Fenn George Manville

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Содержание

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Volume One – Chapter One.
Lodestars

Ben Hayle, keeper, stepped out of his rose-covered cottage in Thoreby Wood; big, black-whiskered, dark-eyed and handsome, with the sun-tanned look of a sturdy Englishman, his brown velveteen coat and vest and tawny leggings setting off his stalwart form.

As he cleared the porch, he half-turned and set down his carefully kept double-barrelled gun against the rough trellis-work; as, at the sound of his foot, there arose from a long, moss-covered, barn-like building, a tremendous barking and yelping.

"Now then: that'll do!" he shouted, as he walked towards the great double door, which was dotted with the mortal remains of what he termed "varmin" – to wit, the nailed-up bodies of stoats, weasels, hawks, owls, magpies and jays, all set down as being the deadly enemies of the game he reared and preserved for Mrs Rolph at The Warren. But even these were not the most deadly enemies of the pheasants and partridges, Thoreby Wood being haunted by sundry ne'er-do-weels who levied toll there, in spite

of all Ben Hayle's efforts and the stern repression of the County Bench.

"May as well stick you up too," said Ben, as he took a glossy-skinned polecat from where he had thrown it that morning, after taking it from a trap.

He opened one of the doors, and two Gordon setters and a big black retriever bounded out, to leap up, dance around him, and make efforts, in dog-like fashion, to show their delight and anxiety to be at liberty once more.

"Down, Bess! Down, Juno! Steady, Sandy! Quiet! Good dogs, then," he cried, as he entered the barn, took a hammer from where it hung, and a nail from a rough shelf, and with the dogs looking on after sniffing at the polecat, as if they took human interest in the proceeding, he nailed the unfortunate, ill-odoured little beast side by side with the last gibbeted offender, a fine old chinchilla-coated grey rat.

"'Most a pity one can't serve Master Caleb Kent the same. Dunno, though," he added with a chuckle. "Time was – that was years ago, though, and nobody can't say I've done badly since. But I did hope we'd seen the last of Master Caleb."

Ben Hayle took off his black felt hat, and gave his dark, grizzled hair a scratch, and his face puckered up as he put away the hammer, to stand thinking.

"No, hang him, he wouldn't dare!"

Ben walked back to the porch to take up his gun, and a look of pride came to brighten his face, as just then a figure appeared

in the porch in the shape of Judith Hayle, a tall, dark-eyed girl of twenty, strikingly like her father, and, as she stood framed in the entrance, she well warranted the keeper's look of pride.

"Are you going far?"

"'Bout the usual round, my dear. Why, Judy, the place don't seem to be the same with you back home. But it is dull for you, eh?"

"Dull, father? No," said the girl laughing.

"Oh, I dunno. After your fine ways up at The Warren with Miss Marjorie and the missus, it must seem a big drop down to be here again."

"Don't, father. You know I was never so happy anywhere as here."

"But you are grown such a lady now; I'm 'most afraid of you."

"No you are not. I sometimes wish that Mrs Rolph had never had me at the house."

"Why?"

"Because it makes you talk to me like that."

"Well, then, I won't say another word. There, I must be off, but – "

He hesitated as if in doubt.

"Yes, father."

"Well, I was only going to say, I see young Caleb has come back to the village, and knowing how he once – "

"Come back, father!" cried Judith, with a look of alarm.

"Yes, I thought I'd tell you; but I don't think he'll come nigh

here again."

"Oh, no, father, I hope not," said the girl, looking thoughtfully towards the wood, with her brows knitting.

"He'd better not," said the keeper, picking up and tapping the butt of his gun. "Might get peppered with number six. Good-bye, my dear."

He kissed her, walked to the edge of the dense fir wood, gave a look back at the figure by the porch, and then plunged in among the bushes and disappeared, closely followed by the eager dogs, while Judith stood frowning at the place where he had disappeared.

"I wish father wouldn't be so close," thought the girl. "He must know why I'm sent back home. It wasn't my fault; I never tried; but he was always after me. Oh, how spiteful Miss Madge did look."

She went into the cottage to stand by the well-polished grate, her hand resting upon the mantelpiece, whose ornaments were various fittings and articles belonging to the gamekeeper's craft, above which, resting in well-made iron racks, were a couple of carefully cared-for guns; one an old flint-lock fowling-piece, the other a strong single-barrel, used for heavier work, and in which the keeper took special pride.

"Caleb," she said with a shudder, "come back! Well, I was so young then."

As Ben Hayle went thoughtfully along the path, trying to fit into their places certain matters which troubled him, the man of

whom they had both been thinking was near at hand, so that, as the gamekeeper was saying to himself, – "Yes: it's because young squire come home to stay that the missus has sent her back," – Caleb Kent stood before him in the path, the dogs giving the first notice of his presence by dashing forward, uttering low growls, and slipping round the slight, dark, good-looking, gipsy-like fellow coming in the opposite direction.

"Hallo, you, sir!" said the keeper sharply.

"And hallo, you, sir!" retorted the young man, showing his white teeth as he thrust his hands far down in his cord breeches pockets, and, as he stopped, passing one cord legging over the other.

"What are you doing here?"

"Looking at you, Ben Hayle. Path's free for me as it is for you. No, I aren't got a gun in two pieces in my pockets. You needn't look. You know how that's done."

"If I'd been you, I'd ha' stopped away altogether," said the keeper, "and not come back here, where nobody wants you."

"Pity you weren't me. Six months' hard would have done you good once more."

"When I get six months' imprisonment, it won't be for night poaching, but for putting a charge of shot in you, you lunging hound. And don't you let that tongue of yours wag so fast, young man. I'm not ashamed of it. Everyone knows I did a bit of poaching when I was a young fool, and did my bit in quod for that trouble with the keepers. But they know too that, when I

came out, and the captain's father come to me and said, 'Drop it, my lad, and be an honest man,' I said I would, and served him faithful; so shut your mouth before I do it with the stock of my gun."

"All right, mate, don't be waxey. Look here: – s'pose I turn honest too."

"You!" said the keeper, scornfully.

"Yes, me; and marry Judy."

"That'll do," cried the keeper sharply.

"No it won't, we're old sweethearts – Judy and me."

"That'll do, I say. Now, cut."

"When I like," said the man, with a sneer. "Better let me marry her; the captain won't."

The keeper caught him by the throat.

"Will you keep that cursed tongue still!"

"No, I won't," cried the young man fiercely, and with a savage look in his eyes. "I know, even if I have been away. I know all about it. But I'm in that little flutter, Ben Hayle."

"Curse you! hold your tongue, will you," roared the keeper; and the dogs began to bark fiercely as he forced the young poacher back against a tree, but only to release him, as a quick sharp voice, called to the dogs, which dashed up to the new-comer, leaping to be caressed.

"Hallo! what's up? You here again?"

Captain Robert Rolph, of The Warren, and of Her Majesty's 20th Dragoon Guards, a well-set-up, athletic-looking fellow,

scowled at the poacher, and the colour came a little into his cheeks.

"Oh yes, I'm back again, master."

"Then take my advice, sir; go away again to somewhere at a distance."

The young man gave him a sidelong glance, and laughed unpleasantly.

"Look here, Caleb Kent: you're a smart-looking fellow. Go up to Trafalgar Square. You'll find one of our sergeants there. Take the shilling, and they'll make a man of you. You'll be in my regiment, and I'll stand your friend."

"Thankye for nothing, captain. 'List so as to be out of your way, eh? Not such a fool."

"Oh, very well then, only look out, sir. I'll see that Sir John Day doesn't let you off so easily next time you're in trouble."

"Ketch me first," said the young man; and giving the pair an ugly, unpleasant look, he walked away.

"Not me," he muttered. "I haven't done yet; wait a bit."

"No good, sir," said the keeper, looking after the young poacher till he was out of sight. "Bad blood, sir; bad blood."

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Morning, Hayle. Er – Miss Hayle quite well?"

"Yes sir, thank you kindly," said the keeper; and then, as the captain walked away, he trudged on through the woods, talking to himself.

"*Miss Hayle*," he said, and he turned a bit red in the face.

“Well, she is good enow for him or any man; but no, no, that would never do. Don’t be a fool, Ben, my lad: you don’t want trouble to come. Trouble,” he muttered, as he half cocked his gun, “why, I’d – bah!” he ejaculated, cooling down; “what’s the good o’ thinking things like that? Better pepper young Caleb. Damn him! he set me thinking it. Captain’s right enough. I like a man who’s fond of a bit of sport.”

As it happened, Captain Rolph was thinking, in a somewhat similar vein, of poachers and dark nights, and opportunities for using a gun upon unpleasant people. But these thoughts were pervaded, too, with bright eyes and cheeks, and he said to himself, —

“He’d better; awkward for him if he does.”

Volume One – Chapter Two.
Mars on the Horizon

In the drawing-room at The Warren, Mrs Rolph, a handsome, dignified lady of five-and-forty, was sitting back, with her brows knit, looking frowningly at a young and pretty girl of nineteen, whose eyes were puzzling, for in one light they seemed beautiful, in another shifting. She was a Rosetti-ish style of girl, with too much neck, a tangle of dark red hair, and lips of that peculiar pout seen in the above artist's pictures, in conjunction with heavily-lidded eyes, and suggesting at one moment infantile retraction from a feeding-bottle, at another parting from the last kiss. There was a want of frankness in her countenance that would have struck a stranger at once, till she spoke, when the soft, winning coo of her voice proved an advocate which made the disingenuous looks and words fade into insignificance.

Her voice sounded very sweet and low now, as she said softly, —

"Are you not judging dear Robert too hardly, aunt?"

"No, Madge, no. It is as plain as can be; he thinks of nothing else when he comes home – he, a man to whom any alliance is open, to be taken in like that by a keeper's – an ex-poacher's daughter."

"Judith is very ladylike and sweet," said Marjorie softly, as if

to herself.

"Madge, do you want to make me angry?" cried Mrs Rolph, indignantly. "Shame upon you! And it is partly your fault. You have been so cold and distant with him, when a few gentle words would have brought him to your side."

"I am sure you would not have liked me to be different towards him. You would not have had me throw myself at his feet."

The words were as gentle-sounding as could be, but all the same there was a suggestion of strength behind, if the speaker cared to exert it.

"No, no, it is not your fault, my dear," cried Mrs Rolph, angrily; "it is mine, I can see it all now. It was a foolish mistake having her here. Educating a girl like that is a great error, and I see it now that it is too late. Oh, Madge, dear, if I could see him happily wedded to you, how different things might be. But I declare that nothing shall ever induce me to consent. If he will go on in utter rebellion to his mother, he must do so."

"But is it too late, aunt?"

"Unless you rouse yourself up to the position, act like a woman of the world, and drag him from this wretched girl. Oh, it is too disgraceful. If I had only thought to send her away before his regiment was quartered so near."

"Yes," said Marjorie, musingly, "but it is too late now."

"Then you will not try?"

"I did not say so. Here he is."

There was a step in the hall, the sound of a stick being thrust

carelessly into a stand, and, directly after, Rolph tramped into the room.

"Ah, Madge," he said, in a careless, easy way; and, ignoring the smile of welcome with which she greeted him, he walked across to his mother's chair.

"Well," he said, "how is the head?" and he stooped down and kissed her brow.

"Not at all well, my dear," she said affectionately. "I think I will go up to my room."

"Have a drive, dear; I'll order the tandem out."

"No, no, my dear, I shall be better soon."

She rose, kissed him, and left the room.

"Dodge to leave Madge and me together," muttered the young man. "All right. Bring things to a climax."

"How very little we see of you, Robert," said Madge softly. "So much training?"

"Health. Shows how wise I have grown. I'm like pepper; a little of me is very nice – too much an abomination."

Marjorie sighed.

"Hallo! Been reading poetry?"

"No," said the girl, in a low, pained voice. "I was thinking."

"Thinking, eh? What about?"

"Of how changed you are from the nice frank boy who used to be so loving and tender."

"Ah, I was rather a milksop, Madge; wasn't I?"

"I never thought so; and it pains me to hear you speak so

harshly of yourself. What has made you alter so?"

"Ask Dame Nature. I was a boy; now I am a man."

Marjorie sighed, and gave him a long, sad look.

"Well," he said, "what is the matter?"

She looked at him again, long and wistfully.

"As if you did not know," she said.

"Know? How should I know?"

"Then I'll tell you," she cried quickly.

"No, no; confide in some lady friend."

"Robert," she said, in a low, husky voice, and her whole manner changed, her eyes flashed and the lines about her lips grew hard. "What have I done that you should treat me like this?"

"Done? Nothing."

"Then why have you turned so cold and hard to me?"

"I am the same to you to-day that I have always been."

"It is not true," she whispered, with her voice full of intensity of feeling, "you left no stone unturned to make me believe you cared for me."

"Nonsense! Why – "

"Silence! You shall hear me now," she continued, with her excitement growing. "I resisted all this till you almost forced me to care for you. You even make me now confess it in this shameless way, and, when you feel that you are the master, you play with me – trifle with my best feelings."

"Gammon! Madge, what is the matter with you? I never dreamed of such a thing."

"What!"

"Are you going mad?"

"Yes," she cried passionately, "driven so by you. It is shameful. I could not have believed the man lived who would have treated a woman so basely. But I am not blind. There is a reason for it all."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think me a child? I am to be won and then tossed aside for the new love – fancy, the poacher's daughter, and when – "

"Don't be a fool, Madge. You are saying words now that you will repent."

"I'll say them," she cried, half wild with jealous rage, and her words sounding the more intense from their being uttered in a low, harsh whisper, "if I die for it. The gamekeeper's daughter, the girl taken in here by your mother out of charity."

"Madge!"

"Who is to be the next favourite, when you are weary of your last conquest – one of the kitchen wenches?"

"Perhaps," he said coolly.

"Rob! Have you no heart that you treat me as you do?"

"I never thought, never said a word to make you think I meant – er – marriage."

"Think you meant marriage?" she whispered. "I did love you as dearly as I hate you now for your heartless cruelty to me. But you shall repent it – repent it bitterly."

"Look here," he said roughly; "for years past we have lived in

this house like brother and sister, and I won't have you speak like this. Does my mother know?"

"Ask her."

"Bah!"

"You dare not ask her what she thinks or whether she approves of your choice. Captain Rolph in love with the gamekeeper's daughter! Is she to be taken to the county ball, and introduced to society? And is she to wear the family diamonds? Judith – Judy – the miserable, low-bred – "

"Here, hold hard!"

Marjorie Emlin stopped short, startled into silence by the furious look and tone she had evoked. The young man had listened, and from time to time had made deprecating movements to try and turn away the furious woman's wrath till she had made this last attack, when he glared with a rage so overpowering that she shrank from him.

"You have done well," he said. "My mother looks upon you as a daughter. I have always been to you as a brother."

"It is not true," she said, as she stood quivering with fear and rage before him, trying to meet his eye. Then, with a low cry, full of vindictive passion, she struck at him, and ran out of the room.

"Curse the girl!" growled Rolph. "I wish women wouldn't be such fools. A kiss and a few warm words, and then, hang 'em! you're expected to marry 'em. Man can't marry every pretty girl he kisses. They want a missionary among 'em to tell 'em this isn't Turkey. If there's much more of it, I'm off back to Aldershot. No,

I'm not," he added, with a half laugh, "not yet – Hallo, mother! You?"

"Yes, my boy. I saw Madge go out just now, looking wild and excited. Rob, dear, you have been speaking to her?"

"Well, I suppose so," he said bitterly.

"And you have told her you love her? – asked her to be your wife?"

"Good heavens, mother! are you gone mad too? – Madge – I never dreamed of such a thing."

"Why?" said Mrs Rolph, with a strange coldness.

"Because – because – "

"Yes; because you have taken a fancy to another," said Mrs Rolph sternly. "Robert, my son, it is not I who am mad, but you. Have you thought well over all this?"

"Don't ask questions," he said sulkily.

"I am your mother, sir, and I assert my right to question you on such a matter as this, as your poor father would have questioned you. But there is no need. I have done wrong, and yet I cannot blame myself, for how could I, his mother, know that my son would act otherwise than as a gentleman."

"Well, I never do."

"It is false. When Mary Hayle died, I bade her go in peace, for I would try to be a mother to the orphaned girl. Heaven knows, I tried to be. I brought her here, and made her the humble companion of your cousin Madge. She shared her lessons; she was taught everything, that she might be able to earn her own

livelihood as a governess."

"Well, I know all that."

"To be treated with ingratitude. My foolish son, when he comes home, must allow himself to be enmeshed by a cunning and deceitful woman."

"What bosh, mother!"

"But it is true. You do not dare to tell me you do not love Judith Hayle?"

"There is no dare in question. I like the girl."

"Unhappy boy! and she has led you on."

Captain Rolph whistled.

"Any telegram come for me? I sent a man to Brackley."

"Telegram!"

"Yes. I want to know about the footrace at Lilley Bridge."

Mrs Rolph gave her foot an impatient stamp.

"Listen to me, sir. This is no time for thinking about low sports."

"Hallo? Low?"

"Yes, sir; low. I have never interfered when I saw you taking so much interest in these pursuits. My son, I said to our friends, is an officer and a gentleman, and if he likes to encourage athleticism in the country by his presence at these meetings, he has a right to do so; but I have not liked it, though I have been silent. You know I have never interfered about your relaxations."

"No; you've been a splendid mater," he said laughingly.

"And I have been proud of my manly son; but when I see him

stooping to folly – ”

“Misapplied quotation, mater – when lovely woman stoops to folly.”

“Be serious, sir. I will not have you degrade yourself in the eyes of the neighbourhood by such conduct, for it means disgrace. What would the Days say – Sir John and Glynne? If it had been she, I would not have cared.”

“Let the Days be,” he said gruffly.

“I will,” said Mrs Rolph; “but listen, Rob, dear; think of poor Madge.”

“Hang poor Madge! Look here, once for all, mother; I’m not a witch in Macbeth. I don’t want three ounces of a red-haired wench – nor seven stone neither.”

“Rob! Shame!”

“I’m not going to have Madge rammed down my throat. If I’m to marry, she’s not in the running.”

“What? when you know my wishes?”

“Man marries to satisfy his own wishes, not his mother’s. I have other ideas.”

“Then what are they, sir?” said Mrs Rolph scornfully.

“That’s my business,” he said, taking out his cigar-case.

“Then, am I to understand that you intend to form an alliance with the family of our keeper?” said Mrs Rolph sarcastically.

“Bah!” roared her son fiercely; and he strode out of the room and banged the door.

“Gone!” cried Mrs Rolph, wringing her hands and making

her rings crackle one against the other. “I was mad to have the wretched girl here. What fools we women are.”

Her son was saying precisely the same as he marched away.

“Does she think me mad?” he growled. “Marry freckle-faced Madge! – form an alliance with Ben Hayle’s Judy! Not quite such a fool. I’ll go and do it, and show the old girl a trick worth two of that. She’s as clean-limbed a girl as ever stepped, and there’s a look of breed in her that I like. Must marry, I suppose. Ck! For the sake of the estate, join the two then – I will – at once. It will stop their mouths at home, and make an end of the Madge business. She’ll be all right, and begin kissing and hugging her and calling her dearest in a week. That’s the way to clear that hedge, so here goes.”

He stopped, took a short run and cleared the hedge at the side of the lane in reality to begin with, before striking off through one of the adjacent fir woods, so as to reach the sandy lanes and wild common on the way to Brackley.

Volume One – Chapter Three. Concerning Virgo and Gemini

"And what does Glynne say?"

"Well, Sir John, she don't say much; it isn't her way to say a deal."

"Humph! No; you're quite right. But I should have thought that she would have said a good deal upon an occasion like this."

"Yes, I thought she would have roused up a little more; but she has been very quiet ever since I went into training for the event."

"Hang it all, Rolph, don't talk about marriage as if it were a bit of athletic sport."

"No, of course not. It was a slip."

"Well, tell me what she did say."

"That I was to talk to you."

"Humph! Well, you have talked to me, and I don't know what to say."

"*Say yes*, sir, and then the event's fixed."

"Exactly, my dear boy, but I might say *yes*, and repent."

"Oh no, you won't, sir, I'm precious fond of her; I am, indeed. Have been since a boy."

"No one could know my daughter without being fond of her," said Sir John stiffly.

"Of course not; and that's why I want to make sure."

"Humph!" ejaculated Sir John. "You've a good income, my boy, and you're a fine, sound fellow; but I don't much like the idea of my little Glynne marrying into the army."

"Oh, but I shall only stay in till I get my commission as major; and then I mean to retire and become a country squire."

"Humph! yes; and go in more for athleticism, I suppose."

"Well, I think an English country gentleman ought to foster the sports and pastimes of his native land – the hunt, the race meetings, and that sort of thing."

"Humph! Do you? Well, I think, my boy, that we ought to take to agriculture and the improvement of stock. But there, I daresay you'll tone down."

"Then you have no objection, Sir John?"

"Who? – I? None at all, my boy; I liked your father, and I hope you'll make her a good husband – as good a husband as I did my poor wife; though, as the common folk say, I say it as shouldn't say it. Now then, have you any more questions to ask?"

"No, I don't think I have. Of course I'm very happy and that sort of thing. A fellow is sure to be at such a time, you know."

"Yes, yes, of course. To be sure. Then that's all is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't want to ask questions about settlements, eh?"

"No, I don't want to ask any questions. I want Glynne, and you say I may have her; so that's all."

"Come along then, and see my pigs."

Captain Robert Rolph looked a little chagrined at the

suggestion respecting pigs; but he concealed his annoyance and walked briskly on beside his companion, Sir John Day, Bart of Brackley Hall, Surrey, a grey, florid, stoutly-built gentleman, whose aspect betokened much of his time being spent in the open air. He was an intent, bright, bustling-looking man, with grey, mutton-chop whiskers; and his drab-cord trousers, brown velveteen coat and low-crowned, grey hat, gave quite a country squire, country-town-bench turn to his appearance.

"I've great faith in these pigs," he said, sharply. "Been at a deal of trouble to get hold of the breed, and if I don't take a cup at the Agricultural Show this year, I shall be down upon some of those judges – in the *Times*."

"Ah, 'tis disappointing when you've set your mind upon a cup and don't get it," said the captain. "How many have you won, Sir John?"

"What, cups? Thirty-four, my boy, thirty-four."

"Ah, I've got fifty," said the captain, with a touch of pride in his tone. "When I go in training for anything, I always say to myself, I shall put it off, and I pretty generally do."

"Humph! yes," said Sir John, shortly; "so I suppose. Oh, by the way though, Rolph, you'd oblige me very much by going back to the house. I'll show you the pigs another day."

"Certainly, certainly," said the young man with alacrity.

"You see there's my brother. He thinks a great deal of Glynne, and I never like to take any important step in life without consulting him. Do you understand?"

"Well – er, not exactly."

"Oh, I mean, just go back and see him, and say what you did to me just now."

"What! Do you mean I must ask his consent, Sir John?" cried the young man, aghast.

"No, no, no! of course not, my dear boy. Tell him I've given mine, and that it's all settled, and that you hope he approves, and – you know what to say. He'll like it. Be right, you see. Captain to senior officer, eh? There, be off, and get it over. I must go on and see the pigs."

"Confound the major!" said Captain Rolph, as he stopped, looking after the brisk retreating figure of the baronet. "He'll want me to ask the housekeeper next. Hang it all! it's almost worth more than the stakes. I did think I'd got it over. The old major's as peppery as a curry. He'll want to order me under arrest if he doesn't like the engagement. Well, here goes to get it over. Let's see; just a mile to the park gates. Pity to waste it."

He glanced round to see if there was anyone near, but he was quite alone on the hard, sandy, retired road; so, buttoning his well-cut morning coat tightly across his chest, he tucked up his cuffs and the bottoms of his trousers, selected two smooth pebbles about as large as kidneys from a stone heap, clasped one firmly in each hand, and then thrust one in his pocket for a moment while he referred to a stop watch, replaced it, took hold of the stone once more, and then, throwing himself into position, the gentlemanly officer seemed to subside into the low-

type professional walking or running man.

For a few moments he remained motionless in a statuesque attitude, his brow all in wrinkles, his teeth set, lips tight, and his chest expanded and thrown forward as if he were waiting the order to start. Then he cried, "Off!" and bounded away at a rapid rate, running hard till he reached the park gates at Brackley, where he stopped short, threw away the stones, referred to his watch, and nodded and smiled as he drew himself up – the stiff, military officer once more.

"Not bad," he said, "and as fresh as a daisy. I could have done it in half a minute less. Now, I'll go and see the old man."

Captain Rolph did not "see the old man" then, for when he reached the house, the old man – that is to say, Major Day, formerly of a lancer regiment that took part in several engagements in the Sikh war, but who had long since hung up his sabre in his bedroom at Brackley – was out for a morning walk, following a pursuit in which he took great delight – to wit, gathering fungi, a family of plants that he made his study, and he was coming back with a small, bright trowel in one hand, his stout stick in the other, and a large salmon creel slung from his shoulder, when he encountered his brother, the baronet, striding away to his model farm.

Major Day was a fierce-looking, smart, officer-like man of sixty, with curly grey hair that stood out from his well-shaped head, piercing eyes, heavy dark brows, and a massive, zebra-patterned moustache, the rest of his face being closely shaven.

Perhaps "zebra-patterned" is an unusual term to give to a cavalry moustache; but this was regularly striped in black and silver grey, giving a peculiar aspect to the keen, upright, military man.

"Halt!" shouted the major. "Hallo, Jack, going to see the pigs?"

"Yes. Thought you were at home. Just sent Rolph to speak to you."

"To speak to me? What about?"

"Oh, I thought it best, you see, being my brother, and – er – as you like Glynne, and – er – "

"What in the name of fortune are you stammering about, Jack?" said the major, sharply. "Why, you don't mean – "

"That he has proposed for Glynne."

"Damn his impudence!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Jem," said the baronet, testily. "He has proposed, and I have given my consent."

"But I always thought he was to marry that second cousin, Marjorie Emlin."

"Doesn't look like it. Never seemed very warm when they dined here."

"But – but it's so unexpected, so sudden. And Glynne?" cried the major, flushing, and bringing his heavy brows down over his eyes; "she hasn't accepted him?"

"Why, of course she has. Don't be a fool, Jem," cried the baronet, angrily.

"Fool! It's enough to make any man a fool. What does that fellow want with a wife – to take gate-money at some meeting?"

"I do wish you wouldn't be so prejudiced, Jem."

"To hold the tape when he's coming in after a footrace?"

"Hang it all, Jem, do be sensible."

"To feed him with raw steaks when he is in training?" continued the major, ironically. "To keep time, and polish his cups, and mind that he does not break the rules of his trainer? Good heavens! Jack, why, both you and Glynne must be mad."

"Indeed!" said the baronet, hotly. "I don't see any madness in giving my consent to my child's accepting the son of an old neighbour, a confoundedly fine fellow, of good birth, and with four thousand a year."

"I don't care if he were better of birth, and had twenty thousand a year. He wouldn't be a fit husband for our Glynne."

"Well, no," said the baronet, proudly. "No man would be sufficiently good for her."

"Who's talking nonsense now?" cried the major. "There are lots of good fellows in the world if she wants a husband, but I don't believe she does."

"But she has accepted him."

"Silly girl. Bit taken with the fine-looking fellow, that's all. Don't know her own mind yet. This is springing a mine."

"Ah well, the thing's settled, so you may just as well retreat from your position, Jem."

"But I shall not retreat, sir. I shall hold my position as long as

I can, and when I am driven back, I shall do my duty as one in command of a light cavalry regiment should: I shall harass the enemy's flanks and rear. He'll get no rest from me."

"Hang it all, Jem, don't do that – don't be rude to the young fellow," cried the baronet in dismay.

"I – I don't approve of it at all, Jack. I don't really."

"But the thing's done, man – the thing's done."

"Then why do you send the fellow to me?"

"Well, I thought it would be a bit civil to you, Jem, and respectful, and – "

"It is not either," cried the major. "I look upon it, knowing as you do how I am attached to Glynne, as a regular insult."

"Now, what nonsense, Jem."

"It is not nonsense, Jack. The fellow is a mere machine – a good-looking, well-built machine, with not a thought above low-class footraces, and training, and rowing, and football, and cricket."

"And not bad things either," said the baronet, hotly.

"No, sir," replied the major, drawing himself up, "not bad things, but good things if a young man takes to them as amusements to keep his nature in subjection, and to bring it to its finest state of development, that he may have a sound brain in a sound body."

"Hear, hear!" cried Sir John.

"But bad, rotten, and blackguardly things when a man gives the whole of his mind to them, and has no more ambition than

leads him to be the winner of a cup in a walking match."

"Oh, rubbish!" cried the baronet, warmly. "Rolph's a gentleman."

"Then he's a confoundedly bad specimen of the class, Jack."

"You're as prejudiced as an old woman, Jem," cried the baronet, angrily.

"Perhaps I am," replied his brother: "but it isn't prejudice to see that this fellow can't talk to a girl on any subject but athletics. I haven't patience with him. I always hated to see him here."

"And I haven't patience with you, Jem; 'pon my honour, I haven't. Why, what next? Here, out of respect to you as my brother, I sent my daughter's future husband to you, and you tell me to my face that you will insult him. I won't have it, sir; I say I won't have it. You're intolerable. You're getting beyond bearing, and – and – confound it all, I will not have it! Pretty thing, indeed, when a man mayn't choose a husband for his own child."

The baronet took a few strides this way and that way, grew scarlet as he spoke, and ended by taking off his grey hat and dabbing his shining forehead.

"I've too much love for Glynne, and too much respect for her mother's memory to stand by silently and see such a miserable bargain concluded; and I enter my protest against what must turn out an unhappy match," said the major.

"It will turn out nothing of the sort, sir," cried the baronet, hotly; "and, look here, Jem, it's time we came to an understanding. I will not have your dictatorial mess-room

manners brought into my establishment; and I tell you once for all, if you can't conform to the simple home life of a country squire's house, the sooner you go, sir, the better."

The major stuck his stick into the turf with a furious stab, as if he had a feud with mother earth; then, dragging round the creel he banged the bright trowel with which he had been gesticulating into the basket, and giving the wicker a swing back, caught up his stick and strode away without a word.

"Confound his insolence!" cried Sir John furiously, "I won't have it. My own brother: my junior by two hours! A man who has been petted and pampered too, because – because he is my brother – because he has been in the wars – because – because – because he is – my brother – because – hang it all!" he roared, stamping heavily on the turf. "What an abominably hasty temper I have got. He'll pack up and go, and – here! – hi! – Jem! – Jem!"

The baronet was stout, but it was the active, muscular stoutness of a man constantly in the open air: he did not suffer from the abnormal size of that which Punch's fashionable tailor called his middle-aged customer's chest, so that it required little effort on his part to set off at a trot after his brother, who heard his shouts and his pursuing steps, but paid no heed to each summons; for, with head erect, and his stick carried as a military man bears his sabre on the route, he marched steadily on with the regular swinging pace of a well-drilled soldier.

"Jem! Hold hard! Jem, old fellow," cried the baronet, overtaking him; but the major kept on without turning his head.

"Jem! Here, I beg your pardon. I lost my temper. I'm a passionate old fool."

Still there was no response, and the major passed on; but his brother now took tight hold of his arm.

"Jem! Come, I say. Don't you hear me? I beg your pardon, I say. Hang it all, old boy, do you want me to go down upon my knees."

"No, Jack," cried the major, stopping short and facing him, "I don't; but you told me I'd better go."

"Yes: in a passion; but you know I don't mean what I say. Here, shake hands, old boy. I say, though, what a peppery old fire-eater you are!"

"Am I, Jack?" said the major, with a grim smile.

"No, no; I mean I am. Look here, old chap, I'm sure there's a membrane, or a strap, or a nerve, or something of that sort, given way inside me. It lets my temper out, and then I say things I don't mean."

"It must have given way a great many years ago, Jack," said the major, drily.

"Oh, come, Jem! Hang it all, old fellow, I've begged your pardon. I've humbled myself to you. Don't jump on a man when he's down. 'Tisn't chivalrous; it isn't indeed."

"Then you don't want me to go?"

"Go? Now look here, Jem, do try and be reasonable. What should I do without you?"

"Well then, I'll stop this time; but really, Jack, if ever you insult

me again like that, I can have my old chambers in St James's, close to the club, and I shall go back to town."

"Go along with you!" cried Sir John. "Don't talk nonsense. We're getting old boys now, Jem, and you'll stop along with me to the end."

"Yes, we're getting old, Jack, very fast indeed," said the major, as his brother laid a hand affectionately upon his shoulder just as he used in old school-boy days; "time gallops away now."

"Ay, it does; and that's why I can't help feeling a bit anxious about seeing Glynne happily settled in life."

"And it ought to make you the more particular about – "

"Hush!" cried the baronet, interrupting him sharply, "the girls! Oh, hang it! how can Glynne be so absurd."

Volume One – Chapter Four.
Serpens

Sir John and his brother had just reached an opening in Brackley Wood, a fine old pheasant preserve, when the former became aware of the fact that his child and the lady whom she had of late made her companion and friend, were seated in the shade cast by a venerable oak, Glynne painting in front of her easel, upon which were the skilful beginnings of an oil picture representing a rough looking gipsy seated upon a tree stump, in the act of carving the knob of a stick with his long Spanish knife, while Lucy Alleyne, the friend, was reading from a book resting upon her knees.

The group formed a pretty enough natural picture, upon which a silvery rain of sunshine was poured through the dense foliage of the overhanging boughs, for, without being classically beautiful, Glynne Day was as fair a specimen of a young English lady as a country visitor would be likely to see in one twenty-four hours. Her's was the kind of face with its sweet, calm, placid repose that asked for a second look and then for a third: and when this was complete, he who gazed, old or young, wanted to look again, and so on, in never tiring mood. It was not that her soft, abundant brown hair was so remarkable, nor that her face was so perfect an oval, nor her nose so true an aquiline, nor her eyes so dark

a grey; but it was the completeness of the whole countenance, the elasticity of the step that bore onward so tall and graceful a figure, while the sweet repose of the face would have warranted anyone in taking the major's side when he declared that no pulse in her frame had ever yet been quickened by the thought of love.

Glynne's companion, Lucy Alleyne, also possessed her share of attractions; but they were cast in a very different mould, for she was dark, large-eyed, little and piquante, with an arch expression about her bow-like mouth that told of suppressed merriment, and a readiness to join in anything that promised laughter, or, as she would have called it, a bit of fun.

The other figure in the group – the model, whose counterfeit presentment was being transferred to canvas, first heard the steps; and he looked up sharply, in a wild, danger-fearing way, as a weasel might, and seemed about to spring to his feet and start off; but a peculiar leer crossed his face, and he half closed his eyes and sat firm as the brothers came up, both glancing at him sourly, the major taking a tighter grip of his stick.

"Ah, my dears!" said Sir John, gruffly, "'most done, Glynne?"

"Yes, papa, quite, for to-day," said the lady addressed, opening her purse and taking out half-a-crown, the sight of which made the model's eyes open a little wider as it was held out to him, while an unpleasant animal look was darted at Glynne as she spoke. "That will do for to day. I will send word by the policeman when I want you again."

"Thankye kindly, my lady," said the young man, wincing at

the name of the messenger; and he now touched his hat to Sir John humbly, and then to his brother.

"You're back again, then, Caleb Kent," growled Sir John.

"Yes, sir, I've come back," whined the man.

"Then, just see if you can't lead a decent life, sir, for I warn you, that if you are brought up again for poaching, it will go pretty hard with you."

"Yes, sir; I know, sir, but I'm going to reform, sir, and turn keeper, and – "

"That'll do. Be off. Let's have deeds, not words."

"Yes, sir, I will, sir. I'm a-goin' to try, sir."

"I said that will do."

"Yes, sir," said the man, humbly; and, touching his cap all round, he slouched off, with an ill-used look, and gave two or three loud sniffs.

"Oh, papa, dear," cried Glynne, "how can you speak so harshly to the poor fellow. He did wrong once, and he has been punished."

"Did wrong once. Bah! He did wrong in being born, and has done wrong ever since. The fellow's a regular gaol-bird, and I don't like to see him near you. For goodness' sake, my dear, if you must paint, paint something decent, not a scoundrel like that."

"Your father's quite right, my dear," said the major, grimly. "That's not the sort of fellow to paint. Whitewashing is what he wants."

Sir John chuckled, and his child looked at him, wonderingly.

"But he is so picturesque, papa, dear, and when I get the canvas finished – "

"Oh, you don't want to finish canvases, pet. Let that go. Plenty else to think of now, eh, Miss Alleyne? Why, my dear, you have a colour like a peach."

"Have I, Sir John?" said the girl, demurely. "How shockingly vulgar! Then I must wear a veil."

"For goodness' sake, don't, my dear child," cried the baronet, hastily. "Pray, don't insult poor nature by refusing to look healthy and well."

"I join in my brother's prayer," said the major, as he shook hands in a quiet, old-fashioned, chivalrous way.

"And so do I," said Glynne, smiling in a calm, strangely placid manner. "Do you know, Lucy, I've been enjoying your colour as I painted."

"James, old fellow," said the baronet, laughing, "let's be in the fashion. How handsome you do look this morning. How your hair curls."

"Uncle always looks handsome," said Glynne, seriously, and she sent a thrill of pleasure through the old man, by quietly taking his arm and leaning towards him in a gentle, affectionate way.

"And I'm nobody, Miss Alleyne," said Sir John with mock annoyance.

"You would not think so, if you heard all that Glynne says about you when we are alone, Sir John."

"Oh, come, that's better," cried the baronet, nodding and

brightening up. “Well, I must go. I suppose you will walk back with uncle, eh, Glynne?”

“Yes, papa,” said Glynne, smiling on him tenderly.

“Then, once more, here goes to see my pigs. You don’t care to come, ladies?”

“No, papa, dear,” said Glynne, with the same gentle smile. “We were going home almost directly.”

“Go along, then,” said Sir John. “I shall be back before lunch. Morning, Miss Alleyne,” and he strode away. “Hope he won’t upset Glynne,” he muttered. “No, I don’t suppose he will say a word. Can’t, as Lucy Alleyne is there. Nice little girl that, by the way.”

Sir John was wrong, for his brother did say something to Glynne – a good deal, in fact. Indeed, no sooner had the baronet gone than Lucy Alleyne exclaimed, —

“And now, dear, if you won’t mind, as you have your uncle with you, I should like to run home.”

“Oh, no,” cried Glynne, “you’ll come and have lunch.”

“Not to-day, dear. Mamma will be anxious to see me back.”

“Indeed!” said Glynne, raising her eyebrows slightly.

“Yes, dear; she is a little anxious, too, about Moray; he has been working so hard lately.”

“Has he?” said Glynne, half-wonderingly, as if it seemed strange to her, in her placid existence, that people should ever work hard.

“New discovery?” said the major. “Star-gazing?”

"I think so," replied Lucy; "but he is so quiet and reserved, and he does not like to speak until he is sure. If you would not mind coming round our way, I could leave you at the end of the lane."

"Mind? No," cried the major; "but are you sure you will not come home with us to lunch?"

"Quite sure, please," said Lucy.

"Then, we'll see you right to your door," said the major, as he shouldered the little easel; "eh, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, of course, uncle," replied Glynne; and they continued along the side path for about a quarter of a mile, before crossing a fir wood, whose trunks rose up like so many ruddy, grey-bronze columns, while the ground was made slippery by the thick coating of pine needles beneath their feet.

"Oh, here's one of your favourites, Major Day," cried Lucy, eagerly, as she ran on and picked a curious grey-looking fungus, with a rough efflorescence on the top. "No, no, don't tell me: I want to see if I recollect what it is."

"She doesn't know, Glynne. Tell her, my dear."

"I, uncle?" said Glynne, smiling up at him. "You know I never recollect the names."

"I know you won't rouse up that brain of yours to take an interest in anything," said the major in a tone of good-tempered reproof. "It's a great shame, when you are naturally so clever."

"I! Clever! Oh, uncle!" said Glynne, laughing.

"I know – I remember," cried Lucy, eagerly – "stop a moment, I have it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the major, whose eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he seemed sufficiently animated to set a stranger wondering at an old soldier taking up with enthusiasm so strange a pursuit as that in which he engaged. "There, you don't know, my dear, but I applaud your brave effort to remember. Someone here would not even try."

"No, uncle, it is of no use," said Glynne, quietly, though she evidently took an interest in her companion's enthusiastic ways.

"I do know," said Lucy, "and I won't be told."

"You don't," said the major, banteringly.

"I do," cried Lucy. "Yes, I have it. It's an *Amanita*."

"Bravo!"

"*Amanita Rubescens*," cried Lucy triumphantly; "and if you break it the flesh turns red – there!"

"And she has broken the mushroom in half, and it has not turned red," said the major, "because she is wrong."

"Oh, Major Day!" cried Lucy, "don't say that. I am right, am I not?"

"No, my dear, not quite," said the major, "but very nearly. That is *Amanita Pantkerinus*, a very near relative of the one I showed you yesterday."

"But I have been trying," cried Lucy.

"I know you have," said the major, smiling, "and I'm sure you can tell me what these are," he continued, pointing to a cluster of flat, greeny-grey buttons, with dimly marked orange rings upon their surface.

"Oh yes, I know them," cried Lucy, eagerly picking two or three from the patch of grass in an opening amongst the Scotch firs. "*Agaricus Deliciosus*; and, oh, it is getting so late. I must make haste back. I can run home now. Good-bye, Glynne; good-bye, Major Day."

"Good-bye, little pupil," he replied, "and you shall have your marks although you were not right."

"We'll stop and watch you till you are safely home," said Glynne. "Good-bye – good-bye."

Volume One – Chapter Five.
Virgo Asleep

Glynne Day stood with her uncle at the edge of the dark wood, where the slippery fir-needles lay thickly, and kept every blade of verdure from thrusting forth a relief to the dull, neutral grey that carpeted the ground, amid the tall, bronze-red columns. They gazed down a steep slope, and over the wild heathery waste that lay between them and what looked like a little wooded islet, rising out of the common into quite a mamelon, almost precipitous of side, and crowned with a heavy-looking edifice of brick, with other structures attached, all solid, plain, and terribly out of character with the wild landscape.

For, from where they stood, as it were on the very verge of the cultivated land, there was a stretch of miles upon miles of rolling surface, here sand, there bog, the one brown and purple with the heather or yellow with the gorse, the other in little patches of vivid green or creamy pink, where the *sphagnum* grew, and the cotton rushes had their home.

"What a desolate looking spot it is," said the major thoughtfully, as they watched the active little figure tripping along the sandy road; "and yet it has its beauties after all."

"Ye-es, I suppose it has," said Glynne, "but I never think about its being ugly or beautiful."

"No, my dear, you don't," said the major half pettishly; "and that's what annoys me. Here you are, as beautiful a girl as well can be."

"Am I, uncle, dear?" said Glynne, with the same calm, pleasant smile.

"Are you? Why of course you are, and with a splendid intellect, only you won't use it."

"Don't scold me, uncle," said the girl, creeping closer to him, "I don't want to be clever, I don't want to know more than I know. I am so happy: why should I change?"

The old man's brow grew knotty and corrugated, partly, from perplexity, partly from annoyance, and he gazed sharply down at the sweet face looking lovingly in his.

"There, there," he said, "I won't scold you, my darling. Look, there's little Lucy waving her handkerchief before she enters Fort Science. Fine fellow that brother of hers."

"Yes, Mr Alleyne is nice," said Glynne, returning her friend's salute; and then, as Lucy disappeared at the curve of a steep path that ran up the sandy mound, they turned and walked back towards the hall.

"And so you are very happy, my dear?" said the major, after a thoughtful pause.

"Oh yes, uncle, so very happy," replied Glynne quietly. "You and papa both love me."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said the major. "I'm not so sure that I do."

"But I am," said the girl gently, "quite sure. Then Lucy loves me very much, and our friends are all so kind, and even the servants always smile pleasantly when I want anything done."

"Of course they do," said the major, testily.

"And it sets me wondering, when people talk about sorrow, and the weariness of the world."

"Humph! I suppose so," the major said, stopping short; "and how about Rolph?"

"Oh, he loves me too, uncle," replied Glynne in the same quiet, placid tone and manner. "I was going to tell you: he has asked me if I would be his wife."

"And you – you have told him you would be?"

"Yes, uncle. Papa approves of it, I know; and Robert is so brave and strong and manly. Don't you think it is right?"

The major gave his hat a tilt on one side, and scratched his grey head vigorously.

"Look here, Glynne," he cried; "you are the most extraordinary girl I ever knew."

"I'm very sorry, uncle," she replied. "I can't help being so."

"No, no, of course not. But look here – do you love Rolph?"

"Oh yes, uncle, very much indeed."

"How do you know you do?" cried the major, in the tone of an examiner dealing *viva voce* with a candidate for a post in the army.

"Oh, because he loves me," said Glynne, naïvely; "and, you see, I've known him a little ever since he was a boy."

"Yes, but look here; what makes you love him? Have you no other reason?"

"No, uncle, dear," said Glynne; and there was not the slightest heightening of colour, nor a trace of excitement as she spoke.

"But, my dear child," cried the major in the most perplexed way, "people don't fall in love like that."

"Don't they, uncle?"

"No, no, of course not. There's a lot of passion and storm, and tempest and that sort of thing."

"But only in books."

"Oh, yes, in real life. I remember when I fell in love with Lady Mary Callaghan."

"Were you really once in love, uncle?" cried Glynne with the first touch of animation that she had shown.

"Of course I was – of course – once – but it didn't come to anything. Well, there was a lot of fire and fury over that."

"Was there, uncle?"

"Yes, to be sure. I felt as if I couldn't live without her, and she felt as if she couldn't live without me, and we were always writing letters to one another and couldn't keep apart."

"Oh, I never felt anything of that kind, uncle, and I rarely write letters if I can help it."

"Then you can't be in love," said the major triumphantly.

"But were you really in love, uncle, with Lady Mary – Mary – "

"Callaghan, my dear. Yes."

"But you did not marry her, uncle."

"N-no – no; you are quite right, my dear, I did not. Circumstances occurred and – er – we were not married. But really, Glynne, my dear, you are a most extraordinary girl."

"I am very sorry."

"Don't say that, my dear; but – er – I – er – this is a very serious thing, this promising yourself in marriage, and I – er – I – er – should like you to be perfectly sure that you are doing wisely. I think a great deal of you, my dear – old bachelor as I am, and it would trouble me more than I can say if you did not make a happy match."

"Dear uncle," she said tenderly, as she clasped her hands upon his arm, and clung to him more closely. "But you need not be afraid, for Robert says he loves me very dearly, and what more could a woman desire?"

"Humph! No, of course not, my dear," said the major, looking more perplexed than ever, as he gazed down into the unruffled face by his side. "Untouched, if I know anything of womankind," he said to himself, "but if I attempt to interfere I shall be making trouble, and upset Jack as well. What the devil shall I do?"

There came no mental answer to this self-put question, and the communings were stopped by Glynne herself, who went on thoughtfully and in the most matter-of-fact way.

"I told Robert that we must not think of being married for some time to come, and he said he was glad of that."

"Said he was glad of it!" cried the major, looking at her aghast.

"Yes, uncle, dear. You see he has to make so many

engagements beforehand. His card is quite full for matches of one kind and another."

"Is it indeed?" said the major sarcastically.

"Yes, uncle. He has to go in training – in training – in training – for, what did he call it? Oh, I remember; in training for the various events, and he would not like to break any of them and pay forfeit."

The major's eyes rolled in their sockets, and he seemed to be trying to swallow something that was extremely unsavoury, but he held his peace.

"He says these engagements take up a great deal of his time; but the people like him, so that he can't very well get out of them."

"Ah, it would be a pity to disappoint them," said the major, while Glynne, in her happy, childlike content, did not notice his tone, but talked on as calmly as if the great event of a woman's life were a most commonplace affair, justifying to the fullest extent her uncle's idea that her heart was quite untouched.

They had spent so long over their walk that Sir John had had time to finish his visit to the pigs, and they all reached the park gates together.

"Halloa!" he exclaimed, looking inquiringly from one to the other, "so you two have had a good talk. Here, what does your uncle say, my dear?" he continued, with a suspicious tone in his voice.

"Uncle? Say?" replied Glynne, opening her beautiful eyes a

little wider. “Oh, uncle has said very little, papa. I’m afraid I have done nothing but prattle to him all the time.”

“What about?” said her father, sharply.

“Oh, principally about my engagement,” she replied calmly.

“Well, and what does he say to it?” said Sir John, half-defiantly.

“Uncle thinks it a very serious step.”

“Yes, of course.”

“And that I ought to be careful in taking it.”

“To be sure, my dear, to be sure. Well?”

“Well, that was all, papa,” she replied. “Lunch must be ready. I’ll go in and take off my things. You are coming soon? Oh, here is Robert. I won’t stop for fear of keeping you waiting.”

The captain was some fifty yards away, but Glynne did not stay. She merely waved her hand, and hurried to the front of the house, while her future lord came slowly on, whistling, with his hands in his pockets.

“You’ve not opposed the match, then?” whispered Sir John.

“No,” said the major, “but I think less of it than ever.”

“Humph!” ejaculated his brother. “Have you spoken to Rolph yet?”

“No. Haven’t seen him.”

“Then, for goodness’ sake, drop all prejudice, Jem, and shake hands warmly. You see they are devotedly attached.”

“No, I don’t,” said the major, gruffly; “but I’ll shake hands.”

“Yes, do, Jem, do. It’s the one desire of my life to see Glynne

engaged to a good, manly fellow who cares for her, and, now the opportunity has come, I look to you to help me."

"Humph!" ejaculated the major, as Rolph came up, and Sir John struck the iron while it was hot, to use his own form of expression.

"Ready for lunch, Rob?"

"Awfully," said the captain. "Quite an edge on."

"That's right," cried Sir John. "Come along. Oh, look here though," he added, as if upon second thoughts; "I've had no experience before in this sort of thing, and I want to get it over, and go on again as usual. I never do anything without telling the major here."

Rolph bowed, and the major returned his salute stiffly.

"I've been telling him about you know what, and it's all settled now, so you can shake hands, you know."

"Yes; my brother has told me about your proposal," said the major, coldly. "You have won a prize, sir, and I wish you joy."

"Thankye, major, thankye," cried Rolph, seizing his hand and shaking it violently. "You don't want to say anything more to me, do you?"

"N-no," said the major, whose inward thoughts made him look ten years older. "N-no."

"That's right," cried the captain, with a sigh of relief. "Shall we go in to lunch now, Sir John?"

"To be sure, yes, my boy. Go on. I daresay Glynne is waiting. Come along, Jem."

He took his brother's arm; and, as the captain disappeared, —

"Thankye, Jem, thankye," he said earnestly. "Now for lunch. I'm as hungry as a hunter, and my mind's at rest."

"Humph!"

Volume One – Chapter Six.
Dust in the Observatory

"Well, Mr Oldroyd, and what do you think? Pray, tell me frankly. You have found out what is the matter with him?"

"Yes, ma'am, I think I have."

"Then, pray, speak."

Mrs Alleyne leaned forward with every curve in her face as well as her eyes contradicting the form of her words. "Pray speak," sounded and looked like a command to speak at once under pain of the lady's displeasure. She was a woman of over fifty, with white hair and high clear forehead; but what would have been a handsome face was detracted from by a pinched, care-worn expression, as if there was some great trouble upon her mind; and this trouble had soured her disposition, and made her imperious and harsh. Her cold and rather repellent manner was not softened by her formal white cap or her dress, which was a stiff, black silk, that in its old age appeared to have doubts as to whether it ought not to be a brown, save where it was relieved by white cuffs and a plain muslin kerchief, such as is seen in old pictures, loosely crossed over the breast, and secured behind.

Neither did the room and its furnishings tend to soften matters, for, though good, everything looked worn and faded, notably the ancient Turkey carpet, and the stiff maroon curtains

that had turned from red into drab, and hung limp and long beside the two tall gaunt windows, looking out upon a clump of desolate Scotch firs.

The rest of the furniture was depressing, and did not suggest comfort. The solid mahogany chairs were stiff, and the worn horse-hair coverings would have been places of torture to a child; the great dining-table was highly polished and full of reflections, but it had nothing pleasant to reflect, and whoever looked, longed to see it draped with some warm, rich cloth. While the great high-backed sideboard stood out like a polished mahogany sarcophagus upon which someone had placed a bronze funereal urn, though really inside that tomb-like structure there was a cellarette with a decanter or two of generous wine; and the bronze urn contained no ashes, merely an iron heater to make it hiss when it was used for tea.

The blank, drab-painted walls seemed to ask appealingly for something to ameliorate their chilling aspect; but there was no mirror, no bracket bearing bust or clock; only opposite to the windows had the appeal been heard. There, in the very worst light for the purpose, a large picture had been hung, whose old gilt frame was tarnished and chipped, and the gloomy canvas, with its cracked varnish, had been covered by some genius of the Martin type with hundreds of figures in every conceivable posture of misery and despair. Fire was issuing from the earth, and lightnings were angularly veining the clouds, the tableau being supposed to represent the end of the world; and the

consequence was that, as far as the walls were concerned, the aspect of the room was not improved.

Now, in every good dining-room, the fireside is, or should be, the most cheerful part. Prior to the days of the Georges, people knew this, and bright tiles and carvings and solid pillars gave a cheery look and countenance to the fire; and this style, thanks to the most sensible modern aesthetes, has come again into vogue, with handsome overmantels, kerbs, and dogs; but Mrs Alleyne's fireside was chilly, the fender and fire-irons were well-polished, but attenuated and of skewery form as to the latter, sharp edge as to the former, while the narrow drab shelf that formed the mantelpiece had for ornaments two obelisks that appeared to have been cast in that objectionable meat-jelly known as brawn.

It only needed the yellowish roller blinds to be drawn half-way down to make the very atmosphere seem oppressive. And this had been done, so that, as the lady of The Firs sat opposite Philip Oldroyd, the young doctor, who was patiently trying to solve that medical problem known as making a practice in an extremely healthy district, could not help thinking to himself that the place was enough to drive a susceptible person melancholy mad.

Oldroyd did not answer for a few moments, but sat thinking, and Mrs Alleyne watched him intently, scanning his great head, and somewhat plain, but intelligent features with his deep, brown, thoughtful eyes, and closely shaven face. The latter was a sacrifice to Mrs Grundy, so that no objection should be made to his appearance by the more critical inhabitants of a narrow-

minded country district, the result having been the destruction of a fine and flowing beard at the cost of much nicking of the skin, and the discomfort of shaving regularly, fine weather or foul.

"I think, Mrs Alleyne, that I know exactly what is the matter with your son."

"Yes, yes," said the lady, impatiently. "Mr Oldroyd, you torture me."

"Then, now I will relieve you, madam," he said with a pleasant smile. "He has really no physical complaint whatever."

"I do not understand you," she said coldly.

"I will be more plain then. He has no disease at all."

"Mr Oldroyd!" said the lady in a disappointed tone, that to the young doctor's ears seemed to say as well: – "How foolish of me to call in this inexperienced country practitioner, who, beyond a little general idea of his profession, knows next to nothing at all."

"Oh, yes, my dear madam, you think he is very ill, and – pray excuse my plainness – in your motherly eyes he appears to be wasting away."

Mrs Alleyne did not reply, but gazed at the speaker haughtily, and looked as cold and repellent as the room.

"Your son, I repeat, has no organic disease; he has a marvellously fine physique, great mental powers, and needs no doctor at all, unless it is to give him good advice."

"I presumed, Mr Oldroyd, that it was the doctor's duty to give advice."

"Exactly, my dear madam; but pray be patient with me if I

talk to you a little differently from what you expected. You were prepared for me to look solemn, shake my head and say that the symptoms were rather serious, but not exactly grave; that we must hope for the best; that I was very glad you sent for me when you did; and that I would send in some medicine, and look in again to-morrow. Now, you said, 'Be frank with me;' I say the same to you. Did you not expect something of this kind?"

"Well," said Mrs Alleyne, with something that looked like – not the dawning of a smile, but the ghost of an old one, called up to flit for a moment about her lips, "yes, I did expect something of the kind."

"Exactly," said Oldroyd, smiling genially, and as if he enjoyed this verbal encounter. "Now, kindly listen to me. As I say, your son has a fine physique, but what does he do with it? Does he take plenty of active out-door exercise?"

Mrs Alleyne shook her head.

"Does he partake of his meals regularly?"

"No, Mr Oldroyd," said Mrs Alleyne, with a sigh.

"Does he sleep sufficiently and well?"

"Alas! No."

"Of course he does not, my dear madam. Here is a man who never employs his muscles; never takes the slightest recreation; disappoints nature when she asks for food; and turns night into day as he performs long vigils watching the stars, and burning the midnight oil. How, in the name of all that is sensible, can such a man expect to enjoy good health? Why, nature revolts against it

and steals it all away, to distribute among people who obey her laws."

Mrs Alleyne sighed, and thought better of the doctor than she did before.

"It is impossible for such a man to be well, Mrs Alleyne; the wonder is that he has any health at all."

"But he is really ill, now, Mr Oldroyd."

"A little touched in the digestion, that is all."

"And you will prescribe something for that?"

"Yes, ma'am, I'll prescribe turpentine."

"Turpentine!" cried Mrs Alleyne, aghast.

"Yes, madam, out of nature's own pharmacopaeia. Let him go and climb the hills every day, and inhale it when the sun is on the fir woods. Let him get a horse and ride amongst the firs, or let him take a spade and dig the ground about this house, and turn it into a pleasant garden, surrounded by fir trees. That is all he wants."

"Oh, doctor, is that all?" said Mrs Alleyne more warmly; and she laid her thin, white hand upon her visitor's arm.

"Well, not quite," he said, with a smile. "He is a great student; no one admires his work more than I, or the wonderful capacity of his mind, but he must be taken out of it a little – a man cannot always be studying the stars."

"No, no; he does too much," said Mrs Alleyne. "You are quite right. But what would you recommend?"

"Nature again, madam. Something to give him an interest in

this world, as well as in the other worlds he makes his study. In short, Mrs Alleyne, it would be the saving of your son if he fell in love."

"Doctor!"

"And took to himself some sweet good girl as a wife."

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The doctor started, and looked for the source of the gush of mirth.

A sweet ringing silvery laugh, that sounded like bell music in the gloomy room, for Lucy Alleyne had entered unheard, to catch the doctor's last words, and burst into this girlish fit of merriment.

"Lucy!" exclaimed Mrs Alleyne with an angry glance, as she rose from her chair.

"Oh, I am so sorry, mamma. I beg your pardon, Mr Oldroyd, but it did seem so droll."

She laughed again so merrily that it seemed infectious, and the young doctor would have joined in had not Mrs Alleyne been there; besides, as this was a professional call, he felt the necessity for some show of dignity.

"May I ask, Lucy, what is the meaning of this extremely unseemly mirth," said Mrs Alleyne, with a good deal of annoyance in her tone.

"Don't be angry with me, mamma dear, but it did seem so comical; the idea of Moray falling in love and being married."

"I fail to see the ridiculous side of the matter," said Mrs

Alleyne, "especially at a time when Mr Oldroyd has been consulted by me upon the question of your brother's health."

"Oh, but you don't think he is really ill, Mr Oldroyd, do you?" cried Lucy, anxiously.

"Indeed, I do not, Miss Alleyne. He requires nothing but plenty of open-air exercise, with more food and regular sleep."

"And a wife," said Lucy, with a mirthful look.

"And a wife," said Oldroyd, gravely; and he gazed so intently at Lucy that her merry look passed away, and she coloured slightly, and glanced hastily at her mother.

"We must make Moray go out more, mamma dear," she said hurriedly. "I'll coax him to have walks with me, and I'll teach him botany; Major Day would be delighted if he'd come with him – I mean go with him; and – oh, I say, mamma, isn't dinner nearly ready? I am so hungry."

"Lucy!" cried Mrs Alleyne, with a reproachful look, as Oldroyd rose.

"It is an enviable sensation, Miss Alleyne," he said, as a diversion to the elder lady's annoyance; "one of nature's greatest boons. As I was saying, Mrs Alleyne, *à propos* of your son, he neglects his health in his scientific pursuits, and the beautifully complicated machine of his system grows rusty. Why, the commonest piece of mechanism will not go well if it is not properly cared for, so how can we expect it of ourselves."

"Quite true, Mr Oldroyd. Did you ride over? Is your horse waiting?"

"Oh, no, I walked. Lovely weather, Miss Alleyne. Good-day, madam, good-day."

"But you have not taken any refreshment, Mr Oldroyd. Allow me to – "

"Why, dinner must be ready, mamma," said Lucy. "Will not Mr Oldroyd stop?"

"Of course, yes, I had forgotten," said Mrs Alleyne, with a slight colour in her cheek, and a peculiar hesitancy in her voice. "We – er – dine early – if you would join us, we should be very glad."

"With great pleasure, madam," said the young doctor, frankly; "it will save me a five miles' walk, for I must go across the common this afternoon to Lindham."

"To see poor old Mrs Wattley?" cried Lucy eagerly, as Mrs Alleyne tried to hide by a smile, her annoyance at her invitation being accepted.

"Yes; to see poor old Mrs Wattley," said Oldroyd, nodding.

"Is she very ill?" said Lucy sympathetically.

"Stricken with a fatal disease, my dear young lady," he replied.

"Oh!" ejaculated Lucy.

"One, however, that gives neither pain nor trouble. She will not suffer in the least."

"I'm glad of that," cried Lucy, "for I like the poor old lady. What is her complaint?"

"Senility," said Oldroyd, smiling. "Why, my dear Miss Alleyne, she is ninety-five."

"Will you come with me, Lucy," said Mrs Alleyne, who had been vainly trying to catch her daughter's eye, and then – "perhaps Mr Oldroyd will excuse us."

"Not if you are going to make any additions to the meal on my account, madam," said the doctor, hastily. "I am the plainest of plain men – a bachelor who lives on chops and steaks, and it needs a sharp-edged appetite to manage these country cuts."

Mrs Alleyne smiled again, and the visitor was left alone.

"Old lady didn't like my staying," he said to himself. "Shouldn't have asked me, then. I am hungry, but – Oh! what a pretty, natural, clever little witch it is. I wish I'd a good practice; I should try my luck if I had, and I don't think there is any one in the way."

"Humph! End of the world," he said, rising and crossing to look at the picture. "What a ghastly daub!"

"What a wilderness; why don't they have the garden done up?" he continued, going to one of the windows, and looking at the depressing, neglected place without. "Ugh! what a home for such a bright little blossom. It must be something awful on a wet, wintry day."

"Sorry I stopped," he said, soon after.

"No, I'm not; I'm glad. Now, I'll be bound to say there's boiled mutton and turnips for dinner, and plain rice pudding. It's just the sort of meal one would expect in a house like this. Mum!"

He gave his lips a significant tap, for the door opened, and Lucy entered, accompanied by a sour-looking maid with a clayey

skin and dull grey eyes, bearing a tray.

"Be as quick as you can, Eliza," said Lucy. "You won't mind my helping, Mr Oldroyd, will you?" she continued. "We only keep one servant now."

"Mind? Not I," he replied cheerily. "Let me help too. I'll lay the knives and forks."

"No, no, no!" cried Lucy, as she wondered what Mrs Alleyne would have said if she had heard her allusion to "one servant now."

"Oh, but I shall," he said; and the maid looked less grim as she saw the doctor begin to help. "Let's see," he said, "knives right, forks left. Won't do to turn the table round if you place them wrong, as the Irishman did."

Just then the maid – Eliza – left the room to fetch some addition to the table.

"I am glad you are going to stay, Mr Oldroyd," said Lucy naïvely.

"Are you?" he said, watching her intently as the busy little hands produced cruets and glasses from the sideboard cupboard.

"Oh yes, for it is so dull here."

"Do you find it so?"

"Oh, no, I don't. I was thinking of Moray. It will be someone for him to talk to. Mamma fidgets about him so; but I felt as sure as could be that he only looked ill because he works so terribly hard."

A step was heard outside, and the young doctor started from

the table, where he was arranging a couple of spoons on either side of a salt-cellar, with so guilty a look that Lucy turned away her head to conceal a smile.

Oldroyd saw it though, and was annoyed at being so weak and boyish; but he felt that, after all, he was right, for it would have looked extremely undignified in Mrs Alleyne's eyes if he had been caught playing so domestic a part in a strange house.

"I wish she had not laughed at me, though," he said to himself; and then he tried to pass the matter off as Mrs Alleyne came back, bland and dignified, trying to conceal the fact that she had been out to make a few preparations that would help to hide the poverty of the land.

"You will excuse our meal being very simple, Mr Oldroyd," she said quietly; "I did not expect company."

"If you would kindly treat me as if I were not company, Mrs Alleyne, I should be greatly obliged," replied Oldroyd; and then there was an interchange of bows – that on the lady's part being of a very dignified but gracious kind, one that suggested tolerance, and an absolute refusal to accept the doctor as anything else than a visitor.

Oldroyd felt rather uncomfortable, but there was comfort in Lucy's presence, as, utterly wanting in her mother's reserve, she busied herself in trying to make everything pleasant and attractive for their guest, in so natural and homely a manner, that while the doctor had felt one moment that he wished he had not stayed, the next he was quite reconciled to his fate.

"I feel as sure as can be that I am right," thought Oldroyd, as at the end of a few minutes, Eliza entered with a large dish, whose contents were hidden by a battered and blackened cover, placed it upon the table, retreated, came back with a couple of vegetable dishes, retreated once more and came back with four dinner-plates, whose edges were chipped and stained from long usage.

Oldroyd glanced at Lucy, and saw her pretty forehead wrinkled up, reading accurately enough that she was troubled at the shabbiness of the table's furnishings; and, as if she felt that he was gazing at her, she looked up quickly, caught his eye, and coloured with vexation, feeling certain as she did that he had read her thoughts.

"Will you excuse me a moment, Mr Oldroyd?" said Mrs Alleyne, with dignity. "We do not use a dinner-bell, the noise disturbs my son. I always fetch him from the observatory myself."

Oldroyd bowed again, and crossed the room to open the door for his hostess to pass out.

"What a nuisance all this formality is," he thought to himself, "I hate it;" but all the same, he felt constrained to follow Mrs Alleyne's lead, and he was beginning once more to regret his stay when he turned to encounter the fresh, natural, girlish look of the daughter of the house.

"Mamma makes a regular habit of fetching my brother to meals, Mr Oldroyd," said Lucy; "I don't believe he would come

unless she went. But while she is away, do tell me once again you don't think Moray is going to be seriously ill?"

"But I do think so," he replied.

"Oh, Mr Oldroyd!"

The young doctor gazed at the pretty sympathetic face with no little pleasure, as he saw its troubled look, and the tears rising in the eyes.

"How nice," he thought, "to be anyone she cares for like this," and then he hugged himself upon his knowledge, which in this case was power – the power of being able to change that troubled face to one full of smiles.

"I think he is going to be very seriously ill – if he does not alter his way of life."

"He could avoid the illness, then?" cried Lucy, with the change coming.

"Certainly he could. He has only to take proper rest and out-door exercise to be as well as you are."

"Then pray advise him, Mr Oldroyd," said Lucy, who was beaming now. "Do try and get him to be sensible. It is of no use to send him medicine – he would not take a drop. Hush! here he is."

At that moment there were slow, deliberate steps in the hall, and then the door opened, and Mrs Alleyne, with a smile full of pride upon her calm, stern face, entered, leaning upon the arm of a tall, grave, thoughtful-looking man, whose large dark-grey eyes seemed to be gazing straight before him, through everything, into the depths of space, while his mind was busy with that which he

sought to see.

He was apparently about three or four-and-thirty, well-built and muscular; but his muscles looked soft and rounded. There was an appearance of relaxation, even in his walk; and, though his eyes were wide open, he gave one the idea of being in a dream. He was dressed in a loose, easy-fitting suit of tweeds, but they had been put on anyhow, and the natural curls of his dark-brown hair and beard made it very evident that the time he spent at the toilet-table was short.

What struck the visitor most was the veneration given to the student by his mother and sister, the former full of pride in her offspring, as she drew back his chair, and waited until he had seated himself, before she took her own place at the head of the table, and signed to her guest to follow her example.

It was a reversal of the ordinary arrangements at a board, for Oldroyd found himself opposite Moray Alleyne, with Mrs Alleyne and her daughter at the head and foot. In fact, it soon became evident that Mrs Alleyne's son took no interest whatever in matters terrestrial of a domestic nature, his mind being generally far away.

Mrs Alleyne had announced to him, as they came towards the dining-room, that Mr Oldroyd would join them at the meal; but the scrap of social information was covered by a film of nebular theory, till the astronomer took his place at the table, when he seemed to start out of a fit of celestial dreaming, and to come back to earth.

"Ah, Mr Oldroyd," he said, with his face lighting up and becoming quite transformed. "I had forgotten that you were to join us. Pray forgive my rudeness. I get so lost in my calculations."

"Don't mention it," said Oldroyd, nodding; and then he looked hard at his *vis-à-vis*, marvelling at the change, and the tones of his deep mellow voice, and thinking what a man this would be if he had become statesman, orator, or the like, concluding by saying mentally, "What a physique for a West End physician! Why, that presence – a little more grey, and that soft, winning, confidential voice, would be a fortune to him. But he would have to dress."

"I am sorry we have only plain boiled mutton to offer you, Mr Oldroyd," said Mrs Alleyne, as the covers were removed.

"I knew it was," thought Oldroyd, glancing at the livid, steaming leg of mutton. Then aloud: "One of the joints I most appreciate, madam – with its appropriate trimmings, Miss Alleyne," he added smiling at Lucy.

"I'm afraid the potatoes are not good," said Lucy, colouring with vexation; "and the turnips seem very hard and stringy."

"Don't prejudge them, my dear," said Mrs Alleyne with dignity. "We have great difficulty in getting good vegetables, Mr Oldroyd," she continued, "though we are in the country. We – er – we do not keep a gardener."

"And the cottage people don't care to sell," said Oldroyd. "I have found that out. But you have a large garden here, Mrs Alleyne."

"Yes," said the lady, coldly.

"Ah," said Oldroyd, looking across at Moray Alleyne. "Now, there's your opportunity. Why not take to gardening?"

"Take to gardening?" said Alleyne, shaking off the dreamy air that had come upon him as he mechanically ate what his mother had carefully placed upon his plate, that lady selecting everything, and her son taking it without question, as a furnace fire might swallow so much coal.

"Yes; take to gardening, my good sir," said Oldroyd. "It is a very ancient occupation, and amply rewards its votaries."

"I am well rewarded by much higher studies," said Alleyne, smiling; and Oldroyd was more than ever impressed by his voice and manner.

"Exactly, but you must have change."

Alleyne shook his head.

"I do not feel the want of change," he said.

"But your body does," replied Oldroyd, "and it is crying out in revolt against the burden your mind is putting upon it."

"Why, doctor," said Alleyne, with his face lighting up more and more, "I thought you had stayed to dinner. This is quite a professional visit."

"My dear sir, pray don't call it so," said Oldroyd. "I only want to give you good advice. I want you to give me better vegetables than these – from your own garden," he added, merrily, as he turned to Lucy, who was eagerly watching her brother's face.

"Thank you, doctor," replied Alleyne shaking his head; "but

I have no time."

Oldroyd hesitated for a moment or two, as he went on with his repast of very badly cooked, exceedingly tough mutton; but a glance at his hostess and Lucy showed him that his words found favour with them, and he persevered in a pleasant, half-bantering strain that had, however, a solid basis of sound shrewd sense beneath its playful tone.

"Hark at him!" he said. "Has not time! Now, look here, my dear Mr Alleyne – pray excuse my familiarity, for though we have been neighbours these past five years, we have not been intimate – I say, look here, my dear sir – potatoes! Thank you, Miss Alleyne. That one will do. I like them waxey. Now look here, my dear sir, you are an astronomer."

"Only a very humble student of a great science, Mr Oldroyd," said the other, meekly.

"Ah, well, we will not discuss that. At all events you are a mathematician, and deal in algebraic quantities, and differential calculus, and logarithms, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes – yes," said Alleyne, going on eating in his mechanical way as if he diligently took to heart the epigrammatic teaching of the old philosopher – "Live not to eat, but eat to live."

"Well then, my dear sir, I'll give you a calculation to make."

"Not now, doctor, pray," said Mrs Alleyne, quickly. "My son's digestion is very weak."

"This won't hurt his digestion, madam," said Oldroyd; "a child could do it without a slate."

"Pray ask me," said Alleyne, "and I will endeavour to answer you."

"Well, then: here is my problem," said Oldroyd; "perhaps you will try and solve it too, Miss Alleyne. Suppose two men set to work to perform a task, and the one – as you mathematicians would put it, say A, worked twenty hours a day for five years, while B worked eight hours a day for twenty years, which would do most work?"

"I know," said Lucy, quickly; "the busy B, for he would do a hundred and sixty hours' work, while A would only do a hundred hours' work."

Alleyne smiled and nodded very tenderly at his sister.

"Isn't that right?" she said quickly, and her cheeks flushed.

"Quite right as to proportion, Lucy," he said, "but in each case it would be three hundred and sixty-five times, or three hundred and thirteen times as much."

"Of course," she said. "How foolish of me."

"Well, Mr Oldroyd, what about your problem?" continued Alleyne, commencing upon a fresh piece of tough mutton.

"You have solved it," said Oldroyd. "You have shown me that the eight-hour's man does more work than the twenty-hour's man."

"Yes, but one works five years, the other twenty, according to your arrangement."

"Not my arrangement, sir, Nature's. The man who worked twenty hours per diem would be worn out mentally at the end

of five years. The man who worked eight hours a day, all surroundings being reasonable, would, at the end of twenty years, be in a condition to go on working well for another ten, perhaps twenty years. Now, my dear sir, do you see my drift?"

Moray Alleyne laid down his knife and fork, placed his elbows on either side of his plate, clasped his hands together, and then seemed to cover them with his thick, dark beard, as he rested his chin.

A dead silence fell upon the little party, and, as if it were some chemical process going on, small round discs of congealed fat formed on the mutton gravy in the dish.

Mrs Alleyne was about to break the silence, but she saw that her son was ready to answer, and she refrained, sitting very upright and motionless in her chair, as she watched the furrows coming and going on his brow.

"That is bringing it home, doctor," he said, and there was a slight huskiness in his voice as he spoke. "But you are exaggerating."

"I protest, no," said Oldroyd, eagerly. "Allow me, I have made some study of animal physiology, and I have learned this: Nature strengthens the muscles, nerves and tissues, if they are well used, up to a certain point. If that mark is passed – in other words, if you trespass on the other side – punishment comes, the deterioration is rapid and sure."

"Mother," said Alleyne, turning to her affectionately; "you have been setting the doctor to tell me this."

"Indeed, no, my dear," she cried, "I was not aware what course our conversation would take; but, believe me, Moray, I am glad, for this must be true."

"True?" cried Oldroyd. "My dear madam, the world teems with proofs."

"Yes," said Alleyne thoughtfully: and there was a far-off, dreamy look in his eyes as he gazed straight before him as if into space, "it is true – it must be true; but with so much to learn – such vast discoveries to make – who can pause?"

"The man who wishes to win in the long race," said Oldroyd smiling, and again there was a minute's absolute silence, during which the young doctor caught a reconnaissant look from Lucy.

Then Alleyne spoke again.

"Yes, Mr Oldroyd, you are right," he said. "Nature is a hard mistress."

"What, for not breaking her laws?" cried Oldroyd. "Come, come, Mr Alleyne, my knowledge of astronomy extends to the Great Bear, Perseus, Cassiopeia, and a few more constellations; but where would your science be if her laws were not immutable?"

For answer, to the surprise of all, Moray Alleyne slowly unclasped his hands, and stretched one across to the young doctor.

"Thank you," he said. "You are quite right. I give way, for I am beaten. Mother, dear, I yield unwillingly, but Nature's laws are immutable, and I'll try to obey them. Are you content?"

"My boy!"

Stern, unbending Mrs Alleyne was for the moment carried away by her emotion, and forgetting the doctor's presence, she left her chair to throw her arms round her son's neck, bend down, kiss his forehead, and then hurry from the room.

"She loves me, Mr Oldroyd," said Alleyne simply. "Lucy dear, bring mamma back. We are behaving very badly to our guest."

Lucy had already left her chair, and she, too, impulsively kissed her brother and then ran from the room to hide her tears.

"Poor things," said Alleyne, smiling. "I behave very badly to them, doctor, and worry them to death; but I am so lost in my studies that I neglect everything. They have made such sacrifices for me, and I forget it. I don't see them – I don't notice what they do. It was to humour me that they came to live in this desolate spot, and my poor mother has impoverished herself to meet the outlay for my costly instruments. It is too bad, but I am lost in my work, and nothing will ever take me from it now."

"Nothing?" said Oldroyd.

"Nothing," was the reply, given in all simple childlike earnestness, as the young doctor gazed straight into the deep full eyes that did not for a moment blanch. "So you will not give me pills and draughts, doctor," said Alleyne at last, smiling.

"Medicine? No. Take exercise, man. Go more into society. See friends. Take walks. Garden. Make this desert bloom with roses."

"Yes – yes – yes," said Alleyne, thoughtfully. "I must try. Mr

Oldroyd," he said suddenly, "I should like to see more of you – if – if you would allow me."

"My dear sir, nothing would give me greater pleasure. Here, I'll come and garden with you, if you like."

"I should be very grateful," said Alleyne. "Give me your advice," he continued, earnestly, "for I – I must live – I have so much to do – endless labour – and if I do not husband my strength, I – you are right: a man must take exercise and sleep. Mr Oldroyd, I shall take your advice, and – Hush, here they come."

In effect, looking red-eyed, but perfectly calm now, Mrs Alleyne entered with Lucy, and the rest of the dinner passed off most pleasantly to Oldroyd, who was ready to accord that the poor, badly-cooked mutton was the most delicious he had ever eaten, and the vegetables as choice as could have been grown. Doubtless this was due to Lucy's grateful glances, and the quiet, grave condescension with which Mrs Alleyne turned from her idol to say a few words now and then.

Even Alleyne himself seemed to be making efforts to drag himself back from the company of the twin orbs in space, or the star-dust of the milky way, to chat about the ordinary things of every-day life; and at last, it was with quite a guilty sensation of having overstepped the bounds of hospitality in his stay that Oldroyd rose to go.

"You will call and see us again soon, Mr Oldroyd?" said Mrs Alleyne, with the dignity of a reigning queen.

"Professionally, madam," he said, "there is no need. I have

exhausted my advice at this first visit. It is for you to play the nurse, and see that my suggestions are carried out."

"Then as a friend," said the lady, extending her thin white hand. "I am sure my son feels grateful to you, and will be glad to see you at any time."

She glanced at Alleyne, who was seated in the sunshine, holding a pair of smoked glass spectacles to his eyes, and gazing up at the dazzling orb passing onwards towards the west.

"I thank you heartily," said Oldroyd. "Society is not so extensive here that one can afford to slight so kind an invitation."

"Mr Oldroyd going?" said Alleyne, starting, as, in obedience to a look from her mother, Lucy bent over him, and, pressing the glasses down with one hand, whispered a few words in his ear.

"Yes, I must be off now," said the young doctor.

"You will come and see us again soon?" said Alleyne. "Would you care to see my observatory? It might interest you a little."

"I shall be glad," said Oldroyd, "very glad – some day," and after a most friendly good-bye, he took his soft hat and stout stick, and, leaving the cheerless, sombre house, went down the steep slope, and took a short cut across the rough boggy land towards his patient's cottage.

"Thorough lady, but she is very stiff; and she worships her son. Charming little girl that. Nice and natural. No modern young-ladyism in her," he muttered, as he picked his way. "I should think it would be possible to be in her company a whole day without a single allusion to frilling, or square-cut, or trains, or

the colour and shape of Miss Blank's last new bonnet. Quite a sensible little girl. Pretty flower growing in very uncongenial soil, but she seems happy enough."

Philip Oldroyd's communings were checked by some very boggy patches, which had to be leaped and skirted, and otherwise avoided; but as soon as he was once more upon firm ground, he resumed where he had left off.

"Wonderfully fond of her brother, too. Well, I don't wonder. He's a fine fellow after all. I thought him a dullard – a book-worm; but he's something more than that. Why, when he wakes up out of his dreamy state, he's a noble-looking fellow. What a model he would make for an artist who wanted to paint a Roman senator. Why doesn't nature give us all those fine massive heads, with crisp hair and beard? Humph! lost in his far-seeing studies, and nothing will draw him out of them for more than a few hours. Nothing would ever draw him away but one thing. One thing? No, not it, though. He's not the sort of man. He's good-looking enough, and he has a voice that, if bent to woo, would play mischief with a woman's heart. He'll never take that complaint, though, I'll vow. It would be all on the lady's side. And yet, I don't know: man is mortal after all. I am for one. Very mortal indeed, and if I go often to The Firs, I shall be mixing Lucy Alleyne up with my prescriptions, and that won't do at all."

Volume One – Chapter Seven.
Planets in Opposition

Judith Hayle was busy "tidying up" the keeper's cottage, which looked brighter since her return home, for there were flowers in glasses set here and there, and she was mentally wishing that father would clean the captain's double gun out in the wash-house instead of bringing a pail of water into the living-room, to plant between his knees as he worked the rod up and down the barrels.

The girl looked serious, for her sudden return had made her father stern, and she expected to be called upon for more explanation, and a cross-examination, which did not begin.

"Who's this?" said the keeper, with a quick look through the little lattice. "The missus. Here, Judy, she hasn't come here for nothing. Go upstairs and let me see her first."

The girl looked startled and hurriedly obeyed, while her father hastily wiped his hands and opened the door.

Mrs Rolph was close up, and he went out into the porch to meet her, drawing aside quietly and gravely to let her pass.

"Will you walk in, ma'am?"

"Yes, Hayle, thank you," said Mrs Rolph, speaking in a distant, dignified way, as of a mistress about to rebuke an erring servant.

She passed him, looking quickly round the room in search of

Judith, and then, turning her eyes inquiringly upon the keeper, who drew a chair forward, and then stood back respectfully as Mrs Rolph sat down.

"Do you know why I have come here, Hayle?" she said, striving to speak as one who feels herself aggrieved.

"Yes, ma'am. 'Bout sending Judith home."

"Your child has spoken to you?"

"No, ma'am."

Mrs Rolph coughed faintly, to gain time. The task did not seem so easy in presence of this sturdy, independent-looking Englishman, and she regretted the tone she had taken, and her next remark as soon as it was spoken.

"Well, Hayle," she continued, "what have you to say to this?"

"Nay, ma'am," said the keeper coldly; "it's what have you to say?"

Mrs Rolph wanted to speak quietly, and make a kind of appeal to the keeper, but the words would not come as she wished, and she turned upon him, in her disappointment and anger, with the first that rose to her lips.

"To say? That all this is disgraceful. I am bitterly hurt and grieved to find that you, an old servant of my husband, the man whom he rescued from disgrace, should, in return for the kindness of years and years, give me cause to speak as I am compelled to do now."

"Indeed, ma'am!"

"Yes. Out of kindness to your poor dead wife, I took Judith,

and clothed and educated her, treated her quite as if she had been of my own family, made her the companion of my niece; in short, spared nothing; and my reward is this: that she has set snares for my son, and caused an amount of unhappiness in my house that it may take years to get over, and which may never be forgotten. Now, then, what excuse have you to offer? What has your child to say?"

The keeper looked at her and smiled.

"Nay, ma'am," he said quietly, "you don't mean all this, and you would not speak so if you were not put out. You know that I've got a case against you. I trusted my poor lass in your hands."

"Trusted, man?"

"Yes, ma'am, that's the word – trusted her. You promised to be like a mother to her."

"And I have been till she proved ungrateful."

"Nay, she has not been ungrateful, ma'am, and you know it. It's for me to ask you what you were doing to let your son put such ideas in my poor child's head."

"Hayle!"

"Yes, ma'am, I must speak my mind."

"It is madness. You know it is madness."

"Yes, ma'am, if you call it so; but that's how we stand, and my poor girl is not to blame. It is you."

"How dare you!"

"Because I am her father, ma'am, and my child is as much to me as your son is to you."

"This is insolence, sir. Have the goodness to remember who I am."

"I never forget it, ma'am. You are my missus, the old master's wife. But this is not a matter of mistress and servant, but of a mother and a father disputing about their children."

Mrs Rolph drew herself up, and her eyes flashed, but the fire was drowned out directly by the tears of trouble and vexation, and the woman prevailed over the mistress directly after, as she said, in quite an altered tone, —

"Hayle, my good man, what is to be done?"

"Hah!" ejaculated the keeper; "now, ma'am, you are talking like a sensible woman, and we may be able to do business."

"Yes, yes, Hayle, I was angry. I could not help it. All this comes nigh to breaking my heart. It is, of course, quite impossible. What do you propose to do?"

"Forget it, ma'am, if I can."

"And Judith?"

"Hah! That's another thing, ma'am."

"But she surely is not so vain as to – to – "

"My Judith is a woman, ma'am. Is that vanity?"

"Yes, of course. No, no, Hayle. But, once more: it is impossible."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Ah, that's very good and sensible of you. Now, look here. I have thought it all over as I came, and I am sorry to say what I have decided upon seems to be the best plan. It will grieve me

terribly, but there's no help for it. You and Judith must go away. You will agree to this, Hayle?"

"You mean, ma'am, that we old people are to settle the matter as to what is best for the young folks?"

"Yes, yes, that is right."

"And what will the young folks say?"

Mrs Rolph hesitated for a moment or two.

"We cannot stop to consult them, my good man, when we are working for their good. Now, look here, Hayle; of course it will put you to a good deal of inconvenience, for which I am sorry, and to meet that difficulty I went back to my room and wrote this." She took a cheque from her little reticule. "It is for fifty pounds, Hayle; it will cover all your expenses till you obtain another appointment. Why, Benjamin Hayle, how long have you been in our service?"

"A many years, ma'am," said the keeper gravely; and then he read the cheque over as Mrs Rolph placed it in his hands. "Ah! 'Pay to Benjamin Hayle or bearer, fifty pounds. – Constantia Rolph.' A good deal of money, ma'am. And now, I think I'll call Judith down."

"Yes – yes, do. I must say a few words to her. Poor girl, I wish her well."

"Thank you, ma'am," said the keeper quietly.

"Yes: it is not all her fault."

"Judith – Judith, my girl," said the keeper, opening the door at the foot of the stairs. "Come down."

There was the quick rustling of a dress, and Judith came down, red-eyed, pale and wild-looking, to lay her hand on her father's arm.

"Ah, Judith, my dear," began Mrs Rolph, hastily. "Your father and I have been discussing this unhappy affair, and, sorry as we are, we feel obliged to come to the conclusion – the same conclusion that you will, as a good, sensible girl, when you have well thought it out – that this silly flirtation cannot go on. It is for your sake as well as my son's that I speak."

Hayle felt his child's hand tremble on his arm.

"You are too wise and too good to wish to injure my son's prospects for life, and so we have decided that it will be better for your father to leave the place, and take you right away, where all this little trouble will soon be forgotten."

"And," interposed the keeper, "the missus has given me this, my dear – a cheque for fifty pounds, to pay all our expenses. What shall I do with it, my dear?"

"Burn it, father," said Judith, slowly. "It is to buy us off."

"Hah!" said the keeper, with a smile full of satisfaction, "that's well said;" and he placed the end of the cheque to the glowing ashes. It burst into flame and he held it till it was nearly burned away, tossing the scrap he had held into the fire.

"Hayle, you must be mad!" cried Mrs Rolph, astonishment having at first closed her lips.

"Nay, ma'am, we're not mad, either of us," said the keeper, gravely. "There are some things money can buy, and some things

it can't, ma'am. What you want is one of the things it can't buy. Judith and I are going away from the cottage – right away, ma'am. I'm only a keeper, but there's a bit of independence in me; and as for my girl here, whom you made a lady, she's going to act like what you have made her. She owns to me, in her looks if not in words, that she loves young master, and she's too proud to come to you and be his wife, till you come to her, and beg her to. Am I right, Judith?"

The girl gave him a quick look, and then drew herself up, and clung to him.

"Yes, father," she said, in a whisper which caused her intense suffering "you are right."

"There, ma'am, are you satisfied?"

"No," said Mrs Rolph in a husky voice, "I am not satisfied, but it cannot be. My son's welfare is at stake."

She rose, and tried to speak again, but unable to utter another word, she left the cottage, father and daughter watching her till she disappeared among the dark aisles of the firs.

Volume One – Chapter Eight. Mars in the Ascendant

"Better get it over," said Captain Rolph, the next day, as he indulged himself in what he called a short "spin" down the lane by the side of The Warren, and in the direction of the Alleynes' home, which stood up, grim and bleak, out of the sandy desert land. "What with the old man, and the major, and the mater, and Madge, and – oh, hang it all! I'm not going to stand any humbug from Judy, and so I tell her. There, I'll go and get it over at once."

He stopped running, braced himself up, and marched in regular military fashion, back to The Warren, to see Marjorie seated at one of the front windows, ready to give him a smile in response to his short nod.

The next moment he stopped short, gazing sharply down the avenue at the broad, bent back of the keeper, who, with head down, was striding away toward the gate.

"What's he been here for? – to see me?"

Rolph entered the house, walked noisily into his study – a gun-room, for the study of fowling-pieces and fishing rods, with a museum-like collection of prize cups and belts dotted about, in company with trophies of the chase, heads, horns and skins. Here he rang the bell, which was very promptly answered by the butler, Captain Rolph being a follower of the celebrated Count

Shucksen, and using so much military drill-sergeant powder with his orders that they went home at once.

"Hayle been to see me, Smith?" he asked, sharply.

"No, sir. Came to bring up your guns after my mistress had been down to the keeper's lodge this morning."

"Brought up my guns," said Rolph, wonderingly. "What for?"

The man looked at him rather curiously in silence.

"Well, idiot, why don't you speak?"

"Not my business, sir. In trouble, I suppose. Benjamin Hayle and me has never been friends, and so he said nothing, on'y one word as he went out."

"And what was that?"

"Sack, sir – sack!"

"That'll do."

"Yes, sir – I knew it would come some day," said the butler to himself. "Sticking up a notorious poacher on a level with respectable servants, and putting his daughter over 'em, making my lady of her. But pride always did have a fall."

"Humph!" muttered Rolph, with a laugh, "the old girl strikes first blow without knowing what was coming. All right. Now for it. Just as well, perhaps. But he was a good keeper."

He went out into the hall just in time to meet Marjorie, who was tripping blithely down the stairs, singing the while.

"What a lovely day it is, Rob," she said.

"Is it?" he said grimly.

"Isn't it, dear? Why, what's the matter? Are you going in to

see auntie on business?"

"Yes, on that business. Did you and my mother hatch up that dodge between you?"

"I don't know what you mean, Rob."

"Of course not, my clever little schemer. Come in, too, and hear how I've flanked you both."

A sudden change came over the girl's smiling countenance, with its air of wonder, and it was with a vindictive flash of her eyes that she suddenly caught Rolph by the arm.

"Not married?" she said in a harsh whisper.

"No; not yet."

"Hah!"

It was a catching sigh of relief as Rolph threw open the drawing-room door, and, with mock politeness, stood aside for Marjorie to enter.

Mrs Rolph looked troubled and disturbed, and evidently welcomed the appearance of Marjorie, making a sign for the girl to come to her side, and then drawing herself up in her most stately way ready to receive her son's attack, which was not long in coming.

"Why did you go to Hayle's this morning?"

"On business, Rob."

"What for?"

"To tell him that the time had come when I required his services no longer, and that he must go at once."

"What! My keeper?"

"Mine, Robert," said Mrs Rolph, firmly. "You forget the terms of your father's will. You have your income; I have mine, with undisturbed possession of everything at The Warren while I live. You occupy the position of my guest when you are here."

"Humph! all right. And so you have discharged Ben, eh? When does he go?"

"To-day."

"Sharp practice, mother; and all because poor Judy is pretty."

"And all because, as I told him, I wished to save – I will speak plainly, even in your cousin's presence – a weak, vain girl from disgrace."

"Humph! pretty plain speaking that, mother."

"There are times when plain speaking is necessary, my son, and when strong action is required to save you from the consequences of a mad passion."

"Rubbish!"

"What! Don't you know Ben Hayle better than that? Do you think he is the man to sit down quietly when he knows the truth? Have you not seen that the foolish fellow believes thoroughly what he as good as told me to my face this morning – that he expects to see his daughter some day mistress here?"

"Ben Hayle's a fool," cried Rolph, angrily, "and you and Madge here are half-crazy. Let's have an end of it. Once for all, mother, I mean to do exactly as I like, and I have done as I liked."

Mrs Rolph started forward in her chair, and Marjorie's lips tightened.

"What do you mean, Rob?" cried the former.

"You want to see me married, I believe?"

"I want to see you prove yourself an honourable gentleman – a worthy son of your father, not a man for whom I should blush."

"All right, then. I've taken the right steps for settling into a quiet, country gentleman. I'm going to be married."

Marjorie's eyes flashed.

"Rob, you will not be so mad as to marry that girl?"

"Yes, I shall," he said coolly.

"Then I have done with you for ever. Judith Hayle may come here when I am in my grave, but till then – "

"Let the churchyard alone, mother. Do you think I'm such a fool as to marry a poacher's daughter?"

"Rob! Then you have repented!" cried Mrs Rolph excitedly, and Marjorie trembled and sank upon her knees to cling to her aunt's waist.

"Oh, yes, I've repented, and I'm going to be a very good boy and get married soon."

"Madge, my dear child!" cried Mrs Rolph, embracing the girl at her feet.

"There, don't get filling her head full of false hopes, the same as you did Judy Hayle's mother," said Rolph brutally. "I went yesterday and proposed, and have been accepted."

Marjorie's breath came and went in a low hiss as she turned her wild eyes upon her cousin.

"Proposed? To whom? Rob, not to that pert, penniless girl at

The Firs?"

"What, the moon-shooter's sister!" cried Rolph. "Hah! nice, little, bright-eyed thing. But no: try again."

Mrs Rolph rose excitedly from her chair, and Marjorie's hands dropped from her waist as she crouched lower upon the carpet.

"Not John Day's daughter – Glynne?"

"Good guess, mother. Glynne Day is to be my wife by-and-by. The old man is agreeable and the major isn't. So now, the sooner you go and call upon them and make it all right the better."

Poor Marjorie dropped out of Mrs Rolph's sight.

"Rob! my dear boy!" she cried as she flung her arms about her son's neck to kiss him fondly, while Marjorie rose slowly, looking white even to her lips, and with a peculiar smile dawning upon them as her eyes flashed upon the group before her.

"I knew I could trust you, Rob," cried Mrs Rolph; and then, recollecting herself, "Madge, my poor child, I am very sorry, but, you see, it was not to be."

"No, auntie dear," said the girl, with the smile growing more marked; "marriages are made in Heaven, you know. I shall not mind – much. Of course the great aim of all our lives was to see dear Rob happy. Glynne Day is very beautiful and sweet, and a daughter of whom you will be quite proud. I should be deceitful if I did not own to being grievously disappointed, but, as was natural, Rob's love for me has only been that of a brother for a sister" – she fixed Rolph's eyes as she spoke, and his turned shiftily away – "and if I have been a little silly, the pain will soon

wear off. Glynne Day. How nice. I'm sure I shall love her very much, though she is rather cold. Isn't she, Rob?"

"That is very nice of you, Madge, my dear," said Mrs Rolph, embracing her niece. "And who knows how soon another prince may come, my dear."

"Oh, aunt!"

"And you will try to forget all this?"

"Of course, aunt, dear. It was fate," said the girl innocently.

"And – and you will not mind going over to Brackley with me to call?"

"I, mind? Oh, auntie, I should be horribly disappointed if you did not take me. There, Rob," she continued, with a little sigh, "that's all over, and I congratulate you – brother; and I shall kiss dearest Glynne as I kiss you now."

"Humph! thought she was going to bite me," muttered Rolph. Then aloud, "Well, Madge, it was a bit of a flirtation, I own. Now, then, as you've behaved like a trump, so will I. What shall it be – a pearl locket, or diamonds, or a bracelet?"

"Oh, how good and generous you are, Rob dear. How nice of you!" cried Marjorie in gushing tones. "I have so often longed for a sapphire bracelet."

"Then you shall have one," said Rolph, but not quite so warmly as he had spoken before. "I'm off now."

"Won't you stay to lunch, dear?" said Mrs Rolph.

"No. I shall have a sandwich in my room. I'm training. I say! can you go over this afternoon?"

"Of course we will, dear," said Mrs Rolph, warmly; and there was a look of relief in her eyes.

"Then that's all settled," said Rolph; and he left the room, not noticing the hard look in his cousin's eyes. "Sorry about poor old Ben Hayle," he muttered as he went to his own room. "But perhaps it's best. Going to be married, and must be a good boy now."

Then a thought struck him, and he hurried back to the drawing-room, to surprise Marjorie upon her knees, with her face buried in Mrs Rolph's lap.

"Oh, beg pardon," he said, hastily; "but look here, mother; don't be quite so hard on Ben Hayle. I mean as to a day or two."

"Leave that to me, Rob – please," said Mrs Rolph.

"Oh, all right," he cried, and he went right off this time. "Poor little Madge! but she won't be long before she hooks another fish. Bet a sov. she tries it on with the astronomer; but I must go and smooth it down a bit at the lodge. What a blessing it is to have nearly enough coin. That bracelet did wonders; but Judy mustn't play quite so high, and, as for Ben – well he's my mother's man, and – I know; I'll let him keep that old gun."

Volume One – Chapter Nine. Attraction and Repulsion

Rolph dined at Brackley that evening, and found Sir John in the best of spirits. Glynne was bright and eager to show him the progress she had made with her painting, at the sight of which he started as they stood together in the drawing-room.

"But I say, Glynne, you know, this is doosid clever and ought to go to the Academy; only, hang it all! you mustn't get painting fellows like that."

"Why not?"

"Because – because – well, you see the fellow's a regular scamp – dangerous sort of a character, you know – been in prison for poaching, and that sort of thing."

"But he's such a patient model."

"Model, eh? Not my idea of a model. Look here, if you want some one to sit, you shall have me."

The conversation changed to the visit she had received that afternoon; and Glynne in her new excitement was rapturous about "dear Mrs Rolph," but rather lukewarm about her niece, and Rolph noticed it.

"Madge nice to you?" he said.

"Your cousin? Oh, yes," replied Glynne, thoughtfully. "She seemed rather shy and strange at first, but soon got over that. We

have always been a little distant, for I think I was too quiet for her; but of course we shall be like sisters now."

"H'm, yes, I suppose so. But Madge is rather a strange girl."

The dinner passed off pretty well. Rolph drinking a good deal of the baronet's favourite claret, and every now and then finding the major's eyes fixed upon him in rather a searching way which he did not like; but on the whole, Major Day was pleasant and gentlemanly, and rather given to sigh on seeing how happy and bright his niece looked. When at last she rose during dessert, and Rolph opened the door for her to pass out to the drawing-room, he was obliged to own that they would make a handsome couple, and on seeing his brother's inquiring glance, he nodded back to him, making Sir John look pleased.

"I've no right to object if they are satisfied," he said to himself; "but he is not the fellow I should have chosen."

All the same, he shook hands warmly enough when Rolph left that night.

"Jack," he said, as he sat with his brother over their last cigar, "I think I may as well get married now."

"You think what!" cried Sir John dropping his cigar.

"I think I shall get married. I mean, when Glynne has gone."

"I should like to catch you at it!" growled Sir John. "When Glynne goes you've got to stop with me."

"Ah, well we shall see," said the major, whose eyes were fixed on the dark corner of the smoking-room, where he could see a fir glade with a pretty, bright little figure stooping over a ring of

dark-coloured fungi – "we shall see. Glynne isn't married yet."

The next morning, soon after breakfast, Rolph started off for a run, for he was training for an event, he said, the run taking him in the direction of the preserves about an hour later.

He had gone for some distance along the path, but he leaped over a fence now and began to thread his way through a pine wood, where every step was over the thick grey needles; and as he walked he from time to time kicked over one of the bright red or speckled grey fungi which grew beneath the trees.

He had about half a mile to go through this wood; the birch plantation and the low copse, and then through the grove in one of the openings of which, and surrounded by firs, stood the keeper's cottage.

He pressed on through the fir wood, then across the birch plantation, where the partridges loved to hide, and the copse where the poachers knew the pheasants roosted on the uncut trees at the edge, but dared not go, because it was so near the keeper's cottage.

Then on to Thoreby Wood, in and out among the bronze-red fir-tree trunks, under the dark green boughs, where the wind was always moaning, as if the sea shore was nigh, and the bed of needles silenced his footfalls, for the way was easy now. In another minute he would be out of the clearing, close to the cottage – at the back.

"Why, there she is," he said to himself, with his heart giving a throb of satisfaction, as he saw before him a girl standing where

the sun shone down through the opening where the cottage stood, and half threw up the figure as it rested one hand upon a tree trunk and leaned forward as if gazing out from the edge of the wood at something in the opening beyond.

Rolph stopped short, to stand gazing at her admiringly.

"What is she watching?" he said to himself, then, smiling as the explanation came.

"Been feeding the pheasants," he thought. "She has thrown them some grain, and they have come out by the cottage."

"Yes," he continued, "she is watching them feed, and is standing back so as not to scare them. Poor beggars! what a shame it seems to go and murder them after they have been reared at home and fed like this."

He hesitated for a few moments, and then began to walk swiftly on, with hushed footsteps, toward where the figure stood, a hundred yards away.

When he saw her first, he was able to gaze down a narrow lane of trees, but a deep gully ran along there, necessitating his diverging from that part, and going in and out among the tall trunks, sometimes catching a glimpse of the watcher, sometimes for her to be hidden from his sight. And so it was that when at last he came out suddenly, he was not five yards behind her, but unheard. He stopped short, startled and astonished. For it was not Judith who stood watching there so intently.

Madge! there!

At that moment, as if she were impressed by his presence,

Marjorie Emlin rose partly erect, drawing back out of the sunshine, and quite involuntarily turning to gaze full in Rolph's face, her own fixed in its expression of malignant joy, as if she had just seen something which had given her the most profound satisfaction. She was laughing, her lips drawn away from her teeth, and her eyes, in the semi-darkness of the fir wood, dilated and glowing with a strange light.

For a moment or two she gazed straight at Rolph, seeing him, but not seeming to realise his presence. Then there was a rapid change of her expression, the malignant look of joy became one of shame, fear, and the horror of being surprised.

"You here, Madge!" he said at last, in a hoarse whisper lest Judith should know that she was being watched. "What does this mean?"

She looked at him wildly, and began to creep away, as one might from some creature which fascinated and yet filled with fear.

She was still shrinking away, but he had caught her wrist and held it firmly as she glared at him, till, with a sudden effort, she tried to wrest herself away.

There was no struggle, for he suddenly cast her away from him, realising in an instant the reason of her presence and of this malignant look of satisfaction, for, as Madge darted away, he rushed into the opening where the cottage stood, in response to a wild cry for help.

He reached the porch in time to catch Judith on his arm, as

she was running from the place, and receive Caleb Kent who was in full pursuit, with his right fist thrown out with all his might.

The impact of two bodies at speed is tremendous, and scientific people of a mathematical turn assure us that when such bodies do meet they fly off at a tangent.

They may have done so here, but, according to matter-of-fact notions, Rolph's fist and arm flew round Judith afterwards, to help the other hold her trembling and throbbing to his heart; while Caleb Kent's head went down with a heavy, resounding bump on the tiled floor of the little entry.

Then Judith shrank away, and Rolph in his rage planted his foot on Caleb Kent's chest, as the fellow lay back, apparently stunned.

But there was a good deal of the wild beast about Caleb Kent. He lay still for a few moments, and then, quick and active as a cat, he twisted himself sidewise and sprang up, his mouth cut and bleeding, his features distorted with passion; and, starting back, he snatched a long knife from his pocket, threw open the blade, and made a spring at Rolph.

Judith uttered a cry of horror, but there was no occasion for her dread, for, quick in his action as the young poacher, Rolph struck up the attacking arm, and the next moment Caleb Kent was outside, with his opponent following him watchfully.

"Keep of!" snarled Caleb, "or I'll have your blood. All right: I see; but never mind, my turn will come yet. If I wait for years, I'll make this straight."

And then as Rolph made a rush at him, he dodged aside and darted into the fir wood, running so swiftly that his adversary felt it would be useless to pursue.

Neither did he wish to, for Judith was standing there by the porch, looking wild-eyed and ghastly.

"You – you are hurt," she faltered.

"Hurt!" he cried, as he clasped her once more in his arms. "No, no, tell me about yourself. Curse him! what did he say?"

"I was alone here and busy when he came. He has followed me about from a child and frightened me. To-day he walked straight in and roughly told me that he loved me, and that I must be his wife."

She shuddered.

"The insolent gaol-bird!"

"He frightened me, though I tried very hard to be firm, and ordered him to leave the place; but he only laughed at me, and caught me in his arms, and tried to kiss me. I was struggling with him for a long time, and no help seemed to be coming. I screamed out, and that frightened him, and he left me; but, before I could fasten the door, he came back and spoke gently to me, but when I would not listen to him, he tried to seize me again, and I cried for help, and you – "

She did not shrink this time, as, throbbing with passion, and uttering threats against the scoundrel, Rolph once more folded her in his arms.

Again she struggled from him, trembling.

"I am not doing right," she said firmly. "If you love me, Rob – "

"If I love you!" he said reproachfully.

"I am sure you have pity for me," she said, taking his hand and raising it to her lips, to utter a cry of horror, for the hand was bleeding freely, and the ruddy current dyed her lips.

"Hurt in my defence," she said with a pained smile, as she bound her own handkerchief about the bleeding knuckles.

"I'd die in your defence," he whispered passionately; "your protector always, dearest."

"Then protect me now," she said, "that I am weak, and let me trust in you. You wish me to be your wife, Robert?"

"Eh? Yes, of course, of course," he said hurriedly.

"And you won't let your mother sending me away make any difference?"

"How could it, little stupid! I'm not a boy," he said, banteringly. "But I must go now, and, as for Master Caleb Kent, I'll just set the policeman on his track."

"But that will mean his being taken before the magistrates, Rob."

"Yes, and a long spell for him this time, or I'll know the reason why."

"No, no," cried the girl, hurriedly. "You mustn't do that."

"Why?"

"Because he hates you enough as it is. He said he'd kill you."

"Will he?" muttered Rolph, between his teeth.

"And I should have to go before the magistrates as a witness; and there's no knowing what Caleb might say."

Rolph looked at her searchingly, while she clung to him till he promised to let the matter rest.

"But suppose he comes again?"

"Father will take care of that," she said confidently. "But do mind yourself as you go. Caleb may be hiding, and waiting for you."

"To come back here," he said sharply.

"If he does, he'll find the door locked," said Judith quietly. "Must you go now?"

"Yes: your father may come back."

"But that doesn't matter now, Rob, does it? Why not tell him we're engaged?"

"No, no: not yet. Leave that to me. Good-bye, now."

He drew the clinging arms from about his neck rather roughly, gave the girl's lips a hasty kiss, and hurried out and across the clearing, turning back twice as he went to see Judith looking after him, with her face shadowed by tears, and then, as their eyes encountered, beaming with sunshine. And again, after he had passed out of sight, he stole back through the trees to find that she was still wistfully gazing at the spot where she saw him last.

And, as unseen he watched her, his thoughts were many upon her unprotected state, and as to whether he ought not to stay until her father's return.

"No," he said, "the beggar will not dare to come back!" and,

after making a circuit of the place, and searching in all directions, he walked thoughtfully away, thinking of what must be done with regard to Caleb Kent, and then about his cousin, against whom his indignation grew hotter the more he thought of what he had seen.

"She must have known that Caleb was in the cottage insulting Judith, and she was glorying in it and would not stir a step to save her, when her presence would have been enough to drive the beggar away. Oh, it seems impossible that a woman could be so spiteful. Hang it! Madge has got hold of that now. It's like being at her mercy. Phew! I'm getting myself in a devil of a mess. I meant to fight shy of her now altogether, but of course no fellow could help running to save a woman in distress."

He stopped short, for a sudden thought struck him.

"Then Judy hasn't heard about Glynne yet. Confound it all! what a tangle I'm getting in."

He took out and lit a cigar. Then smoking rapidly, he felt better.

"All right," he muttered; "the old woman sets that square, and the sooner they're off the estate the better for everybody. But there's no mistake about it, Judy is deuced nice after all."

"Day, sir," said a sharp voice, and Rolph started round to find himself face to face with Hayle.

"Ah, Ben! – you!"

"Yes, sir, me it is," said the keeper, sternly. "Down, dogs!"

This to the animals which began to play about the captain.

"Oh, let 'em be," said Rolph, patting one of the setters on the head.

"Never mind the dogs, sir. I've got something more serious to think about. I suppose you know as the missus has sacked me, and we're off?"

"Yes, Ben, I know; but it was no doing of mine."

"I never thought it was, sir; but me and Judy's to go at once – anywhere, for aught she cares. She'd like me to emigrate, I think."

"No, don't do that, Ben. England's big enough."

"For some people, sir. I don't know as it is for me. Well, sir, I'm sacked, and I dare say it will be a long time before anyone will take me on. My character usen't to be of the best, and the reasons for going 'll be again me. Of course you know why it is."

"Well – er – I suppose – "

"That'll do, sir. You know well enough, it's about you and my Judy."

The captain laughed.

"There, sir, you needn't shuffle with me. I'm my gal's father, and we may as well understand one another."

"My good fellow, recollect whom you are talking to," said the captain, haughtily.

"I do, sir. My late missus's son; and I recollect that I'm nobody's servant now, only an Englishman as can speak out free like. So I say this out plain. Of course, after what's been going on, you mean to marry my Judith?"

"Marry her? Well – er – Ben – "

"No, you don't," said the keeper fiercely, "so don't tell me no lies, because I know you've been and got yourself engaged to young Miss Glynne over at Brackley."

"Well, sir, and if I have, what then?" said Rolph haughtily.

"This, sir," cried the keeper, with his eyes flashing, "that you've been playing a damned cowardly mean part to Miss Glynne and to my Judith. You've led my gal on to believe that you meant to marry her, and then you've thrown her over and took up with Sir John Day's gal. And I tell you this; if my Judith hadn't been what she is, and any harm had come of it, you might have said your prayers, for as sure as there's two charges o' shot in this here gun, I'd put one through you."

"What?"

"You heared what I said, sir, and you know I'm a man of my word. And now, look here: you've been to the lodge to see Judith, for the last time, of course, for if ever you speak to her again, look out. Now, don't deny it, my lad. You've been to my cottage, for it is mine till to-night."

"Yes, I have been to the lodge, Hayle," said Rolph, who was thoroughly cowed by the keeper's fierce manner. "I was going through the wood when, just as I drew near the cottage, I heard a cry for help."

"What?" roared Hayle.

"I ran to the porch just as a man was after Miss Hayle – Steady there."

The sound was startling, for involuntarily the keeper had

cocked both barrels of his gun; and, as he stood there with his eyes flashing, and the weapon trembling in the air, the three dogs looked as if turned to stone, their necks outstretched, heads down, and their long feathery tails rigid, waiting for the double report they felt must follow.

"And – and – what did you do?" cried the keeper in a slow, hoarse voice, which, taken in conjunction with the rapid cocking of the gun, made Rolph think that, if it had been the father who had come upon that scene, there might have been a tragedy in Thoreby Wood that day.

"I say, what did you do?" said the keeper again, in a voice full of suppressed passion.

"That!" said Rolph, slowly raising his right hand to unwind from it Judith's soft white handkerchief, now all stained with blood, and display his knuckles denuded of skin.

"Hah!" ejaculated the keeper, as his eyes flashed. "God bless you for that, sir. You knocked him down?"

"Of course."

"Yes – yes?"

"And he jumped up and drew his knife and struck at me."

"But he didn't hit you, sir; he didn't hit you?" cried the keeper, forgetting everything in his excitement as he clutched the young man's arm.

"No; I was too quick for him; and then he ran off into the wood."

"Damn him!" roared the keeper. "If I had only been there this

would have caught him," he cried, patting the stock of his gun. "I'd have set the dogs on him after I'd given him a couple of charges of shot; I would, sir, so help me God."

The veins were standing out all over the keeper's brow, as he ground his teeth and shook his great heavy fist.

"But wait a bit. It won't be long before we meet."

"I am very glad you were not there, Hayle," said Rolph, after watching the play of the father's features for a few moments.

"Why, sir, why?"

"Because I don't want to have you take your trial for manslaughter."

"No, no; I had enough of that over the breaking of Jack Harris's head, sir; but – "

"Yes, but," said Rolph, quickly, "I wanted to talk to you about that."

"It was Caleb Kent," said the keeper, with sudden excitement.

"Yes, it was Caleb Kent."

"I might have known it; he was always for following her about. Curse him! But talking's no good, sir; and, perhaps, it's as well I wasn't there. Thankye, sir, for that. It makes us something more like quits. As for Caleb Kent, perhaps I shall have a talk to him before I go. But mind you don't speak to my Judy again."

He shouldered his gun, gave Rolph a nod, and then walked swiftly away, the dogs hesitating for a few moments, and then dashing off, to follow close at his heels.

Rolph stood watching the keeper for a few minutes till he

disappeared.

"Well out of that trouble then," he muttered. "Not pleasant for a fellow; it makes one feel so small. Poor little Judy! she'll be horribly wild when she comes to know. What a lot of misery our marriage laws do cause in this precious world."

"Now then for home," he said, after walking swiftly for a few minutes, and, "putting on a spurt" as he termed it, he reached the house and went straight to the library.

He had entered and closed the door to sit down and have a good think about how he could "square Madge," when he became aware that the lady in his thoughts was seated in one of the great arm-chairs with a book in her hand, which she pretended to read. She cowered as her cousin started, and stood gazing down at her with a frowning brow, and a look of utter disgust and contempt about his lips which made her bosom rise and fall rapidly.

"Do you want this room, Rob?" she said, breaking an awkward silence.

"Well, yes, after what took place this morning, you do make the place seem unpleasant," he said coolly.

"Oh, this is too much," cried Madge, her face, the moment before deadly pale, now flushing scarlet, as she threw down the book she had held, and stood before him, biting her lips with rage.

"Yes, too much."

"And have we been to the cottage to see the fair idol? Pray explain," said Marjorie, who was beside herself with rage and

jealousy. “I thought gentlemen who were engaged always made an end of their vulgar amours.”

“Quite right,” said Rolph, meaningly. “I did begin, as you know.”

She winced, and her eyes darted an angry flash at him.

“You mean me,” she said, with her lips turning white.

“I did not say so.”

“But would it not have been better, now we are engaged to Glynne Day – I don’t understand these things, of course – but would it not have been better for a gentleman, now that he is engaged, to cease visiting that creature, and, above all, to keep away when he was not wanted?”

“What do you mean? – not wanted?”

“I mean when she was engaged with her lover, who was visiting her in her father’s absence.”

“The scoundrel!” cried Rolph, fiercely.

“Yes; a miserable, contemptible wretch, I suppose, but an old flame of hers.”

“Look here, Madge; you’re saying all this to make me wild,” cried Rolph, “but it won’t do. You know it’s a lie.”

Madge laughed unpleasantly.

“It’s true. He was always after her. She told me so herself, and how glad she was that the wretch had been sent to prison – of course, because he was in the way just then.”

“Go on,” growled Rolph. “A jealous woman will say anything.”

"Jealous? – I? – Pah! – Only angry with myself because I was so weak as to listen to you."

"And I was so weak as to say anything to a malicious, deceitful cat of a girl, who is spiteful enough to do anything."

"I, spiteful? – Pah!"

"Well, malicious then."

"Perhaps I shall be. I wonder what dear Glynne would say about this business. Suppose I told her that our honourable and gallant friend, as they call it in parliament, had been on a visit to that shameless creature whom poor auntie had been compelled to turn away from the house, and in his honourable and gallant visit arrived just in time to witness the end of a lover's quarrel; perhaps you joined in for ought I know, and – I can't help laughing – Poor fellow! You did. You have been fighting with your rival, and bruised your knuckles. Did he beat you much, Rob, and win?"

Robert Rolph was dense and brutal enough, and his cousin's words made him wince, but he looked at the speaker in disgust as the malevolence of her nature forced itself upon him more and more.

"Well," he cried at last, "I've seen some women in my time, but I never met one yet who could stand by and glory in seeing one whom she had looked upon as a sister insulted like poor Judy was."

"A sister!" cried Marjorie, contemptuously. "Absurd! – a low-born trull!"

"Whom you called dear, and kissed often enough till you

thought I liked her, and then – Hang it all, Madge, are you utterly without shame!"

She shrank from him as if his words were thongs which cut into her flesh, but as he ceased speaking, with a passionate sob, she flung her arms about his neck, and clung tightly there.

"Rob! Don't, I can't bear it," she cried. "You don't know what I have suffered – what agony all this has caused."

"There, there, that will do," he said contemptuously. "I am engaged, my dear."

She sprang from him, and a fierce light burned in her eyes for a moment, but disappointment and her despair were too much for her, and she flung herself upon his breast.

"No, no, Rob, dear, it isn't true. I couldn't help hating Judith or any woman who came between us. You don't mean all this, and it is only to try me. You cannot – you shall not marry Glynne; and as to Judith, it is impossible now."

"Give over," he said roughly, as he tried to free himself from her arms.

"No, you sha'n't go. I must tell you," she whispered hoarsely amidst her sobs. "I hate Judith, but she is nothing – not worthy of a thought I will never mention her name to you again, dear."

"Don't pray," he cried sarcastically. "If you do, I shall always be seeing you gloating over her trouble as I saw you this morning."

"It was because I loved you so, Rob," she murmured as she nestled to him. "It was because I felt that you were mine and mine

only, after the past; and all that was forcing her away from you."

"Bah!" he cried savagely. "Madge! Don't be a fool! Will you loosen your hands before I hurt you."

But she clung to him still.

"No, not yet," she whispered. "You made me love you, Rob, and I forget everything in that. Promise me first that you will break all that off about Glynne Day."

"I promise you that I'll get your aunt to place you in a private asylum," he cried brutally, "if you don't leave go."

There was a slight struggle, and he tore himself free, holding her wrists together in his powerful grasp and keeping her at arm's length.

"There! Idiot!" he cried. "Must I hold you till you come to your senses."

"If you wish – brute!" she cried through her little white teeth as her lips were drawn away. "Kill me if you like now. I don't care a bit: you can't hurt me more than you have."

"If I hurt you, it serves you right. A nice, ladylike creature, 'pon my soul. Pity my mother hasn't been here to see the kind of woman she wanted me to marry."

"Go on," she whispered, "go on. Insult me: you have a right. Go on."

"I'm going off," he said roughly. "There, go up to your room, and have a good hysterical cry and a wash, and come back to your senses. If you will have it you shall, and the whole truth too. I never cared a bit for you. It was all your own doing, leading me

on. Want to go."

"Loose my hands, brute."

"For you to scratch my face, my red-haired pussy. Not such a fool. I know your sweet temper of old. If I let go, will you be quiet?"

Marjorie made no reply, but she ceased to struggle and stood there with her wrists held, the white skin growing black – a prisoner – till, with a contemptuous laugh, he threw the little arms from him.

"Go and tell Glynne everything you know – everything you have seen, if you like," he said harshly, "only tell everything about yourself too, and then come back to me to be loved, my sweet, amiable, little white-faced tigress. I'm not afraid though, Madge. You can't open those pretty lips of yours, can you? It might make others speak in their defence."

"Brute," she whispered as she gazed at him defiantly and held out her bruised wrists.

"Brute, am I? Well, let sleeping brutes lie. Don't try to rouse them up for fear they should bite. Go to your room and bathe your pretty red eyes after having a good cry, and then come and tell me that you think it is best to cry truce, and forget all the past."

"Never, Rob, dear," she said with a curious smile. "Go on; but mind this: you shall never marry Glynne Day."

"Sha'n't I? We shall see. I think I can pull that off," he cried with a mocking laugh. "But if I don't, whom shall I marry?"

She turned from him slowly, and then faced round again as she reached the door.

"Me," she said quietly; and the next minute Robert Rolph was alone.

Volume One – Chapter Ten.
A Cloudy Sky

"Oh, father, I'm so glad you've come."

This was Ben Hayle's greeting as he reached the keeper's lodge.

"Eh? Are you?" he said, with an assumed look of ignorance; but the corners of his eyes were twitching, and he was asking himself how he was to tell his child matters that would nearly break her heart, as he yielded his hand to hers, and let her press him back into his windsor arm-chair. "Nothing the matter, is there?"

She knelt at his feet, and told him all that had passed, and the strong man's muscles jerked, and his grasp of her arm grew at times painful. As she went on, he interjected a savage word from time to time.

"Good girl, good girl. It has hurt you, my darling, but it was right to tell me all, and keep nothing back."

Then he laid his hand softly on her glossy hair, and sat staring straight before him at the window, the moments being steadily marked off by the *tick-tack* of the old eight-day clock in the corner, and no other sound was heard in the room.

Outside, the silence of the fir wood was broken by the cheery lay of a robin in one of the apple-trees of the garden, and once

there came the low, soft cooing of a dove, which the soft, sunny autumn day had deluded into the belief that it was spring.

Then all was again silent for a time, and it seemed to Judith, as she looked up into the stern, thoughtful face, with its dark, fierce eyes, that the heavy throbbing of her heart drowned the beat of the clock; at other times the regular *tick-tack* grew louder, and she could hear nothing else.

"You're not cross with me, father?" she said at last.

"No, it was no fault of yours. Ah, Judy, my girl, I was so proud of your bonny face, but it seems as if it is like to be a curse to you – to us both."

"Father!"

"Yes, my lass; and I don't know which of they two we ought to be most scared of – Caleb Kent or the captain."

"Oh! father!" cried Judith; and she let her head fall upon his knee, as she sobbed wildly.

"I need hardly ask you, then, my girl," he said, as with tender, loving hands, he took her head and bent over it, with his dark, fierce eyes softening. "You like him, then?"

She looked up proudly.

"He loves me, father."

"Ay, and you, my lassie?"

"Yes, father. I have tried very hard not to think about him, but – Yes, I do love him very dearly, and I'm going to be his wife. He said he would speak to you."

"Yes, my dear, and he has spoken to me."

"Oh!" she cried, as she reached up to lay her hands upon the keeper's shoulders, and gaze inquiringly in his eyes.

"It was all one big blunder, my dear," he said; "you ought never to have gone up to the house, and learned things to make you above your station. I used to think so, as I sat here o' night's and smoked my pipe, and say to myself, 'She'll never care for the poor old cottage again.'"

Judith looked up quickly, and her arm stole round her father's neck.

"And then," she whispered, "you said to yourself, 'It is not true, for she'll never forget the old home.'"

"You're a witch, Judy," he cried, drawing her to him, with his face brightening a little. "I did. And if it could have been that you'd wed the captain, and gone up to the house among the grand folk, you would have had me there; you would not have been ashamed of the old man – would you?"

"Why do you ask me that, dear?" said Judith, with her lips quivering. "You know – you know."

"Yes," he said, "I know. But we shall have to go away from the old place, Judy, for it can't never be."

"Oh, father!"

"No, my dear, it won't do. It's all been a muddle, and I ought to have known better, instead of being a proud old fool, pleased as could be to see my lassie growing into a lady. There, I may as well tell you the truth, lass, at once."

"The truth, father?" she said sharply.

"Yes, my dear, though it goes again me to hurt your poor little soft heart."

"What do you mean, father?" she cried, startled now by the keeper's looks.

"It must come, Judy; but I wish you'd found it out for yourself. Young Robert isn't the man his dead father was. He's a liar and a scoundrel, girl, and – "

She sprang from him with her eyes flashing, and a look of angry indignation convulsing her features.

"It's true, my girl. He never meant to marry you, only to make you his plaything because he liked your pretty face."

"It isn't true," said the girl harshly; and the indignation in her breast against her father made her wonderfully like him now.

"It is true, Judy, my pretty. I wouldn't lie to you, and half break your heart. You've got to face it along with me. We're sent away because the captain is going to marry."

"It isn't true, father; he wouldn't marry Madge Emlin, with her cruel, deceitful heart."

"No, my lass; he's chucked her over too. He's going to marry Sir John Day's gal, over at Brackley Hall – her who came here and painted your face in the sun bonnet, when you were home those few days the time I had rheumatiz."

"Is this true, father?"

"As true as gospel, lass."

She gave him a long, searching look, as if reading his very soul, and then crept back to a low chair, sank down, and buried

her face in her hands.

"Hah!" he said to himself, "she takes it better than I thought for. Thank God, it wasn't too late."

He stood thinking for a few minutes.

"Where am I to get a cottage, Judy, my lass?" he said at last. "One of those at Lindham might do for the present, out there by your grandmother's, if there's one empty. Mother Wattley would know. I'll go and see her. Let's get out of this. Poor old place, though," he said, as he looked round. "It seems rather hard."

Judith had raised her head, and sat gazing straight before her, right into the future, but she did not speak.

Volume One – Chapter Eleven.
In a Mist

Glynne Day was seated in her favourite place – a bright, cheerful-looking room connected with her bedchamber on the first floor at Brackley, and turned by her into a pleasant nest; for the French windows opened into a tiny conservatory over a broad bay window of the dining-room, where were displayed the choicest floral gems that Jones, the head gardener, could raise, all being duly tended by her own hands.

The gardener shook his head, and said that "the plahnts wiltered" for want of light, and wanted to cut away the greater part of the tendril-like stems of the huge wistaria, which twisted itself into cables, and formed loops and sprays all over the top glass; but Glynne looked at him in horror, and forbade him to cut a stem. Consequently, in the spring-time, great lavender racemes of the lovely flowers clustered about the broad window at which the mistress of the Hall loved to sit and sketch "bits" of the beautiful landscape around, and make study after study of the precipitous pine-crowned hill a mile away, behind whose dark trees the sun would set, and give her opportunities to paint in gorgeous hues the tints of the western sky.

Here Lucy Alleyne would be brought after their walks, to sit and read, while Glynne filled in sketches she had made; and many

a pleasant hour was passed by the two girls, while the soft breezes of the sunny country waved the long wistaria strands.

"It's no use for me to speak, Mr Morris," said the gardener one day. "It 'most breaks my heart, for all about there, and under the little glass house is the untidiest bit about my garden. I told Sir John about it, and he said, 'Why don't you cut it then, booby?' and when I told him why, and ast him to speak to Miss Glynne, he said, 'Be off, and leave it alone.'"

"And of course you did," said Morris, the butler.

"Sack's the word if I hadn't, sir. But you mark my words: one of these days – I mean nights – them London burglars 'll give us a visit, and they won't want no ladder to get up to the first-floor windows. A baby could climb up them great glycene ropes and get in at that window; and then away goes my young lady's jewels."

"Well, they won't get my plate," said Morris with a chuckle. "I've two loaded pistols in my pantry for anyone who comes, so let 'em look out; and if I shout for help, the major's got his loaded too."

Glynne Day was seated one afternoon in her conservatory, bending over her last water-colour sketch by the open window, when a loud, reverberating bang echoed along the corridor, making the windows rattle outside her room. Starting up, knowing from old experience that it was only an earthquake, one of the social kind which affected Brackley from time to time, she hurried into her little study, and out into the passage, to go to the

end, and tap sharply at the door facing her.

"Come in," was shouted in the same tones as he who uttered the order had cried "wheel into line!" and Glynne entered to find the major with his hair looking knotted, his moustache bristling, and his eyes rolling in their sockets.

"What is the matter, uncle?"

"Matter?" cried the major, who was purple with rage. "Matter? He's your father, Glynne, and he's my brother, but if – if I could only feel that it wasn't wicked to cut him down with the sword I used at Chillianwallah, I'd be thankful."

"Now, uncle, dear, you don't feel anything of the kind," said Glynne, leaning upon the old gentleman's arm.

"I do feel it, and I mean it this time. Now, girl, look here! Why am I such an old idiot – "

"Oh, uncle!"

" – As to stop here, and let that bullying, farm-labouring, overbearing bumpkin – I beg your pardon, my dear, but he is – father of yours, ride rough-shod over me?"

"But, uncle, dear – "

"But, niece, dear, he does; and how I can be such an idiot as to stop here, I don't know. If I were his dependent, it couldn't be worse."

"But, uncle, dear, I'm afraid you do show a little temper sometimes."

"Temper! I show temper! Nothing of the kind," cried the old fellow, angrily, and his grey curls seemed to stand out wildly from

his head. “Only decision – just so much decision as a military man should show – nothing more. Temper, indeed!”

“But you are hasty, dear, and papa so soon gets warm.”

“Warm? Red hot. White hot. He has a temper that would irritate a saint, and heaven knows I am no saint.”

“It does seem such a pity for you and papa to quarrel.”

“Pity? It’s abominable, my child, when we might live together as peaceably as pigeons. But he shall have it his own way now. I’ve done. I’ll have no more of it I’m not a child.”

“What are you going to do, uncle?”

“Do? Pack up and go, this very day. Then he may come to my chambers and beg till all’s blue, but he’ll never persuade me to come out here again.”

“Oh, uncle! It will be so dull if you go away.”

“No, no, not it, my dear. You’ve got your captain; and there’ll be peace in the house then till he finds someone else to bully. Why, I might be one of his farm labourers; that I might. But there’s an end of it now.”

“But, uncle!” cried Glynne, looking perplexed and troubled, “come back with me into the library. I’m sure, if papa was in the wrong, he’ll be sorry.”

“If he was in the wrong! He *was* in the wrong. Me go to him? Not I. My mind’s made up. I’ll not have my old age embittered by his abominable temper. Don’t stop me, girl. I’m going, and nothing shall stay me now.”

“How tiresome it is!” said Glynne, softly, as her broad, white

forehead grew full of wrinkles. “Dear uncle; he must not go. I must do something,” and then, with a smile dawning upon her perplexed face, she descended the stairs, and went softly to the library door, opened it gently, and found Sir John tramping up and down the Turkey carpet, like some wild beast in its cage.

“Who’s that? How dare you enter without – Oh, it’s you, Glynne.”

“Yes, papa. Uncle has gone upstairs and banged his door.”

“I’m glad of it; I’m very glad of it,” cried Sir John, “and I hope it’s for the last time.”

“What has been the matter, papa?” said Glynne, laying her hands upon his shoulders. “Sit down, dear, and tell me.”

“No, no, my dear, don’t bother me. I don’t want to sit down, Glynne.”

“Yes, yes, dear, and tell me all about it.”

Fighting against it all the while, the choleric baronet allowed himself to be pressed down into one of the easy-chairs, Glynne drawing a footstool to his side, sitting at his feet, and clasping and resting her hands upon his knees.

“Well, there, now; are you satisfied?” he said, half laughing, half angry.

“No, papa. I want to know why you and uncle quarrelled.”

“Oh, the old reason,” said Sir John, colouring. “He will be as obstinate as a mule, and the more you try to reason with him, the more he turns to you his hind legs and kicks.”

“Did you try to reason with Uncle James, papa?”

"Did I try to reason with him? Why, of course I did, but you might as well try to reason with a stone trough."

"What was it about?" said Glynne, quietly.

"What was it about? Oh, about the – about the – bless my soul, what did it begin about? Some, some, some – dear me, how absurd, Glynne. He upset me so that it has completely gone out of my head. What do you mean? What do you mean by shaking your head like that? Confound it all, Glynne, are you going to turn against me?"

"Oh, papa, papa, how sad it is," said Glynne, gently. "You have upset poor uncle like this all about some trifle of so little consequence that you have even forgotten what it was."

"I beg your pardon, madam," cried Sir John, trying to rise, but Glynne laid her hand upon his chest and kept him back. "It was no trifle, and it is no joke for your Uncle James to launch out in his confounded haughty, military way, and try to take the reins from my hands. I'm master here. I remember now; it was about Rob."

"Indeed, papa!" said Glynne, with a sad tone in her voice.

"Yes, finding fault about his training. I don't want him to go about like some confounded foot-racing fellow, but he's my son-in-law elect, and he shall do as he pleases. What next, I wonder? Your uncle will be wanting to manage my farm."

Glynne remained very thoughtful and silent for a few minutes, during which time her father continued to fume, and utter expressions of annoyance, till Glynne said suddenly as she looked

up in his face, —

"You were wrong, papa, dear. You should not quarrel with Uncle James."

"Wrong? Wrong? Why, the girl's mad," cried Sir John. "Do you approve of his taking your future husband to task over his amusements?"

"I don't know," said Glynne slowly, as she turned her great, frank-looking eyes upon her father. "I don't know, papa, dear. I don't think I do; but Uncle James is so good and wise, and I know he loves me very much."

"Of course he does; so does everybody else," cried the baronet, excitedly. "I should like to see the man who did not. But I will not have his interference here, and I'm very glad – very glad indeed – that he is going."

"Uncle James meant it for the best, I'm sure, papa," said Glynne, thoughtfully, "and it was wrong of you to quarrel with him."

"I tell you I did not quarrel with him, Glynne; he quarrelled with me," roared Sir John.

"And you ought to go and apologise to him."

"I'd go and hang myself sooner. I'd sooner go and commit suicide in my new patent thrashing-machine."

"Nonsense, papa, dear," said Glynne quietly. "You ought to go and apologise. If you don't, Uncle James will leave us."

"Let him."

"And then you will be very much put out and grieved."

"And a good job too. I mean a good job if he'd leave, for then we should have peace in the place."

"Now, papa!"

"I tell you I'd be very glad of it; a confounded peppery old Nero, talking to me as if I were a private under him. Bully me, indeed! I won't stand it. There!"

"Papa, dear, go upstairs and apologise to Uncle James."

"I won't, Glynne. There's an end of it now. Just because he can't have everything his own way. He has never forgiven me for being the eldest son and taking the baronetcy. Was it my fault that I was born first?"

"Now, papa, dear, that's talking at random; I don't believe Uncle James ever envied you for having the title."

"Then he shouldn't act as if he did. Confound him!"

"Then you'll go up and speak to him. Come, dear, don't let's have this cloud over the house!"

"Cloud? I'll make it a regular tempest," cried Sir John, furiously. "I'll go upstairs and see that he does go, and at once. See if I ferret him out of his nasty, dark, stuffy, dismal chambers again. Brought him down here, and made a healthy, hearty man of him, and this is my reward."

"Is that you talking, papa?" said Glynne, rising with him, for he made a rush now out of his seat, and she smiled in his face as she put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Bah! Get out! Pst! Puss!" cried Sir John, and swinging round, he strode out of the library, and banged the door as if he had

caught his brother's habit.

Glynne stood looking after him, smiling as she listened to his steps on the polished oak floor of the hall, and then seemed quite satisfied as she detected the fact that he had gone upstairs. Then it was that a dreamy, strange look came into her eyes, and she stood there, with one hand resting upon the table, thinking – thinking – thinking of the cause of the quarrel, of the words her uncle had spoken regarding Rolph; and it seemed to her that there was a mist before her, stretching out farther and farther, and hiding the future.

For the major was always so gentle and kind to her. He never spoke to her about Rolph as he had spoken to her father; but she had noticed that he was a little cold and sarcastic sometimes towards her lover.

Was there trouble coming? Did she love Robert as dearly as she should?

She wanted answers to these questions, and the responses were hidden in the mist ahead. Then, as she gazed, it seemed to her that her future was like the vast space into which she had looked from her window by night; and though for a time it was brightened with dazzling, hopeful points, these again became clouded over, and all was misty and dull once more.

Volume One – Chapter Twelve. The Professor in Company

Sir John went upstairs furiously, taking three steps at a time – twice. Then he finished that flight two at a time; walked fast up the first half of the second flight, one step at a time; slowly up the second half; paused on the landing, and then went deliberately along the corridor, with its row of painted ancestors watching him from one side, as if wondering when he was coming to join them there.

Sir John Day was a man who soon made up his mind, whether it was about turning an arable field into pasture, or the setting of a new kind of corn. He settled in five minutes to have steam upon the farm, and did not ponder upon Glynne's engagement for more than ten; so that he was able to make his plans very well in the sixty feet that he had to traverse before he reached his brother's door, upon whose panel he gave a tremendous thump, and then entered at once.

The major was in his shirt-sleeves, apparently turning himself into a jack-in-the-box, for he was standing in an old bullock trunk, one which had journeyed with him pretty well all over India; and as Sir John entered the room sharply, and closed the door behind him, the major started up, looking fiercely and angrily at the intruder.

"Oh, you're packing, then?" said Sir John, in the most uncompromising tone.

"Yes, sir, I am packing," said the major, getting out of the trunk, and slamming down the lid; "and I think, sir, that I might be permitted to do that in peace and quietness."

"Peace? Yes, of course you may," said Sir John, sharply, "only you will make it war."

"I was not aware," said the major, "that it was necessary for me to lock my door – I beg your pardon – your door. And now, may I ask the object of this intrusion? If it is to resume the quarrel, you may spare yourself the pains."

"Indeed!" said Sir John shortly.

"Well," continued the major, "why have you come?"

"You are going, then?"

"Of course I am, sir."

"Well, I came to tell you I'm very glad of it," cried Sir John, clapping his brother on the shoulder; and then – "I say, Jem, I wish I hadn't such a peppery temper."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.