and ready as he is, *so* different from his cousin, once he knew the whole, was really kind and I don’t think he looked down upon me for it. What he hated, I can see now, was the feeling that I was deceitful and unstraightforward. And Mr Gresham understands shades of thought and feeling so wonderfully—almost like a woman. Oh, no, it could not do me any harm in any real friend’s opinion if I could tell it all myself in the first place.”

And perhaps she was right.

“Philippa,” said Evelyn, one morning, “I have ever so many messages for you from Mrs Shepton—dutiful regards or affectionate respects, or something of that kind. She was sorely put to it to find out how to express herself correctly, with proper respect, I mean, and yet with the affection she really does feel for you. She *is* a nice woman and so devoted to Bonny. I only hope—” But here Mrs Marmaduke Headfort hesitated.

“Go on,” said Philippa, “I don’t mind any allusions now. And I love Mrs Shepton. Nothing she could say would vex me.”

“You are wrong for once,” said Evelyn. “It wasn’t anything about you I was going to say. It was only that I do devoutly hope if ever I come to be

—well, at the head of things at Wyverston, that I shall find Mrs Shepton still there. And I hesitated, because it seems horridly cold-blooded to think of the dear old squire's death."

"Yes," her sister agreed, "it does. Still he is an old man, and of course he now *wants* Duke to be recognised as his heir. That makes a difference. I should not think Mrs Shepton at all a lover of change. I daresay she will end her days at Wyverston. She has only been in two places in her life—first as nurse in one of the Gresham families, and then, after a few years of married life, as housekeeper at Wyverston. And her affections seem divided between the two families."

"I don't think she cares much about Bernard Gresham, *our* Mr Gresham," says Evelyn. "It is Michael she is so devoted to, and that is natural, I suppose, as it was in *his* family she was nurse, though she had a good deal to do with Bernard too—he was so much with his relations as a child. She told me some interesting things about the Greshams, by-the-by. Did you know that *Michael's* father was the elder brother, not Bernard's, and that the grand-uncle—grand-uncle to these young men, I mean—from whom Bernard inherited Merle and all his wealth, left it away from Michael on purpose?"

"N-no," Philippa replied. "At least I don't know anything distinctly. Mr Gresham, in talking of his cousin one day, alluded to his having had troubles, and spoke of him as having behaved very well, or very unselfishly or something."

How clearly she remembered the very spot at which they were standing—in the grounds of the old château—when Mr Gresham had alluded to Michael! "A bit of a hero," he had called him, though he had added what, though vaguely, pleased her less, something about "quixotry."

"That was nice of Bernard Gresham," said Evelyn, "for the position is a delicate one, and many men without his good feeling and *perfect* good taste might almost have taken a dislike to Michael; the association of having in a sense supplanted him must be rather painful."

"Supplanted him!" repeated Philippa. "I don't understand what you mean?"

“Oh, no, of course—you know so little. It was this: *Michael’s* father was the elder brother, and though, by all accounts, very charming, he was terribly wild. He ran through all he had and half or wholly broke his wife’s heart. He died when Michael was about eighteen, leaving any amount of debts. They *had* been very well off, much better than Bernard’s parents, who were in India or somewhere—his father, that is to say—his mother died when he was born, and he was practically brought up at his uncle’s. Then his father died, just before Michael’s, so the two young men came next, though the property was not entailed. Well, the old uncle was furious at the way Michael’s father had behaved, but that would not have made any difference to Michael, whom he liked and respected. But he would do nothing to help to pay his dead nephew’s debts, and Michael and his mother were broken-hearted about them. Both on account of the disgrace to Mr Henry Gresham’s memory and also because some of the debts were unusually bad ones; he had borrowed money from all sorts of people who could ill afford to lose it, poor relations of his wife’s, even poorer people still, whom he had cajoled by his charming manners. It was actual ruin to several. Michael pleaded and pleaded with the old uncle till at last he got into a sort of rage and said that for peace sake he would pay them off, if Michael would renounce all expectation of being his heir. And Michael *did*, for his mother’s sake more even than for the other reasons, and he never let her know at what a cost his father’s memory had been cleared. She died soon after, in comparative peace of mind. And he had to face the world practically penniless. He knew it; he knew the old man would keep to what he had said, and he did.”

“Did he leave Michael *nothing*?” said Philippa.

“Nothing. His name was not mentioned in the will. The uncle might have modified it if he had lived longer, but he was very old and he died suddenly.”

“And,” Philippa went on, with some hesitation, “has her—has Mr Gresham done nothing for his cousin?”

Evelyn shook her head.

“I can’t say. I didn’t like to ask Mrs Shepton anything that she did not tell, but she is a very fair, just-minded woman. She did not say anything about

Mr Gresham—Bernard, I mean—one way or the other. But she said a great deal about how proud Michael is. I should think it is most probable that Bernard has offered to help him, but that he has refused it."

"Yes," said Philippa, consideringly. "And then besides if—if he looked upon his arrangement with his grand-uncle as a compact, I daresay he would think it not strictly honourable to take any of his money, even from its present possessor. Still—"

"Still what?" said Evelyn, with some impatience.

"I was only going to say that I think Mr Gresham might have done—well *something* to help Michael on."

"And how do we know that he has not? I feel almost certain he has *tried* to do so at any rate. You remember he used the word 'quixotry' in talking to you of Michael. Ten to one he was thinking of his cousin's refusal to take anything from him."

"Perhaps so," said Philippa, somewhat absently. Evelyn felt slightly irritated with her, and half inclined to blame herself for her own communicativeness.

"Philippa is so fantastic," she thought. "Very likely she will now begin making a hero in earnest of Michael Gresham, and blaming Bernard for what he probably deserves no blame for."

But she scarcely understood her sister. Philippa's thoughts were certainly occupied with the two men, but not exactly to the disparagement of the elder. She was only comparing the two in her mind and saying to herself how little she would have credited Michael with the delicacy and sensitiveness of *feeling* he evidently possessed.

"He must be almost a grand character," she thought. "And I only saw his roughness and hardness. I never would have thought him so capable of devotion as he must have been to his mother. What a hard life he has had! It makes it seem easy for any one to be kind and considerate as Mr Gresham is, when one knows how smooth things have been for him in comparison. Still, prosperity *might* have made him hard and indifferent; it often does. And that I cannot think he would ever be."

She was right—right, that is to say, so far as a large nature can ever fairly judge a small one. Careless or indifferent to his cousin it was not in Bernard Gresham to be, nor forgetful of the kindness shown him throughout his youth by Michael's parents. And Evelyn's belief that the struggles the latter had gone through were far more due to his own determined independence than to Bernard's selfishness or neglect, hit the mark pretty closely.

The very evening of the day on which the sisters had had this talk about the Greshams, a *tête-à-tête*, in which they themselves—Miss Raynsworth more especially—were the principal subject of discussion, took place in Michael Gresham's rooms.

He had dined and was preparing for an evening's study, for he was working very hard just then at the higher branches of technical knowledge connected with his profession, when the sound of a hansom stopping at his door made him glance out of the window with a touch of curiosity. For the street was a quiet one, and the neighbourhood was not fashionable and callers on himself were rare.

But that this caller was one of such, there could be no doubt, for standing on the pavement as he paid the cab, Michael recognised the familiar figure of his cousin Bernard.

He stepped back from the window with a murmur of impatience. Bernard's visits, though infrequent, were not flying ones, and Michael had mapped out his evening's work. There was no use in grumbling, however, and he met the new-comer pleasantly, as the door opened and the small boy who acted as page on such occasions announced Mr Gresham.

"Lucky to find you in, Mike," was Bernard's first greeting. "I would have telegraphed to say I was coming, but I only made up my mind to try to see you half an hour ago, so I thought I would just chance it."

"I am not often out in the evening," said Michael. "I don't go in for dinner-parties and that sort of thing, as you know."

"I have missed you sometimes, however," said his cousin. "Last year I looked you up two or three times, don't you remember? without ever finding you in."

“Last year I stayed later at the office. I very often didn’t come home to dinner,” said Michael, quietly. “This year it is different. I have work that I can do better at home.”

Bernard glanced round the room as his cousin ceased speaking. Michael’s “home” was a somewhat dreary one, and somehow, though he had honestly meant to do his best for the man who had been all but a brother to him in bygone days, Bernard Gresham never realised Michael’s uphill life and struggles without a twinge of something like self-reproach.

“Are you satisfied with the berth you have got?” he said, abruptly. “Are these fellows—Matterson and Wheeler, I mean—treating you properly?”

“Quite properly—quite fairly, that is to say, thanks to you,” Michael replied, for the one thing he had accepted at his cousin’s hands was a substantial guarantee, which in due course was to pave the way towards his being taken in as a working partner. “One does not look for more than that in business matters. I have never expected ready roasted larks to fall to my share; but I am quite satisfied. Once I am thoroughly qualified in this special department,” and he glanced at the papers strewn on the table, “I have no doubt the permanent arrangement will be settled. But talking of roast larks or roast anything, have you dined, Bernard?”

Mr Gresham nodded.

“Yes, thank you, all right. I had something at my club early, on my way here. Have *you* dined?”

Just then there came a scratching at the door.

“Yes,” said Michael, as he got up to open it. “I take my meals down-stairs. That’s one thing I can’t stand, eating and working in the same room. And Solomon,” as the dachshund walked in solemnly, “Solomon has dined too, but he stays behind for a nap.”

Bernard eyed the dog with a smile that was not all amiability.

“Really, Michael,” he observed, “you are too ridiculous about that animal.”

“Was that all you had to say to me?” said Michael, carelessly. He knew his cousin quite well enough to be sure that there was some special reason for his visit, a reason which it was not altogether easy to express, for he was conscious that Bernard was beating about the bush.

“No,” Mr Gresham replied, with a touch of sharpness, “it was not all. I want to ask your advice. But besides that, you have no reason, Mike, to say or to think that I am indifferent about you. I did want to know how you were getting on.”

“All right, old fellow. I have never said or thought that you were indifferent,” Michael answered, and his smile was frank and cordial. “But what is it that you want to consult me about? You are not thinking of getting married, are you?”

“I don’t know,” was the reply.

Michael looked at him keenly.

“That means, I should say, that you are,” he said.

In his turn, Bernard fixed his eyes on his cousin.

“What makes you think so? Have you heard any gossip about it?”

“I don’t know if you would call it gossip or not. I have heard that you seemed—well, a good deal struck by some one you met at Cannes. But you need not mind about it; it came round to me in the most innocent way, though I cannot tell you how.”

In point of fact, Michael’s informant was his old nurse, who had mentioned in a letter to him some allusions which Mrs Marmaduke Headfort had allowed herself to make, in her confidential talks with the housekeeper, to Mr Gresham’s admiration for her sister. But no comments, for or against, had been added by Mrs Shepton.

Bernard did not appear annoyed.

“Oh, at *Cannes*,” he repeated. “It is a nest of gossip about the English visitors, like all those places. And possibly,” he went on more slowly,

“there was some little ground for it.”

“Then you need not trouble to tell me the young lady’s name,” said Michael, quickly, “which, to my mind, is always preferable in such circumstances. But taking that for known, what is it you want to consult me about? How can you—” He stopped short.

“Perhaps she has given you no encouragement to go further?”

A shade of irritation darkened Bernard’s face.

“On the contrary—” he began. Then he, too, stopped short. He had no wish to pose as a *fat*, even to Michael. “We need not enter into that part of it,” he said, composedly. “The thing is this, and, as you like plain speaking, you must not turn upon me, and call me coarse, or unchivalrous, or anything of that kind—the facts are these: I left Cannes all but decided in my own mind to—to—well, to go through with it. But circumstances delayed my return home, or, rather I should say, my return to my usual life. I was so busy about that canvassing business. And, on the whole, I thought it was just as well; I wanted to think it all over. Well, soon I was at leisure again; one day in London, when I was just considering how best to proceed, *not* having cooled upon it, I met some people you too know. The Worthings.”

Michael crushed up a sheet of paper lying on the table by his hand.

“Indeed,” he said. “And what about that? Has Mrs Worthing not relinquished her hopes for the fair Aline—poor little soul—and is she waxing spiteful?”

“She is far too clever to *show* her spite, whether she feels it or not,” said Mr Gresham. “And she is too cautious to state anything distinctly untrue. I can’t make it out. With all reasonable allowance for her—well, spitefulness is as good a word as any—I cannot understand her saying what she has done, unless—unless she has some facts to back her?”

“What did she say?” asked Michael, and he threw the ball of crushed paper into the fire, with a sort of fierceness.

“She said—” began Bernard. Then he got up and walked up and down

the room. “Upon my soul,” he went on, “it’s awfully difficult to tell. It was so vague—just enough to be horribly annoying and upsetting, and—”

“People have no right—no right whatever—to be vague in mischief-making,” said Michael, angrily. “And mischief-making I infer that it was. She spoke ‘vaguely’ against Miss—no, I won’t name her. Why, in heaven’s name, did you not bring the woman to book?”

“How could I?” replied his cousin. “Don’t get so excited, Mike. By Jove! what a Don Quixote you are still! How could I bring her to book, as you say, without seeming to give credence to her hints? The very thing she would have liked. Of course, my only rôle was to treat what she said with absolute indifference, as an absurd mistake. I could see that my doing so riled her. Besides, you would not have had me let her see that, mistake or no mistake, I took any special interest in Miss—in the person concerned?”

“No. I see what you mean,” said Michael, consideringly. “It would have been very wrong, seeing that you had *not* quite made up your mind; very wrong for *her* sake.” And again he eyed his cousin keenly.

Bernard gave a movement of impatience.

“It would have been very disagreeable for *myself*,” he said. “I wouldn’t allow that woman to think any chatter or warnings of *hers* had influenced me. I don’t say—candidly to you in confidence—I don’t say but what they did, for I believe I had made up my mind to go through with it.”

“Then, upon my soul,” said Michael, sharply, “I don’t understand you. You—you care for this girl; you love her or are in love with her, and you would let the poisonous tongue of a thorough-going, scheming woman like Mrs Worthing deter you from what you call going through with it, when you know her motive too! By Jove! Bernard, if you are fool enough to play into her hands, and I see you some fine day married to poor little Aline, you need not come to me to complain of your mother-in-law.”

Bernard flushed crimson.

“You are going too far, Michael,” he said. “To begin with, I have no right to impute the motive you do, nor to impugn Mrs Worthing’s truthfulness. It is

possible her motives are sincere and disinterested. It is not inconceivable that she may have some friendly feeling for me."

"It is conceivable that she is clever enough to make you think so," muttered Michael. Then, after a moment's silence. "But, after all," he said, suddenly, "what *did* she say? All through this conversation you have put off telling me."

"You never asked distinctly," said his cousin. "I began by telling you it was vague—vague, and so extraordinary; so—upon the face of it—*absurd*, that I—I scarcely know how to make you take it seriously." Michael laughed, but it was somewhat forcedly.

"You are really a good deal of an idiot, Bernard. But go on, the more absurd the better."

Chapter Twenty One.

Circumstances.

“I can’t give you her precise words,” said Mr Gresham. “And I don’t think what she said was exactly premeditated. We were talking about Cannes and the people there—it was, in fact, the first time I had seen the Worthings since meeting them there, and I have not seen them again. Something was said about the Lermonts, and Mrs Worthing expressed her surprise at finding that the—the Raynsworths were cousins of theirs. She ‘had never heard of them before; who were they? it seemed odd somehow.’ I reminded her that Mrs Marmaduke Headfort was a Miss Raynsworth, and that the young lady of the same name was her sister. And to my amazement, what do you think the woman said next?”

Michael murmured something unintelligible. Bernard proceeded:

“She looked at me curiously, and said, ‘Ah, that is just it—*is* she her sister?’ I stared, naturally, and then said, carelessly, ‘Do you mean that they are only half-sisters? Possibly so, though I scarcely think it; they are not the least like each other, however.’ She agreed, and if no more had been said I daresay I should have thought no more about it. But I saw by Mrs Worthing’s manner that there was something more to come, and so, as at the bottom of my heart I *was* interested, I said nothing to turn the subject or to shut her up.”

“H-m,” said Michael.

“She hesitated, and then she began again. ‘No,’ she said, ‘I was not thinking of their being only half-sisters, but sisters at all. There is something odd about that family, Mr Gresham, mark my words. I know as a fact—as a fact—that that girl does not always assume the position of Mrs Marmaduke Headfort’s sister. She has been recognised as figuring in a very different capacity.’ ‘What?’ said I. ‘Mother, or grandmother, perhaps?’ ‘It is no laughing matter,’ Mrs Worthing replied; and to give her her due she was serious enough. She had been very anxious about it, for Aline’s sake, as it appeared that the child had taken a tremendous fancy to—to Miss Raynsworth. And then she went on to say that her maid—a

treasure, of course, who had been with her twenty years, and all that sort of thing—had seen and known that same girl as a servant. Where and when she did not say, and I would not ask, but she vouched for it. I laughed at it as an absurd piece of nonsense, and I am glad to believe that I quite took her in. She does not think she made any impression upon me. I made some upon her. I asked her on the face of it how such a thing was possible. She had seen the Lermonts—Miss Lermont above all, who is far from a silly woman—making much of their guest. I did *not* say, 'You have only to look at the girl to see how thorough-bred she is.' I thought it wiser not. I *inferred*, politely, of course, my surprise at a woman like Mrs Worthing condescending to listen to servants' gossip. On the whole, so far as *she* is concerned, I am by no means dissatisfied with my diplomacy."

"And what *are* you dissatisfied about then?" inquired Michael, drily.

Mr Gresham got up and walked towards the window, where he stood for a moment or two staring out in silence. Then, without facing his cousin, he began again.

"I scarcely like to tell you; you will be down upon me for giving a moment's thought to it, but half confidences are no good." And he went on to relate the curious and annoying episode which had occurred at the picnic, an episode which he confessed had been emphasised to him by Philippa's extreme reluctance to having any notice taken of the lady's-maid's impertinence. "So you see," he added, in conclusion, "I could not help putting two and two together, when Mrs Worthing made her extraordinary statement to me, otherwise I should probably have sent it quite out of my mind, as utterly absurd and contemptible nonsense, or, possibly as one of those extraordinary cases of personal resemblance which one does come across or hear of now and then."

"And why not explain it in that way still?"

"I don't know," said Mr Gresham, slowly; "I really cannot say. There was something indefinite, unsatisfactory, in her manner."

"It is surely natural enough that a girl of any refinement would detest to be mixed up in a scene with Mrs Worthing's maid, or Mrs Anybody's

maid," said Michael, hotly. "A low-minded, suspicious servant! Of course, Miss Raynsworth treated the thing as beneath contempt. And after all," he went on, cooling down again, "what *can* you be afraid of? What do you suppose it *can* be but some mistake? The girl is *not* a servant. Would a whole family, including the Lermonts, combine to pass her off as a lady if she were not one? It is inconceivable. Besides, Mrs Marmaduke Headfort spoke of her sister Philippa to you often at Wyverston. I remember hearing her say how unlike they were."

"Yes," Mr Gresham agreed. "I know she did, and I had seen her myself—you forget—the same girl that I met at Cannes—I had seen her at Dorriford."

"Then what in heaven's name are you worrying about?" exclaimed Michael. "You blow hot and cold with one breath."

"I have no doubt that it is all right, practically," said his cousin. "She must be herself. What I dread is the possibility of some wild practical joke—acting a part for a wager," and here he shuddered. "Can you imagine anything more detestable for me? The sort of thing I could not stand coming up in the future about *my wife*. It would be insufferable."

"Then why risk it? Why take any steps towards making her your wife?" said Michael. His tone was peculiar.

Bernard Gresham's face fell.

"You really think there is risk of something of the kind? you seriously advise me to give it up?" he said. "I had hoped you might suggest something, that possibly you might have found out what it has all arisen from, and set my mind at rest."

Michael shook his head and laughed, somewhat grimly. "Not if I know it," he said. "I would do a great deal to oblige you, but not act detective, thank you, my good fellow. Do I advise you to give it up? Well, yes, if," and here his voice softened and deepened till its tones were very grave and yet almost tender too, "if you cannot entirely and absolutely trust a woman to be incapable of any really unladylike or unfeminine action, or course of action—well, yes, without such trust I should strongly advise you, for her sake, even more than your own, to give up all idea of making

her your wife."

Mr Gresham's face had brightened at first; as Michael came to a conclusion it fell again.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "the way you speak seems to describe her. She gives one just that feeling. You might have seen her—"

"I have heard of her," said his cousin, laconically.

"And yet," the other went on, scarcely noticing the interpolation, "yet, I am *not* satisfied, and that's the truth of it. You don't think I could ask her about it—straight out, you know—do you, Mike?"

"Premising, of course, as the excuse for your im— for your interest in the matter, that if she explain things to your satisfaction, you have almost made up your mind to propose to her? Well, what do you think yourself? How does it strike you?"

"Don't be so confoundedly sarcastic," said Mr Gresham, in a tone of reproachful irritation. "I have come to you for advice; I have told you the whole thing as I would do to no one else, and—you might see I am very much upset. I suppose you cannot understand—a cold-blooded misogynist like you."

"Come now, you needn't call me ugly names," said Michael, whose spirits seemed to rise as Bernard's went down. "I suppose we look at things quite differently. I don't think I *do* understand your excessive uneasiness and perplexity."

"Put yourself in my place," said Bernard, eagerly, "if you—" He hesitated.

"Go on; if I cared for any one as you do for *her*," said Michael, "would I feel as you do? No, I would not. That's just it. It is not in me to 'care' in that sort of way, without giving complete trust."

"You don't know anything about it," grumbled his cousin. "You mean, then, that you think I should—"

"I don't mean anything. You are you, and I am I. I am afraid I cannot

advise you."

Bernard got up slowly.

"Thank you for listening to me, all the same, old fellow," he said, as he held out his hand. "You'll come down to Merle at Easter for a day or two as usual? I shall count upon you."

"Well, yes. I daresay I shall, thank you."

They shook hands. Michael opened the door, followed his guest a few steps down the staircase, and stood looking after him till the hall door shut again. Then he returned to his sitting-room, and there came the sound of the hansom driving away.

"I wonder how it will end," he said to himself, and for a few moments he stood there with a curious dreamy expression, very unusual to him. Suddenly he started. The dachshund, divining something out of the common, had crept up to him silently, and was licking his hand.

"All right, Solomon," said Michael, "all right. Many thanks for reminding me that I'm wasting time. That would never do."

He sat down at the table, resolutely drawing his books and papers towards him, and set to work to get as much done in the evening as the long interruption had made possible.

"Easter," he said to himself, when at last he stopped working and proceeded to "tidy up," as the children say, methodically and carefully, all the notes, plans, and books with which the table was spread. "Easter is very late this year—as late as it can be. By that time, nearly a month hence, surely Bernard will have made up his mind, as he calls it." A gesture of something almost like disgust escaped him. "Has he got any mind, I sometimes wonder! What can *she* find to attract or interest her in him, except of course his good looks?"

Easter was so late that year, and the spring came on so rapidly, that it was quite confusing and unsettling to one's ideas.

“Good-Friday on a positively summer day would be too much for my brain to take in,” said Evelyn Headfort.

“Yes,” her sister agreed. “But *Easter* and sunshine are not incongruous. Let us hope we shall not have winter back again; there is still a week to Easter Day, you know, Evey.”

“I don’t think it is likely to get cold again now; there are no weather prophecies of the kind,” said Mrs Headfort. “Still it is well to make hay while the sun shines. I *think* we shall be pretty straight by the end of next week. I mean to say, the rough of the work done, so that I shall not need to come back again till we come for good.”

“I *think* so,” Philippa agreed. “But you know tradespeople and workpeople are proverbially behind time in these cases.”

She glanced around her as she spoke. They were standing in what was in process of being converted into a drawing-room in the old house on Mr Headfort’s —shire property which was now to be Evelyn’s home.

It was a dear old place, and with great capabilities of better things; though hitherto it had been little more—of late years at least—than a large well-kept farm-house.

But it was not substantially out of repair, and it was very roomy. So no fresh building was called for, only the removal or alteration of partitions and doors and such, comparatively speaking, expeditious work, as well as painting, papering, and general embellishment to suit Mrs Marmaduke Headfort’s taste, and to be a fitting background to the well-chosen furniture of which a great part was the old squire’s gift. A “wedding present” he called it, though coming somewhat late in the day.

Altogether fortune was smiling on Duke and his wife. And Evelyn’s busy little brain meant to extract more smiles from the capricious lady before she had done with her. It had not been only and entirely for selfish reasons that she had dragged her sister from home to “rough it” for a fortnight at Palden Grange, declaring that she could not possibly “manage” without Philippa’s advice and practical help about everything.

“Especially as Duke, you know, mamma, will be out all day. He is

infatuated about his new work and says he has such a lot to learn, and he doesn't care a bit what our house is to look like. No, I *must* have Phil."

And Phil she had, the girl herself neither urging nor objecting to the plan. Philippa was perplexed and unsettled in those days. She could not understand Bernard Gresham's silence. For the weeks were passing, and the reasons for seeing and hearing nothing more of him, which for a time had satisfied her, were no longer in existence. Evelyn, too, was puzzled; half prepared to be angry with her hero, and at other times inclined to throw the blame on her sister's "stand-off" manner.

"Though after all," she reflected, with a return to her usual practical common-sense, "it is very awkward for men sometimes. And in our case it is not as if we had a big house and lots of people staying with us, so that he could easily hint to me that he would like an invitation. That would be so *very* marked in our case. No, the only thing is for them to meet again 'accidentally.'"

And she set her quick wits to work, and that successfully. She found out that the master of Merle made a practice of spending Easter there, usually coming down a week or so beforehand. And this year there was no doubt of his being there, as he had been so much away during the winter that various things were calling for his attention. Palden Grange was, as has been mentioned, only a few miles from Merle-in-the-Wold. It was necessary that Evelyn, as well as her husband, should be on the spot for some little time, to direct and superintend the alterations going on, so all turned out naturally, Evelyn arranging that their residence at Palden should include Easter-tide, *and* her sister's company.

Philippa felt as if she must resign herself to fate. She would have had an inexpressible horror of going out of her way or even seeming to do so, to meet Mr Gresham again, yet, on the other hand, any refusal to do what the Headforts so greatly urged would have been disobliging and unkind, unless she could have given the true reason for it. And that reason, above, all the putting it into words, seemed to her as indelicate to entertain as the converse. For after all, Mr Gresham had not literally committed himself, and everybody said, and she was always reading so in stories, that men were very changeable and capricious—even good, well-meaning men.

“Far more so than women,” thought the girl. “No, I must just go on my own way and not swerve to right or left through any thought of him. That is the only thing to do if I wish to retain my own self-respect.”

So Evelyn had her way, and here they were at Palden; here they had been for more than a week, as busy as bees, and nothing had been heard of Mr Gresham, no allusion even had been made to their vicinity to his home, except that one day when something had been said by Duke about taking Phil over to see the gardens at Merle before they left, and she had not replied, Evelyn had not seconded the proposal. She had indeed rather discouraged it, for which her sister had mentally thanked her.

“Imagine our going over there, and his possibly having come home and meeting me like the girl in *Pride and Prejudice*—could anything be more horrible?” thought Philippa.

And she was grateful for the sort of tacit understanding of her feelings which her sister seemed to show, though at the same time rather surprised at it.

Then suddenly the aspect of everything changed.

That very afternoon—the afternoon of the day on which the sisters had been discussing the probability of the work being sufficiently advanced to allow of their return to Greenleaves within a fortnight—as Philippa and Evelyn were unpacking some especially choice china which had just arrived, and which was to be carefully locked up in one of the innumerable cupboards of the old house till Mrs Marmaduke Headfort should return “for good,” the young servant, who was their temporary attendant, appeared in the doorway with a face of some consternation.

“If you please, ma’am,” she began, “there’s a gentleman called to see you. I told him you were very busy, but he *would* come in, while I told you. Mr Gresham is his name.”

“Where is he?” said Evelyn, getting up as she spoke, for she had been kneeling in front of a packing-case—her face rosier than usual. “What room did you show him into? Not into the drawing-room, assuredly,” she went on, with a laugh, to Philippa, “for it is blockaded with ladders and

scaffolding, and—”

“May I not show myself in?” said a voice in the doorway. “I have only just come down and heard of your being here,” and so saying the new-comer came forward.

He shook hands cordially with Evelyn; the circumstances made anything like formality impossible, yet Philippa thought she detected a touch of constraint in his manner as he turned to her. For the moment she had not leisure to ask herself if this pained or gratified her; her whole efforts being devoted to the maintaining in herself an entirely calm exterior, and this Evelyn’s ready tact greatly assisted. She chatted merrily to Mr Gresham about the house, and the furniture, and their future plans, till her two companions grew completely at ease, to all outward appearance at least. But it was not till shortly before Mr Gresham left, that Philippa allowed herself to yield to the happy consciousness which had gilded the last days of her stay at Cannes.

For it was not fancy—he did hold her hand, for a moment longer than conventionality permitted, and though he addressed Evelyn as he made plans for meeting again on the morrow, it was Philippa’s eyes that his sought.

“Yes, you must all come over to luncheon,” he said, “and leave the packing-cases to themselves. I only wish you would come to Merle altogether while you are in the neighbourhood.”

Chapter Twenty Two.

On the Way to the Fish-Ponds.

During the next few days all outward circumstances seemed to combine in one direction. The weather was perfect; Evelyn the most tactful of chaperons; Merle itself surpassed in beauty all that the sisters had heard of it. Their host—for such he practically was, as nearly every day saw them Mr Gresham's guests—quietly exerted all the powers he possessed to enhance the charms of his home. And Philippa lived in the sunshine of the present, in happy confidence as to the future.

"It *must* be all right," she told herself. Only—once or twice—an almost imperceptible hesitation in the young man's manner struck her, or her imagination, with a faint shadow of misgiving, and occasionally an unspoken inquiry in Evelyn's eyes startled her a little.

Why did he not speak definitely?

Though even as she thought this, she dismissed the question.

"I should have no misgiving," she said; "I have no reason for it. It is only that miserable secret in the background! If he would but give me a chance of telling him about it; it would be so delightful to find, as I know I should, how fanciful and exaggerated I have been in fearing that a man like him would really be changed to me because of it."

The opportunity was to come, as such things often do, when she was least expecting it. Two or three days before Easter, Michael Gresham made his appearance at Merle. His cousin welcomed him cordially, though, truth to tell, he had almost forgotten this arranged-for visit.

"So you're all alone," said Michael at breakfast the first morning—he had travelled down by a night train—"I am all the better pleased, though rather surprised. You are not generally so contented with your own society."

Bernard Gresham did not at once reply. He stooped to pat Solomon, who,

needless to say, was in attendance; an unusual piece of amiability which did not escape Michael's attention, any more than the slightly heightened colour on his cousin's face, as he turned to reply.

"Well," he began, "I did mean to ask two or three people down, but it rather went out of my head. I've only been here for a week, and I've been pretty busy looking after the Headforts. They are at Palden Grange; did you know? It's very rough, of course. They are getting it into order, so it was only common humanity to ask them to come over here as much as they liked."

"Oh, indeed," said Michael. "Duke Headfort and his wife, of course, you mean?"

"Ye-es," Bernard resumed, "and—her sister. She is helping her."

Michael said nothing. Bernard wished he would speak, but as he gave no signs of breaking the silence, Mr Gresham began again.

"You remember," he said, with as near an approach to awkwardness as was possible for him, "our conversation that evening some weeks ago?"

"Yes," Michael replied, "I remember it."

"I have heard nothing more," said Bernard. "I have not come across those people again; the Worthings, I mean. And—well, I think I've made up my mind to risk it; to go through with it. Fate seems leading up to it somehow. I was by no means sure that she was here when I came down, though it did occur to me as possible that she might be with her sister, and—I have seen a great deal of her these last few days. I cannot associate her with any unladylike escapade of the kind that was hinted at I cannot believe that there is really any risk to run. There must have been some absurd mistake."

"And," said Michael, "you have no misgivings as—as to her reciprocating your—" He hesitated.

Bernard smiled.

"In ordinary cases that would hardly be a fair question," he said, "but as I

have given you my full confidence so far, I think I may allow that that part of it appears to be all right."

Michael got up from his seat, and strolled across to the fireplace. There, leaning against the mantelpiece, he calmly surveyed his cousin. "Then," he said, "I may almost congratulate you at once? You will doubtless allow me to do so formally as soon as possible?"

"Certainly," Bernard replied. "You shall be the very first to hear of it."

"And you intend to leave that piece of gossip at rest then?" said Michael, after a moment's silence.

A shadow crossed Mr Gresham's face.

"What else can I do?" he inquired.

"Nothing," Michael replied. "Most certainly nothing; but granting that she is all that I feel sure she must be, if there is any truth in the story, anything that a man could dislike his wife having been mixed up in, there is *her* point of view to be considered. *She* will not let it rest."

"How do you mean?" said Bernard, raising his eyebrows.

"She will tell you about it herself, of course," said Michael, curtly.

Bernard seemed considerably discomposed.

"You had better be prepared for the possibility," Michael continued. "There is generally some root for gossip, however exaggerated. I advise you to face this for both your sakes."

"You certainly are a Job's comforter if ever there was one," said his cousin, in a tone of annoyance. "Do you mean to say that I should make further inquiry, or give her an opportunity of explaining it before I commit myself? It would be so awkward, you see. I scarcely—"

"Good heavens! no," said Michael, with angry contempt. "Would I suggest your insulting a woman? I am only forewarning you that if there is anything that requires explanation *she* will volunteer it, and on this

account you had better be sure of your own mind, or you may find yourself in a *very* awkward position, to put it mildly."

Mr Gresham's perceptions were not of the order to detect the covert sarcasm of the last few words.

"I see," he replied, consideringly. "Thank you for the suggestion. It can do no harm to be prepared. But I flatter myself if any one can steer their way through a tangle of the kind, *I* can do so. Thanks, Michael, all the same," and with his serenity quite restored, he got up from the breakfast-table.

The expression of Michael's face when he found himself alone grew hard and dark.

"What evil genius," he said to himself, "brought me down here at this crisis? I wish I were at the antipodes! I almost think I shall go back to town at once, but—it is just possible that, mixed up as I am in this affair, I may be of use to her. Heaven knows what is going to come of it all! That unlucky secret of hers, and Bernard's smallness of character! Will she be disillusioned? or does he really care enough for her to rise above himself? And will she perhaps spend the rest of her life in worshipping an ideal and never find out her mistake? Such things have been with such a woman." He sighed and turned away from the window where he had been standing.

"No," he said, "I'll stay and see it out."

That same afternoon, when writing in the room which at Merle was always considered his own, Michael heard through the open window the sound of voices on the terrace below. One he recognised immediately as belonging to Mrs Marmaduke Headfort, then a man's voice, which he supposed to be that of her husband; Michael had never met Captain Headfort. Himself of course unobserved, he approached the window. Yes, there was a third visitor. It was the first time he had seen Miss Raynsworth in her own character, and suddenly there flashed upon him the full strangeness of the position.

"I shall have to be introduced to her," he thought. "Will little Mrs Headfort be equal to it? She knows at least that her sister and I were travelling companions, even if she has been told no more as to my part in it. And

how will the girl herself stand it? I know how essentially candid she must be. I must do my best to make it as little awkward as possible. They have come over to tea, no doubt; I will keep out of the way till we meet in the drawing-room."

A moment or two later his cousin put his head in at the door.

"The Headforts are here, Michael," he said. "We are going through the woods to the old fish-ponds; do you care to come or not?"

Michael shook his head.

"I am not quite ready," he said; "you'll be back to tea, I suppose? You can introduce me to your friends then. To Miss Raynsworth and Headfort, I mean—Mrs Headfort of course I know."

Bernard Gresham scarcely stayed to hear his reply.

"All right," he said. "They're waiting for me," and he shut the door.

Half-way to the fish-ponds, Evelyn's strength showed signs of giving out.

"Duke," she said, plaintively, "if I go much farther you will have to carry me back. You forget that we walked here from Palden!"

Duke looked intensely penitent.

"Of course," he said; "why didn't you say so before, Evey, when Gresham proposed it?"

"I didn't know how far it was," she replied. "Is it *much* farther, Mr Gresham?"

Bernard hesitated.

"I am extremely sorry, Mrs Headfort," he said. "I'm afraid I must own we haven't come half-way. But of course if it is too much for you we had better give it up."

"Oh, dear, no," said Evelyn, quickly. "That would vex me dreadfully. It is

such a lovely day. You three go on, and I'll easily find my way back to Merle, and wait on the terrace for you. I shall enjoy the quiet, and it would be a shame to stay indoors on such a perfect afternoon."

"Nonsense," said Duke. "Of course I'll take you back, and then I'll stroll this way again and meet you and Philippa on your return," he added to Mr Gresham.

Philippa opened her lips as if about to remonstrate, but before she had time to speak Bernard broke in.

"Don't say you are tired too, Miss Raynsworth. I had set my heart on showing you the fish-ponds. The woods there are in perfection at this time of year."

"I am not tired," said Philippa, quietly. "Perhaps it is the best thing to do. Be sure you rest well, Evey, for there's the walk home to consider."

"Oh, no, you must let me send you back, of course," said Mr Gresham. "*Au revoir*, then," and the quartet separated.

Philippa and her host walked on some little way in silence. Both, though neither fully realised it for the other, were making up their minds to a decided step. For the last few days had made the girl resolve that if circumstances combined to render her doing so possible, she would tell Mr Gresham the facts of the travesty she had since so bitterly regretted. And if anything had been wanting to confirm her in this decision, Michael Gresham's arrival would have done so.

But the task before her was far from an easy one. Independently of her own not unnatural shrinking from the subject, there was the terror lest in volunteering this confidence she should appear prematurely to take for granted any special interest in her affairs on the part of her companion; any right, so to say, on his side, to know all details of her life. How could she broach the subject?

She glanced at him; he was not looking at her, but gazing before him with a preoccupied expression. And in some degree to her relief, just as she was nervously clearing her throat to begin to speak, he suddenly turned towards her.

“We have still fully a mile before we get to the fish ponds,” he said, “but I do not think we need walk quite as fast as we are doing.”

Philippa slackened her pace without speaking.

“I am so glad,” Mr Gresham continued, “of this lucky chance of speaking to you uninterruptedly.” Then for the first time he hesitated.

“I—you,” he went on, “you must know, Miss Raynsworth, how much interest I have come to feel in—you, and—in all that concerns you.”

Philippa glanced up quickly. What was coming? His words would normally have admitted of but one interpretation, but something in his tone, its calm, almost business-like deliberateness, made her doubtful. For the moment she was on the point of availing herself of this preamble as an opening for what she had made up her mind to say. Then she hesitated, and while she did so he went on.

“I—I am not impulsive, Miss Raynsworth. I am considerate by nature, and in anything involving not only my own happiness but that of another, I am deeply conscious that it behoves me to be doubly so. A mistake may be made in two minutes which a lifetime cannot undo. So you will not misunderstand me if I confess that it has taken me many weeks—nay, months—to decide upon—”

There was no doubt now, he was going to propose to her, and with the disappearance of all uncertainty on this head, her own resolution revived. In her nervousness she was for the moment unconscious of the curious egotism of his words, of the entire absence of any nobility of self-forgetfulness, any touch of impassioned feeling in his manner. Her own generosity of character failed to realise its absence in him; her one uppermost impulse was to prevent him in the slightest degree from acting in the dark.

“Stop, Mr Gresham,” she said, hurriedly; “before you say any more I have something to say to you.”

She gave a little gasp; she *felt* herself growing pale. Something made her look up. Instead of the expression of surprise which she had unconsciously expected to meet in his face, her quick instincts perceived

a slight stiffening, a sort of indescribable drawing-back instead of eager protest that nothing she could say would alter his longing for her to hear him out.

And could she have seen into her companion's mind at that moment, she would scarcely have believed the reflections she would there have read.

"She *has* something to tell," he was thinking to himself. "I have not been too cautious."

And aloud he said, quietly:

"As you wish, of course, Miss Raynsworth."

She plunged into it.

"You may remember," she began, "a little incident at Cannes which annoyed you at the time—naturally so—and annoyed you still more, I imagine, afterwards, when I refused to let you resent the impertinence I had been subjected to. I could not have done otherwise, as you will hear. I had promised my mother before leaving home to tell no one what I am now going to tell you, without her leave."

As she spoke there was an imperceptible lightening of Mr Gresham's expression.

"Your mother knew!" he ejaculated.

"Of course," she exclaimed, too bent upon her recital to feel surprise at his words. "This was how it all happened." And forcing herself to speak with perfect calmness, she began at the beginning of the story and told it all, simply and without comment, only omitting the names of any not immediately concerned in the little drama—such as those of Michael Gresham and Mrs Shepton—and carefully exonerating from all shadow of blame in the matter her sister and her parents.

When she had finished there fell a dead silence. With all her self-control Philippa could not bring herself to raise her eyes—the conflicting feelings in her mind made her almost physically giddy.

Then as the silence continued, a new element began to make itself felt. Her pride awoke and she reared her head half defiantly.

“Does he think I am going tamely to await his judgment upon me?” she thought to herself. “If so, he shall—”

But at that moment Mr Gresham’s voice at last made itself heard.

“I have to thank you, Miss Raynsworth,” he said, gently, “for giving me your confidence. You will find it has not been misplaced. You have done the best thing possible in telling me what you have done. Though—” he hesitated, “it is best to be perfectly candid,” he went on, “I cannot but own that it is—a terrible disappointment to me to have to associate anything of so extraordinary a kind with one whom—”

Philippa turned upon him abruptly, her face crimsoning. Something in his measured tone, more than in his actual words, began slowly to insinuate into her a strange, chill misgiving. And why at that moment did there recur to her memory, in advantageous contrast to Mr Gresham’s carefully considered and gently expressed disapproval, his cousin Michael’s stern, almost rough censure of what she had done?

Before she had time to open her lips, her companion began again.

“Excuse me,” he said, “for interrupting you—I think you were going to speak. I must ask you to listen to me first. I will be perfectly frank. I was not *wholly* unprepared for this strange disclosure. The incident at Cannes never quite left my memory, and it was followed up by certain remarks or hints as to something peculiar in which you had been mixed up, which came to my ears more recently.”

“How? and where?” demanded Philippa. For one half instant the thought crossed her brain—could Michael Gresham have been faithless to his trust?—but it was as quickly dismissed. Rough and rugged he might be, but *true*, she felt certain he was.

“I scarcely know that I have any right to reply to your question,” said Mr Gresham, “and no purpose would be fulfilled by my doing so. All that was said to me was very vague, so vague that I have allowed myself to be buoyed up by hopes—now alas! shattered—that the warn—hints I should

say, rested on no real foundation. But do not mistake me, Miss Raynsworth," as Philippa again seemed on the point of speaking.

"Your confidence, I repeat, has not been misplaced. I do not think—no, deliberately speaking—I do not think any lasting annoyance or ill-results need be anticipated—especially when—" But here even *his* self-assurance shrank from completing the sentence. "I want to say," he went on, "that notwithstanding all the pain and regret which I cannot deny I am feeling, my attitude towards you is not radically shaken. In time, I trust and believe, the whole miserable episode will be forgotten—not only by the few outsiders who may have suspected any mystery, but by myself."

He glanced at Philippa as he spoke, expecting to detect a flush of grateful relief on her face. What he did see there, was less easy to interpret. She was no longer red, though, on the other hand, but slightly paler than usual, and she turned her eyes fully upon him without uttering a word.

"I must express myself still more plainly," he said, almost as if addressing a child, "as *my wife*, there will, I feel sure, be nothing, comparatively speaking, to dread in the future. Your candour has disarmed my scruples, for I know I can trust that never, under any conceivable circumstances, could you again be tempted so to set propriety and—and dignity at nought."

Still she did not speak.

"Miss Raynsworth," he said at last, "Miss Raynsworth—Philippa," he exclaimed. "Do you not understand me?" and for the first time a very shadowy apprehension that possibly, just possibly he had appeared too sure of his ground suggested itself. "I—the circumstances have been so exceptional—I have had no opportunity so far of assuring you of the depth and sincerity of my feelings towards you—of my devotion. You must allow they have been well tested. And they have stood the test! I ask you now to be my wife—my happiness is in your hands."

"And I, Mr Gresham," Philippa said at last, her dark eyes turned full upon him, "decline, distinctly and definitely decline, the honour you have done me." He grew scarlet.

“What do you mean?” he said, for once almost rudely. “What has all this conversation been about, if this was what you intended? What was your motive for telling me all you have done? Have I offended you, and how? Your pride has taken fire in some unreasonable way. How can I assure you that the thing will not weigh further with me—that—that—I shall do my best to forget it? Where would you be so protected as in the position of my wife?”

“I understand you perfectly, Mr Gresham,” Philippa replied in a calm even voice, “though at the same time I confess that previously to this conversation I had lamentably failed to do so. On my side, I thank you for your candour, and I repeat, as decidedly as words can convey my meaning, that I decline the proposal you have made me.”

He still seemed unable to believe her.

“Have you been playing with me all this time?” he said, harshly. “It is inconceivable. But what can be your reason for changing so suddenly? I have a right to ask, and a right to know.”

“Yes,” she said, “perhaps you have, though I do not know that my reason will much enlighten you. It is simply this. I am entirely convinced that we are utterly unsuited to each other, and that in marrying you I should be entering upon what would prove a tremendous mistake. You do not, and never would, understand me; surely that should suffice.”

He smiled, bitterly enough. Something in her manner carried conviction home to him, through all the thick folds of his self-esteem.

“And may I inquire further,” he said, “what has thus magically caused the scales to fall from your eyes as regards my poor desserts? For you allow, you could not indeed do otherwise, that the change, however complete, is a very sudden one?”

She turned and looked at him. There was a strange wistfulness in her expression.

“No,” she said, sadly; “I am sorry if I have caused you any pain, but I cannot explain anything more. You would not understand. I am very tired,” she continued, “I do not want to go farther. Would you mind

walking back to meet my brother-in-law and tell him I have gone straight home to Palden? I can find my way from here."

He bowed without speaking and turned away, too absorbed by his own intense mortification to give much heed to her last words, or to feel any compassion for the suffering too plainly betrayed by her white face and faltering voice.

The sound of his retreating footsteps on the crisp, dry path died rapidly away, and Philippa was alone.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Ended.

For a few moments the withdrawal of the intense restraint she had put upon herself caused all other feelings to be merged in that of relief. Philippa glanced round her, and seeing a moss-covered tree stump a few paces off, she made her way to it and sat down.

Then slowly, but all too surely, crept up, one by one, the reflections she could not but face.

It seemed to her that years had passed since Evelyn and her husband had turned back, leaving her and her late companion by themselves.

Yes, indeed, to use his own words; “the scales had fallen from her eyes,” and yet how almost intangible it all seemed! How little some people would understand the terrible and complete revulsion of feeling which had overwhelmed her!

“Nothing,” she thought, “nothing can be quite so horrible as to find that one has been worshipping an idol of clay; a thing which did not exist except in my own imagination. I have no right to feel resentful. Taking him for what he is, he did not behave badly. He evidently *meant* to be generous and chivalrous. But the pain of it to me is none the less. It is far, far worse, at least so it seems to me just now, than to have found out that he did not care for me as I did for him, and yet to have kept my ideal. ‘Disillusionment’ is horrible.”

The tears slowly welled up into her eyes. She brushed them away indignantly.

“What a weak fool I am!” she thought. “If I had any strength of character, I *should* be, I suppose, glad to have found it out in time.”

For bitterly as she was suffering, she was spared the misery of any wavering as to the necessity of her decision. It was done, once for all, done! But other considerations could not be altogether stifled, and

Philippa was still very young.

“It is so disappointing,” she said, half audibly, “in smaller ways, too. Poor Evey, I know how she has been wishing for it, and, I am afraid, mamma! I am only thankful not to have let myself go further, even in fancy. I shall soon be able to pull myself together,” and a sort of wave of courage and even relief seemed to sweep over her, to her own surprise.

How was it that she was not more crushed? After all, she asked herself in the clearer light of her present vision, *was* the “disillusionment” so entirely unexpected? Had she, unconsciously, blinded herself, and refused to admit the possibility of the “something wanting” in Bernard Gresham’s character? If not, whence had arisen her constant self-questionings as to how her confession would be received? Why the doubts that *were* there all the time? often as she had repeated to herself that after all she had done nothing wrong, nothing really calling for shame or self-abasement.

But her mind was growing too wearied and confused to think out this new suggestion. She shivered slightly.

“Oh, how I wish I were at home,” she thought, “and could tell mamma everything! She would understand better than I do myself. It is just as if a door had shut in front of me and all was blank!”

It was really growing cold, for the evenings were still chilly, with the chilliness of early spring, and the sun had gone down some time before. Philippa got up. How long she had sat there she could not tell, and confidently as she had spoken of knowing her way to Palden, she was really slightly at a loss, though familiar with the general direction she should keep to. She retraced her steps for some little distance till she came to a point whence another path should lead to the high-road. She came upon this side-path more quickly than she had expected, but turned into it without misgiving, and satisfied that she would come out at the right place, she walked on, allowing her thoughts to re-absorb her. In spite of herself her imagination persisted in re-enacting, mistily yet painfully, the events of the afternoon, till she almost felt that she could bear it no longer. But there came a diversion. Suddenly it struck her that the distance to the high-road was strangely long. She stopped short and looked about her. There was no sign of the wood coming to an end; on

the contrary, the trees seemed thicker than before.

“I must have taken the wrong path,” she thought, drearily. “Indeed, this is scarcely like a path at all. I had better go back again, I suppose; I may come across the other.”

She turned and went on, looking about her attentively. Some twenty yards or so farther back, the footpath she was on joined another.

“I must have gone wrong here,” she said, and, though with some little hesitation, she turned again.

But it was no use; she only seemed to plunge deeper into the wood, though she tried more than one intercepting path. She was growing very tired, and a feeling of irritation at herself added to her discomfort.

“I really need not have brought this upon myself,” she thought, “If I don’t find my way home soon, there will be a hue and cry after me; nothing could be more odious.”

It was with a feeling of relief that at last she heard the sound of some one approaching. Scarcely of footsteps; it was more a rustle among the still thickly strewn dead leaves of the previous autumn, which by degrees grew into a patter of little feet.

“Solomon!” she exclaimed, as the dog rushed at her in effusive greeting.

But Solomon’s appearance meant that of his master as well.

“I must make the best of it,” thought Philippa, as she realised this. “He will at any rate be able to show me the way to Palden, and if he has not met his cousin he need not suspect anything. I will just tell him I have lost my way.”

A second or two later, Michael Gresham came within view. He started in astonishment as he caught sight of the girl.

“Miss Raynsworth!” he exclaimed, naturally quite forgetful of the fact that this was the first time he had met her in her own character. “How—why—are you alone?”

She looked up at him. It was evident, to her relief, that his first sensation at seeing her was that of pure surprise. But as his glance fell on her white, almost drawn face, and her unmistakable look of exhaustion, his expression warmed into one of deep concern.

“Something has happened,” he thought to himself. “That mean-spirited fellow. Can I have made mischief when I meant to shield her? His clumsy vanity has done it, no doubt.”

But it was with matter-of-fact kindliness only that he went on to speak to her.

“You are looking so dreadfully tired,” he said. “Where are the others? I thought you all started together. Have you lost your way?”

“Yes,” said Philippa, with a kind of gasp. “Evelyn, my sister, got tired, and they turned back. I—I thought I could find the road to Palden by myself.”

The very incoherence of her explanation enlightened him.

“Get off, Solomon,” he exclaimed, in a gruffer tone than the dachshund, still leaping and jumping about Philippa, was accustomed to. “He has not forgotten you, you see,” Michael went on, eager to say something or anything to hide his own suspicion of the situation. Then the colour rose quickly to his face as he realised the awkwardness of the allusion.

“I should say—” he began again, but Philippa, oblivious of any cause for embarrassment in his words, answered, quietly:

“No, the dear dog, and I have never forgotten him. But will you put me on my road home? I *am very* tired,” she added, faintly, though trying to smile.

It seemed to Michael that her white face grew still whiter as she spoke. He half started forward fearing she was going to fall, but she pulled herself together again with a strong effort, and he, instinctively divining that she was just the sort of girl to detest anything approaching to a “scene,” drew back quickly and went on speaking as if he had not noticed the passing weakness which had come over her.

“You have not wandered so very far after all,” he said. “Every turn in these woods has been familiar to me since I was a child, so I can soon set you right. But,”—and here he was forced to allude to her exhausted condition—“do you think you can possibly walk back all the way to Palden?”

He did not in the least allude to her returning to Merle, there to join her friends, as would have seemed natural under the circumstances. At the moment Philippa scarcely realised the tact which prompted this omission, or rather in some unconscious way she took it for granted, as indeed, on looking back afterwards, she saw that she had accepted with tacit confidence the strong and kind support of his presence.

A few minutes dexterous steering among the trees brought them out on to the path she had originally meant to follow, which led directly to the high-road.

Arrived there, Michael stopped short and looked at her consideringly. A little colour, he was glad to see, had returned to her cheeks; there was no longer the ghastly pallor which had made her look as if on the point of fainting.

“She is a strong girl,” he thought to himself, “physically and morally, but she has been through a bad bit of experience. Disillusionment, if it has been that, goes hard with such as she.”

And disillusionment he had reason to suspect it had been.

“Bernard would never have left her alone in this way, selfish as he is, unless he had been made to feel himself very small. As things are, I must risk annoying her by my officiousness; she is not fit to walk farther alone.”

Philippa was unconscious of his scrutiny. She was gazing up and down the road half vaguely.

“Which way—” she was beginning, but Michael interrupted her.

“Miss Raynsworth,” he said, “you mustn’t mind my saying that I really can’t let you go all the way home alone. It is getting dusk, and you own to being very tired.”

“Very well,” said Philippa, simply. “I mean—I should say ‘thank you,’” and again she smiled, and to Michael there was something more pathetic in her smile than if there had been tears in her eyes. “How far is it to Palden? Somehow I am really not as tired as when you first met me.”

“If you don’t mind cross-cuts and skirting one or two ploughed fields,” he said, more lightly, “it need not be more than a mile and a half.”

“I should like to get back as soon as my sister, if possible,” said Philippa. “I don’t want them to be frightened about me.”

She made no attempt at any explanation of the complications she had risked. She felt now a curious but satisfactory indifference to what her companion thought of the whole affair, rather perhaps an unacknowledged reliance on the kindliness of his judgment. And when he left her within fifty yards or so of the entrance to the Grange, and she had said good-bye, with a word of thanks, she felt amazed at herself.

“What am I made of?” she thought. “An hour ago I felt as if everything worth living for had gone from me—as if I could never trust any one again, or dare to believe in happiness. Is this a phase I must pass through? Will that terrible mortification and disappointment come back again blacker than ever?” She shivered as she thought of it. “Or,” as she stood still for a moment and looked after the sturdy figure of Michael Gresham striding away with little Solomon at his heels, “or am I only extraordinarily superficial and impressionable, or”—yet another “or”—“is there something invigorating about that man? He does feel so *true*.”

From whatever source her new-found strength had been derived, it stood her in good stead that evening.

Five minutes later the Merle dog-cart drove up, and Duke and Evelyn got down with disturbed faces, which scarcely cleared when they caught sight of her at the hall door, where she had purposely stationed herself to meet them.

“I am so glad I got home first,” she said. “I was afraid you might be uneasy about me. I have only just come in.”

“Uneasy,” repeated Evelyn in a peculiar tone of voice, as she came into

the house, Captain Headfort remaining behind to say something to the groom who had accompanied them from Merle, after a furtive and somewhat self-conscious glance in his sister-in-law's direction. "'Uneasy!' that's scarcely the word to use, Philippa, under the circumstances. You must know better than that surely."

"What do you mean?" said Philippa, quietly, already scenting war. "Come into the drawing-room, there's a good fire there, and I daresay you are feeling cold."

She had felt uncertain how to meet Evelyn; a word of tenderness or sympathy would have disarmed her, and she would probably have given her sister the fullness of confidence she had been longing to pour out to her mother. But Mrs Headfort's tone braced her to composure and dignity. For the moment, perhaps, she did not allow herself to do justice to the latter's natural and by no means altogether selfish disappointment and anxiety.

"It is better," Philippa thought quickly, "as some explanation is inevitable, to have it out at once, and done with, as far as Evey is concerned. Poor Evey!" she went on to herself, with a sudden revulsion of sympathy towards her sister, as her glance fell on the lines of distress which never seemed natural on Evelyn's soft, childlike face. But to this sort of feeling she felt she must not yield, "Why are you annoyed with me, Evelyn?" she said, directly, "for of course I know you are so. It is better to speak plainly."

"It is not candid of you to try to turn the tables in that way," said Evelyn, hotly. "You know perfectly why I am angry with you. You have behaved—you *must* have behaved in the most extraordinary way to Mr Gresham, after—encouraging him as you have done."

Philippa bit her lips to keep back an indignant reply, "What has he said to you?" she asked, composedly. "Very little," said Evelyn. "Very few men would have behaved as well as he has done. He only told me that you had insisted on going home alone, and that he was completely at a loss to understand you. Of course I knew what he meant—that you had refused him." Then, with a sudden change of tone, "Is it too late, Philippa?" she added, almost in entreaty, "Can I do nothing to put things

right?”

Her eagerness touched Philippa.

“Listen, Evey,” she said, almost solemnly, “and then never let us allude to this matter again. I cannot go into all the details of what passed between Mr Gresham and me. It would be no use. I doubt if *any one*, except perhaps mamma, would quite enter into what I feel. But I must just tell you this. I am as convinced as if I had thought it over for years that he and I are entirely, radically unsuited to each other, and so there is an end of it. Do believe that I absolutely mean what I say, and know what I mean.” Evelyn’s eyes filled with tears. Something in her sister’s manner carried conviction with it.

“Oh, Phil,” she said, “you are a far stronger character than I, I know, and I must, I suppose, give in to you; you must know best. But it does seem such a pity—such an awful pity! And what can have changed your opinion of him so suddenly?”

“Was it suddenly?” said Philippa, dreamily. “Some things seem to have nothing to do with time, and, after all, was it not,”—but here she stopped abruptly—“was it not,” finishing the sentence in her own mind, “lurking there already, the doubt of him? the suspicion of there not being any real sympathy between us?”

“Don’t misunderstand me, Evey!” she went on aloud. “I am terribly sorry to have been the cause of anything,”—she hesitated—“mortifying or disappointing to him, though I daresay it will not last long,” with a little smile. “I do him full justice, and I hope he will marry some one who will make him far happier than I could have done,” she ended, earnestly, and the complete absence of bitterness in her tone was more convincing to her sister than anything else could have been that her castle in the air was doomed to no tangible existence.

Of all those concerned in the little drama which had that day been enacted at Merle-in-the-Wold, perhaps the one the least painfully affected, full of sympathy though he had been for the girl whom he seemed fated to meet under such curious circumstances, was Michael Gresham.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Charley's Friend.

Two years! A very short time to the old, but not so to the young, especially in anticipation. That autumn day when Philippa Raynsworth bade good-bye to her kind friends at Dorriford, she little expected that twice twelve months would pass before she returned there, and had this period been then alluded to, it would have seemed to her half a lifetime off.

What might not happen in two years? To her, standing at the very threshold of life, with every possibility before her, two years would have been almost like two score.

Yet when, in the autumn but one following the Easter of her first visit to Palden, she found herself again at Dorriford, she could hardly believe that two whole years had elapsed since the day when Mrs Lermont kissed her so affectionately, and made her promise to return to them as soon as she could do so.

She was again within a day or two of leaving them, after a quiet but pleasant fortnight with Maida—poor Maida, she was no stronger in health, possibly a shade more fragile than when she and Philippa had last met. But as ever, the fact of her invalidism was never obtruded on those about her, even, on the contrary, to a great extent ignored.

They—the two cousins—had been strolling for a little, a very little only was all Miss Lermont was able for now—up and down the already leaf-strewn drive. The day was mild and calm, a typical autumn day.

Suddenly Maida spoke.

"Do you remember, Philippa," she said—"it has just come back to me—the last time you were here, our standing in the porch and watching the Bertrams drive away?"

Philippa smiled. There was no bitterness in her smile, though it was

perhaps a little sad.

“Yes,” she said, with a little bending of her head as she spoke, “yes, I remember.”

Maida glanced at her.

“You are changed since then,” she went on.

“It is two years ago,” said Philippa. “Two years may alter one a good deal—even less time than that—for I recollect your saying at Cannes, within six months of the time I was here, that I had changed.”

“I remember it, too,” said her cousin. “But now I should express it differently. At Cannes you were *changing*; you seemed unsettled and uncertain, though in some ways matured, and—do not be hurt at the word—softened. But now you *are* changed, the process is completed.”

“I hope for the better?” inquired Philippa. She spoke lightly, but there was an undercurrent of earnestness in her words, too.

“To my mind, if it is not impertinent of me to give my opinion,” said Maida, gently, “very certainly *yes*. You are just what I pictured you would be as a full-grown woman, though—”

“Don’t stop short. I like to know all you feel about me. It does me good.”

“I was going to say I scarcely saw how anything but the discipline of sorrow could make you *quite* what I wanted you to be, my darling,” Miss Lermont replied. And the unwonted expression of affection touched Philippa. “And I trembled at the thought. I am cowardly about suffering for those I love. Yet how short-sighted we are! Here you are, with all the softening, and mellowing, and widening I hoped for, done—and yet—no special suffering has, so far as I know, fallen to your share. Don’t think me inquisitive,” she added, hastily. “I don’t want you to tell me anything you would rather not.”

Philippa hesitated.

“I have often thought of telling you the whole history of my life during the

six or eight months after I was last here," she said. "All my experiences—my personal experiences, I mean—seemed compressed into that time. Since then things have gone on very monotonously, though I have not been either dull or unhappy. You see it was so clear to me that it was my duty to stay at home and help papa again, after Charley so unexpectedly got that splendid piece of work in India. And with Evelyn settled at home so comfortably and no anxiety about her, things just settled down somehow. These last eighteen months have been most uneventful."

"You might have varied them by a *little* visit to us," said Maida.

"Truly I could not," Philippa replied, earnestly. "The one time I could have come, you remember Mrs Lermont was ill and you were fully engaged. I have only been to Palden once—that was last winter—for ten days."

"Is not Evelyn vexed with you for not going more frequently?"

"No," said Philippa. "She knows I could not help it. Now, of course—with Charley back—I shall be comparatively free. But—I don't care to go much to Palden."

"I think I know why," said Maida. "Has it not to do with what you have often thought of telling me? And *are* you going to tell it to me?"

"On the whole," said Philippa, "if you will not think me capricious, I *think* I would rather not. Some day, perhaps."

"As you like, dear, exactly and entirely as you like. But—if I may ask you something?"

"Of course you may."

"I would like to know—I cannot quite master my curiosity, you see, and indeed it is more interest in you than curiosity—I *would* like to know why you refused Bernard Gresham. For I am sure you did refuse him."

"Yes, I did," said Philippa, simply. "And I do not at all mind telling you why. It was just because I became entirely convinced that he and I were thoroughly unsuited to each other."

Maida made a little gesture of agreement.

“I should not express it quite as you do,” she said. “*I* should say he was not worthy of you—not that I think ill of him in any way, but he is simply on a different level altogether. At first, I will own to you, I was disappointed when I saw it was not going to be. I was ‘worldly’ *for* you, Philippa. But I saw more of him again at Cannes last winter, and—I lost all feeling of disappointment. Even when I thought that you had refused to marry out of exaggerated ideas as to your duties at home—even *then* I did not regret it.”

Philippa shook her head.

“No,” she said, “home things had nothing to do with it. At the time I refused him there was no special need of me at home. And my parents are too unselfish to have allowed a sacrifice of that kind; something else would have been arranged. No; I have given you my full reason. But—how I came to find out what I did—that,” with a slight smile, “is my secret. And my great reason for not telling you the whole story is that I know mamma would *rather* I did not tell it, even to you.”

“She knows everything?”

“Everything,” said Philippa, “and she does so ‘understand.’ And never for one moment have I regretted what I did. But Evey,” she went on, “poor Evey, is still a little sore about it. She does not know *quite* the whole, as mamma does.”

“Thank you, dear, for telling me all you have done,” said Maida. And then after a little pause: “Do you think you will never marry, Philippa? Has it left that feeling?”

“No, not exactly,” said the girl, frankly. “You see, after all, it was *not* him I cared for; it was something I believed, or thought I believed him to be. I don’t *think* I shall ever marry, however. I suppose, though it sounds rather conceited to say so, that it would be difficult for me ever to feel quite sure I was not making a mistake.”

She looked down at Miss Lermont as she spoke—Maida was by this time indoors and on her couch again—with a half-questioning look in her eyes.

“Don’t exaggerate that idea,” her friend replied, rather abruptly. “After all, every woman is in the same case? And remember you have not seen many men; your life has been to some extent isolated. Don’t begin to think there are hardly any happy marriages. It is a trick of the day to talk so.”

Philippa’s face grew rather red.

“Don’t snub me so severely,” she said. “Put a little of my hesitation down to humility.”

Miss Lermont laughed.

“Ah, well,” she said. “If the time ever comes when your hesitation vanishes, promise to let me know at once.”

Philippa was to leave Dorriford the next day. That morning brought her a letter from her brother Charley.

“I am only writing,” he said, “to make sure of your keeping to your train. I am going up to town for a night, and will meet you at the junction to-morrow on my way home again. And, by-the-by, I am half thinking of asking a friend to stay two or three days with us. I had not time to tell you about him before you left home,”—for Charley Raynsworth had only returned from the East a day or two before Philippa’s visit to the Lermonts—“we had so much to talk about. He is a civil engineer whom I saw a good deal of in India, and he came home a few weeks ago for good. His name is Gresham—he says he met you at Merle once. Do you remember him? I am sure my father and all of you will like him.”

Philippa’s breath came quick and short for a moment on reading these words.

“How strange,” she thought, “that Charley and he should have been thrown together! ‘Met me at Merle’—yes, indeed—*that day*! Once I see him I daresay it will seem all right. But just at present I feel almost more self-conscious about our last meeting than about the time at Wyverston. I wonder,” she added to herself, “if dear Solomon has been in India too!”

There was still a little flush of excitement on her face when she ran up-

stairs to say good-bye to her cousin Maida, whose slowly increasing weakness was steadily but surely diminishing the hours which she was each day able to spend down-stairs.

“How well you are looking this morning, dear! Are you so delighted to go home, and not the least bit sorry to leave us?” she said, with half-playful reproach.

“Of *course* I am sorry to leave you, dear, dear Maida,” said Philippa, tenderly. “I am feeling very pleased though, this morning, for I have just heard that Charley will meet me at the junction, and I don’t think I had fully realised how nice it is to have him back again,” she added in explanation, which was strictly true so far as it went. And indeed in her anticipation of meeting Michael Gresham again, she could scarcely have described her sensations as pleasurable or the reverse.

A few words from Philippa announcing her safe arrival at home, and ending with affectionate expressions of gratitude to her kind cousins, reached Dorriford the following day.

Then came a blank extending over a fortnight, by the end of which time Miss Lermont began to fear that something must be the matter at Greenleaves.

She was on the point of writing again to Philippa to inquire the cause of her silence, when a letter arrived. It was a long letter and marked “private,” though no restrictions were placed on Maida as to making known to her family the news it contained.

“My hesitation has vanished,” were the words with which Philippa preluded the announcement of her engagement to Michael Gresham. “I am *perfectly* happy, *perfectly* satisfied, though it has been difficult for me to believe myself worthy of him. But as *he* thinks I am—”

More practical details followed. It was not a “brilliant” marriage, such as Evelyn Headfort had dreamt of for her sister. A life of some restrictions, even possibly of a certain amount of struggle, was before her and Michael, but a life brightened and ennobled by high aims and many worthy interests outside themselves, by, above all, completest confidence

and mutual sympathy.

“It seems almost ideal,” thought Maida, as she finished the letter. “I can feel no fears or apprehensions about a marriage like that, whatever the world may say as to the necessity of wealth.”

For Maida’s eyes were growing very clear as to the real estimate of things—she was nearing the heights where earth-born clouds and mists begin to melt away in the everlasting sunshine.

Up to the present time, Bernard Gresham is still unmarried, not having as yet succeeded in discovering the flawless gem among women, to whom he could without misgiving entrust his happiness, and who alone would be fitted to shine as mistress of Merle. He now by no means regrets Philippa’s little looked-for refusal of the honour he laid before her, vainly as he has endeavoured satisfactorily to account to himself for it. But as his cousin’s wife he quite approves of her, and he is always ready cordially to welcome her and her husband when they can spare a week or two for a visit to Merle, on which occasions it is unnecessary to say that “Solomon” again figures as one of Philippa’s fellow-travellers.

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