# YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

## BEECHCROFT AT ROCKSTONE

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# Содержание

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## CHAPTER I. – A DISPERSION

'A telegram! Make haste and open it, Jane; they always make me so nervous! I believe that is the reason Reginald always *will* telegraph when he is coming,' said Miss Adeline Mohun, a very pretty, well preserved, though delicate-looking lady of some age about forty, as her elder sister, brisk and lively and some years older, came into the room.

'No, it is not Reggie. It is from Lily. Poor Lily! Jasper—accident—Come.'

'Poor dear Lily! Is it young Jasper or old Jasper, I wonder?'

'If it were young Jasper she would have put Japs. I am afraid it is her husband. If so, she will be going off to him. I must catch the 11.20 train. Will you come, Ada?'

'Oh no; I should be knocked up, and on your hands. The suspense is bad enough at home.'

'If it is old Jasper, we shall see in the paper to-day. I will send it down to you from the station. Supposing it is Sir Jasper, and she wants to go out to him, we must take in some of the children.'

'Oh! Dear little Primrose would be nice enough, but what should we do with that Halfpenny woman? If we had the other

girls, I suppose they would be at school all day; but surely some might go to Beechcroft. And mind, Jane, I will not have you overtasking yourself! Do not take any of them without having Gillian to help you. That I stipulate.'

Jane Mohun seemed as if she did not hear as these sentences were uttered at intervals, while she stood dashing off postcards at her davenport. Then she said, on her way to the door—

'Don't expect me to-night. I will send Fanny to ask one of the Wellands to come in to you, and telegraph if I bring any one home with me.'

'But, Jane dear—'

However, the door was shut, and by the time Miss Adeline had reached her sister's room, the ever-ready bag was nearly packed.

'I only wanted to say, dear Jane, that you must give my love to dear Lily. I am grieved—grieved for her; but indeed you must not undertake anything rash.' (A shake of the head, as the shoes went into their neat bag.) 'Do not let her persuade you to stay at Silverfold in her absence. You cannot give up everything here.'

'Yes, yes, Ada, I know it does not suit you. Never fear.'

'It is not that, but you are much too useful here to drop everything, especially now every one is away. I would willingly sacrifice myself, but—'

'Yes, I know, Ada dear. Now, good-bye, and take care of yourself, and don't be nervous. It may mean only that young Japs has twisted his little finger.'

And with a kiss, Miss Mohun ran downstairs as fast and lightly

as if her years had been half their amount, and accomplished her orders to Fanny—otherwise Mrs. Mount—a Beechcroft native, who, on being left a widow, had returned to her former mistresses, bringing with her a daughter, who had grown up into an efficient housemaid. After a few words with her, Miss Mohun sped on, finding time at the station to purchase a morning paper just come down, and to read among the telegrams—

'COLOMBO, Sept. 3rd.

'Lieutenant-General Sir Jasper Merrifield, G.C.B., has been thrown from his horse, and received severe injuries.'

She despatched this paper to her sister by a special messenger, whom she had captured by the way, and was soon after in the train, knitting and pondering.

At Silverton station she saw the pony carriage, and in it her niece Gillian, a girl not quite seventeen, with brown eyes showing traces of tears.

'Mamma knew you would come,' she said.

'You have heard direct, of course.'

'Yes; Claude telegraphed. The horse fell over a precipice. Papa's leg and three ribs are broken. Not dangerous. That is all it says; and mamma is going out to him directly.'

'I was quite sure she would. Well, Gillian, we must do the best we can. Has she any plans?'

'I think she waited for you to settle them. Hal is come; he wanted to go with her, but she says it will cost too much, and besides, there is his Ordination in Advent.'

'Has she telegraphed to your uncles?'

'To Beechcroft and to Stokesley; but we don't quite know where Uncle Reginald is. Perhaps he will see the paper.'

Gillian's tears were flowing again, and her aunt said—

'Come, my dear, you must not give way; you must do all you can to make it better for your mother.'

'I know,' she answered. 'Indeed, I didn't cry till I sat waiting, and it all came over me. Poor papa! and what a journey mamma will have, and how dreadful it will be without her! But I know that it is horrid of me, when papa and my sisters must want her so much more.'

'That's right—quite right to keep up before her. It does not sound to me so bad, after all; perhaps they will telegraph again to stop her. Did Claude ask her to come out?'

'Oh no! There were only those few words.'

No more could be learnt till the pony stopped at the door, and Hal ran out to hand out his aunt, and beg her privately to persuade his mother to take him, or, if she would not consent to that, at least to have Macrae, the old soldier-servant, with her—it was not fit for her to travel alone.

Lady Merrifield looked very pale, and squeezed her sister close in her arms as she said—

'You are my great help, Jenny.'

'And must you go?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'Without waiting to hear more?'

'There is no use in losing time. I cannot cross from Folkestone till the day after to-morrow, at night. I must go to London to-morrow, and sleep at Mrs. Merrifield's.'

'But this does not seem to me so very bad.'

'Oh, no, no! but when I get there in three weeks' time, it will be just when I shall be most wanted. The nursing will have told on the girls, and Jasper will be feeling weary of being laid up, and wanting to take liberties.'

'And what will you be after such a journey?'

'Just up to keeping him in order. Come, you have too much sense to expostulate, Jenny.'

'No; you would wear yourself to fiddle-strings if you stayed at home. I only want you to take Hal, or Macrae.'

'Hal is out of the question, I would not interfere with his preparation on any account. Macrae would be a very costly article; and, moreover, I want him to act major-domo here, unless you would, and that I don't dare to hope for.'

'No, you must not, Lily; Ada never feels well here, nor always at Brighton, and Emily would be too nervous to have her without me. But we will take as many children as you please, or we have room for.'

'That is like you, Jenny. I know William will offer to take them in at home, but I cannot send them without Miss Vincent; and she cannot leave her mother, who has had a sort of stroke. Otherwise I should try leaving them here while I am away, but the poor old lady is in no state for it—in fact, I doubt her living long.'

'I know; you have been governess by yourself these last weeks; it will be well to relieve her. The best way will be for us to take Mysie and Valetta, and let them go to the High School; and there is a capital day-school for little boys, close to St. Andrew's, for Fergus, and Gillian can go there too, or join classes in whatever she pleases.'

'My Brownie! Have you really room for all those?'

'Oh yes! The three girls in the spare room and dressing-room, and Fergus in the little room over the porch. I will write to Fanny; I gave her a hint.'

'And I have no doubt that Primrose will be a delight to her aunt Alethea, poor little dear! Yes, that makes it all easy, for in the holidays I know the boys are sure of a welcome at the dear old home, or Hal might have one or two of them at his Curacy.'

The gong sounded for the melancholy dinner that had to go on all the same, and in the midst all were startled by the arrival of a telegram, which Macrae, looking awestruck, actually delivered to Harry instead of to his mistress; but it was not from Ceylon. It was from Colonel Mohun, from Beechcroft: 'Coming 6.30. Going with you. Send children here.'

Never were twenty words, including addresses, more satisfactory. The tears came, for the first time, to Lady Merrifield's eyes at the kindness of her brothers, and Harry was quite satisfied that his uncle would be a far better escort than himself or Macrae. Aunt Jane went off to send her telegram home and write some needful letters, and Lady Merrifield

announced her arrangements to those whom they concerned.

'Oh! mamma, don't,' exclaimed Valetta; 'all the guinea-pigs will die.'

'I thought,' said Gillian, 'that we might stay here with Miss Vincent to look after us.'

'That will not do in her mother's state. Mrs. Vincent cannot be moved up here, and I could not lay such a burthen on them.'

'We would be very good,' said Val.

'That, I hope, you will be any way; but I think it will be easier at Rockstone, and I am quite sure that papa and I shall be better satisfied about you.'

'Mayn't we take Quiz!' asked Fergus.

'And Rigdum Funnidos?' cried Valetta.

'And Ruff and Ring?' chimed in Mysie.

'My dear children, I don't see how Aunt Jane can be troubled with any more animals than your four selves. You must ask her, only do not be surprised or put out if she refuses, for I don't believe you can keep anything there.'

Off the three younger ones went, Gillian observing, 'I don't see how they can, unless it was Quiz; but, mamma, don't you think I might go to Beechcroft with Primrose? I should be so much quieter working for the examination there, and I could send my exercises to Miss Vincent; and then I should keep up Prim's lessons.'

'Your aunt Alethea will, I know, like doing that, my dear; and I am afraid to turn those creatures loose on the aunts without

some one to look after them and their clothes. Fanny will be very helpful; but it will not do to throw too much on her.'

'Oh! I thought they would have Lois—'

'There would not be room for her; besides that, I don't think it would suit your aunts. You and Mysie ought to do all the mending for yourselves and Fergus, and what Valetta cannot manage. I know you would rather be at Beechcroft, my dear; but in this distress and difficulty, some individual likings must be given up.'

'Yes, mamma.'

Lady Merrifield looked rather dubiously at her daughter. She had very little time, and did not want to have an argument, nor to elicit murmurs, yet it might be better to see what was in Gillian's mind before it was too late. Mothers, very fond of their own sisters, cannot always understand why it is not the same with their daughters, who inherit another element of inherited character, and of another generation, and who have not been welded together with the aunts in childhood. 'My dear,' she said, 'you know I am quite ready to hear if you have any real reasonable objection to this arrangement.'

'No, mamma, I don't think I have,' said Gillian thoughtfully. 'The not liking always meeting a lot of strangers, nor the general bustle, is all nonsense, I know quite well. I see it is best for the children, but I should like to know exactly who is to be in authority over them.'

'Certainly Aunt Jane,' replied Lady Merrifield. 'She must be the ultimate authority. Of course you will check the younger ones

in anything going wrong, as you would here, and very likely there will be more restrictions. Aunt Ada has to be considered, and it will be a town life; but remember that your aunt is mistress of the house, and that even if you do think her arrangements uncalled for, it is your duty to help the others to submit cheerfully. Say anything you please fully and freely in your letters to me, but don't let there be any collisions of authority. Jane will listen kindly, I know, in private to any representation you may like to make, but to say before the children, "Mamma always lets them," would be most mischievous.'

'I see,' said Gillian. 'Indeed, I will do my best, mamma, and it will not be for very long.'

'I hope and trust not, my dear child. Perhaps we shall all meet by Easter—papa, and all; but you must not make too sure. There may be delays. Now I must see Halfpenny. I cannot talk to you any more, my Gillyflower, though I am leaving volumes unsaid.

Gillian found Aunt Jane emerging from her room, and beset by her three future guests.

'Aunt Jane, may we bring Quiz?'

'And Rigdum Funnidos and Lady Rigdum?'

'And Ruff and Ring? They are the sweetest doves in the world.'

'Doves! Oh, Mysie, they would drive your aunt Ada distracted, with coo-roo-roo at four o'clock in the morning, just as she goes off to sleep.'

'The Rigdums make no noise but a dear little chirp,'

triumphantly exclaimed Valetta.

'Do you mean the kittens? We have a vacancy for one cat, you know.'

Oh yes, we want you to choose between Artaxerxes and the Sofy. But the Rigdums are the eldest pair of guinea-pigs. They are so fond of me, that I know poor old Funnidos will die of grief if I go away and leave him.'

'I sincerely hope not, Valetta, for, indeed, there is no place to put him in.'

'I don't think he would mind living in the cellar if he only saw me once a day,' piteously pleaded Valetta.

'Indeed, Val, the dark and damp would surely kill the poor thing, in spite of your attentions. You must make up your mind to separation from your pets, excepting the kitten.'

Valetta burst out crying at this last drop that made the bucket overflow, but Fergus exclaimed: 'Quiz! Aunt Jane! He always goes about with us, and always behaves like a gentleman, don't you, Quizzy?' and the little Maltese, who perfectly well understood that there was trouble in the air, sat straight up, crossed his paws, and looked touchingly wistful.

'Poor dear little fellow!' said Aunt Jane; 'yes, I knew he would be good, but Kunz would be horribly, jealous, you see; he is an only dog, and can't bear to have his premises invaded.'

'He ought to be taught better,' said Fergus gravely.

'So he ought,' Aunt Jane confessed; 'but he is too old to begin learning, and Aunt Ada and Mrs. Mount would never bear to see

him disturbed. Besides, I really do not think Quiz would be half so well off there as among his own friends and places here, with Macrae to take care of him.' Then as Fergus began to pucker his face, she added, 'I am really very sorry to be so disagreeable.'

'The children must not be unreasonable,' said Gillian sagely, as she came up.

'And I am to choose between Xerxes and Artaxerxes, is it?' said Aunt Jane.

'No, the Sofy,' said Mysie. 'A Sofy is a Persian philosopher, and this kitten has got the wisest face.'

'Run and fetch them,' suggested her aunt, 'and then we can choose. Oh,' she added, with some relief at the thought, 'if it is an object to dispose of Cockie, we could manage him.'

The two younger ones were gratified, but Gillian and Mysie both exclaimed that Cockie's exclusive affections were devoted to Macrae, and that they could not answer for his temper under the separation. To break up such a household was decidedly the Goose, Fox, and Cabbage problem. As Mysie observed, in the course of the search for the kittens, in the make-the-best-of-it tone, 'It was not so bad as the former moves, when they were leaving a place for good and all.'

'Ah, but no place was ever so good as this,' said poor Valetta.

'Don't be such a little donkey,' said Fergus consequentially. 'Don't you know we are going to school, and I am three years younger than Wilfred was?'

'It is only a petticoat school,' said Val, 'kept by ladies.'

'It isn't.'

'It is; I heard Harry say so.'

'And yours is all butchers and bakers and candlestick makers.'

On which they fell on each other, each with a howl of defiance. Fergus grabbed at Val's pigtail, and she was buffeting him vehemently when Harry came out, held them apart, and demanded if this were the way to make their mother easy in leaving them.

'She said it was a pet-pet-petticoat school,' sobbed Fergus.

'And so it ought to be, for boys that fight with girls.'

'And he said mine was all butchers and bakers and candlestick makers,' whined Valetta.

'Then you'd better learn manners, or they'll take you for a tramp,' observed Harry; but at that moment Mysie broke in with a shout at having discovered the kittens making a plaything of the best library pen-wiper, their mother, the sleek Begum, abetting them, and they were borne off to display the coming glories of their deep fur to Aunt Jane.

Her choice fell upon the Sofy, as much because of the convenience of the name as because of the preternatural wisdom of expression imparted by the sweep of the black lines on the gray visage. Mr. Pollock's landlady was to be the happy possessor of Artaxerxes, and the turbulent portion of the Household was disposed of to bear him thither, and to beg Miss Hacket to give Buff and Ring the run of her cage, whence they had originally come, also to deliver various messages and notes.

By the time they returned, Colonel Mohun was met in the hall by his sister. 'Oh, Reggie, it is too good in you!' were the words that came with her fervent kiss. 'Remember how many years I have been seasoned to being "cockit up on a baggage waggon." Ought not such an old soldier as I to be able to take care of myself?'

'And what would your husband say to you when you got there? And should not I catch it from William? Well, are you packing up the youthful family for Beechcroft, except that at Rotherwood they are shrieking for Mysie?'

'I know how good William and Alethea would be. This child,' pointing to Primrose, who had been hanging on her all day in silence, 'is to go to them; but as I can't send Miss Vincent, educational advantages, as the advertisements say, lie on the side of Rockstone; so Jenny here undertakes to be troubled with the rabble.'

'But Mysie? Rotherwood met me at the station and begged me to obtain her from you. They really wish it.'

'He does, I have no doubt.'

'So does Madame la Marquise. They have been anxious about little Phyllis all the summer. She was languid and off her feed in London, and did not pick up at home as they expected. My belief is that it is too much governess and too little play, and that a fortnight here would set her up again. Rotherwood himself thinks so, and Victoria has some such inkling. At any rate, they are urgent to have Mysie with the child, as the next best thing.'

‘Poor dear little Fly!’ ejaculated Lady Merrifield; ‘but I am afraid Mysie was not very happy there last year.’

‘And what would be the effect of all the overdoing?’ said Miss Mohun.

‘Mysie is tougher than that sprite, and I suppose there is some relaxation,’ said Lady Merrifield.

‘Yes; the doctors have frightened them sufficiently for the present.

‘I suppose Mysie is a prescription, poor child,’ said her aunt, in a tone that evoked from her brother—

‘Jealous, Jenny?’

‘Well, Jane,’ said Lady Merrifield, ‘you know how thankful I am to you and Ada, but I am inclined to let it depend on the letters I get to-morrow, and the way Victoria takes it. If it is really an earnest wish on that dear little Fly’s account, I could not withstand old Rotherwood, and though Mysie might be less happy than she would be with you, I do not think any harm will be done. Everything there is sound and conscientious, and if she picks up a little polish, it won’t hurt her.’

‘Shall you give her the choice?’

‘I see no good in rending the poor child’s mind between two affections, especially as there will be a very short time to decide in, for I shall certainly not send her if Victoria’s is a mere duty letter.’

‘You are quite right there, Lily,’ said the Colonel. ‘The less choice the greater comfort.’

'Well done, sir soldier,' said his sister Jane. 'I say quite right too; only, for my own sake, I wish it had been Valetta.'

'So no doubt does she,' said the mother; 'but unluckily it isn't. And, indeed, I don't think I wish it. Val is safer with you. As Gillian expressed it the other day, "Val does right when she likes it; Mysie does right when she knows it."'

'You have the compliment after all, Jane,' said the Colonel. 'Lily trusts you with the child she doesn't trust!'

There was no doubt the next morning, for Lady Rotherwood wrote an earnest, affectionate letter, begging for Mysie, who, she said, had won such golden opinions in her former visit that it would be a real benefit to Phyllis, as much morally as physically, to have her companionship. It was the tenderest letter that either of the sisters had ever seen from the judicious and excellent Marchioness, full of warm sympathy for Lady Merrifield's anxiety for her husband, and betraying much solicitude for her little girl.

'It has done her good,' said Jane Mohun. 'I did not think she had such a soft spot.'

'Poor Victoria,' said Lady Merrifield, 'that is a shame. You know she is an excellent mother.'

'Too excellent, that's the very thing,' muttered Aunt Jane. 'Well, Mysie's fate is settled, and I dare say it will turn out for the best.'

So Mysie was to go with Mrs. Halfpenny and Primrose to Beechcroft, whence the Rotherwoods would fetch her. If the

lady's letter had been much less urgent, who could have withstood her lord's postscript: 'If you could see the little pale face light up at the bare notion of seeing Mysie, you would know how grateful we shall be for her.'

Mysie herself heard her destiny without much elation, though she was very fond of Lady Phyllis, and the tears came into her eyes at the thought of her being unwell and wanting her.

'Mamma said we must not grumble,' she said to Gillian; 'but I shall feel so lost without you and Val. It is so unhomish, and there's that dreadful German Fraulein, who was not at home last time.'

'If you told mamma, perhaps she would let you stay,' returned Gillian. 'I know I should hate it, worse than I do going to Rockstone and without you.'

'That would be unkind to poor Fly,' said Mysie. 'Besides, mamma said she could not have settling and unsettling for ever. And I shall see Primrose sometimes; besides, I do love Fly. It's marching orders, you know.'

It was Valetta who made the most objection. She declared that it was not fair that Mysie, who had been to the ball at Rotherwood, should go again to live with lords and ladies, while she went to a nasty day-school with butchers' and bakers' daughters. She hoped she should grow horridly vulgar, and if mamma did not like it, it would be her own fault!

Mrs. Halfpenny, who did not like to have to separate Mysie's clothes from the rest after they were packed, rather favoured this

naughtiness by observing: 'The old blue merino might stay at home. Miss Mysie would be too set up to wear that among her fine folk. Set her up, that she should have all the treats, while her own Miss Gillian was turned over to the auld aunties!'

'Nonsense, nurse,' said Gillian. 'I'm much better pleased to go and be of some use! Val, you naughty child, how dare you make such a fuss?' for Valetta was crying again.

'I hate school, and I hate Rockstone, and I don't see why Mysie should always go everywhere, and wear new frocks, and I go to the butchers and bakers and wear horrid old ones.'

'I wish you could come too,' said Mysie; 'but indeed old frocks are the nicest, because one is not bothered to take so much care of them; and lords and ladies aren't a bit better to play with than, other people. In fact, Ivy is what Japs calls a muff and a stick.'

Valetta, however, cried on, and Mysie went the length of repairing to her mother, in the midst of her last notes and packings, to entreat to change with Val, who followed on tip-toe.

'Certainly not,' was the answer from Lady Merrifield, who was being worried on all sides, 'Valetta is not asked, and she is not behaving so that I could accept for her if she were.'

And Val had to turn away in floods of tears, which redoubled on being told by the united voices of her brothers and sisters that they were ashamed of her for being so selfish as to cry for herself when all were in so much trouble about papa.

Lady Merrifield caught some of the last words. 'No, my dear,' she said. 'That is not quite just or kind. It is being unhappy that

makes poor Val so ready to cry about her own grievances. Only, Val, come here, and remember that fretting is not the way to meet such things. There is a better way, my child, and I think you know what I mean. Now, to help you through the time in an outer way, suppose you each set yourself some one thing to improve in while I am away. Don't tell me what it is, but let me find out when I come home.' With that she obeyed an urgent summons to speak to the gardener.

'I shall! I shall,' cried little Primrose, 'write a whole copy-book in single lines! And won't mamma be pleased? What shall you do, Fergus? and Val? and Mysie?'

'I shall get to spin my peg-top so as it will never tumble down, and will turn an engine for drawing water,' was the prompt answer of Fergus.

'What nonsense!' said Val; 'you'd better settle to get your long division sums right.'

'That s girls' stuff,' replied Fergus; 'you'd better settle to leave off crying for nothing.'

'That you had!' said several voices, and Val very nearly cried again as she exclaimed: 'Don't be all so tiresome. I shall make mamma a beautiful crewel cushion, with all the battles in history on it. And won't she be surprised!'

'I think mamma meant more than that,' said Mysie.

'Oh, Mysie, what shall you do?' asked Primrose.

'I did think of getting to translate one of mamma's favourite German stories quite through to her without wanting the

dictionary or stumbling one bit,' said Mysie; 'but I am sure she meant something better and better, and I'm thinking what it is—Perhaps it is making all little Flossie Maddin's clothes, a whole suit all oneself—Or perhaps it is manners. What do you think, Gill?'

'I should say most likely it was manners for you,' volunteered Harry, 'and the extra you are most likely to acquire at Rotherwood.'

'I'm so glad,' said Mysie.

'And you, Gill,' inquired Primrose, 'what will you do? Mine is a copy-book, and Fergus's is the spinning-top-engines, and rule of three; and Val's is a crewel battle cushion and not crying; and Mysie's is German stories and manners; and what's yours, Gill?'

'Gill is so grown up, she is too good to want an inside thing' announced Primrose.

'Oh, Prim, you dear little thing,' cried both elder brother and sister, as they thought with a sort of pang of the child's opinion of grown-up impeccability.

'Harry is grown up more,' put in Fergus; 'why don't you ask him?'

'Because I know,' said Primrose, with a pretty shyness, and as they pressed her, she whispered, 'He is going to be a clergyman.'

There was a call for Mysie and Val from upstairs, and as the younger population scampered off, Gillian said to her brother—

'Is not it like "occupy till I come"?'

'So I was thinking,' said Harry gravely. 'But one must be as

young as Mysie to throw one's "inside things" into the general stock of resolutions.'

'Yes,' said Gillian, with uplifted eyes. 'I do—I do hope to do something.'

Some great thing was her unspoken thought—some great and excellent achievement to be laid before her mother on her return. There was a tale begun in imitation of Bessie Merrifield, called "Hilda's Experiences". Suppose that was finished, printed, published, splendidly reviewed. Would not that be a great thing? But alas, she was under a tacit engagement never to touch it in the hours of study.

# CHAPTER II. – ROCKQUAY

The actual moment of a parting is often softened by the confusion of departure. That of the Merrifield family took place at the junction, where Lady Merrifield with her brother remained in the train, to be carried on to London.

Gillian, Valetta, and Fergus, with their aunt, changed into a train for Rockstone, and Harry was to return to his theological college, after seeing Mysie and Primrose off with nurse on their way to the ancestral Beechcroft, whence Mysie was to be fetched to Rotherwood. The last thing that met Lady Merrifield's eyes was Mrs. Halfpenny gesticulating wildly, under the impression that Mysie's box was going off to London.

And Gillian's tears were choked in the scurry to avoid a smoking-carriage, while Harry could not help thinking—half blaming himself for so doing—that Mysie expended more feeling in parting with Sofy, the kitten, than with her sisters, not perceiving that pussy was the safety-valve for the poor child's demonstrations of all the sorrow that was oppressing her.

Gillian, in the corner of a Rockstone carriage, had time for the full heart-sickness and tumult of fear that causes such acute suffering to young hearts. It is quite a mistake to say that youth suffers less from apprehension than does age; indeed, the very inexperience and novelty add to the alarms, where there is no background of anxieties that have ended happily, only a crowd

of examples of other people's misfortunes. The difference is in the greater elasticity and power of being distracted by outward circumstances; and thus lookers-on never guess at the terrific possibilities that have scared the imagination, and the secret ejaculations that have met them. How many times on that brief journey had not Gillian seen her father dying, her sisters in despair, her mother crushed in the train, wrecked in the steamer, perishing of the climate, or arriving to find all over and dying of the shock; yet all was varied by speculations on the great thing that was to offer itself to be done, and the delight it would give, and when the train slackened, anxieties were merged in the care for bags, baskets, and umbrellas.

Rockstone and Rockquay had once been separate places —a little village perched on a cliff of a promontory, and a small fishing hamlet within the bay, but these had become merged in one, since fashion had chosen them as a winter resort. Speculators blasted away such of the rocks as they had not covered with lodging-houses and desirable residences. The inhabitants of the two places had their separate churches, and knew their own bounds perfectly well; but to the casual observer, the chief distinction between them was that Rockstone was the more fashionable, Rockquay the more commercial, although the one had its shops, the other its handsome crescents and villas. The station was at Rockquay, and there was an uphill drive to reach Rockstone, where the two Miss Mohuns had been early inhabitants—had named their cottage Beechcroft after their

native home, and, to justify the title, had flanked the gate with two copper beeches, which had attained a fair growth, in spite of sea winds, perhaps because sheltered by the house on the other side.

The garden reached out to the verge of the cliff, or rather to a low wall, with iron rails and spikes at the top, and a narrow, rather giddy path beyond. There was a gate in the wall, the key of which Aunt Jane kept in her own pocket, as it gave near access to certain rocky steps, about one hundred and thirty in number, by which, when in haste, the inhabitants of Rockstone could descend to the lower regions of the Quay.

There was a most beautiful sea-view from the house, which compensated for difficulties in gardening in such a situation, though a very slight slope inwards from the verge of the cliff gave some protection to the flower-beds; and there was not only a little conservatory attached to the drawing-room at the end, but the verandah had glass shutters, which served the purpose of protecting tender plants, and also the windows, from the full blast of the winter storms. Miss Mohun was very proud of these shutters, which made a winter garden of the verandah for Miss Adeline to take exercise in. The house was their own, and, though it aimed at no particular beauty, had grown pleasant and pretty looking by force of being lived in and made comfortable.

It was a contrast to its neighbours on either side of its pink and gray limestone wall. On one side began the grounds of the Great Rockstone Hotel; on the other was Cliff House, the big and

seldom-inhabited house of one of the chief partners in the marble works, which went on on the other side of the promontory, and some people said would one day consume Rockstone altogether. It was a very fine house, and the gardens were reported to be beautifully kept up, but the owner was almost always in Italy, and had so seldom been at Rockstone that it was understood that all this was the ostentation of a man who did not know what to do with his money.

Aunt Adeline met the travellers at the door with her charming welcome. Kunz, all snowy white, wagged his tight-curled tail amid his barks, at sight of Aunt Jane, but capered wildly about the Sofy's basket, much to Valetta's agony; while growls, as thunderous as a small kitten could produce, proceeded therefrom.

'Kunz, be quiet,' said Aunt Jane, in a solemn, to-be-minded voice, and he crouched, blinking up with his dark eye.

'Give me the basket. Now, Kunz, this is our cat. Do you hear? You are not to meddle with her.'

Did Kunz really wink assent—a very unwilling assent?

'Oh, Aunt Jane!' from Val, as her aunt's fingers undid the cover of the basket.

'Once for all!' said Aunt Jane.

'M-m-m-m-ps-pss-psss!' from the Sofy, two screams from Val and Fergus, a buffeting of paws, a couple of wild bounds, first on a chair-back, then on the mantelpiece, where, between the bronze candlestick and the vase, the Persian philosopher stood

hissing and swearing, while Kunz danced about and barked.

'Take her down, Gillian,' said Aunt Jane; and Gillian, who had some presence of mind, accomplished it with soothing words, and, thanks to her gloves, only one scratch.

Meantime Miss Mohun caught up Kunz, held up her finger to him, stopped his barks; and then, in spite of the 'Oh, don'ts,' and even the tears of Valetta, the two were held up—black nose to pink nose, with a resolute 'Now, you are to behave well to each other, from Aunt Jane.

Kunz sniffed, the Sofy hissed; but her claws were captive. The dog was the elder and more rational, and when set down again took no more notice of his enemy, whom Valetta was advised to carry into Mrs. Mount's quarters to be comforted and made at home there; the united voice of the household declaring that the honour of the Spitz was as spotless as his coat!

Such was the first arrival at Rockstone, preceding even Aunt Adeline's inquiries after Mysie, and the full explanation of the particulars of the family dispersion. Aunt Ada's welcome was not at all like that of Kunz. She was very tender and caressing, and rejoiced that her sister could trust her children to her. They should all get on most happily together, she had no doubt.

True-hearted as Gillian was, there was something hopeful and refreshing in the sight of that fair, smiling face, and the touch of the soft hand, in the room that was by no means unfamiliar, though she had never slept in the house before. It was growing dark, and the little fire lighted it up in a friendly manner.

Wherever Aunt Jane was, everything was neat; wherever Aunt Adeline was, everything was graceful. Gillian was old enough to like the general prettiness; but it somewhat awed Val and Fergus, who stood straight and shy till they were taken upstairs. The two girls had a very pretty room and dressing-room—the guest chamber, in fact; and Fergus was not far off, in a small apartment which, as Val said, 'stood on legs,' and formed the shelter of the porch.

'But, oh dear! oh dear!' sighed Val, as Gillian unpacked their evening garments, 'Isn't there any nice place at all where one can make a mess?'

'I don't know whether the aunts will ever let us make a mess,' said Gillian; 'they don't look like it.'

At which Valetta's face puckered up in the way only too familiar to her friends.

'Come, don't be silly, Val. You won't have much time, you know; you will go to school, and get some friends to play with, and not want to make messes here.'

'I hate friends!'

'Oh, Val!'

'All but Fly, and Mysie is gone to her. I want Mysie.'

So in truth did Gillian, almost as much as her mother. Her heart sank as she thought of having Val and Fergus to save from scrapes without Mysie's readiness and good humour. If Mysie were but there she should be free for her 'great thing.' And oh! above all, Val's hair—the brown bush that Val had a delusion that

she 'did' herself, but which her 'doing' left looking rather worse than it did before, and which was not permitted in public to be in the convenient tail. Gillian advanced on her with the brush, but she tossed it and declared it all right!

However, at that moment there was a knock. Mrs. Mount's kindly face and stout form appeared. She had dressed Miss Ada and came to see what she could do for the young people, being of that delightful class of old servants who are charmed to have anything young in the house, especially a boy. She took Valetta's refractory mane in hand, tied her sash, inspected Fergus's hands, which had succeeded in getting dirty in their inevitable fashion, and undertook all the unpacking and arranging. To Val's inquiry whether there was any place for making 'a dear delightful mess' she replied with a curious little friendly smile, and wonder that a young lady should want such a thing.

'I'm afraid we are all rather strange specimens of young ladies,' replied Gillian; 'very untidy, I mean.'

'And I'm sure I don't know what Miss Mohun and Miss Ada will say' said good Mrs. Mount.

'What's that? What am I to say?' asked Aunt Jane, coming into the room.

But, after all, Aunt Jane proved to have more sympathy with 'messes' than any of the others. She knew very well that the children would be far less troublesome if they had a place to themselves, and she said, 'Well, Val, you shall have the boxroom in the attics. And mind, you must keep all your goods there, both

of you. If I find them about the house, I shall—'

'Oh, what, Aunt Jane?'

'Confiscate them,' was the reply, in a very awful voice, which impressed Fergus the more because he did not understand the word.

'You need not look so much alarmed, Fergus,' said Gillian; 'you are not at all the likely one to transgress.'

'No,' said Valetta gravely. 'Fergus is what Lois calls a regular old battledore.'

'I won't be called names,' exclaimed Fergus.

'Well, Lois said so—when you were so cross because the poker had got on the same side as the tongs! She said she never saw such an old battledore, and you know how all the others took it up.'

'Shuttlecock yourself then!' angrily responded Fergus, while both aunt and sister were laughing too much to interfere.

'I shall call you a little Uncle Maurice instead,' said Aunt Jane. 'How things come round! Perhaps you would not believe, Gill, that Aunt Ada was once in a scrape, when she was our Mrs. Malaprop, for applying that same epithet on hearsay to Maurice.'

This laugh made Gillian feel more at home with her aunt, and they went up happily together for the introduction to the lumber-room, not a very spacious place, and with a window leading out to the leads. Aunt Jane proceeded to put the children on their word of honour not to attempt to make an exit thereby, which Gillian thought unnecessary, since this pair were not enterprising.

The evening went off happily. Aunt Jane produced one of the old games which had been played at the elder Beechcroft, and had a certain historic character in the eyes of the young people. It was one of those variations of the Game of the Goose that were once held to be improving, and their mother had often told them how the family had agreed to prove whether honesty is really the best policy, and how it had been agreed that all should cheat as desperately as possible, except 'honest Phyl,' who *couldn't*; and how, by some extraordinary combination, good for their morals, she actually was the winner. It was immensely interesting to see the identical much-worn sheet of dilapidated pictures with the padlock, almost close to the goal, sending the counter back almost to the beginning in search of the key. Still more interesting was the imitation, in very wonderful drawing, devised by mamma, of the career of a true knight—from pagedom upwards—in pale watery Prussian-blue armour, a crimson scarf, vermilion plume, gamboge spurs, and very peculiar arms and legs. But, as Valetta observed, it must have been much more interesting to draw such things as that than stupid freehand lines and twists with no sense at all in them.

Aunt Ada, being subject to asthmatic nights, never came down to breakfast, and, indeed, it was at an hour that Gillian thought fearfully early; but her Aunt Jane was used to making every hour of the day available, and later rising would have prevented the two children from being in time for the schools, to which they were to go on the Monday. Some of Aunt Jane's

many occupations on Saturday consisted in arranging with the two heads of their respective schools, and likewise for the mathematical class Gillian was to join at the High School two mornings in the week, and for her lessons on the organ, which were to be at St. Andrew's Church. Somehow Gillian felt as if she were as entirely in her aunt's hands as Kunz and the Sofy had been!

After the early dinner, which suited the invalid's health, Aunt Jane said she would take Valetta and Fergus to go down to the beach with the little Varleys, while she went to her district, leaving Gillian to read to Aunt Ada for half an hour, and then to walk with her for a quiet turn on the beach.

It was an amusing article in a review that Gillian was set to read, and she did it so pleasantly that her aunt declared that she looked forward to many such afternoon pastimes, and then, by an easier way than the hundred and a half steps, they proceeded down the hill, the aunt explaining a great deal to the niece in a manner very gratifying to a girl beginning to be admitted to an equality with grown-up people.

'There is our old church,' said Aunt Ada, as they had a glimpse of a gray tower with a curious dumpy steeple.

'Do you go to church there!'

'I do—always. I could not undertake the hill on Sundays; but Jane takes the school-children to the St. Andrew's service in the afternoon.'

'But which is the parish church?'

'In point of fact, my dear; it is all one parish. Good morning, Mr. Hablot. My niece, Miss Gillian Merrifield. Yes, my sister is come home. I think she will be at the High School. He is the vicar of St. Andrew's,' as the clergyman went off in the direction of the steps.

'I thought you said it was all one parish.'

'St. Andrew's is only a district. Ah, it was all before your time, my dear.'

'I know dear Uncle Claude was the clergyman here, and got St. Andrew's built.'

'Yes, my dear. It was the great work and thought with him and Lord Rotherwood in those days that look so bright now,' said Aunt Ada. 'Yes, and with us all.'

'Do tell me all about it,' entreated Gillian; and her aunt, nothing loth, went on.

'Dear Claude was only five-and-twenty when he had the living. Nobody would take it, it was such a neglected place. All Rockquay down there had grown up with only the old church, and nobody going to it. It was a great deal through Rotherwood. Some property here came to him, and he was shocked at the state of things. Then we all thought the climate might be good for dear Claude, and Jane came to live with him and help him, and look after him. You see there were a great many of us, and Jane—well, she didn't quite get on with Alethea, and Claude thought she wanted a sphere of her own, and that is the way she comes to have more influence than any one else here. And as I am always better

in this air than anywhere else, I came soon after—even before my dear fathers death. And oh! what an eager, hopeful time it was, setting everything going, and making St. Andrew's all we could wish! We were obliged to be cautious at the old church, you know, because of not alarming the old-fashioned people. And so we are still—'

'Is that St. Andrew's? Oh, it is beautiful. May I look in?'

'Not now, my dear. You will see it another time.'

'I wish it were our church.'

'You will find the convenience of having one so near. And our services are very nice with our present rector, Mr. Ellesmere, an excellent active man, but his wife is such an invalid that all the work falls on Jane. I am so glad you are here to help her a little. St. Andrew's has a separate district, and Mr. Hablot is the vicar; but as it is very poor, we keep the charities all in one. Rotherwood built splendid schools, so we only have an infant school for the Rockstone children. On Sunday, Jane assembles the older children there and takes them to church; but in the afternoon they all go to the National Schools, and then to a children's service at St. Andrew's. She gets on so well with Mr. Hablot—he was dear Claude's curate, you see, and little Mrs. Hablot was quite a pupil of ours. What do you think little Gerald Hablot said—he is only five—"Isn't Miss Mohun the most consultedest woman in Rockquay?"'

'I suppose it is true,' said Gillian, laughing, but rather awestruck.

'I declare it makes me quite giddy to count up all she has on her hands. Nobody can do anything without her. There are so few permanent inhabitants, and when people begin good works, they go away, or marry, or grow tired, and then we can't let them drop!'

'Oh! what's that pretty spire, on the rise of the other hill?'

'My dear, that was the Kennel Mission Chapel, a horrid little hideous iron thing, but Lady Flight mistook and called it St. Kenelm's, and St. Kenelm's it will be to the end of the chapter.' And as she exchanged bows with a personage in a carriage, 'There she is, my dear.'

'Who? Did she build that church?'

'It is not consecrated. It really is only a mission chapel, and he is nothing but a curate of Mr. Hablot's,' said Aunt Ada, Gillian thought a little venomously.

She asked, 'Who?'

'The Reverend Augustine Flight, my dear. I ought not to say anything against them, I am sure, for they mean to be very good; but she is some City man's widow, and he is an only son, and they have more money than their brains can carry. They have made that little place very beautiful, quite oppressed with ornament—City taste, you know, and they have all manner of odd doings there, which Mr. Hablot allows, because he says he does not like to crush zeal, and he thinks interference would do more harm than good. Jane thinks he ought not to stand so much, but—'

Gillian somehow felt a certain amusement and satisfaction

in finding that Aunt Jane had one disobedient subject, but they were interrupted by two ladies eagerly asking where to find Miss Mohun, and a few steps farther on a young clergyman accosted them, and begged that Miss Mohun might be told the hour of some meeting. Also that 'the Bellevue Church people would not co-operate in the coal club.'

Then it was explained that Bellevue Church was within the bounds of another parish, and had been built by, and for, people who did not like the doctrine at the services of St. Andrew's.

By this time aunt and niece had descended to the Marine esplanade, a broad road, on one side of which there was a low sea wall, and then the sands and rocks stretched out to the sea, on the other a broad space of short grass, where there was a cricket ground, and a lawn-tennis ground, and the volunteers could exercise, and the band played twice a week round a Russian gun that stood by the flagstaff.

The band was playing now, and the notes seemed to work on Gillian's feet, and yet to bring her heart into her throat, for the last time she had heard that march was from the band of her father's old regiment, when they were all together!

Her aunt was very kind, and talked to her affectionately and encouragingly of the hopes that her mother would find her father recovering, and that it would turn out after all quite an expedition of pleasure and refreshment. Then she said how much she rejoiced to have Gillian with her, as a companion to herself, while her sister was so busy, and she was necessarily so much

left alone.

'We will read together, and draw, and play duets, and have quite a good account of our employment to give,' she said, smiling.

'I shall like it very much,' said Gillian heartily.

'Dear child, the only difficulty will be that you will spoil me, and I shall never be able to part with you. Besides, you will be such a help to my dear Jane. She never spares herself, you know, and no one ever spares her, and I can do so little to help her, except with my head.'

'Surely here are plenty of people,' said Gillian, for they were in the midst of well-dressed folks, and Aunt Ada had more than once exchanged nods and greetings.

'Quite true, my dear; but when there is anything to be done, then there is a sifting! But now we have you, with all our own Lily's spirit, I shall be happy about Jane for this winter at least.

They were again interrupted by meeting a gentleman and lady, to whom Gillian was introduced, and who walked on with her aunt conversing. They had been often in India, and made so light of the journey that Gillian was much cheered. Moreover, she presently came in sight of Val and Fergus supremely happy over a castle on the beach, and evidently indoctrinating the two little Varleys with some of the dramatic sports of Silverfold.

Aunt Ada found another acquaintance, a white moustached old gentleman, who rose from a green bench in a sunny corner, saying, 'Ah, Miss Mohun, I have been guarding your seat for you.'

'Thank you, Major Dennis. My niece, Miss Merrifield.'

He seemed to be a very courteous old gentleman, for he bowed, and made some polite speech about Sir Jasper, and, as he was military, Gillian hoped to have heard some more about the journey when they sat down, and room was made for her; but instead of that he and her aunt began a discussion of the comings and goings of people she had never heard of, and the letting or not letting of half the villas in Rockstone; and she found it so dull that she had a great mind to go and join the siege of Sandcastle. Only her shoes and her dress were fitter for the esplanade than the shore with the tide coming in; and when one has just begun to buy one's own clothes, that is a consideration.

At last she saw Aunt Jane's trim little figure come out on the sands and make as straight for the children as she could, amid greetings and consultations, so with an exclamation, she jumped up and went over the shingle to meet them, finding an endeavour going on to make them tolerably respectable for the walk home, by shaking off the sand, and advising Val to give up her intention of dragging home a broad brown ribbon of weed with a frilled edge, all polished and shiny with wet. She was not likely to regard it as such a curiosity after a few days' experience of Rockquay, as her new friends told her.

Kitty Varley went to the High School, which greatly modified Valetta's disgust to it, for the little girls had already vowed to be the greatest chums in the world, and would have gone home with arms entwined, if Aunt Jane had not declared that such things

could not be done in the street, and Clem Varley, with still more effect, threatened that if they were such a pair of ninnies, he should squirt at them with the dirtiest water he could find.

Valetta had declared that she infinitely preferred Kitty to Fly, and Kitty was so flattered at being adopted by the second cousin of a Lady Phyllis, and the daughter of a knight, that she exalted Val above all the Popsys and Mopsys of her present acquaintance, and at parting bestowed on her a chocolate cream, which tasted about equally of salt water and hot hand—at least if one did not feel it a testimonial of ardent friendship.

Fergus and Clement had, on the contrary, been so much inclined to punch and buffet one another, that Miss Mohun had to make them walk before her to keep the peace, and was by no means sorry when the gate of 'The Tamarisks' was reached, and the Varleys could be disposed of.

However, the battery must have been amicable, for Fergus was crazy to go in and see Clement's little pump, which he declared 'would do it'—an enigmatical phrase supposed to refer to the great peg-top-perpetual-motion invention. He was dragged away with difficulty on the plea of its being too late by Aunt Jane, who could not quite turn two unexpected children in on Mrs. Varley, and had to effect a cruel severance of Val and Kitty in the midst of their kisses.

'Sudden friendships,' said Gillian, from the superiority of her age.

'I do not think you are given that way,' said Aunt Jane.

'Does the large family suffice for all of you? People are so different,' added Aunt Ada.

'Yes,' said Gillian. 'We have never been in the way of caring for any outsider. I don't reckon Bessie Merrifield so—nor Fly Devereux, nor Dolores, because they are cousins.'

'Cousins may be everything or nothing,' asserted Miss Mohun. 'You have been about so much that you have hardly had time to form intimacies. But had you no friends in the officers' families?'

'People always retired before their children grew up to be companionable, said Gillian. 'There was nobody except the Whites. And that wasn't exactly friendship.'

'Who were they?' said Aunt Jane, who always liked to know all about everybody.

'He rose from the ranks,' said Gillian. 'He was very much respected, and nobody would have known that he was not a gentleman to begin with. But his wife was half a Greek. Papa said she had been very pretty; but, oh! she had grown so awfully fat. We used to call her the Queen of the White Ants. Then Kally —her name was really Kalliope—was very nice, and mamma got them to send her to a good day-school at Dublin, and Alethea and Phyllis used to have her in to try to make a lady of her. There used to be a great deal of fun about their Muse, I remember; Claude thought her very pretty, and always stood up for her, and Alethea was very fond of her. But soon after we went to Belfast, Mr. White was made to retire with the rank of captain. I think papa tried to get something for him to do; but I am not sure

whether he succeeded, and I don't know any more about them.'

'Not exactly friendship, certainly,' said Aunt Jane, smiling. 'After all, Gillian, in your short life, you have had wider experiences than have befallen your old aunts!'

'Wider, perhaps, not deeper, Jane,' suggested Miss Adeline.

And Gillian thought—though she felt it would be too sentimental to say—that in her life, persons and scenes outside her own family had seemed to 'come like shadows and so depart'; and there was a general sense of depression at the partings, the anxiety, and the being unsettled again when she was just beginning to have a home.

# CHAPTER III. – PERPETUAL MOTION

If Fergus had not yet discovered the secret of perpetual motion, Gillian felt as if Aunt Jane had done so, and moreover that the greater proportion of parish matters were one vast machine, of which she was the moving power.

As she was a small spare woman, able to do with a very moderate amount of sleep, her day lasted from 6 A.M. to some unnamed time after midnight; and as she was also very methodical, she got through an appalling amount of business, and with such regularity that those who knew her habits could tell with tolerable certainty, within reasonable limits, where she would be found and what she would be doing at any hour of the seven days of the week. Everything she influenced seemed to recur as regularly as the motions of the great ruthless-looking engines that Gillian had seen at work at Belfast; the only loose cog being apparently her sister Adeline, who quietly took her own way, seldom came downstairs before eleven o'clock, went out and came in, made visits or received them, wrote letters, read and worked at her own sweet will. Only two undertakings seemed to belong to her—a mission working party, and an Italian class of young ladies; and even the presidency of these often lapsed upon her sister, when she had had one of those 'bad nights' of asthma,

which were equally sleepless to both sisters. She was principally useful by her exquisite needlework, both in church embroidery and for sales; and likewise as the recipient of all the messages left for Miss Mohun, which she never forgot, besides that, having a clear sensible head, she was useful in consultation.

She was thoroughly interested in all her sister's doings, and always spoke of herself as the invalid, precluded from all service except that of being a pivot for Jane, the stationary leg of the compasses, as she sometimes called herself. This repose, together with her prettiness and sweetness of manner, was very attractive; especially to Gillian, who had begun to feel herself in the grip of the great engine which bore her along without power of independent volition, and with very little time for 'Hilda's Experiences'.

At home she had gone on harmoniously in full acquiescence with household arrangements; but before the end of the week the very same sensations came over her which had impelled her and Jasper into rebellion and disgrace, during the brief reign of a very strict daily governess, long ago at Dublin. Her reason and sense approved of all that was set before her, and much of it was pleasant and amusing; but this was the more provoking by depriving her of the chance of resistance or the solace of complaint. Moreover, with all her time at Aunt Jane's disposal, how was she to do her great thing? Valetta's crewel battle cushion had been reduced to a delicious design of the battle of the frogs and mice, drawn by Aunt Ada, and which she delighted

in calling at full length 'the Batrachyomachia,' sparing none of the syllables which she was to work below. And it was to be worked at regularly for half an hour before bed-time. Trust Aunt Jane for seeing that any one under her dominion did what had been undertaken! Only thus the spontaneity seemed to have departed, and the work became a task. Fergus meanwhile had set his affections on a big Japanese top he had seen in a window, and was eagerly awaiting his weekly threepence, to be able to complete the purchase, though no one but Valetta was supposed to understand what it had to do with his 'great thing.'

It was quite pleasant to Gillian to have a legitimate cause of opposition when Miss Mohun made known that she intended Gillian to take a class at the afternoon Sunday-school, while the two children went to Mrs. Hablot's drawing-room class at St. Andrew's Vicarage, all meeting afterwards at church.

'Did mamma wish it?' asked Gillian.

'There was no time to mention it, but I knew she would.'

'I don't think so,' said Gillian. 'We don't teach on Sundays, unless some regular person fails. Mamma likes to have us all at home to do our Sunday work with her.'

'Alas, I am not mamma! Nor could I give you the time.'

'I have brought the books to go on with Val and Ferg. I always do some of their work with them, and I am sure mamma would not wish them to be turned over to a stranger.'

'The fact is, that young ladies have got beyond Sunday-schools!'

'No, no, Jane,' said her sister; 'Gillian is quite willing to help you; but it is very nice in her to wish to take charge of the children.'

'They would be much better with Mrs. Hablot than dawdling about here and amusing themselves in the new Sunday fashion. Mind, I am not going to have them racketing about the house and garden, disturbing you, and worrying the maids.'

'Aunt Jane!' cried Gillian indignantly, 'you don't think that is the way mamma brought us up to spend Sunday?'

'We shall see,' said Aunt Jane; then more kindly, 'My dear, you are right to use your best judgment, and you are welcome to do so, as long as the children are orderly and learn what they ought.'

It was more of a concession than Gillian expected, though she little knew the effort it cost, since Miss Mohun had been at much pains to set Mrs. Hablot's class on foot, and felt it a slight and a bad example that her niece and nephew should be defaulters. The motive might have worked on Gillian, but it was a lower one, therefore mentioned.

She had seen Mrs. Hablot at the Italian class, and thought her a mere girl, and an absolute subject of Aunt Jane's stumbling pitifully, moreover, in a speech of Adelchi's; therefore evidently not at all likely to teach Sunday subjects half so well as herself!

Nor was there anything amiss on that first Sunday. The lessons were as well and quietly gone through as if with mamma, and there was a pleasant little walk on the esplanade before the children's service at St. Andrew's; after which there was a

delightful introduction to some of the old books mamma had told them of.

They were all rather subdued by the strangeness and newness of their surroundings, as well as by anxiety. If the younger ones were less anxious about their parents than was their sister, each had a plunge to make on the morrow into a very new world, and the Varleys' information had not been altogether reassuring. Valetta had learnt how many marks might be lost by whispering or bad spelling, and how ferociously cross Fraulein Adler looked at a mistake in a German verb; while Fergus had heard a dreadful account of the ordeals to which Burfield and Stebbing made new boys submit, and which would be all the worse for him, because he had a 'rum' Christian name, and his father was a swell.

Gillian had some experience through her elder brothers, and suspected Master Varley of being guilty of heightening the horrors; so she assured Fergus that most boys had the same sort of Christian names, but were afraid to confess them to one another, and so called each other Bill and Jack. She advised him to call himself by his surname, not to mention his father's title if he could help it, and, above all, not to seem to mind anything.

Her own spirits were much exhilarated the next morning by a note from Harry, the recipient of all telegrams, with tidings that the doctors were quite satisfied with Sir Jasper, and that Lady Merrifield had reached Brindisi.

There was great excitement at sight of a wet morning, for it appeared that an omnibus came round on such occasions to pick

up the scholars; and Valetta thought this so delightful that she danced about exclaiming, 'What fun!' and only wishing for Mysie to share it. She would have rushed down to the gate umbrellaless if Aunt Jane had not caught and conducted her, while Gillian followed with Fergus. Aunt Jane looked down the vista of young faces—five girls and three boys—nodding to them, and saying to the senior, a tall damsel of fifteen,

'Here are my children, Emma. You will take care of them, please. You are keeping order here, I suppose?'

There was a smile and bow in answer as the door closed, and the omnibus jerked away its ponderous length.

'I'm sorry to see that Stebbing there,' observed the aunt, as she went back; 'but Emma Norton ought to be able to keep him in order. It is well you have no lessons out of the house to-day, Gillian.'

'Are you going out then?'

'Oh yes!' said Miss Mohun, running upstairs, and presently coming back with a school-bag and a crackling waterproof cloak, but pausing as she saw Gillian at the window, nursing the Sofy, and gazing at the gray cloud over the gray sea. 'You are not at a loss for something to do,' she said, 'you said you meant to write to your mother.'

'Oh yes!' said Gillian, suddenly fretted, and with a sense of being hunted, 'I have plenty to do.'

'I see,' said Miss Mohun, turning over the books that lay on the little table that had been appropriated to her niece, in a way that,

unreasonably or not, unspeakably worried the girl, 'Brachet's French Grammar—that's right. Colenso's Algebra—I don't think they use that at the High School. Julius Caesar—you should read that up in Merivale.'

'I did,' said Gillian, in a voice that very nearly said, 'Do let them alone.'

'Well, you have materials for a very useful, sensible morning's work, and when Ada comes down, very likely she will like to be read to.'

Off went the aunt, leaving the niece stirred into an absolute desire, instead of spending the sensible morning, to take up 'Near Neighbours', and throw herself into an easy-chair; and when she had conscientiously resisted that temptation, her pen would hover over 'Hilda's Experiences', even when she had actually written 'Dearest Mamma.' She found she was in no frame to write such a letter as would be a comfort to her mother, so she gave that up, and made her sole assertion of liberty the working out of a tough double equation in Colenso, which actually came right, and put her in such good humour that she was no longer afraid of drumming the poor piano to death and Aunt Ada upstairs to distraction, but ventured on learning one of the Lieder ohne Worte; and when her Aunt Ada came down and complimented her on the sounds that had ascended, she was complacent enough to write a very cheerful letter, whilst her aunt was busied with her own. She described the Sunday-school question that had arisen, and felt sure that her father would pronounce his Gill to

be a sensible young woman. Afterwards Miss Adeline betook herself to a beautiful lily of church embroidery, observing, as Gillian sat down to read to her Alphonse Karr's Voyage autour de mon Jardin, that it was a real pleasure to listen to such prettily-pronounced French. Kunz lay at her feet, the Sofy nestled in Gillian's lap, and there was a general sense of being rubbed down the right way.

By and by there loomed through the rain two dripping shiny forms under umbrellas strongly inclined to fly away from them —Miss Mohun and Mr. Grant, the junior curate, whom she had brought home to luncheon. Both were full of the irregularities of the two churches of Bellevue and St. Kenelm's on the recent harvest-thanksgiving Sunday. It was hard to tell which was most reprobated, what St. Kenelm's did or what Bellevue did not do. If the one blew trumpets in procession, the other collected the offertory in a warming-pan. Gillian had already begun to find that these misdoings supplied much conversation at Beechcroft Cottage, and began to get half weary, half curious to judge for herself of all these enormities; nor did she feel more interested in the discussion of who had missed church or school, and who needed tickets for meat, or to be stirred up to pay for their coal club.

At last she heard, 'Well, I think you might read to her, Gillian! Oh! were not you listening? A very nice girl near here, a pupil teacher, who has developed a hip complaint, poor child. She will enjoy having visits from you, a young thing like herself.'

Gillian did not like it at all, but she knew that it would be wrong to refuse, and answered, 'Very well,' with no alacrity—hoping that it was not an immediate matter, and that something might happen to prevent it. But at that moment the sun came out, the rain had ceased, and there were glistening drops all over the garden; the weather quarter was clear, and after half an hours rest after dinner Aunt Jane jumped up, decreeing that it was time to go out, and that she would introduce Gillian to Lilian Giles before going on to the rest of her district.

She gathered a few delicate flowers in the little conservatory, and put them in a basket with a peach from the dessert, then took down a couple of books from the shelf. Gillian could not but acquiesce, though she was surprised to find that the one given to her was a translation of Undine.

'The child is not badly off,' explained Miss Mohun. 'Her father is a superior workman. She does not exactly want comforts, but she is sadly depressed and disappointed at not being able to go on with her work, and the great need is to keep her from fretting over her troubles, and interested in something.'

Gillian began to think of one of the graceful hectic invalids of whom she had read, and to grow more interested as she followed Aunt Jane past the old church with the stout square steeple, constructed to hold, on a small side turret window, a light for the benefit of ships at sea. Then the street descended towards the marble works. There was a great quarry, all red and raw with recent blasting, and above, below, and around, rows of new little

stuccoed, slated houses, for the work-people, and a large range of workshops and offices fronting the sea. This was Miss Mohun's district, and at a better-looking house she stopped and used the knocker.

That was no distinction; all had doors with knockers and sash windows, but this was a little larger, and the tiny strip of garden was well kept, while a beautiful myrtle and pelargonium peeped over the muslin blind; and it was a very nice-looking woman who opened the door, though she might have been the better for a cap. Aunt Jane shook hands with her, rather to Gillian's surprise, and heard that Lily was much the same.

'It is her spirits are so bad, you see, Miss Mohun,' she added, as she ushered them into a somewhat stuffy little parlour, carpeted and bedecked with all manner of knick-knacks, photographs, and framed certificates of various societies of temperance and providence on the gaily-papered walls. The girl lay on a couch near the fire, a sallow creature, with a big overhanging brow, made heavier by a dark fringe, and an expression that Gillian not unjustly decided was fretful, though she smiled, and lighted up a little when she saw Miss Mohun.

There was a good deal said about her bad nights, and her appetite, and how the doctor wanted her to take as much as she could, and how everything went against her—even lardy cake and roly-poly pudding with bacon in it!

Miss Mohun put the flowers on the little table near the girl, who smiled a little, and thanked her in a languid dreary manner.

Finding that she had freshly been visited by the rector, Miss Mohun would not stop for any serious reading, but would leave Miss Merrifield to read a story to her.

'And you ought to get on together,' she said, smiling. 'You are just about the same age, and your names rhyme—Gillian and Lilian. And Gillians mother is a Lily too.'

This the young lady lid not like, for she was already feeling it a sort of presumption in the girl to bear a name so nearly resembling her mother's. She had seen a little cottage poverty, and had had a class of little maidservants; but this level of life which is in no want, keeps a best parlour, and does not say ma'am, was quite new to her, and she did not fancy it. When the girls were left together, while Mrs. Giles returned to her ironing, Gillian was the shyer of the two, and began rather awkwardly and reluctantly—

'Miss Mohun thought you would like to hear this. It is a sort of German fairy tale.'

Lilian said, 'Yes, Miss Merrifield' in a short dry tone, completing Gillian's distaste, and she began to read, not quite at her best, and was heartily glad when at the end of half an hour Mrs. Giles was heard in parley with another visitor, so that she had an excuse for going away without attempting conversation. She was overtaken by the children on their way home from their schools, where they had dined. They rushed upon her, together with the two Varleys, who wanted to take them home to tea; and Gillian giving her ready consent, Fergus dashed home to

fetch his beloved humming-top, which was to be introduced to Clement Varley's pump, and in a few minutes they were off, hardly vouchsafing an answer to such comparatively trifling inquiries as how they were placed at their schools.

Gillian found, however, that neither of her aunts was pleased at her having consented to the children's going out without reference to their authority. How did she suppose they were to come home?

'I did not think, can't they be fetched?' said Gillian, startled.

'It is not far,' said Adeline, pitying her. 'One of the maids—'

'My dear Ada!' exclaimed Aunt Jane. 'You know that Fanny cannot go out at night with her throat, and I never will send out those young girls on any account.'

'Can't I go?' said Gillian desperately.

'Are not you a young girl? I must go myself.'

And go she did at a quarter to eight, and brought home the children, looking much injured. Gillian went upstairs with them, and there was an outburst.

'It was horrid to be fetched home so soon, just as there was a chance of something nice; when all the tiresome big ones had gone to dress, and we could have had some real fun,' said Valetta.

'Real fun! Real sense!' said Fergus.

'But what had you been about all this time?'

'Why, their sisters and a man that was there *would* come and drink tea in the nursery, where nobody wanted them, and make us play their play.

'Wasn't that nice? You are always crying out for Harry and me to come and play with you.'

'Oh, it wasn't like that,' said Val, 'you play with us, and they only pretended, and played with each other. It wasn't nice.'

'Clem said it was—forking,' said Fergus.

'No, spooning,' said Val. 'The dish ran after the spoon, you know.'

'Well, but you haven't told me about the schools,' said Gillian, in elder sisterly propriety, thinking the subject had better be abandoned.

'Jolly, jolly, scrumptious!' cried Fergus.

'Oh! Fergus, mamma doesn't like slang words. Jasper doesn't say them.'

'Not at home, but men say what they like at school, and the 'bus was scrumptious and splendiferous!'

'I'm sure it wasn't,' said Valetta; 'I can't bear being boxed up with horrid rude boys.'

'Because you are only a girl!'

'Now, Gill, they shot with—'

'Val, if you tell—'

'Telling Gill isn't telling. Is it, Gill?'

She assented.

'They did, Gill. They shot at us with pea-shooters,' sighed the girl.

'Oh! it was jolly, jolly, jolly!' cried the boy. 'Stebbing hit the girl who made the sour face on her cheeks, and they all squealed,

and the cad looked in and tried to jaw us.'

'But that dreadful boy shot right into his mouth,' said Val, while Fergus went into an ecstasy of laughter. 'Wasn't it a shame, Gill?'

'Indeed it was' said Gillian. 'Such ungentlemanly boys ought not to be allowed in the omnibus.'

'Girls shouldn't be allowed in the 'bus, they are so stupid,' said Fergus. 'That one—as cross as old Halfpenny—who was she, Val?'

'Emma Norton! Up in the highest form!'

'Well, she is a prig, and a tell-tale-tit besides; only Stebbing said if she did, her junior would catch it.'

'What a dreadful bully he must be!' exclaimed Gillian.

I'll tell you what,' said Fergus, in a tone of profound admiration, 'no one can hold a candle to him at batting! He snowballed all the Kennel choir into fits, and he can brosier old Tilly's stall, and go on just the same.'

'What a greedy boy!' exclaimed Val.

'Disgusting,' added Gillian.

'You're girls,' responded Fergus, lengthening the syllable with infinite contempt; but Valetta had spirit enough to reply, 'Much better be a girl than rude and greedy.'

'Exactly,' said Gillian; 'it is only little silly boys who think such things fine. Claude doesn't, nor Harry, nor Japs.'

'You know nothing about it,' said Fergus.

'Well, but you've never told me about school—how you are

placed, and whom you are under.'

'Oh! I'm in middle form, under Miss Edgar. Disgusting! It's only the third form that go up to Smiler. She knows it is no use to try to take Stebbing and Burfield.'

'And, Gill,' added Val, 'I'm in second class too, and I took three places for knowing where Teheran was, and got above Kitty Varley and a girl there two years older than I am, and her name is Maura.'

'Maura, how very odd! I never heard of any one called Maura but one of the Whites,' said Gillian. 'What was her surname?'

This Valetta could not tell, and at the moment Mrs. Mount came up with intent to brush Miss Valetta's hair, and to expedite the going to bed.

Gillian, not very happy about the revelations she had heard, went downstairs, and found her younger aunt alone, Miss Mohun having been summoned to a conference with one of her clients in the parish room. In her absence Gillian always felt more free and communicative, and she had soon told whatever she did not feel as a sort of confidence, including Valetta's derivation of spooning, and when Miss Mohun returned it was repeated to her.

'Yes,' was her comment, 'children's play is a convenient cover to the present form of flirtation. No doubt Bee Varley and Mr. Marlowe believe themselves to have been most good-natured.'

'Who is he, and will it come to anything?' asked Aunt Ada, taking her sister's information for granted.

'Oh no, it is nothing. A civil service man, second cousin's

brother-in-law's stepson. That's quite enough in these days to justify fraternal romping.'

'I thought Beatrice Varley a nice girl.'

'So she is, my dear. It is only the spirit of the age, and, after all, this deponent saith not which was the dish and which was the spoon. Have the children made any other acquaintances, I wonder? And how did George Stebbing comport himself in the omnibus? I was sorry to see him there; I don't trust that boy.'

'I wonder they didn't send him in solitary grandeur in the brougham,' said Miss Ada.

Gillian held the history of the pea-shooting as a confidence, even though Aunt Jane seemed to have been able to see through the omnibus, so she contented herself with asking who George Stebbing was.

'The son of the manager of the marble works; partner, I believe.'

'Yes,' said Aunt Ada. 'the Co. means Stebbing primarily.'

'Is he a gentleman?'

'Well, as much as old Mr. White himself, I suppose. He is come up here—more's the pity—to the aristocratic quarter, if you please,' said Aunt Jane, smiling, 'and if garden parties are not over, Mr. Stebbing may show you what they can be.'

'That boy ought to be at a public school,' said her sister. 'I hope he doesn't bully poor little Fergus.'

'I don't think he does,' said Gillian. 'Fergus seemed rather to admire him.'

'I had rather hear of bullying than patronage in that quarter,' said Miss Mohun. 'But, Gillian, we must impress on the children that they are to go to no one's house without express leave. That will avoid offence, and I should prefer their enjoying the society of even the Varleys in this house.'

Did Aunt Jane repent of her decision on the Thursday half-holiday granted to Mrs. Edgar's pupils, when, in the midst of the working party round the dining-room table, in a pause of the reading, some one said, 'What's that!'—and a humming, accompanied by a drip, drop, drip, drop, became audible?

Up jumped Miss Mohun, and so did Gillian, half in consternation, half to shield the boy from her wrath. In a few moments they beheld a puddle on the mat at the bottom of the oak stairs, while a stream was descending somewhat as the water comes down at Lodore, while Fergus's voice could be heard above—

'Don't, Varley! You see how it will act. The string of the humming-top moves the pump handle, and that spins. Oh!'

'Master Fergus! Oh—h, you bad boy!'

The shriek was caused by the avenging furies who had rushed up the back stairs just as Miss Mohun had darted up the front, so as to behold, on the landing between the two, the boys, one spinning the top, the other working the pump which stood in its own trough of water, receiving a reckless supply from the tap in the passage. The maid's scream of 'What will your aunt say?' was answered by her appearance, and rush to turn the cock.

'Don't, don't, Aunt Jane,' shouted Fergus; 'I've almost done it! Perpetual motion.' He seemed quite unconscious that the motion was kept up by his own hands, and even dismay could not turn him from being triumphant.

'Oh! Miss Jane,' cried Mrs. Mount, 'if I had thought what they boys was after.'

'Mop it up, Alice,' said Aunt Jane to the younger girl. 'No don't come up, Ada; it is too wet for you. It is only a misdirected experiment in hydraulics.'

'I told him not,' said Clement Varley, thinking affairs serious.

'Fergus, I am shocked at you,' said Gillian sternly. 'You are frightfully wet. You must be sent to bed.'

'You must go and change,' said Aunt Jane, preventing the howl about to break forth. 'My dear boy, that tap must be let alone. We can't have cataracts on the stairs.'

'I didn't mean it, Aunt Jane; I thought it was an invention,' said Fergus.

'I know; but another time come and ask me where to try your experiments. Go and take off those clothes; and you, Clement, you are soaking too. Run home at once.'

Gillian, much scandalised, broke out—

'It is very naughty. At home, he would be sent to bed at once.'

'I am not Mrs. Halfpenny, Gillian,' said Aunt Jane coldly.

'Jane has a soft spot for inventions, for Maurice's sake,' said her sister.

'I can't confound ingenuity and enterprise with wanton

mischief, or crush it out for want of sympathy,' said Miss Mohun. 'Come, we must return to our needles.'

If Aunt Jane had gone into the state of wrath to be naturally expected, Gillian would have risen in arms on her brother's behalf, and that would have been much pleasanter than the leniency which made her views of justice appear like unkindness.

This did not dispose her to be the better pleased at an entreaty from the two children to be allowed to join Mrs. Hablot's class on Sunday. It appeared that they had asked Aunt Jane, and she had told them that their sister knew what their mother would like.

'But I am sure she would not mind,' said Valetta. 'Only think, she has got a portfolio with pictures of everything all through the Bible!'

'Yes,' added Fergus, 'Clem told me. There are the dogs eating Jezebel, and such a jolly picture of the lion killing the prophet. I do want to see them! Varley told me!'

'And Kitty told me,' added Valetta. 'She is reading such a book to them. It is called The Beautiful Face, and is all about two children in a wood, and a horrid old grandmother and a dear old hermit, and a wicked baron in a castle! Do let us go, Gillyflower.

'Yes,' said Fergus; 'it would be ever so much better fun than poking here.'

'You don't want fun on Sunday.'

'Not fun exactly, but it is nicer.'

'To leave me, the last bit of home, and mamma's own lessons.'

'They ain't mamma's,' protested Fergus; but Valetta was

touched by the tears in Gillian's eyes, kissed her, and declared, 'Not that.'

Whether it were on purpose or not, the next Sunday was eminently unsuccessful; the Collects were imperfect, the answers in the Catechism recurred to disused babyish blunders; Fergus twisted himself into preternatural attitudes, and Valetta teased the Sofy to scratching point, they yawned ferociously at The Birthday, and would not be interested even in the pony's death. Then when they went out walking, they would not hear of the sober Rockstone lane, but insisted on the esplanade, where they fell in with the redoubtable Stebbing, who chose to patronise instead of bullying 'little Merry'—and took him off to the tide mark—to the agony of his sisters, when they heard the St. Andrew's bell.

At last, when the tempter had gone off to higher game, Fergus's Sunday boots and stockings were such a mass of black mud that Gillian had to drag him home in disgrace, sending Valetta into church alone. She would have put him to bed on her own responsibility, but she could not master him; he tumbled about the room, declaring Aunt Jane would do no such thing, rolled up his stockings in a ball, and threw them in his sister's face.

Gillian retired in tears, which she let no one see, not even Aunt Ada, and proceeded to record in her letter to India that those dreadful boys were quite ruining Fergus, and Aunt Jane was spoiling him.

However, Aunt Jane, having heard what had become of the youth, met him in no spoiling mood; and though she never knew of his tussle with Gillian, she spoke to him very seriously, shut him into his own room, to learn thoroughly what he had neglected in the morning, and allowed him no jam at tea. She said nothing to Gillian, but there were inferences.

The lessons went no better on the following Sunday; Gillian could neither enforce her authority nor interest the children. She avoided the esplanade, thinking she had found a nice country walk to the common beyond the marble works; but, behold, there was an outbreak of drums and trumpets and wild singing. The Salvation Army was marching that way, and, what was worse, yells and cat-calls behind showed that the Skeleton Army was on its way to meet them. Gillian, frightened almost out of her wits, managed to fly over an impracticable-looking gate into a field with her children, but Fergus wanted to follow the drum. After that she gave in. The children went to Mrs. Hablot, and Gillian thought she saw 'I told you so' in the corners of Aunt Jane's eyes.

It was a further offence that her aunt strongly recommended her going regularly to the High School instead of only attending certain classes. It would give her far more chance of success at the examination to work with others and her presence would be good for Valetta. But to reduce her to a schoolgirl was to be resented on Miss Vincent's account as well as her own.

# CHAPTER IV. – THE QUEEN OF THE WHITE ANTS

The High School was very large. It stood at present at the end of a budding branch of Rockquay, where the managers, assisted by the funds advanced by Lord Rotherwood and that great invisible potentate, the head of the marble works, had secured and adapted a suitable house, and a space round it well walled in.

The various classes of students did not see much of each other, except those who were day boarders and spent the midday recreation time together. Even those in the same form were only together in school, as the dressing-room of those who dined there was separate from that of the others, and they did not come in and out at the same time. Valetta had thus only really made friends with two or three more Rockstone girls of about her own age besides Kitty Yarley, with whom she went backwards and forwards every day, under the escort provided in turn by the families of the young ladies.

Gillian's studies were for three hours in the week at the High School, and on two afternoons she learnt from the old organist at Rockstone Church. She went and came alone, except when Miss Mohun happened to join her, and that was not often, 'For,' said that lady to her sister, 'Gillian always looks as if she thought I

was acting spy upon her. I wish I could get on with that girl; I begin to feel almost as poor Lily did with Dolores.'

'She is a very good girl,' said Miss Adeline.

'So she is; and that makes it all the more trying to be treated like the Grand Inquisitor.'

'Shall I speak to her? She is always as pleasant as possible with me.'

'Oh no, don't. It would only make it worse, and prevent you from having her confidence.'

'Ah, Jane, I have often thought your one want was gentleness,' said Miss Ada, with the gesture of her childhood—her head a little on one side. 'And, besides, don't you know what Reggie used to call your ferret look? Well, I suppose you can't help it, but when you want to know a thing and are refraining from asking questions, you always have it more or less.'

'Thank you, Ada. There's nothing like brothers and sisters for telling one home-truths. I suppose it is the penalty of having been a regular Paul Pry in my childhood, in spite of poor Eleanor making me learn "Meddlesome Matty" as soon as I could speak. I always *do* and always *shall* have ringing in my ears—

> '"Oh! what a pretty box is this,
> I'll open it," said little Miss.'

'Well, you know you always do know or find out everything about everybody, and it is very useful.'

'Useful as a bloodhound is, eh?'

'Oh no, not that, Jenny.'

'As a ferret, or a terrier, perhaps. I suppose I cannot help that, though,' she added, rather sadly. 'I have tried hard to cure the slander and gossip that goes with curiosity. I am sorry it results in repulsion with that girl; but I suppose I can only go on and let her find out that my bark, or my eye, is worse than my bite.'

'You are so good, so everything, Jenny,' said Adeline, 'that I am sure you will have her confidence in time, if only you won't poke after it.'

Which made Miss Mohun laugh, though her heart was heavy, for she had looked forward to having a friend and companion in the young generation.

Gillian meantime went her way.

One morning, after her mathematical class was over, she was delayed for about ten minutes by the head mistress, to whom she had brought a message from her aunt, and thus did not come out at noon at the same time as the day scholars. On issuing into the street, where as yet there was hardly any traffic, except what was connected with the two schools, she perceived that a party of boys were besetting a little girl who was trying to turn down the cross road to Bellevue, barring her way, and executing a derisive war-dance around her, and when she, almost crying, made an attempt to dash by, pulling at her plaited tail, with derisive shouts, even Gillian's call, 'Boys, boys, how can you be so disgraceful!' did not check them. One made a face and put

his tongue out, while the biggest called out, 'Thank you, teacher,' and Gillian perceived to her horror, that they were no street boys, but Mrs. Edgar's, and that Fergus was one of them. That he cried in dismay, 'Don't, Stebbing! It's my sister,' was no consolation, as she charged in among them, catching hold of her brother, as she said,

'I could not believe that you could behave in such a disgraceful manner!'

All the other tormentors rushed away headlong, except Stebbing, who, in some compunction, said—

'I beg your pardon, Miss Merrifield, I had no notion it was you.'

'You are making it no better,' said Gillian. 'The gentlemen I am used to know how to behave properly to any woman or girl. My father would be very sorry that my brother has been thrown into such company.'

And she walked away with her head extremely high, having certainly given Master Stebbing a good lesson. Fergus ran after her. 'Gill, Gill, you won't tell.'

'I don't think I ever was more shocked in my life,' returned Gillian.

'But, Gill, she's a nasty, stuck-up, conceited little ape, that Maura White, or whatever her ridiculous name is. They pretend her father was an officer, but he was really a bad cousin of old Mr. White's that ran away; and her mother is not a lady—a great fat disgusting woman, half a nigger; and Mr. White let her brother

and sister be in the marble works out of charity, because they have no father, and she hasn't any business to be at the High School.'

'White, did you say? Maura White!' exclaimed Gillian. 'Captain White dead! Oh, Fergus! it must be Captain White. He was in the dear old Royal Wardours, and papa thought so much of him! To think of your going and treating his daughter in that shocking way!'

'It was what Stebbing said,' gruffly answered Fergus.

'If you let yourself be led by these horrid cads—'

'He is no such thing! He is the crack bat of Edgar's—'

'A boy is a cad who can't behave himself to a girl because she is poor. I really think the apology to me was the worst part or the matter. He only treats people well when he sees they can take care of themselves.'

'I'll tell him about Captain White,' said Fergus, a little abashed.

'Yes. And I will get the aunts to call on Mrs. White, and that may help them to a better level among these vulgar folk.'

'But you won't—' said Fergus, with an expressive pause.

'I won't get you into trouble, for I think you are sorry you treated one of our own in such a manner.'

'I wouldn't, indeed, if I had known.'

'I shall only explain that I have found out whom Maura belongs to. I should go and see them at once, only I must make Val find out where she lives.'

So Gillian returned home, communicating the intelligence

with some excitement that she had discovered that Valetta's schoolmate, Maura White, was none other than the daughter of her father's old fellow-soldier, whose death shocked her greatly, and she requested to go and call on Mrs. White as soon as she could learn her abode.

However, it seemed to be impossible that any one should live in Rockstone unknown to Aunt Jane.

'White?' she said. 'It can't be the Whites down by Cliffside. No; there's a father there, though he generally only comes down for Sunday.'

'I am sure there are some Whites on the Library list,' said Miss Ada.

'Oh yes; but she washes! I know who they must be. I know in Bellevue there are some; but they go to the Kennel Church. Didn't you come home, Ada, from that function you went to with Florence, raving about the handsome youth in the choir?'

'Oh yes, we thought it such an uncommon, foreign face, and he looked quite inspired when he was singing his solo.'

'Yes; I found out that his name was White, a clerk or something in the marble works, and that he had a mother and sister living at Bellevue. I did see the sister when I went to get the marble girls into the G.F.S., but she said something foolish about her mother not liking it.'

'Yes; nobody under the St. Kenelm influence ever will come into the G.F.S.'

'But what is she doing?' asked Gillian. 'Do you mean

Kalliope?'

'I suppose I do. I saw a rather nice-looking young woman in the department where they make Florentine mosaic, and I believe they said she was Miss White, but she cut me off very short with her mother, so I had no more to do with her.'

'I am sure mamma would wish me to call on Mrs. White,' said Gillian.

'There's no reason against it,' said Aunt Jane. 'I will go with you the first day I can.'

When would that be, wondered Gillian. She told Valetta to talk to Maura and learn the name of the house; and this was ascertained to be 3 Ivinghoe Terrace, Bellevue Road, but Val had very little opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of town girls, who did not stay to dinner, as she had to go home immediately after school, under Emma Norton's escort, and perhaps she was not very ardent in the cause, for Kitty Varley and her other friends did not like the child, and she was more swayed by them than perhaps she liked to confess to her sister.

Each morning at breakfast Gillian hoped that Aunt Jane would lay out her day so as to call on Mrs. White; but first there was the working party, then came the mothers' meeting, followed by afternoon tea at Mrs. Hablot's for some parish council. On the third day, which might have been clear, 'a miserable creature,' as Gillian mentally called her, wrote to beg the Misses Mohun to bring themselves and her niece to make up a lawn-tennis set, since some one had failed. Gillian vainly protested that she did

not care about lawn tennis, and could not play unless Jasper was her partner; and Aunt Jane so far sided with her as to say it was very inconvenient, and on such short notice they ought not to be expected. But Aunt Ada clearly wanted to go; and so they went. It was a beautiful place, but Gillian could not enjoy herself, partly because she knew so few of the people, but more because she was vexed and displeased about the Whites. She played very badly; but Aunt Jane, when pressed into the service, skipped about with her little light figure and proved herself such a splendid player, doing it so entirely con amore, that Gillian could not but say to herself, 'She was bent on going; it was all humbug her pretending to want to refuse.'

That afternoon's dissipation had made it needful to do double work the next day, and Gillian was again disappointed. Then came Saturday, when Miss Mohun was never available, nor was she on Monday; and when it appeared that she had to go to a meeting at the Cathedral town on Tuesday, Gillian grew desperate, and at her tete-a-tete meal with Aunt Ada, related the whole history of the Whites, and her great desire to show kindness to her father's old brother-officer's family, and how much she was disappointed.

Miss Adeline was touched, and indeed, fond as she was of her sister, she could not help being flattered by Gillian's preference and confidence.

'Well, my deal, this is a nice day, not too hot or too cold; I do not see why I should not walk down with you and call. If I find

it too far, we can take a cab to go back.'

'Oh, thank you, Aunt Ada; it is very very kind of you, and there is no knowing when Aunt Jane may be able to go. I don't like to close up my Indian letter till I can say I have seen them.'

Gillian fidgeted a good deal lest, before her aunt's postprandial repose was over, visitors should come and put a stop to everything, and she looked ready to cut the throat of a poor lady in a mushroom hat, who came up to leave a message for Miss Mohun about a possible situation for one of her class of boys.

However, at last they started, Kunz and all, Miss Adeline quite infected by Gillian's excitement.

'So your father and mother were very fond of them.'

'Papa thought very highly of him, and was very sorry he had to return,' said Gillian.

'And she was a beautiful Greek.'

Gillian began to be quite afraid of what she might have said.

'I don't think she is more than half Greek,' she said. 'I believe her mother was a Gorfiote, but her father was English or Irish. I believe he kept a shop in Malta.'

'Quite a mixture of nationalities then, and no wonder she is beautiful. That youth had a very striking profile; it quite reminded me of a gem as I saw it against the dark pillar.'

'I did not say she was very beautiful now,' said Gillian, feeling a qualm as she recollected the Queen of the White Ants, and rather oddly divided between truthfulness, fear of alarming her aunt into turning back, and desire of giving her a little

preparation.

'Ah! those southern beauties soon go on. Some one told me that Lord Byron's "Maid of Athens," whose portrait I used to think the loveliest thing in the world, became a great stout woman, but was quite a mother to all the young Englishmen about. I remember I used to try to hold my head and keep my eyelids down like the engraving in an old book that had been my mother's.'

'Oh! I think I have seen it at Beechcroft,' said Gillian, very much amused, for she now perceived whence arose Aunt Ada's peculiar turn of the head and droop of the eyelashes, and how the conscious affectation of childhood had become unconsciously crystallised.

She grew more and more anxious as they found some difficulty in making out Ivinghoe Terrace, and found it at last to be a row of rather dilapidated little houses, apparently built of lath and stucco, and of that peculiar meanness only attained by the modern suburb. Aunt Ada evidently did not like it at all, and owned herself almost ready to turn back, being sure that Valetta must have made some mistake. Gillian repeated that she had always said the Whites were very poor, but she began to feel that her impatience had misled her, and that she would have been better off with the aunt who was used to such places, and whose trim browns and crimsons were always appropriate everywhere, rather than this dainty figure in delicate hues that looked only fit for the Esplanade or the kettledrum, and who was becoming

seriously uneasy, as Kunz, in his fresh snowiness, was disposed to make researches among vulgar remains of crabs and hakes, and was with difficulty restrained from disputing them with a very ignoble and spiteful yellow cur of low degree.

No. 3, with its blistered wall and rusty rail, was attained, Kunz was brought within the enclosure, and Gillian knocked as sharply and fast as she could, in the fear that her aunt might yet turn about and escape.

The door was opened with a rapidity that gave the impression that they had been watched, but it was by a very untidy-looking small maid, and the parlour into which they were turned had most manifestly been lately used as the family dining-room, and was redolent of a mixture of onion, cabbage, and other indescribable odours.

Nobody was there, except a black and white cat, who showed symptoms of flying at Kunz, but thought better of it, and escaped by the window, which fortunately was open, though the little maid would have shut it, but for Miss Adeline's gasping and peremptory entreaty to the contrary. She sat on the faded sofa, looking as if she just existed by the help of her fan and scent-bottle, and when Gillian directed her attention to the case of clasps and medals and the photograph of the fine-looking officer, she could only sigh out, 'Oh, my dear!'

There was a certain air of taste in the arrangement of the few chimney-piece ornaments, and Gillian was pleased to see the two large photographs of her father and mother which Captain White

had so much valued as parting gifts. A few drawings reminded her of the School of Art at Belfast, and there was a vase of wild flowers and ferns prettily arranged, but otherwise everything was wretchedly faded and dreary.

Then came the opening of the door, and into the room rolled, rather than advanced, something of stupendous breadth, which almost took Gillian's breath away, as she durst not look to see the effect on her aunt. If the Queen of the White Ants had been stout before, what was she now? Whatever her appearance had been in the days of comparative prosperity, with a husband to keep her up to the mark, and a desire to rank with the officers' wives, she had let everything go in widowhood, poverty, and neglect; and as she stood panting in her old shiny black alpaca, the only thing Gillian recalled about her like old times was the black lace veil thrown mantilla fashion over her head; but now it was over a widow's cap, and a great deal rustier than of old. Of the lovely foreigner nothing else remained except the dark eyes, and that sort of pasty sallow whiteness that looks at if for generations past cold water and fresh air had been unknown. There was no accent more interesting in her voice than a soupcon of her Irish father as she began, 'I am sorry to have kept the lady so long waiting. Was it about the girl's character that you came?'

'Oh no, Mrs. White, interrupted Gillian, her shyness overpowered by the necessity of throwing herself into the breach. 'Don't you remember me? I am Gillian Merrifield, and this is my aunt, Miss Adeline Mohun.'

The puffy features lighted up into warmth. 'Little Miss Gillian! And I am proud to see you! My little Maura did tell me that Miss Valetta was in her class at the High School; but I thought there was no one now who would come near the poor widow. And is your dear mamma here, Miss Gillian, and are she and your papa quite well?'

Gillian could hardly believe in such dense remoteness that her father's accident should be unknown, but she explained all, and met with abundant sympathy, the dark eyes filled with tears, and the voice broke into sobs, as Mrs. White declared that Sir Jasper and Lady Merrifield had been the best friends she ever had in her life.

But oh! that the handkerchief had been less grimy with which she mopped her eyes, as she spoke of the happy days that were gone! Gillian saw that poor Aunt Ada was in an agony to get away, and hurried out her questions for fear of being stopped. 'How was Kalliope—was she at home?'

'Oh no, poor Kally, she is the best girl in the world. I always say that, with all my sorrows, no one ever was more blest in their children than poor little me. Richard, my eldest, is in a lawyer's office at Leeds. Kally is employed in the art department, just as a compliment to her relation, Mr. White. Quite genteel, superior work, though I must say he does not do as much for us as he might. Such a youth as my Alexis now was surely worthy of the position of a gentleman.'

The good lady was quite disposed to talk; but there was no

making out, through her cloud of confused complaints, what her son and daughter were actually doing; and Aunt Ada, while preserving her courtesy, was very anxious to be gone, and rose to take leave at the first moment possible, though after she was on her feet Mrs. White detained her for some time with apologies about not returning her visit. She was in such weak health, so unequal to walking up the cliff, that she was sure Miss Mohun would excuse her, though Alexis and Kally would be perfectly delighted to hear of Miss Gillian's kindness.

Gillian had not made out half what she wanted to know, nor effected any arrangement for seeing Kalliope, when she found herself out in the street, and her aunt panting with relief. 'My dear, that woman! You don't mean that your mother was fond of her.'

'I never said mamma was fond of her.'

'My dear, excuse me. It was the only reason for letting you drag me here. I was almost stifled. What a night I shall have!'

'I am very sorry, Aunt Ada, but, indeed, I never said that mamma was fond of her, only that papa thought very highly of her husband, and wished us to be kind to her.'

'Well, you gave me that impression, whether you wished it or not! Such a hole; and I'm sure she drinks gin!'

'Oh no, aunt!'

'I can't be mistaken! I really was afraid she was going to kiss you!'

'I do wish I could have made out about Alexis and Kalliope.'

'Oh, my dear, just working like all the lot, though she shuffled about it. I see what they are like, and the less you see of them the better. I declare I am more tired than if I had walked a mile. How am I ever to get up the hill again?'

'I am sorry, aunt,' said Gillian. 'Will you take my arm? Perhaps we may meet Kalliope, if the marble people come out at four or five. What's that bell?' as a little tinkle was heard.

'That's St. Kenelm's! Oh! you would like to go there, and it would rest me; only there's Kunz.'

'I should like to see it very much,' said Gillian.

'Well,' said Aunt Ada, who certainly seemed to have something of the 'cat's away' feeling about her, and, moreover, trusted to avoid meeting Kalliope. 'Just round the corner here is Mrs. Webb's, who used to live with us before she married, Kunz will be happy with her. Won't he, my doggie, like to go and see his old Jessie?'

So Kunz was disposed of with a very pleasant, neat-looking woman, who begged Miss Adeline to come and have some tea after the service.

It was really a beautiful little church—'a little gem' was exactly the term that suggested itself—very ornate, and the chief lack being of repose, for there seemed not an inch devoid of colour or carving. There was a choir of boys in short surplices and blue cassocks, and a very musical service, in the course of which it was discovered to be the Feast of St. Remigius, for after the Lesson a short discourse was given on the Conversion of Clovis,

not forgetting the sacred ampulla.

There were about five ladies present and six old women, belonging to a home maintained by Lady Flight. The young priest, her son, had a beautiful voice, and Gillian enjoyed all very much, and thought the St. Andrew's people very hard and unjust; but all this went out of her head in the porch, for while Lady Flight was greeting Miss Mohun with empressement, and inviting her to come in to tea, Gillian had seen a young woman who had come in late and had been kneeling behind them.

Turning back and holding out her hands, she exclaimed—

'Kalliope! I so wanted to see you.'

'Miss Gillian Merrifield,' was the response. 'Maura told me you were here, but I hardly hoped to see you.'

'How can I see you? Where are you? Busy?'

'I am at the marble works all day—in the mosaic department. Oh, Miss Gillian, I owe it all to Miss Merrifield's encouraging me to go to the School of Art. How is she? And I hope you have good accounts of Sir Jasper?'

'He is better, and I hope my mother is just arriving. That's why we are here; and Alethea and Phyllis are out there. They will want to know all about you.'

At that moment Aunt Adeline looked round, having succeeded in persuading Lady Flight that she had another engagement. She saw a young woman in a shabby black dress, with a bag in her hand, and a dark fringe over a complexion of clear brown, straight features, to whom Gillian was eagerly talking.

'Ah!' she said, as Mr. Flight now came up from the vestry; 'do you know anything of that girl?'

'Second-rate people, somewhere in Bellevue,' said the lady.

'The brother is my best tenor,' said Mr. Flight. 'She is very often at St. Kenelm's, but I do not know any more of her. The mother either goes to Bellevue or nowhere. They are in Bellevue Parish.'

This was quite sufficient answer, for any interference with parochial visiting in the Bellevue district was forbidden.

Aunt Ada called to Gillian, and when she eagerly said, 'This is Kalliope, aunt,' only responded with a stiff bow.

'I do not know what these people might have been, Gillian,' she said, as they pursued their way to Mrs. Webb's; 'but—they must have sunk so low that I do not think your mother can wish you to have anything to do with them.

'Oh, Aunt Ada! Kalliope was always such a good girl!'

'She has a fringe. And she would not belong to the G.F.S.,' said Aunt Ada. 'No, my dear, I see exactly the sort of people they are. Your aunt Jane might be useful to them, if they would let her, but they are not at all fit for you to associate with.'

Gillian chafed inwardly, but she was beginning to learn that Aunt Ada was more impenetrable than Aunt Jane, and, what was worse, Aunt Jane always stood by her sister's decision, whether she would have herself originated it or not.

When the elder aunt came home, and heard the history of their day, and Gillian tried to put in a word, she said—

'My dear, we all know that rising from the ranks puts a man's family in a false position, and they generally fall back again. All this is unlucky, for they do not seem to be people it is possible to get at, and now you have paid your kind act of attention, there is no more to be done till you can hear from Ceylon about them.'

Gillian was silenced by the united forces of the aunts.

'It really was a horrid place,' said Aunt Ada, when alone with her sister; 'and such a porpoise of a woman! Gillian should not have represented her as a favourite.'

'I do not remember that she did so,' returned Aunt Jane. 'I wish she had waited for me. I have seen more of the kind of thing than you have, Ada.'

'I am sure I wish she had. I don't know when I shall get over the stifling of that den; but it was just as if they were her dearest friends.'

'Girls will be silly! And there's a feeling about the old regiment too. I can excuse her, though I wish she had not been so impatient. I fancy that eldest daughter is really a good girl and the mainstay of the family.'

'But she would have nothing to do with you or the G.F.S.'

'If I had known that her father had been an officer, I might have approached her differently. However, I will ask Lily about their antecedents, and in six weeks we shall know what is to be done about them.'

# CHAPTER V. – MARBLES

Six weeks seem a great deal longer to sixteen than to six-and-forty, and Gillian groaned and sighed to herself as she wrote her letters, and assured herself that so far from her having done enough in the way of attention to the old soldier's family, she had simply done enough to mark her neglect and disdain.

'Grizzling' (to use an effective family phrase) under opposition is a grand magnifier; and it was not difficult to erect poor Captain White into a hero, his wife into a patient sufferer, and Alethea's kindness to his daughter into a bosom friendship; while the aunts seemed to be absurdly fastidious and prejudiced. 'I don't wonder at Aunt Ada,' she said to herself; 'I know she has always been kept under a glass case; but I thought better things of Aunt Jane. It is all because Kalliope goes to St. Kenelm's, and won't be in the G.F.S.'

And all the time Gillian was perfectly unaware of her own family likeness to Dolores. Other matters conduced to a certain spirit of opposition to Aunt Jane. That the children should have to use the back instead of the front stair when coming in with dusty or muddy shoes, and that their possessions should be confiscated for the rest of the day when left about in the sitting-rooms and hall, were contingencies she could accept as natural, though they irritated her; but she agreed with Valetta that it was hard to insist on half an hour's regular work at the cushion, which was not a

lesson, but play. She was angered when Aunt Jane put a stop to some sportive passes and chatter on the stairs between Valetta and Alice Mount, and still more so when her aunt took away Adam Bede from the former, as not desirable reading at eleven years old.

It was only the remembrance of her mother's positive orders that withheld Gillian from the declaration that mamma always let them read George Eliot; and in a cooler moment of reflection she was glad she had abstained, for she recollected that *always* was limited to mamma's having read most of Romola aloud to her and Mysie, and to her having had Silas Marner to read when she was unwell in lodgings, and there was a scarcity of books.

Such miffs about her little sister were in the natural order of things, and really it was the 'all pervadingness,' as she called it in her own mind, of Aunt Jane that chiefly worried her, the way that the little lady knew everything that was done, and everything that was touched in the house; but as long as Valetta took refuge with herself, and grumbled to her, it was bearable.

It was different with Fergus. There had been offences certainly; Aunt Jane had routed him out of preparing his lessons in Mrs. Mount's room, where he diversified them with teaching the Sofy to beg, and inventing new modes of tying down jam pots. Moreover, she had declared that Gillian's exemplary patience was wasted and harmful when she found that they had taken three-quarters of an hour over three tenses of a Greek verb, and that he said it worse on the seventh repetition than on the

first. After an evening, when Gillian had gone to a musical party with Aunt Ada, and Fergus did his lessons under Aunt Jane's superintendence, he utterly cast off his sister's aid. There was something in Miss Mohun's briskness that he found inspiring, and she put in apt words or illustrations, instead of only rousing herself from a book to listen, prompt, and sigh. He found that he did his tasks more thoroughly in half the time, and rose in his class; and busy as his aunt was, she made the time not only for this, but for looking over with him those plates of mechanics in the Encyclopaedia, which were a mere maze to Gillian, but of which she knew every detail, from ancient studies with her brother Maurice. As Fergus wrote to his mother, 'Aunt Jane is the only woman who has any natural *scence*.'

Gillian could not but see this as she prepared the letters for the post, and whatever the ambiguous word might be meant for, she had rather not have seen it, for she really was ashamed of her secret annoyance at Fergus's devotion to Aunt Jane, knowing how well it was that Stebbing should have a rival in his affections. Yet she could not help being provoked when the boy followed his aunt to the doors of her cottages like a little dog, and waited outside whenever she would let him, for the sake of holding forth to her about something which wheels and plugs and screws were to do. Was it possible that Miss Mohun followed it all? His great desire was to go over the marble works, and she had promised to take him when it could be done; but, unfortunately, his half-holiday was on Saturday, when the workmen struck off early, and

when also Aunt Jane always had the pupil-teachers for something between instruction and amusement.

Gillian felt lonely, for though she got on better with her younger than her elder aunt, and had plenty of surface intercourse of a pleasant kind with both, it was a very poor substitute for her mother, or her elder sisters, and Valetta was very far from being a Mysie.

The worst time was Sunday, when the children had deserted her for Mrs. Hablot, and Aunt Ada was always lying down in her own room to rest after morning service. She might have been at the Sunday-school, but she did not love teaching, nor do it well, and she did not fancy the town children, or else there was something of opposition to Aunt Jane.

It was a beautiful afternoon, of the first Sunday in October, and she betook herself to the garden with the 'Lyra Innocentium' in her hand, meaning to learn the poem for the day. She wandered up to the rail above the cliff, looking out to the sea. Here, beyond the belt of tamarisks and other hardy low-growing shrubs which gave a little protection from the winds, the wall dividing the garden of Beechcroft Cottage from that of Cliff House became low, with only the iron-spiked railing on the top, as perhaps there was a desire not to overload the cliff. The sea was of a lovely colour that day, soft blue, and with exquisite purple shadows of clouds, with ripples of golden sparkles here and there near the sun, and Gillian stood leaning against the rail, gazing out on it, with a longing, yearning feeling towards the dear ones who had

gone out upon it, when she became conscious that some one was in the other garden, which she had hitherto thought quite deserted, and looking round, she saw a figure in black near the rail. Their eyes met, and both together exclaimed—

'Kalliope!'—'Miss Gillian! Oh, I beg your pardon!'

'How did you come here? I thought nobody did!'

'Mr. White's gardener lets us walk here. It is so nice and quiet. Alexis has taken the younger ones for a walk, but I was too much tired. But I will not disturb you—'

'Oh! don't go away. Nobody will disturb us, and I do so want to know about you all. I had no notion, nor mamma either, that you were living here, or—'

'Or of my dear father's death!' said Kalliope, as Gillian stopped short, confused. 'I did write to Miss Merrifield, but the letter was returned.'

'But where did you write?'

'To Swanage, where she had written to me last.'

'Oh! we were only there for six weeks, while we were looking for houses; I suppose it was just as the Wardours were gone to Natal too?'

'Yes, we knew they were out of reach.'

'But do tell me about it, if you do not mind. My father will want to hear.'

Kalliope told all in a calm, matter-of-fact way, but with a strain of deep suppressed feeling. She was about twenty-three, a girl with a fine outline of features, beautiful dark eyes, and a

clear brown skin, who would have been very handsome if she had looked better fed and less hardworked. Her Sunday dress showed wear and adaptation, but she was altogether ladylike, and even the fringe that had startled Aunt Ada only consisted of little wavy curls on the temples, increasing her classical look.

'It was fever—at Leeds. My father was just going into a situation in the police that we had been waiting for ever so long, and there were good schools, and Richard had got into a lawyer's office, when there began a terrible fever in our street—the drains were to blame, they said—and every one of us had it, except mother and Richard, who did not sleep at home. We lost poor little Mary first, and then papa seemed to be getting better; but he was anxious about expense, and there was no persuading him to take nourishment enough. I do believe it was that. And he had a relapse—and—'

'Oh, poor Kalliope! And we never heard of it!'

'I did feel broken down when the letter to Miss Merrifield came back,' said Kalliope. 'But my father had made me write to Mr. James White—not that we had any idea that he had grown so rich. He and my father were first cousins, sons of two brothers who were builders; but there was some dispute, and it ended by my father going away and enlisting. There was nobody nearer to him, and he never heard any more of his home; but when he was so ill, he thought he would like to be reconciled to "Jem," as he said, so he made me write from his dictation. Such a beautiful letter it was, and he added a line at the end himself. Then at last,

when it was almost too late, Mr. White answered. I believe it was a mere chance—or rather Providence—that he ever knew it was meant for him, but there were kind words enough to cheer up my father at the last. I believe then the clergyman wrote to him.'

'Did not he come near you?'

'No, I have never seen him; but there was a correspondence between him and Mr. Moore, the clergyman, and Richard, and he said he was willing to put us in the way of working for ourselves, if—if—we were not too proud.'

'Then he did it in an unkind way,' said Gillian.

'I try to think he did not mean to be otherwise than good to us. I told Mr. Moore that I was not fit to be a governess, and I did not think they could get on without me at home, but that I could draw better than I would do anything else, and perhaps I might get Christmas cards to do, or something like that. Mr. Moore sent a card or two of my designing, and then Mr. White said he could find work for me in the mosaic department here; and something for my brothers, if we did not give ourselves airs. So we came.'

'Not Richard?' said Gillian, who remembered dimly that Richard had not been held in great esteem by her own brothers.

'No; Richard is in a good situation, so it was settled that he should stay on there.'

'And you—'

'I am in the mosaic department. Oh, Miss Gillian, I am so grateful to Miss Merrifield. Don't you remember her looking at my little attempts, and persuading Lady Merrifield to get mother

to let me go to the School of Art? I began only as the girls do who are mere hands, and now I have to prepare all the designs for them, and have a nice little office of my own for it. Sometimes I get one of my own designs taken, and then I am paid extra.'

'Then do you maintain them all?'

'Oh no; we have lodgers, the organist and his wife,' said Kalliope, laughing, 'and Alexis is in the telegraph office, at the works; besides, it turned out that this house and two more belong to us, and we do very well when the tenants pay their rents.'

'But Maura is not the youngest of you,' said Gillian, who was rather hazy about the family.

'No, there are the two little boys. We let them go to the National School for the present. It is a great trial to my poor mother, but they do learn well there, and we may be able to do something better for them by the time they are old enough for further education.'

Just then the sound of a bell coming up from the town below was a warning to both that the conversation must be broken off. A few words—'I am so glad to have seen you,' and 'It has been such a pleasure'—passed, and then each hastened down her separate garden path.

'Must I tell of this meeting?' Gillian asked herself. 'I shall write it all to mamma and Alethea, of course. How delightful that those lessons that Kalliope had have come to be of so much use! How pleased Alethea will be! Poor dear thing! How much she has gone through! But can there be any need to tell the aunts? Would it

not just make Aunt Ada nervous about any one looking through her sweet and lovely wall? And as to Aunt Jane, I really don't see that I am bound to gratify her passion for knowing everything. I am not accountable to her, but to my own mother. My people know all about Kalliope, and she is prejudiced. Why should I be unkind and neglectful of an old fellow-soldier's family, because she cannot or will not understand what they really are? It would not be the slightest use to tell her the real story. Mrs. White is fat, and Kalliope has a fringe, goes to St. Kenelm's, and won't be in the G.F.S., and that's enough to make her say she does not believe a word of it, or else to make it a fresh ground for poking and prying, in the way that drives one distracted! It really is quite a satis-faction to have something that she can't find out, and it is not underhand while I write every word of it to mamma.'

So Gillian made her conscience easy, and she did write a long and full account of the Whites and their troubles, and of her conversation with Kalliope.

In the course of that week Fergus had a holiday, asked for by some good-natured visitor of Mrs. Edgar's. He rushed home on the previous day with the news, to claim Aunt Jane's promise; and she undertook so to arrange matters as to be ready to go with him to the marble works at three o'clock. Valetta could not go, as she had her music lesson at that time, and she did not regret it, for she had an idea that blasting with powder or dynamite was always going on there. Gillian was not quite happy about the dynamite, but she did not like to forego the chance of seeing what

the work of Kalliope and Alexis really was, so she expressed her willingness to join the party, and in the meantime did her best to prevent Aunt Ada from being driven distracted by Fergus's impatience, which began at half-past two.

Miss Mohun had darted out as soon as dinner was over, and he was quite certain some horrible cad would detain her till four o'clock, and then going would be of no use. Nevertheless he was miserable till Gillian had put on her hat, and then she could do nothing that would content him and keep him out of Aunt Ada's way, but walk him up and down in the little front court with the copper beeches, while she thought they must present to the neighbours a lively tableau of a couple of leopards in a cage.

However, precisely as the clock struck three, Aunt Jane walked up to the iron gate. She had secured an order from Mr. Stebbing, the managing partner, without which they would not have penetrated beyond the gate where 'No admittance except on business' was painted.

Mr. Stebbing himself, a man with what Valetta was wont to call a grisly beard, met them a little within the gate, and did the honours of the place with great politeness. He answered all the boy's questions, and seemed much pleased with his intelligence and interest, letting him see what he wished, and even having the machinery slacked to enable him to perceive how it acted, and most delightful of all, in the eyes of Fergus, letting him behold some dynamite, and explaining its downward explosion. He evidently had a great respect for Miss Mohun, because she

entered into it all, put pertinent questions, and helped her nephew if he did not understand.

It was all dull work to Gillian, all that blasting and hewing and polishing, which made the place as busy as a hive. She only wished she could have seen the cove as once it was, with the weather-beaten rocks descending to the sea, overhung with wild thrift and bramble, and with the shore, the peaceful haunts of the white sea-birds; whereas now the fresh-cut rock looked red and wounded, and all below was full of ugly slated or iron-roofed sheds, rough workmen, and gratings and screeches of machinery.

It was the Whites whom she wanted to see, and she never came upon the brother at all, nor on the sister, till Mr. Stebbing, perhaps observing her listless looks, said that they were coming to what would be more interesting to Miss Merrifield, and took them into the workrooms, where a number of young women were busy over the very beautiful work by which flowers and other devices were represented by inlaying different coloured marbles and semi-precious stones in black and white, so as to make tables, slabs, and letter-weights, and brooches for those who could not aspire to the most splendid and costly productions.

Miss Mohun shook hands with 'the young ladies' within the magic circle of the G.F.S., and showed herself on friendly terms of interest with all. From a little inner office Miss White was summoned, came out, and met an eager greeting from Gillian, but blushed a little, and perhaps had rather not have had her unusual Christian name proclaimed by the explanation—

'This is Kalliope White, Aunt Jane.'

Miss Mohun shook hands with her, and said her niece had been much pleased at the meeting, and her sister would be glad to hear of her, explaining to Mr. Stebbing that Captain White had been a brother-officer of Sir Jasper Merrifield.

Kalliope had a very prettily-shaped head, with short hair in little curls and rings all over it. Her whole manner was very quiet and unassuming, as she explained and showed whatever Mr. Stebbing wished. It was her business to make the working drawings for the others, and to select the stones used, and there could be no doubt that she was a capable and valuable worker.

Gillian asked her to show something designed by herself, and she produced an exquisite table-weight, bearing a spray of sweet peas. Gillian longed to secure it for her mother, but it was very expensive, owing to the uncommon stones used in giving the tints, and Mr. Stebbing evidently did not regard it with so much favour as the jessamines and snowdrops, which, being of commoner marbles, could be sold at a rate fitter for the popular purse. Several beautiful drawings in her office had been laid aside as impracticable, 'unless we had a carte blanche wedding order,' he said, with what Gillian thought a sneer.

She would gladly have lingered longer, but this was a very dull room in Fergus's estimation, and perhaps Aunt Jane did not desire a long continuance of the conversation under Mr. Stebbing's eyes, so Gillian found herself hurried on.

Mr. Stebbing begged Miss Mohun to come in to his wife,

who would have tea ready, and this could not be avoided without manifest incivility. Fergus hoped to have been introduced to the haunts of his hero, but Master George was gone off in attendance on his brother, who was fishing, and there was nothing to relieve the polite circle of the drawing-room—a place most aesthetically correct, from cornice to the little rugs on the slippery floor. The little teacups and the low Turkish table were a perfect study to those who did not—like Fergus—think more of the dainty doll's muffins on the stand, or the long-backed Dachshund who looked for them beseechingly.

Mrs. Stebbing was quite in accordance with the rest, with a little row of curls over her forehead, a terra-cotta dress, and a chain of watch cocks, altogether rather youthful for the mother of a grown-up son, engaged in his father's business.

She was extremely civil and polite, and everything went well except for a certain stiffness. By and by the subject of the Whites came up, and Mr. Stebbing observed that Miss Merrifield seemed to know Miss White.

'Oh yes,' said Gillian eagerly; 'her father was in my father's regiment, the Royal Wardours.'

'A non-commissioned officer, I suppose,' said Mrs. Stebbing.

'Not for a good many years,' said Gillian. 'He was lieutenant for six years, and retired with the rank of captain.'

'I know they said he was a captain,' said Mrs. Stebbing; 'but it is very easy to be called so.'

'Captain White was a real one,' said Gillian, with a tone of

offence. 'Every one in the Royal Wardours thought very highly of him.'

'I am sure no one would have supposed it from his family,' said Mrs. Stebbing. 'You are aware, Miss Mohun, that it was under disgraceful circumstances that he ran away and enlisted.'

'Many a youth who gets into a scrape becomes an excellent soldier, even an officer,' said Miss Mohun.

'Exactly so,' said Mr. Stebbing. 'Those high-spirited lads are the better for discipline, and often turn out well under it. But their promotion is an awkward thing for their families, who have not been educated up to the mark.'

'It is an anomalous position, and I have a great pity for them,' said Miss Mohun. 'Miss White must be a very clever girl.'

'Talented, yes,' said Mr. Stebbing. 'She is useful in her department.

'That may be,' said Mrs. Stebbing; 'but it won't do to encourage her. She is an artful, designing girl, I know very well—'

'Do you know anything against her?' asked Miss Mohun, looking volumes of repression at Gillian, whose brown eyes showed symptoms of glaring like a cat's, under her hat.

'I do not speak without warrant, Miss Mohun. She is one of those demure, proper-behaved sort that are really the worst flirts of all, if you'll excuse me.'

Most thankful was Miss Mohun that the door opened at that moment to admit some more visitors, for she saw that Gillian might at any moment explode.

'Aunt Jane,' she exclaimed, as soon as they had accomplished their departure, 'you don't believe it?'

'I do not think Miss White looks like it,' said Miss Mohun. 'She seemed a quiet, simple girl.'

'And you don't believe all that about poor Captain White?'

'Not the more for Mrs. Stebbing's saying so.'

'But you will find out and refute her. There must be people who know.'

'My dear, you had better not try to rake up such things. You know that the man bore an excellent character for many years in the army, and you had better be satisfied with that,' said Miss Jane for once in her life, as if to provoke Gillian, not on the side of curiosity.

'Then you do believe it!' went on Gillian, feeling much injured for her hero's sake, and wearing what looked like a pertinacious pout.

'Truth compels me to say, Gillian, that the sons of men, even in a small way of business, are not apt to run away and enlist without some reason.'

'And I am quite sure it was all that horrid old White's fault.'

'You had better content yourself with that belief.'

Gillian felt greatly affronted, but Fergus, who thought all this very tiresome, broke in, after a third attempt—

'Aunt Jane, if the pulley of that crane—'

And all the way home they discussed machinery, and Gillian's heart swelled.

‘I am afraid Gillian was greatly displeased with me,’ said Miss Mohun that evening, talking it over with her sister. ‘But her captain might have a fall if she went poking into all the gossip of the place about him.’

‘Most likely whatever he did would be greatly exaggerated,’ said Adeline.

‘No doubt of it! Besides, those young men who are meant by nature for heroes are apt to show some Beserkerwuth in their youth, like Hereward le Wake.’

‘But what did you think of the girl?’

‘I liked her looks very much. I have seen her singing in the choruses at the choral society concert, and thought how nice her manner was. She does justice to her classical extraction, and is modest and ladylike besides. Mrs. Stebbing is spiteful! I wonder whether it is jealousy. She calls her artful and designing, which sounds to me very much as if Master Frank might admire the damsel. I have a great mind to have the two girls to tea, and see what they are made of.’

‘We had much better wait till we hear from Lily. We cannot in the least tell whether she would wish the acquaintance to be kept up. And if there is anything going on with young Stebbing, nothing could be more unadvisable than for Gillian to be mixed up in any nonsense of that sort.’

# CHAPTER VI. – SINGLE MISFORTUNES NEVER COME ALONE

On Sunday, Gillian's feet found their way to the top of the garden, where she paced meditatively up and down, hoping to see Kalliope; and just as she was giving up the expectation, the slender black figure appeared on the other side of the railings.

'Oh, Miss Gillian, how kind!'

'Kally, I am glad!'

Wherewith they got into talk at once, for Lady Merrifield's safe arrival and Sir Jasper's improvement had just been telegraphed, and there was much rejoicing over the good news. Gillian had nearly made up her mind to confute the enemy by asking why Captain White had left Rockquay; but somehow when it came to the point, she durst not make the venture, and they skimmed upon more surface subjects.

The one point of union between the parishes of Rockstone and Rockquay was a choral society, whereof Mr. Flight of St. Kenelm's was a distinguished light, and which gave periodical concerts in the Masonic Hall. It being musical, Miss Mohun had nothing to do with it except the feeling it needful to give her presence to the performances. One of these was to take place in the course of the week, and there were programmes in all the

shops, 'Mr. Alexis White' being set down for more than one solo, and as a voice in the glees.

'Shall not you sing?' asked Gillian, remembering that her sisters had thought Kalliope had a good ear and a pretty voice.

'I? Oh, no!'

'I thought you used to sing.'

'Yes; but I have no time to keep it up.'

'Not even in the choruses?'

'No, I cannot manage it'—and there was a little glow in the clear brown cheek.

'Does your designing take up so much time?'

'It is not that, but there is a great deal to do at home in after hours. My mother is not strong, and we cannot keep a really efficient servant.'

'Oh! but you must be terribly hard-worked to have no time for relaxation.'

'Not quite that, but—it seems to me,' burst out poor Kalliope, 'that relaxation does nothing but bring a girl into difficulties—an unprotected girl, I mean.'

'What do you mean?' cried Gillian, quite excited; but Kalliope had caught herself up.

'Never mind, Miss Gillian; you have nothing to do with that kind of thing.'

'But do tell me, Kally; I do want to be your friend,' said Gillian, trying to put her hand through.

'There's nothing to tell,' said Kalliope, smiling and evidently

touched, but still somewhat red, 'only you know when a girl has nobody to look after her, she has to look after herself.'

'Doesn't Alexis look after you?' said Gillian, not at all satisfied to be put off with this truism.

'Poor Alex! He is younger, you know, and he has quite enough to do. Oh, Miss Gillian, he is such a very dear, good boy.'

'He has a most beautiful voice, Aunt Ada said.'

'Yes, poor fellow, though he almost wishes he had not. Oh dear I there's the little bell! Good-bye, Miss Merrifield, I must run, or Mrs. Smithson will be gone to church, and I shall be locked in.'

So Gillian was left to the enigma why Alexis should regret the beauty of his own voice, and what Kalliope could mean by the scrapes of unprotected girls. It did not occur to her that Miss White was her elder by six or seven years, and possibly might not rely on her judgment and discretion as much as she might have done on those of Alethea.

Meantime the concert was coming on. It was not an amusement that Aunt Ada could attempt, but Miss Mohun took both her nieces, to the extreme pride and delight of Valetta, who had never been, as she said, 'to any evening thing but just stupid childish things, only trees and magic-lanterns'; and would not quite believe Gillian, who assured her in a sage tone that she would find this far less entertaining than either, judging by the manner in which she was wont to vituperate her music lesson.

'Oh! but that's only scales, and everybody hates them! And I do love a German band.'

'Especially in the middle of lesson-time,' said Gillian.

However, Fergus was to spend the evening with Clement Varley; and Kitty was to go with her mother and sister, the latter of whom was to be one of the performers; but it was decreed by the cruel authorities that the two bosom friends would have their tongues in better order if they were some chairs apart; and therefore, though the members of the two families at Beechcroft and the Tamarisks were consecutive, Valetta was quartered between her aunt and Gillian, with Mrs. Varley on the other side of Miss Mohun, and Major Dennis flanking Miss Merrifield. When he had duly inquired after Sir Jasper, and heard of Lady Merrifield's arrival, he had no more conversation for the young lady; and Valetta, having perceived by force of example that in this waiting-time it was not like being in church, poured out her observations and inquiries on her sister.

'What a funny room! And oh! do look at the pictures! Why has that man got on a blue apron? Freemasons! What are Freemasons? Do they work in embroidered blue satin aprons because they are gentlemen? I'll tell Fergus that is what he ought to be; he is so fond of making things—only I am sure he would spoil his apron. What's that curtain for? Will they sing up there? Oh, there's Emma Norton just come in! That must be her father. That's Alice Gidding, she comes to our Sunday class, and do you know, she thought it was Joseph who was put into the den of lions. Has not her mother got a funny head?'

'Hush now, Val. Here they come,' as the whole chorus trooped

in and began the 'Men of Harlech.'

Val was reduced to silence, but there was a long instrumental performance afterwards, during which bad examples of chattering emboldened her to whisper—

'Did you see Beatrice Varley? And Miss Berry, our singing-mistress—and Alexis White? Maura says—'

Aunt Jane gave a touch and a frown which reduced Valetta to silence at this critical moment; and she sat still through a good deal, only giving a little jump when Alexis White, with various others, came to sing a glee.

Gillian could study the youth, who certainly was, as Aunt Ada said, remarkable for the cameo-like cutting of his profile, though perhaps no one without an eye for art would have remarked it, as he had the callow unformed air of a lad of seventeen or eighteen, and looked shy and grave; but his voice was a fine one, and was heard to more advantage in the solos to a hunting song which shortly followed.

Valetta had been rather alarmed at the applause at first, but she soon found out what an opportunity it gave for conversation, and after a good deal of popping her head about, she took advantage of the encores to excuse herself by saying, 'I wanted to see if Maura White was there. She was to go if Mrs. Lee—that's the lodger—would take her. She says Kally won't go, or sing, or anything, because—'

How tantalising! the singers reappeared, and Valetta was reduced to silence. Nor could the subject be renewed in the

interval between the parts, for Major Dennis came and stood in front, and talked to Miss Mohun; and after that Valetta grew sleepy, and nothing was to be got out of her till all was over, when she awoke into extra animation, and chattered so vehemently all the way home that her aunt advised Gillian to get her to bed as quietly as possible, or she would not sleep all night, and would be good for nothing the next day.

Gillian, however, being given to think for herself in all cases of counsel from Aunt Jane, thought it could do no harm to beguile the brushing of the child's hair by asking why Kalliope would not come to the concert.

'Oh, it's a great secret, but Maura told me in the cloakroom. It is because Mr. Frank wants to be her—to be her—her admirer,' said Valetta, cocking her head on one side, and adding to the already crimson colour of her cheeks.

'Nonsense, Val, what do you and Maura know of such things?'

'We aren't babies, Gill, and it is very unkind of you, when you told me I was to make friends with Maura White; and Kitty Varley is quite cross with me about it.'

'I told you to be kind to Maura, but not to talk about such foolish things.'

'I don't see why they should be foolish. It is what we all must come to. Grown-up people do, as Lois says. I heard Aunt Ada going on ever so long about Beatrice Varley and that gentleman.'

'It is just the disadvantage of that kind of school that girls talk that sort of undesirable stuff. Gillian said to herself; but curiosity,

or interest in the Whites, prompted her to add, 'What did she tell you?'

'If you are so cross, I shan't tell you. You hurt my head, I say.'

'Come, Val, I ought to know.'

'It's a secret.'

'Then you should not have told me so much.'

Val laughed triumphantly, and called her sister Mrs. Curiosity, and at that moment Aunt Jane knocked at the door, and said Val was not to talk.

Val made an impatient face and began to whisper, but Gillian had too much proper feeling to allow this flat disobedience, and would not listen, much as she longed to do so. She heard her little sister rolling and tossing about a good deal, but made herself hard-hearted on principle, and acted sleep. On her own judgment, she would not waken the child in the morning, and Aunt Jane said she was quite right, it would be better to let Val have her sleep out, than send her to school fretful and half alive. 'But you ought not to have let her talk last night.'

As usual, reproof was unpleasing, and silenced Gillian. She hoped to extract the rest of the story in the course of the day. But before breakfast was over Valetta rushed in with her hat on, having scrambled into her clothes in a hurry, and consuming her breakfast in great haste, for she had no notion either of losing her place in the class, or of missing the discussion of the entertainment with Kitty, from whom she had been so cruelly parted.

Tete-a-tetes were not so easy as might have been expected between two sisters occupying the same room, for Valetta went to bed and to sleep long before Gillian, and the morning toilette was a hurry; besides, Gillian had scruples, partly out of pride and partly out of conscientiousness, about encouraging Valetta in gossip or showing her curiosity about it. Could she make anything out from Kalliope herself? However, fortune favoured her, for she came out of her class only a few steps behind little Maura; and as some of Mr. Edgar's boys were about, the child naturally regarded her as a protector.

Maura was quite as pretty as her elders, and had more of a southern look. Perhaps she was proportionably precocious, for she returned Gillian's greeting without embarrassment, and was quite ready to enter into conversation and show her gratification at compliments upon her brother's voice.

'And does not Kalliope sing? I think she used to sing very nicely in the old times.'

'Oh yes,' said Maura; 'but she doesn't now.'

'Why not? Has not she time?'

'That's not all' said Maura, looking significant, and an interrogative sound sufficed to bring out—'It is because of Mr. Frank.'

'Mr. Frank Stebbing?'

'Yes. He was always after her, and would walk home with her after the practices, though Alexis was always there. I know that was the reason for I heard la mamma mia trying to persuade her

to go on with the society, and she was determined, and would not. Alex said she was quite right, and it is very tiresome of him, for now she never walks with us on Sunday, and he used to come and give us bonbons and crackers.'

'Then she does not like him?'

'She says it is not right or fitting, because Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing would be against it; but mamma said he would get over them, if she would not be so stupid, and he could make her quite a lady, like an officer's daughter, as we are. Is it not a pity she won't, Miss Gillian?'

'I do not know. I think she is very good,' said Gillian.

'Oh! but if she would, we might all be well off again,' said little worldly-minded Maura; 'and I should not have to help her make the beds, and darn, and iron, and all sorts of horrid things, but we could live properly, like ladies.'

'I think it is more ladylike to act uprightly,' said Gillian.

Wherewith, having made the discovery, and escorted Maura beyond the reach of her enemies, she parted with the child, and turned homewards. Gillian was at the stage in which sensible maidens have a certain repugnance and contempt for the idea of love and lovers as an interruption to the higher aims of life and destruction to family joys. Romance in her eyes was the exaltation of woman out of reach, and Maura's communications inclined her to glorify Kalliope as a heroine, molested by a very inconvenient person, 'Spighted by a fool, spighted and angered both,' as she quoted Imogen to herself.

It would be a grand history to tell Alethea of her friend, when she should have learnt a little more about it, as she intended to do on Sunday from Kalliope herself, who surely would be grateful for some sympathy and friendship. Withal she recollected that it was Indian-mail day, and hurried home to see whether the midday post had brought any letters. Her two aunts were talking eagerly, but suddenly broke off as she opened the door.

'Well, Gillian—' began Aunt Ada.

'No, no, let her see for herself,' said Aunt Jane.

'Oh! I hope nothing is the matter?' she exclaimed, seeing a letter to herself on the table.

'No; rather the reverse.'

A horrible suspicion, as she afterwards called it, came over Gillian as she tore open the letter. There were two small notes. The first was—

'DEAR LITTLE GILL—I am going to give you a new brother. Mother will tell you all.—Your loving sister,

'P. E. M.'

She gasped, and looked at the other.

'DEAREST GILLIAN—After all you have heard about Frank, perhaps you will know that I am very happy. You cannot guess how happy, and it is so delightful that mamma is charmed with him. He has got two medals and three clasps. There are so many to write to, I can only give my poor darling this little word. She will find it is only having another to be as fond of her as her old Alley.'

Gillian looked up in a bewildered state, and gasped 'Both!'

Aunt Jane could not help smiling a little, and saying, 'Yes, both at one fell swoop.'

'It's dreadful,' said Gillian.

'My dear, if you want to keep your sisters to yourself, you should not let them go to India, said Aunt Ada.

'They said they wouldn't! They were quite angry at the notion of being so commonplace,' said Gillian.

'Oh, no one knows till her time comes!' said Aunt Jane.

Gillian now applied herself to her mother's letter, which was also short.

'MY DEAREST GILLYFLOWER—I know this will be a great blow to you, as indeed it was to me; but we must not be selfish, and must remember that the sisters' happiness and welfare is the great point. I wish I could write to you more at length; but time will not let me, scattered as are all my poor flock at home. So I must leave you to learn the bare public facts from Aunt Jane, and only say my especial private words to you. You are used to being brevet eldest daughter to me, now you will have to be so to papa, who is mending fast, but, I think, will come home with me. Isn't that news?

'Your loving mother.'

'They have told you all about it, Aunt Jane!' said Gillian.

'Yes; they have been so cruel as not even to tell you the names of these robbers? Well, I dare say you had rather read my letter than hear it.'

'Thank you very much, Aunt Jane! May I take it upstairs with me?'

Consent was readily given, and Gillian had just time for her first cursory reading before luncheon.

'DEAREST JENNY—Fancy what burst upon me only the day after my coming—though really we ought to be very thankful. You might perhaps have divined what was brewing from the letters. Jasper knew of one and suspected the other before the accident, and he says it prevented him from telegraphing to stop me, for he was sure one or both the girls would want their mother. Phyllis began it. Hers is a young merchant just taken into the great Underwood firm. Bernard Underwood, a very nice fellow, brother to the husband of one of Harry May's sisters—very much liked and respected, and, by the way, an uncommonly handsome man. That was imminent before Jasper's accident, and the letter to prepare me must be reposing in Harry's care. Mr. Underwood came down with Claude to meet me when I landed, and I scented danger in his eye. But it is all right—only his income is entirely professional, and they will have to live out here for some time to come.

'The other only spoke yesterday, having abstained from worrying his General. He is Lord Francis Somerville, son to Lord Liddesdale, and a captain in the Glen Lorn Highlanders, who have not above a couple of years to stay in these parts. He was with the riding party when Jasper fell, and was the first to lift him; indeed, he held him all the time of waiting, for poor

Claude trembled too much. He was an immense help through the nursing, and they came to know and depend on him as nothing else would have made them do; and they proved how sincerely right-minded and good he is. There is some connection with the Underwoods, though I have not quite fathomed it. There is no fear about home consent, for it seems that he is given to outpourings to his mother, and had heard that if he thought of Sir Jasper Merrifield's daughter his parents would welcome her, knowing what Sir J. is. There's for you! considering that we have next to nothing to give the child, and Frank has not much fortune, but Alethea is trained to the soldierly life, and they will be better off than Jasper and I were.

'The worst of it is leaving them behind; and as neither of the gentlemen can afford a journey home, we mean to have the double wedding before Lent. As to outfit, the native tailors must be chiefly trusted to, or the stores at Calcutta, and I must send out the rest when I come home. Only please send by post my wedding veil (Gillian knows where it is), together with another as like it as may be. Any slight lace decorations to make us respectable which suggest themselves to you and her might come; I can't recollect or mention them now. I wish Reginald could come and tell you all, but the poor fellow has to go home full pelt about those Irish. Jasper is writing to William, and you must get business particulars from him, and let Gillian and the little ones hear, for there is hardly any time to write. Phyllis, being used to the idea, is very quiet and matter-of-fact about it. She hoped, indeed, that

I guessed nothing till I was satisfied about papa, and had had time to rest. Alethea is in a much more April condition, and I am glad Frank waited till I was here on her account and on her father's. He is going on well, but must keep still. He declares that being nursed by two pair of lovers is highly amusing. However, such homes being found for two of the tribe is a great relief to his mind. I suppose it is to one's rational mind, though it is a terrible tug at one's heart-strings. You shall hear again by the next mail. A brown creature waits to take this to be posted.—

Your loving sister,

L. M.'

Gillian came down to dinner quite pale, and to Aunt Ada's kind 'Well, Gillian?' she could only repeat, 'It is horrid.'

'It is hard to lose all the pretty double wedding,' said Aunt Ada.

'Gillian does not mean that,' hastily put in Miss Mohun.

'Oh no,' said Gillian; 'that would be worse than anything.'

'So you think,' said Aunt Jane; 'but believe those who have gone through it all, my dear, when the wrench is over, one feels the benefit.'

Gillian shook her head, and drank water. Her aunts went on talking, for they thought it better that she should get accustomed to the prospect; and, moreover, they were so much excited that they could hardly have spoken of anything else. Aunt Jane wondered if Phyllis's betrothed were a brother of Mr. Underwood of St. Matthew's, Whittingtown, with whom she had corresponded about the consumptive home; and Aunt Ada

regretted the not having called on Lady Liddesdale when she had spent some weeks at Rockstone, and consoled herself by recollecting that Lord Rotherwood would know all about the family. She had already looked it out in the Peerage, and discovered that Lord Francis Cunningham Somerville was the only younger son, that his age was twenty-nine, and that he had three sisters, all married, as well as his elder brother, who had children enough to make it improbable that Alethea would ever be Lady Liddesdale. She would have shown Gillian the record, but received the ungracious answer, 'I hate swells.'

'Let her alone, Ada,' said Aunt Jane; 'it is a very sore business. She will be better by and by.'

There ensued a little discussion how the veil at Silverfold was to be hunted up, or if Gillian and her aunt must go to do so.

'Can you direct Miss Vincent?' asked Miss Mohun.

'No, I don't think I could; besides, I don't like to set any one to poke and meddle in mamma's drawers.'

'And she could hardly judge what could be available,' added Miss Ada.

'Gillian must go to find it,' said Aunt Jane; 'and let me see, when have I a day? Saturday is never free, and Monday—I could ask Mrs. Hablot to take the cutting out, and then I could look up Lily's Brussels—'

There she caught a sight of Gillian's face. Perhaps one cause of the alienation the girl felt for her aunt was, that there was a certain kindred likeness between them which enabled each to divine the

other's inquiring disposition, though it had different effects on the elder and younger character. Jane Mohun suspected that she had on her ferret look, and guessed that Gillian's disgusted air meant that the idea of her turning over Lady Merrifield's drawers was almost as distasteful as that of the governess's doing it.

'Suppose Gillian goes down on Monday with Fanny,' she said. 'She could manage very well, I am sure.'

Gillian cleared up a little. There is much consolation in being of a little importance, and she liked the notion of a day at home, a quiet day, as she hoped in her present mood, of speaking to nobody. Her aunt let her have her own way, and only sent a card to Macrae to provide for meeting and for food, not even letting Miss Vincent know that she was coming. That feeling of not being able to talk about it or be congratulated would wear off, Aunt Jane said, if she was not worried or argued with, in which case it might become perverse affectation.

It certainly was not shared by the children. Sisters unseen for three years could hardly be very prominent in their minds. Fergus hoped that they would ride to the wedding upon elephants, and Valetta thought it very hard to miss the being a bridesmaid, when Kitty Varley had already enjoyed the honour. However, she soon began to glorify herself on the beauty of Alethea's future title.

'What will Kitty Varley and all say?' was her cry.

'Nothing, unless they are snobs, as girls always are,' said Fergus.

'It is not a nice word,' said Miss Adeline.

'But there's nothing else that expresses it, Aunt Ada,' returned Gillian.

'I agree to a certain degree,' said Miss Mohun; 'but still I am not sure what it does express.'

'Just what girls of that sort are,' said Gillian. 'Mere worshippers of any sort of handle to one's name.'

'Gillian, Gillian, you are not going in for levelling,' cried Aunt Adeline.

'No,' said Gillian; 'but I call it snobbish to make more fuss about Alethea's concern than Phyllis's—just because he calls himself Lord—'

'That is to a certain degree true,' said Miss Mohun. 'The worth of the individual man stands first of all, and nothing can be sillier or in worse taste than to parade one's grand relations.'

'To parade, yes,' said Aunt Adeline; 'but there is no doubt that good connections are a great advantage.'

'Assuredly,' said Miss Mohun. 'Good birth and an ancestry above shame are really a blessing, though it has come to be the fashion to sneer at them. I do not mean merely in the eyes of the world, though it is something to have a name that answers for your relations being respectable. But there are such things as hereditary qualities, and thus testimony to the existence of a distinguished forefather is worth having.'

'Lily's dear old Sir Maurice de Mohun to wit,' said Miss Adeline. 'You know she used to tease Florence by saying the Barons of Beechcroft had a better pedigree than the Devereuxes.'

'I'd rather belong to the man who made himself,' said Gillian.

'Well done, Gill! But though your father won his own spurs, you can't get rid of his respectable Merrifield ancestry wherewith he started in life.'

'I don't want to. I had rather have them than horrid robber Borderers, such as no doubt these Liddesdale people were.'

There was a little laughing at this; but Gillian was saying in her own mind that it was a fine thing to be one's own Rodolf of Hapsburg, and in that light she held Captain White, who, in her present state of mind, she held to have been a superior being to all the Somervilles—perhaps to all the Devereuxes who ever existed.

# CHAPTER VII. – AN EMPTY NEST

There had been no injunctions of secrecy, and though neither Miss Mohun nor Gillian had publicly mentioned the subject, all Rockquay who cared for the news knew by Sunday morning that Lady Merrifield's two elder daughters were engaged.

Gillian, in the course of writing her letters, had become somewhat familiarised with the idea, and really looked forward to talking it over with Kalliope. Though that young person could hardly be termed Alethea's best friend, it was certain that Alethea stood foremost with her, and that her interest in the matter would be very loving.

Accordingly, Kalliope was at the place of meeting even before Gillian, and anxiously she looked as she said—

'May I venture—may I ask if it is true?'

'True? Oh yes, Kally, I knew you would care.'

'Indeed, I well may. There is no expressing how much I owe to dear Miss Alethea and Lady Merrifield, and it is such a delight to hear of them.'

Accordingly, Gillian communicated the facts as she knew them, and offered to give any message.

'Only my dear love and congratulations,' said Kalliope, with a little sigh. 'I should like to have written, but—'

'But why don't you, then?'

'Oh no; she would be too much engaged to think of us, and it

would only worry her to be asked for her advice.'

'I think I know what it is about,' said Gillian.

'How? Oh, how do you know? Did Mr. Flight say anything?'

'Mr. Flight?' exclaimed Gillian. 'What has he to do with it?'

'It was foolish, perhaps; but I did hope he might have helped Alexis, and now he seems only to care for his music.'

'Helped him! How?'

'Perhaps it was unreasonable, but Alexis has always been to good schools. He was getting on beautifully at Leeds, and we thought he would have gained a scholarship and gone on to be a clergyman. That was what his mind has always been fixed upon. You cannot think how good and devoted he is,' said Kalliope with a low trembling voice; 'and my father wished it very much too. But when the break-up came, Mr. White made our not being too fine, as he said, to work, a sort of condition of doing anything for us. Mr. Moore did tell him what Alexis is, but I believe he thought it all nonsense, and there was nothing to be done. Alexis —dear fellow—took it so nicely, said he was thankful to be able to help mother, and if it was his duty and God's will, it was sure to come right; and he has been plodding away at the marble works ever since, quite patiently and resolutely, but trying to keep up his studies in the evening, only now he has worked through all his old school-books.'

'And does not Mr. Flight know that I will help him?'

'Well, Mr. Flight means to be kind, and sometimes seems to think much of him; but it is all for his music, I am afraid. He is

always wanting new things to be learnt and practised, and those take up so much time; and though he does lend us books, they are of no use for study, though they only make the dear boy long and long the more to get on.'

'Does not Mr. Flight know?'

'I am not sure. I think he does; but in his ardour for music he seems to forget all about it. It does seem such a pity that all Alexis's time should be wasted in this drudgery. If I could only be sure of more extra work for my designs, I could set him free; and if Sir Jasper were only at home, I am sure he would put the boy in the way of earning his education. If it were only as a pupil teacher, he would be glad, but then he says he ought not to throw all on me.'

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.