

# GLYN ELINOR

THE VICISSITUDES OF  
EVANGELINE

**Elinor Glyn**  
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*The Vicissitudes of Evangeline:*

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# Elinor Glyn

## The Vicissitudes of Evangeline

### THE BEGINNING OF EVANGELINE'S JOURNAL

*Branches Park,*

*November 3rd, 1904.*

I wonder so much if it is amusing to be an adventuress, because that is evidently what I shall become now. I read in a book all about it; it is being nice-looking and having nothing to live on, and getting a pleasant time out of life – and I intend to do that! I have certainly nothing to live on, for one cannot count £300 a year – and I am extremely pretty, and I know it quite well, and how to do my hair, and put on my hats, and those things, so, of course, I am an adventuress! I was not intended for this *rôle*– in fact Mrs. Carruthers adopted me on purpose to leave me her fortune, as at that time she had quarrelled with her heir, who was bound to get the place. Then she was so inconsequent as not to make a proper will – thus it is that this creature gets everything, and I nothing!

I am twenty, and up to the week before last, when Mrs. Carruthers got ill, and died in one day, I had had a fairly decent

time at odd moments when she was in a good temper.

There is no use pretending even when people are dead, if one is writing down one's real thoughts. I detested Mrs. Carruthers most of the time. A person whom it was impossible to please. She had no idea of justice, or of anything but her own comfort, and what amount of pleasure other people could contribute to her day!

How she came to do anything for me at all was because she had been in love with papa, and when he married poor mamma – a person of no family – and then died, she offered to take me, and bring me up, just to spite mamma, she has often told me. As I was only four I had no say in the matter, and if mamma liked to give me up that was her affair. Mamma's father was a lord, and her mother I don't know who, and they had not worried to get married, so that is how it is poor mamma came to have no relations. After papa was dead she married an Indian officer, and went off to India, and died too, and I never saw her any more – so there it is, there is not a soul in the world who matters to me, or I to them, so I can't help being an adventuress, and thinking only of myself, can I?

Mrs. Carruthers periodically quarrelled with all the neighbours, so beyond frigid calls now and then in a friendly interval, we never saw them much. Several old, worldly ladies used to come to stay, but I liked none of them, and I have no young friends. When it is getting dark, and I am up here alone, I often wonder what it would be like if I had – but I believe I am

the kind of cat that would not have got on with them too nicely – so perhaps it is just as well; only to have had a pretty – aunt, say, to love one, that might have been nice.

Mrs. Carruthers had no feelings like this. “Stuff and nonsense” – “sentimental rubbish” she would have called them. To get a suitable husband is what she brought me up for, she said, and for the last years had arranged that I should marry her detested heir, Christopher Carruthers, as I should have the money, and he the place.

He is a diplomat, and lives in Paris, and Russia, and amusing places like that, so he does not often come to England. I have never seen him. He is quite old – over thirty – and has hair turning gray.

Now he is master here, and I must leave – unless he proposes to marry me at our meeting this afternoon, which he probably won't do.

However, there can be no harm in my making myself look as attractive as possible under the circumstances. As I am to be an adventuress, I must do the best I can for myself. Nice feelings are for people who have money to live as they please. If I had ten thousand a year, or even five, I would snap my fingers at all men, and say, “No, I make my life as I choose, and shall cultivate knowledge and books, and indulge in beautiful ideas of honour and exalted sentiments, and perhaps one day succumb to a noble passion.” (What grand words the thought even is making me write!!) But as it is, if Mr. Carruthers asks me to marry him,

as he has been told to do by his aunt, I shall certainly say yes, and so stay on here, and have a comfortable home. Until I have had this interview it is hardly worth while packing anything.

What a mercy black suits me! My skin is ridiculously white – I shall stick a bunch of violets in my frock, that could not look heartless, I suppose. But if he asks me if I am sad about Mrs. Carruthers' death, I shall not be able to tell a lie.

I am sad, of course, because death is a terrible thing, and to die like that, saying spiteful things to every one, must be horrid – but I can't, I can't regret her! Not a day ever passed that she did not sting some part of me – when I was little, it was not only with her tongue, she used to pinch me, and box my ears until Doctor Garrison said it might make me deaf, and then she stopped, because she said deaf people were a bore, and she could not put up with them.

I shall not go on looking back! There are numbers of things that even now make me raging to remember.

I have only been out for a year. Mrs. Carruthers got an attack of bronchitis when I was eighteen, just as we were going up to town for the season, and said she did not feel well enough for the fatigues, and off we went to Switzerland. And in the autumn we travelled all over the place, and in the winter she coughed and groaned, and the next season would not go up until the last court, so I have only had a month of London. The bronchitis got perfectly well, it was heart-failure that killed her, brought on by an attack of temper because Thomas broke the Carruthers vase.

I shall not write of her death, or the finding of the will, or the surprise that I was left nothing but a thousand pounds, and a diamond ring.

Now that I am an adventuress, instead of an heiress, of what good to chronicle all that! Sufficient to say if Mr. Carruthers does not obey his orders, and offer me his hand this afternoon, I shall have to pack my trunks, and depart by Saturday – but where to is yet in the lap of the gods!

He is coming by the 3.20 train, and will be in the house before four, an ugly, dull time; one can't offer him tea, and it will be altogether trying and exciting.

He is coming ostensibly to take over his place, I suppose, but in reality it is to look at me, and see if in any way he will be able to persuade himself to carry out his aunt's wishes. I wonder what it will be like to be married to some one you don't know, and don't like? I am not greatly acquainted yet with the ways of men. We have not had any that you could call that here, much – only a lot of old wicked sort of things, in the autumn, to shoot the pheasants, and play bridge with Mrs. Carruthers. The marvel to me was how they ever killed anything, such antiques they were! Some Politicians and ex-Ambassadors, and creatures of that sort; and mostly as wicked as could be. They used to come trotting down the passage to the schoolroom, and have tea with Mademoiselle and me on the slightest provocation! and say such things! I am sure lots of what they said meant something else, Mademoiselle used to giggle so. She was rather a good-looking one I had the

last four years, but I hated her. There was never anyone young and human who counted.

I did look forward to coming out in London, but, being so late, every one was preoccupied when we got there – and no one got in love with me much. Indeed, we went out very little, a part of the time I had a swollen nose from a tennis ball at Ranelagh – and people don't look at girls with swollen noses.

I wonder where I shall go and live! Perhaps in Paris – unless, of course, I marry Mr. Carruthers, – I don't suppose it is dull being married. In London all the married ones seemed to have a lovely time, and had not to bother with their husbands much.

Mrs. Carruthers always assured me love was a thing of absolutely no consequence in marriage. You were bound to love some one, some time, but the very fact of being chained to him would dispel the feeling. It was a thing to be looked upon like measles, or any other disease, and was better to get it over, and then turn to the solid affairs of life. But how she expected me to get it over when she never arranged for me to see anyone I don't know.

I asked her one day what I should do if I got to like some one after I am married to Mr. Carruthers, and she laughed one of her horrid laughs, and said I should probably do as the rest of the world. And what do they do? – I wonder? – Well, I suppose I shall find out some day.

Of course there is the possibility that Christopher (do I like the name of Christopher, I wonder?) – well, that Christopher

may not want to follow her will.

He has known about it for years, I suppose, just as I have, but I believe men are queer creatures, and he may take a dislike to me. I am not a type that would please every one. My hair is too red, brilliant dark fiery red like a chestnut when it tumbles out of its shell, only burnished like metal. If I had the usual white eyelashes I should be downright ugly, but, thank goodness! by some freak of nature mine are black and thick, and stick out when you look at me sideways, and I often think when I catch sight of myself in the glass that I am really very pretty – all put together – but, as I said before, not a type to please every one.

A combination I am that Mrs. Carruthers assured me would cause anxieties. “With that mixture, Evangeline,” she often said, “you would do well to settle yourself in life as soon as possible. Good girls don’t have your colouring.” So you see, as I am branded as bad from the beginning, it does not much matter what I do. My eyes are as green as pale emeralds, and long, and not going down at the corners with the Madonna expression of Cicely Parker, the Vicar’s daughter. I do not know yet what is being good, or being bad, perhaps I shall find out when I am an adventuress, or married to Mr. Carruthers.

All I know is that I want to *live*, and feel the blood rushing through my veins. I want to do as I please, and not have to be polite when I am burning with rage. I want to be late in the morning if I happen to fancy sleeping, and I want to sit up at night if I don’t want to go to bed! So, as you can do what you like

when you are married, I really hope Mr. Carruthers will take a fancy to me, and then all will be well! I shall stay upstairs until I hear the carriage-wheels, and leave Mr. Barton – the lawyer – to receive him. Then I shall saunter down nonchalantly while they are in the hall. It will be an effective entrance. My trailing black garments, and the great broad stairs – this is a splendid house – and if he has an eye in his head he must see my foot on each step! Even Mrs. Carruthers said I have the best foot she had ever seen. I am getting quite excited. I shall ring for Véronique and begin to dress!.. I shall write more presently.

*Thursday evening.*

It is evening, and the fire is burning brightly in my sitting-room where I am writing. *My* sitting-room! – did I say? Mr. Carruthers' sitting-room I meant – for it is mine no longer, and on Saturday, the day after to-morrow, I shall have to bid good-bye to it forever.

For yes – I may as well say it at once – the affair did not walk. Mr. Carruthers quietly, but firmly, refused to obey his aunt's will, and thus I am left an old maid!

I must go back to this afternoon to make it clear, and I must say my ears tingle as I think of it.

I rang for Véronique, and put on my new black afternoon frock, which had just been unpacked. I tucked in the violets in a careless way. Saw that my hair was curling as vigorously as usual, and not too rebelliously for a demure appearance, and so, at exactly the right moment, began to descend the stairs.

There was Mr. Carruthers in the hall. A horribly nice-looking, tall man, with a clean-shaven face, and features cut out of stone. A square chin, with a nasty twinkle in the corner of his eye. He has a very distinguished look, and that air of never having had to worry for his things to fit, they appear as if they had grown on him. He has a cold, reserved manner, and something commanding and arrogant in it, which makes one want to contradict him at once, but his voice is charming. One of that cultivated, refined kind, that sounds as if he spoke a number of languages, and so does not slur his words. I believe this is diplomatic, for some of the old ambassador people had this sort of voice.

He was standing with his back to the fire, and the light of the big window with the sun getting low was full on his face, so I had a good look at him. I said in the beginning that there was no use pretending when one is writing one's own thoughts for one's own self to read when one is old, and keeping them in a locked-up journal, so I shall always tell the truth here – quite different things to what I should say if I were talking to someone, and describing to them this scene. Then I should say I found him utterly unattractive, and in fact, I hardly noticed him! As it was, I noticed him very much, and I have a tiresome inward conviction that he could be very attractive indeed, if he liked.

He looked up, and I came forward with my best demure air, as Mr. Barton nervously introduced us, and we shook hands. I left him to speak first.

“Abominably cold day,” he said, carelessly. That was English and promising!

“Yes, indeed,” I said. “You have just arrived?”

And so we continued in this banal way, with Mr. Barton twirling his thumbs, and hoping, one could see, that we should soon come to the business of the day; interposing a remark here and there, which added to the *gêne* of the situation.

At last Mr. Carruthers said to Mr. Barton that he would go round and see the house; and I said tea would be ready when they got back. And so they started.

My cheeks would burn, and my hands were so cold, it was awkward and annoying, not half the simple affair I had thought it would be upstairs.

When it was quite dark, and the lamps were brought, they came back to the hall, and Mr. Barton, saying he did not want any tea, left us to find papers in the library.

I gave Mr. Carruthers some tea, and asked the usual things about sugar and cream. His eye had almost a look of contempt as he glanced at me, and I felt an angry throb in my throat. When he had finished he got up, and stood before the fire again. Then, deliberately, as a man who has determined to do his duty at any cost, he began to speak:

“You know the wish – or rather, I should say, the command, my aunt left me,” he said – “in fact she states that she had always brought you up to the idea. It is rather a tiresome thing to discuss with a stranger, but perhaps we had better get it over as soon

as possible, as that is what I came down here to-day for. The command was, I should marry you.” – He paused a moment. I remained perfectly still, with my hands idly clasped in my lap, and made myself keep my eyes on his face.

He continued, finding I did not answer – just a faint tone of resentment creeping into his voice – because I would not help him out, I suppose – I should think not! I loved annoying him!

“It is a preposterous idea in these days for any one to dispose of people’s destinies in this way, and I am sure you will agree with me that such a marriage would be impossible.”

“Of course I agree,” I replied, lying with a tone of careless sincerity. I had to control all my real feelings of either anger or pleasure for so long in Mrs. Carruthers’ presence that I am now an adept.

“I am so glad you put it so plainly,” I went on sweetly. “I was wondering how I should write it to you, but now you are here it is quite easy for us to finish the matter at once. Whatever Mrs. Carruthers may have intended me to do, I had no intention of obeying her, but it would have been useless for me to say so to her, and so I waited until the time for speech should come. Won’t you have some more tea?”

He looked at me very straightly, almost angrily, for an instant; presently, with a sigh of relief, he said, half laughing —

“Then we are agreed, we need say no more about it!”

“No more,” I answered, and I smiled too, although a rage of anger was clutching my throat. I do not know who I was angry

with – Mrs. Carruthers for procuring this situation, Christopher for being insensible to my charms, or myself for ever having contemplated for a second the possibility of his doing otherwise. Why, when one thinks of it calmly, should he want to marry me? A penniless adventuress with green eyes, and red hair, that he had never seen before in his life. I hoped he thought I was a person of naturally high colour, because my cheeks from the moment I began to dress had been burning and burning. It might have given him the idea the scene was causing me some emotion, and that he should never know!

He took some more tea, but he did not drink it, and by this I guessed that he also was not as calm as he looked!

“There is something else,” he said. And now there was almost an awkwardness in his voice. “Something else which I want to say, though perhaps Mr. Barton could say it for me – but which I would rather say straight to you – and that is you must let me settle such a sum of money on you as you had every right to expect from my aunt, after the promises I understand she always made to you – ”

This time I did not wait for him to finish! I bounded up from my seat – some uncontrollable sensation of wounded pride throbbing and thrilling through me.

“Money! – Money from you!” I exclaimed. “Not if I were starving!” – then I sat down again, ashamed of this vehemence. How would he interpret it! But it galled me so, and yet I had been ready an hour ago to have accepted him as my husband!

Why, then, this revolt at the idea of receiving a fair substitute in gold? Really, one is a goose, and I had time to realize, even in this tumult of emotion, that there can be nothing so inconsistent as the feelings of a girl.

“You must not be foolish!” he said, coldly. “I intend to settle the money whether you will or no, so do not make any further trouble about it!”

There was something in his voice so commanding and arrogant, just as I noticed at first, that every obstinate quality in my nature rose to answer him.

“I do not know anything about the law in the matter; you may settle what you choose, but I shall never touch any of it,” I said, as calmly as I could; “so it seems ridiculous to waste the money, does it not? You may not, perhaps, be aware I have enough of my own, and do not in any way require yours.”

He became colder and more exasperated.

“As you please, then,” he said, snappishly, and Mr. Barton, fortunately entering at that moment, the conversation was cut short, and I left them.

They are not going back to London until to-morrow morning, and dinner has yet to be got through. Oh! I do feel in a temper, and I can never tell of the emotions that were throbbing through me as I came up the great stairs just now. A sudden awakening to the humiliation of the situation! How had I ever been able to contemplate marrying a man I did not know, just to secure myself a comfortable home! It seems preposterous now.

I suppose it was because I have always been brought up to the idea, and until I came face to face with the man, it did not strike me as odd. Fortunately he can never guess that I had been willing to accept him – my dissimulation has stood me in good stead. Now I am animated by only one idea! To appear as agreeable and charming to Mr. Carruthers as possible. The aim and object of my life shall be to make him regret his decision. When I hear him imploring me to marry him, I shall regain a little of my self-respect! And as for marriage, I shall have nothing to do with the horrid affair! Oh dear no! I shall go away free, and be a happy adventuress – I have read the “Trois Mousquetaires,” and “Vingt Ans Après” – Mademoiselle had them – and I remember milady had only three days to get round her jailer, starting with his hating her, whereas Mr. Carruthers does not hate me, so that counts against my only having one evening. I shall do my best – !

*Thursday night.*

I was down in the library, innocently reading a book when Mr. Carruthers came in. He looked even better in evening dress, but he appeared ill-tempered, and no doubt found the situation unpleasant.

“Is not this a beautiful house?” I said, in a velvet voice, to break the awkward silence, and show him I did not share his unease. “You had not seen it before, for ages, had you?”

“Not since I was a boy,” he answered, trying to be polite. “My aunt quarrelled with my father – she was the direct heiress of all this, and married her cousin, my father’s younger brother – but

you know the family history, of course – ”

“Yes.”

“They hated one another, she and my father.”

“Mrs. Carruthers hated all her relations,” I said demurely.

“Myself among them?”

“Yes,” I said slowly, and bent forward, so that the lamplight should fall upon my hair. “She said you were too much like herself in character for you ever to be friends.”

“Is that a compliment?” he asked, and there was a twinkle in his eye.

“We must speak no ill of the dead,” I said, evasively.

He looked slightly annoyed, as much as these diplomats ever let themselves look anything.

“You are right,” he said. “Let her rest in peace.”

There was silence for a moment.

“What are you going to do with your life now?” he asked, presently. It was a bald question.

“I shall become an adventuress,” I answered deliberately.

“A *what?*” he exclaimed, his black eyebrows contracting.

“An adventuress. Is not that what it is called? A person who sees life, and has to do the best she can for herself.”

He laughed. “You strange little lady?” he said, his irritation with me melting. And when he laughs you can see how even his teeth are, but the two side ones are sharp and pointed like a wolf’s.

“Perhaps after all you had better have married me!”

“No, that would clip my wings,” I said frankly, looking at him straight in the face.

“Mr. Barton tells me you propose leaving here on Saturday. I beg you will not do so – please consider it your home for so long as you wish – until you can make some arrangements for yourself. You look so very young to be going about the world alone!”

He bent down and gazed at me closer – there was an odd tone in his voice.

“I am twenty, and I have been often snubbed,” I said, calmly; “that prepares one for a good deal. I shall enjoy doing what I please.”

“And what are you going to please?”

“I shall go to Claridge’s until I can look about me.”

He moved uneasily.

“But have you no relations? No one who will take care of you?”

“I believe none. My mother was nobody particular you know – a Miss Tonkins by name.”

“But your father?” He sat down now on the sofa beside me; there was a puzzled, amused look in his face – perhaps I was amazing him.

“Papa? Oh! Papa was the last of his family – they were decent people, but there are no more of them.”

He pushed one of the cushions aside.

“It is an impossible position for a girl – completely alone. I

cannot allow it. I feel responsible for you. After all, it would do very well if you married me – I am not particularly domestic by nature, and should be very little at home – so you could live here, and have a certain position, and I would come back now and then to see you were getting on all right.”

One could not say if he were mocking, or no.

“It is too good of you,” I said, without any irony, “but I like freedom, and when you were at home it might be such a bore –”

He leant back, and laughed merrily.

“You are candid, at any rate!” he said.

Mr. Barton came into the room at that moment, full of apologies for being late. Immediately after, with the usual ceremony, the butler entered and pompously announced, “Dinner is served, sir.” How quickly they recognize the new master!

Mr. Carruthers gave me his arm, and we walked slowly down the picture gallery to the banqueting hall, and there sat down at the small round table in the middle, that always looks like an island in a lake.

I talked nicely at dinner. I was dignified and grave, and quite frank. Mr. Carruthers was not bored. The *chef* had outdone himself, hoping to be kept on. I never felt so excited in my life.

I was apparently asleep under a big lamp, after dinner in the library – a book of silly poetry in my lap – when the door opened and he – Mr. Carruthers – came in alone, and walked up the room. I did not open my eyes. He looked for just a minute – how

accurate I am! Then he said, "You are very pretty when asleep!"

His voice was not caressing, or complimentary, merely as if the fact had forced this utterance.

I allowed myself to wake without a start.

"Was the '47 port as good as you hoped?" I asked, sympathetically.

He sat down. I had arranged my chair so that there was none other in its immediate neighbourhood. Thus he was some way off, and could realize my whole silhouette.

"The '47 port – oh yes! – but I am not going to talk of port. I want you to tell me a lot more about yourself, and your plans."

"I have no plans – except to see the world."

He picked up a book, and put it down again; he was not perfectly calm.

"I don't think I shall let you. I am more than ever convinced you ought to have some one to take care of you; you are not of the type that makes it altogether safe to roam about alone."

"Oh! as for my type," I said, languidly, "I know all about that. Mrs. Carruthers said no one with this combination of colour could be good, so I am not going to try. It will be quite simple."

He rose quickly from his chair, and stood in front of the great log fire, such a comical expression on his face.

"You are the quaintest child I have ever met," he said.

"I am not a child – and I mean to know everything I can."

He went over towards the sofa again, and arranged the cushions – great, splendid, fat pillows of old Italian brocade, stiff

with gold and silver.

“Come!” he pleaded, “sit here beside me, and let us talk; you are miles away there, and I want to – make you see reason.”

I rose at once, and came slowly to where he pointed. I settled myself deliberately, there was one cushion of purple and silver right under the light, and there I rested my head.

“Now talk!” I said, and half closed my eyes.

Oh! I was enjoying myself! The first time I have ever been alone with a real man! They – the old ambassadors, and politicians, and generals, used always to tell me I should grow into an attractive woman – now I meant to try what I could do.

Mr. Carruthers remained silent – but he sat down beside me, and looked, and looked right into my eyes.

“Now talk then,” I said again.

“Do you know, you are a very disturbing person,” he said at last, by way of a beginning.

“What is that?” I asked.

“It is a woman who confuses one’s thought when one looks at her. I do not now seem to have anything to say – or too much.”

“You called me a child.”

“I should have called you an enigma.”

I assured him I was not the least complex, and that I only wanted everything simple, and to be left in peace, without having to get married, or worry to obey people.

We had a nice talk.

“You won’t leave here on Saturday,” he said, presently,

apropos of nothing. "I do not think I shall go myself, to-morrow. I want you to show me all over the gardens, and your favourite haunts."

"To-morrow I shall be busy packing," I said, gravely, "and I do not think I want to show you the gardens – there are some corners I rather loved – I believe it will hurt a little to say good-bye."

Just then Mr. Barton came into the room, fussy and ill at ease. Mr. Carruthers' face hardened again, and I rose to say good-night.

As he opened the door for me: "Promise you will come down to give me my coffee in the morning," he said.

"*Qui vivra verra,*" I answered, and sauntered out into the hall. He followed me, and watched as I went up the staircase.

"Good-night!" I called softly, as I got to the top, and laughed a little – I don't know why.

He bounded up the stairs, three steps at a time, and before I could turn the handle of my door, he stood beside me.

"I do not know what there is about you," he said, "but you drive me mad – I shall insist upon carrying out my aunt's wish after all! I shall marry you, and never let you out of my sight – do you hear?"

Oh! such a strange sense of exaltation crept over me – it is with me still! Of course he probably will not mean all that to-morrow, but to have made such a stiff block of stone rush upstairs, and say this much now is perfectly delightful!

I looked at him up from under my eyelashes. "No, you will not

marry me,” I said, calmly; “or do anything else I don’t like, and now really good-night!” and I slipped into my room, and closed the door. I could hear he did not stir for some seconds. Then he went off down the stairs again, and I am alone with my thoughts.

My thoughts! I wonder what they mean. What did I do that had this effect upon him? I intended to do something, and I did it, but I am not quite sure what it was. However, that is of no consequence. Sufficient for me to know that my self-respect is restored, and I can now go out and see the world with a clear conscience.

*He* has asked me to marry him! and *I* have said I won’t!

*Branches Park,*

*Thursday night, Nov. 3rd, 1904.*

Dear Bob, – A quaint thing has happened to me! Came down here to take over the place, and to say decidedly I would not marry Miss Travers, and I find her with red hair and a skin like milk, and a pair of green eyes that look at you from a forest of black eyelashes with a thousand unsaid challenges. I should not wonder if I commit some folly. One has read of women like this in the *cinque-cento* time in Italy, but up to now I had never met one. She is not in the room ten minutes before one feels a sense of unrest, and desire for one hardly knows what – principally to touch her, I fancy. Good Lord! what a skin! pure milk and rare roses – and the reddest Cupid’s bow of a mouth! You had better come down at once, (these things are probably in your line) to save me from some sheer idiocy. The situation is exceptional;

she and I practically alone in the house, for old Barton does not count. She has nowhere to go, and as far as I can make out has not a friend in the world. I suppose I ought to leave – I will try to on Monday, but come down to-morrow by the 4 train.

*Yours,*

*Christopher.*

P.S. '47 port A1, and two or three brands of the old aunt's champagne exceptional, Barton says; we can sample them. Shall send this up by express, you will get it in time for the 4 train.

(The above letter from Mr. Carruthers came into Evangeline's possession later, and which she put into her journal at this place. – Editor's note.)

*Branches,*

*Friday night, November 4th.*

This morning Mr. Carruthers had his coffee alone. Mr. Barton and I breakfasted quite early, before 9 o'clock, and just as I was calling the dogs in the hall for a run, with my outdoor things already on, Mr. Carruthers came down the great stairs with a frown on his face.

“Up so early!” he said. “Are you not going to pour out my tea for me, then?”

“I thought you said coffee! No, I am going out,” and I went on down the corridor, the wolf-hounds following me.

“You are not a kind hostess!” he called after me.

“I am not a hostess at all,” I answered back, “only a guest.”

He followed me. "Then you are a very casual guest, not consulting the pleasure of your host."

I said nothing; I only looked at him over my shoulder, as I went down the marble steps – looked at him, and laughed as on the night before.

He turned back into the house without a word, and I did not see him again until just before luncheon.

There is something unpleasant about saying good-bye to a place, and I found I had all sorts of sensations rising in my throat at various points in my walk. However, all that is ridiculous, and must be forgotten. As I was coming round the corner of the terrace, a great gust of wind nearly blew me into Mr. Carruthers' arms. Odious weather we are having this autumn.

"Where have you been all the morning?" he said, when we had recovered ourselves a little. "I have searched for you all over the place."

"You do not know it all yet, or you would have found me," I said, pretending to walk on.

"No, you shall not go now," he exclaimed, pacing beside me. "Why won't you be amiable and make me feel at home."

"I do apologize if I have been unamiable," I said, with great frankness. "Mrs. Carruthers always brought me up to have such good manners."

After that he talked to me for half an hour about the place.

He seemed to have forgotten his vehemence of the night before. He asked all sorts of questions, and showed a sentiment

and a delicacy I should not have expected from his hard face. I was quite sorry when the gong sounded for luncheon and we went in.

I have no settled plan in my head – I seem to be drifting, – tasting for the first time some power over another human being. It gave me delicious thrills to see his eagerness when contrasted with the dry refusal of my hand only the day before.

At lunch I addressed myself to Mr. Barton; he was too flattered at my attention, and continued to chatter garrulously.

The rain came on, and poured, and beat against the window-panes with a sudden angry thud. No chance of further walks abroad. I escaped upstairs while the butler was speaking to Mr. Carruthers, and began helping Véronique to pack. Chaos and desolation it all seemed in my cosy rooms.

While I was on my knees in front of a great wooden box, hopelessly trying to stow away books, a crisp tap came to the door, and without more ado my host – yes, he is that now – entered the room.

“Good Lord! what is all this,” he exclaimed, “what are you doing?”

“Packing,” I said, not getting up.

He made an impatient gesture.

“Nonsense!” he said, “there is no need to pack. I tell you I will not let you go. I am going to marry you and keep you here always.”

I sat down on the floor and began to laugh.

“You think so, do you?”

“Yes.”

“You can’t force me to marry you, you know – can you? I want to see the world, I don’t want any tiresome man bothering after me. If I ever do marry it will be because – oh, because – ” and I stopped, and began fiddling with the cover of a book.

“What?”

“Mrs. Carruthers said it was so foolish – but I believe I should prefer to marry some one I liked. Oh! I know you think that silly,” and I stopped him as he was about to speak, “but of course, as it does not last any way, it might be good for a little to begin like that, don’t you think so?”

He looked round the room, and on through the wide open double doors into my dainty bedroom where Véronique was still packing.

“You are very cosy here, it is absurd of you to leave it,” he said.

I got up off the floor and went to the window and back. I don’t know why I felt moved, a sudden sense of the cosiness came over me. The world looked wet and bleak outside.

“Why do you say you want me to marry you, Mr. Carruthers?” I said. “You are joking, of course.”

“I am not joking. I am perfectly serious. I am ready to carry out my aunt’s wishes. It can be no new idea to you, and you must have worldly sense enough to realize it would be the best possible solution of your future. I can show you the world, you know.”

He appeared to be extraordinarily good-looking as he stood

there, his face to the dying light. Supposing I took him at his word, after all.

“But what has suddenly changed your ideas since yesterday? You told me you had come down to make it clear to me that you could not possibly obey her orders.”

“That was yesterday,” he said. “I had not really seen you; to-day I think differently.”

“It is just because you are sorry for me; I suppose I seem so lonely,” I whispered demurely.

“It is perfectly impossible – what you propose to do – to go and live by yourself at a London hotel – the idea drives me mad!”

“It will be delightful! no one to order me about from morning to night!”

“Listen,” he said, and he flung himself into an armchair. “You can marry me, and I will take you to Paris, or where you want, and I won’t order you about, – only I shall keep the other beasts of men from looking at you.”

But I told him at once I thought that would be very dull. “I have never had the chance of any one looking at me,” I said, “and I want to feel what it is like. Mrs. Carruthers always assured me I was very pretty, you know, only she said that I was certain to come to a bad end, because of my type, unless I got married at once, and then if my head was screwed on the right way it would not matter; but I don’t agree with her.”

He walked up and down the room impatiently.

“That is just it,” he said.” I would rather be the first – I would

rather you began by me. I am strong enough to ward off the rest.”

“What does ’beginning by you’ mean?” I asked with great candour. “Old Lord Bentworth said I should begin by him, when he was here to shoot pheasants last autumn; he said it could not matter, he was so old; but I didn’t – ”

Mr. Carruthers bounded up from his chair.

“You didn’t what! Good Lord, what did he want you to do!” he asked aghast.

“Well,” I said, and I looked down for a moment, I felt stupidly shy, “he wanted me to kiss him.”

Mr. Carruthers appeared almost relieved, it was strange!

“The old wretch! Nice company my aunt seems to have kept!” he exclaimed. “Could she not take better care of you than that – to let you be insulted by her guests.”

“I don’t think Lord Bentworth meant to insult me. He only said he had never seen such a red, curly mouth as mine, and as I was bound to go to the devil some day with that, and such hair, I might begin by kissing him – he explained it all.”

“And were you not very angry?” his voice wrathful.

“No – not very, I could not be, I was shaking so with laughter. If you could have seen the silly old thing, like a wizened monkey, with dyed hair and an eyeglass, it was too comic! – I only told you because you said the sentence ‘begin by you,’ and I wanted to know if it was the same thing.”

Mr. Carruthers’ eyes had such a strange expression, puzzle and amusement, and something else. He came over close to me.

“Because,” I went on, “if so, I believe if that is always the beginning – I don’t want any beginnings – I haven’t the slightest desire to kiss any one – I should simply hate it.”

Mr. Carruthers laughed. “Oh! you are only a baby child after all!” he said.

This annoyed me. I got up with great dignity. “Tea will be ready in the white drawing-room,” I said stiffly, and walked towards my bedroom door.

He came after me.

“Send your maid away, and let us have it up here,” he said. “I like this room.”

But I was not to be appeased thus easily, and deliberately called Véronique and gave her fresh directions.

“Poor old Mr. Barton will be feeling so lonely,” I said, as I went out into the passage. “I am going to see that he has a nice tea,” and I looked back at Mr. Carruthers over my shoulder. Of course he followed me and we went together down the stairs.

In the hall a footman with a telegram met us. Mr. Carruthers tore it open impatiently. Then he looked quite annoyed.

“I hope you won’t mind,” he said, “but a friend of mine, Lord Robert Vavasour is arriving this afternoon – he is a – er – great judge of pictures. I forgot I asked him to come down and look at them, it clean went out of my head.”

I told him he was host; and why should I object to what guests he had.

“Besides, I am going myself to-morrow,” I said, “if Véronique

can get the packing done.”

“Nonsense – how can I make you understand that I do not mean to let you go at all.”

I did not answer – only looked at him defiantly.

Mr. Barton was waiting patiently for us in the white drawing-room, and we had not been munching muffins for five minutes when the sound of wheels crunching the gravel of the great sweep – the windows of this room look out that way – interrupted our manufactured conversation.

“This must be Bob arriving,” Mr. Carruthers said, and went reluctantly into the hall to meet his guest.

They came back together presently, and he introduced Lord Robert to me.

I felt at once he was rather a pet! Such a shape! Just like the Apollo of Belvidere! I do love that look, with a tiny waist and nice shoulders, and looking as if he were as lithe as a snake, and yet could break pokers in half like Mr. Rochester in “Jane Eyre”!

He has great, big, sleepy eyes of blue, and rather a plaintive expression, and a little fairish moustache turned up at the corners, and the nicest mouth one ever saw, and when you see him moving, and the back of his head, it makes you think all the time of a beautifully groomed thoroughbred horse. I don’t know why. At once – in a minute – when we looked at one another, I felt I should like “Bob”! He has none of Mr. Carruthers’ cynical, hard, expression, and I am sure he can’t be nearly as old, not more than twenty-seven, or so.

He seemed perfectly at home, sat down and had tea, and talked in the most casual, friendly way. Mr. Carruthers appeared to freeze up, Mr. Barton got more banal – and the whole thing entertained me immensely.

I often used to long for adventures in the old days with Mrs. Carruthers, and here I am really having them!

Such a situation! I am sure people would think it most improper! I alone in the house with these three men! I felt I really would have to go – but where!

Meanwhile I have every intention of amusing myself!

Lord Robert and I seemed to have a hundred things to say to one another. I do like his voice – and he is so perfectly *sans gêne*, it makes no difficulties. By the end of tea we were as old friends. Mr. Carruthers got more and more polite, and stiff, and finally jumped up and hurried his guest off to the smoking-room.

I put on such a duck of a frock for dinner, one of the sweetest chastened simplicity, in black, showing peeps of skin through the thin part at the top. Nothing could be more demure or becoming, and my hair would not behave, and stuck out in rebellious waves and curls everywhere.

I thought it would be advisable not to be in too good time, so sauntered down after I knew dinner was announced.

They were both standing on the hearth rug. I always forget to count Mr. Barton, he was in some chair, I suppose, but I did not notice him.

Mr. Carruthers is the taller – about one inch; he must be a

good deal over six feet, because the other one is very tall too, but now that one saw them together Mr. Carruthers' figure appeared stiff and set beside Lord Robert's, and he hasn't got nearly such a little waist. I wonder if any other nation can have that exquisitely *soigné* look of Englishmen in evening dress, I don't believe so. They really are lovely creatures, both of them, and I don't yet know which I like best.

We had such an engaging time at dinner! I was as provoking as I could be in the time – sympathetically absorbingly interested in Mr. Barton's long stories, and only looking at the other two now and then from under my eyelashes – while I talked in the best demure fashion that I am sure even Lady Katherine Montgomerie – a neighbour of ours – would have approved of.

They should not be able to say I could not chaperone myself in any situation.

“Dam – good port this, Christopher,” Lord Robert said, when the '47 was handed round. “Is this what you asked me down to sample?”

“I thought it was to give your opinion about the pictures,” I exclaimed, surprised. “Mr. Carruthers said you were a great judge.”

They looked at one another.

“Oh – ah – yes,” said Lord Robert, lying transparently. “Pictures are awfully interesting. Will you show me them after dinner?”

“The light is too dim for a connoisseur to investigate them

properly,” I said.

“I shall have it all lit by electricity as soon as possible; I wrote about it to-day,” Mr. Carruthers announced, sententiously. “But I will show you the pictures myself, to-morrow, Bob.”

This at once decided me to take Lord Robert round to-night, and I told him so in a velvet voice while Mr. Barton was engaging Christopher’s attention.

They stayed such a long time in the dining-room after I left that I was on my way to bed when they came out into the hall, and could with difficulty be persuaded to remain for a few moments.

“I am too awfully sorry!” Lord Robert said. “I could not get away, I do not know what possessed Christopher, he would sample ports, and talked the hind leg off a donkey, till at last I said to him straight out I wanted to come to you. So here I am – now you won’t go to bed, will you – please, please.”

He has such pleading blue eyes – imploring pathetically like a baby in distress – it is quite impossible to resist him! and we started down the gallery.

Of course he did not know the difference between a Canaletto and a Turner, and hardly made a pretence of being interested, in fact when we got to the end where the early Italians hang, and I was explaining the wonderful texture of a Madonna, he said:

“They all look sea-sick, and out of shape! don’t you think we might sit in that comfy window seat and talk of something else!” Then he told me he loved pictures, but not this sort.

“I like people to look human you know, even on canvas,” he

said. "All these ladies appear as if they were getting enteric like people used in Africa, and I don't like their halos, and things, and all the men are old and bald. But you must not think me a Goth – you will teach me their points, won't you, and then I shall love them."

I said I did not care a great deal for them myself, except the colour.

"Oh! I am so glad," he said. "I should like to find we admired the same things; but no picture could interest me as much as your hair. It is the loveliest thing I have ever seen, and you do it so beautifully."

That did please me! He has the most engaging ways, Lord Robert, and he is very well informed, not stupid a bit, or thick, only absolutely simple and direct. We talked softly together, quite happy for a while.

Then Mr. Carruthers got rid of Mr. Barton, and came towards us. I settled myself more comfortably on the velvet cushions. Purple velvet cushions and curtains in this gallery, good old relics of early Victorian taste. Lots of the house is awful, but these curtains always please me.

Mr. Carruthers' face was as stern as a stone bust of Augustus Caesar. I am sure the monks in the Inquisition looked like that. I do wonder what he meant to say, but Lord Robert did not give him time.

"Do go away, Christopher," he said; "Miss Travers is going to teach me things about Italian Madonnas, and I can't keep my

attention if there is a third person about.”

I suppose if Mr. Carruthers had not been a diplomat he would have sworn, but I believe that kind of education makes you able to put your face how you like, so he smiled sweetly, and took a chair near.

“I shall not leave you, Bob,” he said. “I do not consider you are a good companion for Miss Evangeline. I am responsible for her, and I am going to take care of her.”

“Then you should not have asked him here if he is not a respectable person,” I said, innocently; “but Italian Madonnas ought to chasten and elevate his thoughts. Anyway your responsibility towards me is self constituted. I am the only person whom I mean to obey!” and I settled myself deliberately in the velvet pillows.

“Not a good companion!” exclaimed Lord Robert, “What dam – cheek, Christopher. I have not my equal in the whole Household Cavalry, as you know.”

They both laughed, and we continued to talk in a sparring way, Mr. Carruthers sharp, subtle, and fine as a sword blade – Lord Robert downright, simple, with an air of a puzzled baby.

When I thought they were both wanting me very much to stay, I got up, and said good-night.

They both came down the gallery with me, and insisted upon each lighting a candle from the row of burnished silver candlesticks in the hall, which they presented to me with great mock homage. It annoyed me, I don’t know why, and I suddenly

froze up, and declined them both, while I said good-night again stiffly, and walked in my most stately manner up the stairs.

I could see Lord Robert's eyebrows puckered into a more plaintive expression than ever, while he let the beautiful silver candlestick hang, dropping the grease on to the polished oak floor.

Mr. Carruthers stood quite still, and put his light back on the table. His face was cynical and rather amused. I can't say what irritation I felt, and immediately decided to leave on the morrow – but where to, Fate, or the Devil, could only know!

When I got to my room a lump came in my throat. Véronique had gone to bed, tired out with her day's packing.

I suddenly felt utterly alone, all the exaltation gone. For the moment I hated the two downstairs. I felt the situation equivocal, and untenable, and it had amused me so much an hour ago.

It is stupid and silly, and makes one's nose red, but I felt like crying a little before I got into bed.

*Branches,*

*Saturday afternoon, Nov. 5th.*

This morning I woke with a headache, to see the rain beating against my windows, and mist and fog – a fitting day for the fifth of November. I would not go down to breakfast. Véronique brought me mine to my sitting-room fire, and, with Spartan determination, I packed steadily all the morning.

About twelve a note came up from Lord Robert; I paste it in: “Dear Miss Travers, – Why are you hiding? Was I a bore last

night? Do forgive me and come down. Has Christopher locked you in your room? I will murder the brute if he has!

*“Yours very sincerely,*

*“Robert Vavasour.”*

“Can’t, I am packing,” I scribbled in pencil on the envelope, and gave it back to Charles, who was waiting in the hall for the answer. Two minutes after Lord Robert walked into the room, the door of which the footman had left open.

“I have come to help you,” he said in that voice of his that sounds so sure of a welcome you can’t snub him; “but where are you going?”

“I don’t know,” I said, a little forlornly, and then bent down and vigorously collected photographs.

“Oh, but you can’t go to London by yourself!” he said, aghast. “Look here, I will come up with you, and take you to my aunt, Lady Merrenden. She is such a dear, and I am sure when I have told her all about you she will be delighted to take care of you for some days until you can hunt round.”

He looked such a boy, and his face was so kind, I was touched.

“Oh no, Lord Robert! I cannot do that, but I thank you. I don’t want to be under an obligation to any one,” I said firmly. “Mr. Carruthers suggests a way out of the difficulty – that I should marry him, and stay here. I don’t think he means it really, but he pretends he does.”

He sat down on the edge of a table already laden with books, most of which overbalanced and fell crash on the floor.

“So Christopher wants you to marry him, the old fox!” he said, apparently oblivious of the wreck of literature he had caused. “But you won’t do that, will you? And yet I have no business to say that. He is a dam – good friend, Christopher.”

“I am sure you ought not to swear so often, Lord Robert, it shocks me, brought up as I have been,” I said, with the air of a little angel.

“Do I swear?” he asked, surprised. “Oh no, I don’t think so – at least there is no ‘n’ to the end of the ‘dams,’ so they are only an innocent ornament to conversation. But I won’t do it, if you don’t wish me to.”

After that he helped me with the books, and was so merry and kind I soon felt cheered up, and by lunch time all were finished, and in the boxes ready to be tied up, and taken away. Véronique, too, had made great progress in the adjoining room, and was standing stiff and *maussade* by my dressing-table when I came in. She spoke respectfully in French, and asked me if I had made my plans yet, for, as she explained to me, her own position seemed precarious, and yet having been with me for five years, she did not feel she could leave me at a juncture like this. At the same time she hoped Mademoiselle would make some suitable decision, as she feared (respectfully) it was “*une si drole de position pour une demoiselle du monde,*” alone with “*ces messieurs.*”

I could not be angry, it was quite true what she said.

“I shall go up this evening to Claridge’s, Véronique,” I assured

her, “by about the 5.15 train. We will wire to them after luncheon.”

She seemed comforted, but she added, in the abstract, that a rich marriage was what was obviously Mademoiselle’s fate, and she felt sure great happiness and many jewels would await Mademoiselle, if Mademoiselle could be persuaded to make up her mind. Nothing is sacred to one’s maid! She knew all about Mr. Carruthers, of course. Poor old Véronique – I have a big, warm corner for her in my heart – sometimes she treats me with the frigid respect one would pay to a queen, and at others I am almost her *enfant*, so tender and motherly she is to me. And she puts up with all my tempers and moods, and pets me like a baby just when I am the worst of all.

Lord Robert had left me reluctantly when the luncheon gong sounded.

“Haven’t we been happy?” he said, taking it for granted I felt the same as he did. This is a very engaging quality of his, and makes one feel sympathetic, especially when he looks into one’s eyes with his sleepy blue ones. He has lashes as long and curly as a gipsy’s baby.

Mr. Carruthers was alone in the dining-room when I got in; he was looking out of the window, and turned round sharply as I came up the room. I am sure he would like to have been killing flies on the panes if he had been a boy! His eyes were steel.

“Where have you been all the time?” he asked, when he had shaken hands and said good-morning.

“Up in my room packing,” I said simply. “Lord Robert was so kind, he helped me – we have got everything done, and may I order the carriage for the 5.15 train, please?”

“Certainly not – confound Lord Robert!” Mr. Carruthers said. “What business is it of his? You are not to go. I won’t let you. Dear, silly, little child – ” his voice was quite moved. “You can’t possibly go out into the world all alone. Evangeline, why won’t you marry me? I – do you know, I believe – I shall love you – ”

“I should have to be *perfectly sure* that the person I married loved me, Mr. Carruthers,” I said, demurely, “before I consented to finish up my life like that.”

He had no time to answer, for Mr. Barton and Lord Robert came into the room.

There seemed a gloom over luncheon. There were pauses, and Lord Robert had a more pathetic expression than ever. His hands are a nice shape – but so are Mr. Carruthers’, they both look very much like gentlemen.

Before we had finished, a note was brought in to me. It was from Lady Katherine Montgomerie. She was too sorry, she said, to hear of my lonely position, and she was writing to ask if I would not come over and spend a fortnight with them at Tryland Court.

It was not well worded, and I had never cared much for Lady Katherine, but it was fairly kind, and fitted in perfectly with my plans.

She had probably heard of Mr. Carruthers’ arrival, and was

scandalized at my being alone in the house with him.

Both men had their eyes fixed on my face when I looked up, as I finished reading the note.

“Lady Katherine Montgomerie writes to ask me to Tryland,” I said; “so if you will excuse me I will answer it, and say I will come this afternoon,” – and I got up.

Mr. Carruthers rose too, and followed me into the library. He deliberately shut the door and came over to the writing-table where I sat down.

“Well, if I let you go, will you tell her then that you are engaged to me, and I am going to marry you as soon as possible.”

“No, indeed I won’t!” I said, decidedly.

“I am not going to marry you, or any one, Mr. Carruthers. What do you think of me – ! Fancy my consenting to come back here for ever, and live with you – when I don’t know you a bit – and having to put up with your – perhaps – kissing me, and, and – things of that sort! It is perfectly dreadful to think of!”

He laughed as if in spite of himself. “But supposing I promised not to kiss you – ?”

“Even so,” I said, and I couldn’t help biting the end of my pen, “it could happen that I might get a feeling I wanted to kiss some one else – and there it is! Once you’re married, everything nice is wrong!”

“Evangeline! I won’t let you go – out of my life – you strange little witch, you have upset me, disturbed me, I can settle to nothing. I seem to want you so very much.”

“Pouff!” I said, and I pouted at him.

“You have everything in your life to fill it – position, riches, friends – you don’t want a green-eyed adventuress.”

I bent down and wrote steadily to Lady Katherine. I would be there about 6 o’clock, I said, and thanked her in my best style.

“If I let you go, it is only for the time,” Mr. Carruthers said, as I signed my name. “I *intend* you to marry me – do you hear!”

“Again I say *qui vivra verra!*” I laughed, and rose with the note in my hand.

Lord Robert looked almost ready to cry when I told him I was off in the afternoon.

“I shall see you again,” he said. “Lady Katherine is a relation of my aunt’s husband, Lord Merrenden. I don’t know her myself, though.”

I do not believe him – how can he see me again – young men do talk a lot of nonsense.

“I shall come over on Wednesday to see how you are getting on,” Mr. Carruthers said. “Please do be in.”

I promised I would, and then I came upstairs.

And so it has come to an end, my life at Branches. I am going to start a new phase of existence, my first beginning as an adventuress!

How completely all one’s ideas can change in a few days. This day three weeks ago Mrs. Carruthers was alive. This day two weeks ago I found myself no longer a prospective heiress – and only three days ago I was contemplating calmly the possibility of

marrying Mr. Carruthers – and now – for heaven – I would not marry any one! And so, for fresh woods and pastures new. Oh! I want to see the world, and lots of different human beings – I want to know what it is makes the clock go round – that great, big, clock of life – I want to dance, and to sing, and to laugh, and to *live*– and – and – yes – perhaps some day to kiss some one I love – !

*Tryland Court, Headington,  
Wednesday, November 9th.*

Goodness gracious! I have been here four whole days, and I continually ask myself how I shall be able to stand it for the rest of the fortnight. Before I left Branches I began to have a sinking at the heart. There were horribly touching farewells with housekeepers and people I have known since a child, and one hates to have that choky feeling – especially as just at the end of it – while tears were still in my eyes, Mr. Carruthers came out into the hall, and saw them – so did Lord Robert!

I blinked, and blinked, but one would trickle down my nose. It was a horribly awkward moment.

Mr. Carruthers made profuse inquiries as to my comforts for the drive, in a tone colder than ever, and insisted upon my drinking some cherry brandy. Such fussing is quite unlike his usual manner, so I suppose he too felt it was a tiresome *quart d'heure*. Lord Robert did not hide his concern, he came up to me and took my hand while Christopher was speaking to the footman who was going with me.

“You are a dear,” he said, “and a brick, and don’t you forget I shall come and stay with Lady Katherine before you leave, so you won’t feel you are all among strangers.”

I thanked him, and he squeezed my hand so kindly – I do like Lord Robert.

Very soon I was gay again, and *insouciant*, and the last they saw of me was smiling out of the brougham window as I drove off in the dusk. They both stood upon the steps and waved to me.

Tea was over at Tryland when I arrived, such a long, damp drive! And I explained to Lady Katherine how sorry I was to have had to come so late, and that I could not think of troubling her to have up fresh for me – but she insisted, and after a while a whole new lot came, made in a hurry with the water not boiling, and I had to gulp down a nasty cup – Ceylon tea, too – I hate Ceylon tea! Mr. Montgomerie warmed himself before the fire, quite shielding it from us, who shivered on a row of high-backed chairs beyond the radius of the hearth rug.

He has a way of puffing out his cheeks and making a noise like “Bur-r-r-r” – which sounds very bluff and hearty, until you find he has said a mean thing about some one directly after. And while red hair looks very well on me, I do think a man with it is the ugliest thing in creation. His face is red, and his nose and cheeks almost purple, and fiery whiskers, fierce enough to frighten a cat in a dark lane.

He was a rich Scotch manufacturer, and poor Lady Katherine had to marry him, I suppose, though, as she is Scotch herself, I

daresay she does not notice that he is rather coarse.

There are two sons and six daughters, one married, four grown-up, and one at school in Brussels, and all with red hair! – but straight and coarse, and with freckles and white eyelashes. So really it is very kind of Lady Katherine to have asked me here.

They are all as good as gold on top, and one does poker work, and another binds books and a third embroiders altar-cloths, and the fourth knits ties – all for charities, and they ask everyone to subscribe to them directly they come to the house. The tie and the altar-cloth one were sitting working hard in the drawing-room – Kirstie and Jean are their names – Jessie and Maggie, the poker worker and the bookbinder have a sitting-room to themselves, their workshop they call it. They were there still, I suppose, for I did not see them until dinner. We used to meet once a year at Mrs. Carruthers' Christmas parties ever since ages and ages, and I remember I hated their tartan sashes, and they generally had colds in their heads, and one year they gave every one mumps, so they were not asked the next. The altar-cloth one, Jean, is my age, the other three are older.

It was really very difficult to find something to say, and I can quite understand common people fidgeting when they feel worried like this. I have never fidgeted since eight years ago, the last time Mrs. Carruthers boxed my ears for it. Just before going up to dress for dinner Mr. Montgomerie asked blank out if it was true that Mr. Carruthers had arrived. Lady Katherine had been skirting round this subject for a quarter of an hour.

I only said yes, but that was not enough, and once started, he asked a string of questions, with “Bur-r-r-r” several times in between. Was Mr. Carruthers going to shoot the pheasants in November? Had he decided to keep on the *chef*

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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