

GARVICE CHARLES

LESLIE'S
LOYALTY

Charles Garvice
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CHAPTER I.

LESLIE LISLE

Nobody ever goes to Portmaris; that is to say, nobody who is anybody. It lies – but no matter, ours shall not be the hand to ruin its simplicity by advertising its beauties and advantages, and directing the madding crowd to its sylvan retreat. At present the golden sands which line the bay are innocent of the negro troupe, the peripatetic conjurer, and the monster in human form who pesters you to purchase hideous objects manufactured from shells and cardboard.

A time may come when Portmaris will develop into an Eastbourne or a Brighton, a Scarborough or a Hastings; but, Heaven be praised, that time is not yet, and Portmaris, like an unconscious village beauty, goes on its way as yet ignorant of its loveliness.

At present there are about a dozen houses, most of them fishermen's cottages; a church, hidden in a hollow a mile away from the restless sea; and an inn which is satisfied with being an inn, and has not yet learned to call itself a hotel.

Two or three of the fisherfolk let lodgings, to which come those fortunate individuals who have quite by chance stumbled upon this out-of-the-way spot; and in the sitting-room of the prettiest of these unpretentious cottages was a young girl.

Her name was Leslie Lisle. She was nineteen, slim, graceful, and more than pretty. There is a type of beauty which, with more or less truth, is generally described as Irish. It has dark hair, blue eyes with long black lashes, a clear and colorless complexion of creamy ivory, and a chin that would seem pointed but for the exquisite fullness of the lips. It is a type which is more fascinating than the severe Greek, more "holding" than the voluptuous Spanish, more spirituel than the vivacious French; in short, it is a kind of beauty before which most men go down completely and forever vanquished, and this because the wonderful gray-blue eyes are capable of an infinity of expressions, can be grave one moment and brimming over with fun the next; because there lurks, even when they are most quiescent, a world of possibilities in the way of wit in the corners of the red lips; because the face, as you watch it, can in the course of a few minutes flash with spirit, melt with tenderness, and all the while remain the face of a pure, innocent, healthy, light-hearted girl.

The young men who crossed Leslie Lisle's path underwent a sad experience.

At first they were attracted by her beauty; in a few hours or days, as the case might be, they began to find the attraction lying somewhat deeper than the face; then they grew restless, unhappy, lost their appetites, got to lying awake of nights, and lastly went to pieces completely, and if they possessed sufficient courage, flung themselves perfectly wretched and overcome at the small feet of the slim, girlish figure which had become to them even that of the one woman in the world. And to do Leslie justice, she was not only always surprised, but distressed. She had said nothing, and what is more, looked nothing, to encourage them. She had been just herself, a frank yet modest English girl, with an Irish face, and that indescribable sweetness which draws men's hearts from their bosoms before they know what has happened to them.

She was seated at the piano in the sitting-room of the cottage which the fisherman who owned it had christened Sea View, and she was amusing herself and a particularly silent and morose parrot by singing some of the old songs and ballads which she had found in a rickety music-stand in the corner; and for all the parrot glanced at her disapprovingly with his glassy eye, she had a sufficiently sweet voice, and sang with more than the usual amount of feeling.

While she was in the middle of that famous but slightly monotonous composition, "Robin Grey," the door opened, and a tall, thin man entered.

This was Francis Lisle, her father. He was a man this side of fifty, but looked older in consequence, perhaps, of his hair, which was gray and scanty, a faded face, with a dreamy far away look in the faint blue eyes, and a somewhat bent form and dragging gait. He carried a portable easel in one hand, and held a canvas under his arm.

As he entered he looked round the room as if he had never seen it before, then set the easel up in a corner, placed the canvas on it upside down, and crossing his hands behind his back, stood with bent head gazing at it for some moments in silence. Then he said, in a voice which matched the dreamy face:

"Leslie, come here."

Leslie stopped short in the middle of the most heart-rending line of the cheerful ballad, and walked – no; glided? scarcely; it is difficult to describe how the girl got across the small room, so full of grace, so characteristic was her mode of progression, and putting both hands on his shoulders, leaned her cheek against his head.

"Back already, dear?" she said, and the tone fully indicated the position in which she stood toward her parent. "I thought you were going to make a long day of it."

"Yes, yes," he said, without taking his eyes from the sketch. "I did intend doing so. I started full of my subject and – er – inspired with hope, and I don't think I have altogether failed. It is difficult – very. The tone of that sky would fill a careless amateur with despair, but – but I am not careless. Whatever I may be I am not that. The secrets of art which she hides from the unthinking and – er – irreverent she confides to her true worshipers. Now, Leslie, look at that sky. Look at it carefully, critically, and tell me – do you not think I have caught that half tone, that delicious mingling of the chrome and the ultramarine? There is a wealth of form and color in that right hand corner, and I – yes, I think it is the best, by far the best and truest thing I have as yet done."

Leslie leaned forward, and softly, swiftly, placed the picture right side up.

It had not very much improved by the transposition. It was – well, to put it bluntly, a daub of the most awful description. Never since the world began had there ever, in nature, been anything like it. The average schoolboy libeling nature with a shilling box of colors could not have sinned more deeply. The sea was a brilliant washerwoman's blue, the hills were heaps of muddy ochre, the fishing vessels looked like blackbeetles struggling on their backs, there was a cow in the meadow in the foreground which would have wrung tears from any one who had ever set eyes on that harmless but necessary animal, and the bit of sky in the corner was utterly and completely indescribable.

Leslie looked at it with a sad little expression in her eyes, the pitying look one sees in the face of a woman whose life is spent in humoring the weakness of a beloved one; then she said, gently:

"It is very striking, papa."

"Striking!" repeated Francis Lisle. "Striking! I like that word. You, too, are an artist, my dear Leslie, though you never touch a brush. How well you know how to use the exact expression. I flatter myself that it is striking. I think I may say, without egotism, that no one, no real critic could look at that sketch – for it is a mere sketch – without being struck!"

"Yes, papa," she murmured, soothingly.

He shaded his eyes with his thin white hands in the orthodox fashion, and peered at the monstrosity.

"There is, if I may say so, an – er – originality in the treatment which would alone make the sketch interesting and valuable. Tell me, now, Leslie, what it is in it that catches your fancy most."

Leslie looked at it carefully.

"I – I think that heap of sea-weed nicely painted, papa," she said, putting her arm round his neck.

"Heap of sea-weed?" his brows knitted. "Heap of sea-weed? I don't see anything of the kind."

"There, papa," she said, pointing.

"My dear Leslie, I have always suspected that your sight was not perfect, that there was some defect in its range power; that is not a heap of sea-weed, but a fisherwoman mending her nets!"

"Of course! How stupid of me!" she said, quickly. "I'm afraid I am near-sighted, dear. But don't you think you have done enough for to-day? Why not put it away until to-morrow?"

"There is no to-morrow, Leslie," he said, gravely, as he got out his palette. "'Art is long and life is fleeting.' Never forget that, my dear. No, I can stipple on a little. I intend finishing this sketch, and making a miniature – a cabinet picture. It shall be worthy of a place among those exquisite studies of Foster's. And yet –," he sighed and pushed the hair from his forehead, "and yet I'll be bound that if I tried to sell it, I should not find a dealer to give me a few paltry pounds for it. So blind and prejudiced! No, they would not buy it, and possibly the Academy would refuse to exhibit it. Prejudice, prejudice! But art has its own rewards, thank Heaven! I paint because I must. Fame has no attraction. I am content to wait. Yes, though the recognition which is my due may come too late! It is often thus!"

The girl bent her beautiful head – she stood taller than the drooping figure of her father – and kissed, ah! how tenderly, pityingly, the gray hair.

Francis Lisle, Esquire, the younger son of an old Irish family, had been a dreamer from his youth up. He had started with a good education and a handsome little fortune; he had dreamed away the education, dreamed away the small fortune, dreamed away nearly all his life, and his great dream was that he was an artist. He couldn't draw a haystack, and certainly could not have colored it correctly even if by chance he had drawn it; but he was persuaded that he was a great artist, and he fancied that his hand transferred to the canvas the scenes which he attempted to paint.

And he was not unhappy. His wife had died when Leslie was a mite of a thing, and how he had managed to get on until Leslie was old enough to take care of him can never even be surmised; but she began to play the mother, the guardian, and protector to this visionary father of hers, at an extremely early age. She managed everything, almost fed and clothed him, and kept from him all those petty ills and worries which make life such a burden for most people.

They had no settled home, but wandered about, sometimes on the Continent, but mostly in England, and Francis Lisle had hundreds of sketches which were like nothing under heaven, but were supposed to be "ideas" for larger pictures, of places they had visited.

They had been at Portmaris a couple of months when we find them, and though Francis Lisle was just beginning to get tired of it, and restlessly anxious to be on the move again, Leslie was loth to leave. She had grown fond of the golden sands, the strip of pebbly beach, the narrow street broken by its wind-twisted trees, the green lanes leading to the country beyond, and still more fond of the simple-hearted fisher folk, who always welcomed her with a smile, and had already learned to call her Miss Leslie.

Indeed, Miss Lisle was a dangerous young woman, and the hearts of young and old, gentle and simple, went down before a glance of her gray-blue eyes, a smile from the mobile lips, a word from her voice which thrilled with a melody few could resist.

Francis Lisle went on daubing, his head on one side, a rapt, contented look on his pale, aristocratic face.

"Yes, this is going to be one of my best efforts," he said, with placid complacency. "Go and sing something, Leslie. I can always work better while you are singing. Music and painting are twin sisters. I adore them both."

Leslie went back to the piano with that peculiarly graceful motion of hers, and touched a note or two.

"Were there no letters this morning, dear?" she asked.

"Letters?" Lisle put his hand to his forehead as if rudely called back to earth from the empyrean. "Letters? No. Yes, I forgot. There was one. It was from Ralph Duncombe."

Leslie turned her head slightly, and the rather thick brows which helped the eyes in all their unconscious mischief straightened.

"From Ralph? What does he say?"

"I don't know," replied Lisle, placidly. "I can never read his letters; he writes so terribly plain a hand; its hardness jars upon me. I have it – somewhere?"

He searched his pockets reluctantly.

"No, I must have lost it. Does it matter very much?"

Leslie laughed softly.

"I don't know; but one generally likes to know what is in a letter."

"Well, then, I wish I could find it. I told the postman when he gave it to me that I should probably lose it, and that he had better bring it on to the house; but – well, I don't think he understood me. I often think that we speak an unknown language to these country people."

"Perhaps he did not hear you," said Leslie. "Sometimes, you know, dear, you think you have spoken when you have not uttered a word, but only thought."

"I dare say," he assented, dreamily. "Now I come to think of it, I fancy Duncombe said he was coming down here – ."

The slender white hands which had been touching the keys caressingly stopped.

"Coming here, papa!"

"Yes. I think so. I'm not sure. Now, what could I have done with that letter?"

He made another search, failed to find it, shook his head as if dismissing the subject, and resumed his "work."

Leslie struck a chord, and opened her lips to sing, when the sound of the wheels belonging to the one fly in the place came down the uneven street. She paused to listen, then leaned sideways and looked through the window.

"The station fly!" she said. "And it has stopped at Marine Villa, papa. It must be another visitor. Fancy two visitors at the same time in Portmaris! It will go wild with excitement."

The cranky vehicle had pulled up at the opposite cottage, and Leslie, with mild, very mild, curiosity, got up from the piano and went to the window.

As she did so a man dressed in soft tweed got down from beside the driver, opened the fly-door, and gave his arm to a young man whose appearance filled Leslie's heart with pity; for he was a cripple. His back was bent, his face pale and gentle as a woman's, marked with lines which were eloquent of weary days, and still more weary nights; and in the dark eyes was that peculiar expression of sadness which a life of pain and suffering patiently borne sets as a seal.

The young fellow leaned on his stick and the man's arm, and looked round him, and his eye, dark and full of a soft penetration, fell upon the lovely face at the opposite window.

Leslie drew back, when it was too late, and breathed an exclamation of regret.

"Oh, papa!"

"What is the matter?" asked Lisle, vacantly.

"I am sorry!" she said. "He will think I was staring at him – and so I was. And that will seem so cruel to him, poor fellow."

"What is cruel? which poor fellow?" demanded Lisle with feeble impatience.

"Some one who has just got out of the fly, dear; a cripple, poor fellow; and he saw me watching him." And she sighed again.

"Eh?" said Lisle, as if he were trying to recollect something. "Ah, yes, I remember. Mrs. Whiting told me that he was expected some time to-day; they had a telegram saying he was coming."

"He? Who?" said Leslie, going back to the piano.

"Who?" repeated Lisle, as if he were heartily sorry he had continued the subject. "Why, this young man. Dear me, I forget his name and title – ."

"Title? Poor fellow! Is he a nobleman, papa? That makes it seem so much worse, doesn't it?"

Lisle looked round at her helplessly.

"Upon my word, my dear," he said, "I do not wish to appear dense, but I haven't the least idea of what you are talking about, and – ," he went on more quietly, as if he feared she were going to explain, "it doesn't matter. Pray sing something, and – and do not let us worry about things which do not concern us."

Leslie began to sing without another word.

CHAPTER II.

FATE

The crippled young man, with the assistance of his companion, made his way into the sitting-room of Marine Villa; an invalid's chair was hauled from the top of the fly and carried in, and the young man sank into it with a faint sigh.

"Leave me, Grey," he said. "When Lord Auchester arrives let him come to me at once; and, Grey, be good enough to remember what I told you –."

"Yes, your grace," said the man; then, as his master lifted the soft brown eyes with gentle reproach, he added, correcting himself, "yes, sir."

The young man smiled faintly.

"That is better. Thanks."

The valet unlocked a morocco traveling case, and took out a vial and medicine chest.

"The medicine, your gra – , sir, I mean."

"Ah, yes, I forgot. Thank you," said the young man, and he took the draught with a weary patience. "Thanks. Let me know when his lordship arrives. No, I want nothing more."

The valet went out, shutting the door softly after him, and his master leaned his head upon his hand, and closed his eyes.

Fate had dealt very strangely with this young man. With one hand it had showered upon him most of the gifts which the sons of men set high store by; it had made him a duke, had given him palaces, vast lands, money in such abundance as to be almost a burden; and with the other hand, as if in scorn and derision of the thing called Man, Fate had struck him one of those blows under which humanity is crushed and broken.

A nurse had let him, when a child, slip from her arms, and the great Duke of Rothbury was doomed to go through life a stunted and crooked-back object, with the grim figure of pain always marching by his side, with the bitter knowledge that not all his wealth could prevent the people he met in the streets regarding him with curious and pitying glances, with the bitter sense that the poorest of the laborers on his estates enjoyed a better lot than his, and was more to be envied than himself.

He sat perfectly motionless for some minutes; then he opened his eyes and started slightly; Leslie had just begun to sing.

He wheeled his chair to the window, and set it open quietly, and, keeping behind the curtains, listened with evident pleasure.

The song was still floating across to him when a young man came marching up the street.

Youth is a glorious thing under any circumstances, but when it is combined with perfect health, good temper, a handsome face, and a stalwart form it is god-like in its force and influence.

The little narrow street of Portmaris seemed somehow to grow brighter and wider as the young man strode up it; his well-knit form swaying a little to right and left, his well-shaped head perfectly poised, his bright eyes glancing here and there with intelligent interest, the pleasure-loving lips whistling softly from sheer light-heartedness. He stopped as he came opposite Sea View, and listened to Leslie's song, nodding his head approvingly; then he caught sight of the "Marine Villa" on the opposite house, and walked straight into the little hall.

"Hallo, Grey," he said, and his voice rang, not hardly and unpleasantly, but with that clear golden timbre which only belongs to the voice of a man in perfect health. "Here you are, then! And how is –."

Grey smiled as he bent his head respectfully; everybody was glad to see the young man.

"Yes, my lord. Just got down. His gra – . We are pretty well considering the journey, my lord. He will see your lordship at once."

"All right," said the young fellow. "I rode as far as Northcliffe, but left the horse there, as I didn't know what sort of stables they'd have here."

"You were right, my lord," said Grey, in the approving tone of a confidential servant. "This seems a rare out-of-the-way place. And I should doubt there being a decent stable here."

"Ah, well, the duke will like it all the better for being quiet," the young fellow said.

Grey put his hand to his lips, and coughed apologetically.

"Beg pardon, my lord, but his gra – , that is – well, you'll excuse me, my lord, but we're down here quite incog., as you may say."

As Lord Auchester, staring at the man, was about to laugh, the clear, rather shrill voice of the invalid was heard from the room.

"Is that you, Yorke? Why do you not come in?"

The young fellow entered, and took the long thin hand the duke extended to him.

"Hallo, Dolph!" he said, lowering his voice. "How are you? What made you think of coming to this outlandish spot?"

The duke, still holding his cousin's hand, smiled up at him with a mixture of sadness and self-railery.

"I can't tell you, Yorke; I got tired of town, and told Grey to hunt up some place in Bradshaw that he had never heard of, some place right out of the beaten track, and he chose this."

"Poor unfortunate man!" said Lord Auchester, with a laugh.

"Yes, Grey suffers a great deal from my moods and humors; and so do other persons, yourself to wit, Yorke. It was very kind of you to come to me so soon."

"Of course I came," said Lord Auchester. "I wasn't very far off, you see."

"Fishing?" said the duke, with evident interest.

"Y-es; oh, yes," replied the other young man, quickly. "I rode over as far as Northcliffe – ."

The duke sighed as his eyes wandered musingly over the stalwart, well-proportioned frame.

"You ought to have been in the army, Yorke," he said.

Lord Auchester laughed.

"So I should have been if they hadn't made the possession of brains a *sine qua non*; it seems you want brains for pretty nearly everything nowadays; and it's just brains I'm short of, you see, Dolph."

"You have everything else," said the duke, in a low voice.

He sighed and turned his head away; not that he envied his cousin his handsome face and straight limbs.

"You haven't told me what you wanted me for, Dolph," said Lord Auchester, after a pause, during which both men had been listening half unconsciously to the sweet voice in the cottage opposite.

"I wanted – nothing," said the duke.

"There is nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing; unless," with a sigh and a wistful smile, "unless you can by the wave of a magician's wand change this crooked body of mine for something like your own."

"I would if I could, Dolph," said the other, bending over him, and laying a pair of strong hands soothingly on the invalid's bent shoulders.

"I know that, Yorke. But you cannot, can you? I dare say you think I am a peevish, discontented wretch, and that I ought, as the poor Emperor of Germany said, to bear my pain without complaining – ."

"No, Dolph; I think you complain very little, and face the music first rate," put in the other.

"Thanks. I try to most times, and I could succeed better than I do if I were always alone, but sometimes – ," he sighed bitterly. "Why is it that the world is so false, Yorke? Are there no honest men besides you and Grey, and half a dozen others I could mention? And are there no honest women at all?"

Yorke Auchester raised his eyebrows and laughed.

"What's wrong with the women?" he said.

The duke leaned his head upon his hand, and partially hid his face, which had suddenly become red.

"Everything is wrong with them, Yorke," he said, gravely and in a low voice. "You know, or perhaps you do not know, how I esteem, reverence, respect a woman; perhaps because I dare not love them."

Yorke Auchester nodded.

"If all the men felt as you do about women there would be no bad ones in the world, Dolph," he said.

"To me there is something sacred in the very word. My heart expands, grows warm in the presence of a good woman. I cannot look at a beautiful girl without thinking – don't misunderstand me, Yorke."

"No, no, old chap!"

"I love, I reverence them; and yet they have made me fly from London, have caused me almost to vow that I will never go back; that I will hide my misshapen self for the rest of my weary days –."

"Why Dolph –."

"Listen," said the duke. "Look at me, Yorke. Ah, it is unnecessary. You know what I am. A thing for women to pity, to shudder at – not to love! And yet" – he hid his face – "some of them have tried to persuade me that I —I— could inspire a young girl with love; that I —I— oh, think of it, Yorke! – that I had only to offer myself as a husband to the most beautiful, the fairest, straightest, queenliest of them, to be accepted!"

Yorke Auchester leaned over him.

"You take these things too seriously, Dolph," he said, soothingly. "It's – it's the way of the world, and you can't better it; you must take it as it comes."

"The way of the world! That a girl – young, beautiful, graceful – should be sold by her mother and father, should be willing to sell herself – ah, Yorke! – to a thing like me. Is that the way of the world? What a wicked, heartless, vicious world, then; and what an unhappy wretch am I! What fools they are, too, Yorke! They think it is so fine a thing to wear a ducal coronet! Ha, ha!" He laughed with sad bitterness. "So fine, that they would barter their souls to the evil one to feel the pressure of that same coronet on their brows, to hear other women call them 'Your Grace.' Oh, Yorke, what fools! How I could open their eyes if they would let me! Look at me. I am the Duke of Rothbury, Knight of the Garter – poor garter!" and he looked at his thin leg – "and what else? I almost forget some of my titles; and I would swap them all for a straight back and stalwart limbs like yours. But, Yorke, to share those titles, how many women would let me limp to the altar on their arms!"

He laughed again, still more bitterly.

"Sometimes, when some sweet-faced girl, with the look of an angel in her eyes, with a voice like a heavenly harmony, is making what they call 'a dead set' at me, I have hard work to restrain myself from telling her what I think of her and those who set her at me. Yorke, it is this part of the business which makes my life almost unendurable, and it is only by running away from every one who knows, or has heard of, the 'poor' Duke of Rothbury that I can put up with existence."

"Poor old chap," murmured Lord Auchester.

"Just now," continued the duke, "as we drove up to the door, I caught sight of a beautiful girl at the window opposite. I saw her face grow soft with pity, with the angelic pity of a woman, which, though it stings and cuts into one like a cut from a whip, I try to be grateful for. She pitied me, not knowing who and what I am. Tell her that I am the Duke of Rothbury, and in five minutes or less that angelic look of compassion will be exchanged for the one which you see on the face of the hunter as his prey comes within sight. She will think, 'He is ugly, crooked, maimed for life; but he is a man, and I can therefore marry him; he is a duke and I should be a duchess.' And so, like a moral poison,

like some plague, I blight the souls of the best and purest. Listen to her now; that is the girl singing. What is it? I can hear the words."

He held up his hand. Leslie was singing, quite unconscious of the two listeners.

"My sweet girl love with frank blue eyes,
Though years have passed I see you still;
There, where you stood beside the mill,
Beneath the bright autumnal skies.
Though years have passed I love you yet;
Do you still remember, or do you forget?"

"A nice voice," said Yorke Auchester, approvingly.

"Yes; the voice of a girl-angel. No doubt she is one. She needs only to be informed that an unmarried duke is within reach, and she'll be in a hurry to drop to the earth, and in her hurry to reach and secure him will not mind dragging her white wings in the mud."

"Women are built that way," said Yorke Auchester, concisely.

The duke sighed.

"Oh, yes, they are all alike. Yorke, what a fine duke you would have made! What a mischievous, spiteful old cat Fate is, to make me a duke and you only a younger son! How is it you don't hate and envy me, Yorke?"

"Because I'm not a cad and a beast, I suppose," replied the young fellow, pleasantly. "Why, Dolph, you have been the best friend a man ever had – ."

"Most men hate their best friends," put in the duke, with a sad smile.

"Where should I have been but for you?" continued Yorke Auchester, ignoring the parenthesis. "You have lugged me out of Queer Street by the scruff of my neck half a dozen times. Every penny I ever had came from you, and I've had a mint, a complete mint – and, by the way, Dolph, I want some more."

The duke laughed wearily.

"Take as much as you want, Yorke," he said. "But for you, the money would grow and grow till it buried and smothered me. I cannot spend it; you must help me."

"I will; I always have," said Yorke Auchester, laughing. "It's a pity you haven't got some expensive fad, Dolph – pictures, or coins, or first editions, or racing."

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"I have only one fad," he said; "to be strong and straight, and that not even the Rothbury money can gratify. But I do get some pleasure out of your expenditure. I fancy you enjoy yourself."

"I do."

"Yes? That is well. Some day you will marry – ."

Yorke Auchester's hand dropped from the duke's shoulder.

"Marry some young girl who loves you for yourself alone."

"She's not likely to love me for anything else."

"All the better. Oh, Heaven! What would I not give for such a love as that?" broke out the duke.

As the passionate exclamation left his lips the door opened, and Mrs. Whiting, the landlady, came in. Her face was flushed; she was in a state of nervous excitement, caused by a mixture of curiosity and fear.

"I beg your pardon, your grace," she faltered, puffing timorously; "but did you ring?"

The duke looked straight at the woman, and then up at Yorke Auchester.

"No," said Yorke.

"I beg your grace's pardon," the curious woman began, stammeringly; but Grey coming behind her seized her by the arm, and, none too gently, swung her into the passage and closed the door.

The duke looked down frowningly.

"They've found you out, Dolph," said Yorke.

The duke was silent for a moment, then he sighed.

"Yes, I suppose so; I do not know how. I am sorry. I had hoped to stay here in peace for a few weeks, at any rate. But I must go now. Better to be in London where everybody knows me, and has, to an extent, grown accustomed to me."

He stopped short, and his face reddened.

"Yorke," he said, "do you think she knew which of us was the duke?"

"I don't know," replied Yorke; "I don't think she did."

"She would naturally think it was you if she didn't know," said the duke, thoughtfully, his eyes resting on the tall form of his cousin, who had gone to the window and was looking at the cottage opposite. "She would never imagine me, the cripple. Don't some of these simple folk think that a king is always at least six feet and a half, and that he lives and sleeps in a crown? Yes, you look more like a duke than I do, Yorke; and I wish to Heaven you were!"

"Thanks," said Yorke Auchester, not too attentively. "What a pretty little scrap of a place this is, Dolph, and – ah – ." He stopped short. "By Jove! Dolph, what a lovely girl! Is that the one of whom you were speaking just now?"

The duke put the plain muslin curtain aside and looked.

Leslie had come to the window, and stood, all unconscious of being watched, with her arms raised above her head, in the act of putting a lump of sugar between the bars of the parrot's cage.

The duke gazed at her, at first with an expression of reverent admiration.

"Ah, yes, beautiful!" he murmured; then his face hardened and darkened. "How good, how sweet, how innocent she looks! And yet I'll wager all I own that she is no better than the rest. That with all her angelic eyes and sweet childlike lips, she will be ready to barter her beauty, her youth, her soul, for rank and wealth." He groaned, and clutched his chair with his long, thin, and, alas! claw-like hands. "I cannot bear it. Yorke, I meant to conceal my title, and while I staid down here pretend to be just a poor man, an ordinary commoner, one who would not tempt any girl to play fast and loose with her soul. I should have liked to have made a friend of that girl; to have seen her, talked with her every day, without the perpetual, ever-present dread that she would try and make me marry her. But it is too late, it seems. This woman here knows, everybody in the place knows, or will know. It is too late, unless – ."

He stopped and looked up.

"Yorke!"

"Hallo!" said that young fellow, scarcely turning his head.

"Will you – do you mind – you say you owe me something?" faltered the duke, eagerly.

"Why, of course," assented Yorke Auchester, and he came and bent over him. "What's the matter, Dolph? What is it you want me to do?"

"Just this," said the duke, laying his hand – it trembled – on the strong arm; "be the Duke of Rothbury for a time, and let this miserable cripple sink into the background. You will not refuse? Say it is a whim; a mere fad. Sick people," he smiled, bitterly, "are entitled to these whims and fads, you know, and I've not had many. Humor this one; be the duke, and save me for once from the humiliation which every young girl inflicts upon me."

Yorke Auchester's brow darkened, and he bit his lip.

"Rather a rum idea, old chap, isn't it?" he said, with an uneasy laugh.

"Call it so if you like," responded the duke, with, if possible, increased eagerness. "Are you going to refuse me, Yorke? By Heaven!" – his thin face flushed – "it is the first, the only thing I have ever asked of you – ."

"Hold on!" interrupted Yorke Auchester, almost sternly. "I did not say I would refuse; you know that I cannot. You have been the best friend – ."

The duke raised his hand.

"I knew you would not. Ring the bell, will you?" His voice, his hand, as he pointed to the bell, trembled.

Yorke Auchester strode across the room and rang the bell.

Grey entered.

"Grey," said the duke, in a low voice, "how came this woman to know my name?"

"It was a mistake, your grace," said Grey, troubled and remorseful. "I let it slip when I was wiring, and the idiot at the telegraph station in London must have wired it down to the people on his own account. But – but, your grace, she doesn't know much after all, for she didn't know which is the dook, as she calls it, beggin' your pardon, your grace."

The duke nodded, clasping his hands impatiently and eagerly.

"Ring the bell. Stand aside, and say nothing," he said, in a tone of stern command which he seldom used.

The landlady, who, like Hamlet, was fat and scant of breath, was heard panting up the stairs, knocked timidly, and, in response to the duke's "Come in," entered, and looked from one to the other, in a fearsome, curious fashion.

"Did you ring?"

She would not venture to say "Your grace" this time.

The duke smiled at her.

"Yes," he said, gravely but pleasantly. "His Grace the Duke of Rothbury will stay with me for a few days if you can give him a room, Mrs. – Mrs. – ."

"Whiting, sir, if you please. Oh, certainly, sir," and she dropped a courtesy to Yorke Auchester. "Certainly your grace. It's humble and homely like, but – ."

Grey edged her gently and persuasively out of the room, and when he had followed her the duke leaned back his chair, and looking up at the handsome face of his cousin, laughed.

"It's like a scene in one of the new farces, isn't it, Yorke – I beg your pardon, Godolphin, Duke of Rothbury?"

Farce? Yes. But at that moment began the tragedy of Leslie Lisle's life.

CHAPTER III.

RALPH DUNCOMBE

The "great artist" went on painting, making the sketch more hideously and idiotically unnatural every minute, and was so absorbed in it that Leslie could not persuade him to leave it even for his lunch, and he maundered from the table to the easel with a slice of bread and butter in his hand, or held between his teeth as if he were a performing dog.

Leslie had played and sung to him until she was tired, and she cast a wistful glance from the window toward the blue sky and sunlit sea.

"Won't you leave it for a little while and come out on the beach, dear?" she said, coaxingly.

But Francis Lisle shook his head.

"No, no. I am just in the vein, Leslie; nothing would induce me to lose this light. But I wish you would go. It – it fidgets and unsettles me to have any one in the room who wants to be elsewhere. Go out for your walk; when you come back you will see what I have made of it; I flatter myself you will be surprised."

If she were not it would only be because she had seen so many similar pictures of his.

She put on her hat and dainty little Norfolk jacket of Scotch homespun, and went out with a handkerchief of his she was hemming in her pocket.

The narrow street was bathed in sunshine; at the open doors some of the fisher wives were sitting or standing at their eternal knitting, children were playing noisily in the road-way. The women, one and all, looked up and smiled as she appeared in the open doorway, and one or two little mites ran to her with the fearless joyousness which is the child's indication of love.

Leslie lifted one tiny girl with blue eyes and clustering curls and kissed her, patted the bare heads of the rest, and nodded pleasantly to the mothers.

"Mayn't we come with 'oo?" asked the mite; but Leslie shook her head.

"Not this afternoon, Trotty," she said, and ran away from them down the street which led sheer on to the beach.

As a rule she allowed the children to accompany her, and play round her as she sat at work, but this afternoon she wanted to be alone.

The arrival of the letter which her father had lost had disturbed and troubled her.

The man from whom it had come was a certain Ralph Duncombe, and he was one of the many unfortunates who had fallen in love with her; but, unlike the rest, he had not been content to take "No" for an answer, and gone away and got over it, or drowned himself, but had persisted in hoping and striving.

She had met him at a sea-side boarding house two years before this, had been pleasant and kind to him, as she was to everybody, but had meant nothing more than kindness, and was surprised and pained when he had asked her to be his wife, and declined to take a refusal.

Since that time he had cropped up at intervals, like a tax collector, and it seemed as if Leslie would never convince him that there was no hope for him. His persistence distressed her very much, but she did not know what she could do. He was the sort of man who, having set his heart upon a thing, would work with a dogged earnestness until he had got it; and could not be made to understand that women's hearts are not to be won, like a town, by a siege, however long and stringent it may be.

She went down to the breakwater, and sat down in her favorite spot and got out her handkerchief; and two minutes afterward there was a patter-patter on the stones behind her, and a small black-and-tan terrier leaped on her lap with a joyous yap.

She laughed and hugged him for a moment, then forced him down beside her.

"Oh, Dick, what a wicked Dick you are! You've run the needle into my finger, sir!" she said. "Look there." And she held out a tapering forefinger with one little red drop on it.

Dick smiled in dog fashion, and attempted to bite the finger, but to his surprise and disgust Leslie refused to play.

"I'm too busy, Dick," she said, gravely. "I want to finish this handkerchief; besides, it's too hot. Suppose you coil yourself up like a good little doggie, and go to sleep – . Well, if you must you must, I suppose!" And she let him snuggle into her lap, where, seeing that she really meant it, he immediately went to sleep.

It was a lovely afternoon. There was no one on the beach excepting herself, and all was silent save for the drowsy yawning of the gulls and the heavy boom of the tide as it went out, for the sea was very seldom calm at Portmaris, and in the least windy of days there was generally a ground-swell on.

Leslie sat and worked, and thought, thought mostly of Mr. Ralph Duncombe, her persistent suitor; but once or twice the remembrance of the deformed cripple who had come to lodge at Marine Villa crossed her mind, and she was thinking of him pityingly when the sound of footsteps crunching firmly and uncompromisingly over the pebbles made her start, and caused the terrier to leap up with the fury of its kind.

Leslie's brows came together as she looked up.

A middle-sized young man, with broad shoulders and a rather clumsy but steady gait, was coming down the beach. He was not a good-looking man. He had a big head and red hair, a large mouth and a square jaw; his feet and hands were also large, and there was in his air and manner something which indicated aggressiveness and obstinacy.

Sharp men who had seen him as a boy had said, "That chap will get on," and, unlike most prophets, they had been correct; Ralph Duncombe had "got on." He had started as an errand boy in a city office, and had risen step by step until he had become a partner. Rawlings & Co. had always been well thought of in the city, but Rawlings and Duncombe had now become respected and eminent.

His square, resolute face flushed as he saw her, but the hand with which he took off his hat was as steady as a rock.

"Good-morning, Miss Lisle," he said, making his voice heard above the dull roar of the sea and the shrill barking of the terrier.

Leslie held out one hand while she held the furiously struggling Dick with the other.

He took her hand in his huge fist, and dropped heavily on the shingle beside her.

"I didn't know you had a dog," he said, glancing at her and then at the dog, and then at the sea, as a man does who is so much head-over-heels in love that he cannot bear the glory of his mistress' face all at once.

"I haven't," said Leslie, laughing in the slow, soft way which her adorers found so bewitching – and agonizing. "He doesn't really belong to me, though he pretends that he does. He is the abandoned little animal of Mrs. Merrick, our landlady; but he will follow me about and make a nuisance of himself. Be quiet, Dick, or I shall send you home."

"I'm not surprised," said Ralph Duncombe, with a slight flush, and still avoiding her eyes. "I can sympathize with Dick."

Leslie colored, and took up her work, leaving Dick to wander gingerly round the visitor and smell him inquisitively.

"You got my letter, Miss Leslie?"

"No," she said. "I am very sorry; but papa lost it."

He smiled as if he were not astonished.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "It only said that I was coming and – here I am."

"I – I will go and tell papa; you will come and have some lunch?"

"No don't get up," he said, quickly putting out his hand to stay her. "I've had my lunch, and I can go and see Mr. Lisle presently if –," he paused. "Miss Leslie, I suppose you know why I have come down here?"

Leslie bent her head over her work. She could guess. Such a man as Mr. Ralph Duncombe was not likely to come down to such a place as Portmaris in obedience to a mere whim.

"I've come down because I said that I would come about this time," he went on, slowly and firmly, as if he had well rehearsed his speech – as, indeed, he had. "I'm a man who, when he has set his heart upon anything, doesn't change or give it up because he doesn't happen to get it all at once. I've set my heart upon making you my wife, Miss Leslie –."

Leslie's face flushed, and she made a motion as if to get up, but sank back again with a faint sigh of resignation.

"That's been my keenest wish and desire since I saw you two years ago; and it's just as keen, no less and no more, as it was the first half hour I spent in your society."

"You – you told me this before, Mr. Duncombe," said Leslie, not angrily nor impatiently, but very softly.

"I know," he assented. "And you told me that it couldn't be. And I suppose most men would have been satisfied – or dissatisfied, and given it up. But I'm not made like that. I shouldn't be where I am and what I am if I were. I dare say you think I'm obstinate."

The faintest shadow of a smile played on Leslie's lips.

"Yes!" she said. "But – but may I not be obstinate, too?" pleadingly.

"No," he said, gravely. "You are a woman, a girl, little more than a child, and I'm a man, a man who has fought his way in the world, and knows what it is; and that makes it different."

"But –."

"Wait a minute," he said. "You said 'no' because – well, because I'm not good-looking, because I haven't the taking way with me which some men have; in short, because there's nothing about me that would be likely to take a romantic girl's fancy –."

Leslie laughed softly.

"Who told you that I am romantic, Mr. Duncombe?" she said.

"All girls – young girls who don't know the world – are romantic," he said, as if he were remarking that the world is round, and that two and two make four. "You look at the outside of things, and because I'm not handsome and a – swell – you think you couldn't bring yourself to love me, and that I'm not worth loving."

Leslie shook her head.

"I respect you very much. I like you, Mr. Duncombe," she said, in a low voice.

"Very well. That's all I ask," he retorted, promptly. "Be my wife and I'll change your respect into liking, your liking into love. I'm satisfied with that. When a man's starving he is thankful for half a loaf."

He didn't plead his cause at all badly, and Leslie's gray eyes melted and grew moist.

"Don't shake your head," he said. "Just listen to me first. You know I love you. You can't doubt that. If you did, and you knew what I've given up to come down here, you wouldn't doubt any longer. And you wouldn't if you knew what this love of mine costs me. A business man wants all his wits about him if he means to succeed; he wants all his thoughts and energies for his business; and for the last two years my wits and my thoughts have been wandering after you. It's a wonder that I have succeeded; but I have. Miss Leslie, though I'm plain to look at, I believe I've got brains. If I can't offer you a title –."

Leslie smiled; it was so likely that anyone would offer her a title!

"I can at least make you a rich woman."

Her face flushed.

"Mr. Duncombe –."

"I know what you are going to say. All girls declare that they don't care for money, and they mean it. But that's nonsense. A beautiful woman's beautiful whether she's poor or rich, but she's more likely to be happy with plenty of money. And you shall have plenty. I am a rich man now, as times go, and I mean to be richer. I've been working these two years with one object before me. I've made the money solely that I might become less unworthy to offer myself. Miss Leslie, my heart is yours already, such as it is. Be my wife, and share my home and fortune with me!"

Leslie's lips trembled.

"Oh, if I could!" she murmured, almost inaudibly. "I am so sorry, so sorry!"

He took up a pebble, looked hard at it, and cast it from him.

"You mean that you can't love me?" he said, rather hoarsely.

Her silence gave assent.

He drew a long breath.

"I expected you to say that, but I thought I should persuade you to – try and trust yourself to me, and wait for the love to come." He paused a moment. "Miss Leslie, do you ever think of the future?"

"Of the future?" She turned her startled eyes on his face, grave almost to sternness.

"Yes. Forgive me if I speak plainly. You and your father are alone in the world."

"Yes, ah, yes!" dropped from her parted lips.

"And he – well, even now it is you who are the protector; some day – Leslie, it makes my heart ache to think of you alone in the world, alone and poor. I know that the little he has goes with him. Don't be angry! I am thinking only of you. I cannot help thinking of you and your future. If you would say 'yes,' if you would promise to be my wife, not only would your future be secure, but your present, his present, would be easier, happier; for your father's sake if not for your own –."

He stopped, for Leslie had risen, and stood looking down at him, her lips quivering, her hands clasped tightly.

"No, no!" she panted; "not even for – for his sake! Oh, I could not! I could not!"

He arose. His face was pale, making his red hair more scarlet by contrast.

"I understand," he said. "It isn't that you do not love me, but that you – well, yes, dislike me!"

"No!"

"Yes, that's it," he said, his eyes resting for a moment on the lovely face with the wistful, hungry, half fierce look of a famishing man denied the crust which might save his life. Then his eyes sank to the stones. "I see now that I have been a fool to go on hoping, that my case is hopeless. Don't" – for she had shrunk from his almost savage tone – "don't be afraid. I am not going to bother you any more. I wish I could say that I am going to give up loving you; but I can't do that. Something tells me," he struck his breast, as if he were glad of something to strike, "that I shall go on loving you till I die! See here, Les – Miss Lisle. It's evident that I can't be your husband; but I can be your friend. No," – for she turned her head away – "no, I don't mean that I am going to hang about you and pester you. I couldn't. The sight of you would be torture to me. I hope – yes, I hope I sha'n't see you for years. But what I want to say is this; that if ever you need a friend remember that there is one man in the world who would give his right hand to serve you. Remember that at any time – any time, in one year, two, or when you are old and gray – that you have only to say 'Come!' to bring me like a faithful dog to your feet. That time will never come, you think. Very good. But still you may need me. If you do send to me. I devote my life to you – oh, there's no merit in it. I can't help it. I'm romantic in a way, you see." He smiled with bitter self-scorn for his weakness. "You are the one woman in the world to me. Your case is mine, your friends shall be mine, your foes mine. If you need a protector send for me; if one wrongs you, and you want revenge, send to me, and as there is a heaven above us, I will come at your call to help to avenge you."

His face was white, his eyes gleaming under their red brows. So transformed was he by the master passion that if any one of his city friends had seen him at that moment they would scarcely have recognized him.

Ralph Duncombe talking the "rant" of melodrama! Impossible!

Leslie drew back, her eyes fixed on him in a fascinated kind of gaze, her bosom heaving.

He made an evident effort to regain his self-command, and succeeded. With a long breath he allowed his face to regain its usual hard, self-possessed expression.

"I have frightened you," he said, still rather hoarsely, but calmly. "Forgive me. I told you how I loved you, and you see a man doesn't tear from his heart the hope that has grown there for two years without feeling it. I am going now. You can make any excuse to your father, or you need not tell him you have seen me. Good-by – Leslie! It's the last time I shall call you so."

He held out his hand. It was firm as a rock, and gripped hers so tightly that she winced.

"I've hurt you," he said; "I, who would lay down my life to save you a moment's pain." He looked at his hand. "It was my ring. Ah!" he exclaimed, as if an idea had occurred to him, and he drew the ring from his finger. "Take this," he said, and he took her hand, opened it, and placing the ring on her palm, closed her fingers over it gently and yet firmly, as if he would accept no refusal. "If ever you need a friend, either for yourself or another, if ever you need to be avenged on a foe, send this ring to me – it will not be necessary to send a word with it – and I will come to you. Good-by!"

He raised her hand toward his lips, then with a sound that was half sigh, half groan, he let it fall, and without looking round climbed the beach and was lost to sight.

CHAPTER IV. THE NEW DUKE

The expression on Yorke Auchester's face as his cousin introduced him as his grace, the Duke of Rothbury beggars description.

He stared at the duke and colored, with a mixture of amazement and annoyance, which caused the duke to lean back in his chair and laugh; he did not often laugh.

"That was neatly done, Yorke," he said. "It isn't often a man is made a duke so easily."

"N-o," said Yorke; "but – but it's rather a large order, Dolph," and he turned to the window with something like a frown on his handsome face.

"Not at all," said the duke, cheerfully and airily. "You will find it easy and natural enough after the first half hour. There is very little difference between the duke and the dustman nowadays; indeed, if the dustman can only talk and manage to get into Parliament he is often a greater man than the duke, and he is quite certain to put on more 'side.' Come, Yorke, you are not angry?"

"No, no!" responded Yorke Auchester; "rather surprised, that's all. My elevation is somewhat sudden, you see," and he laughed. "The whim seems to give you pleasure, and it won't hurt me, and it won't last long. You only want me to take your place while you are down here?"

"Just so," said the duke. "I'm afraid you couldn't manage it in London. 'That poor cripple, Rothbury,' is too well known there. Seriously, my dear Yorke, I am very much obliged to you. You have made it possible for me to enjoy a few weeks of quiet and repose. These simple folk won't take any notice, after the first day or two, of a hunchback who is only a common Mr. – let me see; what shall I call myself – Brown, Jones, Robinson? No; there are quite enough of those honored names in the directory already. I'll call myself Temple; there is a Temple in the family nomenclature. Yes; Mr. Temple. There is no fear of our little arrangement becoming known. I'm not one of those men who delight in seeing their coat of arms emblazoned on everything they wear and use. I don't think there is a coronet to be found anywhere about me, and Grey is the pink and pattern of discretion. You can wear the lion's skin – poor lion! – down here at Portmaris in perfect security. Be a good duke, Yorke. Keep up the honor of the old title." He laughed again. "At any rate, you will look every inch of one. And now about that money – a duke must have the means of keeping up his state, you know. Will you hand me up that dispatch box, or shall I ring for Grey?"

Yorke Auchester placed the writing case on the table, and the duke took out his check book.

"How much shall it be, Yorke?" he asked, without looking up, and with a certain shyness, as if it were he who was about to receive the money instead of giving it.

Yorke Auchester looked down at him with an expression on his face which made it nice to look at.

"You are very good to me, Dolph," he said. "It is only the other day you sent me – ."

"Sufficient for the day only is the check thereof," cut in the duke, as if to stop any thanks. "I dare say that is all spent."

"It is, indeed," assented the young man, candidly.

The duke laughed easily.

"Who cares? Not you, who, I dare say, have had your enjoyment out of it; not I, who have more money than I know what to do with. How much? Shall we say a thousand, Yorke?"

Yorke Auchester's face flushed.

"I should like to say it is too much," he said. "But you wouldn't believe me if I did, Dolph."

The duke smiled.

"I certainly should not. I can guess how quickly money flies when one is young and strong, blessed with youth's appetite for pleasure."

He filled in the check in a sharp, pointed hand and gave it to his cousin.

"There you are. You must spend some of it down here for the honor of the name."

Yorke laughed.

"All right," he said, "though I don't quite know what I can buy. Sixpence in periwinkles would go a long way."

"Yes," said the duke; "that is what I find. Money is a burden and a nuisance if you don't know how to get rid of it. Suppose you buy half a crown's worth of winkles and a lobster or two."

When Grey came in with the lunch he was surprised to find his master in so bright a humor.

"You quite understand the arrangement between Lord Auchester and me, Grey?" said the duke.

"Yes, your gra – sir."

The duke smiled.

"My name is Temple, Grey," he said; "this gentleman is the Duke of Rothbury. Don't forget that, and don't, by a slip, let the cat out of the bag. I want to be quiet, and to avoid the worry of being called upon and stared at while I am down here. You're sure you understand, Grey?"

"Quite, sir; oh, quite," said Grey, who was an admirable servant; and in addition to being, as the duke had said, the pink and pattern of discretion, had lived long enough with his grace to know him thoroughly, and to appreciate a good master, who, with all his whims and fads, was tenderness and liberality personified.

"Of course you do," said the duke. "You must be as glad of a little quiet as I can be, and we shall get it down here under this arrangement. Now, mind, be careful and keep the secret. Have you brought up my beef tea? Very well, you need not wait."

Grey wheeled his master to the table, cast a glance of respectful astonishment at Lord Auchester, which meant, "You and I must humor him, of course, my lord," and left the room.

"A nice lunch, isn't it, Yorke?" said the duke, looking round the table. "I hope you will enjoy it. You are nearly always hungry, aren't you?" and he sighed as he smiled.

"Quite always," assented Yorke Auchester. "Chops, soles, and a custard pudding. Right. Sure you won't have any, Dolph?"

The duke shook his head.

"This is as much as I can digest," he said, tapping the basin before him indifferently. "Now tell me the news, Yorke – your grace."

Yorke laughed.

"News? I don't think there's any you don't know."

"Not London news, I dare say," said the duke; "though I don't know much of that. I don't go out more often than I am obliged to. I don't dance, you see," he smiled, "and if I go to the theater I find that I distract the attention of the audience from what is going on upon the stage. I suppose they consider me as interesting, as good, if not better than any play. And as to plays, there aren't many good ones now. The last time I went was to that burlesque at the Diadem Theater, and everybody seemed 'gone,' as you call it, on that dancer. What's her name, eh?"

Yorke Auchester was in the act of disboning his second sole. He stopped and looked up, paused for a moment with a rather singular expression on his frank, handsome face.

"Finetta, do you mean?" he said, slowly.

"Yes, that's the name, I think," said the duke, stirring his beef tea as if he hated it; "so called, I suppose, because she has finished so many good men and true. They tell me that she has completely ruined poor Charlie Farquhar. Is that so, Yorke?"

Yorke seemed very much ingrossed in his sole.

"Oh, Farquhar!" he said. "Yes, he is stone-broke; but I don't know that Fin – I mean Finetta – has had so much to do with it. Charlie was under the delusion that he understood horses, and – ."

"I see," said the duke. "Poor lad! I suppose if I offered to help him he would be quite offended?"

"I don't know. You might try," said Yorke, dryly.

"I'll see. But about this same Finetta. She was pretty – ."

Yorke Auchester looked up with a laugh. It was not a particularly merry one.

"Only pretty?"

"Well, yes, to my eyes; but I'm rather particular and hard to please, I'll admit. Oh, yes, she was pretty, and she danced," he smiled, "yes, she danced without doubt. The young men in the stalls seemed infatuated; but I didn't fall down and worship with the rest. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned, though I'm not much more than your age. Anyhow, a very little of Mlle. Finetta goes a long way with me. Do you know her, Yorke?"

"Oh, everybody knows Finetta," replied Yorke Auchester, carelessly – a little too carelessly.

"And some, it seems, like poor Charlie Farquhar, know her not wisely but too well. Well, I've not been to the theater since, and that's six weeks ago. Is that chop tender?"

"First rate; try it."

"I dare not; but I enjoy seeing you eat it. I've often had thoughts of having a man with a good appetite that I might have the pleasure of seeing him eat a square meal while I sit cursing my beef tea and gruel. The night I went to the Diadem I took Eleanor – ."

Yorke Auchester suspended his fork half way to his mouth, and looked at his cousin.

"Oh," he said, and whatever the "Oh" might have been intended to mean it was singularly dull and inexpressive.

"Yes, it was her birthday, and she asked me to take her. That was kind of her, wasn't it?"

"Was it?" said Yorke, dryly.

"Well, I think so. You mean that most young girls would like to go to the theater with the Duke of Rothbury, or for the matter of that any other duke – unmarried; but that's because they would go with the hope of repeating the visit some day as his duchess. But Eleanor knows that I should not marry her; we have come to a plain understanding on the subject."

"I see," said Yorke Auchester. "I suppose this is Dartmoor mutton? It's very good."

"I dare say," assented the duke, with a smile. "But to return to *my* mutton, which is Eleanor. It was her birthday, and I took her to the theater and gave her a small present; the Rothbury pearls."

"Some persons would call an elephant small," remarked Yorke, laconically.

"Did – did you give her anything, Yorke?" asked the duke, almost shyly, ignoring the comments.

Yorke Auchester took a draught of the admirable claret which Grey had brought down with him, before replying.

"I?" he said, carelessly. "No. Why should I? What would be the use. She doesn't expect anything better than a penwiper or a shilling prayer book from a pauper like me, and she has tin enough to buy a million of 'em if she wants them," and he attacked the custard.

The duke leaned back in his chair, and looked at the handsome face of his cousin, with its frank and free, and happily devil-may-care expression.

"I've a notion that Eleanor would value anything in the way of a penwiper or a prayer book you might give her, Yorke," he said.

"Not she. It's only your fancy."

"I think not," said the duke.

He was silent for a moment, then he said, thoughtfully and gravely:

"At the risk of repeating myself, I will say once more that it is a pity you are not the Duke of Rothbury, Yorke."

"Thanks, but a better man's got the berth, you see."

"And a still greater pity that you can't be the future one. But you can't, can you, Yorke?"

"Not while Uncle Eustace and his two boys come before me, and as they are all as healthy as plowboys, and likely to live to the eighties, every one of 'em, there doesn't seem much chance, Dolph!"

"No," said the duke, in a low voice. "It's rather hard on the British Peerage that the present Duke of Rothbury should be a hunchback and a cripple, and that the next should be a miser, while the young man who would adorn the title – ."

"Should be a penniless young scamp," put in Yorke, lightly.

The duke colored.

"Well, barring the scamp, that was in my thoughts. Do you ever think of the future, Yorke?"

"Never, if I can help it," responded the young fellow, cutting himself a piece of stilton.

The duke smiled, but rather gravely.

"I do, and when I think of it, I wish that I could secure it for you. But you know that I can't, Yorke. Every penny, or nearly every penny, goes to Lord Eustace."

"Don't let it trouble you, Dolph," said Yorke Auchester. "Of course the money must go to keep up the title. Every fellow understands that. Heaven knows I've had enough as it is."

"And so you didn't give Eleanor a birthday present," said the duke, slowly. "That was – to put it delicately, Yorke – thoughtless of you. Will you give me that box, the leather one? Thanks."

He opened the box and took out a small morocco case, and tossed it across the table.

"I had an idea you would forget it, and so – ."

"By Jove, that's pretty!" broke in Yorke.

He had opened the case and revealed a gold bracelet, not set with diamonds, but of plain though first-rate workmanship. Just the sort of gift which a rather poor young man could manage.

"I'm glad you like it. I am sure Eleanor will, especially as it comes from you."

Yorke Auchester colored, and he looked for a moment as if he were about to decline the piece of jewelry; but, checking the words that rose to his lips, he put the case in his pocket.

"It's a shame to let her think it came from me, but I'll give it to her, because – ."

He paused.

"Because you are too good-natured to disoblige me," said the duke.

"She'll think I've been committing burglary."

"In that case she will value the thing all the more highly," retorted the duke. He leaned back and rested his head on his hand.

"Go out and smoke, Yorke," he said presently.

Yorke Auchester was accustomed to his cousin's peremptory words. They were just those of a sick man, and had nothing of discourtesy in them.

"All right," he said. "I'll stroll down to the parade."

The duke smiled.

"I expect you will find nothing but a strip of beach," he said. "There are some cigars in that traveling case."

But Yorke said he had some cigars, and tossing on his hat made his way out into the sunshine.

For the first few minutes, as he went down the village street and along the narrow quay which stood for parade, his face was unusually grave and thoughtful.

We suppose by this time the intelligent reader will have formed some opinion respecting Yorke Auchester. At any rate we are not going to try and persuade the reader that the young fellow was an angel. He was no worse, perhaps a shade better, than most young men of his class. He was idle, but then he had never been taught to work, though in the way of sport he would cheerfully undergo any amount of toil, and endure any amount of hardship. He was thoughtless because he had nothing to think about, except the ever recurring problem – how best to kill time; he was extravagant because, never having earned money, he had no idea of its value. But he would share his last five-pound note with a friend, would sit up beside that friend all night and many nights, if he happened to fall sick, and behind his happy-go-lucky manner hid a heart as tender as a woman's, more tender than most women's, perhaps; and, like the antique hero, feared neither man nor beast. Children and dogs loved him at first sight; but, alas! that was perchance because of his handsome face, his bright smile, and his short, light-hearted laugh, for dogs and children have an unfair partiality for cheerful and good-

looking people, and too often unwisely judge by appearances. Anyhow, there he was with all his faults, and so we have got to take him.

He created quite a little sensation as he sauntered along with his hands in his Norfolk jacket, his hat a little on one side, his big L'Arranaga in his mouth; the simple folk of Portmaris had never before seen anything so splendid. But Yorke did not notice them. He was thinking; wondering what his cousin, the duke, would say if he knew how far too well he, Yorke, knew Finetta; wondering whether he hadn't better cut town and marry Eleanor Dallas and her fifty thousand pounds; wondering – .

"Oh, dash it!" he exclaimed at last, as he felt the crisp check in his pocket. "What's the use of bothering, on such a morning, too!" and he threw off the "pale cast of thought," and began to sing under his breath.

Then he stopped suddenly, for he saw a young girl sitting on the shingle with her back to the breakwater.

It was Leslie, sitting as Ralph Duncombe had left her. She held the ring in her hand, her bosom still heaving, her heart troubled, her eyes fixed on vacancy. There was a tear trembling on the long black lashes, and a faint quiver on the parted lips, and Yorke Auchester, as, unseen by her, he stood and looked at her, saw this.

Now, one of this young man's foibles was the desire, when he saw people in distress or trouble, to help them out of it, or, failing to do that, to at any rate try and cheer them up and console them.

"That's the pretty girl from over the way," he mused. "Pretty! It's a lovely face, perfectly lovely. Now, what's the matter with her, I wonder? She can't be up to her neck in debt, and – and the rest of it. Got into a scrape, I expect, and somebody – papa or mamma, I suppose – has been bullying her. I should think whoever they are they must find it difficult to worry such an angel as that. She's been crying, or going to cry. Now what an ass of a world this is! If I were to go down to her, and ask her what was the matter, and try and cheer her up, and tell her there wasn't anything in the universe worth crying for, she'd jump up like a young wild-cat, feel herself insulted, scream for her brother or her father, and there'd be a row. And yet where would be the harm? I know this, that if I were sitting there down on my luck, I should like her to come and console me; but that's different, I suppose. Well, as the man said when his mother-in-law tumbled out of the second floor window, it's no business of mine."

But though he made this philosophical reflection, he still stood and looked at her wistfully, until, afraid that she might turn her head and see him, he went down the beach and sat down on the other side of the breakwater.

Leslie did not hear him, was quite unconscious of his proximity, did not even notice the perfume of the choice Havana. What was troubling her was the memory of Ralph Duncombe's passionate words and melodramatic promise; and the question, what should she do with the ring? She would have died rather than have put it on her finger; she didn't like – though she wanted – to pitch it in the sea. So she still held it in her soft, hot little palm. Happy ring!

So these two sat. Presently that peculiar desire which assails everybody who sits on the beach at the sea-side began to assail Yorke. Why it should be so difficult to refrain from flinging stones into the sea it is impossible to say; the clever people have found out most things, or say they have, but this still beats them.

Yorke, like everybody else, found the desire irresistible. Half unconsciously he took up a stone and shied it at the end pile of the breakwater. He missed it, mechanically took another aim, and hit it, then he absently found a piece of wood – the fragment of some wreck which had gone down outside in the bay, perhaps – and threw that as far as he could into the sullen, angry waves, which rolled and showed their teeth along the sand.

A minute, perhaps two, afterward, he heard a cry of distress behind him, and looking round saw Leslie standing and gazing seaward, with a troubled, anxious look in her gray eyes.

Yorke was astounded. What on earth had happened? Had she caught sight of a vessel going down, a boat upset – what?

She began to run down the beach, her small feet touching the big bowlders with the lightness and confidence of familiarity, and once more she cried out in distress.

Yorke strode after her, and gained her side.

"What's the matter?" he shouted above the dull sea roar.

She turned her face to him with a piteous look of entreaty and alarm.

"Dick! It's Dick!" she said.

"Dick! Who – which – where?" he demanded, looking in the direction of her eyes.

"It's a little dog – there!" she answered, quickly, and pointing. "A little black and tan, don't you see him? Ah, he is so small!"

"I see him!" said Yorke. "What's he doing out there? And can't he swim?"

"Yes, oh, yes, but the tide is going out, and he has got too far, and the current is dreadfully strong. Oh, poor, poor Dick! He went out after a piece of wood or something that some one threw."

Yorke flushed. He felt as guilty and uncomfortable as if he had been detected in an act of killing a human being.

"See, he cannot make any way! Oh, poor little Dick! I am – so – sorry. I am so fond of him, and he is such a nice – ." She stopped and turned her head away as if she could not go on, and could look no longer.

"I threw the piece of wood," said Yorke. "I didn't see the dog; he's so small – oh, for goodness sake, don't cry! It's all right."

He got out of his coat with the cool quickness of a man who is used to emergencies in the sporting way, and running across the sand, sprang into the sea, and struck out.

Leslie was too astonished for a moment to realize what he had done, then she raised her voice with a warning cry.

"The current!" she called to him. "The current. Oh, come back, please come back!"

CHAPTER V. APPRECIATED GENIUS

Yorke soon found himself out of his depth, and almost as quickly discovered what the young lady meant by shouting, "The current!" But he was a good swimmer – there was scarcely anything Yorke Auchester could not do, except earn his living – and, though he found his boots and clothes very much in the way, he got through the waves at a fair pace, and reached the black and tan.

Saving a fellow creature is hard work enough, but it is almost as bad to rescue a dog, even so small a one as Dick, from a watery grave.

When Yorke had succeeded in getting hold of him with one hand Dick commenced to scratch and claw, no doubt under the impression that the great big man had come to hasten his death rather than prevent it, and Yorke was compelled to swim on his back, and hold the clawing, struggling little terrier pressed hard against his chest.

It was hard work getting back, but he found himself touching the sand at last, and scrambling to his feet waded through what remained of the water, and set Dick upon his four legs at Leslie's feet.

Of course the little imp, after shaking the water off his diminutive carcase, barked furiously at his preserver.

Now the handsomest man – and, for that matter, the prettiest woman also – is not improved in appearance by a bath; that is, before he has dried himself and brushed his hair.

The salt water was running off Yorke's tall figure at all points; his short hair was stuck to his forehead; his mustache drooped, his eyes were blinking, and his clothes adhered to him as if they loved him better than a brother. He didn't look in the least heroic, but extremely comical, and Leslie's first impulse was to laugh.

But the laugh did not – indeed, would not – come, and she picked up the damp Dick and hugged him, and looked over his still snarling countenance at his preserver with a sudden shyness in her eyes and a heightened color in her face.

She looked so supremely lovely as she stood thus that Yorke forgot his sensation of stickiness, and gazed at her with a sudden thrill agitating his heart.

Leslie found her voice at last, but there only came softly, slowly, the commonplace —

"Thank you."

It sounded so terribly commonplace and insufficient that she made an effort and added:

"It was very kind of you to take so much trouble. How wet you must be! You must not stand about."

Yorke smiled, and knocked the hair from his forehead and wrung his shirt sleeves.

"It's all right," he said. "It was my fault. If I hadn't chucked the piece of wood he wouldn't have gone in. He hasn't come to any harm apparently."

"Oh, no, no. He's all right," said Leslie. "He can swim very well when the tide is coming in, but when it is going out it is too strong for him, and – he would have been drowned if you had not gone after him," and her eyes dropped.

"Poor little chap," said Yorke, putting on his coat. "That would never have done, would it, doggie?"

"It is a very dangerous place for bathing," said Leslie. "The current is very strong, and that is why I called out."

"Yes thanks," he said, to spare her the embarrassment of explaining that sudden frightened cry of hers. "I could feel that. But I have to thank Dick for an enjoyable bath, all the same. I suppose he will never forgive me; the person whose life you save never does."

He sat down on the breakwater and began to empty his pockets. There were several papers – bills – reduced to semi-pulp; Yorke did not sorrow over them. His watch had stopped; his cigars and cigar case were irretrievably ruined. He held them up with a laugh, and laid them on top of the breakwater in the sun; then suddenly his happy-go-lucky expression grew rather grave as he took up an envelope and looked at it.

"By George!" he said. "All the rest doesn't matter, but this doesn't belong to me."

Leslie stood and looked down at him anxiously. She was thinking of colds and rheumatism, while the young fellow sat so perfectly contented in his wet clothes.

"Don't you think – had you not better go home and change your things as quickly as possible?" she said, forgetting her shyness in her anxiety.

He looked up from the envelope.

"Why, I shall be dry in ten minutes," he said, carelessly, "and I sha'n't take any harm if I'm not. I never caught cold in my life; besides, salt water never hurts."

Leslie shook her head gravely.

"I don't believe that; it's a fallacy," she said. "Some of the old fishermen here suffer terribly from rheumatism."

"That's because they're old, you see," he said, smiling up at her. "And if you think it's so dangerous hadn't you better put Master Dick down? He is making you awfully wet."

She shook her head, and held Dick all the more tightly.

"I am so glad to get him back," she said, half to herself, "that I don't mind his making me a little damp; but I do wish you would go."

He did not seem to hear her, but after another glance at the letter, said:

"I picked this up just over there," and he nodded in the direction of the cliffs, "and I should like to find its owner; though I expect she won't thank me much when she sees its condition. Have you been here long? Do you know the people here pretty well?"

"We have been here some months," said Leslie, "and – yes, I think I know them all."

"Now, who does she mean by 'we?' Her husband?" Yorke asked himself, and an uncomfortable little pain shot through him. "No!" he assured himself; "she can't be married; too young and – too happy looking! Well, then, perhaps you know a young lady by the name of Lisle – Leslie Lisle," he said.

Leslie smiled.

"That is my name; it is I," she replied.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "Then this is your property!" and he held out the letter.

Leslie took it, and as she looked at the address flushed hotly. It was Ralph Duncombe's missing letter.

Yorke noticed the flush, and he looked aside.

"My father dropped it," she said, with an embarrassment which, slight as it was, did not escape him. "Thank you."

"I'm sorry that I didn't put it in my coat pocket instead of my waistcoat," he said. "But I knew if I did that I should forget it perhaps for weeks. I always forget letters that fellows ask me to post. So I put it in with my watch, that I might come across it when I looked at the time, and so it's got wet; but as it was opened you have read it, so that I hope it doesn't matter so much."

"No, I haven't read it. Papa always opens my letters – he doesn't notice the difference. It does not matter in the least; I know what was in it, thank you," she said, hurriedly.

"I wish some one would always open and read my letters, and answer them, too," said Yorke, devoutly, as he thought of the great pile of bills which awaited him every morning at breakfast. "Are you staying – I mean lodging, visiting here, Miss Lisle?" he asked, for the sake of saying something that would keep her by his side for at least a few minutes longer.

"Yes," said Leslie. "We are staying in 'The Street,' as it is called at Sea View."

Yorke was just about to remark, "I know," but checked himself, and said instead:

"It is a very pretty place, isn't it?"

"Very," assented Leslie; "and quiet. There is no prettier place on the coast than Portmaris."

"So I should think," he said, looking round, then returning to the beautiful face. "I am a stranger, and only arrived an hour or two ago." He looked down, trying to think of something else to say, anything that would keep her; but could think of nothing.

Leslie stood for a moment, silent, too, then she said:

"Will you not go and change your things now? Dick would be very sorry if you were to catch cold on his account."

It was on the tip of Yorke's tongue to ask, "Only Dick?" but once more he checked himself. The retort would have come naturally enough if he had been addressing a London belle; but there was something in the beautiful gray eyes, an indescribable expression of maidenly dignity and reserve, which, sweet as it was, warned him that such conversational small change would not be acceptable to Miss Lisle, so instead he said, with a smile:

"Oh, Dick won't mind. Besides, he knows I am almost as dry as he is by this time."

Leslie shook her head as if in contradiction of his assertion, and with Dick still pressed to her bosom, said:

"Good-morning, and – and thank you very much," she added, with a faint color coming into her face.

Yorke arose, raised his hat, and watched her graceful figure as it lightly stepped up the beach to the quay; then he collected his various soaked articles from the breakwater, and followed at a respectful distance.

"Leslie Lisle," he murmured to himself. "The name's music, and she – ."

Apparently he could not hit upon any set of terms which would describe her even to his own mind, and, pressing the water from his trousers, he climbed the beach, still looking at her.

As he did so he saw a tall, thin gentleman coming toward her. He held a canvas in his hands, gingerly, as if it were wet, and was followed by a small boy carrying a portable easel and other artistic impedimenta, and, as Leslie spoke to the artist and took the easel from the boy, Yorke muttered:

"Her father! Now, if I go up to them she'll feel it incumbent upon her to tell him of my 'heroic act,' and he'll be bored to death trying to find something suitable to say; and she'll be embarrassed and upset, and hate the sight of me. She looks like a girl who can't endure a fuss. No, I'll go round the other way – if there is another way, as the cookery books say."

He looked round, and was on the point of diving into a narrow street opposite him when an invalid chair came round the corner, driven by Grey, and the occupant, whose eyes were as sharp as his body was frail and crooked, caught sight of the stalwart figure, and held up a hand beckoningly.

Yorke looked very much as if he meant making a run for it; then, with a muttered, "Oh, confound it!" he stuck his hands in his pockets, tried to look as if nothing had happened, and sauntered with a careless, leisurely air up the quay.

By this time Francis Lisle had stuck up his easel right in the center of the narrow pavement, and arranged his canvas, and Grey was in the act of dragging the invalid chair round it, when Leslie, bending down, said, in a whisper:

"Papa, I must move the easel; they cannot pass."

"Eh?" said Francis Lisle, looking round nervously. "I beg your pardon, I will move; yes, I will move."

"Do not, please," said the duke, his thin voice softening as it always did in the presence of a lady. "There is plenty of room. You can go round, Grey?"

"Yes, your – yes, sir," said Grey.

His master shot a warning glance at him.

"There is not room," said Leslie, in a low voice, but the duke held up his hand.

"Please do not trouble," he said; "I am not going any further. I only want to speak to this gentleman coming along. I beg you will not trouble to move the easel. Artists must not be disturbed, or the inspiration may desert them," he added to Francis Lisle, with a pleasant smile.

"Thank you, thank you," said Lisle, still clutching the easel; but Grey had turned the chair with its front to the sea, and the duke called to Yorke, who had come upon them at this juncture.

"What a pretty place, Yorke!" he said. "Have you had your stroll? Shall we go back?"

Yorke had discreetly kept behind the chair, and out of sight of his cousin's sharp eyes.

"All right," he assented.

"Will you give me a cigar?" said the duke.

Yorke came up to the chair and put his hand in his pocket, and thoughtlessly extended the cigar case.

"Thanks. Good gracious! Why, it is soaking wet! Hallo, Yorke," and the duke screwed his head round. "Why, where have you been? What have you been doing?"

Yorke flushed, and cast an appealing glance at Leslie's downcast face. To be made the center of an astonished and absurdly admiring group, to be made a cheap twopenny-halfpenny hero of, was more than he could stand.

"Oh it's nothing," he growled. "Had an accident – tumbled into the sea."

"An accident!" exclaimed the duke, staring at him. "Tumbled in the sea! How did you manage that, in the name of goodness?"

Yorke got red, and looked very much like an impatient schoolboy caught playing truant or breaking windows.

"What's it matter!" he said. "Fell off breakwater. Go and get the cigars, Grey; I'll look after his –."

The duke cut in quickly before the word "grace."

"Nothing of the sort," he said. "You get home and change your things. Fell off the breakwater!" He stared at him incredulously.

Mr. Lisle, too, gazed at him with blank astonishment, as if he were surprised to find that it was a man and not a little boy in knickerbockers, who might not unnaturally be expected to tumble off the breakwater.

Leslie meanwhile stood with downcast eyes, then suddenly she said, addressing her father and carefully avoiding the other two:

"This gentleman swam in to save Dick, papa; that is why he is wet."

The duke scanned her face keenly, and smiled curiously.

"That sounds more probable than your account, Yorke. It is a strange thing," he turned his head to Lisle, "that a man is more often ashamed of committing a good or generous action than a bad one. How do you account for it?"

Mr. Lisle looked at him helplessly, as if he had been asked a conundrum which no one could be expected to answer.

"Because there is always such a thundering fuss about it," said Yorke, stalking off.

The duke looked after him for a minute or two, apparently lost in thought, then he turned to Lisle again.

"You are an artist, sir?" he said.

Mr. Lisle flushed.

"I am, at least, an humble worshiper at the throne," he replied, in the low, nervous voice with which he always addressed strangers, and he resumed his painting.

The duke signed to Grey to help him to get out of the chair, which was so placed that he could not see the canvas.

Grey came round, and in opening the apron let the duke's stick fall. Leslie hesitated a moment, then stepped forward and picked it up. The duke took it from her with a faint flush on his pale, hollow cheeks.

"Thank you," he said. "I am afraid I could not get on without it. At one time I could not walk even with its aid. Please don't say you are sorry or pity me," he added, with an air of levity that barely concealed his sensitive dread of any expression of sympathy. "Everybody says that, you know."

"I was not going to say so," said Leslie, looking him full in the face, and with a sweet, gentle smile.

He looked at her with his unnaturally keen eyes.

"No," he said, quietly. "I don't think you were. And this is the picture – ." He stopped as he looked at the awful monstrosity, then caught Leslie's eyes gazing at him with anxious, pleading deprecation, and went on, "Singular effect. You have taken great pains with your subject, Mr. – ."

"Lisle – my name is Lisle," he said, hurriedly. "Yes, yes, I have not spared pains! I have put my heart into my work."

"That is quite evident," said the duke, with perfect gravity, and still regarding the picture. "And that which a man puts his heart in will reward him some day; does, indeed, reward him even while he works."

"True, true!" assented the dreamer, with a gratified glance at the speaker and at Leslie, who stood with downcast eyes, to which the brows were dangerously near. "It is with that hope, that heart, that we artists continue to labor in face of difficulties which to the careless and irreverent seem insurmountable. You think the picture a – a good one, sir; that it is promising?"

The duke was floored for a moment, then he said:

"I think it evidences the painter's love for his art, and his complete devotion to it, Mr. Lisle."

The poor dreamer's face had fallen during the pause, but it brightened at the diplomatic response when it did come, and Leslie, casting a grateful glance at the pale face of the cripple, murmured in his ear:

"Thank you!"

The duke looked at her with a glow of sympathy in his eyes.

"This is your daughter, I presume, Mr. Lisle?" he said.

Lisle nodded.

"Yes," he said. "My only child. All that is left me in the world – excepting my art. You are not an artist also, sir? Pardon me, but your criticism showed such discrimination and appreciation that I was led to conclude you might be a fellow-student."

The duke hesitated a moment.

"No," he said, quietly. "I am not an artist, though I am fond of a good picture – ," poor Lisle gazed at the daub, and nodded with a gratified smile. "I am what is called – I was going to say a gentleman at ease, but I am very seldom at ease. My name is Temple, and I am traveling for the benefit of my health."

Lisle nodded again.

"You will find this an extremely salubrious spot," he said. "My daughter and I are very well here."

The duke glanced at Leslie's tall, graceful figure, and smiled grimly.

"But then she is not a cripple," he said.

"A cripple!" Mr. Lisle looked startled and bewildered. "Oh, no; oh, no."

The duke smiled, and leaning upon his stick, seemed to be watching the painter at his work, but his eyes wandered now and again covertly to the beautiful girl beside him. He noticed that her dress, though admirably fitting, was by no means new or of costly material, that her gloves were well worn and carefully mended in places, that her father, if not shabby, had that peculiar look about his

clothes which tells so plainly of narrow means; and when Leslie, becoming conscious of his wandering glance, moved away and stood at a little distance on the edge of the quay, the duke said:

"Have you disposed of your picture, Mr. Lisle?"

Francis Lisle started and flushed.

"N-o," he replied. "That is, not yet."

"I am glad of that," said the duke. "I should like to become its purchaser, if you are disposed to sell it."

Lisle's breath came fast. He had never sold a "picture" in his life, had long and ardently looked forward to doing so, and – and, oh! had the time arrived?

"Certainly, certainly," he said, nervously, and his brush shook. "You like it so much? But perhaps you would like some others of mine better. I – I have several at the cottage. Will you come and look at them?"

"With pleasure," said the duke. "Meanwhile, what shall I give you for this?"

Lisle gazed at the picture with pitiable agitation; he was in mortal terror lest he should scare his customer away by asking too much.

"Really," he faltered, "I – I don't know its value, I have never – ," he laughed. "What should you think it was worth?"

The duke ought, if he had answered truthfully, to have replied, "Rather less than nothing," but he feigned to meditate severely, then said:

"If fifty pounds – ."

Poor Lisle gasped.

"You – you think – I was going to say twenty."

"We will say fifty," said the duke, as if he were making an excellent bargain. "You have not finished it yet."

"No, no," assented Lisle, eagerly. "I will do so carefully, most carefully. It – it shall be the most finished picture I have ever painted."

"I am sure you will do your best," said the duke. "I will accept your kind invitation to see your other pictures, and now I must be getting back. Good-morning."

"Yes, yes! Good-morning! What did you say your name was?"

"Temple," said the duke.

He glanced at Leslie, raised his hat, was helped into his chair by Grey, who had stood immovable and impassive just out of hearing, and was wheeled away.

Lisle stood all of a quiver for a moment, then beckoned to Leslie.

"What is it, dear," she said, soothingly, as she saw his agitation. Had the crippled stranger told him what the sketch was really like?

"That – that gentleman has bought the picture, Leslie!" he exclaimed, in a tone of nervous excitement and triumph. "You see! I told you the day would come, and it has come. At last! Luck has taken a turn, Leslie! I see a great future before me. I only wanted some one with an appreciative, artistic eye, and this Mr. – Mr. Temple is evidently possessed of one. He saw the value of this at once. I noticed his face change directly he looked at it."

Leslie's face gradually grew red.

"What – what has he given you for it, dear?" she asked.

"Fifty pounds!" exclaimed Lisle, exultingly. "Fifty pounds! It may not be as much as it is worth; but it is a large sum to us, and I am satisfied, more than satisfied! I wonder what he will do with it? Do you think he will let me exhibit it? I will ask him – not just now, but when it is finished. I must finish it at once! Where is my olive green? I have left it at home. Bring it for me, Leslie; it is on the side table."

She went without a word. At the corner of the street she overtook the invalid chair, hesitated a moment, walked on, and then came back.

The duke peered up at her from under his brows.

"I want to speak to you," she said, her breath coming and going quickly.

He motioned to Grey to withdraw out of hearing, and struggling to keep her voice steady, Leslie went on:

"I want to thank you – but, oh, why did you do it? I know – you know that it – it is not worth it – why?"

The duke smiled.

"Do not distress yourself, Miss Lisle," he said, gently. "You refer to my purchase of your father's picture?"

"Yes!" she said, in a troubled voice. "It was kind of you, and it has given him, oh! you cannot tell what pleasure."

"Yes, I think I can. It is not the money."

"No."

"Just so. I understand. And don't you understand that I have bought something more than the sketch? Miss Lisle, I'm not the richest man in England," – he was just within the truth – "but I can afford the luxury of bestowing pleasure on my fellow creatures now and again. Please don't begrudge or deny me that! I have not too many pleasures," and he glanced downward at his stunted figure. "Of the two, I fancy I am more pleased than your father. Don't say any more, and please don't look so heartbroken, or you will rob me of more than half my satisfaction. Miss Lisle, forgive me, but I think you love your father?"

"Yes; oh, yes!" she breathed.

"Very well, then," he said. "Be careful you do not let him see that you think he has got too good a price for his picture. Let him be happy; happiness comes too seldom for us to turn it aside with a cold welcome."

Leslie looked down at the worn and lined face with eyes that glowed with gratitude.

"I – I can't thank you, Mr. Temple!" she said, in a low voice, that thrilled like some exquisite music. "You have made me happy, and – ah, I can't tell you what I feel!" and she trembled and turned up the street.

The duke looked after her with a wistful expression on his pale face.

"She is an angel!" he murmured.

Then his face changed, grew harder and cynical.

"Yes, an angel at present," he said. "But tell her that I am the Duke of Rothbury, and she will become transformed into a harpy, and want to marry me, like the rest. Grey, where are you! Have you gone to sleep? Are you going to keep me here all day?"

CHAPTER VI. TAKING A SAIL

The moon rose early that evening and flooded Portmaris with a light that transformed it, already picturesque enough, into a fairy village beside an enchanted ocean. Leslie sat at the open window of her room, her head resting on her hand, her eyes fixed on the sea, now calmly rippling as if it were rocking itself to sleep in the moonbeams.

Her father had gone to bed, early as it was, worn out with his long day's work and the excitement produced by the sale of his picture, and Leslie was free to recall the events of the day.

Her life hitherto had been so gray and sober, so uneventful, that the incidents which had been crowded into this day had almost bewildered her.

She ought, in common fairness to that individual, have thought first and most of Ralph Duncombe; but it was upon that other young man who had plunged into the waves to reach Dick that her mind was fixed.

Beauty, man's beauty, doesn't count much with women; indeed, it has been remarked by the observant that some of the ugliest men have married the prettiest girls, and it was not Yorke's handsome face which had impressed Leslie. It would be hard to say exactly what it was in him that had done so; perhaps it was the frank smile, the free and musical laugh, that devil-may-care air of his, or the pleasant voice which seemed to float in through the window upon the moonbeams, and find an echo in Leslie's heart. Once or twice she tried to cast him out of her mind. There seemed to her something almost approaching unmaidenliness in dwelling so much upon this stranger; the young man whom she had seen for only a few minutes, and whom she might never see again. Why, she did not even know his name, or at any rate only a part of it. "Yorke," Mr. Temple had called him, and she murmured it absently. "Yorke." It seemed to her to fit him exactly. It had a brave, alert sound in it. She could fancy him ready for any danger, any emergency. He had plunged into the waves after Dick, as if it were quite a matter of course that he should do so, had done it as naturally as if there were no other course open to him. She could see him now, as he came out, with Dick in his arms, his hair plastered on his face, his eyes bright and laughing.

And how anxious he had been to avoid any thanks or fuss! It was wicked of him, of course, to tell a story and account for his besoaked condition by stating that he had fallen off the breakwater – Leslie smiled as she thought of the thinness of the excuse – but she understood why he had fibbed, and – forgave him.

"Don't you like this Mr. Yorke, Dick?" she said to Dick, who lay in a contented coil on her lap. "You ought to do so, for if it had not been for him you would be at the bottom of the sea, little doggie, by this time."

Probably Dick would have liked to have retorted, "And if it hadn't been for him I shouldn't have gone in at all."

Then her thoughts wandered to the crippled hunchback, and her heart thrilled with gratitude as she thought of his kindness; Mrs. Whiting had said that he was a nobleman, but there had evidently been a mistake; very likely the simple-minded landlady had concluded that no one traveling with a man-servant could be less than a man of title.

Leslie thought of the two men – but most of "Yorke" – and all they had said and done for some time before Ralph Duncombe insisted upon his share in her reflections, and as she thought of him she sighed. She pitied him, and was sorry for him, but she did not want to see him again. He had frightened as well as touched her by the passionate avowal which had accompanied the ring.

The ring! She had utterly forgotten it! She put her hand to her pocket, turned it out, but the ring was not there. What had she done with it? It was fast closed in her hand, she remembered, when

she heard Dick's piteous yap; and then she had sprung up, and run down the beach. She must have dropped it among the pebbles.

Her heart smote her reproachfully. The least she could do in return for the passionate love Ralph Duncombe had lavished so uselessly upon her was to keep his ring! She rose, troubled and remorseful. The tide had been going out when she dropped it; it was not likely that it would be seen by any one, and it was probably lying where it had fallen. She seemed to see the plain gold circlet lying there in the silent night, neglected and despised.

Her hat and jacket lay on the bed; she snatched them up, put them on hastily, and left the house.

A light burned behind the windows of Marine Villa opposite, and she glanced up at it, trying to picture to herself the two men in the sitting-room; the one so strong and stalwart, the other so weak and crippled.

As she went quickly down the street she was conscious of a new and strange feeling; it was half pleasant, half painful. It seemed to her as if some spirit of change had entered her quiet, peaceful, uneventful life, as if she were on the verge of some novel experience. The feeling disquieted her. She looked up at the stars almost hidden by the haze of the glorious light thrown broadcast by the moon, and there came into her mind some verses – they were from the Persian, though she did not know it – which she had seen under a picture in one of the Academy exhibitions —

"Love is abroad to-night; his wings
Beat softly at Heaven's gate!"

Murmuring the musical lines, she passed to the quay, and leaping lightly onto the beach, made her way to the breakwater.

At nine o'clock Portmaris, as a rule, goes to bed.

No one was stirring; the street, the quay, were empty. The tide was far out now, and the sands lay a golden beat between sea and beach, unbroken save where at the very margin of the lapping wavelets a boat lay at anchor.

Not even a greater enthusiast than Francis Lisle could have desired a more delicious picture than she made flitting slowly yet lightly over the beach, her graceful figure casting a long shadow behind her. "Night is youth's season," says the poet, and Leslie's heart was beating to-night with a strange pulsation.

She reached the spot where she had sat with Ralph Duncombe's ring in her hand, and going down on one knee searched carefully. The bright light revealed every pebble, and, convinced at last that it was not there, but that she must have held it until she had run some way down the sands, before she dropped it, she rose from her knees with a sigh, and was going back when she saw a man's form lying full length on the top of the breakwater.

It was a young fisherman apparently, for he was clad in the tight-fitting blue jersey and long sea boots, and wore the red woolen cap common to men and boys in Portmaris. He was stretched out full length with his head resting on his arms, his face upturned, perfectly still and motionless.

It occurred to Leslie that he might have picked up the ring, and, well aware that his class was as honest as the day she went up to him, saying:

"Have you found a ring on the beach, just here?"

The man did not answer nor move, and when she got quite up to him she saw that he was asleep.

She saw, too, something else; that it was not a Portmaris fisherman, but the young man whom Mr. Temple had called "Yorke."

With a sudden rush of crimson to her face she was about to beat a retreat when Yorke started slightly, opened his eyes, and stared up at her.

The next instant he was off the breakwater and on his feet.

"By George!" he exclaimed, with a bated breath. "It is you, Miss Lisle!"

"Yes, it is I," said Leslie as calmly and composedly as she could, and from the effort for composure her voice sounded rather cold.

"I beg your pardon. Of course it is. But – ," he hesitated a moment. "Well, the fact is, I was dreaming about you – ." He stopped, as if he were afraid he had given offense.

But Leslie smiled.

"It must have been an uncomfortable dream," she said, glancing at the breakwater.

"No," he said. "I was never more comfortable in my life. I'm more used to roughing it than you'd think. I suppose it was the beauty of the night that tempted you as it tempted me?" he went on, with his frank eyes on her face.

Leslie looked down. She could not ask him the question she had put to the supposed fisherman – if he had found her ring, of course, he would give it to her.

"Yes," she said.

"I told Dolph it was too good to sit indoors," he went on. "That's my cousin, the man you saw to-day, you know."

"Mr. Temple?" said Leslie.

"Mr. – yes, Mr. Temple," he assented, after a moment's hesitation. "And I tried to lure him out; but he doesn't care about stirring after dinner, poor old chap – ," he broke off with a laugh. "You are looking at my get-up?" he said.

Leslie smiled.

"I suppose you took me for one of the marine monsters who abound here. Fact is, I found my things wetter than I supposed – ."

"I knew you would!" said Leslie, with an air of gentle triumph.

"Yes, and as I hadn't a change with me I borrowed a suit from the landlady's boy; a 'boy' about six feet high. I fancy I rather upset my cousin's man sitting down to dinner in 'em; but they're astonishingly comfortable. I'm half inclined to take to them as a regular thing. After all, one might be worse than a fisherman, Miss Lisle."

"Very much," said Leslie, with a smile.

"Oh, you're surely not going!" he said, as she half turned toward the quay. "It's far better out here than indoors; and it's early, too. Won't you walk across the sand to the edge of the sea? It's quite dry."

He moved in that direction as he spoke, and Leslie, with a twinge of conscience, moved also.

"It's a pity all life can't be a moonlight night," he said, after a pause, and with a faint sigh. "By George, it would be grand on the water to-night. There's just enough wind to keep a boat going – and there's a boat!" he exclaimed, pointing to the boat lying at anchor at the edge of the water as if he had made a discovery which was to render this weary world happy for evermore. "What do you say to going for a little sail, Miss Lisle?"

He put the question very much as one truant from school might put it to another, only a little more timorously.

"It would be splendid, a thing to be remembered. Oh, don't say no! I've set my heart upon it – ."

"Why should you not go?" said Leslie, trying to smile, and to keep from her eyes the wistful longing which his audacious suggestion had aroused.

"By myself!" he said, reproachfully, and with a kind of high-minded wonder. "I wouldn't be so selfish. Come, Miss Lisle – I – I mean we – may never have another chance like this. You don't get such nights as this in England often. And you need not be nervous. I can manage a boat in half a gale. But never mind if you think you wouldn't be safe."

This may have been a stroke of artfulness or pure ingenuousness; it settled the matter.

"I have never been afraid in my life – that I remember," said Leslie, conscientiously.

"Then that settles it!" he said, in that tone of free joyousness which appeals to a woman more than any tone a man can use. "Here we are – and by Jove, here's a real sea-monster asleep in the boat. Hallo, there!" he called out to an old man who lay curled up in the bottom of the boat.

Leslie laughed softly.

"It is of no use calling to him," she said. "He is stone deaf. It is old Will, and he is waiting for the turn of the tide."

"Like a good many more of us," said Yorke, cheerfully, and he was about to shake the man, but Leslie put her hand on his arm and stayed him.

"I – I think I had better wake him," she said. "He is old, and not very good-tempered, and – ."

"I see. All right," said Yorke. "I'll keep here in the background. If he refuses to go tell him we'll take his boat and do without him."

Leslie bent over the gunwale, and touched the old man gently. He stirred after a moment or two, and got up on his elbow, frowning at her.

Leslie indicated by expressive pantomime that they wanted to go for a sail, and, after glancing at the sky and at Yorke, the old fellow nodded surlily, and got out of the boat.

Yorke helped him to push the boat into the water.

"And now how are you going to get in?" he said to Leslie, but before she could answer the question old Will took her in his arms and carried her bodily into the boat.

Leslie smiled.

"He is a very self-willed old man, and no one in Portmaris interferes with or contradicts him, perhaps because he is deaf."

"I see," said Yorke. "I never realized until to-night the great advantages of that affliction."

He went forward as he spoke to assist with the sail, but the old man surlily waved him back into the stern.

"All right, William, I'll steer then," he said; but he had no sooner got hold of the tiller than Will angrily signed to him to release it, and pointed to Leslie.

"I think he wants me to steer," she said, with a faint blush. "I am often out sailing with him."

"He evidently regards me as a land lubber, whatever that is," said Yorke. "But, right! the password for to-night is, 'Don't cross old William!'"

He dropped down at her feet and leaned his head upon his hand, and sighed with supreme, unbounded content, and there was silence for a few minutes as the boat glided out to sea; then he said:

"Do you think old William would fly into a paroxysm of rage if I offered him a pipe of tobacco, Miss Lisle?"

"You might try," said Leslie, and the tone of her voice was like an echo of his. The two truants were enjoying themselves, and had no thought of the schoolmaster – just then.

Yorke took out his pouch, and flung it with dextrous aim into the old man's lap. He took it up, glowered at the donor for a moment, then nodded surlily, and, filling his pipe, pitched the pouch back.

"We still live!" said Yorke, and he was about to fill his own pipe, but remembered himself and stopped.

"Please smoke if you wish to," said Leslie, "I do not mind. We must not go far," she added.

"Not farther than Quebec or, say, Boulogne," said Yorke. "All right, Miss Lisle, we'll turn directly you say so. How delightful this is! I may have been happier in the course of an ill-spent life, but I don't remember it. Are you sorry you came? Please answer truthfully, and don't mind my feelings."

But Leslie did not answer. The strange feeling which had haunted her as she left the house was growing more distinct and defiant, stronger and more aggressive. Was it really she, Leslie Lisle, who was sailing over the moonlit sea with this careless and light-hearted young man, or should she wake presently in her tiny room in Sea View and find it all a dream?

Happy? Was this novel sensation, as of some vague undefined joy, happiness or what?

She was wise to leave the question unanswered!

Yorke smoked in silence for a minute or two, then he turned on his elbow so that he could look up at her.

"Miss Lisle," he said, "were you looking for something when you came down the beach just now? I ask because I thought you looked rather troubled –."

"But you were asleep!" said Leslie.

He colored, and his eyes dropped.

"I've given myself away," he said, penitently. "No, Miss Lisle, I wasn't asleep. But I thought it better to pretend, as the children say, lest you should take fright and run away."

Leslie looked away from him.

"You are angry? Well, it serves me right. But don't think of it. Try and forgive me if you can, for I was half asleep, and I was dreaming of you – there, I've offended you again! But don't you know how you can dream though you are wide awake? I was wondering whether I should see you again – there was no harm in that, was there? – wondering whether I should have seen you or spoken to you at all if it hadn't been for Dick –. By the way, how is Dick?"

"He is all right," she said, the tension caused by his former words suddenly relieved, "but I do not think he will ever forgive you for saving his life."

"I'm afraid not," he said. "But you have not answered my question yet."

"Which one?" asked Leslie, with a smile.

"Whether you had lost anything," he said.

"Yes, I had," she replied, in a low voice.

He put his hand in his waistcoat-pocket, and took out the ring and held it up.

"Is this it?" he said, and his voice was suddenly grave and serious.

Leslie took it from his fingers.

"Thank you. Yes," she said. "Where did you find it?"

He was silent a moment as if lost in thought, then he said, as if with an effort:

"On the beach; just where you had been sitting this afternoon. You dropped it, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Leslie.

There was a pause.

"You are glad to get it back?"

"Yes," she said, looking straight in front of her.

"An old favorite, Miss Lisle?" his eyes fixed on the beautiful face over which the moonbeams fell lovingly.

"N-o," she said, the faint color creeping into her cheeks.

"No! But you were glad to get it back. You didn't seem so very glad, you know."

"No, I was not so very glad," she said, almost inaudibly.

He seemed relieved, and yet rather doubtful still.

"It's singular," he said. "But this is the second thing of yours I have found to-day."

"Yes."

"And they say that if you find two things in one day you are sure to lose something yourself," he murmured, a serious, intent look coming into his dark eyes.

"But the day has gone, and you have not lost anything!" said Leslie, with a smile.

His eyes dropped from his intense regard of her face.

"I am not so sure!" he said.

Did she hear him?

CHAPTER VII. THE DUKE'S SNEERS

The boat sails on. Leslie has no mother to watch over her and warn her of sinning against the great goddess Propriety; and as there is no harm to him who thinks none, Leslie is not troubled by conscience because she is out sailing on this Heaven sent evening with a young man and only deaf William for chaperon.

Perhaps this is because of the peculiar nature of the young man. There is no shyness about Yorke, and his manner is just of that kind to inspire confidence; he treats Leslie with a mixture of frankness and respect which could not be greater if he had known her for years instead of a few hours only; and it is but fair to add that his manner toward a duchess would be just the same.

He is happy, is enjoying himself to the utmost, and he assuredly does not trouble his head about the proprieties. But all the same, he is silent after that last remark of his, which Leslie may or may not have heard.

He is lying across the boat, so that without much effort he can see her face. What a lovely face it is, he thinks, and how thoughtful. Is she thinking of that letter he gave her, or of the ring? And who gave her that? It ought not to matter to him, and yet the question worries him not a little. He dismisses it with a half audible "Heigh-ho!"

"I suppose these are what are called dancing waves?" he says at last. "Are you fond of dancing, Miss Leslie? But of course you are."

Leslie lets her dark gray eyes fall on his handsome upturned face as if she had been recalled to earth.

"Oh, yes," she says. "All women are, are they not? But I do not get much dancing. It is years since I was at a party. My father is not strong, and dislikes going out, and – well, there is no one else to go with me; besides, I should not leave him."

He nods thoughtfully, and some idea of what her life must be dawns upon him.

"You must lead a very quiet life," he says.

Leslie smiles.

"Yes, very, very quiet," she assents.

"What do you do to amuse yourself?" he asks.

Leslie thinks a moment.

"Oh," she says, cheerfully, and without a shadow of discontent in her voice or in her face, "I take walks, when my father does not want me, but he usually likes me to stay with him while he is painting; and sometimes William takes me for a sail, and there is the piano. My father likes me to play while he is at work; but when he does not I read."

"And is that all?" he says, raising himself on his elbow that he may better see her face.

"All?" she repeats. "What else is there? It seems a great deal."

He does not answer, but he thinks of the women he knows, the idle women who are always restless and discontented unless they are deep in some excitement, riding, driving, ball and theater going; and as he thinks of the difference between their lives and this girl's, there rises in his breast a longing to brighten her life if only for a few hours a day.

"Well," he says, "it sounds rather slow. And – and have you led this kind of life long?"

"As long as I can remember," replies Leslie. "Papa and I have been alone together ever since I was a little mite, and – yes, it has always been the same."

"And you never go to a theater, a dance, a concert?"

Leslie laughs softly.

"Never is a big word," she says. "Oh, yes, when we are in London my father sometimes but very seldom takes me to a theater, and now and again there are dances at the boarding houses we stay at."

Yorke almost groans. How delightful it would be to take this beautiful young creature for a whole round of theaters, to see her dressed in full war paint, to watch those dark gray eyes light up with pleasant and girlish joy.

"And which are you most fond of?" he asks. "Walking, sailing, playing, reading?"

She thinks again.

"I don't know. I'm very fond of the country, and enjoy my walks, but then I am also fond of sailing, and music, and reading. Do you know the country round here?"

He shakes his head.

"No, I only came to-day, you know."

"Ah, yes," she says, and she says it with a faint feeling of surprise; it seems to her as if he had been here at Portmaris for a week at least. "There is a very lovely place called St. Martin; it is about twelve miles out. There is an old castle, or the remains of one, and from the top of it you can see – well, nearly all the world, it seems."

"That must be worth going to," he says, and an idea strikes him. "My cousin – I mean Mr. Temple, you know – would like to see that."

"Yes," says Leslie. "But he could not walk so far."

"No. Do you mean to say you can?"

Leslie laughs softly.

"Oh, yes; I have walked there and back several times."

"You must be very strong!"

"Yes, I think I am. I am always well; yes, I suppose I am strong."

He still sighs at her; the graceful figure is so slight that he finds it difficult to realize her doing twenty-four miles. The women he knows would have a fit at the mere thought of such an undertaking.

"I think to-morrow is going to be a fine day," he says, looking up at the cloudless sky with a business-like air.

"Yes," says Leslie, as if she were first cousin to the clerk of the weather. "It's going to be fine to-morrow."

"Well, then," he says, "I'll try and get something and drive my cousin over to – what's the name of the place with the castle?"

"St. Martin."

"Yes. The worst of it is that he – I mean my cousin, and not St. Martin – so soon gets bored if he hasn't some one more amusing than I am to keep him company; you see, he's an invalid, and crotchety."

"Poor fellow!" murmurs Leslie. "And yet he is so kind and generous," she adds as she thinks of the fifty pounds he has given for the "picture."

"Yes, indeed!" he assents. "The best fellow that ever drew breath, for all his whims and fancies; and he can't help having those, you know. He would like to go to St. Martin to-morrow, especially if you – do you think we could persuade you and Mr. Lisle to accompany us?"

Leslie looks at him almost startled, then the color comes into her face, and her eyes brighten.

"It would be awfully good-natured of you if you would," he goes on, quickly, and as if he knew he was demanding a great sacrifice of her "awfully good nature."

"My father – ." Leslie shakes her head. "I am afraid he would not go; he will want to paint if the day is fine."

"He can paint at St. Martin," he breaks in, eagerly. "There must be no end of sketches, studies, whatever you call it, there, you know. I wish you'd ask him! It would do my cousin so much good, and – and," the arch hypocrite falters as he meets the innocent, eagerly wistful eyes, "though I dare

say you won't care for the dusty drive, and have seen quite enough of the place, still, you'd be doing a good action, don't you know, and – all that. It will cheer my cousin up sooner than anything."

"Very well," says Leslie. "I will ask my father. But it will not matter if we do not go. You must persuade Mr. Temple."

"Mr. – . Oh, my cousin, yes," he says, with sudden embarrassment. "Yes, of course. Thank you! It is awfully good of you."

Leslie looks at him, her color deepening; then she laughs softly.

"Why, I want to go, too!" she says. "There is no goodness in it."

Yorke Auchester's glance falls before her guileless eyes.

"Then that settles it," he says, confidently. "What point is that out there, Miss Lisle?"

Leslie starts.

"That is Ragged Points!" she replies. "I had no idea we had come so far; please tell him I am going to put the boat round; it must be very late!"

"No, it isn't," he says. "I can tell by the moon. Can't we go a little farther?"

But she ports the helm, and old William, without a word, swings the sail over, and the boat's nose is pointing to land.

Yorke looks at Portmaris, asleep in the moonlight, regretfully.

"That's the worst of being thoroughly happy and comfortable," he says. "It always comes to an end and you have to come back. What a pace we are going, too!" he adds, almost in a tone of complaint.

"The wind is with us," says Leslie.

"I should like to stay at Portmaris and buy a boat," he says, after a moment or two. "It would be very jolly."

Leslie smiles.

"It is not always fine even at Portmaris," she says. "Sometimes the waves are mountain high, and the sea runs up over the quay as if it meant to wash the village away."

"Well, I shouldn't mind that," he remarks. "I wonder why one lives in London? One is always grunting at and slanging it, and yet one hangs on there." He sighs inaudibly as he thinks of what it must be to-night, with its feverish crowd, its glaring lights, its yelling cabmen and struggling horses; thinks of the folly, and, alas! the wickedness, and glances at the lovely, peaceful face above him with a great yearning – and regret.

"I like London," says Leslie. "But then I go there so seldom, that it is a holiday place to me."

"I know," he responds. "Yes, I can understand that. And I like Portmaris because it is a holiday place to me, I suppose."

Leslie smiles.

"I hope you will not catch cold and be all the worse for this holiday," she says.

He laughs.

"There is no fear of that. I never felt better in my life."

"You must sit firm now," she warns him. "I am going to drive the boat on to the sand."

"Here already!" he remarks, as the keel of the boat touches bottom, and the sails run down with a musical thud; and he steps over the side, and so suddenly that the boat lurches over after him.

He puts out his strong arm to stay her from falling, while old William curses the "land lubber" in accents low but deep.

"I'm about as awkward in a small boat as a hippopotamus," he says, remorsefully. "Will you let me help you ashore?"

He means "carry you," and he holds out his arms, but Leslie shrinks back ever so slightly, and old William comes to the side of the boat and picks her up as a matter of course.

Yorke slips a sovereign into the old man's horny palm, and William, who is not dumb as well as deaf, would probably open his lips now, but for astonishment and amazed delight. He does, however, grin.

As the two walk up the beach Yorke looks behind him at the moonlit sea and the boats, and shakes his head.

"It was a shame to come in," he says, "but never mind, perhaps – ." He stops, not daring to finish the sentence, but he feels as if he would cheerfully give half the amount of the check in his pocket for such another sail in the same company.

The quay is empty, the street silent, but as they go up it they see the crippled "Mr. Temple" leaning against the door of Marine Villa.

His keen eyes rest upon them both good-naturedly.

"Where have you been?" he asks.

"Where you ought to have been, Dolph," replies Yorke. "On the water. You can't imagine what it is like."

"Oh, yes, I can," says the duke. "But I am – too old for moonlight sails. I am a day-bird. Have you enjoyed it, Miss Lisle?"

Leslie smiles for answer.

"Look here, Dolph," says Yorke, with affected carelessness. "What do you say to driving out to a place called St. Martin to-morrow? I'm going to try and persuade Miss Lisle and her father to show us the way."

The duke looks at her.

"I shall be very glad," he says. "Will you come, Miss Lisle?"

"If my father – ," begins Leslie, and the duke interrupts her.

"We ought to send a formal invitation," he says, with a smile. "Will you give Mr. Lisle our compliments, Miss Lisle, and tell him how much the Duke of Rothbury and Mr. Temple will be indebted to him if you and he will accompany them on a drive to-morrow."

Leslie looks from one to the other for a moment as if she did not understand. The Duke of Rothbury! Can he be jesting?

The duke struggles with a smile as he sees her astonishment, then he says, casually:

"I hope you found the duke a good sailor, Miss Lisle."

Leslie glances at Yorke, who stands staring at his fishermen's boots, with a moody and not well pleased expression on his face.

"I nearly upset the boat," he says, as if to account for his change of countenance.

"It did not matter," she says. "We were on the sands. Yes, I will tell my father, and – thank you very much."

If the duke expected her to be overwhelmed by the announcement of the title he is doomed to disappointment. The first sensation of surprise over, Leslie is as calm and self-possessed as before.

"Good-night," she says, in her sweet, low voice, and a moment afterward the door of Sea View is closed upon her.

The duke looked at his cousin's downcast face with a whimsical smile.

"How well she took it!" he said. "A London girl of the most accomplished type could not have concealed her flutters with greater ease."

"She had nothing to conceal," said Yorke, with averted eyes. "It didn't matter to her that – that you called me a duke. Why should it?"

"Why should it! My dear Yorke, you have grown simple during your moonlight sail. Oh, she was confused and flustered, believe me; but all her sex are actresses from the cradle. Give me your hand, and let us go in."

Yorke helped him up the stairs and into his chair, then stood gazing moodily out of the window.

"Your outing seems to have made you melancholy, Yorke," said the duke. "And yet you looked as if you enjoyed it just now."

"So I did, but – Dolph, I wish to Heaven you hadn't told her that infer – that nonsense!"

The duke leaned back, and looked at him with real or simulated surprise.

"Why not?" he asked. "Have you forgotten our bargain, agreement?"

"Yes, I had forgotten it," replied Yorke, grimly.

"So soon! Why are you so put out? What does it matter? You are going to-morrow – ."

"You forget the drive – the appointment; but the best thing I can do is to go, as you say," said Yorke. "You can make some excuse – ."

"Nonsense! If you care for this outing, stay and go. It will only mean one more day, and London will not fall to pieces because of your absence for twenty-four hours."

"It is not that – ."

"Well, what is it, then? Are you thinking of this girl?"

Yorke flushed, and turned to the window again.

"What does it matter?" went on the duke. "She is a nice girl, but, my dear Yorke," and his voice grew grave, "even if we had not made this little arrangement about the title, she would be nothing more to you than just a pleasant young lady whom you chanced to meet at an outlandish place on the West Coast."

Yorke thrust his hands deep into his pockets – or rather young Whiting's – and the flush on his face grew deeper!

"I know that!" he said, as grimly as before.

"Very well, then! I repeat – what does it matter? If you are annoyed because, in accordance with an arrangement, I introduced you as the duke, why on earth did you consent? It is too late now! Even if I hadn't told her, Grey, or the woman of the house here, or some one else would have done so to-morrow morning – ."

"It is too late, I suppose!" broke in Yorke, moodily.

"Quite too late," retorts the duke, decisively. "To tell the truth now would create a sensation and fuss which would be unendurable." He put his hand to his head as he spoke, and moaned faintly as if in pain. "Give me that small vial off the table, will you, please?" he said.

One of his periodical attacks of nervous neuralgia was coming on; and at such times he was wont to grow irritable.

Yorke poured out some of the medicine, and gave it to him.

"Thanks. Yes, it would make a hideous fuss. We should have it in the papers headed, 'A Ducal Hoax,' or something of that kind. But I don't want to force you into anything against your will. I can leave here the first thing to-morrow; I certainly should go if you departed from our arrangement. I came down here for rest and quiet, and I should get none if it were known who I am. Yes, we'd better go to-morrow."

"No, no," said Yorke. "After all, as you say, it does not matter. Besides – besides, I shouldn't care to deprive her of the little bit of pleasure I'd planned for her; I fancy she doesn't get too much of it."

"I dare say not. Very well, then, you'll stay till after to-morrow? For goodness sake try and look a little less funereal. You had no objection to assuming the role till you met this girl. What difference does she make? You think she will make love to you, eh? I should have thought from what I know of you, Yorke, that you would have no very great objection to that."

Yorke swung round almost angrily.

"Look here, Dolph," he said, grimly. "You are altogether mistaken about her. I tell you that she does not care, and will not care, whether I or you are the duke; she is not that sort of girl at all."

The duke was in a paroxysm of pain, intense enough to turn a saint cynical; he sneered:

"I know them all, root and branch," he said, his thin voice rendered shrill and cutting by his agony. "I tell you that she will make love to you; that, thinking you are the duke, she will try and marry you as she would try and marry me if she knew the truth."

"No!" said Yorke, shortly, almost fiercely. "I say that she would not care."

"You seem to have learned her nature very quickly," retorted the duke, with another sneer.

Yorke colored and turned away.

"I tell you that she will turn out like the rest. You deny it, doubt it; very well. Play the part you have assumed, and if I am wrong I will admit I have done her an injustice."

"You do her a cruel injustice!" said Yorke, in a low voice.

"Very well, then!" shouted the duke. "Try her, try her. And then own that I was right. Ah, you're afraid. You know, in your heart, that she would not stand the test! Your innocent, high-minded girl would prove like the rest! Come, you are beaten! Better spare her the disappointment of setting her cap at a false duke; better go to-morrow, my dear Yorke!"

Yorke swung round, his face pale, an angry light in his eyes.

"No, I'll stay!" he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

YORKE AUCHESTER AS A STRATEGIST

When Leslie wakes next morning she wonders what it is that sends a thrill of happiness through her; then, as with dazed eyes she looks through the sunny window, she remembers the proposed expedition to St. Martin; but she remembers also that the companion of last evening is a duke, and her spirits droop suddenly.

It is difficult to persuade her father to join in the mildest of excursions; it will be very difficult, indeed, to induce him to accept an invitation to drive with a duke. Some women would have experienced an added joy at the thought that they had been honored with civility from a person of such high rank; but the fact rather lessens Leslie's pleasure.

Yorke did her justice; she is not elated nor awed by the ducal title.

When she comes down to breakfast she finds her father posing in front of his picture, his thin hands clasped behind his back, his head bent; and as she kisses him he sighs rather querulously.

"Is anything the matter, dear?" she asks.

"I've got a headache," he replies. "I – I do not feel up to work, and I am so anxious to get on. How do you think it looks?"

Leslie draws him away from the easel to the table, and forces him gently into his chair.

"We will not look at it this morning, at any rate until we have had breakfast, dear," she says. "It is wonderful how much better and brighter this world and everything in it looks after a cup of coffee. But, papa, you must not work to-day, you must take a rest –."

"A rest!" he begins, impatiently.

"Yes; you know how often you say that working against the grain is time and energy wasted. And there is another reason, dear," she goes on, brightly. "We have an invitation for to-day!"

"A what?" he asks, querulously.

"An invitation, dear. We have been asked to drive to St. Martin. Last night," a faint blush rises to her face, "I ran down to the beach to – to find something I had lost, and I saw Mr. Temple's friend, and we went for a sail with old William; and afterward I saw Mr. Temple outside Marine Villa, and they have been kind enough to ask us to go with them to St. Martin. It was the duke who asked us," she adds, candidly; "but Mr. Temple was just as kind and pressing. I hope you will go, dear."

He puts the thin, straggling hair from his forehead with a nervous gesture.

"What are you talking about, Leslie? what duke?"

Leslie laughs softly.

"It appears that the young man who went in for Dick yesterday, Mr. Temple's friend, is a duke, the Duke of Rothbury," she replies.

Like herself, he is neither elated nor awed, but he lisps a distinct refusal of the invitation.

"The Duke of Rothbury?" he says. "I – I think I've heard the title somewhere. Why do they ask us to go with them? I don't want to go; and I suppose you don't care for it. They are strangers, perfect strangers to us."

"He has already proved himself a very kind friend," says Leslie, gently.

He flushes.

"You mean in buying the picture? Yes, yes. But you know how I dislike strangers, and – and – excursions of this kind. And if you don't want to go very much I'd rather not. Besides, I don't particularly care about making the acquaintance of a duke; I am an artist, a professional man, and I do not believe in associating with persons so far above me in rank. No, we had better decline. I dare say my head will be all right presently, and I shall be able to work, and you can come with me and mix the colors, and so on."

"Very well, dear," she says, struggling to suppress a sigh. "You shall do just as you like. I should have liked to have gone, and the drive would have done you good."

"I am quite well, and I hate long drives," he responds, emphatically, "especially in the company of dukes. What is he doing down here?" he asks, testily. "Did you say you went for a sail with him last evening?"

"Yes," says Leslie, with a sigh that will not be suppressed as she thinks of the moonlit sea, and the pleasant companion who unfortunately has turned out to be a duke. "Yes, and he was very kind and nice, and not a bit like so grand a personage," she adds, with a smile. "He looked exactly like a – fisherman last night, and talked like a young man fresh from school or college. He is not my idea of a duke at all; I fancy I must have thought that dukes talked in blank verse, and habitually wore their coronets and robes."

He waves the subject aside with nervous impatience.

"I don't know anything about them, and I don't want to," he says, getting up and fidgeting round the picture. "I've got this sky too deep, I think, and – ." He continues in an inaudible mutter.

Leslie knows that it is useless to say any more, and is silent, and when her breakfast things are cleared away she gets out her plain little desk to write a refusal.

But at the outset she finds herself in a difficulty. "Mr. and Miss Lisle regret," etc., sounds too formal after that eminently informal sail last night, and yet she does not know how to begin her note in the first person. Should she address him as "Dear duke," or "Your grace," or "My lord," or how?

"Did you ever write to a duke, papa?" she asks at last, playing a tattoo with the pen-holder upon her white, even teeth.

"Never, thank Heaven," he says, absently.

"Then you cannot help me?" she says, with a sigh, and ultimately she puts the note in the formal method.

"Miss Lisle presents her compliments to the Duke of Rothbury, and regrets that she and Mr. Lisle are unable to accept his kind invitation for to-day."

"It looks dreadfully stilted and ungrateful," she says to herself; "but it will certainly remove any risk of further acquaintance, and papa will not be worried into knowing such a great personage."

She sends the note over by Mrs. Merrick's small servant, and in five minutes that diminutive maid comes back open-eyed and mouthed with awe and importance.

"If you please, miss, I gave the note to the gentleman what wheels the other gentleman's chair, and he says the duke has gone to Northcliffe, but he'll give him the note when he comes back."

Leslie laughs rather ruefully.

"We need not have worried about the drive to St. Martin, papa," she says. "The duke has forgotten all about it."

But the artist is painting away vigorously, and apparently does not hear her, and with a feeling of disappointment which it is useless to struggle against, she gets out some work and seats herself at the open window.

She has proved more reliable than the usual run of weather prophets, and the day is all she prognosticated. The street is bathed in sunlight, the sea is sparkling as if it had been sprinkled with amethysts; there is a soft breeze laden with the perfume of the early summer flowers in the cottage gardens; a thrush perched on a tree close by is singing with all its might and main. It would have been very pleasant, that proposed drive to St. Martin.

The morning passes slowly onward; the artist, too absorbed by his work to notice the sunlight, or the sea, or the birds, is still painting when, with the striking of the midday hour there mingles the click clack of horses' hoofs on the stony street, and Leslie looking up with a start – for she has been thinking of all she has lost – sees a wagonette and a pair of stylish bays draw up to the door.

On the box is Yorke, no longer in the fisherman's jersey, but clad in Harris tweed, his handsome face bright and cheerful, his whole "get up" and manner suggesting pleasure and a holiday.

After quieting the spirited horses with words and a touch of the whip, he looks down from his high perch, and seeing the startled eyes looking up at him, raises his hat and smiles.

"Are you ready?" he inquires, just as he inquired last night.

Leslie shakes her head, and tries to smile, but the effort is a failure, and putting down her work, she comes to the open door.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she says. "Did you not get my note?"

"What note?" he asks. "Stand still, will you! No, I haven't seen any note. What was it about?"

"We cannot come," she says, with a look at the horses which is more wistful even than she knows.

His face clouds instantly.

"Not come! Oh, I say! Has anything happened? Why not? It's the loveliest day –."

"Yes, isn't it?" she assents, shading her eyes and looking round. "But my father is not well. He has a headache, and –."

"Why, that's all the more reason he should go!" he responds, promptly. "The drive would set him straight!" he urges, remonstratively. "Look here, I'll go and speak to him."

"And while you do the horses will run away straight into the sea," she says, with a smile.

"No, they won't. If you don't mind just standing by this one, the near one. If he moves growl at him like this, 'Stand still!' He'll stop directly."

"Well, I'll try," she says, laughing in spite of herself; and he goes straight into the room.

Lisle looks up at him with impatient surprise and half-dazed; it is as if the young fellow had brought the brilliant sunlight in with him.

"Mr. Lisle, you don't mean to say you aren't coming?" says Yorke.

"Coming? Where?" He has forgotten all about the invitation.

"Why, to St. somewhere or other," says Yorke. "It never entered my head that you'd refuse. Why should you? If you don't care about it yourself, you ought to go for Miss Leslie's sake. She wants a change, an outing; any one can see that. Perhaps you haven't noticed how pale she looks this morning."

Oh, Yorke!

"Leslie is all right," says Lisle, irritably; "she is always strong and well. I'm sorry we cannot accompany you, but I beg your pardon, you are standing in my light. Thank you."

Yorke looks from the pale, livid face of the dreamer to the impossible picture on the easel, and bites his lips. He is sorely tempted to catch up the artist, easel and all, and bundle them into the carriage. Then a far better and more feasible idea strikes him.

"I'm sorry you can't go, Mr. Lisle," he says as indifferently as he can, "because I thought of asking you to make a rough sketch of the castle for me. Want it for my own room, you know. I'm awfully mad on water colors."

Mr. Lisle looks up with awakened interest.

"There is a good sketch to be got out of the west end, the turret," he murmurs, absently.

"That's just what I wanted," Yorke strikes in promptly. "That's the bit I was going to ask you to paint. Come along, sir; allow me," and he catches up the portable easel and paint box and carries them out before Lisle can realize what is being done.

"All right!" Yorke cries to the astonished Leslie: "he is coming. Run in and put your things on, and don't give him time to think."

"But," falters Leslie, a smile beginning to break on the lovely face.

"But nothing!" he cuts in. "Please be quick, or he'll have time to change his mind."

Leslie runs in, laughing, and Yorke, stowing the easel under the seat, shouts out for Grey.

"Tell the – Mr. Temple we're ready," he says quickly. "Got that hamper?"

"Yes, your grace," says Grey.

"Confound – all right then. Get your master down as soon as possible; and Grey, bring me out a glass of ale. Heigh-ho, that was a narrow squeak," and he draws a long breath. "What, let him deprive her of her outing? Not if I had to take the house as well!"

Presently the duke and Grey come out, and Grey helps him into his seat. They have not long to wait for the other two, and Yorke looks approvingly at the slim, graceful figure, which plainly dressed though it may be, is unmistakably that of a lady.

Mr. Lisle, scarcely knowing what they are doing with him, is bundled in; and Yorke, as a matter of course, stands by to assist Leslie to the seat on the box beside him.

"But would not some one else like to sit there?" she says, hesitatingly.

"I am sure Mr. Lisle would be more comfortable inside," he says. "And we mustn't keep the horses waiting longer than we can help, please," he says, and he puts his hand under her elbow and hoists her up carefully.

Then he springs into his place, touches the horses with the whip, and away they go.

Leslie draws a long breath. It is not until they have got to the open country that she can believe that they have actually started.

"It was a near thing," he says, as if he were reading her thoughts.

"Yes," and she smiles; "I don't know how you managed it."

He laughs light-heartedly.

"It was done by force of arms. I meant you – I mean Mr. Lisle – to go, and when I mean a thing I'm hard to obstruct."

"This is rather a grand turn-out, Yorke," remarks the duke. "May one ask where and how you got it? It doesn't look like a hired affair."

"It isn't," he replies. "When I got to Northcliffe I ran against little Vinson, who appears to be staying there. The wagon was standing outside and he asked me if I would like to go for a drive. I said I should if he'd let me have the horses and not ask to go with me. He stared for a minute, then he took off his gloves, and – here you are, you know."

"Wasn't that rather cool?" asks the duke.

Yorke laughs.

"Oh, he's a good-natured little chap, and didn't seem to mind. Said he'd go for a sail instead."

"He must be very good-natured," said Leslie, smiling in spite of herself.

"So he ought to be. He's as rich as Cræsus, and hasn't a care in the world. His father, Lord Eastford, you know, bought up a lot of nursery gardens just outside what was then London, and they've turned out a gold mine. The part got fashionable, you know."

The mention of a lord reminds Leslie – she had forgotten it until now – that the young man beside her is a duke, and she wonders whether she ought to have addressed him as "your grace."

"Now, Miss Lisle," he says, "you've got to play the part of guide, you know. Is it straight on, or how?"

"Straight on, your grace," she says, thinking she will try how it sounds. It doesn't sound very well in her own ears, nor, apparently, in his, for he stops in the act of flicking a fly off the horse's harness and looks at her; but he does not make any remark.

The roads are good, the day heavenly, and as they bowl along Leslie leans back, wrapped in a supreme content. Her father's voice discoursing of "art" floats now and again toward her, the thud, thud of the horses' hoofs makes pleasant music; and if she should tire of the pretty scenery, there is the handsome face of a good-tempered young man beside her to look at for a change.

Leslie does not know very much about driving; but she knows that he is driving well, that the horses, fresh and high-mettled as they are, are thoroughly under his control; and, half-unconsciously, she finds herself admiring the way in which he handles the whip and the reins.

"May one ask what you are thinking of, Miss Leslie?" he says, glancing at her, after a long silence.

"I was wondering which I liked best – sailing or driving," she replies.

"But you haven't driven yet," he says. "Would you like to drive?"

Leslie shakes her head.

"I should drive them into a ditch, or they would run away with me," she says, smiling.

"Not a bit of it," he retorts; "and I know you are not afraid, because you said last night that you never were afraid."

"Did I say that?" she says. "What wonderful things one says in the moonlight!"

"See here," he says. "I'll show you how to hold the reins."

"If I am not afraid, they will be, if they think you are going to transfer these wild animals to my guidance," and she glances over her shoulder.

"Oh, they're all right," he says, carelessly. "Give me your hand. No, the left one. That's it."

He takes it and opens the slim fingers, and inserts the reins in their proper places; and as he does so notices, if he did not notice last night, how beautifully shaped and refined the small hand is.

"That's right. Now take the whip in your right hand, and – how do you feel?"

"As if I were chained to two romping lions, and they were dragging me off the box."

He laughs, the frank, free laugh which Leslie thinks the pleasantest she ever heard.

"You'll make a splendid whip!" he says, encouragingly. "Hold 'em tight, and don't be afraid of them. Directly you begin to think they are getting too many for you, set your teeth hard, hold 'em like a vise, and give 'em each a flick. So! See? They know you're master then."

The ivory white of Leslie's face is delicately tinted with rose, her eyes are shining brightly, her heart beating to the old tune, "Happiness."

"There is a cart coming, and there isn't room. Oh, dear!" and she begins to get flurried.

"Plenty of room," he says, coolly. "You should shout to the man! But I'll do that for you," and he wakes the sleeping wagoner with a shout that causes the man to spring up and drag his horses aside as if Juggernaut were coming down upon him. "See? That's the way! Oh, you'll do splendidly, and I shall be quite proud of you. I'm fond of driving. Do you know, I've often thought if the worst came to the worst that I'd take to a hansom cab."

Leslie stares at him.

"A duke driving a hansom cab would be rather a novelty, wouldn't it?" she says, with a smile.

To her surprise, his face flushes, and he turns his head away. What has she said? At this moment, fortunately for Yorke's embarrassment, the duke remarks with intentional distinctness:

"Are you insured against accidents, Miss Lisle?"

Leslie holds out the reins.

"You see," she says, "they are getting frightened; and not without cause."

But he will not take the reins from her.

"I know you are enjoying it," he says, just as a schoolboy would speak. "You're all right; I'll help you if you come to a fix. Give that off one a cut, he is letting the other do all the work."

"Which is the off one?" she asks, innocently.

He points to it.

"That's the one. So called because you don't let him off."

It is a feeble joke, but Leslie rewards it with a laugh far and away beyond its merits, and he laughs in harmony.

"You seem to be enjoying yourselves up there," says the duke. "Pray hand any joke down."

"It is Miss Leslie making puns," responds Yorke.

"Now you are getting tired," he says, after a mile or two.

"How do you know?" she asks, curiously.

"Because I can see your hands trembling," he replies. "Give me the reins now, and if you are a good girl you shall drive all the way home."

It is a little thing that he should have such regard for her comfort, but it does not pass unnoticed by Leslie, as she resigns the reins with a "Thank you, your grace."

His face clouds again, however, and he bestows an altogether unnecessary cut on the horses, who plunge forward.

"There is St. Martin, and there is the castle," she says, presently. "Is it not pretty?"

"Very," he assents, but he looks round inquiringly. "I'm looking for some place in which to put the cattle up," he explains. "Horses don't care much for ruins, unless there are hay and oats."

"There is a small inn at the foot of the castle," says Leslie.

"That's all right then," he rejoins, cheerfully. "Hurry up now, my beauties, and let's show them what Vinson's nags can do."

They dash up the road to the inn at a clinking pace, and pull up in masterly style.

The landlord and a stable boy come running out and Yorke flings them the reins. Then he helps Leslie down, and goes round to the back to assist the duke.

"I suppose we shall be able to get some lunch here Yorke?" he says, as he leans on his sticks.

"Lunch indoors on a day like this? Not much!" retorts Yorke, scornfully. "Out with that hamper, Grey, and get this yokel to help you carry it to the tower. You can walk as far as that, Dolph? Miss Lisle will show you the way."

At the sound of her name Leslie turns from the rustic window into which she had been mechanically looking.

"Oh, yes. There has been another party here this morning," she adds.

"How do you know that?" asks Yorke.

"Because I can see the remains of their luncheon on the table," she says, laughing.

"Yes, sir," says the landlord. "Party of three, sir; two gentlemen and a lady."

"Thank goodness they have gone!" says Yorke. "You go on. I'll go and see that the horses are rubbed down and fed; I owe that to Vinson, anyhow."

He is not long in following them, but by the time he has reached the tower, Grey has unpacked the basket, and laid out a tempting lunch. There is a fowl, a ham, an eatable-looking fruit tart, cream, some jelly, the crispiest of loaves, and firmest of butter, and a couple of bottles with golden tops.

"Where did you get this gorgeous spread, Yorke?" inquires the duke.

"Oh, I was out foraging early this morning," he says, carelessly. "Now, Miss Leslie, you are the presiding genius. Of course the salt has been forgotten; it always is."

"No, it has not!" says Leslie, holding it up triumphantly. "Nothing has been forgotten. You have brought everything."

"Including an appetite," he says, brightly, and as he opens a bottle of champagne, he sings:

"The foaming wine of Southern France."

"Yes, I wonder how many persons who read that in their Tennyson realize that it is champagne?" says the duke, brightly.

They seat themselves – cushions have been brought from the wagon for Leslie and the duke – and the feast begins.

"Some chicken, Miss Leslie? This is going to be a failure as a picnic; it isn't going to rain," says Yorke.

"And I rather miss the cow which usually appears on the scene and scampers over the pie," says the duke. "I suppose your grace couldn't manage a cow on a tower."

Yorke looks at him, half angrily.

"Oh, cut that!" he mutters, just loud enough to reach the duke.

Mr. Lisle looks round with his glass in his hand.

"I must find a spot for my sketch," he says.

"All right, presently," says Yorke. "Pleasure first always, as the man said when he killed the tax collector. Miss Lisle have you sworn never to drink more than one glass of champagne?"

But Leslie shakes her head, and declines the offered bottle, and her appetite is soon appeased.

"Shall we leave these gourmands, and find a particularly picturesque study for your father, Miss Lisle?" suggests Yorke; "that is if he is bent on sketch –."

He stops suddenly, for a woman's laugh has risen from the green slope beneath them. It is not an unmusical laugh, but it is unpleasantly loud and bold, and the others start slightly.

"That is the other party," says Leslie.

"It is to be hoped that they are not coming up here. If they should, you will have an opportunity of seeing how I look when I scowl, Miss Lisle," he says.

Leslie gets up and goes to the battlements.

"No; they are going round the other side," she says.

"Heaven be thanked!"

"Too soon!" she rejoins, with a laugh; "they are coming back. What a handsome girl!"

Standing talking and laughing beneath her are two men and a girl. The latter is handsome, as Leslie says, but there is something in the face which, like the laugh, jars upon one. She is dark, of a complexion that is almost Spanish, has dark eyes that sparkle and glitter in the sunlight, and raven hair; and if the face is not perfect in its beauty, her figure nearly approaches the acme of grace. It is lithe, slim, mobile; but it is clad too fashionably, and there is a little too much color about it.

She stands laughing loudly, unconscious of the silent spectator above her, for a moment or two; then, perhaps made aware by that mysterious sense which all of us have experienced, that she is being looked at she looks up, and the two girls' eyes meet. She turns to say something to her companions, and at that moment Yorke joins Leslie.

He looks down at the group below.

"That's the party, evidently," he begins. Then he stops suddenly; something like an oath starts from his lips, and he puts his hand none too gently on Leslie's arm.

"Come away," he says, sharply, and yet with a touch of hoarseness, or can it be fear, in his voice. "Come away, Miss Lisle!"

And Leslie, as she draws back in instant obedience, sees that his face has become white to the lips.

At the same moment, a voice – it must be that of the girl beneath, floats up to them, a lively "rollicking" voice, singing this refined and charming ditty:

"Yes, after dark is the time to lark,
Although we sleep all day;
To pass the wine, and don't repine,
For we're up to the time of day, dear boys,
We're up to the time of day!"

CHAPTER IX. THE PICNIC

As the words of the music-hall song rise on the clear air, Leslie turns away. No respectable woman could have sung such a song, and she is not surprised that her companion, and host, has bidden her "come away."

She steps down from the battlement in silence, and as she does so glances at him. His face is no longer pale, but there is a cloud upon it, which he is evidently trying to dispel. She thinks, not unreasonably, that it is caused by annoyance that she should have heard the song, and she is grateful to him.

The cloud vanishes, and his face resumes something of its usual frank light-heartedness, but not quite all.

"We'll give those folks time to get clear away before we begin our exploration, Miss Lisle," he says, casually, but with the faintest tone of uneasiness in his voice. "That is the worst of these show places, one is never sure of one's company. 'Arriet and 'Arry are everywhere, nowadays."

"Why should they not be?" says Leslie, with a smile. "The world is not entirely made for nice people."

"No, I suppose not," he assents; "and I suppose you are going to say that they had better be here than in some other places, and that it might do 'em good; that's the sort of thing that's talked now. I'm not much of a philanthropist, but that's the kind of thing that good people always say."

"They seemed very happy," says Leslie.

"Who?" he asks, almost sharply. "Oh, those people? Yes; Mr. Lisle ought to get a good sketch somewhere hereabouts," and he leads her back to the duke and Mr. Lisle.

The duke looks up. Grey has made a "back" for him with the cushions and the hampers, and he's smoking in most unwonted contentment.

"Back already!" he says. "I thought you had gone to prospect?"

"So we had," responds Yorke, "but we were alarmed by savages from a neighboring island." He lights a cigar as he speaks. "We are going to give them time to get away in their canoes, as Robinson Crusoe did, you know. By the way, Miss Lisle, if you will sit down, I will reconnoiter and report."

Leslie sinks down beside her father, and Yorke strolls leisurely to the steps leading from the tower.

He pauses there a moment or two, listening, then goes down. At the foot of the steps on the grassy slope he stops again, and the cloud comes on his face darker than before.

"It must be a mistake," he mutters. "It couldn't be she, and yet – ."

He walks on a few paces, and at the foot of the tower comes upon traces of the "savages" – a champagne bottle, empty, of course, and a newspaper.

He takes the latter up mechanically, then unfolds it and turns to the column of theatrical advertisements, and sees the following:

"Diadem Theater Royal. Notice. In consequence of serious indisposition, Miss Finetta will not play this evening."

With an exclamation which is very near an oath, he flings the paper from him and walks on, and as he goes round the base of the tower he is almost run into by one of the gentlemen whom Leslie saw with the dark young lady of the song.

They both stop short and start, then the new-comer exclaims, with a laugh:

"Hello, Auchester! Well, I'm – ."

"Hush! Be quiet!" says Yorke, almost sternly, and with an upward glance.

"Eh?" says the other, "what's the matter? Who the duse would have expected to see you here?"

"I might say the same," retorts Yorke, with about as mirthless a smile as it is possible to imagine.

"How did you come here?"

"Why, by boat," responds the other. "Didn't I tell you so? What have you done with my nags?"

"They are all right," says Yorke. "Come this way, will you? Keep close to the tower, if you don't mind."

The young fellow follows him, with a half-amused, half-puzzled air.

"What's it all mean? Why this mystery, my dear boy?" he asks.

Yorke, having got him out of sight and hearing of the three on the tower, faces him, and instead of replying to his question, asks another.

"Was that Finetta with you just now, Vinson?"

"Yes," says Lord Vinson, at once; "of course it was. Didn't you see her, know her?"

Yorke nods curtly.

"Yes. What is she doing here? How did she come here with you?"

"The simplest thing in the world," replies Lord Vinson. "After you'd left me this morning, I was wondering who I should hunt up to come for a sail, when I saw her coming down the street. You might have knocked me down with a feather."

"I dare say. Well?"

Lord Vinson looks rather aggrieved at being cut so short, but goes on good-temperedly enough.

"She spotted me at once, and the first question she asked was, had I seen you?"

"Well?" demands Yorke, as curtly as before.

"Well, I didn't know what to say for the moment, because I thought perhaps you wouldn't care for her to know."

A faint expression of relief flits across Yorke's face, but it disappears at Vinson's next words.

"She saw me hesitate, and of course knew that I had seen you. 'It's no use your playing it low down on me, my dear boy,' she said, laughing – you know her way. 'You couldn't deceive a two-months-old calf, if you tried. You've seen him, and he's here somewhere.' It was no use trying to deceive her, as she said, and I had to own up that I had seen you this morning, and – that you borrowed my rig."

Yorke bit his lip, and nodded impatiently.

"She took it very well, she did indeed. She only laughed and said that she knew you had left town for some fishing; and, being sick of London herself, she had sent a certificate to say she was down with low or high, or some kind of fever, I forget which, and had to run down here for a bit of a holiday with her brother – or her uncle, I don't know which it is."

Yorke looks round with ill-concealed anxiety.

"Oh, it's all right," says Lord Vinson; "they've gone on to the inn. I came back for my stick. There it is. Well, I thought the best thing I could do was to ask them to come for a sail, and it took her ladyship's fancy, and here we are, don't you know."

Yorke stands with downcast, overclouded face, and the young viscount, after regarding him attentively, says:

"Look here, Auchester, I know what it is, you don't want to run against her just now. Got friends up there, eh?" and he nods his head in the direction of the tower.

"No, I do not want to see her, and I certainly don't want her to see me," assents Yorke. "If you can manage to take her away, Vinson!"

He lays his hand on the young fellow's shoulder, and Vinson, who is never so delighted as when doing a service for his friend, nods intelligently.

"I see. All right, you leave it to me." He pulls out his watch. "I'll get her away at once; in fact, it's time we started. Don't you be uneasy."

"Thanks," says Yorke, and his brow lifts a little. "When does she go back?"

"To-night; she plays to-morrow."

Yorke's brow clears completely, and he smiles.

"Off with you, then," he says. "I'm awfully obliged to you, Vinson. You are right; I don't want the – the people I am with to see her."

Vinson looks up at the tower curiously, and rather wistfully.

"No, my dear boy, I'm not going to introduce you," says Yorke, with a smile. "I'm too anxious to be rid of you – and her. See them safe on board the train to-night, and if anything occurs to prevent them going, send me a message to-morrow morning. I'll give you the address – ." He stops. "No, never mind. Make them go to-night. Tell her she'll lose her engagement, anything, but see that she goes."

Vinson grins.

"I'll tell her you've gone back to town," he says.

Yorke colors.

"Woodman, spare the lie," he says, with forced levity. "No need to tell her that."

"No, it wouldn't do, come to think of it. She'd find out I'd sold her when she'd got back, and then – ." He whistled, significantly. "I like Finetta with her claws in, don't you know. I think you're the only man that's not afraid of her."

Yorke smiles again.

"Well, do what you like," he says. "But go now, there's a good fellow; and for Heaven's sake, don't let her come this way again. We heard her singing!"

Vinson laughs.

"Yes, if you were within a mile of her you couldn't help doing that," he says, dryly. "Well, good-by, old chap. Don't trouble about the nags."

"They are all right," says Yorke. "I'll bring them back safe and sound – ."

"When the coast's clear," finishes the young fellow; and with a smile and a nod, he picks up his stick, and goes off.

Yorke Auchester stands where his friend has left him, and looks out to sea, with a troubled countenance; stares so long, and so lost in thought that it would seem as if he had forgotten his own party. It is not often that the young man has a moody fit, but he has it now, and very badly.

But presently there comes down to him the faint sound of Leslie Lisle's soft, musical laugh – how striking a contrast to that of the young lady whom he has just got rid of! and he wakes from his unpleasant reverie and climbs up to the tower.

The duke is leaning back with an amused and interested smile on his face, which is turned towards Leslie, and it is evident that he is happier and more contented than usual.

"Miss Lisle has just been giving me a description of the Portmaris folks. You have missed something, Yorke," he says, with a laugh. "Have the savages disappeared?"

"Quite," says Yorke; "and if Miss Lisle and her father would like to look round, the coast is now clear."

"You go, papa," says Leslie, with her usual unselfishness; "and I will stay with Mr. Temple."

The duke glances at her.

"You will do nothing of the kind," he says. "I am not going to impose upon your good nature, Miss Lisle. Besides, I dare say, I shall take forty winks."

Leslie hesitates a moment, then she gets up and goes for the easel; but Yorke is too quick for her.

"Come along, Mr. Lisle," he says, touching him on the arm, while he stands looking from the edge of the tower absently, and the three descend.

"Now, this strikes me as a good place," says Yorke, setting up the easel. "Don't know much about it you know, but it seems to me that the outline and the – ."

"Excellent; yes, very good," assents the artist, eagerly getting out his drawing paper. "Yes, I can make a picture of this. You need not wait," he adds. "You will want to talk and – ."

"I see," says Yorke. "Come along, Miss Lisle; we're evidently not wanted."

They stroll away side by side, and slowly descend the grassy slope, which gradually becomes broken by rock, which kindly nature, who has always an eye to effect, has clothed with ferns and moss and lichen.

"I suppose I ought to show you the hermit's cell?" says Leslie. "Everybody sees it."

"By all means," he assents, but rather absently – the loud laugh of Finetta, the music-hall song are still echoing hideously in his ears. "Which hermit?"

"Didn't you know?" she says, lightly stepping from stone to stone. "There was a hermit here once ever so long ago. Here is his cell," and she stops before a cavity in the rocks, a deliciously shady nook, overhung with honeysuckle and wild clematis which perfume the air.

Yorke looks in. Somebody since the hermit's time, had been kind enough to fix a comfortable seat in the little cell, from which a delightful view of the sea and the cliff can be obtained.

"Let us sit down while you tell me about him," he says.

Leslie seats herself, and looks out at the greenery at her feet and wide-stretching blue of sea and sky beyond; and he takes his place beside her, but looks at her instead of the view. "The proper study of mankind is – woman."

"There really was a hermit here ever so long ago," she says, dreamily. "They talk of him at Portmaris even now. He was a very great man in his time, but I am afraid not a very good one. It is said that he killed his best friend in a duel, and, that smitten with remorse for his crime and his foolish life, he vowed that he would never set eyes on mortal man again. So he came and lived in this cell, which he dug out with his own hands, and spent the rest of his life in prayer and meditation. Every day the village folks, and sometimes the pilgrims who visited his shrine, placed food on the ledge of the little window; but though they could hear his voice in prayer or singing hymns, no one ever saw his face, nor did he ever look out upon those who came to visit him."

"He must have been fearfully unhappy," says Yorke, in a low voice, for the soft, subdued tones seem to cast a spell over him.

"No, they say not; for he was often heard, especially after he had been living here for some years, to be singing cheerfully; but that was after he had received his sign."

"His sign?" he asks.

"Yes. He prayed that if Heaven forgave him his sins, and accepted his penitence, it would render the birds tame enough to come at his call."

"And did they?"

"Yes. The pilgrims to the shrine often saw a thin hand thrust through the window with a hedge sparrow or thrush perched upon it, and the rabbits, there were numbers of them, here, would come when he called, and let him feed them with the remains of his frugal fare. One day the village people received no answer when they called to him, not even the *Pax Vobiscum*, which amply repaid them for their pious charity. They waited two days, and then they entered the cell, and found him lying dead on his stone pallet, and a wild dove was resting on his breast. It flew away as they entered, but it was seen hovering about the cell for years afterward, and the Portmaris people say that a dove is always near here, even now."

If Yorke had read the story of the Hermit of St. Martin in a book – he didn't read many books, unfortunately – it would not have affected him at all, but told by this lovely girl, in a voice hushed with sympathetic awe and reverence, it moves him strangely.

"It's a pity there are not more hermits," he says, "a pity a man can't leave the world in which he has made himself such a nuisance, and have a little time to be quiet and repent."

"Yes, your grace," assents Leslie.

He looks at her quickly, and then away to the sea again.

"I wonder whether you'd be offended if I asked a favor of you, Miss Lisle."

"What is it?" she says, lightly. "In the old times the proper reply was, 'Yea, unto half my kingdom,' but I haven't any kingdom."

"Oh, it isn't much," he says. "I was only going to ask you if you would be kind enough not to address me as 'your grace.'"

Leslie looks at him with her slow smile, and a faint blush.

"Is it wrong?" she asks, apologetically. "I didn't know. You see, I have not met many dukes."

He strikes at the sandy pebbles which form the floor of the good hermit's cave, with his stick.

"Oh – oh, it's right enough to call a duke 'your grace,'" he says, hurriedly, "but I'd rather you didn't call me so."

"I'm glad it was right," she rejoins, with an air of relief. "I thought that perhaps I'd committed some awful blunder."

"No, no," he says. "But don't, please. I have a decided objection to it. You see I'm rather a republican than otherwise – everybody is a republican nowadays, don't you know." Oh, Yorke, Yorke! "There will be no dukes or any other titles presently."

"But until that time arrives what should one call you?" asks Leslie, not unreasonably. "Is 'my lord' right?"

"It's better," he admits, "but I don't care much about that from friends, you know. I'm afraid you think it's rather presumptuous of me to call you a friend."

"'An enemy' would sound rude and ungrateful after your and Mr. Temple's kindness," she says, as lightly as before.

"My name is Yorke – one of 'em, and it's the name I like best. I dare say that you have noticed that Mr. – Mr. Temple calls me by it?"

"Yes," says Leslie.

"So it sounds more familiar to me, and – and nicer. I suppose a man has a right to be called what he likes."

"I imagine so," says Leslie.

"Then that's a bargain," he says, cheerfully, as if the matter were disposed of. "This place," he goes on, as if anxious to get away from the subject, "reminds me of Scotland a little bit. You only want a salmon river. I've spent many a day fishing and shooting in a solitude as complete as the hermit's. You get scared at last by the stillness and the silence, and begin to think that all creation has gone to sleep, and are afraid to move lest you should wake it; and then while you stand quite still beside the stream, something comes flitting down the mountain side – something with great antlers and big mournful eyes, and it steps into the water close beside you, and takes a drink, looking round watchfully. Then up you jump and give a shout, and away the stag goes, and all creation's awake again."

It is Leslie's turn to listen now, and she does so with half-parted lips.

"Then at night you go out with a gun, and you lie down flat amongst the bracken, and keep your eyes open, and after a while when you are just feeling tired of it, and thinking what an idiot you are not to be in bed, or at any rate, beside a cozy fire with a pipe, you hear a flap, flap in the air, and a couple of heron come sailing between you and the moon, and you raise your gun carefully and quietly – awfully sharp chap the heron – and down comes one of 'em, and perhaps, if you have any luck, the other with the second barrel. Then you load up again and wait, and after a time, if your luck holds good, a flush of wild duck come flipperty, flopperty, above your head and you bring one or two of them down. And all the time the stream ripples and babbles on, and the soft wind plays through the pines, and – ." He stops with a laugh and that peculiar look which expresses shyness in a man. "I beg your pardon, I forgot; I mean, I must be boring you to death."

"No, you were not," says Leslie, quietly, and with a little sigh.

"I forgot that ladies don't care for sport, except hunting, some of them. They like to hear about London, and all the gossip there."

Leslie shakes her head.

"I'm afraid I'm very singular, then," she says. "For I would rather hear about fishing and shooting, if it is all like that you have been telling me of."

"But it isn't," he says, with a laugh. "Sometimes the birds don't come, and the fish won't rise, and instead of catching any you catch a cold. And then you go back to London, and swear that's it's the best place after all; but after a little while you get sick of it again, and think if you could only get on to a Scotch moor, you'd be happy."

"Man never is, but always to be blest," says Leslie.

"Yes, because men are such fools that they spoil their lives before they know where they are," he says. "I once saw a man try to swim across the Thames, for a wager, with a ten-pound weight round his neck. He would have been drowned, if they hadn't picked him up pretty smartly. It's the same in life – ." He stops suddenly and laughs rather shortly. "We'll get on to a more cheerful topic. There's a hawk, see?" and he points to a bird circling in the vault of blue.

"I was wondering what it was," says Leslie. "You must have good eyes. Do you know all the birds when you see them?"

"Nearly all, I think," he replies. "Horses, and dogs, and birds, I know a little about, but I don't know anything else. I think I should have made a decent gamekeeper or horse breaker; I'm not fit for anything else. But sometimes I console myself with something I read in the paper the other day; the fellow said that there were far too many clever people in the world, and that very soon it would be quite a distinction not to have painted a picture, or written a book, or done something in the scientific way. I'm on the safe road to distinction, Miss Lisle. There isn't a bigger dunce in Portmaris than I am."

So they talk. It is not much. It is neither witty nor wise; it is just the pleasant, aimless chatter of two young people who are almost strangers; and yet so absorbed and interested are they, that they do not note how time flies, that the sun is sinking in the west, and that the shadows are stealing over hill and dale.

Leslie is perfectly at her ease. She has almost forgotten, quite forgotten for the time, indeed, that the young man sitting beside her with his arms folded behind his head, and talking of his fishing and his shooting, and of the strange beasts and birds and fishes he has seen, killed, or captured, is a duke; and he, Yorke, always ready to be happy, to meet the sweet goddess Happiness, half-way, is filled with a strange feeling of peace, that yet is not peace, which at times almost startles him.

In all his life he has not met with a girl like this; so simple, yet so sweetly wise; so good, and yet so bright and winsome. He is beginning to know some of the multitudinous expressions of the beautiful face, to lay traps for the slow heart-winning smile, to set snares for drawing the clear, darkly gray eyes toward his, that he may look into their depths. Her voice makes sweet melody in his ears, and stirs his heart with a vague thrill which will trouble him presently, trouble him very much. It seems to him one moment that he has known her for years, the next that she has just lighted from the clouds, or risen from the depths of the blue sea, and that he shall never know her or get any nearer to her.

And under the influence of these sensations, which summed up as a whole, are as a potent spell, he forgets the dark girl whom he has persuaded Vinson to take away out of sight, forgets the compact that he has made with the duke, forgets that he is sailing under false colors and is deceiving the girl beside him – forgets, in short, everything, save that she is beside him, and that he has the delight of looking at, and talking to, and, ah, best of all, of listening to her.

He would be content to sit there – so that she were by his side – till the end of the world, but a shadow falling across the entrance to the hut rouses Leslie to a sense of the flight of the common enemy.

"Why, it must be late," she says, with the air of one making a great discovery.

"Is it?" he says. "Must we really go? It is very jolly here – it is as jolly as it was last night on the water."

But he gets up and follows her, and they make their way back. As they emerge on the hill-side, they find that the wind has dropped, and is sighing across the downs rather plaintively; and Yorke, looking up, sees a cloud, which, though it is not much bigger than a man's hand, is full of warning.

"Did you happen to bring an umbrella with you?" he asks, with affected carelessness.

Leslie laughs.

"Not even a sunshade. Why?"

"Nothing," he says, inwardly calling himself opprobrious names for not providing the Englishman's traveling companion.

"Do you think it is going to rain?" she asks. "Oh, no, it isn't possible."

"Everything is possible in this charming climate of ours," he says. "Well, Mr. Lisle, how are you getting on?" he asks, as they go up to the artist, still hard at work.

He looks up with a start. To him they have only been absent, say, a quarter of an hour.

"It is difficult," he says. "Very. One needs time – time."

"We'd better come another day," says Yorke. "Oh, you have got on famously," and he keeps his countenance capitally as he looks at the sketch. "I'll carry your easel," and he folds it up, and puts it over his shoulder.

They find the duke waiting for them at the bottom of the tower, and seeing them all together, he does not suspect that the two young people have been spending the whole afternoon *tete-a-tete*.

"I was just going off without you," he says, addressing all three, but looking at Leslie's face, which wears a rapt and dreamy expression.

"It's well you didn't," retorts Yorke. "You and Grey would never have reached home alive. Miss Leslie and I are the only persons who can manage these nags. But come on," and he glances upward – that cloud has grown considerably since they left the hermit's hut – and leads the way to the inn.

"Now, ma'am," he says to the landlady, in his frank, and genial way. "Got the kettle boiling? Right! Let us have some tea while the horses are being put to."

Then he goes round to the stable, inspects the horses, and is back in time to hand Leslie a cup of the beverage, which be the hour what it may, is always welcomed by fair women.

"Now up you get," he says, after surreptitiously tipping everybody – landlord, hostler, rosy-cheeked maid, all round. "Miss Leslie, we can't get on without you in front, you know," he remarks, as Leslie is about to go inside; and he helps her to the box.

The horses are fresh and eager for work, and for a time he drives, but presently he puts the reins in her hands.

"According to promise," he says. "Hold 'em tight while I," and he bends down and searches for something under the box seat.

"Oh, how beautifully they go," she says, half to herself. "What is it you are looking for, your gra – Lord Yorke?"

"Never you mind," he says. "You look after your horses."

Leslie laughs, and laughs again as he comes up, red in the face, and with a Scotch wrap in his hand.

"Are you so cold?" she asks.

"Very," he responds. "It's going to snow, I fancy."

"Why, it is quite close," she says, removing her eyes for a moment from the horses to glance at him with smiling surprise. "It seems hotter than it has been all day."

As she speaks, a low rumbling rolls over their heads and a flash of light cuts across the sky.

"That is lightning," she exclaims.

"It was rather like it," he admits, dryly.

"Did you bring any gamps?" asks the duke.

"Nary one," replies Yorke, grimly. "Slang away, I can bear it – and I deserve it," he mutters, glancing at the girlish figure beside him.

Mr. Lisle looks round absently.

"I'm afraid – it – it is going to rain," he says.

In another minute it is raining. Yorke takes the rug in both hands, and deftly wraps it round Leslie.

"Oh, no, please," she says, and she glances behind her. "Give it to him – Mr. Temple."

"It would be more than my life is worth," he says. "I dare not offer it to him. Please let me fasten it. How shall I? Give me a hairpin!"

"You must hold the horses, then," she says.

"I can see one sticking out," he says.

"Well, take it," she responds, innocently and all unconsciously, for she is thinking of her driving far more than the rain or the rug or anything else.

He looks at her intent and absorbed face, and puts up his hand and draws the hairpin from its soft and silken nest, and she, unheeding, does not know that his hand trembles, actually trembles, as he fastens the rug round her.

"Now give me the reins," he says, "and keep your head down; we are in for a regular storm."

As he speaks, the rain comes down with a whiz, as if it meant to wash them off the box.

Leslie laughs.

"After all, it is a proper picnic," she says.

But the next instant her laugh dies away, for the heavens seem to open before them, a peal of thunder roars like the discharge of a park of artillery just above their heads, and the horses, startled and frightened, stop dead short, then rear up on end.

The carriage sways, and for a moment it seems as if it were going over, and Leslie is forced up close against Yorke.

He holds the terrified horses with one strong hand, against him.

"All right," he says, in a low voice. "Don't be afraid, Leslie!" His arm holds her, supports her, presses her to him, perhaps unconsciously. "You are quite safe, dearest, dearest."

Low as his voice is, Leslie hears him, or – she asks herself – is it only fancy?

For a moment, one brief moment, she cowers, nestling to him, her face hidden against his shoulder; then with a start, she draws away, and with her face red and white by turns, looks straight before her.

And through the roar of thunder, and the hissing of the rain, she hears those words re-echoing, "Leslie, dearest – dearest!"

CHAPTER X. YORKE IN LOVE

The great changes of our lives come suddenly. Swift as the lightning's flash is the revelation to Yorke that he loves the girl who sits beside him.

Half-unconsciously he had uttered the words which are still ringing in her ears, but he knows that his heart has been saying "dearest" all day long.

He knows now what that strange, peaceful happiness meant which made him feel as if he would be content to pass the rest of his life by her side in the hermit's cell.

And he knows that this is no transient passion which will have its day, and pass, leaving not a wreck behind, as so many passions alas! have passed with him. To every one of the sons of men, it is said, comes once in his life, the great all-absorbing love which wipes out all others, and which shall make of all his days an endless misery or a surpassing happiness; and this love has come to Yorke.

In an instant, as it were, it seems to have wrought a change in him. Gay, reckless, thoughtless, an hour ago, he is serious enough now.

His heart is beating quickly, furiously; his strong hands tremble as he holds the terrified horses, and urges them on with whip and voice; and yet, though apparently engrossed with them, thinking more of the silent girl beside him.

She is so silent! She scarcely seems to move, but sits, with the rug concealing her face, her head bent down.

"What have I said?" he asks himself; in truth he scarcely knows. It is as if his heart had suddenly become the master of his voice and actions, and had made a helpless slave of him.

If she would only speak! He longs past all description to hear her voice, even though it should be in anger and indignation; but she does not speak. He lifts his face to the sweeping rain and almost welcomes it. The storm is in harmony with the tempest of awakened passion which rages in his breast. He does not dare to speak to her, scarcely ventures to look her way, and he sits as silent as herself, while the horses dash along the streaming road and up the Portmaris street.

"We might have come by boat, there is water enough," says the duke, dryly. "Miss Lisle, I am afraid you are wet through. Pray get in at once, or you will catch cold."

She stands up on the box, and Yorke goes to unfasten the wrap, but she is too quick for him, and, taking out the hairpin, lets the rug fall, and stands before his eyes, her slim, graceful figure swayed a little away from him as if she did not want him to touch her.

He gets down, and offers her his hand, but she springs from the box lightly, stands a moment, then with a low-voiced "Good-night – and thank you," follows her father into the house.

The duke looks after her.

"The poor child is wet through and chilled," he says, sympathetically. "It's a pity you didn't think of a mackintosh, Yorke. What are you going to do with the rig and horses?"

Yorke looks down at him as if he scarcely heard or understood, for a moment; then he says, absently, like a man only half recovered from a stunning blow:

"The horses – oh, I'll find a place for them."

"You might take them to the station, your grace; they could put them up there in the good stable," suggests Grey.

"Yes, yes; and look sharp," says the duke. "We'll have some dinner by the time you are back. Will you have a glass of whisky and water before you go?"

But Yorke shakes his head almost impatiently.

"I'm all right," he says, curtly, and he drives off.

He sees the horses made comfortable in the stable at the station, and helps to rub them down and litter them; then he turns back.

But at the top of the street he pauses. He cannot face the duke just yet. There is that in his face, in his voice, he knows, which will reveal his secret.

He turns off to the right, and makes his way along a little used road toward the sea.

He is wet through, but he does not notice it; he scarcely knows where he is going until he stands on the edge of the sea.

"I love her!" he murmurs. "Yes, I love her. There is no woman in all the world like her! So good, so gentle, so beautiful."

He thinks of all the girls he has seen, talked with, danced with, and flirted with; but there is none like Leslie.

"I am a lost man if I do not get her!" he says to himself. "And how can I get her?" He groans, and pushes his hat off his brow, that is hot and burning. "She cares nothing for me; why should she? If I was to ask her to be my wife – my wife! How can I?" And he shudders as if some black thought had swept down upon him, and crushed the hope out of him. "How can I? Oh, what a mad, senseless fool I have been! How we chuck our lives away to find out, when it is too late, what it is we've lost. If I had met her a year ago – ." He breaks off, and sighs, as he tramps up and down in the rain. "If I could only wipe out that year! But I can't, I can't, though I'd give ten years of the life that's left in me to be able to do it! What would she think – say – if she knew, if I told her? With all her sweet, childlike ways, and all her innocence and purity, she is a woman, and the very goodness for which I love her would fight against me! She looked and spoke like an angel when she was telling me that story about the hermit. An angel! I'm a nice kind of man to fall in love with an angel, and want to marry her! I might as well fall in love with one of those stars." And he looks up despairingly at the diamond lights that are peering through the rift in the clouds.

"Besides," he mutters, "even if – if that other woman weren't in the question," and he sets his teeth, "how could I ask her to marry me? Even if she'd have me – and why should I dare to think that I could win her love? I'm a pauper and worse. And she thinks me a duke! That's another thing! I forgot that idiotic business! Oh, I've tied myself up in every way, and haven't a chance! And yet I love her – I love her! Leslie!" he repeats the name, as Romeo might have repeated Juliet's, finding a torturing joy in its music. "No, there's no hope! Yorke, my boy, you are badly hit. You've laughed at this kind of thing often enough, but your turn has come. And as there is no hope for you, you have got to bear it. The best thing you can do is to clear out in the morning, and blot Portmaris out of the map of England. I mustn't see her again – never again!"

All his nature protests against this resolve, and his heart aches badly, very badly; but he squares his shoulders and sets his teeth hard.

"Yes, that's the only thing to do; to cut and run. There's one comfort, she won't mind. She won't miss me. God knows what I said when I felt her face against my breast; but whatever it was, I've offended her past forgiveness. She wouldn't see me again, I dare say, if I stayed, and so – ." He heaves a sigh, which is very much like a groan, and turns homeward.

He finds Grey alone in the room when he enters; the dinner things are still on the table, and Grey looks at him with a rather grave and startled expression.

"I've saved some dinner, your grace," he says.

"Your grace' be da – hanged!" says Yorke, almost fiercely.

"Yes, my lord," murmurs Grey. "The duke waited for over an hour, and he has gone to bed; I was afraid of a chill, my lord. And your lordship is wet, very wet, still – ."

"All right," says Yorke, as politely as he can. "Never mind. Go and see after the duke, and dinner – oh, yes. Thanks, you need not wait."

He tries to eat, but for once his faithful appetite fails him, and he pushes his plate away and gets his pipe, that great consoler in all times of trouble; and this is the worst trouble Yorke Auchester has ever had.

It is well on into the small hours when weary, but oppressed by a ghastly wakefulness, he goes to bed, and there he lies, open-eyed and thoughtful, until the sun floods the room.

He gets up, and as he looks in the glass after his bath, he smiles grimly.

"Only one night of it!" he says. "And a great many similar ones lie before me before I get over this! I wonder whether she has been thinking of me? Why should she? And if she should have been they wouldn't be pleasant thoughts."

He pulls the blinds aside and looks at the house opposite, wondering which is her window; and as he does so, the lover's heart-hunger for a sight of his loved one assails him.

It has still strong possession of him when he goes down the stairs and into the street; but he fights against it. The best thing he can do is not to see Leslie Lisle, but to drive Vinson's horses back to Northcliffe, and take the train from there to London, and – stop there; stop there till in a round of the folly which has suddenly grown so senseless and worthless in his eyes, he has dulled the pain of this, his first real love.

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