

SAUNDERS MARSHALL

THE HOUSE OF
ARMOUR

Marshall Saunders

The House of Armour

«Public Domain»

Saunders M.

The House of Armour / M. Saunders — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	11
CHAPTER IV	14
CHAPTER V	17
CHAPTER VI	21
CHAPTER VII	24
CHAPTER VIII	29
CHAPTER IX	33
CHAPTER X	38
CHAPTER XI	43
CHAPTER XII	46
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	52

Marshall Saunders

The House of Armour

CHAPTER I

SCOTLAND THE NEW

In the southeastern extremity of Canada, jutting out into the blue waters of the Atlantic, holding on to the great mainland of North America only by one narrow arm or isthmus, is the green and fertile little peninsula called Acadie, land of abundance, by the French and Indians, and Nova Scotia, New Scotland, by the baronet Sir William Alexander, when in 1621 it was ceded to him by his most worshipful majesty, King James the First of England.

Projected, pushed out from the mainland as it is, the province is pre-eminently a child of the sea. Her wealth comes from it; her traffic is over it; it keeps her warm in winter; it cools her in summer. Old Father Atlantic, savage, boisterous old parent that he is, dashing so often the dead bodies of her children against her rockbound coasts, is yet her chief guardian and protector, and the one who loves her most.

He is on all her sides, lapping her grassy shores, breaking against her frowning cliffs, and running away up into the land, wide, blue tongues of water, where foreign ships can ride at anchor and give to lovely Nova Scotia their fairest merchandise.

Among all the harbors, among all the bays—and they are long and numerous—can none be found to eclipse the chief and prince of them all, glorious old Chebucto, which hundreds of years ago Indians paddled over and called the greatest of waters. It lies almost midway between the two ends of the peninsula and sends up between smiling shores a long, wide, crystal expanse of water, that is curved like a slightly bent arm and is six whole miles in length. Clear and shining it comes in from the sea, washing around its guardian forts, and with a strong, full tide floating the most ponderous leviathans of the deep right up to the wharves of the capital town of the province, built along its shores.

At all times white-winged ships sail over its waters. Farther north the bays skim over and harbors freeze. Here the waters are always blue and open, and tired ships, bruised and buffeted by the angry winter winds of the Northern Atlantic, can always steal in and find a safe and pleasant anchorage. The shores are gently sloping, the hills are wooded, only the softest breezes blow here. Boreas and all his gang must lurk outside the harbor mouth.

It is with one of these ships that we have to do. Steadily day by day plowing the ocean track that leads from England to the little maritime province, a large passenger steamer had come. Soon she would sight the harbor lights, would make her way to the desired haven.

The evening was cold and still; the time was early December. A brilliant moon in a sky of lovely steely blue was in mid-heaven, staring down at the lighted, busy town, the silent country, the glistening line of the harbor, and the crystal sea beyond.

The hull of the steamer sat on the waters a large, black mass. Its decks were white and as bright as day in the moonlight. The captain stood on the bridge, occasionally speaking, but mostly by signs and gestures making known his wishes. A few sailors were hurrying about the decks and officers were directing preparations made for entering port.

The most of the passengers had gone forward and stood in a group at the bow of the ship, eagerly straining their eyes to catch the first glimpse of the town they were approaching. A few lingered behind. Among them were two people, a man of a straight, military figure, and a young girl with a dark, brilliant face.

The man observed attentively his youthful companion, making, man of the world that he was, amused comments on her badly suppressed girlish enthusiasm at being again within sight of her native land.

It was absolutely necessary for her to talk and it charmed him to listen to her sweet, half-foreign voice. At first she had seemed to him to be thoroughly French. Then he had found grafted on her extreme Frenchness manners and ways so entirely English that she made at the same time an interesting and an amusing combination to him.

They were still well out at sea when she looked over her shoulder and made her first salutation.

"There is Thrum Cap," she exclaimed, "wicked old Thrum Cap, thrusting his bald, sandy head out of the water, pretending to look at the moonbeams. What a tale the old villain could tell!" and she shook her glove so impatiently at him that her companion was moved to ask what power the barren sand dune had to call forth such a display of emotion.

"There are treacherous ledges beneath his shimmering waves," said the girl. "Shall I tell you the tale of the English frigate 'La Tribune,' that was wrecked there in 1797?"

"If you will be so kind," he said gravely, giving her no hint that he was already acquainted with the story of the disaster.

At the conclusion of her recital he gave her an inscrutable look, which she did not perceive.

"You seem—ah—to know a vast deal about your native land," he said meditatively. "How has all this knowledge been acquired, since you left here at such an early age?"

"By reading, always reading," said the girl restlessly.

"And you are fond of your country," he said.

"Passionately. What else have I to love? Father, mother—both are gone."

"Your friends, acquaintances—"

"Ah, there are too many. Life has been change to me, always change. Imagine me in early youth a young and tender plant. I throw out my tendrils and attach myself to this object—it is snatched away from me; to that one—it too is snatched away; and finally my tendrils are all gone. Suppose the most charming object to come within my reach, I have no tendril to grasp it. Nothing remains but my country."

"That will all change some day," said the man sententiously.

"In what manner?" she asked.

"You will meet some man in whom everything will become merged—friends, country, everything."

"You mean that I shall fall in love?"

"I do."

"Possibly," she said with a gay laugh. "Probably not."

"Why not?"

"Because, as I have told you, I make few attachments; and if I did I never stay long enough in one place for one to mature. This winter I fancied that I was settled in Paris, but you see I am summoned here."

"Leaving sorrowing admirers behind you," said her companion imperturbably.

"According to me—yes."

"You would not overstate," he said hastily; "you are not like most girls."

"Did you never see any one like me?" she asked vivaciously.

"No," he said quietly; "you are an anomaly. A Frenchwoman educated among English people and speaking your own language with a foreign accent—half of you goes in one direction, half in another."

"Ah, you understand me, Captain Macartney," said the girl with an eager gesture. "You will know what I mean when I say that at times I seem to feel in my veins the gay French blood running beside the sober English."

“Yes, I understand you,” he said with a smile, and he fixed his gaze admiringly on her dark eyes that were wandering restlessly from shore to shore of the entrance to the beautiful harbor.

“Away down there is the place of wrecks,” she said, waving her hand toward the western coast. “Some of my countrymen named it Saint Cendre, and the careless Nova Scotians corrupted it into Sambro. Do you hear that, Captain Macartney?”

The man’s glance had suddenly dropped to the sea and he was staring at it as if he were trying to wrest some secret from it. Now he roused himself. “Yes, Miss Delavigne, I hear.”

“The old name of the harbor was Chebucto,” the girl went on; “Chebook—took—chief haven. The Indian and French names should still remain; it was unfair in Englishmen to drive them out. Is not Acadie more charming than Nova Scotia, and Chebucto than Halifax?”

“Is it not a natural thing that a child should be named after its father?” asked Captain Macartney.

“After its own father, yes,” said the girl quickly; “after a stepfather, no. The French owned this province; the English drove them out.”

“They deserved to go,” said Captain Macartney with some show of warmth.

“Ah, yes, they did at last,” said the girl sadly. “But it is a painful subject; do not let us discuss it.”

“May I ask you one question?” he said eagerly. “Do you approve of the expulsion of the Acadians?”

“Yes.”

“Then you are the most fair-minded and impartial Frenchwoman that I ever met.”

“Because I agree with you,” she said. “Ah, Captain Macartney, you are like the rest of your sex. Now let us see if we can find the forts lying cunningly concealed among those hills. This is the most strongly fortified town in Canada, is it not?”

“Yes,” he replied, with an inward malediction on her fervor of patriotism. “On that island is a battery, a military camp, and a rifle range.”

The girl surveyed with a passionate glance the wooded points of an island they were passing. On a narrow spit of land running out from it was a Martello tower lighthouse.

“It is quite as round and quite as much like a plum pudding as when I left it,” she said merrily; “and it fixes on me its glittering eye in the same manner that it did when I, a little child, went down this harbor to countries that I knew nothing about, and the fog bell seemed to cry, ‘Adieu, adieu, another gone from the pleasant land.’”

“But you have returned,” said the man, biting his lip to hide a smile.

“I have; many have not. You have read of the ‘Cajiens of Louisiana and other places. They went but did not return; their sore hearts are buried among strangers.’”

“And you,” he said curiously, “are you going to remain in Canada?”

“Yes,” said the girl softly; “I shall never leave it again.”

“But your guardians; suppose they—” he stopped abruptly.

“I shall live and die in my native land. They will not prevent me,” she said calmly.

He maintained a polite, though an unsatisfied silence.

“We are looking toward the east, we forget the west,” said the girl turning around. “See, there is York Redoubt, and Sandwich Point, and Falkland with its chapel—dear little Falkland, ‘a nest for fisher people’—and there is the entrance to the Northwest Arm.”

For the twentieth time that evening Captain Macartney smiled at the girl’s enthusiasm. Her eyes were turned lovingly toward the narrow strip of salt water that runs up like an arm behind the peninsula on which the city of Halifax is built.

At the extremity of the peninsula is one of the loveliest natural parks in the world. The girl’s enraptured gaze was turned toward it and she was just about to launch into an ardent enumeration of its attractions, when she was interrupted.

CHAPTER II

MRS. MACARTNEY'S IMPRESSIONS OF CANADA

A bright-faced lad with dark blue Irish eyes and glossy hair came hurrying down the deck, his hands thrust into the pockets of his long ulster, his whole expression that of one suffering from extreme cold.

"Are you frostproof," he exclaimed, "that you stand here motionless in this stinging air? I am not surprised at you, Miss Delavigne," and he made her a low bow, "as you are a Canadian, but I marvel at Geoffrey," and he glanced at his brother, "fresh from India's suns as he is. Shall we not have a last promenade, mademoiselle? The cold is biting me like a dog."

Vivienne laughed and placed herself beside him, while Captain Macartney murmured, "There go our guns; we are announcing ourselves."

"Will you not tell me, Miss Delavigne," said the boy in a confidential tone of voice, "about this matter of signaling? I have asked Geoffrey several times, but he only grunts like an Irish pig, and gives me no answer."

"With all my heart, Mr. Patrick," said the girl with a businesslike air. "From the outposts at the harbor mouth every vessel is reported to the citadel."

"What is the citadel?" he asked.

"It is the fort on the hill in the middle of the town."

"What a quarrelsome set you Halifax people must be," said the boy, "to require so many fortifications and such a number of redcoats to keep you in order."

"Not for ourselves do we need them, Mr. Patrick," she said teasingly, "but for our troublesome guests from the old country." Then hastily, to avoid the wordy warfare that he was eager to plunge into, she went on. "Up there is an island that is all fort."

"Shades of my uncle the general!" he said; "can that be so? Let us go forward and see it."

"A French vice-admiral who ran himself through with his sword is buried on it," said Vivienne, as they proceeded slowly along the deck.

"Hush!" said the boy. "What is mamma doing?"

Vivienne smiled broadly. Mrs. Macartney, the good-hearted, badly educated daughter of a rich but vulgar Dublin merchant, was a constant source of amusement to her. Just now she was waddling down the deck, driving before her a little dapper Nova Scotian gentleman who had become known to them on the passage as excessively polite, excessively shy, and, like Vivienne, excessively patriotic.

Hovering over her victim like a great good-natured bird she separated him from a group of people standing near, and motioned him into the shadow of a suspended lifeboat.

"Ducky, ducky, come and be killed," said Patrick wickedly. "Do you know what mamma is going to do, Miss Delavigne?"

"No, I do not."

"She is going to cross-question that man about Canada in such a ladylike, inane way that he won't know whether he's on his head or his heels. Come and listen."

"Mrs. Macartney may not like it."

"Yes, she will; the more the merrier. Come along."

Vivienne laughed and followed him near the Irish lady, who was preposterously and outrageously fat. A living tide was slowly rolling over her, obliterating all landmarks of a comely person. Her ankles were effaced; her waist was gone. Her wrists had disappeared, and her neck had sunk into her shoulders. Cheeks and chin were a wide crimson expanse, yet her lazy, handsome blue eyes looked steadily out, in no wise affrighted by the oncoming sea of flesh.

“Mamma always does this,” said Patrick gleefully. “She doesn’t know any more about geography than a tabby cat, and she won’t learn till she gets to a place. Look at the little man writhing before her. She has called his dear land Nova Zembla six times. Listen to him.”

“Madam,” the Nova Scotian was saying, “this is Nova Scotia. Nova Zembla is situated in the Arctic regions. It is a land of icebergs and polar bears. I scarcely think it has any inhabitants.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Mrs. Macartney, shaking her portly person with a good-natured laugh. “The names are so much alike that they confuse me. I only know that one is a cold place and the other a warm one, that one is in North America and the other in South.”

“Madam,” he said desperately, and shifting his feet about on a coil of rope on which he had taken refuge, “Nova Zembla is in the north of Europe. We are in North America.”

“Are we?” she said amiably; “then we haven’t come to Canada yet?”

“Oh yes, madam, we have. Nova Scotia is in Canada, in the lower southeastern part—nearest England you know. It is the last in the line of provinces that stretch from the Pacific to the Atlantic.”

At the mention of the Pacific, Mrs. Macartney’s lumbering fancy attempted to take flight to the coral groves of Oceanica. “I did not know that Canada bordered on the Pacific,” she returned dubiously. “How near is it?”

“Just three thousand six hundred and sixty-two miles away, madam. The continent lies between us.”

“Oh indeed,” with relief; “and Canada you say extends all the way across.”

“Yes, madam.”

“And it is made up of different provinces?”

“Yes, madam; they have been confederated.”

“And this one is called Nova Scotia?”

“Yes, madam.”

“And how large may it be?” cajolingly; “half as large as one of our Irish provinces?”

“Madam,” trembling with indignation, “Nova Scotia, with the island at its northeastern extremity, has only about ten thousand square miles of area less than all Ireland with every province in it.”

“Bless me!” she exclaimed in unmitigated surprise. Then after a long pause, and with less assurance, “The island, I suppose, is Newfoundland?”

“No, madam,” dejectedly. “Newfoundland is away to the northeast of us—a two days’ voyage from here.”

Mrs. Macartney, a trifle abashed, decided to abandon the somewhat dangerous ground of Canada’s geographical position, and confine herself to general remarks. She started out gallantly on a new career. “This a fine place to live in, I suppose—plenty of sport. You have hunting and fishing all the year round, don’t you?”

Somewhat mollified he assented unqualifiedly to this. Following the law of association, she dragged from some recess in her mind another less pleasing feature of the hunting world in Canada, which she had somewhere and at some time heard mentioned. “Do the Indians cause you very much trouble?” she asked sympathetically.

“No, madam; our aborigines are a very peaceful set.”

“How long may it be since your last massacre?”

“I don’t quite catch your meaning, madam.”

“Don’t you have risings and rebellions? I had some cousins living in Halifax when I was a girl—army people they were, and they told me that they used to shoot Indians from their bedroom windows.”

At this point the little man gave tokens of a general collapse.

“Perhaps they said bears—I really believe they did,” Mrs. Macartney added hastily, by way of restoring his suspended animation; “in fact I am sure they did, and,” confusedly, “I think they said

the bears came in from the forests after dark, and went about the streets to pick up the scraps thrown from the houses, and it was quite a common thing to see a night-capped head at a window with a gun in its hand—" she stopped delightedly, for the little man was not only himself again, but was laughing spasmodically.

"Madam," he gasped at length, "our native Indians fought vigorously when this province was a battleground between England and France. Since the founding of this city they have gradually calmed down, till now they are meeker than sheep. We have only a few thousands of them, and they are scattered all over the province, living in camps in the woods, or in small settlements. They never do anybody any harm."

"It does my heart good to hear that," said Mrs. Macartney, with a jovial laugh. "Truth to tell, my scalp has been feeling a trifle loose on my head since we came in sight of this country. And if the Indians don't worry you now," insinuatingly, "I daresay you are able to make quite a civilized town of Halifax."

He stifled a laugh. "We try to, madam."

This answer was too indefinite to suit Mrs. Macartney. A suspicion was gaining ground in her mind that Halifax was not the military camp and collection of log houses that she had thought it to be.

"How many people are there in the town?" she inquired guilelessly.

"About forty thousand, madam."

"In Halifax?" she asked hesitatingly, "or in the whole province?"

"In Halifax, madam. There are over four hundred and forty thousand in the province."

Mrs. Macartney was considerably staggered. "And do you have shops and hotels and churches?"

"All three, madam."

"I had an idea that Canadians sent to England for all the necessities of life."

"Just turn around, madam," said the Nova Scotian.

Mrs. Macartney had opened her mouth to make another remark, but the words died away on her lips.

Stretching along the western shore a busy, prosperous town presented itself to her gaze. Like all other towns it must be somewhat grimy and dirty in the light of day. At night, with the moon hanging over it and myriad lights flashing from the tiers of buildings rising one above another on the slope of a long hill, it was like a fairy city.

All along the shore were rows of wooden wharves running out into the harbor where there were moored ocean steamers, coasting vessels, fishing boats, ferry steamers, tugboats, and tiny skiffs, some of which darted gayly in and out among the wharves. Some of the ships were brightly lighted, and people could be seen moving about on them.

"Surely, surely," said Mrs. Macartney, turning to her companion in unfeigned amazement, "I have been misinformed about Canada. One of its provinces is larger than Ireland, and its chief town, if you shut your eyes, would make you think that you were looking at Dublin itself. Sure, I feel like the Queen of Sheba," and with a comical twinkle in her eye, she turned around to see who had laid a hand on her arm.

Her son Patrick stood before her. "And I feel like King Solomon," he exclaimed; "so many unruly ladies to take care of. Miss Delavigne won't come below to look after her traps. Mamma, will you come and point out yours to me?"

"Indeed, no, my son," said the lady amiably; "you weren't here just now when I wanted you, and I had to apply to this gentleman," with a bow to the Nova Scotian. "I'm going to see further sights," and she waddled toward a better place of observation.

CHAPTER III

HOME AGAIN

One of the long wharves was sprinkled with people watching the “Acadian” come in from the sea. Custom-house officials were there, wharf laborers, sailors, loafers, and at the very end of the wharf was a group of fur-clad individuals who were laughing, joking, stamping their feet, or pacing briskly up and down while waiting to welcome the friends and relatives drawing so near to them.

With them, yet a little apart from them, stood a man who did not move from his place and who seemed indifferent to the extreme cold. He was wrapped in a black fur coat, and a cap of the same material—a fine and costly Persian lamb—was pulled down over his brows.

His pale, cold face was turned toward the “Acadian,” and his blue eyes scanned without emotion the people hurrying to and fro on her decks.

When the steamer swung around toward the wharf, he watched the gangways being thrown out and the living tide pouring down them and overflowing in all directions. The air was full of greetings. Mothers and fathers, lovers and friends, were looking into each others’ eyes, and embracing one another tenderly. Then the first gush of salutation over their thoughts reverted to business. In a mass the passengers precipitated themselves upon the custom officials and eagerly watched for and identified their luggage as it was rapidly hoisted from the hold of the steamer to the wharf.

The man in the fur coat pressed his way through the throng of people and gained the deck of the steamer. The Macartneys and Vivienne Delavigne stood together.

The girl saw him coming, went to meet him, and putting out her hand said, “How do you do, Mr. Armour?”

Composed as his face usually was she yet caught an almost instantly repressed look of repulsion. Unspeakably chilled by it and the brevity and stiffness of his greeting, yet too proud and philosophical to show the slightest sign of disappointment, she said steadily:

“This is Mrs. Macartney, who has been kind enough to chaperon me across the Atlantic.”

Mr. Armour bowed politely, his cap in his hand. Captain Macartney she found to her surprise he already knew, though he spoke to him almost as formally as if they had never met before.

Patrick, after a searching glance at Mr. Armour, turned away muttering, “Iceberg!”

When Mr. Armour in a few brief sentences thanked Mrs. Macartney for her kindness to his ward, she said cheerfully: “She’s one of the right sort is Miss Delavigne. She is the only girl I have ever seen that would have satisfied my old grandmother. I was the one that never could please her.” Mr. Armour stared slightly at her as if he did not understand what she was saying, then turning to Vivienne he said shortly, “What luggage have you?”

“Four boxes,” she replied; “black ones with V. D. on the covers.”

“Will you come with me to find them?” he said, and after a brief leavetaking of the Macartneys he preceded her to the gangway.

Vivienne looked regretfully over her shoulders. Mrs. Macartney waved her hand good-naturedly, Captain Macartney smiled and lifted his cap, and Patrick blew a kiss from the tips of his fingers and exclaimed, “*Au revoir, mademoiselle.*”

However they met again. After a time, borne to and fro in the surgings of the crowd, they found themselves in the shed where the luggage had been taken to be examined. Vivienne was a short distance from Mrs. Macartney, who had seated herself on a box that she recognized as her own. Neither Captain Macartney nor Patrick was in sight and she was surveying in huge amusement the scene of civilized confusion so different from the picture of their arrival that her fancy had conjured up—a few logs thrown out in the water, their descent thereupon, and welcome by swarms of half-clad savages dancing around, their tomahawks in hand.

With an amiable interest in the affairs of every one with whom she came in contact, the Irish lady gazed attentively at a custom-house official near her with whom a Halifax maiden was reasoning, vainly endeavoring to persuade him that there was nothing dutiable in her half a dozen open trunks, which looked suspiciously like containing a wedding trousseau.

Mrs. Macartney at intervals took a hand in the argument, and looking sympathetically at a heap of new kid gloves that the officer had just drawn from some hidden recess, she remarked in a wheedling voice: "What's the good of being under the English flag if one is so particular about bits of things like that. Come now, officer, let them pass. I'm sure the duty on them is a mere trifle."

"Thirty-five per cent," he said, throwing up his head to look at her.

Her thoughts reverted to herself and she exclaimed: "Faith, I'll be ruined! Have I got to pay you that for the privilege of covering my hands in cold weather?"

"Yes'm," he said smartly, "that is if your gloves have not been worn." Then fixing her with his appraising eye, as if he gathered from her comfortable appearance that she might be one to indulge in soft raiment and fine linen, he rattled off a list of articles which she would have done well to have left behind her.

"We've got to protect our merchants, madam. If you've brought any description of silk gloves, kid gloves, mitts, silk plush, netting used for manufacture of gloves, we'll assess you. If you've any silk cords, tassel girdles, silk velvets except church vestments—"

"That's a very likely thing for me to have," she interrupted indignantly.

"Silk manufactures," he said, "including gros grains, satins, sarcenet, Persians, poplins, ribbons, shawls, ties, scarfs, bows, handkerchiefs, mantillas,—" and he gabbled on till his breath failed him.

Mrs. Macartney was speechless for the first time in her life. She turned from him with a shudder, as if to say, you are a dangerous man, and hailed an agile young official who was pursuing a comet-like career over trunks and boxes and leaving a trail of white chalk marks behind him.

At her signal he bore down upon her box with bewildering rapidity, opened it, and with long cunning fingers extracted therefrom every dutiable article. The new gloves still stitched together, the silk and linen and dainty trifles still in the wrappers in which they had come from the Dublin shops, lay in a heap before him.

"Twenty dollars," he ejaculated, and she had with his assistance mechanically abstracted from her purse a sufficient amount of the foreign currency to pay him, and he had given her box the pass mark and was away before she realized the extent of the weakness which she had displayed in not uttering one word of protest.

With a sigh of dismay she turned and met Vivienne's eye. They had had many jokes together and with a simultaneous impulse they began to laugh.

"Tis a country of surprises, me dear girl," said Mrs. Macartney wagging her head. "Ah, Geoffrey, hear a tale of distress," and looking at Captain Macartney, who suddenly appeared before them, she poured her troubles in his always sympathetic ear.

Vivienne was listening with interest when amid all the bustle and excitement she felt her guardian's cold eye upon her.

"Your boxes are marked," he said; "will you come now?"

With a hasty good-bye to her friends the girl followed him from the building.

A few sleighs and cabs were drawn up in the shadow of a square warehouse that stood at the head of the wharf. Before one of these sleighs Mr. Armour stopped. A coachman in an enormous fur cape and with his head half hidden in a heavy cap hurried from his seat and went to the horse's head.

Mr. Armour assisted Vivienne into the sleigh, then gathered up the reins in his hands and placed himself beside her. The coachman sprang to the back seat and they passed slowly under a black archway and emerged into long Water Street that follows closely the line of wharves running from one end of the old colonial town to the other.

Once upon the street the horse, a beautiful black creature, impatient from his long time of waiting and feeling lively in the keen frosty air, struck into a quicker pace. Smoothly and swiftly they slipped over the snowy streets, sometimes between rows of lighted shops whose windows sparkled with frost, and sometimes by dwelling houses whose partly closed curtains afforded tantalizing glimpses of light and good cheer within.

The girl's heart beat rapidly. Home—home—the magic word was ringing in her ears. Earnestly peering out from her wraps to observe what changes had taken place during her absence, she scarcely noticed the silence of the man beside her, except when some eager question leaped to her lips and was instantly repressed by an upward glance at his frigid face.

Cold as a statue, dumb as a mummy, he sat. One might have thought him a dead man but for his handling of the whip and reins. He seemed to be plunged in a profound and painful reverie, and did not once break the silence from the time of their leaving the wharf until their arrival within sight of his own house.

They had passed beyond the city limits and on each side of them stretched wide snowy fields bounded by low stone walls. They were approaching the shores of the Arm, where many of the merchants of the town had erected substantial, comfortable houses for themselves.

When they stopped before a gate and the man jumped out to open it, Mr. Armour pulled himself together with an effort and looked down at Vivienne with a confused, "I beg your pardon."

"I did not speak," she said calmly.

"I thought you did," he replied; then touching his horse with the whip they again set out on their way, this time along a winding road bordered by evergreens.

"It was kind in you to come and meet me," said Vivienne when they drew up before a large, square white house with brilliantly lighted windows.

Mr. Armour murmured some unintelligible reply that convinced her he had not heard what she said.

"What curious behavior," she reflected. "He must be ill."

Mr. Armour was looking at the closed sleigh standing before the door.

"Who is going out to-night?" he asked of the man.

"Mrs. Colonibel and Colonel Armour, sir," said the coachman touching his cap. "There is a ball at Government House."

Mr. Armour turned to Vivienne and extended a helping hand, then drawing a latchkey from his pocket he threw open a large inner door.

Vivienne stepped in—stepped from the bitter cold of a Canadian winter night to the warmth and comfort of tropical weather. The large square hall was full of a reddish light. Heavy curtains, whose prevailing color was red, overhung each doorway. A group of tall palms stood in one corner and against them was placed the tinted statue of a lacrosse player. Pictures of Canadian scenery hung on the walls and over two of the doorways hung the heads and branching antlers of Nova Scotian moose.

Her quiet scrutiny of the hall over she found Mr. Armour was regarding her with a look of agitation on his usually impassive face.

"Will you be kind enough to take off your hat?" he said; "it shades your face."

The girl looked at him in surprise and removed the large felt hat that she wore. Somewhat to her amusement she discovered a huge mirror mounted on a marble bracket at her elbow. A passing glance at it showed that her smooth black hair was not dishevelled, but was coiled in the symmetrical rolls imperiously demanded by Dame Fashion as she reigned in Paris. Her face beneath was dark and glowing, her eyes composed as she would have them, and her resemblance to her dead father was extraordinary.

She looked expectantly at Mr. Armour. He bit his lip and without speaking drew aside a velvet *portière* with a hand shaking from some strong and overmastering emotion and signed to her to enter the drawing room.

CHAPTER IV

MAMMY JUNIPER

Vivienne advanced a few paces and looked into a luxuriously furnished apartment, whose prevailing glimmer of red caught and held her eye painfully.

Two gentlemen, the one old, the other young, were seated in arm-chairs drawn up on each side of the blazing fire. They were both in evening dress and both held newspapers in their hands. The younger man lifted up his eyes, threw a glance of unmitigated astonishment, first at Mr. Armour then at Vivienne, and rose hurriedly from his seat.

Vivienne scarcely noticed him. Her attention was directed to Colonel Armour, who looked for an instant not the well-preserved man of sixty that he aspired to be, but the much older man that he really was.

He started nervously, his face turned a sickly yellow, and he clutched the arms of his chair as if unable to raise himself. But it was only for a brief space of time. He regained his composure and stood up, towering a whole head above his sons, who were by no means short men. Leaning one hand heavily on the back of his chair he fixed his eye-glass in place and staring at his elder son said with emphasis: "One of your pleasant surprises, eh, Stanton? Will you introduce me to this young lady?"

The pleading, almost agonized expression with which Mr. Armour had regarded his father died away.

"Do you not know her?" he said in a harsh, sad voice.

"H'm—judging from a faint resemblance" (and here the suspicion of a sneer passed over Colonel Armour's features), "I should say that she might be related to a young man once in my employ."

Vivienne watched the two men with breathless interest. At last she stood face to face with her guardians, and to Colonel Armour, as head of the house, some acknowledgment was due. Therefore when Mr. Armour turned to her with the words, "Allow me to present to you, Miss Delavigne, my father, Colonel Armour, and my brother Valentine," she made them each a pretty salutation and said gracefully that she was rejoiced to have the opportunity of thanking them for their kindness to her through so many years.

Colonel Armour stared at her through his gold-rimmed glass and Mr. Valentine, after making her a profound bow, stood bolt upright and confided to his moustache: "No raw schoolgirl this; a most self-possessed young person. What will Flora say? Merciful heaven, here she is!"

A portly, golden-headed woman, whose beauty was beginning to wane, stood motionless in the doorway. One hand was clutched in the shining satin folds of her dress, while with the other she held up an ostrich fan, over which her large blue eyes peered wrathfully at the girl's slim, graceful figure.

"Flora!" ejaculated Mr. Armour warningly.

The lady started, dropped her fan to her side, and burst into an hysterical laugh. "How you startled me! I did not know that there was a stranger present. Who is this young lady?"

"You know who she is," said Mr. Armour severely, while Mr. Valentine muttered wickedly, "Ananias and Sapphira."

"It is Miss Delavigne, I suppose," she replied peevishly; "but why did you not let us know that she was coming by this steamer? I was unprepared. How do you do?" and she extended her finger tips to Vivienne. "Did you have a good passage? You must have some tea. I will speak to the servants," and she disappeared.

In a few minutes she returned, a shining, sparkling vision, and quite mistress of herself. "I have spoken to the table maid; she will see that you are attended to. Will you excuse us if we leave you? We have an engagement for this evening, and I have to pick up a friend on the way."

“I should be sorry to keep you,” said Vivienne calmly; “and I am tired and would like to go to bed.”

“A room is being made ready for you,” said Mrs. Colonibel graciously. “I hope that you may sleep well. Come Uncle and Valentine, we are late.”

Colonel Armour and Mr. Valentine came from the room, drew on fur topcoats, and with a polite good-night to Mr. Armour and Vivienne left them standing in the hall.

At their departure Mr. Armour fell into a kind of reverie that lasted some minutes. Then he pulled himself together, apologetically ushered Vivienne into the dining room, and bowed himself away.

Vivienne sat at the table drinking tea and eating bread and butter and wondering languidly what Mrs. Colonibel had said to the fat maid-servant, who was waiting on her in great curiosity and some slight disrespect.

“I have finished,” she said at length, fixing her large, dark eyes on the woman who was trotting aimlessly between the table and the sideboard. “Will you show me to my room?”

“Yes, miss,” said the woman shortly, and gathering together Vivienne’s wraps she conducted her up a broad, easy staircase to a second square hall, also luxuriously furnished and having a circular opening which looked down on the one below it.

“The pink room’s been got ready for you, miss,” said the woman, throwing open the door of a chamber blazing with rose color.

Vivienne half shut her dazzled eyes and walked into it.

“The coachman’s going to bring up your boxes when he comes from the stable,” said the maid. “Can I do anything for you?”

“No, thank you,” said Vivienne; “you may bring me some hot water in the morning.”

“It’s here,” said the woman briefly, and walking behind a screen she pointed to a basin with shining faucets.

“That is nice, to have hot water pipes in one’s room,” said Vivienne.

“It’s all over the house,” said the woman, and after hanging Vivienne’s cloak in a closet she withdrew.

The girl walked to the window and looked out at the snow-laden trees. “It seems I wasn’t expected,” she murmured sadly. “It seems to me I’m lonely,” she continued, and putting up her hands to her eyes she tried to check the tears falling from them.

A few hours later she was sleeping a light, unhappy sleep in her huge pink bed, her mother’s portrait pressed to her breast. Suddenly the portrait seemed to turn to a tombstone, that was crushing her to death.

She awoke, gasping for breath, and lifting her heavy eyelids saw that some one was standing over her and that a heavy hand was laid on her breast. She pushed the hand aside and sat up.

Such an ugly, grotesque figure of a black woman as stood over her; her face like midnight, her features large and protruding, a white nightcap perched on the top of her grizzled tufts of hair, bunches of white cotton wool sticking out of her ears, a padded dressing-gown enveloping her shaky limbs, her trembling fingers shading her candle.

“You are dropping wax on my bed,” said the girl coolly.

The old woman’s face contracted with rage, and drawing back she looked as if she were about to hurl her brass candlestick at the occupant of the bed.

“You cannot frighten me,” said Vivienne proudly; “do not try it.”

The black woman burst into a series of revilings and imprecations mixed with references to fire and brimstone, coffins, murderers, fiery chariots, and burning in torment, to which Vivienne listened with curled lip.

“You are a capital hater, Mammy Jupiter,” she said ironically, “and I suppose the vials of your wrath have been filling up all these years. But I really wish you would not disturb me in the middle of the night.”

The colored woman glared at her. Then depositing her candlestick on the floor she knelt on a small rug and began to sway and groan, bending herself almost double in her paroxysm of wrath.

“Poor soul,” said Vivienne, turning her head aside, “her attention has wandered from me. I suppose it is a shock to her to find the daughter of Étienne Delavigne in one of the beds of the sacred house of Armour. But I must be firm.”

Mammy Juniper was apostrophizing some absent person under the name of Ephraim. In spite of the coldness of the room where Vivienne had thrown open the window, the perspiration streamed down her face. In a fierce, low voice and with a wildly swaying body she chanted dismally, “O Ephraim, thou art oppressed and broken in judgment. Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin altars shall be unto him to sin. Thy glory shall fly away like a bird. Ephraim shall receive shame—shall receive shame.”

“I wonder who Ephraim is?” murmured Vivienne.

Mammy Juniper was wringing her hands with an appearance of the greatest agony. “Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left. Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer—to the murderer! oh, my God!” Her voice sank to a husky whisper. She fell forward and pressed for an instant the knotted veins of her throbbing forehead to the cold floor.

Then she sprang to her feet, and extending her clasped hands and in a voice rising to the tones of passionate entreaty exclaimed, “Take with you words and turn to the Lord. He shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots like as Lebanon; his beauty shall be as the olive tree. Ephraim shall say, ‘What have I to do any more with idols?’”

“Mammy Juniper,” said Vivienne, “this is enough. If you want to recite any more passages from the Bible go to your own room.”

The old woman paid no attention to her.

“Go!” said Vivienne, springing from the bed and pointing to the candlestick.

Mammy Juniper mowed horribly at her, yet like a person fascinated by a hated object, she stretched out her hand, took the light, and began to retreat backward from the room.

Vivienne gazed steadily at her. “See, I shall not lock my door,” she said nonchalantly, “and I shall be asleep in ten minutes; but don’t you come back again. Do you hear?”

The old woman made an inarticulate sound of rage.

“You understand me,” said Vivienne. “Now go to bed,” and waving the disturber of her peace over the threshold she noiselessly closed the door.

CHAPTER V

A CONVERSATION WITH JUDY

All of Vivienne's unhappiness passed away with her night's sleep. On waking up to the bright, still beauty of a clear December morning her naturally high spirits rose again.

"The Armours have really little power to afflict me," she said, getting out of bed with a gay laugh. "My attachment to them is altogether a thing of duty, not affection. If they do not care for me I will leave them. That is a simple matter," and going to the window she drew in a long breath of the fresh morning air and noted with delight the blueness of the sky, the whiteness of the snow, and the darkness of the sombre evergreens before the house, where a number of solemn crows sat cawing harshly as if asking for some breakfast.

"Ah, it is cold," she exclaimed, drawing her gown about her, "and I am late. I must hurry."

When she at last left her room the breakfast bell had long since rung. She speedily made her way down the staircase, glancing critically through open doors as she passed them.

"The furnishings are too gorgeous, too tropical," she murmured; "and flaming colors are everywhere. Evidently the person who furnished this house had a barbaric fondness for bright shades."

On arriving in the lower hall she paused before the dining-room door. She could hear the tinkling of china and murmur of voices within. Then with a composure not assumed but real she drew aside the curtain and entered the room.

Mrs. Colonibel, handsome and imposing in a bright blue morning gown, sat behind the silver coffee urn at the head of the table. She knew that Vivienne had entered yet she took up a cream jug and gazed as steadfastly into its depths as though she expected to find a treasure there.

The corners of Vivienne's lips drooped mischievously. "For all exquisite torture to which one can be subjected," she reflected, "commend me to that inflicted on woman number two who enters the house of woman number one who does not want her."

Beside Mrs. Colonibel sat her daughter—a small misshapen girl, with peering black eyes and elfish locks that straggled down each side of her little wizened face and that she kept tossing back in a vain endeavor to make them hide the lump on her deformed back.

"What a contrast," thought Vivienne with a shudder, "between that poor child and her blonde prosperous-looking mother."

Colonel Armour, tall and stately, but looking not quite so young as he had in the lamplight of the night before, sat—as if in compensation for not occupying the seat at the foot of the table—on Mrs. Colonibel's right hand. Holding himself bolt upright and stirring his coffee gently, he was addressing some suave and gracious remarks to the table in general.

Stanton Armour, who sat opposite Mrs. Colonibel, made no pretense of listening to him. Plunged in deep reflection he seemed to be eating and drinking whatever came to hand.

Valentine, gay and careless, alternately listened to his father and tried to balance a piece of toast on the edge of a fork.

"A happy family party," murmured Vivienne; "what a pity to disturb it!"

The table maid, who was slipping noiselessly around the room, saw her but said nothing. Mr. Valentine raising his eyes caught the maid's curious glances and turned around. Then he hurriedly got up.

"Good-morning. Flora, where is Miss Delavigne to sit?"

In some confusion she ejaculated: "I do not know; Jane bring another chair."

"Is there no place for Miss Delavigne?" said Mr. Armour in cold displeasure. "Put the things beside me," and he turned to the maid, who with the greatest alacrity was bringing from the cupboard plates, knives, and forks, enough for two or three people.

“What may I give you?” he went on when Vivienne was seated. “Porridge? We all eat that. No, not any? Shall I give you some steak? Flora, Miss Delavigne will have some coffee.”

Vivienne sat calmly—Mr. Armour on one side of her, his father on the other—taking her breakfast almost in silence. A few remarks were addressed to her—they evidently did not wish her to feel slighted—to which she replied sweetly, but with so much brevity that no one was encouraged to keep up a conversation with her.

There was apparently nothing in the well-bred composure of the people about her to suggest antipathy, yet her sensitiveness on being thrown into a hostile atmosphere was such that she could credit each one with just the degree of enmity that was felt toward her.

After all, what did it matter? She would soon be away; and her dark face flushed and her eyes shone, till the surreptitious observation of her that all the other people at the table—except Mr. Armour—had been carrying on bade fair to become open and unguarded.

Mrs. Colonibel’s heart stirred with rage and uneasiness within her. She hated the girl for her youth and distinction, and with bitter jealousy she noted her daughter’s admiring glances in Vivienne’s direction.

“Judy,” she said, when breakfast was over and the different members of the family were separating, “will you do something for me in my room?”

“No, mamma,” said the girl coolly, and taking up the crutch beside her chair she limped to Vivienne’s side. “Are you going to unpack your boxes, Miss Delavigne?”

“Yes, I am.”

“May I go with you? I love to see pretty things.”

“Certainly,” murmured Vivienne; and suiting her pace to that of the lame girl she went upstairs beside her.

“Bah,” said Judy, halting at the door of the pink room, “they have put you in this atrocious rose-bed.”

“Pink is a charming color,” said Vivienne.

“Yes, in moderation. Come upstairs and see my rooms,” and she slowly ascended another staircase.

Vivienne followed her to the story above, and through a third square hall to a long narrow apartment running the whole length of the northern side of the house.

Judy threw open the door. “Here,” she said, with a flourish of her hand, “having everything against me, I yet managed to arrange a sitting room where one is not in danger of being struck blind by some audacious blue or purple or red. What do you think of it?”

Vivienne glanced about the exquisitely furnished room. “It is charming.”

“Come in,” said Judy, hospitably pulling up a little white chair before the blazing fire. “We’ll have a talk.”

“Do you know,” she went on, seating herself beside Vivienne, “this used to be a lumber room? I got Stanton to come up one day and look at it—he is as artistic in his tastes as mamma is inartistic—and he suggested all this. We cleared out the old furniture and put in those yellow panes of glass to simulate sunshine, and got this satin paper because it would light up well, and he had the white and gold furniture made for me. The cream rugs were a present from Uncle Colonel. Here is my bedroom,” and she hobbled to a door at the western end of the room and threw it open for a full view of the room beyond.

“What a dainty place!” said Vivienne.

“An idea strikes me,” exclaimed Judy, hurrying to the other end of the apartment. “Look here,” and she opened a second door.

Vivienne surveyed a small empty room.

“Wouldn’t you like this for a bedroom?” said Judy excitedly. “We can share this big room in common. You can read and work here, for I am sure you and I would pull well together, and like me you will just hate sitting downstairs all the time.”

Vivienne smiled at her. “I should disturb you—and besides I have been put in the room below.”

“You needn’t mind leaving it,” said Judy. “Mamma will be delighted to get you out of it; it is one of the guest rooms.”

“Oh, in that case,” said Vivienne, “I will accept your invitation. You will speak to Mrs. Colonibel?”

“I will go now,” said Judy, hurrying from the room. Vivienne sat down by the fire and dropped her head upon her hands. “I am not likely to be here long,” she said, “so it doesn’t matter.”

“Mamma is delighted,” she heard presently in a shrill voice. “I knew she would be. There is some furniture that can be put in the room, and when the servants finish their work below they will come up and arrange it. What fun we shall have—”

Vivienne looked kindly at the little cynical face.

“Till our first row,” said Judy, letting her crutch slip to the floor. “I suppose I shall hate you as I do every other body who has a straight back.”

Vivienne did not reply to her, and she went on peering restlessly into her face. “Well, what do you think of us?”

“This is not my first acquaintance with the Armours,” said Vivienne evasively.

“Ah, you were once here as a little child; but you don’t remember much about them, do you?”

“I remember Mammy Juniper,” said Vivienne, with a laugh, “and that she hated me and my father’s memory. I see that she still keeps up her old-womanish habit of prowling about the house at night.”

“Yes,” said Judy peevishly; “and if we forget to lock our doors we find her praying over us at unearthly hours.”

“She has been a faithful servant to the family, hasn’t she?” said Vivienne.

“And she has a diabolical temper,” said Judy.

“Don’t you think that she is crazy?”

“A little perhaps, though I think that she pretends to be more so to cover her inconsistencies. She belongs to the Armours, body and soul, and prides herself on being a model Christian. I say the two things don’t go together. The Armours haven’t been famed for devotion to the cause of religion for some years.”

“She talks about Ephraim,” said Vivienne; “who is he?”

“Ephraim is Uncle Colonel,” said Judy, with a chuckle. “Did she mention his having made a covenant with the Egyptians?”

“No.”

“He has; and the Assyrians are the people of Halifax. If you can get her started on that you’ll be entertained,” and Judy began a low, intensely amused laugh, which waxed louder till Vivienne at last joined her in it.

“It’s too funny,” said Judy, wiping the tears from her eyes. “I can even make Stanton laugh telling him about it, and he’s about the glummiest man I know.”

“Is he always as, as—”

“As hateful?” suggested Judy cheerfully.

“As reserved,” went on Vivienne, “as he is now?”

“Always for the last few years. He gets too much of his own way and he worries over things. I asked him the other day if he had committed a murder. My, how he glowered at me! He’s the worst-tempered man I know.”

“He looks as if he had plenty of self-control,” said Vivienne.

“Wait till you see him in one of his rages—not a black one, but a white, silent Armour rage. He’s master absolute here, and if any one opposes him—well, it’s a bad thing for the family. You know, I suppose, that he has pushed Uncle Colonel out of the business?”

“Has he?” said Vivienne. “I didn’t know it.”

“Didn’t he write you while you were away?”

“Business letters only,” said the girl, “and they were always written by Mr. Stanton, even when I first went.”

“Well, Uncle Colonel is out,” said Judy. “Stanton won’t even let him live in the house.”

“Why he was here last evening and this morning.”

“Oh yes, he gets his meals here. He and Val live down in the cottage; look, down there among the trees,” and she pointed to the gabled roof of a handsome colonial building some distance below the house.

Vivienne got up and went to the window.

“It’s a great surprise to us all to have you come home so unexpectedly,” said Judy; “to mamma, especially, though she has always dreaded it. Did you know you were coming?”

“No,” said Vivienne, in a low voice.

“I thought that you were to be kept abroad now that you have grown up. I don’t know why Stanton brought you back. Does he mean to keep you here?”

“I do not know.”

“It would be a great deal pleasanter for you to live abroad,” said Judy, “and for us too. Your coming is sure to revive unpleasant memories.”

Vivienne turned around swiftly. “What do you mean by unpleasant memories?”

Judy stared at her. “Don’t you know all about yourself—about your father?”

“I know that my father was obliged to work for his living,” said Vivienne proudly, “and that he served Colonel Armour long and faithfully. I see nothing unpleasant about that.”

“No, that is not unpleasant,” said Judy. “But on your word of honor, do you know nothing more?”

“I am at a loss to understand your meaning,” said Vivienne coldly.

“And you will continue at a loss,” replied her new friend doggedly, “for I shall tell you nothing further. I am usually fond of gossip; now I shall hold my tongue.”

Vivienne looked into the little, shrewd, not unkindly face and smiled. “You are an odd girl. How old are you?”

“Sixteen when I’m not sixty,” said the younger girl wearily. “I hate to live and I hate to die; and I hate everything and everybody.”

“Why do you talk like that?” asked Vivienne caressingly.

“Suppose instead of being straight and tall and distinguished-looking, you were an ugly little toad like me—how would you talk?”

“You have beautiful eyes,” said Vivienne, touching Judy’s cheek softly with her fingers.

“Don’t you pity me,” said Judy threateningly. “Don’t you pity me or I shall cry,” and slipping on her knees beside Vivienne she burst into tears.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. COLONIBEL LOSES HER TEMPER

Early in the afternoon Vivienne was on her knees before her boxes when a housemaid knocked at her door and announced to her that there was a “person” downstairs who wished to see her.

Quickly descending the staircase she found Mrs. Macartney looking longingly at those chairs in the hall that were most comfortably upholstered. As soon as she caught sight of Vivienne she sank into a Turkish arm-chair that was all cushions and padding.

“I’m glad to see you, me child,” she said in a hearty, boisterous way. “Sure”—with a mischievous twinkle in her eye—“your friends must be a disreputable set, for when I mentioned your name the domestic looked as if she’d like to shut the door in me face, and there’s another watching me from behind those curtains, so I thought to myself I’ll not sit down, for fear of complications, till me dear girl arrives.”

Vivienne suppressed a smile as she glanced over the somewhat fantastic attire with which Mrs. Macartney bade defiance to the Canadian cold and said, “Will you come into the drawing room?”

“Yes, me dear,” said Mrs. Macartney amiably, getting up and waddling across the hall, “if you’ll kindly keep an eye on me and see that I don’t put any of the bric-a-brac in my pocket. And how do you find yourself after the voyage? Could you help me out of this jacket, me dear? I’m hot with the cold. Just like bakers’ ovens are the houses here, and if I had a fan I’d be grateful indeed.”

Vivienne got her a fan, then they entered upon a long, cozy chat, which consisted largely, to Vivienne’s amusement, of Mrs. Macartney’s impressions of Halifax.

“Such a dirty town, me dear. Troth, your houses are brown and your streets are brown, and I’d like to get at them with soap and water; and such tinder boxes of houses—wood, wood—you’ll all burn up some day if the few brick and stone ones aren’t the salvation of ye; and your lovely surroundings, me dear; the drives and the views, they’re magnificent, just howling with beauty—but what is this?” in a tragic tone and staring open-mouthed before her.

There was the rustle of a silk gown, and looking up Vivienne saw Mrs. Colonibel standing before them, and remembered that she had heard her say that it was her day at home.

Her face was pale and her manner plainly said, “How dare you invite a guest of yours into the sacred precincts of my drawing room?” Then sweeping her long train after her she passed on.

The drawing room was a long apartment having an archway in the middle, from which hung heavy velvet curtains, that however did not keep from Vivienne’s ears and those of her guest, the impatient rustling of Mrs. Colonibel’s gown as she fidgeted to and fro.

Vivienne was deeply annoyed, yet Mrs. Macartney’s face was so ludicrous that she had difficulty in concealing a smile as she murmured: “Would you feel more comfortable in another room?”

“Faith, no, me dear; sit it out. You’ve as good right to be here as she has. Just hear her now; she isn’t mad, is she?” This last remark was in a stage whisper, which, judging from subsequent jerkings and sweepings to and fro, was perfectly audible to the occupant of the other part of the room.

“No, no,” said Vivienne hurriedly; and she plunged into a series of questions where Mrs. Macartney quite lost breath in trying to follow her.

The girl congratulated herself upon the fact that the Irish woman was as good natured as she was happy-go-lucky. An incident that would have sent another woman flying from the house shortened her stay not at all. She lingered on chatting enjoyably about Captain Macartney, who was engaged in some military duties, and Patrick, who was heartbroken because he had an appointment to keep which made it impossible for him to call upon mademoiselle that day, throwing meanwhile curious glances at the curtain which divided them from Mrs. Colonibel.

For nearly two hours Mrs. Colonibel had a succession of visitors. Their voices were distinctly audible to the two people sitting in the front part of the room, and they could plainly hear a great deal of the cheerful afternoon gossip and the occasional tinkling of teacups.

About five o'clock, interesting as was her conversation with Vivienne, Mrs. Macartney began to show signs of weariness. Her nostrils dilated slowly as if she were inhaling the fragrance of her favorite Bohea, and her countenance said plainly, "I smell hot cakes."

"What shall I do?" thought Vivienne; "hospitality says, Get a cup of tea for your guest. Prudence says, You had better not try, lest you fail. However, I will; she shall have some if I make it myself," and excusing herself, she got up and quietly went out through the hall to the back drawing room.

Mrs. Colonibel sat a little removed from the fire beside a tiny, prettily equipped tea-table. Two ladies only, Vivienne was thankful to see, were in the room—genuine Canadian women, looking rosy and comfortable in their winter furs. Vivienne went up to the table and stood in quiet gracefulness. "Mrs. Colonibel, will you give me a cup of tea?"

"Yes, indeed," said the lady, with alacrity; "won't you have some cake too?"

"Thank you," murmured Vivienne, and with a quiet bow she proceeded carefully through the hall.

"What a charming girl," she heard one of the ladies exclaim; "is she staying with you?"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Colonibel; "she is a poor young girl whom Mr. Armour has educated. She won't be here long, I fancy. For various reasons we are obliged to keep her in the background."

Vivienne stopped for an instant. "For various reasons," she repeated angrily. Then with an effort she became calm and went on to be saluted by Mrs. Macartney with the remark that she was a jewel.

Vivienne watched the Irish lady gratefully drinking her tea, then she helped her on with her wraps and saw her depart.

Mrs. Colonibel had yet to have her brush with Vivienne, and the opportunity came at the dinner table. She seized the moment when the three men were engaged in a political discussion, and leaning over, said in a low voice: "Who was that fat, vulgar looking woman that was calling on you this afternoon?"

Vivienne held up her head and looked her well in the eyes. "Oh, you mean the lady for whom I got the tea; Mrs. Macartney is her name."

"Mrs. Macartney—where did you meet her?"

"In Paris."

"She is Irish, I judge by her brogue."

"Oh yes," said Vivienne mischievously; "one would know by her tongue that she is Irish, just as one would know by yours that you are Canadian."

Mrs. Colonibel cast down her eyes. Vivienne had noticed her affected manner of speech, and realized that she shared in the ambition of many of her women friends in Halifax who strove to catch the accent of the English within their gates in order that they too might be taken for English people rather than Canadians.

Presently she went on with a slight sneer. "Mrs. Macartney—an Irish woman—no relation I suppose to Captain Macartney, of the Ninetieth, who was stationed here five years ago?"

"She is his stepmother."

"His stepmother!" and Mrs. Colonibel raised her voice to such a pitch that Colonel Armour and his sons broke off their discussion, and Judy exclaimed in peevish surprise, "What is the matter with you, mamma?"

Mrs. Colonibel paid no attention to any of them but Vivienne. "His stepmother, did you say?" she repeated, fixing the girl with angry eyes.

"I did," replied Vivienne calmly.

"Why did you not tell me so? how is it that you—You did it on purpose!"

Mrs. Colonibel was in a temper. Sitting at the head of her own table, apparently at peace with herself and all mankind, she had flown into a fit of wrath about something which no one in the least understood.

Vivienne disdained to reply to her.

Mrs. Colonibel half rose from the table, her face crimson, her whole frame shaking. "Stanton," she cried, "she"—pointing a trembling finger at Vivienne—"has deliberately insulted me in your house; I will not endure it," and bursting into a flood of tears she hurried from the room.

An extremely awkward silence followed Mrs. Colonibel's departure, which was broken at last by a laugh from Judy.

"Don't be shocked, Miss Delavigne," she said; "mamma has been known to do that before. She is tired I think. What is the trouble, anyway? Fortunately the servants have left the room. Pass me the nuts, Val."

Vivienne's black eyes were resting on her plate, and she did not speak until she found that every one at the table was waiting for her answer.

"Mrs. Macartney called on me to-day," she said, addressing Mr. Armour. "I sat with her in the front drawing room. Mrs. Colonibel passed us, but so quickly that I did not introduce her. Later on she gave me a cup of tea for Mrs. Macartney. That is all," and Vivienne half shrugged her shoulders and closed her lips.

"Macartney, did you say?" exclaimed Mr. Valentine. "Not Geoffrey Macartney's mother?"

"Yes."

"What a joke!" said the young man. "Macartney used to be a frequent visitor here. Indeed, he once spent two months with us when he broke his leg while tobogganing down our slide with Mrs. Colonibel. She was a great friend of his in those days—a great friend. Naturally she would have liked to meet his mother. Did not Mrs. Macartney mention all this to you?"

"She does not know it," said Vivienne; "of that I am sure. Captain Macartney is a reticent man. By the way," she went on vivaciously, "you saw Captain Macartney on the steamer last evening, Mr. Armour; why did you not tell Mrs. Colonibel that his mother had chaperoned me?"

Mr. Valentine burst into low, rippling, and intensely amused laughter. "Ha, ha! old man, there is one for you. We shall see that you are the one to be blamed."

"I never thought of it," said Mr. Armour heavily, and with the ghost of a smile.

"You might have told us," went on Mr. Valentine complainingly. "You know we all liked Macartney. I thought he was in India. Poor Flora! It's a lucky thing for you, Miss Delavigne, that you kept that bit of information till she got out of the room. What is he doing here?"

"He has exchanged into another regiment," said Vivienne. "His young brother is with him too."

"Indeed, we must call; and now cannot we leave the table? I want to go to town."

CHAPTER VII

IN DR. CAMPERDOWN'S OFFICE

The principal hotels of the town of Halifax are situated on Hollis Street, and Hollis Street is next Water Street, and Water Street is next the harbor.

On a dull, windless morning, when the snow clouds hung low in the air, Captain Macartney, encased in a dark uniform and looking exceedingly trim and soldierlike, stepped out of one of these hotels, where he had been to see his stepmother and brother, and walking slowly along the street looked up at the high buildings on each side of him, attentively scrutinizing doorplates and signs as he did so.

There at last was the name he wanted, on the door of a large building that looked rusty and shabby between its smart brick and stone neighbors—Dr. Camperdown, Surgeon. He repeated the words with a satisfied air, then making his way up a dark staircase, pushed open a door that had the polite invitation “Walk in” on it in staring letters. He found himself in a large, bare room, with a row of chairs set about its walls. Unfortunately for him, he was not the first on the field. Six of the chairs were occupied. Three old women, two young ones, and an old man, all poorly dressed and looking in their shabby clothes only half protected from the cold, eyed with small approval the smartly dressed officer who might prove to be a first claimant of the doctor's attention. To their joy he took a seat at the back of the room, thereby giving notice that he was prepared to wait his turn.

They all looked up when the door of an inner apartment was opened. An ugly, sandy head appeared, and a sharp “Next” was flung into the room. One of the old women meekly prepared to enter, stripping off some outer wrap which she dropped on the chair behind her.

“Take your cloud with you,” said one of the younger women kindly; “he'll let you out by another door into the hall.”

After what seemed to Captain Macartney an unconscionably long time, the door was again opened, and another “Next” was ejaculated. His jaws ached with efforts to suppress his yawns. He longed in vain for a paper.

Finally, after long, weary waiting and much internal grumbling, all his fellow-sufferers had one by one disappeared, and he had the room to himself. The last to go, the old man, stayed in the inner office a longer time than all the others combined, and Captain Macartney, fretting and chafing with impatience, sprang to his feet, and walking up and down the room, stared at everything in it, singly and collectively. He found out how many chairs were there. He counted the cobwebs, big and little, high up in the corners. He discovered that one leg of the largest press was gone, and that a block of wood had been stuck in its place, thereby rendering it exceedingly shaky and unsteady. He speculated on the number of weeks that had elapsed since the windows had been washed. He wondered why they should be so dirty and the floor so clean, when suddenly, to his immense relief, the door opened and Dr. Camperdown stood before him.

His hair was shaggy and unkempt, his sharp gray eyes, hiding under the huge eyebrows, were fixed piercingly on the military figure which he came slowly toward, the more closely to examine. His long arms, almost as long as those of the redoubtable Rob Roy—who, Sir Walter Scott tells us, could, without stooping, tie the garters of his Highland hose placed two inches below the knee—were pressed against his sides, and his hands were rammed down into the pockets of an old coffee-colored, office coat, on which a solitary button lingered.

“Macartney, is it you,” he said doubtfully, “or your double?”

“Myself,” said the officer with a smile and extending his hand.

“Come in, come in,” said Dr. Camperdown, passing into the other room. “Sit down,” dragging forward a leather chair on which the dust lay half an inch thick. “Afraid of the dust? Finicky as ever.

Wait, I'll clean it for you—where's my handkerchief? Gave it to that old woman. Stop a bit—here's a towel. Now for a talk." Sprawled out across two chairs, and biting and gnawing at his moustache as if he would uproot it, he gazed with interest at his visitor. "What are you doing in Halifax? Are you in the new regiment?"

"Yes; I arrived three days ago in the 'Acadian.'"

"Same hot-headed Irishman as ever?"

"No; I have cooled considerably since the old subaltern days. India and fevers and accidents have taken the life out of me. How are you getting on? You have a number of charity patients I see."

"Oh Lord, yes; the leeches!"

"Why don't you shake them off?"

Camperdown grunted disapprovingly.

"You encourage them, I fancy," said the officer in his smooth, polished tones. "They would not come if you did not do so. I hope you have others, rich ones, to counterbalance them."

"Yes," gruffly, "I have."

"And you bleed them to make up for the losses you sustain through penniless patients. Ha, ha, Camperdown," and Captain Macartney laughed the pleasant, mellifluous laugh of a man of culture and fashion.

Camperdown looked benevolently at him. "Never mind me. Talk about yourself. What are you making of your life? You're getting older. Have you married?"

"No, but I am thinking of it," gravely and with the faintest shade of conceit. "My stepmother urges me to it, and the advice is agreeable, for I have fallen in love."

"Does she reciprocate?" and Dr. Camperdown bit his moustache more savagely than ever in order to restrain a smile.

"Not entirely; but—you remember the time I broke my leg, Camperdown, five years ago?"

"Yes, a compound fracture."

"The time," scornfully, "that I was fool enough to let Flora Colonibel twist me 'round her little finger."

"Exactly."

"I was taken to the Armours' house you remember, and was fussed over and petted till I loathed the sight of her."

"Yes," dryly, "as much as you had previously admired it."

"By Jove, yes," said the other with a note of lazy contempt in his voice; "and but for that broken leg, Flora Colonibel would have been Flora Macartney now."

"Very likely," said Camperdown grimly; "but what are you harking back to that old story for?"

"It is an odd thing," went on Captain Macartney with some show of warmth, "that, tame cat as I became out at Pinewood, and bored to death as I was with confidences and family secrets, from the old colonial days down, that one thing only was never revealed to me."

"What was that?"

"The fact that the family possessed a kind of ward or adopted daughter, who was being educated abroad."

"So—they did not tell you that?"

"Not a syllable of it," and Captain Macartney eyed keenly the uncommunicative face before him.

"Why should they have told you?" said Dr. Camperdown.

"Why—why," echoed his visitor in some confusion, his face growing furiously red, "for the very good reason that that is the girl with whom I have chosen to fall in love."

Camperdown shrugged his huge shoulders. "How did they know you'd fall in love with the daughter of their poor devil of a bookkeeper?"

Captain Macartney half rose from his seat. "Camperdown," he said haughtily, "in the old days we were friends; you and your father before you were deep in the secrets of the house of Armour. I come to you for information which I am not willing to seek at the club or in the hotels. Who is Miss Vivienne Delavigne?"

"Sit down, sit down," said Camperdown surlily and impatiently. "Scratch a Russian and you'll find a Tartar, and scratch an Irishman and you'll find a fire-eater, and every sensible man is a fool when he falls in love. What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

"You love the girl—isn't that everything?"

"No."

"You didn't propose to her?"

"No."

"Did you ask her about her family?"

"I did not," loftily.

"You wish to know what her station in life is, and whether she can with propriety be taken into the aristocratic family of the Macartneys?"

"Yes," shortly; "if you will be so kind as to tell me."

"Here's the matter in a nutshell then. Her father was French, mother ditto, grandfathers and grandmothers the same—all poorest of the poor, and tillers of the soil. Her father got out of the peasant ring, became confidential man for Colonel Armour, and when he reached years of discretion, which was before I did, I believe that he embezzled largely, burnt the Armours' warehouse, and not being arrested, decamped—the whole thing to the tune of some thousands of dollars. That is her father's record."

Captain Macartney was visibly disturbed. "How long ago did this take place?"

"Twenty years."

"Is it well known—much talked of?"

"No, you know how things are dropped in a town. The story's known, but no one speaks of it. Now the girl has come back, I suppose Dame Rumor will set it flying again."

Captain Macartney relapsed into a chagrined silence. Camperdown sucking in both his cheeks till he was a marvel of ugliness, watched him sharply, and with wicked enjoyment. "You'll have to give her up, Macartney."

"By Jove, I will," said the officer angrily. "My uncle would cut me off with a ha'penny."

"Bah!" said his companion contemptuously. "I would not give her up for all the uncles in Christendom."

"You know nothing about the duty of renunciation," said the other sarcastically. "I've not drunk a glass of wine for a twelve-month."

"What's wrong?" said the physician with professional curiosity.

"Indigestion," shortly. Then slowly, "Suppose I married the girl—she could not live on air."

"Your pay."

"Is not enough for myself."

"You hoped to find her a rich girl," said Dr. Camperdown sharply.

"I will not deny that I had some such expectation," said the other raising his head, and looking at him coolly, but with honest eyes. "Her dress and appearance—her whole *entourage* is that of a person occupying a higher station in life than she does."

"Fiddle-de-dee, what does it matter? She's a lady. What do you care about her ancestors?"

"We don't look upon things on the other side of the Atlantic as you do here," said Captain Macartney half regretfully. "And it is not that alone. It is the disgrace connected with her name that makes the thing impossible."

"Bosh—give her an honest name. You're not half a man, Macartney."

The officer sprang from his seat. His Irish blood was “up.” Camperdown chuckled wickedly to himself as he watched him pacing up and down the narrow apartment, holding up his sword with one hand and clasping the other firmly behind his back. From time to time he threw a wrathful glance in the surgeon’s direction and after he had succeeded in controlling himself, he said doggedly: “I shall not marry her, but I will do what I can for her; she ought to be got out of that house.”

“Why?” said his friend inanely.

“Beg pardon, Camperdown, but your questions infuriate me,” said his companion in a low voice. “You know that is no place for a young, innocent girl to be happy. Begin with the head of the house, Colonel Armour. I’ll sketch his career for you in six words; young devil, middle-aged devil, old devil. Flora Colonibel is a painted peacock. Stanton an iceberg. Judy an elf, imp, tigress, anything you will. Valentine a brainless fop. If you’re a man, you’ll help me get her out of it.”

“*You* can’t do anything now,” said Dr. Camperdown pointedly.

“Yes I can—I’m her friend.”

“You’re her lover, as long as you dangle about her.”

“Stuff and nonsense,” said Captain Macartney peevishly and resuming his seat. “She isn’t in love with me.”

Dr. Camperdown burst into a roar of laughter. “She doesn’t smile upon you; then why all this agony?”

“It’s easily seen that you’ve not proposed to many women,” said Captain Macartney coolly. “They never say yes, at first.”

The shaft went home. His ugly *vis-à-vis* shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

“We had a saying about Flora Colonibel in the past,” said Captain Macartney earnestly, “that she feared neither saint, angel, nor demon, but that she stood in mortal dread of Brian Camperdown. She will persecute that girl to a dead certainty. Can’t you hold her in check? My stepmother will stand by you. She would even take her for a trip somewhere, or have her visit her.”

“I’ll look after her,” briefly. “By the way, where did you meet her?”

“In Paris, with the French lady who has been traveling with her since she left school, and who asked my stepmother to take charge of her on the journey here.”

“Her arrival was a surprise,” said Dr. Camperdown. “Armour didn’t tell me that she was coming.”

Captain Macartney surveyed him with some jealousy. “So you too have an eye to her movements?”

“Yes,” said Camperdown impishly. “I don’t care for her antecedents.”

“Oh, indeed; I am glad that you do not,” said the officer, drawing on his gloves with a smile. “Of course you do not. You have no right to do so. How is that lady with the charming name?”

“She is well.”

“Is she still in her old quarters?”

“Yes.”

“I must do myself the pleasure of calling on her. She is as remarkable as ever I suppose?”

“More so.”

“I can well believe it. Now I must leave you. I am due at the South Barracks at twelve,” and he rose to go.

“Stop, Macartney; there are mitigating circumstances connected with this affair. I told you that Miss Delavigne’s immediate ancestry was poor. It is also noble on her mother’s side—formerly rich. You have heard of the French family the Lacy d’Entrevilles?”

“I have.”

“Ever hear that they sprang from the stock of a prince royal of France?”

“No, I have not.”

“They say they did; one of them, a Marquis René Théodore something or other was a colonel in Louis the Fourteenth’s body-guards—came out to Quebec in command of a regiment there, then to Acadie and founded this branch of the family; it is too long a story to tell. I dare say mademoiselle is as proud as the rest of them.”

“She is,” said his hearer with a short laugh.

“Born aristocrats—and years of noses to the grindstone can’t take it out of them, and the Delavignes, though hewers of wood and drawers of water, as compared with the aristocratic Lacy d’Entrevilles, were all high strung and full of honesty. Seriously, Macartney, I think her father was a monomaniac. A quiet man immersed in his business wouldn’t start out all at once on a career of dishonesty after an unblemished record.”

“I am glad to hear this,” said Captain Macartney, “and I am exceedingly obliged to you. Some other time I shall ask you to favor me with the whole story,” and he went thoughtfully away.

CHAPTER VIII

AN INTERVIEW IN THE LIBRARY

At ten o'clock on the evening of the day that Captain Macartney made his call on Dr. Camperdown Judy was restlessly hitching herself up and down the big front hall at Pinewood.

"Oh, that crutch!" ejaculated Mrs. Colonibel, who was playing cards with Valentine in the drawing room; "how I hate to hear it."

"Don't you like to hear your offspring taking a little exercise?" he asked tantalizingly.

"Not when she's waiting for that detestable French girl," said Mrs. Colonibel. "I do wish Stanton would send her away."

"Everything comes to her who waits," said Valentine. "The trouble is with you women that you won't wait. Play, cousin."

"Here she is," exclaimed Judy, and she flung open the door with a joyful, "Welcome home."

Vivienne was just getting out of a sleigh. "Ah, Judy, how kind of you to wait for me," she said. "Did you get my note?"

"Yes; but nobody asked where you were except mamma."

Vivienne's face clouded slightly, then it brightened again. "Where is Mr. Armour?"

"In the library; he always spends his evenings there."

"I wish to speak to him. Do you think I could go in?"

"Yes; what do you want to say?"

"I will tell you afterward," and with a smile Vivienne let her cloak slip from her shoulders and knocked at a near door.

Judy with her head on one side like a little cat listened to the brief "Come in," then as Vivienne disappeared from view she spun round and round the hall in a kind of dance.

"What is the matter with you?" asked her mother, coming from the drawing room.

Judy stopped. "I have a pain in my mind."

"What kind of a pain, Judy?" asked Valentine, looking over Mrs. Colonibel's shoulder.

"A joyful pain."

"Miss Delavigne has gone upstairs, has she?" asked Mrs. Colonibel.

"Yes, she came in," said Judy evasively.

"Why don't you go to bed?" continued her mother.

"Because I choose to stay here and read," and Judy seizing a book flung herself on a divan.

"Well, I am going," said Mrs. Colonibel; "goodnight," and she turned toward the staircase.

Valentine tossed a cap on his black head and opening a door leading to a veranda ran swiftly down a snowy path to the cottage.

When Vivienne entered the library Mr. Armour looked up in some surprise and with a faint trace of annoyance.

"I hope I am not disturbing you," she said politely.

"Not at all," and he turned his back on the table bestrewn with papers and invited her by a wave of the hand to sit down.

He stood himself leaning one elbow on the mantel, and looked curiously down at her as she sat glancing about at the book-cases and the rose and ashen hangings of his handsome room.

What a strangely self-possessed girl she was. Could he think of another who would come boldly into his presence and demand an interview with his own dignified self? No, he could not. Well, she was a foreigner. How he hated the type; the smooth black bands of hair, the level heavy eyebrows, the burning eyes. What havoc a face like this had already wrought in his family, and he shaded his eyes with his hand and averted them from her as she ejaculated:

"I beg your pardon for keeping you. I will say what I wish very shortly. I have just come from dining with the Macartneys."

"At their hotel?"

"Yes."

"I wish that you had consulted me," he said in his most chilling manner. "Hotels are public places for young girls."

"Not when they are under proper chaperonage," she said gently; "and really I did not suppose that you took any interest in my movements."

He glanced suspiciously at her, but saw that there was no hint of fault-finding in her manner.

"I have come in this evening to tell you something that I know will please you," she said.

Something to please him—he wondered in a dull way what it was.

"Captain Macartney wishes to marry me," she said.

He stared incredulously at her. "Captain Macartney!"

"Yes; he asked me this evening."

He pondered over the news for some instants in silence, then he said, "Why do you say that this will please me?"

Vivienne looked steadily at him. "Mr. Armour, you cannot conceal the fact from me that I am a great burden to you."

"A great burden," he repeated frigidly. "Surely you forget yourself, Miss Delavigne."

"No, no," she replied with animation. "Do not be vexed with me, Mr. Armour; I am just beginning to understand things. You know that I have no father and mother. When I was a little girl away across the sea, and the other children went home for their holidays, I used to cry to think that I had no home. When I got older I found out from your letters that you did not wish me to come. I was surprised that you at last sent for me, but yet delighted, for I thought, even if the Armours do not care for me I shall be in my native land, I shall never leave it; yet, yet—"

She paused for an instant and seemed to be struggling with some emotion. Mr. Armour raised his heavy eyelids just long enough to glance at her, then dropped them again. His eyes carried the picture to the reddish-brown tiles of the hearth—the pretty graceful figure of the half girl, half woman, before him, her little foreign gestures, the alluring softness of her dark eyes. Yet the picture possessed no attraction for him. It only appealed slightly to his half-deadened sensibilities. He was doing wrong to dislike her so intensely. He must keep his feelings under better control.

"Well," he said less coldly, "you were going to say something else."

"I was going to say," remarked Vivienne, a bright impatient color coming and going in her cheeks, "that one cannot live on patriotism. I thought that I would not miss my friends—the people who have been good to me. I find that I do. In this house I feel that I am an intruder—"

"And the Macartneys adore you," he said, a steely gleam of amusement coming into his eyes, "and consequently you wish to be with them."

"That is a slight exaggeration," said Vivienne composedly; "yet we will let it pass. With your permission I will marry Captain Macartney."

"Suppose I withhold my permission."

Vivienne glanced keenly at him. Was this man of marble capable of a jest? Yes, he was. "If you do," she said coolly, "I will run away." Then she laughed with the ease and gayety of girlhood and Mr. Armour watching her smiled gravely.

"I suppose the Macartneys have been much touched by your stories of our cruel treatment of you," he said sarcastically.

Vivienne tapped her foot impatiently on the floor. Did he really think that she was a tell-tale?

"Ah yes," she said nonchalantly; "I have told them that you detest me and allow me only bread and water, that I sleep in a garret, and your father and Mrs. Colonibel run away whenever they see me, small Judy being my only friend in the house."

Mr. Armour smiled more broadly. How quick she was to follow his lead! “Does my father really avoid you?” he asked.

There was some complacency in his tone and Vivienne holding her head a trifle higher responded: “I make no complaint of members of your family to you or to any other person, Mr. Armour.”

He frowned irritably and with one of the peremptory hand gestures that Vivienne so much disliked he went on: “Why did not Macartney speak to me himself about this affair?”

“He will do so to-morrow. I wished to see you first.”

“Why?”

“Will you be kind enough to excuse me from telling you?”

“No,” said Mr. Armour unexpectedly; “I wish to know.”

Vivienne shook her head in an accession of girlish independence that was highly distasteful to him.

“I cannot endure a mystery,” he said sternly.

“Nor I,” said Vivienne demurely; “but really, Mr. Armour, I do not wish to tell you.”

“Those Irish people are spoiling her,” he reflected. Vivienne was watching him and after a time she said reluctantly:

“However, it is a slight thing—you may think it worse than it is if I do not tell you. I”—proudly—“did not wish Captain Macartney to be the first to tell you lest, lest—”

“Lest what?”

“Lest you should seem too glad to get rid of me,” she concluded.

“What do you mean?” he asked haughtily.

Vivienne pushed back her chair and stepped a little farther away from him. “You may think that because I am young, Mr. Armour, I have no pride; I have. I bitterly, bitterly resent your treatment of me. I have tried to please you; never a word of praise have you given me all these years. I come back to you to be treated like an outcast. My father was a gentleman, if he was poor, and of a family superior to that of the Armours. You will be glad, glad, glad to throw me off—”

She stopped to dash away an angry tear from her cheek while Mr. Armour surveyed her in the utmost astonishment.

“You think because I am a girl I do not care,” she went on, her fine small nostrils dilating with anger. “Girls care as well as men.”

“How old are you?” ejaculated Mr. Armour stupidly.

“You do not even know my age,” she retorted, “you—my guardian,” and with a glance of sublime displeasure she tried to put her hand on the door handle.

“Stop a moment,” said Mr. Armour confusedly.

“I have talked long enough to you,” she responded. “You have made me lose my temper; a thing I seldom do,” and with this parting shaft she left the room.

Mr. Armour stood holding the door open for some time after she left him. Then he stooped down and picked a crumpled handkerchief from the floor.

“What irrepressibility!” he muttered; “a most irritating girl. I shall be glad to have her taken off my hands, and she is angry about it. Well, it cannot be helped,” and he seated himself in a quiet, dull fashion by the fire. Worry, annoyance, dread, and unutterable weariness oppressed him, yet through it all his face preserved its expression of icy calm. A stranger looking into the room would have said: “A quiet, handsome man meditating in the solitude of his library;” not by any means, a poor, weary pilgrim to whom life was indeed no joyous thing but a grievous, irksome burden that he longed to, yet dared not, lay down.

Vivienne went slowly upstairs resting one hand on the railing as she did so.

“Well, my dear,” said Judy, meeting her halfway, “what makes your face so red? Have you had an exhibition of Grand-Turkism?”

“Judy,” said Vivienne, stopping short, “I knew before I went to that room to-night that Mr. Armour likes to have his own way.”

“You are a match for him,” said Judy dryly; “now tell me what you wanted to say to him.”

“I wished to announce my engagement to Captain Macartney.”

“Oh, you bad, bad girl,” exclaimed Judy; “oh, you bad girl!”

“A bad girl!” exclaimed Vivienne.

“Come along,” said Judy, dragging her upstairs. “Come to our room. Oh, I am so disappointed! I had other plans for you.”

“Indeed—what were they?”

“I don’t know. I must forget them, I suppose. But don’t be too hard on Stanton, Vivienne.”

“What do you mean by being too hard? You have never heard me say a word against him.”

“No, but you look things with those big eyes of yours. He has a detestable time with Uncle Colonel and Val.”

“In what way?” asked Vivienne feebly.

“Because they are demons; regular dissipated demons, and he is their keeper. They lead him a life; that’s why he’s so solemn. What did he say about your engagement?”

“I fancy that it meets with his approbation.”

“Approbation—fiddlesticks! Do you love your *fiancé*, Vivienne?”

“No, certainly not. He is a gentleman; I like him, and he is very good to his stepmother.”

“What an excellent reason for marrying him,” said Judy sarcastically; “he is good to his stepmother.”

“Therefore he will be good to me.”

“Well, you’re about half right. Let us go to bed. I don’t feel like discussing this engagement of yours.”

Vivienne looked wistfully after the little elfish figure limping away from her. “Judy,” she said, “Judy.”

The girl stopped.

“Don’t you think it is nauseating to hear some girls gushing about their dear darling lovers?”

“Yes, perfectly so.”

“So many of those terrible enthusiastic marriages turn out badly.”

“A great many; I must get Stargarde to talk to you about the marriage question.”

“Who is Stargarde?” asked Vivienne curiously.

“Stargarde is Stargarde,” said Judy enigmatically; “wait till you see her. Good-night.”

CHAPTER IX

THE PAVILION

Dr. Camperdown lived in a large, bare stone house a few blocks distant from his office. Late one afternoon he stood at one of the back windows from which he commanded a magnificent view of the harbor.

“Bah! it’s going to be cold to-night,” he said, suddenly banging down the window; “the snow clouds have blown away.”

He looked about his lonely room, where the furniture was ugly and scanty and the general aspect of things cheerless. “Desolate, eh,” he muttered thoughtfully fixing his eyes on the expiring embers of the fire. “I’ll go and see Stargarde. How long since I’ve seen the—?” and some endearing epithet lost itself between his lips and his moustache.

“It is twelve days—nearly a fortnight,” he went on after a pause. “Time for another spree,” and with grim cheerfulness he lighted the gas and seizing a brush and comb began briskly to smooth his towzled head.

After his refractory locks were in order he went to his wardrobe where with many head shakings he turned over his whole stock of coats before he could find one to suit him.”

“I guess this will do,” he said at last, shaking out one which was minus one button only. “She’ll be sure to spy that vacant spot,” he went on dubiously. “Where’s that old beldame to sew it on? Hannah! fairy, sylph, beauty, come up here!”

There was no sound from the rooms below. With a quick ejaculation he threw the coat over his arm and went down the staircase two steps at a time. Opening the doors of a dull dining room and a still more dull and comfortless drawing room he looked in to find them tenantless.

“Must be in her lowest den,” he said, vaulting like a boy down a narrower flight of stairs leading to a kitchen. There indeed he found an old woman groveling over a fire.

“Hannah,” he shouted, holding his coat toward her. “There’s a button gone, will you sew on another?”

“Eh, what’s that ye said, Mr. Brian?” queried the old woman. “A button? Yes indeed, ye shall have it; just ye wait till I get my workbasket,” and she started to leave the kitchen, but he restrained her with an impatient, “Where is it?”

“In the right top-hand corner of my second drawer, me boy, if ye’ll be so kind. Hannah’s limbs is gettin’ old.”

He shook off the affectionate hand she laid on his shoulder and leaped upstairs again. When he returned with her basket the old woman slowly lifted the cover. “Did ye no bring the thimble?” she asked in surprise.

“No—confound the thimble! Why don’t you keep it in your basket?”

“Because I always keeps it in the left-hand corner of the window,” she answered mildly, “behind the picture of your sainted father—” but Dr. Camperdown was gone, springing up the steps again in a state of desperate hurry.

“If you don’t sew that button on in five minutes,” he vociferated in her ear when he came back, “I’ll turn you out of the house to-morrow.”

“Sure, Mr. Brian, ye know ye’d do no such thing,” said the old woman throwing him a remonstrating glance. “Ye’d go yourself first.”

He laughed shortly, then exclaimed: “Oh, sew it on—sew it on and don’t talk. I’ll give you a dollar if you’ll have it on in two minutes.”

At this the old woman's fingers flew, and in a short time the button was in place, the coat on Dr. Camperdown's back, and with a hasty "I'll not be back to dinner," he had hurried out of the kitchen to the floor above, where he rapidly donned a cap and coat and went out into the street.

The air was keen and frosty and he drew great breaths of it into his capacious lungs.

"I could walk twenty miles," he muttered as he swung himself along by lighted shops and houses.

As he went on the streets became more and more shabby. The gutters about him were dirty and many of the houses were mere wooden shells and a most insufficient protection against the winter winds.

Midway on the dirtiest and least respectable of the streets he stopped in front of a long, clean brick building erected by the charitable people of the town for the better housing of the poor. To the street it presented high walls pierced by windows of good size. Inside was a large yard overlooked by a double row of verandas that ran along the building. Passing through an archway he entered this yard, looked across it at the washhouses, storerooms, and a little eating house with gayly flaunting lights, then turning to his left stepped on a veranda and knocked lightly at a door.

"Come in," said a voice like a bell, and softly turning the handle he entered a little plainly furnished room where a bright fire blazed merrily.

There was one elegant bit of furniture in the room, an elaborately carved davenport, where sat a tall, magnificently proportioned woman with a white, firm, smooth skin like a baby's, a pair of deep blue eyes, and a crown of pale golden hair that lay in coils on the top of her head and waved down in little ringlets and circlets over her neck.

Ah, that neck—he would give worlds to touch it; and Brian Camperdown stood trembling like a boy as he looked at it. The woman had her back to him and was writing busily. Presently the pen stopped running over the paper and she thoughtfully leaned her head on a shapely white hand.

"It is cold," she said suddenly. "Close the door, my friend—ah, Brian, is it you?" turning around and giving him a hand over the back of her chair. "I thought it was one of the people. Wait an instant, won't you, till I finish my letter? It is so important," and with an angelic smile and a womanly dimple she turned back to her desk.

"I'm in no hurry," he said composedly, taking off his coat and hanging it behind the door on a hook with whose location he seemed to be quite well acquainted. Then he arranged his huge limbs in an arm-chair and stared at her.

Though the time was December she had on a cotton gown that had large loose sleeves fitting tightly around her wrists. About her neck and over her breast it was laid in folds that outlined her beautiful form. At her waist it was drawn in by a ribbon, and hung from that downward in a graceful fullness utterly at variance with the sheath-like fit of the prevailing style of dress. Though the gown was cotton there was a bit of fine lace in the neck.

"Some one must have given it to her," muttered Dr. Camperdown, whose eagle eye soon espied its quality. "She would never buy it. Flora probably, if"—with a sneer—"she could make up her mind to part with it." Then he said aloud and very humbly, "Can't you talk to me yet?"

"Yes, yes, Brian," and the woman laughed in her clear, bell-like tones. "I have finished," and she stood up to put her letter on the mantelpiece.

When she was standing one saw what a superb creature she was. A goddess come down from her pedestal would not be more unlike the average woman in appearance than she. Her draperies being almost as loose and unconfined as those of the ancient Greek and Roman women she was untrammelled, and being untrammelled she was graceful in spite of her great height and comely proportions. She was like a big, beautiful child with her innocent, charming manners and blue unworldly eyes, and yet there was something about her that showed she had lived and suffered. She was a woman and into her life had been crowded the experiences of the lives of a dozen ordinary women.

"It is some time since I have seen you, Brian," she said in a fresh, joyous voice.

“Yes,” he articulated, “I have been trying to keep away. Had to come now. I want to talk to you about the Delavigne child. She has arrived. Stanton has brought her here.”

“Has he?” and Stargarde clasped her hands. “When did she come?”

“A few days ago.”

“Have you been out to see her?”

“No, I have been busy.”

“And I have been away; but I will go as soon as I can,” and the woman absently let her eyes meet those of her guest till he was obliged to shut his own to get rid of their dazzle and glitter.

Unfortunately for him she noticed what he was doing. “Brian Camperdown,” she exclaimed, “open your eyes. I won’t talk to you if you sit there half asleep,” and she burst into a merry peal of laughter that a baby might have envied.

“I’m not sleepy,” he said hastily; “I was thinking,” and he surveyed her in unwinking attention.

“Well, do not think; listen to me. That little French girl is so often in my thoughts, and lately in particular I have not been able to get her out of my head.”

“I daresay,” he growled. “There are more people than the Delavigne child in your head—a whole colony of them. I wonder they don’t worry you to death.”

“I hope she will let me be kind to her,” said Stargarde earnestly.

“You needn’t worry,” said Dr. Camperdown. “She’s going to be well looked after. I don’t see why every one comes rushing to me. My father began it when he died with his admonition to do something for the Delavigne child if I had a chance. You have always been at me, and yesterday Macartney cornered me.”

“Macartney! not the Irish officer who used to admire Flora!”

“The same.”

“What does he want you to do?”

“To look after her in a general way. He’s in love with her.”

“Oh, Brian!”

“I suppose I’m a simpleton for telling you,” he said eyeing her reluctantly. “You women have men just like wax in your hands. You twist everything out of us.”

“I do not think you mean that,” she said quietly.

He scrambled from his chair and before she knew his intention had her shapely hands in his and was mumbling over them: “Darling, darling, I would trust you with my soul.”

She looked down at him sadly as he passionately kissed her fingers and returned them to her lap. Then she leaned over and stroked softly his tumbled head, and murmuring, “Poor boy!” pointed to the clock.

“I was going to ask you to stay to tea,” she said, “but—”

“I will be good—I will be good,” he ejaculated lifting his flushed face to hers and hurrying back into his chair. “It was a moment of madness; it won’t happen again.”

“That is what you always say, Brian.”

“I will keep my promise this time. I really will.” Then forcing his hands deep down into his pockets, he said insinuatingly: “You can so easily stop my display of devotion, it is a strange thing that you don’t do it.”

“How can I do so?” she asked with an eagerness that was not pleasing to him.

“By marrying me.”

“Marry you to get rid of you,” she said with incredulity. “Ah, Brian, I know you better than that. You will be a good husband to the woman you marry. I can imagine myself married to you,” she went on pensively; “we should be what is almost better than lovers, and that is companions. You would be with me as constantly as Mascereene there,” and she pointed to a huge, black dog lying with watchful head on his paws behind her davenport.

“You will marry me some day,” said the man doggedly. “If I thought you would not, I would tie a stone around my neck and drop into the harbor to-morrow. No, I would not,” he added bitterly. “We don’t do that sort of thing nowadays. I’d have the stone in my heart instead of around my neck and I’d live on, a sour, ugly old man, till God saw fit to rid the world of me. Do you know what love, even hopeless love, does for a man, Stargarde? what my love for you does for me? What have I to remember of my childhood? Painful visions; my father and mother each side of the fire like this sorrowing at the wickedness of the world. Then I met you, a bonny, light-hearted girl. I loved you the first time I saw you. You have been in my thoughts every minute of the time since. In the morning, at night in my dreams. With you I am still an ugly, cross-grained man; without you I should be a devil.”

The woman listened attentively to what he said, shading her eyes from the firelight with her hand, and looking at him compassionately. “Poor old Brian, poor old Brian,” she said when he sank back into his chair and closed his mouth with a snap. “I am so sorry for you. I should never have the heart to marry another man when you love me so much. If I ever marry it will be you. Still, you know how it is. My heart is in my work. It is not with you.”

“If you felt it going out toward me would you stop it?” he said eagerly.

“No, a thousand times no,” she said warmly. “I believe that the noblest and best thing a man or woman can do is to marry. God intended us to do so. If a man loves a woman and she loves him, they should marry if there are no obstacles in the way. Is not that what I am always glorifying, Brian, the family, the family—the noblest of all institutions upon the earth? The one upon which the special blessing of our Creator rests. But,” in a lower voice and looking earnestly at him, “I should never be guilty of that crime of crimes, namely, marrying a man whom I do not love.”

“I know you would not,” he said uneasily.

“You would not wish me to, Brian,” she continued. “You are an honest, God-fearing man. If I could put my hand in yours now and say, ‘Here I am, but I do not love you,’ you would spurn such a gift, would you not? You would say, ‘I prefer to wait till you can give me your whole self, not the least worthy part of yourself.’” He stirred about restlessly in his chair when she paused as if expecting some answer from him. “I do not know,” he murmured at last. “If you gave me the chance, I think I would embrace it. I think, Stargarde, that if you would come out of this and live with me, you would get to like me.”

“Oh, vain and stupid fallacy,” she exclaimed despairingly; “can you not see it?”

He did not answer, and there was a long silence between them, till she began to speak again, regarding him with a lovely smile of pity and affection. “You see what a terrible responsibility has been laid upon women, Brian. Men, by their long habit of indulging themselves in every impulse and giving freer rein to passion than women do, cannot so well control themselves. The woman must stand firm. I, by reason of your great affection for me, which I accept with all gratitude and humility, feel that I have a charge over you. I wish with all my heart that you could transfer your love to some other woman. If you do not and cannot, and I ever have the happiness to regard you with the same affection that you regard me, you may be sure that I shall marry you.”

The light of hope that played over his rugged features almost made them handsome, till Stargarde went on warningly: “But that day I fear will never come. Looking upon you as a dear brother, and having lived to the age of thirty years without falling in love with any man, I fear that I shall never do so.”

“Is that true?” he gasped with the famished eagerness of a dog that snatches for a whole joint and only gets a bone. “Have you never fancied any of the men that have fancied you?”

“Never,” she said with a smile and a shake of her head.

“How many proposals have you had?”

“I forget; about twenty, I think.”

His mouth worked viciously as if he would like to devour her quondam lovers.

“What a long way we have wandered from Vivienne Delavigne,” said Stargarde. “You were saying that Captain Macartney is in love with her. Does she love him?”

“No, though it will probably end in that. He’s very much in earnest, for he vowed to me that he couldn’t marry. When a man does that you may be sure he’s just about to throw everything overboard for some woman.”

“Does he know all about her?”

“Yes; but his stepmother stands behind egging him on. She’s probably promised a generous settlement on ma’m’selle if he marries her. The disgrace was the black beast in the way; but I imagine he’ll make up his mind to hang on to the old marquis and ignore the embezzlement. A decent fellow, Macartney, as those military men go,” he added in the condescending tone in which a civilian in Halifax will allow a few virtues to the military sojourners in the city.

“I like him,” said Stargarde emphatically, “yet Vivienne Delavigne may not. I wish, Brian, that she was a little older, and you a little fickle.”

“Why do you wish that?”

“Because, what a charming wife she would make for you. I am sure she is good and gentle, and she is alone in the world.”

“And you?” he said coolly.

“Oh, I have enough here,” she said, stretching out her arms lovingly as if she could take in her embrace the whole of the large brick building. “My work is my husband.”

He was about to reply to her but was interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Brian,” said Stargarde hurriedly, “I forgot to say that I have other company to tea. I hope you won’t object, and do try not to notice her. She is one of my charges, and oftentimes a troublesome one.” Then turning toward the door she said: “Come in; come in, dear.”

CHAPTER X

ZEB AND A TEA PARTY

The door swung slowly open and a small, miserably thin child stood narrowly inspecting them through black, curly wisps of hair that hung down over her forehead and made her look like a terrier. She had on a ragged, dirty frock, and a dingy plaid shawl covered her shoulders.

"I am glad to see you, dear child," said Stargarde, going to meet her and taking her warmly by the hand. "Come into the bedroom and take off your things."

The child picked off the back of her black head a tiny boy's cap that lay there like an ugly patch, and plucking impatiently at her shawl to draw it from her shoulders, flashed Stargarde an adoring glance and followed her into an inner room.

"Will you wash your face, dear?" said Stargarde, pouring some water from a ewer to a little basin that she placed on a chair. "Here is a clean towel and some of the nicest soap. Just smell it. Somebody sent it to me from Paris."

The girl tossed back her hair from her dirty face and dabbled her hands in the water. "Who's that cove out there?" she said with an ugly scowl and jerking her head in the direction of the other room.

"A friend of mine, Dr. Camperdown. He is a nice man, Zeb. I hope you will like him."

"Them dirty swells, I hate 'em," returned the child.

Stargarde was silent. To try at the outset to reform the vocabulary of a child of the gutter was, she knew, a mistake. The girl had been brought up in an evil atmosphere, and her little perverted mind was crammed with bitter prejudices against all who were better off in regard to this world's goods than she was herself. Stargarde watched pityingly the sullen face bending over the basin.

"He wants yer," said the child suddenly, and with an acute spasm of jealousy contracting her brows. "I seed it in him. He'll take yer away from the Pav."

Stargarde blushed a little. Just for one instant she was tempted by a natural disinclination not to discuss her love affairs with such an uncongenial being as the one before her. Then she remembered her invariable maxim, "No prevarication. Perfect frankness in my dealings with my fellow-men," and said gently: "I am not willing to go, Zeb, I shall stay here."

"Not if he coaxes yer?" said the child eagerly.

"No, Zeb."

The little renegade scrubbed vigorously at her face without making reply. Then polishing her hands with a towel she approached Stargarde. "Will yer kiss me now?" she said humbly.

"Yes, darling," and the beautiful woman took the dirty child to her breast in a warm embrace.

The child's clothes were not clean. In fact months had passed over her head since her dress had made acquaintance with the wash tub. "Zeb," said Stargarde hesitatingly, "I have a little cotton frock here"—the child frowned angrily and regarded her with a glance as proud as Lucifer's. "It is just like mine," went on Stargarde. "Look, Zeb."

She took a small garment from a closet and showed the child the coquettish frills adorning the skirt and neck. "Seeing it's you," said the child graciously, "I'll take it. But we's no beggars, mind that! Mam and pap'll kill me, likely, but I don't care," and with a fine assumption of indifference she pulled off her ragged gown, kicked it contemptuously aside, and allowed Stargarde to slip over her head the new and pretty dress which tortures would not have forced her to don, if it had not been for the fortunate occurrence that it was made from a similar piece of material to that clothing the woman she so passionately admired.

"I will speak to your mother about it," said Stargarde reassuringly, as she buttoned her visitor up. "I don't think she will mind." Zeb thrust a hand into hers without speaking and walked silently out to Dr. Camperdown with her. When Stargarde introduced her to him she put out her tongue, stuck

up her shoulder at him, and half turning her back drew up a little footstool to the grate, to which she sat so close that Stargarde was in momentary fear lest she should catch fire.

"Now, what shall we have for tea?" said Stargarde cheerily. "Let every one choose what he would like. What are you for, Brian?"

"Anything you choose to give me," he said agreeably, "provided there is enough of it. I'm as hungry as a hunter this evening. Good breakfast, but patients were dogging me all lunch time, and I haven't broken my fast yet."

"Well, we'll give you something substantial," replied his hostess. "What will you have, Zeb?"

"Something in the line o' birds," said the child, a hard and hungry look coming into her eyes. "I sees 'em hangin' up in the shops, I smells 'em and sees the dogs lickin' the bones, but never a taste gets I. Say turkey, missis, or goose."

"They have some turkeys over at the restaurant, I saw them to-day," said Stargarde clapping her hands like a child. "We'll have one, and stuffing, Zeb, and hot potato. Come, let us go and get it."

The child sprang up, and clasping her hand Stargarde hurried out of the room and across the yard to the gay little eating house, going with the utmost speed so that they might not take cold. Breathless and laughing they pulled up outside the door, and opening it, walked soberly in. The child squeezed her patron's hand with delight. The large, bright room before her, with its light walls adorned with pictures and its floor covered with little tables where people were eating and drinking, was like a glimpse of heaven to her. Stargarde went up to the counter.

"Good-evening, Mary," she said to a pretty young girl there; "can you let me have a basket to put some purchases in? Ah, that is just what I want," as the girl, diving behind the counter brought up one of the light flexible things made by the Indians of Nova Scotia. "Now first of all we want a turkey, a small one—no, a large one," in response to a warning pressure from Zeb's fingers. "See, there is one coming from the kitchen on a platter. Isn't he a monster! Put him in a covered dish, Mary, and pop him into the basket with a dish of potatoes and—what vegetables have you?"

"Turnips, beets, parsnips, carrots, squash—"

"Well, give us some of each, but we'll have to get the boy to help us carry them. We never can take all these things. And cranberry sauce, don't forget that. Pickles, Zeb? Do you want some of them? Very good, we'll have a bottle. Have you made your mince pies yet? No. Well, we'll have a lemon one and a strawberry tart and some fruit. Will you have grapes or oranges, Zeb?"

"Dates, and figs, and nuts," gurgled the child in almost speechless delight.

Stargarde stifled a laugh. "So be it Mary, and cheese and crackers for Dr. Camperdown. Now Zeb let us take this basket and run home and Mary will send the rest."

Camperdown looked up in amazement as the two burst into the room. "What's the excitement?" he said, getting up and standing with his back to the fire. "Here, let me put your basket on the table. What's all this?"

"Dear Brian," said Stargarde breathlessly, "you must not talk. Only help us. Set all these dishes on the hearth to keep hot. I should have set my table before we went to the restaurant. Alas, I am a poor housekeeper. Zeb dear, here is the cloth; spread it on the table; and Brian do help her to put the knives and forks and plates around. I will make the tea or coffee—which would you rather have?"

"Coffee for me, if it's dinner," said Camperdown. "I smell meat, don't I? What do you call this meal, anyway?"

"I call it anything," said Stargarde, "only it must be eaten hot. Cold things are detestable."

"Tea for me," piped up Zeb shrilly; "I hates coffee."

Stargarde uncomplainingly searched in her cupboard for two vessels instead of one—brought out a small earthenware teapot and a tin coffeepot, and set them on a trivet which she fastened to the grate. Then finding a small kettle, she filled it with water and put it on the glowing coals.

"I call this pleasant!" exclaimed Dr. Camperdown a few minutes later. The dishes were all nicely arranged on a cloth as white as snow. He had a spotlessly clean but coarse *serviette* spread

across his knees, and was flashing glances of admiration across the mammoth turkey before him at Stargarde, seated at the other end of the board. "I call this pleasant!" he repeated, picking up his knife and fork, "and a woman who serves a dinner smoking hot deserves a medal. My old dame thinks it a crime to put things before me more than lukewarm. I hear her coming up stairs with my dinner. Tramp, tramp—down on a step to rest. Tramp, hobble, up again—down on another, just to aggravate me—bah, I'll dismiss her to-morrow!"

Stargarde looked at him without a shadow on her resplendent face. "You are like the dogs, Brian," she said gayly; "your bark is worse than your bite. You love that old woman, you know you do."

"I don't love any one," he growled. "You're not eating anything there. Stop fanning yourself and attend to your plate—have some more turkey. This is a beauty. Where did he come from? The country, I'll wager. This isn't city flesh on his bones."

"Cornwallis," said Stargarde thoughtfully. "Unfortunate creature—I wish we did not have to eat him."

"Now Stargarde," said the man warmly, "for one meal, no hobbies. Let the S. P. C. and the G. H. A. and the L. M. S. alone for once. Talk nonsense to me and this young lady here," turning politely to his fellow-guest.

His term was inadvisedly chosen, and Zeb flashed him a wicked glance over the bone that her little, sharp teeth were gnawing. Stargarde to her dismay saw that there was a smouldering fire of distrust and dislike between her two guests, that at any moment might break into open flame. Zeb was jealous of Dr. Camperdown. With ready, quick suspicion, she divined the fact that his sympathies were not with her kind. He would take away from her and her fellow-paupers the beautiful woman who at present lived only for them, and she hated him accordingly.

She had only recently come to Halifax. She had experienced different and worse degrees of misery in other cities, and now that a new, bright world was dawning upon her, it was not pleasant to know that her benefactor might be snatched at any moment from her. So she hated him, and he almost hated her as a representative of a class that absorbed the attention of the only woman in the world that he cared for, and who, but for them, would, he knew, devote herself to the endeavor of making more human and more happy his present aching, lonely, miserable heart.

Aware of all this, Stargarde kept the conversation flowing smoothly in channels apart from personal concerns. She talked continuously herself, and laughed like a girl full of glee when the moment for changing the plates having arrived, Dr. Camperdown and Zeb politely rising to assist her, left the table deserted.

When they reseated themselves she drew Zeb's chair closer to her own, for she saw that the child had satisfied her hunger and at any moment might commence hostilities.

"Will you have some tart, Zeb?" she asked kindly.

"Oh, land, no!" said the child; "I'm stuffed. Give it to piggy there. He's good for an hour yet," and she pointed a disdainful finger to the other end of the table.

Dr. Camperdown had a large appetite—an appetite that was, in fact, immense, but he did not like to be reminded of it, and looked with considerable animosity at the small child.

"Do not pay any attention to her, Brian," said Stargarde rapidly in German, then she turned to Zeb. "Dr. Camperdown had no dinner. He is hungry. Won't you go and look at those picture books till we finish?"

"I don't want ter," said the child, as she nestled closer to her, "I likes to be with yer."

What could Stargarde do in the face of such devotion? She left Dr. Camperdown to his own devices, and cracking nuts for the child searched diligently for a philopena. Having found one she shared it with her, related the pretty German custom concerning it, and promised Zeb a present if she would first surprise her the next day.

Zeb listened in fascinated attention, only throwing Dr. Camperdown a glance occasionally, as much as to say, "You see, she is giving me her undivided attention now."

And he was foolish enough to be restive. "If he would only be sensible—two children together," murmured Stargarde, as she got up to pour him out his coffee. As a student of human nature, she was amused at the attitude of the professional man toward the outcast; as a philanthropist, she was fearful lest there should be driven away from her the little bit of vicious childhood that she had charmed to her side.

"If he would only be sensible and think of something else!" she went on to herself. "They'll come to an open rupture soon. I must try to restrain Zeb, for she, alas, is capable of anything. I won't look at him as I give him his coffee."

Unfortunately she was obliged to do so, for as she set it before him, he said childishly, "Do you put the sugar in," thereby obliging her to give him a remonstrating glance.

Zeb saw the blue eyes meet the admiring gray ones and immediately issued an order in her shrill voice, "Gimme a cupper tea."

Stargarde could not scold people. She was a born mother—loving and patient and humoring weaknesses perhaps to a greater degree than was always wise. She patiently waited upon her second troublesome guest, and sat down beside her without saying a word, but in an unlucky instant when she was obliged to go to the cupboard for an additional supply of cream, the war broke out—the deluge arrived.

Zeb, filling her mouth with tea, adroitly squirted a thin stream of it the whole length of the table across Camperdown's shoulder.

He saw it coming, and uttering a wrathful exclamation, jumped up from his seat. Stargarde heard him, and turned around hastily just in time to hear Zeb say contemptuously, "Oh, shut up—you'll get it in the mouth next time."

When Camperdown at Stargarde's request explained what had happened, her lovely face became troubled and she looked as if she were going to cry.

"Zeb," she said with trembling lips, "you must go away. I cannot have you here any longer if you do such things."

The child sprang to her. "Don't ye, don't ye do that. I'll slick up. Gimme a lickin', only let me stay. I'll not look at him—the devil!" with a furious glance at Camperdown. "I'll turn round face to the wall, only, only don't send me out in the cold."

What could Stargarde do? Pardon, pardon, always pardon, that was the secret of her marvelous hold on the members of her enormous family. She drew up the little footstool to a corner, placed the child on it, and shaking her head at Dr. Camperdown, sat down opposite him. "Take people for what they are—not for what they ought to be," she said to him in German.

"You are a good woman, Stargarde," he returned softly in the same language. "I can give you no higher praise. And I have had a good dinner," he continued, drawing back from the table. "What are you going to do with those dishes? Mayn't I help you wash them?"

"No, thank you. Zeb will assist me when you have gone."

He smiled at her hint to withdraw, and placing the rocking-chair by the fire for her, said wistfully: "Do you really wish me to go?"

"Well, you may stay for half an hour longer," she replied, as indulgent with him as she was with the child.

As soon as the words left her lips, he ensconced himself comfortably in the arm-chair, and gazing into the fire listened dreamily to the low-murmured sentences Stargarde was addressing to the child, who had crept into her arms begging to be rocked.

"I wish I could smoke," he said presently; "I think you don't object to the smell of tobacco, Stargarde?"

"No," she said quietly, "not the smell of it."

"But the waste, the hurtfulness of the habit, eh?"

"Yes."

“I’ll take the responsibility of that, if you let me have one pipe, Stargarde, only one.”

“One then let it be,” she replied.

With eyes fixed on her, he felt for his tobacco pouch and pipe, which he blindly filled, only looking at it when the time for lighting came. Then in a state of utter beatification he leaned back, smoking quietly and listening to her clear voice, as she swung slowly to and fro, talking to the child.

After a time Zeb fell asleep and Stargarde’s voice died away.

Camperdown rose slowly to his feet. He knew that it was time for him to be gone and that it was better for him to call attention to it himself than to wait for an ignominious dismissal as soon as Stargarde should come out of the reverie into which she had fallen.

“Good-bye,” he said in startling fashion. “Take notice that I’m going of my own accord for once, and don’t put me out any more. I’m trying to deserve my good fortune, you see.”

“Good-night, Brian,” she said gently.

He seized his cap and coat, flashed her a look of inexpressible affection from his deep-set eyes, and was gone.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. MACARTNEY GETS A FRIGHT

Vivienne and Judy were in their sitting room reading by the light of a lamp on the table between them when the younger girl suddenly pricked up her ears.

"There's a puffing, panting sound on the staircase," she said, "as if a steam-tug were approaching. It must be your Irish friend. I'll decamp, for I don't want to see her." She picked up her crutch and was about to flee to her bedroom when she was arrested by a succession of squeals.

"Holy powers save us," moaned Mrs. Macartney bursting into the room. "There's something odd about this house when the devil lives in the top story of it."

"Thank you," said Judy smartly; "perhaps you don't know that these are my apartments."

Mrs. Macartney did not hear her. Holding Vivienne's hands, and half laughing, half crying, she was rocking herself to and fro.

"He had on a nightcap and a woman's gown, and he goggled at me from an open door; and, me dear, his face was like a coal—"

"It's Mammy Juniper that you've seen, dear Mrs. Macartney," exclaimed Vivienne.

"And who is Mammy Juniper?" inquired her visitor, stopping short to stare at her.

"She's an old family servant; sit down here and I'll tell you about her."

"Ah me; ah me," wailed the Irish lady dropping on a sofa; "we don't have people of her color in my peaceful home. Sure, I thought me last hour had come."

"She is very black," said Vivienne gravely; "and she despises the other colored people here. Mammy is a Maroon. Have you ever heard of that race?"

"Never, me dear; I didn't want to."

"They were a fierce and lawless people living in Jamaica," said Vivienne; "and they fought the English and would not submit till they heard that they were to be hunted with dogs. Then they gave in and were transported here. They disliked Nova Scotia because they said there were no yams nor cocoanuts and bananas growing here, and no wild hogs to hunt; and the men couldn't have as many wives as they chose, nor have cock-fighting; so the government sent them all to Africa; all but the parents of Mammy Juniper, and when they died she became a servant in this family."

"A fearsome body for a servant," said her hearer; "aren't you terrified of her, me dear?"

"No," said Vivienne; "she is more afraid of me than I am of her. I am sorry for her."

"Don't talk about her, me child," said Mrs. Macartney with a shudder. "Talk about yourself. Aren't you shamming ill with that rosy face?"

"I'm not ill," said Vivienne lightly. "This is only a feverish cold; but Dr. Camperdown won't let me go downstairs."

"I was determined to see you," said Mrs. Macartney, pulling Vivienne beside her to the sofa. "I thickened the air with hints that I'd like to come up, but Mrs. Colonibel tried to frighten me with tales of the badness of your cold."

"She doesn't like me to have callers up here, for some reason," said Vivienne.

"She likes to be contrary, me dear. 'Tis the breath of life to her, and maybe she's jealous of your handsome room"—looking admiringly about her—"which is the most elegant of the house. Your whites and golds don't slap me in the face like the colors downstairs. That's the lady of the mansion's good pleasure, I suppose. Ah, but she is a fine woman!"

The inimitable toss of her head as she pronounced this praise of Mrs. Colonibel and the waggish roll of her eyes to the ceiling made Vivienne press her handkerchief to her lips to keep from laughter that she feared might reach Judy's ears.

"I wish you could have seen her ladyship yesterday when she came to invite us to this dinner, me dear," said Mrs. Macartney with a twisting of her mouth. "The boy at the hotel brought up her card—Mrs. Colonibel. 'That's the Lady Proudface,' said I, and I went to the drawing room; and there she stood, and rushed at me like this—" and Mrs. Macartney rising from the sofa charged heavily across the room at an unoffending table which staggered on its legs at her onset.

Vivienne half started from her seat then fell back again laughing spasmodically. "Me dear," said Mrs. Macartney looking over her shoulder at her, "she thought to make up by the warmth of her second greeting for the coldness of her first. She said she wanted us all to come and dine *en famille*, to celebrate the engagement, so I thought I'd tease her and talk French too; so I said, 'Wouldn't we be *de trop*? and you mustn't suppose we belonged to the *élite* of the world, for we were plain people and didn't care a rap for the opinion of the *beau monde*.' You should have seen her face! And then I took pity on her and said we'd come. And come we did; and I'd give a kingdom if you could see Patrick and Geoffrey. They're sitting beside Mrs. Colonibel, bowing and smirking at everything she says, and she's thinking she's mighty entertaining, and when we get home they'll both growl and say they were bored to death, and why didn't I tell them you weren't to be present. Me dear, I didn't dare to," in a stage whisper, and looking over her shoulder. "They'd never have come."

"Is Mrs. Colonibel not at all embarrassed with you?" said Vivienne. "She was not polite to you the other day, though of course it was on my account, not on yours."

"Embarrassed, did you say, me dear?" replied Mrs. Macartney gayly. "Faith, there's no such word in society. You must keep a bold front, whatever you do, or you'll get the gossips after you. Dip your tongue in honey or gall, whichever you like, and hold your head high, and there's no such thing as quailing before the face of mortal man or woman. Drop your head on your breast and go through the world, and you'll have the fingers pointed at you. Me Lady Proudface is the woman to get on. If you'd seen the way she took the news of your engagement you'd have fallen at her feet in admiration."

"She suppressed her disapproval," said Vivienne.

"Disapproval, me child. 'Twas like salt to her eyeballs; but she never winked. Hasn't she said anything to you about it?"

"No; we rarely have any conversations."

"Ah, she'd have but a limited supply of compliments left after her flowery words to me. By the way, did you get the grand bouquet that Geoffrey sent to you?"

"Yes; it is over there by the window."

"He's desolated not to see you, as the French people say; but hist, me dear, there's some one at the door. Maybe it's her ladyship. I'll go into this adjacent room."

"No, no; stay here," exclaimed Vivienne with an apprehensive glance at the narrow doorway leading to her sleeping apartment. "It does not matter who comes."

"It's only I," said a meek voice, and Dr. Camperdown's sandy head appeared, shortly followed by the rest of his body.

Mrs. Macartney, not heeding Vivienne's advice, had tried to enter the next room, and had become firmly wedged in the doorway. Dr. Camperdown was obliged to go to her assistance, and when he succeeded in releasing her she looked at him with such a variety of amusing expressions chasing themselves over her face that he grinned broadly and turned away.

"Who is this gentleman?" said Mrs. Macartney at last breathlessly, with gratitude, and yet with a certain repugnance to the physician on account of his ugly looks.

Vivienne performed the necessary introduction, and Mrs. Macartney ejaculated, "Ah, your doctor. Perhaps," jocularly, "I may offer myself to him as a patient." Then as Dr. Camperdown took Vivienne's wrist in his hand she bent over him with an interested air and said, "It's me flesh, doctor. I don't know what to do about it. The heavens seem to rain it down upon me—flake upon flake, layer upon layer. I've been rubbed and tubbed, and grilled and stewed, and done Banting, and taken Anti-fats, and yet it goes on increasing. Every morning there's more of it, and every evening it grows

upon me. I have to swing and tumble and surge about me bed to get impetus enough to roll out; it's awful, doctor!"

Vivienne listened to her in some surprise, for up to this she had not imagined that Mrs. Macartney felt the slightest uneasiness in regard to her encumbrance of flesh. But there was real anxiety in her tones now, and Vivienne listened with interest for the doctor's reply.

"What do you eat?" he said abruptly, and with a swift glance at her smooth, fair expanse of cheek and chin.

"Three fairish meals a day," she said, "and a supper at night."

"How much do you walk?"

"Sure, I never walk at all if I can get a carriage."

He laughed shortly, and said nothing.

"What do you think about it, doctor—is it a dangerous case?" said Mrs. Macartney, twisting her head so that she could look at his face as he bent over his work. Vivienne saw that she was immensely impressed by his oracular manner of delivering himself.

"Do you want me to prescribe for you?" he asked, straightening himself with a suddenness that made his prospective patient start nervously.

"Ah, yes, doctor, please," she said.

"Begin then by dropping the supper, avoid fats, sweets, anything starchy. Walk till you are ready to drop; heart's all right is it?"

"Ah, yes," pathetically, and with a flicker of her customary waggishness, "my heart's always been my strong point, doctor."

"Report to me at my office," he went on; "come in a week."

She shuffled to her feet, her face considerably brighter. "You've laid me under an obligation, doctor. If you'll make me a shadow smaller, I'll pray for the peace of your soul. And now I must go, me dear," she said, looking at Vivienne, "or I'll be missed from the drawing room. I crept away you know."

Vivienne smiled. Mrs. Colonibel had probably watched her climbing the staircase.

"I must go too," said Dr. Camperdown, rising as Mrs. Macartney left the room. "You'll be all right in a day or two, Miss Delavigne. Mind, we're to be friends."

Vivienne looked up gratefully into his sharp gray eyes. "You are very good to come and see me."

"Armour asked me to," he said shortly.

"Judy told him that I was ill," said Vivienne. "I scolded her a little, because I did not think I really needed a doctor."

"You are a proud little thing," he remarked abruptly.

Vivienne's black eyes sought his face in some surprise.

"You can't get on in this world without help," he continued. "Be kind to other people and let others be kind to you. How do you and Mrs. Colonibel agree?"

"Passably."

"Don't give in to her too much," he said. "A snub does some people more good than a sermon. Good-night," and he disappeared abruptly.

CHAPTER XII

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Vivienne and Judy were having afternoon tea in their room, when the lame girl, who was amusing herself by twirling round and round on the piano stool while she ate her bread and butter, burst into a cackling laugh. "Oh, Vivienne, mamma said such a hateful thing about you—so hateful that I must tell you."

Vivienne laid her head on her chair back and calmly looked at her.

"She said," went on Judy with a chuckle, "she said, 'Throw a handkerchief over her head and you will see the peasant.'"

Vivienne's eyes glittered as they went back to the fire, and Judy continued, "It was such a detestable thing to say, because she knows that you are more like a princess than a peasant. Fancy comparing you to one of the Frenchwomen that one sees down in the market."

Vivienne made no reply to her, and Judy went on talking and grumbling to herself until she heard footsteps in the hall outside.

"Who is that coming up here?" she said, peering through the half-open door. "As I am a miserable gossip, it's Stargarde at last, the mysterious Stargarde, about whom your serene highness is so curious."

Vivienne rose and gazed straight before her in polite fascination. Mr. Armour stood in the doorway, and behind him was a magnificently developed woman who might be any age between twenty-five and thirty. She held her cap in her hand, and the little curls in her masses of golden hair shone round about her head like an aureole. A mantle muffled the upper part of her figure, but Vivienne caught a glimpse of a neck like marble and exquisitely molded hands.

The girl as she stood criticising her visitor did not know that there was anything wistful in her attitude, she had not the remotest idea of bidding for sympathy; therefore it was with the utmost surprise that she saw Stargarde's arms outstretched, and the mantle spreading out like a cloud and descending upon her.

"Poor little girl—shut up in the house this lovely weather," and other compassionate sentences she heard as she went into the cloud and was enveloped by it.

When she emerged, shaking her head and putting up her hands to her coils of black hair to feel that they were not disarranged, Stargarde was smiling at her.

"Did I startle you? Forgive me, I was too demonstrative; but do you know, I fell in love with you before I saw you?"

"Did you?" responded Vivienne, then turning to Mr. Armour, who was loitering about the door as if uncertain whether to come in or not, she invited him to sit down.

"Is your cold any better?" he asked stiffly as he came in.

"Yes, thank you," she replied. "Dr. Camperdown is driving it away."

"Stanton," exclaimed Vivienne's beautiful visitor, flashing a smile at him, "why don't you introduce me?"

"I thought it scarcely necessary," he said, his glance brightening as he turned from Vivienne to her, "after the warmth of your greeting. Yet, if you wish it—this, Miss Delavigne, is our friend Miss Stargarde Turner—"

"Of Rockland Street," she added gravely.

Vivienne tried to hide her astonishment. This woman looked like an aristocrat. Could it be that she lived in one of the worst streets of the city?

Stargarde smiled as if reading her thoughts. "It isn't so bad as you think," she said consolingly. "Wait till you see it." Then she turned to reply to a sharply interjected question by Judy.

While her attention was distracted from her, Vivienne's glance wandered in quiet appreciation over the classic profile and statuesque figure of her guest as she sat slightly bent forward with hands clasped over her knees, her loose draperies encircling her and making her look like one of the Greek statues, rows and rows of which the girl had seen in foreign art galleries.

Who was she? What was she? And how did it happen that she had the extraordinary strength of mind to dress and comport herself so differently from the ordinary woman of the world? There was about her also a radiance that she had never before seen in the face of any human being. She did not understand then as she did later on that it was the spirit of love that glorified Stargarde Turner's face. Her great heart beat only for others. She was so permeated and suffused with a sweet charity toward all men that it shone constantly out of every line of her beautiful countenance.

Vivienne's eyes went from Stargarde to Mr. Armour. He had a wonderful amount of self-control, yet he could not hide the fact that he admired this charming woman, that he listened intently to every word that fell from her lips.

"I am glad that there is some one he is interested in," thought Vivienne. "Usually he seems like a man of stone, not of flesh and blood."

It occurred to her that he had brought Miss Turner up to her room that he might have a chance to listen, without interruption, to the clear, sweet tones of her voice. She imagined that he was in love with her and that his family threw obstacles in the way of their meeting. In this she made a mistake as she soon found out. Stanton Armour was at liberty to pay Miss Turner all the attention he chose, and the whole family welcomed her as an honored guest.

"You and I are going to be friends," said Stargarde turning to her suddenly. "I feel it."

"I hope so," murmured Vivienne.

"Will you have some tea, Israelitess without guile?" asked Judy abruptly flinging an arm over Stargarde's shoulder.

"Yes, dear," and Stargarde turned her face toward her. "Why don't you come to see me?"

"Oh, you worry me with your goodness and perfections," was the impatient retort. "You're too faultless for ordinary purposes. I get on better with that young lady there, who is good but human."

"Have you found some faults in Miss Delavigne already?" asked Stargarde gleefully.

"Yes, plenty of them," said Judy reaching down to the hearth for the teapot.

"What are they?" asked Mr. Armour soberly.

"I haven't time to tell you all now," said Judy. "Come up some day when I'm alone and I'll go over them. You needn't smile, Vivienne, I will. What have you been doing with yourself lately, Stargarde? We haven't seen you for an age."

"I've been in the country finding homes for some of my children."

"This young person hasn't the good fortune to be married," said Judy to Vivienne; "and by children she means orphans and starvelings that she amuses herself by picking out of gutters."

"I hope that you will be interested in my work," said Stargarde enthusiastically to Vivienne.

"No, she won't," said Judy. "That sort of thing isn't in her line."

"Judy," said Mr. Armour, "it seems to me that you are monopolizing the conversation. Suppose you come over to this window seat and talk to me for a while?"

She followed him obediently, and after they were seated burst out with a brisk, "Thank heaven for family privileges! You wouldn't have dared say that to a stranger."

"No," he said, "I don't suppose I would."

"You're pretty plain-spoken though with everybody," said Judy critically; "that is, when you want your own way. When you don't you let people alone. Why are you in such a good temper to-day? Have you been making some money?"

"A little."

"That's all you care for, isn't it?" pursued the girl.

"What do you mean?" he asked, a slight cloud on his face.

“Money is your god,” she said coolly.

He made no reply to her and she went on, “What a pity that you have never married like other men. You’re almost forty, aren’t you?”

“Almost.”

“Just Brian Camperdown’s age; only there is this difference between you, he would get married if he could, and you could if you would. I know some one that would have made a nice, proud wife for you.”

“Judy,” he exclaimed, holding himself a little straighter than he usually did, “what are you talking about?”

“Something that you might have done if you had been as sensible as some people.”

“You are impertinent,” he said angrily.

“This is a long room, and we are some distance from the fireplace,” said Judy in velvet tones, “yet if you raise your voice our two darlings yonder will hear what you are saying.”

Mr. Armour gave her an annoyed glance.

“It isn’t worth your while to quarrel with me,” said Judy smoothly, “the only person in the house that can get on with you. And what have I done? Merely hinted that a charming girl of twenty-one would have done a pretty thing to sacrifice herself to an old bachelor of forty. You ought to feel flattered.”

“I don’t,” he returned sullenly.

“No; because you are a—a—because you are foolish. You ought to feel willing to pay six thousand dollars a year to some one who would make you laugh.”

“What has that to do with Miss Delavigne?” he said.

“Why she amuses you—can’t you see it?—you, a regular grum-growdy of a man, with care sitting forever on your brow.”

“Judy,” he said, “your chatter wearies me.”

“I daresay,” she replied; “it shows you ought to have more of it. You’ll probably go mad some day from business worries.”

Mr. Armour picked up a book that he found on the window seat and began to read it, while Judy turned her back on him and stared out at the peaceful waters of the Arm.

Stargarde was looking earnestly into Vivienne’s face. “You dear child! if I had known you were ill I would have come to you sooner.”

“I have not suffered extremely,” said Vivienne gratefully, yet with dignity.

Stargarde shook her head gently. “Do you care to tell me how you get on with Mrs. Colonibel?”

“We rarely come in contact,” said Vivienne; “we have nothing in common.”

“You do not like her,” said Stargarde sadly; “I know you do not; yet have patience with her, my child. There is a woman who has lived half her life and has not learned its lesson yet. She cannot bear to be contra—opposed; she will have her own way.”

Some hidden emotion caused Stargarde’s face to contract painfully, and Vivienne seeing it said generously, “Let us make some excuse for her. She has reigned here for some years, has she not?”

“Yes; ever since her husband died.”

“And she is jealous of all interference?”

“Yes; and she looks upon you as a usurper. Be as patient as you can with her, dear child, for she thinks that Stanton’s object in bringing you here is to make you mistress over her head.”

“Do you mean that I should become the housekeeper here?”

“Yes; I do.”

Vivienne started. “Oh, I am only here for a short time; I could not think of remaining.” Stargarde looked at her affectionately and with some curiosity, and seeing this the girl went on hastily, “Mrs. Colonibel’s husband is dead, is he not?”

“Yes; he was much older than she was.”

“And her stay here depends upon her cousin, Mr. Armour?”

“Yes; he gives her a handsome salary.”

“It is rather surprising then that she does not try to please him in every respect.”

Stargarde’s eyes lighted up with brilliant indignation. “You bring me to one of my hobbies,” she exclaimed. “I think that if there is one class of people on whom the wrath of God rests more heavily than on others, it is on the good Christian people who, wrapped around in their own virtues, bring up their children in an atmosphere of pagan idolatry. In not one single particle is the child taught to control itself. The very moon and stars would be plucked from the sky if the parent had the power to gratify the child in that way. Nothing, nothing is denied it. And what happens? The parent dies, the child with its shameless disregard of the rights of others is let loose in the world. With what disastrous results we see in the case of Flora Colonibel. Oh, pity her, pity her, my child,” and Stargarde gazed imploringly at Vivienne, her blue eyes dimmed with tears.

Vivienne witnessed Stargarde’s emotion with a kind of awe, and by a gentle glance essayed to comfort her. The woman smiled through her tears, held up her golden head bravely, like a child that has accomplished its season of mourning and is willing to be cheerful, and said steadily: “I rarely discuss Flora—it is too painful a subject—but you are gentle and good; I wish to enlist your sympathies in her favor. You understand?”

“I will try to like her,” said Vivienne with great simplicity, “for your sake.”

“Dear child,” murmured Stargarde, “to do something for others is the way to forget one’s own trouble.”

Vivienne assented to this remark by a smile, and Stargarde fixing her eyes on the fire fell into a brown study. After a time she turned her head with one of her swift, graceful movements, and reading Vivienne’s thoughts with a readiness that rather disconcerted her, said: “You wish to know something about me, don’t you?”

“Yes,” said the girl frankly.

“Good, as Dr. Camperdown says,” replied Stargarde. “I will tell you all that I can. First, I spent the first twelve years of my life as the eldest daughter of a poor parson and his wife. What do you think of that?”

“It is easy to imagine that your descent might be clerical,” said Vivienne innocently.

Stargarde laughed at this with such suppressed amusement that Vivienne knew she must have some *arrière pensée*. “They were not my real parents,” said her new friend at last.

“Indeed,” said Vivienne, measuring her with a glance so pitying that Stargarde hastened to say, “What does it matter? They loved me better I think for being a waif. The Lord knows all about it, so it is all right. You want to know who my parents are, don’t you?”

“Yes; but do not tell me unless you care to do so.”

“I can’t tell you, child,” said Stargarde, gently pinching her cheek. “I will not say that I do not know; I will simply say that I prefer not to tell anything I may know. Would it make any difference to you if I were to tell you that my father had been—well, say a public executioner?”

“I do not know; I cannot tell,” said Vivienne in bewilderment. “I could never imagine that you would spring from such a source as that.”

“Suppose I did; you would not punish the child for the father’s dreadful calling, would you?”

“Most persons would.”

“Yes, they would,” said Stargarde. “We punish the children for the sins of the fathers, and we are always pointing our fingers at our neighbors and saying, ‘I am better than thou,’ as regards lineage. And yet, in the beginning we were all alike.

‘When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?’”

“That was years ago,” said Vivienne in amusement; “blood trickling through the veins of generations has become blue.”

“My dear, we go up and down. The aristocrats of to-day are the paupers of to-morrow, except in rare instances. I do not think any the more of you for a possible existence in your veins of a diluted drop of the blood royal of France. I can understand your sentiment in regard to it, if you say, ‘I must never commit a mean action because I come of a line of distinguished ancestry’; though I think a better sentiment is, ‘Here I stand as noble in the sight of God as any creature of earth; I owe it to him and to myself to keep my record clean.’”

An alarming suspicion crept into Vivienne’s mind. “Are you an anarchist?” she asked anxiously.

“Oh, no, no,” laughed Stargarde; “a socialist if you will, in the broad sense of the term, a Christian socialist; but an anarchist never.”

“Are you a loyal subject to the Queen?”

Stargarde bent her beautiful head. “I am, God bless her! Not loyalty alone do I give her, but tender love and reverence. May all her descendants rule as wisely as she has done.”

Stargarde when she spoke used as many gestures as Vivienne herself. Then she was brimful of personal magnetism, catching her hearers by the electric brilliance of her bright blue eyes and holding them by the pure and silvery tones of her voice. Vivienne felt her blood stir in her veins as she listened to her. She was loth to have her visitor go, and as she saw her glance at the clock she said hurriedly, “We have wandered from the subject of your up-bringing.”

“Come and see me in my rooms,” said Stargarde rising, “and I will tell you all about myself and how I went to live with the Camperdowns when I was twelve. They are all gone now but Brian,” and she sighed. “How I miss them! Family life is such an exquisite thing. You, poor child, know little of it as yet. Some day you will marry and have a home of your own. You have a lover now, little girl, haven’t you?” and she tilted back Vivienne’s head and looked searchingly into her eyes.

“Yes,” said Vivienne gently.

Stargarde smiled. “Before he takes you away I wish you would come and stay with me for a long time. Now I must fly, I have an appointment at six.”

“Good-bye, Miss Turner,” murmured Vivienne, as her caller took her by the hand.

“Good-bye, Stargarde,” corrected her friend.

“Stargarde—it is a beautiful name,” said the girl.

“It is a great worry to people; they ask me why I was so named, and I never can tell them. I only know that it is German, and is occasionally used in Russia.”

“Are you going? are you going?” called Judy, limping briskly from the other end of the room. “Wait a minute. I want to show you some clothes that I will give you for your poor children.”

“I haven’t time, I fear.”

“I will send you home in a sleigh,” said Mr. Armour, strolling toward them.

“Oh, in that case I can give you a few minutes,” said Stargarde.

“This is what we might call a case of love at first sight, isn’t it?” said Judy, fluttering like a kindly disposed blackbird between Vivienne and Stargarde.

Stargarde laughed merrily as she went into the bedroom.

Vivienne was left behind with Mr. Armour. Ever since her interview in the library with him he had regarded her with some friendliness and with decided curiosity. Now he asked with interest,

“Did you ever see any one like Miss Turner?”

“No,” said Vivienne warmly, “never; she is so devoted, so enthusiastic; her *protégés* must love her.”

“They do,” he said dryly.

“It is not my way to plunge into sudden intimacies,” said Vivienne with a little proud movement of her neck; “yet with Miss Turner I fancy all rules are set aside.”

“She is certainly unconventional,” said Mr. Armour.

“I wish I were like that,” said Vivienne. “I wish that I had it in me to live for others.”

“You have a different mission in life,” he said. “You are cut out for a leader in society rather than a religious or philanthropic enthusiast. By the way, Macartney wants your marriage to take place as soon as possible. Of course you concur in his opinion.”

“Yes,” said Vivienne absently, “I will agree to anything that he arranges. As I told you the other day,” she went on with some embarrassment, “I think it is advisable for me to leave here as soon as possible. However, I spoke too abruptly to you. I have been wishing for an opportunity to tell you so.”

“Have you?” he said, twisting the corners of his moustache and trying not to smile at the lofty manner in which she delivered her apology. “It really did not matter.”

“No, I dare say not,” she replied with a quick glance at him; “but I was not polite.”

“I mean it did not matter about me,” he said. “A business man must get used to knocks of various kinds.”

How conceited he was, how proud of his business ability! Vivienne shrugged her shoulders and said nothing.

“About this engagement of yours,” he went on; “if you please we will allow its length to remain undetermined for a time. I may as well confess that I brought you here for a purpose. What that purpose is I do not care to tell, and I beg that you will not speculate about it. Do you think that you can make up your mind to remain under my roof for a few weeks longer?”

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.