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Содержание

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Chapter One.
A High Family

"Con-found those organs!" said the Earl of Barmouth.

"And frustrate their grinders," cried Viscount Diphoos.

"They are such a nuisance, my boy."

"True, oh sire," replied the viscount, who had the heels of his patent leather shoes on the library chimney-piece of the town mansion in Portland Place. He had reached that spot with difficulty, and was smoking a cigar, to calm his nerves for what he called the operation.

"Tom, my boy."

"Yes, gov'nor."

"If her ladyship faints – "

"If what?" cried the viscount, bringing his heels into the fender with a crash.

"If – if – don't speak so sharply, my dear Tom; it jars my back, and sets that confounded gout jigging and tearing at me all up my leg. I say, if her ladyship faints when we come back from the church, will you be ready to catch her. I'm afraid if I tried I should

let her down, and it would look so bad before the servants."

"Be too heavy for you, eh, gov'nor?" said Tom, grinning, as he mentally conjured up the scene.

"Yes, my boy, yes. She has grown so much stouter and heavier, and I have grown thinner and lighter since – since the happy day twenty-six years ago when I married her, Tom – when I married her. Yes, much stouter since I married her. How well I remember it all. Yes: it was an easterly wind, I recollect, and your poor dear mamma – her ladyship, Tom – had the toothache very badly. It made her face swell out on one side as we went across to Paris, and I had a deal of bother to get the waiter and chamber-maid to understand what a linseed-meal poultice was. Very objectionable thing a linseed-meal poultice; I never did like the smell."

"I should think not," said the son, watching his father seriously, the old man having a worn look, as if he had been engaged in a severe struggle with time.

"Peculiarly faint odour about them. Seems only last night, and now one girl going to be married – her ladyship looking out for a rich husband for the other. Er – er – does my wig look all right, Tom?" he continued, patting his head as he turned towards a mirror.

The speaker, who was a very thin, highly-dilapidated old gentleman of sixty-five, heaved a deep sigh, and then bent down to softly rub his right leg.

"Spiff," replied Viscount Diphoos, a dapper little boyish fellow of four-and-twenty, most carefully dressed, and looking as

if, as really was the case, he had just been shampooned, scented, and washed by Monsieur Launay, the French barber. "I say, gov'nor, that tremendous sigh don't sound complimentary to your son and heir."

"My dear boy – my dear Tom," said the old man affectionately, as he toddled up to the back of his son's chair, and stood there patting his shoulders. "It isn't that – it isn't that. I'm very, very proud of my children. Bless you, my dear Tom; bless you, my dear boy! You're a very good son to me, but I'm – I'm a bit weak this morning about Diana; and that confounded fellow with his organ playing those melancholy tunes quite upset me."

"But he has gone now, governor," said Tom.

"Yes, my boy, but – but he'll come back again, he always does. Grind, grind, grind, till he seems to me to be grinding me; and I do not like to swear, Tom, it's setting you such a bad example; but at times I feel as if I must say damn, or something inside me would go wrong."

"Say it then, gov'nor, I'll forgive you. There, I have granted you my indulgence."

"Thank you, Tom; thank you, Diphoos."

"No, no, gov'nor. Tom! – don't Diphoos me. I wish that confounded old wet sponge of a Welsh mountain had been 'diffoosed' before it gave me my name."

"Ye-es, it is ugly, Tom. But they are family names, you see, Barmouth – Diphoos. Very old family the Diphooses. And now this wedding – but there, I'm all right now."

"To be sure you are, gov'nor."

"Yes, yes, yes; you are very good to me, Tom. Bless you, my boy, bless you."

The weak tears stood in the old man's eyes, and his voice shook as he spoke.

"Nonsense, gov'nor, nonsense," said Tom, taking one of the thin withered hands. "I'm not much good to you; I think more of cigars and billiards than anything else. Have a cigar, guv'nor?"

"No, my boy, no thank you; it would make me smell so, and her ladyship might notice it. But, my boy, I see everything, though I'm getting a little old and weak, and don't speak. You stand between her ladyship and me very often, Tom, and make matters more easy. But don't you take any notice of me, my boy, and don't you think I sighed because I was unhappy, for – for I'm very proud of you, Tom, I'm deuced proud of you, my boy; but it does upset me a bit about Diana going. India's a long way off, Tom."

"Yes, gov'nor, but old Goole isn't a bad sort. The old lady wanted a rich husband for Di, and she has got him. Di will be quite a Begum out in India."

"Ye-es, Tom; and I suppose all the female Diphooses marry elderly husbands and marry well. I am a bit anxious about Maude, now."

"No good to be. The old girl will settle all that. But I say, gov'nor, what a set of studs! Come here; one of them's unfastened. You'll lose it."

"I hope not, my boy – I hope not," said the old man, anxiously as his son busied himself over the shirt-front. "Her ladyship would be so vexed. She has taken care of them these ten years, and said I had better wear them to-day."

"Did she?" said Tom, gruffly. "There: that will do. Why, you look quite a buck this morning. That wig's a regular fizzer. Old Launay has touched you up."

"I'm glad I look well, Tom, deuced glad," said the old man, brightening up with pleasure. "And you think Goole's a nice fellow?"

"Ye-es," said Tom, "only, hang it all, gov'nor, there's no romance about it. They are both so confoundedly cool and matter-of-fact. Why if I were going to be married, I should feel all fire and excitement."

"No, my boy, no – oh, no," said the old man sadly; and he shook his head, glancing nervously at the glass the next moment to see if his wig was awry. "You read about that sort of thing in books, but it doesn't often come off in fashionable life. I – I – I remember when – when I married her ladyship, it was all very matter-of-fact and quiet. And there was that poultice. But you will stand by and catch her if she faints, Tom?"

"Oh, she won't faint, gov'nor," said Tom, curling up his lip.

"I – I – I don't know, my boy, I don't know. She said that very likely she should. Mammas do faint, you know, when they are losing their children. I feel very faint myself, Tom: this affair upsets me. I should like just one glass of port."

"No, no, don't have it, gov'nor; it will go right down into your toe. Have a brandy and seltzer."

"Thank you, Tom, my boy, I will," said the old man, rubbing his hands, "I will – I will. Ring for it, will you, Tom, and let Robbins think it's for you."

"Why, gov'nor?" cried Tom, staring, as he rang the bell.

"Well, you see, my boy," said the old man, stooping to gently rub his leg; "after that last visit of the doctor her ladyship told the servants – told the servants that they were not to let me have anything but what she ordered."

Tom uttered an angry ejaculation, waited a few moments, leaped from his chair, and began sawing away furiously at the unanswered bell.

"He's – he's a fine bold young fellow, my son Tom," muttered the old man to himself as he sat down, and began rubbing his leg; "I dare not ring the bell like that – like that."

"Look here, gov'nor," cried Tom, passionately, "I won't have it. I will not stand by and see you sat upon like this. Are you the master of this house or no?"

"Well, Tom, my boy," said the old man, feebly, and with a weak smile upon his closely shaven face, "I – I – I ought to be."

"Then do, for goodness' sake, take your position. It hurts me, dad, it does indeed, to see you humbled so before the servants. I'll pay proper respect to her ladyship, and support her in everything that's just, but when it comes to my old father being made the laughing-stock of every body in the house, I – I – there, damme,

sir, I rebel against it."

As Tom seized the bell again, and dragged at it savagely, the old man seemed deeply moved. He tried to speak, but no words would come, and rising hastily he limped to the window, and stood looking out with blurred eyes, trying to master his emotion.

"Thank you, Tom," he said, speaking as he looked out of the window. "But after the doctor's last visit her ladyship told all the servants – Todd's very particular, you know."

Tom said something about Doctor Todd that sounded condemnatory.

"Yes, my dear boy," said the earl, "but – "

Just then the door opened, and a ponderous-looking butler, carefully dressed, with his hair brushed up into a brutus on the top of his head, and every bristle closely scraped from a fat double-chin which reposed in folds over his stiff white cravat, slowly entered the room.

"Why the devil isn't this bell answered, Robbins?" cried Tom.

"Very sorry, my lord, but I thought – "

"Confound you! how dare you think? You thought my father rang, and that you might be as long as you liked."

"Ye-yes, my lord. I thought his lordship rang."

"Yes, you thought right," cried Tom. "His lordship rang for some brandy and seltzer. Look sharp and get it."

"Yes, my lord, but – "

"Only a very little of the pale brandy in it, Robbins – about a dessert-spoonful," said the earl, apologetically.

"Fetch the spirit-stand and two bottles of seltzer, Robbins," roared the young man. "And look sharp," he added in a tone of voice which sent the butler off in post-haste.

"That's a flea in his fat old ear," cried the young man, laying his hand on his father's shoulder. "And now look here, gov'nor, you would please me very much if you would stand up for your rights. You know I'd back you up."

"Would it please you, Tom?" said the old man, gazing in his son's face, and patting his shoulder, "Well, I'll – I'll try, Tom, I'll try; but – but – I'm afraid it's too late."

"Nonsense, gov'nor. Come, it will make things more comfortable. Keep an eye, too, on Maude. I don't want her to be married off to a millionaire whether she likes him or no."

"I'll try, my boy, I'll try," said the old man, in a hopeless tone of voice. "Her ladyship said – "

"Who's that for, Robbins?" cried a deep masculine-feminine voice outside the door, just as the jingle of glasses on a silver waiter was heard.

"For Lord Diphoos, my lady," was the reply, in a voice that seemed to come through a layer of eider down, and the door was thrown open; there was a tremendous rustling of silk, and Lady Barmouth, a stout, florid, well-preserved woman of forty-eight, swept into the room.

"Ah, my dear child," she exclaimed in a pensive, theatrical tone of voice, as she spread her skirts carefully around her, and exhaled a peculiarly strong scent of eau-de-cologne, "this is a

terribly trying time."

"Awfully," said Tom, shortly. "That will do, Robbins; I'll open the seltzer." Then, as the butler left the room – "Awfully trying – quite a martyrdom for you, mamma. Have a brandy and seltzer?"

"My dear child!" exclaimed her ladyship, in a tone of remonstrance, and leaning one hand upon a chair so as not to disarrange the folds of her costly moiré antique, she tenderly applied the corner of her lace handkerchief to her lips, and after gazing at it furtively to note a soft pink stain, she watched her son as he poured a liberal allowance of pale brandy into a tall engraved glass, skilfully sent the cork flying from a seltzer bottle, filled up the glass with the sparkling mineral water, before handing it to his father.

"There, gov'nor," he exclaimed; "try that."

"Tom, my dear child, no, no," cried her ladyship. "Anthony! No! Certainly not."

"Yes, there is too much brandy, my dear boy," said the old gentleman, hesitating.

"Nonsense! Rubbish! You drink that up, gov'nor, like medicine. You're unstrung and ready to break down. Come: have one, mamma."

"My dear child!" began her ladyship, as she darted a severe look at her husband – "Ah, my darling."

This last was in the most pathetic of tones, for the library door once more opened, and a very sweet-faced fair-haired girl, in her bridesmaid's robe of palest blue, and looking flushed of cheek

and red of eye with weeping, led in the bride in her diaphanous veil, just as she had issued from the hands of Justine Framboise, her ladyship's Parisian maid, through which veil, and beneath the traditional wreath of orange-blossoms, shone as charming a face as bridegroom need wish to see.

"There," exclaimed the bridesmaid in a tone of forced gaiety, "as Justine says, *ne touches pas*. You are only to have a peep."

"Maude, you ridiculous child," cried her ladyship, "you have been crying, and look dreadful, and – there, I declare it is too bad. You have been making your sister weep too."

"I couldn't help it, mamma," cried the girl, passionately; and the tears that had been waiting ready burst out afresh.

"This is too absurd," exclaimed her ladyship, impatiently. "Maude, you ridiculous girl: you are destroying that costly dress, and the flowers will be all rags."

"Yes, why don't you leave off – you two," cried the brother, cynically, "playing at being fond of one another," while the old man looked piteously on.

"Oh, Diana, Diana," continued her ladyship, "here have I made for you the most brilliant match of the season – an enormously wealthy husband, who literally worships you – "

"I don't believe he cares for her a bit," cried Maude, flushing up, speaking passionately, and giving a stamp with her little white kid boot. "And if I were Di, I wouldn't marry a snuffy old man like that for anybody. I'd sooner die."

"Die game, eh?" cried Tom. "Do you hear, Di?"

"Silence!" exclaimed her ladyship in a tone of authority that seemed to quell the girl's burst of passion. "How dare you!"

"Pray don't be cross, mamma," said the bride, quietly. "She could not help crying. The marks will soon pass away."

"They will not," cried her ladyship, angrily. "Sir Grantley Wilters is coming, and her nose is as red as a servant girl's, while your eyes are half swollen up. After all my pains – after all my anxiety – never was mother troubled with such thankless children."

"Poor old girl!" said Tom, taking a good sip of brandy-and-seltzer.

"Anthony!" cried her ladyship, "you must not touch her. You are crushing her veil and those flowers. Oh, this is madness."

Madness or not, before she could check the natural action, the earl had taken his elder daughter in his arms, and kissed her lovingly, patting and stroking her sweet face, as, regardless of wreath and veil, she flung her arms round his neck and nestled closely to him.

"Bless you, my darling. I hope you will like India," he said, "Rather warm, but they make delicious curries there. I hope you will be very very happy;" and the tears trickled down his furrowed countenance as he spoke.

"I'll try to be, papa dear," she whispered, making an effort to speak firmly.

"That's right, my dear. The trains are very comfortable to Brindisi, and Tom says that Goole isn't such a very bad fellow."

"Anthony, are you quite mad!" cried her ladyship, wringing her hands till her diamonds crackled. "Are you all engaged in a conspiracy against me? Such a display is perfectly absurd. The child will not be fit to be seen at the church."

"Yes, yes, mamma dear," said the girl cheerfully. "There, there, Maude will put me straight in a few moments. Kiss me, dear, and I'll go upstairs again; it must be nearly time."

For the sake of the dresses of herself and daughter, her ladyship did not let the bride come too close, but brushed the cheek lightly with her lips; and then the girl turned to her brother, holding out her hands.

He took them, gazing at her at arm's length with mingled pride and sorrow. Then the bridal dress was once more forgotten, and brother and sister were tightly locked in each other's arms.

Her ladyship uttered a wail of dismay, but it was not heeded, as Tom said in a low tone —

"Keep up your pecker, Di, old girl. It's all nonsense about love and that sort of thing. It's duty toward your mother, catechism fashion, and you've done it. You're sold into bondage, eh?"

"Yes, Tom dear," she said, cheerfully. "I shall not mind."

"With all Goole's money to play with I should think not."

"I did not mean that, dear," said the girl, gravely. "I seem to be going right away from you, but there is Maude; don't let her be married like I am, Tom."

"What can I do?"

"I don't know; only try to help her and papa. Be more at home

for both their sakes – and Tryphie's."

Tom started, and looked sharply in his sister's face.

"I will, Di, I will," he said, earnestly. "I know I've been a reckless sort of beast, but I will try now."

She smiled her thanks and kissed him again. Then Lady Maude of the red eyes and nose, took her sister's hand, coming up like a pretty tug to tow off some beautiful craft that had been shattered by a storm in her upper rigging, and bore her off into port for repairs.

Chapter Two.
No Cards

The crossing-sweeper, in a special uniform of rags turned up with mud, had made liberal use of his broom wherever it was not wanted, and now stood in front of Lord Barmouth's house in an attitude as if to draw attention, like a label, to his work – as if in fact morally writing *fecit*.

Everything had been done to give *éclat* to the proceedings, while in addition to the presents which had been on view, fair Italia sent music to lend a charm to the wedding; for Luigi Malsano, the handsome dark performer upon the last newly-improved organ, stood at the edge of the pavement and ground, and smiled – smiled till his fine white teeth glistened in the midst of his great black beard, and every now and then took off his soft felt hat, displayed his long black curls, and rolled his eyes at Dolly Preen, the fair, fresh, country lassie – the young ladies' maid; for Dolly was looking out of the window in company with Justine, her ladyship's attendant, to see the return of the carriages, and the latter exclaimed —

"*Elles sont bêtes ces choses là*!" and then as Luigi ground and smiled, and raised his hat, Justine uttered a contemptuous —

"*Canaille*!"

While Dolly Preen sighed and thought the dark Italian very

handsome. She had indulged in the same thought before.

"*Voilà*!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Justine, as the carriage with its four greys dashed up, and after a little manipulation at the side of the organ, Luigi Malsano rested a well-formed and dirty hand upon the green baize cover of his instrument, and turned out the old ballad —

"'Tis hard to give the hand where the heart can never be."

For after a great deal of scheming the work of the Countess of Barmouth was crowned. She had secured for her daughter a husband in the shape of the British Resident at the court of the Maharajah of Bistreskin, and to herself of selfs she had whispered like the revengeful gentleman in the French romance —

"ÀONEÙ!"

For it was all over.

The carriages had nearly blocked the street, and the crowd had completed the block. The church had been well filled by friends and those curious people who always attend weddings. The ceremony had been performed by a dean, assisted by a canon, and an honorary chaplain to Her Majesty. The bride looked lovely and calm as a statue, though the six bridesmaids in pale blue had sobbed softly, and mourned like so many doves, as they moistened their lace handkerchiefs with a briny dew of pearls, almost as bright as those of the handsome lockets they wore – all alike, and the presents of the bridegroom. They were bouquets of the choicest exotics inside the church, and

without, for the servants were as liberally supplied as they were with favours; and at last the bridegroom's barouche with four of Newman's best greys had borne the happy pair back to the paternal mansion in Portland Place.

There had not been a single hitch, and even her ladyship had held up with a fine Niobe-like expression upon her noble features all through the service. Certainly she had turned faint once at the "I will," but by the help of strong aromatic salts she had recovered herself, and smiled sadly round as if to lend sweetness to the flowers. And now the large party were back in the drawing-room, and preparing to descend to the wedding breakfast.

The fashionable pastry-cooks had been ordered to do their best, and this they had done. There were more of those ghastly sugar plaster edifices on the table than usual; more uneatable traps for the unwary; more hollow mockeries, goodly to the eye, but strange to the taste – preparations that society considers to be *de rigueur* at a wedding. Still in addition there was all that money could procure; fruit and flowers flourished amidst handsome glass and family plate; the servants were in new liveries, and with plenty of aides stood ready; for Lady Barmouth hoped in marrying one daughter to help on the engagement of the second, saying pensively to herself, "And then I shall feel that I have not lived in vain."

"I say, how's the leg?" said a severe-looking gentleman present. "Twinges, eh? Yes, so I suppose. Easy with the good things, mind, or else – you know."

"Yes, yes, twinges, doctor," said his lordship, stooping to have a rub at the offending, or rather offended and resenting, limb. "But you are in such a doosed hurry; you always ask me another question before I've scarcely had time to answer the first. I remember, I remember – now, hang him! look at that. Confound that Lord Todd! I wish I was his doctor for a week or two."

For the family practitioner had passed on to talk to somebody else, leaving his lordship slowly passing his tongue over his lips, and trying to add another wrinkle to his forehead, as he wondered whether he could smuggle in two or three glasses of champagne without being seen by her ladyship or Doctor Todd.

"Ah, my dear Mr Melton," said the latter, "how are you?"

"Quite well, doctor," said the young man addressed, as he passed his hand over his crisp golden beard, and smiled pleasantly at the medical man, whose eyes were playing all over the room, and who now crossed to where the young bride was standing.

"I say," he exclaimed, "I did not congratulate you in the church. God bless you, my dear! may you be very happy. And only the other day you were a baby, eh?"

He nodded, smiled, and passed on to where a very elderly-looking fair young man, elaborately dressed, was talking to a stout mamma – the mother of two of the bridesmaids.

The withered-looking gentleman, who blinked a good deal, and seemed as if the light was too strong for him, turned to speak to the doctor as he approached.

"Well," said the latter – "better?"

"Yas, I think so; yas, doctor, but you know I can't think what ails my constitution."

"I can," thought the doctor, as he turned away looking sharply round the room; "luxury, late hours, too much money, and nothing sensible to do. *Blasé* fool! Oh, there she is."

He crossed as quickly as the crowded state of the room would allow him to where Lady Maude was standing, and made her start as he said sharply —

"I say, when's your turn coming?"

"Never, I hope, doctor," was the reply, as a little hand was placed in his, "never, if it is to make me so wretched as poor darling Di. Do say something kind to her if you have a chance."

"Hum – ha – yes," he said thoughtfully, as he retained the little hand and seemed to be examining a patient. "Don't seem bright, eh?"

"Oh, no, doctor," whispered Maude. "But I'm so glad you've come."

"That's right, my dear; I would come. So I will when you are married – the same as I did when you were born," he said to himself. Then aloud – "I say, when you marry, my dear, you marry for love."

"I will, doctor," cried the girl with her blue eyes flashing, and just then Luigi of the organ struck up a languishing waltz. "But I really am so glad you've come. Do talk to papa and cheer him up. He is so low-spirited. Couldn't you give him a tonic?"

"Wish I could," said the doctor. "Tincture of youth. No, my dear. I can't make the old young. Glad I've come, eh? There's my little friend Tryphie yonder. But they are going to move, I see."

Her ladyship was still very pensive, and gazed appealingly round from one to the other of her guests; but her eyes were wonderfully wide open, and she moved about like a domestic field-marshal determined to carry out her social campaign with *éclat*.

"Sir Grantley," she said, softening her voice down to a contralto coo as she laid her fan on the arm of the elderly young man, whose face on one side was all eye-glass and wrinkles, on the other blank, "will you take down my daughter?"

"Charmed, I'm shaw," was the hesitating reply, as a puzzled look came over the baronet's face; "but her husband, don't you know?"

"I mean Lady Maude," said her ladyship, with a winning smile.

"Yes, of course; beg pardon, I'm shaw," said the baronet hastily, and he crossed the room with her ladyship in a weak-kneed fashion, and apparently suffering from tight boots.

But it so happened that a flank movement had been set on foot by Viscount Diphoos.

"Charley, old man," he was saying to the visitor with the fair beard, who now, as he stood in one of the windows, showed himself to be a fine, broad-shouldered fellow of about eight or nine and twenty, with a fair Saxon forehead half-way down to

his brows, where it became ruddily tanned, as if by exposure to the air. "Charley, old man, go across and nail Maude at once, or the old lady will be handing her over to that wretched screw, Wilters. – Have you seen Tryphie?"

"There she is, over in the far corner, talking to the doctor," said the young man addressed – a bosom friend of the viscount: Charley Melton, the son of a country gentleman with a very small income and no prospects, unless a cousin in the navy should kindly leave this world in his favour, when he would be heir to a title and a goodly domain.

He crossed the room quickly to where Lady Maude was standing, and a curious, conscious look appeared on the girl's face as he approached. There was a warm rosy hue in her cheeks as their eyes met, and then, happy and palpitating, she let her little fingers press very timidly the strong muscular arm that held them to the side within which beat – beat – beat, rather faster than usual, Charley Melton's heart, a habit it had had of late when fortune had thrown him close to his companion.

Her ladyship saw the movement as she was approaching with Sir Grantley Wilters, and darted an angry look at her daughter and another at her son. Then, with her face all smiles, she brought up her light cavalry and took her son in the flank in his turn.

"So sorry, Sir Grantley," she said sweetly; "we were too late. Will you take down my niece?"

"Yas, delighted," said Sir Grantley, screwing the whole of his face up till it formed a series of concentric circles round his eye-

glass. “But who is that fellow?”

“Friend of my son,” said her ladyship in the most confidential way. “Very nice manly fellow, and that sort of thing. Tryphie, my dear, Sir Grantley Wilters will take you down,” she continued, as she stopped before a little piquante, creamy-skinned girl with large hazel eyes, abundant dark-brown hair, and a saucy-looking little mouth. She had a well-shaped nose, but her face was freckled as liberally as nature could arrange it without making the markings touch: but all the same she was remarkably bright and pretty.

“Sold!” muttered Tom, spitefully, as he saw her ladyship beaming upon him after striking him in his tenderest part. But he was consoled a little the next moment as Maude gave him a grateful glance, looking as happy and bright as Melton himself, while as Tryphie took the proffered arm of Sir Grantley Wilters, whose face expressed pain above and a smile below, the sharp little maiden made a *moue* with her lips expressive of disgust at her partner, and gave Diphoos a glance which made him feel decidedly better.

“I don’t like that fellow, Tom, my boy,” said Lord Barmouth, sidling up to his son, and bending down for a furtive rub at his leg. “Damme, Tom, I don’t believe he’s forty, and he looks as old as I do. If her ladyship means him to marry little Tryphie there, I shan’t – shan’t like – like – Damme, it would be too bad.”

“Hang it all, gov’nor; don’t talk like that,” cried Tom, impatiently.

"No, no, certainly not, my boy, certainly not; but I say, Tom, that's a doosed nice boy that young Charley Melton. I like the look of him. He's a manly sort of a fellow. Your uncle and I were at Eton with his father years ago. I say, Tom," he continued, rubbing his leg, "he wouldn't make a bad match for our Maude. Yes, yes, my dear; I'm coming."

"Anthony, for shame!" whispered her ladyship. "They are all waiting. Lady Rigby. I've been looking for you. Take her down at once."

The earl crossed over to make himself agreeable to Lady Rigby, the stout mamma; and the hostess took counsel with herself.

"Either would do," she said. "But Mr Melton's attentions will bring Sir Grantley to the point."

A few minutes later the guests were seated at the wedding breakfast, while Dolly Preen again leaned out of the window, having returned there after attending to the bride, to whom two fresh pocket-handkerchiefs were supplied. Luigi of the organ was still below, handsome and smiling as he scented good things, and he played on as Mistress Preen listened and thought of love and marriage, and music, and how handsome Italian men were, and ended by doing as she had done for many weeks, wrapping a three-penny piece up in many papers and dropping it into Luigi's soft felt hat. For how could she offer coppers to such a man as that!

She was not the only one who dreamed of love, for Justine

Framboise, her ladyship's maid, was enjoying a pleasant flirtation with Monsieur Hector Launay, Coiffeur de Paris, from Upper Gimp Street, Marylebone, a gentleman whose offices were largely in request in Portland Place, and who that morning had left his place of business in charge of a boy, so that he might perform certain capillary conjuring tricks, and then stay and look in the eyes of the fair Justine – a French young lady, who would have been a fortune to her father if she had been a dentist's daughter, so liberally did she show her fine white teeth.

The said flirtation took place upon the stairs, and Perkins, the bride's new maid, took interest therein, to the neglect of her packing and the annoyance of Henry, the Resident's man, with whom she was to ride in the rumble, and then second-class to Paris that day on the honeymoon trip. For Monsieur Hector, with all the gallantry of the fair city from which he hailed, had called Perkins, in Henry's hearing, *une demoiselle charmante*.

"Like his furren imperdence," as Henry said, and then the said Henry had to go in and stand behind his master's chair. As soon after three parts of a bottle of champagne was passed upstairs with a glass by a kindly disposed waiter, the packing of the newly-married lady went on worse than ever, and several travelling-cases were left unfastened in the bedroom.

"I say," whispered Tom, going behind her ladyship's chair, "you are never going to let the gov'nor speak?"

"Yes, certainly. He must," said her ladyship in a decisive tone; and she turned to the guest on her right.

"But he'll break down as sure as a gun," remonstrated the son.

"I have prompted him, and he knows what to say," replied her ladyship. "Go back to your place."

"Oh, just as you like," grumbled Tom; and he returned to his seat, determined in his own mind to stand behind his father's chair, and to prompt him to the best of his ability.

The breakfast went on amidst the pleasant tinkle of glass and plate, the conversation grew louder, there was the frequent pop of champagne corks, and the various couples grew too much engrossed to notice what took place with their neighbours.

"Maude," said Charley Melton at last, "if you were put to the test, should you give up any one you loved, and accept a comparative stranger because he could do as that man has done – load you with diamonds?"

She turned her eyes to his with a reproachful look, and the colour suffused her face.

"No one can hear what I say," he whispered, with his eyes fixed upon his plate. "But listen to me. I feel that it is almost madness, but I love you very, very dearly. You know it – you must know it. Ever since we met, six months since, you have been my sole thought. I ought not to speak, but I cannot keep it back waiting for an opportunity that may never come. And if some day I awoke to the fact that I had made no declaration and another had carried you off, I believe I should go mad. Give me one word of hope. I am very poor – terribly poor, but times may change, and money does not provide all the happiness of life. –

Not one word? Have I been deceived? Was I mad to think that you met me these many times with pleasure? Give me one word – one look."

"I mustn't," said Lady Maude, colouring. "Mamma is giving you one."

Charley Melton gave an unintentional kick under the table, touching his opposite neighbour so hard that he turned reproachfully to the gentleman at his side.

"Oh, Lady Maude!" groaned Charley in tragic tones.

There was a hearty laugh here at some sally made by the doctor, and Maude whispered back in a husky voice —

"I dare not look at you;" and he saw that the colour was mounting to her temples.

"One word then," he whispered, as the conversation waxed louder, but there was no reply.

"Maude," he said, in a low deep voice, "I will not believe you to be cold – heartless."

"Oh no," she sighed.

"Then give me one word to tell me that I may hope."

Still no reply, as the lady sat playing with the viands upon her plate; then her face turned slightly towards him; her long lashes lifted softly, her eyes rested for a moment upon his, and he drew a long breath of relief, turning composed and quiet the next moment as he leaned towards her, saying —

"I never felt what it was to be truly happy until now."

"Nonsense?" said the doctor loudly, after just finishing a

very medical story – one he always told after his third glass of champagne, "I can assure you it is perfectly true. Good – isn't it? She really did elope with her music-master. Fact, – twins."

Several ladies looked shocked, for Lady Rigby, the stout mamma, an old patient, had laughed loudly, and then wiped her mouth with her lace handkerchief as if to take off the smile of which she felt rather ashamed, for her countenance afterwards looked preternaturally solemn.

The earl had escaped the usual supervision, and he also had partaken of a glass of champagne or two – or three – and he thoroughly enjoyed the doctors story.

"It puts me in mind of one," he said, with a chuckle. "You know it, doctor. If the ladies will excuse its being a little indelicate. Quite medical though, quite."

"I am quite sure that Lord Barmouth would not say anything shocking," said the stout mamma, and she began to utter little dry coughs, suggestive of mittens, and muffins, and tea.

"Of course not – of course not, I – I – I wouldn't say it – say it on any consideration," said his lordship, chuckling. "It – it – was about a friend of mine who built a house by Primrose Hill, he – he – he! It's quite a medical story, doctor, over the railway, you know."

"The old girl will be down upon him directly," thought Tom.

"Capital story," said the doctor, laughing, and glancing sidewise at her ladyship. "There'll be an eruption directly," he added to himself.

"He – he – he!" laughed his lordship; "her ladyship never lets me tell this story, does she, my dears?" he continued, smiling at his daughters, "but I assure you, ladies, it's very innocent. I used to go and see him when he had furnished the place, over the railway, and every now and then there used to be quite a rumble and quiver when the trains went through the tunnel! Why, I said to him, one day – 'Why, my dear fellow, I – I – I' eh? – eh? – eh? Bless my heart what was it I said to him, Tom?"

"Pain, father," said Diphoos, grinning, for he had noticed the look of relief that appeared upon the ladies' faces when the hope came that the dreadful old gentleman had forgotten the story. There would not have been much Tom left if their looks had been lightning, for his words set the old gentleman off again.

"Yes, to be sure: I said to him, 'My dear fellow' – just after one of these rumbling noises made by the train in the tunnel – 'my dear boy, you must call in the doctor, or lay down some more good port wine.' – 'Why?' he said. – 'Because,' I replied, 'your house always sounds to me as if it had got a pain in its cellar!' Eh! He – he! devilish good that, wasn't it?"

No one enjoyed that feeble joke as well as the narrator who used to recollect it about once a year, and try to fire it off; but unless his son was there to prompt him, it rarely made more than a flash in the pan.

It was observable that the conversation became very loud just then, and Charley Melton seized the opportunity to whisper a few words to Lady Maude – words which deepened the colour

on her cheeks.

They were interrupted by the clapping of hands, for just then the host rose, and Tom stole gently behind him, taking the seat he had vacated, and preparing himself for the break down he anticipated.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said his lordship, gazing meekly round like a very old Welsh mutton, "I – I – I, believe me, never rose upon such an occasion as this, and – er – and – er."

He gazed piteously at her ladyship at the other end of the table, and at whose instigation, a message having been sent by Robbins the butler, he had risen.

"I say I have never before risen upon such an occasion as this, but I hope that my darling child who is about to – to – to – to – eh, what did you say, Tom my boy."

"Hang it, go on, governor. Quit your roof – paternal roof," whispered Tom.

"Quit your paternal roof, will shine – yes, shine in her new sphere as an ornament to society, as her mother has been before her. A woman all love, all gentleness, and sweetness of disposition."

"Oh, hang it governor; draw it mild," whispered Tom.

"Yes, mild," said his lordship, "mild to a fault. Eh? bless me, what is the matter?"

It was a favourable opportunity for a display of emotion, and her ladyship displayed it beautifully for the assembled company to study and take a lesson in maternal and wifely tenderness. Her

beloved child was being handed over to the tender mercies of a man – was about to leave her home – about to be torn away.

Her ladyship burst into an agony of tears – of wild sobbing – for she was a model of all the virtues; but when virtues were made, nature selected another pattern and this one was cast aside.

A sympathetic coo ran round the table, tears were shed, and Tom winked at Charley Melton, who kept his countenance.

Then her ladyship declared that it was "so foolish," and that she was "quite well now"; and other speeches good and bad were made. And at last the bridegroom's carriage was at the door; the bride was handed in; there was the usual cheering; white satin slippers and showers of rice were thrown, and the carriage rolled away. For Lady Barmouth had achieved one of the objects of her life – a brilliant match for her elder daughter – leaving her free to execute her plans for Maude.

All had been *en règle* so far: the hall was filled with company; the sound of wheels was still to be heard rolling down the broad thoroughfare: when "I say, look out," whispered Tom to his friend. "There she goes."

It was a coarse way of expressing himself, but "there" "she" did go – to wit her ladyship. Sir Grantley Wilters, whom she hoped some day to call son, was close at hand. It was quite time for her maternal feelings to assert themselves again, and they did, for she sank heavily into the nearest arms.

They were not her husband's but those of the baronet, most rotten reeds upon which a lady might lean. The result was that as

Lady Barmouth gave way, Sir Grantley did the same, and both would have fallen heavily but for Doctor Todd, who seized the baronet in time, and with extraneous help her ladyship was placed in the porter's great chair.

"Salts, and a little air: she has only fainted," said the doctor.

By all the rules of family etiquette as observed in the best society, Maude should have run to her mother's side, and made one in a pathetic group: but just at the same moment she encountered Charley Melton's eyes, let her own rest upon them as a singular thrill ran through her, till she wrenched them away and encountered Sir Grantley Wilters' eye-glass, and directly after she recalled a promise she had made to herself.

"Open that door a little," said the doctor – "ajar. Some fresh air."

Luigi Malsano was back in the street, and the organ struck up once more, "'Tis hard to give the hand where the heart can never be," while at the same moment a dismal howl came from the doorstep and a head was thrust in, to be followed by a body rather out of proportion.

It was only Charley Melton's ugly bull-dog Joby, who had followed his master to the house, and been waiting on step and in area for the said master to come. He had several times made an attempt to enter, but had been driven back by Robbins the butler, and thought of going back to his master's chambers, but at last the opportunity had come, and he too found his way in, for Luigi's music nearly drove him mad.

Meanwhile the Resident's young wife was being carried towards Charing Cross *en route* for Brindisi – the Suez Canal – India – right away out of the country, and out of this story, leaving the stage clear for her sister's important scene.

Chapter Three.
Down in the Country – The Angel

"I'm afraid you are not serious, Mr Melton," said Lady Barmouth; shaking her head at him sadly.

"Serious, Lady Barmouth; indeed I am," said Charley Melton, who was Viscount Diphoos' guest down at the Hurst, Lord Barmouth's seat in Sussex; "and as to personal matters, my income – "

"Hush, hush! you bad, wicked boy," exclaimed her ladyship; "what do you take me for? Just as if the union of two young hearts was to be made a question of hard cash and settlements, and such mean, wretched, sordid matters. I beg you will never utter a word to me again about such things. They are shocking to me."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, Lady Barmouth," said Melton, smiling frankly in her face, as in a gentle heaving billow style, she leaned, upon his arm, and undulated softly and tapped his fingers with her fan.

"I like to think of my darling Maude as a sweet innocent girl in whose presence such a sordid thing as money ought never to be mentioned. There, there, there, they are calling you from the lawn, Charley Melton; go to them and play and be happy while you have your youth and high spirits. How I envy you all sometimes?"

"Your ladyship has made me very happy," said Melton, flushing slightly.

"It is my desire to make all belonging to me happy," replied her ladyship. "I have seen Diana, my sweet child, settled, now it is my desire to see Maude the same. There, there, go away, for my eyes are weak with tears, and I feel half hysterical. Go away, my dear boy, go away."

"But you will let me see your ladyship to a seat?"

"No, no, no; go away, go away."

"Yo-hoy!" shouted a familiar voice. "Charley Melton! —*are* you coming!"

"Yes, yes, coming," replied Melton, as her ladyship tapped him on the arm very significantly, and shook her head at him, while her eyes plaintively gazed at his. And she said to herself – "Yes, his expectations, Lady Rigby said, were excellent."

The next moment he was on his way to the croquet lawn, where a gaily dressed party was engaged in preparing for a little match.

"I never expected it," said the young man to himself; "and either I'm in luck's way, or her ladyship is not the mercenary creature people say. She is evidently agreeable, and if she is, I have no fear of Lord Barmouth, for the old man likes me."

"Come, old fellow," cried Tom, advancing to meet him, with the biggest croquet mallet over his shoulder that could be found in the trade. "What have you and the old lady been chatting over? She hasn't been dropping any hints about being *de trop*?"

Melton was silent, for he enjoyed the other's interest.

"If she has," cried Tom, "I'll strike: I won't stand it. It's too bad; – it's – "

"Gently, gently," said Melton, smiling. "She has been all that I could desire, and it is evident that she does not look upon my pretensions to your sister's hand with disfavour."

"What – disfavour? Do you mean to say in plain English that the old girl has not cut up rough about your spooning after Maude?"

"Is that plain English?"

"Never mind. Go on. What did she say?"

"Called me her dear boy, and said her sole wish was to see her child happy."

"Gammon!" said Viscount Diphoos. "She's kidding you."

"Nonsense! What a miserable sceptic you are!"

"Yes; I know my dear mamma."

"I merely quote her words," said Melton, coldly.

"Then the old girl's going off her chump," said Tom. "But there, never mind; so much the better. Charley, old man, I give you my consent."

"Thank you," said Melton, smiling.

"Ah, you may laugh, but 'pon my soul I should like you to marry Maudey. She's the dearest and best girl in the world, and I was afraid the old girl meant Wilters to have her. Well, I am glad, old man. Give us your fist. I'm sure Maudey likes you, so go in and win. Make your hay while the sun shines, my boy. Only

stow all that now. It's croquet, so get a mallet. You and Maudey are partners, against Tryphie Wilder and me."

He shook hands warmly with his friend, and they went down the path together.

"I say, old man, Wilters is coming down to-day. He's been in a fine taking. Saw him in London. Day before yesterday. Said he'd lost his diamond locket. Just as if it mattered to him with all his thousands. But he's as mean as mean. I should like to get him in a line at billiards, and win a lot of money off him. I will, too, some day. Now girls! Ready?"

They were crossing the closely shaven lawn now to where Maude, looking very sweet and innocent, stood talking to Tryphie Wilder, and she coloured with pleasure as the young men advanced.

Soon after the match began, and for ten minutes the two couples played vigorously and well. Then the game languished, and the various players missed their turns, and were soon in a terrible tangle, forgetting their hoops, so that at last, Tom, who was standing under a hawthorn that was one blush of pink, was heard by a knowing old thrush, sitting closely over four blue speckled eggs, to whisper in a low tone —

"Don't be hard on a fellow, Tryphie dear, when you know how fond he is of you."

The thrush laughed thrushly, and blinked her eyes as she recalled the troubles of matrimony: how long eggs were hatching, and what a deal of trouble the little ones were to feed when the

weather was dry and worms were scarce.

Just at the same time too Charley Melton and Maude had come to a stand-still where a great laburnum poured down a shower of rich golden drops, through which rained the rays of the sun, broken up into silvery arrows of light which forced themselves through the girl's fair hair, as she stood trembling and palpitating that happy June day, while Charley Melton's words grew deeper and more thrilling in their meaning.

For their theme was love, one that has never seemed tiring to young and willing ears, though it must be owned that folks do talk, have talked, and always will talk a great deal of nonsense.

This was in the calm and peaceful days of croquet, before people had learned to perspire profusely over lawn-tennis as they flew into wild attitudes and dressed for the popular work. This was croquet *à la Watteau*, and in the midst of the absence of play, Lord Barmouth came slowly down the path, stepped upon the soft lawn as soon as possible, and, choosing a garden seat in a comfortably shady nook, he sat down and began to tenderly rub his leg.

"Heigho!" he sighed; "they, they – they say an Englishman's house is his castle. If it is, his wife's the elephant – white elephant. Why – why don't they go on playing? Ha, there's Tom starting," he continued, putting up his glasses. "I'd give five hundred pounds to be able to stoop and pick up a ball like that young Charley Melton – a strong, straight-backed young villain. And there's my son Tom, too. How he can run! I'd give another five

hundred pounds, if I'd got it, to be able to run across the grass like my son Tom. It strikes me, yes, damme, it strikes me that my son Tom's making up to little Tryphie. Well, and he's no fool if he does."

The game went on now for a few minutes, and then there was another halt.

"I said so to Tom on the morning of Di's wedding," said the old gentleman, caressing his leg; "and that Charley Melton is making up to Maudey, damme that he is, and – and – and – damme, she's smiling at him, bless her, as sure as I'm a martyr to the gout."

There were a few more strokes, and as many pauses, during which the old gentleman watched the players in their laurel-sheltered ground with his double glasses to his eye.

"Let me see, her ladyship said he was one of the Mowbray Meltons, but he isn't. He belongs to the poor branch, but I didn't contradict her ladyship; it makes her angry. He, he, he, he! It's – its – it's very fine to be young and good-looking, and – and – damme, Tom, you young dog," he continued, chuckling, "I can see through your tricks. He's – he's – he's always knocking Tryphie's ball in amongst the bushes, and then they have to go out of sight to find it."

The old man chuckled and shook his head till a twinge of the gout made him wince, when he stooped down and had another rub.

"Why – why – why," he chuckled again directly after, "damme, damme, if young Charley Melton isn't doing the same.

He has knocked Maudey's ball in amongst the laurels, and – oh – oh – oh – you wicked young rogues – they're coming to look for it."

He got up and toddled towards the young couple, patting Maude on the cheek, and giving Charley Melton a poke in the side.

"I – I – I – see through you both," he said, laughing. "Won't do – won't do. Both as transparent as glass, and I can see your hearts playing such a tune."

He crossed to another garden seat, and sat down, putting his leg up in a comfortable position.

"There," said Melton, earnestly. "You see we have both in our favour. Your father would not refuse."

"Pray say no more now," said the girl, gazing up in his face. "It is so new, it troubles me. Let us go on playing. Tom and Tryphie must be waiting."

"I think not," said Melton, with a quiet smile. "Maude, love, to-day I am so happy that it all seems too delightful to be real. Does it seem so to you?"

"I hardly know," she replied, turning her eyes to his for a few moments, and then lowering them; "but somehow I feel sad with it and as if I were too happy for it to last."

"Then you are happy?" he said, eagerly.

For answer she raised her eyes to his, and the game was resumed, for Tom and Tryphie came out of the shrubbery with the lost ball.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed his lordship. "Tom's a sad dog – a sad dog. I was just like him when I was young."

He glanced to the right and left, and, seeing that he was unobserved, drew out a d'oyley from his coat-tail pocket, and from within picked out a slice of tongue and a piece of bread and butter, which he ate with great gusto, but not without turning his head from side to side like some ancient sparrow on the look-out for danger.

He wiped his fingers carefully upon his handkerchief, put away the d'oyley, and smiled to himself.

"That was nice – and refreshing," he said. "I don't suppose Robbins would miss it, and mention the fact to her ladyship. Ah," he continued, raising his glass once more to his eye, "they are having a nice game there. Why, damme, they're all courting like birds in spring-time. But Tom's a sad dog. He, he, he! I was just like him. I was a sad dog too when I was young. I remember once when I was at Chiswick, at the Duke's – he – he – he! with Lady Ann Gowerby, I told her there was not a flower in the whole show to compare with her two lips, and I kissed her behind the laurestinus – damme, that I did, and – and – he, he, he! the old woman – the countess – came and caught us."

The old man chuckled over this recollection till he had to wipe the tears out of his eyes, and then he had a fresh look at the croquet players.

"Tom, you dog," he said, "the old lady will come and catch you, and then, he, he, he! there'll be a devil of a row, for she

means my little Tryphie for some one else. Eh – eh – eh? What! Look there now, Maudey dropped her mallet, and Charley Melton picked it up and kissed her hand. Well, it's nice," he said, smacking his lips, "I was a devil of a fellow to squeeze and kiss the little girls' hands when I was a youngster, but now – "

He bent down to rub his gouty leg, and uttered a low groan as he continued —

"But they're all going wrong, the silly young lambs; I wish Charley Melton was well off. Her ladyship will come over it all like a cloud directly, for I know – she said so – she means Tryphie for old Bellman, and Maudey for that Sir Grantley Wilter. Well, well, well, little gnats, enjoy your bit of sunshine while you can."

"Now, Charley, are you going on?" shouted Tom in indignant tones, "two blue plays – two blue plays."

"There's a dog for you," chuckled Lord Barmouth, "any one would think he had been busy over the game all the time instead of courting Tryphie."

"Coming, Tom," cried Melton; then turning to Maude he whispered, "Darling, you are mine, come what may – Maude, my love – my love!"

Their eyes met for a few moments, and from that look it was evident that the work so nearly completed on the morning of the wedding party had now received the finishing strokes, that the fresh young heart had placed itself in another's keeping, and that henceforth Charley Melton was lord of someone's will, and her duty only to obey.

"I ought to go and stop them," said his lordship, sadly, "but making love without thinking of money used to be nice; but – hallo!" he exclaimed, as a cold nose touched his hand; and looking down there was the ugly massive face of a bull-dog gazing up into his. "Charley Melton's dog, eh! Well, you're a very ugly dog, but you seem to like me. Eh, eh!" he added, as, after a quiet wag of his tail, Joby smelt at his lordship's tail pocket. "So you knew there was a little bit of game pie in there, did you!"

Joby uttered a low whine.

"Well, so there is, good dog," said his lordship, chuckling as he felt in his other pocket, and brought out something very unpleasant-looking crushed up as it was in a piece of paper.

"I'm afraid I have been sitting upon it, my dog," said his lordship, ruefully, "and the jelly and cold gravy have got into the crust. But you will not mind, will you?"

The dog gave a short bark, and evidently did not mind, for he and Lord Barmouth finished the last morsel of the game pie, and Joby ate the jelly-smeared paper afterwards as a kind of digestive pill.

"Ah," said his lordship, patting the dog's head. "I'm glad of that – good dog then – for I did not know what to do with that piece of paper. Eh, eh? whom have we here?" he continued, putting up his glasses. "Her ladyship and Sir Grantley Wilters. There, I told you young people that you were to enjoy your game as you could, for here comes the shadow."

He alluded to Lady Barmouth, who, like the good general

she was, had made her plans, which were rapidly approaching fruition.

Chapter Four.
Cloudy

Lord Barmouth was quite right, for the shadow was coming over the sunshiny portion of the young people's life in the shape of her ladyship, who could in turn assume the *rôle* of Fate or Fury.

Amongst the company expected at the Hurst was Sir Grantley Wilters, and for his own reasons he had made a point of coming. He had arrived that morning, and, learning from Robbins the butler that Melton was there, had hastened to obtain a quiet interview with her ladyship.

"Nothing like taking time by the forelock, don't you know," he said to himself. "Old girl evidently wants me for a son-in-law, and that fellow Melton is a doosed sight too attentive. I can see through it all, though. Old girl keeps him here to make play and draw me on. Artful, doosed artful, don't you know. But it don't matter; suits my book. Time I did marry and settle down. Maude Diphoos is a doosed handsome girl, and'll do me credit. I'll propose at once."

He mused thus in his bedroom, where he gave a few finishing touches to his morning toilet, and then descending to the drawing-room, he was most affectionately received by her ladyship, who took his arm, and they strolled out through the

conservatory into the garden.

"Such delightful weather!" said her ladyship, leaning upon his arm more heavily than was pleasant to a man in tight boots, and rather weak upon his legs.

"Charming," said Sir Grantley. "By the way, Lady Barmouth, we are very great friends, you and I, don't you know."

"Indeed, yes," said her ladyship. "I always feel disposed to call you by your Christian name – Grantley – "

"Do," said the baronet, having a little struggle with his eye-glass – a new one of rather smaller diameter than the last – which he had lost – and which would not consent to stop in its place – "Do – like it. Fact is, Lady Barmouth, I have made up my mind to be married, don't you know."

"You have? Really!" cried her ladyship. "I am glad;" and she adroitly turned their steps down the lilac walk in place of going straight to the croquet lawn.

"Fact, I assure you," continued Sir Grantley. "It is only quite lately that I have seen any one whom I should like to make Lady Wilters; and now – "

"You are hopelessly in love," said her ladyship; showing him her hundred guinea set of teeth – patent mineral, and of pearly whiteness, her best set – down to the false gums. "Oh, you young people in the days of your romance. It is too delightful in spite of its regrets for us who are in the sere and yellow leaf."

Her ladyship, by the way, was very little older than Sir Grantley, and art had made her look the younger of the two,

especially as, in spite of the allusions to the yellow leaf, her ladyship's plump skin was powdered into a state of peach bloom.

"Thanks, much," said Sir Grantley, wincing a little from tight boots, and greeting with delight their approach to a garden seat. "Shall we sit down?"

"Oh, by all means," cried her ladyship; and they took their places under the lilac which bloomed profusely over their heads. "And now," exclaimed Lady Barmouth, with sparkling eyes and another sweet smile to show her hundred guinea teeth, while the plump face was covered with innocent dimples, "tell me, who is the dear girl?"

"Yas," said Sir Grantley, clearing his throat, and feeling decidedly better, "yas."

He paused, and wiped his heated brow with a scented handkerchief.

"Now this is too bad," said her ladyship, playfully. "You are teasing me."

"No, 'pon honour, no," said Sir Grantley. "Fact is, don't you know, I feel a kind of nervous shrinking."

"Ah, you young men, you young men," said her ladyship, shaking her head. "But come: tell me. Do I know her?"

"Oh, yas," said Sir Grantley.

"To be sure," cried her ladyship, clapping her hands together. "It's Lady Mary Mahon. There, I've found you out."

"No," said Sir Grantley. "Guess again," and this time he secured the eye-glass with a good ring of circles round it, which

did not add to his personal appearance.

"Not Lady Mary," mused her ladyship. "Well, it can't be the wealthy Miss Parminter?"

"No," said Sir Grantley, calmly; "oh, dear, no."

"Why, of course not; I know, it's the Honourable Grace Leasome."

"N-no," said Sir Grantley, with the most gentlemanly *insouciance*. "Try again."

"I give it up," said her ladyship, smiling.

"Now, Maude, it's your turn," was heard faintly from the croquet lawn.

"Yas," said Sir Grantley, bowing slightly. "That is the lady. My dear Lady Barmouth, will you allow me humbly and respectfully, don't you know, to propose for your charming daughter's hand?"

Lady Barmouth sank back in her seat as if struck with horror.

"Anything the matter?" said Sir Grantley, looking puzzled.

"Did – did I understand you aright, Sir Grantley?" faltered her ladyship.

"Aright? Oh, yas. Sorry to be so sudden and upset you, but thought you expected it, don't you know."

"My dear Sir Grantley; my dear young friend," exclaimed her ladyship, laying her hand in a sympathising fashion upon his arm. "This is too painful."

"Well, suppose it is," said Sir Grantley, calmly. "Just lost one daughter too – charming girl, Diana – but it must come, Lady Barmouth. I've been a bit free and got rid of some money, but

there's about nine thou a year left, and then I shall have the Mellish estates by and by! – another three thou – might settle that on her, don't you know."

"Oh, this is dreadful," panted her ladyship. "My dear young friend, I should have been too happy to give my consent, but dear Maude is as good as engaged to Mr Melton."

"The doose she is," said Sir Grantley, dropping his glass and looking blankly at his companion.

"Oh, yes," exclaimed her ladyship, applying her scent bottle to her delicate nostrils. "I thought you must have seen it."

"Humph! doosid provoking, don't you know," said Sir Grantley, calmly. "Made up my mind at last, and now too late."

"I am so – so – sorry," sighed her ladyship.

"Can't be helped. I did mean to propose the week before last, but had to see my doctor. Melton, eh? Doosid poor, isn't he?"

"Oh, really, Sir Grantley, I know nothing about Mr Melton's prospects, but he is a Mowbray Melton, and a wealthy cousin is childless, and not likely to many."

"What, Dick Mowbray? Married last week."

"Mr Melton's cousin?"

"To be sure he did, Lady Barmouth; and besides, Charley Melton is one of the younger branch. Poor as Job."

He made as if to rise, but her ladyship laid her hand upon his arm.

"Stop a moment," she exclaimed. "This is a serious matter, Sir Grantley, and it must be cleared up."

"Don't say a word about it, please," he replied, with some trepidation.

"I shall not say a word," replied her ladyship; "but you are under a mistake, Sir Grantley. Mr Melton has a handsome private income."

"Where from?" replied the baronet. "His father has not a rap."

"Then he has magnificent expectations."

"Did he tell you this?" said Sir Grantley, screwing his glass very tightly into his eye.

"N-no," said her ladyship. "There, I will be frank with you, Sir Grantley. You are a gentleman, and I can trust you."

"I hope so," he replied, stiffly.

"The fact is," said her ladyship, "seeing that there was a growing intimacy between my daughter and Mr Melton, who is the son of an old Eton schoolfellow of Lord Barmouth, I made some inquiries."

"Yas?" said Sir Grantley.

"And I understood Lord Barmouth to say that he would be a most eligible *parti* for our dearest child."

"Oh, indeed," said Sir Grantley, carefully examining the sit of one leg of his trousers.

Lady Barmouth stared at the speaker, and then shut her scent bottle with a loud snap.

"If she has deceived me – tricked me over this," thought her ladyship, "I will never forgive her."

"But has Mr Melton professed this to you?" said Sir Grantley,

staring at the change which had come over his proposed mother-in-law. For the sweet smile was gone, and her thin lips were drawn tightly over her teeth: not a dimple was to be seen, and a couple of dark marks came beneath her eyes.

"No," she said, shortly; and there was a great deal of acidity in her tone. "I must say he has not. But I must inquire into this. I trusted implicitly in what my husband, who knew his father intimately, had said. Will you join the croquet party, Sir Grantley?" she continued, forcing back her sweetest smile.

"Yas, oh yas, with pleasure. Charmed," said Sir Grantley; and they rose and walked towards the croquet lawn.

"Dear Sir Grantley," said her ladyship, speaking once more with her accustomed sweetness, "this is a private matter between ourselves. You will not let it influence your visit?"

"Not at all."

"I mean, you will not let it shorten your stay?"

"Oh, no – not at all," he replied. "Charmed to stay, I'm sure. Shan't break my heart, don't you know. Try to bear the disappointment."

Five minutes later her ladyship had left Sir Grantley on the lawn, and gone off in the direction of Lord Barmouth, who saw her coming and beat a retreat, but her ladyship cut him off and met him face to face.

"Tryphie," said Tom to his little cousin, "there's a row cooking."

"Yes," she replied, sending her ball with straight aim through

a hoop. “I saw it coming. I hope it is nothing about Maude; she seems so happy.”

“Hang me if I don’t think it is,” said Tom. “I’m going off directly, for the old girl’s started to wig the governor, I’m certain. I shall go and back him up after giving my mallet to Wilters. Don’t make me madly jealous.”

“Why not?” she replied, mischievously.

“And be careful not to hit his legs,” said Tom. “They’d break like reeds. – Wilters, will you take my mallet? I want to go.”

“Charmed, I’m shaw,” said Sir Grantley, bowing, and being thus introduced to the game, while Tom lit a cigarette and slipped away.

Meanwhile Lady Barmouth had captured her husband as he was moving off, followed closely by Charley Melton’s ugly dog, which no sooner saw her than he lowered his tail, dropped his head, and walked under a clump of Portugal laurel out of the way.

“Barmouth,” said her ladyship, taking him into custody, like a plump social policeman, “I want to speak to you.”

“Certainly, my dear,” he said, mildly. “What is it?”

“About this Mr Charles Melton. What income has he?”

“Well, my dear,” said the old gentleman, “I don’t believe he has any beyond a little allowance from his father, who is very poor.”

“And his expectations,” said her ladyship, sharply. “He has great expectations, has he not?”

“I – I – I don’t think he has, my love,” said the old man; “but

he's a doosed fine, manly young fellow, and I like him very much indeed."

"But you told me that he had great prospects."

"No, my dear, you said *you* had heard that he had. I remember it quite well."

"Don't be an idiot, Barmouth," exclaimed her ladyship. "Listen to me."

"Yes, my dear," he said, looking at her nervously, and then stooping to rub his leg, an act she stopped by giving his hand a smart slap.

"How can you be so offensive," she cried, in a low angry voice; "it is quite disgusting. Listen to me."

"Yes, my dear."

"I went to see Lady Merritty about this matter, and Lady Rigby."

"About my gout, my dear?"

"Do you wish to make me angry, Barmouth?"

"No, my dear."

"I went to see her about this young man – this Melton, and Lady Merritty told me she believed he had most brilliant expectations. But I'll be even with her for this. Oh, it was too bad!"

"What's the matter?" said Tom, joining them.

"Matter!" cried the irate woman. "Why, evidently to gratify some old spite, that wretched woman, Lady Merritty, has been palming off upon us this Mr Melton as a millionaire, and on the

strength of it all I have encouraged him here, and only just now refused an offer made by Sir Grantley Wilters. A beggar! An upstart!"

"Bravo, mother!" cried Tom, enthusiastically. "So he is, a contemptible, weak-kneed, supercilious beggar. I hate him."

"Hate him?" said her ladyship. "Why, you always made him your greatest friend."

"What, old Wilters?" cried Tom.

"Stuff! This Melton," retorted her ladyship.

"Bah!" exclaimed Tom. "I meant that thin weedy humbug, Wilters."

"And I meant that wretched impostor, Melton," cried her ladyship, angrily.

"Look here, mother," cried Tom. "Charley Melton is my friend, and he is here at your invitation. Let me tell you this: if you insult him, if I don't go bang out on the croquet lawn and kick Wilters. Damme, that I will."

"He's a brave dashing young fellow, my son Tom," said his lordship to himself. "I wish I dared – "

"Barmouth," moaned her ladyship, "help me to the house. My son, to whom I should look for support, turns upon his own mother. Alas, that I should live to see such a day!"

"Yes, my dear," said Lord Barmouth, in a troubled way, as he offered the lady his arm. "Tom, my boy, don't speak so rudely to your mamma," he continued, looking back, and they moved slowly towards the open drawing-room window.

As her ladyship left the garden, Joby came slowly up from under the laurels, and laid his head on Tom's knee, for that gentleman had thrown himself on a garden seat.

"Hallo, Joby," he said "you here? I tell you what, old man, if you would go and stick your teeth into Wilters' calf – Bah! he hasn't got a calf! – into his leg, and give him hydrophobia, you'd be doing your master a good turn."

From that hour a gloom came over the scene. Lady Barmouth was scrupulously polite, but Charley Melton remarked a change. There were no more rides out with Maude; no more pleasant *tête-à-têtes*: all was smiles carefully iced, and he turned at last to Tom for an explanation.

"I can't understand it," he said; "a few days ago my suit seemed to find favour in her eyes; now her ladyship seems to ridicule the very idea of my pretentions."

"Yes," said Tom savagely; and he bit his cigar right in half.

"But why, in heaven's name?"

"Heard you were poor."

"Well, I never pretended otherwise."

"No," said Tom, snappishly; "but I suppose some one else did."

"Who?" cried Melton, angrily.

"Shan't tell," cried Tom; "but mind your eye, my boy, or she'll throw you over."

"She shall not," cried Melton, firmly, "for though there is no formal engagement, I hold to your sister, whom I love with all

my heart."

That evening Charley Melton was called away to see his father, who had been taken seriously ill.

"So very sorry," said her ladyship, icily. "But these calls must be answered. Poor Mr Melton, I am so grieved. Maude, my darling, Sir Grantley is waiting to play that game of chess with you."

The consequence was, that Charley Melton's farewell to Maude was spoken with eyes alone, and he left the house feeling that he was doomed never to enter it again as a staying guest, while the enemy was in the field ready to sap and mine his dearest hopes.

Chapter Five.
Back in Town – the Demon

Lady Maude Diphoos sat in her dressing-room in Portland Place with her long brown hair let down and spread all around her like some beautiful garment designed by nature to hide her soft white bust and arms, which were crossed before her as she gazed in the long dressing-glass draped with pink muslin.

For the time being that dressing-glass seemed to be a framed picture in which could be seen the sweet face of a beautiful woman, whose blue eyes were pensive and full of trouble. It was the picture of one greatly in deshabille; but then it was the lady's dressing-room, and there was no one present but the maid.

The chamber was charmingly furnished, enough showing in the glass to make an effective background to the picture; and to add to the charm there was a delicious odour of blended scents that seemed to be exhaled by the principal flower in the room – she whose picture shone in the muslin-draped frame.

There is nothing very new, it may be presumed, for a handsome woman to be seated before her glass with her long hair down, gazing straight before her into the reflector; but this was an exceptional case, for Maude Diphoos was looking right into her mirror and could not see herself. Sometimes what she saw was Charley Melton, but at the present moment the face

of Dolly Preen, her maid, as that body stood half behind her chair, brushing away at her mistress' long tresses, which crackled and sparkled electrically, and dropping upon them certain moist pearls which she as rapidly brushed away.

Dolly Preen was a pretty, plump, dark girl, with a certain rustic beauty of her own such as was found sometimes in the sunny village by the Hurst, from which she had been taken to become young ladies' maid, a sort of moral pincushion, into which Mademoiselle Justine Framboise, her ladyship's attendant, stuck venomed verbal pins.

But Dolly did not look pretty in the glass just now, for her nose was very red, her eyes were swollen up, and as she sniffed, and choked, and uttered a low sob from time to time, she had more the air of a severely punished school-girl than a prim young ladies' maid in an aristocratic family.

Dolly wept and dropped tears on the beautiful soft tangled hair at which Sir Grantley Wilters had often cast longing glances. Then she brushed them off again, and took out her handkerchief to blow her nose – a nose which took a great deal of blowing, as it was becoming overcharged with tears.

"Oh, Dolly, Dolly," said her mistress at last, "this is very, very sad."

At this moment through the open window, faintly heard, there floated, softened by distance, that delicious, now forgotten, but once popular strain – "I'm a young man from the country, but you don't get over me."

Dorothy Preen, Sussex yeoman's daughter, was a young woman from the country, and was it because the air seemed *apropos* that the maiden suddenly uttered an ejaculation which sounded like *Ow*! and dropping the ivory-backed brush, plumped herself down upon the carpet, as if making a nursery cheese, and began to sob as if her heart would break? Was it the appropriate nature of the air? No; it was the air producer.

"Oh, Dolly, Dolly, I don't know what to say," said Lady Maude gently, as she gave her hair a whisk and sent it all flying to one side. "I don't want to send you back home."

"No, no, no, my lady, please don't do that," blubbered the girl.

"But her ladyship is thinking very seriously about it, Dolly, and you see you were found talking to him."

"Ye – ye – yes, my lady."

"But, you foolish girl, don't you understand that he is little better than a beggar – an Italian mendicant?"

"Ye-ye-yes, my lady."

"Then how can you be so foolish?"

"I – I – I don't know, my lady."

"You, a respectable farmer's daughter, to think of taking up with a low man who goes about the streets turning the handle of an organ. Dolly, Dolly, my poor girl, what does it mean?"

"I – I – I don't know, my lady. Ow! I am so miserable."

"Of course you are, my good girl. There, promise me you'll forget it all, and I'll speak to her ladyship, and tell her you'll be more sensible, and get her to let you stay."

"I – I can't, my lady."

"Cannot what?"

"Forget him, my lady."

"Why not?"

"Be-be-because he is so handsome."

"Oh, Dolly, I've no patience with you."

"N-n-no, my lady, because you – you ain't – ain't in love," sobbed the girl with angry vehemence, as she covered her face with her hands and rocked herself to and fro.

"For shame, Dolly," cried Maude, with her face flamingly red. "If a woman is in love that is no reason for her degrading herself. I'm shocked at you."

"Ye-ye-yes, my lady, bu-bu-but you don't know; you – you – you haven't felt it yet. Wh-wh-when it comes over you some day, you – you – you'll be as bad as I am. Ow! ow! ow! I'm a wretched, unhappy girl."

"Then rouse yourself and think no more of this fellow. For shame of you!"

"I – I can't, my lady. He – he – he's so handsome, and I've tried ever so to give him up, but he takes hold of you like."

"Takes hold of you, Dolly? Oh, for shame!"

"I – I d-d-d-don't mean with his hands, my lady, b-b-but with his great dark eyes, miss, and – and he fixes you like; and once you're like I am you're always seeing them, and they're looking right into you, and it makes you – you – you feel as if you must go where he tells you to, and – and I can't help it, and I'm a wretched,

unhappy girl."

"You are indeed," said Maude with spirit. "It is degrading in the extreme. An organ-grinder – pah!"

"It – it – it don't matter what he is, my lady," sobbed Dolly. "It's the man does it. And – and some day wh-wh-when you feel as I do, miss, you'll – "

"Silence," cried Lady Maude. "I'll hear no more such nonsense. Get up, you foolish girl, and go on brushing my hair. You shall think no more of that wretched creature."

Just at that moment, after a dead silence, an air from *Trovatore* rang out from the pavement below, and Dolly, who had picked up the brush, dropped it again, and stood gazing toward the window with so comical an expression of grief and despair upon her face that her mistress rose, and taking her arm gave her a sharp shake.

"You silly girl!" she cried.

"But – but he's so handsome, my lady, I – I can't help it. Do – do please send him away."

"Why, the girl's fascinated," thought Maude, whose cheeks were flushed, and whose heart was increasing its speed as she eagerly twisted up her hair and confined it behind by a spring band.

"If – if you could send him away, my lady."

"Send him away! Yes: it is disgraceful," cried Maude, and as if moved by some strange influence she rapidly made herself presentable and looked angrily from the window.

There was an indignant look in her eyes, and her lips parted

to speak, but at that moment the mechanical music ceased, and the bearer of the green baize draped "kist of whustles" looked up, removed his soft hat, smiled and displayed his teeth as he exclaimed in a rich, mellow voice —

"Ah, signora – ah, bella signora."

Maude Diphoos' head was withdrawn rapidly and her cheeks paled, flushed, and turned pale again, as she stood gazing at her maid, and wondering what had possessed her to attempt to do such a thing as dismiss this man.

"Ah, signora! Ah, bella signora!" came again from below; and this seemed to arouse Maude to action, for now she hastily closed the window and seated herself before the glass.

"Undo my hair and finish brushing it," she said austerely; "and, Dolly, there is to be no more of this wicked folly."

"No, my lady."

"It is disgraceful. Mind, I desire that you never look out at this man, nor speak to him again."

"No, my lady."

"I shall ask her ladyship to look over your error, and mind that henceforth you are to be a very good girl."

"Yes, my lady."

"There: I need say no more; you are very sorry, are you not?"

"Ye-yes, my lady."

"Then mind, I shall expect you to do credit to my interference, for her ladyship will be exceedingly angry if anything of this kind occurs again. Now, you will try?"

"Ye-yes, my lady," sobbed poor Dolly, "I'll try; but you don't know, miss, how hard it is. Some day you may feel as I do, and then you'll be sorry you scolded me so much."

"Silence, Dolly; I have not scolded you so much. I have only interfered to save you from ruin and disgrace."

"Ruin and disgrace, my lady?"

"Yes, you foolish girl. You could not marry such a man as that. There, now go downstairs – no, go to your own room and bathe your eyes before you go down. I feel quite ashamed of you."

"Yes, my lady, so do I," sobbed Dolly. "I'm afraid I'm a very wicked girl, and father will never forgive me; but I can't help it, and – Ow – ow – ow!"

"Dolly! Dolly! Dolly! There, do go to your room," cried Maude impatiently, and the poor girl went sobbing away, leaving her mistress to sit thinking pensively of what she had said.

Lady Maude Diphoos should have continued dressing, but she sat down by her mirror with her head resting upon her hand thinking very deeply of the weak, love-sick girl who had just left the room. Her thoughts were strange, and it seemed to her that so soon as she began to picture the bluff, manly, Saxon countenance of Charley Melton, the dark-eyed, black-bearded face of the Italian leered at her over his shoulder, and so surely as she made an effort to drive away the illusion, the face disappeared from one side to start out again upon the other.

So constant was this to the droning of the organ far below that Maude shivered, and at last started up, feeling more ready

now to sympathise with the girl than to blame as she hurriedly dressed, and prepared to go downstairs to join her ladyship in her afternoon drive.

"Are you aware, Maude, that I have been waiting for you some time?"

"No, mamma. The carriage has not yet come."

"That has nothing whatever to do with it," said her ladyship. "You have kept me waiting. And by the way, Maude, I must request that you do not return Mr Melton's very particular bows. I observed that you did yesterday in the Park, while directly afterwards, when Sir Grantley Wilters passed, you turned your head the other way."

"Really, mamma, I – "

"That will do, child, I am your mother."

"The carriage is at the door, my lady," said Robbins, entering the room; and soon afterwards the ladies descended to enter the barouche and enjoy the air, "gravel grinding," in the regular slow procession by the side of the Serpentine, where it was not long before Maude caught sight of Charley Melton, with his ugly bull-dog by his legs.

He bowed, but Lady Barmouth cut him dead. He bowed again – this time to Maude, who cut him alive, for her piteous look cut him to the heart; and as the carriage passed on the remark the young man made concerning her ladyship was certainly neither refined nor in the best of taste.

Chapter Six.
Not at Home

For Charley Melton's father was better, hence his presence in town, where he had sped as soon as he found that the Diphoos family had left the Hurst, where Lady Barmouth hatched matrimony.

That cut in the Park was unpleasant, but nothing daunted in his determination not to be thrown over, the young man made his way next day to Portland Place, eager, anxious, and wondering whether Maude would be firm, or allow herself to be influenced by her ladyship to his downfall.

Robbins unclosed the door at the great family mansion looking very severe and uncompromising. So stern was his countenance, and so stiff the bristles on his head, that any one with bribery in his heart would have felt that silver would be an insult.

"Not at home."

He left his card, and called next day.

"Not at home."

He waited two days, and called again.

"Not at home."

Another two days, and another call. The same answer.

"Not at home."

Charley Melton turned away with his brow knit, and then

thought over the past, and determined that, come what might, he would not be beaten.

The next day he went again, with his dog trotting closely at his heels. He knocked; the door was opened by Robbins the butler, and to the usual inquiry, that individual responded as before —

"Not at home, sir."

As Melton left his card and turned to go away, Joby quietly walked in, crossed the hall, and went upstairs, while his master, who was biting his lips, turned sharply back and slipped half a sovereign into the butler's hand.

"Look here, Robbins," he said; "you may trust me; what does this mean?"

The butler glanced behind him, and let the door swing nearly to as he stood upon the step.

"Fact is, sir, her ladyship said they was never to be at home to you."

A curious smile crossed Melton's lip as he nodded shortly and turned away, going straight back to his chambers in Duke Street, Saint James's, and walking impatiently up and down till he was fain to cease from utter exhaustion, when he flung himself impatiently in his chair, and sat trying to make plans for the future.

Meanwhile Joby, feeling himself quite at home in the Portland Place mansion, had walked straight into the dining-room, where the luncheon was not yet cleared away. The dog settled himself under the table, till, hearing a halting step, he had come slowly

out to stand watching Lord Barmouth, who toddled in hastily, and helped himself to three or four slices of cold ham, which he was in the act of placing in his pocket as the dog touched him on the leg.

"Eh! I'm very sorry, Robbins – I – eh? Oh dear, how you frightened me, my good dog," he said; "I thought it was the butler."

He was hurrying out when, thinking that perhaps the visitor might also like a little extra refreshment, he hastily took up a couple of cutlets and threw them one by one to the dog, who caught them, and seemed to swallow them with one and the same movement, pill-fashion, for they disappeared, and Joby waited for more.

"I dare not take any more, my good dog," said his lordship, stooping down and patting him; and then, feeling that there was nothing more to be done here, Joby quietly trotted upstairs into the drawing-room, where Maude was seated alone, with her head resting upon her hand, and the tears silently stealing down her cheeks.

She uttered a faint cry, for the dog's great blunt muzzle was laid upon her soft white hand, when, seeing who it was, the poor girl, with a hysterical sob, threw herself down upon her knees beside the great ugly brute, flung her arms round his neck, and hugged him to her breast. "Oh Joby, Joby, Joby, you dear good dog," she sobbed, "how did you come here?" and then, with flushed cheeks, and a faint hope in her breast that the dog's

master might be at hand, she paused with her head thrown back, listening intently.

But there was not a sound to be heard, and she once more caressed the dog, who, with his head resting upon her shoulder, blinked his great eyes and licked his black muzzle as if he liked it all amazingly.

Maude sobbed bitterly as she knelt by the dog, and then a thought seemed to strike her, for she felt its collar, and hesitated; then going to the table she opened a blotter, seized a sheet of note paper, and began to write.

At the end of a few moments she stopped though.

"I dare not – I dare not," she sighed. "It would certainly be found out, and what would he think of me? What does he think of me?" she wailed. "He must believe me not worth a thought. I will send – just a line."

She wrote a few words, folded the paper up small, and was taking some silk from her work-basket, when a cough on the stairs made her start and return to her chair.

"She will see the dog and be so angry," thought Maude, as the rustling of silk proclaimed the coming of her ladyship, when, to her great joy Joby uttered a low growl and dived at once beneath the couch, where he curled himself up completely out of sight.

"Maude," said her ladyship, in an ill-used tone, "you are not looking so well as you should."

"Indeed, mamma?"

"By no means, child; and as I am speaking to you, I may as

well say that I could not help noticing last night that you were almost rude to Sir Grantley Wilters. I must beg that it does not occur again."

"Mamma!"

"There, there, there, that will do," said her ladyship, "not a word. I am going out, and I cannot be made nervous by your silly nonsense."

"Indeed, mamma, I – "

"I will not hear excuses," cried her ladyship. "I tell you I am going out. If Sir Grantley Wilters calls, I insist upon your treating him with proper consideration. As I have told you, and I repeat it once for all, that silly flirtation with Mr Melton is quite at an end, and now we must be serious."

"Serious, mamma!" cried Maude, rising; "I assure you – "

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.