

HENRY WOOD

IT MAY BE
TRUE, VOL. 2
(OF 3)

Henry Wood
It May Be True, Vol. 2 (of 3)

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=35005969

It May Be True, Vol. 2 (of 3):

Содержание

CHAPTER I.	4
CHAPTER II.	24
CHAPTER III.	49
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	53

Mrs. Henry Wood

It May Be True, Vol. 2 (of 3)

CHAPTER I.

NEWS FROM HOME

"The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.
His hair is crisp, and black, and long;
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat;
He earns whate'er he can;
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man."

Longfellow.

It was just sunset as Matthew the pikeman went out to receive toll from some one passing, or rather coming quickly up to the gate.

It was market day at Brampton, so Matthew had to keep his ears open, and his wits about him, for generally he had a lazy post, with scarcely half a dozen calls during the day.

A spare thin man was the occupier of the light cart now coming fast along the road; who as he drew near the gate threw the pence—without slackening his horse's pace—at least a foot from where the other was standing.

"There's manners for you!" said Matthew, stooping to look for the money, "chucks the ha'pence to me as though I was a thief. Hates parting with 'em, I 'spose."

"Or hates touching you with the ends of his fingers," said a voice at his side.

"Good evening to yer, Mrs. Grey," said he, civilly rising and looking up, "Well, I'm blessed if I can find that last penny," and he counted over again those he held in his hand, "I'll make him give me another, next time I sets eyes on him, I know."

"What's this?" said Goody Grey, turning something over with her stick.

"That's it, and no mistake. Why I'd back yer to see through a brick wall, Ma'am."

"There!" said she, not heeding his last remark, and pointing out the cart going slowly up a neighbouring hill, "he's too proud to shake hands with his betters, now. Pride, all pride, upstart pride, like the rest of the fools in this world. And he used to go gleaning in the very fields he now rides over so pompously."

"Can yer call that to mind, Mrs. Grey?" asked Matthew, eyeing her keenly and searchingly.

"Call it to mind! What's that to you? I never said I could, but I know it for a truth."

"Folks say there's few things yer don't know," replied Matthew, somewhat scared at her fierce tone.

"Folks are fools!"

"Some of 'em; not all. Most say yer knows everything, and can give philters and charms for sickness and heart-ache and the like."

"Folks are fools!" repeated she again.

"Well I know nothing, nor don't want to; but," said he, dropping his voice to a whisper, "if yer could only give me a charm to keep *her* tongue quiet," and he pointed with his thumb meaningly over his shoulder in the direction of the cottage, "I'd bless yer from the bottom of my heart as long as I live."

"What blessing will you give me?"

Matthew considered a moment, as the question somewhat puzzled him. Here was a woman who had apparently neither kith nor kin belonging to her, one who stood, as far as he could see, alone in the world. How was he to give her a blessing? She had neither children, nor husband to be kind or unkind to her; she might be a prosperous woman for aught he or the neighbours knew, or she might be the very reverse. She never seemed to crave for sympathy from anyone, but rather to shun it, and never allowed a question of herself on former days to be asked, without growing angry, and if it was repeated, or persisted in, violent.

Presently Matthew hit upon what he thought a safe expedient. "What blessing do yer most want?" he asked cunningly.

"None! I want none."

"I'll give yer one Ma'am all the same. Most of us wish for something, and I'll pray that the one wish of yer heart, whatever it is, yer may get."

"How dare you wish me that?" she said in a fierce tone, "how dare you know I've any wish at all?"

"'Cos I do. That's all," replied Matthew sullenly.

"Who told you? Speak! Answer!"

"Good Lord! Mrs. Grey, ma'am; how you scare a man. Who should tell me? I don't know nothing at all about yer; how should I? All I know is that most folks has wishes of some kind or another; nobody's satisfied in this world, and in course you ain't, and so I just wished yer might be, that's all; there's no great harm in that, is there?"

"I told you folks were fools; but I think you are the biggest fool of the lot."

"Come, come, don't let's have words. I didn't mean to vex yer, you're a lone woman with not a soul to stand by yer, and the Lord knows what you've got on yer mind."

Then seeing her eyes flashed again he hastened to change the subject.

"It's a fine evening, anyhow," said he.

"We shall have rain."

"Rain!" and Matthew looked up overhead, but not a vestige of a cloud or sign of a storm could he see.

"Yes, rain, heavy rain, like the weeping of a stricken, woeful heart."

And she was passing on; but Matthew could not let her go so; he must have the charm, even at the risk of offending her again. He had thought of it for days past, it was the one wish of his heart; he had longed and sought for this opportunity and it must not slip through his fingers thus, so he said meekly, but still rather doubtfully,

"Well it may be going to rain; yer know a deal better than I do, and I won't gainsay yer? we shall know fast enough afore night closes in. And now Mrs. Grey will yer give me the charm?"

"You don't need any charm."

"Can't be done without," said he decidedly. "I've tried everything else I know of, and it ain't no use," said he despairingly.

"Well," said Goody Grey, after a moment's consideration, "do you see this box?" and she took a small box out of her pocket and filled it with some of the fine gravel from his garden, whilst Matthew looked eagerly on as if his life depended on it. "When next you are on your road to the Brampton Arms, and are close to the yew tree which grows within a stone's throw of the door, *turn back*, and when you reach home again take the box out of your pocket and throw away one of the stones, and don't stir forth again, save to answer the 'pike, for the rest of the evening."

"And then?" questioned Matthew.

"Then there's nothing more to be done, except to sit quiet and silent and watch your wife's face."

"Where I shall see ten thousand furies, if I don't answer her."

"You are a man, what need you care? Do as I bid you every time you are tempted to go to the Public-house; never miss once until the box is empty. Then bring it back to me."

"And suppose I miss. What then?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why; what if when I finds myself so near the door of the Public—you see, ma'am, it's a great temptation—I turns in and gets a drop afore I comes home?"

"Then you must add another stone instead of taking one away, and don't attempt to deceive me, or the charm will work harm instead of good."

Deceive her; no. Matthew had far too much faith in the charm to do that; there was no occasion for her fears.

"And is this the only charm you know of?" he asked.

"The only one. When the box is empty the cure is certain; but remember the conditions, a silent tongue and not a drop of drink; the breaking of either one of these at the time when the charm is working, and a stone must be added."

"The box'll never be empty in this world," said he, with a deep sigh; "but I'll try. My thanks to yer all the same, ma'am."

"You can thank me when you bring back the box. How is Mrs. Marks?"

"Pretty tidy, thank yer," but he looked crestfallen, notwithstanding his assertion. "I never know'd her ill; she's like a horse, always ready for any amount of work, nothing knocks her up."

"Sometimes the trees we think the strongest, wither the soonest," said Goody Grey passing on, while Matthew leant against the gate and counted the stones in the box.

"There's eight of them," said he. "I wish it had been an uneven number, it's more lucky. Eight times! More than a week. It'll never be empty—never!" then he looked up and watched Goody Grey almost out of sight, and as he did so her last words came across him again.

What did she mean by them? Did she mean that his old woman was going to die? Then he considered if he should tell her, and whether if he did she would believe it, and take to her bed at once, and leave him in quiet possession of the cottage and his own will; somehow his heart leaped at the thought of the latter, although he shook his head sadly while the former flashed through him.

"There's mischief abroad somewhere, Mrs. Marks," said he, entering the cottage.

"Was when you was out," retorted she; "but it's at home now, and likely to remain so for to-night."

"Who was talking of going out? I'm sure I wasn't. I never thought onc't of it, even."

"Best not, for you won't as long as I know it. You were drunk enough when the young master passed through the 'pike to last for a precious sight to come; you're not going to make a beast of yourself to-night if I can help it."

Mrs. Marks was scrubbing the table down. She was one of those women who, if they have no work to do, make it. She was

never idle. Her house, or rather cottage—there were only four rooms in it—was as clean as a new pin; not a speck of dirt to be seen, and as to dust, that was a thing unknown; but then she was always dusting, scrubbing, or sweeping. Matthew hated the very sight of a brush or pail, and would have grumbled if he dared, but he dared not; he was thoroughly henpecked. Had he been a sober man this would not have been the case; but he was not, and he knew it, and she knew it too; and knowing his weak points she had him at her mercy, and little enough she showed him. He answered her fast enough sometimes, but he dared not go in opposition to her will, even when he came reeling home from the Public-house. Appearances were too against him: he being small and thin, she a tall, stout, strong-looking woman. Certainly the scrubbing agreed wonderfully with her, and there seemed little prospect of Goody Grey's prophecy being verified.

"Who was it passed through the 'pike, just now?" asked she.

"White; as owns the Easdale Farm down yonder, with no more manners than old Jenny out there—the donkey,—she lets her heels fly, but I'm blessed if this chap don't let fly heels and hands both."

"Chap!" reiterated Mrs. Marks, "where's your manners? He's a deal above you in the world."

"May be. But Goody Grey don't say so. She says he was no better nor a gleaner time gone by."

"She!" replied Mrs. Marks, contemptuously. "What does she know about it? She's crazed!"

"Crazed! no more nor you and I. She's a wise woman, and knows a deal more than you think."

"I am glad of it," said Mrs. Marks sneeringly, "for it's a precious little I think of either her or her sayings."

"She went through the 'pike same time as 'other did, and told me all about him."

"Why don't you be minding your own business, instead of talking and gossiping with every tom-fool you meet."

"She's no woman to gossip with, or fool either; she made me tremble and shake again, even the fire don't warm me," said he, lighting his pipe and settling himself in the chimney corner.

"I'll take your word for her having scared you. There's few as couldn't do that easy enough."

Matthew's hand went instinctively into his pocket; he could scarcely refrain from trying the effect of the charm, but it was growing dusk, and he was afraid that for that night at least it was too late.

"Wait a bit," said he in a low voice, "Wait a bit;" but his wife heard him.

"Was that what she said?" asked she.

"No, she said—" and Matthew took the pipe out of his mouth so that he might be heard the plainer, "she said; 'all trees wither the first as looks fat and strong.' That's what she said."

"Trees fat and strong! Are you muddled again?"

"No, I'm not," replied he doggedly, "that's what she said, and no mistake; the very words, I'll take my oath of it; and if you

don't see the drift of 'em I do."

"Let's hear it."

"Well," said Matthew solemnly, "she meant one or t'other of us was going to die," and he looked her full in the face to see how she would take it, expecting it would alarm her as it had done him.

Mrs. Marks put down the scrubbing brush, and resting her arms on the table returned his gaze.

"Oh! you poor frightened hare," she said, "So you think you are going to die, do you? Well I'd have more spirit in me than to list to the words of a mad woman."

His astonishment may be better guessed at than described. He had so entirely made up his mind that his wife was the one Goody Grey had so vaguely hinted at, that he never deemed it possible any one could think otherwise; least of all Mrs. Marks herself: he glanced downwards at his thin legs, then stretched out his arms one after the other and felt them, as if to satisfy himself that he had made no mistake, and that he really was the spare man he imagined.

"No, you're deceiving yourself," said he, "I'll declare it wasn't me she meant. She said fat, I call it to mind well; and I'm as thin as the sign post out yonder and no mistake."

Then he glanced at the stout, strong arms of his wife, now fully developed with her determined scrubbing. "If she meant anyone," said he decidedly, "she just meant you!"

"Me!" screamed Mrs. Marks, "Is it me you are worriting

yourself about, you simpleton? There, rest easy; I'm not afraid of her evil tongue; not that I suppose I've longer to live than other folks: I'm ready to go when my time comes and the Lord pleases; but I'm not to be frightened into my bed by Mrs. Grey or any woman in the parish. No, she's come to the wrong box for that. I'll hold my own as long as I have the strength for it, and am not to be ousted by any one; not I!" and Mrs. Marks nearly upset the pail in her violence, as she swept the scrubbing brush off the table into it.

"Hulloa!" cried a voice, as the latch of the door was lifted, and a stout strong-looking man entered with a good-humoured, cheerful face. "Anybody at home? How are you Mrs. Marks? I'm glad to see you again, and you too," he said, grasping and shaking Matthew's hand heartily.

"It's William Hodge of Deane!" said she in surprise, "Who'd have thought of seeing you down here, and what brings you to these parts?"

"Business," replied the other laconically.

"Something to do with the Smithy, eh?" questioned Matthew.

"Just so."

"You still keep it on, of course."

"Of course."

"There don't stand there cross-examining in that way," called Mrs. Marks, as she opened a cupboard at the further end of the room, "but attend to your own business, and just go and draw some ale, while I get a bit of bread and cheese ready. Supper

won't be served up yet," said she apologetically, returning and spreading a clean snow white cloth on the table; "but you must want a mouthful of something after your long journey."

"I can't wait supper, I'm in too great a hurry; thank yer all the same."

"Are you going further on?" asked Matthew, coming in with the ale.

"No. I'm to put up at the Brampton Arms for the night, or may be two—or perhaps three," he replied.

"I'm sorry for that," said Mrs. Marks. "I hate the very name of the place. They're a bad set, the whole lot of 'em."

"That don't signify a rap to me. I shan't have nothing to do with any of 'em so long as they let's me alone, that's all I care about. I shan't trouble 'em much 'cept for my bed."

"And now for a bit of news about home," said Mrs. Marks, as her visitor began his supper, or rather the bread and cheese she had set before him. "How are they all down at Deane? And how's mother?"

"I'm sorry to say I've no good news of her; she've been ailing some time, and the doctor's stuff don't do her no good; he says she'll go off like the snuff of a candle. But there, she's precious old now, and well nigh worn out. I've a letter from your sister Martha—Mrs. Brooks—telling yer all about it;" and he searched and dived into his deep pockets for it, and then handed it to her.

"Is Jane as queer as ever?" asked Matthew, in a low voice, as his wife was perusing the letter.

"Yes, worse nor ever, I think; scarce ever opens her lips, and stares at yer awful, as though she had the evil eye."

"I always thought she had; she wor as strange a woman as ever I set eyes on."

"Well!" said Mrs. Marks, looking up from her letter, "I suppose I must say yes. Perhaps you'll just look in, Mr. Hodge, when the time comes for you to go back to Deane, and I'll give you the answer."

"I won't fail," replied he.

"What are yer going to say yes to?" asked Matthew.

"Martha says mother's dying, and she wants to know what's to become of Jane, and if she can't come here."

"Here!" exclaimed Matthew. "The Lord save us."

"Save you from what?" asked Mrs. Marks angrily.

"From having a crazed creature in the house. Who knows but what she might burn the house down about us; Mr. Hodge says she ain't no better in the head than she used to be."

"If she was ten times as bad as she is, she should come. It's a sin and a shame to hear you talk so of your own wife's sister and she nowhere to go to, and the cottage big enough to hold her."

"Why can't your sister Martha take her?"

"Just hear him talk," said she, derisively, "and Martha with more children than she knows what to do with; and a husband as is always ailing. Why you've no more charity in you than a miser; there, go and draw some more ale, and have done with your folly. Least said is soonest mended."

Mrs. Marks had two sisters and a mother living at Deane, some forty, or it might be more miles, from Brampton. Martha, the youngest, was married, and blessed—as is too often the case with the poor, or those least able to afford it—with nine children, and a sick husband; the latter worked hard enough when his health permitted, but then there was no certainty about his being able to earn wages. A cold caught and neglected had given him a fever and ague, and the least chill brought on a return of it. His wife, almost as energetic a woman as her sister, Mrs. Marks, but with a more mild and even temper, earned a living by washing, and did the best she could to keep them all; and her management certainly did her credit, her house being as clean as Mrs. Marks', although not so constantly scrubbed or washed.

The other sister, Jane, lived with her mother, an old woman of seventy-five, who, until now, had borne her age well, and looked certainly some ten years younger, but then she had always enjoyed the best of health; was up betimes in the morning, summer and winter, and about her small farm and dairy, which she managed better than most did with half-a-dozen hands to help them.

Ever busy, and uncommonly active, her illness was totally unlooked for, and least expected by Mrs. Marks, who read and re-read her sister's letter several times, to assure herself there was no mistake; that she really was struck with paralysis and not expected to survive many days, and then what was to become of Jane? Jane, who was so totally dependent on others, who lived as

it were on sufferance, rarely doing work, or helping her mother in any way, or interesting herself in any one single thing. If she willed it she worked, if not, she remained idle; her mother never grumbling or finding fault, while the girl who helped her was severely rated as an idle good-for-nothing if any one portion of her daily work was neglected.

There were days when Jane would milk the cows, churn the butter, even scour out the dairy itself, and work willingly and well—she had been out to service in her youth—but these days were few and far between; she usually roamed about at her will, sometimes half over the parish, or else sat at home perfectly quiet and silent knitting, she never did any other kind of needlework; or if unemployed she would clasp her hands together over her knees, her eyes either fixed on vacancy, or restlessly wandering to and fro, to all appearance, as the neighbours said, not exactly a daft woman, but one whose mind was afflicted, or had been visited with some heavy calamity, the weight of which bore her to the ground, and was at times more than she had strength to bear or battle against.

Such was the sister Mrs. Marks had determined on befriending, there being little doubt she would carry out her intention, notwithstanding Matthew's decided aversion to it; and that Jane would ere long be in quiet possession of the one spare room in the cottage.

William Hodge, her present visitor, also came from Deane, and kept the small blacksmith's shop, or parish smithy. He

had two sons, one a good-for-nothing, ne'er-do-weel. Also, well probably a sorrow and constant anxiety to his parents, who had been absent from home now for several months, and at his wife's earnest solicitations Hodge had come down to Brampton to seek him, they having heard accidentally of his being there or somewhere in the neighbourhood.

"How's Mrs. Hodge, and your sons?" asked Mrs. Marks, as Matthew went off once more for the ale.

"Sons!" he repeated. "Ah! there's the rub, you've hit the right nail on the head now. Richard, as works the smithy is as good a lad as ever breathed; but Tom's turned out bad, and between you and I, 'tis he I've come all this way to look after. I'd turn my back upon him and have nothing more to do with him; but there, one can't always do as one wishes."

"Is Tom down here?"

"I've heerd so."

"What's he doing?"

"No good, that you may be sure," replied he, "since he's here on the sly. I'm afeard he's got into bad company, and gone along with a terrible bad lot. The old woman thinks he's turned poacher, and most worrits and frets herself to death about it; so I've come to try and find him, and get him back home again, that is if I can. It'll most break his mother's heart if I don't."

"God grant he isn't with them as murdered poor Susan's husband?"

"Amen," replied he solemnly.

"One of 'em got hanged for that, God rest his soul, though he deserved it; but there's lots of 'em about; they say the gang is more desperate like since then, and have vowed to have their vengeance on Mr. Grant, the Squire's head keeper, but there, it don't do to tell yer all this; bad news comes fast enough of itself, we'll trust and hope Tom isn't with none of these."

"Well, we've all got our troubles," said Mrs. Marks again, seeing he made no reply. "I begin to think those as has no children is better off than those as has 'em."

"Ye've less trouble, no doubt of it."

"Less trouble! oh, I've mine to bear as well as the rest of yer; why there's Matthew, with no more spirit in him than a flea, and all through drink. He'll go off to the public, though 'tis half a mile and more away, whenever my eyes isn't on him."

"That's bad."

"Bad! It's worse than bad. Here's mother dying, Jane not to be trusted to come here alone, and Matthew not able to take care of himself no more than a baby! How I'm to manage to get to Deane I don't know, nor can't see neither how it's to be done."

"If I was you, I'd go somehow. They'll think badly of you if you don't, and as for Marks, leave him to get drunk as oft as he likes, for a treat; I'll wager my life on it, he'll be sober when he sees your face again, my word on it."

This, to Hodge's mind, was satisfactory reasoning enough; but not so to Mrs. Marks. She would like to know who was to take care of the 'pike, during her absence, if Matthew was unable to

do so? This was a question Hodge had not foreseen, and when asked, could not reply to. However, after a little more talking, they came to the friendly arrangement that Mrs. Marks should start on the morrow for Deane; Hodge, in the meanwhile, keeping house with Marks, while she was absent; her stay, not under any circumstances whatever, to extend beyond a week.

It was an arrangement that satisfied both parties, as on considering the matter over, Hodge thought it was just as well he did not put up at the inn for any length of time, his being there might be noised abroad, and, although he intended passing under a feigned name, still Tom might easily recognise a description of him, be on the alert, and keep aloof until all was quiet again.

Mrs. Marks gave him sundry pieces of advice as to how he was to manage while she was at Deane, and among other things, cautioned him to beware of trusting Marks too much about Tom.

"If you take my advice," said she, "you won't tell him a word about him, that's if you want it kept quiet, I never trust him with a secret. He's the man for you if you want a bit of news spread, why it would be all over the parish in—well, I'd give him an hour's start, then I'd walk after him, and hear it all over again from everybody's mouth I met. It's ten times worse when he's got a drop of drink in him, then he'll talk for ever, and you'll may-be hear more than you care to, so mind, I caution you to be wary."

"I shan't wag my tongue, if you don't," replied Hodge.

"I!" exclaimed Mrs. Marks, indignantly. "I mind my own business, which I've plenty of, I can tell you, and don't trouble

my head about other people's; let everybody take care of their own, which it's my belief they don't, or there wouldn't be so many squabbles going on in the village at times."

"You're a wise woman, Mrs. Marks."

"True for you," said Matthew, returning, "I'll back her agin a dozen women, twice her size."

"Hold your tongue, you simpleton," said his wife, "and give me the ale here; you've been a precious time drawing it. What have you been about?" added she, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Been about? Why just tilting the barrel, there ain't enough left to drown a rat in."

"Why don't you say a mouse, or som'ut smaller still. If I'd had my senses about me, I'd never have trusted you within a mile of it," said she, handing the mug to Hodge.

"I'll swear I arn't tasted a drop. I'd scorn to drink on the sly," replied Marks, attempting to look indignant, and glancing at his visitor.

"There, don't straiten your body that way, and try to look big, you meek saint, you! as scorns to drink on the sly, but don't mind telling a lie straight out; there ain't anybody here as believes you, leastways I don't. Why Mr. Hodge," said she, taking the empty mug from his hand, "you'd think I was blessed with the best husband as ever breathed, instead of the greatest rogue. Why you'd be a villain, Marks, if it warn't for knowing your wife's eye's always on you. You're afeard of it, you know you are."

"I'm a devilish deal more afeard of som'ut else; a 'ooman's eye

only strikes skin deep, but her tongue do rattle a man's bones and make his flesh creep," muttered Matthew, turning away.

"There don't settle yourself in the chimney corner again, but come and help Mr. Hodge on with his great-coat. Hear to the wind how it's rising; 'tis a raw cold night outside, I take it."

"It's drenching with rain," said Hodge, as he stepped over the threshold and pulled up the collar of his coat preparatory to facing the rain, which was coming down in torrents.

"Rain!" exclaimed Matthew, as his wife closed the door on her visitor. "Who'd have thought it? But there, *she* said it would rain. Oh! she's a true prophet, is Goody Grey, and no mistake. I said she was a fearful 'ooman, and know'd most everything. The Lord save and deliver us, and have mercy upon us! for we none of us know," and he glanced at Mrs. Marks, "what's going to happen. Good Lord deliver us from harm."

"There go and put the pot on to boil for supper," said Mrs. Marks, turning on him sharply, "and don't stand there a chaunting of the psalms'es."

And with deep sighs and many inward groans, Matthew went and did his wife's bidding, but the psalms seemed uppermost in his mind that night; he seemed to have them at his fingers' ends.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIENDLY INTERFERENCE

"No tears, Celia, now shall win
My resolv'd heart to return;
I have searched thy soul within,
And find nought but pride and scorn;
I have learn'd thy arts, and now
Can disdain as much as thou."

Carew.

Men fall in love every day, yet few of them like to be caught talking or acting sentimentally towards the object of their affections.

Charles was inwardly vexed at Frances' sudden appearance, and still more so at the sarcastic way in which she had spoken and acted. What business was it of hers to take either himself or Miss Neville to task? Was it not partly his fault the wrist was sprained, and would he not have been wanting in common politeness had he, when he accidentally discovered it, not tried in some measure to remedy it?

It was a bad sprain, there was no doubt about that, although she made light of it.

It ought to be looked to; but how to procure proper surgical

attention puzzled him. Somehow he did not quite like being the bearer of the tidings to his brother's wife; he could fancy how proudly and contemptuously she would raise her head, and look him through with her dark flashing eyes; and how quietly—very differently from Frances—hint her displeasure at his interference, and turn his fears and sympathy into ridicule. He could not stand that; no, he was ready to face any open danger, but the covert, sarcastic glance and mocking smile of his sister-in-law was a little beyond even his courage. Yet it was necessary she should be informed of it if Amy was to be helped, which he had made up his mind she must be. How then was it to be managed?

Ideas and plans crowded into his brain one after another, but all more or less impracticable; as he stood at the window, where Amy had left him, hopelessly entangled in a web of perplexing thoughts.

There was, as I said, no restraining Anne's curiosity, she always gratified it, or tried to do so, whatever the risk. Certainly, if curiosity is, as we are told, a woman's failing, and men take every opportunity of reminding them of the fact, or rather laying it at their door, whether they will or not, Anne claimed a large portion of it. Why women should be thought to have a larger share of curiosity than men remains to be proved; surely if it be a sin, it is a very small one in comparison to the long list of sins of greater magnitude not laid to their charge, and if not to woman; then to whom do they belong?

Anne had heard voices in the gallery, and had opened her door just sufficiently wide to allow of her obtaining a sight of those who were talking, and notwithstanding sundry hints from Julia as to the disgraceful way in which she was acting, she determined to see the end, let the cost be what it might. She could not hear what was said, but there could be no harm in just peeping and seeing what was going on.

It was with no little astonishment that she watched Charles and Amy apparently on such intimate terms of acquaintance, when the latter had only assured her the night before that she scarcely knew her cousin to speak to. Subsequently, Frances' arrival on the scene, and evident anger and scorn, astonished her still more.

That Miss Neville was a flirt had crossed her mind ever since the day she had caught her coming home with Mr. Vavasour; but here she was apparently hand and glove with Charles. She did not see cause for any such display of temper as Frances had made; still, she thought it a shame Miss Neville should take all the men to herself, when there were lots of other girls in the house ready to be made love to, now, of necessity, left to their own devices, and dull enough in consequence.

Anne began to think Miss Neville was not acting fairly, and certainly not openly. Why should she have two strings to her bow, while Anne could not conjure up one, for she counted Mr. Hall as nobody, and disdainfully thrust the thought of him aside, as his image presented itself in full force; even as she had gazed at him but last night, over the balusters drenched to the skin, looking the

true personification of a country parson, but totally dissimilar to the beau ideal of Anne's imagination, which she had snugly enshrined somewhere in a small corner of her heart. It seemed ridiculous to imagine him falling in love, and least of all with her, who had determined on marrying a man with fierce moustaches and whiskers, and these Mr. Hall could never have. No, he should not fall in love with her; she would not have it.

Why should such an uncouth being be always dangling after her, while Miss Neville, with no trouble at all, came in for all the loaves and fishes, and she obliged to content herself with the fragments? If all the beaux in the house were to be monopolised in this style, it was time Mrs. Linchmore invited others who would be able to look at Miss Neville without immediately falling down and worshipping her, as though she were an angel. She had no intention of losing her temper, as Frances had done, but she did not see why she should not let Charles know she had seen him, so out of her room she marched at once, and went up straight to where he still stood by the window.

"What on earth have you done to offend Frances?" asked she, beating about the bush, "she looks as surly as a bear."

"I might ask *you* that question, seeing she had evidently been put out before I saw her."

"I was peeping through a crack in the door, and could not help laughing to see the rage she was in."

"She may remain in it, and welcome, for aught I care," replied Charles, trying to appear indifferent, but at the same time

showing some slight symptom of temper.

"So may somebody else," said Anne; "but you know very well she was mortified at seeing you hold Miss Neville's hand, and—and—I don't think it was right of you, Charles."

He looked up as if he could have annihilated her. "I am the best judge of my own affairs," said he, slowly, "and as for Miss Neville, it is impossible she could do wrong."

"I do not accuse Miss Neville of doing wrong; but I think my cousin, Mr. Charles Linchmore, is playing a double game."

Charles bit his lip, but made no reply.

"You may take refuge in a sneer," continued Anne, somewhat hotly, "and play with Frances' feelings as much as you like, and as much as you have done, and few will trouble their heads about it; but it's a shame to carry on the same game with a governess, who cannot help herself, and is obliged, nay expected, to put up with slights from everybody."

"Not from me, Anne."

"Yes, from you, who are making love to two girls at the same time."

"How dare you accuse me of so dishonourable an action?" exclaimed Charles.

"Dare? Oh, I dare a great deal more than that," replied Anne, tossing her head.

"Any way, you could not accuse one of much worse."

"It is the truth, nevertheless, and I cannot see that there is anything daring about it. The daring is not in my speaking, but

in your own act."

"I never made love to Frances, or if I did, her own cold pride annihilated any partiality I might have had for her."

"Partiality!" uttered Anne, sarcastically, "Defend me from such partiality from any man. I wonder you did not say flirtation, but even your assurance could not summon courage to tell such a fib as that."

"A truce to this folly, Anne, or I shall get angry, and you can't convince me I ever—" he hesitated a moment—"loved Frances. Allowing that I did show her a little attention, I don't see she is any the worse for it."

"You have succeeded in making her miserable, although you have not broken her heart, and now want to play Miss Neville the same trick; but I won't stand by and see it, I declare I won't; my woman's heart won't let me; so, if you begin that game, we wage war to the knife. I cannot help pitying Frances, whom I dislike, and will not, if I can help it, have to pity Miss Neville also."

"There is no reason why you should. Miss Neville is superior to a dozen like Frances." Anne opened her eyes at this, but wisely held her tongue. He went on,

"I swear, Anne, I'll never give you reason to pity Miss Neville; but she has sprained her wrist, I think very severely. That confounded brute was the cause of it."

"Man or beast?" she asked. "'Tis difficult to know which you mean."

"My horse," replied he, determined not to be laughed into a

good temper. "She would hold him at the lake when I asked her not to; but women are so obstinate, they will have their own way; there is no reasoning with them. I would not have allowed her if I could have foreseen what was going to happen, but how could I? and now the mischief is done, and she is pretty considerably hurt."

"All her own fault, according to your account, so why should you vex yourself about it? Men generally send us to 'Old Harry' under such circumstances."

"But I consider it to have been partly my fault; I was a fool to allow her to hold the horse, and a still greater one, inasmuch as now the mischief is done, I am unable to help her."

"In what?"

Charles made no reply; he was thinking could Anne help him in his difficulty? She might if she liked, but would she? Could he trust her? as in evincing so much sympathy for Miss Neville would she not partly guess at his secret liking for her—if she had not guessed it already?

Anne was good-natured and truthful enough; had she not just plainly told him he had done wrong? but that he would not allow of for a moment. It was the natural thing to do, and would have been done by any one under similar circumstances. How could he help being sorry? how could he help feeling for her? Dr. Bernard must be sent for, the sprain might get worse. Charles, like most men when their minds are set on attaining any one object, determined on carrying his point. The more difficult the

accomplishment the more resolute was he in attaining it, and clearing all obstacles that stood in his way.

"I'm going to Standale," said he, suddenly looking up.

"To Standale! You have just three hours to do it in; we do not dine before eight, so I dare say you will manage it."

"Yes. Have you any commissions?"

"None, thank you. It will be too dark for you to match some wool for my sister. I know she wants some. Men invariably choose such unseasonable hours for their jaunts, when they know it is impossible for women to load them with commissions."

"Do you not think it would be as well to mention to my brother's wife that I am going to Standale? She might like Dr. Bernard to call to-morrow and see Miss Neville, and prescribe for that injured wrist."

"Nonsense, Charles! It cannot be so bad as that; and besides, you said it was caused entirely through her own obstinacy, so let her bear it as best she may, as a just punishment for her sins."

Then seeing he looked serious and a little annoyed, she added, "Of course you can do as you like about it."

"I shall be ready to start in less than ten minutes," replied he. "You can meet me in the hall, and let me know the result of your communication with Mrs. Linchmore."

"That is what I call cool," said Anne, as Charles vanished; "he does not like to tell Isabella herself, so makes me the bearer of the unpleasant news, and I dare say thinks I am blind and do not see through it. Well, the cunning of some men beats everything.

I believe the wretch is fast falling in love with Miss Neville, if he is not so already. At all events, it strikes me, cousin Frances stands a very good chance of being cut out; so she had better control her temper instead of allowing it to get the better of her as it did to-day."

Then, as if a sudden thought struck her, she turned and darted away after Charles.

"I tell you what it is," said she, breathlessly, coming up with him, "I do not mind doing this little act of mercy for you; but at the same time I must first go and see Miss Neville. It would never do to have Isabella asking me how she looked? What was the matter with her? and lots of other questions, that I could not answer; so you must have patience and give me half-an-hour's start."

"Half-an hour!" cried he, looking at his watch. "Why it is nearly five o'clock now."

"I must have half-an-hour, I ought to have said an hour. Why, if it is so late, not put off your journey to Standale until to-morrow. Is your business there so very pressing?" asked she, slyly.

"Yes. I must go this evening," replied he, evading her look.

"Men are so obstinate, there is no reasoning with them. Is not that what you said of Miss Neville?"

"This is quite a different thing."

"Oh! of course, quite different, when it suits your convenience; but I am not convinced."

"Women never are," muttered Charles, turning on his heel.

In the meanwhile Fanny had carried the flower in safety to her governess, her little mind full of wonderment as to what her cousin Frances could have meant; why she had looked so strangely and spoken still more so?

Children are great observers, and often think and see more clearly than their elders give them credit for. So it was in the present instance. Fanny felt certain her cousin did not like Miss Neville should have the flower, that she was jealous of her, and disliked her; and the child settled very much to her own satisfaction that it was all because her governess was so pretty, and had such lovely hair; even more golden than Edith's, while Frances' was as nearly approaching black as it well could be.

Amy was a little indignant on seeing the flower, and hearing from Fanny that "*he* had sent it to her." She recognised the Camellia at a glance. It was the one Robert Vavasour had gathered for her in the greenhouse; she knew it again, because in arranging the bouquet for Mrs. Linchmore its stem had been too short, and she had added a longer one, and secured it by winding a piece of thread round; it was there still, while some of the pure white leaves of the flower were becoming tinged with brown; evidences of the length of time it had been gathered.

"He said it was not quite fresh," said Fanny watching her governess, as she thought noticing its faded beauty, "but I thought you would like it just as well, because you are so fond of flowers."

"Who desired you to give it me?"

"That tall dark gentleman who walked home with us one day, the day you lost your embroidery." Fanny could not get the latter out of her mind, it was uppermost there.

It was Mr. Vavasour, then who sent it; and why?

Amy remembered his having asked for the flower she had gathered for Mrs. Linchmore, and her refusal to give it. Had he now sent it to show her that another, even Mrs. Linchmore, had been more willing to oblige him than she had; as also how little value he placed on the gift? Or probably their meeting in the greenhouse had escaped his memory, and perhaps he merely wished to please her, seeing how fond she was of flowers, and thought any flower, however faded, was good enough for a governess.

As she stood by the fire her hand unconsciously wandered towards the bars; in another moment the poor flower would have been withered, the heat would have scorched it.

"Oh! don't burn it, Miss Neville, please don't," exclaimed Fanny. "It isn't half dead yet; and I have had such trouble in bringing it you safely, because cousin Frances wanted it."

"Miss Strickland?"

"Yes. She got in such a rage, you never saw anything like it; but I would not let her have it. I was determined she should not. She knew it was for you too, and it was that made her so angry. She told a fib as well, for she said she saw Uncle Charles give it me, and you know it was Mr. Vavasour."

"Did you tell her so?"

"No" replied Fanny, triumphantly, little thinking how every word was grieving her governess. "No, I didn't; she tried very hard to make me say, but I wouldn't; see," said she, baring her arm, "I'll show you what she did. There! see that; only look, Miss Neville," and she pointed to some deep blue marks, plainly the impression of four lines like fingers, "wasn't it spiteful and naughty of her?"

Amy looked up in surprise and compassion. Was it possible Miss Strickland, usually so calm could have so far lost her temper, as to hurt her so severely. Spiteful? yes it was worse than spiteful, it was wicked. If she had shown so little mercy to a child who could not have intentionally harmed her what would be the result of the appeal she meditated making to her womanly feelings? would she feel for her and help? she who had shown none for a helpless child? Amy's heart sank within her, and she began to fear she was in a sea of troubles, that would take a wiser head than hers, and a stronger hand and heart to extricate her from.

And all this time the little girl stood with bared arm before her governess, waiting for and claiming her pity, while the four blue marks seemed more plainly visible each time Amy looked at them.

Would Miss Strickland ever wound her as deeply? Words she did not care for, they were often lightly spoken, and soon perhaps regretted or forgotten; but acts were different things, they caused injuries, and heart-aches to last a life-time. They might like words

be regretted, but could never be recalled, causing irreparable mischief.

Fanny's arm gave Amy a disagreeable insight into Frances' character, one that was altogether new and unexpected. Julia Bennet had often spoken of her, and always from the first as a proud, cold girl, wrapped up in self, with no interest in the every day cares of life, or affection for home ties or duties; but fond of society, and caring for little beyond it, living in the world and only for its approval and worship; a being neither exacting nor demanding homage, but taking it to herself as a matter-of-course and right, yet it was evident to Amy, that though she assumed the appearance of a goddess, she, like many a Homeric deity, was affected with a mortal's worse passion—revenge, and Amy shivered slightly as she thought of the coming interview, fearing an explanation might be more difficult than she had imagined, and that instead of a few quiet words, it might be a stormy warfare.

"You must have your arm bathed, Fanny," she said, putting the sleeve down in its place again, and hiding from sight the ugly marks. "I am sadly afraid you must have been very naughty for Miss Strickland to have punished you so severely. Why was she angry with you? What did you do to annoy her?"

"Nothing, Miss Neville. She tried to make me tell her who sent you the flower; and because I would not she got angry, and wanted to snatch it from me. It was cousin Frances began it all; she caught hold of me as I was coming along quite quietly, and

never thinking of her at all."

"But you must have vexed her, Fanny. It is impossible she could have injured you so severely without."

"Well, perhaps I did, a little—only just a little. I found out," said Fanny, looking down, "something she thought was a secret, and only known to herself, and she could not bear to think I knew it."

"You found out a secret?"

"Yes," replied Fanny, hesitatingly; "but I must not tell you what it is, Miss Neville. Please don't ask me."

"I will not, Fanny; but at the same time I hope it is nothing wrong that will not bear the telling. I am sadly afraid that appearances are against you. I fear now more than ever that you must have seriously offended or wounded Miss Strickland. Are you sure, quite sure, Fanny, that you cannot trust me with the secret?"

"Oh, I must not tell you, indeed I mustn't. You are wrong, too, in what you think. I have done nothing bad, Miss Neville; do believe me, and please don't think badly of me."

"I will try not to, Fanny."

"Oh, how I wish I had come in with Edith when she asked me, and never waited for anyone, then I should never have seen cousin Frances," and fairly overcome with all her little heart had been suffering during the past hour, Fanny burst into tears.

"I have made my appearance at a most unfortunate moment," said Anne, opening the door. "Good gracious, child! don't cry

like that; you are roaring like a mad bull, and will make a perfect fright of yourself into the bargain. There, do stop. I promise you, you shall be forgiven whatever your sin, and receive the kiss of forgiveness on the spot, if you will only have done and be quiet."

"Go, Fanny," said Amy, "we will talk over this quietly by-and-by, go and desire Mary to see to your arm."

"Thank goodness she is gone," said Anne, "now I can begin to breathe again. If there is anything in this world I hate, it is the cry of children and cats; I class them both together, as I don't know which is the worst of the two, all I do know is, that when children once begin, they never know when to leave off."

Then suddenly she caught sight of the Camellia, and took it up, while Amy most sincerely wished she had burnt it.

"Where did you get this Camellia?" asked she.

"Fanny brought it me a few minutes ago," replied Amy, blushing slightly, feeling she was in a manner evading the question.

But Anne was far too point blank to be put off, and had Amy but considered for a moment, she would have remembered how hopeless it was to check or elude Anne's curiosity. She returned to the charge at once, without one moment's thought or hesitation.

"Who gave it her?" she asked shortly.

"I believe Mr. Vavasour did."

"Of course I expected as much. Here are you like some saintly nun, shut up in a cloister, no one supposed to get even a glimpse

of you, and yet for all that, you receive more attention than all us poor girls put together, who are dressing and walking, laughing and talking, and doing I do not know what else besides to please the men. You may smile, but I can tell you I think it no laughing matter. Upon my word, it is a great deal too bad."

"The flower is not worth having," replied Amy, constrained to say something. "It is faded."

"Not worth having! now I do call that ungrateful, when I dare say the poor man has done his best to please you. I know I should be thankful enough at having such a graceful compliment paid me; but there, I never have the chance of showing my gratitude to anybody, seeing no one ever pays me the compliment of even sending me a dead flower!"

"I am sure Mr. Hall would."

"Oh! the monster, don't name him, pray. Thank goodness he has not found out my penchant for flowers, or I believe I should find him waiting every morning at the bottom of the staircase, with a bouquet as big as his head, composed of ivy berries and Christmas holly; he decorates his church with them, and I have no doubt thinks them preferable to the most lovely hot-house flowers; here, take your Camellia," and she held it out at arm's length.

This was a ruse on Anne's part to induce Amy to hold out her arm, so that she might, as it were by accident, discover the sprain, having determined in her own mind, after leaving Charles, not to let Miss Neville know a word about his solicitude; he had

appealed to Anne's good nature, and she was willing enough to help him to get a dozen doctors—if he wished it—to see her, but then Miss Neville must not know anything about it; there was no reason why she should, but every reason why she should not.

Anne would not, by the slightest word or hint, soften Miss Neville's heart towards her cousin; people must manage their own love affairs themselves, and if they got into scrapes, not get others into a mess as well; besides, Anne knew well enough, or rather guessed it, that neither Mr. or Mrs. Linchmore would exactly approve of it, while as for Charles, she hoped Miss Neville would pay him out in the same coin as he had paid Frances. If her cousin was foolish enough to fall in love with the governess, it was his fault, Anne was not going to take the blame, or have anything to do with it.

Then it was evident to Anne's quick sight that Mr. Vavasour was getting up a flirtation too, and if Miss Neville was wise she would improve upon that, there being no one in the world to say a word against his falling desperately in love with her, if he liked; he was a rich man, and his own master entirely, and ought to have a wife to help him spend his money, whereas Charles's fortune was all built upon expectations; it was true he had some four or five hundred a year, but that might, in the end, starve a wife, or turn her into a household drudge.

There was not a shadow of doubt in Anne's mind which of the two ought to be the object of Miss Neville's choice; but true love never did run smooth, and she supposed she would choose

Charles, simply on account of the difficulties that stood in her way. She only wished, with a sigh, she was the chosen one, instead of Miss Neville—and then—what a dance she would lead the two!

"What is the matter with your wrist?" asked she, as Amy of necessity stretched out the left hand for the flower.

"I have sprained it."

Anne never asked the why or wherefore,—which might have surprised Amy had she thought at all about it; knowing, as she did, her inquisitiveness,—but examined it at once.

"Yes, it is a bad sprain, and how swollen the fingers are! and how funny it looks," said she laughing. "Why you might as well be afflicted with gout. How it burns! I should be quite frightened if it was mine."

"I am not in the least so," replied Amy. "I am going to bathe it in cold water presently. I think that will do it good."

"How can you possibly know what will do it good; you ought to have old Dr. Bernard to see it."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Amy hastily, "there is not the slightest necessity for any such thing. I cannot bear the idea of it; pray do not think of it for one moment, I would rather not see him."

"Well, it is horrid, the idea of having a medical man, and knowing that for the time being, you are bound to follow wherever he leads; I hate it too. But old Dr. Bernard is so mild and meek, so fatherly-looking, with his grey hair or hairs—he has only got about twenty round his shining bald pate—so

different to our young doctor at home, who comes blustering in, cracking his oke; and then sends medicine enough to kill the whole household. Of course Isabella knows about your arm?"

"No, not a word, and I hope she will not."

"Hope no such thing, please, as I shall tell her of it the very first opportunity I have."

"Pray do not, Miss Bennet. It will be quite well to-morrow."

"It will not be well for days; and as for not telling Mrs. Linchmore, I always do what I say, and if you were to talk until Doomsday you would not reason me out of it. Only think if it were to bring on fever; you might get seriously ill and die, imagine what a mischance, obliged to have a funeral and all kinds of horrors; and then, how do you suppose us poor visitors would feel. I am sure we are dull enough as it is; at least, I am; so in compassion to our poor nerves, you *must* see that dear old Dr. Bernard. It is no use whatever fighting against your destiny," and without waiting for a reply Anne went away, thinking she had managed admirably well, seeing she had carried her point, without in the least compromising Charles.

She looked into the morning-room on her way down: there was no one there but Alfred Strickland having a quiet nap to while away the time before dinner, and Mr. Hall; the latter with his legs as usual, tucked away out of sight, a book in his hand; but fortunately for Anne his face turned away from its pages, towards the fire; so she crept softly away without disturbing either.

In the hall, to her astonishment, she met Charles, impatiently

awaiting her, cloaked and booted for his cold ride.

"Well, what success?" asked he.

"How ridiculous!" exclaimed Anne angrily. "There is such a thing as being too punctual. If I am to do as you wish, I will not be hurried; I am a woman as well as Miss Neville, and look for as much consideration. Besides, I said half an hour, and half an hour I will have;" and without waiting for a reply she passed on into the drawing-room, while Charles, throwing off his great coat, followed.

But he was doomed to be terribly tried, for there sat Mrs. Linchmore, the object of Anne's search, deep in the mysteries of a game of chess with Mr. Vavasour.

Anne sat down and took up a book. "It will never do for me to disturb them," said she, quietly, rather enjoying the joke of Charles' discomfiture, now visibly expressed on his face.

A muttered exclamation of impatience, which sounded very much like an oath, passed his lips.

Anne slightly winced at this. She thought the case getting desperate.

Why should Charles be in such a tremendous hurry?

It was not a case of life and death. She really thought, considering she was doing him a favour, he might have a chat, and make the time pass pleasantly and agreeably, instead of letting her see how entirely his heart was wrapped up in another girl. Only that her word was passed, from which Anne never deviated, she would have thrown up the office she had undertaken, and

have nothing more to do with it.

Time passed on, not as it generally does, with swift fleet wings; but even to Anne, who did not care how it went, heavily and slowly, very much in the same way as the game of chess was progressing. Charles evinced his impatience by crossing his legs, uncrossing them, taking up a book and tossing over the pages; for not one word did he read or desire to; and finally, as the small French clock on the mantel-piece chimed six, he threw down the book and exclaimed impatiently—

"When the devil will that game be over?" Then catching Anne's astonished look, he laughed aloud, and said, "You do not often see me out of temper, cousin?"

"True, but then I never recollect having seen it tried."

"Or tried so severely as it is now."

"Men have no patience, see how quietly I take it."

"You! you have no interest in the matter."

"Have I not? And pray may I ask do you suppose it is very pleasant for me to be sitting here doing nothing. There are Alfred and Mr. Hall, both in the morning room, alone, waiting to be talked to, and I might have them all to myself, for the next half hour, and certainly all the time I have been wasting on you and your affairs. Have a little more gratitude Sir, or you may get some one else to manage for you."

"You are a good girl, Anne, but a shocking flirt."

"Oh yes! abuse me as much as you like, it will do you good, and perhaps make you in a better temper; as I said before, men

have no patience. As long as things go smoothly and quietly they are all right; but when things happen contrary or not exactly as they wish, they get into a rage, and do not know how to bear it like us poor women, who are taught it every hour of our lives."

"I never remember to have heard such a piece of moral wisdom from your lips before Anne."

They were here, much to the intense delight of Charles, interrupted by the voices of the chess players.

"That was a very pretty checkmate," said Robert Vavasour, "so totally unexpected and unperceived."

"Who has beaten?" asked Anne, going towards them, as Charles went out of the room, leaving her to do as best she could for him.

"Mr. Vavasour," replied Mrs. Linchmore, "he always does."

"Not always; you won two games of me last evening."

"Or rather you allowed me to; but I do not mind being beaten sometimes, it is tiresome never to win."

While the chess-men were being put away, Anne considered how she should begin her story, which, now it had come to the point, seemed more difficult than she had imagined. At length a bright idea struck her.

"I hate chess," she said, "and cannot think what pleasure there can be in poring over such a dull game. I would a thousand times rather play the children's Race game; there is something exciting in that, but poor Miss Neville is too ill to play now."

"Ill!" exclaimed Mrs. Linchmore. "Miss Neville ill?" while

one of the chess-men slipped from Robert Vavasour's fingers, and rolled over on to the soft hearth rug, instead of into the box as he had intended.

"Yes, she has sprained her wrist," continued Anne, giving the chess-man a gentle kick with her foot as it lay close beside her.

"Is that all? I thought at least it was the small pox, or scarlet fever," said Mrs. Linchmore.

"Although it is neither one nor the other," said Anne, "still it is very bad, and ought to be seen to."

"Do you speak from your own personal observation?"

"Yes. I have been sitting with her for some time, and certainly think she looks ill and feverish; her hand is swollen an awful size. I should be quite frightened if it were mine, and told her so. I dare say old Dr. Bernard though would soon put it all right."

"He shall be sent for to-morrow," replied Mrs. Linchmore, "should she be no better, but perhaps a night's rest, and a little of Mrs. Hopkin's doctoring, may make her quite well again. Do you know how she sprained it?"

"I never asked her," replied Anne, evading a direct reply, "all I know is, it is very bad."

"If no better to-morrow, I will send for Dr. Bernard in the afternoon," said Mrs. Linchmore, quietly.

"To-morrow afternoon," repeated Mr. Vavasour quite as quietly, and before Anne had time to shape any answer in reply, "But perhaps Miss Neville is in a great deal of pain; a sprain is an ugly thing sometimes, and at all times painful."

"It is quite impossible to send to-night," replied Mrs. Linchmore, decidedly. "Mr. Linchmore will not return from Standale himself much before ten, and I never send any of the servants so far without his sanction. It strikes me there is a little unnecessary haste and compassion displayed for my governess."

Robert Vavasour was silenced; but not so Anne, she came to the rescue at once, rather nettled.

"I am sure, Isabella, I don't care a bit about it; only I thought as Charles was going into Standale,—I suppose to ride home with your husband at night,—he might as well call on Dr. Bernard as not; or leave a message to say he was wanted."

As there was no good reason why he should not, Mrs. Linchmore was obliged to acquiesce, though apparently,—and she did not care to conceal it—with a very bad grace, and without the slightest solicitude expressed for her governess.

"I have managed it for you," said Anne, going out into the hall, where she found Charles striding up and down, impatiently; "such a fight as I have had."

"Never mind about the fight, Anne. Am I to call on Dr. Bernard?"

"Yes."

The word was scarcely spoken, ere to Anne's astonishment, he had caught her in his arms, and kissed her.

"You're a dear good girl, Anne," he said, "I swear there's nothing I wouldn't do for you!"

"How rough you are, cousin!" exclaimed Anne, struggling

from his hasty embrace. "I'll do nothing for you, if this is the style I am to be rewarded with. It may be all very well for you, but I don't like it."

"Here's another then," laughed Charles, "and now for Dr. Bernard, I suppose he's the best medical man in the place?"

"Oh! for goodness sake," said Anne, aghast at the bare idea of facing Mrs. Linchmore, if any other were called in. "Do not go to any one but old Dr. Bernard, whatever you do; Isabella will never forgive me; she is in a tremendous gale as it is. Do you hear, Charley?" said she, catching his arm as he was going off.

"All right," said he, laughing at her fright, and leaving her only half convinced as to what he intended doing. "I'll tell him to call the first thing in the morning."

Anne held back the hall door as he passed out.

It was pouring with rain, but he was on his horse and away in a second.

"Why he must be desperately in love with that Miss Neville," said Anne, "to go off in such torrents of rain; he'll be drenched to the skin before he gets to the park gates. Well, I wish I could be ill, and somebody—not that Hall—go mad for me in the same way."

And Anne sighed, and smoothed the hair Charles had slightly disarranged.

CHAPTER III. THE LETTER

"They sin who tell us love can die!
With life all other passions fly—
All others are but vanity.
In heaven ambition cannot dwell,
Nor avarice in the vaults of hell.
Earthly these passions, as of earth—
They perish where they draw their birth.
But love is indestructible!
Its holy flame for ever burneth—
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth."

Southey.

Against the mantle-piece in the morning-room leant Mrs. Linchmore; one hand supported her head, the other hung listlessly by her side, while in the long taper fingers she clasped an open letter. A tiny foot peeped from under the folds of her dress, and rested on the edge of the fender; the fire burnt clear and bright, and lent a slight glow to her cheeks, which were generally pale.

She looked very beautiful as she stood there; her graceful figure showed itself to the best advantage, and her long dark

lashes swept her cheek, as she looked thoughtfully on the ground.

Mrs. Linchmore was not a happy woman; she had, as I have said, married for money, and when too late, found out her mistake, and that money without love is nothing worth.

When scarcely seventeen, she had loved with all the fervour and truth of a young heart's first love; her love was returned, but her lover was poor, they must wait for better times; so he went abroad to India, full of hope, and firm in the faith of her to whom he was betrothed; to win honour, fame, glory, and promotion; and with the latter, money wherewith to win as his wife her whom he so dearly loved.

Scarcely three years had passed slowly away, when Mr. Linchmore wooed the beautiful Isabella for his bride; he was young and handsome, and unlike her former lover, rich. Did she forget him to whom her young love was pledged? No, she still thought of him, love for him still filled her heart, yet she smothered it, and became the wife of the wealthy Mr. Linchmore, with scarcely a thought as to the suffering she was causing another, or remorse at her broken faith and perjured vows.

Shortly after her marriage, she heard of her young lover's hasty return, and what a return! Not the return he had so often pictured to her in the days gone by, never to be lived over again; but he came as a sorrowful, broken-hearted man, mourning the loss of one who was no longer worthy of his love, one for whom he had been willing to sacrifice so much, even the wishes of those

nearest and dearest to him—his father and mother, whose only child he was.

His death soon after nearly broke his mother's heart; some said it was occasioned from the effects of a fever, caught in an unhealthy climate, but Mrs. Linchmore, his early love, dared not question her own heart when she heard of it, but gazed around, and shuddered at the magnificence of the home for which he had been sacrificed. Then remorse and anguish, bitter anguish, must have been busy within her, but she showed it not; outwardly, she was the same, or it might be a little prouder, or more stately in her walk, more over-bearing to her servants, with all of the proud woman, and none of the girl about her.

The envy of many. Ah! could they but have seen the wretchedness of her heart, the hollowness of her smiles, would they have envied her? Would they not rather have been thankful and contented with their lot, and changed their envy into pity?

This was what she dreaded. Their pity! No, anything but that. To be hated, feared, disliked, dreaded, all—all anything but pitied. To none would she be other than the rich, the happy Mrs. Linchmore; and so she appeared to some, nay, to all. Henceforth her heart was dead and cold, no love must,—could enter there again.

She became a flirt, and a selfish woman, without one particle of sympathy, and scarcely any love for her husband. How dissimilar they were—in ideas, thoughts, feelings, tastes—in everything. She took no trouble to conceal from him how little

she cared for him; he who loved her so intensely—so truthfully.

In the first early days of their married life he strove to win her affection by every little act of kindness, or devotion that his love prompted; but all in vain;—he failed. All his deeds of kindness all his love elicited no answering token of regard, no look of love from her; she was ever the same—cold, silent, distant; no sweet smile on her face to welcome him home, no brightening of the eye at his approach, no fond pressure of the hand: truly she loved him not, yet no word of unkindness or reproach ever crossed his lips, even when she turned away from his encircling arm as he stooped to kiss his first-born, no word escaped him—but his look,—she remembered that long after; it haunted her dreams for many a long night.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.